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*He listened patiently to tales of the little woes  
of life in a country town*

THE WORKS OF  
HONORÉ DE BALZAC

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY  
GEORGE SAINTSBURY

IN EIGHTEEN VOLUMES

VOLUME VIII

JEALOUSIES OF A COUNTRY  
TOWN

LOST ILLUSIONS  
THE ATHEIST'S MASS

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**THE JEALOUSIES OF A COUNTRY  
TOWN**



## PREFACE

THE two stories of *Les Rivalités* are more closely connected than it was always Balzac's habit to connect the tales which he united under a common heading. Not only are both devoted to the society of Alençon—a town and neighborhood to which he had evidently strong, though it is not clearly known what, attractions—not only is the Chevalier de Valois a notable figure in each; but the community, imparted by the elaborate study of the old *noblesse* in each case, is even greater than either of these ties could give. Indeed, if instead of *Les Rivalités* the author had chosen some label indicating the study of the *noblesse qui s'en va*, it might almost have been preferable. He did not, however; and though in a man who so constantly changed his titles and his arrangements the actual ones are not excessively authoritative, they have authority.

*La Vieille Fille*, despite a certain tone of levity—which, to do Balzac justice, is not common with him, and which is rather hard upon the poor heroine—is one of the best and liveliest things he ever did. The opening picture of the Chevalier, though, like other things of its author's, especially in his overtures, liable to the charge of being elaborated a little too much, is one of the very best things of its kind, and is a sort of *locus classicus* for its subject. The whole picture of country town society is about as good as it can be; and the only blot that I know is to be found in the sentimental Athanase, who was not quite within Balzac's province, extensive as that province is. If we compare Mr. Augustus Moddle, we shall see one of the not too numerous instances in which Dickens has a clear advantage over Balzac; and if it be retorted that Balzac's object was not to present a merely ridiculous object, the rejoinder is not very far to seek. Such a character, with such a fate as Balzac has assigned to him, must be either humorously grotesque or unfeignedly pathetic, and Balzac has not quite made Athanase either.

He is, however, if he is a failure, about the only failure in the book, and he is atoned for by a whole bundle of successes. Of the Chevalier, little more need be said. Balzac, it must be remembered, was the oldest novelist of distinct genius who had the opportunity of delineating the survivors of the *ancien régime* from the life, and directly. It is certain—even if we hesitate at believing him quite so familiar with all the classes of higher society from the *Faubourg* downwards, as he would have us believe him—that he saw something of most of them, and his genius was unquestionably of the kind to which a mere thumbnail study, a mere passing view, suffices for the acquisition of a thorough working knowledge of the object. In this case the Chevalier has served, and not improperly served, as the original of a thousand after-studies. His rival, less carefully projected, is also perhaps a little less alive. Again, Balzac was old enough to have forgathered with many men of the Revolution. But the most characteristic of them were not long-lived, the “little window” and other things having had a bad effect on them; and most of those who survived had, by the time he was old enough to take much notice, gone through metamorphoses of Bonapartism, Constitutional Liberalism, and what not. But still du Bousquier *is* alive, as well as all the minor assistants and spectators in the battle for the old maid’s hand. Suzanne, that tactful and graceless Suzanne to whom we are introduced first of all, is very much alive; and for all her gracelessness, not at all disagreeable. I am only sorry that she sold the counterfeit presentment of the Princess Goritza after all.

*Le Cabinet des Antiques*, in its Alençon scenes, is a worthy pendant to *La Vieille Fille*. The old-world honor of the Marquis d’Esgrignon, the thankless sacrifices of Armande, the *prisca fides* of Maître Chesnel, present pictures for which, out of Balzac, we can look only in Jules Sandeau, and which in Sandeau, though they are presented with a more poetical touch, have less masterly outline than here. One takes—or, at least, I take—less interest in the ignoble intrigues of the other side, except in so far as they menace the fortunes of a worthy house unworthily represented. Vic-

turnien d'Esgrignon, like his companion, Savinien de Portenduère (who, however, is, in every respect, a very much better fellow), does not argue in Balzac any high opinion of the *filz de famille*. He is, in fact, an extremely feeble youth, who does not seem to have got much real satisfaction out of the escapades for which he risked not merely his family's fortune, but his own honor, and who would seem to have been a rake, not from natural taste and spirit and relish, but because it seemed to him to be the proper thing to be. But the beginnings of the fortune of the aspiring and intriguing Camusots are admirably painted; and Madame de Maufrigneuse, that rather doubtful divinity, who appears so frequently in Balzac, here acts the *dea ex machina* with considerable effect. And we end well (as we generally do when Blondet, whom Balzac seems more than once to adopt as mask, is the narrator), in the last glimpse of Mlle. Armande left alone with the remains of her beauty, the ruins of everything dear to her—and God.

These two stories were written at no long interval, yet, for some reason or other, Balzac did not at once unite them. *La Vieille Fille* first appeared in November and December 1836 in the *Presse*, and was inserted next year in the *Scènes de la Vie de Province*. It had three chapter divisions. The second part did not appear all at once. Its first installment, under the general title, came out in the *Chronique de Paris* even before the *Vieille Fille* appeared in March 1836; the completion was not published (under the title of *Les Rivalités en Province*) till the autumn of 1838, when the *Constitutionnel* served as its vehicle. There were eight chapter divisions in this latter. The whole of the *Cabinet* was published in book form (with *Gambara* to follow it) in 1839. There were some changes here; and the divisions were abolished when the whole book in 1844 entered the *Comédie*. One of the greatest mistakes which, in my humble judgment, the organizers of the *édition définitive* have made, is their adoption of Balzac's never executed separation of the pair and deletion of the excellent joint-title *Les Rivalités*.



# THE JEALOUSIES OF A COUNTRY TOWN

## THE OLD MAID

*To M. Eugène Auguste Georges Louis Midy  
de la Greneraye Surville, Civil Engineer of the  
Corps-Royal, a token of affection from his brother-  
in-law.  
De Balzac.*

**P**LENTY of people must have come across at least one Chevalier de Valois in the provinces; there was one in Normandy, another was extant at Bourges, a third flourished at Alençon in the year 1816, and the South very likely possessed one of its own. But we are not here concerned with the numbering of the Valois tribe. Some of them, no doubt, were about as much of Valois as Louis XIV. was a Bourbon; and every Chevalier was so lightly acquainted with the rest, that it was anything but politic to mention one of them when speaking to another. All of them, however, agreed to leave the Bourbons in perfect tranquillity on the throne of France, for it is a little too well proven that Henri IV. succeeded to the crown in default of heirs male in the Orléans, otherwise the Valois branch; so that if any Valois exist at all, they must be descendants of Charles of Valois, Duke of Angoulême, and Marie Touchet; and even there the direct line was extinct (unless proof to the contrary is forthcoming) in the person of the Abbé de Rothelin. As for the Valois Saint-Remy, descended from Henri II., they likewise came to an end with the too famous Lamothe-Valois of the Diamond Necklace affair.

Every one of the chevaliers, if information is correct, was, like the Chevalier of Alençon, an elderly noble, tall, lean, and without fortune. The Bourges Chevalier had emigrated, the Touraine Valois went into hiding during the Revolution, and the Alençon Chevalier was mixed up in the Vendean



war, and implicated to some extent in Chouannerie. The last-named gentleman spent the most part of his youth in Paris, where, at the age of thirty, the Revolution broke in upon his career of conquests. Accepted as a true Valois by persons of the highest quality in his province, the Chevalier de Valois d'Alençon (like his namesakes) was remarkable for his fine manners, and had evidently been accustomed to move in the best society.

He dined out every day, and played cards of an evening, and, thanks to one of his weaknesses, was regarded as a great wit; he had a habit of relating a host of anecdotes of the time of Louis Quinze, and those who heard his stories for the first time thought them passably well narrated. The Chevalier de Valois, moreover, had one virtue: he refrained from repeating his own good sayings, and never alluded to his conquests, albeit his smiles and airs were delightfully indiscreet. The old gentleman took full advantage of the old-fashioned Voltairean noble's privilege of staying away from Mass, but his irreligion was very tenderly dealt with out of regard for his devotion to the Royalist cause.

One of his most remarked graces (Molé must have learned it of him) was his way of taking snuff from an old-fashioned snuff-box with a portrait of a lady on the lid. The Princess Goritza, a lovely Hungarian, had been famous for her beauty towards the end of the reign of Louis XV.; and the Chevalier could never speak without emotion of the foreign great lady whom he loved in his youth, for whom he had fought a duel with M. de Lauzun.

But by this time the Chevalier had lived fifty-eight years, and if he owned to but fifty of them, he might safely indulge himself in that harmless deceit. Thin, fair-complexioned men, among other privileges, retain that youthfulness of shape which in men, as in women, contributes as much as anything to stave off any appearance of age. And, indeed, it is a fact that all the life, or rather, all the grace, which is the expression of life, lies in the figure. Among the Chevalier's personal traits, mention must be made of the portentous nose with which Nature had endowed him. It cut a pallid countenance sharply into two sections which

seemed to have nothing to do with each other; so much so, indeed, that only one-half of his face would flush with the exertion of digestion after dinner; all the glow being confined to the left side, a phenomenon worthy of note in times when physiology is so much occupied with the human heart. M. de Valois's health was not apparently robust, judging by his long, thin legs, lean frame, and sallow complexion; but he ate like an ogre, alleging, doubtless by way of excuse for his voracity, that he suffered from a complaint known in the provinces as a "hot liver." The flush on his left cheek confirmed the story; but in a land where meals are developed on the lines of thirty or forty dishes, and last for four hours at a stretch, the Chevalier's abnormal appetite might well seem to be a special mark of the favor of Providence vouchsafed to the good town. That flush on the left cheek, according to diverse medical authorities, is a sign of prodigality of heart; and, indeed, the Chevalier's past record of gallantry might seem to confirm a professional dictum for which the present chronicler (most fortunately) is in nowise responsible. But in spite of these symptoms, M. de Valois was of nervous temperament, and in consequence long-lived; and if his liver was hot, to use the old-fashioned phrase, his heart was not a whit less inflammable. If there was a line worn here and there in his face, and a silver thread or so in his hair, an experienced eye would have discerned in these signs and tokens the stigmata of desire, the furrows traced by past pleasure. And, in fact, in his face, the unmistakable marks of the crow's foot and the serpent's tooth took the shape of the delicate wrinkles so prized at the court of Cytherea.

Everything about the gallant Chevalier revealed the "ladies' man." So minutely careful was he over his ablutions, that it was a pleasure to see his cheeks; they might have been brushed over with some miraculous water. That portion of his head which the hair refused to hide from view shone like ivory. His eyebrows, like his hair, had a youthful look, so carefully was their growth trained and regulated by the comb. A naturally fair skin seemed to be yet further whitened by some mysterious preparation; and while the

Chevalier never used scent, there was about him, as it were, a perfume of youth which enhanced the freshness of his looks. His hands, that told of race, were as carefully kept as if they belonged to some coxcomb of the gentler sex; you could not help noticing those rose-pink neatly-trimmed finger-nails. Indeed, but for his lordly superlative nose, the Chevalier would have looked like a doll.

It takes some resolution to spoil this portrait with the admission of a foible; the Chevalier put cotton wool in his ears, and still continued to wear earrings—two tiny negroes' heads set with brilliants. They were of admirable workmanship, it is true, and their owner was so far attached to the singular appendages, that he used to justify his fancy by saying "that his sick headaches had left him since his ears were pierced." He used to suffer from sick headaches. The Chevalier is not held up as a flawless character; but even if an old bachelor's heart sends too much blood to his face, is he never therefore to be forgiven for his adorable absurdities? Perhaps (who knows?) there are sublime secrets hidden away beneath them. And besides, the Chevalier de Valois made amends for his negroes' heads with such a variety of other and different charms, that society ought to have felt itself compensated. He really was at great pains to conceal his age and to make himself agreeable.

First and foremost, witness the extreme care which he gave to his linen, the one distinction in dress which a gentleman may permit himself in modern days. The Chevalier's linen was invariably fine and white, as befitted a noble. His coat, though remarkably neat, was always somewhat worn, but spotless and uncreased. The preservation of this garment bordered on the miraculous in the opinion of those who noticed the Chevalier's elegant indifference on this head; not that he went so far as to scrape his clothes with broken glass (a refinement invented by the Prince of Wales), but he set himself to carry out the first principles of dress as laid down by Englishmen of the very highest and finest fashion, and this with a personal element of coxcombrity which Alençon was scarcely capable of appreciating. Does the world owe no esteem to those that take such pains for it? And what was

all this labor but the fulfillment of that very hardest of sayings in the Gospel, which bids us return good for evil? The freshness of the toilet, the care for dress, suited well with the Chevalier's blue eyes, ivory teeth, and bland personality; still, the superannuated Adonis had nothing masculine in his appearance, and it would seem that he employed the illusion of the toilet to hide the ravages of other than military campaigns.

To tell the whole truth, the Chevalier had a voice singularly at variance with his delicate fairness. So full was it and sonorous that you would have been startled by the sound of it unless, with certain observers of human nature, you held the theory that the voice was only what might be expected of such a nose. With something less of volume than a giant double-bass, it was a full, pleasant baritone, reminding you of the hautboy among musical instruments, sweet and resistant, deep and rich.

M. de Valois had discarded the absurd costume still worn by a few antiquated Royalists, and frankly modernized his dress. He always appeared in a maroon coat with gilt buttons, loosely-fitting breeches with gold buckles at the knees, a white sprigged waistcoat, a tight stock, and a collarless shirt; this being a last vestige of eighteenth century costume, which its wearer was the less willing to relinquish because it enabled him to display a throat not unworthy of a lay abbé. Square gold buckles of a kind unknown to the present generation shone conspicuous upon his patent leather shoes. Two watch chains hung in view in parallel lines from a couple of fobs, another survival of an eighteenth century mode which the *incroyable* did not disdain to copy in the time of the Directory. This costume of a transition period, reuniting two centuries, was worn by the Chevalier with the grace of an old-world marquis, a grace lost to the French stage since Molé's last pupil, Fleury, retired from the boards and took his secret with him.

The old bachelor's private life, seemingly open to all eyes, was in reality inscrutable. He lived in a modest lodging (to say the least of it) up two pair of stairs in a house in the Rue du Cours, his landlady being the laundress most in

request in Alençon—which fact explains the extreme elegance of the Chevalier's linen. Ill luck was so to order it that Alençon one day could actually believe that he had not always conducted himself as befitted a man of his quality, and that in his old age he privately married one Césarine, the mother of an infant which had the impertinence to come without being called.

“He gave his hand to her who for so long had lent her hand to iron his linen,” said a certain M. du Bousquier.

The sensitive noble's last days were the more vexed by this unpleasant scandal, because, as shall be shown in the course of this present Scene, he had already lost a long-cherished hope for which he had made many a sacrifice.

Mme. Lardot's two rooms were let to M. le Chevalier de Valois at the moderate rent of a hundred francs per annum. The worthy gentleman dined out every night, and only came home to sleep; he was therefore at charges for nothing but his breakfast, which always consisted of a cup of chocolate with butter and fruit, according to the season. A fire was never lighted in his rooms except in the very coldest winters, and then only while he was dressing. Between the hours of eleven and four M. de Valois took his walks abroad, read the newspapers, and paid calls.

When the Chevalier first settled in Alençon, he magnanimously owned that he had nothing but an annuity of six hundred livres paid in quarterly installments by his old man of business, with whom the certificates were deposited. This was all that remained of his former wealth. And every three months, in fact, a banker in the town paid him a hundred and fifty francs remitted by one M. Bordin of Paris, the last of the *procureurs du Châtelet*. These particulars everybody knew, for the Chevalier had taken care to ask his confidant to keep the matter a profound secret. He reaped the fruits of his misfortunes. A cover was laid for him in all the best houses in Alençon; he was asked to every evening party. His talents as a card-player, a teller of anecdotes, a pleasant and well-bred man of the world, were so thoroughly appreciated that an evening was spoiled if the connoisseur of the town was not present. The host and hostess and all the

ladies present missed his little approving grimace. "You are adorably well dressed," from the old bachelor's lips, was sweeter to a young woman in a ballroom than the sight of her rival's despair.

There were certain old-world expressions which no one could pronounce so well. "My heart," "my jewel," "my little love," "my queen," and all the dear diminutives of the year 1770 took an irresistible charm from M. de Valois's lips; in short, the privilege of superlatives was his. His compliments, of which, moreover, he was chary, won him the goodwill of the elderly ladies; he flattered everyone down to the officials of whom he had no need.

He was so fine a gentleman at the card-table, that his behavior would have marked him out anywhere. He never complained; when his opponents lost he praised their play; he never undertook the education of his partners by showing them what they ought to have done. If a nauseating discussion of this kind began while the cards were making, the Chevalier brought out his snuff-box with a gesture worthy of Molé, looked at the Princess Goritza's portrait, took off the lid in a stately manner, heaped up a pinch, rubbed it to a fine powder between finger and thumb, blew off the light particles, shaped a little cone in his hand, and by the time the cards were dealt he had replenished the cavities in his nostrils and replaced the Princess in his waistcoat pocket—always to the left-hand side.

None but a noble of the Gracious as distinguished from the Great Century could have invented such a compromise between a disdainful silence and an epigram which would have passed over the heads of his company. The Chevalier took dull minds as he found them, and knew how to turn them to account. His irresistible evenness of temper caused many a one to say, "I admire the Chevalier de Valois!" Everything about him, his conversation and his manner, seemed in keeping with his mild appearance. He was careful to come into collision with no one, man or woman. Indulgent with deformity as with defects of intellect, he listened patiently (with the help of the Princess Goritza) to tales of the little woes of life in a country town; to anecdotes of

the undercooked egg at breakfast, or the sour cream in the coffee; to small grotesque details of physical ailments; to tales of dreams and visitations and wakings with a start. The Chevalier was an exquisite listener. He had a languishing glance, a stock attitude to denote compassion; he put in his "Ohs" and "Poohs" and "What-did-you-dos?" with charming appropriateness. Till his dying day no one ever suspected that while these avalanches of nonsense lasted, the Chevalier in his own mind was rehearsing the warmest passages of an old romance, of which the Princess Goritzka was the heroine. Has anyone ever given a thought to the social uses of extinct sentiment?—or guessed in how many indirect ways love benefits humanity?

Possibly this listener's faculty sufficiently explains the Chevalier's popularity; he was always the spoiled child of the town, although he never quitted a drawing-room without carrying off about five livres in his pocket. Sometimes he lost, and he made the most of his losses, but it very seldom happened. All those who knew him say with one accord that never in any place have they met with so agreeable a mummy, not even in the Egyptian museum at Turin. Surely in no known country of the globe did parasite appear in such a benignant shape. Never did selfishness in its most concentrated form show itself so inoffensive, so full of good offices as in this gentleman; the Chevalier's egoism was as good as another man's devoted friendship. If any person went to ask M. de Valois to do some trifling service which the worthy Chevalier could not perform without inconvenience, that person never went away without conceiving a great liking for him, and departed fully convinced that the Chevalier could do nothing in the matter, or might do harm if he meddled with it.

To explain this problematical existence the chronicler is bound to admit, while Truth—that ruthless debauchee—has caught him by the throat, that latterly after the three sad, glorious Days of July, Alençon discovered that M. de Valois's winnings at cards amounted to something like a hundred and fifty crowns every quarter, which amount the ingenious Chevalier intrepidly remitted to himself as an annuity, so

that he might not appear to be without resources in a country with a great turn for practical details. Plenty of his friends—he was dead by that time, please to remark—plenty of his friends denied this *in toto*; they maintained that the stories were fables and slanders set in circulation by the Liberal party, and that M. de Valois was an honorable and worthy gentleman. Luckily for clever gamblers, there will always be champions of this sort for them among the onlookers. Feeling ashamed to excuse wrongdoing, they stoutly deny that wrong has been done. Do not accuse them of wrongheadedness; they have their own sense of self-respect, and the Government sets them an example of the virtue which consists in burying its dead by night without chanting a *Te Deum* over defeat. And suppose that M. de Valois permitted himself a neat stratagem that would have won Gramont's esteem, a smile from Baron de Fœneste, and a shake of the hand from the Marquis de Moncade, was he any the less the pleasant dinner guest, the wit, the unvarying card-player, the charming retailer of anecdotes, the delight of Alençon? In what, moreover, does the action, lying, as it does, outside the laws of right and wrong, offend against the elegant code of a man of birth and breeding? When so many people are obliged to give pensions to others, what more natural than of one's own accord to allow an annuity to one's own best friend? But Læius is dead. . . .

After some fifteen years of this kind of life, the Chevalier had amassed ten thousand and some odd hundred francs. When the Bourbons returned, he said that an old friend of his, M. le Marquis de Pombreton, late a lieutenant in the Black Musketeers, had returned a loan of twelve hundred pistoles with which he emigrated. The incident made a sensation. It was quoted afterwards as a set-off against droll stories in the *Constitutionnel* of the ways in which some *émigrés* paid their debts. The poor Chevalier used to blush all over the right side of his face whenever this noble trait in the Marquis de Pombreton came up in conversation. At the time everyone rejoiced with M. de Valois; he used to consult capitalists as to the best way of investing this wreck of his former fortune; and, putting faith in the Restoration,



invested it all in Government stock when the funds had fallen to fifty-six francs twenty-five centimes. MM. de Lenoncourt, de Navarreins, de Verneuil, de Fontaine, and la Billardière, to whom he was known, had obtained a pension of a hundred crowns for him from the privy purse, he said, and the Cross of St. Louis. By what means the old Chevalier obtained the two solemn confirmations of his title and quality, no one ever knew; but this much is certain, the Cross of St. Louis gave him brevet rank as a colonel on a retiring pension, by reason of his services with the Catholic army in the West.

Besides the fiction of the annuity, to which no one gave a thought, the Chevalier was now actually possessed of a genuine income of a thousand francs. But with this improvement in his circumstances he made no change in his life or manners; only—the red ribbon looked wondrous well on his maroon coat; it was a finishing touch, as it were, to this portrait of a gentleman. Ever since the year 1802 the Chevalier had sealed his letters with an ancient gold seal, engraved roughly enough, but not so badly but that the Castérans, d'Esgrignons, and Troisvilles might see that he bore the arms of France impaled with his own, to wit, *France per pale, gules two bars gemelles, a cross of five mascles conjoined or, on a chief sable a cross pattee argent over all;* with a knight's casque for crest and the motto—VALEO. With these noble arms the so-called bastard Valois was entitled to ride in all the royal coaches in the world.

Plenty of people envied the old bachelor his easy life, made up of boston, trictrac, reversis, whist, and piquet; of good play, dinners well digested, pinches of snuff gracefully taken, and quiet walks abroad. Almost all Alençon thought that his existence was empty alike of ambitions and cares; but where is the man whose life is quite as simple as they suppose who envy him?

In the remotest country village you shall find human molluscs, rotifers inanimate to all appearance, which cherish a passion for lepidoptera or conchology, and are at infinite pains to acquire some new butterfly, or a specimen of *Concha Veneris*. And the Chevalier had not merely shells

and butterflies of his own, he cherished an ambitious desire with a pertinacity and profound strategy worthy of a Sixtus V. He meant to marry a rich old maid; in all probability because a wealthy marriage would be a stepping-stone to the high spheres of the Court. *This* was the secret of his royal bearing and prolonged abode in Alençon.

Very early one Tuesday morning in the middle of spring in the year '16 (to use his own expression), the Chevalier was just slipping on his dressing-gown, an old-fashioned green silk damask of a flowered pattern, when, in spite of the cotton in his ears, he heard a girl's light footstep on the stairs. In another moment someone tapped discreetly three times on the door, and then, without waiting for an answer, a very handsome damsel slipped like a snake into the old bachelor's apartment.

"Ah, Suzanne, is that you?" said the Chevalier de Valois, continuing to strop his razor. "What are you here for, dear little jewel of mischief?"

"I have come to tell you something which perhaps will give you as much pleasure as annoyance."

"Is it something about Césarine?"

"Much I trouble myself about your Césarine," pouted she, half careless, half in earnest.

The charming Suzanne, whose escapade was to exercise so great an influence on the lives of all the principal characters in this story, was one of Mme. Lardot's laundry girls. And now for a few topographical details.

The whole ground floor of the house was given up to the laundry. The little yard was a drying ground where embroidered handkerchiefs, collarettes, muslin slips, cuffs, frilled shirts, cravats, laces, embroidered petticoats, all the fine washing of the best houses in the town, in short, hung out along the lines of hair rope. The Chevalier used to say that he was kept informed of the progress of the receiver-general's wife's flirtations by the number of slips thus brought to light; and the amount of frilled shirts and cambric cravats varied directly with the petticoats and collarettes. By this system of double entry, as it were, he detected all the assignations in the town; but the Chevalier was al-

ways discreet, he never let fall an epigram that might have closed a house to him. And yet he was a witty talker! For which reason you may be sure that M. de Valois's manners were of the finest, while his talents, as so often happens, were thrown away upon a narrow circle. Still, for he was only human after all, he sometimes could not resist the pleasure of a searching side glance which made women tremble, and nevertheless they liked him when they found out how profoundly discreet he was, how full of sympathy for their pretty frailties.

Mme. Lardot's forewoman and factotum, an alarmingly ugly spinster of five-and-forty, occupied the rest of the second floor with the Chevalier. Her door on the landing was exactly opposite his; and her apartment, like his own, consisted of two rooms, looking respectively upon the street and the yard. Above, there was nothing but the attics where the linen was dried in winter. Below lodged Mme. Lardot's grandfather. The old man, Grévin by name, had been a privateer in his time, and had served under Admiral Simeuse in the Indies; now he was paralyzed and stone deaf. Mme. Lardot herself occupied the rooms beneath her forewoman, and so great was her weakness for people of condition, that she might be said to be blind where the Chevalier was concerned. In her eyes, M. de Valois was an absolute monarch, a king that could do no wrong: even if one of her own work-girls had been said to be guilty of finding favor in his sight, she would have said, "He is so amiable!"

And so, if M. de Valois, like most people in the provinces, lived in a glass house, it was secret as a robber's cave so far as he at least was concerned. A born confidant of the little intrigues of the laundry, he never passed the door—which almost always stood ajar—without bringing something for his pets—chocolate, bonbons, ribbons, laces, a gilt cross, and the jokes that grisettes love. Wherefore the little girls adored the Chevalier. Women can tell by instinct whether a man is attracted to anything that wears a petticoat; they know at once the kind of man who enjoys the mere sense of their presence, who never thinks of making blundering demands of repayment for his gallantry. In this respect

womankind has a canine faculty; a dog in any company goes straight to the man who respects animals. The Chevalier de Valois in his poverty preserved something of his former life; he was as unable to live without some fair one under his protection as any *grand seigneur* of a bygone age. He clung to the traditions of the *petite maison*. He loved to give to women, and women alone can receive gracefully, perhaps because it is always in their power to repay.

In these days, when every lad on leaving school tries his hand at unearthing symbols or sifting legends, is it not extraordinary that no one has explained that portent, the Courtesan of the Eighteenth Century? What was she but the tournament of the Sixteenth in another shape? In 1550 the knights displayed their prowess for their ladies; in 1750 they displayed their mistresses at Longchamps; to-day they run their horses over the course. The noble of every age has done his best to invent a life which he, and he only, can live. The painted shoes of the Fourteenth Century are the *talons rouges* of the Eighteenth; the parade of a mistress was one fashion in ostentation; the sentiment of chivalry and the knight errant was another.

The Chevalier de Valois could no longer ruin himself for a mistress, so for bonbons wrapped in bank-bills he politely offered a bag of genuine cracknels; and to the credit of Alençon, be it said, the cracknels caused far more pleasure to the recipients than M. d'Artois's presents of carriages or silver-gilt toilet sets ever gave to the fair Duthé. There was not a girl in the laundry but recognized the Chevalier's fallen greatness, and kept his familiarities in the house a profound secret.

In answer to questions, they always spoke gravely of the Chevalier de Valois; they watched over him. For others he became a venerable gentleman, his life was a flower of sanctity. But at home they would have lighted on his shoulders like paroquets.

The Chevalier liked to know the intimate aspects of family life which laundresses learn; they used to go up to his room of a morning to retail the gossip of the town; he called them his "gazettes in petticoats," his "living *feuilletons*." M.

Sartines himself had not such intelligent spies at so cheap a rate, nor yet so loyal in their rascality. Remark, moreover, that the Chevalier thoroughly enjoyed his breakfasts.

Suzanne was one of his favorites. A clever and ambitious girl with the stuff of a Sophie Arnould in her, she was besides as beautiful as the loveliest courtesan that Titian ever prayed to pose against a background of dark velvet as a model for his *Venus*. Her forehead and all the upper part of her face about the eyes were delicately molded; but the contours of the lower half were cast in a commoner mold. Hers was the beauty of a Normande, fresh, plump, and brilliant-complexioned, with that Rubens fleshiness which should be combined with the muscular development of a Farnese Hercules. This was no *Venus dei Medici*, the graceful feminine counterpart of Apollo.

"Well, child," said the Chevalier, "tell me your adventures little or big."

The Chevalier's fatherly benignity with these grisettes would have marked him out anywhere between Paris and Peking. The girls put him in mind of the courtesans of another age, of the illustrious queens of opera of European fame during a good third of the eighteenth century. Certain it is that he who had lived for so long in a world of women now as dead and forgotten as the Jesuits, the buccaneers, the abbés, and the farmers-general, and all great things generally—certain it is that the Chevalier had acquired an irresistible good humor, a gracious ease, an unconcern, with no trace of egoism discernible in it. So might Jupiter have appeared to Alcmena—a king that chooses to be a woman's dupe, and flings majesty and its thunderbolts to the winds, that he may squander Olympus in follies, and "little suppers," and feminine extravagance; wishful, of all things, to be far enough away from Juno.

The room in which the Chevalier received company was bare enough, with its shabby bit of tapestry to do duty as a carpet, and very dirty, old-fashioned easy-chairs; the walls were covered with a cheap paper, on which the countenances of Louis XVI. and his family, framed in weeping willow, appeared at intervals among funeral urns, bearing the *sub-*

*lime testament* by way of inscription, amid a whole host of sentimental emblems invented by Royalism under the Terror; but in spite of all this, in spite of the old flowered green silk dressing-gown, in spite of its owner's air of dilapidation, a certain fragrance of the eighteenth century clung about the Chevalier de Valois as he shaved himself before the old-fashioned toilet glass, covered with cheap lace. All the graceless graces of his youth seemed to reappear; he might have had three hundred thousand francs' worth of debts to his name, and a chariot at his door. He looked a great man, great as Berthier in the Retreat from Moscow issuing the order of the day to battalions which were no more.

"M. le Chevalier," Suzanne replied archly, "it seems to me that I have nothing to tell you—you have only to look!"

So saying, she turned and stood sidewise to prove her words by ocular demonstration; and the Chevalier, deep old gentleman, still holding his razor across his chin, cast his right eye downwards upon the damsel, and pretended to understand.

"Very good, my little pet, we will have a little talk together presently. But you come first, it seems, to me."

"But, M. le Chevalier, am I to wait till my mother beats me and Mme. Lardot turns me away? If I do not go to Paris at once, I shall never get married here, where the men are so ridiculous."

"These things cannot be helped, child! Society changes, and women suffer just as much as the nobles from the shocking confusion which ensues. Topsy-turvydom in politics ends in topsy-turvy manners. Alas! woman soon will cease to be woman" (here he took the cotton wool out of his ears to continue his toilet). "Women will lose a great deal by plunging into sentiment; they will torture their nerves, and there will be an end of the good old ways of our time, when a little pleasure was desired without blushes, and accepted without more ado, and the vapors" (he polished the earrings with the negroes' heads)—"the vapors were only known as a means of getting one's way; before long they will take the proportions of a complaint only to be

cured by an infusion of orange-blossoms." (The Chevalier burst out laughing.) "Marriage, in short," he resumed, taking a pair of tweezers to pluck out a gray hair, "marriage will come to be a very dull institution indeed, and it was so joyous in my time. The reign of Louis Quatorze and Louis Quinze, bear this in mind, my child, saw the last of the finest manners in the world."

"But, M. le Chevalier," urged the girl, "it is your little Suzanne's character and reputation that is at stake, and you are not going to forsake her, I hope!"

"What is all this?" cried the Chevalier, with a finishing touch to his hair; "I would sooner lose my name!"

"Ah!" said Suzanne.

"Listen to me, little masquerader." He sat down in a large, low chair, a *duchesse*, as it used to be called, which Mme. Lardot had picked up somewhere for her lodger. Then he drew the magnificent Suzanne to him till she stood between his knees; and Suzanne submitted—Suzanne who held her head so high in the streets, and had refused a score of overtures from admirers in Alençon, not so much from self-respect as in disdain of their pettiness. Suzanne so brazenly made the most of the supposed consequences of her errors, that the old sinner, who had fathomed so many mysteries in persons far more astute than Suzanne, saw the real state of affairs at once. He knew well enough that a grisette does not laugh when disgrace is really in question, but he scorned to throw down the scaffolding of an engaging fib with a touch.

"We are slandering ourselves," said he, and there was an inimitable subtlety in his smile. "We are as well conducted as the fair one whose name we bear; we can marry without fear. But we do not want to vegetate here; we long for Paris, where charming creatures can be rich if they are clever, and we are not a fool. So we should like to find out whether the City of Pleasure has young Chevaliers de Valois in store for us, and a carriage and diamonds and an opera box. There are Russians and English and Austrians that are bringing millions to spend in Paris, and some of that money mamma settled on us as a marriage portion when

she gave us our good looks. And besides, we are patriotic; we should like to help France to find her own money in these gentlemen's pockets. Eh! eh! my dear little devil's lamb, all this is not bad. The neighbors will cry out upon you a little at first perhaps, but success will make everything right. The real crime, my child, is poverty; and you and I both suffer for it. As we are not lacking in intelligence, we thought we might turn our dear little reputation to account to take in an old bachelor, but the old bachelor, sweetheart, knows the alpha and omega of woman's wiles; which is to say, that you would find it easier to put a grain of salt upon a sparrow's tail than to persuade me to believe that I have had any share in your affair.

"Go to Paris, my child, go at the expense of a bachelor's vanity; I am not going to hinder you, I will help you, for the old bachelor, Suzanne, is the cash-box provided by nature for a young girl. But do not thrust me into the affair. Now, listen, my queen, understanding life so well as you do—you see, you might do me a good deal of harm and give me trouble; harm, because you might spoil my marriage in a place where people are so particular; trouble on your account, because you will get yourself in a scrape for nothing, a scrape entirely of your own invention, sly girl; and you know, my pet, that I have no money left, I am as poor as a church mouse. Ah! if I were to marry Mlle. Cormon, if I were rich again, I would certainly rather have you than Césarine. You were always fine gold enough to gild lead, it seemed to me; you were made to be a great lord's love; and as I knew you were a clever girl, I am not at all surprised by this trick of yours, I expected as much. For a girl, this means that you burn your boats. It is no common mind, my angel, that can do it; and for that reason you have my esteem," and he bestowed confirmation upon her cheek after the manner of a bishop, with two fingers.

"But, M. le Chevalier, I do assure you that you are mistaken, and——" she blushed, and dared not finish her sentence; at a glance he had seen through her, and read her plans from beginning to end.

"Yes, I understand, you wish me to believe you. Very



well, I believe. But take my advice and go to M. du Bousquier. You have taken M. du Bousquier's linen home from the wash for five or six months, have you not?—Very good. I do not ask to know what has happened between you; but I know *him*. He is vain, he is an old bachelor, he is very rich, he has an income of two thousand five hundred livres, and spends less than eight hundred. If you are the clever girl that I take you for, you will find your way to Paris at his expense. Go to him, my pet, twist him round your fingers, and of all things, be supple as silk, and make a double twist and a knot at every word; he is just the man to be afraid of a scandal; and if he knows that you can make him sit on the stool of repentance—— In short, you understand, threaten to apply to the ladies of the charitable fund. He is ambitious besides. Well and good, with a wife to help him there should be nothing beyond a man's reach; and are you not handsome enough and clever enough to make your husband's fortune? Why, plague take it, you might hold your own with a court lady."

The Chevalier's last words let the light into Suzanne's brain; she was burning with impatience to rush off to du Bousquier; but as she could not hurry away too abruptly, she helped the Chevalier to dress, asking questions about Paris as she did so. As for the Chevalier, he saw that his remarks had taken effect, and gave Suzanne an excuse to go, asking her to tell Césarine to bring up the chocolate that Mme. Lardot made for him every morning, and Suzanne forthwith slipped off in search of her prey.

And here follows du Bousquier's biography.—He came of an old Alençon family in a middle rank between the burghers and the country squires. On the death of his father, a magistrate in the criminal court, he was left without resource, and, like most ruined provincials, betook himself to Paris to seek his fortune. When the Revolution broke out, du Bousquier was a man of affairs; and in those days (in spite of the Republicans, who are all up in arms for the honesty of their government) the word "affairs" was used very loosely. Political spies, jobbers, and contractors, the men who arranged with the syndics of communes for the

sale of the property of *émigrés*, and then bought up land at low prices to sell again,—all these folk, like ministers and generals, were men of affairs.

From 1798 to 1799 du Bousquier held contracts to supply the army with forage and provisions. During those years he lived in a splendid mansion; he was one of the great capitalists of the time; he went shares with Ouvrard; kept open house and led the scandalous life of the times. A Cincinnatus, reaping where he had not sowed, and rich with stolen rations and sacks of corn, he kept *petites maisons* and a bevy of mistresses, and gave fine entertainments to the directors of the Republic. Citizen du Bousquier was one of Barras's intimates; he was on the best of terms with Fouché, and hand and glove with Bernadotte. He thought to be a Minister of State one day, and threw himself heart and soul into the party that secretly plotted against Bonaparte before the battle of Marengo. And but for Kellermann's charge and the death of Desaix, du Bousquier would have played a great part in the state. He was one of the upper members of the permanent staff of the promiscuous government driven by Napoleon's luck to vanish into the side-scenes of 1793.<sup>1</sup>

The victory unexpectedly won by stubborn fighting ended in the downfall of this party; they had placards ready printed, and were only waiting for the First Consul's defeat to proclaim a return to the principles of the Mountain.

Du Bousquier, feeling convinced that a victory was impossible, had two special messengers on the battlefield, and speculated with the larger part of his fortune for a fall in the funds. The first courier came with the news that Mélas was victorious; but the second arriving four hours afterwards, at night, brought the tidings of the Austrian defeat. Du Bousquier cursed Kellermann and Desaix; the First Consul owed him millions, he dared not curse him. But between the chance of making millions on the one hand, and stark ruin on the other, he lost his head. For several days he was half idiotic; he had undermined his constitution with excesses to such an extent that the thunderbolt left him helpless. He had something to hope from the settlement of his

<sup>1</sup>See *Une Ténébreuse Affaire*.

claims upon the Government; but in spite of bribes, he was made to feel the weight of Napoleon's displeasure against army contractors who speculated on his defeat. M. de Fermon, so pleasantly nicknamed "*Fermons la caisse*," left du Bousquier without a penny. The First Consul was even more incensed by the immorality of his private life and his connection with Barras and Bernadotte than by his speculations on the Bourse; he erased M. du Bousquier's name from the list of Receivers-general, on which a last remnant of credit had placed him for Alençon.

Of all his former wealth, nothing now remained to du Bousquier save an income of twelve hundred francs from the Funds, an investment entirely due to chance, which saved him from actual want. His creditors, knowing nothing of the results of his liquidation, only left him enough in consols to bring in a thousand francs per annum; but their claims were paid in full after all, when the outstanding debts had been collected, and the Hôtel de Beauséant, du Bousquier's town house, sold besides. So, after a close shave of bankruptcy, the sometime speculator emerged with his name intact. Preceded by a tremendous reputation due to his relations with former heads of government departments, his manner of life, his brief day of authority, and final ruin through the First Consul, the man interested the city Alençon, where Royalism was secretly predominant. Du Bousquier, exasperated against Bonaparte, with his tales of the First Consul's pettiness, of Josephine's lax morals, and a whole store of anecdotes of ten years of Revolution, seen from within, met with a good reception.

It was about this period of his life that du Bousquier, now well over his fortieth year, came out as a bachelor of thirty-six. He was of medium height, fat as became a contractor, and willing to display a pair of calves that would have done credit to a gay and gallant attorney. He had strongly marked features; a flattened nose with tufts of hair in the equine nostrils; bushy black brows, and eyes beneath them that looked out shrewd as M. de Talleyrand's own, though they had lost something of their brightness. He wore his brown hair very long, and retained the side-whiskers

(*nageoires*, as they were called) of the time of the Republic. You had only to look at his fingers, tufted at every joint, or at the blue knotted veins that stood out upon his hands, to see the unmistakable signs of a very remarkable muscular development; and, in truth, he had the chest of the Farnese Hercules, and shoulders fit to bear the burden of the national debt; you never see such shoulders nowadays. His was a luxuriant virility admirably described by an eighteenth century phrase which is scarcely intelligible to-day; the gallantry of a bygone age would have summed up du Bousquier as a "payer of arrears"—*un vrai payeur d'arrérages*.

Yet, as in the case of the Chevalier de Valois, there were sundry indications at variance with the ex-contractor's general appearance. His vocal powers, for instance, were not in keeping with his muscles; not that it was the mere thread of a voice which sometimes issues from the throats of such two-footed seals; on the contrary, it was loud but husky, something like the sound of a saw cutting through damp, soft wood; it was, in fact, the voice of a speculator brought to grief. For a long while du Bousquier wore the costume in vogue in the days of his glory: the boots with turned-down tops, the white silk stockings, the short cloth breeches, ribbed with cinnamon color, the blue coat, the waistcoat à la Robespierre.

His hatred of the First Consul should have been a sort of passport into the best Royalist houses of Alençon; but the seven or eight families that made up the local Faubourg Saint-Germain into which the Chevalier de Valois had the entrance, held aloof. Almost from the first, du Bousquier had aspired to marry one Mlle. Armande, whose brother was one of the most esteemed nobles of the town; he thought to make this brother play a great part in his own schemes, for he was dreaming of a brilliant return match in politics. He met with a refusal, for which he consoled himself with such compensation as he might find among some half-score of retired manufacturers of *point d'Alençon*, owners of grass lands or cattle, or wholesale linen merchants, thinking that among these chance might put a good match in his way. Indeed, the old bachelor had centered all his hopes on a

prospective fortunate marriage, which a man, eligible in so many ways, might fairly expect to make. For he was not without a certain financial acumen, of which not a few availed themselves. He pointed out business speculations as a ruined gambler gives hints to new hands; and he was expert at discovering the resources, chances, and management of a concern. People looked upon him as a good administrator. It was an often-discussed question whether he should not be mayor of Alençon, but the recollection of his Republican jobberies spoiled his chances, and he was never received at the prefecture.

Every successive government, even the government of the Hundred Days, declined to give him the coveted appointment, which would have assured his marriage with an elderly spinster whom he now had in his mind. It was his detestation of the Imperial Government that drove him into the Royalist camp, where he stayed in spite of insults there received; but when the Bourbons returned, and still he was excluded from the prefecture, that final rebuff filled him with a hatred deep as the profound secrecy in which he wrapped it. Outwardly, he remained patiently faithful to his opinions; secretly, he became the leader of the Liberal party in Alençon, the invisible controller of elections; and, by his cunningly devised maneuvers and underhand methods, he worked no little harm to the restored Monarchy.

When a man is reduced to live through his intellect alone, his hatred is something as quiet as a little stream; insignificant to all appearance, but unailing. This was the case with du Bousquier. His hatred was like a negro's, so placid, so patient, that it deceives the enemy. For fifteen years he brooded over a revenge which no victory, not even the Three Days of July 1830, could sate.

When the Chevalier sent Suzanne to du Bousquier, he had his own reasons for so doing. The Liberal and the Royalist divined each other, in spite of the skillful dissimulation which hid their common aim from the rest of the town.

The two old bachelors were rivals. Both of them had planned to marry the Demoiselle Cormon, whose name came up in the course of the Chevalier's conversation with Suzanne.

Both of them, engrossed by their idea, and masquerading in indifference, were waiting for the moment when some chance should deliver the old maid to one or other of them. And the fact that they were rivals in this way would have been enough to make enemies of the pair even if each had not been the living embodiment of a political system.

Men take their color from their time. This pair of rivals is a case in point; the historic tinge of their characters stood out in strong contrast in their talk, their ideas, their costume. The one, blunt and energetic, with his burly abrupt ways, curt speech, dark looks, dark hair, and dark complexion, alarming in appearance, but impotent in reality as insurrection, was the Republic personified; the other, bland and polished, elegant and fastidious, gaining his ends slowly but surely by diplomacy, and never unmindful of good taste, was the typical old-world courtier. They met on the same ground almost every evening. It was a rivalry always courteous and urbane on the part of the Chevalier, less ceremonious on du Bousquier's, though he kept within the limits prescribed by Alençon, for he had no wish to be driven ignominiously from the field. The two men understood each other well; but no one else saw what was going on. In spite of the minute and curious interest which provincials take in the small details of which their lives are made up, no one so much as suspected that the two men were rivals.

M. le Chevalier's position was somewhat the stronger; he had never proposed for Mlle. Cormon, whereas du Bousquier had declared himself after a rebuff from one of the noblest families, and had met with a second refusal. Still, the Chevalier thought so well of his rival's chances, that he considered it worth while to deal him a *coup de Jarnac*, a treacherous thrust from a weapon as finely tempered as Suzanne. He had fathomed du Bousquier; and, as will shortly be seen, he was not mistaken in any of his conjectures.

Suzanne tripped away down the Rue du Cours, along the Rue de la Porte de Séz and the Rue du Bercail to the Rue du Cygne, where du Bousquier, five years ago, had bought a

small countrified house built of the gray stone of the district, which is used like granite in Normandy, or Breton schist in the West. The sometime forage-contractor had established himself there in more comfort than any other house in the town could boast, for he had brought with him some relics of past days of splendor; but provincial manners and customs were slowly darkening the glory of the fallen Sardanapalus. The vestiges of past luxury looked about as much out of place in the house as a chandelier in a barn. Harmony, which links the works of man or of God together, was lacking in all things large or small. A ewer with a metal lid, such as you only see on the outskirts of Brittany, stood on a handsome chest of drawers; and while the bedroom floor was covered with a fine carpet, the window-curtains displayed a flower pattern only known to cheap printed cottons. The stone mantelpiece, daubed over with paint, was out of all keeping with a handsome clock disgraced by a shabby pair of candlesticks. Local talent had made an unsuccessful attempt to paint the doors in vivid contrasts of startling colors; while the staircase, ascended by all and sundry in muddy boots, had not been painted at all. In short, du Bousquier's house, like the time which he represented, was a confused mixture of grandeur and squalor.

Du Bousquier was regarded as well-to-do, but he led the parasitical life of the Chevalier de Valois, and he is always rich enough that spends less than his income. His one servant was a country bumpkin, a dull-witted youth enough; but he had been trained, by slow degrees, to suit du Bousquier's requirements, until he had learned, much as an orang-outang might learn, to scour floors, black boots, brush clothes, and to come for his master of an evening with a lantern if it was dark, and a pair of sabots if it rained. On great occasions, du Bousquier made him discard the blue-checked cotton blouse with loose sagging pockets behind, which always bulged with a handkerchief, a clasp knife, apples, or "stickjaw." Arrayed in a regulation suit of clothes, he accompanied his master to wait at table, and over-ate himself afterwards with the other servants. Like many other mortals, René had only stuff enough in him

for one vice, and his was gluttony. Du Bousquier made a reward of this service, and in return his Breton factotum was absolutely discreet.

“What, have you come our way, miss?” René asked when he saw Suzanne in the doorway. “It is not your day; we have not got any linen for Mme. Lardot.”

“Big stupid!” laughed the fair Suzanne, as she went up the stairs, leaving René to finish a porringerful of buck-wheat bannocks boiled in milk.

Du Bousquier was still in bed, ruminating his plans for fortune. To him, as to all who have squeezed the orange of pleasure, there was nothing left but ambition. Ambition, like gambling, is inexhaustible. And, moreover, given a good constitution, the passions of the brain will always outlive the heart’s passions.

“Here I am!” said Suzanne, sitting down on the bed; the curtain-rings grated along the rods as she swept them sharply back with an imperious gesture.

“*Quésaco*, my charmer?” asked du Bousquier, sitting upright.

“Monsieur,” Suzanne began, with much gravity, “you must be surprised to see me come in this way; but, under the circumstances, it is no use my minding what people will say.”

“What is all this about?” asked du Bousquier, folding his arms.

“Why, do you not understand?” returned Suzanne. “I know” (with an engaging little pout), “I know how ridiculous it is when a poor girl comes to bother a man about things that you think mere trifles. But if you really knew me, monsieur, if you only knew all that I would do for a man, if he cared about me as I could care about you, you would never repent of marrying me. It is not that I could be of so much use to you *here*, by the way; but if we went to Paris, you should see how far I could bring a man of spirit with such brains as yours, and especially just now, when they are remaking the Government from top to bottom, and the foreigners are the masters. Between ourselves, does this thing in question really matter after all? Is it not a



piece of good fortune for which you would be glad to pay a good deal one of these days? For whom are you going to think and work?"

"For myself, to be sure!" du Bousquier answered brutally.

"Old monster! you shall never be a father!" said Suzanne, with a ring in her voice which turned the words to a prophecy and a curse.

"Come, Suzanne, no nonsense; I am dreaming still, I think."

"What more do you want in the way of reality?" cried Suzanne, rising to her feet. Du Bousquier scrubbed his head with his cotton nightcap, which he twisted round and round with a fidgety energy that told plainly of prodigious mental ferment.

"He actually believes it!" Suzanne said within herself. "And his vanity is tickled. Good Lord, how easy it is to take them in!"

"Suzanne! What the deuce do you want me to do? It is so extraordinary . . . I that thought—— The fact is. . . . But no, no, it can't be——"

"Do you mean that you cannot marry me?"

"Oh, as to that, no. I am not free."

"Is it Mlle. Armande or Mlle. Cormon, who have both refused you already? Look here, M. du Bousquier, it is not as if I was obliged to get gendarmes to drag you to the registrar's office to save my character. There are plenty that would marry me, but I have no intention whatever of taking a man that does not know my value. You may be sorry some of these days that you behaved like this; for if you will not take your chance to-day, not for gold, nor silver, nor anything in this world will I give it you again."

"But, Suzanne—are you sure——?"

"Sir, for what do you take me?" asked the girl, draping herself in her virtue. "I am not going to put you in mind of the promises you made, promises that have been the ruin of a poor girl, when all her fault was that she looked too high and loved too much."

But joy, suspicion, self-interest, and a host of contending

emotions had taken possession of du Bousquier. For a long time past he had made up his mind that he would marry Mlle. Cormon; for after long ruminations over the Charter, he saw that it opened up magnificent prospects to his ambition through the channels of a representative government. His marriage with that mature spinster would raise his social position very much; he would acquire great influence in Alençon. And here this wily Suzanne had conjured up a storm, which put him in a most awkward dilemma. But for that private hope of his, he would have married Suzanne out of hand, and put himself openly at the head of the Liberal party in the town. Such a marriage meant the final renunciation of the best society, and a drop into the ranks of the wealthy tradesmen, shopkeepers, rich manufacturers, and graziers who, beyond a doubt, would carry him as their candidate in triumph. Already du Bousquier caught a glimpse of the Opposition benches. He did not attempt to hide his solemn deliberations; he rubbed his hand over his head, made a wisp of the cotton nightcap, and a damaging confession of the nudity beneath it. As for Suzanne, after the wont of those who succeed beyond their utmost hopes, she sat dumfounded. To hide her amazement at his behavior, she drooped like a hapless victim before her seducer, while within herself she laughed like a grisette on a frolic.

“My dear child, I will have nothing to do with hanky-panky of this sort.”

This brief formula was the result of his cogitations. The ex-contractor to the Government prided himself upon belonging to that particular school of cynic philosophers which declines to be “taken in” by women, and includes the whole sex in one category as suspicious characters. Strong-minded men of this stamp, weaklings are they for the most part, have a catechism of their own in the matter of womankind. Every woman, according to them, from the Queen of France to the milliner, is at heart a rake, a hussy, a dangerous creature, not to say a bit of a rascal, a liar in grain, a being incapable of a serious thought. For du Bousquier and his like, woman is a maleficent *bayadère* that must be left to dance, and sing, and laugh. They see

nothing holy, nothing great in woman; for them she represents, not the poetry of the senses, but gross sensuality. They are like gluttons who should mistake the kitchen for the dining-room. On this showing, a man must be a consistent tyrant, unless he means to be enslaved. And in this respect, again, du Bousquier and the Chevalier de Valois stood at opposite poles.

As he delivered himself of the above remark, he flung his nightcap to the foot of the bed, much as Gregory the Great might have flung down the candle while he launched the thunders of an excommunication; and Suzanne learned that the old bachelor wore a false front.

“Bear in mind, M. du Bousquier, that by coming here I have done my duty,” she remarked majestically. “Remember that I was bound to offer you my hand and to ask for yours; but, at the same time, remember that I have behaved with the dignity of a self-respecting woman; I did not lower myself so far as to cry like a fool; I did not insist; I have not worried you at all. Now you know my position. You know that I cannot stay in Alençon. If I do, my mother will beat me; and Mme. Lardot is as high and mighty over principles as if she washed and ironed with them. She will turn me away. And where am I to go, poor work-girl that I am? To the hospital? Am I to beg for bread? Not I. I would sooner fling myself into the Brillante or the Sarthe. Now, would it not be simpler for me to go to Paris? Mother might find some excuse for sending me, an uncle wants me to come, or an aunt is going to die, or some lady takes an interest in me. It is just a question of money for the traveling expenses and—you know what——”

This news was immeasurably more important to du Bousquier than to the Chevalier de Valois, for reasons which no one knew as yet but the two rivals, though they will appear in the course of the story. At this point, suffice it to say that Suzanne’s fib had thrown the sometime forage-contractor’s ideas into such confusion that he was incapable of thinking seriously. But for that bewilderment, but for the secret joy in his heart (for a man’s own vanity is a swindler that never lacks a dupe), it must have struck him

that any honest girl, with a heart still unspoiled, would have died a hundred deaths rather than enter upon such a discussion, or make a demand for money. He must have seen the look in the girl's eyes, seen the gambler's ruthless meanness that would take a life to gain money for a stake.

"Would you really go to Paris?" he asked.

The words brought a twinkle to Suzanne's gray eyes, but it was lost upon du Bousquier's self-satisfaction.

"I would indeed, sir."

But at this du Bousquier broke out into a singular lament. He had just paid the balance of the purchase-money for his house; and there was the painter, and the glazier, and the bricklayer, and the carpenter. Suzanne let him talk; she was waiting for the figures. Du Bousquier at last proposed three hundred francs, and at this Suzanne got up as if to go.

"Eh, what! Where are you going?" du Bousquier cried uneasily.—"A fine thing to be a bachelor," he said to himself. "I'll be hanged if I remember doing more than rumple the girl's collar; and hey, presto! on the strength of a joke she takes upon herself to draw a bill upon you, point-blank!"

Suzanne meanwhile began to cry. "Monsieur," she said, "I am going to Mme. Granson, the treasurer of the Maternity Fund; she pulled one poor girl in the same straits out of the water (as you may say) to my knowledge."

"Mme. Granson?"

"Yes. She is related to Mlle. Cormon, the lady patroness of the society. Asking your pardon, some ladies in the town have started a society that will keep many a poor creature from making away with her child, like that pretty Faustine of Argentan did; and paid for it with her life at Mortagne just three years ago."

"Here, Suzanne," returned du Bousquier, holding out a key, "open the desk yourself. There is a bag that has been opened, with six hundred francs still left in it. It is all I have."

Du Bousquier's chopfallen expression plainly showed how little goodwill went with his compliance.

"An old thief!" said Suzanne to herself. "I will tell tales about his false hair!" Mentally she compared him

with that delightful old Chevalier de Valois; he had given her nothing, but he understood her, he had advised her, he had the welfare of his grisettes at heart.

"If you are deceiving me, Suzanne," exclaimed the object of this unflattering comparison, as he watched her hand in the drawer, "you shall——"

"So, monsieur, you would not give me the money if I asked you for it?" interrupted she with queenly insolence.

Once recalled to the ground of gallantry, recollections of his prime came back to the ex-contractor. He grunted assent. Suzanne took the bag and departed, first submitting her forehead to a kiss which he gave, but in a manner which seemed to say, "This is an expensive privilege; but it is better than being browbeaten by counsel in a court of law as the seducer of a young woman accused of child murder."

Suzanne slipped the bag into a pouch-shaped basket on her arm, execrating du Bousquier's stinginess as she did so, for she wanted a thousand francs. If a girl is once possessed by a desire, and has taken the first step in trickery and deceit, she will go to great lengths. As the fair clear-starcher took her way along the Rue de Bercail, it suddenly occurred to her that the Maternity Fund under Mlle. Cormon's presidency would probably make up the sum which she regarded as sufficient for a start, a very large amount in the eyes of an Alençon grisette. And besides, she hated du Bousquier, and du Bousquier seemed frightened when she talked of confessing her so-called strait to Mme. Granson. Wherefore Suzanne determined that whether or no she made a farthing out of the Maternity Fund, she would entangle du Bousquier in the inextricable undergrowth of the gossip of a country town. There is something of a monkey's love of mischief in every grisette. Suzanne composed her countenance dolorously and betook herself accordingly to Mme. Granson.

Mme. Granson was the widow of a lieutenant-colonel of artillery who fell at Jena. Her whole yearly income consisted of a pension of nine hundred francs for her lifetime, and her one possession besides was a son whose education and maintenance had absorbed every penny of her savings. She lived in the Rue du Bercail, in one of the cheerless

ground-floor apartments through which you can see from back to front at a glance as you walk down the main street of any little town. Three steps, rising pyramid fashion, brought you to the level of the house door, which opened upon a passage-way and a little yard beyond, with a wooden-roofed staircase at the further end. Mme. Granson's kitchen and dining-room occupied the space on one side of the passage, on the other side a single room did duty for a variety of purposes, for the widow's bedroom among others. Her son, a young man of three-and-twenty, slept upstairs in an attic above the first floor. Athanase Granson contributed six hundred francs to the poor mother's house-keeping. He was distantly related to Mlle. Cormon, whose influence had obtained him a little post in the registrar's office, where he was employed in making out certificates of births, marriages, and deaths.

After this, anyone can see the little chilly yellow-curtained parlor, the furniture covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, and Mme. Granson going round the room, after her visitors had left, to straighten the little straw mats put down in front of each chair, so as to save the waxed and polished red brick floor from contact with dirty boots; and, this being accomplished, returning to her place beside her work-table under the portrait of her lieutenant-colonel. The cushioned armchair, in which she sat at her sewing, was always drawn up between the two windows, so that she could look up and down the Rue du Bercail and see everyone that passed. She was a good sort of woman, dressed with a homely simplicity in keeping with a pale face, beaten thin, as it were, by many cares. You felt the stern soberness of poverty in every little detail in that house, just as you breathed a moral atmosphere of austerity and upright provincial ways.

Mother and son at this moment were sitting together in the dining-room over their breakfast—a cup of coffee, bread and butter, and radishes. And here, if the reader is to understand how gladly Mme. Granson heard Suzanne, some explanation of the secret hopes of the household must be given.

Athanase Granson was a thin, hollow-cheeked young man

of medium height, with a white face in which a pair of dark eyes, bright with thought, looked like two marks made with charcoal. The somewhat worn contours of that face, the curving line of the lips, a sharply turned-up chin, a regularly cut marble forehead, a melancholy expression caused by the consciousness of power on the one hand and of poverty on the other,—all these signs and characteristics told of imprisoned genius. So much so indeed, that anywhere but at Alençon his face would have won help for him from distinguished men, or from the women that can discern genius *incognito*. For if this was not genius, at least it was the outward form that genius takes; and if the strength of a high heart was wanting, it looked out surely from those eyes. And yet, while Athanase could find expression for the loftiest feeling, an outer husk of shyness spoiled everything in him, down to the very charm of youth, just as the frost of penury disheartened every effort. Shut in by the narrow circle of provincial life, without approbation, encouragement, or any way of escape, the thought within him was dying out before its dawn. And Athanase besides had the fierce pride which poverty intensifies in certain natures, the kind of pride by which a man grows great in the stress of battle with men and circumstance, while at the outset it only handicaps him.

Genius manifests itself in two ways—either by taking its own as soon as it finds it, like a Napoleon or a Molière, or by patiently revealing itself and waiting for recognition. Young Granson belonged to the latter class. He was easily discouraged, ignorant of his value. His turn of mind was contemplative, he lived in thought rather than in action, and possibly, to those who cannot imagine genius without the Frenchman's spark of enthusiasm, he might have seemed incomplete. But Athanase's power lay in the world of thought. He was to pass through successive phases of emotion, hidden from ordinary eyes, to one of those sudden resolves which bring the chapter to a close and set fools declaring that "the man is mad." The world's contempt for poverty was sapping the life in Athanase. The bow, continually strung tighter and tighter, was slackened by the

enervating close air of a solitude with never a breath of fresh air in it. He was giving way under the strain of a cruel and fruitless struggle. Athanase had that in him which might have placed his name among the foremost names of France; he had known what it was to gaze with glowing eyes over Alpine heights and fields of air whither unfettered genius soars, and now he was pining to death like some caged and starved eagle.

While he had worked on unnoticed in the town library, he buried his dreams of fame in his own soul lest they should injure his prospects; and he carried besides another secret hidden even more deeply in his heart, the secret love which hollowed his cheeks and sallowed his forehead.

Athanase loved his distant cousin, that Mlle. Cormon, for whom his unconscious rivals du Bousquier and the Chevalier de Valois were lying in ambush. It was a love born of self-interest. Mlle. Cormon was supposed to be one of the richest people in the town; and he, poor boy, had been drawn to love her partly through the desire for material welfare, partly through a wish formed times without number to gild his mother's declining years; and partly also through cravings for the physical comfort necessary to men who live an intellectual life. In his own eyes, his love was dishonored by its very natural origin; and he was afraid of the ridicule which people pour on the love of a young man of three-and-twenty for a woman of forty. And yet his love was quite sincere. Much that happens in the provinces would be improbable upon the face of it anywhere else, especially in matters of this kind.

But in a country town there are no unforeseen contingencies; there is no coming and going, no mystery, no such thing as chance. Marriage is a necessity, and no family will accept a man of dissolute life. A connection between a young fellow like Athanase and a handsome girl might seem a natural thing enough in a great city; in a country town it would be enough to ruin a young man's chances of marriage, especially if he were poor; for when the prospective bridegroom is wealthy an awkward business of this sort may be smoothed over. Between the degradation of



certain courses and a sincere love, a man that is not heartless can make but one choice if he happens to be poor; he will prefer the disadvantages of virtue to the disadvantages of vice. But in a country town the number of women with whom a young man can fall in love is strictly limited. A pretty girl with a fortune is beyond his reach in a place where everyone's income is known to a farthing. A penniless beauty is equally out of the question. To take her for a wife would be "to marry hunger and thirst," as the provincial saying goes. Finally, celibacy has its dangers in youth. These reflections explain how it has come to pass that marriage is the very basis of provincial life.

Men in whom genius is hot and unquenchable, who are forced to take their stand on the independence of poverty, ought to leave these cold regions; in the provinces thought meets with the persecution of brutal indifference, and no woman cares or dares to play the part of a sister of charity to the worker, the lover of art or sciences.

Who can rightly understand Athanase's love for Mlle. Cormon? Not the rich, the sultans of society, who can find seraglios at their pleasure; not respectability, keeping to the track beaten hard by prejudice; nor yet those women who shut their eyes to the cravings of the artist temperament, and, taking it for granted that both sexes are governed by the same laws, insist upon a system of reciprocity in their particular virtues. The appeal must, perhaps, be made to young men who suffer from the repression of young desires just as they are putting forth their full strength; to the artist whose genius is stilled within him by poverty till it becomes a disease; to power at first unsupported, persecuted, and too often unfriended till it emerges at length triumphant from the twofold agony of soul and body.

These will know the throbbing pangs of the cancer which was gnawing Athanase. Such as these have raised long, cruel debates within themselves, with the so high end in sight and no means of attaining to it. They have passed through the experience of abortive effort; they have left the spawn of genius on the barren sands. They know that the strength

of desire is as the scope of the imagination; the higher the leap, the lower the fall; and how many restraints are broken in such falls! These, like Athanase, catch glimpses of a glorious future in the distance; all that lies between seems but a transparent film of gauze to their piercing sight; but of that film which scarcely obscures the vision, society makes a wall of brass. Urged on by their vocation, by the artist's instinct within them, they too seek times without number to make a stepping-stone of sentiments which society turns in the same way to practical ends. What! when marriages in the provinces are calculated and arranged on every side with a view to securing material welfare, shall it be forbidden to a struggling artist or man of science to keep two ends in view, to try to insure his own subsistence that the thought within him may live?

Athanase Granson, with such ideas as these fermenting in his head, thought at first of marriage with Mlle. Cormon as a definite solution of the problem of existence. He would be free to work for fame, he could make his mother comfortable, and he felt sure of himself—he knew that he could be faithful to Mlle. Cormon. But soon his purpose bred a real passion in him. It was an unconscious process. He set himself to study Mlle. Cormon; then familiarity exercised its spell, and at length Athanase saw nothing but beauties—the defects were all forgotten.

The senses count for so much in the love of a young man of three-and-twenty. Through the heat of desire woman is seen as through a prism. From this point of view it was a touch of genius in Beaumarchais to make the page Cherubino in the play strain Marcellina to his heart. If you recollect, moreover, that poverty restricted Athanase to a life of great loneliness, that there was no other woman to look at, that his eyes were always fastened upon Mlle. Cormon, and that all the light in the picture was concentrated upon her, it seems natural, does it not, that he should love her? The feeling hidden in the depths of his heart could but grow stronger day by day. Desire and pain and hope and meditation, in silence and repose, were filling up Athanase's soul to the brim; every hour added its drop. As his senses came to the

aid of imagination and widened the inner horizon, Mlle. Cormon became more and more awe-inspiring, and he grew more and more timid.

The mother had guessed it all. She was a provincial, and she frankly calculated the advantages of the match. Mlle. Cormon might think herself very lucky to marry a young man of twenty-three with plenty of brains, a likely man to do honor to his name and country. Still the obstacles, Athanase's poverty and Mlle. Cormon's age, seemed to her to be insurmountable; there was nothing for it that she could see but patience. She had a policy of her own, like du Bousquier and the Chevalier de Valois; she was on the lookout for her opportunity, waiting, with wits sharpened by self-interest and a mother's love, for the propitious moment.

Of the Chevalier de Valois, Mme. Granson had no suspicion whatsoever; du Bousquier she still credited with views upon the lady, albeit Mlle. Cormon had once refused him. An adroit and secret enemy, Mme. Granson did the contractor untold harm to serve the son to whom she had not spoken a word. After this, who does not see the importance of Suzanne's lie once confided to Mme. Granson? What a weapon put into the hands of the charitable treasurer of the Maternity Fund! How demurely she would carry the tale from house to house when she asked for subscriptions for the chaste Suzanne!

At this particular moment Athanase was pensively sitting with his elbow on the table, balancing a spoon on the edge of the empty bowl before him. He looked with unseeing eyes round the poor room, over the walls covered with an old-fashioned paper only seen in wineshops, at the window-curtains with a chessboard pattern of pink-and-white squares, at the red-brick floor, the straw-bottomed chairs, the painted wooden sideboard, the glass door that opened into the kitchen. As he sat facing his mother and with his back to the fire, and as the fireplace was almost opposite the door, the first thing which caught Suzanne's eyes was his pale face, with the light from the street window falling full upon it, a face framed in dark hair, and eyes with the gleam

of despair in them, and a fever kindled by the morning's thoughts.

The grisette surely knows by instinct the pain and sorrow of love; at the sight of Athanase, she felt that sudden electric thrill which comes we know not whence. We cannot explain it; some strong-minded persons deny that it exists, but many a woman and many a man has felt that shock of sympathy. It is a flash, lighting up the darkness of the future, and at the same time a presentiment of the pure joy of love shared by two souls, and a certainty that this other too understands. It is more like the strong, sure touch of a master hand upon the clavier of the senses than anything else. Eyes are riveted by an irresistible fascination, hearts are troubled, the music of joy rings in the ears and thrills the soul; a voice cries, "It is he!" And then—then very likely, reflection throws a douche of cold water over all this turbulent emotion, and there is an end of it.

In a moment, swift as a clap of thunder, a broadside of new thoughts poured in upon Suzanne. A lightning flash of love burned the weeds which had sprung up in dissipation and wantonness. She saw all that she was losing by blighting her name with a lie, the desecration, the degradation of it. Only last evening this idea had been a joke, now it was like a heavy sentence passed upon her. She recoiled before her success. But, after all, it was quite impossible that anything should come of this meeting; and the thought of Athanase's poverty, and a vague hope of making money and coming back from Paris with both hands full, to say, "I loved you all along"—or fate, if you will have it so—dried up the beneficent dew. The ambitious damsel asked shyly to speak for a moment with Mme. Granson, who took her into her bedroom.

When Suzanne came out again she looked once more at Athanase. He was still sitting in the same attitude. She choked back her tears.

As for Mme. Granson, she was radiant. She had found a terrible weapon to use against du Bousquier at last; she could deal him a deadly blow. So she promised the poor victim of seduction the support of all the ladies who sub-

scribed to the Maternity Fund. She foresaw a dozen calls in prospect. In the course of the morning and afternoon she would conjure down a terrific storm upon the elderly bachelor's head. The Chevalier de Valois certainly foresaw the turn that matters were likely to take, but he had not expected anything like the amount of scandal that came of it.

"We are going to dine with Mlle. Cormon, you know, dear boy," said Mme. Granson; "take rather more pains with your appearance. It is a mistake to neglect your dress as you do; you look so untidy. Put on your best frilled shirt and your green cloth coat. I have my reasons," she added, with a mysterious air. "And besides, there will be a great many people; Mlle. Cormon is going to the Prébautet directly. If a young man is thinking of marrying, he ought to make himself agreeable in every possible way. If girls would only tell the truth, my boy, dear me! you would be surprised at the things that take their fancy. It is often quite enough if a young man rides by at the head of a company of artillery, or comes to a dance in a suit of clothes that fits him passably well. A certain way of carrying the head, a melancholy attitude, is enough to set a girl imagining a whole life; we invent a romance to suit the hero; often he is only a stupid young man, but the marriage is made. Take notice of M. de Valois, study him, copy his manners; see how he looks at ease; he has not a constrained manner, as you have. And talk a little; anyone might think that you knew nothing at all, *you* that know Hebrew by heart."

Athanase heard her submissively, but he looked surprised. He rose, took his cap, and went back to his work.

"Can mother have guessed my secret?" he thought, as he went round by the Rue de Val-Noble where Mlle. Cormon lived, a little pleasure in which he indulged of a morning. His head was swarming with romantic fancies.

"How little she thinks that going past her house at this moment is a young man who would love her dearly, and be true to her, and never cause her a single care, and leave her fortune entirely in her own hands! Oh me! what a strange fatality it is that we two should live as we do in the same

town and within a few paces of each other, and yet nothing can bring us any nearer! How if I spoke to her to-night?"

Meanwhile Suzanne went home to her mother, thinking the while of poor Athanase, feeling that for him she could find it in her heart to do what many a woman must have longed to do for the one beloved with superhuman strength; she could have made a stepping-stone of her beautiful body if so he might come to his kingdom the sooner.

And now we must enter the house where all the actors in this Scene (Suzanne excepted) were to meet that very evening, the house belonging to the old maid, the converging point of so many interests. As for Suzanne, that young woman with her well-grown beauty, with courage sufficient to burn her boats, like Alexander, and to begin the battle of life with an uncalled-for sacrifice of her character, she now disappears from the stage after bringing about a violently exciting situation. Her wishes, moreover, were more than fulfilled. A few days afterwards she left her native place with a stock of money and fine clothes, including a superb green rep gown and a green bonnet lined with rose color, M. de Valois's gifts, which Suzanne liked better than anything else, better even than the Maternity Society's money. If the Chevalier had gone to Paris while Suzanne was in her heyday, she would assuredly have left all for him.

And so this chaste Suzanne, of whom the elders scarcely had more than a glimpse, settled herself comfortably and hopefully in Paris, while all Alençon was deploring the misfortunes with which the ladies of the Charitable and Maternity Societies had manifested so lively a sympathy.

While Suzanne might be taken as a type of the handsome Norman virgins who furnish, on the showing of a learned physician, one-third of the supply devoured by the monster, Paris, she entered herself, and remained in those higher branches of her profession in which some regard is paid to appearances. In an age in which, as M. de Valois said, "woman has ceased to be woman," she was known merely as Mme. du Val-Noble; in other times she would have rivaled an Imperia, a Rhodope, a Ninon. One of the most

distinguished writers of the Restoration took her under his protection, and very likely will marry her some day; he is a journalist, and above public opinion, seeing that he creates a new one every six years.

In almost every prefecture of the second magnitude there is some salon frequented not exactly by the cream of the local society, but by personages both considerable and well considered. The host and hostess probably will be among the foremost people in the town. To them all houses are open; no entertainment, no public dinner is given, but they are asked to it; but in their salon you will not meet the *gens à château*—lords of the manor, peers of France living on their broad acres, and persons of the highest quality in the department, though these are all on visiting terms with the family, and exchange invitations to dinners and evening parties. The mixed society to be found there usually consists of the lesser *noblesse* resident in the town, with the clergy and judicial authorities. It is an influential assemblage. All the wit and sense of the district is concentrated in its solid, unpretentious ranks. Everybody in the set knows the exact amount of his neighbor's income, and professes the utmost indifference to dress and luxury, trifles held to be mere childish vanity compared with the acquisition of a *mouchoir à bœufs*—a pocket handkerchief of some ten or a dozen acres, purchased after as many years of pondering and intriguing and a prodigious deal of diplomacy.

Unshaken in its prejudices, whether good or ill, the coterie goes on its way without a look before or behind. Nothing from Paris is allowed to pass without a prolonged scrutiny; innovations are ridiculous, and consols and cashmere shawls alike objectionable. Provincials read nothing and wish to learn nothing; for them, science, literature, and mechanical invention are as the thing that is not. If a prefect does not suit their notions, they do their best to have him removed; if this cannot be done, they isolate him. So will you see the inmates of a beehive wall up an intruding snail with wax. Finally, of the gossip of the salon, history is made. Young married women put in an appearance there occasionally (though the card-table is the one resource) that their con-

duct may be stamped with the approval of the coterie and their social status confirmed.

Native susceptibilities are sometimes wounded by the supremacy of a single house, but the rest comfort themselves with the thought that they save the expense entailed by the position. Sometimes it happens that no one can afford to keep open house, and then the bigwigs of the place look about them for some harmless person whose character, position, and social standing offer guarantees for the neutrality of the ground, and alarm nobody's vanity or self-interest. This had been the case at Alençon. For a long time past the best society of the town has been wont to assemble in the house of the old maid before mentioned, who little suspected Mme. Granson's designs on her fortune, or the secret hopes of the two elderly bachelors who have just been unmasked.

Mlle. Cormon was Mme. Granson's fourth cousin. She lived with her mother's brother, a sometimes vicar-general of the bishopric of Sées; she had been her uncle's ward, and would one day inherit his fortune. Rose Marie Victoire Cormon was the last representative of a house which, plebeian though it was, had associated and often allied itself with the *noblesse*, and ranked among the oldest families in the province. In former times the Cormons had been intendants of the duchy of Alençon, and had given a goodly number of magistrates to the bench, and several bishops to the Church. M. de Sponde, Mlle. Cormon's maternal grandfather, was elected by the *noblesse* to the States-General; and M. Cormon, her father, had been asked to represent the Third Estate, but neither of them accepted the responsibility. For the last century, the daughters of the house had married into the noble families of the province, in such sort that the Cormons were grafted into pretty nearly every genealogical tree in the duchy. No burgher family came so near being noble.

The house in which the present Mlle. Cormon lived had never passed out of the family since it was built by Pierre Cormon in the reign of Henri IV.; and of all the old maid's worldly possessions, this one appealed most to the greed of



her elderly suitors; though, so far from bringing in money, the ancestral home of the Cormons was a positive expense to its owner. But it is such an unusual thing, in the very center of a country town, to find a house handsome without, convenient within, and free from mean surroundings, that all Alençon shared the feeling of envy.

The old mansion stood exactly halfway down the Rue du Val-Noble, *The Val-Noble*, as it was called, probably because the Brillante, the little stream which flows through the town, has hollowed out a little valley for itself in a dip of the land thereabouts. The most noticeable feature of the house was its massive architecture, of the style introduced from Italy by Marie de' Medici; all the corner-stones and facings were cut with diamond-shaped bosses, in spite of the difficulty of working in the granite of which it is built. It was a two-storied house with a very high-pitched roof, and a row of dormer windows, each with its carved tympanum standing picturesquely enough above the lead-lined parapet with its ornamental balustrade. A grotesque gargoyle, the head of some fantastic bodiless beast, discharged the rain-water through its jaws into the street below, where great stone slabs, pierced with five holes, were placed to receive it. Each gable terminated in a leaden finial, a sign that this was a burgher's house, for none but nobles had a right to put up a weathercock in olden times. To right and left of the yard stood the stables and the coach-house, the kitchen, laundry, and wood-shed. One of the leaves of the great gate used to stand open; so that passers-by, looking in through the little low wicket with the bell attached, could see the parterre in the middle of a spacious paved court, and the low-clipped privet hedges which marked out miniature borders full of monthly roses, clove gilliflowers, scabious, and lilies, and Spanish broom; as well as the laurel-bushes and pomegranates and myrtles which grew in tubs put out of doors for the summer.

The scrupulous neatness and tidiness of the place must have struck any stranger, and furnished him with a clew to the old maid's character. The mistress's eyes must have been unemployed, careful, and prying; less, perhaps, from

any natural bent, than for want of any occupation. Who but an elderly spinster, at a loss how to fill an always empty day, would have insisted that no blade of grass should show itself in the paved courtyard, that the wall-tops should be scoured, that the broom should always be busy, that the coach should never be left with the leather curtains undrawn? Who else, from sheer lack of other employment, could have introduced something like Dutch cleanliness into a little province between Perche, Normandy, and Brittany, where the natives make boast of their crass indifference to comfort? The Chevalier never climbed the steps without reflecting inwardly that the house was fit for a peer of France; and du Bousquier similarly considered that the Mayor of Alençon ought to live there.

A glass door at the top of the flight of steps gave admittance to an antechamber lighted by a second glass door opposite, above a corresponding flight of steps leading into the garden. This part of the house, a kind of gallery floored with square red tiles, and wainscoted to elbow-height, was a hospital for invalid family portraits; one here and there had lost an eye or sustained injury to a shoulder, another stood with a hole in the place where his hat should have been, yet another had lost a leg by amputation. Here cloaks, clogs, overshoes, and umbrellas were left; everybody deposited his belongings in the antechamber on his arrival, and took them again at his departure. A long bench was set against either wall for the servants who came of an evening with their lanterns to fetch home their masters and mistresses, and a big stove was set in the middle to mitigate the icy blasts which swept across from door to door.

This gallery, then, divided the ground floor into two equal parts. The staircase rose to the left on the side nearest the courtyard, the rest of the space being taken up by the great dining-room, with its windows looking out upon the garden, and a pantry beyond, which communicated with the kitchen. To the right lay the salon, lighted by four windows, and a couple of smaller rooms beyond it, a boudoir which gave upon the garden, and a room which did duty as a study and looked into the courtyard. There was a complete suite of

rooms on the first floor, beside the Abbé de Sponde's apartments; while the attic story, in all probability roomy enough, had long since been given over to the tenancy of rats and mice. Mlle. Cormon used to report their nocturnal exploits to the Chevalier de Valois, and marvel at the futility of all measures taken against them.

The garden, about half an acre in extent, was bounded by the Brillante, so called from the mica spangles which glitter in its bed; not, however, in the Val-Noble, for the manufacturers and dyers of Alençon pour all their refuse into the shallow stream before it reaches this point; and the opposite bank, as always happens wherever a stream passes through a town, was lined with houses where various thirsty industries were carried on. Luckily, Mlle. Cormon's neighbors were all of them quiet tradesmen—a baker, a fuller, and one or two cabinetmakers. Her garden, full of old-fashioned flowers, naturally ended in a terrace, by way of a quay, with a short flight of steps down to the water's edge. Try to picture the wallflowers growing in blue-and-white glazed jars along the balustrade by the river, behold a shady walk to right and left beneath the square-clipped lime-trees, and you will have some idea of a scene full of unpretending cheerfulness and sober tranquillity; you can see the views of homely humble life along the opposite bank, the quaint houses, the trickling stream of the Brillante, the garden itself, the linden walks under the garden walls, and the venerable home built by the Cormons. How peaceful, how quiet it was! If there was no ostentation, there was nothing transitory, everything seemed to last forever there.

The ground-floor rooms, therefore, were given over to social uses. You breathed the atmosphere of the Province, ancient, unalterable Province. The great square-shaped salon, with its four doors and four windows, was modestly wainscoted with carved panels, and painted gray. On the wall, above the single oblong mirror on the chimney-piece, the Hours, in monochrome, were ushering in the Day. For this particular style of decoration, which used to infest the spaces above doors, the artist's invention devised the eternal Seasons which meet your eyes almost anywhere in central France,

till you loathe the detestable Cupids engaged in reaping, skating, sowing seeds, or flinging flowers about. Every window was overarched with a sort of baldachin with green damask curtains drawn back with cords and huge tassels. The tapestry-covered furniture, with a darn here and there at the edges of the chairs, belonged distinctly to that period of the eighteenth century when curves and contortions were in the very height of fashion; the frames were painted and varnished, the subjects in the medallions on the backs were taken from *La Fontaine*. Four card-tables, a table for piquet, and another for backgammon filled up the immense space. A rock crystal chandelier, shrouded in green gauze, hung suspended from the prominent cross-beam which divided the ceiling, the only plastered ceiling in the house. Two branched candle-sconces were fixed into the wall above the chimney-piece, where a couple of blue Sèvres vases stood on either side of a copper-gilt clock which represented a scene taken from *Le Déserteur*—a proof of the prodigious popularity of Sedaine's work. It was a group of no less than eleven figures, four inches high; the Deserter emerging from jail escorted by a guard of soldiers, while a young person, swooning in the foreground, held out his reprieve. The hearth and fire-irons were of the same date and style. The more recent family portraits—one or two Rigauds and three pastels by Latour—adorned the wainscot panels.

The study, paneled entirely in old lacquer work, red and black and gold, would have fetched fabulous sums a few years later; Mlle. Cormon was as far as possible from suspecting its value; but if she had been offered a thousand crowns for every panel, she would not have parted with a single one. It was a part of her system to alter nothing, and everywhere in the provinces the belief in ancestral hoards is very strong. The boudoir, never used, was hung with the old-fashioned chintz so much run after nowadays by amateurs of the "Pompadour style," as it is called.

The dining-room was paved with black-and-white stone; it had not been ceiled, but the joists and beams were painted. Ranged round the walls, beneath a flowered trellis, painted in fresco, stood the portentous, marble-topped sideboards,

indispensable in the warfare waged in the provinces against the powers of digestion. The chairs were cane-seated and varnished, the doors of unpolished walnut wood. Everything combined admirably to complete the general effect, the old-world air of the house within and without. The provincial spirit had preserved all as it had always been; nothing was new or old, young or decrepit. You felt a sense of chilly precision everywhere.

Any tourist in Brittany, Normandy, Maine, or Anjou must have seen some house more or less like this in one or other provincial town; for the Hôtel de Cormon was in its way a very pattern and model of burgher houses over a large part of France, and the better deserves a place in this chronicle because it is at once a commentary on the manners of the place and the expression of its ideas. Who does not feel, even now, how much the life within the old walls was one of peaceful routine?

For such library as the house possessed you must have descended rather below the level of the Brillante. There stood a solidly clasped oak-bound collection, none the worse, nay, rather the better, for a thick coating of dust; a collection kept as carefully as a cider-growing district is wont to keep the products of the presses of Burgundy, Touraine, Gascony, and the South. Here were works full of native force and exquisite qualities, with an added perfume of antiquity. No one will import poor wines when the cost of carriage is so heavy.

Mlle. Cormon's whole circle consisted of about a hundred and fifty persons. Of these, some went into the country, some were ill, others from home on business in the department, but there was a faithful band which always came, unless Mlle. Cormon gave an evening party in form; so also did those persons who were bound either by their duties or old habit to live in Alençon itself. All these people were of ripe age. A few among them had traveled, but scarcely any of them had gone beyond the province, and one or two had been implicated in Chouannerie. People could begin to speak freely of the war, now that rewards had come to the heroic defenders of the good cause. M. de Valois had been con-

cerned in the last rising, when the Marquis de Montauran lost his life, betrayed by his mistress; and Marche-à-Terre, now peacefully driving a grazier's trade by the banks of the Mayenne, had made a famous name for himself. M. de Valois, during the past six months, had supplied the key to several shrewd tricks played off upon Hulot the old Republican, commander of a demi-brigade stationed at Alençon from 1798 till 1800. There was talk of Hulot yet in the countryside.<sup>1</sup>

The women made little pretense of dress, except on Wednesdays, when Mlle. Cormon gave a dinner party, and last week's guests came to pay their "visit of digestion." On Wednesday evening the rooms were filled. Guests and visitors came in gala dress; here and there a woman brought her knitting or her tapestry work, and some young ladies unblushingly drew patterns for *point d'Alençon*, by which they supported themselves. Men brought their wives, because there were so few young fellows there; no whisper could pass unnoticed, and therefore there was no danger of love-making for maid or matron. Every evening at six o'clock the lobby was filled with articles of dress, with sticks, cloaks, and lanterns. Everyone was so well acquainted, the customs of the house were so primitive, that if by any chance the Abbé de Sponde was in the lime-tree walk, and Mlle. Cormon in her room, neither Josette the maid nor Jacquelin the man thought it necessary to inform them of the arrival of visitors. The first comer waited till someone else arrived; and when they mustered players sufficient for whist or boston, the game was begun without waiting for the Abbé de Sponde or mademoiselle. When it grew dark, Josette or Jacquelin brought lights as soon as the bell rang, and the old Abbé out in the garden, seeing the drawing-room windows illuminated, hastened slowly towards the house. Every evening the piquet, boston, and whist tables were full, giving an average of twenty-five or thirty persons, including those who came to chat; but often there were as many as thirty or forty, and then Jacquelin took candles into the study and the boudoir. Between eight and nine at night the servants

<sup>1</sup> See *Les Chouans*.

began to fill the antechamber; and nothing short of a revolution would have found anyone in the salon by ten o'clock. At that hour the frequenters of the house were walking home through the streets, discussing the points made, or keeping up a conversation begun in the salon. Sometimes the talk turned on a pocket-handkerchief of land on which somebody had an eye, sometimes it was the division of an inheritance and disputes among the legatees, or the pretensions of the aristocratic set. You see exactly the same thing at Paris when the theaters disgorge.

Some people who talk a great deal about poetry and understand nothing about it, are wont to rail at provincial towns and provincial ways; but lean your forehead on your left hand, as you sit with your feet on the fire-dogs, and rest your elbow on your knee, and then—if you have fully realized for yourself the level pleasant landscape, the house, the interior, the folk within it and their interests, interests that seem all the larger because the mental horizon is so limited (as a grain of gold is beaten thin between two sheets of parchment)—then ask yourself what human life is. Try to decide between the engraver of the hieroglyphic birds on an Egyptian obelisk, and one of these folk in Alençon playing boston through a score of years with du Bousquier, M. de Valois, Mlle. Cormon, the President of the Tribunal, the Public Prosecutor, the Abbé de Sponde, Mme. Granson *e tutti quanti*. If the daily round, the daily pacing of the same track in the footsteps of many yesterdays, is not exactly happiness, it is so much like it that others, driven by dint of storm-tossed days to reflect on the blessings of calm, will say that it is happiness indeed.

To give the exact measure of the importance of Mlle. Cormon's salon, it will suffice to add that du Bousquier, a born statistician, computed that its frequenters mustered among them a hundred and thirty-one votes in the electoral college, and eighteen hundred thousand livres of income derived from lands in the province. The town of Alençon was not, it is true, completely represented there. The aristocratic section, for instance, had a salon of their own, and the receiver-general's house was a sort of official inn kept, as

in duty bound, by the Government, where everybody who was anybody danced, flirted, fluttered, fell in love, and supped. One or two unclassified persons kept up the communications between Mlle. Cormon's salon and the other two, but the Cormon salon criticised all that passed in the opposed camps very severely. Sumptuous dinners gave rise to unfavorable comment; ices at a dance caused searchings of heart; the women's behavior and dress and any innovations were much discussed.

Mlle. Cormon being, as it were, the style of the firm, and figure-head of an imposing coterie, was inevitably the object of any ambition as profound as that of the du Bousquier or the Chevalier de Valois. To both gentlemen she meant a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, with a peerage for the Chevalier, a receiver-general's post for du Bousquier. A salon admittedly of the first rank is every whit as hard to build up in a country town as in Paris. And here was the salon ready made. To marry Mlle. Cormon was to be lord of Alençon. Finally, Athanase, the only one of the three suitors that had ceased to calculate, cared as much for the woman as for her money.

Is there not a whole strange drama (to use the modern cant phrase) in the relative position of these four human beings? There is something grotesque, is there not, in the idea of three rival suitors eagerly pressing about an old maid who never so much as suspected their intentions, in spite of her intense and very natural desire to be married? Yet although, things being so, it may seem an extraordinary thing that she should not have married before, it is not difficult to explain how and why, in spite of her fortune and her three suitors, Mlle. Cormon was still unwed.

From the first, following the family tradition, Mlle. Cormon had always wished to marry a noble, but between the years 1789 and 1799 circumstances were very much against her. While she would have wished to be the wife of a person of condition, she was horribly afraid of the Revolutionary Tribunal; and these two motives weighing about equally, she remained stationary according to a law which holds equally good in æsthetics or statics. At the same time, the



condition of suspended judgment is not unpleasant for a girl, so long as she feels young and thinks that she can choose where she pleases. But, as all France knows, the system of government immediately preceding the wars of Napoleon produced a vast number of widows; and the number of heiresses was altogether out of proportion to the number of eligible men. When order was restored in the country, in the time of the Consulate, external difficulties made marriage as much of a problem as ever for Rose Marie Victoire. On the one hand, she declined to marry an elderly man; and, on the other, dread of ridicule and circumstances put quite young men out of the question. In those days heads of families married their sons as mere boys, because in this way they escaped the conscription. With the obstinacy of a landed proprietor, mademoiselle would not hear of marrying a military man; she had no wish to take a husband only to give him back to the Emperor, she wished to keep him for herself. And so, between 1804 and 1815 it was impossible to compete with a younger generation of girls, too numerous already in times when cannon shot had thinned the ranks of marriageable men.

Again, apart from Mlle. Cormon's predilection for birth, she had a very pardonable craze for being loved for her own sake. You would scarcely believe the lengths to which she carried this fancy. She set her wits to work to lay snares for her admirers, to try their sentiments; and that with such success, that the unfortunates one and all fell into them, and succumbed in the whimsical ordeals through which they passed at unawares. Mlle. Cormon did not study her suitors, she played the spy upon them. A careless word, or a joke, and the lady did not understand jokes very well, was excuse enough to dismiss an aspirant as found wanting. This had neither spirit nor delicacy; that was untruthful and not a Christian; one wanted to cut down tall timber and coin money under the marriage canopy; another was not the man to make her happy; or, again, she had her suspicions of gout in the family, or took fright at her wooer's antecedents. Like Mother Church, she would fain see a priest without blemish at her altar. And then Rose Marie Victoire

made the worst of herself, and was as anxious to be loved, with all her factitious plainness and imaginary faults, as other women are to be married for virtues which they have not and for borrowed beauty. Mlle. Cormon's ambition had its source in the finest instincts of womanhood. She would reward her lover by discovering to him a thousand virtues after marriage, as other women reveal the many little faults kept hitherto strenuously out of sight. But no one understood. The noble girl came in contact with none but commonplace natures, with whom practical interests came first; the finer calculations of feeling were beyond their comprehension.

She grew more and more suspicious as the critical period so ingeniously called "second youth" drew nearer. Her fancy for making the worst of herself with increasing success frightened away the latest recruits; they hesitated to unite their lot with hers. The strategy of her game of hoodman-blind (the virtues to be revealed when the finder's eyes were opened) was a complex study for which few men have inclination; they prefer perfection ready-made. An ever-present dread of being married for her money made her unreasonably distrustful and uneasy. She fell foul of the rich, and the rich could look higher; she was afraid of poor men, she would not believe them capable of that disinterestedness on which she set such store; till at length her rejections and other circumstances let in an unexpected light upon the minds of suitors thus presented for her selection like dried peas on a seedsman's sieve. Every time a marriage project came to nothing, the unfortunate girl, being gradually led to despise mankind, saw the other sex at last in a false light. Inevitably, in her inmost soul, she grew misanthropic, a tinge of bitterness was infused into her conversation, a certain harshness into her expression. And her manners became more and more rigid under the stress of enforced celibacy; in her despair she sought to perfect herself. It was a noble vengeance. She would polish and cut for God the rough diamond rejected by men.

Before long public opinion was against Mlle. Cormon. People accept the verdict which a woman passes upon herself if, being free to marry, she fails to fulfill expectations,

or is known to have refused eligible suitors. Everyone decides that she has her own reasons for declining marriage, and those reasons are always misinterpreted. There was some hidden physical defect or deformity, they said; but she, poor girl, was pure as an angel, healthy as a child, and overflowing with kindness. Nature had meant her to know all the joys, all the happiness, all the burdens of motherhood.

Yet in her person Mlle. Cormon did not find a natural auxiliary to gain her heart's desire. She had no beauty, save of the kind so improperly called "the Devil's"; that full-blown freshness of youth which, theologically speaking, the Devil never could have possessed; unless, indeed, we are to look for an explanation of the expression in the Devil's continual desire of refreshing himself. The heiress's feet were large and flat; when, on rainy days, she crossed the wet streets between her house and St. Leonard's, her raised skirt displayed (without malice, be it said) a leg which scarcely seemed to belong to a woman, so muscular was it, with a small, firm, prominent calf like a sailor's. She had a figure for a wet nurse. Her thick, honest waist, her strong, plump arms, her red hands; everything about her, in short, was in keeping with the round, expansive contours and portly fairness of the Norman style of beauty. Wide open, prominent eyes of no particular color gave to a face, by no means distinguished in its round outlines, a sheepish, astonished expression not altogether inappropriate, however, in an old maid: even if Rose had not been innocent, she must still have seemed so. An aquiline nose was oddly assorted with a low forehead, for a feature of that type is almost invariably found in company with a lofty brow. In spite of thick, red lips, the sign of great kindness of nature, there were evidently so few ideas behind that forehead, that Rose's heart could scarcely have been directed by her brain. Kind she must certainly be, but not gracious. And we are apt to judge the defects of goodness very harshly, while we make the most of the redeeming qualities of vice.

An extraordinary length of chestnut hair lent Rose Cormon such beauty as belongs to vigor and luxuriance, her

chief personal characteristics. In the time of her pretensions she had a trick of turning her face in three-quarters profile to display a very pretty ear, gracefully set between the azure-streaked white throat and the temple, and thrown into relief by thick masses of her hair. Dressed in a ball gown, with her head poised at this angle, Rose might almost seem beautiful. With her protuberant bust, her waist, her high health, she used to draw exclamations of admiration from Imperial officers. "What a fine girl!" they used to say.

But, as years went on, the stoutness induced by a quiet, regular life distributed itself so unfortunately over her person, that its original proportions were destroyed. No known variety of corset could have discovered the poor spinster's hips at this period of her existence; she might have been cast in one uniform piece. The youthful proportions of her figure were completely lost; her dimensions had grown so excessive, that no one could see her stoop without fearing that, being so top-heavy, she would certainly overbalance herself; but nature had provided a sufficient natural counterpoise, which enabled her to dispense with all adventitious aid from "dress improvers." Everything about Rose was very genuine.

Her chin developed a triple fold, which reduced the apparent length of her throat, and made it no easy matter to turn her head. She had no wrinkles, she had creases. Wags used to assert that she powdered herself, as nurses powder babies, to prevent chafing of the skin. To a young man, consumed, like Athanase, with suppressed desires, this excessive corpulence offered just the kind of physical charm which could not fail to attract youth. Youthful imaginations, essentially intrepid, stimulated by appetite, are prone to dilate upon the beauties of that living expanse. So does the plump partridge allure the epicure's knife. And, indeed, any debt-burdened young man of fashion in Paris would have resigned himself readily enough to fulfilling his part of the contract and making Mlle. Cormon happy. Still the unfortunate spinster had already passed her fortieth year!

At this period of enforced loneliness, after the long, vain struggle to fill her life with those interests that are all in all to woman, she was fortifying herself in virtue by the most strict observance of religious duties; she had turned to the great consolation of well-preserved virginity. A confessor, endowed with no great wisdom, had directed Mlle. Cormon in the paths of asceticism for some three years past, recommending a system of self-scourging, calculated, according to modern doctors, to produce an effect the exact opposite of that expected by the poor priest, whose knowledge of hygiene was but limited. These absurd practices were beginning to bring a certain monastic tinge to Rose Cormon's face; with frequent pangs of despair, she watched the sallow hues of middle age creeping across its natural white and red; while the trace of down about the corners of her upper lip showed a distinct tendency to darken and increase like smoke. Her temples grew shiny. She had passed the turning-point, in fact. It was known for certain in Alençon that Mlle. Cormon suffered from heated blood. She inflicted her confidence upon the Chevalier de Valois, reckoning up the number of foot-baths that she took, and devising cooling treatment with him. And that shrewd observer would end by taking out his snuff-box, and gazing at the portrait of the Princess Goritza as he remarked, "But the real sedative, my dear young lady, would be a good and handsome husband."

"But whom could one trust?" returned she.

But the Chevalier only flicked away the powdered snuff from the creases of his paduasoy waistcoat. To anybody else the proceeding would have seemed perfectly natural, but it always made the poor old maid feel uncomfortable.

The violence of her objectless longings grew to such a height that she shrank from looking a man in the face, so afraid was she that the thoughts which pierced her heart might be read in her eyes. It was one of her whims, possibly a later development of her former tactics, to behave almost ungraciously to the possible suitors towards whom she still felt herself attracted, so afraid was she of being accused of folly. Most people in her circle were utterly

incapable of appreciating her motives, so noble throughout; they explained her manner to her coevals in 'single blessedness by a theory of revenge for some past slight.

With the beginning of the year 1815 Rose Cormon had reached the fatal age, to which she did not confess. She was forty-two. By this time her desire to be married had reached a degree of intensity bordering on monomania. She saw her chances of motherhood fast slipping away forever; and, in her divine ignorance, she longed above all things for children of her own. There was not a soul found in Alençon to impute a single unchaste desire to the virtuous girl. She loved love, taking all for granted, without realizing for herself what love would be—a devout Agnès, incapable of inventing one of the little shifts of Molière's heroine.

She had been counting upon chance of late. The disbanding of the Imperial troops and the reconstruction of the King's army was sending a tide of military men back to their native places, some of them on half-pay, some with pensions, some without, and all of them anxious to find some way of amending their bad fortune, and of finishing their days in a fashion which would mean the beginning of happiness for Mlle. Cormon. It would be hard indeed if she could not find a single brave and honorable man among all those who were coming back to the neighborhood. He must have a sound constitution in the first place, he must be of suitable age, and a man whose personal character would serve as a passport to his Bonapartist opinions; perhaps he might even be willing to turn Royalist for the sake of gaining a lost social position.

Supported by these mental calculations, Mlle. Cormon maintained the severity of her attitude for the first few months of the year; but the men that came back to the town were all either too old or too young, or their characters were too bad, or their opinions too Bonapartist, or their station in life was incompatible with her position, fortune, and habits. The case grew more and more desperate every day. Officers high in the service had used their advantages under Napoleon to marry, and these gentle-

men now became Royalists for the sake of their families. In vain had she put up prayers to Heaven to send her a husband that she might be happy in Christian fashion; it was written, no doubt, that she should die virgin and martyr, for not a single likely-looking man presented himself.

In the course of conversation in her drawing-room of an evening, the frequenters of the house kept the police register under tolerably strict supervision; no one could arrive in Alençon but they informed themselves at once as to the new-comer's mode of life, quality, and fortune. But, at the same time, Alençon is not a town to attract many strangers; it is not on the high road to any large city; there are no chance arrivals; naval officers on their way to Brest do not so much as stop in the place.

Poor Mlle. Cormon at last comprehended that her choice was reduced to the natives. At times her eyes took an almost fierce expression, to which the Chevalier would respond with a keen glance at her as he drew out his snuff-box to gaze at the Princess Goritzza. M. de Valois knew that in feminine jurisprudence, fidelity to an old love is a guarantee for the new. But Mlle. Cormon, it cannot be denied, was not very intelligent. His snuff-box strategy was wasted upon her.

She redoubled her watchfulness, the better to combat the "evil one," and with devout rigidness and the sternest principles she consigned her cruel sufferings to the secret places of her life.

At night, when she was alone, she thought of her lost youth, of her faded bloom, of the thwarted instincts of her nature; and while she laid her passionate longings at the foot of the Cross, together with all the poetry doomed to remain pent within her, she vowed inwardly to take the first man that was willing to marry her, just as he was, without putting him to any proof whatsoever. Sounding her own dispositions, after a series of vigils, each more trying than the last, in her own mind she went so far as to espouse a sub-lieutenant, a tobacco-smoker to boot; nay, he was even head over ears in debt. Him she proposed to transform with care, submission, and gentleness into a pat-

tern for mankind. But only in the silence of night could she plan these imaginary marriages, in which she amused herself with playing the sublime part of guardian angel; with morning, if Josette found her mistress's bed-clothes turned topsy-turvy, mademoiselle had recovered her dignity; with morning, after breakfast, she would have nothing less than a solid landowner, a well-preserved man of forty—a young man, as you may say.

The Abbé de Sponde was incapable of giving his niece assistance of any sort in schemes for marriage. The good man, aged seventy or thereabouts, referred all the calamities of the Revolution to the design of a Providence prompt to punish a dissolute Church. For which reason M. de Sponde had long since entered upon a deserted path to heaven, the way trodden by the hermits of old. He led an ascetic life, simply, unobtrusively; hiding his deeds of charity, his constant prayer and fasting, from all other eyes. Necessity was laid upon all priests, he thought, to do as he did; he preached by example, turning a serene and smiling face upon the world, while he completely cut himself off from worldly interests. All his thoughts were given to the afflicted, to the needs of the Church, and the saving of his own soul. He left the management of his property to his niece. She paid over his yearly income to him, and, after a slight deduction for his maintenance, the whole of it went in private almsgiving or in donations to the Church.

All the Abbé's affections were centered upon his niece, and she looked upon him as a father. He was a somewhat absent-minded father, however, without the remotest conception of the rebellion of the flesh; a father who gave thanks to God for maintaining his beloved daughter in a state of virginity; for from his youth up he had held, with St. John Chrysostom, "that virginity is as much above the estate of marriage as the angels are above man."

Mlle. Cormon was accustomed to look up to her uncle; she did not venture to confide her wishes for a change of condition to him; and he, good man, on his side was accustomed to the ways of the house, and perhaps might not have relished the introduction of a master into it. Ab-



sorbed in thoughts of the distress which he relieved, or lost in fathomless inner depths of prayer, he was often unconscious of what was going on about him; frequenters of the house set this down to absent-mindedness; but while he said little, his silence was neither unsociable nor ungenial. A tall, spare, grave, and solemn man, his face told of kindly feeling and a great inward peace. His presence in the house seemed as it were to consecrate it. The Abbé entertained a strong liking for that elderly skeptic the Chevalier de Valois. Far apart as their lives were, the two grand wrecks of the eighteenth century clergy and *noblesse* recognized each other by generic signs and tokens; and the Chevalier, for that matter, could converse with unction with the Abbé, just as he talked like a father with his grisettes.

Some may think that Mlle. Cormon would leave no means untried to gain her end; that among other permissible feminine artifices, for instance, she would turn to her toilets, wear low-cut bodices, use the passive coquetry of a display of the splendid equipment with which she might take the field. On the contrary, she was as heroic and steadfast in her high-necked gown as a sentry in his sentry-box. All her dresses, bonnets, and finery were made in Alençon by two hunchbacked sisters, not wanting in taste. But in spite of the entreaties of the two artists, Mlle. Cormon utterly declined the adventitious aid of elegance; she must be substantial throughout, body and plumage, and possibly her heavy-looking dresses became her not amiss. Laugh who will at her, poor thing. Generous natures, those who never trouble themselves about the form in which good feeling shows itself, but admire it wherever they find it, will see something sublime in this trait. Perhaps some slight-natured feminine critic may begin to carp, and say that there is no woman in France so simple but that she can angle for a husband; that Mlle. Cormon is one of those abnormal creatures which common-sense forbids us to take for a type; that the best or the most babyish unmarried woman that has a mind to hook a gudgeon can put forward some physical charm wherewith to bait her line. But when

you begin to think that the sublime Apostolic Roman Catholic Church is still a power in Brittany and the ancient duchy of Alençon, these criticisms fall to the ground. Faith and piety admit no such subtleties. Mlle. Cormon kept to the straight path, preferring the misfortune of a maidenhood infinitely prolonged to the misery of untruthfulness, to the sin of small deceit. Armed with self-discipline, such a girl cannot make a sacrifice of a principle; and therefore love (or self-interest) must make a very determined effort to find her out and win her.

Let us have the courage to make a confession, painful in these days when religion is nothing but a means of advancement for some, a dream for others: the devout are subject to a kind of moral ophthalmia, which, by the especial grace of Providence, removes a host of small earthly concerns out of the sight of the pilgrim of Eternity. In a word, the devout are apt to be dense in a good many ways. Their stupidity, at the same time, is a measure of the force with which their spirits turn heavenwards; albeit the skeptical M. de Valois maintained that it is a moot point whether stupid women take naturally to piety, or whether piety, on the other hand, has a stupefying effect upon an intelligent girl.

It must be borne in mind that it is the purest orthodox goodness, ready to drink rapturously of every cup set before it, to submit devoutly to the will of God, to see the print of the divine finger everywhere in the clay of life,—that it is catholic virtue stealing like hidden light into the innermost recesses of this History that alone can bring everything into right relief, and widen its significance for those who yet have faith. And, again, if the stupidity is admitted, why should the misfortunes of stupidity be less interesting than the woes of genius in a world where fools so overwhelmingly preponderate?

To resume. Mlle. Cormon's divine girlish ignorance of life was an offense in the eyes of the world. She was anything but observant, as her treatment of her suitors sufficiently showed. At this very moment, a girl of sixteen who had never opened a novel in her life might have read

a hundred chapters of romance in Athanase's eyes. But Mlle. Cormon saw nothing all the while; she never knew that the young man's voice was unsteady with emotion which he dared not express, and the woman who could invent refinements of high sentiment to her own undoing could not discern the same feelings in Athanase.

Those who know that qualities of heart and brain are as independent of each other as genius and greatness of soul, will see nothing extraordinary in this psychological phenomenon. A complete human being is so rare a prodigy, that Socrates, that pearl among mankind, agreed with a contemporary phrenologist that he himself was born to be a very scurvy knave. A great general may save his country at Zurich, and yet take a commission from contractors; a banker's doubtful honesty does not prevent him from being a statesman; a great composer may give the world divine music, and yet forge another man's signature; and a woman of refined feeling may be excessively weak-minded. In short, a devout woman may have a very lofty soul, and yet have no ears to hear the voice of another noble soul at her side.

The unaccountable freaks of physical infirmity find a parallel in the moral world. Here was a good creature making her preserves and breaking her heart till she grew almost ridiculous, because, forsooth, there was no one to eat them but her uncle and herself. Those who sympathized with her for the sake of her good qualities, or, in some cases, on account of her defects, used to laugh over her disappointments. People began to wonder what would become of so fine a property with all Mlle. Cormon's savings, and her uncle's to boot.

It was long since they began to suspect that at bottom, and in spite of appearances, Mlle. Cormon was "an original." Originality is not allowed in the provinces; originality means that you have ideas which nobody else can understand, and in a country town people's intellects, like their manner of life, must all be on a level. Even in 1804 Rose's matrimonial prospects were considered so problematical, that "to marry like Mlle. Cormon" was a current saying

in Alençon, and the most ironical way of suggesting Such-an-one would never marry at all.

The necessity to laugh at someone must indeed be imperious in France, if anyone could be found to raise a smile at the expense of that excellent creature. Not merely did she entertain the whole town, she was charitable, she was good; she was incapable of saying a spiteful word; and more than that, she was so much in unison with the whole spirit of the place, its manners and its customs, that she was generally beloved as the very incarnation of the life of the province; she had imbibed all its prejudices and made its interests hers; she had never gone beyond its limits, she adored it; she was embedded in provincial tradition. In spite of her eighteen thousand livres per annum, a tolerably large income for the neighborhood, she accommodated herself to the ways of her less wealthy neighbors. When she went to her country house, the Prébaudet, for instance, she drove over in an old-fashioned wicker cariole hung with white leather straps, and fitted with a couple of rusty weather-beaten leather curtains, which scarcely closed it in. The equipage, drawn by a fat, broken-winded mare, was known all over the town. Jacquelin, the manservant, cleaned it as carefully as if it had been the finest brougham from Paris. Mademoiselle was fond of it; it had lasted her a dozen years, a fact which she was wont to point out with the triumphant joy of contented parsimony. Most people were grateful to her for forbearing to humiliate them by splendor which she might have flaunted before their eyes; it is even credible that if she had sent for a calèche from Paris, it would have caused more talk than any of her "disappointments." After all, the finest carriage in the world, like the old-fashioned cariole, could only have taken her to the Prébaudet; and in the provinces they always keep the end in view, and trouble themselves very little about the elegance of the means, provided that they are sufficient.

To complete the picture of Mlle. Cormon's household and domestic life, several figures must be grouped round Mlle. Cormon and the Abbé de Sponde. Jacquelin, and

“Josette, and Mariette, the cook, ministered to the comfort of uncle and niece.

Jacquelin, a man of forty, short and stout, dark-haired and ruddy, with a countenance of the Breton sailor type, had been in service in the house for twenty-two years. He waited at table, groomed the mare, worked in the garden, cleaned the Abbé's shoes, ran errands, chopped firewood, drove the cariole, went to the Prébaudet for corn, hay, and straw, and slept like a dormouse in the antechamber of an evening. He was supposed to be fond of Josette, and Josette was six-and-thirty. But if she had married him, Mlle. Cormon would have dismissed her, and so the poor lovers were fain to save up their wages in silence, and to wait and hope for mademoiselle's marriage, much as the Jews look for the advent of the Messiah.

Josette came from the district between Alençon and Mortagne; she was a fat little woman. Her face, which reminded you of a mud-bespattered apricot, was not wanting either in character or intelligence. She was supposed to rule her mistress. Josette and Jacquelin, feeling sure of the event, found consolation, presumably by discounting the future. Mariette, the cook, had likewise been in the family for fifteen years; she was skilled in the cookery of the country and the preparation of the most esteemed provincial dishes.

Perhaps the fat old bay mare, of the Normandy breed, which Mlle. Cormon used to drive to the Prébaudet, ought to count for a good deal, for the affection which the five inmates of the house bore the animal amounted to mania. Penelope, for that was her name, had been with them for eighteen years; and so well was she cared for, so regularly tended, that Jacquelin and mademoiselle hoped to get quite another ten years of work out of her. Penelope was a stock subject and source of interest in their lives. It seemed as if poor Mlle. Cormon, with no child of her own, lavished all her maternal affection upon the lucky beast. Almost every human being leading a solitary life in a crowded world will surround himself with a make-believe family of some sort, and Penelope took the place of dogs, cats, or canaries.

These four faithful servants—for Penelope's intelligence had been trained till it was very nearly on a par with the wits of the other three, while they had sunk pretty much into the dumb, submissive, dog-trot life of the animal—these four retainers came and went and did the same things day after day, with the unfailing regularity of clockwork. But, to use their own expression, "they had eaten their white bread first." Mlle. Cormon suffered from a fixed idea upon the nerves; and, after the wont of such sufferers, she grew fidgety and hard to please, not by force of nature, but because she had no outlet for her energies. She had neither husband nor children to fill her thoughts, so they fastened upon trifles. She would talk for hours at a stretch of some inconceivably small matter, of a dozen serviettes, for instance, lettered Z, which somehow or other had been put before O.

"Why, what can Josette be thinking about?" she cried. "Has she no notion what she is doing?"

Jacquelin chanced to be late in feeding Penelope one afternoon, so every day for a whole week afterwards mademoiselle inquired whether the horse had been fed at two o'clock. Her narrow imagination spent itself on small matters. A layer of dust forgotten by the feather mop, a slice of scorched toast, an omission to close the shutters on Jacquelin's part when the sun shone in upon furniture and carpets,—all these important trifles produced serious trouble, mademoiselle lost her temper over them. "Nothing was the same as it used to be. The servants of old days were so changed that she did not know them. They were spoilt. She was too good to them," and so forth and so forth. One day Josette gave her mistress the *Journée du Chrétien* instead of the *Quinzaine de Pâques*. The whole town heard of the mistake before night. Mademoiselle had been obliged to get up and come out of church, disturbing whole rows of chairs and raising the wildest conjectures, so that she was obliged afterwards to give all her friends a full account of the mishap.

"Josette," she said mildly, when she had come the whole way home from St. Leonard's, "this must never happen again."

Mlle. Cormon was far from suspecting that it was a very fortunate thing for her that she could vent her spleen in petty squabbles. The mind, like the body, requires exercise; these quarrels were a sort of mental gymnastics. Josette and Jacquelin took such unevennesses of temper as the agricultural laborer takes the changes of the weather. The three good souls could say among themselves that "It is a fine day," or "It rains," without murmuring against the powers above. Sometimes in the kitchen of a morning they would wonder in what humor mademoiselle would wake, much as a farmer studies the morning mists. And of necessity Mlle. Cormon ended by seeing herself in all the infinitely small details which made up her life. Herself and God, her confessor and her washing-days, the preserves to be made, the services of the church to attend, and the uncle to take care of,—all these things absorbed faculties that were none of the strongest. For her the atoms of life were magnified by virtue of an optical process peculiar to the selfish or the self-absorbed. To so perfectly healthy a woman, the slightest symptom of indigestion was a positively alarming portent. She lived, moreover, under the ferule of the system of medicine practiced by our grandsires; a drastic dose fit to kill Penelope, taken four times a year, merely gave Mlle. Cormon a fillip.

What tremendous ransackings of the week's dietary if Josette, assisting her mistress to dress, discovered a scarcely visible pimple on shoulders that still boasted a satin skin! What triumph if the maid could bring a certain hare to her mistress's recollection, and trace the accursed pimple to its origin in that too heating article of food! With what joy the two women would cry, "It is the hare beyond a doubt!"

"Marianne over-seasoned it," mademoiselle would add; "I always tell her not to overdo it for my uncle and me, but Marianne has no more memory than——"

"Than the hare," suggested Josette.

"It is the truth," returned mademoiselle; "she has no more memory than the hare; you have just hit it."

Four times in a year, at the beginning of each season,

Mlle. Cormon went to spend a certain number of days at the Prébaudet. It was now the middle of May, when she liked to see how her apple-trees had "snowed," as they say in the cider country, an allusion to the white blossoms strewn in the orchards in the spring. When the circles of fallen petals look like snow-drifts under the trees, the proprietor may hope to have abundance of cider in the autumn. Mlle. Cormon estimated her barrels, and at the same time superintended any necessary after-winter repairs, planning out work in the garden and orchard, from which she drew no inconsiderable supplies. Each time of year had its special business.

Mademoiselle used to give a farewell dinner to her faithful inner circle before leaving, albeit she would see them again at the end of three weeks. All Alençon knew when the journey was to be undertaken. Anyone that had fallen behind-hand immediately paid a call, her drawing-room was filled; everybody wished her a prosperous journey, as if she had been starting for Calcutta. Then, in the morning, all the tradespeople were standing in their doorways; everyone, great and small, watched the cariole go past, and it seemed as if everybody learned a piece of fresh news when one repeated after another, "So Mlle. Cormon is going to the Prébaudet."

One would remark, "She has bread ready baked, she has!"

And his neighbor would return, "Eh! my lad, she is a good woman; if property always fell into such hands as hers, there would not be a beggar to be seen in the countryside."

Or another would exclaim, "Hullo! I should not wonder if our oldest vines are in flower, for there is Mlle. Cormon setting out for the Prébaudet. How comes it that she is so little given to marrying?"

"I should be quite ready to marry her, all the same," a wag would answer. "The marriage is half made—one side is willing, but the other isn't. Pooh! the oven is heating for M. du Bousquier."

"*M. du Bousquier?* She has refused him."



At every house that evening people remarked solemnly, "Mlle. Cormon has gone."

Or perhaps, "So you have let Mlle. Cormon go!"

The Wednesday selected by Suzanne for making a scandal chanced to be this very day of leave-taking, when Mlle. Cormon nearly drove Josette to distraction over the packing of the parcels which she meant to take with her. A good deal that was done and said in the town that morning was like to lend additional interest to the farewell gathering at night. While the old maid was busily making preparations for her journey; while the astute Chevalier was playing his game of piquet in the house of Mlle. Armande de Gordes, sister of the aged Marquis de Gordes, and queen of the aristocratic salon, Mme. Granson had sounded the alarm bell in half a score of houses. There was not a soul but felt some curiosity to see what sort of figure the seducer would cut that evening; and to Mme. Granson and the Chevalier de Valois it was an important matter to know how Mlle. Cormon would take the news, in her double quality of marriageable spinster and lady president of the Maternity Fund. As for the unsuspecting du Bousquier, he was taking the air on the Parade. He was just beginning to think that Suzanne had made a fool of him; and this suspicion only confirmed the rules which he had laid down with regard to womankind.

On these high days the cloth was laid about half-past three in the Maison Cormon. Four o'clock was the state dinner hour in Alençon, on ordinary days they dined at two, as in the time of the Empire; but, then, they supped!

Mlle. Cormon always felt an inexpressible sense of satisfaction when she was dressed to receive her guests as mistress of her house. It was one of the pleasures which she most relished, be it said without malice, though egoism certainly lay beneath the feeling. When thus arrayed for conquest, a ray of hope slid across the darkness of her soul; a voice within her cried that nature had not endowed her so abundantly in vain, that surely some enterprising man was about to appear for her. She felt the younger for the wish, and the fresher for her toilet; she looked at her stout figure with a certain elation; and afterwards, when she went downstairs

to submit salon, study, and boudoir to an awful scrutiny, this sense of satisfaction still remained with her. To and fro she went, with the naïve contentment of the rich man who feels conscious at every moment that he is rich and will lack for nothing all his life long. She looked round upon her furniture, the eternal furniture, the antiquities, the lacquered panels, and told herself that such fine things ought to have a master.

After admiring the dining-room, where the space was filled by the long table with its snowy cloth, its score of covers symmetrically laid; after going through the roll-call of a squadron of bottles ordered up from the cellar, and making sure that each bore an honorable label; and finally, after a most minute verification of a score of little slips of paper on which the Abbé had written the names of the guests with a trembling hand—it was the sole occasion on which he took an active part in the household, and the place of every guest always gave rise to grave discussion—after this review, Mlle. Cormon in her fine array went into the garden to join her uncle; for at this pleasantest hour of the day he used to walk up and down the terrace beside the Brillante, listening to the twittering of the birds, which, hidden closely among the leaves in the lime-tree walk, knew no fear of boys or sportsmen.

Mlle. Cormon never came out to the Abbé during these intervals of waiting without asking some hopelessly absurd question, in the hope of drawing the good man into a discussion which might interest him. Her reasons for so doing must be given, for this very characteristic trait adds the finishing touch to her portrait.

Mlle. Cormon considered it a duty to talk; not that she was naturally loquacious, for, unfortunately, with her dearth of ideas and very limited stock of phrases, it was difficult to hold forth at any length; but she thought that in this way she was fulfilling the social duties prescribed by religion, which bids us be agreeable to our neighbor. It was a duty which weighed so much upon her mind, that she had submitted this case of conscience out of the *Child's Guide to Manners* to her director, the Abbé Couturier. Whereupon, so

far from being disarmed by the penitent's humble admission of the violence of her mental struggles to find something to say, the old ecclesiastic, being firm in matters of discipline, read her a whole chapter out of St. François de Sales on the Duties of a Woman in the World; on the decent gayety of the pious Christian female, and the duty of confining her austerities to herself; a woman, according to this authority, ought to be amiable in her home and to act in such a sort that her neighbor never feels dull in her company. After this, Mlle. Cormon, with a deep sense of duty, was anxious to obey her director at any cost. He had bidden her to discourse agreeably, so every time the conversation languished she felt the perspiration breaking out over her with the violence of her exertions to find something to say which should stimulate the flagging interest. She would come out with odd remarks at such times. Once she revived, with some success, a discussion on the ubiquity of the apostles (of which she understood not a syllable) by the unexpected observation that "You cannot be in two places at once unless you are a bird." With such conversational cues as these, the lady had earned the title of "dear, good Mlle. Cormon" in her set, which phrase, in the mouth of local wits, might be taken to mean that she was as ignorant as a carp, and a bit of a "natural"; but there were plenty of people of her own caliber to take the remark literally, and reply, "Oh yes, Mlle. Cormon is very good."

Sometimes (always in her desire to be agreeable to her guests and fulfill her duties as a hostess) she asked such absurd questions that everybody burst out laughing. She wanted to know, for example, what the Government did with the taxes which it had been receiving all these years; or how it was that the Bible had not been printed in the time of Christ, seeing that it had been written by Moses. Altogether she was on a par with the English country gentleman, and member of the House of Commons, who made the famous speech in which he said, "I am always hearing of Posterity; I should very much like to know what Posterity has done for the country."

On such occasions, the heroic Chevalier de Valois came

to the rescue, bringing up all the resources of his wit and tact at the sight of the smiles exchanged by pitiless smatterers. He loved to give to woman, did this elderly noble; he lent his wit to Mlle. Cormon by coming to her assistance with a paradox, and covered her retreat so well, that sometimes it seemed as if she had said nothing foolish. She once owned seriously that she did not know the difference between an ox and a bull. The enchanting Chevalier stopped the roars of laughter by saying that oxen could never be more than uncles to the bullocks. Another time, hearing much talk of cattle-breeding and its difficulties—a topic which often comes up in conversation in the neighborhood of the superb du Pin stud—she so far grasped the technicalities of horse-breeding as to ask, “Why, if they wanted colts, they did not serve a mare twice a year.” The Chevalier drew down the laughter upon himself.

“It is quite possible,” said he. The company pricked up their ears.

“The fault lies with the naturalists,” he continued; “they have not found out how to breed mares that are less than eleven months in foal.”

Poor Mlle. Cormon no more understood the meaning of the words than the difference between the ox and the bull. The Chevalier met with no gratitude for his pains; his chivalrous services were beyond the reach of the lady’s comprehension. She saw that the conversation grew livelier; she was relieved to find that she was not so stupid as she imagined. A day came at last when she settled down in her ignorance, like the Duc de Brancas; and the hero of *Le Distrait*, it may be remembered, made himself so comfortable in the ditch after his fall, that when the people came to pull him out, he asked what they wanted with him. Since a somewhat recent period Mlle. Cormon had lost her fears. She brought out her conversational cues with a self-possession akin to that solemn manner—the very coxcombrity of stupidity—which accompanies the fatuous utterances of British patriotism.

As she went with stately steps towards the terrace therefore, she was chewing the cud of reflection, seeking for some

question which should draw her uncle out of a silence which always hurt her feelings; she thought that he felt dull.

"Uncle," she began, hanging on his arm, and nestling joyously close to him (for this was another of her make-believes, "if I had a husband, I should do just so!" she thought)—"Uncle, if everything on earth happens by the will of God, there must be a reason for everything?"

"Assuredly," the Abbé de Sponde answered gravely. He loved his niece, and submitted with angelic patience to be torn from his meditations.

"Then if I never marry at all, it will be because it is the will of God?"

"Yes, my child."

"But still, as there is nothing to prevent me from marrying to-morrow, my will perhaps might thwart the will of God?"

"That might be so, if we really knew God's will," returned the sub-prior of the Sorbonne. "Remark, my dear, that you insert an *if*."

Poor Rose was bewildered. She had hoped to lead her uncle to the subject of marriage by way of an argument *ad omnipotentem*. But the naturally obtuse are wont to adopt the remorseless logic of childhood, which is to say, they proceed from the answer to another question, a method frequently found embarrassing.

"But, uncle," she persisted, "God cannot mean women never to marry; for if He did, all of them ought to be either unmarried or married. Their lots are distributed unjustly."

"My child," said the good Abbé, "you are finding fault with the Church, which teaches that celibacy is a more excellent way to God."

"But if the Church was right, and everybody was a good Catholic, there would soon be no more people, uncle."

"You are too ingenious, Rose; there is no need to be so ingenious to be happy."

Such words brought a smile of satisfaction to poor Rose's lips and confirmed her in the good opinion which she began to conceive of herself. Behold how the world, like our friends and enemies, contributes to strengthen our faults.

At this moment guests began to arrive, and the conversation was interrupted. On these high festival occasions, the disposition of the rooms brought about little familiarities between the servants and invited guests. Mariette saw the President of the Tribunal, a triple expansion glutton, as he passed by her kitchen.

“Oh, M. du Ronceret, I have been making cauliflower *au gratin* on purpose for you, for mademoiselle knows how fond you are of it. ‘Mind you do not fail with it, Mariette,’ she said; ‘M. le Président is coming.’”

“Good Mlle. Cormon,” returned the man of law. “Mariette, did you baste the cauliflowers with gravy instead of stock? It is more savory.” And the President did not disdain to enter the council-chamber where Mariette ruled the roast, nor to cast an epicure’s eye over her preparations, and give his opinion as a master of the craft.

“Good-day, madame,” said Josette, addressing Mme. Granson, who sedulously cultivated the waiting-woman. “Mademoiselle has not forgotten you; you are to have a dish of fish.”

As for the Chevalier de Valois, he spoke to Mariette with the jocularly of a great noble unbending to an inferior—

“Well, dear cordon bleu, I would give you the Cross of the Legion of Honor if I could; tell me, is there any dainty morsel for which one ought to save oneself?”

“Yes, yes, M. de Valois, a hare from the Prébaudet; it weighed fourteen pounds!”

“That’s a good girl,” said the Chevalier, patting Josette on the cheek with two fingers. “Ah! weighs fourteen pounds, does it?”

Du Bousquier was not of the party. Mlle. Cormon treated him hardly, faithful to her system before described. In the very bottom of her heart she felt an inexplicable drawing towards this man of fifty, whom she had once refused. Sometimes she repented of that refusal, and yet she had a presentiment that she should marry him after all, and a dread of him which forbade her to wish for the marriage. These ideas stimulated her interest in du Bousquier. The Republican’s herculean proportions produced an effect upon

her which she would not admit to herself; and the Chevalier de Valois and Mme. Granson, while they could not explain Mlle. Cormon's inconsistencies, had detected naïve, furtive glances, sufficiently clear in their significance to set them both on the watch to ruin the hopes which du Bousquier clearly entertained in spite of a first check.

Two guests kept the others waiting, but their official duties excused them both. One was M. du Coudrai, registrar of mortgages; the other, M. Choisnel, had once acted as land-steward to the Marquis de Gordes. Choisnel was the notary of the old *noblesse*, and received everywhere among them with the distinction which his merits deserved; he had besides a not inconsiderable private fortune. When the two late comers arrived, Jacquelin, the man-servant, seeing them turn to go into the drawing-room, came forward with, " 'They' are all in the garden."

The registrar of mortgages was one of the most amiable men in the town. There were but two things against him—he had married an old woman for her money in the first place, and in the second it was his habit to perpetrate outrageous puns, at which he was the first to laugh. But, doubtless, the stomachs of the guests were growing impatient, for at first sight he was hailed with that faint sigh which usually welcomes last comers under such circumstances. Pending the official announcement of dinner, the company strolled up and down the terrace by the Brillante, looking out over the stream with its bed of mosaic and its water-plants, at the so picturesque details of the row of houses huddled together on the opposite bank; the old-fashioned wooden balconies, the tumble-down window sills, the balks of timber that shored up a story projecting over the river, the cabinetmaker's workshop, the tiny gardens where odds and ends of clothing were hanging out to dry. It was, in short, the poor quarter of a country town, to which the near neighborhood of the water, a weeping willow drooping over the bank, a rosebush or so, and a few flowers, had lent an indescribable charm, worthy of a landscape painter's brush.

The Chevalier meanwhile was narrowly watching the faces of the guests. He knew that his firebrand had very suc-

cessfully taken hold of the best coteries in the town; but no one spoke openly of Suzanne and du Bousquier and the great news as yet. The art of distilling scandal is possessed by provincials in a supreme degree. It was felt that the time was not yet ripe for open discussion of the strange event. Everyone was bound to go through a private rehearsal first. So it was whispered—

“Have you heard?”

“Yes.”

“Du Bousquier?”

“And the fair Suzanne.”

“Does Mlle. Cormon know anything?”

“No.”

“Ah!”

This was gossip *piano*, presently destined to swell into a *crescendo* when they were ready to discuss the first dish of scandal.

All of a sudden the Chevalier confronted Mme. Granson. That lady had sported her green bonnet, trimmed with auriculas; her face was beaming. Was she simply longing to begin the concert? Such news is as good as a gold-mine to be worked in the monotonous lives of these people; but the observant and uneasy Chevalier fancied that he read something more in the good lady's expression—to wit, the exultation of self-interest! At once he turned to look at Athanase, and detected in his silence the signs of profound concentration of some kind. In another moment the young man's glance at Mlle. Cormon's figure, which sufficiently resembled a pair of regimental kettledrums, shot a sudden light across the Chevalier's brain. By that gleam he could read the whole past.

“Egad!” he said to himself, “what a slap in the face I have laid myself out to get!”

He went across to offer his arm to Mlle. Cormon, so that he might afterwards take her in to dinner. She regarded the Chevalier with respectful esteem; for, in truth, with his name and position in the aristocratic constellations of the province, he was one of the most brilliant ornaments of her salon. In her heart of hearts, she had longed to be Mme. de



Valois at any time during the past twelve years. The name was like a branch for the swarming thoughts of her brain to cling about—he fulfilled all her ideals as to the birth, quality, and externals of an eligible man. But while the Chevalier de Valois was the choice of heart and brain and social ambition, the elderly ruin, curled though he was like a St. John of a procession-day, filled Mlle. Cormon with dismay; the heiress saw nothing but the noble; the woman could not think of him as a husband. The Chevalier's affectation of indifference to marriage, and still more his unimpeachable character in a household of work-girls, had seriously injured him, contrary to his own expectations. The man of quality, so clearly-sighted in the matter of the annuity, miscalculated on this subject; and Mlle. Cormon herself was not aware that her private reflections upon the too well-conducted Chevalier might have been translated by the remark, "What a pity that he is not a little bit of a rake!"

Students of human nature have remarked these leanings of the saint towards the sinner, and wondered at a taste so little in accordance, as they imagine, with Christian virtue. But, to go no further, what nobler destiny for a virtuous woman than the task of cleansing, after the manner of charcoal, the turbid waters of vice? How is it that nobody has seen that these generous creatures, confined by their principles to strict conjugal fidelity, must naturally desire a mate of great practical experience? A reformed rake makes the best husband. And so it came to pass that the poor spinster must sigh over the chosen vessel, offered her as it were in two pieces. Heaven alone could weld the Chevalier du Valois and du Bousquier in one.

If the significance of the few words exchanged between the Chevalier and Mlle. Cormon is to be properly understood, it is necessary to put other matters before the reader. Two very serious questions were dividing Alençon into two camps, and, moreover, du Bousquier was mixed up in both affairs in some mysterious way. The first of these debates concerned the curé. He had taken the oath of allegiance in the time of the Revolution, and now was living down orthodox prejudices by setting an example of the loftiest goodness.

He was a Cheverus on a smaller scale, and so much was he appreciated, that when he died the whole town wept for him. Mlle. Cormon and the Abbé de Sponde belonged, however, to the minority, to the Church sublime in its orthodoxy, a section which was to the Court of Rome as the Ultras were shortly to be to the Court of Louis XVIII. The Abbé, in particular, declined to recognize the Church that had submitted to force and made terms with the Constitutionnels. So the curé was never seen in the salon of the Maison Cormon, and the sympathies of its frequenters were with the officiating priest of St. Leonard's, the aristocratic church in Alençon. Du Bousquier, that rabid Liberal under a Royalist's skin, knew how necessary it is to find standards to rally the discontented, who form, as it were, the back-shop of every opposition, and therefore he had already enlisted the sympathies of the trading classes for the curé.

Now for the second affair. The same blunt diplomatist was the secret instigator of a scheme for building a theater, an idea which had only lately sprouted in Alençon. Du Bousquier's zealots knew not their Mahomet, but they were the more ardent in their defense of what they believed to be their own plan. Athanase was one of the very hottest of the partisans in favor of the theater; in the mayor's office for several days past he had been pleading for the cause which all the younger men had taken up.

To return to the Chevalier. He offered his arm to Mlle. Cormon, who thanked him with a radiant glance for this attention. For all answer, the Chevalier indicated Athanase by a meaning look.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "as you have such well-balanced judgment in matters of social convention, and as that young man is related to you in some way——"

"Very distantly," she broke in.

"Ought you not to use the influence which you possess with him and his mother to prevent him from going utterly to the bad? He is not very religious as it is; he defends that perjured priest; but that is nothing. It is a much more serious matter; is he not plunging thoughtlessly into opposition without realizing how his conduct may affect his

prospects? He is scheming to build this theater; he is the dupe of that Republican in disguise, du Bousquier——”

“Dear me, M. de Valois, his mother tells me that he is so clever, and he has not a word to say for himself; he always stands planted before you like a statue——”

“Of limitations,” cried the registrar. “I caught that flying.—I present my *devoirs* to the Chevalier de Valois,” he added, saluting the latter with the exaggeration of Henri Monnier as “Joseph Prudhomme,” an admirable type of the class to which M. du Coudrai belonged.

M. de Valois, in return, gave him the abbreviated patronizing nod of a noble standing on his dignity; then he drew Mlle. Cormon further along the terrace by the distance of several flower-pots, to make the registrar understand that he did not wish to be overheard.

Then, lowering his voice, he bent to say in Mlle. Cormon’s ear: “How can you expect that lads educated in these detestable Imperial Lyceums should have any ideas? Great ideas and a lofty love can only come of right courses and nobleness of life. It is not difficult to foresee, from the look of the poor fellow, that he will be weak in his intellect and come to a miserable end. See how pale and haggard he looks!”

“His mother says that he works far too hard,” she replied innocently. “He spends his nights, think of it! in reading books and writing. What good can it possibly do a young man’s prospects to sit up writing at night?”

“Why, it exhausts him,” said the Chevalier, trying to bring the lady’s thoughts back to the point, which was to disgust her with Athanase. “The things that went on in those Imperial Lyceums were something really shocking.”

“Oh yes,” said the simple lady. “Did they not make them walk out with drums in front? The masters had no more religion than heathens; and they put them in uniform, poor boys, exactly as if they had been soldiers. What notions!”

“And see what comes of it,” continued the Chevalier, indicating Athanase. “In my time, where was the young man that could not look a pretty woman in the face? Now, *he*

lowers his eyes as soon as he sees you. That young man alarms me, because I am interested in him. Tell him not to intrigue with Bonapartists, as he is doing, to build this theater; if these little youngsters do not raise an insurrection and demand it (for insurrection and constitution, to my mind, are two words for the same thing), the authorities will build it. And tell his mother to look after him."

"Oh, she will not allow him to see these half-pay people or to keep low company, I am sure. I will speak to him about it," said Mlle. Cormon; "he might lose his situation at the mayor's office. And then what would they do, he and his mother? It makes you shudder."

As M. de Talleyrand said of his wife, so said the Chevalier within himself at that moment, as he looked at the lady—

"If there is a stupider woman, I should like to see her. On the honor of a gentleman, if virtue make a woman so stupid as this, is it not a vice? And yet, what an adorable wife she would make for a man of my age! What principle! What ignorance of life!"

Please to bear in mind that these remarks were addressed to the Princess Goritzza during the manipulation of a pinch of snuff.

Mme. Granson felt instinctively that the Chevalier was talking of Athanase. In her eagerness to know what he had been saying, she followed Mlle. Cormon, who walked up to the young man in question, putting out six feet of dignity in front; but at that very moment Jacquelin announced that "Mademoiselle was served," and the mistress of the house shot an appealing glance at the Chevalier. But the gallant registrar of mortgages was beginning to see a something in M. de Valois's manner, a glimpse of the barrier which the *noblesse* were about to raise between themselves and the *bourgeoisie*; so, delighted with a chance to cut out the Chevalier, he crooked his arm, and Mlle. Cormon was obliged to take it. M. de Valois, from motives of policy, fastened upon Mme. Granson.

"Mlle. Cormon takes the liveliest interest in your dear Athanase, my dear lady," he said, as they slowly followed in the wake of the other guests, "but that interest is falling

off through your son's fault. He is lax and Liberal in his opinions, he is agitating for this theater; he is mixed up with the Bonapartists; he takes the part of the Constitutionnel curé. This line of conduct may cost him his situation. You know how carefully his Majesty's government is weeding the service. If your dear Athanase is once cashiered, where will he find employment? He must not get into bad odor with the authorities."

"Oh, M. le Chevalier," cried the poor startled mother, "what do I not owe you for telling me this! You are right; my boy is a tool in the hands of a bad set; I will open his eyes to his position."

It was long since the Chevalier had sounded Athanase's character at a glance. He saw in the depths of the young man's nature the scarcely malleable material of Republican convictions; a lad at that age will sacrifice everything for such ideas if he is smitten with the word Liberty, that so vague, so little comprehended word which is like a standard of revolt for those at the bottom of the wheel for whom revolt means revenge. Athanase was sure to stick to his opinions, for he had woven them, with his artist's sorrows and his embittered views of the social framework, into his political creed. He was ready to sacrifice his future at the outset for these opinions, not knowing that he, like all men of real ability, would have seen reason to modify them by the time he reached the age of six-and-thirty, when a man has formed his own conclusions of life, with its intricate relations and interdependences. If Athanase was faithful to the opposition in Alençon, he would fall into disgrace with Mlle. Cormon. Thus far the Chevalier saw clearly.

And so this little town, so peaceful in appearance, was to the full as much agitated internally as any congress of diplomats, when craft and guile and passion and self-interest are met to discuss the weightiest questions between empire and empire.

Meanwhile the guests gathered about the table were eating their way through the first course as people eat in the provinces, without a blush for an honest appetite; whereas, in Paris, it would appear that our jaws are controlled by

sumptuary edicts which deliberately set the laws of anatomy at defiance. We eat with the tips of our teeth in Paris, we filch the pleasures of the table, but in the provinces things are taken more naturally; possibly existence centers a little too much about the great and universal method of maintenance to which God condemns all His creatures. It was at the end of the first course that Mlle. Cormon brought out the most celebrated of all her conversational cues; it was talked of for two years afterwards; it is quoted even now, indeed, in the sub-*bourgeois* strata of Alençon whenever her marriage is under discussion. Over the last entrée but one, the conversation waxed lively and wordy, turning, as might have been expected, upon the affair of the theater and the curé. In the first enthusiasm of Royalism in 1816, those extremists, who were afterwards called *les Jésuites du pays*, were for expelling the Abbé François from his cure. M. de Valois suspected du Bousquier of supporting the priest and instigating the intrigues; at any rate, the noble Chevalier piled the burdens on du Bousquier's back with his wonted skill; and du Bousquier, being unrepresented by counsel, was condemned and put in the pillory. Among those present, Athanase was the only person sufficiently frank to stand up for the absent, and he felt that he was not in a position to bring out his ideas before these Alençon magnates, of whose intellects he had the meanest opinion. Only in the provinces nowadays will you find young men keeping a respectful countenance before people of a certain age without daring to have a fling at their elders or to contradict them too flatly. To resume. On the advent of some delicious *canards aux olives*, the conversation first decidedly flagged, and then suddenly dropped dead. Mlle. Cormon, emulous of her own poultry, invented another *canard* in her anxiety to defend du Bousquier, who had been represented as an arch-concoctor of intrigue, and a man to set mountains fighting.

“For my own part,” said she, “I thought that M. du Bousquier gave his whole attention to childish matters.”

Under the circumstances, the epigram produced a tremendous effect. Mlle. Cormon had a great success; she

brought the Princess Goritza face downwards on the table. The Chevalier, by no means expecting his Dulcinea to say anything so much to the purpose, could find no words to express his admiration; he applauded after the Italian fashion, noiselessly, with the tips of his fingers.

"She is adorably witty," he said, turning to Mme. Gran-son. "I have always said that she would unmask her batteries some day."

"But when you know her very well she is charming," said the widow.

"All women, madame, have *esprit* when you know them well."

When the Homeric laughter subsided, Mlle. Cormon asked for an explanation of her success. Then the chorus of scandal grew to a height. Du Bousquier was transformed into a bachelor Père Gigogne; it was he who filled the Foundling Hospital; the immorality of his life was laid bare at last; it was all of a piece with his Paris orgies, and so forth and so forth. Led by the Chevalier de Valois, the cleverest of conductors of this kind of orchestra, the overture was something magnificent.

"I do not know," said he, with much indulgence, "what there could possibly be to prevent a du Bousquier from marrying a Mademoiselle Suzanne whatever-it-is, what do you call her? Suzette! I only know the children by sight, though I lodge with Mme. Lardot. If this Suzon is a tall, fine-looking forward sort of girl with gray eyes, a slender figure, and little feet—I have not paid much attention to these things, but she seemed to me to be very insolent and very much du Bousquier's superior in the matter of manners. Besides, Suzanne has the nobility of beauty; from that point of view, she would certainly make a marriage beneath her. The Emperor Joseph, you know, had the curiosity to go to see the du Barry at Luciennes. He offered her his arm; and when the poor courtesan, overcome by such an honor, hesitated to take it, 'Beauty is always a queen,' said the Emperor. Remark that the Emperor Joseph was an Austrian German," added the Chevalier; "but, believe me, that Germany, which we think of as a very boorish country, is

really a land of noble chivalry and fine manners, especially towards Poland and Hungary, where there are——” Here the Chevalier broke off, fearing to make an allusion to his own happy fortune in the past; he only took up his snuff-box and confided the rest to the Princess who had smiled on him for thirty-six years.

“The speech was delicately considerate for Louis XV.,” said du Ronceret.

“But we are talking of the Emperor Joseph, I believe,” returned Mlle. Cormon, with a little knowing air.

“Mademoiselle,” said the Chevalier, seeing the wicked glances exchanged by the President, the registrar, and the notary, “Mme. du Barry was Louis Quinze’s Suzanne, a fact known well enough to us scapegraces, but which young ladies are not expected to know. Your ignorance shows that the diamond is flawless. The corruptions of history have not so much as touched you.”

At this the Abbé de Sponde looked graciously upon M. de Valois and bent his head in laudatory approval.

“Do you not know history, mademoiselle?” asked the registrar.

“If you muddle up Louis XV. and Suzanne, how can you expect me to know your history?” was Mlle. Cormon’s angelic reply. She was so pleased! The dish was empty and the conversation revived to such purpose that everybody was laughing with their mouths full at her last observation.

“Poor young thing!” said the Abbé de Sponde. “When once trouble comes, that love grown divine called charity is as blind as the pagan love, and should see nothing of the causes of the trouble. You are President of the Maternity Society, Rose; this child will need help; it will not be easy for her to find a husband.”

“Poor child!” said Mlle. Cormon.

“Is du Bousquier going to marry her, do you suppose?” asked the President of the Tribunal.

“It would be his duty to do so if he were a decent man,” said Mme. Granson; “but, really, my dog has better notions of decency——”



“And yet Azor is a great forager,” put in the registrar, trying to joke this time as a change from a pun.

They were still talking of du Bousquier over the dessert. He was the butt of uncounted playful jests, which grew more and more thunder-charged under the influence of wine. Led off by the registrar, they followed up one pun with another. Du Bousquier's character was now apparent; he was not a father of the Church, nor a reverend father, nor yet a conscript father, and so on and so on, till the Abbé de Sponde said, “In any case, he is not a foster-father,” with a gravity that checked the laughter.

“Nor a heavy father,” added the Chevalier.

The Church and the aristocracy had descended into the arena of word-play without loss of dignity.

“Hush!” said the registrar, “I can hear du Bousquier's boots creaking; he is in over shoes over boots, and no mistake.”

It nearly always happens that when a man's name is in everyone's mouth, he is the last to hear what is said of him; the whole town may be talking of him, slandering him or crying him down, and if he has no friends to repeat what other people say of him, he is not likely to hear it. So the blameless du Bousquier, du Bousquier who would fain have been guilty, who wished that Suzanne had not lied to him, was supremely unconscious of all that was taking place. Nobody had spoken to him of Suzanne's revelations. For that matter, everybody thought it indiscreet to ask questions about the affair, when the man most concerned sometimes possesses secrets which compel him to keep silence. So when people adjourned for coffee to the drawing-room, where several evening visitors were already assembled, du Bousquier wore an irresistible and slightly fatuous air.

Mlle. Cormon, counseled by confusion, dared not look towards the terrible seducer. She took possession of Athanase and administered a lecture, bringing out the oddest assortment of the commonplaces of Royalist doctrines and edifying truisms. As the unlucky poet had no snuff-box with a portrait of a princess on the lid to sustain him under the shower-bath of foolish utterances, it was with a

vacant expression that he heard his adored lady. His eyes were fixed on that enormous bust, which maintained the absolute repose characteristic of great masses. Desire wrought a kind of intoxication in him. The old maid's thin, shrill voice became low music for his ears; her platitudes were fraught with ideas.

Love is an utterer of false coin; he is always at work transforming common copper into gold louis; sometimes, also, he makes his seeming halfpence of fine gold.

"Well, Athanase, will you promise me?"

The final phrase struck on the young man's ear; he woke with a start from a blissful dream.

"What, mademoiselle?" returned le.

Mlle. Cormon rose abruptly and glanced across at du Bousquier. At that moment he looked like the brawny fabulous deity, whose likeness you behold upon Republican three-franc pieces. She went over to Mme. Granson and said in a confidential tone—

"Your son is weak in his intellect, my poor friend. That lyceum has been the ruin of him," she added, recollecting how the Chevalier de Valois had insisted on the bad education given in those institutions.

Here was a thunderbolt! Poor Athanase had had his chance of flinging fire upon the dried stems heaped up in the old maid's heart, and he had not known it! If he had but listened to her, he might have made her understand; for in Mlle. Cormon's present highly-wrought mood a word would have been enough, but the very force of the stupefying cravings of love-sick youth spoiled his chances; so sometimes a child full of life kills himself through ignorance.

"What can you have been saying to Mlle. Cormon?" asked his mother.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?—I will have this cleared up," she said, and put off serious business to the morrow; du Bousquier was hopelessly lost, she thought, and the speech troubled her very little.

Soon the four card-tables received their complement of players. Four persons sat down to piquet, the most ex-

pensive amusement of the evening, over which a good deal of money changed hands. M. Choissnel, the attorney for the crown, and a couple of ladies went to the red-lacquered cabinet for a game of tric-trac. The candles in the wall-sconces were lighted, and then the flower of Mlle. Cormon's set blossomed out about the fire, on the settees, and about the tables. Each new couple, on entering the room, made the same remark to Mlle. Cormon, "So you are going to the Prébaudet to-morrow?"

"Yes, I really must," she said, in answer to each.

All through the evening the hostess wore a preoccupied air. Mme. Granson was the first to see that she was not at all like herself. Mlle. Cormon was thinking.

"What are you thinking about, cousin?" Mme. Granson asked at last, finding her sitting in the boudoir.

"I am thinking of that poor girl. Am I not patroness of the Maternity Society? I will go now to find ten crowns for you."

"*Ten crowns!*" exclaimed Mme. Granson. "Why, you have never given so much to anyone before!"

"But, my dear, it is so natural to have a child."

This improper cry from the heart struck the treasurer of the Maternity Society dumb from sheer astonishment. Du Bousquier had actually gone up in Mlle. Cormon's opinion!

"Really," began Mme. Granson, "du Bousquier is not merely a monster—he is a villain into the bargain. When a man has spoiled somebody else's life, it is his duty surely to make amends. It should be his part rather than ours to rescue this young person; and when all comes to all, she is a bad girl, it seems to me, for there are better men in Alençon than that cynic of a du Bousquier. A girl must be shameless indeed to have anything to do with him."

"Cynic? Your son, dear, teaches you Latin words that are quite beyond me. Certainly I do not want to make excuses for M. du Bousquier; but explain to me why it is immoral for a woman to prefer one man to another?"

"Dear cousin, suppose now that you were to marry my Athanase; there would be nothing but what was very natural in that. He is young and good-looking; he has a future be-

fore him; Alençon will be proud of him some day. But—everyone would think that you took such a young man as your husband for the sake of greater conjugal felicity. Slanderous tongues would say that you were making a sufficient provision of bliss for yourself. There would be jealous women to bring charges of depravity against you. But what would it matter to you? You would be dearly loved—loved sincerely. If Athanase seemed to you to be weak of intellect, my dear, it is because he has too many ideas. Extremes meet. He is as clean in his life as a girl of fifteen; *he* has not wallowed in the pollutions of Paris. . . . Well, now, change the terms, as my poor husband used to say. It is relatively just the same situation as du Bousquier's and Suzanne's. But what would be slander in your case is true in every way of du Bousquier. Now do you understand?"

"No more than if you were talking Greek," said Rose Cormon, opening wide eyes and exerting all the powers of her understanding.

"Well, then, cousin, since one must put dots on all the *i*'s, it is quite out of the question that Suzanne should love du Bousquier. And when the heart counts for nothing in such an affair——"

"Why, really, cousin, how should people love if not with their hearts?"

At this Mme. Granson thought within herself, as the Chevalier had thought—

"The poor cousin is too innocent by far. This goes beyond the permissible——" Aloud she said, "Dear girl, it seems to me that a child is not conceived of spirit alone."

"Why, yes, dear, for the Holy Virgin——"

"But, my dear, good girl, du Bousquier is not the Holy Ghost."

"That is true," returned the spinster; "he is a man—a man dangerous enough for his friends to recommend him strongly to marry."

"You, cousin, might bring that about——"

"Oh, how?" cried the spinster, with a glow of Christian charity.

"Decline to receive him until he takes a wife. For the

sake of religion and morality, you ought to make an example of him under the circumstances."

"We will talk of this again, dear Mme. Granson, when I come back from the Prébaudet. I will ask advice of my uncle and the Abbé Couturier," and Mlle. Cormon went back to the large drawing-room. The liveliest hour of the evening had begun.

The lights, the groups of well-dressed women, the serious and magisterial air of the assembly, filled Mlle. Cormon with pride in the aristocratic appearance of the rooms, a pride in which her guests all shared. There were plenty of people who thought that the finest company of Paris itself was no finer. At that moment du Bousquier, playing a rubber with M. de Valois and two elderly ladies, Mme. du Coudrai and Mme. du Ronceret, was the object of suppressed curiosity. Several women came up on the pretext of watching the game, and gave him such odd, albeit furtive, glances that the old bachelor at last began to think that there must be something amiss with his appearance.

"Can it be that my toupet is askew?" he asked himself. And he felt that all-absorbing uneasiness to which the elderly bachelor is peculiarly subject. A blunder gave him an excuse for leaving the table at the end of the seventh rubber.

"I cannot touch a card but I lose," he said; "I am decidedly too unlucky at cards."

"You are lucky in other respects," said the Chevalier, with a knowing look. Naturally, the joke made the round of the room, and everyone exclaimed over the exquisite breeding shown by the Prince Talleyrand of Alençon.

"There is no one like M. de Valois for saying such things," said the niece of the curé of St. Leonard's.

Du Bousquier went up to the narrow mirror above "The Deserter," but he could detect nothing unusual.

Towards ten o'clock, after innumerable repetitions of the same phrase with every possible variation, the long ante-chamber began to fill with visitors preparing to embark; Mlle. Cormon convoying a few favored guests as far as the *perron* for a farewell embrace. Knots of guests took their

departure, some in the direction of the Brittany road and the château, and others turning towards the quarter by the Sarthe. And then began the exchange of remarks with which the streets had echoed at the same hour for a score of years. There was the inevitable, "Mlle. Cormon looked very well this evening."

"Mlle. Cormon? She looked strange, I thought."

"How the Abbé stoops, poor man! And how he goes to sleep—did you see? He never knows where the cards are now; his mind wanders."

"We shall be very sorry to lose him."

"It is a fine night. We shall have a fine day to-morrow."

"Fine weather for the apples to set."

"You beat us to-night; you always do when M. de Valois is your partner."

"Then how much did he win?"

"To-night? Why, he won three or four francs. He never loses."

"Faith, no. There are three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, you know; at that rate, whist is as good as a farm for him."

"Oh! what bad luck we had to-night!"

"You are very fortunate, monsieur and madame, here you are at your own doorstep, while we have half the town to cross."

"I do not pity you; you could keep a carriage if you liked, you need not go afoot."

"Ah! monsieur, we have a daughter to marry (that means one wheel), and a son to keep in Paris, and that takes the other."

"Are you still determined to make a magistrate of him?"

"What can one do? You must do something with a boy, and besides, it is no disgrace to serve the King."

Sometimes a discussion on cider or flax was continued on the way, the very same things being said at the same season year after year. If any observer of human nature had lived in that particular street, their conversation would have supplied him with an almanac. At this moment, however, the talk was of a decidedly Rabelaisian turn; for du Bousquier,

walking on ahead by himself, was humming the well-known tune "*Femme sensible, entends-tu le ramage?*" without a suspicion of its appropriateness. Some of the party held that du Bousquier was uncommonly long-headed, and that people judged him unjustly. President du Ronceret inclined towards this view since he had been confirmed in his post by a new royal decree. The rest regarded the forage-contractor as a dangerous man of lax morals, of whom anything might be expected. In the provinces, as in Paris, public men are very much in the position of the statue in Addison's ingenious fable. The statue was erected at a place where four roads met; two cavaliers coming up on opposite sides declared, the one that it was white, the other that it was black, until they came to blows, and both of them lying on the ground discovered that it was black on one side and white on the other, while a third cavalier coming up to their assistance affirmed that it was red.

When the Chevalier de Valois reached home, he said to himself: "It is time to spread a report that I am going to marry Mlle. Cormon. The news shall come from the d'Esgrignons' salon; it shall go straight to the Bishop's palace at Séz and come back through one of the vicars-general to the curé of St. Leonard's. He will not fail to tell the Abbé Couturier, and in this way Mlle. Cormon will receive the shot under the water-line. The old Marquis d'Esgrignon is sure to ask the Abbé de Sponde to dinner to put a stop to gossip which might injure Mlle. Cormon if I fail to come forward; or me, if she refuses me. The Abbé shall be well and duly entangled; and after a call from Mlle. de Gordes, in the course of which the grandeur and the prospects of the alliance will be put before Mlle. Cormon, she is not likely to hold out. The Abbé will leave her more than a hundred thousand crowns; and as for her, she must have put by more than a hundred thousand livres by this time; she has her house, the Prébaudet, and some fifteen thousand livres per annum. One word to my friend the Comte de Fontaine, and I am Mayor of Alençon, and deputy; then, once seated on the right-hand benches, the way to a peerage is cleared by a well-timed cry of 'Clôture,' or 'Order.'"

When Mme. Granson reached home, she had a warm explanation with her son. He could not be made to understand the connection between his political opinions and his love. It was the first quarrel which had troubled the peace of the poor little household.

Next morning, at nine o'clock, Mlle. Cormon, packed into the cariole with Josette by her side, drove up the Rue Saint-Blaise on her way to the Prébaudet, looking like a pyramid above an ocean of packages. And the event which was to surprise her there and hasten on her marriage was unseen as yet by Mme. Granson, or du Bousquier, or M. de Valois, or by Mlle. Cormon herself. Chance is the greatest artist of all.

On the morrow of mademoiselle's arrival at the Prébaudet, she was very harmlessly engaged in taking her eight o'clock breakfast, while she listened to the reports of her bailiff and gardener, when Jacquelin in a great flurry, burst into the dining-room.

"Mademoiselle," cried he, "M. l'Abbé has sent an express messenger to you; that boy of Mother Grosmort's has come with a letter. The lad left Alençon before daybreak, and yet here he is! He came almost as fast as Penelope. Ought he to have a glass of wine?"

"What can have happened, Josette? Can uncle be——"

"He would not have written if he was," said the woman, guessing her mistress's fears.

Mlle. Cormon glanced over the first few lines.

"Quick! quick!" she cried. "Tell Jacquelin to put Penelope in.—Get ready, child, have everything packed in half an hour, we are going back to town," she added, turning to Josette.

"Jacquelin!" called Josette, excited by the expression of Mlle. Cormon's face. Jacquelin on receiving his orders came back to the house to expostulate.

"But, mademoiselle, Penelope has only just been fed."

"Eh! what does that matter to me? I want to start this moment."

"But, mademoiselle, it is going to rain."



"Very well. We shall be wet through."

"The house is on fire," muttered Josette, vexed because her mistress said nothing, but read her letter through to the end, and then began again at the beginning.

"Just finish your coffee at any rate. Don't upset yourself! See how red you are in the face."

"Red in the face, Josette!" exclaimed Mlle. Cormon, going up to the mirror; and as the quicksilvered sheet had come away from the glass, she beheld her countenance doubly distorted. "Oh, dear!" she thought, "I shall look ugly!—Come, come, Josette, child, help me to dress. I want to be ready before Jacquelin puts Penelope in. If you cannot put all the things into the chaise, I would rather leave them here than lose a minute."

If you have fully comprehended the degree of monomania to which Mlle. Cormon had been driven by her desire to marry, you will share her excitement. Her worthy uncle informed her that M. de Troisville, a retired soldier from the Russian service, the grandson of one of his best friends, wishing to settle down in Alençon, had asked for his hospitality for the sake of the Abbé's old friendship with the mayor, his grandfather, the Vicomte de Troisville of the reign of Louis XV. M. de Sponde, in alarm, begged his niece to come home at once to help him to entertain the guest and to do the honors of the house; for as there had been some delay in forwarding the letter, M. de Troisville might be expected to drop in upon him that very evening.

How was it possible after reading that letter to give any attention to affairs at the Prébaudet? The tenant and the bailiff, beholding their mistress's dismay, lay low and waited for orders. When they stopped her passage to ask for instructions, Mlle. Cormon, the despotic old maid, who saw to everything herself at the Prébaudet, answered them with an "As you please," which struck them dumb with amazement. This was the mistress who carried administrative zeal to such lengths that she counted the fruit and entered it under headings, so that she could regulate the consumption by the quantity of each sort!

"I must be dreaming, I think," said Josette, when she

saw her mistress flying upstairs like some elephant on which God should have bestowed wings.

In a little while, in spite of the pelting rain, mademoiselle was driving away from the Prébaudet, leaving her people to have things all their own way. Jacquelin dared not take it upon himself to drive the placid Penelope any faster than her usual jog-trot pace; and the old mare, something like the fair queen after whom she was named, seemed to take a step back for every step forward. Beholding this, mademoiselle bade Jacquelin, in a vinegar voice, to urge the poor astonished beast to a gallop, and to use the whip if necessary, so appalling was the thought that M. de Troisville might arrive before the house was ready for him. A grandson of an old friend of her uncle's could not be much over forty, she thought; a military man must infallibly be a bachelor. She vowed inwardly that, with her uncle's help, M. de Troisville should not depart in the estate in which he entered the Maison Cormon. Penelope galloped; but mademoiselle, absorbed in dresses and dreams of a wedding night, told Jacquelin again and again that he was standing still. She fidgeted in her seat, without vouchsafing any answer to Josette's questions, and talked to herself as if she were revolving mighty matters in her mind.

At last the cariole turned into the long street of Alençon, known as the Rue Saint-Blaise if you come in on the side of Mortagne, the Rue de la Porte de Séez by the time you reach the sign of the *Three Moors*, and lastly as the Rue du Bercail, when it finally debouches into the high road into Brittany. If Mlle. Cormon's departure for the Prébaudet made a great noise in Alençon, anybody can imagine the hubbub caused by her return on the following day, with the driving rain lashing her face. Everybody remarked Penelope's furious pace, Jacquelin's sly looks, the earliness of the hour, the bundles piled up topsy-turvy, the lively conversation between mistress and maid, and, more than all things, the impatience of the party.

The Troisville estates lay between Alençon and Mortagne. Josette, therefore, knew about the different branches of the family. A word let fall by her mistress just as they

reached the *pavé* of Alençon put Josette in possession of the facts, and a discussion sprang up, in the course of which the two women settled between themselves that the expected guest must be a man of forty or forty-two, a bachelor, neither rich nor poor. Mademoiselle saw herself Vicomtesse de Troisville.

“And here is uncle telling me nothing, knowing nothing, and wanting to know nothing! Oh, so like uncle! He would forget his nose if it was not fastened to his face.”

Have you not noticed how mature spinsters, under these circumstances, grow as intelligent, fierce, bold, and full of promises as a Richard III.? To them, as to clerics in liquor, nothing is sacred.

In one moment, from the upper end of the Rue Saint-Blaise to the Porte de Sééz, the town of Alençon heard of Mlle. Cormon's return with aggravating circumstances, heard with a mighty perturbation of its vitals and trouble of the organs of life, public and domestic. Cook-maids, shop-keepers, and passers-by carried the news from door to door, then, without delay, it circulated in the upper spheres, and almost simultaneously the words, “Mlle. Cormon has come back,” exploded like a bomb in every house.

Meanwhile Jacquelin climbed down from his wooden bench in front, polished by some process unknown to cabinet-makers, and with his own hands opened the great gates with the rounded tops. They were closed in Mlle. Cormon's absence as a sign of mourning; for when she went away her house was shut up, and the faithful took it in turn to show hospitality to the Abbé de Sponde. (M. de Valois used to pay his debt by an invitation to dine at the Marquis d'Esgrignon's.) Jacquelin gave the familiar call to Penelope standing in the middle of the road; and the animal, accustomed to this maneuver, turned into the courtyard, steering clear of the flower-bed, till Jacquelin took the bridle and walked round with the chaise to the steps before the door.

“Mariette!” called Mlle. Cormon.

“Mademoiselle?” returned Mariette, engaged in shutting the gates.

“Has the gentleman come?”

“No, mademoiselle.”

“And is my uncle here?”

“He is at the church, mademoiselle.”

Jacquelin and Josette were standing on the lowest step of the flight, holding out their hands to steady their mistress's descent from the cariole; she, meanwhile, had hoisted herself upon the shaft, and was clutching at the curtains, before springing down into their arms. It was two years since she had dared to trust herself upon the iron step of double strength, secured to the shaft by a fearfully made contrivance with huge bolts.

From the height of the steps, mademoiselle surveyed her courtyard with an air of satisfaction.

“There, there, Mariette, let the great gate alone and come here.”

“There is something up,” Jacquelin said to Mariette as she came past the chaise.

“Let us see now, child, what is there in the house?” said Mlle. Cormon, collapsing on the bench in the long ante-chamber as if she were exhausted.

“Just nothing at all,” replied Mariette, hands on hips. “Mademoiselle knows quite well that M. l'Abbé always dines out when she is not at home; yesterday I went to bring him back from Mlle. Armande's.”

“Then where is he?”

“M. l'Abbé? He is gone to church; he will not be back till three o'clock.”

“Uncle thinks of nothing! Why couldn't he have sent you to market? Go down now, Mariette, and, without throwing money away, spare for nothing, get the best, finest, and daintiest of everything. Go to the coach office and ask where people send orders for *pâtés*. And I want crayfish from the brooks along the Brillante. What time is it?”

“Nine o'clock all but a quarter.”

“Oh dear, oh dear; don't lose any time in chattering, Mariette. The visitor my uncle is expecting may come at any moment; pretty figures we should cut if he comes to breakfast.”

Mariette, turning round, saw Penelope in a lather, and gave Jacquelin a glance which said, "Mademoiselle means to put her hand on a husband this time."

Mlle. Cormon turned to her housemaid. "Now, it is our turn, Josette; we must make arrangements for M. de Troisville to sleep here to-night."

How gladly those words were uttered! "We must arrange for M. de Troisville" (pronounced Tréville) "to sleep here to-night!" How much lay in those few words! Hope poured like a flood through the old maid's soul.

"Will you put him in the green chamber?"

"The Bishop's room? No," said mademoiselle, "it is too near mine. It is very well for his Lordship, a holy man."

"Give him your uncle's room."

"It looks so bare; it would not do."

"Lord, mademoiselle, you could have a bed put up in the boudoir in a brace of shakes; there is a fireplace there. Moreau will be sure to find a bedstead in his warehouse that will match the hangings as nearly as possible."

"You are right, Josette. Very well; run round to Moreau's and ask his advice about everything necessary; I give you authority. If the bed, M. de Troisville's bed, can be set up by this evening, so that M. de Troisville shall notice nothing, supposing that M. de Troisville should happen to come in while Moreau is here, I am quite willing. If Moreau cannot promise that, M. de Troisville shall sleep in the green chamber, although M. de Troisville will be very near me."

Josette departed; her mistress called her back.

"Tell Jacquelin all about it," she exclaimed in a stern and awful voice; "let *him* go to Moreau. How about my dress? Suppose M. de Troisville came and caught me like this, without uncle here to receive him!—Oh, uncle, uncle!—Come, Josette, you shall help me to dress."

"But how about Penelope?" the woman began imprudently. Mlle. Cormon's eyes shot sparks for the first and last time in her life.

"It is always Penelope! Penelope this, Penelope that! Is Penelope mistress here?"

“She is all of a lather, and she has not been fed.”

“Eh! and if she dies, let her die!——” cried Mlle. Cormon—“so long as I am married,” she added in her own mind.

Josette stood stockstill a moment in amazement, such a remark was tantamount to murder; then, at a sign from her mistress, she dashed headlong down the steps into the yard.

“Mademoiselle is possessed, Jacquelin!” were Josette’s first words.

And in this way, everything that occurred throughout the day led up to the great climax which was to change the whole course of Mlle. Cormon’s life. The town was already turned upside down by five aggravating circumstances which attended the lady’s sudden return, to wit—the pouring rain; Penelope’s panting pace and sunk flanks covered with foam; the earliness of the hour; the untidy bundles; and the spinster’s strange, scared looks. But when Mariette invaded the market to carry off everything that she could lay her hands on; when Jacquelin went to inquire for a bedstead of the principal upholsterer in the Rue Porte de Sééz, close by the church; here, indeed, was material on which to build the gravest conjecture! The strange event was discussed on the Parade and the Promenade; everyone was full of it, not excepting Mlle. Armande, on whom the Chevalier de Valois happened to be calling at the time.

Only two days ago Alençon had been stirred to its depths by occurrences of such capital importance, that worthy matrons were still exclaiming that it was like the end of the world! And now, this last news was summed up in all houses by the inquiry, “What can be happening at the Cormons’?”

The Abbé de Sponde, skillfully questioned when he emerged from St. Leonard’s to take a walk with the Abbé Couturier along the Parade, made reply in the simplicity of his heart, to the effect that he expected a visit from the Vicomte de Troisville, who had been in the Russian service during the Emigration, and now was coming back to settle in Alençon. A kind of labial telegraph, at work that afternoon between two and five o’clock, informed all the inhabi-

tants of Alençon that Mlle. Cormon at last had found herself a husband by advertisement. She was going to marry the Vicomte de Troisville. Some said that "Moreau was at work on a bedstead already." In some places the bed was six feet long. It was only four feet at Mme. Granson's house in the Rue du Bercaïl. At President du Ronceret's, where du Bousquier was dining, it dwindled into a sofa. The tradespeople said that it cost eleven hundred francs. It was generally thought that this was like counting your chickens before they were hatched.

Further away, it was said that the price of carp had gone up. Mariette had swooped down upon the market and created a general scarcity. Penelope had dropped down at the upper end of the Rue Saint-Blaise; the death was called in question at the receiver-general's; nevertheless, at the prefecture it was known for a fact that the animal fell dead just as she turned in at the gate of the Hôtel Cormon, so swiftly had the old maid come down upon her prey. The saddler at the corner of the Rue de Sééz, in his anxiety to know the truth about Penelope, was hardy enough to call in to ask if anything had happened to Mlle. Cormon's chaise. Then from the utmost end of the Rue Saint-Blaise to the furthestmost parts of the Rue du Bercaïl, it was known that, thanks to Jacquelin's care, Penelope, dumb victim of her mistress's intemperate haste, was still alive, but she seemed to be in a bad way.

All along the Brittany road the Vicomte de Troisville was a penniless younger son, for the domains of Perche belonged to the Marquis of that ilk, a peer of France with two children. The match was a lucky thing for an impoverished *émigré*; as for the Vicomte himself, that was Mlle. Cormon's affair. Altogether the match received the approval of the aristocratic section on the Brittany road; Mlle. Cormon could not have put her fortune to a better use.

Among the *bourgeoisie*, on the other hand, the Vicomte de Troisville was a Russian general that had borne arms against France. He was bringing back a large fortune made at the court of St. Petersburg. He was a "foreigner," one of the "Allies" detested by the Liberals. The Abbé de Sponde

had maneuvered the match on the sly. Every person who had any shadow of a right of entrance to Mlle. Cormon's drawing-room vowed to be there that night.

While the excitement went through the town, and all but put Suzanne out of people's heads, Mlle. Cormon herself was not less excited; she felt as she had never felt before. She looked round the drawing-room, the boudoir, the cabinet, the dining-room, and a dreadful apprehension seized upon her. Some mocking demon seemed to show her the old-fashioned splendor in a new light; the beautiful furniture, admired ever since she was a child, was suspected, nay, convicted, of being out of date. She was shaken, in fact, by the dread that catches almost every author by the throat when he begins to read his own work aloud to some exigent or jaded critic. Before he began, it was perfect in his eyes; now the novel situations are stale; the finest periods turned with such secret relish are turgid or halting; the metaphors are mixed or grotesque; his sins stare him in the face. Even so, poor Mlle. Cormon shivered to think of the smile on M. de Troisville's lips when he looked round that salon, which looked like a Bishop's drawing-room, unchanged for one possessor after another. She dreaded his cool survey of the ancient dining-room; in short, she was afraid that the picture might look the older for the ancient frame. How if all these old things should tinge her with their age? The bare thought of it made her flesh creep. At that moment she would have given one-fourth of her savings for the power of renovating her house at a stroke of a magic wand. Where is the general so conceited that he will not shudder on the eve of an action? She, poor thing, was between an Austerlitz and a Waterloo.

"Mme. la Vicomtesse de Troisville," she said to herself, "what a fine name! Our estates will pass to a good house, at any rate."

Her excitement fretted her. It sent a thrill through every fiber of every nerve to the least of the ramifications and the papillæ so well wadded with flesh. Hope tingling in her veins set all the blood in her body in circulation. She felt capable, if need was, of conversing with M. de Troisville.



Of the activity with which Josette, Mariette, Jacquelin, Moreau, and his assistants set about their work, it is needless to speak. Ants rescuing their eggs could not have been busier than they. Everything, kept so neat and clean with daily care, was starched and ironed, scrubbed, washed, and polished. The best china saw the light. Linen damask cloths and serviettes docketed A B C D emerged from the depths where they lay shrouded in triple wrappings and defended by bristling rows of pins. The rarest shelves of that oak-bound library were made to give account of their contents; and finally, mademoiselle offered up three bottles of liqueurs to the coming guest, three bottles bearing the label of the most famous distiller of over-sea—Mme. Amphoux, name dear to connoisseurs.

Mlle. Cormon was ready for battle, thanks to the devotion of her lieutenants. The munitions of war, the heavy artillery of the kitchen, the batteries of the pantry, the victuals, provisions for the attack, and body of reserves, had all been brought up in array. Orders were issued to Jacquelin, Mariette, and Josette to wear their best clothes. The garden was raked over. Mademoiselle only regretted that she could not come to an understanding with the nightingales in the trees, that they might warble their sweetest songs for the occasion. At length, at four o'clock, just as the Abbé came in, and mademoiselle was beginning to think that she had brought out her daintiest linen and china and made ready the most exquisite of dinners in vain, the crack of a postilion's whip sounded outside in the Val-Noble.

"It is *he!*" she thought, and the lash of the whip struck her in the heart.

And indeed, heralded by all this tittle-tattle, a certain post-chaise, with a single gentleman inside it, had made such a prodigious sensation as it drove down the Rue Saint-Blaise and turned into the Rue du Cours, that several small urchins and older persons gave chase to the vehicle, and now were standing in a group about the gateway of the Hôtel Cormon to watch the postilion drive in. Jacquelin, feeling that his own marriage was in the wind, had also heard the crack of the whip, and was out in the yard to

throw open the gates. The postilion (an acquaintance) was on his mettle, he turned the corner to admiration, and came to a stand before the flight of steps. And, as you can understand, he did not go until Jacquelin had duly and properly made him tipsy.

The Abbé came out to meet his guest, and in a trice the chaise was despoiled of its occupant, robbers in a hurry could not have done their work more nimbly; then the chaise was put into the coach-house, the great door was closed, and in a few minutes there was not a sign of M. de Troisville's arrival. Never did two chemicals combine with a greater alacrity than that displayed by the house of Cormon to absorb the Vicomte de Troisville. As for mademoiselle, if she had been a lizard caught by a shepherd, her heart could not have beat faster. She sat heroically in her low chair by the fireside; Josette threw open the door, and the Vicomte de Troisville, followed by the Abbé de Sponde, appeared before her.

"This is M. le Vicomte de Troisville, niece, a grandson of an old schoolfellow of mine.—M. de Troisville, my niece, Mlle. Cormon."

"Dear uncle, how nicely he puts it," thought Rose Marie Victoire.

The Vicomte de Troisville, to describe him in a few words, was a du Bousquier of noble family. Between the two men there was just that difference which separates the gentleman from the ordinary man. If they had been standing side by side, even the most furious Radical could not have denied the signs of race about the Vicomte. There was all the distinction of refinement about his strength, his figure had lost nothing of its magnificent dignity. Blue-eyed, dark-haired, and olive-skinned, he could not have been more than six-and-forty. You might have thought him a handsome Spaniard preserved in Russian ice. His manner, gait, and bearing, and everything about him, suggested a diplomat, and a diplomat that has seen Europe. He looked like a gentleman in his traveling dress.

M. de Troisville seemed to be tired. The Abbé rose to conduct him to his room, and was overcome with astonish-

ment when Rose opened the door of the boudoir, now transformed into a bedroom. Then uncle and niece left the noble visitor leisure to attend to his toilet with the help of Jacquelin, who brought him all the luggage which he needed. While M. de Troisville was dressing, they walked on the terrace by the Brillante. The Abbé, by a strange chance, was more absent-minded than usual, and Mlle. Cormon no less preoccupied, so they paced to and fro in silence. Never in her life had Mlle. Cormon seen so attractive a man as this Olympian Vicomte. She could not say to herself, like a German girl, "I have found my Ideal!" but she felt that she was in love from head to foot. "The very thing for me," she thought. On a sudden she fled to Mariette, to know whether dinner could be put back a little without serious injury.

"Uncle, this M. de Troisville is very pleasant," she said when she came back again.

"Why, my girl, he has not said a word as yet," returned the Abbé, laughing.

"But one can tell by his general appearance. Is he a bachelor?"

"I know nothing about it," replied her uncle, his thoughts full of that afternoon's discussion with the Abbé Couturier on Divine Grace. "M. de Troisville said in his letter that he wanted to buy a house here.—If he were married, he would not have come alone," he added carelessly. It never entered his head that his niece could think of marriage for herself.

"Is he rich?"

"He is the younger son of a younger branch. His grandfather held a major's commission, but this young man's father made a foolish marriage."

"Young man!" repeated his niece. "Why, he is quite five-and-forty, uncle, it seems to me." She felt an uncontrollable desire to compare his age with hers.

"Yes," said the Abbé. "But to a poor priest at seventy, a man of forty seems young, Rose."

By this time all Alençon knew that M. le Vicomte de Troisville had arrived at the Hôtel Cormon.

The visitor very soon rejoined his host and hostess, and began to admire the view of the Brillante, the garden, and the house.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," he said, "to find such a place as this would be the height of my ambition."

The old maid wished to read a declaration in the speech. She lowered her eyes.

"You must be very fond of it, mademoiselle," continued the Vicomte.

"How could I help being fond of it? It has been in our family since 1574, when one of our ancestors, an Intendant of the Duchy of Alençon, bought the ground and built the house. It is laid on piles."

Jacquelin having announced that dinner was ready, M. de Troisville offered his arm. The radiant spinster tried not to lean too heavily upon him; she was still afraid that he might think her forward.

"Everything is quite in harmony here," remarked the Vicomte as they sat down to table.

"Yes, the trees in our garden are full of birds that give us music for nothing. Nobody molests them; the nightingales sing there every night," said Mlle. Cormon.

"I am speaking of the inside of the house," remarked the Vicomte; he had not troubled himself to study his hostess particularly, and was quite unaware of her vacuity.—"Yes, everything contributes to the general effect; the tones of color, the furniture, the character of the house," added he, addressing Mlle. Cormon.

"It costs a great deal, though," replied that excellent spinster, "the rates are something enormous." The word "contribute" had impressed itself on her mind.

"Ah! then are the rates high here?" asked the Vicomte, too full of his own ideas to notice the absurd *non sequitur*.

"I do not know," said the Abbé. "My niece manages her own property and mine."

"The rates are a mere trifle if people are well to do," struck in Mlle. Cormon, anxious not to appear stingy. "As to the furniture, I leave things as they are. I shall never make any changes here; at least I shall not, unless I

marry, and in that case everything in the house must be arranged to suit the master's taste."

"You are for great principles, mademoiselle," smiled the Vicomte; "somebody will be a lucky man."

"Nobody ever made such a pretty speech before," thought Mlle. Cormon.

The Vicomte complimented his hostess upon the appointments of the table and the housekeeping, admitting that he had thought that the provinces were behind the times, and found himself in most delectable quarters.

"*Delectable*, good Lord! what does it mean?" thought she. "Where is the Chevalier de Valois to reply to him? De-lect-able? Is it made up of several words? There! courage; perhaps it is Russian, and if so I am not obliged to say anything."—Then she added aloud, her tongue unloosed by an eloquence which almost every human creature can find in a great crisis—"We have the most brilliant society here, Monsieur le Vicomte. You will be able to judge for yourself, for it assembles in this very house; on some of our acquaintances we can always count; they will have heard of my return no doubt, and will be sure to come to see me. There is the Chevalier de Valois, a gentleman of the old court, a man of infinite wit and taste; then there is M. le Marquis d'Esgrignon and Mlle. Armande, his sister"—she bit her lip and changed her mind—"a—a remarkable woman in her way. She refused all offers of marriage so as to leave her fortune to her brother and his son."

"Ah! yes; the d'Esgrignons, I remember them," said the Vicomte.

"Alençon is very gay," pursued mademoiselle, now that she had fairly started off. "There is so much going on; the Receiver-General gives dances; the Prefect is a very pleasant man; his lordship the Bishop occasionally honors us with a visit——"

"Come!" said the Vicomte, smiling as he spoke, "I have done well, it seems, to come creeping back like a hare (*un lièvre*) to die in my form."

"It is the same with me," replied mademoiselle; "I am like a creeper (*le lierre*), I must cling to something or die."

The Vicomte took the saying thus twisted for a joke, and smiled.

“ Ah! ” thought his hostess, “ that is all right, *he* understands me. ”

The conversation was kept up upon generalities. Under pressure of a strong desire to please, the strange, mysterious, indefinable workings of consciousness brought all the Chevalier de Valois's tricks of speech uppermost in Mlle. Cormon's brain. It fell out, as it sometimes does in a duel, when the Devil himself seems to take aim; and never did duelist hit his man more fairly and squarely than the old maid. The Vicomte de Troisville was too well mannered to praise the excellent dinner, but his silence was panegyric in itself! As he drank the delicious wines with which Jacquelin plied him, he seemed to be meeting old friends with the liveliest pleasure; for your true amateur does not applaud, he enjoys. He informed himself curiously of the prices of land, houses, and sites; he drew from mademoiselle a long description of the property between the Brillante and the Sarthe. He was amazed that the town and the river lay so far apart, and showed the greatest interest in local topography. The Abbé sat silent, leaving all the conversation to his niece. And, in truth, mademoiselle considered that she interested M. de Troisville; he smiled graciously at her, he made far more progress with her in the course of a single dinner than the most ardent of her former wooers in a whole fortnight. For which reasons, you may be certain that never was guest so cosseted, so lapped about with small attentions and observances. He might have been a much loved lover, new come home to the house of which he was the delight.

Mademoiselle forestalled his wants. She saw when he needed bread, her eyes brooded over him; if he turned his head, she adroitly supplemented his portion of any dish which he seemed to like; if he had been a glutton, she would have killed him. What a delicious earnest of all that she counted upon doing for her lover! She made no silly blunders of self-depreciation this time! She went gallantly forward, full sail, and all flags flying; posed as the queen of

Alençon, and vaunted her preserves. Indeed, she fished for compliments, talking about herself as if her trumpeter were dead. And she saw that she pleased the Vicomte, for her wish to please had so transformed her, that she grew almost feminine. It was not without inward exultation that she heard footsteps while they sat at dessert; sounds of going and coming in the antechamber and noises in the salon; and knew that the usual company was arriving. She called the attention of her uncle and M. de Troisville to this fact as a proof of the affection in which she was held, whereas it really was a symptom of the paroxysm of curiosity which convulsed the whole town. Impatient to show herself in her glory, she ordered coffee and the liqueurs to be taken to the salon, whither Jacquelin went to display to the élite of Alençon the splendors of a Dresden china service, which only left the cupboard twice in a twelvemonth. All these circumstances were noted by people disposed to criticise under their breath.

"Egad!" cried du Bousquier, "nothing but Mme. Amphoux's liqueurs, which only come out on the four great festival days!"

"Decidedly, this match must have been arranged by correspondence for a year past," said M. le Président du Ronceret. "The postmaster here has been receiving letters with an Odessa postmark for the last twelve months."

Mme. Granson shuddered. M. le Chevalier de Valois had eaten a heavy dinner, but he felt the pallor spreading over his left cheek; felt, too, that he was betraying his secret, and said, "It is cold to-day, do you not think? I am freezing."

"It is the neighborhood of Russia," suggested du Bousquier. And the Chevalier looked at his rival as who should say, "Well put in!"

Mlle. Cormon was so radiant, so triumphant, that she looked positively handsome, it was thought. Nor was this unwonted brilliancy wholly due to sentiment; ever since the morning the blood had been surging through her veins; the presentiments of a great crisis at hand affected her nerves. It needed a combination of circumstances to make her so little like herself. With what joy did she not solemnly in-

roduce the Vicomte to the Chevalier, and the Chevalier to the Vicomte; all Alençon was presented to M. de Troisville, and M. de Troisville made the acquaintance of all Alençon. It fell out, naturally enough, that the Vicomte and the Chevalier, two born aristocrats, were in sympathy at once; they recognized each other for inhabitants of the same social sphere. They began to chat as they stood by the fire. A circle formed about them listening devoutly to their conversation, though it was carried on *sotto voce*. Fully to realize the scene, imagine Mlle. Cormon standing with her back to the chimney-piece, busy preparing coffee for her supposed suitor.

M. DE VALOIS. "So M. le Vicomte is coming to settle here, people say."

M. DE TROISVILLE. "Yes, monsieur. I have come to look for a house." (*Mlle. Cormon turns, cup in hand.*) "And I must have a large one"—(*Mlle. Cormon offers the cup of coffee*)—"to hold my family." (*The room grows dark before the old maid's eyes.*)

M. DE VALOIS. "Are you married?"

M. DE TROISVILLE. "Yes, I have been married for sixteen years. My wife is the daughter of the Princess Scherbelloff."

Mlle. Cormon dropped like one thunderstruck. Du Bousquier, seeing her reel, sprang forward, and caught her in his arms. Somebody opened the door to let him pass out with his enormous burden. The mettled Republican, counseled by Josette, summoned up his strength, bore the old maid to her room, and deposited her upon the bed. Josette, armed with a pair of scissors, cut the stay-laces, drawn outrageously tight. Du Bousquier, rough and ready, dashed cold water over Mlle. Cormon's face and the bust, which broke from its bounds like Loire in flood. The patient opened her eyes, saw du Bousquier, and gave a cry of alarmed modesty. Du Bousquier withdrew, leaving half a dozen women in possession, with Mme. Granson at their head, Mme. Granson beaming with joy.

What had the Chevalier de Valois done? True to his system, he had been covering the retreat.



“Poor Mlle. Cormon!” he said, addressing M. de Troisville, but looking round the room, quelling the beginnings of an outbreak of laughter with his haughty eyes. “She is dreadfully troubled with heated blood. She would not be bled before going to the Prébaudet (her country house), and this is the result of the spring weather.”

“She drove over in the rain this morning,” said the Abbé de Sponde. “She may have taken a little cold, and so caused the slight derangement of the system to which she is subject. But she will soon get over it.”

“She was telling me the day before yesterday that she had not had a recurrence of it for three months; she added at the time that it was sure to play her a bad turn,” added the Chevalier.

“Ah! so you are married!” thought Jacquelin, watching M. de Troisville, who was sipping his coffee.

The faithful man-servant made his mistress’s disappointment his own. He guessed her feelings. He took away the liqueurs brought out for a bachelor, and not for a Russian woman’s husband. All these little things were noticed with amusement.

The Abbé de Sponde had known all along why M. de Troisville had come to Alençon, but in his absent-mindedness he had said nothing about it; it had never entered his mind that his niece could take the slightest interest in that gentleman. As for the Vicomte, he was engrossed by the object of his journey; like many other married men, he was in no great hurry to introduce his wife into the conversation; he had had no opportunity of saying that he was married; and besides, he thought that Mlle. Cormon knew his history. Du Bousquier reappeared, and was questioned without mercy. One of the six women came down, and reported that Mlle. Cormon was feeling much better, and that her doctor had come; but she was to stay in bed, and it appeared that she ought to be bled at once. The salon soon filled. In Mlle. Cormon’s absence, the ladies were free to discuss the tragi-comic scene which had just taken place; and duly they enlarged, annotated, embellished, colored, adorned, em-

broidered, and bedizened the tale which was to set all Alençon thinking of the old maid on the morrow.

Meanwhile, Josette upstairs was saying to her mistress, "That good M. du Bousquier! How he carried you upstairs! What a fist! Really, your illness made him quite pale. He loves you still."

And with this final phrase, the solemn and terrible day came to a close.

Next day, all morning long, the news of the comedy, with full details, circulated over Alençon, raising laughter everywhere, to the shame of the town be it said. Next day, Mlle. Cormon, very much the better for the blood-letting, would have seemed sublime to the most hardened of those who jeered at her, if they could but have seen her noble dignity and the Christian resignation in her soul, as she gave her hand to the unconscious perpetrator of the hoax, and went in to breakfast. Ah! heartless wags, who were laughing at her expense, why could you not hear her say to the Vicomte—

"Mme. de Troisville will have some difficulty in finding a house to suit her. Do me the favor of using my house, monsieur, until you have made all your arrangements."

"But I have two girls and two boys, mademoiselle. We should put you to a great deal of inconvenience."

"Do not refuse me," said she, her eyes full of apprehension and regret.

"I made the offer, however you might decide, in my letter; but you did not take it," remarked the Abbé.

"What, uncle! did you know?—"

Poor thing, she broke off. Josette heaved a sigh, and neither M. de Troisville nor the uncle noticed anything.

After breakfast, the Abbé de Sponde, carrying out the plan agreed upon over night, took the Vicomte to see houses for sale and suitable sites for building. Mlle. Cormon was left alone in the salon.

"I am the talk of the town, child, by this time," she said, looking piteously at Josette.

"Well, mademoiselle, get married."

“But, my girl, I am not at all prepared to make a choice.”

“Bah! I should take M. du Bousquier if I were you.”

“M. de Valois says that he is such a Republican, Josette.”

“Your gentlemen don’t know what they are talking about; they say that he robbed the Republic, so he can’t have been at all fond of it,” said Josette, and with that she went.

“That girl is amazingly shrewd,” thought Mlle. Cormon, left alone to her gnawing perplexity.

She saw that the only way of silencing talk was to marry at once. This last so patently humiliating check was enough to drive her to extreme measures; and it takes a great deal to force a feeble-minded human being out of a groove, be it good or bad. Both the old bachelors understood the position of affairs, both made up their minds to call in the morning to make inquiries, and (in their own language) to press the point.

M. de Valois considered that the occasion demanded a scrupulous toilet; he took a bath, he groomed himself with unusual care, and for the first time and the last Césarine saw him applying “a suspicion of rouge” with incredible skill.

Du Bousquier, rough and ready Republican that he was, inspired by dogged purpose, paid no attention to his appearance, he hurried round, and came in first. The fate of men, like the destinies of empires, hangs on small things. History records all such principal causes of great failure or success—a Kellermann’s charge at Marengo, a Blücher coming up at the battle of Waterloo, a Prince Eugène slighted by Louis XIV., a curé on the battlefield of Denain; but nobody profits by the lesson to be diligently attentive to the little trifles of his own life. Behold the results.—The Duchesse de Langeais in *L’Histoire des Treize* entering a convent for want of ten minutes’ patience; Judge Popinot in *L’Interdiction* putting off his inquiries as to the Marquis d’Espard till to-morrow; Charles Grandet coming home by way of Bordeaux instead of Nantes—and these things are said to happen by accident and mere chance! The few moments spent in putting on that suspicion of rouge wrecked M. de

Valois's hopes. Only in such a way could the Chevalier have succumbed. He had lived for the Graces, he was foredoomed to die through them. Even as he gave a last look in the mirror, the burly du Bousquier was entering the disconsolate old maid's drawing-room. His entrance coincided with a gleam of favor in the lady's mind, though in the course of her deliberations the Chevalier had decidedly had the advantage.

"It is God's will," she said to herself when du Bousquier appeared.

"Mademoiselle, I trust you will not take my importunity in bad part; I did not like to trust that great stupid of a René to make inquiries, and came myself."

"I am perfectly well," she said nervously; then, after a pause, and in a very emphatic tone, "Thank you, M. du Bousquier, for the trouble that you took and that I gave you yesterday——"

She recollected how she had lain in du Bousquier's arms, and the accident seemed to her to be a direct order from heaven. For the first time in her life a man had seen her with her belt wrenched apart, her stay-laces cut, the jewel shaken violently out of its case.

"I was so heartily glad to carry you, that I thought you a lightweight," said he.

At this Mlle. Cormon looked at du Bousquier as she never looked at any man in the world before; and thus encouraged, the ex-contractor for forage flung a side glance that went straight to the old maid's heart.

"It is a pity," added he, "that this has not given me the right to keep you always." (She was listening with rapture in her face.) "You looked dazzling as you lay swooning there on the bed; I never saw such a fine woman in my life, and I have seen a good many.—There is this about a stout woman, she is superb to look at, she has only to show herself, she triumphs."

"You mean to laugh at me," said the old maid; "that is not kind of you, when the whole town is perhaps putting a bad construction on things that happened yesterday."

"It is as true as that my name is du Bousquier, made-

moiselle. My feelings towards you have never changed; your first rejection did not discourage me."

The old maid lowered her eyes. There was a pause, a painful ordeal for du Bousquier. Then Mlle. Cormon made up her mind and raised her eyelids; she looked up tenderly at du Bousquier through her tears.

"If this is so, monsieur," she said, in a tremulous voice, "I only ask you to allow me to lead a Christian life, do not ask me to change any of my habits as to religion, leave me free to choose my directors, and I will give you my hand," holding it out to him as she spoke.

Du Bousquier caught the plump, honest hand that held so many francs, and kissed it respectfully.

"But I have one thing more to ask," added Mlle. Cormon, suffering him to kiss her hand.

"It is granted, and if it is impossible, it shall be done" (a reminiscence of Beaujon).

"Alas!" began the old maid, "for love of me you must burden your soul with a sin which I know is heinous; falsehood is one of the seven deadly sins; but still you can make confession, can you not? We will both of us do penance." They looked tenderly at each other at those words.

"Perhaps," continued Mlle. Cormon, "after all, it is one of those deceptions which the Church calls venial——"

"Is she going to tell me that she is in Suzanne's plight?" thought du Bousquier. "What luck!——" Aloud he said, "Well, mademoiselle?"

"And you must take it upon you——"

"What?"

"To say that this marriage was agreed upon between us six months ago."

"Charming woman!" exclaimed the forage-contractor, and by his manner he implied that he was prepared to make even this sacrifice; "a man only does thus much for the woman he has worshiped for ten years."

"In spite of my severity?" asked she.

"Yes, in spite of your severity."

"M. du Bousquier, I have misjudged you." Again she held out her big, red hand, and again du Bousquier kissed it.

At that very moment the door opened, and the betrothed couple, turning their heads, perceived the charming but too tardy Chevalier.

“Ah! fair queen,” said he, “so you have risen?”

Mlle. Cormon smiled at him, and something clutched at her heart. M. de Valois, grown remarkably young and irresistible, looked like Lauzur entering La Grande Mademoiselle’s apartments.

“Ah! my dear du Bousquier!” he continued, half laughingly, so sure was he of success. “M. de Troisville and the Abbé de Sponde are in front of your house, looking it over like a pair of surveyors.”

“On my word,” said du Bousquier, “if the Vicomte de Troisville wants it, he can have it for forty thousand francs. It is of no use whatever to me.—Always, if mademoiselle has no objection, that must be ascertained first.—Mademoiselle, may I tell?—Yes?—Very well, *my dear Chevalier*, you shall be the first to hear”—Mlle. Cormon dropped her eyes—“of the honor and the favor that mademoiselle is doing me; I have kept it a secret for more than six months. We are going to be married in a few days, the contract is drawn up, we shall sign it to-morrow. So, you see, that I have no further use for my house in the Rue du Cygne. I am quietly on the lookout for a purchaser; and the Abbé de Sponde, *who knew this*, naturally took M. de Troisville to see it.”

There was such a color of truth about this monstrous fib that the Chevalier was quite taken in by it. *My dear Chevalier* was a return for all preceding defeats; it was like the victory won at Pultowa by Peter the Great over Charles XII. And thus du Bousquier enjoyed a delicious revenge for hundreds of pin-pricks endured in silence; but in his triumph he forgot that he was not a young man, he passed his fingers through the false toupet, and—it came off in his hand!

“I congratulate you both,” said the Chevalier, with an agreeable smile; “I wish that you may end like the fairy stories, ‘They lived very happily and had a fine—*family of children!*’” Here he shaped a cone of snuff in his palm before adding mockingly, “But, monsieur, you forgot that—er—you wear borrowed plumes.”

Du Bousquier reddened. The false toupet was ten inches awry. Mlle. Cormon raised her eyes to the face of her betrothed, saw the bare cranium, and bashfully looked down again. Never toad looked more venomously at a victim than du Bousquier at the Chevalier.

“A pack of aristocrats that look down on me!” he thought. “I will crush you all some of these days.”

The Chevalier de Valois imagined that he had regained all the lost ground. But Mlle. Cormon was not the woman to understand the connection between the Chevalier's congratulation and the allusion to the false toupet; and, for that matter, even if she had understood, her hand had been given. M. de Valois saw too clearly that all was lost. Meantime, as the two men stood without speaking, Mlle. Cormon innocently studied how to amuse them.

“Play a game of reversis,” suggested she, without any malicious intention.

Du Bousquier smiled, and went as future master of the house for the card-table. Whether the Chevalier de Valois had lost his head, or whether he chose to remain to study the causes of his defeat and to remedy it, certain it is that he allowed himself to be led like a sheep to the slaughter. But he had just received the heaviest of all bludgeon blows; and a noble might have been excused if he had been at any rate stunned by it. Very soon the worthy Abbé de Sponde and M. de Troisville returned, and at once Mlle. Cormon hurried into the antechamber, took her uncle aside, and told him in a whisper of her decision. Then, hearing that the house in the Rue du Cygne suited M. de Troisville, she begged her betrothed to do her the service of saying that her uncle knew that the place was for sale. She dared not confide the fib to the Abbé, for fear that he should forget. The falsehood was destined to prosper better than if it had been a virtuous action. All Alençon heard the great news that night. For four days the town had found as much to say as in the ominous days of 1814 and 1815. Some laughed at the idea, others thought it true; some condemned, others approved the marriage. The *bourgeoisie* of Alençon regarded it as a conquest, and they were the best pleased.

The Chevalier de Valois, next day, among his own circle, brought out this cruel epigram, "The Cormons are ending as they began; stewards and contractors are all on a footing."

The news of Mlle. Cormon's choice went to poor Athanase's heart; but he showed not a sign of the dreadful tumult surging within. He heard of the marriage at President du Ronceret's while his mother was playing a game of boston. Mme. Granson, looking up, saw her son's face in the glass; he looked white, she thought, but then he had been pale ever since vague rumors had reached him in the morning. Mlle. Cormon was the card on which Athanase staked his life, and chill presentiments of impending catastrophe already wrapped him about. When intellect and imagination have exaggerated a calamity till it becomes a burden too heavy for shoulders and brow to bear, when some long-cherished hope fails utterly, and with it the visions which enable a man to forget the fierce vulture cares gnawing at his heart; then, if that man has no belief in himself, in spite of his powers; no belief in the future, in spite of the Power Divine—he is broken in pieces. Athanase was a product of education under the Empire. Fatalism, the Emperor's creed, spread downwards to the lowest ranks of the army, to the very schoolboys at their desks. Athanase followed Mme. du Ronceret's play with a stolidity which might so easily have been taken for indifference, that Mme. Granson fancied she had been mistaken as to her son's feelings.

Athanase's apparent carelessness explained his refusal to sacrifice his so-called "Liberal" opinions. This word, then recently coined for the Emperor Alexander, proceeded into the language, I believe, by way of Mme. de Staël through Benjamin Constant.

After that fatal evening the unhappy young man took to haunting one of the most picturesque walks along the Sarthe; every artist who comes to Alençon sketches it from that point of view, for the sake of the watermills, and the river gleaming brightly out among the fields, between the shapely well-grown trees on either side. Flat though the land may be, it lacks none of the subdued peculiar charm of French land-



scape; for in France your eyes are never wearied by glaring Eastern sunlight, nor saddened by too continual mist. It is a lonely spot. Dwellers in the provinces care nothing for beautiful scenery, perhaps because it is always about them. If there is such a thing as a promenade, a mall, or any spot from which you see a beautiful view, it is sure to be the one unfrequented part of the town. Athanase liked the loneliness, with the water like a living presence in it, and the fields just turning green in the warmth of the early spring sunlight. Occasionally someone who had seen him sitting at a poplar foot, and received an intent gaze from his eyes, would speak to Mme. Granson about him.

“There is something the matter with your son.”

“I know what he is about,” the mother would say with a satisfied air, hinting that he was meditating some great work.

Athanase meddled no more in politics; he had no opinions; and yet, now and again, he was merry enough, merry at the expense of others, after the wont of those who stand alone and apart in contempt of public opinion. The young fellow lived so entirely outside the horizon of provincial ideas and amusements, that he was interesting to few people; he did not so much as rouse curiosity. Those who spoke of him to his mother did so for her sake, not for his. Not a creature in Alençon sympathized with Athanase; the Sarthe received the tears which no friend, no loving woman dried. If the magnificent Suzanne had chanced to pass that way, how much misery might have been prevented—the two young creatures would have fallen in love.

And yet Suzanne certainly passed that way. Her ambition had been first awakened by a sufficiently marvelous tale of things which happened in 1799; an old story of adventures begun at the sign of the *Three Moors* had turned her childish brain. They used to tell how an adventuress, beautiful as an angel, had come from Paris with a commission from Fouché to ensnare the Marquis de Montauran, the Chouan leader sent over by the Bourbons; how she met him at that very inn of the *Three Moors* as he came back from his Mortagne expedition; and how she won his love, and gave him

up to his enemies. The romantic figure of this woman, the power of beauty, the whole story of Marie de Verneuil and the Marquis de Montauran, dazzled Suzanne, till, as she grew older, she too longed to play with men's lives. A few months after her flight, she could not resist the desire to see her native place again, on her way to Brittany with an artist. She wanted to see Fougères, where the Marquis de Montauran met his death; and thought of making a pilgrimage to the scenes of stories told to her in childhood of that War in the West, so little known even yet. She wished, besides, to revisit Alençon with such splendor in her surroundings, and so completely metamorphosed, that nobody should know her again. She intended to put her mother beyond the reach of want in one moment, and, in some tactful way, to send a sum of money to poor Athanase—a sum which for genius in modern days is the equivalent of a Rebecca's gift of horse and armor to an Ivanhoe of the Middle Ages.

A month went by. Opinions as to Mlle. Cormon's marriage fluctuated in the strangest way. There was an incredulous section which strenuously denied the truth of the report, and a party of believers who persistently affirmed it. At the end of a fortnight, the doubters received a severe check. Du Bousquier's house was sold to M. de Troisville for forty-three thousand francs. M. de Troisville meant to live quite quietly in Alençon; he intended to return to Paris after the death of the Princess Scherbelloff, but until the inheritance fell in he would spend his time in looking after his estates. This much appeared to be fact. But the doubting faction declined to be crushed. Their assertion was that, married or no, du Bousquier had done a capital stroke of business, for his house only stood him in a matter of twenty-seven thousand francs. The believers were taken aback by this peremptory decision on the part of their opponents. "Choisnel, Mlle. Cormon's notary, had not heard a word of marriage settlements," added the incredulous.

But on the twentieth day the unshaken believers enjoyed a signal victory over the doubters. M. Lepresseur, the Liberal notary, went to Mlle. Cormon's house, and the contract was signed. This was the first of many sacrifices which

Rose made to her husband. The fact was that du Bousquier detested Choisnel; he blamed the notary for Mlle. Armande's refusal in the first place, as well as for his previous rejection by Mlle. Cormon, who, as he believed, had followed Mlle. Armande's example. He managed Mlle. Cormon so well, that she, noble-hearted woman, believing that she had misjudged her future husband, wished to make reparation for her doubts, and sacrificed her notary to her love. Still she submitted the contract to Choisnel, and he—a man worthy of Plutarch—defended Mlle. Cormon's interests by letter. This was the one cause of delay.

Mlle. Cormon received a good many anonymous letters. She was informed, to her no small astonishment, that Suzanne was as honest a woman as she was herself; and that the seducer in the false toupet could not possibly have played the part assigned to him in such an adventure. Mlle. Cormon scorned anonymous letters; she wrote, however, to Suzanne with a view to gaining light on the creeds of the Maternity Society. Suzanne probably had heard of du Bousquier's approaching marriage; she confessed to her stratagem, sent a thousand francs to the Fund, and damaged the forage-contractor's character very considerably. Mlle. Cormon called an extraordinary meeting of the Maternity Charity, and the assembled matrons passed a resolution that henceforward the Fund should give help after and not before misfortunes befell.

In spite of these proceedings, which supplied the town with titbits of gossip to discuss, the banns were published at the church and the mayor's office. It was Athanase's duty to make out the needful documents. The betrothed bride had gone to the Prébaudet, a measure taken partly by way of conventional modesty, partly for general security. Thither du Bousquier went every morning, fortified by atrocious and sumptuous bouquets, returning in the evening to dinner.

At last, one gray rainy day in June, the wedding took place; and Mlle. Cormon and the Sieur du Bousquier, as the incredulous faction called him, were married at the parish church in the sight of all Alençon. Bride and bridegroom drove to the mayor's office, and afterwards to the church, in

a calèche—a splendid equipage for Alençon. Du Bousquier had it sent privately from Paris. The loss of the old cariole was a kind of calamity for the whole town. The saddler of the Porte de Sééz lost an income of fifty francs per annum for repairs; he lifted up his voice and wept. With dismay the town of Alençon beheld the luxury introduced by the Maison Cormon; everyone feared a rise of prices all round, an increase of house rent, an invasion of Paris furniture. There were some whose curiosity pricked them to the point of giving Jacquelin ten sous for a nearer sight of so startling an innovation in a thrifty province. A pair of Normandy horses likewise caused much concern.

“If we buy horses for ourselves in this way, we shall not sell them long to those that come to buy of us,” said du Ronceret’s set.

The reasoning seemed profound, stupid though it was, in so far as it prevented the district from securing a monopoly of money from outside. In the political economy of the provinces the wealth of nations consists not so much in a brisk circulation of money as in hoards of unproductive coin.

At length the old maid’s fatal wish was fulfilled. Penelope sank under the attack of pleurisy contracted forty days before the wedding. Nothing could save her. Mme. Granson, Mariette, Mme. du Coudrai, Mme. du Ronceret—the whole town, in fact—noticed that the bride came into church with the left foot foremost, an omen all the more alarming because the word Left even then had acquired a political significance. The officiating priest chanced to open the mass-book at the *De profundis*. And so the wedding passed off, amid presages so ominous, so gloomy, so overwhelming, that nobody was found to augur well of it. Things went from bad to worse. There was no attempt at a wedding party; the bride and bridegroom started out for the Prébaudet. Paris fashions were to supplant old customs! In the evening Alençon said its say to all these absurdities; some persons had reckoned upon one of the usual provincial jollifications, which they considered they had a right to expect, and these spoke their minds pretty freely. But Mariette and

Jacquelin had a merry wedding, and they alone in all Alençon gainsaid the dismal prophecies.

Du Bousquier wished to spend the profit made by the sale of his house on restoring and modernizing the Hôtel Cormon. He had quite made up his mind to stay for some months at the Prébaudet, whither he brought his uncle de Sponde. The news spread dismay through Alençon; everyone felt that du Bousquier was about to draw the country into the downward path of domestic comfort. The foreboding grew to a fear one morning when du Bousquier drove over from the Prébaudet to superintend his workmen at the Val-Noble; and the townspeople beheld a tilbury, harnessed to a new horse, and René in livery by his master's side. Du Bousquier had invested his wife's savings in the Funds, which stood at sixty-seven francs fifty centimes. This was the first act of the new administration. In the space of one year, by constantly speculating for a rise, he made for himself a fortune almost as considerable as his wife's. But something else happened in connection with this marriage to make it seem yet more inauspicious, and put all previous overwhelming portents and alarming innovations into the background.

It was the evening of the wedding day. Athanase and his mother were sitting in the salon by the little fire of brushwood (or *régalades*, as they say in the patois), which the servant had lighted after dinner.

"Well," said Mme. Granson, "we will go to President du Ronceret's to-night, now that we have no Mlle. Cormon. Goodness me! I shall never get used to calling her Mme. du Bousquier; that name makes my lips sore."

Athanase looked at his mother with a sad constraint; he could not smile, and he wanted to acknowledge, as it were, the artless thoughtfulness which soothed the wound it could not heal.

"Mamma," he began—it was several years since he had used that word, and his tones were so gentle that they sounded like his child's voice—"mamma, dear, do not let us go out just yet; it is so nice here by the fire!"

It was a supreme cry of mortal anguish; the mother heard it and did not understand.

“Let us stay, child,” she said. “I would certainly rather talk with you and listen to your plans than play at boston and perhaps lose my money.”

“You are beautiful to-night; I like to look at you. And besides, the current of my thoughts is in harmony with this poor little room, where we have been through so much trouble—you and I.”

“And there is still more in store for us, poor Athanase, until your work succeeds. For my own part, I am used to poverty; but, oh, my treasure, to look on and see your youth go by while you have no joy of it! Nothing but work in your life! That thought is like a disease for a mother. It tortures me night and morning. I wake up to it. Ah, God in heaven! what have I done? What sin of mine is punished with this?”

She left her seat, took a little chair, and sat down beside Athanase, nestling close up to his side, till she could lay her head on her child's breast. Where a mother is truly a mother, the grace of love never dies. Athanase kissed her on the eyes, on the gray hair, on the forehead, with the reverent love that fain would lay the soul where the lips are laid.

“I shall never succeed,” he said, trying to hide the fatal purpose which he was revolving in his mind.

“Pooh! you are not going to be discouraged? Mind can do all things, as you say. With ten bottles of ink, ten reams of paper, and a strong will, Luther turned Europe upside down. Well, and you are going to make a great name for yourself; you are going to use to good ends the powers which he used for evil. Did you not say so? Now I remember what you say, you see; I understand much more than you think; for you still lie so close under my heart, that your least little thought thrills through it, as your slightest movement did once.”

“I shall not succeed *here*, you see, mamma, and I will not have you looking on while I am struggling and heartsore and in anguish. Mother, let me leave Alençon; I want to go through it all away from you.”

“I want to be at your side always,” she said proudly.

“Suffering alone! *you* without your mother! your poor mother that would be your servant if need were, and keep out of sight for fear of injuring you, if you wished it, and never accuse you of pride! No, no, Athanase, we will never be parted!”

Athanase put his arms about her and held her with a passionate tight clasp, as a dying man might cling to life.

“And yet I wish it,” he said. “If we do not part, it is all over with me. . . . The double pain—yours and mine—would kill me. It is better that I should live, is it not?”

Mme. Granson looked with haggard eyes into her son’s face.

“So this is what you have been brooding over! They said truth. Then are you going away?”

“Yes.”

“But you are not going until you have told me all about it, and without giving me any warning? You must have some things to take with you, and money. There are some louis d’ors sewed into my petticoat; you must have them.”

Athanase burst into tears.

“That was all that I wanted to tell you,” he said after a while. “Now, I will see you to the President’s house.”

Mother and son went out together. Athanase left Mme. Granson at the door of the house where she was to spend the evening. He looked long at the shafts of light that escaped through chinks in the shutters. He stood there glued to the spot, while a quarter of an hour went by, and it was with almost delirious joy that he heard his mother say, “Grand independence of hearts.”

“Poor mother, I have deceived her!” he exclaimed to himself as he reached the river.

He came down to the tall poplar on the bank where he had been wont to sit and meditate during the last six weeks. Two big stones lay there; he had brought them himself for a seat. And now, looking out over the fair landscape lying in the moonlight, he passed in review all the so glorious future that should have been his. He went through cities stirred to enthusiasm by his name; he heard the cheers of crowded streets, breathed the incense of banquets, looked

with a great yearning over that life of his dreams, rose up-lifted and radiant in glorious triumph, raised a statue to himself, summoned up all his illusions to bid them farewell in a last Olympian carouse. The magic could only last for a little while; it fled, it had vanished forever. In that supreme moment he clung to his beautiful tree as if it had been a friend; then he put the stones, one in either pocket, and buttoned his overcoat. His hat he had purposely left at home. He went down the bank to look for a deep spot which he had had in view for some time; and slid in resolutely, trying to make as little noise as possible. There was scarcely a sound.

When Mme. Granson came home about half-past nine that night, the maid-of-all-work said nothing of Athanase, but handed her a letter. Mme. Granson opened it and read—

“I have gone away, my kind mother; do not think hardly of me.” That was all.

“A pretty thing he has done!” cried she. “And how about his linen and the money? But he will write, and I shall find him. The poor children always think themselves wiser than their fathers and mothers.” And she went to bed with a quiet mind.

The Sarthe had risen with yesterday's rain. Fishers and anglers were prepared for this, for the swollen river washes down the eels from the little streams on its course. It so happened that an eel-catcher had set his lines over the very spot where Athanase had chosen to drown himself, thinking that he should never be heard of again; and next morning, about six o'clock, the man drew out the young dead body.

One or two women among Mme. Granson's few friends went to prepare the poor widow with all possible care to receive the dreadful yield of the river. The news of the suicide, as might be expected, produced a tremendous sensation. Only last evening the poverty-stricken man of genius had not a single friend; the morning after his death scores of voices cried, “I would so willingly have helped him!” So easy is it to play a charitable part when no outlay is involved. The Chevalier de Valois, in the spirit of revenge, explained the suicide. It was a boyish, sincere, and noble



passion for Mlle. Cormon that drove Athanase to take his own life. And when the Chevalier had opened Mme. Granson's eyes, she saw a multitude of little things to confirm this view. The story grew touching; women cried over it.

Mme. Granson sorrowed with a dumb concentration of grief which few understood. For mothers there are two ways of bereavement. It often happens that everyone else can understand the greatness of her loss; her boy was admired and appreciated, young or handsome, with fair prospects before him or brilliant successes won already; everyone regrets him, everyone shares her mourning, and the grief that is widely spread is not so hard to bear. Then there is the loss that *one* understands. No one else knew her boy and all that he was; his smiles were for her alone; she, and she only, knew how much perished with that life, too early cut short. Such sorrow hides itself; beside that darkness other woe grows pale; no words can describe it; and, happily, there are not many women who know what it is to have those heart-strings finally severed.

Even before Mme. du Bousquier came back to town, her obliging friend, Mme. du Ronceret, went to fling a dead body down among the roses of her new-wedded happiness, to let her know what a love she had refused. Ever so gently the Présidente squeezed a shower of drops of wormwood over the honey of the first month of married life. And as Mme. du Bousquier returned, it so happened that she met Mme. Granson at the corner of the Val-Noble, and the look in the heartbroken mother's eyes cut her to the quick. It was a look from a woman dying of grief, a thousand curses gathered up into one glance of malediction, a thousand sparks in one gleam of hate. It frightened Mme. du Bousquier; it boded ill and invoked ill upon her.

Mme. Granson had belonged to the party most opposed to the curé; she was a bitter partisan of the priest of St. Leonard's; but on the very evening of the tragedy she thought of the rigid orthodoxy of her own party, and she shuddered. She herself had laid her son in his shroud, thinking all the while of the Mother of the Saviour; then with a soul quivering with agony, she betook herself to the house of

the perjured priest. She found him busy, the humble good man, storing the hemp and flax which he gave to poor women and girls to spin, so that no worker should ever want work, a piece of wise charity which had saved more than one family that could not endure to beg. He left his hemp at once and brought his visitor into the dining-room, where the stricken mother saw the frugality of her own housekeeping in the supper that stood waiting for the curé.

“M. l’Abbé,” she began, “I have come to entreat you——”

She burst into tears, and could not finish the sentence.

“I know why you have come,” answered the holy man, “and I trust to you, madame, and to your relative Mme. du Bousquier to make it right with his Lordship at Sééz. Yes, I will pray for your unhappy boy; yes, I will say Masses; but we must avoid all scandal, we must give no occasion to ill-disposed people to gather together in the church. . . . I myself, alone, and at night——”

“Yes, yes, as you wish, if only he is laid in consecrated ground!” she said, poor mother; and taking the priest’s hand in hers, she kissed it.

And so, just before midnight, a bier was smuggled into the parish church. Four young men, Athanase’s friends, carried it. There were a few little groups of veiled and black-clad women, Mme. Granson’s friends, and some seven or eight lads that had been intimate with the dead. The bier was covered with a pall, torches were lit at the corners, and the curé read the office for the dead, with the help of one little choir boy whom he could trust. Then the suicide was buried, noiselessly, in a corner of the churchyard, and a dark wooden cross with no name upon it marked the grave for the mother. Athanase lived and died in the shadow.

Not a voice was raised against the curé; his Lordship at Sééz was silent; the mother’s piety redeemed her son’s impious deed.

Months afterwards, moved by the inexplicable thirst of sorrow which drives the unhappy to steep their lips in their bitter cup, the poor woman went to see the place where her son drowned himself. Perhaps she felt instinctively that

there were thoughts to be gathered under the poplar tree; perhaps, too, she longed to see all that his eyes had seen for the last time. The sight of the spot would kill many a mother; while again there are some who can kneel and worship there.—There are truths on which the patient anatomist of human nature cannot insist too much; verities against which education and laws and systems of philosophy are shattered. It is absurd—let us repeat it again and again—to try to lay down hard and fast rules in matters of feeling; the personal element comes in to modify feeling as it arises, and a man's character influences his most instinctive actions.

Mme. Granson, by the riverside, saw a woman at some distance—a woman who came nearer, till she reached the fatal spot, and exclaimed—

“Then this is the place!”

One other woman in the world wept there as the mother was weeping, and that woman was Suzanne. She had heard of the tragedy on her arrival that morning at the *Three Moors*. If poor Athanase had been alive, she might have done what poor and generous people dream of doing, and the rich never think of putting in practice; she would have inclosed a thousand francs with the words, “Money lent by your father to a comrade who now repays you.” During her journey Suzanne had thought of this angelic way of giving. She looked up and saw Mme. Granson.

“I loved him,” she said; then she hurried away.

Suzanne, true to her nature, did not leave Alençon till she had changed the bride's wreath of orange flowers to water-lilies. She was the first to assert that Mme. du Bousquier would be Mlle. Cormor as long as she lived. And with one jibe she avenged both Athanase and the dear Chevalier de Valois.

Alençon beheld another and more piteous suicide. Athanase was promptly forgotten by a world that willingly, and indeed of necessity, forgets its dead as soon as possible, but the poor Chevalier's existence became a kind of death-in-life, a suicide continued morning after morning during fourteen years. Three months after du Bousquier's marriage, people remarked, not without astonishment, that the Chevalier's

linen was turning yellow, and his hair irregularly combed. M. de Valois was no more, for a disheveled M. de Valois could not be said to be himself. An ivory tooth here and there deserted from the ranks, and no student of human nature could discover to what corps they belonged, whether they were native or foreign, animal or vegetable; nor whether, finally, they had been extracted by old age, or were merely lying out of sight and out of mind in the Chevalier's dressing-table drawer. His cravat was wisped, careless of elegance, into a cord. The negroes' heads grew pale for lack of soap and water. The lines on the Chevalier's face deepened into wrinkles and darkened as his complexion grew more and more like parchment; his neglected nails were sometimes adorned with an edge of black velvet. Grains of snuff lay scattered like autumn leaves in the furrows of his waistcoat. The cotton in his ears was but seldom renewed. Melancholy, brooding on his brow, spread her sallow hues through his wrinkles; in short, time's ravages, hitherto so carefully repaired, began to appear in rifts and cracks in the noble edifice. Here was proof of the power of the mind over matter! The blond cavalier, the *jeune premier*, fell into decay when hope failed.

Hitherto the Chevalier's nose had made a peculiarly elegant appearance in public; never had it been seen to distill a drop of amber, to let fall a dark wafer of moist rappee; but now, with a snuff-bedabbled border about the nostrils, and an unsightly stream taking advantage of the channel hollowed above the upper lip, that nose, which no longer took pains to please, revealed the immense trouble that the Chevalier must have formerly taken with himself. In this neglect you saw the extent, the greatness and persistence of the man's designs upon Mlle. Cormon. The Chevalier was crushed by a pun from du Coudrai, whose dismissal he however procured. It was the first instance of vindictiveness on the part of the urbane gentleman; but then the pun was atrocious, worse by a hundred cubits than any other ever made by the registrar of mortgages. M. du Coudrai, observing this nasal revolution, had nicknamed the Chevalier "Nérestan" (*nez-restant*).

Latterly the Chevalier's witticisms had been few and far between; the anecdotes went the way of the teeth, but his appetite continued as good as ever; out of the great shipwreck of his hopes he saved nothing but his digestion; and while he took his snuff feebly, he dispatched his dinner with an avidity alarming to behold. You may mark the extent of the havoc wrought in his ideas in the fact that his colloquies with the Princess Goritzza grew less and less frequent. He came to Mlle. Armande's one day with a false calf in front of his shins. The bankruptcy of elegance was something painful, I protest; all Alençon was shocked by it. It scared society to see an elderly young man drop suddenly into his dotage, and from sheer depression of spirits pass from fifty to ninety years. And besides, he had betrayed his secret. He had been waiting and lying in wait for Mlle. Cormon. For ten long years, persevering sportsman that he was, he had been stalking the game, and he had missed his shot. The impotent Republic had won a victory over a valiant Aristocracy, and that in full flood of Restoration! The sham had triumphed over the real; spirit was vanquished by matter, diplomacy by insurrection; and as a final misfortune, a grisette in an outbreak of bad temper, let out the secret of the Chevalier's levées!

At once he became a man of the worst character. The Liberal party laid all du Bousquier's foundlings on the Chevalier's doorstep, while the Faubourg Saint-Germain of Alençon boastingly accepted them; laughed and cried, "The dear Chevalier! What else could he do?" Saint-Germain pitied the Chevalier, took him to its bosom, and smiled more than ever upon him; while an appalling amount of unpopularity was drawn down upon du Bousquier's head. Eleven persons seceded from the salon Cormon and went over to the d'Esgrignons.

But the especial result of the marriage was a more sharply-marked division of parties in Alençon. The Maison d'Esgrignon represented undiluted aristocracy; for the Troisvilles on their return joined the clique. The Maison Cormon, skillfully influenced by du Bousquier, was not exactly Liberal, nor yet resolutely Royalist, but of that un-

lucky shade of opinion which produced the 221 members, so soon as the political struggle took a definite shape, and the greatest, most august, and only real power at Kingship came into collision with that most false, fickle, and tyrannical power which, when wielded by an elective body, is known as the power of Parliament.

The third salon, the salon du Ronceret, out and out Radical in its politics, was secretly allied with the Maison Common.

With the return from the Prébaudet, a life of continual suffering began for the Abbé de Sponde. He kept all that he endured locked within his soul, uttering not a word of complaint to his niece; but to Mlle. Armande he opened his heart, admitting that taking one folly with another, he should have preferred the Chevalier. M. de Valois would not have had the bad taste to thwart a feeble old man with but a few days to live. Du Bousquier had pulled the old home to pieces.

"Mademoiselle," the old Abbé said as the thin tears fell from his faded old eyes, "the lime-tree walk, where I have been used to meditate these fifty years, is gone. My dear lime-trees have all been cut down! Just as I am nearing the end of my days the Republic has come back again in the shape of a horrible revolution in the house."

"Your niece must be forgiven," said the Chevalier de Valois. "Republicanism is a youthful error; youth goes out to seek for liberty, and finds tyranny in its worst form—the tyranny of the impotent rabble. Your niece, poor thing, has not been punished by the thing wherein she sinned."

"What is to become of me in a house with naked women dancing all over the walls? Where shall I find the lime-tree walks where I used to read my breviary?"

Like Kant, who lost the thread of his ideas when somebody cut down the fir-tree on which he fixed his eyes as he meditated, the good Abbé, pacing up and down the shadowless alleys, could not say his prayers with the same uplifting of soul. Du Bousquier had laid out an English garden!

"It looked nicer," Mme. du Bousquier said. Not that

she really thought so, but the Abbé Couturier had authorized her to say and do a good many things that she might please her husband.

With the restoration, all the glory departed from the old house, and all its quaint, cheerful, old-world look. If the Chevalier de Valois's neglect of his person might be taken as a sort of abdication, the *bourgeois* majesty of the salon Cormon passed away when the drawing-room was decorated with white and gold; and blue silk curtains and mahogany ottomans made their appearance. In the dining-room, fitted up in the modern style, the dishes were somehow not so hot, nor the dinners quite what they had been. M. du Coudrai said that the puns stuck fast in his throat when he saw the painted figures on the walls and felt their eyes upon him. Without, the house was provincial as ever; within, the forage-contractor of the Directory made himself everywhere felt. All over the house you saw the stockbroker's bad taste; stucco pilasters, glass doors, classic cornices, arid decoration—a medley of every imaginable style and ill-assorted magnificence.

Alençon criticised such unheard-of luxury for a fortnight, and grew proud of it at the end of a few months. Several rich manufacturers refurnished their houses in consequence, and set up fine drawing-rooms. Modern furniture made its appearance; astral lamps might even be seen in some places.

The Abbé de Sponde was the first to see the unhappiness which lay beneath the surface of his dear child's married life. The old dignified simplicity which ruled their way of living was gone; du Bousquier gave two balls every month in the course of the first winter. The venerable house—oh, to think of it!—echoed with the sound of violins and worldly gayety. The Abbé, on his knees, prayed while the merriment lasted.

The politics of the sober salon underwent a gradual change for the worse. The Abbé de Sponde divined du Bousquier; he shuddered at his nephew's dictatorial tone. He saw tears in his niece's eyes when the disposal of her fortune was taken out of her hands; her husband left her only the control of the linen, the table, and such things as fall to a woman's lot.

Rose had no more orders to give. Jacquelin, now coachman exclusively, took his orders from no one but his master; René, the groom, did likewise, so did the man-cook imported from Paris; Mariette was only the kitchen-maid; and Mme. du Bousquier had no one to tyrannize over but Josette.

Does anyone know how much it costs to give up the delicious exercise of authority? If the triumph of will is one of the most intoxicating of the great man's joys, to have one's own way is the whole life of narrow natures. No one but a cabinet minister fallen into disgrace can sympathize with Mme. du Bousquier's bitter pain when she saw herself reduced to a cipher in her own house. She often drove out when she would rather have stayed at home; she saw company which she did not like; she who had been free to spend as she pleased, and had never spent at all, had lost the control of the money which she loved. Impose limits, and who does not wish to go beyond them? Is there any sharper suffering than that which comes of thwarted will?

But these beginnings were the roses of life. Every concession was counseled by poor Rose's love for her husband, and at first du Bousquier behaved admirably to his wife. He was very good to her; he brought forward sufficient reasons for every encroachment. The room, so long left empty, echoed with the voices of husband and wife in fireside talk. And so, for the first few years of married life, Mme. du Bousquier wore a face of content, and that little air of emancipation and mystery often seen in a young wife after a marriage of love. She had no more trouble with "heated blood." This countenance of hers routed scoffers, gave the lie to gossip concerning du Bousquier, and put observers of human nature at fault.

Rose Marie Victoire was so afraid lest she should lose her husband's affection or drive him from her side by setting her will against his, that she would have made any sacrifice, even of her uncle if need be. And the Abbé de Sponde, deceived by Mme. du Bousquier's poor foolish little joys, bore his own discomforts the more easily for the thought that his niece was happy.

At first Alençon shared this impression. But there was one



man less easy to deceive than all the rest of Alençon put together. The Chevalier de Valois had taken refuge on the Mons Sacer of the most aristocratic section, and spent his time with the d'Esgrignons. He lent an ear to the scandal and tittle-tattle; night and day he studied how to have his revenge before he died. The perpetrator of puns had been already brought low, and he meant to stab du Bousquier to the heart.

The poor Abbé, knowing as he did the cowardliness of his niece's first and last love, shuddered as he guessed his nephew's hypocritical nature and the man's intrigues. Du Bousquier, be it said, put some constraint upon himself; he had an eye to the Abbé's property, and had no wish to annoy his wife's uncle in any way, yet he dealt the old man his deathblow.

If you can translate the word Intolerance by Firmness of Principle; if you can forbear to condemn in the old Roman Catholic Vicar-General that stoicism which Scott has taught us to revere in Jeanie Deans's Puritan father; if, finally, you can recognize in the Roman Church the nobility of a *Potius mori quam fœdari* which you admire in a Republican—then you can understand the anguish that rent the great Abbé de Sponde when he saw the apostate in his nephew's drawing-room; when he was compelled to meet the renegade, the backslider, the enemy of the Church, the aider and abettor of the Oath to the Constitution. It was du Bousquier's private ambition to lord it over the countryside; and as a first proof of his power, he determined to reconcile the officiating priest of St. Leonard's with the curé of Alençon. He gained his object. His wife imagined that peace had been made where the stern Abbé saw no peace, but surrender of principle. M. de Sponde was left alone in the faith. The Bishop came to du Bousquier's house, and appeared satisfied with the cessation of hostilities. The Abbé François's goodness had conquered everyone—everyone except the old Roman of the Roman Church, who might have cried with Cornélie, "Ah, God! what virtues you make me hate!" The Abbé de Sponde died when orthodoxy expired in the diocese.

In 1819 the Abbé de Sponde's property raised Mme. du

Bousquier's income from land to twenty-five thousand livres without counting the Prébaudet or the house in the Val-Noble. About the same time du Bousquier returned the amount of his wife's savings (which she had made over to him), and instructed her to invest the moneys in purchases of land near the Prébaudet, so that the estate, including the Abbé de Sponde's adjoining property, was one of the largest in the department. As for du Bousquier, he invested his money with the Kellers, and made a journey to Paris four times a year. Nobody knew the exact amount of his private fortune, but at this time he was supposed to be one of the wealthiest men in the department of the Orne. A dexterous man, and the permanent candidate of the Liberal party, he always lost his election by seven or eight votes under the Restoration. Ostensibly he repudiated his connection with the Liberals, offering himself as a Ministerial-Royalist candidate; but although he succeeded in gaining the support of the Congrégation and of the magistrature, the repugnance of the administration was too strong to be overcome.

Then the rabid Republican, frantic with ambition, conceived the idea of beginning a struggle with the Royalism and Aristocracy of the country, just as they were carrying all before them. He gained the support of the clergy by an appearance of piety very skillfully kept up; always going with his wife to Mass, giving money to the convents, and supporting the confraternity of the Sacré-Cœur; and whenever a dispute arose between the clergy and the town, or the department, or the State, he was very careful to take the clerical side. And so, while secretly supported by the Liberals, he gained the influence of the Church; and as a Constitutional-Royalist kept close beside the aristocratic section, the better to ruin it. And ruin it he did. He was always on the watch for any mistake on the part of those high in rank or in office under the Government; with the support of the *bourgeoisie* he carried out all the improvements which the nobles and officials ought to have undertaken and directed, if the imbecile jealousies of place had not frustrated their efforts. Constitutional opinion carried him

through in the affair of the curé, in the theater question, and in all the various schemes of improvement which du Bousquier first prompted the Liberals to make, and afterwards supported in the course of debate, declaring himself in favor of any measures for the good of the country. He brought about an industrial revolution; and his detestation of certain families on the high road to Brittany rapidly increased the material prosperity of the province.

And so he paved the way for his revenge upon the *gens à châteaux* in general, and the d'Esgrignons in particular; some day, not so very far distant, he would plunge a poisoned blade into the very heart of the clique. He found capital to revive the manufacture of *point d'Alençon* and to increase the linen trade. Alençon began to spin its own flax by machinery. And while his name was associated with all these interests, and written in the hearts of the masses, while he did all that Royalty left undone, du Bousquier risked not a farthing of his own. With his means, he could afford to wait while enterprising men with little capital were obliged to give up and leave the results of their labors to luckier successors. He posed as a banker. A Laffitte on a small scale, he became a sleeping partner in all new inventions, taking security for his money. And as a public benefactor, he did remarkably well for himself. He was a promoter of insurance companies, a patron of new public conveyances; he got up memorials for necessary roads and bridges. The authorities, being left behind in this way, regarded this activity in the light of an encroachment; they blundered, and put themselves into the wrong, for the prefecture was obliged to give way for the good of the country.

Du Bousquier embittered the provincial *noblesse* against the court nobles and the peerage. He helped, in short, to bring it to pass that a very large body of Constitutional-Royalists supported the *Journal des Débats* and M. de Chateaubriand in a contest with the throne. It was an ungrateful opposition based on ignoble motives which contributed to bring about the triumph of the *bourgeoisie* and the press in 1830. Wherefore du Bousquier, like those whom he represented, had the pleasure of watching a funeral

procession of Royalty<sup>1</sup> pass through their district without a single demonstration of sympathy from a population alienated from them in ways so numerous that they cannot be indicated here.

Then the old Republican, with all that weight of masses on his conscience, hauled down the white flag above the town-hall amid the applause of the people. For fifteen years he had acted a part to satisfy his vendetta, and no man in France beholding the new throne raised in August 1830 could feel more intoxicated than he with the joy of revenge. For him, the succession of the younger branch meant the triumph of the Revolution; for him, the hoisting of the Tricolor flag was the resurrection of the Mountain; and *this* time the nobles should be brought low by a surer method than the guillotine, in that its action should be less violent. A peerage for life only; a National Guard which stretches the marquis and the grocer from the corner shop on the same camp-bed; the abolition of detail demanded by a *bourgeois* barrister; a Catholic Church deprived of its supremacy; in short, all the legislative inventions of August 1830 simply meant for du Bousquier the principles of 1793 carried out in a most ingenious manner.

Du Bousquier has been receiver-general of taxes since 1830. He relied for success upon his old connections with Égalité Orléans (father of Louis-Philippe) and M. de Folmon, steward of the Dowager Duchess. He is supposed to have an income of eighty thousand livres. In the eyes of his fellow-countrymen, *Monsieur* du Bousquier is a man of substance, honorable, upright, obliging, unswerving in his principles. To him, Alençon owes her participation in the industrial movement which makes her, as it were, the first link in a chain which some day perhaps may bind Brittany to the state of things which we nickname "modern civilization." In 1816 Alençon boasted but two carriages, properly speaking; ten years afterwards, calèches, coupés, landaus, cabriolets, and tilburies were rolling about the streets without causing any astonishment. At first the townsmen and landowners were alarmed by the rise of prices, afterwards

<sup>1</sup>Charles X. on his way to England.

they discovered that the increased expenditure produced a corresponding increase in their incomes.

Du Ronceret's prophetic words, "Du Bousquier is a very strong man," were now taken up by the country. But, unfortunately for du Bousquier's wife, the remark is a shocking misnomer. Du Bousquier, the husband, is a very different person from du Bousquier the public man and politician. The great citizen, so liberal in his opinions, so easy humored, so full of love for his country, is a despot at home, and has not a particle of love for his wife. The Cromwell of the Val-Noble is profoundly astute, hypocritical, and crafty; he behaves to those of his own household as he behaved to the aristocrats on whom he fawned, until he could cut their throats. Like his friend Bernadotte, he has an iron hand in a velvet glove. His wife gave him no children. Suzanne's epigram, and the Chevalier de Valois's insinuations, were justified; but the Liberals and Constitutional-Royalists among the townspeople, the little squires, the magistrature, and the "clericals" (as the *Constitutionnel* used to say), all threw the blame upon Mme. du Bousquier. M. du Bousquier had married such an elderly wife, they said; and besides, how lucky it was for her, poor thing, for at her age bearing a child meant such a risk. If, in periodically recurrent despair, Mme. du Bousquier confided her troubles with tears to Mme. du Coudrai or Mme. du Ronceret,

"Why, you must be mad, dear!" those ladies would reply. "You do not know what you want; a child would be the death of you."

Men like M. du Coudrai, who followed du Bousquier's lead because they fastened their hopes to his success, would prompt their wives to sing du Bousquier's praises; and Rose must listen to speeches that wounded like a stab.

"You are very fortunate, dear, to have such a capable husband; some men have no energy, and can neither manage their own property nor bring up their children; you are spared these troubles."

Or, "Your husband is making you queen of the district, fair lady. He will never leave you at a loss; he does everything in Alençon."

“ But I should like him to take less trouble for the public and rather——”

“ My dear Mme. du Bousquier, you are very hard to please; all the women envy you your husband.”

Unjustly treated by a world which condemned her without a hearing, she found ample scope for the exercise of Christian virtues in her inner life. She who lived in tears always turned a serene face upon the world. For her, pious soul, was there not sin in the thought which was always pecking at her heart—“ I loved the Chevalier de Valois, and I am du Bousquier’s wife!” Athanase’s love rose up like a remorse to haunt her dreams. After her uncle’s death and the revelation of all that he had suffered, the future grew yet more dreadful as she thought how grieved he would have been by such changes of political and religious doctrine. Unhappiness often falls like a thunderbolt, as upon Mme. Granson, for instance; but Rose’s misery gradually widened out before her as a drop of oil spreads over stuff, slowly saturating every fiber.

The Chevalier de Valois was the malignant artificer of her misfortune. He had it on his mind to snatch his opportunity and undeceive Mme. du Bousquier as to one of her articles of faith; for the Chevalier, a man of experience, saw through du Bousquier the married man, as he had seen through du Bousquier the bachelor. But it was not easy to take the astute Republican by surprise. His salon, naturally, was closed to the Chevalier de Valois, as to all others who discontinued their visits to the Maison Cormon at the time of his marriage. And besides, du Bousquier was above the reach of ridicule; he possessed an immense fortune, he was king of Alençon; and as for his wife, he cared about her much as Richard III. might have cared for the loss of the horse with which he thought to win the battle. To please her husband, Mme. du Bousquier had broken with the Maison d’Esgrignon, but sometimes, when he was away at Paris for a few days, she paid Mlle. Armande a visit.

Two years after Mme. du Bousquier’s marriage, just at the time of the Abbé’s death, Mlle. Armande went up to her as she came out of church. Both women had been to St.

Leonard's to hear a *messe noire* said for M. de Sponde; and Mlle. Armande, a generous natured woman, thinking that she ought to try to comfort the weeping heiress, walked with her as far as the Parade. From the Parade, still talking of the beloved and lost, they came to the forbidden Hôtel d'Esgrignon, and Mlle. Armande drew Mme. du Bousquier into the house by the charm of her talk. Perhaps the poor broken-hearted woman loved to speak of her uncle with someone whom her uncle had loved so well. And besides, she wished to receive the old Marquis's greetings after an interval of nearly three years. It was half-past one o'clock; the Chevalier de Valois had come to dinner, and with a bow he held out both hands.

"Ah! well, dear, good, and well-beloved lady," he said tremulously, "*we* have lost our sainted friend. Your mourning is ours. Yes; your loss is felt as deeply here as under your roof—more deeply," he added, alluding to du Bousquier.

A funeral oration followed, to which everyone contributed his phrase; then the Chevalier, gallantly taking the lady's hand, drew it under his arm, pressed it in the most adorable way, and led her aside into the embrasure of a window.

"You are happy, at any rate?" he asked with a fatherly tone in his voice.

"Yes," she said, lowering her eyes.

Hearing that "Yes," Mme. de Troisville (daughter of the Princess Scherbelloff) and the old Marquise de Castéran came up; Mlle. Armande also joined them, and the group took a turn in the garden till dinner should be ready. Mme. du Bousquier was so stupid with grief that she did not notice that a little conspiracy of curiosity was on foot among the ladies.

"We have her here, let us find out the answer to the riddle," the glances exchanged among them seemed to say.

"You should have children to make your happiness complete," began Mlle. Armande, "a fine boy like my nephew——"

Tears came to Mme. du Bousquier's eyes.

“I have heard it said that it was entirely your own fault if you had none,” said the Chevalier, “that you were afraid of the risk.”

“*Il*” she cried, innocently; “I would endure a hundred years in hell to have a child.”

The subject thus broached, Mme. la Vicomtesse de Troisville and the dowager Marquise de Castéran steered the conversation with such exceeding tact, that they entangled poor Rose until, all unsuspectingly, she revealed the secrets of her married life. Mlle. Armande laid her hand on the Chevalier’s arm, and they left the three matrons to talk confidentially. Then Mme. du Bousquier’s mind was disabused with regard to the deception of her marriage; and as she was still “a natural,” she amused her confidantes with her irresistible naïveté. Before long the whole town was in the secret of du Bousquier’s maneuvers, and knew that Mlle. Cormon’s marriage was a mockery; but after the first burst of laughter, Mme. du Bousquier gained the esteem and sympathy of every woman in it. While Mlle. Cormon rushed unsuccessfully at opportunities of establishing herself, everyone had laughed; but people admired her when they knew the position in which she was placed by the severity of her religious principles. “Poor, dear Mlle. Cormon!” was replaced by “poor Mme. du Bousquier!”

In this way the Chevalier made du Bousquier both ridiculous and very unpopular for a while, but the ridicule died down with time; the slander languished when everybody had cut his joke; and besides, it seemed to many persons that the mute Republican had a right to retire at the age of fifty-seven. But if du Bousquier previously hated the Maison d’Esgrignon, this incident so increased his rancor that he was pitiless afterwards in the day of vengeance. Mme. du Bousquier received orders never to set foot in that house again; and by way of reprisals, he inserted the following paragraph in the *Orne Courier*, his own new paper:—

“A REWARD of *rente* to bring in a thousand francs will be paid to any person who shall prove that one M. de Pombron existed either before or after the Emigration.”



Though Mme. du Bousquier's happiness was essentially negative, she saw that her marriage had its advantages. Was it not better to take an interest in the most remarkable man in the place than to live alone? After all, du Bousquier was better than the dogs, cats, and canaries on which old maids center their affections; and his feeling for his wife was something more genuine and disinterested than the attachment of servants, confessors, and legacy-hunters. At a still later period she looked upon her husband as an instrument in God's hands to punish her for the innumerable sins which she discovered in her desires for marriage; she regarded herself as justly rewarded for the misery which she had brought on Mme. Granson, and for hastening her own uncle's end. Obedient to a religious faith which bade her kiss the rod, she praised her husband in public; but in the confessional, or over her prayers at night, she often wept and entreated God to pardon the apostate who said one thing and thought another, who wished for the destruction of the order of nobles and the Church, the two religions of the Maison Cormon. Living in an uncongenial atmosphere, compelled to suppress herself, compelled likewise by a sense of duty to make her husband happy, and to injure him in nothing, she became attached to him with an indefinable affection, perhaps the result of use and wont. Her life was a perpetual contradiction. She felt the strongest aversion for the conduct and opinions of the man she had married, and yet it was her duty to take a tender interest in him; and if, as often happened, du Bousquier ate her preserves, or thought that the dinner was good, she was in the seventh heaven. She saw that his comfort was secured even in the smallest details. If he left the wrapper of his newspaper on the table, there it must remain.

"Leave it, René," she would say, "the master had some reason for putting it there."

Did du Bousquier go on a journey? She fidgeted over his traveling cloak and his linen; she took the most minute precautions for his material comfort. If he was going over to the Prébaudet, she began to consult the weather glass twenty-four hours beforehand. A sleeping dog has eyes and

ears for his master, and so it was with Mme. du Bousquier; she used to watch the expression of her husband's face to read his wishes. And if that burly personage, vanquished by duty-prescribed love, caught her by the waist and kissed her on the forehead, exclaiming, "You are a good woman!" tears of joy filled the poor creature's eyes. It is probable that du Bousquier felt it incumbent upon him to make compensations which won Rose Marie Victoire's respect; for the Church does not require that an assumption of wifely devotion should be carried quite so far as Mme. du Bousquier thought necessary. And yet when she listened to the rancorous talk of men who took Constitutional-Royalism as a cloak for their real opinions, the woman of saintly life uttered not a word. She foresaw the downfall of the Church, and shuddered. Very occasionally she would hazard some foolish remark, promptly cut in two by a look from du Bousquier. In the end this life at cross-purposes had a benumbing influence on Mme. du Bousquier's wits; she found it both simpler and more dignified to keep her mind to herself, and led outwardly a mere animal existence. She grew slavishly submissive, making a virtue of the abject condition to which her husband had reduced her; she did her husband's will without murmuring in the least. The timid sheep walked in the way marked out by the shepherd; never leaving the bosom of the Church, practicing austerities, without a thought of the Devil, his pomps and works. And so, within herself she united the purest Christian virtues, and du Bousquier truly was one of the luckiest men in the kingdom of France and Navarre.

"She will be a simpleton till her last sigh," said the cruel ex-registrar (now cashiered). But, all the same, he dined at her table twice a week.

The story would be singularly incomplete if it omitted to mention a last coincidence; the Chevalier de Valois and Suzanne's mother died at the same time.

The Chevalier died with the Monarchy in August 1830. He went to Nonancourt to join the funeral procession; piously making one of the King's escort to Cherbourg, with the Troisvilles, Castérans, d'Esgrignons, Verneuil, and the

rest. He had brought with him his little hoard of savings and the principal which brought him in his annual income, some fifty thousand francs in all, which he offered to a faithful friend of the elder branch to convey to His Majesty. His own death was very near, he said; the money had come to him through the King's bounty; and, after all, the property of the last of the Valois belonged to the Crown. History does not say whether the Chevalier's fervent zeal overcame the repugnance of the Bourbon who left his fair kingdom of France without taking one farthing into exile; but the King surely must have been touched by the old noble's devotion; and this much is at least certain—Césarine, M. de Valois's universal legatee, inherited scarcely six hundred livres of income at his death. The Chevalier came back to Alençon, broken-hearted and spent with the fatigue of the journey, to die just as Charles X. set foot on foreign soil.

Mme. du Val-Noble and her journalist protector, fearing reprisals from the Liberals, were glad of an excuse to return *incognito* to the village where the old mother died. Suzanne attended the sale of the Chevalier's furniture to buy some relic of her first good friend, and ran up the price of the snuff-box to the enormous amount of a thousand francs. The Princess Goritz's portrait alone was worth that sum. Two years afterwards, a young man of fashion, struck with its marvelous workmanship, obtained it of Suzanne for his collection of fine eighteenth century snuff-boxes; and so the delicate toy which had been the confidante of the most courtly of love affairs, and the delight of an old age till its very end, is now brought into the semi-publicity of a collection. If the dead could know what is done after they are gone, there would be a flush at this moment on the Chevalier's left cheek.

If this history should inspire owners of sacred relics with a holy fear, and set them drafting codicils to provide for the fate of such precious souvenirs of a happiness now no more, by giving them into sympathetic hands; even so an enormous service would have been rendered to the chivalrous and sentimental section of the public; but it contains another and a much more exalted moral. . . . Does it not show that a new branch of education is needed? Is it not an appeal to the

so enlightened solicitude of Ministers of Public Instruction to create chairs of anthropology, a science in which Germany is outstripping us?

Modern myths are even less understood of the people than ancient myths, eaten up with myths though we may be. Fables crowd in upon us on every side, allegory is pressed into service on all occasions to explain everything. If fables are the torches of history, as the humanist school maintains, they may be a means of securing empires from revolution, if only professors of history will undertake that their interpretations thereof shall permeate the masses in the departments. If Mlle. Cormon had had some knowledge of literature; if there had been a professor of anthropology in the department of the Orne; if (a final if) she had read her Ariosto, would the appalling misfortune of her marriage have befallen her? She would, perhaps, have found out for herself why the Italian poet makes his heroine Angelica prefer Medoro (a suave Chevalier de Valois) to Orlando, who had lost his mare, and could do nothing but work himself into a fury. Might not Medoro be taken as an allegorical figure as the courtier of woman's sovereignty, whereas Orlando is revolution personified, an undisciplined, furious, purely destructive force, incapable of producing anything? This is the opinion of one of M. Ballanche's pupils; we publish it, declining all responsibility.

As for the tiny negroes' heads, no information of any kind concerning them is forthcoming. Mme. du Val-Noble you may see any day at the Opera. Thanks to the primary education given to her by the Chevalier de Valois, she looks almost like a woman who makes a necessity of virtue, while in truth she only exists by virtue of necessity.

Mme. du Bousquier is still living, which is to say, is it not, that her troubles are not yet over? At sixty, when women can permit themselves to make admissions, talking confidentially to Mme. du Coudrai, whose husband was reinstated in August 1830, she said that the thought that she must die without knowing what it was to be a wife and mother was more than she could bear.



## THE COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES

TO BARON VON HAMMER-PURGSTALL,

*Member of the Aulic Council, Author of the History of the Ottoman Empire.*

*Dear Baron,—You have taken so warm an interest in my long, vast History of French Manners in the Nineteenth Century, you have given me so much encouragement to persevere with my work, that you have given me a right to associate your name with some portion of it. Are you not one of the most important representatives of conscientious, studious Germany? Will not your approval win for me the approval of others, and protect this attempt of mine? So proud am I to have gained your good opinion, that I have striven to deserve it by continuing my labors with the unflinching courage characteristic of your methods of study, and of that exhaustive research among documents without which you could never have given your monumental work to the world of letters. Your sympathy with such labor as you yourself have bestowed upon the most brilliant civilization of the East, has often sustained my ardor through nights of toil given to the details of our modern civilization. And will not you, whose naïve kindness can only be compared with that of our own La Fontaine, be glad to know of this?*

*May this token of my respect for you and your work find you at Döbling, dear Baron, and put you and yours in mind of one of your most sincere admirers and friends.*

*De Balzac.*

**T**HERE stands a house at a corner of a street, in the middle of a town, in one of the least important prefectures in France, but the name of the street and the name of the town must be suppressed here. Everyone will ap-

preciate the motives of this sage reticence demanded by convention; for if a writer takes upon himself the office of analyst of his own time, he is bound to touch on many sore subjects. The house was called the Hôtel d'Esgrignon; but let d'Esgrignon be considered a mere fancy name, neither more nor less connected with real people than the conventional Belval, Floricour, or Derville of the stage, or the Adalberts and Monbreuses of romance. After all, the names of the principal characters will be quite as much disguised; for though in this history the chronicler would prefer to conceal the facts under a mass of contradictions, anachronisms, improbabilities, and absurdities, the truth will out in spite of him. You uproot a vine-stock, as you imagine, and the stem will send up lusty shoots after you have plowed your vineyard over.

The "Hôtel d'Esgrignon" was nothing more nor less than the house in which the old Marquis lived; or, in the style of ancient documents, Charles Marie Victor Ange Carol, Marquis d'Esgrignon. It was only an ordinary house, but the townspeople and tradesmen had begun by calling it the Hôtel d'Esgrignon in jest, and ended after a score of years by giving it that name in earnest.

The name of Carol, or Karawl, as the Thierrys would have spelt it, was glorious among the names of the most powerful chieftains of the Northmen who conquered Gaul and established the feudal system there. Never had Carol bent his head before King or Communes, the Church or Finance. Intrusted in the days of yore with the keeping of a French March, the title of marquis in their family meant no shadow of imaginary office; it had been a post of honor with duties to discharge. Their fief had always been their domain. Provincial nobles were they in every sense of the word; they might boast of an unbroken line of great descent; they had been neglected by the court for two hundred years; they were lords-paramount in the estates of a province where the people looked up to them with superstitious awe, as to the image of the Holy Virgin that cures the toothache. The house of d'Esgrignon, buried in its remote border country, was preserved as the charred piles of one of Cæsar's

bridges are maintained intact in a river bed. For thirteen hundred years the daughters of the house had been married without a dowry or taken the veil; the younger sons of every generation had been content with their share of their mother's dower and gone forth to be captains or bishops; some had made a marriage at court; one cadet of the house became an admiral, a duke, and a peer of France, and died without issue. Never would the Marquis d'Esgrignon of the elder branch accept the title of duke.

"I hold my marquissate as His Majesty holds the realm of France, and on the same conditions," he told the Constable de Luynes, a very paltry fellow in his eyes at that time.

You may be sure that d'Esgrignons lost their heads on the scaffold during the troubles. The old blood showed itself proud and high even in 1789. The Marquis of that day would not emigrate; he was answerable for his March. The reverence in which he was held by the countryside saved his head; but the hatred of the genuine *sans-culottes* was strong enough to compel him to pretend to fly, and for a while he lived in hiding. Then, in the name of the Sovereign People, the d'Esgrignon lands were dishonored by the District, and the woods sold by the Nation in spite of the personal protest made by the Marquis, then turned of forty. Mlle. d'Esgrignon, his half-sister, saved some portions of the fief, thanks to the young steward of the family, who claimed on her behalf the *partage de présuccession*, which is to say, the right of a relative to a portion of an *émigré's* lands. To Mlle. d'Esgrignon, therefore, the Republic made over the castle itself and a few farms. Chesnel, the faithful steward, was obliged to buy in his own name the church, the parsonage house, the castle gardens, and other places to which his patron was attached—the Marquis advancing the money.

The slow, swift years of the Terror went by, and the Marquis, whose character had won the respect of the whole country, decided that he and his sister ought to return to the castle and improve the property which Maître Chesnel—for he was now a notary—had contrived to save for them out of the wreck. Alas! was not the plundered and dis-



mantled castle all too vast for a lord of the manor shorn of all his ancient rights; too large for the landowner whose woods had been sold piecemeal, until he could scarcely draw nine thousand francs of income from the pickings of his old estates?

It was in the month of October 1800 that Chesnel brought the Marquis back to the old feudal castle, and saw with deep emotion, almost beyond control, his patron standing in the midst of the empty courtyard, gazing round upon the moat, now filled up with rubbish, and the castle towers razed to the level of the roof. The descendant of the Franks looked for the missing Gothic turrets and the picturesque weather vanes which used to rise above them; and his eyes turned to the sky, as if asking of heaven the reason of this social upheaval. No one but Chesnel could understand the profound anguish of the great d'Esgrignon, now known as Citizen Carol. For a long while the Marquis stood in silence, drinking in the influences of the place, the ancient home of his forefathers, with the air that he breathed; then he flung out a most melancholy exclamation.

"Chesnel," he said, "we will come back again some day when the troubles are over; I could not bring myself to live here until the edict of pacification has been published; *they* will not allow me to set my scutcheon on the wall."

He waved his hand towards the castle, mounted his horse, and rode back beside his sister, who had driven over in the notary's shabby basket chaise.

The Hôtel d'Esgrignon in the town had been demolished; a couple of factories now stood on the site of the aristocrat's house. So Maître Chesnel spent the Marquis's last bag of louis on the purchase of the old-fashioned building in the square, with its gables, weather-vane, turret, and dovecot. Once it had been the courthouse of the bailiwick, and subsequently the *présidial*; it had belonged to the d'Esgrignons from generation to generation; and now, in consideration of five hundred louis d'or, the present owner made it over with the title given by the Nation to its rightful lord. And so, half in jest, half in earnest, the old house was christened the Hôtel d'Esgrignon.

In 1800 little or no difficulty was made over erasing names from the fatal list, and some few *émigrés* began to return. Among the very first nobles to come back to the old town were the Baron de Nouastre and his daughter. They were completely ruined. M. d'Esgrignon generously offered them the shelter of his roof; and in his house, two months later, the Baron died, worn out with grief. The Nouastres came of the best blood of the province; Mlle. de Nouastre was a girl of two-and-twenty; the Marquis d'Esgrignon married her to continue his line. But she died in childbirth, a victim to the unskillfulness of her physician, leaving, most fortunately, a son to bear the name of the d'Esgrignons. The old Marquis—he was but fifty-three, but adversity and sharp distress had added months to every year—the poor old Marquis saw the death of the loveliest of human creatures, a noble woman in whom the charm of the feminine figures of the sixteenth century lived again, a charm now lost save to men's imaginations. With her death the joy died out of his old age. It was one of those terrible shocks which reverberate through every moment of the years that follow. For a few moments he stood beside the bed where his wife lay, with her hands folded like a saint, then he kissed her on the forehead, turned away, drew out his watch, broke the mainspring, and hung it up beside the hearth. It was eleven o'clock in the morning.

“Mlle. d'Esgrignon,” he said, “let us pray God that this hour may not prove fatal yet again to our house. My uncle the archbishop was murdered at this hour; at this hour also my father died——”

He knelt down beside the bed and buried his face in the coverlet; his sister did the same. In another moment they both rose to their feet. Mlle. d'Esgrignon burst into tears; but the old Marquis looked with dry eyes at the child, round the room, and again on his dead wife. To the stubbornness of the Frank he united the fortitude of a Christian.

These things came to pass in the second year of the nineteenth century. Mlle. d'Esgrignon was then twenty-seven years of age. She was a beautiful woman. An ex-contractor for forage to the armies of the Republic, a man

of the district, with an income of six thousand francs, persuaded Chesnel to carry a proposal of marriage to the lady. The Marquis and his sister were alike indignant with such presumption in their man of business, and Chesnel was almost heartbroken; he could not forgive himself for yielding to the *Sieur du Croisier's* blandishments. The Marquis's manner with his old servant changed somewhat; never again was there quite the old affectionate kindness, which might almost have been taken for friendship. From that time forth the Marquis was grateful, and his magnanimous and sincere gratitude continually wounded the poor notary's feelings. To some sublime natures gratitude seems an excessive payment; they would rather have that sweet equality of feeling which springs from similar ways of thought, and the blending of two spirits by their own choice and will. And *Maître Chesnel* had known the delights of such high friendship; the Marquis had raised him to his own level. The old noble looked on the good notary as something more than a servant, something less than a child; he was the voluntary liege man of the house, a serf bound to his lord by all the ties of affection. There was no balancing of obligations; the sincere affection on either side put them out of the question.

In the eyes of the Marquis, Chesnel's official dignity was as nothing; his old servitor was merely disguised as a notary. As for Chesnel, the Marquis was now, as always, a being of a divine race; he believed in nobility; he did not blush to remember that his father had thrown open the doors of the salon to announce that "My Lord Marquis is served." His devotion to the fallen house was due not so much to his creed as to egoism; he looked on himself as one of the family. So his vexation was intense. Once he had ventured to allude to his mistake in spite of the Marquis's prohibition, and the old noble answered gravely—"Chesnel, before the troubles you would not have permitted yourself to entertain such injurious suppositions. What can these new doctrines be if they have spoiled *you?*"

*Maître Chesnel* had gained the confidence of the whole town; people looked up to him; his high integrity and considerable fortune contributed to make him a person of im-

portance. From that time forth he felt a very decided aversion for the Sieur du Croisier; and though there was little rancor in his composition, he set others against the sometime forage-contractor. Du Croisier, on the other hand, was a man to bear a grudge and nurse a vengeance for a score of years. He hated Chesnel and the d'Esgrignon family with the smothered, all-absorbing hate only to be found in a country town. His rebuff had simply ruined him with the malicious provincials among whom he had come to live, thinking to rule over them. It was so real a disaster that he was not long in feeling the consequences of it. He betook himself in desperation to a wealthy old maid, and met with a second refusal. Thus failed the ambitious schemes with which he had started. He had lost his hope of a marriage with Mlle. d'Esgrignon, which would have opened the Faubourg Saint-Germain of the province to him; and after the second rejection, his credit fell away to such an extent that it was almost as much as he could do to keep his position in the second rank.

In 1805, M. de la Roche-Guyon the oldest son of an ancient family which had previously intermarried with the d'Esgrignons, made proposals in form through Maître Chesnel for Mlle. Marie Armande Claire d'Esgrignon. She declined to hear the notary.

"You must have guessed before now that I am a mother, dear Chesnel," she said; she had just put her nephew, a fine little boy of five, to bed.

The old Marquis rose and went up to his sister, but just returned from the cradle; he kissed her hand reverently, and as he sat down again, found words to say—

"My sister, you are a d'Esgrignon."

A quiver ran through the noble girl; the tears stood in her eyes. M. d'Esgrignon, the father of the present Marquis, had married a second wife, the daughter of a farmer of taxes ennobled by Louis XIV. It was a shocking *mésalliance* in the eyes of his family, but fortunately of no importance, since a daughter was the one child of the marriage. Armande knew this. Kind as her brother had always been, he looked on her as a stranger in blood. And

this speech of his had just recognized her as one of the family.

And was not her answer the worthy crown of eleven years of her noble life? Her every action since she came of age had borne the stamp of the purest devotion; love for her brother was a sort of religion with her.

"I shall die Mlle. d'Esgrignon," she said simply, turning to the notary.

"For you there could be no fairer title," returned Chesnel, meaning to convey a compliment. Poor Mlle. d'Esgrignon reddened.

"You have blundered, Chesnel," said the Marquis, flattered by the steward's words, but vexed that his sister had been hurt. "A d'Esgrignon may marry a Montmorency; their descent is not so pure as ours. The d'Esgrignons bear *or, two bends, gules*," he continued, "and nothing during nine hundred years has changed their scutcheon; as it was at first, so it is to-day. Hence our device, *Cil est nostre*, taken at a tournament in the reign of Philip Augustus, with the supporters, a knight in armor *or* on the right, and a lion *gules* on the left."

"I do not remember that any woman I have ever met has struck my imagination as Mlle. d'Esgrignon did," said Émile Blondet, to whom contemporary literature is indebted for this history among other things. "Truth to tell, I was a boy, a mere child at the time, and perhaps my memory-pictures of her owe something of their vivid color to a boy's natural turn for the marvelous.

"If I was playing with other children on the Parade, and she came to walk there with her nephew Victurnien the sight of her in the distance thrilled me with very much the effect of galvanism on a dead body. Child as I was, I felt as though new life had been given me.

"Mlle. Armande had hair of tawny gold; there was a delicate fine down on her cheek, with a silver gleam upon it which I loved to catch, putting myself so that I could see the outlines of her face lit up by the daylight, and feel the fascination of those dreamy emerald eyes, which sent a flash

of fire through me whenever they fell upon my face. I used to pretend to roll on the grass before her in our games, only to try to reach her little feet, and admire them on a closer view. The soft whiteness of her skin, her delicate features, the clearly cut lines of her forehead, the grace of her slender figure, took me with a sense of surprise, while as yet I did not know that her shape was graceful, nor her brows beautiful, nor the outline of her face a perfect oval. I admired as children pray at that age, without too clearly understanding why they pray. When my piercing gaze attracted her notice, when she asked me (in that musical voice of hers, with more volume in it, as it seemed to me, than all other voices), 'What are you doing, little one? Why do you look at me?'—I used to come nearer and wriggle and bite my finger-nails, and redden and say, 'I do not know.' And if she chanced to stroke my hair with her white hand, and ask me how old I was, I would run away and call from a distance, 'Eleven!'

"Every princess and fairy of my visions, as I read the *Arabian Nights*, looked and walked like Mlle. d'Esgrignon; and afterwards, when my drawing-master gave me heads from the antique to copy, I noticed that their hair was braided like Mlle. d'Esgrignon's. Still later, when the foolish fancies had vanished one by one, Mlle. Armande remained vaguely in my memory as a type; that Mlle. Armande for whom men made way respectfully, following the tall brown-robed figure with their eyes along the Parade and out of sight. Her exquisitely graceful form, the rounded curves sometimes revealed by a chance gust of wind, and always visible to my eyes in spite of the ample folds of stuff, revisited my young man's dreams. Later yet, when I came to think seriously over certain mysteries of human thought, it seemed to me that the feeling of reverence was first inspired in me by something expressed in Mlle. d'Esgrignon's face and bearing. The wonderful calm of her face, the suppressed passion in it, the dignity of her movements, the saintly life of duties fulfilled,—all this touched and awed me. Children are more susceptible than people imagine to the subtle influences of ideas; they never make game of real dignity; they feel the charm of real graciousness, and beauty attracts them, for

childhood itself is beautiful, and there are mysterious ties between things of the same nature.

“Mlle. d’Esgrignon was one of my religions. To this day I can never climb the staircase of some old manor-house but my foolish imagination must needs picture Mlle. Armande standing there, like the spirit of feudalism. I can never read old chronicles but she appears before my eyes in the shape of some famous woman of old time; she is Agnes Sorel, Marie Touchet, Gabrielle; and I lend her all the love that was lost in her heart, all the love that she never expressed. The angel shape seen in glimpses through the haze of childish fancies visits me now sometimes across the mists of dreams.”

Keep this portrait in mind, it is a faithful picture and sketch of character. Mlle. d’Esgrignon is one of the most instructive figures in this story; she affords an example of the mischief that may be done by the purest goodness for lack of intelligence.

Two-thirds of the *émigrés* returned to France during 1804 and 1805, and almost every exile from the Marquis d’Esgrignon’s province came back to the land of his fathers. There were certainly defections. Men of good birth entered the service of Napoleon, and went into the army or held places at the Imperial court, and others made alliances with the upstart families. All those who cast in their lots with the Empire retrieved their fortunes and recovered their estates, thanks to the Emperor’s munificence; and these for the most part went to Paris and stayed there. But some eight or nine families still remained true to the proscribed *noblesse* and loyal to the fallen monarchy. The La Roche-Guyons, Nouastres, Verneuil, Castérans, Troisvilles, and the rest were some of them rich, some of them poor; but money, more or less, scarcely counted for anything among them. They took an antiquarian view of themselves; for them the age and preservation of the pedigree was the one all-important matter; precisely as, for an amateur, the weight of metal in a coin is a small matter in comparison with clean lettering, a flawless stamp, and high antiquity. Of these

families, the Marquis d'Esgrignon was the acknowledged head. His house became their *cénacle*. There His Majesty, Emperor and King, was never anything but "M. de Bonaparte"; there "the King" meant Louis XVIII., then at Mittau; there the Department was still the Province, and the prefecture the *intendance*.

The Marquis was honored among them for his admirable behavior, his loyalty as a noble, his undaunted courage; even as he was respected throughout the town for his misfortunes, his fortitude, his steadfast adherence to his political convictions. The man so admirable in adversity was invested with all the majesty of ruined greatness. His chivalrous fair-mindedness was so well known that litigants many a time had referred their disputes to him for arbitration. All gently bred Imperialists and the authorities themselves showed as much indulgence for his prejudices as respect for his personal character; but there was another and a large section of the new society which was destined to be known after the Restoration as the Liberal party; and these, with du Croisier as their unacknowledged head, laughed at an aristocratic oasis which nobody might enter without proof of irreproachable descent. Their animosity was all the more bitter because honest country squires and the higher officials, with a good many worthy folk in the town, were of the opinion that all the best society thereof was to be found in the Marquis d'Esgrignon's salon. The prefect himself, the Emperor's chamberlain, made overtures to the d'Esgrignons, humbly sending his wife (a Grandlieu) as ambassadress.

Wherefore, those excluded from the miniature provincial Faubourg Saint-Germain nicknamed the salon "The Collection of Antiquities," and called the Marquis himself "M. Carol." The receiver of taxes, for instance, addressed his applications to "M. Carol (*ci-devant* des Grignons)," maliciously adopting the obsolete way of spelling.

"For my own part," said Émile Blondet, "if I try to call up childish memories, I remember that the nickname of 'Collection of Antiquities' always made me laugh, in spite of my respect—my love, I ought to say—for Mlle. d'Esgrignon."



gnon. The Hôtel d'Esgrignon stood at the angle of two of the busiest thoroughfares in the town, and not five hundred paces away from the market-place. Two of the drawing-room windows looked upon the street and two upon the square; the room was like a glass cage, everyone who came past could look through it from side to side. I was only a boy of twelve at the time, but I thought, even then, that the salon was one of those rare curiosities which seem, when you come to think of them afterwards, to lie just on the borderland between reality and dreams, so that you can scarcely tell to which side they most belong.

“The room, the ancient Hall of Audience, stood above a row of cellars with grated air-holes, once the prison cells of the old court-house, now converted into a kitchen. I do not know that the magnificent lofty chimney-piece of the Louvre, with its marvelous carving, seemed more wonderful to me than the vast open hearth of the salon d'Esgrignon when I saw it for the first time. It was covered like a melon with a network of tracery. Over it stood an equestrian portrait of Henri III., under whom the ancient duchy of appanage reverted to the crown; it was a great picture executed in low relief, and set in a carved and gilded frame. The ceiling spaces between the chestnut cross-beams in the fine old roof were decorated with scroll-work patterns; there was a little faded gilding still left along the angles. The walls were covered with Flemish tapestry, six scenes from the Judgment of Solomon, framed in golden garlands, with satyrs and cupids playing among the leaves. The parquet floor had been laid down by the present Marquis, and Chesnel had picked up the furniture at sales of the wreckage of old châteaux between 1793 and 1795; so that there were Louis Quatorze consoles, tables, clock-cases, andirons, candle-sconces and tapestry-covered chairs, which marvelously completed a stately room, large out of all proportion to the house. Luckily, however, there was an equally lofty ante-chamber, the ancient Salle des Pas Perdus of the *présidial*, which communicated likewise with the magistrate's deliberating chamber, used by the d'Esgrignons as a dining-room.

“Beneath the old paneling, amid the threadbare braveries

of a bygone day, some eight or ten dowagers were drawn up in state in a quavering line; some with palsied heads, others dark and shriveled like mummies; some erect and stiff, others bowed and bent, but all of them tricked out in more or less fantastic costumes as far as possible removed from the fashion of the day, with beribboned caps above their curled and powdered 'heads,' and old discolored lace. No painter however earnest, no caricature however wild, ever caught the haunting fascination of those aged women; they come back to me in dreams; their puckered faces shape themselves in my memory whenever I meet an old woman who puts me in mind of them by some faint resemblance of dress or feature. And whether it is that misfortune has initiated me into the secrets of irremediable and overwhelming disaster; whether that I have come to understand the whole range of human feelings, and, best of all, the thoughts of Old Age and Regret; whatever the reason, nowhere and never again have I seen among the living or in the faces of the dying the wan look of certain gray eyes that I remember, nor the dreadful brightness of others that were black.

"Neither Hoffmann nor Maturin, the two weirdest imaginations of our time, ever gave me such a thrill of terror as I used to feel when I watched the automaton movements of those bodies sheathed in whalebone. The paint on actors' faces never caused me a shock; I could see below it the rouge in grain, the *rouge de naissance*, to quote a comrade at least as malicious as I can be. Years had leveled those women's faces, and at the same time furrowed them with wrinkles, till they looked like the heads on wooden nutcrackers carved in Germany. Peeping in through the window-panes, I gazed at the battered bodies, and ill-jointed limbs (how they were fastened together, and, indeed, their whole anatomy was a mystery I never attempted to explain); I saw the lantern jaws, the protuberant bones, the abnormal development of the hips; and the movements of these figures as they came and went seemed to me no whit less extraordinary than their sepulchral immobility as they sat round the card-tables.

"The men looked gray and faded like the ancient tapestries on the wall; in dress they were much more like the men

of the day, but even they were not altogether convincingly alive. Their white hair, their withered waxen-hued faces, their devastated foreheads and pale eyes, revealed their kinship to the women, and neutralized any effects of reality borrowed from their costume.

“The very certainty of finding all these folk seated at or among the tables every day at the same hours invested them at length in my eyes with a sort of spectacular interest as it were; there was something theatrical, something unearthly about them.

“Whenever, in after times, I have gone through museums of old furniture in Paris, London, Munich, or Vienna, with the gray-headed custodian who shows you the splendors of time past, I have peopled the rooms with figures from the Collection of Antiquities. Often, as little schoolboys of eight or ten we used to propose to go and take a look at the curiosities in their glass cage, for the fun of the thing. But as soon as I caught sight of Mlle. Armande’s sweet face, I used to tremble; and there was a trace of jealousy in my admiration for the lovely child Victurnien, who belonged, as we all instinctively felt, to a different and higher order of being from our own. It struck me as something indescribably strange that the young fresh creature should be there in that cemetery awakened before the time. We could not have explained our thoughts to ourselves, yet we felt that we were *bourgeois* and insignificant in the presence of that proud court.”

The disasters of 1813 and 1814, which brought about the downfall of Napoleon, gave new life to the Collection of Antiquities, and what was more than life, the hope of recovering their past importance; but the events of 1815, the troubles of the foreign occupation, and the vacillating policy of the Government until the fall of M. Decazes, all contributed to defer the fulfillment of the expectations of the personages so vividly described by Blondet. This story, therefore, only begins to shape itself in 1822.

In 1822 the Marquis d’Esgrignon’s fortunes had not improved in spite of the changes worked by the Restoration

in the condition of *émigrés*. Of all nobles hardly hit by Revolutionary legislation, his case was the hardest. Like other great families, the d'Esgrignons before 1789 derived the greater part of their income from their rights as lords of the manor in the shape of dues paid by those who held of them; and, naturally, the old *seigneurs* had reduced the size of the holdings in order to swell the amounts paid in quit-rents and heriots. Families in this position were hopelessly ruined. They were not affected by the ordinance by which Louis XVIII. put the *émigrés* into possession of such of their lands as had not been sold; and at a later date it was impossible that the law of indemnity should indemnify them. Their suppressed rights, as everybody knows, were revived in the shape of a land tax known by the very name of *domaines*, but the money went into the coffers of the State.

The Marquis by his position belonged to that small section of the Royalist party which would hear of no kind of compromise with those whom they styled, not Revolutionaries, but revolted subjects, or, in more parliamentary language, they had no dealings with Liberals or Constitutionnels. Such Royalists, nicknamed *Ultras* by the opposition, took for leaders and heroes those courageous orators of the Right, who from the very beginning attempted, with M. de Polignac, to protest against the charter granted by Louis XVIII. This they regarded as an ill-advised edict extorted from the Crown by the necessity of the moment, only to be annulled later on. And, therefore, so far from co-operating with the King to bring about a new condition of things, the Marquis d'Esgrignon stood aloof, an upholder of the strictest sect of the Right in politics, until such time as his vast fortune should be restored to him. Nor did he so much as admit the thought of the indemnity which filled the minds of the Villèle ministry, and formed a part of a design of strengthening the Crown by putting an end to those fatal distinctions of ownership which still lingered on in spite of legislation.

The miracles of the Restoration of 1814, the still greater miracle of Napoleon's return in 1815, the portents of a sec-

ond flight of the Bourbons, and a second reinstatement (that almost fabulous phase of contemporary history), all these things took the Marquis by surprise at the age of sixty-seven. At that time of life, the most high-spirited men of their age were not so much vanquished as worn out in the struggle with the Revolution; their activity, in their remote provincial retreats, had turned into a passionately held and immovable conviction; and almost all of them were shut in by the enervating, easy round of daily life in the country. Could worse luck befall a political party than this—to be represented by old men at a time when its ideas are already stigmatized as old-fashioned?

When the legitimate sovereign appeared to be firmly seated on the throne again in 1818, the Marquis asked himself what a man of seventy should do at court; and what duties, what office he could discharge there? The noble and high-minded d'Esgrignon was fain to be content with the triumph of the Monarchy and Religion, while he waited for the results of that un hoped-for, indecisive victory, which proved to be simply an armistice. He continued, as before, lord-paramount of his salon, so felicitously named the Collection of Antiquities.

But when the victors of 1793 became the vanquished in their turn, the nickname given at first in jest began to be used in bitter earnest. The town was no more free than other country towns from the hatreds and jealousies bred of party spirit. Du Croisier, contrary to all expectations, married the rich old maid who had refused him at first; carrying her off from his rival, the darling of the aristocratic quarter, a certain Chevalier whose illustrious name will be sufficiently hidden by suppressing it altogether, in accordance with the usage formerly adopted in the place itself, where he was known by his title only. He was "the Chevalier" in the town, as the Comte d'Artois was "Monsieur" at court. Now, not only had that marriage produced a war after the provincial manner, in which all weapons are fair; it had hastened the separation of the great and little *noblesse*, of the aristocratic and *bourgeois* social elements, which had been united for a little space by the heavy weight of Napoleonic

rule. After the pressure was removed, there followed that sudden revival of class divisions which did so much harm to the country.

The most national of all sentiments in France is vanity. The wounded vanity of the many induced a thirst for Equality; though, as the most ardent innovator will some day discover, Equality is an impossibility. The Royalists pricked the Liberals in the most sensitive spots, and this happened especially in the provinces, where either party accused the other of unspeakable atrocities. In those days the blackest deeds were done in politics, to secure public opinion on one side or another, to catch the votes of that public of fools which holds up hands for those that are clever enough to serve out weapons to them. Individuals are identified with their political opinions, and opponents in public life forthwith become private enemies. It is very difficult in a country town to avoid a man-to-man conflict of this kind over interests or questions which in Paris appear in a more general and theoretical form, with the result that political combatants also rise to a higher level; M. Laffitte, for example, or M. Casimir Périer can respect M. de Villèle or M. de Peyronnet as a man. M. Laffitte, who drew the fire on the Ministry, would have given them an asylum in his house if they had fled thither on the 29th of July 1830. Benjamin Constant sent a copy of his work on Religion to the Vicomte de Chateaubriand, with a flattering letter acknowledging benefits received from the former Minister. At Paris men are systems, whereas in the provinces systems are identified with men; men, moreover, with restless passions, who must always confront one another, always spy upon each other in private life, and pull their opponents' speeches to pieces, and live generally like two duelists on the watch for a chance to thrust six inches of steel between an antagonist's ribs. Each must do his best to get under his enemy's guard, and a political hatred becomes as all-absorbing as a duel to the death. Epigram and slander are used against individuals to bring the party into discredit.

In such warfare as this, waged ceremoniously and without rancor on the side of the Antiquities, while du Croisier's

faction went so far as to use the poisoned weapons of savages—in this warfare the advantages of wit and delicate irony lay on the side of the nobles. But it should never be forgotten that the wounds made by the tongue and the eyes, by gibe or slight, are the last of all to heal. When the Chevalier turned his back on mixed society and intrenched himself on the Mons Sacer of the aristocracy, his witticisms thenceforward were directed at du Croisier's salon; he stirred up the fires of war, not knowing how far the spirit of revenge was to urge the rival faction. None but purists and loyal gentlemen and women sure one of another entered the Hôtel d'Esgrignon; they committed no indiscretions of any kind; they had their ideas, true or false, good or bad, noble or trivial, but there was nothing to laugh at in all this. If the Liberals meant to make the nobles ridiculous, they were obliged to fasten on the political actions of their opponents; while the intermediate party, composed of officials and others who paid court to the higher powers, kept the nobles informed of all that was done and said in the Liberal camp, and much of it was abundantly laughable. Du Croisier's adherents smarted under a sense of inferiority, which increased their thirst for revenge.

In 1822, du Croisier put himself at the head of the manufacturing interest of the province, as the Marquis d'Esgrignon headed the *noblesse*. Each represented his party. But du Croisier, instead of giving himself out frankly for a man of the extreme Left, ostensibly adopted the opinions formulated at a later day by the 221 deputies.

By taking up this position, he could keep in touch with the magistrates and local officials and the capitalists of the department. Du Croisier's salon, a power at least equal to the salon d'Esgrignon, larger numerically, as well as younger and more energetic, made itself felt all over the countryside; the Collection of Antiquities, on the other hand, remained inert, a passive appendage, as it were, of a central authority which was often embarrassed by its own partisans; for not merely did they encourage the Government in a mistaken policy, but some of its most fatal blunders were made in con-

sequence of the pressure brought to bear upon it by the Conservative party.

The Liberals, so far, had never contrived to carry their candidate. The department declined to obey their command, knowing that du Croisier, if elected, would take his place on the Left Center benches, and as far as possible to the Left. Du Croisier was in correspondence with the Brothers Keller, the bankers, the oldest of whom shone conspicuous among "the nineteen deputies of the Left," that phalanx made famous by the efforts of the entire Liberal press. This same M. Keller, moreover, was related by marriage to the Comte de Gondreville, a Constitutional peer who remained in favor with Louis XVIII. For these reasons, the Constitutional Opposition (as distinct from the Liberal party) was always prepared to vote at the last moment, not for the candidate whom they professed to support, but for du Croisier, if that worthy could succeed in gaining a sufficient number of Royalist votes; but at every election du Croisier was regularly thrown out by the Royalists. The leaders of that party, taking their tone from the Marquis d'Esgrignon, had pretty thoroughly fathomed and gauged their man; and with each defeat, du Croisier and his party waxed more bitter. Nothing so effectually stirs up strife as the failure of some snare set with elaborate pains.

In 1822 there seemed to be a lull in hostilities which had been kept up with great spirit during the first four years of the Restoration. The salon du Croisier and the salon d'Esgrignon, having measured their strength and weakness, were in all probability waiting for opportunity, that Providence of party strife. Ordinary persons were content with the surface quiet which deceived the Government; but those who knew du Croisier better, were well aware that the passion of revenge in him, as in all men whose whole life consists in mental activity, is implacable, especially when political ambitions are involved. About this time du Croisier, who used to turn white and red at the bare mention of d'Esgrignon or the Chevalier, and shuddered at the name of the Collection of Antiquities, chose to wear the impassive countenance of a savage. He smiled upon his enemies, hating them



but the more deeply, watching them the more narrowly from hour to hour. One of his own party, who seconded him in these calculations of cold wrath, was the President of the Tribunal, M. du Ronceret, a little country squire, who had vainly endeavored to gain admittance among the Antiquities.

The d'Esgrignons' little fortune, carefully administered by Maître Chesnel, was barely sufficient for the worthy Marquis's needs; for though he lived without the slightest ostentation, he also lived like a noble. The governor found by his Lordship the Bishop for the hope of the house, the young Comte Victurnien d'Esgrignon, was an elderly Oratorian who must be paid a certain salary, although he lived with the family. The wages of a cook, a waiting-woman for Mlle. Armande, an old valet for M. le Marquis, and a couple of other servants, together with the daily expenses of the household, and the cost of an education for which nothing was spared, absorbed the whole family income, in spite of Mlle. Armande's economies, in spite of Chesnel's careful management, and the servants' affection. As yet, Chesnel had not been able to set about repairs at the ruined castle; he was waiting till the leases fell in to raise the rent of the farms, for rents had been rising lately, partly on account of improved methods of agriculture, partly by the fall in the value of money, of which the landlord would get the benefit at the expiration of leases granted in 1809.

The Marquis himself knew nothing of the details of the management of the house or of his property. He would have been thunderstruck if he had been told of the excessive precautions needed "to make both ends of the year meet in December," to use the housewife's saying, and he was so near the end of his life, that everyone shrank from opening his eyes. The Marquis and his adherents believed that a House, to which no one at court or in the Government gave a thought, a House that was never heard of beyond the gates of the town, save here and there in the same department, was about to revive its ancient greatness, to shine forth in all its glory. The d'Esgrignons' line should reappear with renewed luster in the person of Victurnien, just as the de-

spoiled nobles came into their own again, and the handsome heir to a great estate would be in a position to go to court, enter the King's service, and marry (as other d'Esgrignons had done before him) a Navarreins, a Cadignan, a d'Uxelles, a Beauséant, a Blamont-Chauvry; a wife, in short, who should unite all the distinctions of birth and beauty, wit and wealth, and character.

The intimates who came to play their game of cards of an evening—the Troisvilles (pronounced Tréville), the La Roche-Guyons, the Castérans (pronounced Catéran), and the Duc de Verneuil—had all so long been accustomed to look up to the Marquis as a person of immense consequence, that they encouraged him in such notions as these. They were perfectly sincere in their belief; and indeed, it would have been well founded if they could have wiped out the history of the last forty years. But the most honorable and undoubted sanctions of right, such as Louis XVIII. had tried to set on record when he dated the Charter from the one-and-twentieth year of his reign, only exist when ratified by the general consent. The d'Esgrignons not only lacked the very rudiments of the language of latter-day politics, to wit, money, the great modern *relief*, or sufficient rehabilitation of nobility; but, in their case, too, "historical continuity" was lacking, and that is a kind of renown which tells quite as much at court as on the battlefield, in diplomatic circles as in Parliament, with a book, or in connection with an adventure; it is, as it were, a sacred *ampulla* poured upon the heads of each successive generation. Whereas a noble family, inactive and forgotten, is very much in the position of a hard-featured, poverty-stricken, simple-minded, and virtuous maid, these qualifications being the four cardinal points of misfortune. The marriage of a daughter of the Troisvilles with General Montcornet, so far from opening the eyes of the Antiquities, very nearly brought about a rupture between the Troisvilles and the salon d'Esgrignon, the latter declaring that the Troisvilles were mixing themselves up with all sorts of people.

There was one, and one only, among all these folk who did not share their illusions. And that one, needless to say,

was Chesnel the notary. Although his devotion, sufficiently proved already, was simply unbounded for the great house now reduced to three persons; although he accepted all their ideas, and thought them nothing less than right, he had too much common-sense, he was too good a man of business to more than half the families in the department, to miss the significance of the great changes that were taking place in people's minds, or to be blind to the different conditions brought about by industrial development and modern manners. He had watched the Revolution pass through the violent phase of 1793, when men, women, and children wore arms, and heads fell on the scaffold, and victories were won in pitched battles with Europe; and now he saw the same forces quietly at work in men's minds, in the shape of ideas which sanctioned the issues. The soil had been cleared, the seed sown, and now came the harvest. To his thinking, the Revolution had formed the mind of the younger generation; he touched the hard facts and knew that although there were countless unhealed wounds, what had been done was done, past recall. The death of a king on the scaffold, the protracted agony of a queen, the division of the nobles' lands, in his eyes were so many binding contracts; and where so many vested interests were involved, it was not likely that those concerned would allow them to be attacked. Chesnel saw clearly. His fanatical attachment to the d'Esgrignons was whole-hearted, but it was not blind, and it was all the fairer for this. The young monk's faith that sees heaven laid open and beholds the angels, is something far below the power of the old monk who points them out to him. The steward was like the old monk; he would have given his life to defend a worm-eaten shrine.

He tried to explain the "innovations" to his old master, using a thousand tactful precautions; sometimes speaking jestingly, sometimes affecting surprise or sorrow over this or that; but he always met the same prophetic smile on the Marquis's lips, the same fixed conviction in the Marquis's mind, that these follies would go by like others. Events contributed in a way which has escaped attention to assist such noble champions of forlorn hopes to cling to their super-

stitutions. What could Chesnel do when the old Marquis said, with a lordly gesture, "God swept away Bonaparte with his armies, his new great vassals, his crowned kings, and his vast conceptions! God will deliver us from the rest." And Chesnel hung his head sadly, and did not dare to answer, "It cannot be God's will to sweep away France." Yet both of them were grand figures; the one, standing out against the torrent of facts like an ancient block of lichen-covered granite, still upright in the depths of an Alpine gorge; the other, watching the course of the flood to turn it to account. Then the good gray-headed notary would groan over the irreparable havoc which these superstitions were sure to work in the mind, the habits, and ideas of the Comte Victurnien d'Esgrignon.

Idolized by his father, idolized by his aunt, the young heir was a spoilt child in every sense of the word; but still a spoilt child who justified paternal and maternal illusions. Maternal, be it said, for Victurnien's aunt was truly a mother to him; and yet, however careful and tender she may be that never bore a child, there is a something lacking in her motherhood. A mother's second sight cannot be acquired. An aunt, bound to her nursling by ties of such a pure affection as united Mlle. Armande to Victurnien, may love as much as a mother might; may be as careful, as kind, as tender, as indulgent, but she lacks the mother's instinctive knowledge when and how to be severe; she has no sudden warnings, none of the uneasy presentiments of the mother's heart; for a mother, bound to her child from the beginnings of life by all the fibers of her being, still is conscious of the communication, still vibrates with the shock of every trouble, and thrills with every joy in the child's life as if it were her own. If Nature has made of woman, physically speaking, a neutral ground, it has not been forbidden to her, under certain conditions, to identify herself completely with her offspring. When she has not merely given life, but given of her whole life, you behold that wonderful, unexplained, and inexplicable thing—the love of a woman for one of her children above the others. The outcome of this story is one more proof of a proven truth—a mother's place cannot be

filled. A mother foresees danger long before a Mlle. Armande can admit the possibility of it, even if the mischief is done. The one prevents the evil, the other remedies it. And besides, in the maiden's motherhood there is an element of blind adoration, she cannot bring herself to scold a beautiful boy.

A practical knowledge of life, and the experience of business, had taught the old notary a habit of distrustful clear-sighted observation something akin to the mother's instinct. But Chesnel counted for so little in the house (especially since he had fallen into something like disgrace over that unlucky project of a marriage between a d'Esgrignon and a du Croisier), that he had made up his mind to adhere blindly in future to the family doctrines. He was a common soldier, faithful to his post, and ready to give his life; it was never likely that they would take his advice, even in the height of the storm; unless chance should bring him, like the King's bedesman in *The Antiquary*, to the edge of the sea, when the old baronet and his daughter were caught by the high tide.

Du Croisier caught a glimpse of his revenge in the anomalous education given to the lad. He hoped, to quote the expressive words of the author quoted above, "to drown the lamb in its mother's milk." *This* was the hope which had produced his taciturn resignation and brought that savage smile on his lips.

The young Comte Victurnien was taught to believe in his own supremacy as soon as an idea could enter his head. All the great nobles of the realm were his peers, his one superior was the King, and the rest of mankind were his inferiors, people with whom he had nothing in common, towards whom he had no duties. They were defeated and conquered enemies, whom he need not take into account for a moment; their opinions could not affect a noble, and they all owed him respect. Unluckily, with the rigorous logic of youth, which leads children and young people to proceed to extremes whether good or bad, Victurnien pushed these conclusions to their utmost consequences. His own external advantages, moreover, confirmed him in his beliefs. He had

been extraordinarily beautiful as a child; he became as accomplished a young man as any father could wish.

He was of average height, but well proportioned, slender, and almost delicate-looking, but muscular. He had the brilliant blue eyes of the d'Esgrignons, the finely-molded aquiline nose, the perfect oval of the face, the auburn hair, the white skin, and the graceful gait of his family; he had their delicate extremities, their long taper fingers with the inward curve, and that peculiar distinction of shapeliness of the wrist and instep, that supple felicity of line, which is as sure a sign of race in men as in horses. Adroit and alert in all bodily exercises, and an excellent shot, he handled arms like a St. George, he was a paladin on horseback. In short, he gratified the pride which parents take in their children's appearance; a pride founded, for that matter, on a just idea of the enormous influence exercised by physical beauty. Personal beauty has this in common with noble birth, it cannot be acquired afterwards; it is everywhere recognized, and often is more valued than either money or brains; beauty has only to appear and triumph; nobody asks more of beauty than that it should simply exist.

Fate had endowed Victurnien, over and above the privileges of good looks and noble birth, with a high spirit, a wonderful aptitude of comprehension, and a good memory. His education, therefore, had been complete. He knew a good deal more than is usually known by young provincial nobles, who develop into highly-distinguished sportsmen, owners of land, and consumers of tobacco; and are apt to treat art, sciences, letters, poetry, or anything offensively above their intellects, cavalierly enough. Such gifts of nature and education surely would one day realize the Marquis d'Esgrignon's ambitions; he already saw his son a Marshal of France if Victurnien's tastes were for the army; an ambassador if diplomacy held any attraction for him; a cabinet minister if that career seemed good in his eyes; every place in the state belonged to Victurnien. And, most gratifying thought of all for a father, the young Count would have made his way in the world by his own merits even if he had not been a d'Esgrignon.

All through his happy childhood and golden youth, Victurnien had never met with opposition to his wishes. He had been the king of the house; no one curbed the little prince's will; and naturally he grew up insolent and audacious, selfish as a prince, self-willed as the most high-spirited cardinal of the Middle Ages,—defects of character which anyone might guess from his qualities, essentially those of the noble.

The Chevalier was a man of the good old times when the Gray Musketeers were the terror of the Paris theaters, when they horsewhipped the watch and drubbed servers of writs, and played a host of page's pranks, at which Majesty was wont to smile so long as they were amusing. This charming deceiver and hero of the *ruelles* had no small share in bringing about the disasters which afterwards befell. The amiable old gentleman, with nobody to understand him, was not a little pleased to find a budding Faublas, who looked the part to admiration, and put him in mind of his own young days. So, making no allowance for the difference of the times, he sowed the maxims of a roué of the Encyclopedic period broadcast in the boy's mind. He told wicked anecdotes of the reign of His Majesty Louis XV.; he glorified the manners and customs of the year 1750; he told of the orgies in *petites maisons*, the follies of courtesans, the capital tricks played on creditors, the manners, in short, which furnished forth Dancourt's comedies and Beaumarchais's epigrams. And unfortunately, the corruption lurking beneath the utmost polish tricked itself out in Voltairean wit. If the Chevalier went rather too far at times, he always added as a corrective that a man must always behave himself like a gentleman.

Of all this discourse, Victurnien comprehended just so much as flattered his passions. From the first he saw his old father laughing with the Chevalier. The two elderly men considered that the pride of a d'Esgrignon was a sufficient safeguard against anything unbecoming; as for a dishonorable action, no one in the house imagined that a d'Esgrignon could be guilty of it. **HONOR**, the great principle of Monarchy, was planted firm like a beacon in the hearts of the

family; it lighted up the least action, it kindled the least thought of a d'Esgrignon. "A d'Esgrignon ought not to permit himself to do such and such a thing, he bears a name which pledges him to make the future worthy of the past"—a noble teaching which should have been sufficient in itself to keep alive the tradition of *noblesse*—had been, as it were, the burden of Victurnien's cradle song. He heard them from the old Marquis, from Mlle. Armande, from Chesnel, from the intimates of the house. And so it came to pass that good and evil met, and in equal forces, in the boy's soul.

At the age of eighteen, Victurnien went into society. He noticed some slight discrepancies between the outer world of the town and the inner world of the Hôtel d'Esgrignon, but he in no wise tried to seek the causes of them. And, indeed, the causes were to be found in Paris. He had yet to learn that the men who spoke their minds out so boldly in evening talk with his father, were extremely careful of what they said in the presence of the hostile persons with whom their interests compelled them to mingle. His own father had won the right of freedom of speech. Nobody dreamed of contradicting an old man of seventy, and besides, everyone was willing to overlook fidelity to the old order of things in a man who had been violently despoiled.

Victurnien was deceived by appearances, and his behavior set up the backs of the townspeople. In his impetuous way he tried to carry matters with too high a hand over some difficulties in the way of sport, which ended in formidable lawsuits, hushed up by Chesnel for money paid down. Nobody dared to tell the Marquis of these things. You may judge of his astonishment if he had heard that his son had been prosecuted for shooting over his lands, his domains, his covers, under the reign of a son of St. Louis! People were too much afraid of the possible consequences to tell him about such trifles, Chesnel said.

The young Count indulged in other escapades in the town. These the Chevalier regarded as "*amourettes*," but they cost Chesnel something considerable in portions for forsaken damsels seduced under imprudent promises of marriage: yet other cases there were which came under an article of the



Code as to the abduction of minors; and but for Chesnel's timely intervention, the new law would have been allowed to take its brutal course, and it is hard to say where the Count might have ended. Victurnien grew the bolder for these victories over *bourgeois* justice. He was so accustomed to be pulled out of scrapes, that he never thought twice before any prank. Courts of law, in his opinion, were bugbears to frighten people who had no hold on him. Things which he would have blamed in common people were for him only pardonable amusements. His disposition to treat the new laws cavalierly while obeying the maxims of a Code for aristocrats, his behavior and character, were all pondered, analyzed, and tested by a few adroit persons in du Croisier's interests. These folk supported each other in the effort to make the people believe that Liberal slanders were revelations, and that the Ministerial policy at bottom meant a return to the old order of things.

What a bit of luck to find something by way of proof of their assertions! President du Ronceret, and the public prosecutor likewise, lent themselves admirably, so far as was compatible with their duty as magistrates, to the design of letting off the offender as easily as possible; indeed, they went deliberately out of their way to do this, well pleased to raise a Liberal clamor against their overlarge concessions. And so, while seeming to serve the interest of the d'Esgri-gnons, they stirred up ill-feeling against them. The treacherous du Ronceret had it in his mind to pose as incorruptible at the right moment over some serious charge, with public opinion to back him up. The young Count's worst tendencies, moreover, were insidiously encouraged by two or three young men who followed in his train, paid court to him, won his favor, and flattered and obeyed him, with a view to confirming his belief in a noble's supremacy; and all this at a time when a noble's chance of preserving his power lay in using it with the utmost discretion for half a century to come.

Du Croisier hoped to reduce the d'Esgri-gnons to the last extremity of poverty; he hoped to see their castle demolished, and their lands sold piecemeal by auction, through the follies

which this harebrained boy was pretty certain to commit. This was as far as he went; he did not think, with President du Ronceret, that Victurnien was likely to give justice another kind of hold upon him. Both men found an ally for their schemes of revenge in Victurnien's overweening vanity and love of pleasure. President du Ronceret's son, a lad of seventeen, was admirably fitted for the part of instigator. He was one of the Count's companions, a new kind of spy in du Croisier's pay; du Croisier taught him his lesson, set him to track down the noble and beautiful boy through his better qualities, and sardonically prompted him to encourage his victim in his worst faults. Fabien du Ronceret was a sophisticated youth, to whom such a mystification was attractive; he had precisely the keen brain and envious nature which finds in such a pursuit as this the absorbing amusement which a man of an ingenious turn lacks in the provinces.

In three years, between the ages of eighteen and one-and-twenty, Victurnien cost poor Chesnel nearly eighty thousand francs! And this without the knowledge of Mlle. Armande or the Marquis. More than half of the money had been spent in buying off lawsuits; the lad's extravagance had squandered the rest. Of the Marquis's income of ten thousand livres, five thousand were necessary for the housekeeping; two thousand more represented Mlle. Armande's allowance (parsimonious though she was) and the Marquis's expenses. The handsome young heir-presumptive, therefore, had not a hundred louis to spend. And what sort of figure can a man make on two thousand livres? Victurnien's tailor's bills alone absorbed his whole allowance. He had his linen, his clothes, gloves, and perfumery from Paris. He wanted a good English saddle-horse, a tilbury, and a second horse. M. du Croisier had a tilbury and a thoroughbred. Was the *bourgeoisie* to cut out the *noblesse*? Then, the young Count must have a man in the d'Esgrignon livery. He prided himself on setting the fashion among young men in the town and the department; he entered that world of luxuries and fancies which suit youth and good looks and wit so well. Chesnel paid for it all, not without using, like ancient parliaments, the right of protest, albeit he spoke with angelic kindness.

“What a pity it is that so good a man should be so tiresome!” Victurnien would say to himself every time that the notary stanchéd some wound in his purse.

Chesnel had been left a widower, and childless; he had taken his old master's son to fill the void in his heart. It was a pleasure to him to watch the lad driving up the High Street, perched aloft on the box-seat of the tilbury, whip in hand, and a rose in his button-hole, handsome, well turned out, envied by everyone.

Pressing need would bring Victurnien with uneasy eyes and coaxing manner, but steady voice, to the modest house in the Rue du Bercail; there had been losses at cards at the Troisvilles', or the Duc de Verneuil's, or the prefecture, or the receiver-general's, and the Count had come to his providence, the notary. He had only to show himself to carry the day.

“Well, what is it, M. le Comte? What has happened?” the old man would ask, with a tremor in his voice.

On great occasions Victurnien would sit down, assume a melancholy, pensive expression, and submit with little coquetries of voice and gesture to be questioned. Then when he had thoroughly roused the old man's fears (for Chesnel was beginning to fear how such a course of extravagance would end), he would own up to a peccadillo which a bill for a thousand francs would absolve. Chesnel possessed a private income of some twelve thousand livres, but the fund was not inexhaustible. The eighty thousand francs thus squandered represented his savings, accumulated for the day when the Marquis should send his son to Paris, or open negotiations for a wealthy marriage.

Chesnel was clear-sighted so long as Victurnien was not there before him. One by one he lost the illusions which the Marquis and his sister still fondly cherished. He saw that the young fellow could not be depended upon in the least, and wished to see him married to some modest, sensible girl of good birth, wondering within himself how a young man could mean so well and do so ill, for he made promises one day only to break them all on the next.

But there is never any good to be expected of young men

who confess their sins and repent, and straightway fall into them again. A man of strong character only confesses his faults to himself, and punishes himself for them; as for the weak, they drop back into the old ruts when they find that the bank is too steep to climb. The springs of pride which lie in a great man's secret soul had been slackened in Victurnien. With such guardians as he had, such company as he kept, such a life as he had led, he had suddenly become an enervated voluptuary at that turning-point in his life when a man most stands in need of the harsh discipline of misfortune and poverty to bring out the strength that is in him, the pinch of adversity which formed a Prince Eugène, a Frederick II., a Napoleon. Chesnel saw that Victurnien possessed that uncontrollable appetite for enjoyments which should be the prerogative of men endowed with giant powers; the men who feel the need of counterbalancing their gigantic labors by pleasures which bring one-sided mortals to the pit.

At times the good man stood aghast; then, again, some profound sally, some sign of the lad's remarkable range of intellect, would reassure him. He would say, as the Marquis said at the rumor of some escapade, "Boys will be boys." Chesnel had spoken to the Chevalier, lamenting the young lord's propensity for getting into debt; but the Chevalier manipulated his pinch of snuff, and listened with a smile of amusement.

"My dear Chesnel, just explain to me what a national debt is," he answered. "If France has debts, egad! why should not Victurnien have debts? At this time and at all times princes have debts, every gentleman has debts. Perhaps you would rather that Victurnien should bring you his savings?—Do you know what our great Richelieu (not the Cardinal, a pitiful fellow that put nobles to death, but the Maréchal), do you know what he did once when his grandson the Prince de Chinon, the last of the line, let him see that he had not spent his pocket-money at the University?"

"No, M. le Chevalier."

"Oh, well; he flung the purse out of the window to a sweeper in the courtyard, and said to his grandson, 'Then they do not teach you to be a prince here?'"

Chesnel bent his head and made no answer. But that night, as he lay awake, he thought that such doctrines as these were fatal in times when there was one law for everybody, and foresaw the first beginnings of the ruin of the d'Esgrignons.

But for these explanations which depict one side of provincial life in the time of the Empire and the Restoration, it would not be easy to understand the opening scene of this history, an incident which took place in the great salon one evening towards the end of October 1822. The card-tables were forsaken, the Collection of Antiquities—elderly nobles, elderly countesses, young marquises, and simple baronesses—had settled their losses and winnings. The master of the house was pacing up and down the room, while Mlle. Armande was putting out the candles on the card-tables. He was not taking exercise alone, the Chevalier was with him, and the two wrecks of the eighteenth century were talking of Victurnien. The Chevalier had undertaken to broach the subject with the Marquis.

“Yes, Marquis,” he was saying, “your son is wasting his time and his youth; you ought to send him to court.”

“I have always thought,” said the Marquis, “that if my great age prevents me from going to court—where, between ourselves, I do not know what I should do among all these new people whom His Majesty receives, and all that is going on there—that if I could not go myself, I could at least send my son to present our homage to His Majesty. The King surely would do something for the Count—give him a company, for instance, or a place in the Household, a chance, in short, for the boy to win his spurs. My uncle the Archbishop suffered a cruel martyrdom; I have fought for the cause without deserting the camp with those who thought it their duty to follow the Princes. I held that while the King was in France, his nobles should rally round him.—Ah! well, no one gives us a thought; a Henri IV. would have written before now to the d'Esgrignons, ‘Come to me, my friends; we have won the day!’—After all, we are something better than the Troisvilles, yet here are two Troisvilles made

peers of France; and another, I hear, represents the nobles in the Chamber." (He took the upper electoral colleges for assemblies of his own order.) "Really, they think no more of us than if we did not exist. I was waiting for the Princes to make their journey through this part of the world; but as the Princes do not come to us, we must go to the Princes."

"I am enchanted to learn that you think of introducing our dear Victurnien into society," the Chevalier put in adroitly. "He ought not to bury his talent in a hole like this town. The best fortune that he can look for here is to come across some Norman girl" (mimicking the accent), "country-bred, stupid, and rich. What could he make of her?—his wife? Oh! good Lord!"

"I sincerely hope that he will defer his marriage until he has obtained some great office or appointment under the Crown," returned the gray-haired Marquis. "Still, there are serious difficulties in the way."

And these were the only difficulties which the Marquis saw at the outset of his son's career.

"My son, the Comte d'Esgrignon, cannot make his appearance at court like a tatterdemalion," he continued after a pause, marked by a sigh; "he must be equipped. Alas! for these two hundred years we have had no retainers. Ah! Chevalier, this demolition from top to bottom always brings me back to the first hammer stroke delivered by M. de Mirabeau. The one thing needful nowadays is money; that is all that the Revolution has done that I can see. The King does not ask you whether you are a descendant of the Valois or a conqueror of Gaul; he asks whether you pay a thousand francs in *tailles* which nobles never used to pay. So I cannot well send the Count to court without a matter of twenty thousand crowns——"

"Yes," asserted the Chevalier, "with that trifling sum he could cut a brave figure."

"Well," said Mlle. Armande, "I have asked Chesnel to come to-night. Would you believe it, Chevalier, ever since the day when Chesnel proposed that I should marry that miserable du Croisier——"

“Ah! that was truly unworthy, mademoiselle!” cried the Chevalier.

“Unpardonable!” said the Marquis.

“Well, since then my brother has never brought himself to ask anything whatsoever of Chesnel,” continued Mlle. Armande.

“Of your old household servant? Why, Marquis, you would do Chesnel honor—an honor which he would gratefully remember till his latest breath.”

“No,” said the Marquis, “the thing is beneath one’s dignity, it seems to me.”

“There is not much question of dignity; it is a matter of necessity,” said the Chevalier, with the trace of a shrug.

“Never,” said the Marquis, riposting with a gesture which decided the Chevalier to risk a great stroke to open his old friend’s eyes.

“Very well,” he said, “since you do not know it, I will tell you myself that Chesnel has let your son have something already, something like——”

“My son is incapable of accepting anything whatever from Chesnel,” the Marquis broke in, drawing himself up as he spoke. “He might have come to *you* to ask you for twenty-five louis——”

“Something like a hundred thousand livres,” said the Chevalier, finishing his sentence.

“The Comte d’Esgrignon owes a hundred thousand livres to a Chesnel!” cried the Marquis, with every sign of deep pain. “Oh! if he were not an only son, he should set out to-night for Mexico with a captain’s commission. A man may be in debt to money-lenders, they charge a heavy interest, and you are quits; that is right enough; but *Chesnel!* a man to whom one is attached!——”

“Yes, our adorable Victurnien has run through a hundred thousand livres, dear Marquis,” resumed the Chevalier, flicking a trace of snuff from his waistcoat; “it is not much, I know. I myself at his age—— But, after all, let us let old memories be, Marquis. The Count is living in the provinces; all things taken into consideration, it is not so much

amiss. He will go far; these irregularities are common in men who do great things afterwards——”

“And he is sleeping upstairs, without a word of this to his father,” exclaimed the Marquis.

“Sleeping innocently as a child who has merely got five or six little *bourgeoises* into trouble, and now must have duchesses,” returned the Chevalier.

“Why, he deserves a *lettre de cachet!*”

“‘They’ have done away with *lettres de cachet*,” said the Chevalier. “You know what a hubbub there was when they tried to institute a law for special cases. We could not keep the provost’s courts, which M. de Bonaparte used to call *commissions militaires*.”

“Well, well; what are we to do if our boys are wild, or turn out scapegraces? Is there no locking them up in these days?” asked the Marquis.

The Chevalier looked at the heartbroken father and lacked courage to answer, “We shall be obliged to bring them up properly.”

“And you have never said a word of this to me, Mlle. d’Esgrignon,” added the Marquis, turning suddenly round upon Mlle. Armande. He never addressed her as Mlle d’Esgrignon except when he was vexed; usually she was called “my sister.”

“Why, monsieur, when a young man is full of life and spirits, and leads an idle life in a town like this, what else can you expect?” asked Mlle. d’Esgrignon. She could not understand her brother’s anger.

“Debts! eh! why, hang it all!” added the Chevalier. “He plays cards, he has little adventures, he shoots,—all these things are horribly expensive nowadays.”

“Come,” said the Marquis, “it is time to send him to the King. I will spend to-morrow morning in writing to our kinsmen.”

“I have some acquaintance with the Ducs de Navarreins, de Lenoncourt, de Maufrigneuse, and de Chaulieu,” said the Chevalier, though he knew, as he spoke, that he was pretty thoroughly forgotten.

“My dear Chevalier, there is no need of such formali-



ties to present a d'Esgrignon at court," the Marquis broke in—"A hundred thousand livres," he muttered; "this Chesnel makes very free. This is what comes of these accursed troubles. Monsieur Chesnel protects my son. And now I must ask him. . . . No, sister, you must undertake this business. Chesnel shall secure himself for the whole amount by a mortgage on our lands. And just give this harebrained boy a good scolding; he will end by ruining himself if he goes on like this."

The Chevalier and Mlle. d'Esgrignon thought these words perfectly simple and natural, absurd as they would have sounded to any other listener. So far from seeing anything ridiculous in the speech, they were both very much touched by a look of something like anguish in the old noble's face. Some dark premonition seemed to weigh upon M. d'Esgrignon at that moment, some glimmering of an insight into the changed times. He went to the settee by the fireside and sat down, forgetting that Chesnel would be there before long; that Chesnel, of whom he could not bring himself to ask anything.

Just then the Marquis d'Esgrignon looked exactly as any imagination with a touch of romance could wish. He was almost bald, but a fringe of silken, white locks, curled at the tips, covered the back of his head. All the pride of race might be seen in a noble forehead, such as you may admire in a Louis XV., a Beaumarchais, a Maréchal de Richelieu; it was not the square, broad brow of the portraits of the Maréchal de Saxe; nor yet the small hard circle of Voltaire, compact to overfullness; it was graciously rounded and finely molded, the temples were ivory tinted and soft; and mettle and spirit, unquenched by age, flashed from the brilliant eyes. The Marquis had the Condé nose and the lovable Bourbon mouth, from which, as they used to say of the Comte d'Artois, only witty and urbane words proceed. His cheeks, sloping rather than foolishly rounded to the chin, were in keeping with his spare frame, thin legs, and plump hands. The strangulation cravat at his throat was of the kind which every marquis wears in all the portraits which adorn eighteenth century literature; it is common

alike to Saint-Preux and to Lovelace, to the elegant Montesquieu's heroes and to Diderot's homespun characters (see the first editions of those writers' works).

The Marquis always wore a white, gold-embroidered, high waistcoat, with the red ribbon of a commander of the Order of St. Louis blazing upon his breast; and a blue coat with wide skirts, and fleurs-de-lys on the flaps, which were turned back—an odd costume which the King had adopted. But the Marquis could not bring himself to give up the Frenchman's knee-breeches nor yet the white silk stockings or the buckles at the knees. After six o'clock in the evening he appeared in full dress.

He read no newspapers but the *Quotidienne* and the *Gazette de France*, two journals accused by the Constitutional press of obscurantist views and uncounted "monarchical and religious" enormities; while the Marquis d'Esgrignon, on the other hand, found heresies and revolutionary doctrines in every issue. No matter to what extremes the organs of this or that opinion may go, they will never go quite far enough to please the purists on their own side; even as the portrayer of this magnificent personage is pretty certain to be accused of exaggeration, whereas he has done his best to soften down some of the cruder tones and dim the more startling tints of the original.

The Marquis d'Esgrignon rested his elbows on his knees and leant his head on his hands. During his meditations Mlle. Armande and the Chevalier looked at one another without uttering the thoughts in their minds. Was he pained by the discovery that his son's future must depend upon his sometime land steward? Was he doubtful of the reception awaiting the young Count? Did he regret that he had made no preparation for launching his heir into that brilliant world of court? Poverty had kept him in the depths of his province; how should he have appeared at court? He sighed heavily as he raised his head.

That sigh, in those days, came from the real aristocracy all over France; from the loyal provincial *noblesse*, consigned to neglect with most of those who had drawn sword and braved the storm for the cause.

“What have the Princes done for the du Guénics, or the Fontaines, or the Bauvans, who never submitted?” he muttered to himself. “They fling miserable pensions to the men who fought most bravely, and give them a royal lieutenancy in a fortress somewhere on the outskirts of the kingdom.”

Evidently the Marquis doubted the reigning dynasty. Mlle. d’Esgrignon was trying to reassure her brother as to the prospects of the journey, when a step outside on the dry narrow footway gave them notice of Chesnel’s coming. In another moment Chesnel appeared; Joséphin, the Count’s gray-haired valet, admitted the notary without announcing him.

“Chesnel, my boy——” (Chesnel was a white-haired man of sixty-nine, with a square-jawed, venerable countenance; he wore knee-breeches, ample enough to fill several chapters of dissertation in the manner of Sterne, ribbed stockings, shoes with silver clasps, an ecclesiastical-looking coat and a high waistcoat of scholastic cut).

“Chesnel, my boy, it was very presumptuous of you to lend money to the Comte d’Esgrignon! If I repaid you at once and we never saw each other again, it would be no more than you deserve for giving wings to his vices.”

There was a pause, a silence such as there falls at court when the King publicly reprimands a courtier. The old notary looked humble and contrite.

“I am anxious about that boy, Chesnel,” continued the Marquis in a kindly tone; “I should like to send him to Paris to serve His Majesty. Make arrangements with my sister for his suitable appearance at court.—And we will settle accounts——”

The Marquis looked grave as he left the room with a friendly gesture of farewell to Chesnel.

“I thank M. le Marquis for all his goodness,” returned the old man, who still remained standing.

Mlle. Armande rose to go to the door with her brother; she had rung the bell, old Joséphin was in readiness to light his master to his room.

“Take a seat, Chesnel,” said the lady, as she returned, and with womanly tact she explained away and softened the Marquis’s harshness. And yet beneath that harshness Chesnel saw a great affection. The Marquis’s attachment for his old servant was something of the same order as a man’s affection for his dog; he will fight anyone who kicks the animal, the dog is like a part of his existence, a something which, if not exactly himself, represents him in that which is nearest and dearest—his sensibilities.

“It is quite time that M. le Comte should be sent away from the town, mademoiselle,” he said sententiously.

“Yes,” returned she. “Has he been indulging in some new escapade?”

“No, mademoiselle.”

“Well, why do you blame him?”

“I am not blaming him, mademoiselle. No, I am not blaming him. I am very far from blaming him. I will even say that I shall never blame him, whatever he may do.”

There was a pause. The Chevalier, nothing if not quick to take in a situation, began to yawn like a sleep-ridden mortal. Gracefully he made his excuses and went, with as little mind to sleep as to go and drown himself. The imp Curiosity kept the Chevalier wide awake, and with airy fingers plucked away the cotton wool from his ears.

“Well, Chesnel, is it something new?” Mlle. Armande began anxiously.

“Yes, things that cannot be told to M. le Marquis; he would drop down in an apoplectic fit.”

“Speak out,” she said. With her beautiful head leant on the back of her low chair, and her arms extended listlessly by her side, she looked as if she were waiting passively for her deathblow.

“Mademoiselle, M. le Comte, with all his cleverness, is a plaything in the hands of mean creatures, petty natures on the lookout for a crushing revenge. They want to ruin us and bring us low! There is the President of the Tribunal, M. du Ronceret; he has, as you know, a very great notion of his descent——”

“His grandfather was an attorney,” interposed Mlle. Armande.

“I know he was. And for that reason you have not received him; nor does he go to M. de Troisville’s, nor to M. le Duc de Verneuil’s, nor to the Marquis de Castéran’s; but he is one of the pillars of du Croisier’s salon. Your nephew may rub shoulders with young M. Fabien du Ronceret without condescending too far, for he must have companions of his own age. Well and good. That young fellow is at the bottom of all M. le Comte’s follies; he and two or three of the rest of them belong to the other side, the side of M. le Chevalier’s enemy, who does nothing but breathe threats of vengeance against you and all the nobles together. They all hope to ruin you through your nephew. The ringleader of the conspiracy is this sycophant of a du Croisier, the pretended Royalist. Du Croisier’s wife, poor thing, knows nothing about it; you know her, I should have heard of it before this if she had ears to hear evil. For some time these wild young fellows were not in the secret, nor was anybody else; but the ringleaders let something drop in jest, and then the fools got to know about it, and after the Count’s recent escapades they let fall some words while they were drunk. And those words were carried to me by others who are sorry to see such a fine, handsome, noble, charming lad ruining himself with pleasure. So far people feel sorry for him; before many days are over they will—I am afraid to say what——”

“They will despise him; say it out, Chesnel!” Mlle. Armande cried piteously.

“Ah! How can you keep the best people in the town from finding out faults in their neighbors? They do not know what to do with themselves from morning to night. And so M. le Comte’s losses at play are all reckoned up. Thirty thousand francs have taken flight during these two months, and everybody wonders where he gets the money. If they mention it when I am present I just call them to order. Ah! but—— ‘Do you suppose’ (I told them this morning), ‘do you suppose that if the d’Esgrignon family have lost their manorial rights, that therefore they have been robbed of their hoard of treasure? The young

Count has a right to do as he pleases; and so long as he does not owe you a halfpenny, you have no right to say a word.”

Mlle. Armande held out her hand, and the notary kissed it respectfully.

“Good Chesnel! . . . But, my friend, how shall we find the money for this journey? Victurnien must appear as befits his rank at court.”

“Oh! I have borrowed money on Le Jard, mademoiselle.”

“What? You had nothing left! Ah, Heaven! what can we do to reward you?”

“You can take the hundred thousand francs which I hold at your disposal. You can understand that the loan was negotiated in confidence, so that it might not reflect on you; for it is known in the town that I am closely connected with the d’Esgrignon family.”

Tears came into Mlle. Armande’s eyes. Chesnel saw them, took a fold of the noble woman’s dress in his hands, and kissed it.

“Never mind,” he said, “a lad must sow his wild oats. In great salons in Paris his boyish ideas will take a new turn. And, really, though our old friends here are the worthiest folk in the world, and no one could have nobler hearts than they, they are not amusing. If M. le Comte wants amusement, he is obliged to look below his rank, and he will end by getting into low company.”

Next day the old traveling coach saw the light, and was sent to be put in repair. In a solemn interview after breakfast, the hope of the house was duly informed of his father’s intentions regarding him—he was to go to court and ask to serve His Majesty. He would have time during the journey to make up his mind about his career. The navy or the army, the privy council, an embassy, or the Royal Household,—all were open to a d’Esgrignon, a d’Esgrignon had only to choose. The King would certainly look favorably upon the d’Esgrignons, because they had asked nothing of him, and had sent the youngest representative of their house to receive the recognition of Majesty.

But young d’Esgrignon, with all his wild pranks, had

guessed instinctively what society in Paris meant, and formed his own opinions of life. So when they talked of his leaving the country and the paternal roof, he listened with a grave countenance to his revered parent's lecture, and refrained from giving him a good deal of information in reply. As, for instance, that young men no longer went into the army or the navy as they used to do; that if a man had a mind to be a second lieutenant in a cavalry regiment without passing through a special training in the *Écoles*, he must first serve in the *Pages*; that sons of the greatest houses went exactly like commoners to Saint-Cyr and the *École Polytechnique*, and took their chances of being beaten by base blood. If he had enlightened his relatives on these points, funds might not have been forthcoming for a stay in Paris; so he allowed his father and aunt Armande to believe that he would be permitted a seat in the King's carriages, that he must support his dignity at court as the d'Esgrignon of the time, and rub shoulders with great lords of the realm.

It grieved the Marquis that he could send but one servant with his son; but he gave him his own old valet Joséphin, a man who could be trusted to take care of his young master, and to watch faithfully over his interests. The poor father must do without Joséphin, and hope to replace him with a young lad.

"Remember that you are a Carol, my boy," he said; "remember that you come of an unalloyed descent, and that your scutcheon bears the motto *Cil est nostre*; with such arms you may hold your head high everywhere, and aspire to queens. Render grace to your father, as I to mine. We owe it to the honor of our ancestors, kept stainless until now, that we can look all men in the face, and need bend the knee to none save a mistress, the King, and God. This is the greatest of your privileges."

Chesnel, good man, was breakfasting with the family. He took no part in counsels based on heraldry, nor in the inditing of letters addressed to diverse mighty personages of the day; but he had spent the night in writing to an old friend of his, one of the oldest established notaries of Paris. Without this letter it is not possible to understand Chesnel's real

and assumed fatherhood. It almost recalls Dædalus' address to Icarus; for where, save in old mythology, can you look for comparisons worthy of this man of antique mold?

“MY DEAR AND ESTIMABLE SORBIER,—I remember with no little pleasure that I made my first campaign in our honorable profession under your father, and that you had a liking for me, poor little clerk that I was. And now I appeal to old memories of the days when we worked in the same office, old pleasant memories for our hearts, to ask you to do me the one service that I have ever asked of you in the course of our long lives, crossed as they have been by political catastrophes, to which, perhaps, I owe it that I have the honor to be your colleague. And now I ask this service of you, my friend, and my white hairs will be brought with sorrow to the grave if you should refuse my entreaty. It is no question of myself or of mine, Sorbier, for I lost poor Mme. Chesnel, and I have no child of my own. Something more to me than my own family (if I had had one) is involved—it is the Marquis d’Esgrignon’s only son. I have had the honor to be the Marquis’s land steward ever since I left the office to which his father sent me at his own expense, with the idea of providing for me. The house which nurtured me has passed through all the troubles of the Revolution. I have managed to save some of their property; but what is it, after all, in comparison with the wealth that they have lost? I cannot tell you, Sorbier, how deeply I am attached to the great house, which has been all but swallowed up under my eyes by the abyss of time. M. le Marquis was proscribed, and his lands confiscated, he was getting on in years, he had no child. Misfortunes upon misfortunes! Then M. le Marquis married, and his wife died when the young Count was born, and to-day this noble, dear, and precious child is all the life of the d’Esgrignon family; the fate of the house hangs upon him. He has got into debt here with amusing himself. What else should he do in the provinces with an allowance of a miserable hundred louis? Yes, my friend, a hundred louis, the great house has come to this.

“In this extremity his father thinks it necessary to send



the Count to Paris to ask for the King's favor at court. Paris is a very dangerous place for a lad; if he is to keep steady there, he must have the grain of sense which makes notaries of us. Besides, I should be heartbroken to think of the poor boy living amid such hardships as we have known.—Do you remember the pleasure with which you shared my roll in the pit of the Théâtre-Français when we spent a day and a night there waiting to see *The Marriage of Figaro*? Oh, blind that we were!—We were happy and poor, but a noble cannot be happy in poverty. A noble in want—it is a thing against nature! Ah! Sorbier, when one has known the satisfaction of propping one of the grandest genealogical trees in the kingdom in its fall, it is so natural to interest one's self in it and to grow fond of it, and love it, and water it, and look to see it blossom. So you will not be surprised at so many precautions on my part; you will not wonder when I beg the help of your lights, so that all may go well with our young man.

“The family has allowed a hundred thousand francs for the expenses of M. le Comte's journey. There is not a young man in Paris fit to compare with him, as you will see! You will take an interest in him as if he were your only son; and lastly, I am quite sure that Mme. Sorbier will not hesitate to second you in the office of guardian. M. le Comte Victurnien's monthly allowance is fixed at two thousand francs, but give him ten thousand for his preliminary expenses. The family have provided in this way for a stay of two years, unless he takes a journey abroad, in which case we will see about making other arrangements. Join me in this work, my old friend, and keep the purse-strings fairly tight. Represent things to M. le Comte without reproving him; hold him in as far as you can, and do not let him anticipate his monthly allowance without sufficient reason, for he must not be driven to desperation if honor is involved.

“Keep yourself informed of his movements and doings, of the company which he keeps, and watch over his connections with women. M. le Chevalier says that an opera dancer often costs less than a court lady. Obtain information on that point and let me know. If you are too busy,

perhaps Mme. Sorbier might know what becomes of the young man, and where he goes. The idea of playing the part of guardian angel to such a noble and charming boy might have attractions for her. God will remember her for accepting the sacred trust. Perhaps when you see M. le Comte Victurnien, her heart may tremble at the thought of all the dangers awaiting him in Paris; he is very young, and very handsome; clever, and at the same time disposed to trust others. If he forms a connection with some designing woman, Mme. Sorbier could counsel him better than you yourself could do. The old man-servant who is with him can tell you many things; sound Joséphin, I have told him to go to you in delicate matters.

“But why should I say more? We once were clerks together, and a pair of scamps; remember our escapades, and be a little bit young again, my old friend, in your dealings with him. The sixty thousand francs will be remitted to you in the shape of a bill on the Treasury by a gentleman who is going to Paris,” and so forth.

If the old couple to whom this epistle was addressed had followed out Chesnel's instructions, they would have been compelled to take three private detectives into their pay. And yet there was ample wisdom shown in Chesnel's choice of a depository. A banker pays money to anyone accredited to him so long as the money lasts; whereas, Victurnien was obliged, every time that he was in want of money, to make a personal visit to the notary, who was quite sure to use the right of remonstrance.

Victurnien heard that he was to be allowed two thousand francs every month, and thought that he betrayed his joy. He knew nothing of Paris. He fancied that he could keep up princely state on such a sum.

Next day he started on his journey. All the benedictions of the Collection of Antiquities went with him; he was kissed by the dowagers; good wishes were heaped on his head; his old father, his aunt, and Chesnel went with him out of the town, tears filling the eyes of all the three. The sudden departure supplied material for conversation for several even-

ings; and what was more, it stirred the rancorous minds of the salon du Croisier to the depths. The forage-contractor, the president, and others who had vowed to ruin the d'Esgrignons, saw their prey escaping out of their hands. They had based their schemes of revenge on a young man's follies, and now he was beyond their reach.

The tendency in human nature, which often gives a bigot a rake for a daughter, and makes a frivolous woman the mother of a narrow pietist; that rule of contraries, which, in all probability, is the "resultant" of the law of similarities, drew Victurnien to Paris by a desire to which he must sooner or later have yielded. Brought up as he had been in the old-fashioned provincial house, among the quiet, gentle faces that smiled upon him, among sober servants attached to the family, and surroundings tinged with a general color of age, the boy had only seen friends worthy of respect. All of those about him, with the exception of the Chevalier, that example of venerable age, were elderly men and women, sedate of manner, decorous and sententious of speech. He had been petted by those women in the gray gowns and embroidered mittens described by Blondet. The antiquated splendors of his father's house were as little calculated as possible to suggest frivolous thoughts; and lastly, he had been educated by a sincerely religious abbé, possessed of all the charm of an old age, which has dwelt in two centuries, and brings to the Present its gifts of the dried roses of experience, the faded flowers of the old customs of its youth. Everything should have combined to fashion Victurnien to serious habits; his whole surroundings from childhood bade him continue the glory of a historic name, by taking his life as something noble and great; and yet Victurnien listened to dangerous promptings.

For him, his noble birth was a stepping-stone which raised him above other men. He felt that the idol of *Noblesse*, before which they burned incense at home, was hollow; he had come to be one of the commonest as well as one of the worst types from a social point of view—a consistent egoist. The aristocratic cult of the *Ego* simply taught him to follow his own fancies; he had been idolized by those who had the

care of him in childhood, and adored by the companions who shared in his boyish escapades, and so he had formed a habit of looking and judging everything as it affected his own pleasure; he took it as a matter of course when good souls saved him from the consequences of his follies, a piece of mistaken kindness which could only lead to his ruin. Victurnien's early training, noble and pious though it was, had isolated him too much. He was out of the current of the life of his time, for the life of a provincial town is certainly not in the main current of the age, Victurnien's true destiny lifted him above it. He had learned to think of an action, not as it affected others, nor relatively, but absolutely from his own point of view. Like despots, he made the law to suit the circumstance, a system which works in the lives of prodigal sons the same confusion which fancy brings into art.

Victurnien was quick-sighted, he saw clearly and without illusion, but he acted on impulse, and unwisely. An indefinable flaw of character, often seen in young men, but impossible to explain, led him to will one thing and do another. In spite of an active mind, which showed itself in unexpected ways, the senses had but to assert themselves, and the darkened brain seemed to exist no longer. He might have astonished wise men; he was capable of setting fools agape. His desires, like a sudden squall of bad weather, overclouded all the clear and lucid spaces of his brain in a moment; and then, after the dissipations which he could not resist, he sank, utterly exhausted in body, heart, and mind, into a collapsed condition bordering upon imbecility. Such a character will drag a man down into the mire if he is left to himself, or bring him to the highest heights of political power if he has some stern friend to keep him in hand. Neither Chesnel, nor the lad's father, nor Aunt Armande had fathomed the depths of a nature so nearly akin on many sides to the poetic temperament, yet smitten with a terrible weakness at its core.

By the time the old town lay several miles away, Victurnien felt not the slightest regret; he thought no more about the father, who had loved ten generations in his son,

nor of the aunt, and her almost insane devotion. He was looking forward to Paris with vehement ill-starred longings, in thought he had lived in that fairyland, it had been the background of his brightest dreams. He imagined that he would be first in Paris, as he had been in the town and the department where his father's name was potent; but it was vanity, not pride, that filled his soul, and in his dreams his pleasures were to be magnified by all the greatness of Paris. The distance was soon crossed. The traveling coach, like his own thoughts, left the narrow horizon of the province for the vast world of the great city, without a break in the journey. He stayed in the Rue de Richelieu, in a handsome hotel close to the boulevard, and hastened to take possession of Paris as a famished horse rushes into a meadow.

He was not long in finding out the difference between country and town, and was rather surprised than abashed by the change. His mental quickness soon discovered how small an entity he was in the midst of this all-comprehending Babylon; how insane it would be to attempt to stem the torrent of new ideas and new ways. A single incident was enough. He delivered his father's letter of introduction to the Duc de Lenoncourt, a noble who stood high in favor with the King. He saw the Duke in his splendid mansion, among surroundings befitting his rank. Next day he met him again. This time the Peer of France was lounging on foot along the boulevard, just like any ordinary mortal, with an umbrella in his hand; he did not even wear the Blue Ribbon, without which no knight of the order could have appeared in public in other times. And, duke and peer and first gentleman of the bedchamber though he was, M. de Lenoncourt, spite of his high courtesy, could not repress a smile as he read his relative's letter; and that smile told Victurnien that the Collection of Antiquities and the Tuileries were separated by more than sixty leagues of road; the distance of several centuries lay between them.

The names of the families grouped about the throne are quite different in each successive reign, and the characters change with the names. It would seem that, in the sphere of court, the same thing happens over and over again in each

generation; but each time there is a quite different set of personages. If history did not prove that this is so, it would seem incredible. The prominent men at the court of Louis XVIII., for instance, had scarcely any connection with the Rivières, Blacas, d'Avarays, Vitrolles, d'Autichamps, Pasquiers, Larochejaqueleins, Decazes, Dambrays, Lainés, de Villèles, la Bourdonnays. and others who shone at the court of Louis XV. Compare the courtiers of Henri IV. with those of Louis XIV.; you will hardly find five great families of the former time still in existence. The nephew of the great Richelieu was a very insignificant person at the court of Louis XIV.; while His Majesty's favorite, Villeroy, was the grandson of a secretary ennobled by Charles IX. And so it befell that the d'Esgrignons, all but princes under the Valois, and all-powerful in the time of Henri IV., had no fortune whatever at the court of Louis XVIII., which gave them not so much as a thought. At this day there are names as famous as those of royal houses—the Foix-Graillys, for instance, or the d'Hérouvilles—left to obscurity tantamount to extinction for want of money, the one power of the time.

All which things Victurnien beheld entirely from his own point of view; he felt the equality that he saw in Paris as a personal wrong. The monster Equality was swallowing down the last fragments of social distinction in the Restoration. Having made up his mind on this head, he immediately proceeded to try to win back his place with such dangerous, if blunted weapons, as the age left to the *noblesse*. It is an expensive matter to gain the attention of Paris. To this end, Victurnien adopted some of the ways then in vogue. He felt that it was a necessity to have horses and fine carriages, and all the accessories of modern luxury; he felt, in short, "that a man must keep abreast of the times," as de Marsay said—de Marsay, the first dandy that he came across in the first drawing-room to which he was introduced. For his misfortune, he fell in with a set of roués, with de Marsay, de Ronquerolles, Maxime de Trailles, des Lupeaulx, Rastignac, Ajuda-Pinto, Beaudenord, de la Roche-Hugon, de Manerville, and the Vandenesses, whom he met wherever he went, and a great many houses were open to a young

man with his ancient name and reputation for wealth. He went to the Marquise d'Espard's, to the Duchesses de Grandlieu, de Carigliano, and de Chaulieu, to the Marquises d'Aiglemont and de Listomère, to Mme. de Sérizy's, to the Opéra, to the embassies and elsewhere. The Faubourg Saint-Germain has its provincial genealogies at its fingers' ends; a great name once recognized and adopted therein is a passport which opens many a door that will scarcely turn on its hinges for unknown names or the lions of a lower rank.

Victurnien found his relatives both amiable and ready to welcome him so long as he did not appear as a suppliant; he saw at once that the surest way of obtaining nothing was to ask for something. At Paris, if the first impulse moves people to protect, second thoughts (which last a good deal longer) impel them to despise the protégé. Independence, vanity, and pride, all the young Count's better and worse feelings combined, led him, on the contrary, to assume an aggressive attitude. And therefore the Ducs de Verneuil, de Lenoncourt, de Chaulieu, de Navarreins, d'Hérouville, de Grandlieu, and de Maufrigneuse, the Princes de Cadignan and de Blaumont-Chauvry, were delighted to present the charming survivor of the wreck of an ancient family at court.

Victurnien went to the Tuileries in a splendid carriage with his armorial bearings on the panels; but his presentation to His Majesty made it abundantly clear to him that the people occupied the royal mind so much that his nobility was like to be forgotten. The restored dynasty, moreover, was surrounded by triple ranks of eligible old men and gray-headed courtiers; the young *noblesse* was reduced to a cipher, and this Victurnien guessed at once. He saw that there was no suitable place for him at court, nor in the government, nor the army, nor, indeed, anywhere else. So he launched out into the world of pleasure. Introduced at the Élysée-Bourbon, at the Duchesse d'Angoulême's, at the Pavillon Marsan, he met on all sides with the surface civilities due to the heir of an old family, not so old but it could be called to mind by the sight of a living member. And, after all, it was

not a small thing to be remembered. In the distinction with which Victurnien was honored lay the way to the *péerage* and a splendid marriage; he had taken the field with a false appearance of wealth, and his vanity would not allow him to declare his real position. Besides, he had been so much complimented on the figure that he made, he was so pleased with his first success, that, like many other young men, he felt ashamed to draw back. He took a suite of rooms in the Rue du Bac, with stables and a complete equipment for the fashionable life to which he had committed himself. These preliminaries cost him fifty thousand francs, which money, moreover, the young gentleman managed to draw in spite of all Chesnel's wise precautions, thanks to a series of unforeseen events.

Chesnel's letter certainly reached his friend's office, but Maître Sorbier was dead; and Mme. Sorbier, a matter-of-fact person, seeing that it was a business letter, handed it on to her husband's successor. Maître Cardot, the new notary, informed the young Count that a draft on the Treasury made payable to the deceased would be useless; and by way of reply to the letter, which had cost the old provincial notary so much thought, Cardot dispatched four lines intended not to reach Chesnel's heart, but to produce the money. Chesnel made the draft payable to Sorbier's young successor; and the latter, feeling but little inclination to adopt his correspondent's sentimentality, was delighted to put himself at the Count's orders, and gave Victurnien as much money as he wanted.

Now those who know what life in Paris means, know that fifty thousand francs will not go very far in furniture, horses, carriages, and elegance generally; but it must be borne in mind that Victurnien immediately contracted some twenty thousand francs' worth of debts besides, and his tradespeople at first were not at all anxious to be paid, for our young gentleman's fortune had been prodigiously increased, partly by rumor, partly by Joséphin, that Chesnel in livery.

Victurnien had not been in town a month before he was obliged to repair to his man of business for ten thousand francs; he had only been playing whist with the Ducs de



Navarreins, de Chaulieu, and de Lenoncourt, and now and again at his club. He had begun by winning some thousands of francs, but pretty soon lost five or six thousand, which brought home to him the necessity of a purse for play. Victurnien had the spirit that gains goodwill everywhere, and puts a young man of a great family on a level with the very highest. He was not merely admitted at once into the band of patrician youth, but was even envied by the rest. It was intoxicating to him to feel that he was envied, nor was he in this mood very likely to think of reform. Indeed, he had completely lost his head. He would not think of the means; he dipped into his money-bags as if they could be refilled indefinitely; he deliberately shut his eyes to the inevitable results of the system. In that dissipated set, in the continual whirl of gayety, people take the actors in their brilliant costumes as they find them; no one inquires whether a man can afford to make the figure he does, there is nothing in worse taste than inquiries as to ways and means. A man ought to renew his wealth perpetually, and as Nature does—below the surface and out of sight. People talk if somebody comes to grief; they joke about a new-comer's fortune till their minds are set at rest, and at this they draw the line. Victurnien d'Esgrignon, with all the Faubourg Saint-Germain to back him, with all his protectors exaggerating the amount of his fortune (were it only to rid themselves of responsibility), and magnifying his possessions in the most refined and well-bred way, with a hint or a word; with all these advantages—to repeat—Victurnien was, in fact, an eligible Count. He was handsome, witty, sound in politics; his father still possessed the ancestral castle and the lands of the marquise. Such a young fellow is sure of an admirable reception in houses where there are marriageable daughters, fair but portionless partners at dances, and young married women who find that time hangs heavy on their hands. So the world, smiling, beckoned him to the foremost benches in its booth; the seats reserved for marquises are still in the same place in Paris; and if the names are changed, the things are the same as ever.

In the most exclusive circle of society in the Faubourg

Saint-Germain, Victurnien found the Chevalier's double in the person of the Vidame de Pamiers. The Vidame was a Chevalier de Valois raised to the tenth power, invested with all the prestige of wealth, enjoying all the advantages of high position. The dear Vidame was a repository for everybody's secrets, and the gazette of the Faubourg besides; nevertheless, he was discreet, and, like other gazettes, only said things that might safely be published. Again Victurnien listened to the Chevalier's esoteric doctrines. The Vidame told young d'Esgrignon, without mincing matters, to make conquests among women of quality, supplementing the advice with anecdotes from his own experience. The Vicomte de Pamiers, it seemed, had permitted himself much that it would serve no purpose to relate here; so remote was it all from our modern manners, in which soul and passion play so large a part, that nobody would believe it. But the excellent Vidame did more than this.

"Dine with me at a tavern to-morrow," said he, by way of conclusion. "We will digest our dinner at the Opéra, and afterwards I will take you to a house where several people have the greatest wish to meet you."

The Vidame gave a delightful little dinner at the Rocher de Cancale; three guests only were asked to meet Victurnien—de Marsay, Rastignac, and Blondet. Émile Blondet, the young Count's fellow-townsmen, was a man of letters on the outskirts of society to which he had been introduced by a charming woman from the same province. This was one of the Vicomte de Trosville's daughters, now married to the Comte de Montcornet, one of those of Napoleon's generals who went over to the Bourbons. The Vidame held that a dinner party of more than six persons was beneath contempt. In that case, according to him, there was an end alike of cookery and conversation, and a man could not sip his wine in a proper frame of mind.

"I have not yet told you, my dear boy, where I mean to take you to-night," he said, taking Victurnien's hands and tapping on them. "You are going to see Mlle. des Touches; all the pretty women with any pretensions to wit will be at her house *en petit comité*. Literature, art, poetry, any sort

of genius, in short, is held in great esteem there. It is one of our old-world *bureaux d'esprit*, with a veneer of monarchical doctrine, the livery of this present age."

"It is sometimes as tiresome and tedious there as a pair of new boots, but there are women with whom you cannot meet anywhere else," said de Marsay.

"If all the poets who went there to rub up their muse were like our friend here," said Rastignac, tapping Blondet familiarly on the shoulder, "we should have some fun. But a plague of odes, and ballads, and driveling meditations, and novels with wide margins, pervades the sofas and the atmosphere."

"I don't dislike them," said de Marsay, "so long as they corrupt girls' minds, and don't spoil women."

"Gentlemen," smiled Blondet, "you are encroaching on my field of literature."

"You need not talk. You have robbed us of the most charming woman in the world, you lucky rogue; we may be allowed to steal your less brilliant ideas," cried Rastignac.

"Yes, he is a lucky rascal," said the Vidame, and he twitched Blondet's ear. "But perhaps Victurnien here will be luckier still this evening——"

"*Already!*" exclaimed de Marsay. "Why, he only came here a month ago; he has scarcely had time to shake the dust of his old manor house off his feet, to wipe off the brine in which his aunt kept him preserved; he has only just set up a decent horse, a tilbury in the latest style, a groom——"

"No, no, not a groom," interrupted Rastignac; "he has some sort of an agricultural laborer that he brought with him 'from his place.' Buisson, who understands a livery as well as most, declared that the man was physically incapable of wearing a jacket."

"I will tell you what, you ought to have modeled yourself on Beaudenord," the Vidame said seriously. "He has this advantage over all of you, my young friends, he has a genuine specimen of the English tiger——"

"Just see, gentlemen, what the *noblesse* have come to in France!" cried Victurnien. "For them the one important thing is to have a tiger, a thoroughbred, and baubles——"

“Bless me!” said Blondet. “‘This gentleman’s good-sense at times appalls me.’—Well, yes, young moralist, you nobles have come to that. You have not even left to you that luster of lavish expenditure for which the dear Vidame was famous fifty years ago. We revel on a second floor in the Rue Montorgueil. There are no more wars with the Cardinal, no Field of the Cloth of Gold. You, Comte d’Esgrignon, in short, are supping in the company of one Blondet, younger son of a miserable provincial magistrate, with whom you would not shake hands down yonder; and in ten years’ time you may sit beside him among peers of the realm. Believe in yourself after that, if you can.”

“Ah, well,” said Rastignac, “we have passed from action to thought, from brute force to force of intellect, we are talking——”

“Let us not talk of our reverses,” protested the Vidame; “I have made up my mind to die merrily. If our friend here has not a tiger as yet, he comes of a race of lions, and can dispense with one.”

“He cannot do without a tiger,” said Blondet; “he is too newly come to town.”

“His elegance may be new as yet,” returned de Marsay, “but we are adopting it. He is worthy of us, he understands his age, he has brains, he is nobly born and gently bred; we are going to like him, and serve him, and push him——”

“Whither?” inquired Blondet.

“Inquisitive soul!” said Rastignac.

“With whom will he take up to-night?” de Marsay asked.

“With a whole seraglio,” said the Vidame.

“Plague take it! What can we have done that the dear Vidame is punishing us by keeping his word to the infanta? I should be pitiable indeed if I did not know her——”

“And I was once a coxcomb even as he,” said the Vidame, indicating de Marsay.

The conversation continued pitched in the same key, charmingly scandalous, and agreeably corrupt. The dinner went off very pleasantly. Rastignac and de Marsay went to the Opéra with the Vidame and Victurnien, with a view

to following them afterwards to Mlle. des Touches' salon. And thither, accordingly, this pair of rakes betook themselves, calculating that by that time the tragedy would have been read; for of all things to be taken between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, a tragedy in their opinion was the most unwholesome. They went to keep a watch on Victurnien and to embarrass him, a piece of schoolboy's mischief embittered by a jealous dandy's spite. But Victurnien was gifted with that page's effrontery which is a great help to ease of manner; and Rastignac, watching him as he made his entrance, was surprised to see how quickly he caught the tone of the moment.

"That young d'Esgrignon will go far, will he not?" he said, addressing his companion.

"That is as may be," returned de Marsay, "but he is in a fair way."

The Vidame introduced his young friend to one of the most amiable and frivolous duchesses of the day, a lady whose adventures caused an explosion five years later. Just then, however, she was in the full blaze of her glory; she had been suspected, it is true, of equivocal conduct; but suspicion, while it is still suspicion and not proof, marks a woman out with the kind of distinction which slander gives to a man. Nonentities are never slandered; they chafe because they are left in peace. This woman was, in fact, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, a daughter of the d'Uxelles; her father-in-law was still alive; she was not to be the Princesse de Cadignan for some years to come. A friend of the Duchesse de Langeais and the Vicomtesse de Beauséant, two glories departed, she was likewise intimate with the Marquise d'Espard, with whom she disputed her fragile sovereignty as queen of fashion. Great relations lent her countenance for a long while, but the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse was one of those women who, in some way, nobody knows how, or why, or where, will spend the rents of all the lands of earth, and of the moon likewise, if they were not out of reach. The general outline of her character was scarcely known as yet; de Marsay, and de Marsay only, really had read her. That redoubtable dandy

now watched the Vidame de Pamiers' introduction of his young friend to that lovely woman, and bent over to say in Rastignac's ear—

“My dear fellow, he will go up *whiz!* like a rocket, and come down like a stick,” an atrociously vulgar saying which was remarkably fulfilled.

The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had lost her heart to Victurnien after first giving her mind to a serious study of him. Any lover who should have caught the glance by which she expressed her gratitude to the Vidame might well have been jealous of such friendship. Women are like horses let loose on a steppe when they feel, as the Duchess felt with the Vidame de Pamiers, that the ground is safe; at such moments they are themselves; perhaps it pleases them to give, as it were, samples of their tenderness in intimacy in this way. It was a guarded glance, nothing was lost between eye and eye; there was no possibility of reflection in any mirror. Nobody intercepted it.

“See how she has prepared herself,” Rastignac said, turning to de Marsay. “What a virginal toilet; what swan's grace in that snow-white throat of hers! How white her gown is, and she is wearing a sash like a little girl; she looks round like a madonna inviolate. Who would think that you had passed that way?”

“The very reason why she looks as she does,” returned de Marsay, with a triumphant air.

The two young men exchanged a smile. Mme. de Maufrigneuse saw the smile and guessed at their conversation, and gave the pair a broadside of her eyes, an art acquired by Frenchwomen since the Peace, when Englishwomen imported it into this country, together with the shape of their silver plate, their horses and harness, and the piles of insular ice which impart a refreshing coolness to the atmosphere of any room in which a certain number of British females are gathered together. The young men grew serious as a couple of clerks at the end of a homily from headquarters before the receipt of an expected bonus.

The Duchess when she lost her heart to Victurnien had made up her mind to play the part of romantic Innocence, a

rôle much understudied subsequently by other women, for the misfortune of modern youth. Her Grace of Maufrigneuse had just come out as an angel at a moment's notice, precisely as she meant to turn to literature and science somewhere about her fortieth year instead of taking to devotion. She made a point of being like nobody else. Her parts, her dresses, her caps, opinions, toilets, and manner of acting were all entirely new and original. Soon after her marriage, when she was scarcely more than a girl, she had played the part of a knowing and almost depraved woman; she ventured on risky repartees with shallow people, and betrayed her ignorance to those who knew better. As the date of that marriage made it impossible to abstract one little year from her age without the knowledge of Time, and as Her Grace had reached her twenty-sixth year, she had taken it into her head to be immaculate. She scarcely seemed to belong to earth; she shook out her wide sleeves as if they had been wings. Her eyes fled to heaven at too warm a glance, or word, or thought.

There is a madonna painted by Piola, the great Genoese painter, who bade fair to bring out a second edition of Rafael till his career was cut short by jealousy and murder; his madonna, however, you may dimly discern through a pane of glass in a little street in Genoa.

A more chaste-eyed madonna than Piola's does not exist; but compared with Mme. de Maufrigneuse, that heavenly creature was a Messalina. Women wondered among themselves how such a giddy young thing had been transformed by a change of dress into the fair veiled seraph who seemed (to use an expression now in vogue) to have a soul as white as new fallen snow on the highest Alpine crests. How had she solved in such short space the Jesuitical problem how to display a bosom whiter than her soul by hiding it in gauze? How could she look so ethereal while her eyes drooped so murderously? Those almost wanton glances seemed to give promise of untold languorous delight, while by an ascetic's sigh of aspiration after a better life the mouth appeared to add that none of those promises would be fulfilled. Ingenuous youths (for there were a few to be found in the

Guards of that day) privately wondered whether, in the most intimate moments, it were possible to speak familiarly to this White Lady, this starry vapor slidden down from the Milky Way. This system, which answered completely for some years at a stretch, was turned to good account by women of fashion, whose breasts were lined with a stout philosophy, for they could cloak no inconsiderable exactions with these little airs from the sacristy. Not one of the celestial creatures but was quite well aware of the possibilities of less ethereal love which lay in the longing of every well-conditioned male to recall such beings to earth. It was a fashion which permitted them to abide in a semi-religious, semi-Ossianic empyrean; they could, and did, ignore all the practical details of daily life, a short and easy method of disposing of many questions. De Marsay, foreseeing the future developments of the system, added a last word, for he saw that Rastignac was jealous of Victurnien.

“My boy,” said he, “stay as you are. Our Nucingen will make your fortune, whereas the Duchess would ruin you. She is too expensive.”

Rastignac allowed de Marsay to go without asking further questions. He knew Paris. He knew that the most refined and noble and disinterested of women—a woman who cannot be induced to accept anything but a bouquet—can be as dangerous an acquaintance for a young man as any opera girl of former days. As a matter of fact, the opera girl is an almost mythical being. As things are now at the theaters, dancers and actresses are about as amusing as a declaration of the rights of woman, they are puppets that go abroad in the morning in the character of respected and respectable mothers of families, and act men’s parts in tight-fitting garments at night.

Worthy M. Chesnel, in his country notary’s office, was right; he had foreseen one of the reefs on which the Count might make shipwreck. Victurnien was dazzled by the poetic aureole which Mme. de Maufigneuse chose to assume; he was chained and padlocked from the first hour in her company, bound captive by that girlish sash, and caught by the curls twined round fairy fingers. Far corrupted the



boy was already, but he really believed in that farrago of maidenliness and muslin, in sweet looks as much studied as an Act of Parliament. And if the one man, who is in duty bound to believe in feminine fibs, is deceived by them, is not that enough?

For a pair of lovers, the rest of their species are about as much alive as figures on the tapestry. The Duchess, flattery apart, was avowedly and admittedly one of the ten handsomest women in society. "The loveliest woman in Paris" is, as you know, as often met with in the world of love-making, as "the finest book that has appeared in this generation" in the world of letters.

The converse which Victurnien held with the Duchess can be kept up at his age without too great a strain. He was young enough and ignorant enough of life in Paris to feel no necessity to be upon his guard, no need to keep a watch over his lightest words and glances. The religious sentimentalism, which finds a broadly humorous commentary in the after-thoughts of either speaker, puts the old-world French chat of men and women, with its pleasant familiarity, its lively ease, quite out of the question; they make love in a mist nowadays.

Victurnien was just sufficient of an unsophisticated provincial to remain suspended in a highly appropriate and unfeigned rapture which pleased the Duchess; for women are no more to be deceived by the comedies which men play than by their own. Mme. de Maufrigneuse calculated, not without dismay, that the young Count's infatuation was likely to hold good for six whole months of disinterested love: She looked so lovely in this dove's mood, quenching the light in her eyes by the golden fringe of their lashes, that when the Marquise d'Espard bade her friend good-night, she whispered, "Good! very good, dear!" And with those farewell words, the fair Marquise left her rival to make the tour of the modern *Pays du Tendre*; which, by the way, is not so absurd a conception as some appear to think. New maps of the country are engraved for each generation; and if the names of the routes are different, they still lead to the same capital city.

In the course of an hour's *tête-à-tête*, on a corner sofa, under the eyes of the world, the Duchess brought young d'Esgrignon as far as Scipio's Generosity, the Devotion of Amadis, and Chivalrous Self-abnegation (for the Middle Ages were just coming into fashion, with their daggers, machicolations, hauberks, chainmail, peaked shoes, and romantic painted cardboard properties). She had an admirable turn, moreover, for leaving things unsaid, for leaving ideas in a discreet, seeming careless way, to work their way down, one by one, into Victurnien's heart, like needles into a cushion. She possessed a marvelous skill in reticence; she was charming in hypocrisy, lavish of subtle promises, which revived hope and then melted away like ice in the sun if you looked at them closely, and most treacherous in the desire which she felt and inspired. At the close of this charming encounter she produced the running noose of an invitation to call, and flung it over him with a dainty demureness which the printed page can never set forth.

"You will forget me," she said. "You will find so many women eager to pay court to you instead of enlightening you. . . . But you will come back to me undeceived. Are you coming to me first? . . . No. As you will.—For my own part, I tell you frankly that your visits will be a great pleasure to me. People of soul are so rare, and I think that you are one of them.—Come, good-by; people will begin to talk about us if we talk together any longer."

She made good her words and took flight. Victurnien went soon afterwards, but not before others had guessed his ecstatic condition; his face wore the expression peculiar to happy men, something between an Inquisitor's calm discretion and the self-contained beatitude of a devotee, fresh from the confessional and absolution.

"Mme. de Maufrigneuse went pretty briskly to the point this evening," said the Duchesse de Grandlieu, when only half a dozen persons were left in Mlle. des Touches' little drawing-room—to wit, des Lupeaulx, a Master of Requests, who at that time stood very well at court, Vandenesse, the Vicomtesse de Grandlieu, Canalis, and Mme. de Sérizy.

“D’Esgrignon and Maufrigneuse are two names that are sure to cling together,” said Mme. de Sérizy, who aspired to epigram.

“For some days past she has been out at grass on Platonism,” said des Lupeaulx.

“She will ruin that poor innocent,” added Charles de Vandenesse.

“What do you mean?” asked Mlle des Touches.

“Oh, morally and financially, beyond all doubt,” said the Vicomtesse, rising.

The cruel words were cruelly true for young d’Esgrignon.

Next morning he wrote to his aunt describing his introduction into the high world of the Faubourg Saint-Germain in bright colors flung by the prism of love, explaining the reception which met him everywhere in a way which gratified his father’s family pride. The Marquis would have the whole long letter read to him twice; he rubbed his hands when he heard of the Vidame des Pamiers’ dinner—the Vidame was an old acquaintance—and of the subsequent introduction to the Duchess; but at Blondet’s name he lost himself in conjectures. What could the younger son of a judge, a public prosecutor during the Revolution, have been doing there?

There was joy that evening among the Collection of Antiquities. They talked over the young Count’s success. So discreet were they with regard to Mme. de Maufrigneuse, that the one man who heard the secret was the Chevalier. There was no financial postscript at the end of the letter, no unpleasant concluding reference to the sinews of war, which every young man makes in such a case. Mlle. Armande showed it to Chesnel. Chesnel was pleased and raised not a single objection. It was clear, as the Marquis and the Chevalier agreed, that a young man in favor with the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse would shortly be a hero at court, where in the old days women were all-powerful. The Count had not made a bad choice. The dowagers told over all the gallant adventures of the Maufrigneuses from Louis XIII. to Louis XVI.—they spared to inquire into preceding reigns—and when all was done they were enchanted. Mme. de

Maufrigneuse was much praised for interesting herself in Victurnien. Any writer of plays in search of a piece of pure comedy would have found it well worth his while to listen to the Antiquities in conclave.

Victurnien received charming letters from his father and aunt, and also from the Chevalier. That gentleman recalled himself to the Vidame's memory. He had been at Spa with M. de Pamiers in 1778, after a certain journey made by a celebrated Hungarian princess. And Chesnel also wrote. The fond flattery to which the unhappy boy was only too well accustomed shone out of every page; and Mlle. Armande seemed to share half of Mme. de Maufrigneuse's happiness.

Thus happy in the approval of his family, the young Count made a spirited beginning in the perilous and costly ways of dandyism. He had five horses—he was moderate—de Marsay had fourteen! He returned the Vidame's hospitality, even including Blondet in the invitation, as well as de Marsay and Rastignac. The dinner cost five hundred francs, and the noble provincial was fêted on the same scale. Victurnien played a good deal, and, for his misfortune, at the fashionable game of whist.

He laid out his days in busy idleness. Every day between twelve and three o'clock he was with the Duchess; afterwards he went to meet her in the Bois de Boulogne and ride beside her carriage. Sometimes the charming couple rode together, but this was early in fine summer mornings. Society, balls, the theater, and gayety filled the Count's evening hours. Everywhere Victurnien made a brilliant figure; everywhere he flung the pearls of his wit broadcast. He gave his opinion on men, affairs, and events in profound sayings; he would have put you in mind of a fruit-tree putting forth all its strength in blossom. He was leading an enervating life, wasteful of money, and even yet more wasteful, it may be, of a man's soul; in that life the fairest talents are buried out of sight, the most incorruptible honesty perishes, the best-tempered springs of will are slackened.

The Duchess, so white and fragile and angel-like, felt

attracted to the dissipations of bachelor life; she enjoyed first nights, she liked anything amusing, anything improvised. Bohemian restaurants lay outside her experience; so d'Esgrignon got up a charming little party at the Rocher de Cancale for her benefit, asked all the amiable scamps whom she cultivated and sermonized, and there was a vast amount of merriment, wit, and gayety, and a corresponding bill to pay. That supper party led to others. And through it all Victurnien worshiped her as an angel. Mme. de Maufrigneuse for him was still an angel, untouched by any taint of earth; an angel at the Variétés, where she sat out the half-obscene, vulgar farces, which made her laugh; an angel through the cross-fire of highly-flavored jests and scandalous anecdotes, which enlivened a stolen frolic; a languishing angel in the latticed box at the Vaudeville; an angel while she criticised the postures of opera dancers with the experience of an elderly habitué of *le coin de la reine*; an angel at the Porte Saint-Martin, at the little boulevard theaters, at the masked balls, which she enjoyed like any schoolboy. She was an angel who asked him for the love that lives by self-abnegation and heroism and self-sacrifice; an angel who would have her lover live like an English lord, with an income of a million francs. D'Esgrignon once exchanged a horse because the animal's coat did not satisfy her notions. At play she was an angel, and certainly no *bourgeoise* that ever lived could have bidden d'Esgrignon "Stake for me!" in such an angelic way. She was so divinely reckless in her folly, that a man might well have sold his soul to the Devil lest this angel should lose her taste for earthly pleasures.

The first winter went by. The Count had drawn on M. Cardot for the trifling sum of thirty thousand francs over and above Chesnel's remittance. As Cardot very carefully refrained from using his right of remonstrance, Victurnien now learned for the first time that he had overdrawn his account. He was the more offended by an extremely polite refusal to make any further advance, since it so happened that he had just lost six thousand francs at play at the club, and

he could not very well show himself there until they were paid.

After growing indignant with Maître Cardot, who had trusted him with thirty thousand francs (Cardot had written to Chesnel, but to the fair Duchess's favorite he made the most of his so-called confidence in him), after all this, d'Esgrignon was obliged to ask the lawyer to tell him how to set about raising the money, since debts of honor were in question.

“Draw bills on your father's banker, and take them to his correspondent; he, no doubt, will discount them for you. Then write to your family, and tell them to remit the amount to the banker.”

An inner voice seemed to suggest du Croisier's name in this predicament. He had seen du Croisier on his knees to the aristocracy, and of the man's real disposition he was entirely ignorant. So to du Croisier he wrote a very offhand letter, informing him that he had drawn a bill of exchange on him for ten thousand francs, adding that the amount would be repaid on receipt of the letter either by M. Chesnel or by Mlle. Armande d'Esgrignon. Then he indited two touching epistles—one to Chesnel, another to his aunt. In the matter of going headlong to ruin, a young man often shows singular ingenuity and ability, and fortune favors him. In the morning Victurnien happened on the name of the Paris bankers in correspondence with du Croisier, and de Marsay furnished him with the Kellers' address. De Marsay knew everything in Paris. The Kellers took the bill and gave him the sum without a word, after deducting the discount. The balance of the account was in du Croisier's favor.

But the gaming debt was as nothing in comparison with the state of things at home. Invoices showered in upon Victurnien.

“I say! Do you trouble yourself about that sort of thing?” Restignac said, laughing. “Are you putting them in order, my dear boy? I did not think you were so business-like.”

“My dear fellow, it is quite time I thought about it; there are twenty odd thousand francs there.”

De Marsay, coming in to look up d'Esgrignon for a steeplechase, produced a dainty little pocketbook, took out twenty thousand francs, and handed them to him.

"It is the best way of keeping the money safe," said he; "I am twice enchanted to have won it yesterday from my honored father, Milord Dudley."

Such French grace completely fascinated d'Esgrignon; he took it for friendship; and as to the money, punctually forgot to pay his debts with it, and spent it on his pleasures. The fact was that de Marsay was looking on with an unspeakable pleasure while young d'Esgrignon "got out of his depth," in dandy's idiom; it pleased de Marsay in all sorts of fondling ways to lay an arm on the lad's shoulder; by and by he should feel its weight, and disappear the sooner. For de Marsay was jealous; the Duchess flaunted her love affair; she was not at home to other visitors when d'Esgrignon was with her. And besides, de Marsay was one of those savage humorists who delight in mischief, as Turkish women in the bath. So when he had carried off the prize and bets were settled at the tavern where they breakfasted, and a bottle or two of good wine had appeared, de Marsay turned to d'Esgrignon with a laugh—

"Those bills that you are worrying over are not yours, I am sure."

"Eh! if they weren't, why should he worry himself?" asked Rastignac.

"And whose should they be?" d'Esgrignon inquired.

"Then you do not know the Duchess's position?" queried de Marsay, as he sprang into the saddle.

"No," said d'Esgrignon, his curiosity aroused.

"Well, dear fellow, it is like this," returned de Marsay—"thirty thousand francs to Victorine, eighteen thousand francs to Houbigaut, lesser amounts to Herbault, Nattier, Nourtier, and those Latour people,—altogether a hundred thousand francs."

"An angel!" cried d'Esgrignon, with eyes uplifted to heaven.

"This is the bill for her wings," Rastignac cried facetiously.

“She owes all that, my dear boy,” continued de Marsay, “precisely because she is an angel. But we have all seen angels in this position,” he added, glancing at Rastignac; “there is this about women that is sublime, they understand nothing of money; they do not meddle with it, it is no affair of theirs; they are invited guests at the ‘banquet of life,’ as some poet or other said that came to an end in the work-house.”

“How do you know this, when I do not?” d’Esgrignon artlessly returned.

“You are sure to be the last to know it, just as she is sure to be the last to hear that you are in debt.”

“I thought she had a hundred thousand livres a year,” said d’Esgrignon.

“Her husband,” replied de Marsay, “lives apart from her. He stays with his regiment and practices economy, for he has one or two little debts of his own as well, has our dear Duke. Where do you come from? Just learn to do as we do, and keep our friends’ accounts for them. Mlle. Diane (I fell in love with her for the name’s sake), Mlle. Diane d’Uxelles brought her husband sixty thousand livres of income; for the last eight years she has lived as if she had two hundred thousand. It is perfectly plain that at this moment her lands are mortgaged up to their full value; some fine morning the crash must come, and the angel will be put to flight by—must it be said?—by sheriff’s officers that have the effrontery to lay hands on an angel just as they might take hold of one of us.”

“Poor angel!”

“Lord! it costs a great deal to dwell in a Parisian heaven; you must whiten your wings and your complexion every morning,” said Rastignac.

Now as the thought of confessing his debts to his beloved Diane had passed through d’Esgrignon’s mind, something like a shudder ran through him when he remembered that he still owed sixty thousand francs, to say nothing of bills to come for another ten thousand. He went back melancholy enough. His friends remarked his ill-disguised preoccupation, and spoke of it among themselves at dinner.



“Young d’Esgrignon is getting out of his depth. He is not up to Paris. He will blow his brains out. A little fool!” and so on and so on.

D’Esgrignon, however, promptly took comfort. His servant brought him two letters. The first was from Chesnel. A letter from Chesnel smacked of the stale grumbling faithfulness of honesty and its consecrated formulas. With all respect he put it aside till the evening. But the second letter he read with unspeakable pleasure. In Ciceronian phrases, du Croisier groveled before him, like a Sganarelle before a G6ronste, begging the young Count in future to spare him the affront of first depositing the amount of the bills which he should condescend to draw. The concluding phrase seemed meant to convey the idea that here was an open cash-box full of coin at the service of the noble d’Esgrignon family. So strong was the impression that Victurnien, like Sganarelle or Mascarille in the play, like everybody else who feels a twinge of conscience at his finger-tips, made an involuntary gesture.

Now that he was sure of unlimited credit with the Kellers, he opened Chesnel’s letter gayly. He had expected four full pages, full of expostulation to the brim; he glanced down the sheet for the familiar words “prudence,” “honor,” “determination to do right,” and the like, and saw something else instead which made his head swim.

“MONSIEUR LE COMTE,—Of all my fortune I have now but two hundred thousand francs left. I beg of you not to exceed that amount, if you should do one of the most devoted servants of your family the honor of taking it. I present my respects to you.  
CHESNEL.”

“He is one of Plutarch’s men,” Victurnien said to himself, as he tossed the letter on the table. He felt chagrined; such magnanimity made him feel very small.

“There! one must reform,” he thought; and instead of going to a restaurant and spending fifty or sixty francs over his dinner, he retrenched by dining with the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and told her about the letter.

“I should like to see that man,” she said, letting her eyes shine like two fixed stars.

“What would you do?”

“Why, he should manage my affairs for me.”

Diane de Maufrigneuse was divinely dressed; she meant her toilet to do honor to Victurnien. The levity with which she treated his affairs or, more properly speaking, his debts fascinated him.

The charming pair went to the Italiens. Never had that beautiful and enchanting woman looked more seraphic, more ethereal. Nobody in the house could have believed that she had debts which reached the sum total mentioned by de Marsay that very morning. No single one of the cares of earth had touched that sublime forehead of hers, full of woman's pride of the highest kind. In her, a pensive air seemed to be some gleam of an earthly love, nobly extinguished. The men for the most part were wagering that Victurnien, with his handsome figure, laid her under contribution; while the women, sure of their rival's subterfuge, admired her as Michel Angelo admired Rafael, *in petto*. Victurnien loved Diane, according to one of these ladies, for the sake of her hair—she had the most beautiful fair hair in France; another maintained that Diane's pallor was her principal merit, for she was not really well shaped, her dress made the most of her figure; yet others thought that Victurnien loved her for her foot, her one good point, for she had a flat figure. But (and this brings the present-day manner of Paris before you in an astonishing manner) whereas all the men said that the Duchess was subsidizing Victurnien's splendor, the women, on the other hand, gave people to understand that it was Victurnien who paid for the angel's wings, as Rastignac said.

As they drove back again, Victurnien had it on the tip of his tongue a score of times to open this chapter, for the Duchess's debts weighed more heavily upon his mind than his own; and a score of times his purpose died away before the attitude of the divine creature beside him. He could see her by the light of the carriage lamps; she was bewitching in the love-languor which always seemed to be extorted by the violence of passion from her madonna's purity. The

Duchess did not fall into the mistake of talking of her virtue, of her angel's estate, as provincial women, her imitators, do. She was far too clever. She made him, for whom she made such great sacrifices, think these things for himself. At the end of six months she could make him feel that a harmless kiss on her hand was a deadly sin; she contrived that every grace should be extorted from her, and this with such consummate art, that it was impossible not to feel that she was more an angel than ever when she yielded.

None but Parisian women are clever enough always to give a new charm to the moon, to romanticize the stars, to roll in the same sack of charcoal and emerge each time whiter than ever. This is the highest refinement of intellectual and Parisian civilization. Women beyond the Rhine or the English Channel believe nonsense of this sort when they utter it; while your Parisienne makes her lover believe that she is an angel, the better to add to his bliss by flattering his vanity on both sides—temporal and spiritual. Certain persons, detractors of the Duchess, maintain that she was the first dupe of her own white magic. A wicked slander. The Duchess believed in nothing but herself.

By the end of the year 1823 the Kellers had supplied Victurnien with two hundred thousand francs, and neither Chesnel nor Mlle. Armande knew anything about it. He had had, besides, two thousand crowns from Chesnel at one time and another, the better to hide the sources on which he was drawing. He wrote lying letters to his poor father and aunt, who lived on, happy and deceived, like most happy people under the sun. The insidious current of life in Paris was bringing a dreadful catastrophe upon the great and noble house; and only one person was in the secret of it. This was du Croisier. He rubbed his hands gleefully as he went past in the dark and looked in at the Antiquities. He had good hope of attaining his ends; and his ends were not, as heretofore, the simple ruin of the d'Esgrignons, but the dishonor of their house. He felt instinctively at such times that his revenge was at hand; he scented it in the wind! He had been sure of it indeed from the day when he discovered

that the young Count's burden of debt was growing too heavy for the boy to bear.

Du Croisier's first step was to rid himself of his most hated enemy, the venerable Chesnel. The good old man lived in the Rue du Bercail, in a house with a steep-pitched roof. There was a little paved courtyard in front, where the rose-bushes grew and clambered up to the windows of the upper story. Behind lay a little country garden, with its box-edged borders, shut in by damp, gloomy-looking walls. The prim, gray-painted street door, with its wicket opening and bell attached, announced quite as plainly as the official scutcheon that "a notary lives here."

It was half-past five o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour the old man usually sat digesting his dinner. He had drawn his black leather-covered armchair before the fire, and put on his armor, a painted pasteboard contrivance shaped like a top boot, which protected his stockinged legs from the heat of the fire; for it was one of the good man's habits to sit for a while after dinner with his feet on the dogs and to stir up the glowing coals. He always ate too much; he was fond of good living. Alas! if it had not been for that little failing, would he not have been more perfect than it is permitted to mortal man to be? Chesnel had finished his cup of coffee. His old housekeeper had just taken away the tray which had been used for this purpose for the last twenty years. He was waiting for his clerks to go before he himself went out for his game at cards, and meanwhile he was thinking—no need to ask of whom or what. A day seldom passed but he asked himself, "Where is *he*? What is *he* doing?" He thought that the Count was in Italy with the fair Duchesse de Maufrigneuse.

When every franc of a man's fortune has come to him, not by inheritance, but through his own earning and saving, it is one of his sweetest pleasures to look back upon the pains that have gone to the making of it, and then to plan out a future for his crowns. This it is to conjugate the verb "to enjoy" in every tense. And the old lawyer, whose affections were all bound up in a single attachment, was thinking that all the carefully-chosen, well-tilled land

which he had pinched and scraped to buy would one day go to round out the d'Esgrignon estates, and the thought doubled his pleasure. His pride swelled as he sat at his ease in the old armchair; and the building of glowing coals, which he raised with the tongs, sometimes seemed to him to be the old noble house built up again, thanks to his care. He pictured the young Count's prosperity, and told himself that he had done well to live for such an aim. Chesnel was not lacking in intelligence; sheer goodness was not the sole source of his great devotion; he had a pride of his own; he was like the nobles who used to rebuild a pillar in a cathedral to inscribe their name upon it; he meant his name to be remembered by the great house which he had restored. Future generations of d'Esgrignons should speak of old Chesnel. Just at this point his old housekeeper came in with signs of extreme alarm in her countenance.

"Is the house on fire, Brigitte?"

"Something of the sort," said she. "Here is M. du Croisier wanting to speak to you——"

"M. du Croisier," repeated the old lawyer. A stab of cold misgiving gave him so sharp a pang at the heart that he dropped the tongs. "M. du Croisier here!" thought he, "our chief enemy!"

Du Croisier came in at that moment, like a cat that scents milk in a dairy. He made a bow, seated himself quietly in the easy-chair which the lawyer brought forward, and produced a bill for two hundred and twenty-seven thousand francs, principal and interest, the total amount of sums advanced to M. Victurnien in bills of exchange drawn upon du Croisier, and duly honored by him. Of these, he now demanded immediate repayment, with a threat of proceeding to extremities with the heir-presumptive of the house. Chesnel turned the unlucky letters over one by one, and asked the enemy to keep the secret. This he engaged to do if he were paid within forty-eight hours. He was pressed for money; he had obliged various manufacturers; and there followed a series of the financial fictions by which neither notaries nor borrowers are deceived. Chesnel's eyes were dim; he could scarcely keep back the tears. There was but one way of

raising the money; he must mortgage his own lands up to their full value. But when du Croisier learned the difficulty in the way of repayment, he forgot that he was hard pressed; he no longer wanted ready money, and suddenly came out with a proposal to buy the old lawyer's property. The sale was completed within two days. Poor Chesnel could not bear the thought of the son of the house undergoing a five years' imprisonment for debt. So in a few days' time nothing remained to him but his practice, the sums that were due to him, and the house in which he lived. Chesnel, stripped of all his lands, paced to and fro in his private office, paneled with dark oak, his eyes fixed on the beveled edges of the chestnut cross-beams of the ceiling, or on the trellised vines in the garden outside. He was not thinking of his farms now, nor of Le Jard, his dear house in the country; not he.

"What will become of him? He ought to come back; they must marry him to some rich heiress," he said to himself; and his eyes were dim, his head heavy.

How to approach Mlle. Armande, and in what words to break the news to her, he did not know. The man who had just paid the debts of the family quaked at the thought of confessing these things. He went from the Rue du Bercail to the Hôtel d'Esgrignon with pulses throbbing like some girl's heart when she leaves her father's roof by stealth, not to return again till she is a mother and her heart is broken.

Mlle. Armande had just received a charming letter, charming in its hypocrisy. Her nephew was the happiest man under the sun. He had been to the baths, he had been traveling in Italy with Mme. de Maufrigneuse, and now sent his journal to his aunt. Every sentence was instinct with love. There were enchanting descriptions of Venice, and fascinating appreciations of the great works of Venetian art; there were most wonderful pages full of the Duomo at Milan, and again of Florence; he described the Apennines, and how they differed from the Alps, and how in some village like Chiavari happiness lay all around you, ready made.

The poor aunt was under the spell. She saw the far-off country of love, she saw, hovering above the land, the angel whose tenderness gave to all that beauty a burning glow.

She was drinking in the letter at long draughts; how should it have been otherwise? The girl who had put love from her was now a woman ripened by repressed and pent-up passion, by all the longings continually and gladly offered up as a sacrifice on the altar of the hearth. Mlle. Armande was not like the Duchess. She did not look like an angel. She was rather like the little, straight, slim and slender, ivory-tinted statues, which those wonderful sculptors, the builders of cathedrals, placed here and there about the buildings. Wild plants sometimes find a hold in the damp niches, and weave a crown of beautiful bluebell flowers about the carved stone. At this moment the blue buds were unfolding in the fair saint's eyes. Mlle. Armande loved the charming couple as if they stood apart from real life; she saw nothing wrong in a married woman's love for Victurnien; any other woman she would have judged harshly; but in this case, not to have loved her nephew would have been the unpardonable sin. Aunts, mothers, and sisters have a code of their own for nephews and sons and brothers.

Mlle. Armande was in Venice; she saw the lines of fairy palaces that stand on either side of the Grand Canal; she was sitting in Victurnien's gondola; he was telling her what happiness it had been to feel that the Duchess's beautiful hand lay in his own, to know that she loved him as they floated together on the breast of the amorous Queen of Italian seas. But even in that moment of bliss, such as angels know, someone appeared in the garden walk! It was Chesnel! Alas! the sound of his tread on the gravel might have been the sound of the sands running from Death's hour-glass to be trodden under his unshod feet. The sound, the sight of a dreadful hopelessness in Chesnel's face, gave her that painful shock which follows a sudden recall of the senses when the soul has sent them forth into the world of dreams.

"What is it?" she cried, as if some stab had pierced to her heart.

"All is lost!" said Chesnel. "M. le Comte will bring dishonor upon the house if we do not set it in order." He held out the bills, and described the agony of the last few days in a few simple but vigorous and touching words.

“He is deceiving us! The miserable boy!” cried Mlle. Armande, her heart swelling as the blood surged back to it in heavy throbs.

“Let us both say *mea culpa*, mademoiselle,” the old lawyer said stoutly; “we have always allowed him to have his own way; he needed stern guidance; he could not have it from you with your inexperience of life; nor from me, for he would not listen to me. He has had no mother.”

“Fate sometimes deals terribly with a noble house in decay,” said Mlle. Armande, with tears in her eyes.

The Marquis came up as she spoke. He had been walking up and down the garden while he read the letter sent by his son after his return. Victurnien gave his itinerary from an aristocrat’s point of view; telling how he had been welcomed by the greatest Italian families of Genoa, Turin, Milan, Florence, Venice, Rome, and Naples. This flattering reception he owed to his name, he said, and partly, perhaps, to the Duchess as well. In short, he had made his appearance magnificently, and as befitted a d’Esgrignon.

“Have you been at your old tricks, Chesnel?” asked the Marquis.

Mlle. Armande made Chesnel an eager sign, dreadful to see. They understood each other. The poor father, the flower of feudal honor, must die with all his illusions. A compact of silence and devotion was ratified between the two noble hearts by a simple inclination of the head.

“Ah! Chesnel, it was not exactly in this way that the d’Esgrignons went into Italy at the end of the fourteenth century, when Marshal Trivulzio, in the service of the King of France, served under a d’Esgrignon, who had a Bayard too under his orders. Other times, other pleasures. And, for that matter, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse is at least the equal of a Marchesa di Spinola.”

And, on the strength of his genealogical tree, the old man swung himself off with a coxcomb’s air, as if he himself had once made a conquest of the Marchesa di Spinola, and still possessed the Duchess of to-day.

The two companions in unhappiness were left together on the garden bench, with the same thought for a bond



of union. They sat for a long time, saying little save vague, unmeaning words, watching the father walk away in his happiness, gesticulating as if he were talking to himself.

"What will become of him now?" Mlle. Armande asked after a while.

"Du Croisier has sent instructions to the MM. Keller; he is not to be allowed to draw any more without authorization."

"And there are debts," continued Mlle. Armande.

"I am afraid so."

"If he is left without resources, what will he do?"

"I dare not answer that question to myself."

"But he must be drawn out of that life, he must come back to us, or he will have nothing left."

"And nothing else left to him," Chesnel said gloomily. But Mlle. Armande as yet did not and could not understand the full force of those words.

"Is there any hope of getting him away from that woman, that Duchess? Perhaps she leads him on."

"He would not stick at a crime to be with her," said Chesnel, trying to pave the way to an intolerable thought by others less intolerable.

"Crime," repeated Mlle. Armande. "Oh, Chesnel, no one but you would think of such a thing!" she added, with a withering look; before such a look from a woman's eyes no mortal can stand. "There is but one crime that a noble can commit—the crime of high treason; and when he is beheaded, the block is covered with a black cloth, as it is for kings."

"The times have changed very much," said Chesnel, shaking his head. Victurnien had thinned his last thin, white hairs. "Our Martyr-King did not die like the English King Charles."

That thought soothed Mlle. Armande's splendid indignation; a shudder ran through her; but still she did not realize what Chesnel meant.

"To-morrow we will decide what we must do," she said; "it needs thought. At the worst, we have our lands."

"Yes," said Chesnel. "You and M. le Marquis own the

estate conjointly; but the larger part of it is yours. You can raise money upon it without saying a word to him."

The players at whist, reversis, boston, and backgammon noticed that evening that Mlle. Armande's features, usually so serene and pure, showed signs of agitation.

"That poor heroic child!" said the old Marquise de Castéran, "she must be suffering still. A woman never knows what her sacrifices to her family may cost her."

Next day it was arranged with Chesnel that Mlle. Armande should go to Paris to snatch her nephew from perdition. If anyone could carry off Victurnien, was it not the woman whose mother's heart yearned over him? Mlle. Armande made up her mind that she would go to the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse and tell her all. Still, some sort of pretext was necessary to explain the journey to the Marquis and the whole town. At some cost to her maidenly delicacy, Mlle. Armande allowed it to be thought that she was suffering from a complaint which called for a consultation of skilled and celebrated physicians. Goodness knows whether the town talked of this or no! But Mlle. Armande saw that something far more to her than her own reputation was at stake. She set out. Chesnel brought her his last bag of louis; she took it, without paying any attention to it, as she took her white capuchine and thread mittens.

"Generous girl! What grace!" he said, as he put her into the carriage with her maid, a woman who looked like a gray sister.

Du Croisier had thought out his revenge, as provincials think out everything. For studying out a question in all its bearings, there are no folk in this world like savages, peasants, and provincials; and this is how, when they proceed from thought to action, you find every contingency provided for from beginning to end. Diplomatists are children compared with these classes of mammals; they have time before them, an element which is lacking to those people who are obliged to think about a great many things, to superintend the progress of all kinds of schemes, to look forward for all sorts of contingencies in the wider interests of human affairs. Had du Croisier sounded poor Victurnien's nature so well,

that he foresaw how easily the young Count would lend himself to his schemes of revenge? Or was he merely profiting by an opportunity for which he had been on the watch for years? One circumstance there was, to be sure, in his manner of preparing his stroke, which shows a certain skill. Who was it that gave du Croisier warning of the moment? Was it the Kellers? Or could it have been President du Ronceret's son, then finishing his law studies in Paris?

Du Croisier wrote to Victurnien, telling him that the Kellers had been instructed to advance no more money; and that letter was timed to arrive just as the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse was in the utmost perplexity, and the Comte d'Esgrignon consumed by the sense of a poverty as dreadful as it was cunningly hidden. The wretched young man was exerting all his ingenuity to seem as if he were wealthy!

Now in the letter which informed the victim that in future the Kellers would make no further advances without security, there was a tolerably wide space left between the forms of an exaggerated respect and the signature. It was quite easy to tear off the best part of the letter and convert it into a bill of exchange for any amount. The diabolical missive had even been enclosed in an envelope, so that the other side of the sheet was blank. When it arrived, Victurnien was writhing in the lowest depths of despair. After two years of the most prosperous, sensual, thoughtless, and luxurious life, he found himself face to face with the most inexorable poverty; it was an absolute impossibility to procure money. There had been some throes of crisis before the journey came to an end. With the Duchess's help he had managed to extort various sums from bankers; but it had been with the greatest difficulty, and, moreover, those very amounts were about to start up again before him as overdue bills of exchange in all their rigor, with a stern summons to pay from the Bank of France and the commercial court. All through the enjoyments of those last weeks the unhappy boy had felt the point of the Commander's sword; at every supper-party he heard, like Don Juan, the heavy tread of the statue outside upon the stairs. He felt an unaccountable creeping of the flesh, a warning that the sirocco of debt is nigh at

hand. He reckoned on chance. For five years he had never turned up a blank in the lottery; his purse had always been replenished. After Chesnel had come du Croisier (he told himself), after du Croisier surely another gold mine would pour out its wealth. And besides, he was winning great sums at play; his luck at play had saved him several unpleasant steps already; and often a wild hope sent him to the Salon des Étrangers only to lose his winnings afterwards at whist at the club. His life for the past two months had been like the immortal finale of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*; and of a truth, if a young man has come to such a plight as Victurnien's that finale is enough to make him shudder. Can anything better prove the enormous power of music than that sublime rendering of the disorder and confusion arising out of a life wholly given up to sensual indulgence? that fearful picture of a deliberate effort to shut out the thought of debts and duels, deceit and evil luck? In that music Mozart disputes the palm with Molière. The terrific finale, with its glow, its power, its despair and laughter, its grisly specters and elfish women, centers about the prodigal's last effort made in the after-supper heat of wine, the frantic struggle which ends the drama. Victurnien was living through this infernal poem, and alone. He saw visions of himself—a friendless, solitary outcast, reading the words carved on the stone, the last words on the last page of the book that had held him spellbound—THE END!

Yes; for him all would be at an end, and that soon. Already he saw the cold, ironical eyes which his associates would turn upon him, and their amusement over his downfall. Some of them he knew were playing high on that gambling-table kept open all day long at the Bourse, or in private houses, at the clubs, and anywhere and everywhere in Paris; but not one of these men could spare a banknote to save an intimate. There was no help for it—Chesnel must be ruined. He had devoured Chesnel's living.

He sat with the Duchess in their box at the Italiens, the whole house envying them their happiness, and while he smiled at her, all the Furies were tearing at his heart. Indeed, to give some idea of the depths of doubt, despair, and

incredulity in which the boy was groveling; he who so clung to life—the life which the angel had made so fair—who so loved it, that he would have stooped to baseness merely to live; he, the pleasure-loving scapegrace, the degenerate d'Esgrignon, had even taken out his pistols, had gone so far as to think of suicide. He who would never have brooked the appearance of an insult was abusing himself in language which no man is likely to hear except from himself.

He left du Croisier's letter lying open on the bed. Joséphin had brought it in at nine o'clock. Victurnien's furniture had been seized, but he slept none the less. After he came back from the Opéra, he and the Duchess had gone to a voluptuous retreat, where they often spent a few hours together after the most brilliant court balls and evening parties and gayeties. Appearances were very cleverly saved. Their love-nest was a garret like any other to all appearance; Mme. de Maufrigneuse was obliged to bow her head with its court feathers or wreath of flowers to enter in at the door; but within all the peris of the East had made the chamber fair. And now that the Count was on the brink of ruin, he had longed to bid farewell to the dainty nest, which he had built to realize a day-dream worthy of his angel. Presently adversity would break the enchanted eggs; there would be no brood of white doves, no brilliant tropical birds, no more of the thousand bright-winged fancies which hover above our heads even to the last days of our lives. Alas! alas! in three days he must be gone; his bills had fallen into the hands of the money-lenders, the law proceedings had reached the last stage.

An evil thought crossed his brain. He would fly with the Duchess; they would live in some undiscovered nook in the wilds of North or South America; but—he would fly with a fortune, and leave his creditors to confront their bills. To carry out the plan, he had only to cut off the lower portion of that letter with du Croisier's signature, and to fill in the figures to turn it into a bill, and present it to the Kellers. There was a dreadful struggle with temptation; tears were shed, but the honor of the family triumphed, subject to one

condition. Victurnien wanted to be sure of his beautiful Diane; he would do nothing unless she should consent to their flight. So he went to the Duchess in the Rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and found her in coquettish morning dress, which cost as much in thought as in money, a fit dress in which to begin to play the part of Angel at eleven o'clock in the morning.

Mme. de Maufrigneuse was somewhat pensive. Cares of a similar kind were gnawing her mind; but she took them gallantly. Of all the various feminine organizations classified by physiologists, there is one that has something indescribably terrible about it. Such women combine strength of soul and clear insight, with a faculty for prompt decision, and a recklessness, or rather resolution in a crisis which would shake a man's nerves. And these powers lie out of sight beneath an appearance of the most graceful helplessness. Such women only among womankind afford examples of a phenomenon which Buffon recognized in men alone, to wit, the union, or rather the disunion, of two different natures in one human being. Other women are wholly women; wholly tender, wholly devoted, wholly mothers, completely null and completely tiresome; nerves and brain and blood are all in harmony; but the Duchess, and others like her, are capable of rising to the highest heights of feeling, or of showing the most selfish insensibility. It is one of the glories of Molière that he has given us a wonderful portrait of such a woman, from one point of view only, in that greatest of his full-length figures—Célimène; Célimène is the typical aristocratic woman, as Figaro, the second edition of Panurge, represents the people.

So the Duchess, being overwhelmed with debt, laid it upon herself to give no more than a moment's thought to the avalanche of cares, and to take her resolution once and for all; Napoleon could take up or lay down the burden of his thoughts in precisely the same way. The Duchess possessed the faculty of standing aloof from herself; she could look on as a spectator at the crash when it came, instead of submitting to be buried beneath. This was certainly great, but repulsive in a woman. When she awoke in the morning

she collected her thoughts; and by the time she had begun to dress she had looked at the danger in its fullest extent and faced the possibilities of terrific downfall. She pondered. Should she take refuge in a foreign country? Or should she go to the King and declare her debts to him? Or again, should she fascinate a du Tillet or a Nucingen, and gamble on the stock exchange to pay her creditors? The city man would find the money; he would be intelligent enough to bring her nothing but the profits, without so much as mentioning the losses, a piece of delicacy which would gloss all over. The catastrophe, and these various ways of averting it, had all been reviewed quite coolly, calmly, and without trepidation.

As a naturalist takes up some king of butterflies and fastens him down on cotton-wool with a pin, so Mme. de Maufigneuse had plucked love out of her heart while she pondered the necessity of the moment, and was quite ready to replace the beautiful passion on its immaculate setting so soon as her duchess's coronet was safe. *She* knew none of the hesitation which Cardinal Richelieu hid from all the world but Père Joseph; none of the doubts that Napoleon kept at first entirely to himself. "Either the one or the other," she told herself.

She was sitting by the fire, giving orders for her toilet for a drive in the Bois if the weather should be fine, when Victurnien came in.

The Comte d'Esgrignon, with all his stifed capacity, his so keen intellect, was in exactly the state which might have been looked for in the woman. His heart was beating violently, the perspiration broke out over him as he stood in his dandy's trappings; he was afraid as yet to lay a hand on the corner-stone which upheld the pyramid of his life with Diane. So much it cost him to know the truth. The cleverest men are fain to deceive themselves on one or two points if the truth once known is likely to humiliate them in their own eyes, and damage themselves with themselves. Victurnien forced his own irresolution into the field by committing himself.

"What is the matter with you?" Diane de Maufigneuse

had said at once, at the sight of her beloved Victurnien's face.

"Why, dear Diane, I am in such perplexity; a man gone to the bottom and at his last gasp is happy in comparison."

"Pshaw! it is nothing," said she; "you are a child. Let us see now; tell me about it."

"I am hopelessly in debt. I have come to the end of my tether."

"Is that all?" said she, smiling at him. "Money matters can always be arranged somehow or other; nothing is irretrievable except disasters in love."

Victurnien's mind being set at rest by this swift comprehension of his position, he unrolled the bright-colored web of his life for the last two years and a half; but it was the seamy side of it which he displayed with something of genius, and still more of wit, to his Diane. He told his tale with the inspiration of the moment, which fails no one in great crises; he had sufficient artistic skill to set it off by a varnish of delicate scorn for men and things. It was an aristocrat who spoke. And the Duchess listened as she could listen.

One knee was raised, for she sat with her foot on a stool. She rested her elbow on her knee and leant her face on her hand so that her fingers closed daintily over her shapely chin. Her eyes never left his; but thoughts by myriads flitted under the blue surface, like gleams of stormy light between two clouds. Her forehead was calm, her mouth gravely intent; grave with love; her lips were knotted fast by Victurnien's lips. To have her listening thus was to believe that a divine love flowed from her heart. Wherefore, when the Count had proposed flight to this soul, so closely knit to his own, he could not help crying, "You are an angel!"

The fair Maufrigneuse made silent answer; but she had not spoken as yet.

"Good, very good," she said at last. (She had not given herself up to the love expressed in her face; her mind had been entirely absorbed by deep-laid schemes which she kept to herself.) "But *that* is not the question, dear." (The "angel" was only "that" by this time.) "Let us think of your affairs. Yes, we will go, and the sooner the better."



Arrange it all; I will follow you. It is glorious to leave Paris and the world behind. I will set about my preparations in such a way that no one can suspect anything."

*I will follow you!* Just so Mlle. Mars might have spoken those words to send a thrill through two thousand listening men and women. When a Duchesse de Maufrigneuse offers, in such words, to make such a sacrifice to love, she has paid her debt. How should Victurnien speak of sordid details after that? He could so much the better hide his schemes, because Diane was particularly careful not to inquire into them. She was now, and always, as de Marsay said, an invited guest at a banquet wreathed with roses, a banquet which mankind, as in duty bound, made ready for her.

Victurnien would not go till the promise had been sealed. He must draw courage from his happiness before he could bring himself to do a deed on which, as he inwardly told himself, people would be certain to put a bad construction. Still (and this was the thought that decided him) he counted on his aunt and father to hush up the affair; he even counted on Chesnel. Chesnel would think of one more compromise. Besides, "this business," as he called it in his thoughts, was the only way of raising money on the family estate. With three hundred thousand francs, he and Diane would lead a happy life hidden in some palace in Venice: and there they would forget the world. They went through their romance in advance.

Next day Victurnien made out a bill for three hundred thousand francs, and took it to the Kellers. The Kellers advanced the money, for du Croisier happened to have a balance at the time; but they wrote to let him know that he must not draw again on them without giving them notice. Du Croisier, much astonished, asked for a statement of accounts. It was sent. Everything was explained. The day of his vengeance had arrived.

When Victurnien had drawn "his" money, he took it to Mme. de Maufrigneuse. She locked up the banknotes in her desk, and proposed to bid the world farewell by going to the Opéra to see it for the last time. Victurnien was

thoughtful, absent, and uneasy. He was beginning to reflect. He thought that his seat in the Duchess's box might cost him dear; that perhaps, when he had put the three hundred thousand francs in safety, it would be better to travel post, to fall at Chesnel's feet, and tell him all. But before they left the opera-house, the Duchess, in spite of herself, gave Victurnien an adorable glance, her eyes were shining with the desire to go back once more to bid farewell to the nest which she loved so much. And boy that he was, he lost a night.

The next day, at three o'clock, he was back again at the Hôtel de Maufrigneuse; he had come to take the Duchess's orders for that night's escape. And, "Why should we go?" asked she; "I have thought it all out. The Vicomtesse de Beauséant and the Duchesse de Langeais disappeared. If I go too, it will be something quite commonplace. We will brave the storm. It will be a far finer thing to do. I am sure of success." Victurnien's eyes dazzled; he felt as if his skin were dissolving and the blood oozing out all over him.

"What is the matter with you?" cried the fair Diane, noticing a hesitation which a woman never forgives. Your truly adroit lover will hasten to agree with any fancy that Woman may take into her head, and suggest reasons for doing otherwise, while leaving her free exercise of her right to change her mind, her intentions, and sentiments generally as often as she pleases. Victurnien was angry for the first time, angry with the wrath of a weak man of poetic temperament; it was a storm of rain and lightning flashes, but no thunder followed. The angel on whose faith he had risked more than his life, the honor of his house, was very roughly handled.

"So," said she, "we have come to this after eighteen months of tenderness! You are unkind, very unkind. Go away!—I do not want to see you again. I thought that you loved me. You do not."

"*I do not love you?*" repeated he, thunderstruck by the reproach.

"No, monsieur."

"And yet——" he cried. "Ah! if you but knew what I have just done for your sake!"

“And how have you done so much for me, monsieur? As if a man ought not to do anything for a woman that has done so much for him.”

“You are not worthy to know it!” Victurnien cried in a passion of anger.

“Oh!”

After that sublime “Oh!” Diane bowed her head on her hand and sat, still, cold, and implacable as angels naturally may be expected to do, seeing that they share none of the passions of humanity. At the sight of the woman he loved in this terrible attitude, Victurnien forgot his danger. Had he not just that moment wronged the most angelic creature on earth? He longed for forgiveness, he threw himself before her, he kissed her feet, he pleaded, he wept. Two whole hours the unhappy young man spent in all kinds of follies, only to meet the same cold face, while the great silent tears dropping one by one, were dried as soon as they fell lest the unworthy lover should try to wipe them away. The Duchess was acting a great agony, one of those hours which stamp the woman who passes through them as something august and sacred.

Two more hours went by. By this time the Count had gained possession of Diane’s hand; it felt cold and spiritless. The beautiful hand, with all the treasures in its grasp, might have been supple wood; there was nothing of Diane in it; he had taken it, it had not been given to him. As for Victurnien, the spirit had ebbed out of his frame, he had ceased to think. He would not have seen the sun in heaven. What was to be done? What course should he take? What resolution should he make? The man who can keep his head in such circumstances must be made of the same stuff as the convict who spent the night in robbing the Bibliothèque Royale of its gold medals, and repaired to his honest brother in the morning with a request to melt down the plunder. “What is to be done?” cried the brother. “Make me some coffee,” replied the thief. Victurnien sank into a bewildered stupor, darkness settled down over his brain. Visions of past rapture flitted across the misty gloom like the figures that Rafael painted against a black background; to these he must

bid farewell. Inexorable and disdainful, the Duchess played with the tip of her scarf. She looked in irritation at Victurnien from time to time; she coquetted with memories, she spoke to her lover of his rivals as if anger had finally decided her to prefer one of them to a man who could so change in one moment after twenty-eight months of love.

“Ah! that charming young Félix de Vandenesse, so faithful as he was to Mme. de Mortsauf, would never have permitted himself such a scene! He can love, can de Vandenesse! De Marsay, that terrible de Marsay, such a tiger as everyone thought him, was rough with other men; but, like all strong men, he kept his gentleness for women. Montriveau trampled the Duchesse de Langeais under foot, as Othello killed Desdemona, in a burst of fury which at any rate proved the extravagance of his love. It was not like a paltry squabble. There was rapture in being so crushed. Little, fair-haired, slim, and slender men loved to torment women; they could only reign over poor, weak creatures; it pleased them to have some ground for believing that they were men. The tyranny of love was their one chance of asserting their power. She did not know why she had put herself at the mercy of fair hair. Such men as de Marsay, Montriveau, and Vandenesse, dark-haired and well grown, had a ray of sunlight in their eyes.”

It was a storm of epigrams. Her speeches, like bullets, came hissing past his ears. Every word that Diane hurled at him was triple-barbed; she humiliated, stung, and wounded him with an art that was all her own, as half a score of savages can torture an enemy bound to a stake.

“You are mad!” he cried at last, at the end of his patience, and out he went in God knows what mood. He drove as if he had never handled the reins before, locked his wheels in the wheels of other vehicles, collided with the curbstone in the Place Louis-Quinze, went he knew not whither. The horse, left to its own devices, made a bolt for the stable along the Quai d’Orsay; but as he turned into the Rue de l’Université, Joséphin appeared to stop the runaway.

“You cannot go home, sir,” the old man said, with a scared face; “they have come with a warrant to arrest you.”

Victurnien thought that he had been arrested on the criminal charge, albeit there had not been time for the public prosecutor to receive his instructions. He had forgotten the matter of the bills of exchange, which had been stirred up again for some days past in the form of orders to pay, brought by the officers of the court with accompaniments in the shape of bailiffs, men in possession, magistrates, commissaries, policemen, and other representatives of social order. Like most guilty creatures, Victurnien had forgotten everything but his crime.

"It is all over with me," he cried.

"No, M. le Comte, drive as fast as you can to the Hôtel du Bon la Fontaine, in the Rue de Grenelle. Mlle. Armande is waiting there for you, the horses have been put in, she will take you with her."

Victurnien, in his trouble, caught like a drowning man at the branch that came to his hand; he rushed off to the inn, reached the place, and flung his arms about his aunt. Mlle. Armande cried as if her heart would break; anyone might have thought that she had a share in her nephew's guilt. They stepped into the carriage. A few minutes later they were on the road to Brest, and Paris lay behind them. Victurnien uttered not a sound; he was paralyzed. And when aunt and nephew began to speak, they talked at cross purposes; Victurnien, still laboring under the unlucky misapprehension which flung him into Mlle. Armande's arms, was thinking of his forgery; his aunt had the debts and the bills on her mind.

"You know all, aunt," he had said.

"Poor boy, yes, but we are here. I am not going to scold you just yet. Take heart."

"I must hide somewhere."

"Perhaps. . . . Yes, it is a very good idea."

"Perhaps I might get into Chesnel's house without being seen if we timed ourselves to arrive in the middle of the night?"

"That will be best. We shall be better able to hide this from my brother.—Poor angel! how unhappy he is!" said she, petting the unworthy child.

“ Ah! now I begin to know what dishonor means; it has chilled my love.”

“ Unhappy boy; what bliss and what misery!” And Mlle. Armande drew his fevered face to her breast and kissed his forehead, cold and damp though it was, as the holy women might have kissed the brow of the dead Christ when they laid Him in His grave-clothes. Following out the excellent scheme suggested by the prodigal son, he was brought by night to the quiet house in the Rue du Bercail; but chance ordered it that by so doing he ran straight into the wolf’s jaws, as the saying goes. That evening Chesnel had been making arrangements to sell his connection to M. Lepressoir’s head-clerk. M. Lepressoir was the notary employed by the Liberals, just as Chesnel’s practice lay among the aristocratic families. The young fellow’s relatives were rich enough to pay Chesnel the considerable sum of a hundred thousand francs in cash.

Chesnel was rubbing his hands. “ A hundred thousand francs will go a long way in buying up debts,” he thought. “ The young man is paying a high rate of interest on his loans. We will lock him up down here. I will go yonder myself and bring those curs to terms.”

Chesnel, honest Chesnel, upright, worthy Chesnel, called his darling Comte Victurnien’s creditors “ curs.”

Meanwhile his successor was making his way along the Rue du Bercail just as Mlle. Armande’s traveling carriage turned into it. Any young man might be expected to feel some curiosity if he saw a traveling carriage stop at a notary’s door in such a town and at such an hour of the night; the young man in question was sufficiently inquisitive to stand in a doorway and watch. He saw Mlle. Armande alight.

“ Mlle. Armande d’Esgrignon at this time of night!” said he to himself. “ What can be going forward at the d’Esgrignons?”

At the sight of mademoiselle, Chesnel opened the door circumspectly and set down the light which he was carrying; but when he looked out and saw Victurnien, Mlle. Armande’s first whispered word made the whole thing plain to him. He

looked up and down the street; it seemed quite deserted; he beckoned, and the young Count sprang out of the carriage and entered the courtyard. All was lost. Chesnel's successor had discovered Victurnien's hiding-place.

Victurnien was hurried into the house and installed in a room beyond Chesnel's private office. No one could enter it except across the old man's dead body.

"Ah! M. le Comte!" exclaimed Chesnel, notary no longer.

"Yes, monsieur," the Count answered, understanding his old friend's exclamation. "I did not listen to you; and now I have fallen into the depths, and I must perish."

"No, no," the good man answered, looking triumphantly from Mlle. Armande to the Count. "I have sold my connection. I have been working for a very long time now, and am thinking of retiring. By noon to-morrow I shall have a hundred thousand francs; many things can be settled with that. Mademoiselle, you are tired," he added; "go back to the carriage and go home and sleep. Business to-morrow."

"Is he safe?" returned she, looking at Victurnien.

"Yes."

She kissed her nephew; a few tears fell on his forehead. Then she went.

"My good Chesnel," said the Count, when they began to talk of business, "what are your hundred thousand francs in such a position as mine? You do not know the full extent of my troubles, I think."

Victurnien explained the situation. Chesnel was thunderstruck. But for the strength of his devotion, he would have succumbed to this blow. Tears streamed from the eyes that might well have had no tears left to shed. For a few moments he was a child again, for a few moments he was bereft of his senses; he stood like a man who should find his own house on fire, and through a window see the cradle ablaze and hear the hiss of the flames on his children's curls. He rose to his full height—*il se dressa en pied*, as Amyot would have said; he seemed to grow taller; he raised his withered hands and wrung them despairingly and wildly.

"If only your father may die and never know this, young

man! To be a forger is enough; a parricide you must not be. Fly, you say? No. They would condemn you for contempt of court! Oh, wretched boy! Why did you not forge *my* signature? I would have paid; I should not have taken the bill to the public prosecutor.—Now I can do nothing. You have brought me to a stand in the lowest pit in hell!—Du Croisier! What will come of it? What is to be done?—If you had killed a man, there might be some help for it. But forgery—*forgery!* And time—the time is flying,” he went on, shaking his fist towards the old clock. “You will want a sham passport now. One crime leads to another. First,” he added, after a pause, “first of all we must save the house of d’Esgignon.”

“But the money is still in Mme. de Maufrigneuse’s keeping,” exclaimed Victurnien.

“Ah!” exclaimed Chesnel. “Well, there is some hope left—a faint hope. Could we soften du Croisier, I wonder, or buy him over? He shall have all the lands if he likes. I will go to him; I will wake him and offer him all we have.—Besides, it was not you who forged that bill; it was I. I will go to jail; I am too old for the hulks, they can only put me in prison.”

“But the body of the bill is in my handwriting,” objected Victurnien, without a sign of surprise at this reckless devotion.

“Idiot! . . . that is, pardon, M. le Comte. Joséphin should have been made to write it,” the old notary cried wrathfully. “He is a good creature; he would have taken it all on his shoulders. But there is an end of it; the world is falling to pieces,” the old man continued, sinking exhausted into a chair. “Du Croisier is a tiger; we must be careful not to rouse him. What time is it? Where is the draft? If it is at Paris, it might be bought back from the Kellers; they might accommodate us. Ah! but there are dangers on all sides; a single false step means ruin. Money is wanted in any case. But, there! nobody knows you are here, you must live buried away in the cellar if needs must. I will go at once to Paris as fast as I can; I can hear the mail coach from Brest.”



In a moment the old man recovered the faculties of his youth—his agility and vigor. He packed up clothes for the journey, took money, brought a six-pound loaf to the little room beyond the office, and turned the key on his child by adoption.

“Not a sound in here,” he said, “no light at night; and stop here till I come back, or you will go to the hulks. Do you understand, M. le Comte? Yes, *to the hulks!* if anybody in a town like this knows that you are here.”

With that Chesnel went out, first telling his housekeeper to give out that he was ill, to allow no one to come into the house, to send everybody away, and to postpone business of every kind for three days. He wheedled the manager of the coach-office, made up a tale for his benefit—he had the makings of an ingenious novelist in him—and obtained a promise that if there should be a place, he should have it, passport or no passport, as well as a further promise to keep the hurried departure a secret. Luckily, the coach was empty when it arrived.

In the middle of the following night Chesnel was set down in Paris. At nine o'clock in the morning he waited on the Kellers, and learned that the fatal draft had returned to du Croisier three days since; but while obtaining this information, he in no way committed himself. Before he went away he inquired whether the draft could be recovered if the amount were refunded. François Keller's answer was to the effect that the document was du Croisier's property, and that it was entirely in his power to keep or return it. Then, in desperation, the old man went to the Duchess.

Mme. de Maufrigneuse was not at home to any visitor at that hour. Chesnel, feeling that every moment was precious, sat down in the hall, wrote a few lines, and succeeded in sending them to the lady by dint of wheedling, fascinating, bribing, and commanding the most insolent and inaccessible servants in the world. The Duchess was still in bed; but, to the great astonishment of her housemaid, the old man in black knee-breeches, ribbed stockings, and shoes with buckles to them, was shown into her room.

“What is it, monsieur?” she asked, posing in her dis-

order. "What does he want me for, ungrateful that he is?"

"It is this, Mme. la Duchesse," the good man exclaimed, "you have a hundred thousand crowns belonging to us."

"Yes," began she. "What does it signify——?"

"The money was gained by a forgery, for which we are going to the hulks, a forgery which we committed for love of you," Chesnel said quickly. "How is it that you did not guess it, so clever as you are? Instead of scolding the boy, you ought to have had the truth out of him, and stopped him while there was time, and saved him."

At the first words the Duchess understood; she felt ashamed of her behavior to so impassioned a lover, and afraid besides that she might be suspected of complicity. In her wish to prove that she had not touched the money left in her keeping, she lost all regard for appearances; and besides, it did not occur to her that a notary was a man. She flung off the eider-down quilt, sprang to her desk (flitting past the lawyer like an angel out of one of the vignettes which illustrate Lamartine's books), held out the notes, and went back in confusion to bed.

"You are an angel, madame." (She was to be an angel for all the world, it seemed.) "But this will not be the end of it. I count upon your influence to save us."

"To save you! I will do it or die! Love that will not shrink from a crime must be love indeed. Is there a woman in the world for whom such a thing has been done? Poor boy! Come, do not lose time, dear M. Chesnel; and count upon me as upon yourself."

"Mme. la Duchesse! Mme. la Duchesse!" It was all that he could say, so overcome was he. He cried, he could have danced; but he was afraid of losing his senses, and refrained.

"Between us, we will save him," she said, as he left the room.

Chesnel went straight to Joséphin. Joséphin unlocked the young Count's desk and writing-table. Very luckily, the notary found letters which might be useful, letters from du Croisier and the Kellers. Then he took a place in a

diligence which was just about to start; and by dint of fees to the postilions, the lumbering vehicle went as quickly as the coach. His two fellow-passengers on the journey happened to be in as great a hurry as he himself, and readily agreed to take their meals in the carriage. Thus swept over the road, the notary reached the Rue du Bercail, after three days of absence, an hour before midnight. And yet he was too late. He saw the gendarmes at the gate, crossed the threshold, and met the young Count in the courtyard. Victurnien had been arrested. If Chesnel had had the power, he would beyond a doubt have killed the officers and men; as it was, he could only fall on Victurnien's neck.

"If I cannot hush this matter up, you must kill yourself before the indictment is made out," he whispered. But Victurnien had sunk into such stupor, that he stared back uncomprehendingly.

"Kill myself?" he repeated.

"Yes. If your courage should fail, my boy, count upon me," said Chesnel, squeezing Victurnien's hand.

In spite of his anguish of mind and tottering limbs, he stood firmly planted, to watch the son of his heart, the Comte d'Esgrignon, go out of the courtyard between two gendarmes, with the commissary, the justice of the peace, and the clerk of the court; and not until the figures had disappeared, and the sound of footsteps had died away into silence, did he recover his firmness and presence of mind.

"You will catch cold, sir," Brigitte remonstrated.

"The Devil take you!" cried her exasperated master.

Never in the nine-and-twenty years that Brigitte had been in his service had she heard such words from him! Her candle fell out of her hands, but Chesnel neither heeded his housekeeper's alarm nor heard her exclaim. He hurried off towards the Val-Noble.

"He is out of his mind," said she; "after all, it is no wonder. But where is he off to? I cannot possibly go after him. What will become of him? Suppose that he should drown himself!"

And Brigitte went to waken the head-clerk and send him to look along the river bank; the river had a gloomy reputa-

tion just then, for there had lately been two cases of suicide—one a young man full of promise, and the other a girl, a victim of seduction. Chesnel went straight to the Hôtel du Croisier. There lay his only hope. The law requires that a charge of forgery must be brought by a private individual. It was still possible to withdraw if du Croisier chose to admit that there had been a misapprehension; and Chesnel had hopes, even then, of buying the man over.

M. and Mme. du Croisier had much more company than usual that evening. Only a few persons were in the secret. M. du Ronceret, President of the Tribunal; M. Sauvager, deputy public prosecutor; and M. du Coudrai, a registrar of mortgages, who had lost his post by voting on the wrong side, were the only persons who were supposed to know about it; but Mesdames du Ronceret and du Coudrai had told the news, in strict confidence, to one or two intimate friends, so that it had spread half over the semi-noble, semi-*bourgeois* assembly at M. du Croisier's. Everybody felt the gravity of the situation, but no one ventured to speak of it openly; and, moreover, Mme. du Croisier's attachment to the upper sphere was so well known, that people scarcely dared to mention the disaster which had befallen the d'Esgrignons or to ask for particulars. The persons most interested were waiting till good Mme. du Croisier retired, for that lady always retreated to her room at the same hour to perform her religious exercises as far as possible out of her husband's sight.

Du Croisier's adherents, knowing the secret and the plans of the great commercial power, looked round when the lady of the house disappeared; but there were still several persons present whose opinions or interests marked them out as untrustworthy, so they continued to play. About half-past eleven all had gone save intimates: M. Sauvager, M. Camusot, the examining magistrate, and his wife, M. and Mme. du Ronceret and their son Fabien, M. and Mme. du Coudrai, and Joseph Blondet, the eldest son of an old judge; ten persons in all.

It is told of Talleyrand that one fatal day, three hours after midnight, he suddenly interrupted a game of cards in the Duchesse de Luynes' nouse by laying down his watch on

the table and asking the players whether the Prince de Condé had any child but the Duc d'Enghien.

"Why do you ask?" returned Mme. de Luynes, "when you know so well that he has not."

"Because if the Prince has no other son, the House of Condé is now at an end."

There was a moment's pause, and they finished the game.— President du Ronceret now did something very similar. Perhaps he had heard the anecdote; perhaps, in political life, little minds and great minds are apt to hit upon the same expression. He looked at his watch, and interrupted the game of boston with—

"At this moment M. le Comte d'Esgrignon is arrested, and that house which has held its head so high is dishonored forever."

"Then, have you got hold of the boy?" du Coudrai cried gleefully.

Everyone in the room, with the exception of the President, the deputy, and du Croisier, looked startled.

"He has just been arrested in Chesnel's house, where he was hiding," said the deputy public prosecutor, with the air of a capable but unappreciated public servant, who ought by right to be Minister of Police. M. Sauvager, the deputy, was a thin, tall young man of five-and-twenty, with a lengthy olive-hued countenance, black frizzled hair, and deep-set eyes; the wide, dark rings beneath them were completed by the wrinkled purple eyelids above. With a nose like the beak of some bird of prey, a pinched mouth, and cheeks worn lean with study and hollowed by ambition, he was the very type of a second-rate personage on the lookout for something to turn up, and ready to do anything if so he might get on in the world, while keeping within the limitations of the possible and the forms of law. His pompous expression was an admirable indication of the time-serving eloquence to be expected of him. Chesnel's successor had discovered the young Count's hiding-place to him, and he took great credit to himself for his penetration.

The news seemed to come as a shock to the examining magistrate, M. Camusot, who had granted the warrant of

arrest on Sauvager's application, with no idea that it was to be executed so promptly. Camusot was short, fair, and fat already, though he was only thirty years old or thereabouts; he had the flabby, livid look peculiar to officials who live shut up in their private study or in a court of justice; and his little, pale, yellow eyes were full of the suspicion which is often mistaken for shrewdness.

Mme. Camusot looked at her spouse, as who should say, "Was I not right?"

"Then the case will come on," was Camusot's comment.

"Could you doubt it?" asked du Coudrai. "Now they have got the Count, all is over."

"There is the jury," said Camusot. "In this case, M. le Préfet is sure to take care that after the challenges from the prosecution and the defense, the jury to a man will be for an acquittal.—My advice would be to come to a compromise," he added, turning to du Croisier.

"Compromise!" echoed the President; "why, he is in the hands of justice."

"Acquitted or convicted, the Comte d'Esgrignon will be dishonored all the same," put in Sauvager.

"I am bringing an action,"<sup>1</sup> said du Croisier. "I shall have Dupin senior. We shall see how the d'Esgrignon family will escape out of his clutches."

"The d'Esgrignons will defend the case and have counsel from Paris; they will have Berryer," said Mme. Camusot. "You will have a Roland for your Oliver."

Du Croisier, M. Sauvager, and the President du Ronceret looked at Camusot, and one thought troubled their minds. The lady's tone, the way in which she flung her proverb in the faces of the eight conspirators against the house of d'Esgrignon, caused them inward perturbation, which they dissembled as provincials can dissemble, by dint of lifelong practice in the shifts of a monastic existence. Little Mme. Camusot saw their change of countenance and subsequent composure when they scented opposition on the

<sup>1</sup>A trial for an offense of this kind in France is an action brought by a private person (*partie civile*) to recover damages and at the same time a criminal prosecution conducted on behalf of the Government.—TR.

part of the examining magistrate. When her husband unveiled the thoughts in the back of his own mind, she had tried to plumb the depths of hate in du Croisier's adherents. She wanted to find out how du Croisier had gained over this deputy public prosecutor, who had acted so promptly and so directly in opposition to the views of the central power.

"In any case," continued she, "if celebrated counsel come down from Paris, there is a prospect of a very interesting session in the Court of Assize; but the matter will be snuffed out between the Tribunal and the Court of Appeal. It is only to be expected that the Government should do all that can be done, below the surface, to save a young man who comes of a great family, and has the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse for friend. So I do not think that we shall have 'a sensation at Landernau.'"

"How you go on, madame!" the President said sternly. "Can you suppose that the Court of First Instance will be influenced by considerations which have nothing to do with justice?"

"The event proves the contrary," she said meaningly, looking full at Sauvager and the President, who glanced coldly at her.

"Explain yourself, madame," said Sauvager. "You speak as if we had not done our duty."

"Mme. Camusot meant nothing," interposed her husband.

"But has not M. le Président just said something prejudicing a case which depends on the examination of the prisoner?" said she. "And the evidence is still to be taken, and the Court has not given its decision?"

"We are not at the law-courts," the deputy public prosecutor replied tartly; "and besides, we know all that."

"But the public prosecutor knows nothing at all about it yet," returned she, with an ironical glance. "He will come back from the Chamber of Deputies in all haste. You have cut out his work for him, and he, no doubt, will speak for himself."

The deputy prosecutor knitted his thick bushy brows. Those interested read tardy scruples in his countenance. A great silence followed, broken by no sound but the dealing

of the cards. M. and Mme. Camusot, sensible of a decided chill in the atmosphere, took their departure to leave the conspirators to talk at their ease.

"Camusot," the lady began in the street, "you went too far. Why lead those people to suspect that you will have no part in their schemes? They will play you some ugly trick."

"What can they do? I am the only examining magistrate."

"Cannot they slander you in whispers, and procure your dismissal?"

At that very moment Chesnel ran up against the couple. The old notary recognized the examining magistrate; and with the lucidity which comes of an experience of business, he saw that the fate of the d'Esgrignons lay in the hands of the young man before him.

"Ah, sir!" he exclaimed, "we shall soon need you badly. Just a word with you.—Your pardon, madame," he added, as he drew Camusot aside.

Mme. Camusot, as a good conspirator, looked towards du Croisier's house, ready to break up the conversation if anybody appeared; but she thought, and thought rightly, that their enemies were busy discussing this unexpected turn which she had given to the affair. Chesnel meanwhile drew the magistrate into a dark corner under the wall, and lowered his voice for his companion's ear.

"If you are for the house of d'Esgrignon," he said, "Mme. la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, the Prince de Cadignan, the Ducs de Navarreins and de Lenoncourt, the Keeper of the Seals, the Chancellor, the King himself, will interest themselves in you. I have just come from Paris; I knew all about this; I went post-haste to explain everything at court. We are counting on you, and I will keep your secret. If you are hostile, I shall go back to Paris to-morrow and lodge a complaint with the Keeper of the Seals that there is a suspicion of corruption. Several functionaries were at du Croisier's house to-night, and no doubt, ate and drank there, contrary to law; and besides, they are friends of his."



Chesnel would have brought the Almighty to intervene if he had had the power. He did not wait for an answer; he left Camusot and fled like a deer towards du Croisier's house. Camusot, meanwhile, bidden to reveal the notary's confidences, was at once assailed with, "Was I not right, dear?"—a wifely formula used on all occasions, but rather more vehemently when the fair speaker is in the wrong. By the time they reached home, Camusot had admitted the superiority of his partner in life, and appreciated his good fortune in belonging to her, which confession, doubtless, was the prelude of a blissful night.

Chesnel met his foes in a body as they left du Croisier's house, and began to fear that du Croisier had gone to bed. In his position he was compelled to act quickly, and any delay was a misfortune.

"In the King's name!" he cried, as the man-servant was closing the hall door. He had just brought the King on the scene for the benefit of an ambitious little official, and the word was still on his lips. He fretted and chafed while the door was unbarred; then, swift as a thunderbolt, dashed into the antechamber, and spoke to the servant—

"A hundred crowns to you, young man, if you can wake Mme. du Croisier and send her to me this instant. Tell her anything you like."

Chesnel grew cool and composed as he opened the door of the brightly lighted drawing-room, where du Croisier was striding up and down. For a moment the two men scanned each other, with hatred and enmity, twenty years deep, in their eyes. One of the two had his foot on the heart of the house of d'Esgrignon; the other, with a lion's strength, came forward to pluck it away.

"Your humble servant, sir," said Chesnel. "Have you made the charge?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was it made?"

"Yesterday."

"Have any steps been taken since the warrant of arrest was issued?"

"I believe so."

"I have come to treat with you."

"Justice must take its course, nothing can stop it, the arrest has been made."

"Never mind that, I am at your orders, at your feet." The old man knelt before du Croisier, and stretched out his hands entreatingly.

"What do you want? Our lands, our castle? Take all; withdraw the charge; leave us nothing but life and honor. And over and besides all this, I will be your servant, command and I will obey."

Du Croisier sat down in an easy-chair and left the old man to kneel.

"You are not vindictive," pleaded Chesnel; "you are good-hearted, you do not bear us such a grudge that you will not listen to terms. Before daylight the young man ought to be at liberty."

"The whole town knows that he has been arrested," returned du Croisier, enjoying his revenge.

"It is a great misfortune; but as there will neither be proofs nor trial, we can easily manage that."

Du Croisier reflected. He seemed to be struggling with self-interest; Chesnel thought that he had gained a hold on his enemy through the great motive of human action. At that supreme moment Mme. du Croisier appeared.

"Come here and help me to soften your dear husband, madame!" said Chesnel, still on his knees. Mme. du Croisier made him rise with every sign of profound astonishment. Chesnel explained his errand; and when she knew it, the generous daughter of the intendants of the Ducs d'Alençon turned to du Croisier with tears in her eyes.

"Ah! monsieur, can you hesitate? The d'Esgrignons, the honor of the province!" she said.

"There is more in it than that," exclaimed du Croisier, rising to begin his restless walk again.

"More? What more?" asked Chesnel in amazement.

"France is involved, M. Chesnel. It is a question of the country, of the people, of giving my lords your nobles a lesson, and teaching them that there is such a thing as justice, and law, and a *bourgeoisie*—a lesser nobility as good

as they, and a match for them! There shall be no more trampling down half a score of wheat fields for a single hare; no bringing shame on families by seducing unprotected girls; they shall not look down on others as good as they are, and mock at them for ten whole years, without finding out at last that these things swell into avalanches, and those avalanches will fall and crush and bury my lords the nobles. You want to go back to the old order of things. You want to tear up the social compact, the Charter in which our rights are set forth——”

“And so?”

“Is it not a sacred mission to open the people’s eyes?” cried du Croisier. “Their eyes will be opened to the morality of your party when they see nobles going to be tried at the Assize Court like Pierre and Jacques. They will say, then, that small folk who keep their self-respect are as good as great folk that bring shame on themselves. The Assize Court is a light for all the world. Here, I am the champion of the people, the friend of law. You yourselves twice flung me on the side of the people—once when you refused an alliance, twice when you put me under the ban of your society. You are reaping as you have sown.”

If Chesnel was startled by this outburst, so no less was Mme. du Croisier. To her this was a terrible revelation of her husband’s character, a new light not merely on the past but on the future as well. Any capitulation on the part of the colossus was apparently out of the question; but Chesnel in no wise retreated before the impossible.

“What, monsieur?” said Mme. du Croisier. “Would you not forgive? Then you are not a Christian.”

“I forgive as God forgives, madame, on certain conditions.”

“And what are they?” asked Chesnel, thinking that he saw a ray of hope.

“The elections are coming on; I want the votes at your disposal.”

“You shall have them.”

“I wish that we, my wife and I, should be received familiarly every evening, with an appearance of friendliness

at any rate, by M. le Marquis d'Esgrignon and his circle," continued du Croisier.

"I do not know how we are going to compass it, but you shall be received."

"I wish to have the family bound over by a surety of four hundred thousand francs, and by a written document stating the nature of the compromise, so as to keep a loaded cannon pointed at its heart."

"We agree," said Chesnel, without admitting that the three hundred thousand francs was in his possession; "but the amount must be deposited with a third party and returned to the family after your election and repayment."

"No; after the marriage of my grand-niece, Mlle. Duval. She will very likely have four million francs some day; the reversion of our property (mine and my wife's) shall be settled upon her by her marriage-contract, and you shall arrange a match between her and the young Count."

"Never!"

"*Never!*" repeated du Croisier, quite intoxicated with triumph. "Good-night!"

"Idiot that I am," thought Chesnel, "why did I shrink from a lie to such a man?"

Du Croisier took himself off; he was pleased with himself; he had enjoyed Chesnel's humiliation; he had held the destinies of a proud house, the representative of the aristocracy of the province, suspended in his hand; he had set the print of his heel on the very heart of the d'Esgrignons; and, finally, he had broken off the whole negotiation on the score of his wounded pride. He went up to his room, leaving his wife alone with Chesnel. In his intoxication, he saw his victory clear before him. He firmly believed that the three hundred thousand francs had been squandered; the d'Esgrignons must sell or mortgage all that they had to raise the money; the Assize Court was inevitable to his mind.

An affair of forgery can always be settled out of court in France if the missing amount is returned. The losers by the crime are usually well-to-do, and have no wish to blight an imprudent man's character. But du Croisier had no mind to slacken his hold until he knew what he was about. He

meditated until he fell asleep on the magnificent manner in which his hopes would be fulfilled by way of the Assize Court or by marriage. The murmur of voices below, the lamentations of Chesnel and Mme. du Croisier, sounded sweet in his ears.

Mme. du Croisier shared Chesnel's views of the d'Esgri-gnons. She was a deeply religious woman, a Royalist attached to the *noblesse*; the interview had been in every way a cruel shock to her feelings. She, a stanch Royalist, had heard the roaring of that Liberalism, which, in her director's opinion, wished to crush the Church. The Left benches for her meant the popular upheaval and the scaffolds of 1793.

"What would your uncle, that sainted man who hears us, say to this?" exclaimed Chesnel. Mme. du Croisier made no reply, but the great tears rolled down her cheeks.

"You have already been the cause of one poor boy's death; his mother will go mourning all her days," continued Chesnel (he saw how his words told, but he would have struck harder and even broken this woman's heart to save Victurnien). "Do you want to kill Mlle. Armande, for she would not survive the dishonor of the house for a week? Do you wish to be the death of poor Chesnel, your old notary? For I shall kill the Count in prison before they shall bring the charge against him, and take my own life afterwards, before they shall try me for murder in an Assize Court."

"That is enough! that is enough, my friend! I would do anything to put a stop to such an affair; but I never knew M. du Croisier's real character until a few minutes ago. To you I can make the admission: there is nothing to be done."

"But what if there is?"

"I would give half the blood in my veins that it were so," said she, finishing her sentence by a wistful shake of the head.

As the First Consul, beaten on the field of Marengo till five o'clock in the evening, by six o'clock saw the tide of battle turned by Desaix's desperate attack and Kellermann's terrific charge, so Chesnel in the midst of defeat saw the beginnings of victory. No one but a Chesnel, an old notary,

an ex-steward of the manor, old Maître Sorbier's junior clerk, in the sudden flash of lucidity which comes with despair, could rise thus, high as a Napoleon, nay, higher. This was not Marengo, it was Waterloo, and the Prussians had come up; Chesnel saw this, and was determined to beat them off the field.

"Madame," he said, "remember that I have been your man of business for twenty years; remember that if the d'Esgrignons mean the honor of the province, you represent the honor of the *bourgeoisie*; it rests with you, and you alone, to save the ancient house. Now, answer me; are you going to allow dishonor to fall on the shade of your dead uncle, on the d'Esgrignons, on poor Chesnel? Do you want to kill Mlle. Armande weeping yonder? Or do you wish to expiate wrongs done to others by a deed which will rejoice your ancestors, the intendants of the Dukes of Alençon, and bring comfort to the soul of our dear Abbé. If he could rise from his grave, he would command you to do this thing that I beg of you upon my knees."

"What is it?" asked Mme. du Croisier.

"Well. Here are the hundred thousand crowns," said Chesnel, drawing the bundles of notes from his pocket. "Take them, and there will be an end of it."

"If that is all," she began, "and if no harm can come of it to my husband——"

"Nothing but good," Chesnel replied. "You are saving him from eternal punishment in hell, at the cost of a slight disappointment here below."

"He will not be compromised, will he?" she asked, looking into Chesnel's face.

Then Chesnel read the depths of the poor wife's mind. Mme. du Croisier was hesitating between her two creeds; between wifely obedience to her husband as laid down by the Church, and obedience to the altar and the throne. Her husband, in her eyes, was acting wrongly, but she dared not blame him; she would fain save the d'Esgrignons, but she was loyal to her husband's interests.

"Not in the least," Chesnel answered; "your old notary swears it by the Holy Gospels——"

He had nothing left to lose for the d'Esgrignons but his soul; he risked it now by this horrible perjury, but Mme. du Croisier must be deceived, there was no other choice but death. Without losing a moment, he dictated a form of receipt by which Mme. du Croisier acknowledged payment of a hundred thousand crowns five days before the fatal letter of exchange appeared; for he recollected that du Croisier was away from home, superintending improvements on his wife's property at the time.

"Now swear to me that you will declare before the examining magistrate that you received the money on that date," he said, when Mme. du Croisier had taken the notes and he held the receipt in his hand.

"It will be a lie, will it not?"

"Venial sin," said Chesnel.

"I could not do it without consulting my director, M. l'Abbé Couturier."

"Very well," said Chesnel, "will you be guided entirely by his advice in this affair?"

"I promise that."

"And you must not give the money to M. du Croisier until you have been before the magistrate."

"No. Ah! God give me strength to appear in a Court of Justice and maintain a lie before men!"

Chesnel kissed Mme. du Croisier's hand, then stood upright, and majestic as one of the prophets that Rafael painted in the Vatican.

"Your uncle's soul is thrilled with joy," he said; "you have wiped out forever the wrong that you did by marrying an enemy of altar and throne"—words that made a lively impression on Mme. du Croisier's timorous mind.

Then Chesnel all at once bethought himself that he must make sure of the lady's director, the Abbé Couturier. He knew how obstinately devout souls can work for the triumph of their views when once they come forward for their side, and wished to secure the concurrence of the Church as early as possible. So he went to the Hôtel d'Esgrignon, roused up Mlle. Armande, gave her an account of that night's work,

and sped her to fetch the Bishop himself into the forefront of the battle.

“Ah, God in heaven! Thou must save the house of d’Esgrignon!” he exclaimed, as he went slowly home again. “The affair is developing now into a fight in a Court of Law. We are face to face with men that have passions and interests of their own; we can get anything out of them. This du Croisier has taken advantage of the public prosecutor’s absence; the public prosecutor is devoted to us, but since the opening of the Chambers he has gone to Paris. Now, what can they have done to get round his deputy? They have induced him to take up the charge without consulting his chief. This mystery must be looked into, and the ground surveyed to-morrow; and then, perhaps, when I have unraveled this web of theirs, I will go back to Paris to set great powers at work through Mme. de Maufrigneuse.”

So he reasoned, poor, aged, clear-sighted wrestler, before he lay down half dead with bearing the weight of so much emotion and fatigue. And yet, before he fell asleep he ran a searching eye over the list of magistrates, taking all their secret ambitions into account, casting about for ways of influencing them, calculating his chances in the coming struggle. Chesnel’s prolonged scrutiny of consciences, given in a condensed form, will perhaps serve as a picture of the judicial world in a country town.

Magistrates and officials generally are obliged to begin their career in the provinces; judicial ambition there ferments. At the outset every man looks towards Paris; they all aspire to shine in the vast theater where great political causes come before the courts, and the higher branches of the legal profession are closely connected with the palpitating interests of society. But few are called to that paradise of the man of law, and nine-tenths of the profession are bound sooner or later to regard themselves as shelved for good in the provinces. Wherefore, every Tribunal of First Instance and every Court-Royal is sharply divided in two. The first section has given up hope, and is either torpid or content; content with the excessive respect paid to office in a country town, or torpid with tranquillity. The second section is



made up of the younger sort, in whom the desire of success is untempered as yet by disappointment, and of the really clever men urged on continually by ambition as with a goad; and these two are possessed with a sort of fanatical belief in their order.

At this time the younger men were full of Royalist zeal against the enemies of the Bourbons. The most insignificant deputy official was dreaming of conducting a prosecution, and praying with all his might for one of those political cases which bring a man's zeal into prominence, draw the attention of the higher powers, and mean advancement for King's men. Was there a member of any official staff of prosecuting counsel who could hear of a Bonapartist conspiracy breaking out somewhere else without a feeling of envy? Where was the man that did not burn to discover a Caron, or a Berton, or a revolt of some sort? With reasons of State, and the necessity of diffusing the monarchical spirit throughout France as their basis, and a fierce ambition stirred up whenever party spirit ran high, these ardent politicians on their promotion were lucid, clear-sighted, and perspicacious. They kept up a vigorous detective system throughout the kingdom; they did the work of spies, and urged the nation along a path of obedience, from which it had no business to swerve.

Justice, thus informed with monarchical enthusiasm, atoned for the errors of the ancient parliaments, and walked, perhaps, too ostentatiously hand in hand with religion. There was more zeal than discretion shown; but justice sinned not so much in the direction of Machiavellism as by giving too candid expression to its views, when those views appeared to be opposed to the general interests of a country which must be put safely out of reach of revolutions. But taken as a whole, there was still too much of the *bourgeois* element in the administration; it was too readily moved by petty Liberal agitation; and as a result, it was inevitable that it should incline sooner or later to the Constitutional party, and join ranks with the *bourgeoisie* in the day of battle. In the great body of legal functionaries, as in other departments of the administration, there was not wanting a certain hypoc-

ris, or rather that spirit of imitation which always leads France to model herself on the Court, and, quite unintentionally, to deceive the powers that be.

Officials of both complexions were to be found in the court on which young d'Esgrignon's fate depended. M. le Président du Ronceret and an elderly judge, Blondet by name, represented the section of functionaries shelved for good, and resigned to stay where they were; while the young and ambitious party comprised the examining magistrate M. Camusot, and his deputy M. Michu, appointed through the interest of the Cinq-Cygnés, and certain of promotion to the Court of Appeal of Paris at the first opportunity.

Président du Ronceret held a permanent post; it was impossible to turn him out. The aristocratic party declined to give him what he considered to be his due, socially speaking; so he declared for the *bourgeoisie*, glossed over his disappointment with the name of independence, and failed to realize that his opinions condemned him to remain a president of a court of first instance for the rest of his life. Once started on this track, the sequence of events led du Ronceret to place his hopes of advancement on the triumph of du Croisier and the Left. He was in no better odor at the Prefecture than at the Court-Royal. He was compelled to keep on good terms with the authorities; the Liberals distrusted him, consequently he belonged to neither party. He was obliged to resign his chances of election to du Croisier, he exercised no influence, and played a secondary part. The false position reacted on his character; he was soured and discontented; he was tired of political ambiguity, and privately had made up his mind to come forward openly as leader of the Liberal party, and so to strike ahead of du Croisier. His behavior in the d'Esgrignon affair was the first step in this direction. To begin with, he was an admirable representative of that section of the middle classes which allows its petty passions to obscure the wider interests of the country; a class of crotchety politicians, upholding the government one day and opposing it the next, compromising every cause and helping none; helpless after they have

done the mischief till they set about brewing more; unwilling to face their own incompetence, thwarting authority while professing to serve it. With a compound of arrogance and humility they demand of the people more submission than kings expect, and fret their souls because those above them are not brought down to their level, as if greatness could be little, as if power existed without force.

President du Ronceret was a tall, spare man with a receding forehead and scanty, auburn hair. He was wall-eyed, his complexion was blotched, his lips thin and hard, his scarcely audible voice came out like the husky wheezings of asthma. He had for a wife a great, solemn, clumsy creature, tricked out in the most ridiculous fashion, and outrageously overdressed. Mme. la Présidente gave herself the airs of a queen; she wore vivid colors, and always appeared at balls adorned with the turban, dear to the British female, and lovingly cultivated in out-of-the-way districts in France. Each of the pair had an income of four or five thousand francs, which, with the President's salary, reached a total of some twelve thousand. In spite of a decided tendency to parsimony, vanity required that they should receive one evening in the week. Du Croisier might import modern luxury into the town, M. and Mme. du Ronceret were faithful to the old traditions. They had always lived in the old-fashioned house belonging to Mme. du Ronceret, and had made no changes in it since their marriage. The house stood between a garden and a courtyard. The gray old gable end, with one window in each story, gave upon the road. High walls inclosed the garden and the yard, but the space taken up beneath them in the garden by a walk shaded with chestnut trees was filled in the yard by a row of outbuildings. An old rust-devoured iron gate in the garden wall balanced the yard gateway, a huge, double-leaved carriage entrance with a buttress on either side, and a mighty shell on the top. The same shell was repeated over the house door.

The whole place was gloomy, close, and airless. The row of iron-grated openings in the opposite wall, as you entered, reminded you of prison windows. Every passer-by could look in through the railings to see how the garden grew; the

flowers in the little square borders never seemed to thrive there.

The drawing-room on the ground floor was lighted by a single window on the side of the street, and a French window above a flight of steps, which gave upon the garden. The dining-room on the other side of the great antechamber, with its windows also looking out into the garden, was exactly the same size as the drawing-room, and all three apartments were in harmony with the general air of gloom. It wearied your eyes to look at the ceilings all divided up by huge painted crossbeams and adorned with a feeble lozenge pattern or a rosette in the middle. The paint was old, startling in tint, and begrimed with smoke. The sun had faded the heavy silk curtains in the drawing-room; the old-fashioned Beauvais tapestry which covered the white-painted furniture had lost all its color with wear. A Louis-Quinze clock on the chimney-piece stood between two extravagant, branched sconces filled with yellow wax candles, which the *Présidente* only lighted on occasions when the old-fashioned rock-crystal chandelier emerged from its green wrapper. Three card-tables, covered with threadbare baize, and a backgammon box, sufficed for the recreations of the company; and *Mme. du Ronceret* treated them to such refreshments as cider, chestnuts, pastry puffs, glasses of *eau sucrée*, and home-made orgeat. For some time past she had made a practice of giving a party once a fortnight, when tea and some pitiable attempts at pastry appeared to grace the occasion.

Once a quarter the *du Roncerets* gave a grand three-course dinner, which made a great sensation in the town, a dinner served up in execrable ware, but prepared with the science for which the provincial cook is remarkable. It was a Gargantuan repast, which lasted for six whole hours, and by abundance the President tried to vie with *du Croisier's* elegance.

And so *du Ronceret's* life and its accessories were just what might have been expected from his character and his false position. He felt dissatisfied at home without precisely knowing what was the matter; but he dared not go

to any expense to change existing conditions, and was only too glad to put by seven or eight thousand francs every year, so as to leave his son Fabien a handsome private fortune. Fabien du Ronceret had no mind for the magistracy, the bar, or the civil service, and his pronounced turn for doing nothing drove his parent to despair.

On this head there was rivalry between the President and the Vice-President, old M. Blondet. M. Blondet, for a long time past, had been sedulously cultivating an acquaintance between his son and the Blandureau family. The Blandureaus were well-to-do linen manufacturers, with an only daughter, and it was on this daughter that the President had fixed his choice of a wife for Fabien. Now, Joseph Blondet's marriage with Mlle. Blandureau depended on his nomination to the post which his father, old Blondet, hoped to obtain for him when he himself should retire. But President du Ronceret, in underhand ways, was thwarting the old man's plans, and working indirectly upon the Blandureaus. Indeed, if it had not been for this affair of young d'Esgrignon's, the astute President might have cut them out, father and son, for their rivals were very much richer.

M. Blondet, the victim of the Machiavellian President's intrigues, was one of the curious figures which lie buried away in the provinces like old coins in a crypt. He was at that time a man of sixty-seven or thereabouts, but he carried his years well; he was very tall, and in build reminded you of the canons of the good old times. The smallpox had riddled his face with numberless dints, and spoilt the shape of his nose by imparting to it a gimlet-like twist; it was a countenance by no means lacking in character, very evenly tinted with a diffused red, lighted up by a pair of bright little eyes, with a sardonic look in them, while a certain sarcastic twitch of the purpled lips gave expression to that feature.

Before the Revolution broke out, Blondet senior had been a barrister; afterwards he became the public accuser, and one of the mildest of those formidable functionaries. Goodman Blondet, as they used to call him, deadened the force of the new doctrines by acquiescing in them all, and putting

none of them in practice. He had been obliged to send one or two nobles to prison; but his further proceedings were marked with such deliberation, that he brought them through to the 9th Thermidor with a dexterity which won respect for him on all sides. As a matter of fact, Goodman Blondet ought to have been President of the Tribunal, but when the courts of law were reorganized he had been set aside; Napoleon's aversion from Republicans was apt to reappear in the smallest appointments under his government. The qualification of ex-public accuser, written in the margin of the list against Blondet's name, set the Emperor inquiring of Cambacérès whether there might not be some scion of an ancient parliamentary stock to appoint instead. The consequence was that du Ronceret, whose father had been a councilor of parliament, was nominated to the presidency; but, the Emperor's repugnance notwithstanding, Cambacérès allowed Blondet to remain on the bench, saying that the old barrister was one of the best jurisconsults in France.

Blondet's talents, his knowledge of the old law of the land and subsequent legislation, should by rights have brought him far in his profession; but he had this much in common with some few great spirits; he entertained a prodigious contempt for his own special knowledge, and reserved all his pretensions, leisure, and capacity for a second pursuit unconnected with the law. To this pursuit he gave his almost exclusive attention. The good man was passionately fond of gardening. He was in correspondence with some of the most celebrated amateurs; it was his ambition to create new species; he took an interest in botanical discoveries, and lived, in short, in the world of flowers. Like all florists, he had a predilection for one particular plant; the *pelargonium* was his especial favorite. The court, the cases that came before it, and his outward life were as nothing to him compared with the inward life of fancies and abundant emotions which the old man led. He fell more and more in love with his flower-seraglio; and the pains which he bestowed on his garden, the sweet round of the labors of the months, held Goodman Blondet fast in his greenhouse. But for that

hobby he would have been a deputy under the Empire, and shone conspicuous beyond a doubt in the Corps Legislatif.

His marriage was the second cause of his obscurity. As a man of forty, he was rash enough to marry a girl of eighteen, by whom he had a son named Joseph in the first year of their marriage. Three years afterwards Mme. Blondet, then the prettiest woman in the town, inspired in the prefect of the department a passion which ended only with her death. The prefect was the father of her second son Émile; the whole town knew this, old Blondet himself knew it. The wife who might have roused her husband's ambition, who might have won him away from his flowers, positively encouraged the judge in his botanical tastes. She no more cared to leave the place than the prefect cared to leave his prefecture so long as his mistress lived.

Blondet felt himself unequal at his age to a contest with a young wife. He sought consolation in his greenhouse, and engaged a very pretty servant-maid to assist him to tend his ever-changing bevy of beauties. So while the judge potted, pricked out, watered, layered, slipped, blended, and induced his flowers to break, Mme. Blondet spent his substance on the dress and finery in which she shone at the prefecture. One interest alone had power to draw her away from the tender care of a romantic affection which the town came to admire in the end; and this interest was Émile's education. The child of love was a bright and pretty boy, while Joseph was no less heavy and plain-featured. The old judge, blinded by paternal affection, loved Joseph as his wife loved Émile.

For a dozen years M. Blondet bore his lot with perfect resignation. He shut his eyes to his wife's intrigue with a dignified, well-bred composure, quite in the style of an eighteenth century *grand seigneur*; but, like all men with a taste for a quiet life, he could cherish a profound dislike, and he hated his younger son. When his wife died, therefore, in 1818, he turned the intruder out of the house, and packed him off to Paris to study law on an allowance of twelve hundred francs for all resource, nor could any cry of distress ex-

tract another penny from his purse. Émile Blondet would have gone under if it had not been for his real father.

M. Blondet's house was one of the prettiest in the town. It stood almost opposite the prefecture, with a neat little court in front. A row of old-fashioned iron railings between two brickwork piers enclosed it from the street; and a low wall, also of brick, with a second row of railings along the top, connected the piers with the neighboring house. The little court, a space about ten fathoms in width by twenty in length, was cut in two by a brick pathway which ran from the gate to the house door between a border on either side. Those borders were always renewed; at every season of the year they exhibited a successful show of blossom, to the admiration of the public. All along the back of the garden-beds a quantity of climbing plants grew up and covered the walls of the neighboring houses with a magnificent mantle; the brickwork piers were hidden in clusters of honeysuckle; and, to crown all, in a couple of terra-cotta vases at the summit, a pair of acclimatized cactuses displayed to the astonished eyes of the ignorant those thick leaves bristling with spiny defenses which seem to be due to some plant disease.

It was a plain-looking house, built of brick, with brickwork arches above the windows, and bright green Venetian shutters to make it gay. Through the glass door you could look straight across the house to the opposite glass door, at the end of a long passage, and down the central alley in the garden beyond; while through the windows of the dining-room and drawing-room, which extended, like the passage, from back to front of the house, you could often catch further glimpses of the flower-beds in a garden of about two acres in extent. Seen from the road, the brickwork harmonized with the fresh flowers and shrubs, for two centuries had overlaid it with mosses and green and russet tints. No one could pass through the town without falling in love with a house with such charming surroundings, so covered with flowers and mosses to the roof-ridge, where two pigeons of glazed crockery ware were perched by way of ornament.

M. Blondet possessed an income of about four thousand



lives derived from land, besides the old house in the town. He meant to avenge his wrongs legitimately enough. He would leave his house, his lands, his seat on the bench to his son Joseph, and the whole town knew what he meant to do. He had made a will in that son's favor; he had gone as far as the Code will permit a man to go in the way of disinheriting one child to benefit another; and what was more, he had been putting by money for the past fifteen years to enable his lout of a son to buy back from Émile that portion of his father's estate which could not legally be taken away from him.

Émile Blondet thus turned adrift had contrived to gain distinction in Paris, but so far it was rather a name than a practical result. Émile's indolence, recklessness, and happy-go-lucky ways drove his real father to despair; and when that father died, a half-ruined man, turned out of office by one of the political reactions so frequent under the Restoration, it was with a mind uneasy as to the future of a man endowed with the most brilliant qualities.

Émile Blondet found support in a friendship with a Mlle. de Troisville, whom he had known before her marriage with the Comte de Montcornet. His mother was living when the Troisvilles came back after the Emigration; she was related to the family, distantly it is true, but the connection was close enough to allow her to introduce Émile to the house. She, poor woman, foresaw the future. She knew that when she died her son would lose both mother and father, a thought which made death doubly bitter, so she tried to interest others in him. She encouraged the liking that sprang up between Émile and the eldest daughter of the house of Troisville; but while the liking was exceedingly strong on the young lady's part, a marriage was out of the question. It was a romance on the pattern of *Paul et Virginie*. Mme. Blondet did what she could to teach her son to look to the Troisvilles, to found a lasting attachment on a children's game of "make-believe" love, which was bound to end as boy-and-girl romances usually do. When Mlle. de Troisville's marriage with General Montcornet was announced, Mme. Blondet, a dying woman, went to the bride and solemnly implored her never to aban-

don Émile, and to use her influence for him in society in Paris, whither the General's fortune summoned her to shine.

Luckily for Émile, he was able to make his own way. He made his appearance, at the age of twenty, as one of the masters of modern literature; and met with no less success in the society into which he was launched by the father who at first could afford to bear the expense of the young man's extravagance. Perhaps Émile's precocious celebrity and the good figure that he made strengthened the bonds of his friendship with the Countess. Perhaps Mme. de Montcornet, with the Russian blood in her veins (her mother was the daughter of the Princess Scherbelloff), might have cast off the friend of her childhood if he had been a poor man struggling with all his might among the difficulties which beset a man of letters in Paris; but by the time that the real strain of Émile's adventurous life began, their attachment was unalterable on either side. He was looked upon as one of the leading lights of journalism when young d'Esgrignon met him at his first supper-party in Paris; his acknowledged position in the world of letters was very high, and he towered above his reputation. Goodman Blondet had not the faintest conception of the power which the Constitutional Government had given to the press; nobody ventured to talk in his presence of the son of whom he refused to hear. And so it came to pass that he knew nothing of Émile whom he had cursed and Émile's greatness.

Old Blondet's integrity was as deeply rooted in him as his passion for flowers; he knew nothing but law and botany. He would have interviews with litigants, listen to them, chat with them, and show them his flowers; he would accept rare seeds from them; but once on the bench, no judge on earth was more impartial. Indeed, his manner of proceeding was so well known, that litigants never went near him except to hand over some document which might enlighten him in the performance of his duty, and nobody tried to throw dust in his eyes. With his learning, his lights, and his way of holding his real talents cheap, he was so indispensable to President du Ronceret, that, matrimonial schemes apart, that functionary would have done all that he could, in an

underhand way, to prevent the Vice-President from retiring in favor of his son. If the learned old man left the bench, the President would be utterly unable to do without him.

Goodman Blondet did not know that it was in Émile's power to fulfill all his wishes in a few hours. The simplicity of his life was worthy of one of Plutarch's men. In the evening he looked over his cases; next morning he worked among his flowers; and all day long he gave decisions on the bench. The pretty maid-servant, now of ripe age, and wrinkled like an Easter pippin, looked after the house, and they lived according to the established customs of the strictest parsimony. Mlle. Cadot always carried the keys of her cupboards and fruit-loft about with her. She was indefatigable. She went to market herself, she cooked and dusted and swept, and never missed mass of a morning. To give some idea of the domestic life of the household, it will be enough to remark that the father and son never ate fruit till it was beginning to spoil, because Mlle. Cadot always brought out anything that would not keep. No one in the house ever tasted the luxury of new bread, and all the fast days in the calendar were punctually observed. The gardener was put on rations like a soldier; the elderly Valideh always kept an eye upon him. And she, for her part, was so deferentially treated, that she took her meals with the family, and in consequence was continually trotting to and fro between the kitchen and the parlor at breakfast and dinner time.

Mlle. Blandureau's parents had consented to her marriage with Joseph Blondet upon one condition—the penniless and briefless barrister must be an assistant judge. So, with the desire of fitting his son to fill the position, old M. Blondet racked his brains to hammer the law into his son's head by dint of lessons, so as to make a cut-and-dried lawyer of him. As for Blondet junior, he spent almost every evening at the Blandureaus' house, to which also young Fabien du Ronceret had been admitted since his return, without raising the slightest suspicion in the minds of father or son.

Everything in this life of theirs was measured with an accuracy worthy of Gerard Dow's *Money Changer*; not a

grain of salt too much, not a single profit foregone; but the economical principles by which it was regulated were relaxed in favor of the greenhouse and garden. "The garden was the master's craze," Mlle. Cadot used to say. The master's blind fondness for Joseph was not a craze in her eyes; she shared the father's predilection; she pampered Joseph; she darned his stockings; and would have been better pleased if the money spent on the garden had been put by for Joseph's benefit.

That garden was kept in marvelous order by a single man; the paths, covered with river-sand, continually turned over with the rake, meandered among the borders full of the rarest flowers. Here were all kinds of color and scent, here were lizards on the walls, legions of little flower-pots standing out in the sun, regiments of forks and hoes, and a host of innocent things, a combination of pleasant results to justify the gardener's charming hobby.

At the end of the greenhouse the judge had set up a grand stand, an amphitheater of benches to hold some five or six thousand pelargoniums in pots—a splendid and famous show. People came to see his geraniums in flower, not only from the neighborhood, but even from the departments round about. The Empress Marie Louise, passing through the town, had honored the curiously kept greenhouse with a visit; so much was she impressed with the sight, that she spoke of it to Napoleon, and the old judge received the Cross of the Legion of Honor. But as the learned gardener never mingled in society at all, and went nowhere except to the Blandureaus, he had no suspicion of the President's underhand maneuvers; and others who could see the President's intentions were far too much afraid of him to interfere or to warn the inoffensive Blondets.

As for Michu, that young man with his powerful connections gave much more thought to making himself agreeable to the women in the upper social circles to which he was introduced by the Cinq-Cygnés, than to the extremely simple business of a provincial Tribunal. With his independent means (he had an income of twelve thousand livres), he was courted by mothers of daughters, and led a frivolous life.

He did just enough at the Tribunal to satisfy his conscience, much as a schoolboy does his exercises, saying ditto on all occasions, with a "Yes, dear President." But underneath the appearance of indifference lurked the unusual powers of the Paris law student who had distinguished himself as one of the staff of prosecuting counsel before he came to the provinces. He was accustomed to taking broad views of things; he could do rapidly what the President and Blondet could only do after much thinking, and very often solved knotty points for them. In delicate conjunctures the President and Vice-President took counsel with their junior, confided thorny questions to him, and never failed to wonder at the readiness with which he brought back a task in which old Blondet found nothing to criticise. Michu was sure of the influence of the most crabbed aristocrats, and he was young and rich; he lived, therefore, above the level of departmental intrigues and pettinesses. He was an indispensable man at picnics, he frisked with young ladies and paid court to their mothers, he danced at balls, he gambled like a capitalist. In short, he played his part of young lawyer of fashion to admiration; without, at the same time, compromising his dignity, which he knew how to assert at the right moment like a man of spirit. He won golden opinions by the manner in which he threw himself into provincial ways, without criticising them; and for these reasons, everyone endeavored to make his time of exile endurable.

The public prosecutor was a lawyer of the highest ability; he had taken the plunge into political life, and was one of the most distinguished speakers on the ministerialist benches. The President stood in awe of him; if he had not been away in Paris at the time, no steps would have been taken against Victurnien; his dexterity, his experience of business, would have prevented the whole affair. At that moment, however, he was in the Chamber of Deputies, and the President and du Croisier had taken advantage of his absence to weave their plot, calculating, with a certain ingenuity, that if once the law stepped in, and the matter was noised abroad, things would have gone too far to be remedied.

As a matter of fact, no staff of prosecuting counsel in

any Tribunal, at that particular time, would have taken up a charge of forgery against the eldest son of one of the noblest houses in France without going into the case at great length, and a special reference, in all probability, to the Attorney-General. In such a case as this, the authorities and the Government would have tried endless ways of compromising and hushing up an affair which might send an imprudent young man to the hulks. They would very likely have done the same for a Liberal family in a prominent position, so long as the Liberals were not too openly hostile to the throne and the altar. So du Croisier's charge and the young Count's arrest had not been very easy to manage. The President and du Croisier had compassed their ends in the following manner.

M. Sauvager, a young Royalist barrister, had reached the position of deputy public prosecutor by dint of subservience to the Ministry. In the absence of his chief he was head of the staff of counsel for prosecution, and, consequently, it fell to him to take up the charge made by du Croisier. Sauvager was a self-made man; he had nothing but his stipend; and for that reason the authorities reckoned upon someone who had everything to gain by devotion. The President now exploited the position. No sooner was the document with the alleged forgery in du Croisier's hands, than Mme. la Présidente du Ronceret, prompted by her spouse, had a long conversation with M. Sauvager. In the course of it she pointed out the uncertainties of a career in the *magistrature debout* compared with the *magistrature assise*, and the advantages of the bench over the bar; she showed how a freak on the part of some official, or a single false step, might ruin a man's career.

"If you are conscientious and give your conclusions against the powers that be, you are lost," continued she. "Now, at this moment, you might turn your position to account to make a fine match that would put you above unlucky chances for the rest of your life; you may marry a wife with fortune sufficient to land you on the bench, in the *magistrature assise*. There is a fine chance for you. M. du Croisier will never have any children; everybody knows

why. His money, and his wife's as well, will go to his niece, Mlle. Duval. M. Duval is an ironmaster, his purse is tolerably filled, to begin with, and his father is still alive, and has a little property besides. The father and son have a million of francs between them; they will double it with du Croisier's help, for du Croisier has business connections among great capitalists and manufacturers in Paris. M. and Mme. Duval the younger would be certain to give their daughter to a suitor brought forward by du Croisier, for he is sure to leave two fortunes to his niece; and, in all probability, he will settle the reversion of his wife's property upon Mlle. Duval in the marriage-contract, for Mme. du Croisier has no kin. You know how du Croisier hates the d'Esgrignons. Do him a service, be his man, take up this charge of forgery which he is going to make against young d'Esgrignon, and follow up the proceedings at once without consulting the public prosecutor at Paris. And, then, pray Heaven that the Ministry dismisses you for doing your office impartially, in spite of the powers that be; for if they do, your fortune is made! You will have a charming wife and thirty thousand francs a year with her, to say nothing of four millions of expectations in ten years' time."

In two evenings Sauvager was talked over. Both he and the President kept the affair a secret from old Blondet, from Michu, and from the second member of the staff of prosecuting counsel. Feeling sure of Blondet's impartiality on a question of fact, the President made certain of a majority without counting Camusot. And now Camusot's unexpected defection had thrown everything out. What the President wanted was a committal for trial before the public prosecutor got warning. How if Camusot or the second counsel for the prosecution should send word to Paris?

And here some portion of Camusot's private history may perhaps explain how it came to pass that Chesnel took it for granted that the examining magistrate would be on the d'Esgrignons' side, and how he had the boldness to tamper in the open street with that representative of justice.

Camusot's father, a well-known silk mercer in the Rue des Bourdonnais, was ambitious for the only son of his first

marriage, and brought him up to the law. When Camusot junior took a wife, he gained with her the influence of an usher of the Royal cabinet, backstairs influence, it is true, but still sufficient, since it had brought him his first appointment as justice of the peace, and the second as examining magistrate. At the time of his marriage, his father only settled an income of six thousand francs upon him (the amount of his mother's fortune, which he could legally claim), and as Mlle. Thirion brought him no more than twenty thousand francs as her portion, the young couple knew the hardships of hidden poverty. The salary of a provincial justice of the peace does not exceed fifteen hundred francs, while an examining magistrate's stipend is augmented by something like a thousand francs, because his position entails expenses and extra work. The post, therefore, is much coveted, though it is not permanent, and the work is heavy, and that was why Mme. Camusot had just scolded her husband for allowing the President to read his thoughts.

Marie Cécile Amélie Thirion, after three years of marriage, perceived the blessing of Heaven upon it in the regularity of two auspicious events—the births of a girl and a boy; but she prayed to be less blessed in future. A few more of such blessings would turn straitened means into distress. M. Camusot's father's money was not likely to come to them for a long time; and, rich as he was, he would scarcely leave more than eight or ten thousand francs a year to each of his children, four in number, for he had been married twice. And besides, by the time that all "expectations," as match-makers call them, were realized, would not the magistrate have children of his own to settle in life? Anyone can imagine the situation for a little woman with plenty of sense and determination, and Mme. Camusot was such a woman. She did not refrain from meddling in matters judicial. She had far too strong a sense of the gravity of a false step in her husband's career.

She was the only child of an old servant of Louis XVIII., a valet who had followed his master in his wanderings in Italy, Courland, and England, till after the Restoration the King rewarded him with the one place that he could fill at



court, and made him usher by rotation to the Royal cabinet. So in Amélie's home there had been, as it were, a sort of reflection of the court. Thirion used to tell her about the lords, and ministers, and great men whom he announced and introduced and saw passing to and fro. The girl, brought up at the gates of the Tuileries, had caught some tincture of the maxims practiced there, and adopted the dogma of passive obedience to authority. She had sagely judged that her husband, by ranging himself on the side of the d'Esgrignons, would find favor with Mme. la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse; and with two powerful families on whose influence with the King the Sieur Thirion could depend at an opportune moment, Camusot might get an appointment at the first opportunity within the jurisdiction of Paris, and afterwards at Paris itself. That promotion, dreamed of and longed for at every moment, was certain to have a salary of six thousand francs attached to it, as well as the alleviation of living in her own father's house, or under the Camusots' roof, and all the advantages of a father's fortune on either side. If the adage, "Out of sight is out of mind," holds good of most women, it is particularly true where family feeling or royal or ministerial patronage is concerned. The personal attendants of kings prosper at all times; you take an interest in a man, be it only a man in livery, if you see him every day.

Mme. Camusot, regarding herself as a bird of passage, had taken a little house in the Rue du Cygne: Furnished lodgings there were none; the town was not enough of a thoroughfare, and the Camusots could not afford to live at an inn like M. Michu. So the fair Parisian had no choice for it but to take such furniture as she could find; and as she paid a very moderate rent, the house was remarkably ugly, albeit a certain quaintness of detail was not wanting. It was built against a neighboring house in such a fashion that the side with only one window in each story gave upon the street, and the front looked out upon a yard where rose-bushes and buckthorn were growing along the wall on either side. On the farther side, opposite the house, stood a shed, a roof over two brick arches. A little wicket-gate gave en-

trance into the gloomy place (made gloomier still by the great walnut tree which grew in the yard), and a double flight of steps, with an elaborately-wrought but rust-eaten handrail, led to the house door. Inside the house there were two rooms on each floor. The dining-room occupied that part of the ground floor nearest the street, and the kitchen lay on the other side of a narrow passage almost wholly taken up by the wooden staircase. Of the two first floor rooms, one did duty as the magistrate's study, the other as a bedroom, while the nursery and the servants' bedroom stood above in the attics. There were no ceilings in the house; the cross-beams were simply whitewashed and the spaces plastered over. Both rooms on the first floor and the dining-room below were wainscoted and adorned with the labyrinthine designs which taxed the patience of the eighteenth century joiner; but the carving had been painted a dingy gray most depressing to behold.

The magistrate's study looked as though it belonged to a provincial lawyer; it contained a big bureau, a mahogany armchair, a law student's books, and shabby belongings transported from Paris. Mme. Camusot's room was more of a native product; it boasted a blue-and-white scheme of decoration, a carpet, and that anomalous kind of furniture which appears to be in the fashion, while it is simply some style that has failed in Paris. As to the dining-room, it was nothing but an ordinary provincial dining-room, bare and chilly, with a damp, faded paper on the walls.

In this shabby room, with nothing to see but the walnut tree, the dark leaves growing against the walls, and the almost deserted road beyond them, a somewhat lively and frivolous woman, accustomed to the amusements and stir of Paris, used to sit all day long, day after day, and for the most part of the time alone, though she received tiresome and inane visits which led her to think her loneliness preferable to empty tittle-tattle. If she permitted herself the slightest gleam of intelligence, it gave rise to interminable comment and embittered her condition. She occupied herself a good deal with her children, not so much from taste as for the sake of an interest in her almost solitary life, and

exercised her mind on the only subjects which she could find; to wit, the intrigues which went on around her, the ways of provincials, and the ambitions shut in by their narrow horizons. So she very soon fathomed mysteries of which her husband had no idea. As she sat at her window with a piece of intermittent embroidery work in her fingers, she did not see her woodshed full of fagots nor the servant busy at the wash-tub; she was looking out upon Paris, Paris where everything is pleasure, everything is full of life. She dreamed of Paris gayeties, and shed tears because she must abide in this dull prison of a country town. She was disconsolate because she lived in a peaceful district, where no conspiracy, no great affair would ever occur. She saw herself doomed to sit under the shadow of the walnut tree for some time to come.

Mme. Camusot was a little, plump, fresh, fair-haired woman, with a very prominent forehead, a mouth which receded, and a turned-up chin, a type of countenance which is passable in youth, but looks old before the time. Her bright, quick eyes expressed her innocent desire to get on in the world, and the envy born of her present inferior position, with rather too much candor; but still they lighted up her commonplace face and set it off with a certain energy of feeling, which success was certain to extinguish in later life. At that time she used to give a good deal of time and thought to her dresses, inventing trimmings and embroidering them; she planned out her costumes with the maid whom she had brought with her from Paris, and so maintained the reputation of Parisiennes in the provinces. Her caustic tongue was dreaded; she was not beloved. In that keen, investigating spirit peculiar to unoccupied women who are driven to find some occupation for empty days, she had pondered the President's private opinions, until at length she discovered what he meant to do, and for some time past she had advised Camusot to declare war. The young Count's affair was an excellent opportunity. Was it not obviously Camusot's part to make a stepping-stone of this criminal case by favoring the d'Esgrignons, a family with power of a very different kind from the power of the du Croisier party?

“Sauvager will never marry Mlle. Duval. They are dangling her before him, but he will be the dupe of those Machiavels in the Val-Noble to whom he is going to sacrifice his position. Camusot, this affair, so unfortunate as it is for the d’Esgrignons, so insidiously brought on by the President for du Croisier’s benefit, will turn out well for nobody but *you*,” she had said, as they went in.

The shrewd Parisienne had likewise guessed the President’s underhand maneuvers with the Blandureaus, and his object in baffling old Blondet’s efforts, but she saw nothing to be gained by opening the eyes of father or son to the perils of the situation; she was enjoying the beginning of the comedy; she knew about the proposals made by Chesnel’s successor on behalf of Fabien du Ronceret, but she did not suspect how important that secret might be to her. If she or her husband were threatened by the President, Mme. Camusot could threaten too, in her turn, to call the amateur gardener’s attention to a scheme for carrying off the flower which he meant to transplant into his home.

Chesnel had not penetrated, like Mme. Camusot, into the means by which Sauvager had been won over; but by dint of looking into the various lives and interests of the men grouped about the Lilies of the Tribunal, he knew that he could count upon the public prosecutor, upon Camusot, and M. Michu. Two judges for the d’Esgrignons would paralyze the rest. And, finally, Chesnel knew old Blondet well enough to feel sure that if he ever swerved from impartiality, it would be for the sake of the work of his whole lifetime,—to secure his son’s appointment. So Chesnel slept, full of confidence, on the resolve to go to M. Blondet and offer to realize his so long cherished hopes, while he opened his eyes to President du Ronceret’s treachery. Blondet won over, he would take a peremptory tone with the examining magistrate, to whom he hoped to prove that if Victurnien was not blameless, he had been merely imprudent; the whole thing should be shown in the light of a boy’s thoughtless escapade.

But Chesnel slept neither soundly nor for long. Before dawn he was awakened by his housekeeper. The most bewitching person in this history, the most adorable youth on

the face of the globe, Mme. la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse herself, in man's attire, had driven alone from Paris in a calèche, and was waiting to see him.

"I have come to save him or to die with him," said she, addressing the notary, who thought that he was dreaming. "I have brought a hundred thousand francs, given me by His Majesty out of his private purse, to buy Victurnien's innocence, if his adversary can be bribed. If we fail utterly, I have brought poison to snatch him away before anything takes place, before even the indictment is drawn up. But we shall not fail. I have sent word to the public prosecutor; he is on the road behind me; he could not travel in my calèche, because he wished to take the instructions of the Keeper of the Seals."

Chesnel rose to the occasion and played up to the Duchess; he wrapped himself in his dressing-gown, fell at her feet and kissed them, not without asking her pardon for forgetting himself in his joy.

"We are saved!" cried he; and gave orders to Brigitte to see that Mme. la Duchesse had all that she needed after traveling post all night. He appealed to the fair Diane's spirit, by making her see that it was absolutely necessary that she should visit the examining magistrate before daylight, lest anyone should discover the secret, or so much as imagine that the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had come.

"And have I not a passport in due form?" quoth she, displaying a sheet of paper, wherein she was described as M. le Vicomte Félix de Vandenesse, Master of Requests, and His Majesty's private secretary. "And do I not play my man's part well?" she added, running her fingers through her wig à la Titus, and twirling her riding switch.

"Oh! Mme. la Duchesse, you are an angel!" cried Chesnel, with tears in his eyes. (She was destined always to be an angel, even in man's attire.) "Button up your great-coat, muffle yourself up to the eyes in your traveling cloak, take my arm, and let us go as quickly as possible to Camusot's house before anybody can meet us."

"Then am I going to see a man called Camusot?" she asked.

“With a nose to match his name,”<sup>1</sup> assented Chesnel.

The old notary felt his heart dead within him, but he thought it none the less necessary to humor the Duchess, to laugh when she laughed, and shed tears when she wept; groaning in spirit, all the same, over the feminine frivolity which could find matter for a jest while setting about a matter so serious. What would he not have done to save the Count? While Chesnel dressed, Mme. de Maufrigneuse sipped the cup of coffee and cream which Brigitte brought her, and agreed with herself that provincial women cooks are superior to the Parisian *chefs*, who despise the little details which make all the difference to an epicure. Thanks to Chesnel’s taste for delicate fare, Brigitte was found prepared to set an excellent meal before the Duchess.

Chesnel and his charming companion set out for M. and Mme. Camusot’s house.

“Ah! so there is a Mme. Camusot?” said the Duchess. “Then the affair may be managed.”

“And so much the more readily, because the lady is visibly tired enough of living among us provincials; she comes from Paris,” said Chesnel.

“Then we must have no secrets from her?”

“You will judge how much to tell or to conceal,” Chesnel replied humbly. “I am sure that she will be greatly flattered to be the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse’s hostess; you will be obliged to stay in her house until nightfall, I expect, unless you find it inconvenient to remain.”

“Is this Mme. Camusot a good-looking woman?” asked the Duchess, with a coxcomb’s air.

“She is a bit of a queen in her own house.”

“Then she is sure to meddle in court-house affairs,” returned the Duchess. “Nowhere but in France, my dear M. Chesnel, do you see women so much wedded to their husbands that they are wedded to their husbands’ professions, work, or business as well. In Italy, England, and Germany, women make it a point of honor to leave men to fight their own battles; they shut their eyes to their husbands’ work as perseveringly as our French citizens’ wives do all that in

<sup>1</sup> *Camus*, flat-nosed.

them lies to understand the position of their joint-stock partnership; is not that what you call it in your legal language? Frenchwomen are so incredibly jealous in the conduct of their married life, that they insist on knowing everything; and that is how, in the least difficulty, you feel the wife's hand in the business; the Frenchwoman advises, guides, and warns her husband. And, truth to tell, the man is none the worse off. In England, if a married man is put in prison for debt for twenty-four hours, his wife will be jealous and make a scene when he comes back."

"Here we are, without meeting a soul on the way," said Chesnel. "You are the more sure of complete ascendancy here, Mme. la Duchesse, since Mme. Camusot's father is one Thirion, usher of the Royal cabinet."

"And the King never thought of that!" exclaimed the Duchess. "He thinks of nothing! Thirion introduced us, the Prince de Cadignan, M. de Vandenesse, and me! We shall have it all our own way in this house. Settle everything with M. Camusot while I talk to his wife."

The maid, who was washing and dressing the children, showed the visitors into the little fireless dining-room.

"Take that card to your mistress," said the Duchess, lowering her voice for the woman's ear; "nobody else is to see it. If you are discreet, child, you shall not lose by it."

At the sound of a woman's voice, and the sight of the handsome young man's face, the maid looked thunderstruck.

"Wake M. Camusot," said Chesnel, "and tell him that I am waiting to see him on important business," and she departed upstairs forthwith.

A few minutes later Mme. Camusot, in her dressing-gown, sprang downstairs and brought the handsome stranger into her room. She had pushed Camusot out of bed and into his study with all his clothes, bidding him dress himself at once and wait there. The transformation scene had been brought about by a bit of pasteboard with the words *MADAME LA DUCHESSSE DE MAUFRIGNEUSE* engraved upon it. A daughter of the usher of the Royal cabinet took in the whole situation at once.

"Well!" exclaimed the maid-servant, left with Chesnel in

the dining-room, "would not anyone think that a thunder-bolt had dropped in among us? The master is dressing in his study; you can go upstairs."

"Not a word of all this, mind," said Chesnel.

Now that he was conscious of the support of a great lady who had the King's consent (by word of mouth) to the measures about to be taken for rescuing the Comte d'Esgrignon, he spoke with an air of authority, which served his cause much better with Camusot than the humility with which he would otherwise have approached him.

"Sir," said he, "the words let fall last evening may have surprised you, but they are serious. The house of d'Esgrignon counts upon you for the proper conduct of investigations from which it must issue without a spot."

"I shall pass over anything in your remarks, sir, which must be offensive to me personally, and obnoxious to justice; for your position with regard to the d'Esgrignons excuses you up to a certain point, but——"

"Pardon me, sir, if I interrupt you," said Chesnel. "I have just spoken aloud the things which your superiors are thinking and dare not avow; though what those things are any intelligent man can guess, and you are an intelligent man.—Grant that the young man had acted imprudently, can you suppose that the sight of a d'Esgrignon dragged into an Assize Court can be gratifying to the King, the Court, or the Ministry? Is it to the interest of the kingdom, or of the country, that historic houses should fall? Is not the existence of a great aristocracy, consecrated by time, a guarantee of that Equality which is the catchword of the Opposition at this moment? Well and good; now not only has there not been the slightest imprudence, but we are innocent victims caught in a trap."

"I am curious to know how," said the examining magistrate.

"For the last two years, the Sieur du Croisier has regularly allowed M. le Comte d'Esgrignon to draw upon him for very large sums," said Chesnel. "We are going to produce drafts for more than a hundred thousand crowns, which he continually met; the amounts being remitted by me—"



bear that well in mind—either before or after the bills fell due. M. le Comte d'Esgrignon is in a position to produce a receipt for the sum paid by him, before this bill, this alleged forgery, was drawn. Can you fail to see in that case that this charge is a piece of spite and party feeling? And a charge brought against the heir of a great house by one of the most dangerous enemies of the Throne and Altar, what is it but an odious slander? There has been no more forgery in this affair than there has been in my office. Summon Mme. du Croisier, who knows nothing as yet of the charge of forgery; she will declare to you that I brought the money and paid it over to her, so that in her husband's absence she might remit the amount, for which he has not asked her. Examine du Croisier on the point; he will tell you that he knows nothing of my payment to Mme. du Croisier."

"You may make such assertions as these, sir, in M. d'Esgrignon's salon, or in any other house where people know nothing of business, and they may be believed; but no examining magistrate, unless he is a driveling idiot, can imagine that a woman like Mme. du Croisier, so submissive as she is to her husband, has a hundred thousand crowns lying in her desk at this moment, without saying a word to him; nor yet that an old notary would not have advised M. du Croisier of the deposit on his return to town."

"The old notary, sir, had gone to Paris to put a stop to the young man's extravagance."

"I have not yet examined the Comte d'Esgrignon," Camusot began; "his answers will point out my duty."

"Is he in close custody?"

"Yes."

"Sir," said Chesnel, seeing danger ahead, "the examination can be made in our interests or against them. But there are two courses open to you: you can establish the fact on Mme. du Croisier's deposition that the amount was deposited with her before the bill was drawn; or you can examine the unfortunate young man implicated in this affair, and he in his confusion may remember nothing and commit himself. You will decide which is the more credible—a slip of memory

on the part of a woman in her ignorance of business or a forgery committed by a d'Esgrignon."

"All this is beside the point," began Camusot; "the question is, whether M. le Comte d'Esgrignon has or has not used the lower half of a letter addressed to him by du Croisier as a bill of exchange."

"Eh! and so he might," a voice cried suddenly, as Mme. Camusot broke in, followed by the handsome stranger, "so he might, when M. Chesnel had advanced the money to meet the bill——"

She leant over her husband.

"You will have the first vacant appointment as assistant judge at Paris, you are serving the King himself in this affair; I have proof of it; you will not be forgotten," she said, lowering her voice for his ear. "This young man that you see here is the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse; you must never have seen her, and do all that you can for the young Count boldly."

"Gentlemen," said Camusot, "even if the preliminary examination is conducted to prove the young Count's innocence, can I answer for the view the court may take? M. Chesnel, and you also, my sweet, know what M. le Président wants."

"Tut, tut, tut!" said Mme. Camusot, "go yourself to M. Michu this morning, and tell him that the Count has been arrested; you will be two against two in that case, I will be bound. *Michu* comes from Paris, and you know that he is devoted to the *noblesse*. Good blood cannot lie."

At that very moment Mlle. Cadot's voice was heard in the doorway. She had brought a note, and was waiting for an answer. Camusot went out, and came back again to read the note aloud:—

"M. le Vice-Président begs M. Camusot to sit in audience to-day and for the next few days, so that there may be a quorum during M. le Président's absence."

"Then there is an end of the preliminary examination!" cried Mme. Camusot. "Did I not tell you, dear, that they

would play you some ugly trick? The President has gone off to slander you to the public prosecutor and the President of the Court-Royal. You will be changed before you can make the examination. Is that clear?"

"You will stay, monsieur," said the Duchess. "The public prosecutor is coming, I hope, in time."

"When the public prosecutor arrives," little Mme. Camusot said, with some heat, "he must find all over.—Yes, my dear, yes," she added, looking full at her amazed husband.—"Ah! old hypocrite of a President, you are setting your wits against us; you shall remember it! You have a mind to help us to a dish of your own making, you shall have two served up to you by your humble servant Cécile Amélie Thirion!—Poor old Blondet! It is lucky for him that the President has taken this journey to turn us out, for now that great oaf of a Joseph Blondet will marry Mlle. Blandureau. I will let Father Blondet have some seeds in return.—As for you, Camusot, go to M. Michu's, while Mme. la Duchesse and I will go to find old Blondet. You must expect to hear it said all over the town to-morrow that I took a walk with a lover this morning."

Mme. Camusot took the Duchess's arm, and they went through the town by deserted streets to avoid any unpleasant adventure on the way to the old Vice-President's house. Chesnel meanwhile conferred with the young Count in prison; Camusot had arranged a stolen interview. Cook-maids, servants, and the other early risers of a country town, seeing Mme. Camusot and the Duchess taking their way through the back streets, took the young gentleman for an adorer from Paris. That evening, as Cécile Amélie had said, the news of her behavior was circulated about the town, and more than one scandalous rumor was occasioned thereby. Mme. Camusot and her supposed lover found old Blondet in his greenhouse. He greeted his colleague's wife and her companion, and gave the charming young man a keen, uneasy glance.

"I have the honor to introduce one of my husband's cousins," said Mme. Camusot, bringing forward the Duchess; "he is one of the most distinguished horticulturists in Paris;

and as he cannot spend more than the one day with us, on his way back from Brittany, and has heard of your flowers and plants, I have taken the liberty of coming early."

"Oh, the gentleman is a horticulturist, is he?" said old Blondet.

The Duchess bowed.

"This is my coffee-plant," said Blondet, "and here is a tea-plant."

"What can have taken M. le Président away from home?" put in Mme. Camusot. "I will wager that his absence concerns M. Camusot."

"Exactly.—This, monsieur, is the queerest of all cactuses," he continued, producing a flower-pot which appeared to contain a piece of mildewed rattan; "it comes from Australia. You are very young, sir, to be a horticulturist."

"Dear M. Blondet, never mind your flowers," said Mme. Camusot. "You are concerned, you and your hopes, and your son's marriage with Mlle. Blandureau. You are duped by the President."

"Bah!" said old Blondet, with an incredulous air.

"Yes," retorted she. "If you cultivated people a little more and your flowers a little less, you would know that the dowry and the hopes that you have sown, and watered, and tilled, and weeded are on the point of being gathered now by cunning hands."

"Madame!—"

"Oh, nobody in the town will have the courage to fly in the President's face and warn you. I, however, do not belong to the town, and, thanks to this obliging young man, I shall soon be going back to Paris; so I can inform you that Chesnel's successor has made formal proposals for Mlle. Claire Blandureau's hand on behalf of young du Ronceret, who is to have fifty thousand crowns from his parents. As for Fabien, he has made up his mind to receive a call to the bar, so as to gain an appointment as judge."

Old Blondet dropped the flower-pot which he had brought out for the Duchess to see.

"Oh, my cactus! Oh, my son! and Mlle. Blandureau! . . . Look here! the cactus flower is broken to pieces."

“No,” Mme. Camusot answered, laughing; “everything can be put right. If you have a mind to see your son a judge in another month, we will tell you how you must set to work——”

“Step this way, sir, and you will see my pelargoniums, an enchanting sight while they are in flower——” Then he added to Mme. Camusot, “Why did you speak of these matters while your cousin was present?”

“All depends upon him,” riposted Mme. Camusot. “Your son’s appointment is lost forever if you let fall a word about this young man.”

“Bah!”

“The young man is a flower——”

“Ah!”

“He is the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, sent here by His Majesty to save young d’Esgrignon, whom they arrested yesterday on a charge of forgery brought against him by du Croisier. Mme. la Duchesse has authority from the Keeper of the Seals; he will ratify any promises that she makes to us——”

“My cactus is all right!” exclaimed Blondet, peering at his precious plant.—“Go on; I am listening.”

“Take counsel with Camusot and Michu to hush up the affair as soon as possible, and your son will get the appointment. It will come in time enough to baffle du Ronceret’s underhand dealings with the Blandureaus. Your son will be something better than assistant judge; he will have M. Camusot’s post within the year. The public prosecutor will be here to-day. M. Sauvager will be obliged to resign, I expect, after his conduct in this affair. At the court my husband will show you documents which completely exonerate the Count and prove that the forgery was a trap of du Croisier’s own setting.”

Old Blondet went into the Olympic circus where his six thousand pelargoniums stood, and made his bow to the Duchess.

“Monsieur,” said he, “if your wishes do not exceed the law, this thing may be done.”

“Monsieur,” returned the Duchess, “send in your resig-

nation to M. Chesnel to-morrow, and I will promise you that your son shall be appointed within the week; but you must not resign until you have had confirmation of my promise from the public prosecutor. You men of law will come to a better understanding among yourselves. Only let him know that the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse has pledged her word to you. And not a word as to my journey hither," she added.

The old judge kissed her hand and began recklessly to gather his best flowers for her.

"Can you think of it? Give them to madame," said the Duchess. "A young man would not have flowers about him when he had a pretty woman on his arm."

"Before you go down to the court," added Mme. Camusot, "ask Chesnel's successor about those proposals that he made in the name of M. and Mme. du Ronceret."

Old Blondet, quite overcome by this revelation of the President's duplicity, stood planted on his feet by the wicket gate, looking after the two women as they hurried away through by-streets home again. The edifice raised so painfully during ten years for his beloved son was crumbling visibly before his eyes. Was it possible? He suspected some trick, and hurried away to Chesnel's successor.

At half-past nine, before the court was sitting, Vice-President Blondet, Camusot, and Michu met with remarkable punctuality in the council chamber. Blondet locked the door with some precautions when Camusot and Michu came in together.

"Well, Mr. Vice-President," began Michu, "M. Sauvauger, without consulting the public prosecutor, has issued a warrant for the apprehension of one Comte d'Esgrignon, in order to serve a grudge borne against him by one du Croisier, an enemy of the King's government. It is a regular topsy-turvy affair. The President, for his part, goes away, and thereby puts a stop to the preliminary examination! And we know nothing of the matter. Do they, by any chance, mean to force our hand?"

"This is the first word I have heard of it," said the Vice-President. He was furious with the President for stealing a

march on him with the Blandureaus. Chesnel's successor, the du Roncerets' man, had just fallen into a snare set by the old judge; the truth was out, he knew the secret.

"It is lucky that we spoke to you about that matter, my dear master," said Camusot, "or you might have given up all hope of seating your son on the bench or of marrying him to Mlle. Blandureau."

"But it is no question of my son, nor of his marriage," said the Vice-President; "we are talking of young Comte d'Esgrignon. Is he or is he not guilty?"

"It seems that Chesnel deposited the amount to meet the bill with Mme. du Croisier," said Michu, "and a crime has been made of a mere irregularity. According to the charge, the Count made use of the lower half of a letter bearing du Croisier's signature as a draft which he cashed at the Kellers'."

"An imprudent thing to do," was Camusot's comment.

"But why is du Croisier proceeding against him if the amount was paid in beforehand?" asked Vice-President Blondet.

"He does not know that the money was deposited with his wife; or he pretends that he does not know," said Camusot.

"It is a piece of provincial spite," said Michu.

"Still it looks like a forgery to me," said old Blondet. No passion could obscure judicial clear-sightedness in him.

"Do you think so?" returned Camusot. "But, at the outset, supposing that the Count had no business to draw upon du Croisier, there would still be no forgery of the signature; and the Count believed that he had a right to draw on Croisier when Chesnel advised him that the money had been placed to his credit."

"Well, then, where is the forgery?" asked Blondet. "It is the intent to defraud which constitutes forgery in a civil action."

"Oh, it is clear, if you take du Croisier's version for truth, that the signature was diverted from its purpose to obtain a sum of money in spite of du Croisier's contrary injunction to his bankers," Camusot answered.

"Gentlemen," said Blondet, "this seems to me to be a mere trifle, a quibble.—Suppose you had the money, I ought perhaps to have waited until I had your authorization; but I, Comte d'Esgrignon, was pressed for money, so I—Come, come, your prosecution is a piece of revengeful spite. Forgery is defined by the law as an attempt to obtain any advantage which rightfully belongs to another. There is no forgery here, according to the letter of the Roman law, nor according to the spirit of modern jurisprudence (always from the point of view of a civil action, for we are not here concerned with the falsification of public or authentic documents). Between private individuals the essence of a forgery is the intent to defraud; where is it in this case? In what times are we living, gentlemen? Here is the President going away to balk a preliminary examination which ought to be over by this time! Until to-day I did not know M. le Président, but he shall have the benefit of arrears; from this time forth he shall draft his decisions himself. You must set about this affair with all possible speed, M. Camusot."

"Yes," said Michu. "In my opinion, instead of letting the young man out on bail, we ought to pull him out of this mess at once. Everything turns on the examination of du Croisier and his wife. You might summons them to appear while the court is sitting, M. Camusot; take down their depositions before four o'clock, send in your report to-night, and we will give our decision in the morning before the court sits."

"We will settle what course to pursue while the barristers are pleading," said Vice-President Blondet, addressing Camusot.

And with that the three judges put on their robes and went into court.

At noon Mlle. Armande and the Bishop reached the Hôtel d'Esgrignon; Chesnel and M. Couturier were there to meet them. There was a sufficiently short conference between the prelate and Mme. du Croisier's director, and the latter set out at once to visit his charge.

At eleven o'clock that morning du Croisier received a summons to appear in the examining magistrate's office between



one and two in the afternoon. Thither he betook himself, consumed by well-founded suspicions. It was impossible that the President should have foreseen the arrival of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse upon the scene, the return of the public prosecutor, and the hasty confabulation of his learned brethren; so he had omitted to trace out a plan for du Croisier's guidance in the event of the preliminary examination taking place. Neither of the pair imagined that the proceedings would be hurried on in this way. Du Croisier obeyed the summons at once; he wanted to know how M. Camusot was disposed to act. So he was compelled to answer the questions put to him. Camusot addressed him in summary fashion with the six following inquiries:—

“Was the signature on the bill alleged to be a forgery in your handwriting?—Had you previously done business with M. le Comte d'Esgrignon?—Was not M. le Comte d'Esgrignon in the habit of drawing upon you, with or without advice?—Did you not write a letter authorizing M. d'Esgrignon to rely upon you at any time?—Had not Chesnel squared the account not once, but many times already?—Were you not away from home when this took place?”

All these questions the banker answered in the affirmative. In spite of wordy explanations, the magistrate always brought him back to a “Yes” or “No.” When the questions and answers had been alike resumed in the *procès-verbal*, the examining magistrate brought out a final thunderbolt.

“Was du Croisier aware that the money destined to meet the bill had been deposited with him, du Croisier, according to Chesnel's declaration, and a letter of advice sent by the said Chesnel to the Comte d'Esgrignon, five days before the date of the bill?”

That last question frightened du Croisier. He asked what was meant by it, and whether he was supposed to be the defendant and M. le Comte d'Esgrignon the plaintiff? He called the magistrate's attention to the fact that if the money had been deposited with him, there was no ground for the action.

“Justice is seeking information,” said the magistrate, as

he dismissed the witness, but not before he had taken down du Croisier's last observation.

"But the money, sir——"

"The money is at your house."

Chesnel, likewise summoned, came forward to explain the matter. The truth of his assertions was borne out by Mme. du Croisier's deposition. The Count had already been examined. Prompted by Chesnel, he produced du Croisier's first letter, in which he begged the Count to draw upon him without the insulting formality of depositing the amount beforehand. The Comte d'Esgrignon next brought out a letter in Chesnel's handwriting, by which the notary advised him of the deposit of a hundred thousand crowns with M. du Croisier. With such primary facts as these to bring forward as evidence, the young Count's innocence was bound to emerge triumphantly from a court of law.

Du Croisier went home from the court, his face white with rage, and the foam of repressed fury on his lips. His wife was sitting by the fireside in the drawing-room at work upon a pair of slippers for him. She trembled when she looked into his face, but her mind was made up.

"Madame," he stammered out, "what deposition is this that you made before the magistrate? You have dishonored, ruined, and betrayed me!"

"I have saved you, monsieur," answered she. "If some day you will have the honor of connecting yourself with the d'Esgrignons by marrying your niece to the Count, it will be entirely owing to my conduct to-day."

"A miracle!" cried he. "Balaam's ass has spoken. Nothing will astonish me after this. And where are the hundred thousand crowns which (so M. Camusot tells me) are here in my house?"

"Here they are," said she, pulling out a bundle of banknotes from beneath the cushions of her settee. "I have not committed mortal sin by declaring that M. Chesnel gave them into my keeping."

"While I was away?"

"You were not here."

"Will you swear that to me on your salvation?"

"I swear it," she said composedly.

"Then why did you say nothing to me about it?" demanded he.

"I was wrong there," said his wife, "but my mistake was all for your good. Your niece will be Marquise d'Esgrignon some of these days, and you will perhaps be a deputy, if you behave well in this deplorable business. You have gone too far; you must find out how to get back again."

Du Croisier, under stress of painful agitation, strode up and down his drawing-room; while his wife, in no less agitation, awaited the result of this exercise. Du Croisier at length rang the bell.

"I am not at home to anyone to-night," he said, when the man appeared; "shut the gates; and if anyone calls, tell them that your mistress and I have gone into the country. We shall start directly after dinner, and dinner must be half an hour earlier than usual."

The great news was discussed that evening in every drawing-room; little shopkeepers, working folk, beggars, the *noblesse*, the merchant class—the whole town, in short, was talking of the Comte d'Esgrignon's arrest on a charge of forgery. The Comte d'Esgrignon would be tried in the Assize Court; he would be condemned and branded. Most of those who cared for the honor of the family denied the fact. At nightfall Chesnel went to Mme. Camusot and escorted the stranger to the Hôtel d'Esgrignon. Poor Mlle. Armande was expecting him; she led the fair Duchess to her own room, which she had given up to her, for his lordship the Bishop occupied Victurnien's chamber; and, left alone with her guest, the noble woman glanced at the Duchess with most piteous eyes.

"You owed help, indeed, madame, to the poor boy who ruined himself for your sake," she said, "the boy to whom we are all of us sacrificing ourselves."

The Duchess had already made a woman's survey of Mlle. d'Esgrignon's room; the cold, bare, comfortless chamber, that might have been a nun's cell, was like a picture of the life of the heroic woman before her. The Duchess saw it all

—past, present, and future—with rising emotion, felt the incongruity of her presence, and could not keep back the falling tears that made answer for her.

But in Mlle. Armande the Christian overcame Victurnien's aunt. "Ah, I was wrong; forgive me, Mme. la Duchesse; you did not know how poor we were, and my nephew was incapable of admission. And besides, now that I see you, I can understand all—even the crime!"

And Mlle. Armande, withered and thin and white, but beautiful as those tall, austere, slender figures which German art alone can paint, had tears too in her eyes.

"Do not fear, dear angel," the Duchess said at last; "he is safe."

"Yes, but honor?—and his career? Chesnel told me; the King knows the truth."

"We will think of a way of repairing the evil," said the Duchess.

Mlle. Armande went downstairs to the salon, and found the Collection of Antiquities complete to a man. Every one of them had come, partly to do honor to the Bishop, partly to rally round the Marquis; but Chesnel, posted in the ante-chamber, warned each new arrival to say no word of the affair, that the aged Marquis might never know that such a thing had been. The loyal Frank was quite capable of killing his son or du Croisier; for either the one or the other must have been guilty of death in his eyes. It chanced, strangely enough, that he talked more of Victurnien than usual; he was glad that his son had gone back to Paris. The King would give Victurnien a place before very long; the King was interesting himself at last in the d'Esgrignons. And his friends, their hearts dead within them, praised Victurnien's conduct to the skies. Mlle. Armande prepared the way for her nephew's sudden appearance among them by remarking to her brother that Victurnien would be sure to come to see them, and that he must be even then on his way.

"Bah!" said the Marquis, standing with his back to the hearth, "if he is doing well where he is, he ought to stay there, and not to be thinking of the joy it would give his

old father to see him again. The King's service has the first claim."

Scarcely one of those present heard the words without a shudder. Justice might give over a d'Esgrignon to the executioner's branding iron. There was a dreadful pause. The old Marquise de Castéran could not keep back a tear that stole down over her rouge, and turned her head away to hide it.

Next day at noon, in the sunny weather, a whole excited population was dispersed in groups along the high street, which ran through the heart of the town, and nothing was talked of but the great affair: Was the Count in prison or was he not?—All at once the Comte d'Esgrignon's well-known tilbury was seen driving down the Rue Saint-Blaise; it had evidently come from the Prefecture, the Count himself was on the box seat, and by his side sat a charming young man, whom nobody recognized. The pair were laughing and talking and in great spirits. They wore Bengal roses in their button-holes. Altogether, it was a theatrical surprise which words fail to describe.

At ten o'clock the court had decided to dismiss the charge, stating their very sufficient reasons for setting the Count at liberty, in a document which contained a thunderbolt for du Croisier, in the shape of an *inasmuch* that gave the Count the right to institute proceedings for libel. Old Chesnel was walking up the Grande Rue, as if by accident, telling all who cared to hear him that du Croisier had set the most shameful snares for the d'Esgrignons' honor, and that it was entirely owing to the forbearance and magnanimity of the family that he was not prosecuted for slander.

On the evening of that famous day, after the Marquis d'Esgrignon had gone to bed, the Count, Mlle. Armande, and the Chevalier were left with the handsome young page, now about to return to Paris. The charming cavalier's sex could not be hidden from the Chevalier, and he alone, besides the three officials and Mme. Camusot, knew that the Duchess had been among them.

"The House is saved," began Chesnel, "but after this shock it will take a hundred years to rise again. The debts

must be paid now; you must marry an heiress, M. le Comte, there is nothing else left for you to do."

"And take her where you may find her," said the Duchess.

"A second *mésalliance!*" exclaimed Mlle. Armande.

The Duchess began to laugh.

"It is better to marry than to die," said she. As she spoke she drew from her waistcoat pocket a tiny crystal phial that came from the court apothecary.

Mlle. Armande shrank away in horror. Old Chesnel took the fair Maufrigneuse's hand, and kissed it without permission.

"Are you all out of your minds here?" continued the Duchess. "Do you really expect to live in the fifteenth century when the rest of the world has reached the nineteenth? My dear children, there is no *noblesse* nowadays; there is no aristocracy left! Napoleon's Code Civil made an end of the parchments, exactly as cannon made an end of feudal castles. When you have some money, you will be very much more of nobles than you are now. Marry anybody you please, Victurnien, you will raise your wife to your rank; that is the most substantial privilege left to the French *noblesse*. Did not M. de Talleyrand marry Mme. Grandt without compromising his position? Remember that Louis XIV. took the Widow Scarron for his wife."

"He did not marry her for her money," interposed Mlle. Armande.

"If the Comtesse d'Esgrignon were one du Croisier's niece, for instance, would you receive her?" asked Chesnel.

"Perhaps," replied the Duchess; "but the King, beyond all doubt, would be very glad to see her.—So you do not know what is going on in the world?" continued she, seeing the amazement in their faces. "Victurnien has been in Paris; he knows how things go there. We had more influence under Napoleon. Marry Mlle. Duval, Victurnien; she will be just as much Marquise d'Esgrignon as I am Duchesse de Maufrigneuse."

"All is lost—even honor!" said the Chevalier, with a wave of the hand.

"Good-by, Victurnien," said the Duchess, kissing her

lover on the forehead; "we shall not see each other again. Live on your lands; that is the best thing for you to do; the air of Paris is not at all good for you."

"Diane!" the young Count cried despairingly.

"Monsieur, you forget yourself strangely," the Duchess retorted coolly, as she laid aside her rôle of man and mistress, and became not merely an angel again, but a duchess, and not only a duchess, but Molière's Célimène.

The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse made a stately bow to these four personages, and drew from the Chevalier his last tear of admiration at the service of *le beau sexe*.

"How like she is to the Princess Goritza!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

Diane had disappeared. The crack of the postilion's whip told Victurnien that the fair romance of his first love was over. While the peril lasted, Diane could still see her lover in the young Count; but out of danger, she despised him for the weakling that he was.

Six months afterwards, Camusot received the appointment of assistant judge at Paris, and later he became an examining magistrate. Goodman Blondet was made a councilor to the Court-Royal; he held the post just long enough to secure a retiring pension, and then went back to live in his pretty little house. Joseph Blondet sat in his father's seat at the court till the end of his days; there was not the faintest chance of promotion for him, but he became Mlle. Blandureau's husband; and she, no doubt, is leading to-day, in the little flower-covered brick house, as dull a life as any carp in a marble basin. Michu and Camusot also received the Cross of the Legion of Honor, while Blondet became an Officer. As for M. Sauvager, deputy public prosecutor, he was sent to Corsica, to du Croisier's great relief; he had decidedly no mind to bestow his niece upon that functionary.

Du Crosier himself, urged by President du Ronceret, appealed from the finding of the Tribunal to the Court-Royal, and lost his cause. The Liberals throughout the department held that little d'Esgrignon was guilty; while the Royalists, on the other hand, told frightful stories of plots

woven by "that abominable du Croisier" to compass his revenge. A duel was fought indeed; the hazard of arms favored du Croisier, the young Count was dangerously wounded, and his antagonist maintained his words. This affair embittered the strife between the two parties; the Liberals brought it forward on all occasions. Meanwhile du Croisier never could carry his election, and saw no hope of marrying his niece to the Count, especially after the duel.

A month after the decision of the Tribunal was confirmed in the Court-Royal, Chesnel died, exhausted by the dreadful strain, which had weakened and shaken him mentally and physically. He died in the hour of victory, like some old faithful hound that has brought the boar to bay, and gets his death on the tusks. He died as happily as might be, seeing that he left the great House all but ruined, and the heir in penury, bored to death by an idle life, and without a hope of establishing himself. That bitter thought and his own exhaustion, no doubt, hastened the old man's end. One great comfort came to him as he lay amid the wreck of so many hopes, sinking under the burden of so many cares—the old Marquis, at his sister's entreaty, gave him back all the old friendship. The great lord came to the little house in the Rue du Bercail, and sat by his old servant's bedside, all unaware how much that servant had done and sacrificed for him. Chesnel sat upright, and repeated Simeon's cry.—The Marquis allowed them to bury Chesnel in the castle chapel; they laid him cross-wise at the foot of the tomb which was waiting for the Marquis himself, the last, in a sense, of the d'Esgrignons.

And so died one of the last representatives of that great and beautiful thing, Service; giving to that often discredited word its original meaning, the relation between feudal lord and servitor. That relation, only to be found in some out-of-the-way province, or among a few old servants of the King, did honor alike to a *noblesse* that could call forth such affection, and to a *bourgeoisie* that could conceive it. Such noble and magnificent devotion is no longer possible among us. Noble houses have no servitors left; even as France has no longer a King, nor an hereditary peerage, nor



lands that are bound irrevocably to an historic house, that the glorious names of a nation may be perpetuated. Chesnel was not merely one of the obscure great men of private life; he was something more—he was a great fact. In his sustained self-devotion is there not something indefinably solemn and sublime, something that rises above the one beneficent deed, or the heroic height which is reached by a moment's supreme effort? Chesnel's virtues belong essentially to the classes which stand between the poverty of the people on the one hand, and the greatness of the aristocracy on the other; for these can combine homely burgher virtues with the heroic ideals of the noble, enlightening both by a solid education.

Victurnien was not well looked upon at court; there was no more chance of a great match for him, nor a place. His Majesty steadily refused to raise the d'Esgrignons to the peerage, the one royal favor which could rescue Victurnien from his wretched position. It was impossible that he should marry a *bourgeoise* heiress in his father's lifetime, so he was bound to live on shabbily under the paternal roof with memories of his two years of splendor in Paris, and the lost love of a great lady to bear him company. He grew moody and depressed, vegetating at home with a careworn aunt and a half-broken-hearted father, who attributed his son's condition to a wasting malady. Chesnel was no longer there.

The Marquis died in 1830. The great d'Esgrignon, with a following of all the less infirm *noblesse* from the Collection of Antiquities, went to wait upon Charles X. at Nonancourt; he paid his respects to his sovereign, and swelled the meager train of the fallen king. It was an act of courage which seems simple enough to-day, but, in that time of enthusiastic revolt, it was heroism.

“The Gaul has conquered!” These were the Marquis's last words.

By that time du Croisier's victory was complete. The new Marquis d'Esgrignon accepted Mlle. Duval as his wife a week after his old father's death. His bride brought him three millions of francs, for du Croisier and his wife settled the reversion of their fortunes upon her in the marriage con-

tract. Du Croisier took occasion to say during the ceremony that the d'Esgrignon family was the most honorable of all the ancient houses in France.

Some day the present Marquis d'Esgrignon will have an income of more than a hundred thousand crowns. You may see him in Paris, for he comes to town every winter and leads a jolly bachelor life, while he treats his wife with something more than the indifference of the *grand seigneur* of olden times; he takes no thought whatever for her.

"As for Mlle. d'Esgrignon," said Émile Blondet, to whom all the detail of the story is due, "if she is no longer like the divinely fair woman whom I saw by glimpses in my childhood, she is decidedly, at the age of sixty-seven, the most pathetic and interesting figure in the Collection of Antiquities. She queens it among them still. I saw her when I made my last journey to my native place in search of the necessary papers for my marriage. When my father knew who it was that I had married, he was struck dumb with amazement; he had not a word to say until I told him that I was a prefect.

"'You were born to it,' he said, with a smile.

"As I took a walk round the town, I met Mlle. Armande. She looked taller than ever. I looked at her, and thought of Marius among the ruins of Carthage. Had she not outlived her creed, and the beliefs that had been destroyed? She is a sad and silent woman, with nothing of her old beauty left except the eyes, that shine with an unearthly light. I watched her on her way to Mass, with her book in her hand, and could not help thinking that she prayed to God to take her out of the world."

LES JARDIES, *July 1837.*



# **LOST ILLUSIONS**



## PREFACE

THE longest, without exception, of Balzac's books, and one which contains hardly any passage that is not very nearly of his best, *Illusions Perdues* suffers, I think, a little in point of composition from the mixture of the Angoulême scenes of its first and third parts with the purely Parisian interest of *Un Grand Homme de Province*. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the gain in distinctness and lucidity of arrangement derived from putting *Les Deux Poètes* and *Ève et David* (a much better title than that which has been preferred in the *Édition Définitive*) together in one volume, and reserving the greatness and decadence of Lucien de Rubempré for another. It is distinctly awkward that this should be divided, as it is itself an enormous episode, a sort of Herodotean parenthesis, rather than an integral part of the story. And, as a matter of fact, it joins on much more to the *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes* than to its actual companions. In fact, it is an instance of the somewhat haphazard and arbitrary way in which the actual division of the *Comédie* has worked, that it should, dealing as it does wholly and solely with Parisian life, be put in the *Scènes de la Vie de Province*, and should be separated from its natural conclusion not merely as a matter of volumes, but as a matter of divisions. In making the arrangement, however, it is necessary to remember Balzac's own scheme, especially as the connection of the three parts in other ways is too close to permit the wrenching of them asunder altogether and finally. This caution given, all that is necessary can be done by devoting the introduction of this volume entirely to the first and third or Angoulême parts, and by consecrating another preface at the beginning of the second part to the egregious Lucien by himself.

There is a double gain in doing this, for independently of the connection as above referred to, Lucien has little to do except as an opportunity for the display of virtue by his sister and David Séchard; and the parts in which they ap-

pear are among the most interesting of Balzac's work. The "idyllic" charm of this marriage for love, combined as it is with exhibitions of the author's power in more than one of the ways in which he loved best to show it, has never escaped attention from Balzac's most competent critics. He himself had speculated in print and paper before David Séchard was conceived; he himself had for all "maniacs," all men of one idea, the fraternal enthusiasm of a fellow-victim. He could never touch a miser without a sort of shudder of interest; and that singular fancy of his for describing complicated legal and commercial undertakings came in too. Nor did he spare, in this wide-ranging book, to bring in other favorite matters of his, the *hobereau*—or squireen—aristocracy, the tittle-tattle of the country town, and so forth.

The result is a book of multifarious interest, not hampered, as some of its fellows are, by an uncertainty on the author's part as to what particular hare he is coursing. Part of the interest, after the description of the printing-office and of old Séchard's swindling of his son, is a doubling, it is true, upon that of *La Muse du Département*, and is perhaps a little less amusingly done; but it is blended with better matters. Sixte du Châtelet is a considerable addition to Balzac's gallery of the aristocracy in transition—of the Bonapartist *parvenus*, whom perhaps he understood even better than the old nobility, for they were already in his time becoming adulterated and alloyed; or than the new folk of business and finance, for they were but in their earliest stages. Nor is the rest of the society of Madame de Bargeton inferior.

But the real interest both of *Les Deux Poètes*, and still more of *Ève et David*, between which two, be it always remembered, comes in the original the *Distinguished Provincial*, lies in the characters who gave their name to the last part. In David, the man of one idea, who yet has room for an honest love and an all-undeserved friendship, Balzac could not go wrong. David Séchard takes a place by himself among the sheep of the *Comédie*. Some may indeed say that this phrase is unfortunate, that Balzac's sheep have more qualities of the mutton than innocence. It is not quite to

## PREFACE



be denied. But David is very far indeed from being a good imbecile, like César Birotteau, or a man intoxicated out of common-sense by a passion respectable in itself, like Goriot. His sacrifice of his mania in time is something—nay, it is very much; and his disinterested devotion to his brother-in-law does not quite pass the limits of sense.

But what shall we say of Eve? She is good, of course, good as gold, as Eugénie Grandet herself; and the novelist has been kind enough to allow her to be happier. But has he quite interested us in her love for David? Has he even persuaded us that the love existed in a form deserving the name? Did not Eve rather take her husband to protect him, to look after him, than either to love, honor, and obey in the orthodox sense, or to love for love's sake only, as some still take their husbands and wives even at the end of the nineteenth century? This is a question which each reader must answer for himself; but few are likely to refuse assent to the sentence, "Happy the husband who has such a wife as Eve Chardon!"

The bibliography of this long and curious book—almost the only one which contains verse, some of Balzac's own, some given to him by his more poetical friends—occupies full ten pages of M. de Lovenjoul's record. The first part, which bore the general title, was a book from the beginning, and appeared in 1837 in the *Scènes de la Vie de Province*. It had five chapters, and the original verse it contained had appeared in the *Annales Romantiques* ten years earlier with slight variants. The second part, *Un Grand Homme de Province*, likewise appeared as a book, independently published by Souverain in 1839 in two vols. and forty chapters. But two of these chapters had been inserted a few days before the publication in the *Estafette*. Here Canalis was more distinctly identified with Lamartine than in the subsequent texts. The third part, unlike its forerunners, appeared serially in two papers, *L'État* and *Le Parisien*, in the year 1843, under the title of *David Séchard, ou les Souffrances d'un Inventeur*, and next year became a book under the first title only. But before this last issue it had been united to the other two parts, and had appeared as *Eve et David* in the first edition of the *Comédies*. G. S.





## LOST ILLUSIONS

*To Monsieur Victor Hugo.*

*It was your birthright to be, like a Rafael or a Pitt, a great poet at an age when other men are children; it was your fate, the fate of Chateaubriand and of every man of genius, to struggle against jealousy skulking behind the columns of a newspaper, or crouching in the subterranean places of journalism. For this reason I desired that your victorious name should help to win a victory for this work that I inscribe to you, a work which, if some persons are to be believed, is an act of courage as well as a veracious history. If there had been journalists in the time of Molière, who can doubt but that they, like marquises, financiers, doctors, and lawyers, would have been within the province of the writer of plays? And why should Comedy, qui castigat ridendo mores, make an exception in favor of one power, when the Parisian press spares none? I am happy, monsieur, in this opportunity of subscribing myself your sincere admirer and friend,*

*De Balzac.*

### PART I

#### TWO POETS

**A**T the time when this story opens, the Stanhope press and the ink-distributing roller were not as yet in general use in small provincial printing establishments. Even at Angoulême, so closely connected through its paper-mills with the art of typography in Paris, the only machinery in use was the primitive wooden invention to which the language owes a figure of speech—"the press groans" was no mere

retorical expression in those days. Leather ink-balls were still used in old-fashioned printing houses; the pressmen dabbed the ink by hand on the characters, and the movable table on which the form of type was placed in readiness for the sheet of paper, being made of marble, literally deserved its name of "impression-stone." Modern machinery has swept all this old-world mechanism into oblivion; the wooden press which, with all its imperfections, turned out such beautiful work for the Elzevirs, Plantin, Aldus, and Didot is so completely forgotten, that something must be said as to the obsolete gear on which Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard set an almost superstitious affection, for it plays a part in this chronicle of great small things.

Séchard had been in his time a journeyman pressman, a "bear" in compositors' slang. The continued pacing to and fro of the pressman from ink-table to press, from press to ink-table, no doubt suggested the nickname. The "bears," however, make matters even by calling the compositors monkeys, on account of the nimble industry displayed by those gentlemen in picking out the type from the hundred and fifty-two compartments of the cases.

In the disastrous year 1793, Séchard, being fifty years old and a married man, escaped the great Requisition which swept the bulk of French workmen into the army. The old pressman was the only hand left in the printing-house; and when the master (otherwise the "gaffer") died, leaving a widow, but no children, the business seemed to be on the verge of extinction; for the solitary "bear" was quite incapable of the feat of transformation into a "monkey," and in his quality of pressman had never learned to read or write. Just then, however, a Representative of the People being in a mighty hurry to publish the Decrees of the Convention, bestowed a master printer's license on Séchard, and requisitioned the establishment. Citizen Séchard accepted the dangerous patent, bought the business of his master's widow with his wife's savings, and took over the plant at half its value. But he was not even at the beginning. He was bound to print the Decrees of the Republic without mistakes and without delay.

In this strait Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard had the luck to discover a noble Marseillais who had no mind to emigrate and lose his lands, nor yet to show himself openly and lose his head, and consequently was fain to earn a living by some lawful industry. A bargain was struck. M. le Comte de Maucombe, disguised in a provincial printer's jacket, set up, read, and corrected the decrees which forbade citizens to harbor aristocrats under pain of death; while the "bear," now a "gaffer," printed the copies and duly posted them, and the pair remained safe and sound.

In 1795, when the squall of the Terror had passed over, Nicolas Séchard was obliged to look out for another jack-of-all-trades to be compositor, reader, and foreman in one; and an Abbé who declined the oath succeeded the Comte de Maucombe as soon as the First Consul restored public worship. The Abbé became a Bishop at the Restoration, and in after days the Count and the Abbé met and sat together on the same bench of the House of Peers.

In 1795 Jérôme-Nicolas had not known how to read or write; in 1802 he had made no progress in either art; but by allowing a handsome margin for "wear and tear" in his estimates, he managed to pay a foreman's wages. The once easy-going journeyman was a terror to his "bears" and "monkeys." Where poverty ceases, avarice begins. From the day when Séchard first caught a glimpse of the possibility of making a fortune, a growing covetousness developed and sharpened in him a certain practical faculty for business—greedy, suspicious, and keen-eyed. He carried on his craft in disdain of theory. In course of time he had learned to estimate at a glance the cost of printing per page or per sheet in every kind of type. He proved to unlettered customers that large type cost more to move; or, if small type was under discussion, that it was more difficult to handle. The setting up of the type was the one part of his craft of which he knew nothing; and so great was his terror lest he should not charge enough, that he always made a heavy profit. He never took his eyes off his compositors while they were paid by the hour. If he knew that a paper manufacturer was in difficulties, he would buy up his stock at a

cheap rate and warehouse the paper. So from this time forward he was his own landlord, and owned the old house which had been a printing office from time immemorial.

He had every sort of luck. He was left a widower with but one son. The boy he sent to the grammar school; he must be educated, not so much for his own sake as to train a successor to the business; and Séchard treated the lad harshly so as to prolong the time of parental rule, making him work at ease on holidays, telling him that he must learn to earn his own living, so as to recompense his poor old father, who was slaving his life out to give him an education.

Then the Abbé went, and Séchard promoted one of his four compositors to be foreman, making his choice on the future bishop's recommendation of the man as an honest and intelligent workman. In these ways the worthy printer thought to tide over the time until his son could take a business which was sure to extend in young and clever hands.

David Séchard's school career was a brilliant one. Old Séchard, as a "bear" who had succeeded in life without any education, entertained a very considerable contempt for attainments in book learning; and when he sent his son to Paris to study the higher branches of typography, he recommended the lad so earnestly to save a good round sum in the "working man's paradise" (as he was pleased to call the city), and so distinctly gave the boy to understand that he was not to draw upon the paternal purse, that it seemed as if old Séchard saw some way of gaining private ends of his own by that sojourn in the Land of Sapience. So David learned his trade, and completed his education at the same time, and Didot's foreman became a scholar; and yet when he left Paris at the end of 1819, summoned home by his father to take the helm of business, he had not cost his parent a farthing.

Now Nicolas Séchard's establishment hitherto had enjoyed a monopoly of all the official printing in the department, besides the work for the prefecture and the diocese—three connections which should prove highly profitable to an active young printer; but precisely at this juncture the firm of Cointet Brothers, paper manufacturers, applied to the

authorities for the second printer's license in Angoulême. Hitherto old Séchard had contrived to reduce this license to a dead letter, thanks to the war crises of the Empire, and consequent atrophy of commercial enterprise; but he had neglected to buy up the right himself, and this piece of parsimony was the ruin of the old business. Séchard thought joyfully when he heard the news that the coming struggle with the Cointets would be fought out by his son and not by himself.

"I should have gone to the wall," he thought, "but a young fellow from the Didots will pull through."

The septuagenarian sighed for the time when he could live at ease in his own fashion. If his knowledge of the higher branches of the craft of printing was scanty, on the other hand, he was supposed to be past master of an art which workmen pleasantly call "tipple-ography," an art held in high esteem by the divine author of *Pantagruel*; though of late, by reason of the persecution of societies yclept of Temperance, the cult has fallen, day by day, into disuse.

Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard, bound by the laws of etymology to be a dry subject, suffered from an inextinguishable thirst. His wife, during her lifetime, managed to control within reasonable bounds the passion for the juice of the grape, a taste so natural to the bear that M. de Chateaubriand remarked it among the ursine tribes of the New World. But philosophers inform us that old age is apt to revert to the habits of youth, and Séchard senior is a case in point—the older he grew, the better he loved to drink. The master-passion had given a stamp of originality to an ursine physiognomy; his nose had developed till it reached the proportions of a double great-canon A; his veined cheeks looked like vine-leaves, covered, as they were, with bloated patches of purple, madder red, and often mottled hues; till altogether, the countenance suggested a huge truffle clasped about by autumn vine tendrils. The little gray eyes, peering out from beneath thick eyebrows like bushes covered with snow, were agleam with the cunning of avarice that had extinguished everything else in the man, down to the very

instinct of fatherhood. Those eyes never lost their cunning even when disguised in drink. Séchard put you in mind of one of La Fontaine's Franciscan friars, with the fringe of grizzled hair still curling about his bald pate. He was short and corpulent, like one of the old-fashioned lamps for illumination, that burn a vast deal of oil to a very small piece of wick; for excess of any sort confirms the habit of body, and drunkenness, like much study, makes the fat man stouter, and the lean man leaner still.

For thirty years Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard had worn the famous municipal three-cornered hat, which you may still see here and there on the head of the town crier in out-of-the-way places. His breeches and waistcoat were of greenish velveteen, and he wore an old-fashioned brown great-coat, gray cotton stockings, and shoes with silver buckles to them. This costume, in which the workman shone through the burgess, was so thoroughly in keeping with the man's character, defects, and way of life, that he might have come ready dressed into the world. You could no more imagine him apart from his clothes than you could think of a bulb without its husk. If the old printer had not long since given the measure of his blind greed, the very nature of the man came out in the manner of his abdication.

Knowing, as he did, that his son must have learned his business pretty thoroughly in the great school of the Didots, he had yet been ruminating for a long while over the bargain that he meant to drive with David. All that the father made, the son, of course, was bound to lose, but in business this worthy knew nothing of father or son. If, in the first instance, he had looked on David as his only child, later he came to regard him as the natural purchaser of the business, whose interests were therefore opposed to his own. Séchard meant to sell dear; David, of course, to buy cheap; his son therefore was an antagonist, and it was his duty to get the better of him. The transformation of sentiment into self-seeking, ordinarily slow, tortuous, and veiled by hypocrisy in better educated people, was swift and direct in the old "bear," who demonstrated the superiority of shrewd tittle-ography over book-learned typography.

David came home, and the old man received him with all the cordiality which cunning folk can assume with an eye to business. He was as full of thought for him as any lover for his mistress; giving him his arm, telling him where to put his foot down so as to avoid the mud, warming the bed for him, lighting a fire in his room, making supper ready. The next day, after he had done his best to fluster his son's wits over a sumptuous dinner, Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard, after copious potations, began with a "Now for business," a remark so singularly misplaced between two hiccoughs, that David begged his parent to postpone serious matters until the morrow. But the old "bear" was by no means inclined to put off the long expected battle; he was too well prepared to turn his tipsiness to good account. He had dragged the chain these fifty years, he would not wear it another hour; to-morrow his son should be the "gaffer."

Perhaps a word or two about the business premises may be said here. The printing-house had been established since the reign of Louis XIV. in the angle made by the Rue de Beaulieu and the Place du Mûrier; it had been devoted to its present purposes for a long time past. The ground floor consisted of a single huge room lighted on the side next the street by an old-fashioned casement, and by a large sash window that gave upon the yard at the back. A passage at the side led to the private office; but in the provinces the processes of typography excite such a lively interest, that customers usually preferred to enter by way of the glass door in the street front, though they at once descended three steps, for the floor of the workshop lay below the level of the street. The gaping newcomer always failed to note the perils of the passage through the shop; and while staring at the sheets of paper strung in groves across the ceiling, ran against the rows of cases, or knocked his hat against the tie-bars that secured the presses in position. Or the customer's eyes would follow the agile movements of a compositor, picking out type from the hundred and fifty-two compartments of his case, reading his copy, verifying the words in the composing-stick, and leading the lines, till a ream of damp paper weighted with heavy slabs, and set down in the



middle of the gangway, tripped up the bemused spectator, or he caught his hip against the angle of a bench, to the huge delight of boys, "bears," and "monkeys." No wight had ever been known to reach the further end without accident. A couple of glass-windowed cages had been built out into the yard at the back; the foreman sat in state in the one, the master printer in the other. Out in the yard the walls were agreeably decorated by trellised vines, a tempting bit of color, considering the owner's reputation. On the one side of the space stood the kitchen, on the other the woodshed, and in a ramshackle penthouse against the hall at the back the paper was trimmed and damped down. Here, too, the forms, or, in ordinary language, the masses of set-up type, were washed. Inky streams issuing thence blended with the ooze from the kitchen sink, and found their way into the kennel in the street outside; till peasants coming into the town of a market day believed that the Devil was taking a wash inside the establishment.

As to the house above the printing office, it consisted of three rooms on the first floor and a couple of attics in the roof. The first room did duty as dining-room and lobby; it was exactly the same length as the passage below, less the space taken up by the old-fashioned wooden staircase; and was lighted by a narrow casement on the street and a bull's-eye window looking into the yard. The chief characteristic of the apartment was a cynic simplicity, due to money-making greed. The bare walls were covered with plain whitewash, the dirty brick floor had never been scoured, the furniture consisted of three rickety chairs, a round table, and a sideboard stationed between the two doors of a bedroom and a sitting-room. Windows and doors alike were dingy with accumulated grime. Reams of blank paper or printed matter usually encumbered the floor, and more frequently than not the remains of Séchard's dinner, empty bottles and plates, were lying about on the packages.

The bedroom was lighted on the side of the yard by a window with leaded panes, and hung with the old-world tapestry that decorated house fronts in provincial towns on Corpus Christi Day. For furniture it boasted a vast

four-post bedstead with canopy, valances and quilt of crimson serge, a couple of worm-eaten armchairs, two, tapestry-covered chairs in walnut wood, an aged bureau, and a timepiece on the mantel-shelf. The Seigneur Rouzeau, Jérôme-Nicolas's master and predecessor, had furnished the homely old-world room; it was just as he had left it.

The sitting-room had been partially modernized by the late Mme. Séchard; the walls were adorned with a wainscot, fearful to behold, painted the color of powder blue. The panels were decorated with wall-paper—Oriental scenes in sepia tint—and for all furniture, half-a-dozen chairs with lyre-shaped backs and blue leather cushions were ranged round the room. The two clumsy arched windows that gave upon the Place du Mûrier were curtainless; there was neither clock nor candle sconce nor mirror above the mantel-shelf, for Mme. Séchard had died before she carried out her scheme of decoration; and the "bear," unable to conceive the use of improvements that brought in no return in money, had left it at this point.

Hither, *pède titubante*, Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard brought his son, and pointed to a sheet of paper lying on the table—a valuation of plant drawn up by the foreman under his direction.

"Read that, my boy," said Jérôme-Nicolas, rolling a drunken eye from the paper to his son, and back again to the paper. "You will see what a jewel of a printing-house I am giving you."

"Three wooden presses, held in position by iron tie-bars, cast-iron plates——"

"An improvement of my own," put in Séchard senior.

"——Together with all the implements, ink-tables, balls, benches, *et cetera*, sixteen hundred francs!" Why, father," cried David, letting the sheet fall, "these presses of yours are old sabots not worth a hundred crowns; they are only fit for firewood."

"Sabots?" cried old Séchard, "*Sabots?* There, take the inventory and let us go downstairs. You will soon see whether your paltry iron-work contrivances will work like these solid old tools, tried and trusty. You will not have

the heart after that to slander honest old presses that go like mail coaches, and are good to last you your lifetime without needing repairs of any sort! Sabots! Yes, sabots that are like to hold salt enough to cook your eggs with—sabots that your father has plodded on with these twenty years; they have helped him to make you what you are.”

The father, without coming to grief on the way, lurched down the worn, knotty staircase that shook under his tread. In the passage he opened the door of the workshop, flew to the nearest press (artfully oiled and cleaned for the occasion) and pointed out the strong oaken cheeks, polished up by the apprentice.

“Isn’t it a love of a press?”

A wedding announcement lay in the press. The old “bear” folded down the frisket upon the tympan, and the tympan upon the form, ran in the carriage, worked the lever, drew out the carriage, and lifted the frisket and tympan, all with as much agility as the youngest of the tribe. The press, handled in this sort, creaked aloud in such fine style that you might have thought that some bird had dashed itself against a window pane and flown away again.

“Where is the English press that could go at that pace?” the parent asked of his astonished son.

Old Séchard hurried to the second, and then to the third in order, repeating the maneuver with equal dexterity. The third presenting to his wine-troubled eye a patch overlooked by the apprentice, with a notable oath he rubbed it with the skirt of his overcoat, much as a horse-dealer polishes the coat of an animal that he is trying to sell.

“With those three presses, David, you can make your nine thousand francs a year without a foreman. As your future partner, I am opposed to your replacing these presses by your cursed cast-iron machinery, that wears out the type. You in Paris have been making such a to-do over that damned Englishman’s invention—a foreigner, an enemy of France who wants to help the ironfounders to a fortune. Oh! you wanted Stanhopes, did you? Thanks for your Stanhopes, that cost two thousand five hundred francs a-piece, about twice as much as my three jewels put together,

and maul your type to pieces, because there is no give in them. I haven't book-learning like you, but you keep this well in mind, the life of the Stanhope is the death of the type. Those three presses will serve your turn well enough, the printing will be properly done, and folk here in Angoulême won't ask any more of you. You may print with presses made of wood or iron or gold or silver, *they* will never pay you a farthing more."

"‘*Item,*’" pursued David, "'five thousand pounds weight of type from M. Vafard's foundry——'" Didot's apprentice could not help smiling at the name.

"Laugh away! After twelve years of wear, that type is as good as new. That is what I call a typefounder! M. Vafard is an honest man, who uses hard metal; and, to my way of thinking, the best typefounder is the one you go to most seldom."

"‘——Taken at ten thousand francs,’" continued David. "Ten thousand francs, father! Why, that is two francs a pound, and the Messrs. Didot only ask thirty-six sous for their *Cicero*! These nail-heads of yours will only fetch the price of old metal—fivepence a pound."

"You call M. Gillé's italics, running-hand and round-hand, ‘nail-heads,’ do you? M. Gillé, that used to be printer to the Emperor! And type that cost six francs a pound! masterpieces of engraving, bought only five years ago. Some of them are as bright yet as when they came from the foundry. Look here!"

Old Séchard pounced upon some packets of unused sorts, and held them out for David to see.

"I am not book-learned; I don't know how to read or write; but, all the same, I know enough to see that M. Gillé's sloping letters are the fathers of your Messrs. Didot's English running-hand. Here is round-hand," he went on, taking up an unused pica type.

David saw that there was no way of coming to terms with his father. It was a case of Yes or No—of taking or leaving it. The very ropes across the ceiling had gone down into the old "bear's" inventory, and not the smallest item was omitted; jobbing chases, wetting-boards, paste-pots,

rinsing-trough, and lye-brushes had all been put down and valued separately with miserly exactitude. The total amounted to thirty thousand francs, including the license and the goodwill. David asked himself whether or no this thing were feasible.

Old Séchard grew uneasy over his son's silence; he would rather have had stormy argument than a wordless acceptance of the situation. Chaffering in these sorts of bargains means that a man can look after his interests. "A man who is ready to pay you anything you ask will pay nothing," old Séchard was saying to himself. While he tried to follow his son's train of thought, he went through the list of odds and ends of plant needed by a country business, drawing David now to a hot-press, now to a cutting-press, bragging of its usefulness and sound condition.

"Old tools are always the best tools," said he. "In our line of business they ought to fetch more than the new, like goldbeaters' tools."

Hideous vignettes, representing Hymen and Cupids, skeletons raising the lids of their tombs to describe a V or an M, and huge borders of masks for theatrical posters became in turn objects of tremendous value through old Jérôme-Nicolas's vinous eloquence. Old custom, he told his son, was so deeply rooted in the district that he (David) would only waste his pains if he gave them the finest things in life. He himself had tried to sell them a better class of almanac than the *Double Liégeois* on grocers' paper; and what came of it?—the original *Double Liégeois* sold better than the most sumptuous calendars. David would soon see the importance of these old-fashioned things when he found he could get more for them than for the most costly new-fangled articles.

"Aha! my boy, Paris is Paris, and the provinces are the provinces. If a man came in from L'Houmeau with an order for wedding cards, and you were to print them without a Cupid and garlands, he would not believe that he was properly married; you would have them all back again if you sent them out with a plain M on them after the style of your Messrs. Didot. They may be fine printers, but their

inventions won't take in the provinces for another hundred years. So there you are."

A generous man is a bad bargain-driver. David's nature was of the sensitive and affectionate type that shrinks from a dispute, and gives way at once if an opponent touches his feelings. His loftiness of feeling, and the fact that the old toper had himself well in hand, put him still further at a disadvantage in a dispute about money matters with his own father, especially as he credited that father with the best intentions, and took his covetous greed for a printer's attachment to his old familiar tools. Still, as Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard had taken the whole place over from Rouzeau's widow for ten thousand francs, paid in assignats, it stood to reason that thirty thousand francs in coin at the present day was an exorbitant demand.

"Father, you are cutting my throat!" exclaimed David.

"I," cried the old toper, raising his hand to the lines of cord across the ceiling, "I who gave you life? Why, David, what do you suppose the license is worth? Do you know that the sheet of advertisements alone, at fivepence a line, brought in five hundred francs last month? You turn up the books, lad, and see what we make by placards and the registers at the Prefecture, and the work for the mayor's office, and the bishop too. You are a do-nothing that has no mind to get on. You are haggling over the horse that will carry you to some pretty bit of property like Marsac."

Attached to the valuation of plant there was a deed of partnership between Séchard senior and his son. The good father was to let his house and premises to the new firm for twelve hundred francs per annum, reserving one of the two rooms in the roof for himself. So long as David's purchase-money was not paid in full, the profits were to be divided equally; so soon as he paid off his father, he was to be the sole proprietor of the business.

David made a mental calculation of the value of the license, the goodwill, and the stock of paper, leaving the plant out of account. It was just possible, he thought, to clear off the debt. He accepted the conditions. Old Séchard, accustomed to peasants' haggling, knowing nothing

of the wider business views of Paris, was amazed at such a prompt conclusion.

“Can he have been putting money by?” he asked himself. “Or is he scheming out, at this moment, some way of not paying me?”

With this notion in his head, he tried to find out whether David had any money with him; he wanted to be paid something on account. The old man’s inquisitiveness roused his son’s distrust; David remained close buttoned up to the chin.

Next day, old Séchard made the apprentice move all his own household stuff up into the attic until such time as an empty market cart could take it out on the return journey into the country; and David entered into possession of three bare unfurnished rooms on the day that saw him installed in the printing-house, without one sou wherewith to pay his men’s wages. When he asked his father, as a partner, to contribute his share towards the working expenses, the old man pretended not to understand. He had found the printing-house, he said, and he was not bound to find the money too. He had paid his share. Pressed close by his son’s reasoning, he answered that when he himself had paid Rouzeau’s widow he had not had a penny left. If he, a poor, ignorant working man, had made his way, Didot’s apprentice should do still better. Besides, had not David been earning money, thanks to an education paid for by the sweat of his old father’s brow? Now surely was the time when the education would come in useful.

“What have you done with your ‘polls’?” he asked, returning to the charge. He meant to have light on a problem which his son left unresolved the day before.

“Why, had I not to live?” David asked indignantly, “and books to buy besides?”

“Oh! you bought books, did you? You will make a poor man of business. A man that buys books is hardly fit to print them,” retorted the “bear.”

Then David endured the most painful of humiliations—the sense of shame for a parent; there was nothing for it but to be passive while his father poured out a flood of

reasons—sordid, whining, contemptible, money-getting reasons—in which the niggardly old man wrapped his refusal. David crushed down his pain into the depths of his soul; he saw that he was alone; saw that he had no one to look to but himself; saw, too, that his father was trying to make money out of him; and in a spirit of philosophical curiosity, he tried to find out how far the old man would go. He called old Séchard's attention to the fact that he had never as yet made any inquiry as to his mother's fortune; if that fortune would not buy the printing-house, it might go some way towards paying the working expenses.

"Your mother's fortune?" echoed old Séchard; "why, it was her beauty and intelligence!"

David understood his father thoroughly after that answer; he understood that only after an interminable, expensive, and disgraceful lawsuit could he obtain any account of the money which by rights was his. The noble heart accepted the heavy burden laid upon it, seeing clearly beforehand how difficult it would be to free himself from the engagements into which he had entered with his father.

"I will work," he said to himself. "After all, if I have a rough time of it, so had the old man; besides, I shall be working for myself, shall I not?"

"I am leaving you a treasure," said Séchard, uneasy at his son's silence.

David asked what the treasure might be.

"Marion!" said his father.

Marion, a big country girl, was an indispensable part of the establishment. It was Marion who damped the paper and cut it to size; Marion did the cooking, washing, and marketing; Marion unloaded the paper carts, collected accounts, and cleaned the ink-balls; and if Marion had but known how to read, old Séchard would have put her to set up type into the bargain.

Old Séchard set out on foot for the country. Delighted as he was with his sale of the business, he was not quite easy in his mind as to the payment. To the throes of the vendor, the agony of uncertainty as to the completion of the pur-



chase inevitably succeeds. Passion of every sort is essentially jesuitical. Here was a man who thought that education was useless, forcing himself to believe in the influence of education. He was mortgaging thirty thousand francs upon the ideas of honor and conduct which education should have developed in his son; David had received a good training, so David would sweat blood and water to fulfill his engagements; David's knowledge would discover new resources; and David seemed to be full of fine feelings, so—David would pay! Many a parent does in this way, and thinks that he has acted a father's part; old Séchard was quite of that opinion by the time that he reached his vineyard at Marsac, a hamlet some four leagues out of Angoulême. The previous owner had built a nice little house on the bit of property, and from year to year had added other bits of land to it, until in 1809 the old "bear" bought the whole, and went thither, exchanging the toil of the printing press for the labor of the winepress. As he put it himself, "he had been in that line so long that he ought to know something about it."

During the first twelvemonth of rural retirement, Séchard senior showed a careful countenance among his vine props; for he was always in his vineyard now, just as, in the old days, he had lived in his shop, day in, day out. The prospect of thirty thousand francs was even more intoxicating than sweet wine; already in imagination he fingered the coin. The less the claim to the money, the more eager he grew to pouch it. Not seldom his anxieties sent him hurrying from Marsac to Angoulême; he would climb up the rocky staircases into the old city and walk into his son's workshop to see how business went. There stood the presses in their places; the one apprentice, in a paper cap, was cleaning the ink-balls; there was a creaking of a press over the printing of some trade circular, the old type was still unchanged, and in the dens at the end of the room he saw his son and the foreman reading books, which the "bear" took for proof-sheets. Then he would join David at dinner and go back to Marsac, chewing the cud of uneasy reflection.

Avarice, like love, has the gift of second sight, distinctively

guessing at future contingencies, and hugging its presentiments. Séchard senior living at a distance, far from the workshop and the machinery which possessed such a fascination for him, reminding him, as it did, of days when he was making his way, could *feel* that there were disquieting symptoms of inactivity in his son. The name of Cointet Brothers haunted him like a dread; he saw Séchard & Son dropping into the second place. In short, the old man scented misfortune in the wind.

His presentiments were too well founded; disaster was hovering over the house of Séchard. But there is a tutelary deity for misers, and by a chain of unforeseen circumstances that tutelary deity was so ordering matters that the purchase-money of his extortionate bargain was to be tumbled after all into the old toper's pouch.

Indifferent to the religious reaction brought about by the Restoration, indifferent no less to the Liberal movement, David preserved a most unlucky neutrality on the burning questions of the day. In those times provincial men of business were bound to profess political opinions of some sort if they meant to secure custom; they were forced to choose for themselves between the patronage of the Liberals on the one hand or the Royalists on the other. And love, moreover, had come to David's heart, and with his scientific preoccupation and finer nature he had not room for the dogged greed of which your successful man of business is made; it choked the keen money-getting instinct which would have led him to study the differences between the Paris trade and the business of a provincial printing-house. The shades of opinion so sharply defined in the country are blurred and lost in the great currents of Parisian business life. Cointet Brothers set themselves deliberately to assimilate all shades of monarchical opinion. They let everyone know that they fasted of a Friday and kept Lent; they haunted the cathedral; they cultivated the society of the clergy; and in consequence, when books of devotion were once more in demand, Cointet Brothers were the first in this lucrative field. They slandered David, accusing him of Liberalism, Atheism, and what not. How, asked they, could

anyone employ a man whose father had been a Septembrist, a Bonapartist, and a drunkard to boot? The old man was sure to leave plenty of gold pieces behind him. They themselves were poor men with families to support, while David was a bachelor and could do as he pleased; he would have plenty one of these days; he could afford to take things easily; whereas . . . and so forth and so forth.

Such tales against David, once put into circulation, produced their effect. The monopoly of the prefectorial and diocesan work passed gradually into the hands of Cointet Brothers; and before long David's keen competitors, emboldened by his inaction, started a second local sheet of advertisements and announcements. The older establishment was left at length with the job-printing orders from the town, and the circulation of the *Charente Chronicle* fell off by one-half. Meanwhile the Cointets grew richer; they had made handsome profits on their devotional books; and now they offered to buy Séchard's paper, to have all the trade and judicial announcements of the department in their own hands.

The news of this proposal sent by David to his father brought the old vinegrower from Marsac into the Place du Mûrier with the swiftness of the raven that scents the corpses on a battlefield.

"Leave me to manage the Cointets," said he to his son; "don't you meddle in this business."

The old man saw what the Cointets meant; and they took alarm at his clearsighted sagacity. His son was making a blunder, he said, and he, Séchard, had come to put a stop to it.

"What was to become of the connection if David gave up the paper? It all depended upon the paper. All the attorneys and solicitors and men of business in L'Houmeau were Liberals to a man. The Cointets had tried to ruin the Séchards by accusing them of Liberalism, and by so doing gave them a plank to cling to—the Séchards should keep the Liberal business. Sell the paper indeed! Why, you might as well sell the stock-in-trade and the license!"

Old Séchard asked the Cointets sixty thousand francs for

the printing business, so as not to ruin his son; he was fond of his son; he was taking his son's part. The vinegrower brought his son to the front to gain his point, as a peasant brings in his wife.

His son was unwilling to do this, that, or the other; it varied according to the offers which he wrung one after another from the Cointets, until, not without an effort, he drew them on to give twenty-two thousand francs for the *Charente Chronicle*. But, at the same time, David must pledge himself thenceforward to print no newspaper whatsoever, under a penalty of thirty thousand francs for damages.

That transaction dealt the deathblow to the Séchard establishment; but the old vinegrower did not trouble himself much on that head. Murder usually follows robbery. Our worthy friend intended to pay himself with the ready money. To have the cash in his own hands he would have given in David himself over and above the bargain, and so much the more willingly since that this nuisance of a son could claim one-half of the unexpected windfall. Taking this fact into consideration, therefore, the generous parent consented to abandon his share of the business, but not the business premises; and the rental was still maintained at the famous sum of twelve hundred francs per annum.

The old man came into town very seldom after the paper was sold to the Cointets. He pleaded his advanced age, but the truth was that he took little interest in the establishment now that it was his no longer. Still, he could not quite shake off his old kindness for his stock-in-trade; and when business brought him into Angoulême, it would have been hard to say which was the stronger attraction to the old house—his wooden presses or the son whom (as a matter of form) he asked for rent. The old foreman, who had gone over to the rival establishment, knew exactly how much this fatherly generosity was worth; the old fox meant to reserve a right to interfere in his son's affairs, and had taken care to appear in the bankruptcy as a privileged creditor for arrears of rent.

The causes of David's heedlessness throw a light on the

character of that young man. Only a few days after his establishment in the paternal printing office, he came across an old school friend in the direst poverty. Lucien Chardon, a young fellow of one-and-twenty or thereabouts, was the son of a surgeon-major who had retired with a wound from the Republican army. Nature had meant M. Chardon senior for a chemist; chance opened the way for a retail druggist's business in Angoulême. After many years of scientific research, death cut him off in the midst of his incompleated experiments, and the great discovery that should have brought wealth to the family was never made. Chardon had tried to find a specific for the gout. Gout is a rich man's malady; the rich will pay large sums to recover health when they have lost it, and for this reason the druggist deliberately selected gout as his problem. Halfway between the man of science on the one side and the charlatan on the other, he saw that the scientific method was the one road to assured success, and had studied the causes of the complaint, and based his remedy on a certain general theory of treatment, with modifications in practice for varying temperaments. Then, on a visit to Paris undertaken to solicit the approval of the *Académie des Sciences*, he died, and lost all the fruits of his labors.

It may have been that some presentiment of the end had led the country druggist to do all that in him lay to give his boy and girl a good education; the family had been living up to the income brought in by the business; and now when they were left almost destitute, it was an aggravation of their misfortune that they had been brought up in the expectations of a brilliant future; for these hopes were extinguished by their father's death. The great Desplein, who attended Chardon in his last illness, saw him die in convulsions of rage.

The secret of the army surgeon's ambition lay in his passionate love for his wife, the last survivor of the family of Rubempré, saved as by miracle from the guillotine in 1793. He had gained time by declaring that she was pregnant, a lie told without the girl's knowledge or consent. Then when in a manner he had created a claim to call her

his wife, he had married her in spite of their common poverty. The children of this marriage, like all children of love, inherited the mother's wonderful beauty, that gift so often fatal when accompanied by poverty. The life of hope and hard work and despair, in all of which Mme. Chardon had shared with such keen sympathy, had left deep traces in her beautiful face, just as the slow decline of a scanty income had changed her ways and habits; but both she and the children confronted evil days bravely enough. She sold the druggist's shop in the Grand' Rue de L'Houmeau, the principal suburb of Angoulême; but it was impossible for even one woman to exist on the three hundred francs of income brought in by the investment of the purchase-money, so the mother and daughter accepted the position, and worked to earn a living. The mother went out as a monthly nurse, and for her gentle manners was preferred to any other among the wealthy houses, where she lived without expense to her children, and earned some seven francs a week. To save her son the embarrassment of seeing his mother reduced to this humble position, she assumed the name of Madame Charlotte; and persons requiring her services were requested to apply to M. Postel, M. Chardon's successor in the business. Lucien's sister worked for a laundress, a decent woman much respected in L'Houmeau, and earned fifteen daily sous. As Mme. Prieur's forewoman she had a certain position in the workroom, which raised her slightly above the class of working-girls.

The two women's slender earnings, together with Mme. Chardon's three hundred francs of *rentes*, amounted to about eight hundred francs a year, and on this sum three persons must be fed, clothed, and lodged. Yet, with all their frugal thrift, the pittance was scarcely sufficient; nearly the whole of it was needed for Lucien. Mme. Chardon and her daughter Eve believed in Lucien as Mahomet's wife believed in her husband; their devotion for his future knew no bounds. Their present landlord was the successor to the business, for M. Postel let them have rooms at the further end of a yard at the back of the laboratory for a very low rent, and Lucien slept in the poor garret above. A father's passion for

natural science had stimulated the boy, and at first induced him to follow in the same path. Lucien was one of the most brilliant pupils at the grammar school of Angoulême, and when David Séchard left, his future friend was in the third form.

When chance brought the school-fellows together again, Lucien was weary of drinking from the rude cup of penury, and ready for any of the rash decisive steps that youth takes at the age of twenty. David's generous offer of forty francs a month if Lucien would come to him and learn the work of a printer's reader came in time; David had no need whatever of a printer's reader, but he saved Lucien from despair. The ties of a school friendship thus renewed were soon drawn closer than ever by the similarity of their lot in life and the dissimilarity of their characters. Both felt high swelling hopes of manifold success; both consciously possessed the high order of intelligence which sets a man on a level with lofty heights, consigned though they were socially to the lowest level. Fate's injustice was a strong bond between them. And then, by different ways, following each his own bent of mind, they had attained to poesy. Lucien, destined for the highest speculative fields of natural science, was aiming with hot enthusiasm at fame through literature; while David, with that meditative temperament which inclines to poetry, was drawn by his tastes towards natural science.

The exchange of rôles was the beginning of an intellectual comradeship. Before long, Lucien told David of his own father's farsighted view of the application of science to manufacture, while David pointed out the new ways in literature that Lucien must follow if he meant to succeed. Not many days had passed before the young men's friendship became a passion such as is only known in early manhood. Then it was that David caught a glimpse of Eve's fair face, and loved, as grave and meditative natures can love. The *et nunc et semper et in secula seculorum* of the Liturgy is the device taken by many a sublime unknown poet, whose works consist in magnificent epics conceived and lost between heart and heart. With a lover's insight, David read

the secret hopes set by the mother and sister on Lucien's poet's brow; and knowing their blind devotion, it was very sweet to him to draw nearer to his love by sharing her hopes and her self-sacrifice. And in this way Lucien came to be David's chosen brother. As there are ultras who would fain be more Royalist than the King, so David outdid the mother and sister in his belief in Lucien's genius; he spoiled Lucien as a mother spoils her child.

Once, under pressure of the lack of money which tied their hands, the two were ruminating after the manner of young men over ways of promptly realizing a large fortune; and, after fruitless shakings of all the trees already stripped by previous comers, Lucien bethought himself of two of his father's ideas. M. Chardon had talked of a method of refining sugar by a chemical process, which would reduce the cost of production by one-half; and he had another plan for employing an American vegetable fiber for making paper, something after the Chinese fashion, and effecting an enormous saving in the cost of raw material. David, knowing the importance of a question raised already by the Didots, caught at this latter notion, saw a fortune in it, and looked upon Lucien as a benefactor whom he could never repay.

Anyone may guess how the ruling thoughts and inner life of this pair of friends unfitted them for carrying on the business of a printing house. So far from making fifteen to twenty thousand francs, like Cointet Brothers, printers and publishers to the diocese, and proprietors of the *Charente Chronicle* (now the only newspaper in the department)—Séchard & Son made a bare three hundred francs per month, out of which the foreman's salary must be paid, as well as Marion's wages and the rent and taxes; so that David himself was scarcely making twelve hundred francs per annum. Active and industrious men of business would have bought new type and new machinery, and made an effort to secure orders for cheap printing from the Paris book trade; but master and foreman, deep in absorbing intellectual interests, were quite content with such orders as came to them from their remaining customers.

In the long length the Cointets had come to understand



David's character and habits. They did not slander him now; on the contrary, wise policy required that they should allow the business to flicker on; it was to their interest indeed to maintain it in a small way, lest it should fall into the hands of some more formidable competitor; they made a practice of sending prospectuses and circulars—job-printing, as it is called—to the Séchards' establishment. So it came about that, all unwittingly, David owed his existence, commercially speaking, to the cunning schemes of his competitors. The Cointets, well pleased with his "craze," as they called it, behaved to all appearance both fairly and handsomely; but, as a matter of fact, they were adopting the tactics of the mail-coach owners who set up a sham opposition coach to keep *bonâ fide* rivals out of the field.

Inside and outside the condition of the Séchard printing establishment bore testimony to the sordid avarice of the old "bear," who never spent a penny on repairs. The old house had stood in sun and rain, and borne the brunt of the weather, till it looked like some venerable tree trunk set down at the entrance of the alley, so riven it was, with seams and cracks of all sorts and sizes. The house front, built of brick and stone, with no pretensions to symmetry, seemed to be bending beneath the weight of a worm-eaten roof covered with the curved pantiles in common use in the south of France. The decrepit casements were fitted with the heavy, unwieldy shutters necessary in that climate, and held in place by massive iron cross bars. It would have puzzled you to find a more dilapidated house in Angoulême; nothing but sheer tenacity of mortar kept it together. Try to picture the workshop, light at either end, and dark in the middle; the walls covered with handbills and begrimed by friction of all the workmen who had rubbed past them for thirty years; the cobweb of cordage across the ceiling, the stacks of paper, the old-fashioned presses, the pile of slabs for weighting the damp sheets, the rows of cases, and the two dens in the far corners where the master printer and foreman sat—and you will have some idea of the life led by the two friends.

One day early in May 1821, David and Lucien were standing together by the window that looked into the yard. It was nearly two o'clock, and the four or five men were going out to dinner. David waited until the apprentice had shut the street door with the bell fastened to it; then he drew Lucien out into the yard as if the smell of paper, ink, and presses and old woodwork had grown intolerable to him, and together they sat down under the vines, keeping the office and the door in view. The sunbeams, playing among the trellised vine-shoots, hovered over the two poets, making, as it were, an aureole about their heads, bringing the contrast between their faces and their characters into a vigorous relief that would have tempted the brush of some great painter.

David's physique was of the kind that Nature gives to the fighter, the man born to struggle in obscurity, or with the eyes of all men turned upon him. The strong shoulders, rising above the broad chest, were in keeping with the full development of his whole frame. With his thick crop of black hair, his fleshy, high-colored, swarthy face, supported by a thick neck, he looked at first sight like one of Boileau's canons; but on a second glance there was that in the lines about the thick lips, in the dimple of the chin, in the turn of the square nostrils, with the broad irregular line of central cleavage, and, above all, in the eyes, with the steady light of an all-absorbing love that burned in them, which revealed the real character of the man—the wisdom of the thinker, the strenuous melancholy of a spirit that discerns the horizon on either side, and sees clearly to the end of winding ways, turning the clear light of analysis upon the joys of fruition, known as yet in idea alone, and quick to turn from them in disgust. You might look for the flash of genius from such a face; you could not miss the ashes of the volcano; hopes extinguished beneath a profound sense of the social annihilation to which lowly birth and lack of fortune condemns so many a loftier mind. And by the side of the poor painter, who loathed a handicraft so closely allied to intellectual work, close to this Silenus, joyless, self-sustained, drinking deep draughts from the cup of knowledge

and of poetry that he might forget the cares of his narrow lot in the intoxication of soul and brain, stood Lucien, graceful as some sculptured Indian Bacchus.

For in Lucien's face there was the distinction of line which stamps the beauty of the antique; the Greek profile, with the velvet whiteness of women's faces, and eyes full of love, eyes so blue that they looked dark against a pearly setting, and dewy and fresh as those of a child. Those beautiful eyes looked out from under their long chestnut lashes, beneath eyebrows that might have been traced by a Chinese pencil. The silken down on his cheeks, like his bright curling hair, shone golden in the sunlight. A divine graciousness transfused the white temples that caught that golden gleam; a matchless nobleness had set its seal in the short chin raised, but not abruptly. The smile that hovered about the coral lips, yet redder as they seemed by force of contrast with the even teeth, was the smile of some sorrowing angel. Lucien's hands denoted race; they were shapely hands, hands that men obey at a sign, and women love to kiss. Lucien was slender and of middle height. From a glance at his feet, he might have been taken for a girl in disguise, and this so much the more easily from the feminine contour of the hips, a characteristic of keen-witted, not to say astute, men. This is a trait which seldom misleads, and in Lucien it was a true indication of character: for when he analyzed the society of to-day, his restless mind was apt to take its stand on the lower ground of those diplomatists who hold that success justifies the use of any means however base. It is one of the misfortunes attendant upon great intellects that perforce they comprehend all things, both good and evil.

The two young men judged society by the more lofty standard because their social position was at the lowest end of the scale, for unrecognized power is apt to avenge itself for lowly station by viewing the world from a lofty standpoint. Yet it is, nevertheless, true that they grew but the more bitter and hopeless after these swift soaring flights to the upper regions of thought, their world by right. Lucien had read much and compared; David had thought much and

deeply. In spite of the young printer's look of robust, country-bred health, his turn of mind was melancholy and somewhat morbid—he lacked confidence in himself; but Lucien, on the other hand, with an enterprising but changeable nature, was gifted with a boldness little to be expected from his feminine, almost effeminate, figure, graceful though it was. Lucien possessed the Gascon temperament to the highest degree—rash, brave, and adventurous, prone to make the most of the bright side, and as little as possible of the dark; his was the nature that sticks at no crime if there is anything to be gained by it, and laughs at the vice which serves as a stepping-stone. Just now these tendencies of ambition were held in check, partly by the fair illusions of youth, partly by the enthusiasm which led him to prefer the nobler methods, which every man in love with glory tries first of all. Lucien was struggling as yet with himself and his own desires, and not with the difficulties of life; at strife with his own power, and not with the baseness of other men, that fatal exemplar for impressionable minds. The brilliancy of his intellect had a keen attraction for David. David admired his friend, while he kept him out of the scrapes into which he was led by the *furie française*.

David, with his well-balanced mind and timid nature at variance with a strong constitution, was by no means wanting in the persistence of the Northern temper; and if he saw all the difficulties before him, none the less he vowed to himself to conquer, never to give way. In him the unswerving virtue of an apostle was softened by pity that sprang from inexhaustible indulgence. In the friendship grown old already, one was the worshiper, and that one was David; Lucien ruled him like a woman sure of love, and David loved to give way. He felt that his friend's physical beauty implied a real superiority, which he accepted, looking upon himself as one made of coarser and commoner human clay.

“The ox for patient labor in the fields, the free life for the bird,” he thought to himself. “I will be the ox, and Lucien shall be the eagle.”

So for three years these friends had mingled the destinies bright with such glorious promise. Together they read the

great works that appeared above the horizon of literature and science since the Peace—the poems of Schiller, Goethe, and Byron, the prose writings of Scott, Jean-Paul, Berzelius, Davy, Cuvier, Lamartine, and many more. They warmed themselves beside these great hearthfires; they tried their powers in abortive creations, in work laid aside and taken up again with new glow of enthusiasm. Incessantly they worked with the unwearied vitality of youth; comrades in poverty, comrades in the consuming love of art and science, till they forgot the hard life of the present, for their minds were wholly bent on laying the foundations of future fame.

“Lucien,” said David, “do you know what I have just received from Paris?” He drew a tiny volume from his pocket. “Listen!”

And David read, as a poet can read, first André de Chénier’s Idyll *Nèère*, then *Le Malade*, following on with the Elegy on a Suicide, another elegy in the classic taste, and the two last *Iambes*.

“So that is André de Chénier!” Lucien exclaimed again and again. “It fills one with despair!” he cried for the third time, when David surrendered the book to him, unable to read further for emotion.—“A poet rediscovered by a poet!” said Lucien, reading the signature of the preface.

“After Chénier had written those poems, he thought that he had written nothing worth publishing,” added David.

Then Lucien in his turn read aloud the fragment of an epic called *L’Aveugle* and two or three of the Elegies, till, when he came upon the line—

“If they know not bliss, is there happiness on earth?”

he pressed the book to his lips, and tears came to the eyes of either, for the two friends were lovers and fellow-worshippers.

The vine-stems were changing color with the spring; covering the rifted, battered walls of the old house where squalid cracks were spreading in every direction, with fluted columns and knots and bas-reliefs and uncounted masterpieces of I know not what order of architecture, erected by fairy hands. Fancy had scattered flowers and crimson gems

over the gloomy little yard, and Chénier's *Camille* became for David the Eve whom he worshiped, for Lucien a 'great lady to whom he paid his homage. Poetry had shaken out her starry robe above the workshop where the "monkeys" and "bears" were grotesquely busy among types and presses. Five o'clock struck, but the friends felt neither hunger nor thirst; life had turned to a golden dream, and all the treasures of the world lay at their feet. Far away on the horizon lay the blue streak to which Hope points a finger in storm and stress; and a siren voice sounded in their ears, calling, "Come, spread your wings; through that streak of gold or silver or azure lies the sure way of escape from evil fortune!"

Just at that moment the low glass door of the workshop was opened, and out came Cérizet, an apprentice (David had brought the urchin from Paris). This youth introduced a stranger, who saluted the friends politely, and spoke to David.

"This, sir, is a monograph which I am desirous of printing," said he, drawing a huge package of manuscript from his pocket. "Will you oblige me with an estimate?"

"We do not undertake work on such a scale, sir," David answered, without looking at the manuscript. "You had better see the Messieurs Cointet about it."

"Still we have a very pretty type which might suit it," put in Lucien, taking up the roll. "We must ask you to be kind enough, sir, to leave your commission with us and to call again to-morrow, and we will give you an estimate."

"Have I the pleasure of addressing M. Lucien Chardon?"

"Yes, sir," said the foreman.

"I am fortunate in this opportunity of meeting with a young poet destined to such greatness," returned the author. "Mme. de Bargeton sent me here."

Lucien flushed red at the name, and stammered out something about gratitude for the interest which Mme. de Bargeton took in him. David noticed his friend's embarrassed flush, and left him in conversation with the country gentleman, the author of a monograph on silkworm cultivation,

prompted by vanity to print the effort for the benefit of fellow-members of the local agricultural society.

When the author had gone, David spoke.

“Lucien, are you in love with Mme. de Bargeton?”

“Passionately.”

“But social prejudices set you as far apart as if she were living at Peking and you in Greenland.”

“The will of two lovers can rise victorious over all things,” said Lucien, lowering his eyes.

“You will forget us,” returned the alarmed lover, as Eve’s fair face rose before his mind.

“On the contrary, I have perhaps sacrificed my love to you,” cried Lucien.

“What do you mean?”

“In spite of my love, in spite of the different motives which bid me obtain a secure footing in her house, I have told her that I will never go thither again unless another is made welcome too, a man whose gifts are greater than mine; a man destined for a brilliant future—David Séchard, my brother, my friend. I shall find an answer waiting when I go home. All the aristocrats may have been asked to hear me read my verses this evening, but I shall not go if the answer is negative, and I will never set foot in Mme. de Bargeton’s house again.”

David brushed the tears from his eyes, and wrung Lucien’s hand. The clock struck six.

“Eve must be anxious; good-by,” Lucien added abruptly.

He hurried away. David stood overcome by the emotion that is only felt to the full at his age, and more especially in such a position as his—the friends were like two young swans with wings unclipped as yet by the experiences of provincial life.

“Heart of gold!” David exclaimed to himself, as his eyes followed Lucien across the workshop.

Lucien went down to L’Houmeau along the broad Promenade de Beaulieu, the Rue du Minage, and Saint-Peter’s Gate. It was the longest way round, so you may be sure that Mme. de Bargeton’s house lay on the way. So de-

licious it was to pass under her windows, though she knew nothing of his presence, that for the past two months he had gone round daily by the Palet Gate into L'Houmeau.

Under the trees of Beaulieu he saw how far the suburb lay from the city. The custom of the country, moreover, had raised other barriers harder to surmount than the mere physical difficulty of the steep flights of steps which Lucien was descending. Youth and ambition had thrown the flying-bridge of glory across the gulf between the city and the suburb, yet Lucien was as uneasy in his mind over his lady's answer as any king's favorite who has tried to climb yet higher, and fears that being overbold he is like to fall. This must seem a dark saying to those who have never studied the manners and customs of cities divided into the upper and lower town; wherefore it is necessary to enter here upon some topographical details, and this so much the more if the reader is to comprehend the position of one of the principal characters in the story—Mme. de Bargeton.

The old city of Angoulême is perched aloft on a crag like a sugar-loaf, overlooking the plain where the Charente winds away through the meadows. The crag is an outlying spur on the Périgord side of a long, low ridge of hill, which terminates abruptly just above the road from Paris to Bordeaux, so that the Rock of Angoulême is a sort of promontory marking out the lines of three picturesque valleys. The ramparts and great gateways and ruined fortress on the summit of the crag still remain to bear witness to the importance of this stronghold during the Religious Wars, when Angoulême was a military position coveted alike of Catholics and Calvinists, but its old-world strength is a source of weakness in modern days; Angoulême could not spread down to the Charente, and shut in between its ramparts and the steep sides of the crag, the old town is condemned to stagnation of the most fatal kind.

The Government made an attempt about this very time to extend the town towards Périgord, building a Prefecture, a Naval School, and barracks along the hillside, and opening up roads. But private enterprise had been beforehand elsewhere. For some time past the suburb of L'Houmeau



had sprung up, a mushroom growth at the foot of the crag and along the river-side, where the direct road runs from Paris to Bordeaux. Everybody has heard of the great paper-mills of Angoulême, established perforce three hundred years ago on the Charente and its branch streams, where there was a sufficient fall of water. The largest State factory of marine ordnance in France was established at Ruelle, some six miles away. Carriers, wheelwrights, post-houses, and inns, every agency for public conveyance, every industry that lives by road or river, was crowded together in Lower Angoulême, to avoid the difficulty of the ascent of the hill. Naturally, too, tanneries, laundries, and all such waterside trades stood within reach of the Charente; and along the banks of the river lay the stores of brandy and great warehouses full of the water-borne raw material; all the carrying trade of the Charente, in short, had lined the quays with buildings.

So the Faubourg of L'Houmeau grew into a busy and prosperous city, a second Angoulême rivaling the upper town, the residence of the powers that be, the lords spiritual and temporal of Angoulême; though L'Houmeau, with all its business and increasing greatness, was still a mere appendage of the city above. The *noblesse* and officialdom dwelt on the crag, trade and wealth remained below. No love is lost between these two sections of the community all the world over, and in Angoulême it would have been hard to say which of the two camps detested the other the more cordially. Under the Empire the machinery worked fairly smoothly, but the Restoration wrought both sides to the highest pitch of exasperation.

Nearly every house in the upper town of Angoulême is inhabited by noble, or at any rate by old burgher, families, who live independently on their incomes—a sort of autochthonous nation who suffer no aliens to come among them. Possibly, after two hundred years of unbroken residence, and it may be an intermarriage or two with one of the primordial houses, a family from some neighboring district may be adopted, but in the eyes of the aboriginal race they are still newcomers of yesterday.

Prefects, receivers-general, and various administrations that have come and gone during the last forty years' have tried to tame the ancient families perched aloft like wary ravens on their crag; the said families were always willing to accept invitations to dinners and dances; but as to admitting the strangers to their own houses, they were inexorable. Ready to scoff and disparage, jealous and niggardly, marrying only among themselves, the families formed a serried phalanx to keep out intruders. Of modern luxury they had no notion; and as for sending a boy to Paris, it was sending him, they thought, to certain ruin. Such sagacity will give a sufficient idea of the old-world manners and customs of this society, suffering from thick-headed Royalism, infected with bigotry rather than zeal, all stagnating together, motionless as their town founded upon the rock. Yet Angoulême enjoyed a great reputation in the provinces round about for its educational advantages, and neighboring towns sent their daughters to its boarding schools and convents.

It is easy to imagine the influence of the class sentiment which held Angoulême aloof from L'Houmeau. The merchant classes are rich, the *noblesse* are usually poor. Each side takes its revenge in scorn of the other. The tradespeople in Angoulême espouse the quarrel. "He is a man of L'Houmeau!" a shopkeeper of the upper town will tell you, speaking of a merchant in the lower suburb, throwing an accent into the speech which no words can describe. When the Restoration defined the position of the French *noblesse*, holding out hopes to them which could only be realized by a complete and general topsy-turvydom; the distance between Angoulême and L'Houmeau, already more strongly marked than the distance between the hill and plain, was widened yet further. The better families, all devoted as one man to the Government, grew more exclusive here than in any other part of France. "The man of L'Houmeau" became little better than a pariah. Hence the deep, smothered hatred which broke out everywhere with such ugly unanimity in the insurrection of 1830 and destroyed the elements of a durable social system in France.

As the overweening haughtiness of the Court nobles detached the provincial *noblesse* from the throne, so did these last alienate the *bourgeoisie* from the royal cause by behavior that galled their vanity in every possible way.

So "a man of L'Houmeau," a druggist's son, in Mme. de Bargeton's house was nothing less than a little revolution. Who was responsible for it? Lamartine and Victor Hugo, Casimir Delavigne and Canalis, Béranger and Chateaubriand, Villemain and M. Aignan, Soumet and Tissot, Étienne and Davrigny, Benjamin Constant and Lamennais, Cousin and Michaud,—all the old and young illustrious names in literature in short, Liberals and Royalists, alike must divide the blame among them. Mme. de Bargeton loved art and letters, eccentric taste on her part, a craze deeply deplored in Angoulême. In justice to the lady, it is necessary to give a sketch of the previous history of a woman born to shine, and left by unlucky circumstances in the shade, a woman whose influence decided Lucien's career.

M. de Bargeton was the great-grandson of an alderman of Bordeaux named Mirault, ennobled under Louis XIII. for long tenure of office. His son, bearing the name of Mirault de Bargeton, became an officer in the household troops of Louis XIV., and married so great a fortune that in the reign of Louis XV. his son dropped the Mirault and was called simply M. de Bargeton. This M. de Bargeton, the alderman's grandson, lived up to his quality so strenuously that he ran through the family property and checked the course of its fortunes. Two of his brothers indeed, great-uncles of the present Bargeton, went into business again, for which reason you will find the name of Mirault among Bordeaux merchants at this day. The lands of Bargeton, in Angoumois in the barony of Rochefoucauld, being entailed, and the house in Angoulême, called the Hôtel Bargeton, likewise, the grandson of M. de Bargeton the Waster came in for these hereditaments; though the year 1789 deprived him of all seignorial rights save to rents paid by his tenants, which amounted to some ten thousand francs per annum. If his grandsire had walked in the ways of his illustrious progenitors, Bargeton I. and Bargeton II., Bargeton V. (who may

be dubbed Bargeton the Mute by way of distinction) should by rights have been born to the title of Marquis of Bargeton; he would have been connected with some great family or other, and in due time he had been a duke and a peer of France, like many another; whereas, in 1805, he thought himself uncommonly lucky when he married Mlle. Marie-Louise-Anaïs de Nègrepelisse, the daughter of a noble long relegated to the obscurity of his manorhouse, scion though he was of the younger branch of one of the oldest families in the south of France. There had been a Nègrepelisse among the hostages of St. Louis. The head of the elder branch, however, had borne the illustrious name of d'Espard since the reign of Henri Quatre, when the Nègrepelisse of that day married an heiress of the d'Espard family. As for M. de Nègrepelisse, the younger son of a younger son, he lived upon his wife's property, a small estate in the neighborhood of Barbezieux, farming the land to admiration, selling his corn in the market himself, and distilling his own brandy, laughing at those who ridiculed him, so long as he could pile up silver crowns, and now and again round out his estate with another bit of land.

Circumstances unusual enough in out-of-the-way places in the country had inspired Mme. de Bargeton with a taste for music and reading. During the Revolution one Abbé Niollant, the Abbé Roze's best pupil, found a hiding-place in the old manor-house of Escarbas, and brought with him his baggage of musical compositions. The old country gentleman's hospitality was handsomely repaid, for the Abbé undertook his daughter's education. Anaïs, or Naïs, as she was called, must otherwise have been left to herself, or, worse still, to some coarse-minded servant-maid. The Abbé was not only a musician, he was well and widely read, and knew both Italian and German; so Mlle. de Nègrepelisse received instruction in those tongues, as well as in counterpoint. He explained the great masterpieces of the French, German, and Italian literatures, and deciphered with her the music of the great composers. Finally, as time hung heavy on his hands in the seclusion enforced by political storms, he taught his pupil Latin and Greek and some smatterings of natural

science. A mother might have modified the effects of a man's education upon a young girl, whose independent spirit had been fostered in the first place by a country life. The Abbé Niollant, an enthusiast and a poet, possessed the artistic temperament in a peculiarly high degree, a temperament compatible with many estimable qualities, but prone to raise itself above *bourgeois* prejudices by the liberty of its judgments and breadth of view. In society an intellect of this order wins pardon for its boldness by its depth and originality; but in private life it would seem to do positive mischief, by suggesting wanderings from the beaten track. The Abbé was by no means wanting in goodness of heart, and his ideas were therefore the more contagious for this high-spirited girl, in whom they were confirmed by a lonely life. The Abbé Niollant's pupil learned to be fearless in criticism and ready in judgment; it never occurred to her tutor that qualities so necessary in a man are disadvantages in a woman destined for the homely life of a house-mother. And though the Abbé constantly impressed upon his pupil that it behoved her to be the more modest and gracious with the extent of her attainments, Mlle. de Nègrepelisse conceived an excellent opinion of herself and a robust contempt for ordinary humanity. All those about her were her inferiors, or persons who hastened to do her bidding, till she grew to be as haughty as a great lady, with none of the charming blandness and urbanity of a great lady. The instincts of vanity were flattered by the pride that the poor Abbé took in his pupil, the pride of an author who sees himself in his work, and for her misfortune she met no one with whom she could measure herself. Isolation is one of the greatest drawbacks of a country life. We lose the habit of putting ourselves to any inconvenience for the sake of others when there is no one for whom to make the trifling sacrifices of personal effort required by dress and manner. And everything in us shares in the change for the worse; the form and the spirit deteriorate together.

With no social intercourse to compel self-repression, Mlle. de Nègrepelisse's bold ideas passed into her manner and the expression of her face. There was a cavalier air about

her, a something that seems at first original, but only suited to women of adventurous life. So this education, and the consequent asperities of character, which would have been softened down in a higher social sphere, could only serve to make her ridiculous at Angoulême so soon as her adorers should cease to worship eccentricities that charm only in youth.

As for M. de Nègrepelisse, he would have given all his daughter's books to save the life of a sick bullock; and so miserly was he, that he would not have given her two farthings over and above the allowance to which she had a right, even if it had been a question of some indispensable trifle for her education.

In 1802 the Abbé died, before the marriage of his dear child, a marriage which he, doubtless, would never have advised. The old father found his daughter a great care now that the Abbé was gone. The high-spirited girl, with nothing else to do, was sure to break into rebellion against his niggardliness, and he felt quite unequal to the struggle. Like all young women who leave the appointed track of woman's life, Naïs had her own opinions about marriage, and had no great inclination thereto. She shrank from submitting herself, body and soul, to the feeble, undignified specimens of mankind whom she had chanced to meet. She wished to rule, marriage meant obedience; and between obedience to coarse caprices and a mind without indulgence for her tastes, and flight with a lover who should please her, she would not have hesitated for a moment.

M. de Nègrepelisse maintained sufficient of the tradition of birth to dread a *mésalliance*. Like many another parent, he resolved to marry his daughter, not so much on her account as for his own peace of mind. A noble or a country gentleman was the man for him, somebody not too clever, incapable of haggling over the account of the trust; stupid enough and easy enough to allow Naïs to have her own way, and disinterested enough to take her without a dowry. But where to look for a son-in-law to suit father and daughter equally well, was the problem. Such a man would be the phoenix of sons-in-law.

To M. de Nègrepelisse pondering over the eligible bachelors of the province with these double requirements in his mind, M. de Bargeton seemed to be the only one who answered to this description. M. de Bargeton, aged forty, considerably shattered by the amorous dissipations of his youth, was generally held to be a man of remarkably feeble intellect; but he had just the exact amount of commonsense required for the management of his fortune, and breeding sufficient to enable him to avoid blunders or blatant follies in society in Angoulême. In the bluntest manner M. de Nègrepelisse pointed out the negative virtues of the model husband designed for his daughter, and made her see the way to manage him so as to secure her own happiness. So Naïs married the bearer of arms, two hundred years old already, for the Bargetons' arms are blazoned thus: *the first or, three attires gules; the second, three ox's heads cabossed, two and one, sable; the third, barry of six, azure and argent, in the first, six shells or, three, two, and one.* Provided with a chaperon, Naïs could steer her fortunes as she chose under the style of the firm, and with the help of such connections as her wit and beauty would obtain for her in Paris. Naïs was enchanted by the prospect of such liberty. M. de Bargeton was of the opinion that he was making a brilliant marriage, for he expected that in no long while M. de Nègrepelisse would leave him the estates which he was rounding out so lovingly; but to an unprejudiced spectator it certainly seemed as though the duty of writing the bridegroom's epitaph might devolve upon his father-in-law.

By this time Mme. de Bargeton was thirty-six years old and her husband fifty-eight. The disparity in age was the more startling since M. de Bargeton looked like a man of seventy, whereas his wife looked scarcely half her age. She could still wear rose-color, and her hair hanging loose upon her shoulders. Although their income did not exceed twelve thousand francs, they ranked among the half-dozen largest fortunes in the old city, merchants and officials excepted; for M. and Mme. de Bargeton were obliged to live in Angoulême until such time as Mme. de Bargeton's inheritance should fall in and they could go to Paris. Meanwhile they

were bound to be attentive to old M. de Nègrelisse (who kept them waiting so long that his son-in-law in fact predeceased him), and Nais's brilliant intellectual gifts, and the wealth that lay like undiscovered ore in her nature, profited her nothing, underwent the transforming operation of Time, and changed to absurdities. For our absurdities spring, in fact, for the most part, from the good in us, from some faculty or quality abnormally developed. Pride, untempered by intercourse with the great world, becomes stiff and starched by contact with petty things; in a loftier moral atmosphere it would have grown to noble magnanimity. Enthusiasm, that virtue within a virtue, forming the saint, inspiring the devotion hidden from all eyes and glowing out upon the world in verse, turns to exaggeration, with the trifles of a narrow existence for its object. Far away from the centers of light shed by great minds, where the air is quick with thought; knowledge stands still, taste is corrupted like stagnant water, and passion dwindles, frittered away upon the infinitely small objects which it strives to exalt. Herein lies the secret of the avarice and tittle-tattle that poison provincial life. The contagion of narrow-mindedness and meanness affects the noblest natures; and in such ways as these, men born to be great, and women who would have been charming if they had fallen under the forming influence of greater minds, are balked of their lives.

Here was Mme. de Bargeton, for instance, smiting the lyre for every trifle, and publishing her emotions indiscriminately to her circle. As a matter of fact, when sensations appeal to an audience of one, it is better to keep them to ourselves. A sunset certainly is a glorious poem; but if a woman describes it, in high-sounding words, for the benefit of matter-of-fact people, is she not ridiculous? There are pleasures which can only be felt to the full when two souls meet, poet and poet, heart and heart. She had a trick of using high-sounding phrases, interlarded with exaggerated expressions, the kind of stuff ingeniously nicknamed *tartines* by the French journalist, who furnishes a daily supply of the commodity for a public that daily performs the difficult feat of swallowing it. She squandered superlatives reck-



lessly in her talk, and the smallest things took giant proportions. It was at this period of her career that she began to type-ize, individualize, synthesize, dramatize, superiorize, analyze, poetize, angelize, neologize, tragedify, prosify, and colossify—you must violate the laws of language to find words to express the new-fangled whimsies in which even women here and there indulge. The heat of her language communicated itself to the brain, and the dithyrambs on her lips were spoken out of the abundance of her heart. She palpitated, swooned, and went into ecstasies over anything and everything, over the devotion of a Sister of Charity, and the execution of the brothers Fauchet, over M. d'Arincourt's *Ipsiboé*, Lewis's *Anaconda*, or the escape of La Valette, or the presence of mind of a lady friend who put burglars to flight by imitating a man's voice. Everything was heroic, extraordinary, strange, wonderful, and divine. She would work herself into a state of excitement, indignation, or depression; she soared to heaven, and sank again, gazed at the sky, or looked to earth; her eyes were always filling with tears. She wore herself out with chronic admiration, and wasted her strength on curious dislikes. Her mind ran on the Pasha of Janina; she would have liked to try conclusions with him in his seraglio, and had a great notion of being sewn in a sack and thrown into the water. She envied that blue-stocking of the desert, Lady Hester Stanhope; she longed to be a sister of Saint Camilla and tend the sick and die of yellow fever in a hospital at Barcelona; 'twas a high, a noble destiny! In short, she thirsted, for any draught but the clear spring water of her own life, flowing hidden among green pastures. She adored Byron and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or anybody else with a picturesque or dramatic career. Her tears were ready to flow for every misfortune; she sang pæans for every victory. She sympathized with the fallen Napoleon, and with Mehemet Ali, massacring the foreign usurpers of Egypt. In short, any kind of genius was accommodated with an aureole, and she was fully persuaded that gifted immortals lived on incense and light.

A good many people looked upon her as a harmless

lunatic, but in these extravagances of hers a keener observer surely would have seen the broken fragments of a magnificent edifice that had crumbled into ruin before it was completed, the stones of a heavenly Jerusalem—love, in short, without a lover. And this was indeed the fact.

The story of the first eighteen years of Mme. de Bargeton's married life can be summed up in a few words. For a long while she lived upon herself and distant hopes. Then, when she began to see that their narrow income put the longed-for life in Paris quite out of the question, she looked about her at the people with whom her life must be spent, and shuddered at her loneliness. There was not a single man who could inspire the madness to which women are prone when they despair of a life become stale and unprofitable in the present, and with no outlook for the future. She had nothing to look for, nothing to expect from chance, for there are lives in which chance plays no part. But when the Empire was in the full noonday of glory, and Napoleon was sending the flower of his troops to the Peninsula, her disappointed hopes revived. Natural curiosity prompted her to make an effort to see the heroes who were conquering Europe in obedience to a word from the Emperor in the order of the day; the heroes of a modern time who outdid the mythical feats of paladins of old. The cities of France, however avaricious or refractory, must perforce do honor to the Imperial Guard, and mayors and prefects went out to meet them with set speeches as if the conquerors had been crowned kings. Mme. de Bargeton went to a *ridotto* given to the town by a regiment, and fell in love with an officer of good family, a sub-lieutenant, to whom the crafty Napoleon had given a glimpse of the baton of a Marshal of France. Love, restrained, greater and nobler than the ties that were made and unmade so easily in those days, was consecrated coldly by the hands of death. On the battlefield of Wagram a shell shattered the only record of Mme. de Bargeton's young beauty, a portrait worn on the heart of the Marquis of Cante-Croix. For long afterwards she wept for the young soldier, the colonel in his second campaign, for the heart hot with love and glory that set a letter from Naïs

above Imperial favor. The pain of those days cast a veil of sadness over her face, a shadow that only vanished at the terrible age when woman first discovers with dismay that the best years of her life are over, and she has had no joy of them; when she sees her roses wither, and the longing for love is revived again with the desire to linger yet for a little on the last smiles of youth. Her nobler qualities dealt so many wounds to her soul at the moment when the cold of the provinces seized upon her. She would have died of grief like the ermine if by chance she had been sullied by contact with those men whose thoughts were bent on winning a few sous nightly at cards after a good dinner; pride saved her from the shabby love intrigues of the provinces. A woman so much above the level of those about her, forced to decide between the emptiness of the men whom she meets and the emptiness of her own life, can but make the one choice; marriage and society became a cloister for Anaïs. She lived by poetry as the Carmelite lives by religion. All the famous foreign books published in France for the first time between 1815 and 1821 the great essayists, M. de Bonald and M. de Maistre (those two eagles of thought)—all the lighter French literature, in short, that appeared during that sudden outburst of first vigorous growth might bring delight into her solitary life, but not flexibility of mind or body. She stood strong and straight like some forest tree, lightning-blasted but still erect. Her dignity became a stilted manner, her social supremacy led her into affectation and sentimental over-refinements; she queened it with her foibles, after the usual fashion of those who allow their courtiers to adore them.

This was Mme. de Bargeton's past life, a dreary chronicle which must be given if Lucien's position with regard to the lady is to be comprehensible. Lucien's introduction came about oddly enough. In the previous winter a newcomer had brought some interest into Mme. de Bargeton's monotonous life. The place of controller of excise fell vacant, and M. de Barante appointed a man whose adventurous life was a sufficient passport to the house of the sovereign lady who had her share of feminine curiosity.

M. du Châtelet—he began life as plain Sixte Châtelet, but since 1806 had the wit to adopt the participle—M. du Châtelet was one of the agreeable young men who escaped conscription after conscription by keeping very close to the Imperial sun. He had begun his career as private secretary to an Imperial Highness, a post for which he possessed every qualification. Personable and of a good figure, a clever billiard-player, a passable amateur actor, he danced well, and excelled in most physical exercises; he could, moreover, sing a ballad and applaud a witticism. Supple, envious, never at a loss, there was nothing that he did not know—nothing that he really knew. He knew nothing, for instance, of music, but he could sit down to the piano and accompany, after a fashion, a woman who consented after much pressing to sing a ballad learned by heart in a month of hard practice. Incapable though he was of any feeling for poetry, he would boldly ask permission to retire for ten minutes to compose an impromptu, and return with a quatrain, flat as a pancake, wherein rhyme did duty for reason. M. du Châtelet had besides a very pretty talent for filling in the ground of the Princess's worsted work after the flowers had been begun; he held her skeins of silk with infinite grace, entertaining her with dubious nothings more or less transparently veiled. He was ignorant of painting, but he could copy a landscape, sketch a head in profile, or design a costume and color it. He had, in short, all the little talents that a man could turn to such useful account in times when women exercised more influence in public life than most people imagine. Diplomacy he claimed to be his strong point; it usually is with those who have no knowledge, and are profound by reason of their emptiness; and, indeed, this kind of skill possesses one signal advantage, for it can only be displayed in the conduct of the affairs of the great, and when discretion is the quality required, a man who knows nothing can safely say nothing, and take refuge in a mysterious shake of the head; in fact, the cleverest practitioner is he who can swim with the current and keep his head well above the stream of events which he appears to control, a man's fitness for this business varying inversely as his specific

gravity. But in this particular art or craft, as in all others, you shall find a thousand mediocrities for one man of genius; and in spite of Châtelet's services, ordinary and extraordinary, Her Imperial Highness could not procure a seat in the Privy Council for her private secretary; not that he would not have made a delightful Master of Requests, like many another, but the Princess was of the opinion that her secretary was better placed with her than anywhere else in the world. He was made a Baron, however, and went to Cassel as envoy extraordinary, no empty form of words, for he cut a very extraordinary figure there—Napoleon used him as a diplomatic courier in the thick of a European crisis. Just as he had been promised the post of minister to Jerome in Westphalia, the Empire fell to pieces; and balked of his *ambassade de famille*, as he called it, he went off in despair to Egypt with General de Montriveau. A strange chapter of accidents separated him from his traveling companion, and for two long years Sixte du Châtelet led a wandering life among the Arab tribes of the desert, who sold and re-sold their captive—his talents being not of the slightest use to the nomad tribes. At length, about the time that Montriveau reached Tangier, Châtelet found himself in the territory of the Imam of Muscat, had the luck to find an English vessel just about to set sail, and so came back to Paris a year sooner than his sometime companion. Once in Paris, his recent misfortunes, and certain connections of long standing, together with services rendered to great persons now in power, recommended him to the President of the Council, who put him in M. de Barante's department until such time as a controllership should fall vacant. So the part that M. du Châtelet once had played in the history of an Imperial Princess, his reputation for success with women, the strange story of his travels and sufferings, all awakened the interest of the ladies of Angoulême.

M. le Baron Sixte du Châtelet informed himself as to the manners and customs of the upper town, and took his cue accordingly. He appeared on the scene as a jaded man of the world, broken in health, and weary in spirit. He would raise his hand to his forehead at all seasons, as if pain never

gave him a moment's respite, a habit that recalled his travels and made him interesting. He was on visiting terms with the authorities—the general in command, the prefect, the receiver-general, and the bishop; but in every house he was frigid, polite, and slightly supercilious, like a man out of his proper place awaiting the favors of power. His social talents he left to conjecture, nor did they lose anything in reputation on that account; then when people began to talk about him and wish to know him, and curiosity was still lively; when he had reconnoitered the men and found them nought, and studied the women with the eyes of experience in the cathedral for several Sundays, he saw that Mme. de Bargeton was the person with whom it would be best to be on intimate terms. Music, he thought, should open the doors of a house where strangers were never received. Sur-reptitiously he procured one of Miroir's Masses, learned it upon the piano; and one fine Sunday when all Angoulême went to the cathedral, he played the organ, sent those who knew no better into ecstasies over the performance, and stimulated the interest felt in him by allowing his name to slip out through the attendants. As he came out after mass, Mme. de Bargeton complimented him, regretting that she had had no opportunity of playing duets with such a musician; and naturally, during an interview of her own seeking, he received the passport, which he could not have obtained if he had asked for it.

So the adroit Baron was admitted to the circle of the queen of Angoulême, and paid her marked attention. The elderly beau—he was forty-five years old—saw that all her youth lay dormant and ready to revive, saw treasures to be turned to account, and possibly a rich widow to wed, to say nothing of expectations; it would be a marriage into the family of Nègrepelisse, and for him this meant a family connection with the Marquise d'Espard, and a political career in Paris. Here was a fair tree to cultivate in spite of the ill-omened, unsightly mistletoe that grew thick upon it; he would hang his fortunes upon it, and prune it, and wait till he could gather its golden fruit.

High-born Angoulême shrieked against the introduction

of a Giaour into the sanctuary, for Mme. de Bargeton's salon was a kind of holy of holies in a society that kept itself unspotted from the world. The only outsider intimate there was the bishop; the prefect was admitted twice or thrice in the year, the receiver-general was never received at all; Mme. de Bargeton would go to concerts and "at homes" at his house, but she never accepted invitations to dinner. And now, she who had declined to open her doors to the receiver-general, welcomed a mere controller of excise! Here was a novel order of precedence for snubbed authority; such a thing it had never entered their minds to conceive.

Those who by dint of mental effort can understand a kind of pettiness which, for that matter, can be found on any and every social level, will realize the awe with which the *bourgeoisie* of Angoulême regarded the Hôtel de Bargeton. The inhabitant of L'Houmeau beheld the grandeur of that miniature Louvre, the glory of the Angoumois Hôtel de Rambouillet, shining at a solar distance; and yet, within it there was gathered together all the direst intellectual poverty, all the decayed gentility from twenty leagues round about.

Political opinion expended itself in wordy commonplaces vociferated with emphasis; the *Quotidienne* was comparatively Laodicean in its loyalty, and Louis XVIII. a Jacobin. The women, for the most part, were awkward, silly, insipid, and ill dressed; there was always something amiss that spoiled the whole; nothing in them was complete, toilet or talk, flesh or spirit. But for his designs on Mme. de Bargeton, Châtelet could not have endured the society. And yet the manners and spirit of caste, the something that tells of birth, the proud spirit of the noble in his ruined manor-house, the knowledge of the traditions of good breeding,—these things covered a multitude of deficiencies. Nobility of feeling was far more real here than in the lofty world of Paris. You might compare these country Royalists, if the metaphor may be allowed, to old-fashioned silver plate, antiquated and tarnished, but weighty; their attachment to the House of Bourbon as the House of Bourbon did them honor. The very fixity of their political opinions was a

sort of faithfulness. The distance that they set between themselves and the *bourgeoisie*, their very exclusiveness, gave them a certain elevation, and enhanced their value. Each noble represented a certain price for the townsmen, as Bambara negroes, we are told, attach a money value to cowrie shells.

Some of the women, flattered by M. du Châtelet, discerned in him the superior qualities lacking in the men of their own set, and the insurrection of self-love was pacified. These ladies all hoped to succeed to the Imperial Highness. Purists were of the opinion that you might see the intruder in Mme. de Bargeton's house, but not elsewhere. Du Châtelet was fain to put up with a good deal of insolence, but he held his ground by cultivating the clergy. He encouraged the queen of Angoulême in foibles bred of the soil; he brought her all the newest books; he read aloud the poetry that appeared. Together they went into ecstasies over these poets, she in all sincerity, he with suppressed yawns; but he bore with the Romantics with a patience hardly to be expected of a man of the Imperial school, who scarcely could make out what the young writers meant. Not so Mme. de Bargeton; she waxed enthusiastic over the Renaissance, due to the return of the Bourbon Lilies; she loved M. de Chateaubriand for calling Victor Hugo "a sublime child." It depressed her that she could only know genius from afar, she sighed for Paris, where great men live. For these reasons M. du Châtelet thought he had done a wonderfully clever thing when he told the lady that there at that moment in Angoulême there was "another sublime child," a young poet, a rising star whose glory surpassed the whole Parisian galaxy, though he knew it not. A great man of the future had been born in L'Houmeau! The headmaster of the school had shown the Baron some admirable verses. The poor and humble lad was a second Chatterton, with none of the political baseness and ferocious hatred of the great ones of earth that led his English prototype to turn pamphleteer and revile his benefactors. Mme. de Bargeton in her little circle of five or six persons, who were supposed to share her tastes for art and letters, because



this one scraped a fiddle, and that splashed sheets of white paper, more or less, with sepia, and the other was president of a local agricultural society, or was gifted with a bass voice that rendered *Se fatio in corpo* like a war whoop—Mme. de Bargeton amid these grotesque figures was like a famished actor set down to a stage dinner of pasteboard. No words, therefore, can describe her joy at these tidings. She must see this poet, this angel! She raved about him, went into raptures, talked of him for whole hours together. Before two days were out the sometime diplomatic courier had negotiated (through the headmaster) for Lucien's appearance in the Hôtel de Bargeton.

Poor helots of the provinces, for whom the distances between class and class are so far greater than for the Parisian (for whom, indeed, these distances visibly lessen day by day); souls so grievously oppressed by the social barriers behind which all sorts and conditions of men sit crying *Raca!* with mutual anathemas—you, and you alone, will fully comprehend the ferment in Lucien's heart and brain, when his awe-inspiring headmaster told him that the great gates of the Hôtel de Bargeton would shortly open and turn upon their hinges at his fame! Lucien and David, walking together of an evening in the Promenade de Beaulieu, had looked up at the house with the old-fashioned gables, and wondered whether their names would ever so much as reach ears inexorably deaf to knowledge that came from a lowly origin; and now he (Lucien) was to be made welcome there!

No one except his sister was in the secret. Eve, like the thrifty housekeeper and divine magician that she was, conjured up a few louis d'or from her savings to buy thin shoes for Lucien of the best shoemaker in Angoulême, and an entirely new suit of clothes from the most renowned tailor. She made a frill for his best shirt, and washed and pleated it with her own hands. And how pleased she was to see him so dressed! How proud she felt of her brother, and what quantities of advice she gave him! Her intuition foresaw countless foolish fears. Lucien had a habit of resting his elbows on the table when he was deep in thought; he would even go so far as to draw a table nearer to lean upon

it; Eve told him that he must forget himself so far in those aristocratic precincts.

She went with him as far as St. Peter's Gate, and when they were almost opposite the cathedral she stopped, and watched him pass down the Rue de Beaulieu to the Promenade, where M. du Châtelet was waiting for him. And after he was out of sight, she still stood there, poor girl! in a great tremor of emotion, as though some great thing had happened to them. Lucien in Mme. de Bargeton's house!—for Eve it meant the dawn of success. The innocent creature did not suspect that where ambition begins, ingenuous feeling ends.

Externals in the Rue du Minage gave Lucien no sense of surprise. This palace, that loomed so large in his imagination, was a house built of the soft stone of the country, mellowed by time. It looked dismal enough from the street, and inside it was extremely plain; there was the usual provincial courtyard—chilly, prim, and neat; and the house itself was sober, almost convent-like, but in good repair.

Lucien went up the old staircase with the balustrade of chestnut wood (the stone steps ceased after the second floor), crossed a shabby antechamber, and came into the presence in a little wainscoted drawing-room, beyond a dimly-lit salon. The carved woodwork, in the taste of the eighteenth century, had been painted gray. There were monochrome paintings on the frieze panels, and the walls were adorned with crimson damask with a meager border. The old-fashioned furniture shrank piteously from sight under covers of a red-and-white check pattern. On a sofa, covered with thin matted cushions, sat Mme. de Bargeton; the poet beheld her by the light of two wax candles on a sconce with a screen fitted to it, that stood before her on a round table with a green cloth.

The queen did not attempt to rise, but she twisted very gracefully on her seat, smiling on the poet, who was not a little fluttered by the serpentine quiverings; her manner was distinguished, he thought. For Mme. de Bargeton, she was impressed with Lucien's extreme beauty, with his diffidence, with everything about him; for her the poet already was

poetry incarnate. Lucien scrutinized his hostess with discreet side glances; she disappointed none of his expectations of a great lady.

Mme. de Bargeton, following a new fashion, wore a coif of slashed black velvet, a head-dress that recalls memories of medieval legend to a young imagination, to amplify, as it were, the dignity of womanhood. Her red-gold hair, escaping from under her cap, hung loose; bright golden color in the light, red in the rounded shadow of the curls that only partially hid her neck. Beneath a massive white brow, clean cut and strongly outlined, shone a pair of bright gray eyes encircled by a margin of mother-of-pearl, two blue veins on either side of the nose bringing out the whiteness of that delicate setting. The Bourbon curve of the nose added to the ardent expression of an oval face; it was as if the royal temper of the House of Condé shone conspicuous in this feature. The careless cross-folds of the bodice left a white throat bare, and half revealed the outlines of a still youthful figure and shapely, well-placed contours beneath.

With fingers tapering and well-kept, though somewhat too thin, Mme. de Bargeton amiably pointed to a seat by her side, M. du Châtelet ensconced himself in an easy-chair, and Lucien then became aware that there was no one else in the room.

Mme. de Bargeton's words intoxicated the young poet from L'Houmeau. For Lucien those three hours spent in her presence went by like a dream that we would fain have last forever. She was not thin, he thought; she was slender; in love with love, and loverless; and delicate in spite of her strength. Her foibles, exaggerated by her manner, took his fancy; for youth sets out with a love of hyperbole, that infirmity of noble souls. He did not so much as see that her cheeks were faded, that the patches of color on the cheek-bone were faded and hardened to a brick-red by listless days and a certain amount of ailing health. His imagination fastened at once on the glowing eyes, on the dainty curls rippling with light, on the dazzling fairness of her skin, and hovered about those bright points as the moth hovers about the candle flame. For her spirit made such appeal to his

that he could no longer see the woman as she was. Her feminine exaltation had carried him away, the energy of her expressions, a little staled in truth by pretty hard and constant wear, but new to Lucien, fascinated him so much the more easily because he was determined to be pleased. He had brought none of his own verses to read, but nothing was said of them; he had purposely left them behind because he meant to return; and Mme. de Bargeton did not ask for them, because she meant that he should come back some future day to read them to her. Was not this a beginning of an understanding?

As for M. Sixte du Châtelet, he was not over well pleased with all this. He perceived rather too late in the day that he had a rival in this handsome young fellow. He went with him as far as the first flight of steps below Beaulieu to try the effect of a little diplomacy; and Lucien was not a little astonished when he heard the controller of excise pluming himself on having effected the introduction, and proceeding in this character to give him (Lucien) the benefit of his advice.

“Heaven send that Lucien might meet with better treatment than he had done,” such was the matter of M. du Châtelet’s discourse. “The Court was less insolent than this pack of dolts in Angoulême. You were expected to endure deadly insults; the superciliousness you had to put up with was something abominable. If this kind of folk did not alter their behavior, there would be another Revolution of ’89. As for himself, if he continued to go to the house, it was because he found Mme. de Bargeton to his taste; she was the only woman worth troubling about in Angoulême; he had been paying court to her for want of anything better to do, and now he was desperately in love with her. She would be his before very long, she loved him, everything pointed that way. The conquest of this haughty queen of the society would be his one revenge on the whole household of booby clodpates.”

Châtelet talked of his passion in the tone of a man who would have a rival’s life if he crossed his path. The elderly butterfly of the Empire came down with his whole weight

on the poor poet, and tried to frighten and crush him by his self-importance. He grew the taller as he gave an embellished account of his perilous wanderings; but while he impressed the poet's imagination, the lover was by no means afraid of him.

In spite of the elderly coxcomb, and regardless of his threats and airs of a *bourgeois* bravo, Lucien went back again and again to the house—not too often at first, as became a man of L'Houmeau; but before very long he grew accustomed to the vast condescension, as it had seemed to him at the outset, and came more and more frequently. The druggist's son was a completely insignificant being. If any of the *noblesse*, men or women, calling upon Naïs, found Lucien in the room, they met him with the overwhelming graciousness that well-bred people use towards their inferiors. Lucien thought them very kind for a time, and later found out the real reason for their specious amiability. It was not long before he detected a patronizing tone that stirred his gall and confirmed him in his bitter Republicanism, a phase of opinion through which many a would-be patrician passes by way of prelude to his introduction to polite society.

But was there anything that he would not have endured for Naïs?—for so he heard her named by the clan. Like Spanish *grandees* and the old Austrian nobility at Vienna, these folk, men and women alike, called each other by their Christian names, a final shade of distinction in the inmost ring of Angoumois aristocracy.

Lucien loved Naïs as a young man loves the first woman who flatters him, for Naïs prophesied great things and boundless fame for Lucien. She used all her skill to secure her hold upon her poet; not merely did she exalt him beyond measure, but she represented him to himself as a child without fortune whom she meant to start in life; she treated him like a child, to keep him near her; she made him her reader, her secretary, and cared more for him than she would have thought possible after the dreadful calamity that had befallen her.

She was very cruel to herself in those days, telling herself

that it would be folly to love a young man of twenty, so far apart from her socially in the first place; and her behavior to him was a bewildering mixture of familiarity and capricious fits of pride arising from her fears and scruples. She was sometimes a lofty patroness, sometimes she was tender and flattered him. At first, while he was overawed by her rank, Lucien experienced the extremes of dread, hope, and despair, the torture of a first love, that is beaten deep into the heart with the hammer strokes of alternate bliss and anguish. For two months Mme. de Bargeton was for him a benefactress who would take a mother's interest in him; but confidences came next. Mme. de Bargeton began to address her poet as "dear Lucien," and then as "dear," without more ado. The poet grew bolder, and addressed the great lady as Naïs, and there followed a flash of the anger that captivates a boy; she reproached him for calling her by a name in everybody's mouth. The haughty and high-born Nègrepelisse offered the fair angel youth that one of her appellations which was unsoiled by use; for him she would be "Louise." Lucien was in the third heaven.

One evening when Lucien came in he found Mme. de Bargeton looking at a portrait, which she promptly put away. He wished to see it, and to quiet the despair of a first fit of jealousy Louise showed him Cante-Croix's picture, and told with tears the piteous story of a love so stainless, so cruelly cut short. Was she experimenting with herself? Was she trying at first unfaithfulness to the memory of the dead? Or had she taken it into her head to raise up a rival to Lucien in the portrait? Lucien was too much of a boy to analyze his lady-love; he gave way to unfeigned despair when she opened the campaign by entrenching herself behind the more or less skillfully devised scruples which women raise to have them battered down. When a woman begins to talk about her duty, regard for appearances or religion, the objections she raises are so many redoubts which she loves to have carried by storm. But on the guileless Lucien these coquetries were thrown away; he would have advanced of his own accord.

"I shall not die for you, I will live for you," he cried

audaciously one evening; he meant to have no more of M. de Cante-Croix, and gave Louise a glance which told plainly that a crisis was at hand.

Startled at the progress of this new love in herself and her poet, Louise demanded some verses promised for the first page of her album, looking for a pretext for a quarrel in his tardiness. But what became of her when she read the following stanzas, which, naturally, she considered finer than the finest work of Canalis, the poet of the aristocracy?—

“The magic brush, light lying flights of song—  
To these, but not to these alone, belong  
    My pages fair;  
Often to me, my mistress’s pencil steals  
To tell the secret gladness that she feels,  
    The hidden care.

And when her fingers, slower at the last,  
Of a rich Future, now become the Past,  
    Seek count of me,  
Oh Love, when swift thick coming memories rise,  
    I pray of Thee,  
May they bring visions fair as cloudless skies  
Of happy voyage o’er a summer sea!”

“Was it really I who inspired those lines?” she asked.

The doubt suggested by coquetry to a woman who amused herself by playing with fire brought tears to Lucien’s eyes; but her first kiss upon his forehead calmed the storm. Decidedly Lucien was a great man, and she meant to form him; she thought of teaching him Italian and German and perfecting his manners. That would be pretext sufficient for having him constantly with her under the very eyes of her tiresome courtiers. What an interest in her life! She took up music again for her poet’s sake, and revealed the world of sound to him, playing grand fragments of Beethoven till she sent him into ecstasy; and, happy in his delight, turned to the half-swooning poet.

“Is not such happiness as this enough?” she asked hypocritically; and poor Lucien was stupid enough to answer, “Yes.”

In the previous week things had reached such a point, that Louise had judged it expedient to ask Lucien to dine

with M. de Bargeton as a third. But in spite of this precaution, the whole town knew the state of affairs; and so extraordinary did it appear, that no one could believe the truth. The outcry was terrific. Some were of the opinion that society was on the eve of cataclysm. "See what comes of Liberal doctrines!" cried others.

Then it was that the jealous Châtelet discovered that Madame Charlotte, the monthly nurse, was no other than Mme. Chardon, "the mother of the Chateaubriand of L'Houmeau," as he put it. The remark passed muster as a joke. Mme. de Chandour was the first to hurry to Mme. de Bargeton.

"Naïs, dear," she said, "do you know what everybody is talking about in Angoulême? This little rhymester's mother is the Madame Charlotte who nursed my sister-in-law through her confinement two months ago."

"What is there extraordinary in that, my dear?" asked Mme. de Bargeton with her most regal air. "She is a druggist's widow, is she not? A poor fate for a Rubempré. Suppose that you or I had not a penny in the world, what should we either of us do for a living? How would you support your children?"

Mme. de Bargeton's presence of mind put an end to the jeremiads of the *noblesse*. Great natures are prone to make a virtue of misfortune; and there is something irresistibly attractive about well-doing when persisted in through evil report; innocence has the piquancy of the forbidden.

Mme. de Bargeton's rooms were crowded that evening with friends who came to remonstrate with her. She brought her most caustic wit into play. She said that as noble families could not produce a Molière, a Racine, a Rousseau, a Voltaire, a Massillon, a Beaumarchais, or a Diderot, people must make up their minds to it, and accept the fact that great men had upholsterers and clockmakers and cutlers for their fathers. She said that genius was always noble. She railed at boorish squires for understanding their real interests so imperfectly. In short, she talked a good deal of nonsense, which would have let the light into heads less dense, but left her audience agape at her eccentricity. And in



these ways she conjured away the storm with her heavy artillery.

When Lucien, obedient to her request, appeared for the first time in the faded great drawing-room, where the whist-tables were set out, she welcomed him graciously, and brought him forward, like a queen who means to be obeyed. She addressed the controller of excise as "M. Châtelet," and left that gentleman thunderstruck by the discovery that she knew about the illegal superfetation of the particle. Lucien was forced upon her circle, and was received as a poisonous element, which every person in it vowed to expel with the antidote of insolence.

Naïs had won a victory, but she had lost her supremacy of empire. There was a rumor of insurrection. Amélie, otherwise Mme. de Chandour, hearkening to "M. Châtelet's" counsels, determined to erect a rival altar by receiving on Wednesdays. Now Mme. de Bargeton's salon was open every evening; and those who frequented it were so wedded to their ways, so accustomed to meet about the same tables, to play the familiar game of backgammon, to see the same faces and the same candle sconces night after night; and afterwards to cloak and shawl, and put on overshoes and hats in the old corridor, that they were quite as much attached to the steps of the staircase as to the mistress of the house.

"All resigned themselves to endure the songster" (*chardonneret*) "of the sacred grove," said Alexandre de Brébian, which was witticism number two. Finally, the president of the agricultural society put an end to the sedition by remarking judicially that "before the Revolution the greatest nobles admitted men like Duclos and Grimm and Crébillon to their society—men who were nobodies, like this little poet of L'Houmeau; but one thing they never did, they never received tax-collectors, and, after all, Châtelet is only a tax-collector."

Du Châtelet suffered for Chardon. Everyone turned the cold shoulder upon him; and Châtelet was conscious that he was attacked. When Mme. de Bargeton called him "M. Châtelet," he swore to himself that he would possess

her; and now he entered into the views of the mistress of the house, came to the support of the young poet, and declared himself Lucien's friend. The great diplomatist, overlooked by the shortsighted Emperor, made much of Lucien, and declared himself his friend! To launch the poet into society, he gave a dinner, and asked all the authorities to meet him—the prefect, the receiver-general, the colonel in command of the garrison, the head of the Naval School, the president of the Court, and so forth. The poet, poor fellow, was fêted so magnificently, and so belauded, that anybody but a young man of two-and-twenty would have shrewdly suspected a hoax. After dinner, Châtelet drew his rival on to recite *The Dying Sardanapalus*, the masterpiece of the hour; and the headmaster of the school, a man of a phlegmatic temperament, applauded with both hands, and vowed that Jean-Baptiste Rousseau had done nothing finer. Sixte, Baron du Châtelet, thought in his heart that this slip of a rhymester would wither incontinently in a hothouse of adulation; perhaps he hoped that when the poet's head was turned with brilliant dreams, he would indulge in some impertinence that would promptly consign him to the obscurity from which he had emerged. Pending the decease of genius, Châtelet appeared to offer up his hopes as a sacrifice at Mme. de Bargeton's feet; but with the ingenuity of a rake, he kept his own plan in abeyance, watching the lovers' movements with keenly critical eyes, and waiting for the opportunity of ruining Lucien.

From this time forward, vague rumors reported the existence of a great man in Angoumois. Mme. de Bargeton was praised on all sides for the interest which she took in this young eagle. No sooner was her conduct approved than she tried to win a general sanction. She announced a soirée, with ices, tea, and cakes, a great innovation in a city where tea, as yet, was sold only by druggists as a remedy for indigestion. The flower of Angoumoisin aristocracy was summoned to hear Lucien read his great work. Louise had hidden all the difficulties from her friend, but she let fall a few words touching the social cabal formed against him; she would not have him ignorant of the perils besetting his

career as a man of genius, nor of the obstacles insurmountable to weaklings. She drew a lesson from the recent victory. Her white hands pointed him to glory that lay beyond a prolonged martyrdom; she spoke of stakes and flaming pyres; she spread the adjectives thickly on her finest *tartines*, and decorated them with a variety of her most pompous epithets. It was an infringement of the copyright of the passages of declamation that disfigure *Corinne*; but Louise grew so much the greater in her own eyes as she talked, that she loved the Benjamin who inspired her eloquence the more for it. She counseled him to take a bold step and renounce his patronymic for the noble name of Rubempré; he need not mind the tittle-tattle over a change which the King, for that matter, would authorize. Mme. de Bargeton undertook to procure this favor; she was related to the Marquise d'Espard, who was a Blamont-Chauvry before her marriage, and a *persona grata* at Court. The words "King," "Marquise d'Espard," and "the Court" dazzled Lucien like a blaze of fireworks, and the necessity of the baptism was plain to him.

"Dear child," said Louise, with tender mockery in her tones, "the sooner it is done, the sooner it will be sanctioned."

She went through social strata and showed the poet that this step would raise him many rungs higher in the ladder. Seizing the moment, she persuaded Lucien to forswear the chimerical notions of '89 as to equality; she roused a thirst for social distinction allayed by David's cool commonsense; she pointed out fashionable society as the goal and the only stage for such a talent as his. The ravid Liberal became a Monarchist *in petto*; Lucien set his teeth in the apple of desire of rank, luxury, and fame. He swore to win a crown to lay at his lady's feet, even if there should be blood-stains on the bays. He would conquer at any cost, *quibuscumque viis*. To prove his courage, he told her of his present way of life; Louise had known nothing of its hardships, for there is an indefinable pudency inseparable from strong feeling in youth, a delicacy which shrinks from a display of great qualities; and a young man loves to have the real quality of his

nature discerned through the incognito. He described that life, the shackles of poverty borne with pride, his days of work for David, his nights of study. His young ardor recalled memories of the colonel of six-and-twenty; Mme. de Bargeton's eyes grew soft; and Lucien, seeing this weakness in his awe-inspiring mistress, seized a hand that she abandoned to him, and kissed it with the frenzy of a lover and a poet in his youth. Louise even allowed him to set his eager, quivering lips upon her forehead.

"Oh, child! child! if anyone should see us, I should look very ridiculous," she said, shaking off the ecstatic torpor.

In the course of that evening, Mme. de Bargeton's wit made havoc of Lucien's prejudices, as she styled them. Men of genius, according to her doctrine, had neither brothers nor sisters nor father nor mother; the great tasks laid upon them required that they should sacrifice everything that they might grow to their full stature. Perhaps their families might suffer at first from the all-absorbing exactions of a giant brain, but at a later day they were repaid a hundred-fold for self-denial of every kind during the early struggles of the kingly intellect with adverse fate; they shared the spoils of victory. Genius was answerable to no man. Genius alone could judge of the means used to an end which no one else could know. It was the duty of a man of genius, therefore, to set himself above law; it was his mission to reconstruct law; the man who is master of his age may take all that he needs, run any risks, for all is his. She quoted instances. Bernard Palissy, Louis XI., Fox, Napoleon, Christopher Columbus, and Julius Cæsar,—all these world-famous gamblers had begun life hampered with debt, or as poor men; all of them had been misunderstood, taken for madmen, reviled for bad sons, bad brothers, bad fathers; and yet in after life each one had come to be the pride of his family, of his country, of the civilized world.

Her arguments fell upon fertile soil in the worst of Lucien's nature, and spread corruption in his heart; for him, when his desires were hot, all means were admissible. But—failure is high treason against society; and when the fallen

conqueror has run amuck through *bourgeois* virtues, and pulled down the pillars of society, small wonder that society, finding Marius seated among the ruins, should drive him forth in abhorrence. All unconsciously Lucien stood with the palm of genius on the one hand and a shameful ending in the hulks upon the other; and, on high upon the Sinai of the prophets, beheld no Dead Sea covering the cities of the plain—the hideous winding-sheet of Gomorrhah.

So well did Louise loosen the swaddling-bands of provincial life that confined the heart and brain of her poet, that the said poet determined to try an experiment upon her. He wished to feel certain that this proud conquest was his without laying himself open to the mortification of a rebuff. The forthcoming *soirée* gave him his opportunity. Ambition blended with his love. He loved, and he meant to rise, a double desire not unnatural in young men with a heart to satisfy and the battle of life to fight. Society, summoning all her children to one banquet, arouses ambition in the very morning of life. Youth is robbed of its charm, and generous thoughts are corrupted by mercenary scheming. The idealist would fain have it otherwise, but intrusive fact too often gives the lie to the fiction which we should like to believe, making it impossible to paint the young man of the nineteenth century other than he is. Lucien imagined that his scheming was entirely prompted by good feeling, and persuaded himself that it was done solely for his friend David's sake.

He wrote a long letter to his Louise; he felt bolder, pen in hand, than face to face. In a dozen sheets, copied out three several times, he told her of his father's genius and blighted hopes and of his grinding poverty. He described his beloved sister as an angel, and David as another Cuvier, a great man of the future, and a father, friend, and brother to him in the present. He should feel himself unworthy of his Louise's love (his proudest distinction) if he did not ask her to do for David all that she had done for him. He would give up everything rather than desert David Séchard; David must witness his success. It was one of those wild letters in which a young man points a pistol at a refusal,

letters full of boyish casuistry and the incoherent reasoning of an idealist; a delicious tissue of words embroidered here and there by the naïve utterances that women love so well—unconscious revelations of the writer's heart.

Lucien left the letter with the housemaid, went to the office, and spent the day in reading proofs, superintending the execution of orders, and looking after the affairs of the printing-house. He said not a word to David. While youth bears a child's heart, it is capable of sublime reticence. Perhaps, too, Lucien began to dread the Phocion's axe which David could wield when he chose, perhaps he was afraid to meet those clear-sighted eyes that read the depths of his soul. But when he read Chénier's poems with David, his secret rose from his heart to his lips at the sting of a reproach that he felt as the patient feels the probing of a wound.

And now try to understand the thoughts that troubled Lucien's mind as he went down from Angoulême. Was the great lady angry with him? Would she receive David? Had he, Lucien, in his ambition, flung himself headlong back into the depths of L'Houmeau? Before he set that kiss on Louise's forehead, he had had time to measure the distance between a queen and her favorite, so far had he come in five months, and he did not tell himself that David could cross over the same ground in a moment. Yet he did not know how completely the lower orders were excluded from this upper world; he did not so much as suspect that a second experiment of this kind meant ruin for Mme. de Bargeton. Once accused and fairly convicted of a liking for *canaille*, Louise would be driven from the place, her caste would shun her as men shunned a leper in the Middle Ages. Naïfs might have broken the moral law, and her whole circle, the clergy and the flower of the aristocracy, would have defended her against the world through thick and thin; but a breach of another law, the offense of admitting all sorts of people to her house—this was sin without remission; the sins of those in power are always overlooked—once let them abdicate, and they shall pay the penalty. And what was it but abdication to receive David?

But if Lucien did not see these aspects of the question, his aristocratic instinct discerned plenty of difficulties of another kind, and he took alarm. A fine manner is not the invariable outcome of noble feeling; and while no man at court had a nobler air than Racine, Corneille looked very much like a cattle-dealer, and Descartes might have been taken for an honest Dutch merchant; and visitors to La Brède, meeting Montesquieu in a cotton nightcap, carrying a rake over his shoulder, mistook him for a gardener. A knowledge of the world, when it is not sucked in with mother's milk and part of the inheritance of descent, is only acquired by education, supplemented by certain gifts of chance—a graceful figure, distinction of feature, a certain ring in the voice. All these, so important trifles, David lacked, while Nature had bestowed them upon his friend. Of gentle blood on the mother's side, Lucien was a Frank, even down to the high-arched instep. David had inherited the physique of his father the pressman and the flat foot of the Gael. Lucien could hear the shower of jokes at David's expense; he could see Mme. de Bargeton's repressed smile; and at length, without being exactly ashamed of his brother, he made up his mind to disregard his first impulse and to think twice before yielding to it in future.

So, after the hour of poetry and self-sacrifice, after the reading of verse that opened out before the friends the fields of literature in the light of a newly risen sun, the hour of worldly wisdom and of scheming struck for Lucien.

Down once more in L'Houmeau he wished that he had not written that letter; he wished he could have it back again; for down the vista of the future he caught a glimpse of the inexorable laws of the world. He guessed that nothing succeeds like success, and it cost him something to step down from the first rung of the scaling ladder by which he meant to reach and storm the heights above. Pictures of his quiet and simple life rose before him, pictures fair with the brightest colors of blossoming love. There was David; what a genius David had—David who had helped him so generously, and would die for him at need; he thought of his mother, of how great a lady she was in her lowly lot, and how she

thought that he was as good as he was clever; then of his sister so gracious in submission to her fate, of his own innocent childhood and conscience as yet unstained, of budding hopes undespoiled by rough winds, and at these thoughts the past broke into flowers once more for his memory.

Then he told himself that it was a far finer thing to hew his own way through serried hostile mobs of aristocrats or philistines by repeated successful strokes, than to reach the goal through a woman's favor. Sooner or later his genius should shine out; it had been so with the others, his predecessors; they had tamed society. Women would love him when that day came! The example of Napoleon, which, unluckily for this nineteenth century of ours, has filled a great many ordinary persons with aspirations after extraordinary destinies,—the example of Napoleon occurred to Lucien's mind. He flung his schemes to the winds and blamed himself for thinking of them. For Lucien was so made that he went from evil to good, or from good to evil, with the same facility.

Lucien had none of the scholar's love for his retreat; for the past month indeed he had felt something like shame at the sight of the shop front, where you could read—

POSTEL (LATE CHARDON), PHARMACEUTICAL CHEMIST,

in yellow letters on a green ground. It was an offense to him that his father's name should be thus posted up in a place where every carriage passed.

Every evening, when he closed the ugly iron gate and went up to Beaulieu to give his arm to Mme. de Bargeton among the dandies of the upper town, he chafed beyond all reason at the disparity between his lodging and his fortune.

"I love Mme. de Bargeton; perhaps in a few days she will be mine, yet here I live in this rat-hole!" he said to himself this evening, as he went down the narrow passage into the little yard behind the shop. This evening bundles of boiled herbs were spread out along the wall, the apprentice was scouring a cauldron, and M. Postel himself, girded about with his laboratory apron, was standing with



a retort in his hand, inspecting some chemical produce while keeping an eye upon the shop door, or if the eye happened to be engaged, he had at any rate an ear for the bell.

A strong scent of camomile and peppermint pervaded the yard and the poor little dwelling at the side, which you reached by a short ladder, with a rope on either side by way of hand-rail. Lucien's room was an attic just under the roof.

"Good-day, sonny," said M. Postel, that typical provincial tradesman. "Are you pretty middling? I have just been experimenting on treacle, but it would take a man like your father to find what I am looking for. Ah! he was a famous chemist, he was! If I had only known his gout specific, you and I should be rolling along in our carriage this day."

The little druggist, whose head was as thick as his heart was kind, never let a week pass without some allusion to Chardon senior's unlucky secretiveness as to that discovery, words that Lucien felt like a stab.

"It is a great pity," Lucien answered curtly. He was beginning to think his father's apprentice prodigiously vulgar, though he had blessed the man for his kindness, for honest Postel had helped his master's widow and children more than once.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" M. Postel inquired, putting down his test tube on the laboratory table.

"Is there a letter for me?"

"Yes, a letter that smells like balm! it is lying on the counter near my desk."

Mme. de Bargeton's letter lying among the physic bottles in a druggist's shop! Lucien sprang in to rescue it.

"Be quick, Lucien! your dinner has been waiting an hour for you, it will be cold!" a sweet voice called gently through a half-opened window; but Lucien did not hear.

"That brother of yours has gone crazy, mademoiselle," said Postel, lifting his face.

The old bachelor looked rather like a miniature brandy cask, embellished by a painter's fancy with a fat, ruddy countenance much pitted with the smallpox; at the sight of

Eve his face took a ceremonious and amiable expression, which said plainly that he had thoughts of espousing the daughter of his predecessor, but could not put an end to the strife between love and interest in his heart. He often said to Lucien, with a smile, "Your sister is uncommonly pretty, and you are not so bad looking neither! Your father did everything well."

Eve was tall, dark-haired, dark of complexion, and blue-eyed; but notwithstanding these signs of virile character, she was gentle, tender-hearted, and devoted to those she loved. Her frank innocence, her simplicity, her quiet acceptance of a hard-working life, her character—for her life was above reproach—could not fail to win David Séchard's heart. So, since the first time that these two had met, a repressed and single-hearted love had grown up between them in the German fashion, quietly, with no fervid protestations. In their secret souls they thought of each other as if there were a bar between that kept them apart; as if the thought were an offense against some jealous husband; and hid their feelings from Lucien as though their love in some way did him a wrong. David, moreover, had no confidence in himself, and could not believe that Eve could care for him; Eve was a penniless girl, and therefore shy. A real work-girl would have been bolder; but Eve, gently bred, and fallen into poverty, resigned herself to her dreary lot. Diffident as she seemed, she was in reality proud, and would not make a single advance towards the son of a father said to be rich. People who knew the value of a growing property, said that the vineyard of Marsac was worth more than eighty thousand francs, to say nothing of the additional bits of land which old Séchard used to buy as they came into the market, for old Séchard had savings—he was lucky with his vintages, and a clever salesman. Perhaps David was the only man in Angoulême who knew nothing of his father's wealth. In David's eyes Marsac was a hovel bought in 1810 for fifteen or sixteen thousand francs, a place that he saw once a year at vintage time when his father walked him up and down among the vines and boasted of an output of wine which the young printer never saw, and he cared nothing about it.

David was a student leading a solitary life; and the love that gained even greater force in solitude, as he dwelt upon the difficulties in the way, was timid, and looked for encouragement; for David stood more in awe of Eve than a simple clerk of some high-born lady. He was awkward and ill at ease in the presence of his idol, and as eager to hurry away as he had been to come. He repressed his passion, and was silent. Often of an evening, on some pretext of consulting Lucien, he would leave the Place du Mûrier and go down through the Palet Gate as far as L'Houmeau, but at the sight of the green iron railings his heart failed him. Perhaps he had come too late, Eve might think him a nuisance; she would be in bed by this time no doubt; and so he turned back. But though his great love had only appeared in trifles, Eve read it clearly; she was proud, without a touch of vanity in her pride, of the deep reverence in David's looks and words and manner towards her, but it was the young printer's enthusiastic belief in Lucien that drew her to him most of all. He had divined the way to win Eve. The mute delights of this love of theirs differed from the transports of stormy passion, as wildflowers in the fields from the brilliant flowers in garden beds. Interchange of glances, delicate and sweet as blue water-flowers on the surface of the stream; a look in either face, vanishing as swiftly as the scent of briar-rose; melancholy, tender as the velvet of moss—these were the blossoms of two rare natures, springing up out of a rich and fruitful soil on foundations of rock. Many a time Eve had seen revelations of the strength that lay below the appearance of weakness, and made such full allowance for all that David left undone, that the slightest word now might bring about a closer union of soul and soul.

Eve opened the door, and Lucien sat down without a word at the little table on an X-shaped trestle. There was no tablecloth; the poor little household boasted but three silver spoons and forks, and Eve had laid them all for the dearly loved brother.

“What have you there?” she asked when she had set a dish on the table, and put the extinguisher on the portable stove, where it had been kept hot for him.

Lucien did not answer. Eve took up a little plate, daintily garnished with vine-leaves, and set it on the table with a jug full of cream.

"There, Lucien, I have had strawberries for you."

But Lucien was so absorbed in his letter that he did not hear a word. Eve came to sit beside him without a murmur; for in a sister's love for a brother it is an element of great pleasure to be treated without ceremony.

"Oh! what is it?" she cried as she saw tears shining in her brother's eyes.

"Nothing, nothing, Eve," he said, and putting his arm about her waist, he drew her towards him and kissed her forehead, her hair, her throat, with warmth that surprised her.

"You are keeping something from me."

"Well, then—she loves me."

"I knew very well that you kissed me for somebody else," the poor sister pouted, flushing red.

"We shall all be happy," cried Lucien, swallowing great spoonfuls of soup.

"*We?*" echoed Eve. The same presentiment that had crossed David's mind prompted her to add, "You will not care so much about us now."

"How can you think that, if you know me?"

Eve put out her hand and grasped his tightly; then she carried off the empty plate and the brown earthen soup-tureen, and brought the dish that she had made for him. But instead of eating his dinner, Lucien read his letter over again; and Eve, discreet maiden, did not ask another question, respecting her brother's silence. If he wished to tell her about it, she could wait; if he did not, how could she ask him to tell her? She waited. Here is the letter:—

"MY FRIEND,—Why should I refuse to your brother in science the help that I have lent you? All merits have equal rights in my eyes; but you do not know the prejudices of those among whom I live. We shall never make an aristocracy of ignorance understand that intellect ennobles. If I have not sufficient influence to compel them to accept M.

David Séchard, I am quite willing to sacrifice the worthless creatures to you. It would be a perfect hecatomb in the antique manner. But, dear friend, you would not, of course, ask me to leave them all in exchange for the society of a person whose character and manners might not please me. I know from your flatteries how easily friendship can be blinded. Will you think the worse of me if I attach a condition to my consent? In the interests of your future I should like to see your friend, and know and decide for myself whether you are not mistaken. What is this but the mother's anxious care of my dear poet, which I am in duty bound to take?

“LOUISE DE NÈGREPELISSE.”

Lucien had no suspicion of the art with which polite society puts forward a “Yes” on the way to a “No,” and a “No” that leads to a “Yes.” He took this note for a victory. David should go to Mme. de Bargeton's house! David would shine there in all the majesty of his genius! He raised his head so proudly in the intoxication of a victory which increased his belief in himself and his ascendancy over others, his face was so radiant with the brightness of many hopes, that his sister could not help telling him that he looked handsome.

“If that woman has any sense, she must love you! And if so, to-night she will be vexed, for all the ladies will try all sorts of coquetries on you. How handsome you will look when you read your *Saint John in Patmos!* If only I were a mouse, and could just slip in and see it! Come, I have put your clothes out in mother's room.”

The mother's room bore witness to self-respecting poverty. There were white curtains to the walnut wood bedstead, and a strip of cheap green carpet at the foot. A chest of drawers with wooden top, a looking-glass, and a few walnut wood chairs completed the furniture. The clock on the chimney-piece told of the old vanished days of prosperity. White curtains hung in the windows, a gray flowered paper covered the walls, and the tiled floor, colored and waxed by Eve herself, shone with cleanliness. On a little round table

in the middle of the room stood a red tray with a pattern of gilt roses, and three cups and a sugar-basin of Limoges porcelain. Eve slept in the little adjoining closet, where there was just room for a narrow bed, an old-fashioned low chair, and a work-table by the window; there was about as much space as there is in a ship's cabin, and the door always stood open for the sake of air. But if all these things spoke of great poverty, the atmosphere was sedate and studious; and for those who knew the mother and children, there was something touchingly appropriate in their surroundings.

Lucien was tying his cravat when David's step sounded outside in the little yard, and in another moment the young printer appeared. From his manner and looks he seemed to have come down in a hurry.

"Well, David!" cried the ambitious poet, "we have gained the day! She loves me! You shall come too."

"No," David said with some confusion, "I came down to thank you for this proof of friendship, but I have been thinking things over seriously. My own life is cut out for me, Lucien. I am David Séchard, printer to His Majesty in Angoulême, with my name at the bottom of the bills posted on every wall. For people of that class, I am an artisan, or I am in business, if you like it better, but I am a craftsman who lives over a shop in the Rue de Beaulieu at the corner of the Place du Mûrier. I have not the wealth of a Keller just yet, nor the name of a Desplein, two sorts of power that the nobles still try to ignore, and—and I am so far agreed with them—this power is nothing without a knowledge of the world and the manners of a gentleman. How am I to prove my claim to this sudden elevation? I should only make myself a laughing-stock for nobles and *bourgeoisie* to boot. As for you, your position is different. A foreman is not committed to anything. You are busy gaining knowledge that will be indispensable by and by; you can explain your present work by your future. And, in any case, you can leave your place to-morrow and begin something else; you might study law or diplomacy, or go into the civil service. Nobody has docketed and pigeon-

holed *you*, in fact. Take advantage of your social maiden fame to walk alone and grasp honors. Enjoy all pleasures gladly, even frivolous pleasures. I wish you luck, Lucien; I shall enjoy your success; you will be like a second self for me. Yes, in my own thoughts I shall live your life. You shall have the holiday life, in the glare of the world and among the swift working springs of intrigue. I will lead the work-a-day life, the tradesman's life of sober toil, and the patient labor of scientific research.

"You shall be our aristocracy," he went on, looking at Eve as he spoke. "If you totter, you shall have my arm to steady you. If you have reason to complain of the treachery of others, you will find a refuge in our hearts, the love there will never change. And influence and favor and the goodwill of others might fail us if we were two; we should stand in each other's way; go forward, you can tow me after you if it comes to that. So far from envying you, I will dedicate my life to yours. The thing that you have just done for me, when you risked the loss of your benefactress, your love it may be, rather than forsake or disown me, that little thing, so great as it was—ah, well, Lucien, that in itself would bind me to you for ever if we were not brothers already. Have no remorse, no concern over seeming to take the larger share. This one-sided bargain is exactly to my taste. And, after all, suppose that you should give me a pang now and again, who knows that I shall not still be your debtor all my life long?"

He looked timidly towards Eve as he spoke; her eyes were full of tears, she saw all that lay below the surface.

"In fact," he went on, turning to Lucien, who stood amazed at this, "you are well made, you have a graceful figure, you wear your clothes with an air, you look like a gentleman in that blue coat of yours with the yellow buttons and the plain nankeen trousers; now I should look like a working man among those people, I should be awkward and out of my element, I should say foolish things, or say nothing at all; but as for you, you can overcome any prejudice as to names by taking your mother's, you can call yourself Lucien de Rubempré, I am and always shall be David

Sécharde. In this society that you frequent, everything tells for you, everything would tell against me. You were born to shine in it. Women will worship that angel's face of yours; won't they, Eve?"

Lucien sprang up and flung his arms about David. David's humility had made short work of many doubts and plenty of difficulties. Was it possible not to feel twice tenderly towards this friend, who by the way of friendship had come to think the very thoughts that he, Lucien, had reached through ambition? The aspirant for love and honors felt that the way had been made smooth for him; the young man and the comrade felt all his heart go out towards his friend. It was one of those moments that come very seldom in our lives, when all the forces in us are sweetly strung, and every chord vibrating gives out full resonance.

And yet, this goodness of a noble nature increased Lucien's human tendency to take himself as the center of things. Do not all of us say more or less, "*L'État, c'est moi!*" with Louis Quatorze? Lucien's mother and sister had concentrated all their tenderness on him, David was his devoted friend; he was accustomed to see the three making every effort for him in secret, and consequently he had all the faults of a spoiled eldest son. The noble is eaten up with the egoism which their unselfishness was fostering in Lucien; and Mme. de Bargeton was doing her best to develop the same fault by inciting him to forget all that he owed to his sister, and mother, and David. He was far from doing so as yet; but was there not ground for the fear that as his sphere of ambition widened, his whole thought perforce would be how he might maintain himself in it?

When emotion had subsided, David had a suggestion to make. He thought that Lucien's poem, *Saint John in Patmos*, was possibly too biblical to be read before an audience but little familiar with apocalyptic poetry. Lucien, making his first appearance before the most exacting public in the Charente, seemed to be nervous. David advised him to take André de Chénier and substitute certain pleasure for a dubious delight. Lucien was a perfect reader, the listeners would enjoy listening to him, and his modesty would doubt-



less serve him well. Like most young people, the pair were endowing the rest of the world with their own intelligence and virtues; for if youth that has not yet gone astray is pitiless for the sins of others, it is ready, on the other hand, to put a magnificent faith in them. It is only, in fact, after a good deal of experience of life that we recognize the truth of Raphael's great saying—"To comprehend is to equal."

The power of appreciating poetry is rare, generally speaking, in France; *esprit* soon dries up the source of the sacred tears of ecstasy; nobody cares to be at the trouble of deciphering the sublime, of plumbing the depths to discover the infinite. Lucien was about to have his first experience of the ignorance and indifference of worldlings. He went round by way of the printing office for David's volume of poetry.

The two lovers were left alone, and David had never felt more embarrassed in his life. Countless terrors seized upon him; he half wished, half feared that Eve would praise him; he longed to run away, for even modesty is not exempt from coquetry. David was afraid to utter a word that might seem to beg for thanks; everything that he could think of put him in some false position, so he held his tongue and looked guilty. Eve, guessing the agony of modesty, was enjoying the pause; but when David twisted his hat as if he meant to go, she looked at him and smiled.

"Monsieur David," she said, "if you are not going to pass the evening at Mme. de Bargeton's, we can spend the time together. It is fine; shall we take a walk along the Charente? We will have a talk about Lucien."

David longed to fling himself at the feet of this delicious girl. Eve had rewarded him beyond his hopes by that tone in her voice; the kindness of her accent had solved the difficulties of the position, her suggestion was something better than praise, it was the first grace given by love.

"But give me time to dress!" she said, as David made as if to go at once.

David went out; he who all his life long had not known one tune from another, was humming to himself; honest

Postel, hearing him with surprise, conceived a vehement suspicion of Eve's feelings towards the printer.

The most trifling things that happened that evening made a great impression on Lucien, and his character was peculiarly susceptible to first impressions. Like all inexperienced lovers he arrived so early that Louise was not in the drawing-room; but M. de Bargeton was there, alone. Lucien had already begun to serve his apprenticeship in the practice of the small deceits with which the lover of a married woman pays for his happiness—deceits through which, moreover, she learns the extent of her power; but so far Lucien had not met the lady's husband face to face.

M. de Bargeton's intellect was of the limited kind, exactly poised on the border line between harmless vacancy, with some glimmerings of sense, and the excessive stupidity that can neither take in nor give out any idea. He was thoroughly impressed with the idea of doing his duty in society; and, doing his utmost to be agreeable, had adopted the smile of an opera dancer as his sole method of expression. Satisfied, he smiled; dissatisfied, he smiled again. He smiled at good news and evil tidings; with slight modifications the smile did duty on all occasions. If he was positively obliged to express his personal approval, a complacent laugh reinforced the smile; but he never vouchsafed a word until driven to the last extremity. A *tête-à-tête* put him in the one embarrassment of his vegetative existence, for then he was obliged to look for something to say in the vast blank of his vacant interior. He usually got out of the difficulty by a return to the artless ways of childhood; he thought aloud, took you into his confidence concerning the smallest details of his existence, his physical wants, the small sensations which did duty for ideas with him. He never talked about the weather, nor did he indulge in the ordinary commonplaces of conversation—the way of escape provided for weak intellects; he plunged you into the most intimate and personal topics.

“I took veal this morning to please Mme. de Bargeton, who is very fond of veal, and my stomach has been very un-

easy since," he would tell you. "I knew how it would be; it never suits me. How do you explain it?" Or, very likely—

"I am just about to ring for a glass of *eau sucrée*; will you have some at the same time?"

Or, "I am going to take a ride to-morrow; I am going over to see my father-in-law."

These short observations did not permit of discussion; a "Yes" or "No," extracted from his interlocutor, the conversation dropped dead. Then M. de Bargeton mutely implored his visitor to come to his assistance. Turning westward his old asthmatic pug-dog's countenance, he gazed at you with big, lusterless eyes, in a way that said, "You were saying?"

The people whom he loved best were bores anxious to talk about themselves; he listened to them with an unfeigned and delicate interest which so endeared him to the species that all the twaddlers of Angoulême credited M. de Bargeton with more understanding than he chose to show, and were of the opinion that he was underrated. So it happened that when these persons could find nobody else to listen to them, they went off to give M. de Bargeton the benefit of the rest of the story, argument, or what not, sure beforehand of his eulogistic smile. Mme. de Bargeton's rooms were always crowded, and generally her husband felt quite at his ease. He interested himself in the smallest details; he watched those who came in and bowed and smiled, and brought the new arrivals to his wife; he lay in wait for departing visitors, and went with them to the door, taking leave of them with that eternal smile. When conversation grew lively, and he saw that everyone was interested in one thing or another, he stood, happy and mute, planted like a swan on both feet, listening, to all appearance, to a political discussion; or he looked over the card-players' hands without a notion of what it was all about, for he could not play at any game; or he walked about and took snuff to promote digestion. Anaïs was the bright side of his life; she made it unspeakably pleasant for him. Stretched out at full length in his arm-chair, he watched admiringly while she did

her part as hostess, for she talked for him. It was a pleasure, too, to him to try to see the point in her remarks; and as it was often a good while before he succeeded, his smiles appeared after a delay, like the explosion of a shell which has entered the earth and worked up again. His respect for his wife, moreover, almost amounted to adoration. And so long as we can adore, is there not happiness enough in life? Anaïs's husband was as docile as a child who asks nothing better than to be told what to do; and, generous and clever woman as she was, she had taken no undue advantage of his weaknesses. She had taken care of him as you take care of a cloak; she kept him brushed, neat, and tidy, looked closely after him, and humored him; and humored, looked after, brushed, kept tidy, and cared for, M. de Bargeton had come to feel an almost dog-like affection for his wife. It is so easy to give happiness that costs nothing! Mme. de Bargeton, knowing that her husband had no pleasure but in good cheer, saw that he had good dinners; she had pity upon him, she had never uttered a word of complaint; indeed, there were people who could not understand that a woman might keep silence through pride, and argued that M. de Bargeton must possess good qualities hidden from public view. Mme. de Bargeton had drilled him into military subordination; he yielded a passive obedience to his wife. "Go and call on Monsieur So-and-So or Madame Such-an-One," she would say, and he went forthwith, like a soldier at the word of command. He stood at attention in her presence, and waited motionless for his orders.

There was some talk about this time of nominating the mute gentleman for a deputy. Lucien as yet had not lifted the veil which hid such an unimaginable character; indeed, he had scarcely frequented the house long enough. M. de Bargeton, spread at full length in his great chair, appeared to see and understand all that was going on; his silence added to his dignity, and his figure inspired Lucien with prodigious awe. It is the wont of imaginative natures to magnify everything, or to find a soul to inhabit every shape; and Lucien took this gentleman, not for a granite guard-

post, but for a formidable sphinx, and thought it necessary to conciliate him.

“I am the first comer,” he said, bowing with more respect than people usually showed the worthy man.

“That is natural enough,” said M. de Bargeton.

Lucien took the remark for an epigram; the lady’s husband was jealous, he thought; he reddened under it, looked in the glass, and tried to give himself a countenance.

“You live in L’Houmeau,” said M. de Bargeton, “and people who live a long way off always come earlier than those who live near by.”

“What is the reason of that?” asked Lucien politely.

“I don’t know,” answered M. de Bargeton, relapsing into immobility.

“You have not cared to find out,” Lucien began again; “anyone who could make that observation could discover the cause.”

“Ah!” said M. de Bargeton, “final causes! Eh! eh! . . .”

The conversation came to a dead stop; Lucien racked his brains to resuscitate it.

“Mme. de Bargeton is dressing, no doubt,” he began, shuddering at the silliness of the question.

“Yes, she is dressing,” her husband naturally answered.

Lucien looked up at the ceiling, and vainly tried to think of something else to say. As his eyes wandered over the gray painted joists and the spaces of plaster between, he saw, not without qualms, that the little chandelier with the old-fashioned cut-glass pendants had been stripped of its gauze covering and filled with wax candles. All the covers had been removed from the furniture, and the faded flowered silk damask had come to light. These preparations meant something extraordinary. The poet looked at his boots, and misgivings about his costume arose in his mind. Grown stupid with dismay, he turned and fixed his eyes on a Japanese jar standing on a be-garlanded console table of the time of Louis Quinze; then, recollecting that he must conciliate Mme. de Bargeton’s husband, he tried to find out if the good gentleman had a hobby of any sort in which he might be humored.

“You seldom leave the city, monsieur?” he began, returning to M. de Bargeton.

“Very seldom.”

Silence again. M. de Bargeton watched Lucien’s slightest movements like a suspicious cat; the young man’s presence disturbed him. Each was afraid of the other.

“Can he feel suspicious of my attentions?” thought Lucien; “he seems to be anything but friendly.”

Lucien was not a little embarrassed by the uneasy glances that the other gave him as he went to and fro, when, luckily for him, the old man-servant (who wore livery for the occasion) announced “M. du Châtelet.” The Baron came in, very much at his ease, greeted his friend Bargeton, and favored Lucien with the little nod then in vogue, which the poet in his mind called purse-proud impertinence.

Sixte du Châtelet appeared in a pair of dazzling white trousers with invisible straps that kept them in shape. He wore pumps and thread stockings; the black ribbon of his eyeglass meandered over a white waistcoat, and the fashion and elegance of Paris was strikingly apparent in his black coat. He was indeed just the faded beau who might be expected from his antecedents, though advancing years had already endowed him with a certain waist-girth which somewhat exceeded the limits of elegance. He had dyed the hair and whiskers grizzled by his sufferings during his travels, and this gave a hard look to his face. The skin which had once been so delicate had been tanned to the copper-red color of Europeans from India; but in spite of his absurd pretensions to youth, you could still discern traces of the Imperial Highness’s private secretary in du Châtelet’s general appearance. He put up his eyeglass and stared at his rival’s nankeen trousers, at his boots, at his waistcoat, at the blue coat made by the Angoulême tailor, he looked him over from head to foot in short, then he coolly returned the eyeglass to his waistcoat pocket with a gesture that said, “I am satisfied.” And Lucien, eclipsed at this moment by the elegance of the inland revenue department, thought that it would be his turn by and by, when he should turn a face lighted up with poetry upon the assembly; but this prospect

did not prevent him from feeling the sharp pang that succeeded to the uncomfortable sense of M. de Bargeton's imagined hostility. The Baron seemed to bring all the weight of his fortune to bear upon him, the better to humiliate him in his poverty. M. de Bargeton had counted on having no more to say, and his soul was dismayed by the pause spent by the rivals in mutual survey; he had a question which he kept for desperate emergencies, laid up in his mind, as it were, against a rainy day. Now was the proper time to bring it out.

"Well, monsieur," he said, looking at Châtelet with an important air, "is there anything fresh? anything that people are talking about?"

"Why, the latest thing is M. Chardon," Châtelet said maliciously. "Ask him. Have you brought some charming poem for us?" inquired the vivacious Baron, adjusting the side curl that had gone astray on his temple.

"I should have asked you whether I had succeeded," Lucien answered; "you have been before me in the field of verse."

"Pshaw!" said the other, "a few vaudevilles, well enough in their way, written to oblige, a song now and again to suit some occasion, lines for music, no good without the music, and my long Epistle to a Sister of Buonaparte (ungrateful that he was), will not hand down my name to posterity."

At this moment Mme. de Bargeton appeared in all the glory of an elaborate toilet. She wore a Jewess's turban, enriched with an Eastern clasp. The cameos on her neck gleamed through the gauze scarf gracefully wound about her shoulders; the sleeves of her printed muslin dress were short, so as to display a series of bracelets on her shapely white arms. Lucien was charmed with this theatrical style of dress. M. du Châtelet gallantly plied the queen with fulsome compliments, that made her smile with pleasure; she was so glad to be praised in Lucien's hearing. But she scarcely gave her dear poet a glance, and met Châtelet with a mortifying civility that kept him at a distance.

By this time the guests began to arrive. First and fore-

most appeared the Bishop and his Vicar-General, dignified and reverend figures both, though no two men could well be more unlike, his lordship being tall and attenuated, and his acolyte short and fat. Both churchmen's eyes were bright; but while the Bishop was pallid, his Vicar-General's countenance glowed with high health. Both were impassive, and gesticulated but little; both appeared to be prudent men, and their silence and reserve were supposed to hide great intellectual powers.

Close upon the two ecclesiastics followed Mme. de Chandour and her husband, a couple so extraordinary that those who are unfamiliar with provincial life might be tempted to think that such persons were purely imaginary. Amélie de Chandour posed as the rival queen of Angoulême; her husband, M. de Chandour, known in the circle as Stanislas, was a *ci-devant* young man, slim still at five-and-forty, with a countenance like a sieve. His cravat was always tied so as to present two menacing points—one spike reached the height of his right ear, the other pointed downwards to the red ribbon of his cross. His coat-tails were violently at strife. A cut-away waistcoat displayed the ample swelling curves of a stiffly starched shirt fastened by massive gold studs. His dress, in fact, was exaggerated, till he looked almost like a living caricature, which no one could behold for the first time with gravity.

Stanislas looked himself over from top to toe with a kind of satisfaction; he verified the number of his waistcoat buttons, and followed the curving outlines of his tight-fitting trousers with fond glances that came to a standstill at last on the pointed tips of his shoes. When he ceased to contemplate himself in this way, he looked towards the nearest mirror to see if his hair still kept in curl; then, sticking a finger in his waistcoat pocket, he looked about him at the women with happy eyes, flinging his head back in three-quarters profile with all the airs of a king of the poultry-yard, airs which were prodigiously admired by the aristocratic circle of which he was the beau. There was a strain of eighteenth century grossness, as a rule, in his talk; a detestable kind of conversation which procured him some suc-



cess with women—he made them laugh. M. du Châtelet was beginning to give this gentleman some uneasiness; and, as a matter of fact, since Mme. de Bargeton had taken him up, the lively interest taken by the women in the Byron of Angoulême was distinctly on the increase. His coxcomb's superciliousness tickled their curiosity; he posed as the man whom nothing can arouse from his apathy, and his jaded Sultan's airs were like a challenge.

Amélie de Chandour, short, plump, fair-complexioned, and dark-haired, was a poor actress; her voice was loud, like everything else about her; her head, with its load of feathers in winter and flowers in summer, was never still for a moment. She had a fine flow of conversation, though she could never bring a sentence to an end without a wheezing accompaniment from an asthma, to which she would not confess.

M. de Saintot, otherwise Astolphe, President of the Agricultural Society, a tall, stout, high-colored personage, usually appeared in the wake of his wife, Elisa, a lady with a countenance like a withered fern, called Lili by her friends—a baby name singularly at variance with its owner's character and demeanor. Mme. de Saintot was a solemn and extremely pious woman, and a very trying partner at a game of cards. Astolphe was supposed to be a scientific man of the first rank. He was as ignorant as a carp, but he had compiled the articles on Sugar and Brandy for a Dictionary of Agriculture by wholesale plunder of newspaper articles and pillage of previous writers. It was believed all over the department that M. Saintot was engaged upon a treatise on modern husbandry; but though he locked himself into his study every morning, he had not written a couple of pages in a dozen years. If anybody called to see him, he always contrived to be discovered rummaging among his papers, hunting for a stray note or mending a pen; but he spent the whole time in his study on puerilities, reading the newspaper through from end to end, cutting figures out of corks with his penknife, and drawing patterns on his blotting-paper. He would turn over the leaves of his Cicero to see if anything applicable to the events of the day might catch his eye, and drag his quotation by the heels into the conversa-

tion that evening, saying, "There is a passage in Cicero which might have been written to suit modern times," and out came his phrase, to the astonishment of his audience. "Really," they said among themselves, "Astolphe is a well of learning." The interesting fact circulated all over the town, and sustained the general belief in M. de Saintot's abilities.

After this pair came M. de Bartas, known as Adrien among the circle. It was M. de Bartas who boomed out his song in a bass voice and made prodigious claims to musical knowledge. His self-conceit had taken a stand upon *soffeggi*; he began by admiring his appearance while he sang, passed thence to talking about music, and finally to talking of nothing else. His musical tastes had become a monomania; he grew animated only on the one subject of music; he was miserable all evening until somebody begged him to sing. When he had bellowed one of his airs, he revived again; strutted about, raised himself on his heels, and received compliments with a deprecating air, but modesty did not prevent him from going from group to group for his meed of praise; and when there was no more to be said about the singer, he returned to the subject of the song, discussing its difficulties or extolling the composer.

M. Alexandre de Brébien performed heroic exploits in *sepia*; he disfigured the walls of his friends' rooms with a swarm of crude productions, and spoiled all the albums in the department. M. Alexandre de Brébien and M. de Bartas came together, each with his friend's wife on his arm, a cross-cornered arrangement which gossip declared to be carried out to the fullest extent. As for the two women, Mesdames Charlotte de Brébien and Josephine de Bartas, or Lolotte and Fifine, as they were called, both took an equal interest in a scarf, or the trimming of a dress, or the reconciliation of several irreconcilable colors; both were eaten up with a desire to look like Parisiennes, and neglected their homes, where everything went wrong. But if they dressed like dolls in tightly-fitting gowns of home manufacture, and exhibited outrageous combinations of crude colors upon their persons, their husbands availed themselves of the

artist's privilege and dressed as they pleased, and curious it was to see the provincial dowdiness of the pair. In their threadbare clothes they looked like the supernumeraries that represent rank and fashion at stage weddings in third-rate theaters.

One of the queerest figures in the rooms was M. le Comte de Senonches, known by the aristocratic name of Jacques, a mighty hunter, lean and sunburned, a haughty gentleman, about as amiable as a wild boar, as suspicious as a Venetian, and jealous as a Moor, who lived on terms of the friendliest and most perfect intimacy with M. du Hautoy, otherwise Francis, the friend of the house.

Mme. de Senonches (Zéphirine) was a tall, fine-looking woman, though her complexion was spoiled already by pimples due to liver complaint, on which grounds she was said to be exacting. With a slender figure and delicate proportions, she could afford to indulge in languid manners, savoring somewhat of affectation, but revealing passion and the consciousness that every least caprice will be gratified by love.

Francis, the house friend, was rather distinguished-looking. He had given up his consulship in Valence, and sacrificed his diplomatic prospects to live near Zéphirine (also known as Zizine) in Angoulême. He had taken the household in charge, he superintended the children's education, taught them foreign languages, and looked after the fortunes of M. and Mme. de Senonches with the most complete devotion. Noble Angoulême, administrative Angoulême, and *bourgeois* Angoulême alike had looked askance for a long while at this phenomenon of the perfect union of three persons; but finally the mysterious conjugal trinity appeared to them so rare and pleasing a spectacle, that if M. du Hautoy had shown any intention of marrying, he would have been thought monstrously immoral. Mme. de Senonches, however, had a lady companion, a goddaughter, and her excessive attachment to this Mlle. de la Haye was beginning to raise surmises of disquieting mysteries; it was thought, in spite of some impossible discrepancies in dates, that Françoise de la Haye bore a striking likeness to Francis du Hautoy.

When "Jacques" was shooting in the neighborhood, people used to inquire after Francis, and Jacques would discourse on his steward's little ailments, and talk of his wife in the second place. So curious did this blindness seem in a man of jealous temper, that his greatest friends used to draw him out on the topic for the amusement of others who did not know of the mystery. M. du Hautoy was a finical dandy whose minute care of himself had degenerated into mincing affectation and childishness. He took an interest in his cough, his appetite, his digestion, his night's rest. Zéphirine had succeeded in making a valetudinarian of her factotum; she coddled him and doctored him; she crammed him with delicate fare as if he had been a fine lady's lap-dog; she embroidered waistcoats for him and pocket-handkerchiefs and cravats until he became so used to wearing finery that she transformed him into a kind of Japanese idol. Their understanding was perfect. In season and out of season Zizine consulted Francis with a look, and Francis seemed to take his ideas from Zizine's eyes. They frowned and smiled together, and seemingly took counsel of each other before making the simplest commonplace remark.

The largest landowner in the neighborhood, a man whom everyone envied, was the Marquis de Pimentel; he and his wife, between them, had an income of forty thousand livres, and spent their winters in Paris. This evening they had driven into Angoulême in their calèche, and had brought their neighbors, the Baron and Baroness de Rastignac and their party, the Baroness's aunt and daughters, two charming young ladies, penniless girls who had been carefully brought up, and were dressed in the simple way that sets off natural loveliness.

These personages, beyond question the first in the company, met with a reception of chilling silence; the respect paid to them was full of jealousy, especially as everybody saw that Mme. de Bargeton paid marked attention to the guests. The two families belonged to the very small minority who hold themselves aloof from provincial gossip, belong to no clique, live quietly in retirement, and maintain a dignified reserve. M. de Pimentel and M. de Rastignac, for in-

stance, were addressed by their names in full, and no length of acquaintance had brought their wives and daughters into the select coterie of Angoulême; both families were too nearly connected with the Court to compromise themselves through provincial follies.

The Prefect and the General in command of the garrison were the last comers, and with them came the country gentleman who had brought the treatise on silkworms to David that very morning. Evidently he was the mayor of some canton or other, and a fine estate was his sufficient title to gentility; but from his appearance, it was plain that he was quite unused to polite society. He looked uneasy in his clothes, he was at a loss to know what to do with his hands, he shifted about from one foot to another as he spoke, and half rose and sat down again when anybody spoke to him. He seemed ready to do some menial service; he was obsequious, nervous, and grave by turns, laughing eagerly at every joke, listening with servility; and occasionally, imagining that people were laughing at him, he assumed a knowing air. His treatise weighed upon his mind; again and again he tried to talk about silkworms; but the luckless wight happened first upon M. de Bartas, who talked music in reply, and next on M. de Saintot, who quoted Cicero to him; and not until the evening was half over did the mayor meet with sympathetic listeners in Mme. and Mlle. du Brossard, a widowed gentlewoman and her daughter.

Mme. and Mlle. du Brossard were not the least interesting persons in the clique, but their story may be told in a single phrase—they were as poor as they were noble. In their dress there was just that tinge of pretension which betrays carefully hidden penury. The daughter, a big, heavy young woman of seven-and-twenty, was supposed to be a good performer on the piano, and her mother praised her in season and out of season in the clumsiest way. No eligible man had any taste which Camille did not share on her mother's authoritative statement. Mme. du Brossard, in her anxiety to establish her child, was capable of saying that her dear Camille liked nothing so much as a roving life from one garrison town to another; and, before the evening was out,

that she was sure her dear Camille liked a quiet country farmhouse existence of all things. Mother and daughter had the pinched sub-acid dignity characteristic of those who have learned by experience the exact value of expressions of sympathy; they belonged to a class which the world delights to pity; they had been the objects of the benevolent interest of egoism; they had sounded the empty void beneath the consoling formulas with which the world ministers to the necessities of the unfortunate.

M. de Séverac was fifty-nine years old, and a childless widower. Mother and daughter listened, therefore, with devout admiration to all that he told them about his silkworm nurseries.

“My daughter has always been fond of animals,” said the mother. “And as women are especially interested in the silk which the little creatures produce, I shall ask permission to go over to Séverac, so that my Camille may see how the silk is spun. My Camille is so intelligent, she will grasp anything that you tell her in a moment. Did she not understand one day the inverse ratio of the squares of distances!”

This was the remark that brought the conversation between Mme. du Brossard and M. de Séverac to a glorious close after Lucien’s reading that night.

A few habitués slipped in familiarly among the rest, so did one or two eldest sons; shy, mute young men tricked out in gorgeous jewelry, and highly honored by an invitation to this literary solemnity, the boldest man among them so far shook off the weight of awe as to chatter a good deal with Mlle. de la Haye. The women solemnly arranged themselves in a circle, and the men stood behind them. It was a quaint assemblage of wrinkled countenances and heterogeneous costumes, but none the less it seemed very alarming to Lucien, and his heart beat fast when he felt that everyone was looking at him. His assurance bore the ordeal with some difficulty in spite of the encouraging example of Mme. de Bargeton, who welcomed the most illustrious personages of Angoulême with ostentatious courtesy and elaborate graciousness; and the uncomfortable feeling

that oppressed him was aggravated by a trifling matter which anyone might have foreseen, though it was bound to come as an unpleasant shock to a young man with so little experience of the world. Lucien, all eyes and ears, noticed that no one except Louise, M. de Bargeton, the Bishop, and some few who wished to please the mistress of the house, spoke of him as M. de Rubempré; for his formidable audience he was M. Chardon. Lucien's courage sank under their inquisitive eyes. He could read his plebeian name in the mere movements of their lips, and hear the anticipatory criticisms made in the blunt, provincial fashion that too often borders on rudeness. He had not expected this prolonged ordeal of pin-pricks; it put him still more out of humor with himself. He grew impatient to begin the reading, for then he could assume an attitude which should put an end to his mental torments; but Jacques was giving Mme. de Pimentel the history of his last day's sport; Adrien was holding forth to Mlle. Laure de Rastignac on Rossini, the newly risen music star; and Astolphe, who had got by heart a newspaper paragraph on a patent plough, was giving the Baron the benefit of the description. Lucien, luckless poet that he was, did not know that there was scarce a soul in the room beside Mme. de Bargeton who could understand poetry. The whole matter-of-fact assembly was there by a misapprehension, nor did they, for the most part, know what they had come out for to see. There are some words that draw a public as unfailingly as the clash of cymbals, the trumpet, or the mountebank's big drum; "beauty," "glory," "poetry," are words that bewitch the coarsest intellect.

When everyone had arrived; when the buzz of talk ceased after repeated efforts on the part of M. de Bargeton, who, obedient to his wife, went round the room much as the beadle makes the circuit of the church, tapping the pavement with his wand; when silence, in fact, was at last secured, Lucien went to the round table near Mme. de Bargeton. A fierce thrill of excitement ran through him as he did so. He announced in an uncertain voice that, to prevent disappointment, he was about to read the masterpieces

of a great poet, discovered only recently (for although André de Chénier's poems appeared in 1819, no one in Angoulême had so much as heard of him). Everybody interpreted this announcement in one way—it was a shift of Mme. de Bargeton's, meant to save the poet's self-love and to put the audience at ease.

Lucien began with *Le Malade*, and the poem was received with a murmur of applause; but he followed it with *L'Aveugle*, which proved too great a strain upon the average intellect. None but artists or those endowed with the artistic temperament can understand and sympathize with him in the diabolical torture of that reading. If poetry is to be rendered by the voice, and if the listener is to grasp all that it means, the most devout attention is essential; there should be an intimate alliance between the reader and his audience, or swift and subtle communication of the poet's thought and feeling becomes impossible. Here this close sympathy was lacking, and Lucien in consequence was in the position of an angel who should endeavor to sing of heaven amid the chucklings of hell. An intelligent man in the sphere most stimulating to his faculties can see in every direction like a snail; he has the keen scent of a dog, the ears of a mole; he can hear, and feel, and see all that is going on around him. A musician or a poet knows at once whether his audience is listening in admiration or fails to follow him, and feels it as the plant that revives or droops under favorable or unfavorable conditions. The men who had come with their wives had fallen to discussing their own affairs; by the acoustic law before mentioned, every murmur rang in Lucien's ear; he saw all the gaps caused by the spasmodic workings of jaws sympathetically affected, the teeth that seemed to grin defiance at him.

When, like the dove in the deluge, he looked round for any spot on which his eyes might rest, he saw nothing but rows of impatient faces. Their owners clearly were waiting for him to make an end; they had come together to discuss questions of practical interest. With the exceptions of Laure de Rastignac, the Bishop, and two or three of the younger men, they one and all looked bored. As a matter of



fact, those who understand poetry strive to develop the germs of another poetry, quickened within them by the poet's poetry; but this glacial audience, so far from attaining to the spirit of the poet, did not even listen to the letter.

Lucien felt profoundly discouraged; he was damp with chilly perspiration; a glowing glance from Louise, to whom he turned, gave him courage to persevere to the end, but his poet's heart was bleeding from countless wounds.

"Do you find this very amusing, Fifine?" inquired the wizened Lili, who perhaps had expected some kind of gymnastics.

"Don't ask me what I think, dear; I cannot keep my eyes open when anyone begins to read aloud."

"I hope that Naïs will not give us poetry often in the evenings," said Francis. "If I am obliged to attend while somebody reads aloud after dinner, it upsets my digestion."

"Poor dearie," whispered Zéphirine, "take a glass of *eau sucrée*."

"It was very well declaimed," said Alexandre, "but I like whist better myself."

After this dictum, which passed muster as a joke from the play on the word "whist," several card-players were of the opinion that the reader's voice needed a rest, and on this pretext one or two couples slipped away into the card-room. But Louise, and the Bishop, and pretty Laure de Rastignac besought Lucien to continue, and this time he caught the attention of his audience with Chénier's spirited reactionary *Iambes*. Several persons, carried away by his impassioned delivery, applauded the reading without understanding the sense. People of this sort are impressed by vociferation, as a coarse palate is tickled by strong spirits.

During an interval, as they partook of ices, Zéphirine despatched Francis to examine the volume, and informed her neighbor Amélie that the poetry was in print.

Amélie brightened visibly.

"Why, that is easily explained," said she. "M. de Rubempré works for a printer. It is as if a pretty woman should make her own dresses," she added, looking at Lolotte.

“He printed his poetry himself!” said the women among themselves.

“Then, why does he call himself M. de Rubempré?” inquired Jacques. “If a noble takes a handicraft, he ought to lay his name aside.”

“So he did as a matter of fact,” said Zizine, “but his name was plebeian, and he took his mother’s name, which is noble.”

“Well, if his verses are printed, we can read them for ourselves,” said Astolphe.

This piece of stupidity complicated the question, until Sixte du Châtelet condescended to inform these unlettered folk that the prefatory announcement was no oratorical flourish, but a statement of fact, and added that the poems had been written by a Royalist brother of Marie-Joseph Chénier, the Revolutionary leader. All Angoulême, except Mme. de Rastignac and her two daughters and the Bishop, who had really felt the grandeur of the poetry, were mystified, and took offense at the hoax. There was a smothered murmur, but Lucien did not heed it. The intoxication of the poetry was upon him; he was far away from the hateful world, striving to render in speech the music that filled his soul, seeing the faces about him through a cloudy haze. He read the somber Elegy on the Suicide, lines in the taste of a bygone day, pervaded by sublime melancholy; then he turned to the page where the line occurs, “Thy songs are sweet, I love to say them over,” and ended with the delicate idyll *Néère*.

Mme. de Bargeton sat with one hand buried in her curls, heedless of the havoc she wrought among them, gazing before her with unseeing eyes; alone in her drawing-room, lost in delicious dreaming; for the first time in her life she had been transported to the sphere which was hers by right of nature. Judge, therefore, how unpleasantly she was disturbed by Amélie, who took it upon herself to express the general wish.

“Naïs,” this voice broke in, “we came to hear M. Chardon’s poetry, and you are giving us poetry out of a book. The extracts are very nice, but the ladies feel a patriotic

preference for the wine of the country; they would rather have it."

"The French language does not lend itself very readily to poetry, does it?" Astolphe remarked to Châtelet. "Cicero's prose is a thousand times more poetical to my way of thinking."

"The true poetry of France is song, lyric verse," Châtelet answered.

"Which proves that our language is eminently adapted for music," said Adrien.

"I should very much like to hear the poetry that has cost Naïs her reputation," said Zéphirine; "but after receiving Amélie's request in such a way, it is not very likely that she will give us a specimen."

"She ought to have them recited in justice to herself," said Francis. "The little fellow's genius is his sole justification."

"You have been in the diplomatic service," said Amélie to M. du Châtelet, "go and manage it somehow."

"Nothing easier," said the Baron.

The Princess's private secretary, being accustomed to petty maneuvers of this kind, went to the Bishop and contrived to bring him to the fore. At the Bishop's entreaty, Naïs had no choice but to ask Lucien to recite his own verses for them, and the Baron received a languishing smile from Amélie as the reward of his prompt success.

"Decidedly, the Baron is a very clever man," she observed to Lolotte.

But Amélie's previous acidulous remark about women who made their own dresses rankled in Lolotte's mind.

"Since when have you begun to recognize the Emperor's barons?" she asked, smiling.

Lucien had essayed to deify his beloved in an ode, dedicated to her under a title in favor with all lads who write verse after leaving school. This ode, so fondly cherished, so beautiful—since it was the outpouring of all the love in his heart, seemed to him to be the one piece of his own work that could hold its own with Chénier's verse; and with a tolerably fatuous glance at Mme. de Bargeton, he an-

nounced "TO HER!" He struck an attitude proudly for the delivery of the ambitious piece, for his author's self-love felt safe and at ease behind Mme. de Bargeton's petticoat. And at the selfsame moment Mme. de Bargeton betrayed her own secret to the women's curious eyes. Although she had always looked down upon this audience from her own loftier intellectual heights, she could not help trembling for Lucien. Her face was troubled, there was a sort of mute appeal for indulgence in her glances, and while the verses were recited she was obliged to lower her eyes and dissemble her pleasure as stanza followed stanza.

TO HER

Out of the glowing heart of the torrent of glory and light,  
At the foot of Jehovah's throne where the angels stand afar,  
Each on a seistron of gold repeating the prayers of the night,  
Put up for each by his star.

Out from the cherubim quire a bright-haired Angel springs,  
Veiling the glory of God that dwells on a dazzling brow,  
Leaving the courts of heaven to sink upon silver wings  
Down to our world below.

God looked in pity on earth, and the Angel, reading His thought,  
Came down to lull the pain of the mighty spirit at strife  
Reverent bent o'er the maid, and for age left desolate brought  
Flowers of the springtime of life.

Bringing a dream of hope to solace the mother's fears,  
Hearkening unto the voice of the tardy repentant cry,  
Glad as angels are glad, to reckon Earth's pitying tears,  
Given with alms of a sigh.

One there is, and but one, bright messenger sent from the skies  
Whom earth like a lover fain would hold from the heav'nward  
flight?

But the angel, weeping, turns and gazes with sad, sweet eyes  
Up to the heaven of light.

Not by the radiant eyes, not by the kindling glow  
Of virtue sent from God, did I know the secret sign,  
Nor read the token set on a white and dazzling brow  
Of an origin divine.

Nay, it was Love grown blind and dazed with excess of light  
Striving and striving in vain to mingle Earth and Heaven,  
Helpless and powerless against the invincible armor bright  
By the dread archangel given.

Ah! be wary, take heed, lest aught should be seen or heard  
 Of the shining seraph band, as they take the heavenward way;  
 Too soon the Angel on Earth will learn the magical word  
 Sung at the close of the day.

Then you shall see afar, rifting the darkness of night,  
 A gleam as of dawn that spreads across the starry floor,  
 And the seamen that watch for a sign shall mark the track of their  
 flight,  
 A luminous pathway in Heaven and a beacon for evermore.

“Do you read the riddle?” said Amélie, giving M. du Châtelet a coquettish glance.

“It is the sort of stuff that we all of us wrote more or less after we left school,” said the Baron with a bored expression—he was acting his part of arbiter of taste who has seen everything. “We used to deal in Ossianic mists, Malvinas and Fingals and cloudy shapes, and warriors who got out of their tombs with stars above their heads. Nowadays this poetical frippery has been replaced by Jehovah, angels, seistrons, the plumes of seraphim, and all the paraphernalia of Paradise freshened up with a few new words such as ‘immense, infinite, solitude, intelligence’; you have lakes, and the words of the Almighty, a kind of Christianized Pantheism, enriched with the most extraordinary and unheard-of rhymes. We are in quite another latitude, in fact; we have left the North for the East, but the darkness is just as thick as before.”

“If the ode is obscure, the declaration is very clear, it seems to me,” said Zéphirine.

“And the archangel’s armor is a tolerably thin gauze robe,” said Francis.

Politeness demanded that the audience should profess to be enchanted with the poem; and the women, furious because they had no poets in their train to extol them as angels, rose, looked bored by the reading, murmuring, “Very nice!” “Charming!” “Perfect!” with frigid coldness.

“If you love me, do not congratulate the poet or his angel,” Lolotte laid her commands on her dear Adrien in imperious tones; and Adrien was fain to obey.

“Empty words, after all,” Zéphirine remarked to Francis, “and love is a poem that we live.”

“You have just expressed the very thing that I was thinking, Zizine, but I should not have put it so neatly,” said Stanislas, scanning himself from top to toe with loving attention.

“I would give, I don’t know how much, to see Naïs’s pride brought down a bit,” said Amélie, addressing Châtelet. “Naïs sets up to be an archangel as if she were better than the rest of us, and mixes us up with low people; his father was an apothecary, and his mother is a nurse; his sister works in a laundry, and he himself is a printer’s foreman.”

“If his father sold biscuits for worms” (*vers*), said Jacques, “he ought to have made his son take them.”

“He is continuing in his father’s line of business, for the stuff that he has just been reading to us is a drug in the market, it seems,” said Stanislas, striking one of his most killing attitudes. “Drug for drug, I would rather have something else.”

Everyone apparently combined to humiliate Lucien by various aristocrats’ sarcasms. Lili the religious thought it a charitable deed to use any means of enlightening Naïs, and Naïs was on the brink of a piece of folly. Francis the diplomatist undertook the direction of the silly conspiracy; everyone was interested in the progress of the drama; it would be something to talk about to-morrow. The ex-consul, being far from anxious to engage in a duel with a young poet who would fly into a rage at the first hint of insult under his lady’s eyes, was wise enough to see that the only way of dealing Lucien his deathblow was by the spiritual arm which was safe from vengeance. He therefore followed the example set by Châtelet the astute, and went to the Bishop. Him he proceeded to mystify.

He told the Bishop that Lucien’s mother was a woman of uncommon powers and great modesty, and that it was she who found the subjects for her son’s verses. Nothing pleased Lucien so much, according to the guileful Francis, as any recognition of her talents—he worshiped his mother. Then, having inculcated these notions, he left the rest to time.

His lordship was sure to bring out the insulting illusion, for which he had been so carefully prepared, in the course of conversation.

When Francis and the Bishop joined the little group where Lucien stood, the circle who gave him the cup of hemlock to drain by little sips watched him with redoubled interest. The poet, luckless young man, being a total stranger, and unaware of the manners and customs of the house, could only look at Mme. de Bargeton and give embarrassed answers to embarrassing questions. He knew neither the names nor condition of the people about him; the women's silly speeches made him blush for them, and he was at his wits' end for a reply. He felt, moreover, how very far removed he was from these divinities of Angoulême when he heard himself addressed sometimes as M. Chardon, sometimes as M. de Rubempré, while they all addressed each other as Lolotte, Adrien, Astolphe, Lili, and Fifine. His confusion rose to a flight when, taking Lili for a man's surname, he addressed the coarse M. de Senonches as M. Lili; that Nimrod broke in upon him with a "*Monsieur Lulu?*" and Mme. de Bargeton flushed red to the eyes.

"A woman must be blind indeed to bring this little fellow among us!" muttered Senonches.

Zéphirine turned to speak to the Marquise de Pimentel—"Do you not see a strong likeness between M. Chardon and M. de Cante-Croix, madame?" she asked in a low but quite audible voice.

"The likeness is ideal," smiled Mme. de Pimentel.

"Glory has a power of attraction to which we can confess," said Mme. de Bargeton, addressing the Marquise. "Some women are as much attracted by greatness as others by littleness," she added, looking at Francis.

This was beyond Zéphirine's comprehension; she thought her consul a very great man; but the Marquise laughed, and her laughter ranged her on Naïs's side.

"You are fortunate, monsieur," said the Marquis de Pimentel, addressing Lucien for the purpose of calling him M. de Rubempré, and not M. Chardon, as before; "you should never find time heavy on your hands."

“Do you work quickly?” asked Lolotte, much in the way that she would have asked a joiner “if it took long to make a box.”

The bludgeon stroke stunned Lucien, but he raised his head at Mme. de Bargeton’s reply—

“My dear, poetry does not grow in M. de Rubempré’s head like grass in our courtyards.”

“Madame, we cannot feel too reverently towards the noble spirits in whom God has set some ray of this light,” said the Bishop, addressing Lolotte. “Yes, poetry is something holy. Poetry implies suffering. How many silent nights those verses that you admire have cost! We should bow in love and reverence before the poet; his life here is almost always a life of sorrow; but God doubtless reserves a place in heaven for him among His prophets. This young man is a poet,” he added, laying a hand on Lucien’s head; “do you not see the sign of Fate set on that high forehead of his?”

Glad to be so generously championed, Lucien made his acknowledgments in a grateful look, not knowing that the worthy prelate was to deal his deathblow.

Mme. de Bargeton’s eyes traveled round the hostile circle. Her glances went like arrows to the depths of her rivals’ hearts, and left them twice as furious as before.

“Ah, monseigneur,” cried Lucien, hoping to break thick heads with his golden scepter, “but ordinary people have neither your intellect nor your charity. No one heeds our sorrows, our toil is unrecognized. The gold-digger working in the mine does not labor as we to wrest metaphors from the heart of the most ungrateful of all languages. If this is poetry—to give ideas such definite and clear expressions that all the world can see and understand—the poet must continually range through the entire scale of human intellects, so that he can satisfy the demands of all; he must conceal hard thinking and emotion, two antagonistic powers, beneath the most vivid color; he must know how to make one word cover a whole world of thought; he must give the results of whole systems of philosophy in a few picturesque lines; indeed, his songs are like seeds that must break into



blossom in other hearts wherever they find the soil prepared by personal experience. How can you express unless you first have felt? And is not passion suffering? Poetry is only brought forth after painful wanderings in the vast regions of thought and life. There are men and women in books who seem more really alive to us than men and women who have lived and died—Richardson's Clarissa, Chénier's Camille, the Delia of Tibullus, Ariosto's Angelica, Dante's Francesca, Molière's Alceste, Beaumarchais's Figaro, Scott's Rebecca the Jewess, the Don Quixote of Cervantes,—do we not owe these deathless creations to immortal throes? ”

“And what are you going to create for us?” asked Châtelet.

“If I were to announce such conceptions, I should give myself out for a man of genius, should I not?” answered Lucien. “And besides, such sublime creations demand a long experience of the world and a study of human passion and interests which I could not possibly have made; but I have made a beginning,” he added, with bitterness in his tone, as he took a vengeful glance round the circle; “the time of gestation is long——”

“Then it will be a case of difficult labor,” interrupted M. du Hautoy.

“Your excellent mother might assist you,” suggested the Bishop.

The epigram, innocently made by the good prelate, the long-looked-for revenge, kindled a gleam of delight in all eyes. The smile of satisfied caste that traveled from mouth to mouth was aggravated by M. de Bargeton's imbecility; he burst into a laugh, as usual, some moments later.

“Monseigneur, you are talking a little above our heads; these ladies do not understand your meaning,” said Mme. de Bargeton, and the words paralyzed the laughter, and drew astonished eyes upon her. “A poet who looks to the Bible for his inspiration has a mother indeed in the Church.—M. de Rubempré, will you recite *Saint John in Patmos* for us, or *Belshazzar's Feast*, so that his lordship may see that Rome is still the *Magna Parens* of Virgil.”

The women exchanged smiles at the Latin words.

The bravest and highest spirits know times of prostration at the outset of life. Lucien had sunk to the depths at the blow, but he struck the bottom with his feet, and rose to the surface again, vowing to subjugate this little world. He rose like a bull, stung to fury by a shower of darts, and prepared to obey Louise by declaiming *Saint John in Patmos*; but by this time the card-tables had claimed their complement of players, who returned to the accustomed groove to find amusement there which poetry had not afforded them. They felt besides that the revenge of so many outraged vanities would be incomplete unless it were followed up by contemptuous indifference; so they showed their tacit disdain for the native product by leaving Lucien and Mme. de Bargeton to themselves. Everyone appeared to be absorbed in his own affairs; one chattered with the prefect about a new cross road, another proposed to vary the pleasures of the evening with a little music. The great world of Angoulême, feeling that it was no judge of poetry, was very anxious, in the first place, to hear the verdict of the Pimentels and Rastignacs, and formed a little group about them. The great influence wielded in the department by these two families was always felt on every important occasion; everyone was jealous of them, everyone paid court to them, foreseeing that they might some day need that influence.

“What do you think of our poet and his poetry?” Jacques asked of the Marquise. Jacques used to shoot over the lands belonging to the Pimentel family.

“Why, it is not bad for provincial poetry,” she said, smiling; “and besides, such a beautiful poet cannot do anything amiss.”

Everyone thought the decision admirable; it traveled from lip to lip, gaining malignance by the way. Then Châtelet was called upon to accompany M. de Bartas on the piano while he mangled the great solo from *Figaro*; and the way being opened to music, the audience, as in duty bound, listened while Châtelet in turn sang one of Chateaubriand's ballads, a chivalrous ditty made in the time of the

Empire. Duets followed, of the kind usually left to boarding school misses, and rescued from the schoolroom by Mme. du Brossard, who meant to make a brilliant display of her dear Camille's talents for M. de Séverac's benefit.

Mme. de Bargeton, hurt by the contempt which everyone showed her poet, paid back scorn for scorn by going to her boudoir during these performances. She was followed by the prelate. His Vicar-General had just been explaining the profound irony of the epigram into which he had been entrapped; and the Bishop wished to make amends. Mlle. de Rastignac, fascinated by the poetry, also slipped into the boudoir without her mother's knowledge.

Louise drew Lucien to her mattress-cushioned sofa; and with no one to see or hear, she murmured in his ear, "Dear angel, they did not understand you; but, 'Thy songs are sweet, I love to say them over.'"

And Lucien took comfort from the pretty speech, and forgot his woes for a little.

"Glory is not to be had cheaply," Mme. de Bargeton continued, taking his hand and holding it tightly in her own. "Endure your woes, my friend, you will be great one day; your pain is the price of your immortality. If only I had a hard struggle before me! God preserve you from the enervating life without battles, in which the eagle's wings have no room to spread themselves. I envy you; for if you suffer, at least you live. You will put out your strength, you will feel the hope of victory; your strife will be glorious. And when you shall come to your kingdom, and reach the imperial sphere where great minds are enthroned, then remember the poor creatures disinherited by fate, whose intellects pine in an oppressive moral atmosphere, who die and have never lived, knowing all the while what life might be; think of the piercing eyes that have seen nothing, the delicate senses that have only known the scent of poison flowers. Then tell in your song of plants that wither in the depths of the forest, choked by twining growths and rank, greedy vegetation, plants that never have been kissed by the sunlight, and die, never having put forth a blossom. It would be a terribly gloomy poem, would it

not, a fanciful subject? What a sublime poem might be made of the story of some daughter of the desert transported to some cold western clime, calling for her beloved sun, dying of a grief that none can understand, overcome with cold and longing. It would be an allegory; many lives are like that."

"You would picture the spirit which remembers Heaven," said the Bishop; "someone surely must have written such a poem in the days of old; I like to think that I see a fragment of it in the Song of Songs."

"Take that as your subject," said Laure de Rastignac, expressing her artless belief in Lucien's powers.

"The great sacred poem of France is still unwritten," remarked the Bishop. "Believe me, glory and success await the man of talent who shall work for religion."

"That task will be his," said Mme. de Bargeton rhetorically. "Do you not see the first beginnings of the vision of the poem, like the flame of dawn, in his eyes?"

"Naïs is treating us very badly," said Fifine; "what can she be doing?"

"Don't you hear?" said Stanislas. "She is flourishing away, using big words that you cannot make head or tail of."

Amélie, Fifine, Adrien, and Francis appeared in the doorway with Mme. de Rastignac, who came to look for her daughter.

"Naïs," cried the two ladies, both delighted to break in upon the quiet chat in the boudoir, "it would be very nice of you to come and play something for us."

"My dear child, M. de Rubempré is just about to recite his *Saint John in Patmos*, a magnificent biblical poem."

"Biblical!" echoed Fifine in amazement.

Amélie and Fifine went back to the drawing-room, taking the word back with them as food for laughter. Lucien pleaded a defective memory and excused himself. When he reappeared, nobody took the slightest notice of him; everyone was chatting or busy at the card-table; the poet's aureole had been plucked away, the landowners had no use for him, the more pretentious sort looked upon him as an

enemy to their ignorance, while the women were jealous of Mme. de Bargeton, the Beatrice of this modern Dante, to use the Vicar-General's phrase, and looked at him with cold, scornful eyes.

"So this is society!" Lucien said to himself as he went down to L'Houmeau by the steps of Beaulieu; for there are times when we choose to take the longest way, that the physical exercise of walking may promote the flow of ideas.

So far from being disheartened, the fury of repulsed ambition gave Lucien new strength. Like all those whose instincts bring them to a higher social sphere which they reach before they can hold their own in it, Lucien vowed to make any sacrifice to the end that he might remain on that higher social level. One by one he drew out the poisoned shafts on his way home, talking aloud to himself, scoffing at the fools with whom he had to do, inventing neat answers to their idiotic questions, desperately vexed that the witty responses occurred to him so late in the day. By the time that he reached the Bordeaux road, between the river and the foot of the hill, he thought that he could see Eve and David sitting on a balk of timber by the river in the moonlight, and went down the footpath towards them.

While Lucien was hastening to the torture in Mme. de Bargeton's rooms, his sister had changed her dress for a gown of pink cambric covered with narrow stripes, a straw hat, and a little silk shawl. The simple costume seemed like a rich toilet on Eve, for she was one of those women whose great nature lends stateliness to the least personal detail; and David felt prodigiously shy of her now that she had changed her working dress. He had made up his mind that he would speak of himself; but now as he gave his arm to this beautiful girl, and they walked through L'Houmeau together, he could find nothing to say to her. Love delights in such reverent awe as redeemed souls know on beholding the glory of God. So, in silence, the two lovers went across the Bridge of Saint Anne, and followed the left bank of the Charente. Eve felt embarrassed by the pause, and stopped

to look along the river; a joyous shaft of sunset had turned the water between the bridge and the new powder mills into a sheet of gold.

"What a beautiful evening it is!" she said, for the sake of saying something; "the air is warm and fresh, and full of the scent of flowers, and there is a wonderful sky."

"Everything speaks to our heart," said David, trying to proceed to love by way of analogy. "Those who love find infinite delight in discovering the poetry of their own inmost souls in every chance effect of the landscape, in the thin, clear air, in the scent of the earth. Nature speaks for them."

"And loosens their tongues too," Eve said merrily. "You were very silent as we came through L'Houmeau. Do you know, I felt quite uncomfortable——"

"You looked so beautiful, that I could not say anything," David answered candidly.

"Then, just now I am not so beautiful?" inquired she.

"It is not that," he said; "but I was so happy to have this walk alone with you, that——" he stopped short in confusion, and looked at the hillside and the road to Saintes.

"If the walk is any pleasure to you, I am delighted; for I owe you an evening, I think, when you have given up yours for me. When you refused to go to Mme. de Bargeton's, you were quite as generous as Lucien when he made the demand at the risk of vexing her."

"No, not generous, only wise," said David. "And now that we are quite alone under the sky, with no listeners except the bushes and the reeds by the edge of the Charente, let me tell you about my anxiety as to Lucien's present step, dear Eve. After all that I have just said, I hope that you will look on my fears as a refinement of friendship. You and your mother have done all that you could to put him above his social position; but when you stimulated his ambition, did you not unthinkingly condemn him to a hard struggle? How can he maintain himself in the society to which his tastes incline him? I know Lucien; he likes to reap, he does not like toil; it is his nature. Social claims will take up the whole of his time, and for a man who has

nothing but his brains, time is capital. He likes to shine; society will stimulate his desires until no money will satisfy them; instead of earning money, he will spend it. You have accustomed him to believe in his great powers in fact, but the world at large declines to believe in any man's superior intellect until he has achieved some signal success. Now success in literature is only won in solitude and by dogged work. What will Mme. de Bargeton give your brother in return for so many days spent at her feet? Lucien has too much spirit to accept help from her; and he cannot afford, as we know, to cultivate her society, twice ruinous as it is for him. Sooner or later that woman will throw over this dear brother of ours, but not before she has spoiled him for hard work, and given him a taste for luxury and a contempt for our humdrum life. She will develop his love of enjoyment, his inclination for idleness, that debauches a poetic soul. Yes, it makes me tremble to think that this great lady may make a plaything of Lucien. If she cares for him sincerely, he will forget everything else for her; or if she does not love him, she will make him unhappy; for he is wild about her."

"You have sent a chill of dread through my heart," said Eve, stopping as they reached the weir. "But so long as mother is strong enough for her tiring life, so long as I live we shall earn enough, perhaps, between us to keep Lucien until success comes. My courage will never fail," said Eve, brightening. "There is no hardship in work when we work for one we love; it is not drudgery. It makes me happy to think that I toil so much, if indeed it is toil, for him. Oh, do not be in the least afraid, we will earn money enough to send Lucien into the great world. There lies his road to success."

"And there lies his road to ruin," returned David. "Dear Eve, listen to me. A man needs an independent fortune, or the sublime cynicism of poverty, for the slow execution of great work. Believe me, Lucien's horror of privation is so great, the savor of banquets, the incense of success is so sweet in his nostrils, his self-love has grown so much in Mme. de Bargeton's boudoir, that he will do anything

desperate sooner than fall back, and you will never earn enough for his requirements."

"Then you are only a false friend to him!" Eve cried in despair, "or you would not discourage us in this way."

"Eve! Eve!" cried David, "if only I could be a brother to Lucien! You alone can give me that title; he could accept anything from me then; I should claim the right of devoting my life to him with the love that hallows your self-sacrifice, but with some worldly wisdom too. Eve, my darling, give Lucien a store from which he need not blush to draw! His brother's purse will be like his own, will it not? If you only knew all my thoughts about Lucien's position! If he means to go to Mme. de Bargeton's, he must not be my foreman any longer, poor fellow! He ought not to live in L'Houmeau; you ought not to be a working girl; and your mother must give up her employment as well. If you will consent to be my wife, the difficulties will all be smoothed away. Lucien might live on the second floor in the Place du Mûrier until I can build rooms for him over the shed at the back of the yard (if my father will allow it, that is). And in that way we would arrange a free and independent life for him. The wish to support Lucien will give me a better will to work than I ever should have had for myself alone; but it rests with you to give me the right to devote myself to him. Some day, perhaps, he will go to Paris, the only place that can bring out all that is in him, and where his talents will be appreciated and rewarded. Living in Paris is expensive, and the earnings of all three of us will be needed for his support. And besides, will not you and your mother need someone to lean upon then? Dear Eve, marry me for love of Lucien; perhaps afterwards you will love me when you will see how I shall strive to help him and to make you happy. We are, both of us, equally simple in our tastes; we have few wants; Lucien's welfare shall be the great object of our lives. His heart shall be our treasure-house, we will lay up all our fortune, and think and feel and hope in him."

"Worldly considerations keep us apart," said Eve, moved by this love that tried to explain away its greatness. "You



are rich and I am poor. One must love indeed to overcome such a difficulty."

"Then you do not care enough for me?" cried the stricken David.

"But perhaps your father would object——"

"Never mind," said David; "if asking my father is all that is necessary, you will be my wife. Eve, my dear Eve, how you have lightened life for me in a moment; and my heart has been very heavy with thoughts that I could not utter, I did not know how to speak of them. Only tell me that you care for me a little, and I will take courage to tell you the rest."

"Indeed," she said, "you make me quite ashamed; but confidence for confidence, I will tell you this, that I have never thought of anyone but you in my life. I looked upon you as one of those men to whom a woman might be proud to belong, and I did not dare to hope so great a thing for myself, a penniless working girl with no prospects."

"That is enough, that is enough," he answered, sitting down on the bar by the weir, for they had gone to and fro like mad creatures over the same length of pathway.

"What is the matter?" she asked, her voice expressing for the first time a woman's sweet anxiety for one who belongs to her.

"Nothing but good," he answered. "It is the sight of a whole lifetime of happiness that dazzles me, as it were; it is overwhelming. Why am I happier than you?" he asked, with a touch of sadness. "For I know that I am happier."

Eve looked at David with mischievous, doubtful eyes that asked an explanation.

"Dear Eve, I am taking more than I give. So I shall always love you more than you love me, because I have more reason to love. You are an angel; I am a man."

"I am not so learned," Eve said, smiling. "I love you——"

"As much as you love Lucien?" he broke in.

"Enough to be your wife, enough to devote myself to you,

to try not to add anything to your burdens, for we shall have some struggles; it will not be quite easy at first."

"Dear Eve, have you known that I loved you since the first day I saw you?"

"Where is the woman who does not feel she is loved?"

"Now let me get rid of your scruples as to my imaginary riches. I am a poor man, dear. Yes, it pleased my father to ruin me; he made a speculation of me, as a good many so-called benefactors do. If I make a fortune, it will be entirely through you. That is not a lover's speech, but sober, serious earnest. I ought to tell you about my faults, for they are exceedingly bad ones in a man who has his way to make. My character and habits and favorite occupations all unfit me for business and money-getting, and yet we can only make money by some kind of industry; if I have some faculty for the discovery of gold-mines, I am singularly ill adapted for getting the gold out of them. But you who, for your brother's sake, went into the smallest details, with a talent for thrift, and the patient watchfulness of the born man of business, you will reap the harvest that I shall sow. The present state of things, for I have been like one of the family for a long time, weighs so heavily upon me, that I have spent days and nights in search of some way of making a fortune. I know something of chemistry, and a knowledge of commercial requirements has put me on the scent of a discovery that is likely to pay. I can say nothing as yet about it; there will be a long while to wait; perhaps for some years we may have a hard time of it; but I shall find out how to make a commercial article at last. Others are busy making the same researches, and if I am first in the field, we shall have a large fortune. I have said nothing to Lucien, his enthusiastic nature would spoil everything; he would convert my hopes into realities, and begin to live like a lord, and perhaps get into debt. So keep my secret for me. Your sweet and dear companionship will be consolation in itself during the long time of experiment, and the desire to gain wealth for you and Lucien will give me persistence and tenacity——"

"I had guessed this too," Eve said, interrupting him; "I

knew that you were one of those inventors, like my poor father, who must have a woman to take care of them."

"Then you love me! Ah! say so without fear to me, who saw a symbol of my love for you in your name. Eve was the one woman in the world; if it was true in the outward world for Adam, it is true again in the inner world of my heart for me. My God! do you love me?"

"Yes," she said, lengthening out the word as if to make it cover the extent of feeling expressed by a single syllable.

"Well, let us sit here," he said, and taking Eve's hand, he went to a great balk of timber lying below the wheels of a paper-mill. "Let me breathe the evening air, and hear the frogs croak, and watch the moonlight quivering upon the river; let me take all this world about us into my soul, for it seems to me that my happiness is written large over it all; I am seeing it for the first time in all its splendor, lighted up by love, grown fair through you. Eve, dearest, this is the first moment of pure and unmixed joy that fate has given to me! I do not think that Lucien can be as happy as I am."

David felt Eve's hand, damp and quivering in his own, and a tear fell upon it.

"May I not know the secret?" she pleaded coaxingly.

"You have a right to know it, for your father was interested in the matter, and to-day it is a pressing question, and for this reason. Since the downfall of the Empire, calico has come more and more into use, because it is so much cheaper than linen. At the present moment paper is made of a mixture of hemp and linen rags, but the raw material is dear, and the expense naturally retards the great advance which the French press is bound to make. Now you cannot increase the output of linen rags, a given population gives a pretty constant result, and it only increases with the birth-rate. To make any perceptible difference in the population for this purpose, it would take a quarter of a century and a great revolution in habits of life, trade, and agriculture. And if the supply of linen rags is not enough to meet one-half nor one-third of the demand, some cheaper material than linen rags must be found for cheap

paper. This deduction is based on facts that came under my knowledge here. The Angoulême paper-makers, the last to use pure linen rags, say that the proportion of cotton in the pulp has increased to a frightful extent of late years."

In answer to a question from Eve, who did not know what "pulp" meant, David gave an account of paper-making, which will not be out of place in a volume which owes its existence in book form to the paper industry no less than to the printing-press; but the long digression, doubtless, had best be condensed at the first.

Paper, an invention not less marvelous than the other dependent invention of printing, was known in ancient times in China. Thence by the unrecognized channels of commerce the art reached Asia Minor, where paper was made in the year 750, according to tradition, a paper made of cotton reduced to a pulp and boiled. Parchment had become so extremely dear that a cheap substitute was discovered in an imitation of the cotton paper known in the East as *charta bombycina*. The imitation, made from rags, was first made at Basel, in 1170, by a colony of Greek refugees, according to some authorities; or at Padua, in 1301, by an Italian named Pax, according to others. In these ways the manufacture of paper was perfected slowly and in obscurity; but this much is certain, that so early as the reign of Charles VI. paper pulp for playing cards was made in Paris.

When those immortals, Faust, Coster, and Gutenberg, invented the Book, craftsmen as obscure as many a great artist of those times appropriated paper to the uses of typography. In the fifteenth century, that naïve and vigorous age, names were given to the various formats as well as to the different sizes of type, names that bear the impress of the naïveté of the times; and the various sheets came to be known by the different watermarks on their centers; the grapes, the figure of our Savior, the crown, the shield, or the flower-pot, just as, at a later day, the eagle of Napoleon's time gave the name to the "double eagle" size. And in the same way the types were called Cicero, Saint-Augustine, and Canon type, because they were first used to print

the treatises of Cicero and theological and liturgical works. Italics are so called because they were invented in Italy by Aldus of Venice.

Before the invention of machine-made paper, which can be woven in any length, the largest sized sheets were the *grand jésus* and the double columbier (this last being scarcely used now except for atlases or engravings), and the size of paper for printers' use was determined by the dimensions of the impression-stone. When David explained these things to Eve, web-paper was almost undreamed of in France, although, about 1799, Denis Robert d'Essonne had invented a machine for turning out a ribbon of paper, and Didot-Saint-Léger had since tried to perfect it. The vellum paper invented by Ambroise Didot only dates back as far as 1780.

This bird's-eye view of the history of the invention shows incontestably that great industrial and intellectual advances are made exceedingly slowly, and little by little, even as Nature herself proceeds. Perhaps articulate speech and the art of writing were gradually developed in the same groping way as typography and paper-making.

"Rag-pickers collect all the rags and old linen of Europe," the printer concluded, "and buy any kind of tissue. The rags are sorted and warehoused by the wholesale rag merchants, who supply the paper-mills. To give you some idea of the extent of the trade, you must know, mademoiselle, that in 1814 Cardon the banker, owner of the pulp-ing troughs of Buges and Langlée (where Léorier de l'Isle endeavored in 1776 to solve the very problem that occupied your father), Cardon brought an action against one Proust for an error in weights of two millions in a total of ten million pounds' weight of rags, worth about four million francs! The manufacturer washes the rags, and reduces them to a thin pulp, which is strained, exactly as a cook strains sauce through a tamis, through an iron frame with a fine wire bottom where the mark which gives its name to the size of the paper is woven. The size of this *mold*, as it is called, regulates the size of the sheet.

"When I was with the Messieurs Didot," David contin-

ued, "they were very much interested in this question, and they are still interested; for the improvement which your father endeavored to make is a great commercial requirement, and one of the crying needs of the time. And for this reason: although linen lasts so much longer than cotton, that it is in reality cheaper in the end, the poor would rather make the smaller outlay in the first instance, and, by virtue of the law of *Væ victis!* pay enormously more before they have done. The middle classes do the same. So there is a scarcity of linen. In England, where four-fifths of the population use cotton to the exclusion of linen, they make nothing but cotton paper. The cotton paper is very soft and easily creased to begin with, and it has a further defect: it is so soluble that if you steep a book made of cotton paper in water for fifteen minutes, it turns to a pulp, while an old book left in water for a couple of hours is not spoilt. You could dry the old book, and the pages, though yellow and faded, would still be legible, the work would not be destroyed.

"There is a time coming when legislation will equalize our fortunes, and we shall all be poor together; we shall want our linen and our books to be cheap, just as people are beginning to prefer small pictures because they have not wall space enough for large ones. Well, the shirts and the books will not last, that is all; it is the same on all sides, solidity is dying out. So this problem is one of the first importance for literature, science, and politics.

"One day, in my office, there was a hot discussion going on about the material the Chinese use for making paper. Their paper is far better than ours, because the raw material is better; and a good deal was said about this thin, light Chinese paper, for if it is light and thin, the texture is close, there are no transparent spots in it. In Paris there are learned men among the printers' readers; Fourier and Pierre Leroux are Lachevardière's readers at this moment; and the Comte de Saint-Simon, who happened to be correcting proofs for us, came in in the middle of the discussion. He told us at once that, according to Kempfer and du Halde, the *Broussonetia* furnishes the substance of the Chinese paper; it is a vegetable substance (like linen or cotton for

that matter). Another reader maintained that Chinese paper was principally made of an animal substance, to wit, the silk that is abundant there. They made a bet about it in my presence. The Messieurs Didot are printers to the Institute, so naturally they referred the question to that learned body. M. Marcel, who used to be superintendent of the Royal Printing Establishment, was umpire, and he sent the two readers to M. l'Abbé Grozier, Librarian at the Arsenal. By the Abbé's decision they both lost their wagers. The paper was not made of silk nor yet from the *Broussonetia*; the pulp proved to be the triturated fiber of some kind of bamboo. The Abbé Grozier had a Chinese book, an iconographical and technological work, with a great many pictures in it, illustrating all the different processes of paper-making, and he showed us a picture of a workshop with the bamboo stalks lying in a heap in the corner; it was extremely well drawn.

“Lucien told me that your father, with the intuition of a man of talent, had a glimmering of a notion of some way of replacing linen rags with an exceedingly common vegetable product, not previously manufactured, but taken direct from the soil, as the Chinese use vegetable fiber at first hand. I have classified the guesses made by those who came before me, and have begun to study the question. The bamboo is a kind of reed; naturally I began to think of the reeds that grow here in France.

“Labor is very cheap in China, where a workman earns three halfpence a day, and this cheapness of labor enables the Chinese to manipulate each sheet of paper separately. They take it out of the mold, and press it between heated tablets of white porcelain, that is the secret of the surface and consistence, the lightness and satin smoothness of the best paper in the world. Well, here in Europe the work must be done by machinery; machinery must take the place of cheap Chinese labor. If we could but succeed in making a cheap paper of as good a quality, the weight and thickness of printed books would be reduced by more than one-half. A set of Voltaire, printed on our woven paper and bound, weighs about two hundred and fifty pounds; it would only

weigh fifty if we used Chinese paper. That surely would be a triumph, for the housing of many books has come to be a difficulty; everything has grown smaller of late; this is not an age of giants; men have shrunk, everything about them shrinks, and house-room into the bargain. Great mansions and great suites of rooms will be abolished sooner or later in Paris, for no one will afford to live in the great houses built by our forefathers. What a disgrace for our age if none of its books should last! Dutch paper—that is, paper made from flax—will be quite unobtainable in ten years' time. Well, your brother told me of this idea of your father's, this plan for using vegetable fiber in paper-making, so you see that if I succeed, you have a right to——”

Lucien came up at that moment and interrupted David's generous assertion.

“I do not know whether you have found the evening pleasant,” said he; “it has been a cruel time for me.”

“Poor Lucien! what can have happened?” cried Eve, as she saw her brother's excited face.

The poet told the history of his agony, pouring out a flood of clamorous thoughts into those friendly hearts, Eve and David listening in pained silence to a torrent of woes that exhibited such greatness and such pettiness.

“M. de Bargeton is an old dotard. The indigestion will carry him off before long, no doubt,” Lucien said, as he made an end, “and then I will look down on these proud people; I will marry Mme. de Bargeton. I read to-night in her eyes a love as great as mine for her. Yes, she felt all that I felt; she comforted me; she is as great and noble as she is gracious and beautiful. She will never give me up.”

“It is time that life was made smooth for him, is it not?” murmured David, and for answer Eve pressed his arm without speaking. David guessed her thoughts, and began at once to tell Lucien about his own plans.

If Lucien was full of his troubles, the lovers were quite as full of themselves. So absorbed were they, so eager that Lucien should approve their happiness, that neither Eve nor David so much as noticed his start of surprise at the news. Mme. de Bargeton's lover had been dreaming of



a great match for his sister; he would reach a high position first, and then secure himself by an alliance with some family of influence, and here was one more obstacle in his way to success! His hopes were dashed to the ground. "If Mme. de Bargeton consents to be Mme. de Rubempré, she would never care to have David Séchard for a brother-in-law!"

This stated clearly and precisely was the thought that tortured Lucien's inmost mind. "Louise is right!" he thought bitterly. "A man with a career before him is never understood by his family."

If the marriage had not been announced immediately after Lucien's fancy had put M. de Bargeton to death, he would have been radiant with heartfelt delight at the news. If he had thought soberly over the probable future of a beautiful and penniless girl like Eve Chardon, he would have seen that this marriage was a piece of un hoped-for good fortune. But he was living just now in a golden dream; he had soared above all barriers on the wings of an *if*; he had seen a vision of himself, rising above society; and it was painful to drop so suddenly down to hard fact.

Eve and David both thought that their brother was overcome with the sense of such generosity; to them, with their noble natures, the silent consent was a sign of true friendship. David began to describe with kindly and cordial eloquence the happy fortunes in store for them all. Unchecked by protests put in by Eve, he furnished his first floor with a lover's lavishness, built a second floor with boyish good faith for Lucien, and rooms above the shed for Mme. Chardon—he meant to be a son to her. In short, he made the whole family so happy and his brother-in-law so independent, that Lucien fell under the spell of David's voice and Eve's caresses; and as they went through the shadows beside the still Charente, a gleam in the warm, starlit night, he forgot the sharp crown of thorns that had been pressed upon his head. "M. de Rubempré" discovered David's real nature in fact. His facile character returned almost at once to the innocent, hardworking burgher life that he knew; he saw it transfigured and free from care.

The buzz of the aristocratic world grew more and more remote; and when at length they came upon the paved road of L'Houmeau, the ambitious poet grasped his brother's hand, and made a third in the joy of the happy lovers.

"If only your father makes no objection to the marriage," he said.

"You know how much he troubles himself about me; the old man lives for himself," said David. "But I will go over to Marsac to-morrow and see him, if it is only to ask leave to build."

David went back to the house with the brother and sister, and asked Mme. Chardon's consent to his marriage with the eagerness of a man who would fain have no delay. Eve's mother took her daughter's hand, and gladly laid it in David's; and the lover, grown bolder on this, kissed his fair betrothed on the forehead, and she flushed red, and smiled at him.

"The betrothal of the poor," the mother said, raising her eyes as if to pray for heaven's blessing upon them.—"You are brave, my boy," she added, looking at David, "but we have fallen on evil fortune, and I am afraid lest our bad-luck should be infectious."

"We shall be rich and happy," David said earnestly. "To begin with, you must not go out nursing any more, and you must come and live with your daughter and Lucien in Angoulême."

The three began at once to tell the astonished mother all their charming plans, and the family party gave themselves up to the pleasure of chatting and weaving a romance, in which it is so pleasant to enjoy future happiness, and to store the unsown harvest. They had to put David out at the door; he could have wished the evening to last for ever, and it was one o'clock in the morning when Lucien and his future brother-in-law reached the Palet Gate. The unwanted movement made honest Postel uneasy; he opened the window, and looking through the Venetian shutters, he saw a light in Eve's room.

"What can be happening at the Chardons'?" thought he, and seeing Lucien come in, he called out to him—

“What is the matter, sonny? Do you want me to do anything?”

“No, sir,” returned the poet; “but as you are our friend, I can tell you about it; my mother has just given her consent to my sister’s engagement to David Séchard.”

For all answer, Postel shut the window with a bang, in despair that he had not asked for Mlle. Chardon earlier.

David, however, did not go back into Angoulême; he took the road to Marsac instead, and walked through the night the whole way to his father’s house. He went along by the side of the croft just as the sun rose, and caught sight of the old “bear’s” face under an almond-tree that grew out of the hedge.

“Good day, father,” called David.

“Why! is it you, my boy? How come you to be out on the road at this time of day? There is your way in,” he added, pointing to a little wicket gate. “My vines have flowered and not a shoot has been frosted. There will be twenty puncheons or more to the acre this year; but then look at all the dung that has been put on the land!”

“Father, I have come on important business.”

“Very well; how are your presses doing? You must be making heaps of money as big as yourself.”

“I shall some day, father, but I am not very well off just now.”

“They all tell me that I ought not to put on so much manure,” replied his father. “The gentry, that is M. le Marquis, M. le Comte, and Monsieur What-do-you-call-’em, say that I am letting down the quality of the wine. What is the good of book-learning except to muddle your wits? Just you listen: these gentlemen get seven, or sometimes eight puncheons of wine to the acre, and they sell them for sixty francs a piece, that means four hundred francs per acre at most in a good year. Now I make twenty puncheons, and get thirty francs a piece for them—that is six hundred francs! And where are they, the fools? Quality, quality, what is quality to me? They can keep their quality for themselves, these Lord Marquises. Quality means hard cash for me, that is what it means. You were saying?—”

“I am going to be married, father, and I have come to ask for——”

“Ask me for what? Nothing of the sort, my boy. Marry; I give you my consent, but as for giving you anything else, I haven’t a penny to bless myself with. Dressing the soil is the ruin of me. These two years I have been paying money out of pocket for top-dressing, and taxes, and expenses of all kinds; Government eats up everything, nearly all the profit goes to the Government. The poor growers have made nothing these two last seasons. This year things don’t look so bad; and, of course, the beggarly puncheons have gone up to eleven francs already. We work to put money into the coopers’ pockets. Why, are you going to marry before the vintage?——”

“I only came to ask for your consent, father.”

“Oh! that is another thing. And who is the victim, if one may ask?”

“I am going to marry Mlle. Eve Chardon.”

“Who may she be? What kind of victual does she eat?”

“She is the daughter of the late M. Chardon, the druggist in L’Houmeau.”

“You are going to marry a girl out of L’Houmeau! *you!* a burgess of Angoulême, and printer to His Majesty! This is what comes of book-learning! Send a boy to school forsooth! Oh! well, then she is very rich, is she, my boy?” and the old vinegrower came up closer with a cajoling manner; “if you are marrying a girl out of L’Houmeau, it must be because she has lots of cash, eh? Good! you will pay me my rent now. There are two years and one quarter owing, you know, my boy; that is two thousand seven hundred francs altogether; the money will come just in the nick of time to pay the cooper. If it was anybody else, I should have a right to ask for interest; for, after all, business is business, but I will let you off the interest. Well, how much has she?”

“Just as much as my mother had.”

The old vinegrower very nearly said, “Then she has only ten thousand francs!” but he recollected just in time that

he had declined to give an account of her fortune to her son, and exclaimed, "She has nothing!"

"My mother's fortune was her beauty and intelligence," said David.

"You just go into the market and see what you can get for it! Bless my buttons! what bad luck parents have with their children. David, when I married, I had a paper cap on my head for my whole fortune, and a pair of arms; I was a poor pressman; but with the fine printing-house that I gave you, with your industry and your education, you might marry a burgess's daughter, a woman with thirty or forty thousand francs. Give up your fancy, and I will find you a wife myself. There is someone about three miles away, a miller's widow, thirty-two years old, with a hundred thousand francs in land. There is your chance! You can add her property to Marsac, for they touch. Ah! what a fine property we should have, and how I would look after it! They say she is going to marry her foreman Courtois, but you are the better man of the two. I would look after the mill, and she should live like a lady up in Angoulême."

"I am engaged, father."

"David, you know nothing of business; you will ruin yourself, I see. Yes, if you marry this girl out of L'Houmeau, I shall square accounts and summons you for the rent, for I see that no good will come of this. Oh! my presses, my poor presses! it took some money to grease you and keep you going. Nothing but a good year can comfort me after this."

"It seems to me, father, that until now I have given you very little trouble——"

"And paid mighty little rent," put in his parent.

"I came to ask you something else besides. Will you build a second floor to your house, and some rooms above the shed?"

"Deuce a bit of it; I have not the cash, and that you know right well. Besides, it would be money thrown clean away, for what would it bring in? Oh! you get up early of a morning to come and ask me to build you a place that would ruin a king, do you?. Your name may be David, but

I have not got Solomon's treasury. Why, you are mad! or they changed my child at nurse. There is one for you that will have grapes on it," he said, interrupting himself to point out a shoot. "Offspring of this sort don't disappoint their parents; you dung the vines, and they repay you for it. I sent you to school; I spent any amount of money to make a scholar of you; I sent you to the Didots to learn your business; and all this fancy education ends in a daughter-in-law out of L'Houmeau without a penny to her name. If you had not studied books, if I had kept you under my eye, you would have done as I pleased, and you would be marrying a miller's widow this day with a hundred thousand francs in hand, to say nothing of the mill. Oh! your cleverness leads you to imagine that I am going to reward this fine sentiment by building palaces for you, does it? . . . Really, anybody might think that the house that has been a house these two hundred years was nothing but a pigsty, not fit for the girl out of L'Houmeau to sleep in! What next! She is the Queen of France, I suppose."

"Very well, father, I will build the second floor myself; the son will improve his father's property. It is not the usual way, but it happens so sometimes."

"What, my lad! you can find money for building, can you, though you can't find money to pay the rent, eh? You sly dog, to come round your father."

The question thus raised was hard to lay, for the old man was only too delighted to seize an opportunity of posing as a good father without disbursing a penny; and all that David could obtain was his bare consent to the marriage and free leave to do what he liked in the house—at his own expense; the old "bear," that pattern of a thrifty parent, kindly consenting not to demand the rent and drain the savings to which David imprudently owned. David went back again in low spirits. He saw that he could not reckon on his father's help in misfortune.

In Angoulême that day people talked of nothing but the Bishop's epigram and Mme. de Bargeton's reply. Every least thing that happened that evening was so much exag-

gerated and embellished and twisted out of all knowledge, that the poet became the hero of the hour. While this storm in a teacup raged on high, a few drops fell among the *bourgeoisie*; young men looked enviously after Lucien as he passed on his way through Beaulieu, and he overheard chance phrases that filled him with conceit.

"There is a lucky young fellow!" said an attorney's clerk, named Petit-Claud, a plain-featured youth who had been at school with Lucien, and treated him with small patronizing airs.

"Yes, he certainly is," answered one of the young men who had been present on the occasion of the reading; "he is a good-looking fellow, he has some brains, and Mme. de Bargeton is quite wild about him."

Lucien had waited impatiently until he could be sure of finding Louise alone. He had to break the tidings of his sister's marriage to the arbitress of his destinies. Perhaps after yesterday's *soirée*, Louise would be kinder than usual, and her kindness might lead to a moment of happiness. So he thought, and he was not mistaken; Mme. de Bargeton met him with a vehemence of sentiment that seemed like a touching progress of passion to the novice in love. She abandoned her hands, her beautiful golden hair to the burning kisses of the poet who had passed through such an ordeal.

"If only you could have seen your face whilst you were reading," cried Louise, using the familiar *tu*, the caress of speech, since yesterday, while her white hands wiped the pearls of sweat from the brows on which she set a poet's crown. "There were sparks of fire in those beautiful eyes! From your lips, as I watched them, there fell the golden chains that suspend the hearts of men upon the poet's mouth. You shall read Chénier through to me from beginning to end; he is the lover's poet. You shall not be unhappy any longer; I will not have it. Yes, dear angel, I will make an oasis for you, there you shall live your poet's life, sometimes busy, sometimes languid; indolent, full of work, and musing by turns; but never forget that you owe your laurels to me, let that thought be my noble *guerdon* for the sufferings

which I must endure. Poor love! the world will not spare me any more than it has spared you; the world is avenged on all happiness in which it has no share. Yes, I shall always be a mark for envy—did you not see that last night? The bloodthirsty insects are quick enough to drain every wound that they pierce. But I was happy; I lived. It is so long since all my heartstrings vibrated.”

The tears flowed fast, and for all answer Lucien took Louise's hand and gave it a lingering kiss. Everyone about him soothed and caressed the poet's vanity; his mother and his sister and David and Louise now did the same. Everyone helped to raise the imaginary pedestal on which he had set himself. His friend's kindness and the fury of his enemies combined to establish him more firmly in his self-confident ambition; he lived in an unreal world. A young imagination readily falls in with the flattering estimates of others, a handsome young fellow so full of promise finds others eager to help him on every side, and only after one or two sharp and bitter lessons does he begin to see himself as an ordinary mortal.

“My beautiful Louise, do you mean in very truth to be my Beatrice, a Beatrice who condescends to be loved?”

Louise raised the fine eyes, hitherto down-dropped.

“If you show yourself worthy—some day!” she said, with an angelic smile which belied her words. “Are you not happy? To be the sole possessor of a heart, to speak freely at all times with the certainty of being understood, is not this happiness?”

“Yes,” he answered, with a lover's pout of vexation.

“Child!” she exclaimed, laughing at him. “Come, you have something to tell me, have you not? You came in absorbed in thought, my Lucien.”

Lucien, in fear and trembling, confided to his beloved that David was in love with his sister Eve, that his sister Eve was in love with David, and that the two were to be married shortly.

“Poor Lucien!” said Louise; “he was afraid he should be beaten and scolded, as if it was he himself that was going to be married! Why, where is the harm?” she continued,



her fingers toying with Lucien's hair. "What is your family to me when you are an exception? Suppose that my father were to marry his cook, would that trouble you much? Dear boy, lovers are for each other their whole family. Have I a greater interest than my Lucien in the world? Be great, find the way to win fame, that is our affair!"

This selfish answer made Lucien the happiest of mortals. But in the middle of the fantastic reasonings, with which Louise convinced him that they two were alone in the world, in came M. de Bargeton. Lucien frowned and seemed to be taken aback, but Louise made him a sign and asked him to stay to dinner and to read André de Chénier aloud to them until people arrived for their evening game at cards.

"You will give her pleasure," said M. de Bargeton, "and me also. Nothing suits me better than listening to reading aloud after dinner."

Cajoled by M. de Bargeton, cajoled by Louise, waited upon with the respect which servants show to a favored guest of the house, Lucien remained in the Hôtel de Bargeton, and began to think of the luxuries which he enjoyed for the time being as the rightful accessories of Lucien de Rubempré. He felt his position so strong through Louise's love and M. de Bargeton's weakness, that, as the rooms filled, he assumed a lordly air, which that fair lady encouraged. He tasted the delights of despotic sway which Naïs had acquired by right of conquest, and liked to share with him; and, in short, that evening he tried to act up to the part of the lion of a little town. A few of those who marked these airs drew their own conclusions from them, and thought that, according to the old expression, he had come to the last term with the lady. Amélie, who had come with M. du Châtelet, was sure of the deplorable fact, in a corner of the drawing-room where the jealous and envious gathered together.

"Do not think of calling Naïs to account for the vanity of a youngster, who is as proud as he can be because he has got into society where he never expected to set foot," said Châtelet. "Don't you see that this Chardon takes the civil-

ity of a woman of the world for an advance? He does not know the difference between the silence of real passion and the patronizing graciousness due to his good looks and youth and talent. It would be too bad if women were blamed for all the desires which they inspire. *He* certainly is in love with her, but as for Naïs——”

“Oh! Naïs,” echoed the perfidious Amélie, “Naïs is well enough pleased. A young man’s love has so many attractions—at her age. A woman grows young again in his company; she is a girl, and acts a girl’s hesitation and manners, and does not dream that she is ridiculous. Just look! Think of a druggist’s son giving himself a conqueror’s airs with Mme. de Bargeton.”

“Love knows nought of high or low degree,” hummed Adrien.

There was not a single house in Angoulême next day where the degree of intimacy between M. Chardon (*alias* de Rubempré) and Mme. de Bargeton was not discussed; and though the utmost extent of their guilt amounted to two or three kisses, the world already chose to believe the worst of both. Mme. de Bargeton paid the penalty of her sovereignty. Among the various eccentricities of society, have you never noticed its erratic judgments and the unaccountable differences in the standard it requires of this or that man or woman? There are some persons who may do anything; they may behave totally irrationally, anything becomes them, and it is who shall be first to justify their conduct; then, on the other hand, there are those on whom the world is unaccountably severe, they must do everything well, they are not allowed to fail nor to make mistakes, at their peril they do anything foolish; you might compare these last to the much admired statues which must come down at once from their pedestal if the frost chips off a nose or a finger. They are not permitted to be human; they are required to be for ever divine and for ever impeccable. So one glance exchanged between Mme. de Bargeton and Lucien outweighed twelve years of Zizine’s connection with Francis in the social balance; and a squeeze of the hand drew down all the thunders of the Charente upon the lovers.

David had brought a little secret hoard back with him from Paris, and it was this sum that he set aside for the expenses of his marriage and for the building of the second floor in his father's house. His father's house it was; but, after all, was he not working for himself? It would all be his again some day, and his father was sixty-eight years old. So David built a timbered second story for Lucien, so as not to put too great a strain on the old rifted house-walls. He took pleasure in making the rooms where the fair Eve was to spend her life as brave as might be.

It was a time of blithe and unmixed happiness for the friends. Lucien was tired of the shabbiness of provincial life, and weary of the sordid frugality that looked on a five-franc piece as a fortune, but he bore the hardships and the pinching thrift without grumbling. His moody looks had been succeeded by an expression of radiant hope. He saw the star shining above his head, he had dreams of a great time to come, and built the fabric of his good fortune on M. de Bargeton's tomb. M. de Bargeton, troubled with indigestion from time to time, cherished the happy delusion that indigestion after dinner was a complaint to be cured by a hearty supper.

By the beginning of September, Lucien had ceased to be a printer's foreman; he was M. de Rubempré, housed sumptuously in comparison with his late quarters in the tumble-down attic with the dormer window where "young Chardon" had lived in L'Houmeau; he was not even a "man of L'Houmeau"; he lived in the heights of Angoulême, and dined four times a week with Mme. de Bargeton. A friendship had grown up between M. de Rubempré and the Bishop, and he went to the palace. His occupations put him upon a level with the highest rank; his name would be one day among the great names of France; and, in truth, as he went to and fro in his apartments, the pretty sitting-room, the charming bedroom, and the tastefully furnished study, he might console himself for the thought that he drew thirty francs every month out of his mother's and sister's hard earnings; for he saw the day approaching when *An Archer of Charles IX.*, the historical romance on which he had been

at work for two years, and a volume of verse entitled *Marguerites*, should spread his fame through the world of literature, and bring in money enough to repay them all, his mother and sister and David. So, grown great in his own eyes, and giving ear to the echoes of his name in the future, he could accept present sacrifices with noble assurance; he smiled at his poverty, he relished the sense of these last days of penury.

Eve and David had set Lucien's happiness before their own. They had put off their wedding, for it took some time to paper and paint their rooms and to buy the furniture, and Lucien's affairs had been settled first. No one who knew Lucien could wonder at their devotion. Lucien was so engaging, he had such winning ways, his impatience and his desires were so graciously expressed, that his cause was always won before he opened his mouth to speak. This unlucky gift of fortune, if it is the salvation of some, is the ruin of many more. Lucien and his like find a world pre-disposed in favor of youth and good looks, and ready to protect those who give it pleasure with the selfish good-nature that flings alms to a beggar if he appeals to the feelings and awakens emotion; and in this favor many a grown child is content to bask instead of putting it to a profitable use. With mistaken notions as to the significance and the motive of social relations, they imagine that they shall always meet with deceptive smiles; and so at last the moment comes for them when the world leaves them bald, stripped bare, without fortune or worth, like an elderly coquette by the door of a salon, or a stray rag in the gutter.

Eve herself had wished for the delay. She meant to establish the little household on the most economical footing, and to buy only strict necessaries; but what could two lovers refuse to a brother who watched his sister at her work, and said in tones that came from the heart, "How I wish I could sew!" The sober, observant David had shared in the devotion; and yet, since Lucien's triumph David had watched him with misgivings; he was afraid that Lucien would change towards them, afraid that he would look down upon their homely ways. Once or twice, to try his brother,

David had made him choose between home pleasures and the great world, and saw that Lucien gave up the delights of vanity for them, and exclaimed to himself, "They will not spoil him for us!" Now and again the three friends and Mme. Chardon arranged picnic parties in provincial fashion—a walk in the woods along the Charente, not far from Angoulême, and dinner out on the grass, David's apprentice bringing the basket of provisions to some place appointed beforehand; and at night they would come back, tired somewhat, but the whole excursion had not cost three francs. On great occasions, when they dined at a *restaurât*, as it is called, a sort of country inn, a compromise between a provincial wineshop and a Parisian *guinguette*, they would spend as much as five francs, divided between David and the Chardons. David gave his brother infinite credit for forsaking Mme. de Bargeton and grand dinners for these days in the country, and the whole party made much of the great man of Angoulême.

Matters had gone so far, that the new home was very nearly ready, and David had gone over to Marsac to persuade his father to come to the wedding, not without a hope that the old man might relent at the sight of his daughter-in-law, and give something towards the heavy expenses of the alterations, when there befell one of those events which entirely change the face of things in a small town.

Lucien and Louise had a spy in Châtelet, a spy who watched, with the persistence of a hate in which avarice and passion are blended, for an opportunity of making a scandal. Sixte meant that Mme. de Bargeton should compromise herself with Lucien in such a way that she should be "lost," as the saying goes; so he posed as Mme. de Bargeton's humble confidant, admired Lucien in the Rue du Minage, and pulled him to pieces everywhere else. Naïs had gradually given him *les petites entrées*, in the language of the Court, for the lady no longer mistrusted her elderly admirer; but Châtelet had taken too much for granted—love was still in the Platonic stage, to the great despair of Louise and Lucien.

There are, for that matter, love affairs which start

with a good or a bad beginning, as you prefer to take it. Two creatures launch into the tactics of sentiment; they talk when they should be acting, and skirmish in the open instead of settling down to a siege. And so they grow tired of one another, expend their longings in empty space; and, having time for reflection, come to their own conclusions about each other. Many a passion that has taken the field in gorgeous array, with colors flying and an ardor fit to turn the world upside down, has turned home again without a victory, inglorious and crestfallen, cutting but a foolish figure after these vain alarms and excursions. Such mishaps are sometimes due to the diffidence of youth, sometimes to the demurs of an inexperienced woman, for old players at this game seldom end in a fiasco of this kind.

Provincial life, moreover, is singularly well calculated to keep desire unsatisfied and maintain a lover's arguments on the intellectual plane; while, at the same time, the very obstacles placed in the way of the sweet intercourse which binds lovers so closely each to each, hurry ardent souls on towards extreme measures. A system of espionage of the most minute and intricate kind underlies provincial life; every house is transparent, the solace of close friendships which break no moral law is scarcely allowed; and such outrageously scandalous constructions are put upon the most innocent human intercourse, that many a woman's character is taken away without cause. One here and there, weighed down by her unmerited punishment, will regret that she has never known to the full the forbidden felicity for which she is suffering. The world, which blames and criticises with a superficial knowledge of the patent facts in which a long inward struggle ends, is in reality a prime agent in bringing such scandals about; and those whose voices are loudest in condemnation of the alleged misconduct of some slandered woman never give a thought to the immediate provocation of the overt step. That step many a woman only takes after she has been unjustly accused and condemned, and Mme. de Bargeton was now on the verge of this anomalous position.

The obstacles at the outset of a passion of this kind are

alarming to inexperience, and those in the way of the two lovers were very like the bonds by which the population of Lilliput throttled Gulliver, a multiplicity of nothings, which made all movement impossible, and baffle the most vehement desires. Mme. de Bargeton, for instance, must always be visible. If she had denied herself to visitors when Lucien was with her, it would have been all over with her; she might as well have run away with him at once. It is true that they sat in the boudoir, now grown so familiar to Lucien that he felt as if he had a right to be there; but the doors stood scrupulously open, and everything was arranged with the utmost propriety. M. de Bargeton pervaded the house like a cockchafer; it never entered his head that his wife could wish to be alone with Lucien. If he had been the only person in the way, Naïs could have got rid of him, sent him out of the house, or given him something to do; but he was not the only one; visitors flocked in upon her, and so much the more as curiosity increased, for your provincial has a natural bent for teasing, and delights to thwart a growing passion. The servants came and went about the house promiscuously and without a summons; they had formed the habits with a mistress who had nothing to conceal; any change now made in her household ways was tantamount to a confession, and Angoulême still hung in doubt.

Mme. de Bargeton could not set foot outside her house but the whole town knew whither she was going. To take a walk alone with Lucien out of Angoulême would have been a decided measure indeed; it would have been less dangerous to shut herself up with him in the house. There would have been comments the next day if Lucien had stayed on till midnight after the rooms were emptied. Within as without her house, Mme. de Bargeton lived in public.

These details describe life in the provinces; an intrigue is either openly avoided or impossible anywhere.

Like all women carried away for the first time by passion, Louise discovered the difficulties of her position one by one. They frightened her, and her terror reacted upon the fond talk that fills the fairest hours which lovers spend alone together. Mme. de Bargeton had no country house whither

she could take her beloved poet, after the manner of some women who will forge ingenious pretexts for burying themselves in the wilderness; but, weary of living in public, and pushed to extremities by a tyranny which afforded no pleasures sweet enough to compensate for the heaviness of the yoke, she even thought of Escarbas, and of going to see her aged father—so much irritated was she by these paltry obstacles.

Châtelet did not believe in such innocence. He lay in wait, and watched Lucien into the house, and followed a few minutes later, always taking M. de Chandour, the most indiscreet person in the clique, along with him; and, putting that gentleman first, hoped to find a surprise by such perseverance in pursuit of the chance. His own part was a very difficult one to play, and its success was the more doubtful because he was bound to appear neutral if he was to prompt the other actors who were to play in his drama. So, to give himself a countenance, he had attached himself to the jealous Amélie, the better to lull suspicion in Lucien and in Mme. de Bargeton, who was not without perspicacity. In order to spy upon the pair, he had contrived of late to open up a stock controversy on the point with M. de Chandour. Châtelet said that Mme. de Bargeton was simply amusing herself with Lucien; she was too proud, too high born to stoop to the apothecary's son. The rôle of incredulity was in accordance with the plan which he had laid down, for he wished to appear as Mme. de Bargeton's champion. Stanislas de Chandour held that Mme. de Bargeton had not been cruel to her lover, and Amélie goaded them to argument, for she longed to know the truth. Each stated his case, and (as not unfrequently happens in small country towns) some intimate friends of the house dropped in in the middle of the argument. Stanislas and Châtelet vied with each other in backing up their opinions by observations extremely pertinent. It was hardly to be expected that the champions should not seek to enlist partisans. "What do you yourself think?" they asked, each of his neighbor. These polemics kept Mme. de Bargeton and Lucien well in sight.



At length one day Châtelet called attention to the fact that whenever he went with M. de Chandour to Mme. de Bargeton's and found Lucien there, there was not a sign nor a trace of anything suspicious; the boudoir door stood open, the servants came and went, there was nothing mysterious to betray the sweet crime of love, and so forth and so forth. Stanislas, who did not lack a certain spice of stupidity in his composition, vowed that he would cross the room on tiptoe the next day, and the perfidious Amélie held him to his bargain.

For Lucien that morrow was the day on which a young man tugs out some of the hairs of his head, and inwardly vows that he will give up the foolish business of sighing. He was accustomed to his situation. The poet, who had seated himself so bashfully in the boudoir-sanctuary of the queen of Angoulême, had been transformed into an urgent lover. Six months had been enough to bring him on a level with Louise, and now he would fain be her lord and master. He left home with a settled determination to be extravagant in his behavior; he would say that it was a matter of life or death to him; he would bring all the resources of torrid eloquence into play; he would cry that he had lost his head, that he could not think, could not write a line. The horror that some women feel for premeditation does honor to their delicacy; they would rather surrender upon the impulse of passion than in fulfillment of a contract. In general, prescribed happiness is not the kind that any of us desire.

Mme. de Bargeton read fixed purpose in Lucien's eyes and forehead and in the agitation in his face and manner, and proposed to herself to baffle him, urged thereto partly by a spirit of contradiction, partly also by an exalted conception of love. Being given to exaggeration, she set an exaggerated value upon her person. She looked upon herself as a sovereign lady, a Beatrice, a Laura. She enthroned herself, like some dame of the Middle Ages, upon a daïs, looking down upon the tourney of literature, and meant that Lucien, as in duty bound, should win her by his prowess in the field; he must eclipse "the sublime child," and Lamartine, and Sir Walter Scott, and Byron. The

noble creature regarded her love as a stimulating power; the desire which she had kindled in Lucien should give him the energy to win glory for himself. This feminine Quixotry is a sentiment which hallows love and turns it to worthy uses; it exalts and reverences love. Mme. de Bargeton, having made up her mind to play the part of Dulcinea in Lucien's life for seven or eight years to come, desired, like many another provincial, to give herself as the reward of prolonged service, a trial of constancy which should give her time to judge her lover.

Lucien began the strife by a piece of vehement petulance, at which a woman laughs so long as she is heart-free, and saddens only when she loves; whereupon Louise took a lofty tone, and began one of her long orations, interlarded with high-sounding words.

"Was that your promise to me, Lucien?" she said as she made an end. "Do not sow regrets in the present time, so sweet as it is, to poison my after life. Do not spoil the future, and, I say it with pride, do not spoil the present! Is not my whole heart yours? What more must you have? Can it be that your love is influenced by the clamor of the senses, when it is the noblest privilege of the beloved to silence them? For whom do you take me? Am I not your Beatrice? If I am not something more than a woman for you, I am less than a woman."

"That is just what you might say to a man if you cared nothing at all for him," cried Lucien, frantic with passion.

"If you cannot feel all the sincere love underlying my ideas, you will never be worthy of me."

"You are throwing doubts on my love to dispense yourself from responding to it," cried Lucien, and he flung himself weeping at her feet.

The poor boy cried in earnest at the prospect of remaining so long at the gate of paradise. The tears of the poet, who feels that he is humbled through his strength, were mingled with childish crying for a plaything.

"You have never loved me!" he cried.

"You do not believe what you say," she answered, flattered by his violence.

“Then give me proof that you are mine,” said the disheveled poet.

Just at that moment Stanislas came up unheard by either of the pair. He beheld Lucien in tears, half reclining on the floor, with his head on Louise’s knee. The attitude was suspicious enough to satisfy Stanislas; he turned sharply round upon Châtelet, who stood at the door of the salon. Mme. de Bargeton sprang up in a moment, but the spies beat a precipitate retreat like intruders, and she was not quick enough for them.

“Who came just now?” she asked the servants.

“M. de Chandour and M. du Châtelet,” said Gentil, her old footman.

Mme. de Bargeton went back, pale and trembling, to her boudoir.

“If they saw you just now, I am lost,” she told Lucien.

“So much the better!” exclaimed the poet, and she smiled to hear the cry, so full of selfish love.

A story of this kind is aggravated in the provinces by the way in which it is told. Everybody knew in a moment that Lucien had been detected at Naïs’s feet. M. de Chandour, elated by the important part he played in the affair, went first to tell the great news at the club, and thence from house to house, Châtelet hastening to say that *he* had seen nothing; but by putting himself out of court, he egged Stanislas on to talk, he drew him on to add fresh details; and Stanislas, thinking himself very witty, added a little to the tale every time that he told it. Everyone flocked to Amélie’s house that evening, for by that time the most exaggerated versions of the story were in circulation among the Angoulême nobility, every narrator having followed Stanislas’s example. Women and men were alike impatient to know the truth; and the women who put their hands before their faces and shrieked the loudest were none other than Mesdames Amélie, Zéphirine, Fifine, and Lolotte, all with more or less heavy indictments of illicit love laid to their charge. There were variations in every key upon the painful theme.

“Well, well,” said one of the ladies, “poor Naïs! have

you heard about it? I do not believe it myself, she has a whole blameless record behind her; she is far too proud to be anything but a patroness to M. Chardon. Still, if it is true, I pity her with all my heart."

"She is all the more to be pitied because she is making herself frightfully ridiculous; she is old enough to be M. Lulu's mother, as Jacques called him. The little poet is twenty-two at most; and Naïs, between ourselves, is quite forty."

"For my own part," said M. du Châtelet, "I think that M. de Rubempré's position in itself proves Naïs's innocence. A man does not go down on his knees to ask for what he has had already."

"That is as may be!" said Francis, with levity that brought Zéphirine's disapproving glance down upon him.

"Do just tell us how it really was," they besought Stanislas, and formed a small secret committee in a corner of the salon.

Stanislas, in the long length, had put together a little story of facetious suggestions, and accompanied it with pantomime, which made the thing prodigiously worse.

"It is incredible!"

"At midday?"

"Naïs was the last person whom I should have suspected!"

"What will she do now?"

Then followed more comments, and suppositions without end. Châtelet took Mme. de Bargeton's part; but he defended her so ill, that he stirred the fire of gossip instead of putting it out.

Lili, disconsolate over the fall of the fairest angel in the Angoumois hierarchy, went, dissolved in tears, to carry the news to the palace. When the delighted Châtelet was convinced that the whole town was agog, he went off to Mme. de Bargeton's, where, alas! there was but one game of whist that night, and diplomatically asked Naïs for a little talk in the boudoir. They sat down on the sofa, and Châtelet began in an undertone—

"You know what all Angoulême is talking about, of course?"

“No.”

“Very well, I am too much your friend to leave you in ignorance. I am bound to put you in a position to silence slanders, invented, no doubt, by Amélie, who has the overweening audacity to regard herself as your rival. I came to call on you this morning with that monkey of a Stanislas; he was a few paces ahead of me, and he came so far” (pointing to the door of the boudoir); “he says that he *saw* you and M. de Rubempré in such a position that he could not enter; he turned round upon me, quite bewildered as I was, and hurried me away before I had time to think; we were out in Beaulieu before he told me why we had beaten a retreat. If I had known, I would not have stirred out of the house till I had cleared up the matter and exonerated you, but it would have proved nothing to go back again then.

“Now, whether Stanislas’s eyes deceived him, or whether he is right, *he must have made a mistake*. Dear Naïs, do not let that dolt trifle with your life, your honor, your future; stop his mouth at once. You know my position here. I have need of all these people, but still I am entirely yours. Dispose of a life that belongs to you. You have rejected my prayers, but my heart is always yours; I am ready to prove my love for you at any time and in any way. Yes, I will watch over you like a faithful servant, for no reward, but simply for the sake of the pleasure that it is to me to do anything for you, even if you do not know of it. This morning I have said everywhere that I was at the door of the salon, and had seen nothing. If you are asked to give the name of the person who told you about this gossip, pray make use of me. I should be very proud to be your acknowledged champion; but, between ourselves, M. de Bargeton is the proper person to ask Stanislas for an explanation. . . . Suppose that young Rubempré had behaved foolishly, a woman’s character ought not to be at the mercy of the first hare-brained boy who flings himself at her feet. That is what I have been saying.”

Naïs bowed in acknowledgment, and looked thoughtful. She was weary to disgust of provincial life. Châtelet had

scarcely begun before her mind turned to Paris. Meanwhile Mme. de Bargeton's adorer found the silence somewhat awkward.

"Dispose of me, I repeat," he said.

"Thank you," answered the lady.

"What do you think of doing?"

"I shall see."

A prolonged pause.

"Are you so fond of that young Rubempré?"

A proud smile stole over her lips, she folded her arms, and fixed her gaze on the curtains. Châtelet went out; he could not read that high heart.

Later in the evening, when Lucien had taken his leave, and likewise the four old gentlemen who came for their whist without troubling themselves about ill-founded tittle-tattle, M. de Bargeton was preparing to go to bed, and had opened his mouth to bid his wife good-night, when she stopped him.

"Come here, dear, I have something to say to you," she said, with a certain solemnity.

M. de Bargeton followed her into the boudoir.

"Perhaps I have done wrongly," she said, "to show a warm interest in M. de Rubempré, which he, as well as the stupid people here in the town, has misinterpreted. This morning Lucien threw himself here at my feet with a declaration, and Stanislas happened to come in just as I told the boy to get up again. A woman, under any circumstances, has claims which courtesy prescribes to a gentleman; but in contempt of these, Stanislas has been saying that he came unexpectedly and found us in an equivocal position. I was treating the boy as he deserved. If the young scatterbrain knew of the scandal caused by his folly, he would go, I am convinced, to insult Stanislas, and compel him to fight. That would simply be a public proclamation of his love. I need not tell you that your wife is pure; but if you think, you will see that it is something dishonoring for both you and me if M. de Rubempré defends her. Go at once to Stanislas and ask him to give you satisfaction for his insulting language; and mind, you must not accept any ex-

planation short of a full and public retraction in the presence of witnesses of credit. In this way you will win back the respect of all right-minded people; you will behave like a man of spirit and a gentleman, and you will have a right to my esteem. I shall send Gentil on horseback to the Escarbas; my father must be your second; old as he is, I know that he is the man to trample this puppet under foot that has smirched the reputation of a Nègrepelisse. You have the choice of weapons, choose pistols; you are an admirable shot."

"I am going," said M. de Bargeton, and he took his hat and his walking cane.

"Good, that is how I like a man to behave, dear; you are a gentleman," said his wife. She felt touched by his conduct, and made the old man very happy and proud by putting up her forehead for a kiss. She felt something like a maternal affection for the great child; and when the carriage gateway had shut with a clang behind him, the tears came into her eyes in spite of herself.

"How he loves me!" she thought. "He clings to life, poor dear man, and yet he would give his life for me."

It did not trouble M. de Bargeton that he must stand up and face his man on the morrow, and look coolly into the muzzle of a pistol pointed straight at him; no, only one thing in the business made him feel uncomfortable, and on the way to M. de Chandour's house he quaked inwardly.

"What shall I say?" he thought within himself; "Naïs really ought to have told me what to say," and the good gentleman racked his brains to compose a speech that should not be ridiculous.

But people of M. de Bargeton's stamp, who live perforce in silence because their capacity is limited and their outlook circumscribed, often behave at great crises with a ready-made solemnity. If they say little, it naturally follows that they say little that is foolish; their extreme lack of confidence leads them to think a good deal over the remarks that they are obliged to make; and, like Balaam's ass, they speak marvelously to the point if a miracle loosens their tongues. So M. de Bargeton bore himself like a man of uncommon

sense and spirit, and justified the opinion of those who held that he was a philosopher of the school of Pythagoras.

He reached Stanislas's house at nine o'clock, bowed silently to Amélie before a whole room full of people, and greeted others in turn with that simple smile of his, which under the present circumstances seemed profoundly ironical. There followed a great silence, like the pause before a storm. Châtelet had made his way back again, and now looked in a very significant fashion from M. de Bargeton to Stanislas, whom the injured gentleman accosted politely.

Châtelet knew what a visit meant at this time of night, when old M. de Bargeton was invariably in his bed. It was evidently Naïs who had set the feeble arm in motion. Châtelet was on such a footing in that house that he had some right to interfere in family concerns. He rose to his feet and took M. de Bargeton, saying, "Do you wish to speak to Stanislas?"

"Yes," said the old gentleman, well pleased to find a go-between who perhaps might say his say for him.

"Very well; go into Amélie's bedroom," said the controller of excise, likewise well pleased at the prospect of a duel which possibly might make Mme. de Bargeton a widow, while it put a bar between her and Lucien, the cause of the quarrel. Then Châtelet went to M. de Chandour.

"Stanislas," he said, "here comes Bargeton, to call you to account, no doubt, for the things you have been saying about Naïs. Go into your wife's room, and behave, both of you, like gentlemen. Keep the thing quite quiet, make a great show of politeness, behave with phlegmatic British dignity, in short."

In another minute Stanislas and Châtelet went to Bargeton.

"Sir," said the injured husband, "do you say that you discovered Mme. de Bargeton and M. de Rubempré in an equivocal position?"

"M. Chardon," corrected Stanislas with ironical stress; he did not take Bargeton seriously.

"So be it," answered the other. "If you do not withdraw your assertions at once before the company now in your



house, I must ask you to look for a second. My father-in-law, M. de Nègrepelisse, will wait upon you at four o'clock to-morrow morning. Both of us may as well make our final arrangements, for the only way out of the affair is the one that I have indicated. I choose pistols, as the insulted party."

This was the speech that M. de Bargeton had ruminated on the way; it was the longest that he had ever made in life. He brought it out without excitement or vehemence, in the simplest way in the world. Stanislas turned pale. "After all, what did I see?" said he to himself.

Put between the shame of eating his words before the whole town, and fear, hideous fear that caught him by the throat with burning fingers; confronted by this mute personage, who seemed in no humor to stand nonsense, Stanislas chose the more remote peril.

"All right. To-morrow morning," he said, thinking that the matter might be arranged somehow or other.

The three went back to the room. Everybody scanned their faces as they came in; Châtelet was smiling, M. de Bargeton looked exactly as if he were in his own house, but Stanislas looked ghastly pale. At the sight of his face, some of the women here and there guessed the nature of the conference, and the whisper "They are going to fight!" circulated from ear to ear. One half the room was of the opinion that Stanislas was in the wrong, his white face and his demeanor convicted him of a lie; the other half admired M. de Bargeton's attitude. Châtelet was solemn and mysterious. M. de Bargeton stayed a few minutes, scrutinized people's faces, and retired.

"Have you pistols?" Châtelet asked in a whisper of Stanislas, who shook from head to foot.

Amélie knew what it all meant. She felt ill, and the women flocked about her to take her into her bedroom. There was a terrific sensation; everybody talked at once. The men stopped in the drawing-room, and declared, with one voice, that M. de Bargeton was within his right.

"Would you have thought the old fogey capable of acting like this?" asked M. de Saintot.

"But he was a crack shot when he was young," said the pitiless Jacques. "My father often used to tell me of Bargeton's exploits."

"Pooh! Put them at twenty paces, and they will miss each other if you give them cavalry pistols," said Francis, addressing Châtelet.

Châtelet stayed after the rest had gone to reassure Stanislas and his wife, and to explain that all would go off well. In a duel between a man of sixty and a man of thirty-five, all the advantage lay with the latter.

Early next morning, as Lucien sat at breakfast with David, who had come back alone from Marsac, in came Mme. Chardon with a scared face.

"Well, Lucien," she said, "have you heard the news? Everyone is talking of it, even the people in the market. M. de Bargeton all but killed M. de Chandour this morning in M. Tulloy's meadow; people are making puns on the name.<sup>1</sup> It seems that M. de Chandour said that he found you with Mme. de Bargeton yesterday."

"It is a lie! Mme. de Bargeton is innocent," cried Lucien.

"I heard about the duel from a countryman, who saw it all from his cart. M. de Nègrepelisse came over at three o'clock in the morning to be M. de Bargeton's second; he told M. de Chandour that if anything happened to his son-in-law, he should avenge him. A cavalry officer lent the pistols; M. de Nègrepelisse tried them over and over again. M. du Châtelet tried to prevent them from practicing with the pistols, but they referred the question to the officer; and he said that, unless they meant to behave like children, they ought to have pistols in working order. The seconds put them at twenty-five paces. M. de Bargeton looked as if he had just come out for a walk. He was the first to fire; the ball lodged in M. de Chandour's neck, and he dropped before he could return the shot. The house-surgeon at the hospital has just said that M. de Chandour will have a wry neck for the rest of his days. I came to tell you how it ended, lest you should go to Mme. de Bargeton's or show

<sup>1</sup>Tue l'oise

yourself in Angoulême, for some of M. de Chandour's friends might call you out."

As she spoke, the apprentice brought in Gentil, M. de Bargeton's footman. The man had come with a note for Lucien; it was from Louise.

"You have doubtless heard the news," she wrote, "of the duel between Chandour and my husband. We shall not be at home to anyone to-day. Be careful; do not show yourself. I ask this in the name of the affection you bear me. Do you not think that it would be best to spend this melancholy day in listening to your Beatrice, whose whole life has been changed by this event, who has a thousand things to say to you?"

"Luckily, my marriage is fixed for the day after to-morrow," said David, "and you will have an excuse for not going to see Mme. de Bargeton quite so often."

"Dear David," returned Lucien, "she asks me to go to her to-day; and I ought to do as she wishes, I think; she knows better than we do how I should act in the present state of things."

"Then is everything ready here?" asked Mme. Chardon.

"Come and see," cried David, delighted to exhibit the transformation of the first floor. Everything there was new and fresh, everything was pervaded by the sweet influences of early married days, still crowned by the wreath of orange blossoms and the bridal veil; days when the springtide of love finds its reflection in material things, and everything is white and spotless and has not lost its bloom.

"Eve's home will be fit for a princess," said the mother, "but you have spent too much, you have been reckless."

David smiled by way of answer. But Mme. Chardon had touched the sore spot in a hidden wound which caused the poor lover cruel pangs. The cost of carrying out his ideas had far exceeded his estimates; he could not afford to build above the shed. His mother-in-law must wait a while for the home he had meant to make for her. There is

nothing more keenly painful to a generous nature than a failure to keep such promises as these; it is like mortification to the little vanities of affection, as they may be styled. David sedulously hid his embarrassment to spare Lucien; he was afraid that Lucien might be overwhelmed by the sacrifices made for his sake.

“Eve and her girl friends have been working very hard too,” said Mme. de Chardon. “The wedding clothes and the house linen are all ready. The girls are so fond of her, that, without letting her know about it, they have covered the mattresses with white twill and a rose-colored piping at the edges. So pretty! It makes one wish one was going to be married.”

Mother and daughter had spent all their little savings to furnish David's home with the things of which a young bachelor never thinks. They knew that he was furnishing with great splendor, for something had been said about ordering a dinner-service from Limoges, and the two women had striven to make Eve's contributions to the housekeeping worthy of David's. This little emulation in love and generosity could but bring the husband and wife into difficulties at the very outset of their married life, with every sign of homely comfort about them, comfort that might be regarded as positive luxury in a place so behind the times as the *Angoulême* of those days.

As soon as Lucien saw his mother and David enter the bedroom with the blue-and-white draperies and neat furniture that he knew, he slipped away to Mme. de Bargeton. He found Naïs at table with her husband; M. de Bargeton's early morning walk had sharpened his appetite, and he was breakfasting quite unconcernedly after all that had passed. Lucien saw the dignified face of M. de Nègrepelisse, the old provincial noble, a relic of the old French *noblesse*, sitting beside Naïs.

When Gentil announced M. de Rubempré, the white-headed old man gave him a keen, curious glance; the father was anxious to form his own opinions of this man whom his daughter had singled out for notice. Lucien's extreme beauty made such a vivid impression upon him, that he could

not repress an approving glance; but at the same time he seemed to regard the affair as a flirtation, a mere passing fancy on his daughter's part. Breakfast over, Louise could leave her father and M. de Bargeton together; she beckoned Lucien to follow her as she withdrew.

"Dear," she said, and the tones of her voice were half glad, half melancholy, "I am going to Paris, and my father is taking Bargeton back with him to the Escarbas, where he will stay during my absence. Mme. d'Espard (she was a Blamont-Chauvry before her marriage) has great influence herself and influential relations. The d'Espards are connections of ours; they are the older branch of the Nègrepelles; and if she vouchsafes to acknowledge the relationship, I intend to cultivate her a good deal; she may perhaps procure a place for Bargeton. At my solicitation it might be desired at Court that he should represent the Charente, and that would be a step towards his election here. If he were a deputy, it would further other steps that I wish to take in Paris. You, my darling, have brought about this change in my life. After this morning's duel, I am obliged to shut up my house for some time; for there will be people who will side with the Chandours against us. In our position, and in a small town, absence is the only way of softening down bad feeling. But I shall either succeed, and never see Angoulême again, or I shall not succeed, and then I mean to wait in Paris until the time comes when I can spend my summers at the Escarbas and the winters in Paris. It is the only life for a woman of quality, and I have waited too long before entering upon it. The one day will be enough for our preparations; to-morrow night I shall set out, and you are coming with me, are you not? You shall start first. I will overtake you between Mansle and Ruffec, and we shall soon be in Paris. There, beloved, is the life for a man who has anything in him. We are only at our ease among our equals; we are uncomfortable in any other society. Paris, besides, is the capital of the intellectual world, the stage on which you will succeed; overleap the gulf that separates us quickly. You must not allow your ideas to grow rancid in the provinces; put yourself into communication at once with

the great men who represent the nineteenth century. Try to stand well with the Court and with those in power. No honor, no distinction comes to seek out the talent that perishes for lack of light in a little town; tell me, if you can, the name of any great work of art executed in the provinces! On the contrary, see how Jean-Jacques, himself sublime in his poverty, felt the irresistible attraction of that sun of the intellectual world, which produces ever-new glories and stimulates the intellect—Paris, where men rub against one another. What is it but your duty to hasten to take your place in the succession of pleiades that rise from generation to generation? You have no idea how it contributes to the success of a clever young man to be brought into a high light, socially speaking. I will introduce you to Mme. d'Espard; it is not easy to get into her set; but you meet all the greatest people at her house, Cabinet ministers and ambassadors, and great orators from the Chamber of Deputies, and peers and men of influence, and wealthy or famous people. A young man with good looks and more than sufficient genius could fail to excite interest only by very bad management.

“There is no pettiness about those who are truly great; they will lend you their support; and when you yourself have a high position, your work will rise immensely in public opinion. The great problem for the artist is the problem of putting himself in evidence. In these ways there will be hundreds of chances of making your way, of sinecures, of a pension from the civil list. The Bourbons are so fond of encouraging letters and the arts, and you therefore must be a religious poet and a Royalist poet at the same time. Not only is it the right course, but it is the way to get on in life. Do the Liberals and the Opposition give places and rewards and make the fortunes of men of letters? Take the right road and reach the goal of genius. You have my secret, do not breathe a syllable of it, and prepare to follow me.—Would you rather not go?” she added, surprised that her lover made no answer.

To Lucien, listening to the alluring words, and bewildered by the rapid bird's-eye view of Paris which they brought be-

fore him, it seemed as if hitherto he had been using only half his brain and suddenly had found the other half, so swiftly his ideas widened. He saw himself stagnating in Angoulême like a frog under a stone in a marsh. Paris and her splendors arose before him; Paris, the Eldorado of provincial imaginings, with golden robes and the royal diadem about her brows, and arms outstretched to talent of every kind. Great men would greet him there as one of their order. Everything smiled upon genius. There, there were no jealous booby-squires to invent stinging gibes and humiliate a man of letters; there was no stupid indifference to poetry in Paris. Paris was the fountainhead of poetry; there the poet was brought into the light and paid for his work. Publishers should no sooner read the opening pages of *An Archer of Charles IX.* than they should open their cashboxes with "How much do you want?" And besides all this, he understood that this journey with Mme. de Bargeton would virtually give her to him; that they should live together.

So at the words, "Would you rather not go?" tears came into his eyes, he flung his arms about Louise, held her tightly to his heart, and marbled her throat with impassioned kisses. Suddenly he checked himself, as if memory had dealt him a blow.

"Great heavens!" he cried, "my sister is to be married the day after to-morrow!"

That exclamation was the last expiring cry of noble and single-hearted boyhood. The so powerful ties that bind young hearts to home, and a first friendship, and all early affections were to be severed at one ruthless blow.

"Well," cried the haughty Nègrepelisse, "and what has your sister's marriage to do with the progress of our love? Have you set your mind so much on being best man at a wedding party of tradespeople and working men, that you cannot give up these exalted joys for my sake? A great sacrifice indeed!" she went on, scornfully. "This morning I sent my husband out to fight in your quarrel. There, sir, go; I am mistaken in you."

She sank fainting upon the sofa. Lucien went to her,

entreating her pardon, calling execrations upon his family, his sister, and David.

“I had such faith in you!” she said. “M. de Cante-Croix had an adored mother; but to win a letter from me, and the words ‘I am satisfied,’ he fell in the thick of the fight. And now, when I ask you to take a journey with me, you cannot think of giving up a wedding dinner for my sake.”

Lucien was ready to kill himself; his desperation was so unfeigned, that Louise forgave him, though at the same time she made him feel that he must redeem his mistake.

“Come, come,” she said, “be discreet, and to-morrow at midnight be upon the road, a hundred paces out of Mansle.”

Lucien felt the globe shrink under his feet; he went back to David’s house, hopes pursuing him as the Furies followed Orestes, for he had glimmerings of endless difficulties, all summed up in the appalling words, “Where is the money to come from?”

He stood in such terror of David’s perspicacity, that he locked himself into his pretty new study until he could recover himself, his head was swimming in this new position. So he must leave the rooms just furnished for him at such a cost, and all the sacrifices that had been made for him had been made in vain. Then it occurred to Lucien that his mother might take the rooms and save David the heavy expense of building at the end of the yard, as he had meant to do; his departure would be, in fact, a convenience to the family. He discovered any quantity of urgent reasons for his sudden flight; for there is no such Jesuit as the desire of your heart. He hurried down at once to tell the news to his sister in L’Houmeau and to take counsel with her. As he reached Postel’s shop, he bethought himself that if all other means failed, he could borrow enough to live upon for a year from his father’s successor.

“Three francs per day will be abundance for me if I live with Louise,” he thought; “it is only a thousand francs for a whole year. And in six months’ time I shall have plenty of money.”

Then, under seal and promise of secrecy, Eve and her mother heard Lucien’s confidences. Both the women began



to cry as they heard of the ambitious plans; and when he asked the reason of their trouble, they told him that every penny they possessed had been spent on table-linen, house-linen, Eve's wedding clothes, and on a host of things that David had overlooked. They had been so glad to do this, for David had made a marriage-settlement of ten thousand francs on Eve. Lucien then spoke of his idea of a loan, and Mme. Chardon undertook to ask M. Postel to lend them a thousand francs for a twelve-month.

"But, Lucien," said Eve, as a thought clutched at her heart, "you will not be here at my wedding! Oh! come back, I will put it off for a few days. Surely she will give you leave to come back in a fortnight, if only you go with her now? Surely she would spare you to us for a week, Lucien, when we brought you up for her? We shall have no luck if you are not at the wedding. . . . But will a thousand francs be enough for you?" she asked, suddenly interrupting herself. "Your coat suits you divinely, but you have only that one! You have only two fine shirts, the other six are coarse linen; and three of your white ties are just common muslin, there are only two lawn cravats, and your pocket-handkerchiefs are not good ones. Where will you find a sister in Paris who will get up your linen in one day as you want it? You will want ever so much more. Then you have just the one pair of new nankeen trousers, last year's trousers are tight for you; you will be obliged to have clothes made in Paris, and Paris prices are not like Angoulême prices. You have only two presentable white waistcoats; I have mended the others already. Come, I advise you to take two thousand francs."

David came in as she spoke, and apparently heard the two last words, for he looked at the brother and sister and said nothing.

"Do not keep anything from me," he said at last.

"Well," exclaimed Eve, "he is going away with *her*."

Mme. Chardon came in again, and, not seeing David, began at once—

"Postel is willing to lend you the thousand francs, Lucien," she said, "but only for six months; and even then

he wants you to let him have a bill endorsed by your brother-in-law, for he says that you are giving him no security."

She turned and saw David, and there was a deep silence in the room. The Chardons thought how they had abused David's goodness, and felt ashamed. Tears stood in the young printer's eyes.

"Then you will not be here at our wedding!" he began. "You are not going to live with us! And here have I been squandering all that I had! Oh! Lucien, as I came along, bringing Eve her little bits of wedding jewelry, I did not think that I should be sorry I spent the money on them." He brushed his hand over his eyes as he drew the little cases from his pocket.

He set down the tiny morocco-covered boxes on the table in front of his mother-in-law.

"Oh! why do you think so much for me?" protested Eve, giving him a divinely sweet smile that belied her words.

"Mamma, dear," said David, "just tell M. Postel that I will put my name to the bill, for I can tell from your face, Lucien, that you have quite made up your mind to go."

Lucien's head sank dejectedly; there was a little pause, then he said, "Do not think hardly of me, my dear, good angels."

He put his arms about Eve and David, and drew them close, and held them tightly to him as he added, "Wait and see what comes of it, and you shall know how much I love you. What is the good of our high thinking, David, if it does not enable us to disregard the petty ceremonial in which the law entangles our affections? Shall I not be with you in spirit, in spite of the distance between us? Shall we not be united in thought? Have I not a destiny to fulfill? Will publishers come here to seek my *Archer of Charles IX.* and the *Marguerites*? A little sooner or a little later I should be obliged in any case to do as I am doing to-day, should I not? And shall I ever find a better opportunity than this? Does not my success entirely depend upon my entrance on life in Paris through the Marquise d'Espard's salon?"

"He is right," said Eve; "you yourself were saying, were you not, that he ought to go to Paris at once?"

David took Eve's hand in his, and drew her into the narrow little room where she had slept for seven years.

"Love, were you saying just now that he would want two thousand francs?" he said in her ear. "Postel is only lending one thousand."

Eve gave her betrothed a look, and he read all her anguish in her eyes.

"Listen, my adored Eve, we are making a bad start in life. Yes, my expenses have taken all my capital; I have just two thousand francs left, and half of it will be wanted to carry on the business. If we give your brother the thousand francs, it will mean that we are giving away our bread, that we shall live in anxiety. If I were alone, I know what I should do; but we are two. Decide for us."

Eve, distracted, sprang to her lover's arms, and kissed him tenderly, as she answered through her tears—

"Do as you would do if you were alone; I will work to earn the money."

In spite of the most impassioned kiss ever given and taken by betrothed lovers, David left Eve overcome with trouble, and went out to Lucien.

"Do not worry yourself," he said; "you shall have your two thousand francs."

"Go in to see Postel," said Mme. Chardon, "for you must both give your signatures to the bill."

When Lucien and David came back unexpectedly, they found Eve and her mother on their knees in prayer. The women felt sure that Lucien's return would bring the realization of many hopes; but at that moment they could only feel how much they were losing in the parting, and the happiness to come seemed too dearly bought by an absence that broke up their life together, and would fill the coming days with innumerable fears for Lucien.

"If you could ever forget this sight," David said in Lucien's ear, "you would be the basest of men."

David, no doubt, thought that these grave words were needed; Mme. de Bargeton's influence seemed to him less to be feared than his friend's unlucky instability of character, Lucien was so easily led for good or evil. Eve soon packed

Lucien's clothes; the Fernando Cortez of literature carried but little baggage. He was wearing his best overcoat, his best waistcoat, and one of the two fine shirts. The whole of his linen, the celebrated coat, and his manuscript made up so small a package that, to hide it from Mme. de Bargeton, David proposed to send it by coach to a paper merchant with whom he had dealings, and wrote and advised him to that effect, and asked him to keep the parcel until Lucien sent for it.

In spite of Mme. de Bargeton's precautions, Châtelet found out that she was leaving Angoulême; and with a view to discovering whether she was traveling alone or with Lucien, he sent his man to Ruffec with instructions to watch every carriage that changed horses at that stage.

"If she is taking her poet with her," thought he, "I have her now."

Lucien set out before daybreak the next morning. David went with him. David had hired a cabriolet, pretending that he was going to Marsac on business, a little piece of deception which seemed probable under the circumstances. The two friends went to Marsac, and spent part of the day with the old "bear." As evening came on they set out again, and in the beginnings of the dawn they waited in the road, on the further side of Mansle, for Mme. de Bargeton. When the seventy-year-old traveling carriage, which he had many a time seen in the coach-house, appeared in sight, Lucien felt more deeply moved than he had ever been in his life before; he sprang into David's arms.

"God grant that this may be for your good!" said David, and he climbed into the shabby cabriolet and drove away with a feeling of dread clutching at his heart; he had terrible presentiments of the fate awaiting Lucien in Paris.

## PART II

### EVE AND DAVID

**L**UCIEN had gone to Paris; and David Séchard, with the courage and intelligence of the ox which painters give the Evangelist for accompanying symbol, set himself to make the large fortune for which he had wished that evening down by the Charente, when he sat with Eve by the weir, and she gave him her hand and her heart. He wanted to make the money quickly, and less for himself than for Eve's sake and Lucien's. He would place his wife amid the elegant and comfortable surroundings that were hers by right, and his strong arm should sustain her brother's ambitions—this was the programme that he saw before his eyes in letters of fire.

Journalism and politics, the immense development of the book trade, of literature and of the sciences; the increase of public interest in matters touching the various industries in the country; in fact, the whole social tendency of the epoch following the establishment of the Restoration produced an enormous increase in the demand for paper. The supply required was almost ten times as large as the quantity in which the celebrated Ouvrard speculated at the outset of the Revolution. Then Ouvrard could buy up first the entire stock of paper and then the manufacturers; but in the year 1821 there were so many paper-mills in France, that no one could hope to repeat his success; and David had neither audacity enough nor capital enough for such a speculation. Machinery for producing paper in any length was just coming into use in England. It was one of the most urgent needs of the time, therefore, that the paper trade should keep pace with the requirements of the French system of civil government, a system by which the right of discussion was to be extended to every man, and the whole fabric based upon continual expression of individual opinion;

a grave misfortune, for the nation that deliberates is but little wont to act.

So, strange coincidence! while Lucien was drawn into the great machinery of journalism, where he was like to leave his honor and his intelligence torn to shreds, David Séchard, at the back of his printing-house, foresaw all the practical consequences of the increased activity of the periodical press. He saw the direction in which the spirit of the age was tending, and sought to find means to the required end. He saw also that there was a fortune awaiting the discoverer of cheap paper, and the event has justified his clear-sightedness. Within the last fifteen years, the Patent Office has received more than a hundred applications from persons claiming to have discovered cheap substances to be employed in the manufacture of paper. David felt more than ever convinced that this would be no brilliant triumph, it is true, but a useful and immensely profitable discovery; and after his brother-in-law went to Paris, he became more and more absorbed in the problem which he had set himself to solve.

The expenses of his marriage and of Lucien's journey to Paris had exhausted all his resources; he confronted the extreme of poverty at the very outset of married life. He had kept one thousand francs for the working expenses of the business, and owed a like sum, for which he had given a bill to Postel the druggist. So here was a double problem for this deep thinker; he must invent a method of making cheap paper, and that quickly; he must make the discovery, in fact, in order to apply the proceeds to the needs of the household and of the business. What words can describe the brain that can forget the cruel preoccupations caused by hidden want, by the daily needs of a family and the daily drudgery of a printer's business, which requires such minute, painstaking care; and soar, with the enthusiasm and intoxication of the man of science, into the regions of the unknown in quest of a secret which daily eludes the most subtle experiment? And the inventor, alas! as will shortly be seen, has plenty of woes to endure, beside the ingratitude of the many; idle folk that can do nothing themselves tell them, "Such an one is a born inventor;

he could not do otherwise. He no more deserves credit for his invention than a prince for being born to rule! He is simply exercising his natural faculties, and his work is its own reward," and the people believe them.

Marriage brings profound mental and physical perturbations into a girl's life; and if she marries under the ordinary conditions of lower middle class life, she must moreover begin to study totally new interests and initiate herself in the intricacies of business. With marriage, therefore, she enters upon a phase of her existence when she is necessarily on the watch before she can act. Unfortunately, David's love for his wife retarded this training; he dared not tell her the real state of affairs on the day after their wedding, nor for some time afterwards. His father's avarice condemned him to the most grinding poverty, but he could not bring himself to spoil the honeymoon by beginning his wife's commercial education and prosaic apprenticeship to his laborious craft. So it came to pass that housekeeping, no less than working expenses, ate up the thousand francs, his whole fortune. For four months David gave no thought to the future, and his wife remained in ignorance. The awakening was terrible! Postel's bill fell due; there was no money to meet it, and Eve knew enough of the debt and its cause to give up her bridal trinkets and silver.

That evening Eve tried to induce David to talk of their affairs, for she had noticed that he was giving less attention to the business and more to the problem of which he had once spoken to her. Since the first few weeks of married life, in fact, David spent most of his time in the shed in the backyard, in the little room where he was wont to mold his ink-rollers. Three months after his return to Angoulême, he had replaced the old-fashioned round ink-balls by rollers made of strong glue and treacle, and an ink-table, on which the ink was evenly distributed, an improvement so obvious that Cointet Brothers no sooner saw it than they adopted the plan themselves.

By the partition wall of this kitchen, as it were, David had set up a little furnace with a copper pan, ostensibly to save the cost of fuel over the recasting of his rollers, though

the molds had not been used twice, and hung there rusting upon the wall. Nor was this all; a solid oak door had been put in by his orders, and the walls were lined with sheet-iron; he even replaced the dirty window sash by panes of ribbed glass, so that no one without could watch him at his work.

When Eve began to speak about the future, he looked uneasily at her, and cut her short at the first word by saying, "I know all that you must think, child, when you see that the workshop is left to itself, and that I am dead, as it were, to all business interests; but, see," he continued, bringing her to the window, and pointing to the mysterious shed, "there lies our fortune. For some months yet we must endure our lot, but let us bear it patiently; leave me to solve the problem of which I told you, and all our troubles will be at an end."

David was so good, his devotion was so thoroughly to be taken upon his word, that the poor wife, with a wife's anxiety as to daily expenses, determined to spare her husband the household cares and to take the burden upon herself. So she came down from the pretty blue-and-white room, where she sewed and talked contentedly with her mother, took possession of one of the two dens at the back of the printing-room, and set herself to learn the business routine of typography. Was it not heroism in a wife who expected ere long to be a mother?

During the past few months David's workmen had left him one by one; there was not work enough for them to do. Cointet Brothers, on the other hand, were overwhelmed with orders; they were employing all the workmen of the department; the alluring prospect of high wages even brought them a few from Bordeaux, more especially apprentices, who thought themselves sufficiently expert to cancel their articles and go elsewhere. When Eve came to look into the affairs of Séchard's printing works, she discovered that he employed three persons in all.

First in order stood Cérizet, an apprentice of Didot's, whom David had chosen to train. Most foremen have some one favorite among the great number of workers under



them, and David had brought Cérizet to Angoulême, where he had been learning more of the business. Marion, as much attached to the house as a watch-dog, was the second; and the third was Kolb, an Alsacien, at one time a porter in the employ of the Messrs. Didot. Kolb had been drawn for military service, chance brought him to Angoulême, and David recognized the man's face at a review just as his time was about to expire. Kolb came to see David, and was smitten forthwith by the charms of the portly Marion; she possessed all the qualities which a man of his class looks for in a wife—the robust health that bronzes the cheeks, the strength of a man (Marion could lift a form of type with ease), the scrupulous honesty on which an Alsacien sets such store, the faithful service which bespeaks a sterling character, and finally, the thrift which had saved a little sum of a thousand francs, besides a stock of clothing and linen, neat and clean, as country linen can be. Marion herself, a big, stout woman of thirty-six, felt sufficiently flattered by the admiration of a cuirassier, who stood five feet seven inches in his stockings, a well-built warrior, strong as a bastion, and not unnaturally suggested that he should become a printer. So, by the time Kolb received his full discharge, Marion and David between them had transformed him into a tolerably creditable “bear,” though their pupil could neither read nor write.

Job printing, as it is called, was not so abundant at this season but that Cérizet could manage it without help. Cérizet, compositor, clicker, and foreman, realized in his person the “phenomenal triplicity” of Kant; he set up type, read proof, took orders and made out invoices; but the most part of the time he had nothing to do, and used to read novels in his den at the back of the workshop while he waited for an order for a bill-head or a trade circular. Marion, trained by old Séchard, prepared and wetted down the paper, helped Kolb with the printing, hung the sheets to dry, and cut them to size; yet cooked the dinner none the less, and did her marketing very early of a morning.

Eye told Cérizet to draw out a balance-sheet for the last six months, and found that the gross receipts amounted to

eight hundred francs. On the other hand, wages at the rate of three francs per day—two francs to Cérizet, and one to Kolb—reached a total of six hundred francs; and as the goods supplied for the work printed and delivered amounted to some hundred odd francs, it was clear to Eve that David had been carrying on business at a loss during the first half-year of their married life. There was nothing to show for rent, nothing for Marion's wages, nor for interest on capital represented by the plant, the license, and the ink; nothing, finally, by way of allowance for the host of things included in the technical expression "wear and tear," a word which owes its origin to the cloths and silks which are used to moderate the force of the impression, and to save wear to the type; a square of stuff (the *blanket*) being placed between the platen and the sheet of paper in the press.

Eve made a rough calculation of the resources of the printing office and of the output, and saw how little hope there was for a business drained dry by the all-devouring activity of the brothers Cointet; for by this time the Cointets were not only contract printers to the town and the prefecture, and printers to the Diocese by special appointment—they were paper-makers and proprietors of a newspaper to boot. That newspaper, sold two years ago by the Séchards, father and son, for twenty-two thousand francs, was now bringing in eighteen thousand francs per annum. Eve began to understand the motives lurking beneath the apparent generosity of the brothers Cointet; they were leaving the Séchard establishment just sufficient work to gain a pittance, but not enough to establish a rival house.

When Eve took the management of the business, she began by taking stock. She set Kolb and Marion and Cérizet to work, and the workshop was put to rights, cleaned out, and set in order. Then one evening when David came in from a country excursion, followed by an old woman with a huge bundle tied up in a cloth, Eve asked counsel of him as to the best way of turning to profit the odds and ends left them by old Séchard, promising that she herself would look after the business. Acting upon her husband's advice, Mme. Séchard sorted all the remnants of paper which she found,

and printed old popular legends in double columns upon a single sheet, such as peasants paste upon their cottage walls, the histories of *The Wandering Jew*, *Robert the Devil*, *La Belle Maguelonne*, and sundry miracles. Eve sent Kolb out as a hawker.

Cérizet had not a moment to spare now; he was composing the naïve pages with the rough cuts that adorned them from morning to night; Marion was able to manage the taking off; and all domestic cares fell to Mme. Chardon, for Eve was busy coloring the prints. Thanks to Kolb's activity and honesty, Eve sold three thousand broad-sheets at a penny a-piece, and made three hundred francs in all at a cost of thirty francs.

But when every peasant's hut and every little wineshop for twenty leagues round was papered with these legends, a fresh speculation must be discovered; the Alsacien could not go beyond the limits of the department. Eve, turning over everything in the whole printing house, had found a collection of figures for printing a "Shepherd's Calendar," a kind of almanac meant for those who cannot read, letter-press being replaced by symbols, signs, and pictures in colored inks, red, black, and blue. Old Séchard, who could neither read nor write himself, had made a good deal of money at one time by bringing out an almanac in hieroglyph. It was in book form, a single sheet folded to make one hundred and twenty-eight pages.

Thoroughly satisfied with the success of the broad-sheets, a piece of business only undertaken by country printing offices, Mme. Séchard invested all the proceeds in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, and began it upon a large scale. Millions of copies of this work are sold annually in France. It is printed upon even coarser paper than the *Almanac of Liège*, a ream (five hundred sheets) costing in the first instance about four francs; while the printed sheets sell at the rate of a halfpenny a-piece—twenty-five francs per ream.

Mme. Séchard determined to use one hundred reams for the first impression; fifty thousand copies would bring in two thousand francs. A man so deeply absorbed in his work as David in his researches is seldom observant; yet

David, taking a look round his workshop, was astonished to hear the groaning of a press and to see Cérizet always on his feet, setting up type under Mme. Séchard's direction. There was a pretty triumph for Eve on the day when David came in to see what she was doing, and praised the idea, and thought the calendar an excellent stroke of business. Furthermore, David promised to give advice in the matter of colored inks, for an almanac meant to appeal to the eye; and finally, he resolved to recast the ink-rollers himself in his mysterious workshop, so as to help his wife as far as he could in her important little enterprise.

But just as the work began with strenuous industry, there came letters from Lucien in Paris, heart-sinking letters that told his mother and sister and brother-in-law of his failure and distress; and when Eve, Mme. Chardon, and David each secretly sent money to their poet, it must be plain to the reader that the three hundred francs they sent were like their very blood. The overwhelming news, the disheartening sense that work as bravely as she might she made so little, left Eve looking forward with a certain dread to an event which fills the cup of happiness to the full. The time was coming very near now, and to herself she said, "If my dear David has not reached the end of his researches before my confinement, what will become of us? And who will look after our poor printing office and the business that is growing up?"

The *Shepherd's Calendar* ought by rights to have been ready before the 1st of January, but Cérizet was working unaccountably slowly; all the work of composing fell to him; and Mme. Séchard, knowing so little, could not find fault, and was fain to content herself with watching the young Parisian.

Cérizet came from the great Foundling Hospital in Paris. He had been apprenticed to the MM. Didot, and between the ages of fourteen and seventeen he was David Séchard's fanatical worshiper. David put him under one of the cleverest workmen, and took him for his copy-holder, his page. Cérizet's intelligence naturally interested David; he won the lad's affection by procuring amusements now and again for

him, and comforts from which he was cut off by poverty. Nature had endowed Cérizet with an insignificant, rather pretty little countenance, red hair, and a pair of dull blue eyes; he had come to Angoulême and brought the manners of the Parisian street-boy with him. He was formidable by reason of a quick sarcastic turn and a spiteful disposition. Perhaps David looked less strictly after him in Angoulême; or, perhaps, as the lad grew older, his mentor put more trust in him or in the sobering influences of a country town; but be that as it may, Cérizet (all unknown to his sponsor) was going completely to the bad, and the printer's apprentice was acting the part of a Don Juan among little work girls. His morality, learned in Paris drinking-saloons, laid down the law of self-interest as the sole rule of guidance; he knew, moreover, that next year he would be "drawn for a soldier," to use the popular expression, saw that he had no prospects, and ran into debt, thinking that soon he should be in the army, and none of his creditors would run after him. David still possessed some ascendancy over the young fellow, due not to his position as master, nor yet to the interest that he had taken in his pupil, but to the great intellectual power which the sometime street-boy fully recognized.

Before long Cérizet began to fraternize with the Cointets' workpeople, drawn to them by the mutual attraction of blouse and jacket, and the class feeling, which is, perhaps, strongest of all in the lowest ranks of society. In their company Cérizet forgot the little good doctrine which David had managed to instill into him; but, nevertheless, when the others joked the boy about the presses in his workshop ("old sabots," as the "bears" contemptuously called them), and showed him the magnificent machines, twelve in number, now at work in the Cointets' great printing office, where the single wooden press was only used for experiments, Cérizet would stand up for David and fling out at the braggarts.

"My gaffer will go farther with his 'sabots' than yours with their cast-iron contrivances that turn out mass books all day long," he would boast. "He is trying to find out a

secret that will lick all the printing offices in France and Navarre."

"And meantime you take your orders from a washer-woman, you snip of a foreman on two francs a day."

"She is pretty though," retorted Cézizet; "it is better to have her to look at than the phizzes of your gaffers."

"And do you live by looking at his wife?"

From the region of the wineshop, or from the door of the printing office, where these bickerings took place, a dim light began to break in upon the brothers Cointet as to the real state of things in the Séchard establishment. They came to hear of Eve's experiment, and held it expedient to stop these flights at once, lest the business should begin to prosper under the poor wife's management.

"Let us give her a rap over the knuckles, and disgust her with the business," said the brothers Cointet.

One of the pair, the practical printer, spoke to Cézizet, and asked him to do proof-reading for them by piecework, to relieve their reader, who had more than he could manage. So it came to pass that Cézizet earned more by a few hours' work of an evening for the brothers Cointet than by a whole day's work for David Séchard. Other transactions followed; the Cointets seeing no small aptitude in Cézizet, he was told that it was a pity that he should be in a position so little favorable to his interests.

"You might be foreman some day in a big printing office, making six francs a day," said one of the Cointets one day, "and with your intelligence you might come to have a share in the business."

"Where is the use of my being a good foreman?" returned Cézizet. "I am an orphan, I shall be drawn for the army next year, and if I get a bad number who is there to pay someone else to take my place?"

"If you make yourself useful," said the well-to-do printer, "why should not somebody advance the money?"

"It won't be my gaffer in any case!" said Cézizet.

"Pooh! Perhaps by that time he will have found out the secret."

The words were spoken in a way that could not but rouse the worst thoughts in the listener; and Cérizet gave the papermaker and printer a very searching look.

"I do not know what he is busy about," he began prudently, as the master said nothing, "but he is not the kind of man to look for capitals in the lower case!"

"Look here, my friend," said the printer, taking up half-a-dozen sheets of the diocesan prayer-book and holding them out to Cérizet, "if you can correct these for us by to-morrow, you shall have eighteen francs to-morrow for them. We are not shabby here; we put our competitor's foreman in the way of making money. As a matter of fact, we might let Mme. Séchard go too far to draw back with her *Shepherd's Calendar*, and ruin her; very well, we give you permission to tell her that we are bringing out a *Shepherd's Calendar* of our own, and to call her attention too to the fact that she will not be the first in the field."

Cérizet's motive for working so slowly on the composition of the almanac should be clear enough by this time.

When Eve heard that the Cointets meant to spoil her poor little speculation, dread seized upon her; at first she tried to see a proof of attachment in Cérizet's hypocritical warning of competition; but before long she saw signs of an over-keen curiosity in her sole compositor—the curiosity of youth, she tried to think.

"Cérizet," she said one morning, "you stand about on the threshold, and wait for M. Séchard in the passage, to pry into his private affairs; when he comes out into the yard to melt down the rollers, you are there looking at him, instead of getting on with the almanac. These things are not right, especially when you see that I, his wife, respect his secrets, and take so much trouble on myself to leave him free to give himself up to his work. If you had not wasted time, the almanac would be finished by now, and Kolb would be selling it, and the Cointets could have done us no harm."

"Eh! madame," answered Cérizet. "Here am I doing five francs' worth of composing for two francs a day, and don't you think that that is enough? Why, if I did not

read proofs of an evening for the Cointets, I might feed myself on husks."

"You are turning ungrateful early," said Eve, deeply hurt, not so much by Cérizet's grumbling as by his coarse tone, threatening attitude, and aggressive stare; "you will get on in life."

"Not with a woman to order me about though, for it is not often that the month has thirty days in it then."

Feeling wounded in her womanly dignity, Eve gave Cérizet a withering look and went upstairs again. At dinner-time she spoke to David.

"Are you sure, dear, of that little rogue Cérizet?"

"Cérizet!" said David. "Why, he was my youngster; I trained him, I took him on as my copy-holder. I put him to composing; anything that he is he owes to me in fact! You might as well ask a father if he is sure of his child."

Upon this, Eve told her husband that Cérizet was reading proofs for the Cointets.

"Poor fellow! he must live," said David, humbled by the consciousness that he had not done his duty as a master.

"Yes, but there is this difference, dear, between Kolb and Cérizet—Kolb tramps about twenty leagues every day, spends fifteen or twenty sous, and brings us back seven and eight and sometimes nine francs of sales; and when his expenses are paid, he never asks for more than his wages. Kolb would sooner cut off his hand than work a lever for the Cointets; Kolb would not peer among the things that you throw out into the yard if people offered him a thousand crowns to do it; but Cérizet picks them up and looks at them."

It is hard for noble natures to think evil, to believe in ingratitude; only through rough experience do they learn the extent of human corruption; and even when there is nothing left them to learn in this kind, they rise to an indulgence which is the last degree of contempt.

"Pooh! pure Paris street-boy's curiosity," cried David.

"Very well, dear, do me the pleasure to step downstairs and look at the work done by this boy of yours, and tell me



then whether he ought not to have finished our almanac this month."

David went into the workshop after dinner, and saw that the calendar should have been set up in a week. Then, when he heard that the Cointets were bringing out a similar almanac, he came to the rescue. He took command of the printing office, Kolb helped at home instead of selling broad-sheets. Kolb and Marion pulled off the impressions from one form, while David worked another press with Cérizet, and superintended the printing in various inks. Every sheet must be printed four separate times, for which reason none but small houses will attempt to produce a *Shepherd's Calendar*, and that only in the country where labor is cheap, and the amount of capital employed in the business is so small that the interest amounts to little. Wherefore, a press which turns out beautiful work cannot compete in the printing of such sheets, coarse though they may be.

So, for the first time since old Séchard retired, two presses were at work in the old house. The calendar was, in its way, a masterpiece; but Eve was obliged to sell it for less than a halfpenny, for the Cointets were supplying hawkers at the rate of three centimes per copy. Eve made no loss on the copies sold to hawkers; on Kolb's sales, made directly, she gained; but her little speculation was spoiled. Cérizet saw that his fair employer distrusted him; in his own conscience he posed as the accuser, and said to himself, "You suspect me, do you? I will have my revenge," for the Paris street-boy is made on this wise. Cérizet accordingly took pay out of all proportion to the work of proof-reading done for the Cointets, going to their office every evening for the sheets, and returning them in the morning. He came to be on familiar terms with them through the daily chat, and at length saw a chance of escaping the military service, a bait held out to him by the brothers. So far from requiring promptings from the Cointets, he was the first to propose the espionage and exploitation of David's researches.

Eve saw how little she could depend upon Cérizet, and to find another Kolb was simply impossible; she made up her mind to dismiss her one compositor, for the insight of a

woman who loves told her that Cérizet was a traitor; but as this meant a deathblow to the business, she took a man's resolution. She wrote to M. Métivier, with whom David and the Cointets and almost every papermaker in the department had business relations, and asked him to put the following advertisement into a trade paper:—

“FOR SALE, as a going concern, a Printing Office, with License and Plant; situated at Angoulême. Apply for particulars to M. Métivier, Rue Serpente.”

The Cointets saw the advertisement. “That little woman has a head on her shoulders,” they said. “It is time that we took her business under our own control, by giving her enough work to live upon; we might find a real compositor in David's successor; it is to our interest to keep an eye upon that workshop.”

The Cointets went to speak to David Séchard, moved thereto by this thought. Eve saw them, knew that her stratagem had succeeded at once, and felt a thrill of the keenest joy. They stated their proposal. They had more work than they could undertake, their presses could not keep pace with the work, would M. Séchard print for them? They had sent to Bordeaux for workmen, and could find enough to give full employment to David's three presses.

“Gentlemen,” said Eve, while Cérizet went across to David's workshop to announce the two printers, “while my husband was with the MM. Didot he came to know of excellent workers, honest and industrious men; he will choose his successor, no doubt, from among the best of them. If he sold his business outright for some twenty thousand francs, it would bring us in a thousand francs per annum; that would be better than losing a thousand yearly over such trade as you leave us. Why did you envy us the poor little almanac speculation, especially as we have always brought it out?”

“Oh, why did you not give us notice, madam? We would not have interfered with you,” one of the brothers answered blandly (he was known as “the tall Cointet”).

“ Oh, come, gentlemen! you only began your almanac after Cérizet told you that I was bringing out mine.”

She spoke briskly, looking full at “the tall Cointet” as she spoke. He lowered his eyes; Cérizet’s treachery was proven to her.

This brother managed the business and the paper-mill; he was by far the cleverer man of business of the two. Jean showed no small ability in the conduct of the printing establishment, but in intellectual capacity he might be said to take colonel’s rank, while Boniface was a general. Jean left the command to Boniface. This latter was thin and spare in person; his face, sallow as an altar candle, was mottled with reddish patches; his lips were pinched; there was something in his eyes that reminded you of a cat’s eyes. Boniface Cointet never excited himself; he would listen to the grossest insults with the serenity of a bigot, and reply in a smooth voice. He went to mass, he went to confession, he took the sacrament. Beneath his caressing manners, beneath an almost spiritless look, lurked the tenacity and ambition of the priest, and the greed of the man of business consumed with a thirst for riches and honors. In the year 1820 “tall Cointet” wanted all that the *bourgeoisie* finally obtained by the Revolution of 1830. In his heart he hated the aristocrats, and in religion he was indifferent; he was as much or as little of a bigot as Bonaparte was a member of the Mountain; yet his vertebral column bent with a flexibility wonderful to behold before the *noblesse* and the official hierarchy; for the powers that be, he humbled himself, he was meek and obsequious. One final characteristic will describe him for those who are accustomed to dealings with all kinds of men, and can appreciate its value—Cointet concealed the expression of his eyes by wearing colored glasses, ostensibly to preserve his sight from the reflection of the sunlight on the white buildings in the streets; for Angoulême, being set upon a hill, is exposed to the full glare of the sun. Tall Cointet was really scarcely above middle height; he looked much taller than he actually was by reason of the thinness, which told of overwork and a brain in continual ferment. His lank, sleek gray hair, cut in somewhat

ecclesiastical fashion; the black trousers, black stockings, black waistcoat, and long puce-colored greatcoat (styled a *lévite* in the South), all completed his resemblance to a Jesuit.

Boniface was called "tall Cointet" to distinguish him from his brother, "fat Cointet," and the nicknames expressed a difference in character as well as a physical difference between a pair of equally redoubtable personages. As for Jean Cointet, a jolly stout fellow, with a face from a Flemish interior, colored by the southern sun of Angoulême, thick-set, short and paunchy as Sancho Panza; with a smile on his lips and a pair of sturdy shoulders, he was a striking contrast to his older brother. Nor was the difference only physical and intellectual. Jean might almost be called Liberal in politics; he belonged to the Left Center, only went to mass on Sundays, and lived on a remarkably good understanding with the Liberal men of business. There were those in L'Houmeau who said that this divergence between the brothers was more apparent than real. Tall Cointet turned his brother's seeming good nature to advantage very skillfully. Jean was his bludgeon. It was Jean who gave all the hard words; it was Jean who conducted the executions which little beseemed the elder brother's benevolence. Jean took the storms department; he would fly into a rage, and propose terms that nobody could think of accepting, to pave the way for his brother's less unreasonable propositions. And by such policy the pair attained their ends, sooner or later.

Eve, with a woman's tact, had soon divined the characters of the two brothers; she was on her guard with foes so formidable. David, informed beforehand of everything by his wife, lent a profoundly inattentive mind to his enemies' proposals.

"Come to an understanding with my wife," he said, as he left the Cointets in the office and went back to his laboratory. "Mme. Séchard knows more about the business than I do myself. I am interested in something that will pay better than this poor place; I hope to find a way to retrieve the losses that I have made through you——"

“And how?” asked the fat Cointet, chuckling.

Eve gave her husband a look that meant, “Be careful!”

“You will be my tributaries,” said David, “and all other consumers of papers besides.”

“Then what are you investigating?” asked the hypocritical Boniface Cointet.

Boniface’s question slipped out smoothly and insinuatingly, and again Eve’s eyes implored her husband to give an answer that was no answer, or to say nothing at all.

“I am trying to produce paper at fifty per cent. less than the present cost price,” and he went. He did not see the glances exchanged between the brothers. “That is an inventor, a man of his build cannot sit with his hands before him.—Let us exploit him,” said Boniface’s eyes. “How can we do it?” said Jean’s.

Mme. Séchard spoke. “David treats me just in the same way,” she said. “If I show any curiosity, he feels suspicious of my name, no doubt, and out comes that remark of his; it is only a formula, after all.”

“If your husband can work out the formula, he will certainly make a fortune more quickly than by printing; I am not surprised that he leaves his business to itself,” said Boniface, looking across the empty workshop, where Kolb, seated upon a wetting-board, was rubbing his bread with a clove of garlic; “but it would not suit our views to see this place in the hands of an energetic, pushing, ambitious competitor,” he continued, “and perhaps it might be possible to arrive at an understanding. Suppose, for instance, that you consented for a consideration to allow us to put in one of our own men to work your presses for our benefit, but nominally for you; the thing is sometimes done in Paris. We would find the fellow work enough to enable him to rent your place and pay you well, and yet make a little profit for himself.”

“It depends on the amount,” said Eve Séchard. “What is your offer?” she added, looking at Boniface to let him see that she understood his scheme perfectly well.

“What is your own idea?” Jean Cointet put in briskly.

“Three thousand francs for six months,” said she.

“Why, my dear young lady, you were proposing to sell the place outright for twenty thousand francs,” said Boniface with much suavity. “The interest on twenty thousand francs is only twelve hundred francs per annum at six per cent.”

For a moment Eve was thrown into confusion; she saw the need for discretion in matters of business.

“You wish to use our presses and our name as well,” she said; “and, as I have already shown you, I can still do a little business. And then we pay rent to M. Séchard senior, who does not load us with presents.”

After two hours of debate, Eve obtained two thousand francs for six months, one thousand to be paid in advance. When everything was concluded, the brothers informed her that they meant to put in Cérizet as lessee of the premises. In spite of herself, Eve started with surprise.

“Isn’t it better to have somebody who knows the workshop?” asked the fat Cointet.

Eve made no reply; she took leave of the brothers, vowing inwardly to look after Cérizet.

“Well, here are our enemies in the place!” laughed David, when Eve brought out the papers for his signature at dinner-time.

“Pshaw!” said she, “I will answer for Kolb and Marion; they alone would look after things. Besides, we shall be making an income of four thousand francs from the workshop, which only cost us money as it is; and looking forward, I see a year in which you may realize your hopes.”

“You were born to be the wife of a scientific worker, as you said by the weir,” said David, grasping her hand tenderly.

But though the Séchard household had money sufficient that winter, they were none the less submitted to Cérizet’s espionage, and all unconsciously became dependent upon Boniface Cointet.

“We have them now!” the manager of the paper-mill had exclaimed as he left the house with his brother the printer. “They will begin to regard the rent as a regular

income; they will count upon it and run themselves into debt. In six months' time we will decline to renew the agreement, and then we shall see what this man of genius has at the bottom of his mind; we will offer to help him out of his difficulty by taking him into partnership and exploiting his discovery."

Any shrewd man of business who should have seen tall Cointet's face as he uttered those words, "taking him into partnership," would have known that it behoves a man to be even more careful in the selection of the partner whom he takes before the Tribunal of Commerce than in the choice of the wife whom he weds at the Mayor's office. Was it not enough already, and more than enough, that the ruthless hunters were on the track of the quarry? How should David and his wife, with Kolb and Marion to help them, escape the toils of a Boniface Cointet?

A draft for five hundred francs came from Lucien, and this, with Cérizet's second payment, enabled them to meet all the expenses of Mme. Séchard's confinement. Eve and the mother and David had thought that Lucien had forgotten them, and rejoiced over this token of remembrance as they had rejoiced over his success, for his first exploits in journalism made even more noise in Angoulême than in Paris.

But David, thus lulled into a false security, was to receive a staggering blow, a cruel letter from Lucien:—

*Lucien to David.*

"MY DEAR DAVID,—I have drawn three bills on you, and negotiated them with Métivier; they fall due in one, two, and three months' time. I took this hateful course, which I know will burden you heavily, because the one alternative was suicide. I will explain my necessity some time, and I will try besides to send the amounts as the bills fall due.

"Burn this letter; say nothing to my mother and sister; for, I confess it, I have counted upon you, upon the heroism known so well to your despairing brother,

"LUCIEN DE RUBEMPRÉ."

By this time Eve had recovered from her confinement.

"Your brother, poor fellow, is in desperate straits," David told her. "I have sent him three bills for a thousand francs at one, two, and three months; just make a note of them," and he went out into the fields to escape his wife's questionings.

But Eve had felt very uneasy already. It was six months since Lucien had written to them. She talked over the news with her mother till her forebodings grew so dark that she made up her mind to dissipate them. She would take a bold step in her despair.

Young M. de Rastignac had come to spend a few days with his family. He had spoken of Lucien in terms that set Paris gossip circulating in Angoulême, till at last it reached the journalist's mother and sister. Eve went to Mme. de Rastignac, asked the favor of an interview with her son, spoke of all her fears, and asked him for the truth. In a moment Eve heard of her brother's connection with the actress Coralie, of his duel with Michel Chrestien, arising out of his own treacherous behavior to Daniel d'Arthez; she received, in short, a version of Lucien's history, colored by the personal feeling of a clever and envious dandy. Rastignac expressed sincere admiration for the abilities so terribly compromised, and a patriotic fear for the future of a native genius; spite and jealousy masqueraded as pity and friendliness. He spoke of Lucien's blunders. It seemed that Lucien had forfeited the favor of a very great person, and that a patent conferring the right to bear the name and arms of Rubempré had actually been made out and subsequently torn up.

"If your brother, madame, had been well advised, he would have been on the way to honors, and Mme. de Bargeton's husband by this time; but what can you expect? He deserted her and insulted her. She is now Mme. la Comtesse Sixte du Châtelet, to her own great regret, for she loved Lucien."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Mme. Séchard.

"Your brother is like a young eagle, blinded by the first rays of glory and luxury. When an eagle falls, who can



tell how far he may sink before he drops to the bottom of some precipice? The fall of a great man is always proportionately great."

Eve came away with a great dread in her heart; those last words pierced her like an arrow. She had been wounded to the quick. She said not a word to anybody, but again and again a tear rolled down her cheeks, and fell upon the child at her breast. So hard is it to give up illusions sanctioned by family feeling, illusions that have grown with our growth, that Eve had doubted Eugène de Rastignac. She would rather hear a true friend's account of her brother. Lucien had given them d'Arthez's address in the days when he was full of enthusiasm for the brotherhood; she wrote a pathetic letter to d'Arthez, and received the following reply:—

*D'Arthez to Mme. Séchard.*

"MADAME,—You ask me to tell you the truth about the life that your brother is leading in Paris; you are anxious for enlightenment as to his prospects; and to encourage a frank answer on my part, you repeat certain things that M. de Rastignac has told you, asking me if they are true. With regard to the purely personal matter, madame, M. de Rastignac's confidences must be corrected in Lucien's favor. Your brother wrote a criticism of my book, and brought it to me in remorse, telling me that he could not bring himself to publish it, although disobedience to the orders of his party might endanger one who was very dear to him. Alas! madame, a man of letters must needs comprehend all passions, since it is his pride to express them; I understood that where a mistress and a friend are involved, the friend is inevitably sacrificed. I smoothed your brother's way; I corrected his murderous article myself, and gave it my full approval.

"You ask whether Lucien has kept my friendship and esteem; to this it is difficult to make an answer. Your brother is on a road that leads to ruin. At this moment I still feel sorry for him; before long I shall have forgotten him, of set purpose, not so much on account of what he

has done already as for that which he inevitably will do. Your Lucien is not a poet, he has the poetic temper; he dreams, he does not think; he spends himself in emotion, he does not create. He is, in fact—permit me to say it—a womanish creature that loves to shine, the Frenchman's great failing. Lucien will always sacrifice his best friend for the pleasure of displaying his own wit. He would not hesitate to sign a pact with the Devil to-morrow if so he might secure a few years of luxurious and glorious life. Nay, has he not done worse already? He has bartered his future for the short-lived delights of living openly with an actress. So far he has not seen the dangers of his position; the girl's youth and beauty and devotion (for she worships him) have closed his eyes to the truth; he cannot see that no glory nor success nor fortune can induce the world to accept the position. Very well, as it is now, so it will be with each new temptation—your brother will not look beyond the enjoyment of the moment. Do not be alarmed; Lucien will never go so far as a crime, he has not the strength of character; but he would take the fruits of a crime, he would share the benefit but not the risk—a thing that seems abhorrent to the whole world, even to scoundrels. Oh, he would despise himself, he would repent; but bring him once more to the test, and he would fail again; for he is weak of will, he cannot resist the allurements of pleasure, nor forego the least of his ambitions. He is insolent, like all who would fain be poets; he thinks it clever to juggle with the difficulties of life instead of facing and overcoming them. He will be brave at one time, cowardly at another, and deserves neither credit for his courage, nor blame for his cowardice. Lucien is like a harp with strings that are slackened or tightened by the atmosphere. He might write a great book in a glad or angry mood, and care nothing for the success that he had desired for so long.

“When he first came to Paris he fell under the influence of an unprincipled young fellow, and was dazzled by his companion's adroitness and experience in the difficulties of a literary life. This juggler completely bewitched Lucien; he dragged him into a life which a man cannot lead and

respect himself, and, unluckily for Lucien, love shed its magic over the path. The admiration that is given too readily is a sign of want of judgment; a poet ought not to be paid in the same coin as a dancer on the tight-rope. We all felt hurt when intrigue and literary rascality were preferred to the courage and honor of those who counseled Lucien rather to face the battle than to filch success, to spring down into the arena rather than become a trumpet in the orchestra.

“ Society, madame, oddly enough, shows plentiful indulgence to young men of Lucien’s stamp; they are popular, the world is fascinated by their external gifts and good looks. Nothing is asked of them, all their sins are forgiven; they are treated like perfect natures, others are blind to their defects, they are the world’s spoiled children. And, on the other hand, the world is stern beyond measure to strong and complete natures. Perhaps in this apparently flagrant injustice society acts sublimely, taking a harlequin at his just worth, asking nothing of him but amusement, promptly forgetting him; and asking divine great deeds of those before whom she bends the knee. Everything is judged by the laws of its being; the diamond must be flawless; the ephemeral creation of fashion may be flimsy, bizarre, inconsequent. So Lucien may perhaps succeed to admiration in spite of his mistakes; he has only to profit by some happy vein or to be among good companions; but if an evil angel crosses his path, he will go to the very depths of hell. ’Tis a brilliant assemblage of good qualities embroidered upon too slight a tissue; time wears the flowers away till nothing but the web is left; and if that is poor stuff, you behold a rag at the last. So long as Lucien is young, people will like him; but where will he be as a man of thirty? That is the question which those who love him sincerely are bound to ask themselves. If I alone had come to think in this way of Lucien, I might perhaps have spared you the pain which my plain speaking will give you; but to evade the questions put by your anxiety, and to answer a cry of anguish like your letter with commonplaces, seemed to me alike unworthy of you and of me, whom you esteem too highly;

and besides, those of my friends who knew Lucien are unanimous in their judgment. So it appeared to me to be a duty to put the truth before you, terrible though it may be. Anything may be expected of Lucien, anything good or evil. That is our opinion, and this letter is summed up in that sentence. If the vicissitudes of his present way of life (a very wretched and slippery one) should bring the poet back to you, use all your influence to keep him among you; for until his character has acquired stability, Paris will not be safe for him. He used to speak of you, you and your husband, as his guardian angels; he has forgotten you, no doubt; but he will remember you again when tossed by tempest, with no refuge left to him but his home. Keep your heart for him, madame; he will need it.

“Permit me, madame, to convey to you the expression of the sincere respect of a man to whom your rare qualities are known, a man who honors your mother’s fears so much, that he desires to style himself your devoted servant,

“D’ARTHEZ.”

Two days after the letter came Eve was obliged to find a wet-nurse; her milk had dried up. She had made a god of her brother; now, in her eyes, he was depraved through the exercise of his noblest faculties; he was wallowing in the mire. She, noble creature that she was, was incapable of swerving from honesty and scrupulous delicacy, from all the pious traditions of the hearth, which still burns so clearly and sheds its light abroad in quiet country homes. Then David had been right in his forecasts! The leaden hues of grief overspread Eve’s white brow. She told her husband her secret in one of the pellucid talks in which married lovers tell everything to each other. The tones of David’s voice brought comfort. Though the tears stood in his eyes when he knew that grief had dried his wife’s fair breast, and knew Eve’s despair that she could not fulfill her mother’s duties, he held out reassuring hopes.

“Your brother’s imagination has led him astray, you see, child. It is so natural that a poet should wish for blue and purple robes and hurry as eagerly after festivals as he

does. It is a bird that loves glitter and luxury with such simple sincerity, that God forgives him if man condemns him for it."

"But he is draining our lives!" exclaimed poor Eve.

"He is draining our lives just now, but only a few months ago he saved us by sending us the firstfruits of his earnings," said the good David. He had the sense to see that his wife, in her despair, was going beyond the limit, and that love for Lucien would very soon come back. "Fifty years ago, or thereabouts, Mercier said in his *Tableau de Paris* that a man cannot live by literature, poetry, letters, or science, by the creatures of his brain, in short; and Lucien, poet that he is, would not believe the experience of five centuries. The harvests that are watered with ink are only reaped ten or twelve years after the sowing, if indeed there is any harvest after all. Lucien has taken the green wheat for the sheaves. He will have learned something of life at any rate. He was the dupe of a woman at the outset; he was sure to be duped afterwards by the world and false friends. He has bought his experience dear, that is all. Our ancestors used to say, 'If the son of the house brings back his two ears and his honor safe, all is well——'"

"Honor!" poor Eve broke in. "Oh, but Lucien has fallen in so many ways! Writing against his conscience! Attacking his best friend! Living upon an actress! Showing himself in public with her. Bringing us to lie on straw——"

"Oh, that is nothing——!" cried David, and suddenly stopped short. The secret of Lucien's forgery had nearly escaped him, and, unluckily, his start left a vague uneasy impression on Eve.

"What do you mean by nothing?" she answered. "And where shall we find the money to meet bills for three thousand francs?"

"We shall be obliged to renew the lease with Cérizet, to begin with," said David. "The Cointets have been allowing him fifteen per cent. on the work done for them, and in that way alone he has made six hundred francs, besides contriving to make five hundred francs by job printing."

"If the Cointets know that, perhaps they will not renew

the lease," said Eve. "They will be afraid of him, for Cérizet is a dangerous man."

"Eh! what is that to me!" cried David, "we shall be rich in a very little while. When Lucien is rich, dear angel, he will have nothing but good qualities."

"Oh! David, my dear, my dear; what is this that you have said unthinkingly? Then Lucien fallen into the clutches of poverty would not have the force of character to resist evil? And you think just as M. d'Arthez thinks! No one is great unless he has strength of character, and Lucien is weak. An angel who must not be tempted—what is that?"

"What but a nature that is noble only in its own region, its own sphere, its heaven? I will spare him the struggle; Lucien is not meant for it. Look here! I am so near the end now that I can talk to you about the means."

He drew several sheets of white paper from his pocket, brandished them in triumph, and laid them on his wife's lap.

"A ream of paper, royal size, would cost five francs at the most," he added, while Eve handled the specimens with almost childish surprise.

"Why, how did you make these sample bits?" she asked.

"With an old kitchen sieve of Marion's."

"And are you not satisfied yet?" asked Eve.

"The problem does not lie in the manufacturing process; it is a question of the first cost of the pulp. Alas, child, I am only a late comer in a difficult path. As long ago as 1794 Mme. Masson tried to use printed paper a second time; she succeeded, but what a price it cost! The Marquis of Salisbury tried to use straw as a material in 1800, and the same idea occurred to Séguin in France in 1801. Those sheets in your hand are made from the common rush, the *arundo phragmites*, but I shall try nettles and thistles; for if the material is to continue to be cheap, one must look for something that will grow in marshes and waste lands where nothing else can be grown. The whole secret lies in the preparation of the stems. At present my method is not quite simple enough. Still, in spite of this difficulty, I feel sure that I can give the French paper-trade the privilege of our literature; papermaking will be for France what coal

and iron and coarse potter's clay are for England—a monopoly. I mean to be the Jacquart of the trade.”

Eve rose to her feet. David's simplemindedness had roused her to enthusiasm, to admiration; she held out her arms to him and held him tightly to her, while she laid her head upon his shoulder.

“You give me my reward as if I had succeeded already,” he said.

For all answer Eve held up her sweet face, wet with tears, to his, and for a moment she could not speak.

“The kiss was not for the man of genius,” she said, “but for my comforter. Here is a rising glory for the glory that has set; and, in the midst of my grief for the brother that has fallen so low, my husband's greatness is revealed to me.—Yes, you will be great, great like the Graindorges, the Rouvets, and Van Robais', and the Persian who discovered madder, like all the men you have told me about; great men whom nobody remembers, because their good deeds were obscure industrial triumphs.”

“What are they doing just now?”

It was Boniface Cointet who spoke. He was walking up and down outside in the Place du Mûrier with Cérizet, watching the silhouettes of the husband and wife on the blinds. He always came at midnight for a chat with Cérizet, for the latter played the spy upon his former master's every movement.

“He is showing her the paper he made this morning, no doubt,” said Cérizet.

“What is it made of?” asked the paper manufacturer.

“Impossible to guess,” answered Cérizet; “I made a hole in the roof and scrambled up and watched the gaffer; he was boiling pulp in a copper pan all last night. There was a heap of stuff in a corner, but I could make nothing of it; it looked like a heap of tow as near as I could make out.”

“Go no farther,” said Boniface Cointet in unctuous tones; “it would not be right. Mme. Séchard will offer to renew your lease; tell her that you are thinking of setting up for yourself. Offer her half the value of the plant and license,

and, if she takes the bid, come to me. In any case spin the matter out. . . . Have they no money?"

"Not a sou," said Cérizet.

"Not a sou," repeated tall Cointet.—"I have them now," said he to himself.

Métivier, paper manufacturers' wholesale agent, and Cointet Brothers, printers and paper manufacturers, were also bankers in all but name. This surreptitious banking system defies all the ingenuity of the Inland Revenue Department. Every banker is required to take out a license which, in Paris, costs five hundred francs; but no hitherto devised method of controlling commerce can detect the delinquents, or compel them to pay their due to the Government. And though Métivier and the Cointets were "outside brokers," in the language of the Stock Exchange, none the less among them they could set some hundreds of thousands of francs moving every three months in the markets of Paris, Bordeaux, and Angoulême. Now it so fell out that that very evening Cointet Brothers had received Lucien's forged bills in the course of business. Upon this debt tall Cointet forthwith erected a formidable engine, pointed, as will presently be seen, against the poor, patient inventor.

By seven o'clock next morning Boniface Cointet was taking a walk by the millstream that turned the wheels in his big factory; the sound of the water covered his talk, for he was talking with a companion, a young man of nine-and-twenty, who had been appointed attorney to the Court of First Instance in Angoulême some six weeks ago. The young man's name was Pierre Petit-Claud.

"You are a schoolfellow of David Séchard's, are you not?" asked tall Cointet by way of greeting to the young attorney. Petit-Claud had lost no time in answering to the wealthy manufacturer's summons.

"Yes, sir," said Petit-Claud, keeping step with tall Cointet.

"Have you renewed the acquaintance?"

"We have met once or twice at most since he came back. It could hardly have been otherwise. In Paris I was buried away in the office or at the courts on week days, and on



Sundays and holidays I was buried hard at work studying, for I had only myself to look to." (Tall Cointet nodded approvingly.) "When we met again, David and I, he asked me what I had done with myself. I told him that after I had finished my time at Poitiers I had risen to be Maître Olivet's head-clerk, and that some time or other I hoped to make a bid for his berth. I know a good deal more of Lucien Chardon (de Rubempré he calls himself now), he was Mme. de Bargeton's lover, our great poet, David Séchard's brother-in-law in fact."

"Then you can go and tell David of your appointment, and offer him your services," said tall Cointet.

"One can't do that," said the young attorney.

"He has never had a lawsuit, and he has no attorney, so one can do that," said Cointet, scanning the other narrowly from behind his colored spectacles.

A certain quantity of gall mingled with the blood in Pierre Petit-Claud's veins; his father was a tailor in L'Houmeau, and his schoolfellows had looked down upon him. His complexion was of the muddy and unwholesome kind, which tells a tale of bad health, late hours and penury, and almost always of a bad disposition. The best description of him may be given in two familiar expressions—he was sharp and snappish. His cracked voice suited his sour face, meager look, and magpie's eyes of no particular color. A magpie's eye, according to Napoleon, is a sure sign of dishonesty. "Look at So-and-so," he said to Las Cases at Saint Helena, alluding to a confidential servant whom he had been obliged to dismiss for malversation. "I do not know how I could have been deceived in him for so long; he has a magpie's eye." Tall Cointet, surveying the weedy little lawyer, noted his face pitted with smallpox, the thin hair, and the forehead, bald already, receding towards a bald cranium; saw, too, the confession of weakness in his attitude with the hand on the hip. "Here is my man," said he to himself.

As a matter of fact, this Petit-Claud, who had drunk scorn like water, was eaten up with a strong desire to succeed in life; he had no money, but nevertheless he had the

audacity to buy his employer's connection for thirty thousand francs, reckoning upon a rich marriage to clear off the debt, and looking to his employer, after the usual custom, to find him a wife, for an attorney always has an interest in marrying his successor, because he is the sooner paid off. But if Petit-Claud counted upon his employer, he counted yet more upon himself. He had more than average ability, and that of a kind not often found in the provinces, and rancor was the mainspring of his power. A mighty hatred makes a mighty effort.

There is a great difference between a country attorney and an attorney in Paris; tall Cointet was too clever not to know this, and to turn the meaner passions that move a pettifogging lawyer to good account. An eminent attorney in Paris, and there are many who may be so qualified, is bound to possess to some extent the diplomat's qualities; he has so much business to transact, business in which large interests are involved; questions of such wide interest are submitted to him that he does not look upon procedure as machinery for bringing money into his pocket, but as a weapon of attack or defense. A country attorney, on the other hand, cultivates the science of costs, *brouille*, as it is called in Paris, a host of small items that swell lawyers' bills and require stamped paper. These less weighty matters of the law completely fill the country attorney's mind; he has a bill of costs always before his eyes, whereas his brother of Paris thinks of nothing but his fees. The fee is an honorarium paid by a client over and above the bill of costs, for the more or less skillful conduct of his case. One-half of the bill of costs goes to the Treasury, whereas the entire fee belongs to the attorney. Let us admit frankly that the fees received are seldom as large as the fees demanded and deserved by a clever lawyer. Wherefore, in Paris, attorneys, doctors, and barristers, like courtesans with a chance-come lover, take very considerable precautions against the gratitude of clients. The client before and after the lawsuit would furnish a subject worthy of Meissonier; there would be brisk bidding among attorneys for the possession of two such admirable bits of genre.

There is yet another difference between the Parisian and the country attorney. An attorney in Paris very seldom appears in court, though he is sometimes called upon to act as arbitrator (*référé*). Barristers, at the present day, swarm in the provinces; but in 1822 the country attorney very often united the functions of solicitor and counsel. As a result of this double life, the attorney acquired the peculiar intellectual defects of the barrister, and retained the heavy responsibilities of the attorney. He grew talkative and fluent, and lost his lucidity of judgment, the first necessity for the conduct of affairs. If a man of more than ordinary ability tries to do the work of two men, he is apt to find that the two men are mediocrities. The Paris attorney never spends himself in forensic eloquence; and as he seldom attempts to argue for and against, he has some hope of preserving his mental rectitude. It is true that he brings the balista of the law to work, and looks for the weapons in the armory of judicial contradictions, but he keeps his own convictions as to the case, while he does his best to gain the day. In a word, a man loses his head not so much by thinking as by uttering thoughts. The spoken word convinces the utterer; but a man can act against his own judgment without warping it, and contrive to win a bad cause without maintaining that it is a good one, like the barrister. Perhaps for this very reason an old attorney is the more likely of the two to make a good judge.

A country attorney, as we have seen, has plenty of excuses for his mediocrity; he takes up the cause of petty passions, he undertakes pettifogging business, he lives by charging expenses, he strains the Code of procedure and pleads in court. In a word, his weak points are legion; and if by chance you come across a remarkable man practicing as a country attorney, he is indeed above the average level.

“I thought, sir, that you sent for me on your own affairs,” said Petit-Claud, and a glance that put an edge on his words fell upon tall Cointet’s impenetrable blue spectacles.

“Let us have no beating about the bush,” returned Boniface Cointet. “Listen to me.”

After that beginning, big with mysterious import, Cointet set himself down upon a bench, and beckoned Petit-Claud to do likewise.

“When M. du Hautoy came to Angoulême in 1804 on his way to his consulship at Valence, he made the acquaintance of Mme. de Senonches, then Mlle. Zéphirine, and had a daughter by her,” added Cointet for the attorney’s ear—“Yes,” he continued, as Petit-Claud gave a start; “yes, and Mlle. Zéphirine’s marriage with M. de Senonches soon followed the birth of the child. The girl was brought up in my mother’s house; she is the Mlle. Françoise de la Haye in whom Mme. de Senonches takes an interest; she is her godmother in the usual style. Now, my mother farmed land belonging to old Mme. de Cardanet, Mlle. Zéphirine’s grandmother; and as she knew the secret of the sole heiress of the Cardanets and the Senonches of the older branch, they made me trustees for the little sum which M. François du Hautoy meant for the girl’s fortune. I made my own fortune with those ten thousand francs, which amount to thirty thousand at the present day. Mme. de Senonches is sure to give the wedding clothes, and some plate and furniture to her goddaughter. Now, I can put you in the way of marrying the girl, my lad,” said Cointet, slapping Petit-Claud on the knee; “and when you marry Françoise de la Haye, you will have a large number of the aristocracy of Angoulême as your clients. This understanding between us (under the rose) will open up magnificent prospects for you. Your position will be as much as anyone could want; in fact they don’t ask better, I know.”

“What is to be done?” Petit-Claud asked eagerly. “You have an attorney, Maître Cachan——”

“And, moreover, I shall not leave Cachan at once for you; I shall only be your client later on,” said Cointet significantly. “What is to be done, do you ask, my friend? Eh! why, David Séchard’s business. The poor devil has three thousand francs’ worth of bills to meet; he will not meet them; you will stave off legal proceedings in such a way as to increase the expenses enormously. Don’t trouble yourself; go on, pile on items. Doublon, my process-server,

will act under Cachan's directions, and he will lay on like a blacksmith. A word to the wise is sufficient. Now, young man?—"

An eloquent pause followed, and the two men looked at each other.

"We have never seen each other," Cointet resumed; "I have not said a syllable to you; you know nothing about M. du Hautoy, nor about Mme. de Senonches, nor Mlle. de la Haye; only, when the time comes, two months hence, you will propose for the young lady. If we should want to see each other, you will come here after dark. Let us have nothing in writing."

"Then you mean to ruin Séchard?" asked Petit-Claud.

"Not exactly; but he must be in gaol for some time——"

"And what is the object?"

"Do you think that I am noodle enough to tell you that? If you have wit enough to find out, you will have sense enough to hold your tongue."

"Old Séchard has plenty of money," said Petit-Claud. He was beginning already to enter into Boniface Cointet's notions, and foresaw a possible cause of failure.

"So long as the father lives, he will not give his son a farthing; and the old printer has no mind as yet to send in an order for his funeral cards."

"Agreed!" said Petit-Claud, promptly making up his mind. "I don't ask you for guarantees; I am an attorney. If anyone plays me a trick, there will be an account to settle between us."

"The rogue will go far," thought Cointet; he bade Petit-Claud good morning.

The day after this conference was the 30th of April, and the Cointets presented the first of the three bills forged by Lucien. Unluckily, the bill was brought to poor Mme. Séchard; and she, seeing at once that the signature was not in her husband's handwriting, sent for David and asked him point-blank—

"You did not put your name to that bill, did you?"

"No," said he; "your brother was so pressed for time that he signed for me."

Eve returned the bill to the bank messenger sent by the Cointets.

"We cannot meet it," she said; then, feeling that her strength was failing, she went up to her room. David followed her.

"Go quickly to the Cointets, dear," Eve said faintly; "they will have some consideration for you; beg them to wait; and call their attention besides to the fact that when Cérizet's lease is renewed, they will owe you a thousand francs."

David went forthwith to his enemies. Now any foreman may become a master printer, but there are not always the makings of a good man of business in a skilled typographer; David knew very little of business; when, therefore, with a heavily beating heart and a sensation of throttling, David had put his excuses badly enough and formulated his request, the answer—"This is nothing to do with us; the bill has been passed on to us by Métivier; Métivier will pay us. Apply to M. Métivier"—cut him short at once.

"Oh!" cried Eve when she heard the result, "as soon as the bill is returned to M. Métivier, we may be easy."

At two o'clock the next day Victor-Ange-Herménégilde Doublon, bailiff, made protest for non-payment at two o'clock, a time when the Place du Mûrier is full of people; so that though Doublon was careful to stand and chat at the back door with Marion and Kolb, the news of the protest was known all over the business world of Angoulême that evening. Tall Cointet had enjoined it upon Master Doublon to show the Séchards the greatest consideration; but when all was said and done, could the bailiff's hypocritical regard for appearance save Eve and David from the disgrace of a suspension of payment? Let each judge for himself. A tolerably long digression in this kind will seem all too short; and ninety out of every hundred readers shall seize with avidity upon details that possess all the piquancy of novelty, thus establishing yet once again the truth of the well-known axiom that there is nothing so little known as that which everybody is supposed to know—the Law of the Land to wit.

And of a truth, for the immense majority of Frenchmen, a minute description of some part of the machinery of banking will be as interesting as any chapter of foreign travel. When a tradesman living in one town gives a bill to another tradesman elsewhere (as David was supposed to have done for Lucien's benefit), the transaction ceases to be a simple promissory note, given in the way of business by one tradesman to another in the same place, and becomes in some sort a letter of exchange. When, therefore, Métivier accepted Lucien's three bills, he was obliged to send them for collection to his correspondents in Angoulême—to Cointet Brothers, that is to say. Hence, likewise, a certain initial loss for Lucien in exchange on Angoulême, taking the practical shape of an abatement of so much per cent. over and above the discount. In this way Séchard's bills had passed into circulation in the bank. You would not believe how greatly the quality of banker, united with the august title of creditor, changes the debtor's position. For instance, when a bill has been passed through the bank (please note that expression), and transferred from the money market in Paris to the financial world of Angoulême, if that bill is protested, then the bankers in Angoulême must draw up a detailed account of the expenses of protest and return; 'tis a duty which they owe to themselves. Joking apart, no account of the most romantic adventure could be more wildly improbable than this of the journey made by a bill. Behold a certain article in the Code of commerce authorizing the most ingenious pleasantries after Mascarille's manner, and the interpretation thereof shall make apparent manifold atrocities lurking beneath the formidable word "legal."

Master Doublon registered the protest and went himself with it to MM. Cointet Brothers. The firm had a standing account with their bailiff; he gave them six months' credit; and the lynxes of Angoulême practically took a twelve-month, though tall Cointet would say month by month to the lynxes' jackal, "Do you want any money, Doublon?" Nor was this all. Doublon gave the influential house a rebate upon every transaction; it was the merest trifle, one franc fifty centimes on a protest, for instance.

Tall Cointet quietly sat himself down at his desk and took out a small sheet of paper with a thirty-five centime stamp upon it, chatting as he did so with Doublon as to the standing of some of the local tradesmen.

“Well, are you satisfied with young Gannerac?”

“He is not doing badly. Lord, a carrier drives a trade——”

“Drives a trade, yes; but, as a matter of fact, his expenses are a heavy pull on him; his wife spends a good deal, so they tell me——”

“Of *his* money?” asked Doublon, with a knowing look.

The lynx meanwhile had finished ruling his sheet of paper, and now proceeded to trace the ominous words at the head of the following account in bold characters:—

ACCOUNT OF EXPENSES OF PROTEST AND RETURN.

*To one bill for one thousand francs, bearing date of February the tenth, eighteen hundred and twenty-two, drawn by Séchard junior of Angoulême, to order of Lucien Charodon, otherwise de Rubempré, endorsed to order of Métivier, and finally to our order, matured the thirtieth of April last, protested by Doublon, process-server, on the first of May eighteen hundred and twenty-two.*

	fr.	c.
<i>Principal</i> .....	1000	—
<i>Expenses of Protest</i> .....	12	35
<i>Bank charges, one-half per cent.</i> .....	5	—
<i>Brokerage, one-quarter per cent.</i> .....	2	50
<i>Stamp on re-draft and present account,</i>	1	35
<i>Interest and postage</i> .....	3	—
	-----	-----
	1024	20
<i>Exchange at the rate of one and a quarter</i>		
<i>per cent. on 1024 fr. 20 c.</i> .....	13	25
	-----	-----
<i>Total</i>	1037	45

*One thousand and thirty-seven francs forty-five centimes, for which we repay ourselves by our draft at sight upon M.*



*Métivier, Rue Serpente, Paris, payable to order of M. Gannerac of L'Houmeau.*

COINTET BROTHERS.

ANGOULÊME, *May 2, 1822.*

At the foot of this little memorandum, drafted with the ease that comes of long practice (for the writer chatted with Doublon as he wrote), there appeared the subjoined form of declaration:—

“We, the undersigned, Postel of L'Houmeau, pharmaceutical chemist, and Gannerac, forwarding agent, merchant of this town, hereby certify that the present rate of exchange on Paris is one and a quarter per cent.

“ANGOULÊME, *May 2, 1822.*”

“Here, Doublon, be so good as to step round and ask Postel and Gannerac to put their names to this declaration, and bring it back with you to-morrow morning.”

And Doublon, quite accustomed as he was to these instruments of torture, forthwith went, as if it were the simplest thing in the world. Evidently the protest might have been sent in an envelope, as in Paris, and even so all Angoulême was sure to hear of the poor Séchards' unlucky predicament. How they all blamed his want of business energy! His excessive fondness for his wife had been the ruin of him, according to some; others maintained that it was affection for his brother-in-law; and what shocking conclusions did they not draw from these premises! A man ought never to embrace the interests of his kith and kin! Old Séchard's hard-hearted conduct met with approval, and people admired him for his treatment of his son!

And now, all you who for any reason whatsoever should forget to “honor your engagements,” look well into the methods of the banking business, by which one thousand francs may be made to pay interest at the rate of twenty-eight francs in ten minutes, without breaking the law of the land.

The thousand francs, the one incontestable item in the account, comes first.

The second item is shared between the bailiff and the Inland Revenue Department. The six francs due to the State for providing a piece of stamped paper, and putting the debtor's mortification on record, will probably insure a long life to this abuse; and as you already know, one franc fifty centimes from this item found its way into the banker's pockets in the shape of Doublon's rebate.

"Bank charges one-half per cent.," runs the third item, which appears upon the ingenious plea that if a banker has not received payment, he has for all practical purposes discounted a bill. And although the contrary may be the case, if you fail to receive a thousand francs, it seems to be very much the same thing as if you had paid them away. Everybody who has discounted a bill knows that he has to pay more than the six per cent. fixed by the law; for a small percentage appears under the humble title of "charges," representing a premium on the financial genius and skill with which the capitalist puts his money out to interest. The more money he makes out of you, the more he asks. Wherefore it would be undoubtedly cheaper to discount a bill with a fool, if fools there be in the profession of bill-discounting.

The law requires the banker to obtain a stockbroker's certificate for the rate of exchange. When a place is so unlucky as to boast no stock exchange, two merchants act instead. This is the significance of the item "brokerage"; it is a fixed charge of a quarter per cent. on the amount of the protested bill. The custom is to consider the amount as paid to the merchants who act for the stockbroker, and the banker quietly puts the money into his cash-box. So much for the third item in this delightful account.

The fourth includes the cost of the piece of stamped paper on which the account itself appears, as well as the cost of the stamp for the re-draft, as it is ingeniously named, viz. the banker's draft upon his colleague in Paris.

The fifth is a charge for postage and the legal interest due upon the amount for the time that it may happen to be absent from the banker's strong box.

The final item, the exchange, is the object for which the

bank exists, which is to say for the transmission of sums of money from one place to another.

Now sift this account thoroughly, and what do you find? The method of calculation closely resembles Polichinelle's arithmetic in Lablache's Neapolitan song, "fifteen and five make twenty-two." The signatures of Messieurs Postel and Gannerac were obviously given to oblige in the way of business; the Cointets would act at need for Gannerac as Gannerac acted for the Cointets. It was a practical application of the well-known proverb, "Reach me the rhubarb and I will pass you the senna." Cointet Brothers, moreover, kept a standing account with Métivier; there was no need of a redraft, and no redraft was made. A returned bill between the two firms simply meant a debit or credit entry and another line in a ledger.

This highly-colored account, therefore, is reduced to the one thousand francs, with an additional thirteen francs for expenses of protest, and half per cent. for a month's delay, one thousand and eighteen francs it may be in all.

Suppose that in a large banking-house a bill for a thousand francs is daily protested on an average, then the banker receives twenty-eight francs a day by the grace of God and the constitution of the banking system, that all-powerful invention due to the Jewish intellect of the Middle Ages, which after six centuries still controls monarchs and peoples. In other words, a thousand francs would bring such a house twenty-eight francs per day, or ten thousand two hundred and twenty francs per annum. Triple the average of protests, and consequently of expenses, and you shall derive an income of thirty thousand francs per annum, interest upon purely fictitious capital. For which reason, nothing is more lovingly cultivated than these little "accounts of expenses."

If David Séchard had come to pay his bill on the third of May, that is, the day after it was protested, MM. Cointet Brothers would have met him at once with, "We have returned your bill to M. Métivier," although, as a matter of fact, the document would have still been lying upon the desk. A banker has a right to make out the account of ex-

penses on the evening of the day when the bill is protested, and he uses the right to "sweat the silver crowns," in the country banker's phrase.

The Kellers, with correspondents all over the world, make twenty thousand francs per annum by charges for postage alone; accounts of expenses of protest pay for Mme. la Baronne de Nucingen's dresses, opera box, and carriage. The charge for postage is a more shocking swindle, because a house will settle ten matters of business in as many lines of a single letter. And of the tithe wrung from misfortune, the Government, strange to say! takes its share, and the national revenue is swelled by a tax on commercial failure. And the Bank? from the august height of the counting-house she flings an observation, full of common-sense, at the debtor, "How is it," asks she, "that you cannot meet your bill?" and, unluckily, there is no reply to the question. Wherefore the "account of expenses" is an account bristling with dreadful fiction, fit to cause any debtor, who henceforth shall reflect upon this instructive page, a salutary shudder.

On the 4th of May, Métivier received the account from Cointet Brothers, with instructions to proceed against M. Lucien Chardon, otherwise de Rubempré, with the utmost rigor of the law.

Eve also wrote to M. Métivier, and a few days later received an answer which reassured her completely:—

*To M. Séchard Junior, Printer, Angoulême.*

"I have duly received your esteemed favor of the 5th instant. From your explanation of the bill due on April 30th, I understand that you have obliged your brother-in-law, M. de Rubempré, who is spending so much that it will be doing you a service to summons him. His present position is such that he is not likely to delay payment for long. If your brother-in-law should refuse payment, I shall rely upon the credit of your old-established house.—I sign myself now, as ever, your obedient servant,

"MÉTIVIER."

“Well,” said Eve, commenting upon the letter to David, “Lucien will know when they summons him that we could not pay.”

What a change wrought in Eve those few words meant! The love that grew deeper as she came to know her husband's character better and better, was taking the place of love for her brother in her heart. But to how many illusions had she not bade farewell?

And now let us trace out the whole history of the bill and the account of expenses in the business world of Paris. The law enacts that the third holder, the technical expression for the third party into whose hands the bill passes, is at liberty to proceed for the whole amount against any one of the various indorsers who appears to him to be the most likely to make prompt payment. M. Métivier, using this discretion, served a summons upon Lucien. Behold the successive stages of the proceedings, all of them perfectly futile. Métivier, with the Cointets behind him, knew that Lucien was not in a position to pay, but insolvency in fact is not insolvency in law until it has been formally proved.

Formal proof of Lucien's inability to pay was obtained in the following manner.

On the 5th of May, Métivier's process-server gave Lucien notice of the protest and an account of the expense thereof, and summoned him to appear before the Tribunal of Commerce, or County Court, of Paris, to hear a vast number of things: this, among others, that he was liable to imprisonment as a merchant. By the time that Lucien, hard pressed and hunted down on all sides, read this jargon, he received notice of judgment against him by default. Coralie, his mistress, ignorant of the whole matter, imagined that Lucien had obliged his brother-in-law, and handed him all the documents together—too late. An actress sees so much of bailiffs, duns, and writs upon the stage, that she looks on all stamped paper as a farce.

Tears filled Lucien's eyes; he was unhappy on Séchard's account, he was ashamed of the forgery, he wished to pay, he desired to gain time. Naturally he took counsel of his

friends. But by the time Lousteau, Blondet, Bixiou, and Nathan had told the poet to snap his fingers at a court only established for tradesmen, Lucien was already in the clutches of the law. He beheld upon his door the little yellow placard which leaves its reflection on the porter's countenance, and exercises a most astringent influence upon credit; striking terror into the heart of the smallest tradesman, and freezing the blood in the veins of a poet susceptible enough to care about the bits of wood, silken rags, dyed woolen stuffs, and multifarious gimcracks entitled furniture.

When the broker's men came for Coralie's furniture, the author of the *Marguerites* fled to a friend of Bixiou's, one Desroches, a barrister, who burst out laughing at the sight of Lucien in such a state about nothing at all.

"That is nothing, my dear fellow. Do you want to gain time?"

"Yes, as much as possible."

"Very well, apply for stay of execution. Go and look up Masson, he is a solicitor in the Commercial Court, and a friend of mine. Take your documents to him. He will make a second application for you, and give notice of objection to the jurisdiction of the court. There is not the least difficulty; you are a journalist, your name is known well enough. If they summons you before a civil court, come to me about it, that will be my affair; I engage to send anybody who offers to annoy the fair Coralie about his business."

On the 28th of May, Lucien's case came on in the civil court, and judgment was given before Desroches expected it. Lucien's creditor was pushing on the proceedings against him. A second execution was put in, and again Coralie's pilasters were gilded with placards. Desroches felt rather foolish; a colleague had "caught him napping," to use his own expression. He demurred, not without reason, that the furniture belonged to Mlle. Coralie, with whom Lucien was living, and demanded an order for inquiry. Thereupon the judge referred the matter to the registrar for inquiry, the furniture was proved to belong to the

## LOST ILLUSIONS

actress, and judgment was entered accordingly. Métivier appealed, and judgment was confirmed on appeal on the 30th of June.

On the 7th of August, Maître Cachan received by the coach a bulky package endorsed, "Métivier *versus* Séchard and Lucien Chardon."

The first document was a neat little bill, of which a copy (accuracy guaranteed) is here given for the reader's benefit:—

<i>To Bill due the last day of April, drawn by</i>		
<i>Séchard junior to order of Lucien de</i>		
<i>Rubempré, together with expenses of</i>		
<i>fr.</i>	<i>c.</i>	
<i>protest and return, . . . . .</i>	<i>1037</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>May 5th—Serving notice of protest and</i>		
<i>summons to appear before the</i>		
<i>Tribunal of Commerce in</i>		
<i>Paris, May 7th, . . . . .</i>		
	<i>8</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>" 7th—Judgment by default and war-</i>		
<i>rant of arrest, . . . . .</i>		
	<i>35</i>	<i>—</i>
<i>" 10th—Notification of judgment . . . . .</i>		
	<i>8</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>" 12th—Warrant of execution, . . . . .</i>		
	<i>5</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>" 14th—Inventory and appraisalment</i>		
<i>previous to execution, . . . . .</i>		
	<i>16</i>	<i>—</i>
<i>" 18th—Expenses of affixing placards, . . . . .</i>		
	<i>15</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>" 19th—Registration, . . . . .</i>		
	<i>4</i>	<i>—</i>
<i>" 24th—Verification of inventory, and</i>		
<i>application for stay of execu-</i>		
<i>tion on the part of the said</i>		
<i>Lucien de Rubempré, object-</i>		
<i>ing to the jurisdiction of the</i>		
<i>Court, . . . . .</i>		
	<i>12</i>	<i>—</i>
<i>" 27th—Order of the Court upon appli-</i>		
<i>cation duly repeated, and</i>		
<i>transfer of case to the Civil</i>		
<i>Court, . . . . .</i>		
	<i>35</i>	<i>—</i>
<hr style="width: 100%;"/>		
<i>Carried forward, . . . . .</i>	<i>1177</i>	<i>45</i>

# LOST ILLUSIONS

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	fr.	c.
Brought forward, . . . . .	1177	45
May 28th— <i>Notice of summary proceedings in the Civil Court at the instance of Métivier, represented by counsel.</i> . . . . .	6	50
June 2nd— <i>Judgment, after hearing both parties, condemning Lucien Chardon to pay costs of suit for expenses of protest and return; the plaintiff to bear costs of proceedings in the Commercial Court,</i> . . . . .	150	—
“ 6th— <i>Notification of judgment,</i> . . . . .	10	—
“ 15th— <i>Warrant of execution,</i> . . . . .	5	50
“ 19th— <i>Inventory and appraisement preparatory to execution; interpleader summons by the Demoiselle Coralie, claiming goods and chattels taken in execution; demand for immediate special inquiry before further proceedings be taken,</i> . . . . .	20	—
“ “ — <i>Judge’s order referring matter to registrar for immediate special inquiry,</i> . . . . .	40	—
“ “ — <i>Judgment in favor of the said Mademoiselle Coralie,</i> . . . . .	250	—
“ 20th— <i>Appeal by Métivier,</i> . . . . .	17	—
“ 30th— <i>Confirmation of judgment,</i> . . . . .	250	—
<i>Total,</i> . . . . .	1926	45
<i>Bill matured May 31st, with expenses of protest and return,</i> . . . . .	1037	45
<i>Serving notice of protest,</i> . . . . .	8	75
<i>Total,</i> . . . . .	1046	20



<i>Bill matured June 30th, with expenses of</i>	<i>fr.</i>	<i>c.</i>
<i>protest and return,</i>	1037	45
<i>Serving notice of protest,</i>	8	75
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<i>Total,</i>	1046	20

This document was accompanied by a letter from Métivier, instructing Maître Cachan, notary of Angoulême, to prosecute David Séchard with the utmost rigor of the law. Wherefore Maître Victor-Ange-Herménégilde Doublon summoned David Séchard before the Tribunal of Commerce in Angoulême for the sum-total of four thousand and eighteen francs eighty-five centimes, the amount of the three bills and expenses already incurred. On the morning of the very day when Doublon served the writ upon Eve, requiring her to pay a sum so enormous in her eyes, there came a letter like a thunderbolt from Métivier:—

*To Monsieur Séchard Junior, Printer, Angoulême.*

“SIR,—Your brother-in-law M. Chardon is so shamelessly dishonest, that he declares his furniture to be the property of an actress with whom he is living. You ought to have informed me candidly of these circumstances, and not have allowed me to go to useless expense over law proceedings. I have received no answer to my letter of the 10th of May last. You must not, therefore, take it amiss if I ask for immediate repayment of the three bills and the expenses to which I have been put.—Yours, etc.,

“MÉTIVIER.”

Eve had heard nothing during these months, and supposed, in her ignorance of commercial law, that her brother had made reparation for his sins by meeting the forged bills.

“Be quick, and go at once to Petit-Claud, dear,” she said; “tell him about it, and ask his advice.”

David hurried to his schoolfellow’s office.

“When you came to tell me of your appointment and of-

ferred me your services, I did not think that I should need them so soon," he said.

Petit-Claud studied the fine face of this man who sat opposite him in the office chair, and scarcely listened to the details of the case, for he knew more of them already than the speaker. As soon as he saw Séchard's anxiety, he said to himself, "The trick has succeeded."

This kind of comedy is often played in an attorney's office. "Why are the Cointets persecuting him?" Petit-Claud wondered within himself, for the attorney can use his wit to read his clients' thoughts as clearly as the ideas of their opponents, and it is his business to see both sides of the judicial web.

"You want to gain time," he said at last, when Séchard had come to an end. "How long do you want? Something like three or four months?"

"Oh! four months! that would be my salvation," exclaimed David. Petit-Claud appeared to him as an angel.

"Very well. No one shall lay hands on any of your furniture, and no one shall arrest you for four months—But it will cost you a good deal," said Petit-Claud.

"Eh! what does that matter to me?" cried Séchard.

"You are expecting some money to come in; but are you sure of it?" asked Petit-Claud, astonished at the way in which his client walked into the toils.

"In three months' time I shall have plenty of money," said the inventor, with an inventor's hopeful confidence.

"Your father is still above ground," suggested Petit-Claud; "he is in no hurry to leave his vines."

"Do you think that I am counting on my father's death?" returned David. "I am on the track of a trade secret, the secret of making a sheet of paper as strong as Dutch paper, without a thread of cotton in it, and at a cost of fifty per cent. less than cotton pulp."

"There is a fortune in that!" exclaimed Petit-Claud. He knew now what the tall Cointet meant.

"A large fortune, my friend, for in ten years' time the demand for paper will be ten times larger than it is to-day. Journalism will be the craze of our day."

“Nobody knows your secret?”

“Nobody except my wife.”

“You have not told anyone what you mean to do—the Cointets, for example?”

“I did say something about it, but in general terms, I think.”

A sudden spark of generosity flashed through Petit-Claud's rancorous soul; he tried to reconcile Séchard's interests with the Cointets' projects and his own.

“Listen, David, we are old schoolfellows, you and I; I will fight your case; but understand this clearly—the defense, in the teeth of the law, will cost you five or six thousand francs! Do not compromise your prospects. I think you will be compelled to share the profits of your invention with some one of our paper manufacturers. Let us see now. You will think twice before you buy or build a paper-mill; and there is the cost of the patent besides. All this means time, and money too. The servers of writs will be down upon you too soon perhaps, although we are going to give them the slip——”

“I have my secret,” said David, with the simplicity of the man of books.

“Well and good, your secret will be your plank of safety,” said Petit-Claud; his first loyal intention of avoiding a lawsuit by a compromise was frustrated. “I do not wish to know it; but mind this that I tell you. Work in the bowels of the earth if you can, so that no one may watch you and gain a hint from your ways of working, or your plank will be stolen from under your feet. An inventor and a simpleton often live in the same skin. Your mind runs so much on your secrets that you cannot think of everything. People will begin to have their suspicions at last, and the place is full of paper manufacturers. So many manufacturers, so many enemies for you! You are like a beaver with the hunters about you; do not give them your skin——”

“Thank you, dear fellow, I have told myself all this,” exclaimed Séchard, “but I am obliged to you for showing so much concern for me and for your forethought. It does

not really matter to me myself. An income of twelve hundred francs would be enough for me, and my father ought by rights to leave me three times as much some day. Love and thought make up my life—a divine life. I am working for Lucien's sake and for my wife's."

"Come, give me this power of attorney, and think of nothing but your discovery. If there should be any danger of arrest, I will let you know in time, for we must think of all possibilities. And let me tell you again to allow no one of whom you are not as sure as you are of yourself to come into your place."

"Cérizet did not care to continue the lease of the plant and premises, hence our little money difficulties. We have no one at home now but Marion and Kolb, an Alsacien as trusty as a dog, and my wife and her mother——"

"One word," said Petit-Claud, "don't trust that dog——"

"You do not know him," exclaimed David; "he is like a second self."

"May I try him?"

"Yes," said Séchard.

"There, good-by, but send Mme. Séchard to me; I must have a power of attorney from your wife. And bear in mind, my friend, that there is a fire burning in your affairs," said Petit-Claud, by way of warning of all the troubles gathering in the law courts to burst upon David's head.

"Here am I with one foot in Burgundy and the other in Champagne," he added to himself as he closed the office door on David.

Harassed by money difficulties, beset with fears for his wife's health, stung to the quick by Lucien's disgrace, David had worked on at his problem. He had been trying to find a single process to replace the various operations of pounding and maceration to which all flax or cotton or rags, any vegetable fiber in fact, must be subjected, and as he went to Petit-Claud's office, he abstractedly chewed a bit of nettle stalk that had been steeping in water. On his way home, tolerably satisfied with his interview, he felt a little pellet

sticking between his teeth. He laid it on his hand, flattened it out, and saw that the pulp was far superior to any previous result. The want of cohesion is the great drawback of all vegetable fiber; straw, for instance, yields a very brittle paper, which may almost be called metallic and resonant. These chances only befall bold inquirers into Nature's methods!

"Now," said he to himself, "I must contrive to do by machinery and some chemical agency the thing that I myself have done unconsciously."

When his wife saw him, his face was radiant with belief in victory. There were traces of tears in Eve's face.

"Oh! my darling, do not trouble yourself; Petit-Claud will guarantee that we shall not be molested for several months to come. There will be a good deal of expense over it; but, as Petit-Claud said when he came to the door with me, 'A Frenchman has a right to keep his creditors waiting, provided he repays them capital, interest, and costs.'—Very well, then, we shall do that——"

"And live meanwhile?" asked poor Eve, who thought of everything.

"Ah! that is true," said David, carrying his hand to his ear after the unaccountable fashion of most perplexed mortals.

"Mother will look after little Lucien, and I can go back to work again," said she.

"Eve! oh, my Eve!" cried David, holding his wife closely to him.—"At Saintes, not very far from here, in the sixteenth century, there lived one of the very greatest of Frenchmen, for he was not merely the inventor of glaze, he was the glorious precursor of Buffon and Cuvier besides; he was the first geologist, good simple soul that he was. Bernard Palissy endured the martyrdom appointed for all seekers into secrets, but his wife and children and all his neighbors were against him. His wife used to sell his tools; nobody understood him, he wandered about the countryside, he was hunted down, they jeered at him. But I—am loved——"

"Dearly loved!" said Eve, with the quiet serenity of the love that is sure of itself.

“And so may well endure all that poor Bernard Palissy suffered—Bernard Palissy, the discoverer of Écouen ware, the Huguenot excepted by Charles IX. on the day of Saint-Bartholomew. He lived to be rich and honored in his old age, and lectured on the ‘Science of Earths,’ as he called it, in the face of Europe.”

“So long as my fingers can hold an iron, you shall want for nothing,” cried the poor wife, in tones that told of the deepest devotion. “When I was Mme. Prieur’s forewoman I had a friend among the girls, Basine Clerget, a cousin of Postel’s, a very good child; well, Basine told me the other day when she brought back the linen, that she was taking Mme. Prieur’s business; I will work for her.”

“Ah! you shall not work there for long,” said David; “I have found out——”

Eve, watching his face, saw the sublime belief in success which sustains the inventor, the belief that gives him courage to go forth into the virgin forests of the country of Discovery; and, for the first time in her life, she answered that confident look with a half-sad smile. David bent his head mournfully.

“Oh! my dear! I am not laughing! I did not doubt! It was not a sneer!” cried Eve on her knees before her husband. “But I see plainly now that you were right to tell me nothing about your experiments and your hopes. Ah! yes, dear, an inventor should endure the long painful travail of a great idea alone, he should not utter a word of it even to his wife. . . . A woman is a woman still. This Eve of yours could not help smiling when she heard you say, ‘I have found out,’ for the seventeenth time this month.”

David burst out laughing so heartily at his own expense that Eve caught his hand in hers and kissed it reverently. It was a delicious moment for them both, one of those roses of love and tenderness that grow beside the desert paths of the bitterest poverty, nay, at times in yet darker depths.

As the storm of misfortune grew, Eve’s courage redoubled; the greatness of her husband’s nature, his inventor’s simplicity, the tears that now and again she saw in the eyes of this dreamer of dreams with the tender heart,

—all these things aroused in her an unsuspected energy of resistance. Once again she tried the plan that had succeeded so well already. She wrote to M. Métivier, reminding him that the printing office was for sale, offered to pay him out of the proceeds, and begged him not to ruin David with needless costs. Métivier received the heroic letter, and shammed dead. His head-clerk replied that in the absence of M. Métivier he could not take it upon himself to stay proceedings, for his employer had made it a rule to let the law take its course. Eve wrote again, offering this time to renew the bills and pay all the costs hitherto incurred. To this the clerk consented, provided that Séchard senior guaranteed payment. So Eve walked over to Marsac, taking Kolb and her mother with her. She braved the old vine-dresser, and so charming was she, that the old man's face relaxed, and the puckers smoothed out at the sight of her; but when, with inward quakings, she came to speak of a guarantee, she beheld a sudden and complete change of the tittle-ographic countenance.

“If I allowed my son to put his hand to the lips of my cash box whenever he had a mind, he would plunge it deep into the vitals, he would take all I have!” cried old Séchard. “That is the way with children; they eat up their parents’ purse. What did I do myself, eh? I never cost my parents a farthing. Your printing office is standing idle. The rats and the mice do all the printing that is done in it. . . . You have a pretty face; I am very fond of you; you are a careful, hard-working woman; but that son of mine!—Do you know what David is? I’ll tell you—he is a scholar that will never do a stroke of work! If I had reared him, as I was reared myself, without knowing his letters, and if I had made a ‘bear’ of him, like his father before him, he would have money saved and put out at interest by now. . . . Oh! he is my cross, that fellow is, look you! And, unluckily, he is all the family I have, for there is never like to be a later edition. And then he makes you unhappy—”

Eve protested with a vehement gesture of denial.

“Yes, he does,” affirmed old Séchard; “you had to find a wet nurse for the child. Come, come, I know all about it,

you are in the county court, and the whole town is talking about you. I was only a 'bear,' I have no book learning, I was not foreman at the Didots', the first printers in the world; but yet I never set eyes on a bit of stamped paper. Do you know what I say to myself as I go to and fro among my vines, looking after them and getting in my vintage, and doing my bits of business?—I say to myself, 'You are taking a lot of trouble, poor old chap; working to pile one silver crown on another, you will leave a fine property behind you, and the bailiffs and the lawyers will get it all; . . . or else it will go in nonsensical notions and crotchets.'—Look you here, child; you are the mother of yonder little lad; it seemed to me as I held him at the font with Mme. Chardon that I could see his old grandfather's copper nose on his face; very well, think less of Séchard and more of that little rascal. I can trust no one but you; you will prevent him from squandering my property—my poor property."

"But, dear papa Séchard, your son will be a credit to you, you will see; he will make money and be a rich man one of these days, and wear the Cross of the Legion of Honor at his button-hole."

"What is he going to do to get it?"

"You will see. But meanwhile, would a thousand crowns ruin you? A thousand crowns would put an end to the proceedings. Well, if you cannot trust him, lend the money to me; I will pay it back; you could make it a charge on my portion, on my earnings——"

"Then has someone brought David into a court of law?" cried the vinedresser, amazed to find that the gossip was really true. "See what comes of knowing how to write your name! And how about my rent! Oh! little girl, I must go to Angoulême at once and ask Cachan's advice, and see that I am straight. You did right well to come over. Forewarned is forearmed."

After two hours of argument Eve was fain to go, defeated by the unanswerable *dictum*, "Women never understand business." She had come with a faint hope, she went back again almost heartbroken, and reached home just in



time to receive notice of judgment; Séchard must pay Méti-  
vier in full. The appearance of a bailiff at a house door  
is an event in a country town, and Doublon had come far  
too often of late. The whole neighborhood was talking  
about the Séchards. Eve dared not leave her house; she  
dreaded to hear the whispers as she passed.

"Oh! my brother, my brother!" cried poor Eve, as she  
hurried into the passage and up the stairs, "I can never  
forgive you, unless it was——"

"Alas! it was that, or suicide," said David, who had fol-  
lowed her.

"Let us say no more about it," she said quietly. "The  
woman who dragged him down into the depths of Paris has  
much to answer for; and your father, my David, is quite in-  
exorable! Let us bear it in silence."

A discreet rapping at the door cut short some word of  
love on David's lips. Marion appeared, towing the big,  
burly Kolb after her across the outer room.

"Madame," said Marion, "we have known, Kolb and I,  
that you and the master were very much put out; and as  
we have eleven hundred francs of savings between us, we  
thought we could not do better than put them in the mis-  
tress's hands——"

"Die misdress," echoed Kolb fervently.

"Kolb," cried David, "you and I will never part. Pay  
a thousand francs on account to Maître Cachan, and take  
a receipt for it; we will keep the rest. And, Kolb, no power  
on earth must extract a word from you as to my work, or  
my absences from home, or the things you may see me bring  
back; and if I send you to look for plants for me, you  
know, no human being must set eyes on you. They will try  
to corrupt you, my good Kolb; they will offer you thou-  
sands, perhaps tens of thousands of francs, to tell——"

"Dey may offer me millions," cried Kolb, "but not ein  
vort from me shall dey traw. Haf I not peen in der army,  
and know my orders?"

"Well, you are warned. March, and ask M. Petit-Claud  
to go with you as witness."

"Yes," said the Alsacien. "Some tay I hope to be rich

enough to dust der chacket of dat man of law. I don't like his gountenance."

"Kolb is a good man, madame," said big Marion; "he is as strong as a Turk, and as meek as a lamb. Just the one that would make a woman happy. It was his notion, too, to invest our savings this way—'safings,' as he calls them. Poor man, if he doesn't speak right, he thinks right, and I understand him all the same. He has a notion of working for somebody else, so as to save us his keep——"

"Surely we shall be rich, if it is only to repay these good folk," said David, looking at his wife.

Eve thought it quite simple; it was no surprise to her to find other natures on a level with her own. The dullest—nay, the most indifferent—observer could have seen all the beauty of her nature in her way of receiving this service.

"You will be rich some day, dear master," said Marion; "your bread is ready baked. Your father has just bought another farm, he is putting by money for you; that he is."

And under the circumstances, did not Marion show an exquisite delicacy of feeling by belittling, as it were, her kindness in this way?

French procedure, like all things human, has its defects; nevertheless, the sword of justice, being a two-edged weapon, is excellently adapted alike for attack or defense. Procedure, moreover, has its amusing side; for when opposed lawyers arrive at an understanding, as they well may do, without exchanging a word, through their manner of conducting their case, a suit becomes a kind of war waged on the lines laid down by the first Marshal Biron, who, at the siege of Rouen, it may be remembered, received his son's project for taking the city in two days with the remark, "You must be in a great hurry to go and plant cabbages!" Let two commanders-in-chief spare their troops as much as possible, let them imitate the Austrian generals who give the men time to eat their soup though they fail to effect a juncture, and escape reprimand from the Aulic Council; let them avoid all decisive measures, and they shall carry on a war for ever. Maître Cachan, Petit-Claud, and Doublon did better than the Austrian generals; they took for their

example Quintus Fabius Cunctator—the Austrian of antiquity.

Petit-Claud, malignant as a mule, was not long in finding out all the advantages of his position. No sooner had Boniface Cointet guaranteed his costs than he vowed to lead Cachan a dance, and to dazzle the paper manufacturer with a brilliant display of genius in the creation of items to be charged to Métivier. Unluckily for the fame of the young forensic Figaro, the writer of this history is obliged to pass over the scene of his exploits in as great a hurry as if he trod on burning coals; but a single bill of costs, in the shape of the specimen sent from Paris, will no doubt suffice for the student of contemporary manners. Let us follow the example set us by the Bulletins of the Grande Armée, and give a summary of Petit-Claud's valiant feats and exploits in the province of pure law; they will be the better appreciated for concise treatment.

David Séchard was summoned before the Tribunal of Commerce at Angoulême for the 3rd of July, made default, and notice of judgment was served on the 8th. On the 10th Doublon obtained an execution warrant, and attempted to put in an execution on the 12th. On this Petit-Claud applied for an interpleader summons, and served notice on Métivier for that day fortnight. Métivier made application for a hearing without delay, and on the 19th Séchard's application was dismissed. Hard upon this followed notice of judgment, authorizing the issue of an execution warrant on the 22nd, a warrant of arrest on the 23rd, and bailiff's inventory previous to the execution on the 24th. Métivier, Doublon, Cachan & Company were proceeding at this furious pace, when Petit-Claud suddenly pulled them up, and stayed execution by lodging notice of appeal to the Court-Royal. Notice of appeal, duly reiterated on the 25th of July, drew Métivier off to Poitiers.

“Come!” said Petit-Claud to himself, “there we are likely to stop for some time to come.”

No sooner was the storm passed over to Poitiers, and an attorney practicing in the Court-Royal instructed to defend the case, than Petit-Claud, a champion facing both ways,

made application in Mme. Séchard's name for the immediate separation of her estate from her husband's; using "all diligence" (in legal language) to such purpose, that he obtained an order from the court on the 28th, and inserted notice at once in the *Charente Courier*. Now David the lover had settled ten thousand francs upon his wife in the marriage contract, making over to her as security the fixtures of the printing office and the household furniture; and Petit-Claud therefore constituted Mme. Séchard her husband's creditor for that small amount, drawing up a statement of her claims on the estate in the presence of a notary on the 1st of August.

While Petit-Claud was busy securing the household property of his clients, he gained the day at Poitiers on the point of law on which the demurrer and appeal were based. He held that, as the Court of the Seine had ordered the plaintiff to pay costs of proceedings in the Paris commercial court, David was so much the less liable for expenses of litigation incurred upon Lucien's account. The Court-Royal took this view of the case, and judgment was entered accordingly. David Séchard was ordered to pay the amount in dispute in the Angoulême Court, less the law expenses incurred in Paris; these Métivier must pay, and each side must bear their own costs in the appeal to the Court-Royal.

David Séchard was duly notified of the result on the 17th of August. On the 18th the judgment took the practical shape of an order to pay capital, interest, and costs, followed up by notice of an execution for the morrow. Upon this Petit-Claud intervened and put in a claim for the furniture as the wife's property duly separated from her husband's; and what was more, Petit-Claud produced Séchard senior upon the scene of action. The old vinegrower had become his client on this wise. He came to Angoulême on the day after Eve's visit, and went to Maître Cachan for advice. His son owed him arrears of rent; how could he come by his rent in the scrimmage in which his son was engaged?

"I am engaged by the other side," pronounced Cachan, "and I cannot appear for the father when I am suing the

son; but go to Petit-Claud, he is very clever, he may perhaps do even better for you than I should do."

Cachan and Petit-Claud met at the Court.

"I have sent you Séchard senior," said Cachan; "take the case for me in exchange." Lawyers do each other services of this kind in country towns as well as in Paris.

The day after Séchard senior gave Petit-Claud his confidence, the tall Cointet paid a visit to his confederate.

"Try to give old Séchard a lesson," he said. "He is the kind of man that will never forgive his son for costing him a thousand francs or so; the outlay will dry up any generous thoughts in his mind, if he ever has any."

"Go back to your vines," said Petit-Claud to his new client. "Your son is not very well off; do not eat him out of house and home. I will send for you when the time comes."

On behalf of Séchard senior, therefore, Petit-Claud claimed that the presses, being fixtures, were so much the more to be regarded as tools and implements of trade, and the less liable to seizure, in that the house had been a printing office since the reign of Louis XIV. Cachan, on Métivier's account, waxed indignant at this. In Paris Lucien's furniture had belonged to Coralie, and here again in Angoulême David's goods and chattels all belonged to his wife or his father; pretty things were said in court. Father and son were summoned; such claims could not be allowed to stand.

"We mean to unmask the frauds intrenched behind bad faith of the most formidable kind; here is the defense of dishonesty bristling with the plainest and most innocent articles of the Code, and why?—to avoid repayment of three thousand francs; obtained how?—from poor Métivier's cash box! And yet there are those who dare to say a word against bill-discounters! What times we live in! . . . Now, I put it to you—what is this but taking your neighbor's money? . . . You will not surely sanction a claim which would bring immorality to the very core of justice!"

Cachan's eloquence produced an effect on the court. A divided judgment was given in favor of Mme. Séchard, the

house furniture being held to be her property; and against Séchard senior, who was ordered to pay costs—four hundred and thirty-four francs, sixty-five centimes.

“It is kind of old Séchard,” laughed the lawyers; “he would have a finger in the pie, so let him pay!”

Notice of judgment was given on the 26th of August; the presses and plant could be seized on the 28th. Placards were posted. Application was made for an order empowering them to sell on the spot. Announcements of the sale appeared in the papers, and Doublon flattered himself that the inventory should be verified and the auction take place on the 2nd of September.

By this time David Séchard owed Métivier five thousand two hundred and seventy-five francs, twenty-five centimes (to say nothing of interest), by formal judgment confirmed by appeal, the bill of costs having been duly taxed. Likewise to Petit-Claud he owed twelve hundred francs, exclusive of the fees, which were left to David's generosity with the generous confidence displayed by the hackney coachman who has driven you so quickly over the road on which you desire to go.

Mme. Séchard owed Petit-Claud something like three hundred and fifty francs and fees besides; and of old Séchard, beside four hundred and thirty-four francs, sixty-five centimes, the little attorney demanded a hundred crowns by way of fee. Altogether, the Séchard family owed about ten thousand francs. This is what is called “putting fire into the bed straw.”

Apart from the utility of these documents to other nations who thus may behold the battery of French law in action, the French legislator ought to know the lengths to which the abuse of procedure may be carried, always supposing that the said legislator can find time for reading. Surely some sort of regulation might be devised, some way of forbidding lawyers to carry on a case until the sum in dispute is more than eaten up in costs? Is there not something ludicrous in the idea of submitting a square yard of soil and an estate of thousands of acres to the same legal formalities? These bare outlines of the history of the vari-

ous stages of procedure should open the eyes of Frenchmen to the meaning of the words "legal formalities, justice, and costs," little as the immense majority of the nation know about them.

Five thousand pounds' weight of type in the printing office were worth two thousand francs as old metal; the three presses were valued at six hundred francs; the rest of the plant would fetch the price of old iron and firewood. The household furniture would have brought in a thousand francs at most. The whole personal property of Séchard junior therefore represented the sum of four thousand francs; and Cachan and Petit-Claud made claims for seven thousand francs in costs already incurred, to say nothing of expenses to come, for the blossom gave promise of fine fruits enough, as the reader will shortly see. Surely the lawyers of France and Navarre, nay, even of Normandy herself, will not refuse Petit-Claud his meed of admiration and respect? Surely, too, kind hearts will give Marion and Kolb a tear of sympathy?

All through the war Kolb sat on a chair in the doorway, acting as watch-dog, when David had nothing else for him to do. It was Kolb who received all the notifications, and a clerk of Petit-Claud's kept watch over Kolb. No sooner were the placards announcing the auction put up on the premises than Kolb tore them down; he hurried round the town after the bill-poster, tearing the placards from the walls.

"Ah, scoundrels!" he cried, "to dorment so goot a man; und they calls it chustice!"

Marion made half a franc a day by working half time in a paper-mill as a machine tender, and her wages contributed to the support of the household. Mme. Chardon went back uncomplainingly to her old occupation, sitting up night after night, and bringing home her wages at the end of the week. Poor Mme. Chardon! Twice already she had made a nine days' prayer for those she loved, wondering that God should be deaf to her petitions, and blind to the light of the candles on His altar.

On the 2nd of September, a letter came from Lucien, the

first since the letter of the winter, which David had kept from his wife's knowledge—the announcement of the three bills which bore David's signature. This time Lucien wrote to Eve.

“The third since he left us!” she said. Poor sister, she was afraid to open the envelope that covered the fatal sheet.

She was feeding the little one when the post came in; they could not afford a wet-nurse now, and the child was being brought up by hand. Her state of mind may be imagined, and David's also, when he had been roused to read the letter, for David had been at work all night, and only lay down at daybreak.

*Lucien to Eve.*

“PARIS, August 29th.

“MY DEAR SISTER,—Two days ago, at five o'clock in the morning, one of God's noblest creatures breathed her last in my arms; she was the one woman on earth capable of loving me as you and mother and David love me, giving me beside that unselfish affection, something that neither mother nor sister can give—the utmost bliss of love. Poor Coralie, after giving up everything for my sake, may perhaps have died for me—for me, who this moment have not the wherewithal to bury her. She could have solaced my life; you, and you alone, my dear good angels, can console me for her death. God has forgiven her, I think, the innocent girl, for she died like a Christian. Oh! this Paris! Eve, Paris is the glory and the shame of France. Many illusions I have lost here already, and I have others yet to lose, when I begin to beg for the little money needed before I can lay the body of my angel in consecrated earth.

“Your unhappy brother,

“LUCIEN.

“P. S.—I must have given you much trouble by my heedlessness; some day you will know all, and you will forgive me. You must be quite easy now; a worthy merchant, a M.



Camusot, to whom I once caused cruel pangs, promised to arrange everything, seeing that Coralie and I were so much distressed."

"The sheet is still moist with his tears," said Eve, looking at the letter with a heart so full of pity that something of the old love for Lucien shone in her eyes.

"Poor fellow, he must have suffered cruelly if he has been loved as he says!" exclaimed Eve's husband, happy in his love; and these two forgot all their own troubles at this cry of a supreme sorrow. Just at that moment Marion rushed in.

"Madame," she panted, "here they are! Here they are!"

"Who is here?"

"Doublon and his men, bad luck to them! Kolb will not let them come in; they have come to sell us up."

"No, no, they are not going to sell you up, never fear," cried a voice in the next room, and Petit-Claud appeared upon the scene. "I have just lodged notice of appeal. We ought not to sit down under a judgment that attaches a stigma of bad faith to us. I did not think it worth while to fight the case here. I let Cachan talk to gain time for you; I am sure of gaining the day at Poitiers——"

"But how much will it cost to win the day?" asked Mme. Séchard.

"Fees if you win, one thousand francs if we lose our case."

"Oh, dear!" cried poor Eve; "why, the remedy is worse than the disease!"

Petit-Claud was not a little confused at this cry of innocence enlightened by the progress of the flames of litigation. It struck him too that Eve was a very beautiful woman. In the middle of the discussion old Séchard arrived, summoned by Petit-Claud. The old man's presence in the chamber where his little grandson in the cradle lay smiling at misfortune completed the scene. The young attorney at once addressed the newcomer with—

"You owe me seven hundred francs for the interpleader,

Papa Séchard; but you can charge the amount to your son in addition to the arrears of rent."

The vinedresser felt the sting of the sarcasm conveyed by Petit-Claud's tone and manner.

"It would have cost you less to give security for the debt at first," said Eve, leaving the cradle to greet her father-in-law with a kiss.

David, quite overcome by the sight of the crowd outside the house (for Kolb's resistance to Doublon's men had collected a knot of people), could only hold out a hand to his father; he did not say a word.

"And how, pray, do I come to owe you seven hundred francs?" the old man asked, looking at Petit-Claud.

"Why, in the first place, I am engaged by you. Your rent is in question; so, as far as I am concerned, you and your debtor are one and the same person. If your son does not pay my costs in the case, you must pay them yourself.—But this is nothing. In a few hours David will be put in prison; will you allow him to go?"

"What does he owe?"

"Something like five or six thousand francs, besides the amounts owing to you and to his wife."

The speech aroused all the old man's suspicions at once. He looked round the little blue-and-white bedroom at the touching scene before his eyes—at a beautiful woman weeping over a cradle, at David bowed down by anxieties, and then again at the lawyer. This was a trap set for him by that lawyer; perhaps they wanted to work upon his paternal feelings, to get money out of him? That was what it all meant. He took alarm. He went over to the cradle and fondled the child, who held out both little arms to him. No heir to an English peerage could be more tenderly cared for than the little one in that house of trouble; his little embroidered cap was lined with pale pink.

• "Eh! let David get out of it as best he may. I am thinking of this child here," cried the old grandfather, "and the child's mother will approve of that. David that knows so much must know how to pay his debts."

"Now I will just put your meaning into plain language,"

said Petit-Claud ironically. "Look here, Papa Séchard, you are jealous of your son. Hear the truth; you put David into his present position by selling the business to him for three times its value. You ruined him to make an extortionate bargain! Yes, don't you shake your head; you sold the newspaper to the Cointets and pocketed all the proceeds, and that was as much as the whole business was worth. You bear David a grudge, not merely because you have plundered him, but because, also, your own son is a man far above yourself. You profess to be prodigiously fond of your grandson, to cloak your want of feeling for your son and his wife, because you ought to pay down money *hic et nunc* for them, while you need only show a posthumous affection for your grandson. You pretend to be fond of the little fellow, lest you should be taxed with your want of feeling for your own flesh and blood. That is the bottom of it, Papa Séchard."

"Did you fetch me over to hear this?" asked the old man, glowering at his lawyer, his daughter-in-law, and his son in turn.

"Monsieur!" protested poor Eve, turning to Petit-Claud, "have you vowed to ruin us? My husband has never uttered a word against his father." (Here the old man looked cunningly at her.) "David has told me scores of times that you loved him in your way," she added, looking at her father-in-law, and understanding his suspicions.

Petit-Claud was only following out the tall Cointet's instructions. He was widening the breach between the father and son, lest Séchard senior should extricate David from his intolerable position. "The day that David Séchard goes to prison shall be the day of your introduction to Mme. de Senonches," the "tall Cointet" had said no longer ago than yesterday.

Mme. Séchard, with the quick insight of love, had divined Petit-Claud's mercenary hostility, even as she had once before felt instinctively that Cérizet was a traitor. As for David, his astonishment may be imagined; he could not understand how Petit-Claud came to know so much of his father's nature and his own history. Upright and honorable

as he was, he did not dream of the relations between his lawyer and the Cointets; nor, for that matter, did he know that the Cointets were at work behind Métivier. Meanwhile old Séchard took his son's silence as an insult, and Petit-Claud, taking advantage of his client's bewilderment, beat a retreat.

"Good-by, my dear David; you have had warning, notice of appeal doesn't invalidate the warrant for arrest. It is the only course left open to your creditors, and it will not be long before they take it. So, go away at once— Or, rather, if you will take my advice, go to the Cointets and see them about it. They have capital. If your invention is perfected and answers the purpose, go into partnership with them. After all, they are very good fellows——"

"Your invention?" broke in old Séchard.

"Why, do you suppose that your son is fool enough to let his business slip away from him without thinking of something else?" exclaimed the attorney. "He is on the brink of the discovery of a way of making paper at a cost of three francs per ream, instead of ten, he tells me."

"One more dodge for taking me in! You are all as thick as thieves in a fair. If David has found out such a plan, he has no need of me—he is a millionaire! Good-by, my dears, and a good-day to you all," and the old man disappeared down the staircase.

"Find some way of hiding yourself," was Petit-Claud's parting word to David, and with that he hurried out to exasperate old Séchard still further. He found the vine-grower growling to himself outside in the Place du Mûrier, went with him as far as L'Houmeau, and there left him with a threat of putting in an execution for the costs due to him unless they were paid before the week was out.

"I will pay you if you will show me how to disinherit my son without injuring my daughter-in-law or the boy," said old Séchard, and they parted forthwith.

"How well the 'tall Cointet' knows the folk he is dealing with! It is just as he said; those seven hundred francs will preve the father from paying seven thousand," the

little lawyer thought within himself as he climbed the path to Angoulême. "Still, that old slyboots of a paper-maker must not overreach us; it is time to ask him for something beside promises."

"Well, David dear, what do you mean to do?" asked Eve, when the lawyer had followed her father-in-law.

"Marion, put your biggest pot on the fire!" called David; "I have my secret fast."

At this Eve put on her bonnet and shawl and walking shoes with feverish haste.

"Kolb, my friend, get ready to go out," she said, "and come with me; if there is any way out of this hell, I must find it."

When Eve had gone out, Marion spoke to David. "Do be sensible, sir," she said, "or the mistress will fret herself to death. Make some money to pay off your debts, and then you can try to find treasure at your ease——"

"Don't talk, Marion," said David; "I am going to overcome my last difficulty, and then I can apply for the patent and the improvement on the patent at the same time."

This "improvement on the patent" is the curse of the French patentee. A man may spend ten years of his life working out some obscure industrial problem; and when he has invented some piece of machinery, or made a discovery of some kind, he takes out a patent and imagines that he has a right to his own invention; then there comes a competitor; and unless the first inventor has foreseen all possible contingencies, the second comer makes an "improvement on the patent" with a screw or a nut, and takes the whole thing out of his hands. The discovery of a cheap material for paper pulp, therefore, is by no means the conclusion of the whole matter. David Séchard was anxiously looking ahead on all sides lest the fortune sought in the teeth of such difficulties should be snatched out of his hands at the last. Dutch paper, as flax paper is still called, though it is no longer made in Holland, is slightly sized; but every sheet is sized separately by hand, and this increases the cost of pro-

duction. If it were possible to discover some way of sizing the paper in the pulping trough, with some inexpensive glue, like that in use to-day (though even now it is not quite perfect), there would be no "improvement on the patent" to fear. For the past month, accordingly, David had been making experiments in sizing pulp. He had two discoveries before him.

Eve went to see her mother. Fortunately, it so happened that Mme. Chardon was nursing the deputy-magistrate's wife, who had just given the Milauds of Nevers an heir presumptive; and Eve, in her distrust of all attorneys and notaries, took into her head to apply for advice to the legal guardian of widows and orphans. She wanted to know if she could relieve David from his embarrassments by taking them upon herself and selling her claims upon the estate, and besides, she had some hope of discovering the truth as to Petit-Claud's unaccountable conduct. The official, struck with Mme. Séchard's beauty, received her not only with the respect due to a woman, but with a sort of courtesy to which Eve was not accustomed. She saw in the magistrate's face an expression which, since her marriage, she had seen in no eyes but Kolb's; and for a beautiful woman like Eve, this expression is the criterion by which men are judged. When passion, or self-interest, or age dims that spark of unquestioning fealty that gleams in a young man's eyes, a woman feels a certain mistrust of him, and begins to observe him critically. The Cointets, Cérizet, and Petit-Claud—all the men whom Eve felt instinctively to be her enemies—had turned hard, indifferent eyes on her; with the deputy-magistrate, therefore, she felt at ease, although, in spite of his kindly courtesy, he swept all her hopes away by his first words.

"It is not certain, madame, that the Court-Royal will reverse the judgment of the court restricting your lien on your husband's property, for payment of moneys due to you by the terms of your marriage-contract, to household goods and chattels. Your privilege ought not to be used to defraud the other creditors. But in any case, you will be allowed to take your share of the proceeds with the other

creditors, and your father-in-law likewise, as a privileged creditor, for arrears of rent. When the court has given the order, other points may be raised as to the 'contribution,' as we call it, when a schedule of the debts is drawn up, and the creditors are paid a dividend in proportion to their claims."

"Then M. Petit-Claud is bringing us to bankruptcy," she cried.

"Petit-Claud is carrying out your husband's instructions," said the magistrate; "he is anxious to gain time, so his attorney says. In my opinion, you would perhaps do better to waive the appeal and buy in at the sale the indispensable implements for carrying on the business; you and your father-in-law together might do this, you to the extent of your claim through your marriage-contract, and he for his arrears of rent. But that would be bringing the matter to an end too soon perhaps. The lawyers are making a good thing out of your case."

"But then I should be entirely in M. Séchard's father's hands. I should owe him the hire of the machinery as well as the house-rent; and my husband would still be open to further proceedings from M. Métivier, for M. Métivier would have had almost nothing."

"That is true, madame."

"Very well, then we should be even worse off than we are."

"The arm of the law, madame, is at the creditor's disposal. You have received three thousand francs, and you must of necessity repay the money."

"Oh, sir, can you think that we are capable——" Eve suddenly came to a stop. She saw that her justification might injure her brother.

"Oh! I know quite well that this is an obscure affair, that the debtors on the one side are honest, scrupulous, and even behaving handsomely; and the creditor, on the other, is only a cat's-paw——"

Eve, aghast, looked at him with bewildered eyes.

"You can understand," he continued, with a look full of homely shrewdness, "that we on the bench have plenty of

time to think over all that goes on under our eyes, while the gentlemen in court are arguing with each other."

Eve went home in despair over her useless effort. That evening at seven o'clock, Doublon came with the notification of imprisonment for debt. The proceedings had reached the acute stage.

"After this, I can only go out after nightfall," said David.

Eve and Mme. Chardon burst into tears. To be in hiding was for them a shameful thing. As for Kolb and Marion, they were the more alarmed for David because they had long since made up their minds that there was no guile in their master's nature; so frightened were they on his account, that they came upstairs under pretence of asking whether they could do anything, and found Eve and Mme. Chardon in tears; the three whose life had been so straightforward hitherto were overcome by the thought that David must go into hiding. And how, moreover, could they hope to escape the invisible spies who henceforth would dog every least movement of a man, unluckily so absent-minded?

"Gif montame vill vait ein liddle kvarter hour, she can regonnoiter der enemy's camp," put in Kolb. "You shall see dot I oonderstand mein pizness; for gif I look like ein German, I am ein dru Vrenchman, and, vat is more, I am ver' conning."

"Oh! madame, do let him go," begged Marion. "He is only thinking of saving the master; he hasn't another thought in his head. Kolb is not an Alsacien, he is—eh! well—a regular Newfoundland dog for rescuing folks."

"Go, my good Kolb," said David; "we have still time to do something."

Kolb hurried off to pay a visit to the bailiff; and it so fell out that David's enemies were in Doublon's office, holding a council as to the best way of securing him.

The arrest of a debtor is an unheard-of thing in the country, an abnormal proceeding if ever there was one. Everybody, in the first place, knows everybody else, and creditor and debtor being bound to meet each other daily all their lives long, nobody likes to take this odious course.



When a defaulter—to use the provincial term for a debtor, for they do not mince their words in the provinces wher speaking of this legalized method of helping yourself to another man's goods—when a defaulter plans a failure on a large scale, he takes sanctuary in Paris. Paris is a kind of City of Refuge for provincial bankrupts, an almost impenetrable retreat; the writ of the pursuing bailiff has no force beyond the limits of his jurisdiction, and there are other obstacles rendering it almost invalidating. Wherefore the Paris bailiff is empowered to enter the house of a third party to seize the person of the debtor, while for the bailiff of the provinces the domicile is absolutely inviolable. The law probably makes this exception as to Paris, because there it is the rule for two or more families to live under the same roof; but in the provinces the bailiff who wishes to make forcible entry must have an order from the Justice of the Peace; and so wide a discretion is allowed the Justice of the Peace, that he is practically able to give or withhold assistance to the bailiffs. To the honor of the Justices, it should be said, that they dislike the office, and are by no means anxious to assist blind passion or revenge.

There are, besides, other and no less serious difficulties in the way of arrest for debt—difficulties which tend to temper the severity of legislation, and public opinion not unfrequently makes a dead letter of the law. In great cities there are poor or degraded wretches enough; poverty and vice know no scruples, and consent to play the spy, but in a little country town people know each other too well to earn wages of the bailiff; the meanest creature who should lend himself to dirty work of this kind would be forced to leave the place. In the absence of recognized machinery, therefore, the arrest of a debtor is a problem presenting no small difficulty; it becomes a kind of strife of ingenuity between the bailiff and the debtor, and matter for many pleasant stories in the newspapers.

Cointet the elder did not choose to appear in the affair; but the fat Cointet openly said that he was acting for Métivier, and went to Doublon, taking Cérizet with him. Cérizet was his foreman now, and had promised his co-opera-

tion in return for a thousand-franc note. Doublon could reckon upon two of his understrappers, and thus the Cointets had four bloodhounds already on the victim's track. At the actual time of arrest, Doublon could furthermore count upon the police force, who are bound, if required, to assist a bailiff in the performance of his duty. The two men, Doublon himself, and the visitors were all closeted together in the private office, beyond the public office, on the ground floor.

A tolerably wide-paved lobby, a kind of passage-way, led to the public office. The gilded scutcheons of the court, with the word "Bailiff" printed thereon in large black letters, hung outside on the house wall on either side the door. Both office windows gave upon the street, and were protected by heavy iron bars; but the private office looked into the garden at the back, wherein Doublon, an adorer of Pomona, grew espaliers with marked success. Opposite the office door you beheld the door of the kitchen, and, beyond the kitchen, the staircase that ascended to the first story. The house was situated in a narrow street at the back of the new Law Courts, then in process of construction, and only finished after 1830.—These details are perhaps necessary if Kolb's adventures are to be intelligible to the reader.

It was Kolb's idea to go to the bailiff, to pretend to be willing to betray his master, and in this way to discover the traps which would be laid for David. Kolb told the servant who opened the door that he wanted to speak to M. Doublon on business. The servant was busy washing up her plates and dishes, and not very well pleased at Kolb's interruption; she pushed open the door of the outer office, and bade him wait there till her master was at liberty; then, as he was a stranger to her, she told the master in the private office that "a man" wanted to speak to him. Now, "a man" so invariably means "a peasant," that Doublon said, "Tell him to wait," and Kolb took a seat close to the door of the private office. There were voices talking within.

"Ah, by the by, how do you mean to set about it? For, if we can catch him to-morrow, it will be so much time saved." It was the fat Cointet who spoke.

“Nothing easier; the gaffer has come fairly by his nickname,” said Cérizet.

At the sound of the fat Cointet’s voice Kolb guessed at once that they were talking about his master, especially as the sense of the words began to dawn upon him; but, when he recognized Cérizet’s tones, his astonishment grew more and more.

“Und dat fellow haf eaten his pread!” he thought, horror-stricken.

“We must do it in this way, boys,” said Doublon. “We will post our men, at good long intervals, about the Rue de Beaulieu and the Place du Mûrier in every direction, so that we can follow the gaffer (I like that word) without his knowledge. We will not lose sight of him until he is safe inside the house where he means to lie in hiding (as he thinks); there we will leave him in peace for a while; then some fine day we shall come across him before sunrise or after sunset.”

“But what is he doing now, at this moment? He may be slipping through our fingers,” said the fat Cointet.

“He is in his house,” answered Doublon; “if he left it, I should know. I have one witness posted in the Place du Mûrier, another at the corner of the Law Courts, and another thirty paces from the house. If our man came out, they would whistle; he could not make three paces from his door but I should know it at once from the signal.”

(Bailiffs speak of their understrappers by the police title of “witnesses.”)

Here was better hap than Kolb had expected! He went noiselessly out of the office, and spoke to the maid in the kitchen.

“Meestair Touplon ees engaged for som time to kom,” he said; “I vill kom back early to-morrow morning.”

A sudden idea had struck the Alsacien, and he proceeded to put it into execution. Kolb had served in a cavalry regiment; he hurried off to see a livery stablekeeper, an acquaintance of his, picked out a horse, had it saddled, and rushed back to the Place du Mûrier. He found Madame Eve in the lowest depths of despondency.

“What is it, Kolb?” asked David when the Alsacien’s face looked in upon them, scared but radiant.

“You haf scountrels all around you. De safest way ees to hide de master. Haf montame thought of hiding de master anywheres?”

When Kolb, honest fellow, had explained the whole history of Cérizet’s treachery, of the circle traced about the house, and of the fat Cointet’s interest in the affair, and given the family some inkling of the schemes set on foot by the Cointets against the master,—then David’s real position gradually became fatally clear.

“It is the Cointets’ doing!” cried poor Eve, aghast at the news; “*they* are proceeding against you! that accounts for Métivier’s hardness. . . . They are paper-makers—David! they want your secret!”

“But what can we do to escape them?” exclaimed Mme. Chardon.

“If de misdress had som liddle blace vere the master could pe hidden,” said Kolb; “I bromise to take him dere so dot nopody shall know.”

“Wait till nightfall, and go to Basine Clerget,” said Eve. “I will go now and arrange it all with her. In this case, Basine will be like another self to me.”

“Spies will follow you,” David said at last, recovering some presence of mind. “How can we find a way of communicating with Basine if none of us can go to her?”

“Montame kan go,” said Kolb. “Here ees my scheme—I go out mit der master, ve draws de vischtlers on our drack. Montame kan go to Montemoiselle Clerchet; nopody vill vollow her. I haf a horse; I take de master oop behint; und der teufel is in it if they katches us.”

“Very well; good-by, dear,” said poor Eve, springing to her husband’s arms; “none of us can go to see you, the risk is too great. We must say good-by for the whole time that your imprisonment lasts. We will write to each other; Basine will post your letters, and I will write under cover to her.”

No sooner did David and Kolb come out of the house than they heard a sharp whistle, and were followed to the livery

stable. Once there, Kolb took his master up behind him, with a caution to keep tight hold.

"Veestle away, mine goot vriends! I care not von rap," cried Kolb. "You vill not catch an old trooper," and the old cavalry man clapped both spurs to his horse, and was out into the country and the darkness not merely before the spies could follow, but before they had time to discover the direction that he took.

Eve meanwhile went out on the tolerably ingenious pretext of asking advice of Postel, sat a while enduring the insulting pity that spends itself in words, left the Postel family, and stole away unseen to Basine Clérget, told her troubles, and asked for help and shelter. Basine, for greater safety, had brought Eve into her bedroom, and now she opened the door of a little closet, lighted only by a skylight in such a way that prying eyes could not see into it. The two friends unstoppered the flue which opened into the chimney of the stove in the workroom, where the girls heated their irons. Eve and Basine spread ragged coverlets over the brick floor to deaden any sound that David might make, put in a truckle bed, a stove for his experiments, and a table and chair. Basine promised to bring food in the night; and as no one had occasion to enter her room, David might defy his enemies one and all, or even detectives.

"At last!" Eve said, with her arms about her friend, "at last he is in safety."

Eve went back to Postel to submit a fresh doubt that had occurred to her, she said. She would like the opinion of such an experienced member of the Chamber of Commerce; she so managed that he escorted her home, and listened patiently to his commiseration.

"Would this have happened if you had married me?"—all the little druggist's remarks were pitched in this key.

Then he went home again to find Mme. Postel jealous of Mme. Séchard, and furious with her spouse for his polite attention to that beautiful woman. The apothecary advanced the opinion that little red-haired women were preferable to tall, dark women, who, like fine horses, were always in the stable, he said. He gave proofs of his sincerity,

no doubt, for Mme. Postel was very sweet to him next day.

"We may be easy," Eve said to her mother and Marion, whom she found still "in a taking," in the latter's phrase.

"Oh! they are gone," said Marion, when Eve looked unthinkingly round the room.

One league out of Angoulême on the main road to Paris, Kolb stopped.

"Vere shall we go?"

"To Marsac," said David; "since we are on the way already, I will try once more to soften my father's heart."

"I would rather mount to der assault of a pattery," said Kolb, "your resbected fader haf no heart whatefer."

The ex-pressman had no belief in his son; he judged him from the outside point of view, and waited for results. He had no idea, to begin with, that he had plundered David, nor did he make allowance for the very different circumstances under which they had begun life; he said to himself; "I set him up with a printing-house, just as I found it myself; and he, knowing a thousand times more than I did, cannot keep it going." He was mentally incapable of understanding his son; he laid the blame of failure upon him, and even prided himself, as it were, on his superiority to a far greater intellect than his own, with the thought, "I am securing his bread for him."

Moralists will never succeed in making us comprehend the full extent of the influence of sentiment upon self-interest, an influence every whit as strong as the action of interest upon our sentiments; for every law of our nature works in two ways, and acts and reacts upon us.

David, on his side, understood his father, and in his sublime charity forgave him. Kolb and David reached Marsac at eight o'clock, and suddenly came in upon the old man as he was finishing his dinner, which, by force of circumstances, came very near bedtime.

"I see you because there is no help for it," said old Séchard with a sour smile.

"Und how should you and mein master meet? He soars

in der shkies, and you are always mit your vines! You bay for him, that's vot you are a fader for——”

“Come, Kolb, off with you. Put up the horse at Mme. Courtois's so as to save inconvenience here; fathers are always in the right, remember that.”

Kolb went off, growling like a chidden dog, obedient but protesting; and David proposed to give his father indisputable proof of his discovery, while reserving his secret. He offered to give him an interest in the affair in return for money paid down; a sufficient sum to release him from his present difficulties, with or without a further amount of capital to be employed in developing the invention.

“And how are you going to prove to me that you can make good paper that costs nothing out of nothing, eh?” asked the ex-printer, giving his son a glance, vinous, it may be, but keen, inquisitive, and covetous; a look like a flash of lightning from a sodden cloud; for the old “bear,” faithful to his traditions, never went to bed without a nightcap, consisting of a couple of bottles of excellent old wine, which he “tipped down” of an evening, to use his own expression.

“Nothing simpler,” said David; “I have none of the paper about me, for I came here to be out of Doublon's way; and having come so far, I thought I might as well come to you at Marsac as borrow of a money-lender. I have nothing on me but my clothes. Shut me up somewhere on the premises, so that nobody can come in or see me at work, and——”

“What? you will not let me see you at your work then?” asked the old man, with an ugly look at his son.

“You have given me to understand plainly, father, that in matters of business there is no question of father and son——”

“Ah! you distrust the father that gave you life!”

“No; the other father who took away the means of earning a livelihood.”

“Each for himself, you are right!” said the old man.

“Very good, I will put you in the cellar.”

“I will go down there with Kolb. You must let me have

a large pot for my pulp," said David; then he continued, without noticing the quick look his father gave him,—“and you must find artichoke and asparagus stalks for me, and nettles, and the reeds that you cut by the stream side, and to-morrow morning I will come out of your cellar with some splendid paper.”

“If you can do that,” hiccoughed the “bear,” “I will let you have, perhaps—I will see, that is, if I can let you have—pshaw! twenty-five thousand francs. On condition, mind, that you make as much for me every year.”

“Put me to the proof, I am quite willing,” cried David. “Kolb! take the horse and go to Mansle, quick, buy a large hair sieve for me of a cooper, and some glue of the grocer, and come back again as soon as you can.”

“There! drink,” said old Séchard, putting down a bottle of wine, a loaf, and the cold remains of the dinner. “You will need your strength. I will go and look for your bits of green stuff; green rags you use for your pulp, and a trifle too green, I’m afraid.”

Two hours later, towards eleven o’clock that night, David and Kolb took up their quarters in a little outhouse against the cellar wall; they found the floor paved with runnel tiles, and all the apparatus used in the Angoumois for the manufacture of Cognac brandy.

“Pans and firewood! Why, it is as good as a factory made on purpose!” cried David.

“Very well, good-night,” said old Séchard; “I shall lock you in, and let both the dogs loose; nobody will bring you any paper, I am sure. You show me those sheets to-morrow, and I give you my word I will be your partner, and the business will be straightforward and properly managed.”

David and Kolb, locked into the distillery, spent nearly two hours in macerating the stems, using a couple of logs for mallets. The fire blazed up, the water boiled. About two o’clock in the morning Kolb heard a sound which David was too busy to notice, a kind of deep breath like a suppressed hiccough. Snatching up one of the two lighted dips, he looked round the walls, and beheld old Séchard’s em-purpled countenance filling up a square opening above a door



hitherto hidden by a pile of empty casks in the cellar itself. The cunning old man had brought David and Kolb into his underground distillery by the other door, through which the casks were rolled when full. The inner door had been made so that he could roll his puncheons straight from the cellar into the distillery, instead of taking them round through the yard.

"Aha! thees eies not fair blay, you vant to shvindle your son!" cried the Alsacien. "Do you know vot you do ven you trink ein pottle of vine? You gif goot trink to ein bad scountrel."

"Oh, father!" cried David.

"I came to see if you wanted anything," said old Séchard, half sober by this time.

"Und it was for de inderest vot you take in us dot you brought der liddle ladder!" commented Kolb, as he pushed the casks aside and flung open the door; and there, in fact, on a short step-ladder, the old man stood in his shirt.

"Risking your health!" said David.

"I think I must be walking in my sleep," said old Séchard, coming down in confusion. "Your want of confidence in your father set me dreaming; I dreamed you were making a pact with the Devil to do impossible things."

"Der teufel," said Kolb; "dot is your own bassion for de liddle goldfinches."

"Go back to bed again, father," said David; "lock us in if you will, but you may save yourself the trouble of coming down again. Kolb will mount guard."

At four o'clock in the morning David came out of the distillery; he had been careful to leave no sign of his occupation behind him; but he brought out some thirty sheets of paper that left nothing to be desired in fineness, whiteness, toughness, and strength, all of them bearing by way of water-mark the impress of the uneven hairs of the sieve. The old man took up the samples and put his tongue to them, the lifelong habit of the pressman, who tests papers in this way. He felt it between his thumb and finger, crumpled and creased it, put it through all the trials by which a printer assays the quality of a sample submitted

to him, and when it was found wanting in no respect, he still would not allow that he was beaten.

"We have yet to know how it takes an impression," he said, to avoid praising his son.

"Fonny man!" exclaimed Kolb.

The old man was cool enough now; he cloaked his feigned hesitation with paternal dignity.

"I wish to tell you in fairness, father, that even now it seems to me that the paper costs more than it ought to do; I want to solve the problem of sizing it in the pulping trough. I have just that one improvement to make."

"Oho! so you are trying to trick me!"

"Well, shall I tell you? I can size the pulp as it is, but so far I cannot do it evenly, and the surface is as rough as a burr!"

"Very good, size your pulp in the trough, and you shall have my money."

"Mein master vill nefer see de golor of your money," declared Kolb.

Plainly, the old man meant to punish David for last night's humiliation, for he treated him more than coldly. David sent away Kolb.

"Father," he began, "I have never borne you any grudge for making over the business to me at such an exorbitant valuation; I have seen the father through it all. I have said to myself—'The old man has worked very hard, and he certainly gave me a better bringing up than I had a right to expect; let him enjoy the fruits of his toil in peace, and in his own way.'—I even gave up my mother's money to you. I began encumbered with debt, and bore all the burdens that you put upon me without a murmur. Well, harassed for debts that were not of my making, with no bread in the house, and my feet held to the flames, I have found out the secret. I have struggled on patiently till my strength is exhausted. It is perhaps your duty to help me, but do not give *me* a thought; think of a woman and a little one" (David could not keep back the tears at this); "think of them, and give them help and protection.—Kolb and Marion have given me their savings; will you do less?"

he cried at last, seeing that his father was cold as the impression-stone.

“And that was not enough for you,” said the old man, without the slightest sense of shame; “why, you would waste the wealth of the Indies! Good-night! I am too ignorant to lend a hand in schemes got up on purpose to exploit me. A monkey will never gobble down a bear” (alluding to the workshop nicknames); “I am a vinegrower, I am not a banker. And what is more, look you, business between father and son never turns out well. Stay and eat your dinner here; you shan’t say that you came for nothing.”

There are some deep-hearted natures that can force their own pain down into inner depths unsuspected by those dearest to them; and with them, when anguish forces its way to the surface and is visible, it is only after a mighty upheaval. David’s nature was one of these. Eve had thoroughly understood the noble character of the man. But now that the depths had been stirred, David’s father took the wave of anguish that passed over his son’s features for a child’s trick, an attempt to “get round” his father, and his bitter grief for mortification over the failure of the attempt. Father and son parted in anger.

David and Kolb reached Angoulême on the stroke of midnight. They came back on foot, and stealthily, like burglars. Before one o’clock in the morning David was installed in the impenetrable hiding-place prepared by his wife in Basine Clerget’s house. No one saw him enter it, and the pity that henceforth should shelter David was the most resourceful pity of all—the pity of a work-girl.

Kolb bragged that day that he had saved his master on horseback, and only left him in a carrier’s van well on the way to Limoges. A sufficient provision of raw material had been laid up in Basine’s cellar, and Kolb, Marion, Mme. Séchard, and her mother had no communication with the house.

Two days after the scene at Marsac, old Séchard came hurrying to Angoulême and his daughter-in-law. Covetousness had brought him. There were three clear weeks

ahead before the vintage began, and he thought he would be on the look-out for squalls, to use his own expression. To this end he took up his quarters in one of the attics which he had reserved by the terms of the lease, willfully shutting his eyes to the bareness and want that made his son's home desolate. If they owed him rent, they could well afford to keep him. He ate his food from a tinned iron plate, and made no marvel at it. "I began in the same way," he told his daughter-in-law, when she apologized for the absence of silver spoons.

Marion was obliged to run into debt for necessaries for them all. Kolb was earning a franc for daily wage as a bricklayer's laborer; and at last poor Eve, who, for the sake of her husband and child, had sacrificed her last resources to entertain David's father, saw that she had only ten francs left. She had hoped to the last to soften the old miser's heart by her affectionate respect, and patience, and pretty attentions; but old Séchard was obdurate as ever. When she saw him turn the same cold eyes on her, the same look that the Cointets had given her, and Petit-Claud and Cérizet, she tried to watch and guess old Séchard's intentions. Trouble thrown away! Old Séchard, never sober, never drunk, was inscrutable; intoxication is a double veil. If the old man's tipsiness was sometimes real, it was quite as often feigned for the purpose of extracting David's secret from his wife. Sometimes he coaxed, sometimes he frightened his daughter-in-law.

"I will drink up my property; *I will buy an annuity*," he would threaten when Eve told him that she knew nothing.

The humiliating struggle was wearing her out; she kept silence at last, lest she should show disrespect to her husband's father.

"But, father," she said one day when driven to extremity, "there is a very simple way of finding out everything. Pay David's debts; he will come home, and you can settle it between you."

"Ha! that is what you want to get out of me, is it?" he cried. "It is as well to know!"

But if Séchard had no belief in his son, he had plenty of

faith in the Cointets. He went to consult them, and the Cointets dazzled him of set purpose, telling him that his son's experiments might mean millions of francs.

"If David can prove that he has succeeded, I shall not hesitate to go into partnership with him, and reckon his discovery as half the capital," the tall Cointet told him.

The suspicious old man learned a good deal over nips of brandy with the work-people, and something more by questioning Petit-Claud and feigning stupidity; and at length he felt convinced that the Cointets were the real movers behind Métivier; they were plotting to ruin Séchard's printing establishment, and to lure him (Séchard) on to pay his son's debts by holding out the discovery as a bait. The old man of the people did not suspect that Petit-Claud was in the plot, nor had he any idea of the toils woven to ensnare the great secret. A day came at last when he grew angry and out of patience with the daughter-in-law who would not so much as tell him where David was hiding; he determined to force the laboratory door, for he had discovered that David was wont to make his experiments in the workshop where the rollers were melted down.

He came downstairs very early one morning and set to work upon the lock.

"Hey! papa Séchard, what are you doing there?" Marion called out. (She had risen at daybreak to go to her paper-mill, and now she sprang across to the workshop.)

"I am in my own house, am I not?" said the old man in some confusion.

"Oh, indeed, are you turning thief in your old age? You are not drunk this time either—— I shall go straight to the mistress and tell her."

"Hold your tongue, Marion," said Séchard, drawing two crowns of six francs each from his pocket. "There——"

"I will hold my tongue, but don't you do it again," said Marion, shaking her finger at him, "or all Angoulême shall hear of it."

The old man had scarcely gone out, however, when Marion went up to her mistress.

"Look, madame," she said, "I have had twelve francs out of your father-in-law, and here they are——"

"How did you do it?"

"What was he wanting to do but to take a look at the master's pots and pans and stuff, to find out the secret, forsooth. I knew quite well that there was nothing in the little place, but I frightened him and talked as if he were setting about robbing his son, and he gave me twelve francs to say nothing about it."

Just at that moment Basine came in radiant, and with a letter for her friend, a letter from David written on magnificent paper, which she handed over when they were alone.

"MY ADORED EVE,—I am writing to you the first letter on my first sheet of paper made by the new process. I have solved the problem of sizing the pulp in the trough at last. A pound of pulp costs five sous, even supposing that the raw material is grown on good soil with special culture; three francs' worth of sized pulp will make a ream of paper at twelve pounds to the ream. I am quite sure that I can lessen the weight of books by one-half. The envelope, the letter, and samples enclosed are all manufactured in different ways. I kiss you; we shall have wealth now to add to our happiness, everything else we had before."

"There!" said Eve, handing the samples to her father-in-law, "when the vintage is over let your son have the money, give him a chance to make his fortune, and you shall be repaid ten times over; he has succeeded at last!"

Old Séchard hurried at once to the Cointets. Every sample was tested and minutely examined; the prices, from three to ten francs per ream, were noted on each separate slip; some were sized, others unsized; some were of almost metallic purity, others soft as Japanese paper; in color there was every possible shade of white. If old Séchard and the two Cointets had been Jews examining diamonds, their eyes could not have glistened more eagerly.

"Your son is on the right track," the fat Cointet said at length.

“Very well, pay his debts,” returned old Séchard.

“By all means, if he will take us into partnership,” said the tall Cointet.

“You are extortioners!” cried old Séchard. “You have been suing him under Métivier’s name, and you mean me to buy you off; that is the long and the short of it. Not such a fool, gentlemen——”

The brothers looked at one another, but they contrived to hide their surprise at the old miser’s shrewdness.

“We are not millionaires,” said fat Cointet; “we don’t discount bills for amusement. We should think ourselves well off if we could pay ready money for our bits of accounts for rags, and we still give bills to our dealer.”

“The experiment ought to be tried first on a much larger scale,” the tall Cointet said coldly; “sometimes you try a thing with a saucepan and succeed, and fail utterly when you experiment with bulk. You should help your son out of difficulties.”

“Yes; but when my son was at liberty, would he take me as his partner?”

“That is no business of ours,” said the fat Cointet. “My good man, do you suppose that when you have paid some ten thousand francs for your son, that there is an end of it? It will cost two thousand francs to take out a patent; there will be journeys to Paris; and before going to any expense, it would be prudent to do as my brother here suggests, and make a thousand reams or so; to try several whole batches to make sure. You see, there is nothing you must be so much on your guard against as an inventor.”

“I have a liking for bread ready buttered myself,” added the tall Cointet.

All through that night the old man ruminated over this dilemma—“If I pay David’s debts, he will be set at liberty, and once set at liberty, he need not share his fortune with me unless he chooses. He knows very well that I cheated him over the first partnership, and he will not care to try a second; so it is to my interest to keep him shut up, the wretched boy.”

The Cointets knew enough of Séchard senior to see that they should hunt in couples. All three said to themselves—“Experiments must be tried before the discovery can take any practical shape. David Séchard must be set at liberty before those experiments can be made; and David Séchard, set at liberty, will slip through our fingers.”

Everybody involved, moreover, had his own little afterthought.

Petit-Claud, for instance, said, “As soon as I am married, I will slip my neck out of the Cointets’ yoke; but till then I shall hold on.”

The tall Cointet thought, “I would rather have David under lock and key, and then I should be master of the situation.”

Old Séchard, too, thought, “If I pay my son’s debts, he will repay me with a ‘Thank you!’”

Eve, hard pressed (for the old man threatened now to turn her out of the house), would neither reveal her husband’s hiding-place, nor even send proposals of a safe-conduct. She could not feel sure of finding so safe a refuge a second time.

“Set your son at liberty,” she told her father-in-law, “and then you shall know everything.”

The four interested persons sat, as it were, with a banquet spread before them, none of them daring to begin, each one suspicious and watchful of his neighbor. A few days after David went into hiding, Petit-Claud went to the mill to see the tall Cointet.

“I have done my best,” he said; “David has gone into prison of his own accord somewhere or other; he is working out some improvement there in peace. It is no fault of mine if you have not gained your end; are you going to keep your promise?”

“Yes, if we succeed,” said the tall Cointet. “Old Séchard was here only a day or two ago; he came to ask us some questions as to paper-making. The old miser has got wind of his son’s invention; he wants to turn it to his own account, so there is some hope of a partnership. You are with the father and the son——”



“Be the third person in the trinity and give them up,” smiled Petit-Claud.

“Yes,” said Cointet. “When you have David in prison, or bound to us by a deed of partnership, you shall marry Mlle. de la Haye.”

“Is that your *ultimatum*?”

“My *sine quâ non*,” said Cointet, “since we are speaking in foreign languages.”

“Then here is mine in plain language,” Petit-Claud said dryly.

“Ah! let us have it,” answered Cointet with some curiosity.

“You will present me to-morrow to Mme. de Senonches, and do something definite for me; you will keep your word, in short; or I will clear off Séchard’s debts myself, sell my practice, and go into partnership with him. I will not be duped. You have spoken out, and I am doing the same. I have given proof, give me proof of your sincerity. You have all, and I have nothing. If you won’t do fairly by me, I know your cards, and I shall play for my own hand.”

The tall Cointet took his hat and umbrella, his face at the face time taking its Jesuitical expression, and out he went, bidding Petit-Claud come with him.

“You shall see, my friend, whether I have prepared your way for you,” said he.

The shrewd paper-manufacturer saw his danger at a glance; and saw, too, that with a man like Petit-Claud it was better to play above board. Partly to be prepared for contingencies, partly to satisfy his conscience, he had dropped a word or two to the point in the ear of the ex-consul-general, under the pretext of putting Mlle. de la Haye’s financial position before that gentleman.

“I have the man for Françoise,” he had said; “for with thirty thousand francs of *dot*, a girl must not expect too much nowadays.”

“We will talk it over later on,” answered Francis de Hautoy, ex-consul-general. “Mme. de Senonches’ position has altered very much since Mme. de Bargeton went away;

we very likely might marry Françoise to some elderly country gentleman."

"She would disgrace herself if you did," Cointet returned in his dry way. "Better marry her to some capable, ambitious young man; you could help him with your influence, and he would make a good position for his wife."

"We shall see," said Francis de Hautoy; "her god-mother ought to be consulted first in any case."

When M. de Bargeton died, his wife sold the great house in the Rue du Minage. Mme. de Senonches, finding her own house scarcely large enough, persuaded M. de Senonches to buy the Hôtel de Bargeton, the cradle of Lucien Chardon's ambitions, the scene of the earliest events in his career. Zéphirine de Senonches had it in mind to succeed to Mme. de Bargeton; she, too, would be a kind of queen in Angoulême; she would have "a salon," and be a great lady, in short. There was a schism in Angoulême, a strife dating from the late M. de Bargeton's duel with M. de Chandour. Some maintained that Louise de Nègrepelisse was blameless, others believed in Stanislas de Chandour's scandals. Mme. de Senonches declared for the Bargetons, and began by winning over that faction. Many frequenters of the Hôtel de Bargeton had been so accustomed for years to their nightly game of cards in the house that they could not leave it, and Mme. de Senonches turned this fact to account. She received every evening, and certainly gained all the ground lost by Amélie de Chandour, who set up for a rival.

Francis de Hautoy, living in the inmost circle of nobility in Angoulême, went so far as to think of marrying Françoise to old M. de Séverac, Mme. du Brossard having totally failed to capture that gentleman for her daughter; and when Mme. de Bargeton reappeared as the prefect's wife, Zéphirine's hopes for her dear god-daughter waxed high indeed. The Comtesse du Châtelet, so she argued, would be sure to use her influence for her champion.

Boniface Cointet had Angoulême at his fingers' ends; he saw all the difficulties at a glance, and resolved to sweep them out of the way by a bold stroke that only a Tartufe's

brain could invent. The puny lawyer was not a little amazed to find his fellow-conspirator keeping his word with him; not a word did Petit-Claud utter, he respected the musings of his companion, and they walked the whole way from the paper-mill to the Rue du Minage in silence.

"Monsieur and madame are at breakfast"—this announcement met the ill-timed visitors on the steps.

"Take in our names, all the same," said the tall Cointet; and feeling sure of his position, he followed immediately behind the servant and introduced his companion to the elaborately affected Zéphirine, who was breakfasting in company with M. Francis du Hautoy and Mlle. de la Haye. M. de Senonches had gone, as usual, for a day's shooting over M. de Pimentel's land.

"M. Petit-Claud is the young lawyer of whom I spoke to you, madame; he will go through the trust accounts when your fair ward comes of age."

The ex-diplomatist made a quick scrutiny of Petit-Claud, who, for his part, was looking furtively at the "fair ward." As for Zéphirine, who heard of the matter for the first time, her surprise was so great that she dropped her fork.

Mlle. de la Haye, a shrewish young woman with an ill-tempered face, a waist that could scarcely be called slender, a thin figure, and colorless fair hair, in spite of a certain little air that she had, was by no means easy to marry. The "parentage unknown" on her birth certificate was the real bar to her entrance into the sphere where her god-mother's affection strove to establish her. Mlle. de la Haye, ignorant of her real position, was very hard to please; the richest merchant in L'Houmeau had found no favor in her sight. Cointet saw the sufficiently significant expression of the young lady's face at the sight of the little lawyer, and turning, beheld a precisely similar grimace on Petit-Claud's countenance. Mme. de Senonches and Francis looked at each other, as if in search of an excuse for getting rid of the visitors. All this Cointet saw. He asked M. de Hautoy for the favor of a few minutes' speech with him, and the pair went together into the drawing-room.

"Fatherly affection is blinding you, sir," he said bluntly.

“You will not find it an easy thing to marry your daughter; and, acting in your interest throughout, I have put you in a position from which you cannot draw back; for I am fond of Françoise, she is my ward. Now—Petit-Claud knows *everything!* His overweening ambition is a guarantee for our dear child’s happiness; for, in the first place, Françoise will do as she likes with her husband; and, in the second, he wants your influence. You can ask the new prefect for the post of crown attorney for him in the court here. M. Milaud is definitely appointed to Nevers, Petit-Claud will sell his practice, you will have no difficulty in obtaining a deputy public prosecutor’s place for him; and it will not be long before he becomes attorney for the crown, president of the court, deputy, what you will.”

Francis went back to the dining-room and behaved charmingly to his daughter’s suitor. He gave Mme. de Senonches a look, and brought the scene to a close with an invitation to dine with them on the morrow; Petit-Claud must come and discuss the business in hand. He even went downstairs and as far as the court with the visitors, telling Petit-Claud that, after Cointet’s recommendation, both he and Mme. de Senonches were disposed to approve all that Mlle. de la Hayes’ trustee had arranged for the welfare of that little angel.

“Oh!” cried Petit-Claud, as they came away, “what a plain girl! I have been taken in——”

“She looks a lady-like girl,” returned Cointet, “and besides, if she were a beauty, would they give her to you? Eh! my dear fellow, thirty thousand francs and the influence of Mme. de Senonches and the Comtesse du Châtelet! Many a small landowner would be wonderfully glad of the chance, and all the more so since M. Francis du Hautoy is never likely to marry, and all that he has will go to the girl. Your marriage is as good as settled.”

“How?”

“That is what I am just going to tell you,” returned Cointet, and he gave his companion an account of his recent bold stroke. “M. Milaud is just about to be appointed attorney for the crown at Nevers, my dear fellow,” he con-

tinued; "sell your practice, and in ten years' time you will be Keeper of the Seals. You are not the kind of man to draw back from any service required of you by the court."

"Very well," said Petit-Claud, his zeal stirred by the prospect of such a career, "very well, be in the Place du Mûrier to-morrow at half-past four; I will see old Séchard in the meantime; we will have a deed of partnership drawn up, and the father and the son shall be bound thereby, and delivered to the third person of the trinity—Cointet, to wit."

To return to Lucien in Paris. On the morrow of the loss announced in his letter, he obtained a *visa* for his passport, bought a stout holly stick, and went to the Rue d'Enfer to take a place in the little market van, which took him as far as Longjumeau for half a franc. He was going home to Angoulême. At the end of the first day's tramp he slept in a cowshed, two leagues from Arpajon. He had come no farther than Orléans before he was very weary, and almost ready to break down, but there he found a boatman willing to bring him as far as Tours for three francs, and food during the journey cost him but forty sous. Five days of walking brought him from Tours to Poitiers, and left him with but five francs in his pockets, but he summoned up all his remaining strength for the journey before him.

He was overtaken by night in the open country, and had made up his mind to sleep out of doors, when a traveling carriage passed by, slowly climbing the hillside, and, all unknown to the postillion, the occupants, and the servant, he managed to slip in among the luggage, crouching in between two trunks lest he should be shaken off by the jolting of the carriage—and so he slept.

He awoke with the sun shining into his eyes, and the sound of voices in his ears. The carriage had come to a standstill. Looking about him, he knew that he was at Mansle, the little town where he had waited for Mme. de Bargeton eighteen months before, when his heart was full of hope and love and joy. A group of post-boys eyed him curiously and suspiciously, covered with dust as he was,

wedged in among the luggage. Lucien jumped down, but before he could speak two travelers stepped out of the calèche, and the words died away on his lips; for there stood the new Prefect of the Charente, Sixte du Châtelet, and his wife, Louise de Nègrepelisse.

“Chance gave us a traveling-companion if we had but known!” said the Countess. “Come in with us, monsieur.”

Lucien gave the couple a distant bow and a half-humbled, half-defiant glance; then he turned away into a cross country road in search of some farmhouse where he might make a breakfast on milk and bread, and rest a while, and think quietly over the future. He still had three francs left. On and on he walked with the hurrying pace of fever, noticing as he went, down by the riverside, that the country grew more and more picturesque. It was near mid-day when he came upon a sheet of water with willows growing about the margin, and stopped for a while to rest his eyes on the cool, thick-growing leaves; and something of the grace of the fields entered into his soul.

In among the crests of the willows he caught a glimpse of a mill near by on a branch stream, and of the thatched roof of the mill-house where the house-leeks were growing. For all ornament, the quaint cottage was covered with jessamine and honeysuckle and climbing hops, and the garden about it was gay with phloxes and tall, juicy-leaved plants. Nets lay drying in the sun along a paved causeway raised above the highest flood level, and secured by massive piles. Ducks were swimming in the clear mill-pond below the currents of water roaring over the wheel. As the poet came nearer he heard the clack of the mill, and saw the good-natured, homely woman of the house knitting on a garden bench, and keeping an eye upon a little one who was chasing the hens about.

Lucien came forward. “My good woman,” he said, “I am tired out; I have a fever on me, and I have only three francs; will you undertake to give me brown bread and milk, and let me sleep in the barn for a week? I shall have time to write to my people, and they will either come to fetch me or send me money.”

"I am quite willing, always supposing that my husband has no objection.—Hey! little man!"

The miller came up, gave Lucien a look over, and took his pipe out of his mouth to remark, "Three francs for a week's board! You might as well pay nothing at all."

"Perhaps I shall end as a miller's man," thought the poet, as his eyes wandered over the lovely country. Then the miller's wife made a bed ready for him, and Lucien lay down and slept so long that his hostess was frightened.

"Courtois," she said, next day at noon, "just go in and see whether that young man is dead or alive; he has been lying there these fourteen hours."

The miller was busy spreading out his fishing-nets and lines. "It is my belief," he said, "that the pretty fellow yonder is some starveling play-actor without a brass farthing to bless himself with."

"What makes you think that, little man?" asked the mistress of the mill.

"Lord, he is not a prince, nor a lord, nor a member of parliament, nor a bishop; why are his hands as white as if he did nothing?"

"Then it is very strange that he does not feel hungry and wake up," retorted the miller's wife; she had just prepared breakfast for yesterday's chance guest. "A play-actor, is he?" she continued. "Where will he be going? It is too early yet for the fair at Angoulême."

But neither the miller nor his wife suspected that (actors, princes, and bishops apart) there is a kind of being who is both prince and actor, and invested besides with a magnificent order of priesthood—that the Poet who seems to do nothing, yet reigns over all humanity when he can paint humanity.

"What can he be?" Courtois asked of his wife.

"Suppose it should be dangerous to take him in?" queried she.

"Pooh! thieves look more alive than that; we should have been robbed by this time," returned her spouse.

"I am neither a prince nor a thief, nor a bishop nor an actor," Lucien said wearily; he must have overhead the

colloquy through the window, and now he suddenly appeared. "I am poor, I am tired out, I have come on foot from Paris. My name is Lucien de Rubempré, and my father was M. Chardon, who used to have Postel's business in L'Houmeau. My sister married David Séchard, the printer in the Place du Mûrier at Angoulême."

"Stop a bit," said the miller, "that printer is the son of the old skinflint who farms his own land at Marsac, isn't he?"

"The very same," said Lucien.

"He is a queer kind of a father, he is!" Courtois continued. "He is worth two hundred thousand francs and more, without counting his money-box, and he has sold his son up, they say."

When body and soul have been broken by a prolonged painful struggle, there comes a crisis when a strong nature braces itself for greater effort; but those who give way under the strain either die or sink into unconsciousness like death. That hour of crisis had struck for Lucien; at the vague rumor of the catastrophe that had befallen David he seemed almost ready to succumb. "Oh! my sister!" he cried. "Oh, God! what have I done? Base wretch that I am!"

He dropped down on the wooden bench, looking white and powerless as a dying man; the miller's wife brought out a bowl of milk and made him drink, but he begged the miller to help him back to his bed, and asked to be forgiven for bringing a dying man into their house. He thought his last hour had come. With the shadow of death, thoughts of religion crossed a brain so quick to conceive picturesque fancies; he would see the curé, he would confess and receive the last sacraments. The moan, uttered in the faint voice by a young man with such a comely face and figure, went to Mme. Courtois's heart.

"I say, little man, just take the horse and go to Marsac and ask Dr. Marron to come and see this young man; he is in a very bad way, it seems to me, and you might bring the curé as well. Perhaps they may know more about that printer in the Place du Mûrier than you do, for Postel married M. Marron's daughter."



Courtois departed. The miller's wife tried to make Lucien take food; like all country-bred folk, she was full of the idea that sick folk must be made to eat. He took no notice of her, but gave way to a violent storm of remorseful grief, a kind of mental process of counter-irritation, which relieved him.

The Courtois' mill lies a league away from Marsac, the town of the district, and the half-way halt between Mansle and Angoulême; so it was not long before the good miller came back with the doctor and the curé. Both functionaries had heard rumors coupling Lucien's name with the name of Mme. de Bargeton; and now when the whole department was talking of the lady's marriage to the new Prefect and her return to Angoulême as the Comtesse du Châtelet, both curé and doctor were consumed with a violent curiosity to know why M. de Bargeton's widow had not married the young poet with whom she had left Angoulême. And when they heard, furthermore, that Lucien was at the mill, they were eager to know whether the poet had come to the rescue of his brother-in-law. Curiosity and humanity alike prompted them to go at once to the dying man. Two hours after Courtois set out, Lucien heard the rattle of old iron over the stony causeway, the country doctor's ramshackle chaise came up to the door, and out stepped the MM. Marron, for the curé was the doctor's uncle. Lucien's bedside visitors were as intimate with David's father as country neighbors usually are in a small vine-growing township. The doctor looked at the dying man, felt his pulse, and examined his tongue; then he looked at the miller's wife, and smiled reassuringly.

"Mme. Courtois," said he, "if, as I do not doubt, you have a bottle of good wine somewhere in the cellar, and a fat eel in your fish-pond, put them before your patient, it is only exhaustion; there is nothing the matter with him. Our great man will be on his feet again directly."

"Ah! monsieur," said Lucien, "it is not the body, it is the mind that ails. These good people have told me tidings that nearly killed me; I have just heard bad news of my sister, Mme. Séchard. Mme. Courtois says that your

daughter is married to Postel, monsieur, so you must know something of David Séchard's affairs; oh, for heaven's sake, monsieur, tell me what you know!"

"Why, he must be in prison," began the doctor; "his father would not help him——"

"*In prison!*" repeated Lucien, "and why?"

"Because some bills came from Paris; he had overlooked them, no doubt, for he does not pay much attention to his business, they say," said Dr. Marron.

"Pray leave me with M. le Curé," said the poet, with a visible change of countenance. The doctor and the miller and his wife went out of the room, and Lucien was left alone with the old priest.

"Sir," he said, "I feel that death is near, and I deserve to die. I am a very miserable wretch, I can only cast myself into the arms of religion. I, sir, *I* have brought all these troubles on my sister and brother, for David Séchard has been a brother to me! I drew those bills that David could not meet! . . . I have ruined him. In my terrible misery, I forgot the crime. A millionaire put an end to the proceedings, and I quite believed that he had met the bills; but nothing of the kind has been done, it seems." And Lucien told the tale of his sorrows. The story, as he told it in his feverish excitement, was worthy of the poet. He besought the curé to go to Angoulême and to ask for news of Eve and his mother, Mme. Chardon, and to let him know the truth, and whether it was still possible to repair the evil.

"I shall live till you come back, sir," he added, as the hot tears fell. "If my mother, and sister, and David do not cast me off, I shall not die."

Lucien's remorse was terrible to see, the tears, the eloquence, the young white face with the heartbroken, despairing look, the tales of sorrow upon sorrow till human strength could no more endure, all these things aroused the curé's pity and interest.

"In the provinces, as in Paris," he said, "you must believe only half of all that you hear. Do not alarm yourself; a piece of hearsay, three leagues away from Angoulême,

is sure to be far from the truth. Old Séchard, our neighbor, left Marsac some days ago; very likely he is busy settling his son's difficulties. I am going to Angoulême; I will come back and tell you whether you can return home; your confessions and repentance will help to plead your cause."

The curé did not know that Lucien had repented so many times during the last eighteen months, that penitence, however impassioned, had come to be a kind of drama with him, played to perfection, played so far in all good faith, but none the less a drama. To the curé succeeded the doctor. He saw the patient was passing through a nervous crisis, and the danger was beginning to subside. The doctor-nephew spoke as comfortably as the curé-uncle, and at length the patient was persuaded to take nourishment.

Meanwhile the curé, knowing the manners and customs of the countryside, had gone to Mansle; the coach from Ruffec to Angoulême was due to pass about that time, and he found a vacant place in it. He would go to his grand-nephew Postel in L'Houmeau (David's former rival) and make inquiries of him. From the assiduity with which the little druggist assisted his venerable relative to alight from the abominable cage which did duty as a coach between Ruffec and Angoulême, it was apparent to the meanest understanding that M. and Mme. Postel founded their hopes of future ease upon the old curé's will.

"Have you breakfasted? Will you take something? We did not in the least expect you! This is a pleasant surprise!" Out came questions innumerable in a breath.

Mme. Postel might have been born to be the wife of an apothecary in L'Houmeau. She was a common-looking woman, about the same height as little Postel himself, such good looks as she possessed being entirely due to youth and health. Her florid auburn hair grew very low upon her forehead. Her demeanor and language were in keeping with homely features, a round countenance, the red cheeks of a country damsel, and eyes that might almost be described as yellow. Everything about her said plainly enough that she had been married for expectations of money. After a

year of married life, therefore, she ruled the house; and Postel, only too happy to have discovered the heiress, meekly submitted to his wife. Mme. Léonie Postel, *née* Marron, was nursing her first child, the darling of the old curé, the doctor, and Postel, a repulsive infant, with a strong likeness to both parents.

"Well, uncle," said Léonie, "what has brought you to Angoulême, since you will not take anything, and no sooner come in than you talk of going?"

But when the venerable ecclesiastic brought out the names of David Séchard and Eve, little Postel grew very red, and Léonie, his wife, felt it incumbent upon her to give him a jealous glance—the glance that a wife never fails to give when she is perfectly sure of her husband, and gives a look into the past by way of a caution for the future.

"What have yonder folk done to you, uncle, that you should mix yourself up with their affairs?" inquired Léonie, with very perceptible tartness.

"They are in trouble, my girl," said the curé, and he told the Postels about Lucien at the Courtois' mill.

"Oh! so that is the way he came back from Paris, is it?" exclaimed Postel. "Yet he had some brains, poor fellow, and he was ambitious too. He went out to look for wool, and comes home shorn. But what does he want here? His sister is frightfully poor; for all these geniuses, David and Lucien alike, know very little about business. There was some talk of him at the Tribunal, and, as a judge, I was obliged to sign the warrant of execution. It was a painful duty. I do not know whether the sister's circumstances are such that Lucien can go to her; but in any case the little room that he used to occupy here is at liberty, and I shall be pleased to offer it to him."

"That is right, Postel," said the priest; he bestowed a kiss on the infant slumbering in Léonie's arms, and, adjusting his cocked hat, prepared to walk out of the shop.

"You will dine with us, uncle, of course," said Mme. Postel; "if once you meddle in those people's affairs, it will be some time before you have done. My husband will drive you back again in his little pony-cart."

Husband and wife stood watching their valued, aged relative on his way to Angoulême. "He carries himself well for his age, all the same," remarked the druggist.

By this time David had been in hiding for eleven days in a house only two doors away from the druggist's shop, which the worthy ecclesiastic had just quitted to climb the steep path into Angoulême with the news of Lucien's present condition.

When the Abbé Marron debouched upon the Place du Mûrier he found three men, each one remarkable in his own way, and all of them bearing with their whole weight upon the present and future of the hapless voluntary prisoner. There stood old Séchard, the tall Cointet, and his confederate, the puny limb of the law, three men representing three phases of greed as widely different as the outward forms of the speakers. The first had it in his mind to sell his own son; the second, to betray his client; and the third, while bargaining for both iniquities, was inwardly resolved to pay for neither. It was nearly five o'clock. Passers-by on their way home to dinner stopped a moment to look at the group.

"What the devil can old Séchard and the tall Cointet have to say to each other?" asked the more curious.

"There is something on foot concerning that miserable wretch that leaves his wife and child and mother-in-law to starve," suggested some.

"Talk of sending a boy to Paris to learn his trade!" said a provincial oracle.

"M. le Curé! What brings you here, eh?" exclaimed old Séchard, catching sight of the Abbé as soon as he appeared.

"I have come on account of your family," answered the old man.

"Here is another of my son's notions!" exclaimed old Séchard.

"It would not cost you much to make everybody happy all around," said the priest, looking at the windows of the printing-house. Mme. Séchard's beautiful face appeared at that moment between the curtains; she was hushing her

child's cries by tossing him in her arms and singing to him.

"Are you bringing news of my son?" asked old Séchard, "or what is more to the purpose—money?"

"No," answered M. Marron, "I am bringing the sister news of her brother."

"Of Lucien?" cried Petit Claud.

"Yes. He walked all the way from Paris, poor young man. I found him at the Courtois' house; he was worn out with misery and fatigue. Oh! he is very much to be pitied."

Petit-Claud took the tall Cointet by the arm, saying aloud, "If we are going to dine with Mme. de Senonches, it is time to dress." When they had come away a few paces, he added, for his companion's benefit, "Catch the cub, and you will soon have the dam; we have David now——"

"I have found you a wife, find me a partner," said the tall Cointet with a treacherous smile.

"Lucien is an old school-fellow of mine; we used to be chums. I shall be sure to hear something from him in a week's time. Have the banns put up, and I will engage to put David in prison. When he is on the gaoler's register, I shall have done my part."

"Ah!" exclaimed the tall Cointet under his breath, "we might have the patent taken out in our name; that would be the thing!"

A shiver ran through the meager little attorney when he heard those words.

Meanwhile Eve beheld her father-in-law enter with the Abbé Marron, who had let fall a word which unfolded the whole tragedy.

"Here is our curé, Mme. Séchard," the old man said, addressing his daughter-in-law, "and pretty tales about your brother he has to tell us no doubt!"

"Oh!" cried poor Eve, cut to the heart; "what can have happened now?"

The cry told so unmistakably of many sorrows, of great dread on so many grounds, that the Abbé Marron made haste to say, "Reassure yourself, madame; he is living."

Eve turned to the vinegrower.

“Father,” she said, “perhaps you will be good enough to go to my mother; she must hear all that this gentleman has to tell us of Lucien.”

The old man went in search of Mme. Chardon, and addresses her on this wise—

“Go and have it out with the Abbé Marron; he is a good sort, priest though he is. Dinner will be late, no doubt. I shall come back again in an hour,” and the old man went out. Insensible as he was to everything but the clink of money and the glitter of gold, he left Mme. Chardon without caring to notice the effect of the shock that he had given her.

Mme. Chardon had changed so greatly during the last eighteen months, that in that short time she no longer looked like the same woman. The troubles hanging over both of her children, her abortive hopes for Lucien, the unexpected deterioration in one in whose powers and honesty she had for so long believed,—all these things had told heavily upon her. Mme. Chardon was not only noble by birth, she was noble by nature; she idolized her children; consequently, during the last six months she had suffered as never before since her widowhood. Lucien might have borne the name of Lucien de Rubempré by Royal letters patent; he might have founded the family anew, revived the title, and borne the arms; he might have made a great name—he had thrown the chance away; nay, he had fallen into the mire!

For Mme. Chardon the mother was a harder judge than Eve the sister. When she heard of the bills, she looked upon Lucien as lost. A mother is often fain to shut her eyes, but she always knows the child that she held at her breast, the child that has been always with her in the house; and so when Eve and David discussed Lucien’s chances of success in Paris, and Lucien’s mother to all appearance shared Eve’s illusions, in her inmost heart there was a tremor of fear lest David should be right, for her mother’s consciousness bore witness to the truth of his words. So well did she know Eve’s sensitive nature, that she could not bring herself to speak of her fears; she was obliged to choke

them down and keep such silence as mothers alone can keep when they know how to love their children.

And Eve, on her side, had watched her mother, and saw the ravages of hidden grief with a feeling of dread; her mother was not growing old, she was failing from day to day. Mother and daughter lived a life of generous deception, and neither was deceived. The brutal old vine-grower's speech was the last drop that filled the cup of affliction to overflowing. The words struck a chill to Mme. Chardon's heart.

"Here is my mother, monsieur," said Eve, and the Abbé, looking up, saw a white-haired woman with a face as thin and worn as the features of some aged nun, and yet grown beautiful with the calm and sweet expression that devout submission gives to the faces of women who walk by the will of God, as the saying is. Then the Abbé understood the lives of the mother and daughter, and had no more sympathy left for Lucien; he shuddered to think of all that the victims had endured.

"Mother," said Eve, drying her eyes as she spoke, "poor Lucien is not very far away, he is at Marsac."

"And why is he not here?" asked Mme. Chardon.

Then the Abbé told the whole story as Lucien had told it to him—the misery of the journey, the troubles of the last days in Paris. He described the poet's agony of mind when he heard of the havoc wrought at home by his imprudence, and his apprehension as to the reception awaiting him at Angoulême.

"He has doubts of us; has it come to this?" said Mme. Chardon.

"The unhappy young man has come back to you on foot, enduring the most terrible hardships by the way; he is prepared to enter the humblest walks in life—if so he may make reparation."

"Monsieur," Lucien's sister said, "in spite of the wrong he has done us, I love my brother still, as we love the dead body when the soul has left it; and even so, I love him more than many sisters love their brothers. He has made us poor indeed; but let him come to us, he shall share the last



crust of bread, anything indeed that he has left us. Oh, if he had never left us, monsieur, we should not have lost our heart's treasure."

"And the woman who took him from us brought him back on her carriage!" exclaimed Mme. Chardon. "He went away sitting by Mme. de Bargeton's side in her calèche, and he came back behind it."

"Can I do anything for you?" asked the good curé, seeking an opportunity to take leave.

"A wound in the purse is not fatal, they say, monsieur," said Mme. Chardon, "but the patient must be his own doctor."

"If you have sufficient influence with my father-in-law to induce him to help his son, you would save a whole family," said Eve.

"He has no belief in you, and he seemed to me to be very much exasperated against your husband," answered the old curé. He retained an impression, from the ex-pressman's rambling talk, that the Séchards' affairs were a kind of wasps' nest with which it was imprudent to meddle, and his mission being fulfilled, he went to dine with his nephew, Postel. That worthy, like the rest of Angoulême, maintained that the father was in the right, and soon dissipated any little benevolence that the old gentleman was disposed to feel towards the son and his family.

"With those that squander money something may be done," concluded little Postel, "but those that make experiments are the ruin of you."

The curé went home, his curiosity was thoroughly satisfied, and this is the end and object of the exceeding interest taken in other people's business in the provinces. In the course of the evening the poet was duly informed of all that had passed in the Séchard family, and the journey was represented as a pilgrimage undertaken from motives of the purest charity.

"You have run your brother-in-law and sister into debt to the amount of ten or twelve thousand francs," said the Abbé, as he drew to an end, "and nobody hereabouts has that trifling amount to lend a neighbor, my dear sir. We

are not rich in Angoumois. When you spoke to me of your bills, I thought that a much smaller amount was involved."

Lucien thanked the old man for his good offices. "The promise of forgiveness which you have brought is for me a priceless gift."

Very early the next morning Lucien set out from Marsac, and reached Angoulême towards nine o'clock. He carried nothing but his walking-stick; the short jacket that he wore was considerably the worse for his journey, his black trousers were whitened with dust, and a pair of worn boots told sufficiently plainly that their owner belonged to the hapless tribe of tramps. He knew well enough that the contrast between his departure and return was bound to strike his fellow-townsmen; he did not try to hide the fact from himself. But just then, with his heart swelling beneath the oppression of remorse awakened in him by the old curé's story, he accepted his punishment for the moment, and made up his mind to brave the eyes of his acquaintances. Within himself he said, "I am behaving heroically."

Poetic temperaments of this stamp begin as their own dupes. He walked up through L'Houmeau, shame at the manner of his return struggling with the charm of old associations as he went. His heart beat quickly as he passed Postel's shop; but, very luckily for him, the only persons inside it were Léonie and her child. And yet, vanity was still so strong in him, that he could feel glad that his father's name had been painted out on the shop-front; for Postel, since his marriage, had redecorated his abode, and the word "Pharmacy" now alone appeared there, in the Paris fashion, in big letters.

When Lucien reached the steps by the Palet Gate, he felt the influence of his native air, his misfortunes no longer weighed upon him. "I shall see them again!" he said to himself, with a thrill of delight.

He reached the Place du Mûrier, and had not met a soul, a piece of luck that he scarcely hoped for, he who once had gone about his native place with a conqueror's air. Marion and Kolb, on guard at the door, flew out upon the steps, crying out, "Here he is!"

Lucien saw the familiar workshop and courtyard, and on the staircase met his mother and sister, and for a moment, while their arms were about him, all three almost forgot their troubles. In family life we almost always compound with our misfortunes; we make a sort of bed to rest upon; and, if it is hard, hope makes it tolerable. If Lucien looked the picture of despair, poetic charm was not wanting to the picture. His face had been tanned by the sunlight of the open road, and the deep sadness visible in his features overshadowed his poet's brow. The change in him told so plainly of sufferings endured, his face was so worn by sharp misery, that no one could help pitying him. Imagination had fared forth into the world and found sad reality at the home-coming. Eve was smiling in the midst of her joy, as the saints smile upon martyrdom. The face of a young and very fair woman grows sublimely beautiful at the touch of grief; Lucien remembered the innocent girlish face that he saw last before he went to Paris, and the look of gravity that had come over it spoke so eloquently that he could not but feel a painful impression. The first quick, natural outpouring of affection was followed at once by a reaction on either side; they were afraid to speak; and when Lucien almost involuntarily looked round for another who should have been there, Eve burst into tears, and Lucien did the same, but Mme. Chardon's haggard face showed no sign of emotion. Eve rose to her feet and went downstairs, partly to spare her brother a word of reproach, partly to speak to Marion.

"Lucien is so fond of strawberries, child, we must find some strawberries for him."

"Oh, I was sure that you would want to welcome M. Lucien; you shall have a nice little breakfast and a good dinner too."

"Lucien," said Mme. Chardon when the mother and son were left alone, "you have a great deal to repair here. You went away that we all might be proud of you; you have plunged us into want. You have all but destroyed your brother's opportunity of making a fortune that he only cared to win for the sake of his new family. Nor is this all that you have destroyed——" said the mother.

There was a dreadful pause; Lucien took his mother's reproaches in silence.

"Now begin to work," Mme. Chardon went on more gently. "You tried to revive the noble family of whom I come; I do not blame you for it. But the man who undertakes such a task needs money above all things, and must bear a high heart in him; both were wanting in your case. We believed in you once; our belief has been shaken. This was a hard-working, contented household, making its way with difficulty; you have troubled their peace. The first offense may be forgiven, but it must be the last. We are in a very difficult position here; you must be careful, and take your sister's advice, Lucien. The school of trouble is a very hard one, but Eve has learned much by her lessons; she has grown grave and thoughtful, she is a mother. In her devotion to our dear David she has taken all the family burdens upon herself; indeed, through your wrong-doing she has come to be my only comfort."

"You might be still more severe, my mother," Lucien said, as he kissed her. "I accept your forgiveness, for I will not need it a second time."

Eve came into the room, saw her brother's humble attitude, and knew that he had been forgiven. Her kindness brought a smile for him to her lips, and Lucien answered with tear-filled eyes. A living presence acts like a charm, changing the most hostile positions of lovers or of families, no matter how just the resentment. Is it that affection finds out the ways of the heart, and we love to fall into them again? Does the phenomenon come within the province of the science of magnetism? Or is it reason that tells us that we must either forgive or never see each other again? Whether the cause be referred to mental, physical, or spiritual conditions, everyone knows the effect; everyone has felt that the looks, the actions or gestures of the beloved awaken some vestige of tenderness in those most deeply sinned against and grievously wronged. Though it is hard for the mind to forget, though we still smart under the injury, the heart returns to its allegiance in spite of all. Poor Eve listened to her brother's confidences until

breakfast-time; and whenever she looked at him, she was no longer mistress of her eyes; in that intimate talk she could not control her voice. And with the comprehension of the conditions of literary life in Paris, she understood that the struggle had been too much for Lucien's strength. The poet's delight as he caressed his sister's child, his deep grief over David's absence, mingled with joy at seeing his country and his own folk again, the melancholy words that he let fall,—all these things combined to make that day a festival. When Marion brought in the strawberries, he was touched to see that Eve had remembered his taste in spite of her distress, and she, his sister, must make ready a room for the prodigal brother and busy herself for Lucien. It was a truce, as it were, to misery. Old Séchard himself assisted to bring about this revulsion of feeling in the two women—“You are making as much of him as if he were bringing you any amount of money!”

“And what has my brother done that we should not make much of him?” cried Eve, jealously screening Lucien.

Nevertheless, when the first expansion was over, shades of truth came out. It was not long before Lucien felt the difference between the old affection and the new. Eve respected David from the depths of her heart; Lucien was beloved for his own sake, as we love a mistress still in spite of the disasters she causes. Esteem, the very foundation on which affection is based, is the solid stuff to which affection owes, I know not what, of certainty and security by which we live; and this was lacking now between Mme. Chardon and her son, between the sister and brother. Mother and daughter did not put entire confidence in him, as they would have done if he had not lost his honor; and he felt this. The opinion expressed in d'Arthez's letter was Eve's own estimate of her brother; unconsciously she revealed it by her manner, tones, and gestures. Oh! Lucien was pitied, that was true; but as for all that he had been, the pride of the household, the great man of the family, the hero of the fireside,—all this, like their fair hopes of him, was gone, never to return. They were so afraid of his heedlessness that he was not told where David was hidden. Lucien wanted to see his

brother; but this Eve, insensible to the caresses which accompanied his curious questionings, was not the Eve of L'Houmeau, for whom a glance from him had been an order that must be obeyed. When Lucien spoke of making reparation, and talked as though he could rescue David, Eve only answered—

“Do not interfere; we have enemies of the most treacherous and dangerous kind.”

Lucien tossed his head, as who should say, “I have measured myself against Parisians,” and the look in his sister's eyes said unmistakably, “Yes, but you were defeated.”

“Nobody cares for me now,” Lucien thought. “In the home circle, as in the world without, success is a necessity.”

The poet tried to explain their lack of confidence in him; he had not been at home two days before a feeling of vexation rather than of angry bitterness gained hold on him. He applied Parisian standards to the quiet, temperate existence of the provinces, quite forgetting that the narrow, patient life of the household was the result of his own misdoing.

“They are bourgeois, they cannot understand me,” he said, setting himself apart from his sister and mother and David, now that they could no longer be deceived as to his real character and his future.

Many troubles and shocks of fortune had quickened the intuitive sense in both the women. Eve and Mme. Chardon guessed the thoughts in Lucien's inmost soul; they felt that he misjudged them; they saw him mentally isolating himself.

“Paris has changed him very much,” they said between themselves. They were indeed reaping the harvest of egoism which they themselves had fostered.

It was inevitable but that the leaven should work in all three; and this most of all in Lucien, because he felt that he was so heavily to blame. As for Eve, she was just the kind of sister to beg an erring brother to “Forgive me for your trespasses”; but when the union of two souls has been as perfect since life's very beginnings, as it had been with Eve and Lucien, any blow dealt to that fair ideal is fatal. Scoundrels can draw knives on each other and make it up

again afterwards, while a look or a word is enough to sunder two lovers forever. In the recollection of an almost perfect life of heart and heart lies the secret of many an estrangement that none can explain. Two may live together without full trust in their hearts if only their past holds no memories of complete and unclouded love; but for those who once have known that intimate life, it becomes intolerable to keep perpetual watch over looks and words. Great poets know this; Paul and Virginie die before youth is over; can we think of Paul and Virginie estranged? Let us note that, to the honor of Lucien and Eve, the grave injury done was not the source of the pain; it was entirely a matter of feeling upon either side, for the poet in fault, as for the sister who was in no way to blame. Things had reached the point when the slightest misunderstanding, or little quarrel, or a fresh disappointment in Lucien would end in final estrangement. Money difficulties may be arranged, but feelings are inexorable.

Next day Lucien received a copy of the local paper. He turned pale with pleasure when he saw his name at the head of one of the first "leaders" in that highly respectable sheet, which, like the provincial academies that Voltaire compared to a well-bred miss, was never talked about.

"Let Franche-Comté boast of giving the light to Victor Hugo, to Charles Nodier, and Cuvier," ran the article, "Brittany of producing a Chateaubriand and a Lamennais, Normandy of Casimir Delavigne, and Touraine of the author of *Éloa*; Angoumois that gave birth, in the days of Louis XIII., to our illustrious fellow-countryman Guez, better known under the name of Balzac—our Angoumois need no longer envy Limousin her Dupuytren, nor Auvergne, the country of Montlosier, nor Bordeaux, birthplace of so many great men; for we too have our poet!—The writer of the beautiful sonnets entitled the *Marguerites* unites his poet's fame to the distinction of a prose writer, for to him we also owe the magnificent romance of *The Archer of Charles IX*. Some day our nephews will be proud to be the fellow-townsmen of Lucien Chardon, a rival of Petrarch!!!"

(The country newspapers of those days were sown with notes of admiration, as reports of English election speeches are studded with "cheers" in brackets.)

"In spite of his brilliant success in Paris, our young poet has not forgotten the Hôtel de Bargeton, the cradle of his triumphs; nor the Angoumois aristocracy, who first applauded his poetry; nor the fact that the wife of M. le Comte du Châtelet, our Prefect, encouraged his early footsteps in the pathway of the Muses. He has come back among us once more! All L'Houmeau was thrown into excitement yesterday by the appearance of our Lucien de Rubempré. The news of his return produced a profound sensation throughout the town. Angoulême certainly will not allow L'Houmeau to be beforehand in doing honor to the poet who in journalism and literature has so gloriously represented our town in Paris. Lucien de Rubempré, a religious and Royalist poet, has braved the fury of parties; he has come home, it is said, for repose after the fatigue of a struggle which would try the strength of an even greater intellectual athlete than a poet and a dreamer.

"There is some talk of restoring our great poet to the title of the illustrious house of de Rubempré, of which his mother, Mme. Chardon, is the last survivor, and it is added that Mme. la Comtesse du Châtelet was the first to think of this eminently politic idea. The revival of an ancient and almost extinct family by young talent and newly won fame is another proof that the immortal author of the Charter still cherishes the desire expressed by the words 'Union and oblivion.'

"Our poet is staying with his sister, Mme. Séchard."

Under the heading "Angoulême" followed some items of news:—

"Our Prefect, M. le Comte du Châtelet, Gentleman in Ordinary to His Majesty, has just been appointed Extraordinary Councilor of State.

"All the authorities called yesterday on M. le Préfet.

"Mme. la Comtesse du Châtelet will receive on Thursdays.

"The Mayor of Escarbas, M. de Nègrepelisse, the rep-



representative of the younger branch of the d'Espard family, and father of Mme. du Châtelet, recently raised to the rank of a Count and peer of France and a Commander of the Royal Order of St. Louis, has been nominated for the presidency of the electoral college of Angoulême at the forthcoming elections."

"There!" said Lucien, taking the paper to his sister. Eve read the article with attention, and returned the sheet with a thoughtful air.

"What do you say to that?" asked he, surprised at a reserve that seemed so like indifference.

"The Cointets are proprietors of that paper, dear," she said; "they put in exactly what they please, and it is not at all likely that the prefecture or the palace have forced their hand. Can you imagine that your old rival the prefect would be generous enough to sing your praises? Have you forgotten that the Cointets are suing us under Métivier's name? and that they are trying to turn David's discovery to their own advantage? I do not know the source of this paragraph, but it makes me uneasy. You used to rouse nothing but envious feeling and hatred here; a prophet has no honor in his own country, and they slandered you, and now in a moment it is all changed——"

"You do not know the vanity of country towns," said Lucien. "A whole little town in the south turned out not so long ago to welcome a young man that had won the first prize in some competition; they looked on him as a budding great man."

"Listen, dear Lucien; I do not want to preach to you, I will say everything in a very few words—you must suspect every least little thing here."

"You are right," said Lucien, but he was surprised at his sister's lack of enthusiasm. He himself was full of delight to find his humiliating and shame-stricken return to Angoulême changed into a triumph in this way.

"You have no belief in the little fame that has cost so dear!" he said again after a long silence. Something like a storm had been gathering in his heart during the past

hour. For all answer Eve gave him a look, and Lucien felt ashamed of his accusation.

Dinner was scarcely over when a messenger came from the prefecture with a note addressed to M. Chardon. That note appeared to decide the day for the poet's vanity; the world contending against the family for him had won.

"M. le Comte Sixte du Châtelet and Mme. la Comtesse du Châtelet request the honor of M. Lucien Chardon's company at dinner on the fifteenth of September. R. S. V. P."

Enclosed with the invitation there was a card—

LE COMTE SIXTE DU CHÂTELET,

Gentleman of the Bedchamber, Prefect of the Charente,  
Councilor of State.

"You are in favor," said old Séchard; "they are talking about you in the town as if you were somebody! Angoulême and L'Houmeau are disputing as to which shall twist wreaths for you."

"Eve, dear," Lucien whispered to his sister, "I am exactly in the same condition as I was before in L'Houmeau when Mme. de Bargeton sent me the first invitation—I have not a dress suit for the prefect's dinner-party."

"Do you really mean to accept the invitation?" Eve asked in alarm, and a dispute sprang up between the brother and sister. Eve's provincial good sense told her that if you appear in society, it must be with a smiling face and faultless costume. "What will come of the prefect's dinner?" she wondered. "What has Lucien to do with the great people of Angoulême? Are they plotting something against him?" but she kept these thoughts to herself.

Lucien spoke the last word at bedtime: "You do not know my influence. The prefect's wife stands in fear of a journalist; and besides, Louise de Nègrepelisse lives on in the Comtesse du Châtelet, and a woman with her influence can rescue David. I am going to tell her about my brother's invention, and it would be a mere nothing to her to obtain a

subsidy of ten thousand francs from the Government for him."

At eleven o'clock that night the whole household was awakened by the town band, reinforced by the military band from the barracks. The Place du Mûrier was full of people. The young men of Augoulême were giving Lucien Chardon de Rubempré a serenade. Lucien went to his sister's window and made a speech after the last performance.

"I thank my fellow-townsmen for the honor that they do me," he said in the midst of a great silence; "I will strive to be worthy of it; they will pardon me if I say no more; I am so much moved by this incident that I cannot speak."

"Hurrah for the writer of *The Archer of Charles IX!*  
. . . Hurrah for the poet of the *Marguerites!* . . .  
Long live Lucien de Rubempré!"

After these three salvoes, taken up by some few voices, three crowns and a quantity of bouquets were adroitly flung into the room through the open window. Ten minutes later the Place du Mûrier was empty, and silence prevailed in the streets.

"I would rather have ten thousand francs," said old Séchard, fingering the bouquets and garlands with a satirical expression. "You gave them daisies, and they give you posies in return; you deal in flowers."

"So that is your opinion of the honors shown me by my fellow-townsmen, is it?" asked Lucien. All his melancholy had left him, his face was radiant with good-humor. "If you knew mankind, Papa Séchard, you would see that no moment in one's life comes twice. Such a triumph as this can only be due to genuine enthusiasm! . . . My dear mother, my good sister, this wipes out many mortifications."

Lucien kissed them; for when joy overflows like a torrent flood, we are fain to pour it out into a friend's heart. "When an author is intoxicated with success, he will hug his porter if there is nobody else on hand," according to Bixiou.

"Why, darling, why are you crying?" he said, looking into Eve's face. "Ah! I know, you are crying for joy!"

"Oh me!" said Eve, when she and her mother were left alone in the bedroom, "there is a pretty woman of the worst kind in a poet, I think."

"You are right," said her mother, shaking her head as she spoke. "Lucien has forgotten everything already; not merely his own troubles, but ours as well."

Mother and daughter separated, and neither dared to utter all her thoughts.

In a country eaten up with the kind of social insubordination disguised by the word Equality, a triumph of any kind whatsoever is a sort of miracle which requires, like some other miracles for that matter, the co-operation of skilled labor. Out of ten ovations offered to ten living men, selected for this distinction by a grateful country, you may be quite sure that nine are given from considerations connected as remotely as possible with the conspicuous merits of the renowned recipient. What was Voltaire's apotheosis at the Théâtre-Français but the triumph of eighteenth century philosophy? A triumph in France means that everybody else feels that he is adorning his own temples with the crown that he sets on the idol's head.

The women's presentiments proved correct. The distinguished provincial's reception was antipathetic to Angoumois immobility; it was too evidently got up by some interested persons or by enthusiastic stage mechanists, a suspicious combination. Eve, moreover, like most of her sex, was distrustful by instinct, even when reason failed to justify her suspicions to herself. "Who can be so fond of Lucien that he could rouse the town for him?" she wondered as she fell asleep. "The *Marguerites* are not published yet; how can they compliment him on a future success?"

The ovation was, in fact, the work of Petit-Claud.

Petit-Claud had dined with Mme. de Senonches, for the first time, on the evening of the day that brought the curé of Marsac to Angoulême with the news of Lucien's return. That same evening he made formal application for the hand of Mlle. de la Haye. It was a family dinner, one of the solemn occasions marked not so much by the number of the

guests as by the splendor of their toilets. Consciousness of the performance weighs upon the family party, and every countenance looks significant. Françoise was on exhibition. Mme. de Senonches had sported her most elaborate costume for the occasion; M. du Hautoy wore a black coat; M. de Senonches had returned from his visit to the Pimentels on the receipt of a note from his wife, informing him that Mme. du Châtelet was to appear at their house for the first time since her arrival, and that a suitor in form for Françoise would appear on the scene. Boniface Cointet also was there, in his best maroon coat of clerical cut, with a diamond pin worth six thousand francs displayed in his shirt frill—the revenge of the rich merchant upon a poverty-stricken aristocracy.

Petit-Claud himself, scoured and combed, had carefully removed his grey hairs, but he could not rid himself of his wizened air. The puny little man of law, tightly buttoned into his clothes, reminded you of a torpid viper; for if hope had brought a spark of life into his magpie's eyes, his face was icily rigid, and so well did he assume an air of gravity, that an ambitious public prosecutor could not have been more dignified.

Mme. de Senonches had told her intimate friends that her ward would meet her betrothed that evening, and that Mme. du Châtelet would appear at the Hôtel de Senonches for the first time; and having particularly requested them to keep these matters secret, she expected to find her rooms crowded. The Comte and Comtesse du Châtelet had left cards everywhere officially, but they meant the honor of a personal visit to play a part in their policy. So aristocratic Angoulême was in such a prodigious ferment of curiosity, that certain of the Chandour camp proposed to go to the Hôtel de Bargeton that evening. (They persistently declined to call the house by its new name.)

Proofs of the Countess's influence had stirred up ambition in many quarters; and not only so, it was said that the lady had changed so much for the better that everybody wished to see and judge for himself. Petit-Claud learned great news on the way to the house; Cointet told him that

Zéphirine had asked leave to present her dear Françoise's betrothed to the Countess, and that the Countess had granted the favor. Petit-Claud had seen at once that Lucien's return put Louise de Nègrepelisse in a false position; and now, in a moment, he flattered himself that he saw a way to take advantage of it.

M. and Mme. de Senonchs had undertaken such heavy engagements when they bought the house, that, in provincial fashion, they thought it imprudent to make any changes in it. So when Mme. du Châtelet was announced, Zéphirine went up to her with—"Look, dear Louise, you are still in your old home!" indicating, as she spoke, the little chandelier, the paneled wainscot, and the furniture, which once had dazzled Lucien.

"I wish least of all to remember it, dear," Mme. la Préfète answered graciously, looking round on the assemblage.

Everyone admitted that Louise de Nègrepelisse was not like the same woman. If the provincial had undergone a change, the woman herself had been transformed by those eighteen months in Paris, by the first happiness of a still recent second marriage, and the kind of dignity that power confers. The Comtesse du Châtelet bore the same resemblance to Mme. de Bargeton that a girl of twenty bears to her mother.

She wore a charming cap of lace and flowers, fastened by a diamond-headed pin; the ringlets that half hid the contours of her face added to her look of youth, and suited her style of beauty. Her foulard gown, designed by the celebrated Victorine, with a pointed bodice, exquisitely fringed, set off her figure to advantage; and a silken lace scarf, adroitly thrown about too long a neck, partly concealed her shoulders. She played with the dainty scent-bottle, hung by a chain from her bracelet; she carried her fan and her handkerchief with ease—pretty trifles, as dangerous as a sunken reef for the provincial dame. The refined taste shown in the least details, the carriage and manner modeled upon Mme. d'Espard, revealed a profound study of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

As for the elderly beau of the Empire, he seemed since his marriage to have followed the example of the species of melon that turns from green to yellow in a night. All the youth that Sixte had lost seemed to appear in his wife's radiant countenance; provincial pleasantries passed from ear to ear, circulating the more readily because the women were furious at the new superiority of the sometime queen of Angoulême; and the persistent intruder paid the penalty of his wife's offense.

The rooms were almost as full as on that memorable evening of Lucien's readings from Chénier. Some faces were missing: M. de Chandour and Amélie, M. de Pimentel and the Rastignacs—and M. de Bargeton was no longer there; but the Bishop came, as before, with his vicars-general in his train. Petit-Claud was much impressed by the sight of the great world of Angoulême. Four months ago he had no hope of entering the circle, to-day he felt his detestation of "the classes" sensibly diminished. He thought the Comtesse du Châtelet a most fascinating woman. "It is she who can procure me the appointment of deputy public prosecutor," he said to himself.

Louise chatted for an equal length of time with each of the women; her tone varied with the importance of the person addressed and the position taken up by the latter with regard to her journey to Paris with Lucien. The evening was half over when she withdrew to the boudoir with the Bishop. Zéphirine came over to Petit-Claud, and laid her hand on his arm. His heart beat fast as his hostess brought him to the room where Lucien's troubles first began, and were now about to come to a crisis.

"This is M. Petit-Claud, dear; I recommend him to you the more warmly because anything that you may do for him will doubtless benefit my ward."

"You are an attorney, are you not, monsieur?" said the august Nègrelisse, scanning Petit-Claud.

"Alas! yes, *Mme. la Comtesse*." (The son of the tailor in L'Houmeau had never once had occasion to use those three words in his life before, and his mouth was full of them.) "But it rests with you, *Mme. la Comtesse*,

whether or no I shall act for the Crown. M. Milaud is going to Nevers, it is said——”

“But a man is usually second deputy and then first deputy, is he not?” broke in the Countess. “I should like to see you in the first deputy’s place at once. But I should like first to have some assurance of your devotion to the cause of our legitimate sovereigns, to religion, and more especially to M. de Villèle, if I am to interest myself on your behalf to obtain the favor.”

Petit-Claud came nearer. “Madame,” he said in her ear, “I am the man to yield the King absolute obedience.”

“That is just what *we* want to-day,” said the Countess, drawing back a little to make him understand that she had no wish for promises given under his breath. “So long as you satisfy Mme. de Senonches, you can count upon me,” she added, with a royal movement of her fan.

Petit-Claud looked towards the door of the boudoir, and saw Cointet standing there. “Madame,” he said, “Lucien is here, in Angoulême.”

“Well, sir?” asked the Countess, in tones that would have put an end to all power of speech in an ordinary man.

“Mme. la Comtesse does not understand,” returned Petit-Claud, bringing out that most respectful formula again. “How does Mme. la Comtesse wish that the great man of her making should be received in Angoulême? There is no middle course; he must be honored or despised here.”

This was a dilemma to which Louise de Nègrepelisse had never given a thought; it touched her closely, yet rather for the sake of the past than of the future. And as for Petit-Claud, his plan for arresting David Séchard depended upon the lady’s actual feelings towards Lucien. He waited.

“M. Petit-Claud,” said the Countess, with haughty dignity, “you mean to be on the side of the Government. Learn that the first principle of government is this—never to have been in the wrong, and that the instinct of power and the sense of dignity is even stronger in women than in governments.”

“That is just what I thought, madame,” he answered quickly, observing the Countess meanwhile with attention



the more profound because it was scarcely visible. "Lucien came here in the depths of misery. But if he must receive an ovation, I can compel him to leave Angoulême by the means of the ovation itself. His sister and brother-in-law, David Séchard, are hard pressed for debts."

In the Countess's haughty face there was a swift, barely perceptible change; it was not satisfaction, but the repression of satisfaction. Surprised that Petit-Claud should have guessed her wishes, she gave him a glance as she opened her fan, and Françoise de la Haye's entrance at that moment gave her time to find an answer.

"It will not be long before you are public prosecutor, monsieur," she said, with a significant smile. That speech did not commit her in any way, but it was explicit enough. Françoise had come in to thank the Countess.

"Oh! madame, then I shall owe the happiness of my life to you," she exclaimed, bending girlishly to add in the Countess's ear, "To marry a petty provincial attorney would be like being burnt by slow fires."

It was Francis, with his knowledge of officialdom, who had prompted Zéphirine to make this set upon Louise.

"In the very earliest days after promotion," so the ex-consul-general told his fair friend, "everybody, prefect, or monarch, or man of business, is burning to exert his influence for his friends; but a patron soon finds out the inconveniences of patronage, and then turns from fire to ice. Louise will do more just now for Petit-Claud than she would do for your husband in three months' time."

"Mme. la Comtesse is thinking of all that our poet's triumph entails?" continued Petit-Claud. "She should receive Lucien before there is an end of the nine-days' wonder."

The Countess terminated the audience with a bow, and rose to speak with Mme. de Pimentel, who came to the boudoir. The news of old Nègrepelisse's elevation to a marquise had greatly impressed the Marquise; she judged it expedient to be amiable to a woman so clever as to rise the higher for an apparent fall.

"Do tell me, dear, why you took the trouble to put your father in the House of Peers?" said the Marquise, in the

course of a little confidential conversation, in which she bent the knee before the superiority of "her dear Louise."

"They were all the more ready to grant the favor because my father has no son to succeed him, dear, and his vote will always be at the disposal of the Crown; but if we should have sons, I quite expect that my oldest will succeed to his grandfather's name, title, and peerage."

Mme. de Pimentel saw, to her annoyance, that it was idle to expect a mother ambitious for children not yet in existence to further her own private designs of raising M. de Pimentel to a peerage.

"I have the Countess," Petit-Claud told Cointet when they came away. "I can promise you your partnership. I shall be deputy public prosecutor before the month is out, and Séchard will be in your power. Try to find a buyer for my connection; it has come to be the first in Angoulême in my hands during the last five months——"

"Once put *you* on the horse, and there is no need to do more," said Cointet, half jealous of his own work.

The causes of Lucien's triumphant reception in his native town must now be plain to everybody. Louise du Châtelet followed the example of that King of France who left the Duke of Orléans unavenged; she chose to forget the insults received in Paris by Mme. de Bargeton. She would patronize Lucien, and overwhelming him with her patronage, would completely crush him and get rid of him by fair means. Petit-Claud knew the whole tale of the cabals in Paris through town gossip, and shrewdly guessed how a woman must hate the man who would not love when she was fain of his love.

The ovation justified the past of Louise de Nègrepelisse. The next day Petit-Claud appeared at Mme. Séchard's house, heading a deputation of six young men of the town, all of them Lucien's schoolfellows. He meant to finish his work, to intoxicate Lucien completely, and to have him in his power. Lucien's old schoolfellows at the Angoulême grammar-school wished to invite the author of the *Marguerites* and *The Archer of Charles IX.* to a banquet given in honor of the great man arisen from their ranks.

"Come, this is your doing, Petit-Claud!" exclaimed Lucien.

"Your return has stirred our conceit," said Petit-Claud; "we made it a point of honor to get up a subscription, and we will have a tremendous affair for you. The masters and the head-master will be there, and, at the present rate, we shall, no doubt, have the authorities too."

"For what day?" asked Lucien.

"Sunday next."

"That is quite out of the question," said Lucien, "I cannot accept an invitation for the next ten days, but then I will gladly——"

"Very well," said Petit-Claud, "so be it then, in ten days' time."

Lucien behaved charmingly to his old schoolfellows, and they regarded him with almost respectful admiration. He talked away very wittily for half an hour; he had been set upon a pedestal, and wished to justify the opinion of his fellow-townsmen; so he stood with his hands thrust into his pockets, and held forth from the height to which he had been raised. He was modest and good-natured, as befitted genius in dressing-gown and slippers; he was the athlete, wearied by a wrestling bout with Paris, and disenchanted above all things; he congratulated the comrades who had never left the dear old province, and so forth, and so forth. They were delighted with him. He took Petit-Claud aside, and asked him for the real truth about David's affairs, reproached him for allowing his brother-in-law to go into hiding, and tried to match his wits against the little lawyer. Petit-Claud made an effort over himself, and gave his acquaintance to understand that he (Petit-Claud) was only an insignificant little country attorney, with no sort of craft nor subtlety.

The whole machinery of modern society is so infinitely more complex than in ancient times, that the subdivision of human faculty is the result. The great men of the days of old were perforce universal geniuses, appearing at rare intervals like lighted torches in an antique world. In the course of ages the intellect began to work on special lines, but the

great man still could "take all knowledge for his province." A man "full cautelous," as was said of Louis XI., for instance, could apply that special faculty in every direction, but to-day the single quality is subdivided, and every profession has its special craft. A peasant or a pettifogging solicitor might very easily overreach an astute diplomat over a bargain in some remote country village; and the wiliest journalist may prove the veriest simpleton in a piece of business. Lucien could but be a puppet in the hands of Petit-Claud.

That guileful practitioner, as might have been expected, had written the article himself; Angoulême and L'Houmeau, thus put on their mettle, thought it incumbent upon them to pay honor to Lucien. His fellow-citizens, assembled in the Place du Mûrier, were Cointets' workpeople from the paper-mills and printing-house, with a sprinkling of Lucien's old schoolfellows and the clerks in the employ of Messieurs Petit-Claud and Cachan. As for the attorney himself, he was once more Lucien's chum of old days; and he thought, not without reason, that before very long he should learn David's whereabouts in some unguarded moment. And if David came to grief through Lucien's fault, the poet would find Angoulême too hot to hold him. Petit-Claud meant to secure his hold; he posed, therefore, as Lucien's inferior.

"What better could I have done?" he said accordingly. "My old chum's sister was involved, it is true, but there are some positions that simply cannot be maintained in a court of law. David asked me on the first of June to insure him a quiet life for three months; he had a quiet life until September, and even so I have kept his property out of his creditors' power, for I shall gain my case in the Court-Royal; I contend that the wife is a privileged creditor, and her claim is absolute, unless there is evidence of intent to defraud. As for you, you have come back in misfortune, but you are a genius."—(Lucien turned about as if the incense were burned too close to his face.)—"Yes, my dear fellow, a *genius*. I have read your *Archer of Charles IX.*; it is more than a romance, it is literature. Only two living

men could have written the preface—Chateaubriand and Lucien.”

Lucien accepted the eulogium, and did not think it necessary to mention that d’Arthez had written the preface. Ninety-nine writers out of a hundred would have done the same.

“Well, nobody here seemed to have heard of you!” Petit-Claud continued, with apparent indignation. “When I saw the general indifference, I made up my mind to change all that. I wrote that article in the paper——”

“What? Did you write it?” exclaimed Lucien.

“I myself. Angoulême and L’Houmeau were stirred to rivalry; I arranged for a meeting of your old schoolfellows, and got up yesterday’s serenade; and when once the enthusiasm began to grow, we started a committee for the dinner. ‘If David is in hiding,’ said I to myself, ‘Lucien shall be crowned at any rate.’ And I have done even better than that,” continued Petit-Claud; “I have seen the Comtesse du Châtelet and made her understand that she owes it to herself to extricate David from his position; she can do it, and she ought to do it. If David has really discovered the secret of which he spoke to me, the Government ought to lend him a hand, it would not ruin the Government; and think what a fine thing for a prefect to have half the credit of the great invention for the well-timed help. It would set people talking about him as an enlightened administrator.—Your sister has taken fright at our musketry practice; she was scared of the smoke. A battle in the law-courts costs quite as much as a battle on the field; but David has held his ground, he has his secret. They cannot stop him, and they will not pull him up now.”

“Thanks, my dear fellow; I see that I can take you into my confidence; you shall help me to carry out my plan.”

Petit-Claud looked at Lucien, and his gimlet face was a point of interrogation.

“I intend to rescue Séchard,” Lucien said, with a certain importance. “I brought his misfortunes upon him; I mean to make full reparation. . . . I have more influence over Louise——”

“Who is Louise?”

“The Comtesse du Châtelet!”

Petit-Claud started.

“I have more influence over her than she herself suspects,” said Lucien; “only, my dear fellow, if I can do something with your authorities here, I have no decent clothes.”—Petit-Claud made as though he would offer his purse.

“Thank you,” said Lucien, grasping Petit-Claud’s hand. “In ten days’ time I will pay a visit to the Countess and return your call.”

They shook hands like old comrades, and separated.

“He ought to be a poet,” said Petit-Claud to himself; “he is quite mad.”

“There are no friends like one’s school friends; it is a true saying,” Lucien thought as he went to find his sister.

“What can Petit-Claud have promised to do that you should be so friendly with him, my Lucien?” asked Eve. “Be on your guard with him.”

“With *him*?” cried Lucien. “Listen, Eve,” he continued, seeming to bethink himself, “you have no faith in me now, you do not trust me, so it is not likely you will trust Petit-Claud; but in ten or twelve days you will change your mind,” he added, with a touch of fatuity. And he went up to his room, and indited the following epistle to Lousteau:—

“*Lucien to Lousteau.*”

“MY FRIEND,—Of the pair of us, I alone can remember that bill for a thousand francs that I once lent you; and I know how things will be with you when you open this letter too well, alas; not to add immediately that I do not expect to be repaid in current coin of the realm; no, I will take it in credit from you, just as one would ask Florine for pleasure. We have the same tailor; therefore, you can order a complete outfit for me on the shortest possible notice. I am not precisely wearing Adam’s costume, but I cannot show myself here. To my astonishment, the honors paid by the departments to a Parisian celebrity awaited me. I am the hero of a banquet, for all the world as if I were a Deputy of the Left. Now, after that, do you understand

that I must have a black coat? Promise to pay; have it put down to your account, try the advertisement dodge, rehearse an unpublished scene between Don Juan and M. Dimanche, for I must have a gala suit at all costs. I have nothing, nothing but rags: start with that; it is August, the weather is magnificent, *ergo* see that I receive by the end of the week a charming morning suit, dark bronze-green jacket, and three waistcoats, one a brimstone yellow, one a plaid, and the third must be white; furthermore, let there be three pairs of trousers of the most fetching kind—one pair of white English stuff, one pair of nankeen, and a third of thin black kerseymere; lastly, send a black dress-coat and a black satin waistcoat. If you have picked up another Florine somewhere, I beg her good offices for two cravats. So far this is nothing; I count upon you and your skill in these matters; I am not much afraid of the tailor. But the ingenuity of poverty, assuredly the most active of all poisons at work in the system of man (*id est* the Parisian), an ingenuity that would catch Satan himself napping, has failed so far to discover a way to obtain a hat on credit!—How many a time, my dear friend, have we deplored this! When one of us shall bring a hat that costs a thousand francs into fashion, then, and not till then, can we afford to wear them; until that day comes we are bound to have cash enough in our pockets to pay for a hat. Ah! what an ill turn the Comédie-Française did us with, ‘*Laufleur*, you will put gold in my pockets!’

“I write with a profound sense of all the difficulties involved by the demand. Enclose with the above a pair of boots, a pair of pumps, a hat, half a dozen pairs of gloves. ’Tis asking the impossible; I know it. But what is a literary life but a periodical recurrence of the impossible? Work the miracle, write a long article, or play some small scurvy trick, and I will hold your debt as fully discharged—this is all I say to you. It is a debt of honor after all, my dear fellow, and due these twelve months; you ought to blush for yourself if you had any blushes left.

“Joking apart, my dear Lousteau, I am in serious difficulties, as you may judge for yourself when I tell you that

Mme. de Bargeton has married Châtelet, and Châtelet is prefect of Angoulême. The precious pair can do a good deal for my brother-in-law; he is in hiding at this moment on account of that letter of exchange, and the horrid business is all my doing. So it is a question of appearing before Mme. la Préfète and regaining my influence at all costs. It is shocking, is it not, that David Séchard's fate should hang upon a neat pair of shoes, a pair of open-worked gray silk stockings (mind you, remember them), and a new hat? I shall give out that I am sick and ill, and take to my bed, like Duvicquet, to save the trouble of replying to the pressing invitations of my fellow-townsmen. My fellow-townsmen, dear boy, have treated me to a fine serenade. *My fellow-townsmen*, forsooth; I begin to wonder how many fools go to make up that word, since I learned that two or three of my old schoolfellows worked up the capital of the Angoumois to this pitch of enthusiasm.

"If you could contrive to slip a few lines as to my reception in among the news items, I should be several inches the taller for it here; and besides, I should make Mme. la Préfète feel that, if I have not friends, I have some credit, at any rate, with the Parisian press. I give up none of my hopes, and I will return the compliment. If you want a good, solid, substantial article for some magazine or other, I have time enough now to think something out. I only say the word, my dear friend; I count upon you as you may count upon me, and I am yours sincerely.

LUCIEN DE R.

"P.S.—Send the things to the coach office to wait until called for."

Lucien held up his head again. In this mood he wrote the letter, and as he wrote his thoughts went back to Paris. He had spent six days in the provinces, and the uneventful quietness of provincial life had already entered into his soul; his mind returned to those dear old miserable days with a vague sense of regret. The Comtesse du Châtelet filled his thoughts for a whole week; and at last he came to attach so much importance to his reappearance, that he hurried down to the coach office in L'Houmeau after nightfall in a perfect



agony of suspense, like a woman who has set her last hopes upon a new dress, and waits in despair until it arrives.

“Ah! Lousteau, all your treasons are forgiven,” he said to himself, as he eyed the packages, and knew from the shape of them that everything had been sent. Inside the hatbox he found a note from Lousteau:—

“FLORINE’S DRAWING-ROOM.

“MY DEAR BOY,—The tailor behaved very well; but as thy profound retrospective glance led thee to forebode, the cravats, the hat, and the silk hosen perplexed our souls, for there was nothing in our purse to be perplexed thereby. As said Blondet, so say we; there is a fortune awaiting the establishment which will supply young men with inexpensive articles on credit; for when we do not pay in the beginning, we pay dear in the end. And by the by, did not the great Napoleon, who missed a voyage to the Indies for want of boots, say that, ‘If a thing is easy, it is never done?’ So everything went well—except the boots. I beheld a vision of thee, fully dressed, but without a hat! appareled in waistcoats, yet shoeless! and bethought me of sending a pair of moccasins given to Florine as a curiosity by an American. Florine offered the huge sum of forty francs, that we might try our luck at play for you. Nathan, Blondet, and I had such luck (as we were not playing for ourselves) that we were rich enough to ask La Torpille, des Lupeaulx’s sometime ‘rat,’ to supper. Frascati certainly owed us that much. Florine undertook the shopping, and added three fine shirts to the purchases. Nathan sends you a cane. Blondet, who won three hundred francs, is sending you a gold chain; and the gold watch, the size of a forty-franc piece, is from La Torpille; some idiot gave the thing to her, and it will not go. ‘Trumpery rubbish,’ she says, ‘like the man that owned it.’ Bixiou, who came to find us up at the *Rocher de Cancale*, wished to enclose a bottle of Portugal water in the package. Said our first comic man, ‘If this can make him happy, let him have it!’ growling it out in a deep bass voice with the bourgeois pomposity that he can act to the life. Which things, my dear boy, ought to

prove to you how much we care for our friends in adversity. Florine, whom I have had the weakness to forgive, begs you to send us an article on Nathan's last. Fare thee well, my son. I can only commiserate you on finding yourself back in the same box from which you emerged when you discovered your old comrade, ÉTIENNE L."

"Poor fellows! They have been gambling for me," said Lucien; he was quite touched by the letter. A waft of the breeze from an unhealthy country, from the land where one has suffered most, may seem to bring the odors of Paradise; and in a dull life there is an indefinable sweetness in memories of past pain.

Eve was struck dumb with amazement when her brother came down in his new clothes. She did not recognize him.

"Now I can walk out in Beaulieu," he cried; "they shall not say it of me that I came back in rags. Look, here is a watch which I shall return to you, for it is mine; and, like its owner, it is erratic in its ways."

"What a child he is!" exclaimed Eve. "It is impossible to bear you any grudge."

"Then do you imagine, my dear girl, that I sent for all this with the silly idea of shining in Angoulême? I don't care *that* for Angoulême" (twirling his cane with the engraved gold knob). "I intend to repair the wrong I have done, and this is my battle array."

Lucien's success in this kind was his one real triumph; but the triumph, be it said, was immense. If admiration freezes some people's tongues, envy loosens at least as many more, and if women lost their heads over Lucien, men slandered him. He might have cried in the words of the songwriter, "I thank thee, my coat!" He left two cards at the prefecture, and another upon Petit-Claud. The next day, the day of the banquet, the following paragraph appeared under the heading "Angoulême" in the Paris newspapers:—

" ANGOULÊME.

"The return of the author of *The Archer of Charles IX.* has been the signal for an ovation which does equal honor

to the town and to M. Lucien de Rubempré, the young poet who has made so brilliant a beginning; the writer of the one French historical novel not written in the style of Scott, and of a preface which may be called a literary event. The town hastened to offer him a patriotic banquet on his return. The name of the recently appointed prefect is associated with the public demonstration in honor of the author of the *Marguerites*, whose talent received such warm encouragement from Mme. du Châtelet at the outset of his career."

In France, when once the impulse is given, nobody can stop. The colonel of the regiment offered to put his band at the disposal of the committee. The landlord of the *Bell* (renowned for truffled turkeys, despatched, in the most wonderful porcelain jars to the uttermost parts of the earth), the famous innkeeper of L'Houmeau, would supply the repast. At five o'clock some forty persons, all in state and festival array, were assembled in his largest hall, decorated with hangings, crowns of laurel, and bouquets. The effect was superb. A crowd of onlookers, some hundred persons, attracted for the most part by the military band in the yard, represented the citizens of Angoulême.

Petit-Claud went to the window. "All Angoulême is here," he said, looking out.

"I can make nothing of this," remarked little Postel to his wife (they had come out to hear the band play). "Why, the prefect and the receiver-general, and the colonel and the superintendent of the powder factory, and our mayor and deputy, and the headmaster of the school, and the manager of the foundry at Ruelle, and the public prosecutor M. Milaud, and all the authorities have just gone in!"

The band struck up as they sat down to table with variations on the air *Vive le roi, vive la France*, a melody which has never found popular favor. It was then five o'clock in the evening; it was eight o'clock before dessert was served. Conspicuous among the sixty-five dishes appeared an Olympus in confectionery, surmounted by a figure of France modeled in chocolate, to give the signal for toasts and speeches.

"Gentlemen," called the prefect, rising to his feet, "the

King! the rightful ruler of France! To what do we owe the generation of poets and thinkers who maintain the scepter of letters in the hands of France, if not to the peace which the Bourbons have restored——”

“Long live the King!” cried the assembled guests (ministerialists predominated).

The venerable headmaster rose.

“To the hero of the day,” he said, “to the young poet who combines the gift of the *prosateur* with the charm and poetic faculty of Petrarch in that sonnet-form which Boileau declares to be so difficult.”

Cheers.

The colonel rose next. “Gentlemen, to the Royalist! for the hero of this evening had the courage to fight for sound principles!”

“Bravo!” cried the prefect, leading the applause.

Then Petit-Claud called upon all Lucien’s school-fellows there present. “To the pride of the grammar-school of Angoulême! to the venerable headmaster so dear to us all, to whom the acknowledgment for some part of our triumph is due!”

The old headmaster dried his eyes; he had not expected this toast. Lucien rose to his feet, the whole room was suddenly silent, and the poet’s face grew white. In that pause the old headmaster who sat on his left crowned him with a laurel wreath. A round of applause followed, and when Lucien spoke it was with tears in his eyes and a sob in his throat.

“He is drunk,” remarked the attorney-general-designate to his neighbor Petit-Claud.

“It is not the wine,” returned Petit-Claud.

“My dear fellow-countrymen, my dear comrades,” Lucien said at last, “I could wish that all France might witness this scene; for thus men rise to their full stature, and in such ways as these our land demands great deeds and noble work of us. And when I think of the little that I have done, and of this great honor shown to me to-day, I can only feel confused and impose upon the future the task of justifying your reception of me. The recollection of this moment will give

me renewed strength for efforts to come. Permit me to indicate for your homage my earliest muse and protectress, and to associate her name with that of my birthplace; so—to the Comtesse du Châtelet and the noble town of Angoulême!”

“He came out of that pretty well!” said the public prosecutor, nodding approval; “our speeches were all prepared, and his was improvised.”

At ten o'clock the party began to break up, and little knots of guests went home together. David Séchard heard the unwonted music.

“What is going on in L'Houmeau?” he asked of Basine.

“They are giving a dinner to your brother-in-law, Lucien——”

“I know that he would feel sorry to miss me there,” he said.

At midnight Petit-Claud walked home with Lucien. As they reached the Place du Mûrier, Lucien said, “Come life, come death, we are friends, my dear fellow.”

“My marriage-contract,” said the lawyer, “with Mlle. Françoise de la Haye will be signed to-morrow at Mme. de Senonches's house; do me the pleasure of coming. Mme. de Senonches implored me to bring you, and you will meet Mme. du Châtelet; they are sure to tell her of your speech, and she will feel flattered by it.”

“I knew what I was about,” said Lucien.

“Oh! you will save David.”

“I am sure I shall,” the poet replied.

Just at that moment David appeared as if by magic in the Place du Mûrier. This was how it had come about. He felt that he was in a rather difficult position; his wife insisted that Lucien must neither go to David nor know of his hiding-place; and Lucien all the while was writing the most affectionate letters, saying that in a few days' time all should be set right; and even as Basine Clerget explained the reason why the band played, she put two letters into his hands. *The first was from Eve.*

“DEAREST,” she wrote, “do as if Lucien were not here; do not trouble yourself in the least; our whole security

depends upon the fact that your enemies cannot find you; get that idea firmly into your dear head. I have more confidence in Kolb and Marion and Basine than in my own brother; such is my misfortune. Alas! poor Lucien is not the ingenuous and tender-hearted poet whom we used to know; and it is simply because he is trying to interfere on your behalf, and because he imagines that he can discharge our debts (and this from pride, my David), that I am afraid of him. Some fine clothes have been sent from Paris for him, and five gold pieces in a pretty purse. He gave the money to me, and we are living on it.

“We have one enemy the less. Your father has gone, thanks to Petit-Claud. Petit-Claud unraveled his designs, and put an end to them at once by telling him that you would do nothing without consulting him, and that he (Petit-Claud) would not allow you to concede a single point in the matter of the invention until you had been promised an indemnity of thirty thousand francs; fifteen thousand to free you from embarrassment, and fifteen thousand more to be yours in any case, whether your invention succeeds or no. I cannot understand Petit-Claud. I embrace you, dear, a wife’s kiss for her husband in trouble. Our little Lucien is well. How strange it is to watch him grow rosy and strong, like a flower, in these stormy days! Mother prays God for you now, as always, and sends love only less tender than mine.—Your  
EVE.”

As a matter of fact, Petit-Claud and the Cointets had taken fright at old Séchard’s peasant’s shrewdness, and got rid of him so much the more easily because it was now vintage time at Marsac. Eve’s letter enclosed another from Lucien:—

“MY DEAR DAVID,—Everything is going well. I am armed *cap-à-pie*; to-day I open the campaign, and in forty-eight hours I shall have made great progress. How glad I shall be to embrace you when you are free again and my debts are all paid! My mother and sister persist in mistrusting me; their suspicion wounds me to the quick. As if

I did not know already that you are hiding with Basine, for every time that Basine comes to the house I hear news of you and receive answers to my letters; and besides, it is plain that my sister could not find anyone else to trust. It hurts me cruelly to think that I shall be so near you to-day, and yet that you will not be present at this banquet in my honor. I owe my little triumph to the vainglory of Angoulême; in a few days it will be quite forgotten, and you alone would have taken a real pleasure in it. But, after all, in a little while you will pardon everything to one who counts it more than all the triumphs in the world to be your brother,

“LUCIEN.”

Two forces tugged sharply at David's heart; he adored his wife; and if he held Lucien in somewhat less esteem, his friendship was scarcely diminished. In solitude our feelings have unrestricted play; and a man preoccupied like David, with all-absorbing thoughts, will give way to impulses for which ordinary life would have provided a sufficient counterpoise. As he read Lucien's letter to the sound of military music, and heard of this unlooked-for recognition, he was deeply touched by that expression of regret. He had known how it would be. A very slight expression of feeling appeals irresistibly to a sensitive soul, for they are apt to credit others with like depths. How should the drop fall unless the cup were full to the brim?

So at midnight, in spite of all Basine's entreaties, David must go to see Lucien.

“Nobody will be out in the streets at this time of night,” he said; “I shall not be seen, and they cannot arrest me. Even if I should meet people, I can make use of Kolb's way of going into hiding. And besides, it is so intolerably long since I saw my wife and child.”

The reasoning was plausible enough; Basine gave way, and David went. Petit-Claud was just taking leave as he came up, and at his cry of “*Lucien!*” the two brothers flung their arms about each other with tears in their eyes.

Life holds not many moments such as these. Lucien's heart went out in response to this friendship for its own

sake. There was never question of debtor and creditor between them, and the offender met with no reproaches save his own. David, generous and noble that he was, he was longing to bestow pardon; he meant first of all to read Lucien a lecture, and scatter the clouds that overspread the love of the brother and sister; and with these ends in view, the lack of money and its consequent dangers disappeared entirely from his mind.

“Go home,” said Petit-Claud, addressing his client; “take advantage of your imprudence to see your wife and child again, at any rate; and you must not be seen, mind you!—How unlucky!” he added, when he was alone in the Place du Mûrier. “If only Cérizet were here——”

The buildings magniloquently styled the Angoulême Law Courts were then in process of construction. Petit-Claud muttered these words to himself as he passed by the hoardings, and heard a tap upon the boards, and a voice issuing from a crack between two planks—

“Here I am,” said Cérizet; “I saw David coming out of L’Houmeau. I was beginning to have my suspicions about his retreat, and now I am sure; and I know where to have him. But I want to know something of Lucien’s plans before I set the snare for David; and here are you sending him into the house! Find some excuse for stopping here, at least, and when David and Lucien come out, send them round this way; they will think they are quite alone, and I shall overhear their good-by.”

“You are a very devil,” muttered Petit-Claud.

“Well, I’m blessed if a man wouldn’t do anything for the thing you promised me.”

Petit-Claud walked away from the hoarding, and paced up and down in the Place du Mûrier; he watched the windows of the room where the family sat together, and thought of his own prospects to keep up his courage. Cérizet’s cleverness had given him the chance of striking the final blow. Petit-Claud was a double-dealer of the profoundly cautious stamp that is never caught by the bait of a present satisfaction, nor entangled by a personal attachment, after his first initiation into the strategy of self-seeking and the



instability of the human heart. So, from the very first he had put little trust in Cointet. He foresaw that his marriage negotiations might very easily be broken off, saw also that in that case he could not accuse Cointet of bad faith, and he had taken his measures accordingly. But since his success at the Hôtel de Bargeton, Petit-Claud's game was above board. A certain under-plot of his was useless now, and even dangerous to a man with his political ambitions. He had laid the foundations of his future importance in the following manner:—

Gannerac and a few of the wealthy men of business in L'Houmeau formed a sort of Liberal clique in constant communication (through commercial channels) with the leaders of the Opposition. The Villèle ministry, accepted by the dying Louis XVIII., gave the signal for a change of tactics in the Opposition camp; for since the death of Napoleon the Liberals had ceased to resort to the dangerous expedient of conspiracy. They were busy organizing resistance by lawful means throughout the provinces, and aiming at securing control of the great bulk of electors by convincing the masses. Petit-Claud, a rabid Liberal, and a man of L'Houmeau, was the instigator, the secret counselor, and the very life of this movement in the lower town, which groaned under the tyranny of the aristocrats at the upper end. He was the first to see the danger of leaving the whole press of the department in the control of the Cointets; the Opposition must have its organ; it would not do to be behind other cities.

“If each one of us gives Gannerac a bill for five hundred francs, he would have some twenty thousand francs and more; we might buy up Séchard's printing-office, and we could do as we liked with the master-printer if we lent him the capital,” Petit-Claud had said.

Others had taken up the idea, and in this way Petit-Claud strengthened his position with regard to David on the one side and the Cointets on the other. Casting about him for a tool for his party, he naturally thought that a rogue of Cérizet's caliber was the very man for the purpose.

“If you can find Séchard's hiding-place and put him in

our hands, somebody will lend you twenty thousand francs to buy his business, and very likely there will be a newspaper to print. So, set about it," he had said.

Petit-Claud put more faith in Cérizet's activity than in all the Doublons in existence; and then it was that he promised Cointet that Séchard should be arrested. But now that the little lawyer cherished hopes of office, he saw that he must turn his back upon the Liberals; and, meanwhile, the amount for the printing-office had been subscribed in L'Houmeau. Petit-Claud decided to allow things to take their natural course.

"Pooh!" he thought, "Cérizet will get into trouble with his paper, and give me an opportunity of displaying my talents."

He walked up to the door of the printing-office and spoke to Kolb the sentinel. "Go up and warn David that he had better go now," he said, "and take every precaution. I am going home; it is one o'clock."

Marion came to take Kolb's place. Lucien and David came down together and went out, Kolb a hundred paces ahead of them, and Marion at the same distance behind. The two friends walked past the hoarding, Lucien talking eagerly the while.

"My plan is extremely simple, David; but how could I tell you about it while Eve was there? She would never understand. I am quite sure that at the bottom of Louise's heart there is a feeling that I can rouse, and I should like to arouse it if it is only to avenge myself upon that idiot the prefect. If our love affair only lasts for a week, I will contrive to send an application through her for a subvention of twenty thousand francs for you. I am going to see her again to-morrow in the little boudoir where our old affair of the heart began; Petit-Claud says that the room is the same as ever; I shall play my part in the comedy; and I will send word by Basine to-morrow morning to tell you whether the actor was hissed. You may be at liberty by then, who knows?—Now do you understand how it was that I wanted clothes from Paris? One cannot act the lover's part in rags."

At six o'clock that morning Cérizet went to Petit-Claud.

"Doublon can be ready to take his man to-morrow at noon, I will answer for it," he said; "I know one of Mlle. Clerget's girls, do you understand?" Cérizet unfolded his plan, and Petit-Claud hurried to find Cointet.

"If M. Francis du Hautoy will settle his property on Françoise, you shall sign a deed of partnership with Séchard in two days. I shall not be married for a week after the contract is signed, so we shall both be within the terms of our little agreement, tit for tat. To-night, however, we must keep a close watch over Lucien and Mme. la Comtesse du Châtelet, for the whole business lies in that. . . . If Lucien hopes to succeed through the Countess's influence, I have David safe——"

"You will be Keeper of the Seals yet, it is my belief," said Cointet.

"And why not? No one objects to M. de Peyronnet," said Petit-Claud. He had not altogether sloughed his skin of Liberalism.

Mlle. de la Haye's ambiguous position brought most of the upper town to the signing of the marriage-contract. The comparative poverty of the young couple and the absence of a *corbeille* quickened the interest that people love to exhibit; for it is with beneficence as with ovations, we prefer the deeds of charity which gratify self-love. The Marquise de Pimentel, the Comtesse du Châtelet, M. de Senonches, and one or two frequenters of the house had given Françoise a few wedding presents, which made great talk in the city. These pretty trifles, together with the trousseau which Zéphirine had been preparing for the past twelve months, the godfather's jewels, and the usual wedding gifts, consoled Françoise and roused the curiosity of some mothers of daughters.

Petit-Claud and Cointet had both remarked that their presence in the Angoulême Olympus was endured rather than courted. Cointet was Françoise's trustee and quasi-guardian; and if Petit-Claud was to sign the contract, Petit-Claud's presence was as necessary as the attendance of the

man to be hanged at an execution; but though, once married, Mme. Petit-Claud might keep her right of entry to her godmother's house, Petit-Claud foresaw some difficulty on his own account, and resolved to be beforehand with these haughty personages.

He felt ashamed of his parents. He had sent his mother to stay at Mansle; now he begged her to say that she was out of health and to give her consent in writing. So humiliating was it to be without relations, protectors, or witnesses to his signature, that Petit-Claud thought himself in luck that he could bring a presentable friend at the Countess's request. He called to take up Lucien, and they drove to the Hôtel de Bargeton.

On that memorable evening the poet dressed to outshine every man present. Mme. de Senonches had spoken of him as the hero of the hour, and a first interview between two estranged lovers is the kind of scene that provincials particularly love. Lucien had come to be the lion of the evening; he was said to be so handsome, so much changed, so wonderful, that every well-born woman in Angoulême was curious to see him again. Following the fashion of the transition period between the eighteenth century small clothes and the vulgar costume of the present day, he wore tight-fitting black trousers. Men still showed their figures in those days, to the utter despair of lean, clumsily-made mortals; and Lucien was an Apollo. The open-work gray silk stockings, the neat shoes, and the black satin waistcoat were scrupulously drawn over his person, and seemed to cling to him. His forehead looked the whiter by contrast with the thick, bright curls that rose above it with studied grace. The proud eyes were radiant. The hands, small as a woman's, never showed to better advantage than when gloved. He had modeled himself upon de Marsay, the famous Parisian dandy, holding his hat and cane in one hand, and keeping the other free for the very occasional gestures which illustrated his talk.

Lucien had quite intended to emulate the famous false modesty of those who bend their heads to pass beneath the Porte Saint-Denis, and to slip unobserved into the room;

but Petit-Claud, having but one friend, made him useful. He brought Lucien almost pompously through a crowded room to Mme. de Senonches. The poet heard a murmur as he passed; not so very long ago that hum of voices would have turned his head, to-day he was quite indifferent; he did not doubt but that he himself was greater than the whole Olympus put together.

"Madame," he said, addressing Mme. de Senonches, "I have already congratulated my friend Petit-Claud (a man with the stuff in him of which Keepers of the Seals are made) on the honor of his approaching connection with you, slight as are the ties between godmother and goddaughter——" (this with the air of a man uttering an epigram, by no means lost upon any woman in the room, for every woman was listening without appearing to do so). "And for myself," he continued, "I am delighted to have the opportunity of paying my homage to you."

He spoke easily and fluently, as some great lord might speak under the roof of his inferiors; and as he listened to Zéphirine's involved reply, he cast a glance over the room to consider the effect that he wished to make. The pause gave him time to discover Francis du Hautoy and the prefect; to bow gracefully to each with the proper shade of difference in his smile; and, finally, to approach Mme. du Châtelet as if he had just caught sight of her. That meeting was the real event of the evening. No one so much as thought of the marriage-contract lying in the adjoining bedroom, whither Françoise and the notary led guest after guest to sign the document. Lucien made a step towards Louise de Nègrepelisse, and then spoke with that grace of manner now associated, for her, with memories of Paris.

"Do I owe to you, madame, the pleasure of an invitation to dine at the Prefecture the day after to-morrow?" he said.

"You owe it solely to your fame, monsieur," Louise answered drily, somewhat taken aback by the turn of a phrase by which Lucien deliberately tried to wound her pride.

"Ah! Mme. la Comtesse, I cannot bring you the guest if the man is in disgrace," said Lucien, with a perceptible sig-

nificance in his coxcomb's manner, and, without waiting for an answer, he turned and greeted the Bishop with stately grace.

"Your lordship's prophecy has been partially fulfilled," he said, and there was a winning charm in his tones; "I will endeavor to fulfill it to the letter. I consider myself very fortunate since this evening brings me an opportunity of paying my respects to you."

Lucien drew the Bishop into a conversation that lasted for ten minutes. The women looked on Lucien as a phenomenon. His unexpected insolence had struck Mme. du Châtelet dumb; she could not find an answer. Looking round the room, she saw that every woman admired Lucien; she watched group after group repeating the phrases by which Lucien crushed her with seeming disdain, and her heart contracted with a spasm of mortification.

"Suppose that he should not come to the Prefecture after this, what talk there would be!" she thought. "Where did he learn this pride? Can Mlle. des Touches have taken a fancy for him? . . . He is so handsome. They say that she hurried to see him in Paris the day after that actress died. . . . Perhaps he has come to the rescue of his brother-in-law, and happened to be behind our calèche at Mansle by accident. Lucien looked at us very strangely that morning."

A crowd of thoughts crossed Louise's brain, and unluckily for her, she continued to ponder visibly as she watched Lucien. He was talking with the Bishop as if he were the king of the room; making no effort to find anyone out, waiting till others came to him, looking round about him with varying expression, and as much at his ease as his model de Marsay. M. de Senonches appeared at no great distance, but Lucien still stood beside the prelate.

At the end of ten minutes Louise could contain herself no longer. She rose and went over to the Bishop, and said—

"What is being said, my lord, that you smile so often?"

Lucien drew back discreetly, and left Mme. du Châtelet with his lordship.

"Ah! Mme. la Comtesse, what a clever young fellow

he is! He was explaining to me that he owed all that he is to you——”

“I am not ungrateful, madame,” said Lucien, with a reproachful glance that charmed the Countess.

“Let us have an understanding,” she said, beckoning him with her fan. “Come into the boudoir. My Lord Bishop, you shall judge between us.”

“She has found a funny task for his lordship,” said one of the Chandour camp, sufficiently audibly.

“Judge between us!” repeated Lucien, looking from the prelate to the lady; “then, is one of us in fault?”

Louise de Nègrepelisse sat down on the sofa in the familiar boudoir. She made the Bishop sit on one side and Lucien on the other, then she began to speak. But Lucien, to the joy and surprise of his old love, honored her with inattention; her words fell unheeded on his ears; he sat like Pasta in *Tancredi*, with the words *O patria!* upon her lips, the music of the great cavatina *Dell Rizzo* might have passed into his face. Indeed, Coralie’s pupil had contrived to bring the tears to his eyes.

“Oh! Louise, how I loved you!” he murmured, careless of the Bishop’s presence, heedless of the conversation, as soon as he knew that the Countess had seen the tears.

“Dry your eyes, or you will ruin me here a second time,” she said in an aside that horrified the prelate.

“And once is enough,” was Lucien’s quick retort. “That speech from Mme. d’Espard’s cousin would dry the eyes of a weeping Magdalene. Oh me! for a little moment old memories, and lost illusions, and my twentieth year came back to me, and you have——”

His lordship hastily retreated to the drawing-room at this; it seemed to him that his dignity was like to be compromised by this sentimental pair. Everyone ostentatiously refrained from interrupting them, and a quarter of an hour went by; till at last Sixte du Châtelet, vexed by the laughter and talk, and excursions to the boudoir door, went in with a countenance distinctly overclouded, and found Louise and Lucien talking excitedly.

“Madame,” said Sixte in his wife’s ear, “you know An-

goulême better than I do, and surely you should think of your position as Mme. la Préfète and of the Government?"

"My dear," said Louise, scanning her responsible editor with a haughtiness that made him quake, "I am talking with M. de Rubempré of matters which interest you. It is a question of rescuing an inventor about to fall a victim to the basest machinations; you will help us. As to those ladies yonder, and their opinion of me, you shall see how I will freeze the venom of their tongues."

She came out of the boudoir on Lucien's arm, and drew him across to sign the contract with a great lady's audacity.

"Write your name after mine," she said, handing him the pen. And Lucien submissively signed in the place indicated beneath her name.

"M. de Senonches, would you have recognized M. de Rubempré?" she continued, and the insolent sportsman was compelled to greet Lucien.

She returned to the drawing-room on Lucien's arm, and seated him on the awe-inspiring central sofa between herself and Zéphirine. There, enthroned like a queen, she began, at first in a low voice, a conversation in which epigram evidently was not wanting. Some of her old friends, and several women who paid court to her, came to join the group, and Lucien soon became the hero of the circle. The Countess drew him out on the subject of life in Paris; his satirical talk flowed with spontaneous and incredible spirit; he told anecdotes of celebrities, those conversational luxuries which the provincial devours with such avidity. His wit was as much admired as his good looks. And Mme. la Comtesse Sixte du Châtelet, preparing Lucien's triumph so patiently, sat like a player enraptured with the sound of his instrument; she gave him opportunities for a reply; she looked round the circle for applause so openly, that not a few of the women began to think that their return together was something more than a coincidence, and that Lucien and Louise, loving with all their hearts, had been separated by a double treason. Pique, very likely, had brought about this ill-starred match with Châtelet. And a reaction set in against the prefect.



Before the Countess rose to go at one o'clock in the morning, she turned to Lucien and said in a low voice, "Do me the pleasure of coming punctually to-morrow evening." Then, with the friendliest little nod, she went, saying a few words to Châtelet, who was looking for his hat.

"If Mme. du Châtelet has given me a correct idea of the state of affairs, count on me, my dear Lucien," said the prefect, preparing to hurry after his wife. She was going away without him, after the Paris fashion. "Your brother-in-law may consider that his troubles are at an end," he added as he went.

"M. le Comte surely owes me so much," smiled Lucien.

Cointet and Petit-Claud heard these farewell speeches.

"Well, well, we are done for now," Cointet muttered in his confederate's ear. Petit-Claud, thunderstruck by Lucien's success, amazed by his brilliant wit and varying charm, was gazing at Françoise de la Haye; the girl's whole face was full of admiration for Lucien. "Be like your friend," she seemed to say to her betrothed. A gleam of joy flitted over Petit-Claud's countenance.

"We have still a whole day before the prefect's dinner; I will answer for everything.

An hour later, as Petit-Claud and Lucien walked home together, Lucien talked of his success. "Well, my dear fellow, I came, I saw, I conquered! Séchard will be very happy in a few hours' time."

"Just what I wanted to know," thought Petit-Claud. Aloud he said—"I thought you were simply a poet, Lucien, but you are a Lauzun too, that is to say—twice a poet," and they shook hands—for the last time, as it proved.

"Good news, dear Eve," said Lucien, waking his sister, "David will have no debts in less than a month!"

"How is that?"

"Well, my Louise is still hidden by Mme. du Châtelet's petticoat. She loves me more than ever; she will send a favorable report of our discovery to the Minister of the Interior through her husband. So we have only to endure our troubles for one month, while I avenge myself on the prefect and complete the happiness of his married life."

Eve listened, and thought that she must be dreaming.

"I saw the little gray drawing-room where I trembled like a child two years ago; it seemed as if scales fell from my eyes when I saw the furniture and the pictures and the faces again. How Paris changes one's ideas!"

"Is that a good thing?" asked Eve, at last beginning to understand.

"Come, come; you are still asleep. We will talk about it to-morrow after breakfast."

"Cérizet's plot was exceedingly simple, a commonplace stratagem familiar to the provincial bailiff. Its success entirely depends upon circumstances, and in this case it was certain, so intimate was Cérizet's knowledge of the characters and hopes of those concerned. Cérizet had been a kind of Don Juan among work-girls, ruling his victims by playing off one against another. Since he had been the Cointets' extra foreman, he had singled out one of Basine Clerget's assistants, a girl almost as handsome as Mme. Séchard. Henriette Signol's parents owned a small vineyard two leagues out of Angoulême, on the road to Saintes. The Signols, like everybody else in the country, could not afford to keep their only child at home; so they meant her to go out to service, in country phrase. The art of clear-starching is a part of every country housemaid's training; and so great was Mme. Prieur's reputation, that the Signols sent Henriette to her as apprentice, and paid for their daughter's board and lodging.

Mme. Prieur was one of the old-fashioned mistresses, who consider that they fill a parent's place towards their apprentices. They were a part of the family; she took them with her to church, and looked scrupulously after them. Henriette Signol was a tall, fine-looking girl, with bold eyes, and long, thick, dark hair, and the pale, very fair complexion of girls in the South—white as a magnolia flower. For which reasons Henriette was one of the first on whom Cérizet cast his eyes, but Henriette came of "honest farmer folk," and only yielded at last to jealousy, to bad example, and the treacherous promise of subsequent marriage. By this time Cérizet was the Cointets' foreman. When he

learned that the Signols owned a vineyard worth some ten or twelve thousand francs, and a tolerably comfortable cottage, he hastened to make it impossible for Henriette to marry anyone else. Affairs had reached this point when Petit-Claud held out the prospect of a printing-office and twenty thousand francs of borrowed capital, which was to prove a yoke upon the borrower's neck. Cérizet was dazzled, the offer turned his head; Henriette Signol was now only an obstacle in the way of his ambitions, and he neglected the poor girl. Henriette, in her despair, clung more closely to her seducer as he tried to shake her off. When Cérizet began to suspect that David was hiding in Basine's house, his views with regard to Henriette underwent another change, though he treated her as before. A kind of frenzy works in a girl's brain when she must marry her seducer to conceal her dishonor, and Cérizet was on the watch to turn this madness to his own account.

During the morning of the day when Lucien had set himself to reconquer his Louise Cérizet told Basine's secret to Henriette, giving her to understand at the same time that their marriage and future prospects depended upon the discovery of David's hiding-place. Thus instructed, Henriette easily made certain of the fact that David was in Basine Clerget's inner room. It never occurred to the girl that she was doing wrong to act the spy, and Cérizet involved her in the guilt of betrayal by this first step.

Lucien was still sleeping while Cérizet, closeted with Petit-Claud, heard the history of the important trifles with which all Angoulême presently would ring.

The Cointets' foreman gave a satisfied nod as Petit-Claud came to an end. "Lucien surely has written you a line since he came back, has he not?" he asked.

"This is all that I have," answered the lawyer, and he held out a note on Mme. Séchard's writing-paper.

"Very well," said Cérizet, "let Doublon be in wait at the Palet Gate about ten minutes before sunset; tell him to post his gendarmes, and you shall have our man."

"Are you sure of *your* part of the business?" asked Petit-Claud, scanning Cérizet.

"I rely on chance," said the ex-street boy, "and she is a saucy hussy; she does not like honest folk."

"You must succeed," the lawyer said dryly.

"I shall succeed," said Cérizet. "You have pushed me into this dirty business; you may as well let me have a few bank-notes to wipe off the stains."—Then detecting a look that he did not like in the attorney's face, he continued, with a deadly glance, "If you have cheated me, sir, if you don't buy the printing-office for me within a week—you will leave a young widow"; he lowered his voice.

"If we have David on the gaol register at six o'clock, come round to M. Gannerac's at nine, and we will settle your business," Petit-Claud answered peremptorily.

"Agreed. Your will shall be done, governor," said Cérizet.

Cérizet understood the art of washing paper, a dangerous art for the Treasury. He washed out Lucien's four lines and replaced them, imitating the handwriting with a dexterity which augured ill for his own future:—

"MY DEAR DAVID,—Your business is settled; you need not fear to go to the prefect. You can go out at sunset, I will come to meet you and tell you what to do at the prefecture.—Your brother,  
LUCIEN."

At noon Lucien wrote to David, telling him of his evening's success. The prefect would be sure to lend his influence, he said; he was full of enthusiasm over the invention, and was drawing up a report that very day to send to the Government. Marion carried the letter to Basine, taking some of Lucien's linen to the laundry as a pretext for the errand.

Petit-Claud had told Cérizet that a letter would in all probability be sent. Cérizet called for Mlle. Signol, and the two walked by the Charente. Henriette's integrity must have held out for a long while, for the walk lasted for two hours. A whole future of happiness and ease and the interests of a child were at stake, and Cérizet asked a mere trifle of her. He was very careful besides to say nothing of

the consequences of that trifle. She was only to carry a letter and a message, that was all; but it was the greatness of the reward for the trifling service that frightened Henriette. Nevertheless, Cérizet gained her consent at last; she would help him in his stratagem.

At five o'clock Henriette must go out and come in again, telling Basine Clerget that Mme. Séchard wanted to speak to her at once. Fifteen minutes after Basine's departure she must go upstairs, knock at the door of the inner room, and give David the forged note. That was all. Cérizet looked to chance to manage the rest.

For the first time in twelve months, Eve felt the iron grasp of necessity relax a little. She began at last to hope. She, too, would enjoy her brother's visit; she would show herself abroad on the arm of a man fêted in his native town, adored by the women, beloved by the proud Comtesse du Châtelet. She dressed herself prettily, and proposed to walk out after dinner with her brother to Beaulieu. In September all Angoulême comes out at that hour to breathe the fresh air.

"Oh! that is the beautiful Mme. Séchard," voices said here and there.

"I should never have believed it of her," said a woman.

"The husband is in hiding, and the wife walks abroad," said Mme. Postel for young Mme. Séchard's benefit.

"Oh, let us go home," said poor Eve; "I have made a mistake."

A few minutes before sunset, the sound of a crowd rose from the steps that lead down to L'Houmeau. Apparently some crime had been committed, for persons coming from L'Houmeau were talking among themselves. Curiosity drew Lucien and Eve towards the steps.

"A thief has just been arrested no doubt, the man looks as pale as death," one of these passers-by said to the brother and sister. The crowd grew larger.

Lucien and Eve watched a group of some thirty children, old women, and men, returning from work, clustering about the gendarmes, whose gold-laced caps gleamed above the

heads of the rest. About a hundred persons followed the procession, the crowd gathering like a storm cloud.

"Oh! it is my husband!" Eve cried out.

"*David!*" exclaimed Lucien.

"It is his wife," said voices, and the crowd made way.

"What made you come out?" asked Lucien.

"Your letter," said David, haggard and white.

"I knew it!" said Eve, and she fainted away. Lucien raised his sister, and with the help of two strangers he carried her home; Marion laid her in bed, and Kolb rushed off for a doctor. Eve was still insensible when the doctor arrived; and Lucien was obliged to confess to his mother that he was the cause of David's arrest; for he, of course, knew nothing of the forged letter and Cérizet's stratagem. Then he went up to his room and locked himself in, struck dumb by the malediction in his mother's eyes.

In the dead of night he wrote one more letter amid constant interruptions; the reader can divine the agony of the writer's mind from those phrases, jerked out, as it were, one by one:—

"MY BELOVED SISTER,—We have seen each other for the last time. My resolution is final, and for this reason. In many families there is one unlucky member, a kind of disease in their midst. I am that unlucky one in our family. The observation is not mine; it was made at a friendly supper one evening at the *Rocher de Cancale* by a diplomat who has seen a great deal of the world. While we laughed and joked, he explained the reason why some young lady or other remained unmarried, to the astonishment of the world—it was 'a touch of her father,' he said, and with that he unfolded his theory of inherited weaknesses. He told us how such and such a family would have flourished but for the mother; how it was that a son had ruined his father, or a father had stripped his children of prospects and respectability. It was said laughingly, but we thought of so many cases in point in ten minutes that I was struck with the theory. The amount of truth in it furnished all sorts of wild paradoxes, which journalists maintain cleverly enough

for their own amusement when there is nobody else at hand to mystify. I bring bad luck to our family. My heart is full of love for you, yet I behave like an enemy. The blow dealt unintentionally is the cruellest blow of all. While I was leading a bohemian life in Paris, a life made up of pleasure and misery; taking good fellowship for friendship, forsaking my true friends for those who wished to exploit me, and succeeded; forgetful of you, or remembering you only to cause you trouble,—all that while you were walking in the humble path of hard work, making your way slowly but surely to the fortune which I tried so madly to snatch. While you grew better, I grew worse; a fatal element entered into my life through my own choice. Yes, unbounded ambition makes an obscure existence simply impossible for me. I have tastes and remembrances of past pleasures that poison the enjoyments within my reach; once I should have been satisfied with them, now it is too late. Oh, dear Eve, no one can think more hardly of me than I do myself; my condemnation is absolute and pitiless. The struggle in Paris demands steady effort; my will power is spasmodic, my brain works intermittently. The future is so appalling that I do not care to face it, and the present is intolerable.

“I wanted to see you again. I should have done better to stay in exile all my days. But exile without means of subsistence would be madness; I will not add another folly to the rest. Death is better than a maimed life; I cannot think of myself in any position in which my overweening vanity would not lead me into folly.

“Some human beings are like the figure 0, another must be put before it, and they acquire ten times their value. I am nothing unless a strong inexorable will is wedded to mine. Mme. de Bargeton was in truth my wife; when I refused to leave Coralie for her I spoiled my life. You and David might have been excellent pilots for me, but you are not strong enough to tame my weakness, which in some sort eludes control. I like an easy life, a life without cares; to clear an obstacle out of my way I can descend to baseness that sticks at nothing. I was born a prince. I have more than the requisite intellectual dexterity for success, but only

by moments; and the prizes of a career so crowded by ambitious competitors are to those who expend no more than the necessary strength, and retain a sufficient reserve power when they reach the goal.

“I shall do harm again with the best intentions in the world. Some are men like oaks, I am a delicate shrub it may be, and I forsooth must needs aspire to be a forest cedar.

“There you have my bankrupt’s schedule. The disproportion between my powers and my desires, my want of balance, in short, will bring all my efforts to nothing. There are many such characters among men of letters, many men whose intellectual powers and character are always at variance, who will one thing and wish another. What would become of me? I can see it all beforehand, as I think of this and that great light that once shone in Paris, now utterly forgotten. On the threshold of old age I shall be a man older than my age, needy and without a name. My whole soul rises up against the thought of such a close; I will not be a social rag. Ah, dear sister, loved and worshiped at least as much for your severity at the last as for your tenderness at first—if we have paid so dear for my joy at seeing you all once more, you and David may perhaps some day think that you could grudge no price however high for a little last happiness for an unhappy creature who loved you. Do not try to find me, Eve; do not seek to know what becomes of me. My intellect for once shall be backed by my will. Renunciation, my angel, is daily death of self; my renunciation will only last for one day; I will take advantage now of that day . . .”

“Two o’clock.

“Yes, I have quite made up my mind. Farewell for ever, dear Eve. There is something sweet in the thought that I shall live only in your hearts henceforth, and I wish no other burying place. Once more, farewell. . . . That is the last word from your brother  
LUCIEN.”

Lucien read the letter over, crept noiselessly downstairs, and left it in the child’s cradle! amid falling tears he set a



last kiss on the forehead of his sleeping sister; then he went out. He put out his candle in the gray dusk, took a last look at the old house, stole softly along the passage, and opened the street door; but in spite of his caution, he awakened Kolb, who slept on a mattress on the workshop floor.

"Who goes there?" cried Kolb.

"It is I, Lucien; I am going away, Kolb."

"You would haf done better gif you hat nefer kom," Kolb muttered audibly.

"I should have done better still if I had never come into the world," Lucien answered. "Good-by, Kolb; I don't bear you any grudge for thinking as I think myself. Tell David that I was sorry I could not bid him good-by, and say that this was my last thought."

By the time the Alsacien was up and dressed, Lucien had shut the house door, and was on his way towards the Char-ente by the Promenade de Beaulieu. He might have been going to a festival, for he had put on his new clothes from Paris and his dandy's trinkets for a drowning shroud. Something in Lucien's tone had struck Kolb. At first the man thought of going to ask his mistress whether she knew that her brother had left the house; but as the deepest silence prevailed, he concluded that the departure had been arranged beforehand, and lay down again and slept.

Little, considering the gravity of the question, has been written on the subject of suicide; it has not been studied. Perhaps it is a disease that cannot be observed. Suicide is one effect of a sentiment which we will call self-esteem, if you will, to prevent confusion by using the word "honor." When a man despises himself, and sees that others despise him, when real life fails to fulfill his hopes, then comes the moment when he takes his life, and thereby does homage to society—shorn of his virtues or his splendor, he does not care to face his fellows. Among atheists—Christians being without the question of suicide—among atheists, whatever may be said to the contrary, none but a base coward can take up a dishonored life.

There are three kinds of suicide—the first is only the last and acute stage of a long illness, and this kind belongs dis-

tinctly to pathology; the second is the suicide of despair; and the third the suicide based on logical argument. Despair and deductive reasoning had brought Lucien to this pass, but both varieties are curable; it is only the pathological suicide that is inevitable. Not unfrequently you find all three causes combined, as in the case of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Lucien having made up his mind, fell to considering methods. The poet would fain die as became a poet. At first he thought of throwing himself into the Charente and making an end then and there; but as he came down the steps from Beaulieu for the last time, he heard the whole town talking of his suicide; he saw the horrid sight of a drowned dead body, and thought of the recognition and the inquest; and, like some other suicides, felt that vanity reached beyond death.

He remembered the day spent at Courtois's mill, and his thoughts returned to the round pool among the willows that he saw as he came along by the little river, such a pool as you often find on small streams, with a still, smooth surface that conceals great depths beneath. The water is neither green nor blue nor white nor tawny; it is like a polished steel mirror. No sword-grass grows about the margin; there are no blue water forget-me-nots, nor broad lily leaves; the grass at the brim is short and thick, and the weeping willows that droop over the edge grow picturesquely enough. It is easy to imagine a sheer precipice beneath filled with water to the brim. Any man who should have the courage to fill his pockets with pebbles would not fail to find death, and never be seen thereafter.

At the time while he admired the lovely miniature of a landscape, the poet had thought to himself, "'Tis a spot to make your mouth water for a *noyade*."

He thought of it now as he went down into L'Houmeau; and when he took his way towards Marsac, with the last somber thoughts gnawing at his heart, it was with the firm resolve to hide his death. There should be no inquest held over him; he would not be laid in earth; no one should see him in the hideous condition of the corpse that floats on the

surface of the water. Before long he reached one of the slopes, common enough on all French high roads, and commonest of all between Angoulême and Poitiers. He saw the coach from Bordeaux to Paris coming up at full speed behind him, and knew that the passengers would probably alight to walk up the hill. He did not care to be seen just then. Turning off sharply into a beaten track, he began to pick the flowers in a vineyard hard by.

When Lucien came back to the road with a great bunch of the yellow stone-crop which grows everywhere upon the stony soil of the vineyards, he came out upon a traveler dressed in black from head to foot. The stranger wore powder, there were silver buckles on his shoes of Orléans leather, and his brown face was scarred and seamed as if he had fallen into the fire in infancy. The traveler, so obviously clerical in his dress, was walking slowly and smoking a cigar. He turned as Lucien jumped down from the vineyard into the road. The deep melancholy on the handsome young face, the poet's symbolical flowers, and his elegant dress seemed to strike the stranger. He looked at Lucien with something of the expression of a hunter that has found his quarry at last after long and fruitless search. He allowed Lucien to come alongside, in nautical phrase; then he slackened his pace, and appeared to look along the road up the hill; Lucien, following the direction of his eyes, saw a light traveling carriage with two horses, and a post-boy standing beside it.

"You have allowed the coach to pass you, monsieur; you will lose your place unless you care to take a seat in my calèche and overtake the mail, for it is rather quicker traveling post than by the public conveyance." The traveler spoke with extreme politeness and a very marked Spanish accent.

Without waiting for an answer, he drew a cigar-case from his pocket, opened it, and held it out to Lucien.

"I am not on a journey," said Lucien, "and I am too near the end of my stage to indulge in the pleasure of smoking——"

"You are very severe with yourself," returned the

Spaniard. "Though I am a canon of the cathedral of Toledo, I occasionally smoke a cigarette. God gave us tobacco to allay our passions and our pains. You seem to be downcast, or at any rate, you carry the symbolical flower of sorrow in your hand, like the rueful god Hymen. Come! all your troubles will vanish away with the smoke," and again the ecclesiastic held out his little straw case; there was something fascinating in his manner, and kindness towards Lucien lighted up his eyes.

"Forgive me, father," Lucien answered stiffly; "there is no cigar that can scatter my troubles." Tears came to his eyes at the words.

"It must surely be Divine Providence that prompted me to take a little exercise to shake off a traveler's morning drowsiness," said the churchman. "A Divine prompting to fulfill my mission here on earth by consoling you.—What great trouble can you have at your age?"

"Your consolations, father, can do nothing for me. You are a Spaniard, I am a Frenchman; you believe in the commandments of the Church, I am an atheist."

"*Santa Virgen del Pilar!* you are an atheist!" cried the other, laying a hand on Lucien's arm with maternal solicitude. "Ah! here is one of the curious things I promised myself to see in Paris. We, in Spain, do not believe in atheists. There is no country but France where one can have such opinions at nineteen years."

"Oh! I am an atheist in the fullest sense of the word. I have no belief in God, in society, in happiness. Take a good look at me, father; for in a few hours' time life will be over for me. My last sun has risen," said Lucien, with a sort of rhetorical effect he waved his hand towards the sky.

"How so; what have you done that you must die? Who has condemned you to die?"

"A tribunal from which there is no appeal—I myself."

"You, child!" cried the priest. "Have you killed a man? Is the scaffold waiting for you? Let us reason together a little. If you are resolved, as you say, to return to nothingness, everything on earth is indifferent to you, is it not?"

Lucien bowed assent.

“Very well, then; can you not tell me about your troubles? Some little affair of the heart has taken a bad turn, no doubt?”

Lucien shrugged his shoulders very significantly.

“Are you resolved to kill yourself to escape dishonor, or do you despair of life? Very good. You can kill yourself at Poitiers quite as easily as at Angoulême, and at Tours it will be no harder than at Poitiers. The quicksands of the Loire never give up their prey——”

“No, father,” said Lucien; “I have settled it all. Not three weeks ago I chanced upon the most charming raft that can ferry a man sick and tired of this life into the other world——”

“The other world? You are not an atheist.”

“Oh! by another world I mean my next transformation, animal or plant.”

“Have you some incurable disease?”

“Yes, father.”

“Ah! now we come to the point. What is it?”

“Poverty.”

The priest looked at Lucien. “The diamond does not know its own value,” he said, and there was an inexpressible charm, and a touch of something like irony in his smile.

“None but a priest could flatter a poor man about to die,” exclaimed Lucien.

“You are not going to die,” the Spaniard returned authoritatively.

“I have heard many times of men that were robbed on the high road, but I have never yet heard of one that found a fortune there,” said Lucien.

“You will hear of one now,” said the priest, glancing towards the carriage to measure the time still left for their walk together. “Listen to me,” he continued, with his cigar between his teeth; “if you are poor, that is no reason why you should die. I need a secretary, for mine has just died at Barcelona. I am in the same position as the famous Baron Goëtz, minister of Charles XII. He was traveling towards Sweden (just as I am going to Paris), and in some

little town or other he chanced upon the son of a goldsmith, a young man of remarkable good looks, though they could scarcely equal yours. . . . Baron Goërtz discerned intelligence in the young man (just as I see poetry on your brow); he took him into his traveling carriage, as I shall take you very shortly; and of a boy condemned to spend his days in burnishing spoons and forks and making trinkets in some little town like Angoulême, he made a favorite, as you shall be mine.

“Arrived at Stockholm, he installed his secretary and overwhelmed him with work. The young man spent his nights in writing, and, like all great workers, he contracted a bad habit, a trick—he took to chewing paper. The late M. de Malesherbes used to rap people over the knuckles; and he did this once, by the by, to somebody or other whose suit depended upon him. The handsome young secretary began by chewing blank paper, found it insipid after a while, and acquired a taste for manuscript as having more flavor. People did not smoke as yet in those days. At last, from flavor to flavor, he began to chew parchment and swallow it. Now, at that time a treaty was being negotiated between Russia and Sweden. The States-General insisted that Charles XII. should make peace (much as they tried in France to make Napoleon treat for peace in 1814), and the basis of these negotiations was the treaty between the two powers with regard to Finland. Goërtz gave the original into his secretary’s keeping; but when the time came for laying the draft before the States-General, a trifling difficulty arose, the treaty was not to be found. The States-General believed that the Minister, pandering to the King’s wishes, had taken it into his head to get rid of the document. Baron Goërtz was, in fact, accused of this, and the secretary owned that he had eaten the treaty. He was tried and convicted and condemned to death.—But you have not come to that yet, so take a cigar and smoke till we reach the calèche.”

Lucien took a cigar and lit it, Spanish fashion, at the priest’s cigar. “He is right,” he thought; “I can take my life at any time.”

“It often happens that a young man’s fortunes take a

turn when despair is darkest," the Spaniard continued. "That is what I wished to tell you, but I preferred to prove it by a case in point. Here was the handsome young secretary lying under sentence of death, and his case the more desperate because, as he had been condemned by the States-General, the King could not pardon him, but he connived at his escape. The secretary stole away in a fishing-boat with a few crowns in his pocket, and reached the court of Courland with a letter of introduction from Goërtz, explaining his secretary's adventures and his craze for paper. The Duke of Courland was a spendthrift; he had a steward and a pretty wife—three several causes of ruin. He placed the charming young stranger with his steward.

"If you can imagine that the sometime secretary had been cured of his depraved taste by a sentence of death, you do not know the grip that a man's failings have upon him; let a man discover some satisfaction for himself, and the headsman will not keep him from it.—How is it that vice has this power? Is it inherent strength in the vice, or inherent weakness in human nature? Are there certain tastes that should be regarded as verging on insanity? For myself, I cannot help laughing at the moralists who try to expel such diseases by fine phrases.—Well, it so fell out that the steward refused a demand for money; and the Duke taking fright at this, called for an audit. Sheer imbecility! Nothing easier than to make out a balance-sheet; the difficulty never lies there. The steward gave his secretary all the necessary documents for compiling a schedule of the civil list of Courland. He had nearly finished it when, in the dead of night, the unhappy paper-eater discovered that he was chewing up one of the Duke's discharges for a considerable sum. He had eaten half the signature! Horror seized upon him; he fled to the Duchess, flung himself at her feet, told her of his craze, and implored the aid of his sovereign lady, implored her in the middle of the night. The handsome young face made such an impression on the Duchess that she married him as soon as she was left a widow. And so in mid-eighteenth century, in a land where the king-at-arms is king, the goldsmith's son became a prince, and some-

thing more. On the death of Catherine I. he was regent; he ruled the Empress Anne, and tried to be the Richelieu of Russia. Very well, young man; now know this—if you are handsomer than Biron, I, simple canon that I am, am worth more than a Baron Goëtz. So get in; we will find a duchy of Courland for you in Paris, or failing the duchy, we shall certainly find the duchess.”

The Spanish priest laid a hand on Lucien’s arm, and literally forced him into the traveling carriage. The postilion shut the door.

“Now speak; I am listening,” said the canon of Toledo, to Lucien’s bewilderment. “I am an old priest; you can tell me everything, there is nothing to fear. So far we have only run through our patrimony or squandered mamma’s money. We have made a flitting from our creditors, and we are honor personified down to the tips of our elegant little boots. . . . Come, confess baldly; it will be just as if you were talking to yourself.”

Lucien felt like that hero of an Eastern tale, the fisher who tried to drown himself in mid-ocean, and sank down to find himself a king of countries under the sea. The Spanish priest seemed so really affectionate, that the poet hesitated no longer; between Angoulême and Ruffec he told the story of his whole life, omitting none of his misdeeds, and ended with the final catastrophe which he had brought about. The tale only gained in poetic charm because this was the third time he had told it in the past fortnight. Just as he made an end they passed the house of the Rastignac family.

“Young Rastignac left that place for Paris,” said Lucien; “he is certainly not my equal, but he has had better luck.”

The Spaniard started at the name. “Oh!” he said.

“Yes. That shy little place belongs to his father. As I was telling you just now, he was the lover of Mme. de Nucingen, the famous banker’s wife. I drifted into poetry; he was cleverer, he took the practical side.”

The priest stopped the calèche; and was so far curious as to walk down the little avenue that led to the house, showing more interest in the place than Lucien expected from a Spanish ecclesiastic.



"Then, do you know the Rastignacs?" asked Lucien.

"I know everyone in Paris," said the Spaniard, taking his place again in the carriage. "And so for want of ten or twelve thousand francs, you were about to take your life; you are a child, you know neither men nor things. A man's future is worth the value that he chooses to set upon it, and you value yours at twelve thousand francs! Well, I will give more than that for you any time. As for your brother-in-law's imprisonment, it is the merest trifle. If this dear M. Séchard has made a discovery, he will be a rich man some day, and a rich man has never been imprisoned for debt. You do not seem to me to be strong in history. History is of two kinds—there is the official history taught in schools, a lying compilation *ad usum delphini*; and there is secret history which deals with the real causes of events—a scandalous chronicle. Let me tell you briefly a little story which you have not heard. There was, once upon a time, a man, young and ambitious, and a priest to boot. He wanted to enter on a political career, so he fawned on the Queen's favorite; the favorite took an interest in him, gave him the rank of minister, and a seat at the council board. One evening somebody wrote to the young aspirant, thinking to do him a service (never do a service, by the by, unless you are asked), and told him that his benefactor's life was in danger. The King's wrath was kindled against his rival; to-morrow, if the favorite went to the palace, he would certainly be stabbed; so said the letter. Well, now, young man, what would you have done?"

"I should have gone at once to warn my benefactor," Lucien exclaimed quickly.

"You are indeed the child which your story reveals!" said the priest. "Our man said to himself, 'If the King is resolved to go to such lengths, it is all over with my benefactor, I must receive this letter too late'; so he slept on till the favorite was stabbed——"

"He was a monster!" said Lucien, suspecting that the priest meant to sound him.

"So are all great men; this one was the Cardinal de Richelieu, and his benefactor was the Maréchal d'Ancre.

You really do not know your history of France, you see. Was I not right when I told you that history as taught in schools is simply a collection of facts and dates, more than doubtful in the first place, and with no bearing whatever on the gist of the matter. You are told that such a person as Jeanne Darc once existed; where is the use of that? Have you never drawn your own conclusions from that fact? never seen that if France had accepted the Angevin dynasty of the Plantagenets, the two peoples thus reunited would be ruling the world to-day, and the islands that now brew political storms for the continent would be French provinces? . . . Why, have you so much as studied the means by which simple merchants like the Medici became Grand-Dukes of Tuscany?"

"A poet in France is not bound to be 'as learned as a Benedictine,'" said Lucien.

"Well, they became Grand-Dukes as Richelieu became a minister. If you had looked into history for the causes of events instead of getting the headings by heart, you would have found precepts for your guidance in this life. These real facts taken at random from among so many supply you with the axiom—'Look upon men, and on women most of all, as your instruments; but never let them see this.' If someone higher in place can be useful to you, worship him as a god; and never leave him until he has paid the price of your servility to the last farthing. In your intercourse with men, in short, be grasping and mean as a Jew; all that the Jew does for money, you must do for power. And besides all this, when a man has fallen from power, care no more for him than if he had ceased to exist. And do you ask why you must do these things? You mean to rule the world, do you not? You must begin by obeying and studying it. Scholars study books; politicians study men, and their interests and the springs of action. Society and mankind in masses are fatalists; they bow down and worship the accomplished fact. Do you know why I am giving you this little history lesson? It seems to me that your ambition is boundless——"

"Yes, father."

“ I saw that myself,” said the priest. “ But at this moment you are thinking, ‘ Here is this Spanish canon inventing anecdotes and straining history to prove to me that I have too much virtue——’ ”

Lucien began to smile; his thoughts had been read so clearly.

“ Very well, let us take facts that every schoolboy knows. One day France is almost entirely overrun by the English; the King has only a single province left. Two figures arise from among the people—a poor herd girl, that very Jeanne Darc of whom we were speaking, and a burgher named Jacques Cœur. The girl brings the power of virginity, the strength of her arm; the burgher gives his gold, and the kingdom is saved. The maid is taken prisoner, and the King, who could have ransomed her, leaves her to be burned alive. The King allows his courtiers to accuse the great burgher of capital crime, and they rob him and divide all his wealth among themselves. The spoils of an innocent man, hunted down, brought to bay, and driven into exile by the Law, went to enrich five noble houses; and the father of the Archbishop of Bourges left the kingdom forever without one sou of all his possessions in France, and no resource but moneys remitted to Arabs and Saracens in Egypt. It is open to you to say that these examples are out of date, that three centuries of public education have since elapsed, and that the outlines of those ages are more or less dim figures. Well, young man, do you believe in the last demigod of France, in Napoleon? One of his generals was in disgrace all through his career; Napoleon made him a marshal grudgingly, and never sent him on service if he could help it. That marshal was Kellermann. Do you know the reason of the grudge? . . . Kellermann saved France and the First Consul at Marengo by a brilliant charge; the ranks applauded under fire and in the thick of the carnage. That heroic charge was not even mentioned in the bulletin. Napoleon’s coolness towards Kellerman, Fouché’s fall, and Talleyrand’s disgrace were all attributable to the same cause; it is the ingratitude of a Charles VII., or a Richelieu, or——”

“But, father,” said Lucien, “suppose that you should save my life and make my fortune, you are making the ties of gratitude somewhat slight.”

“Little rogue,” said the Abbé, smiling as he pinched Lucien’s ear with an almost royal familiarity. “If you are ungrateful to me, it will be because you are a strong man, and I shall bend before you. But you are not that just yet; as a simple ’prentice you have tried to be master too soon, the common fault of Frenchmen of your generation. Napoleon’s example has spoiled them all. You send in your resignation because you have not the pair of epaulettes that you fancied. But have you attempted to bring the full force of your will and every action of your life to bear upon your one idea?”

“Alas! no.”

“You have been inconsistent, as the English say,” smiled the canon.

“What I have been matters nothing now,” said Lucien, “if I can be nothing in future.”

“If at the back of all your good qualities there is power *semper virens*,” continued the priest, not averse to show that he had a little Latin, “nothing in this world can resist you. I have taken enough of a liking for you already——”

Lucien smiled incredulously.

“Yes,” said the priest, in answer to the smile, “you interest me as much as if you had been my son; and I am strong enough to afford to talk to you as openly as you have just done to me. Do you know what it is that I like about you?—This: you have made a sort of *tabula rasa* within yourself, and are ready to hear a sermon on morality that you will hear nowhere else; for mankind in the mass are even more consummate hypocrites than any one individual can be when his interests demand a piece of acting. Most of us spend a good part of our lives in clearing our minds of the notions that sprang up unchecked during our nonage. This is called ‘getting our experience.’”

Lucien, listening, thought within himself, “Here is some old intriguer delighted with a chance of amusing himself on a journey. He is pleased with the idea of bringing about a

change of opinion in a poor wretch on the brink of suicide; and when he is tired of his amusement, he will drop me. Still he understands paradox, and seems to be quite a match for Blondet or Lousteau."

But in spite of these sage reflections, the diplomat's poison had sunk deeply into Lucien's soul; the ground was ready to receive it, and the havoc wrought was the greater because such famous examples were cited. Lucien fell under the charm of his companion's cynical talk, and clung the more willingly to life because he felt that this arm which drew him up from the depths was a strong one.

In this respect the ecclesiastic had evidently won the day; and, indeed, from time to time a malicious smile bore his cynical anecdotes company.

"If your system of morality at all resembles your manner of regarding history," said Lucien, "I should dearly like to know the motive of your present act of charity, for such it seems to be."

"There, young man, I have come to the last head of my sermon; you will permit me to reserve it, for in that case we shall not part company to-day," said the canon, with the tact of the priest who sees that his guile has succeeded.

"Very well, talk morality," said Lucien. To himself he said, "I will draw him out."

"Morality begins with the law," said the priest. "If it were simply a question of religion, laws would be superfluous; religious peoples have few laws. The laws of statecraft are above civil law. Well, do you care to know the inscription which a politician can read, written at large over your nineteenth century? In 1793 the French invented the idea of the sovereignty of the people—and the sovereignty of the people came to an end under an absolute ruler in the Emperor. So much for your history as a nation. Now for your private manners. Mme. Tallien and Mme. Beauharnais both acted alike. Napoleon married the one, and made her your Empress; the other he would never receive at court, princess though she was. The sans-culotte of 1793 takes the Iron Crown in 1804. The fanatical lovers of Equality or Death conspire fourteen years afterwards with a Legitimist aris-

tocracy to bring back Louis XVIII. And that same aristocracy, lording it to-day in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, has done worse—has been merchant, usurer, pastry-cook, farmer, and shepherd. So in France systems political and moral have started from one point and reached another diametrically opposed; and men have professed one kind of opinion and acted on another. There has been no consistency in national policy, nor in the conduct of individuals. You cannot be said to have any morality left. Success is the supreme justification of all actions whatsoever. The fact in itself is nothing; the impression that it makes upon others is everything. Hence, please observe a second precept: Present a fair exterior to the world, keep the seamy side of life to yourself, and turn a resplendent countenance upon others. Discretion, the motto of every ambitious man, is the watchword of our Order; take it for your own. Great men are guilty of almost as many base deeds as poor outcasts; but they are careful to do these things in shadow and to parade their virtues in the light, or they would not be great men. Your insignificant man leaves his virtues in the shade; he publicly displays his pitiable side, and is despised accordingly. You, for instance, have hidden your titles to greatness and made a display of your worst failings. You openly took an actress for your mistress, lived with her and upon her; you were by no means to blame for this; everybody admitted that both of you were perfectly free to do as you liked; but you ran full tilt against the ideas of the world, and the world has not shown you the consideration that is shown to those who obey the rules of the game. If you had left Coralie to this M. Camusot, if you had hidden your relations with her, you might have married Mme. de Bargeton; you would now be prefect of Angoulême and Marquis de Rubempré.

“Change your tactics, bring your good looks, your charm, your wit, your poetry to the front. If you indulge in small discreditable courses, let it be within four walls and you will never again be guilty of a blot on the decorations of this great theatrical scene called society. Napoleon called this ‘washing dirty linen at home.’ The corollary follows natur-

ally on this second precept—Form is everything. Be careful to grasp the meaning of that word ‘form.’ There are people who, for want of knowing better, will help themselves to money under pressure of want, and take it by force. These people are called criminals; and, perforce, they square accounts with Justice. A poor man of genius discovers some secret, some invention as good as a treasure; you lend him three thousand francs (for that, practically, the Cointets have done; they hold your bills, and they are about to rob your brother-in-law); you torment him until he reveals or partly reveals his secret; you settle your accounts with your own conscience, and your conscience does not drag you into the assize-court.

“The enemies of social order, beholding this contrast, take occasion to yap at justice, and wax wroth in the name of the people, because forsooth burglars and fowl-stealers are sent to the hulks, while a man who brings whole families to ruin by a fraudulent bankruptcy is let off with a few months’ imprisonment. But these hypocrites know quite well that the judge who passes sentence on the thief is maintaining the barrier set between the poor and the rich, and that if that barrier were overturned, social chaos would ensue; while, in the case of the bankrupt, the man who steals an inheritance cleverly, and the banker who slaughters a business for his own benefit, money merely changes hands, that is all.

“Society, my son, is bound to draw those distinctions which I have pointed out for your benefit. The one great point is this—you must be a match for society.—Napoleon, Richelieu, and the Medicis were a match for their generations. And as for you, you value yourself at twelve thousand francs! You of this generation in France worship the golden calf; what else is the religion of your Charter that will not recognize a man politically unless he owns property? What is this but the command, ‘Strive to be rich’? Some day, when you shall have made a fortune without breaking the law, you will be rich; you will be the Marquis de Rubempré, and can indulge in the luxury of honor. You will be so extremely sensitive on the point of

honor that no one will dare to accuse you of past shortcomings if in the process of making your way you should happen to smirch it now and again, which I myself should never advise," he added, patting Lucien's hand.

"So what must you put in that comely head of yours? Simply this and nothing more—propose to yourself a brilliant and conspicuous goal, and go towards it secretly; let no one see your methods or your progress. You have behaved like a child; be a man, be a hunter, lie in wait for your quarry in the world of Paris, wait for your chance and your game; you need not be particular nor mindful of your dignity, as it is called; we are all of us slaves to something, to some failing of our own or to necessity; but keep that law of laws—secrecy."

"Father, you frighten me," said Lucien; "this seems to me to be a highwayman's theory."

"And you are right," said the canon, "but it is no invention of mine. All *parvenus* reason in this way—the house of Austria and the house of France alike. You have nothing, you say? The Medicis, Richelieu, and Napoleon started from precisely your standpoint; but *they*, my child, considered that their prospects were worth ingratitude, treachery, and the most glaring inconsistencies. You must dare all things to gain all things. Let us discuss it. Suppose that you sit down to a game of *bouillotte*, do you begin to argue over the rules of the game? There they are, you accept them."

"Come, now," thought Lucien, "he can play *bouillotte*."

"And what do you do?" continued the priest; "do you practice openness, that fairest of virtues? Not merely do you hide your tactics, but you do your best to make others believe that you are on the brink of ruin as soon as you are sure of winning the game. In short, you dissemble, do you not? You lie to win four or five louis d'or. What would you think of a player so generous as to proclaim that he held a hand full of trumps? Very well, the ambitious man who carries virtue's precepts into the arena when his antagonists have left them behind is behaving like a child. Old men of the world might sav to him, as card-players would say to the



man who declines to take advantage of his trumps, 'Monsieur, you ought not to play at *bouillotte*.'

"Did you make the rules of the game of ambition? Why did I tell you to be a match for society?—Because, in these days, society by degrees has usurped so many rights over the individual, that the individual is compelled to act in self-defense. There is no question of laws now, their place has been taken by custom, which is to say grimacings, and forms must always be observed."

Lucien started with surprise.

"Ah, my child!" said the priest, afraid that he had shocked Lucien's innocence; "did you expect to find the Angel Gabriel in an abbé loaded with all the iniquities of the diplomacy and counter-diplomacy of two kings? I am an agent between Ferdinand VII. and Louis XVIII., two—kings who owe their crowns to profound—er—combinations, let us say. I believe in God, but I have a still greater belief in our Order, and our Order has no belief save in temporal power. In order to strengthen and consolidate the temporal power, our Order upholds the Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church, which is to say, the doctrines which dispose the world at large to obedience. We are the Templars of modern times; we have a doctrine of our own. Like the Templars, we have been dispersed, and for the same reasons; we were almost a match for the world. If you will enlist as a soldier, I will be your captain. Obey me as a wife obeys her husband, as a child obeys his mother, and I will guarantee that you shall be Marquis de Rubempré in less than six months; you shall marry into one of the proudest houses in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and some day you shall sit on a bench with peers of France. What would you have been at this moment if I had not amused you by my conversation?—An undiscovered corpse in a deep bed of mud. Well and good, now for an effort of imagination——"

Lucien looked curiously at his protector.

"Here, in this calèche beside the Abbé Carlos Herrera, canon of Toledo, secret envoy from His Majesty Ferdinand VII. to His Majesty the King of France, bearer of a despatch thus worded it may be—'When you have delivered

me, hang all those whom I favor at this moment, more especially the bearer of this despatch, for then he can tell no tales'—well, beside this envoy sits a young man who has nothing in common with that poet recently deceased. I have fished you out of the water, I have brought you to life again, you belong to me as the creation belongs to the creator, as the afrits of fairy-tales belong to the genii, as the janissary to the Sultan, as the soul to the body. I will sustain you in the way to power with a strong hand; and at the same time I promise that your life shall be a continual course of pleasure, honors, and enjoyment. You shall never want for money. You shall shine, you shall go bravely in the eyes of the world; while I, crouching in the mud, will lay a firm foundation for the brilliant edifice of your fortunes. For I love power for its own sake. I shall always rejoice in your enjoyment, forbidden to me. In short, my self shall become your self! Well, if a day should come when this pact between man and the tempter, this agreement between the child and the diplomatist should no longer suit your ideas, you can still look about for some quiet spot, like that pool of which you were speaking, and drown yourself; you will only be as you are now, or a little more or less wretched and dishonored."

"This is not like the Archbishop of Granada's homily," said Lucien as they stopped to change horses.

"Call this concentrated education by what name you will, my son, for you are my son, I adopt you henceforth, and shall make you my heir; it is the Code of ambition. God's elect are few and far between. There is no choice, you must bury yourself in the cloister (and there you very often find the world again in miniature) or accept the Code."

"Perhaps it would be better not to be so wise," said Lucien, trying to fathom this terrible priest.

"What!" rejoined the canon. "You begin to play before you know the rules of the game, and now you throw it up just as your chances are best, and you have a substantial godfather to back you! And you do not even care to play a return match? You do not mean to say that you

have no mind to be even with those who drove you from Paris?"

Lucien quivered; the sounds that rang through every nerve seemed to come from some bronze instrument, some Chinese gong.

"I am only a poor priest," returned his mentor, and a grim expression, dreadful to behold, appeared for a moment on a face burned to a copper-red by the sun of Spain, "I am only a poor priest; but if I had been humiliated, vexed, tormented, betrayed, and sold as you have been by the scoundrels of whom you have told me, I should do like an Arab of the desert—I would devote myself body and soul to vengeance. I might end by dangling from a gibbet, garrotted, impaled, guillotined in your French fashion, I should not care a rap; but they should not have my head until I had crushed my enemies under my heel."

Lucien was silent; he had no wish to draw the priest out any further.

"Some are descended from Cain and some from Abel," the canon concluded; "I myself am of mixed blood—Cain for my enemies, Abel for my friends. Woe to him that shall awaken Cain! After all, you are a Frenchman; I am a Spaniard, and, what is more, a canon."

"What a Tartar!" thought Lucien, scanning the protector thus sent to him by Heaven.

There was no sign of the Jesuit, nor even of the ecclesiastic, about the Abbé Carlos Herrera. His hands were large, he was thick-set and broad-chested, evidently he possessed the strength of a Hercules; his terrific expression was softened by benignity assumed at will; but a complexion of impenetrable bronze inspired feelings of repulsion rather than attachment for the man.

The strange diplomatist looked somewhat like a bishop, for he wore powder on his long, thick hair, after the fashion of the Prince de Talleyrand; a gold cross, hanging from a strip of blue ribbon with a white border, indicated an ecclesiastical dignitary. The outlines beneath the black silk stockings would not have disgraced an athlete. The exquisite neatness of his clothes and person revealed an amount

of care which a simple priest, and, above all, a Spanish priest, does not always take with his appearance. A three-cornered hat lay on the front seat of the carriage, which bore the arms of Spain.

In spite of the sense of repulsion, the effect made by the man's appearance was weakened by his manner, fierce and yet winning as it was; he evidently laid himself out to please Lucien, and the winning manner became almost coaxing. Yet Lucien noticed the smallest trifles uneasily. He felt that the moment of decision had come; they had reached the second stage beyond Ruffec, and the decision meant life or death.

The Spaniard's last words vibrated through many chords in his heart, and, to the shame of both, it must be said that all that was worst in Lucien responded to an appeal deliberately made to his evil impulses, and the eyes that studied the poet's beautiful face had read him very clearly. Lucien beheld Paris once more; in imagination he caught again at the reins of power let fall from his unskilled hands, and he avenged himself! The comparisons which he himself had drawn so lately between the life of Paris and life in the provinces faded from his mind with the more painful motives for suicide; he was about to return to his natural sphere, and this time with a protector, a political intriguer unscrupulous as Cromwell.

"I was alone, now there will be two of us," he told himself. And then this priest had been more and more interested as he told of his sins one after another. The man's charity had grown with the extent of his misdoings; nothing had astonished this confessor. And yet, what could be the motive of a mover in the intrigues of kings? Lucien at first was fain to be content with the banal answer—the Spanish are a generous race. The Spaniard is generous! even so the Italian is jealous and a poisoner, the Frenchman fickle, the German frank, the Jew ignoble, and the Englishman noble. Reverse these verdicts and you shall arrive within a reasonable distance of the truth! The Jews have monopolized the gold of the world; they compose *Robert the Devil*, act *Phèdre*, sing *William Tell*, give commissions for pictures and

build palaces, write *Reisebilder* and wonderful verse; they are more powerful than ever, their religion is accepted, they have lent money to the Holy Father himself! As for Germany, a foreigner is often asked whether he has a contract in writing, and this in the smallest matters, so tricky are they in their dealings. In France the spectacle of national blunders has never lacked national applause for the past fifty years; we continue to wear hats which no mortal can explain, and every change of government is made on the express condition that things shall remain exactly as they were before. England flaunts her perfidy in the face of the world, and her abominable treachery is only equaled by her greed. All the gold of two Indies passed through the hands of Spain, and now she has nothing left. There is no country in the world where poison is so little in request as in Italy, no country where manners are easier or more gentle. As for the Spaniard he has traded largely on the reputation of the Moor.

As the Canon of Toledo returned to the calèche, he had spoken a word to the post-boy. "Drive post-haste," he said, "and there will be three francs for drink-money for you." Then, seeing that Lucien hesitated, "Come! come!" he exclaimed, and Lucien took his place again, telling himself that he meant to try the effect of the *argumentum ad hominem*.

"Father," he began, "after pouring out, with all the coolness in the world, a series of maxims which the vulgar would consider profoundly immoral——"

"And so they are," said the priest; "that is why Jesus Christ said that it must needs be that offenses come, my son; and that is why the world displays such horror of offenses."

"A man of your stamp will not be surprised by the question which I am about to ask?"

"Indeed, my son, you do not know me," said Carlos Herrera. "Do you suppose that I should engage a secretary unless I knew that I could depend upon his principles sufficiently to be sure that he would not rob me? I like you. You are as innocent in every way as a twenty-year-old suicide. Your question?"

“Why do you take an interest in me? What price do you set on my obedience? Why should you give me everything? What is your share?”

The Spaniard looked at Lucien, and a smile came over his face.

“Let us wait till we come to the next hill; we can walk up and talk out in the open. The back seat of a traveling carriage is not the place for confidences.”

They traveled in silence for some time; the rapidity of the movement seemed to increase Lucien’s moral intoxication.

“Here is a hill, father,” he said at last, awakening from a kind of dream.

“Very well, we will walk.” The Abbé called to the postilion to stop, and the two sprang out upon the road.

“You child,” said the Spaniard, taking Lucien by the arm, “have you ever thought over Otway’s *Venice Preserved*? Did you understand the profound friendship between man and man which binds Pierre and Jaffier each to each so closely that a woman is as nothing in comparison, and all social conditions are changed?—Well, so much for the poet.”

“So the canon knows something of the drama,” thought Lucien. “Have you read Voltaire?” he asked.

“I have done better,” said the other; “I put his doctrine in practice.”

“You do not believe in a God?”

“Come! it is I who am the atheist, is it?” the Abbé said, smiling. “Let us come to practical matters, my child,” he added, putting an arm round Lucien’s waist. “I am forty-six years old, I am the natural son of a great lord; consequently, I have no family, and I have a heart. But, learn this, carve it on that still so soft brain of yours—man dreads to be alone. And of all kinds of isolation, inward isolation is the most appalling. The early anchorite lived with God; he dwelt in the spirit world, the most populous world of all. The miser lives in a world of imagination and fruition; his whole life and all that he is, even his sex, lies in the brain. A man’s first thought, be he leper or convict, hopelessly sick

or degraded, is to find another with a like fate to share it with him. He will exert the utmost that is in him, every power, all his vital energy, to satisfy that craving; it is his very life. But for that tyrannous longing, would Satan have found companions? There is a whole poem yet to be written, a first part of *Paradise Lost*; Milton's poem is only the apology for the revolt."

"It would be the Iliad of Corruption," said Lucien.

"Well, I am alone, I live alone. If I wear the priest's habit, I have not a priest's heart. I like to devote myself to someone; that is my weakness. That is my life, that is how I came to be a priest. I am not afraid of ingratitude, and I am grateful. The Church is nothing to me; it is an idea. I am devoted to the King of Spain, but you cannot give affection to a King of Spain; he is my protector, he towers above me. I want to love my creature, to mold him, fashion him to my use, and love him as a father loves his child. I shall drive in your tilbury, my boy, enjoy your success with women, and say to myself, 'This fine young fellow, this Marquis de Rubempré, my creation whom I have brought into this great world, is my very Self; his greatness is my doing, he speaks or is silent with my voice, he consults me in everything.' The Abbé de Vermont felt thus for Marie-Antoinette."

"He led her to the scaffold."

"He did not love the Queen," said the priest; "*he* only loved the Abbé de Vermont."

"Must I leave desolation behind me?"

"I have money, you shall draw on me."

"I would do a great deal just now to rescue David Séchard," said Lucien, in the tone of one who has given up all idea of suicide.

"Say but one word, my son, and by to-morrow morning he shall have money enough to set him free."

"What! Would you give me twelve thousand francs?"

"Ah! child, do you not see that we are traveling on at the rate of four leagues an hour? We shall dine at Poitiers before long, and there, if you decide to sign the pact, to give me a single proof of obedience, a great proof that I shall re-

quire, then the Bordeaux coach shall carry fifteen thousand francs to your sister——”

“Where is the money?”

The Spaniard made no answer, and Lucien said within himself, “There I had him; he was laughing at me.”

In another moment they took their places. Neither of them said a word. Silently the Abbé groped in the pocket of the coach, and drew out a traveler’s leather pouch with three divisions in it; thence he took a hundred Portuguese moidores, bringing out his large hand filled with gold three times.

“Father, I am yours,” said Lucien, dazzled by the stream of gold.

“Child!” said the priest, and set a tender kiss on Lucien’s forehead. “There is twice as much still left in the bag, besides the money for traveling expenses.”

“And you are traveling alone!” cried Lucien.

“What is that?” asked the Spaniard. “I have more than a hundred thousand crowns in drafts on Paris. A diplomatist without money is in your position of this morning—a poet without a will of his own!”

As Lucien took his place in the calèche beside the so-called Spanish diplomatist, Eve rose to give her child a draught of milk, found the fatal letter in the cradle, and read it. A sudden cold chilled the damps of morning slumber, dizziness came over her, she could not see. She called aloud to Marion and Kolb.

“Has my brother gone out?” she asked, and Kolb answered at once with, “Yes, montame, pefore tay.”

“Keep this that I am going to tell you a profound secret,” said Eve. “My brother has gone no doubt to make away with himself. Hurry, both of you, make inquiries cautiously, and look along the river.”

Eve was left alone in a dull stupor dreadful to see. Her trouble was at its height when Petit-Claud came in at seven o’clock to talk over the steps to be taken in David’s case. At such a time, any voice in the world may speak, and we let them speak.



“Our poor, dear David is in prison, madame,” so began Petit-Claud. “I foresaw all along that it would end in this. I advised him at the time to go into partnership with his competitors the Cointets; for while your husband has simply the idea, they have the means of putting it into practical shape. So as soon as I heard of his arrest yesterday evening, what did I do but hurry away to find the Cointets and try to obtain such concessions as might satisfy you. If you try to keep the discovery to yourselves, you will continue to live a life of shifts and chicanery. You must give in, or else when you are exhausted and at the last gasp, you will end by making a bargain with some capitalist or other, and perhaps to your own detriment, whereas to-day I hope to see you make a good one with the MM. Cointet. In this way you will save yourselves the hardships and the misery of the inventor’s duel with the greed of the capitalist and the indifference of the public. Let us see! If the MM. Cointet should pay your debts—if, over and above your debts, they should pay you a further sum of money down, whether or no the invention succeeds; while at the same time it is thoroughly understood that if it succeeds a certain proportion of the profits of working the patent shall be yours, would you not be doing very well?—You yourself, madame, would then be the proprietors of the plant in the printing-office. You would sell the business, no doubt; it is quite worth twenty thousand francs. I will undertake to find you a buyer at that price.

“Now if you draw up a deed of partnership with the MM. Cointet, and receive fifteen thousand francs in money paid down, you will have thirty-five thousand francs of capital; and if you invest it in the Funds at the present moment, it will bring you in an income of two thousand francs. You can live on two thousand francs in the provinces. Bear in mind, too, madame, that, given certain contingencies, there will be yet further payments. I say ‘contingencies,’ because we must lay our accounts with failure.

“Very well,” continued Petit-Claud, “now these things I am sure that I can obtain for you. First of all, David’s release from prison; secondly, fifteen thousand francs, a

premium paid on his discovery, whether the experiments fail or succeed; and lastly, a partnership between David and the MM. Cointet, to be taken out after private experiment made jointly. The deed of partnership for the working of the patent should be drawn up on the following basis: The MM. Cointet to bear all the expenses, the capital invested by David to be confined to the expenses of procuring the patent, and his share of the profits to be fixed at twenty-five per cent. You are a clear-headed and very sensible woman, qualities which are not often found combined with great beauty; think over these proposals, and you will see that they are very favorable."

Poor Eve in her despair burst into tears. "Ah, sir! why did you not come yesterday evening to tell me this? We should have been spared disgrace and—and something far worse——"

"I was talking with the Cointets until midnight. They are behind Métivier, as you must have suspected. But how has something worse than our poor David's arrest happened since yesterday evening?"

"Here is the awful news that I found when I awoke this morning," she said, holding out Lucien's letter. "You have just given me proof of your interest in us; you are David's friend and Lucien's; I need not ask you to keep the secret——"

"You need not feel the least anxiety," said Petit-Claud, as he returned the letter. "Lucien will not take his life. Your husband's arrest was his doing; he was obliged to find some excuse for leaving you, and this exit of his looks to me like a piece of stage business."

The Cointets had gained their ends. They had tormented the inventor and his family, until, worn out by the torture, the victims longed for a respite, and then seized their opportunity and made the offer. Not every inventor has the tenacity of the bull-dog that will perish with his teeth fast set in his capture; the Cointets had shrewdly estimated David's character. The tall Cointet looked upon David's imprisonment as the first scene of the first act of the drama. The second act opened with the proposal which Petit-Claud

had just made. As arch-schemer, the attorney looked upon Lucien's frantic folly as a bit of un hoped-for luck, a chance that would finally decide the issues of the day.

Eve was completely prostrated by this event; Petit-Claud saw this, and meant to profit by her despair to win her confidence, for he saw at last how much she influenced her husband. So far from discouraging Eve, he tried to reassure her, and very cleverly diverted her thoughts to the prison. She should persuade David to take the Cointets into partnership.

"David told me, madame, that he only wished for a fortune for your sake and your brother's; but it should be clear to you by now that to try to make a rich man of Lucien would be madness. The youngster would run through three fortunes."

Eve's attitude told plainly enough that she had no more illusions left with regard to her brother. The lawyer waited a little so that her silence should have the weight of consent.

"Things being so, it is now a question of you and your child," he said. "It rests with you to decide whether an income of two thousand francs will be enough for your welfare, to say nothing of old Séchard's property. Your father-in-law's income has amounted to seven or eight thousand francs for a long time past, to say nothing of capital lying out at interest. So, after all, you have a good prospect before you. Why torment yourself?"

Petit-Claud left Eve Séchard to reflect upon this prospect. The whole scheme had been drawn up with no little skill by the tall Cointet the evening before.

"Give them the glimpse of a possibility of money in hand," the lynx had said, when Petit-Claud brought the news of the arrest; "once let them grow accustomed to that idea, and they are ours; we will drive a bargain, and little by little we shall bring them down to our price for the secret."

The argument of the second act of the commercial drama was in a manner summed up in that speech.

Mme. Séchard, heartbroken and full of dread for her brother's fate, dressed and came downstairs. An agony of

terror seized her when she thought that she must cross Angoulême alone on the way to the prison. Petit-Claud gave little thought to his fair client's distress. When he came back to offer his arm, it was from a tolerably Machiavellian motive; but Eve gave him credit for delicate consideration; and he allowed her to thank him for it. The little attention, at such a moment, from so hard a man, modified Mme. Séchard's previous opinion of Petit-Claud.

"I am taking you round by the longest way," he said, "and we shall meet nobody."

"For the first time in my life, monsieur, I feel that I have no right to hold up my head before other people; I had a sharp lesson given to me last night—"

"It will be the first and the last."

"Oh! I certainly shall not stay in the town now——"

"Let me know if your husband consents to the proposals that are all but definitely offered by the Cointets," said Petit-Claud at the gate of the prison; "I will come at once with an order for David's release from Cachan, and in all likelihood he will not go back again to prison."

This suggestion, made on the very threshold of the gaol, was a piece of cunning strategy—a *combinazione*, as the Italians call an indefinable mixture of treachery and truth, a cunningly planned fraud which does not break the letter of the law, or a piece of deft trickery for which there is no legal remedy. St. Bartholomew's, for instance, was a political combination.

Imprisonment for debt, for reasons previously explained, is such a rare occurrence in the provinces, that there is no house of detention, and a debtor is perforce imprisoned with the accused, convicted, and condemned—the three graduated subdivisions of the class generically styled criminal. David was put for the time being in a cell on the ground floor from which some prisoner had probably been recently discharged at the end of his time. Once inscribed on the gaoler's register, with the amount allowed by the law for a prisoner's board for one month, David confronted a big, stout man, more powerful than the King himself in a prisoner's eyes; this was the gaoler.

An instance of a thin gaoler is unknown in the provinces. The place, to begin with, is almost a sinecure, and a gaoler is a kind of innkeeper who pays no rent and lives very well, while his prisoners fare very ill; for, like an innkeeper, he gives them rooms according to their payments. He knew David by name, and what was more, knew about David's father, and thought that he might venture to let the printer have a good room on credit for one night; for David was penniless.

The prison of Angoulême was built in the Middle Ages, and has no more changed than the old cathedral. It is built against the old *présidial*, or ancient court of appeal, and people still call it the *maison de justice*. It boasts the conventional prison gateway, the solid-looking, nail-studded door, the low, worn archway which the better deserves the qualification "cyclopean," because the gaoler's peephole or *judas* looks out like a single eye from the front of the building. As you enter you find yourself in a corridor which runs across the entire width of the building, with a row of doors of cells that give upon the prison yard and are lighted by high windows covered with a square iron grating. The gaoler's house is separated from these cells by an archway in the middle, through which you catch a glimpse of the iron gate of the prison yard. The gaoler installed David in a cell next to the archway, thinking that he would like to have a man of David's stamp as a near neighbor for the sake of company.

"This is the best room," he said. David was struck dumb with amazement at the sight of it.

The stone walls were tolerably damp. The windows, set high in the wall, were heavily barred; the stone-paved floor was cold as ice, and from the corridor outside came the sound of the measured tramp of the warder, monotonous as waves on the beach. "You are a prisoner! you are watched and guarded!" said the footsteps at every moment of every hour. All these small things together produce a prodigious effect upon the minds of honest folk. David saw that the bed was execrable, but the first night in a prison is full of violent agitation, and only on the second night does

the prisoner notice that his couch is hard. The gaoler was graciously disposed; he naturally suggested that his prisoner should walk in the yard until nightfall.

David's hour of anguish only began when he was locked into his cell for the night. Lights are not allowed in the cells. A prisoner detained on arrest used to be subjected to rules devised for malefactors, unless he brought a special exemption signed by the public prosecutor. The gaoler certainly might allow David to sit by his fire, but the prisoner must go back to his cell at locking-up time. Poor David learned the horrors of prison life by experience, the rough coarseness of the treatment revolted him. Yet a revulsion, familiar to those who live by thought, passed over him; he detached himself from his loneliness, and found a way of escape in a poet's waking dream.

At last the unhappy man's thoughts turned to his own affairs. The stimulating influence of a prison upon conscience and self-scrutiny is immense. David asked himself whether he had done his duty as the head of a family. What despairing grief his wife must feel at this moment! Why had he not done as Marion had said, and earned money enough to pursue his investigations at leisure?

"How can I stay in Angoulême after such a disgrace? And when I come out of prison, what will become of us? Where shall we go?"

Doubts as to his process began to occur to him, and he passed through an agony which none save inventors can understand. Going from doubt to doubt, David began to see his real position more clearly; and to himself he said, as the Cointets had said to old Séchard, as Petit-Claud had just said to Eve, "Suppose that all should go well, what does it amount to in practice? The first thing to be done is to take out a patent, and money is needed for that—and experiments must be tried on a large scale in a paper-mill, which means that the discovery must pass into other hands. Oh! Petit-Claud was right!"

A very vivid light sometimes dawns in the darkest prison.

"Pshaw!" said David; "I shall see Petit-Claud to-mor-

row no doubt," and he turned and slept on the filthy mattress covered with coarse brown sacking.

So when Eve unconsciously played into the hands of the enemy that morning, she found her husband more than ready to listen to the proposals. She put her arms about him and kissed him, and sat down on the edge of the bed (for there was but one chair of the poorest and commonest kind in the cell). Her eyes fell on the unsightly pail in a corner, and over the walls covered with inscriptions left by David's predecessors, and tears filled the eyes that were red with weeping. She had sobbed long and very bitterly, but the sight of her husband in a felon's cell drew fresh tears.

"And the desire of fame may lead one to this!" she cried. "Oh! my angel, give up your career. Let us walk together along the beaten track; we will not try to make haste to be rich, David. . . . I need very little to be very happy, especially now, after all that we have been through. . . . And if you only knew—the disgrace of arrest is not the worst. . . . Look."

She held out Lucien's letter, and when David had read it, she tried to comfort him by repeating Petit-Claud's bitter comment.

"If Lucien has taken his life, the thing is done by now," said David; "if he has not made away with himself by this time, he will not kill himself. As he himself says, 'his courage cannot last longer than a morning——'"

"But the suspense!" cried Eve, forgiving almost everything at the thought of death. Then she told her husband of the proposals which Petit-Claud professed to have received from the Cointets. David accepted them at once with manifest pleasure.

"We shall have enough to live upon in a village near L'Houmeau, where the Cointets' paper-mill stands. I want nothing now but a quiet life," said David. "If Lucien has punished himself by death, we can wait so long as father lives; and if Lucien is still living, poor fellow, he will learn to adapt himself to our narrow ways. The Cointets certainly will make money by my discovery; but, after all, what

am I compared with our country? One man in it, that is all; and if the whole country is benefited, I shall be content. There! dear Eve, neither you nor I were meant to be successful in business. We do not care enough about making a profit; we have not the dogged objection to parting with our money, even when it is legally owing, which is a kind of virtue of the counting-house, for these two sorts of avarice are called prudence and a faculty of business."

Eve felt overjoyed; she and her husband held the same views, and this is one of the sweetest flowers of love; for two human beings who love each other may not be of the same mind, or take the same view of their interests. She wrote to Petit-Claud telling him that they both consented to the general scheme, and asked him to release David. Then she begged the gaoler to deliver the message.

Ten minutes later Petit-Claud entered the dismal place. "Go home, madame," he said, addressing Eve, "we will follow you.—Well, my dear friend," turning to David, "so you allowed them to catch you! Why did you come out? How came you to make such a mistake?"

"Eh! how could I do otherwise? Look at this letter that Lucien wrote."

David held out a sheet of paper. It was Cérizet's forged letter.

Petit-Claud read it, looked at it, fingered the paper as he talked, and still talking, presently, as if through absence of mind, folded it up and put it in his pocket. Then he linked his arm in David's, and they went out together, the order for release having come during the conversation.

It was like heaven to David to be at home again. He cried like a child when he took little Lucien in his arms and looked round his room after three weeks of imprisonment, and the disgrace, according to provincial notions, of the last few hours. Kolb and Marion had come back. Marion had heard in L'Houmeau that Lucien had been seen walking along on the Paris road, somewhere beyond Marsac. Some country folk, coming in to market, had noticed his fine clothes. Kolb, therefore, had set out on horseback along the high road, and heard at last at Mansle that Lucien was



traveling post in a calèche—M. Marron had recognized him as he passed.

“What did I tell you?” said Petit-Claud. “That fellow is not a poet; he is a romance in heaven knows how many chapters.”

“Traveling post!” repeated Eve. “Where can he be going this time?”

“Now go to see the Cointets, they are expecting you,” said Petit-Claud, turning to David.

“Ah! monsieur!” cried the beautiful Eve, “pray do your best for our interests; our whole future lies in your hands.”

“If you prefer it, madame, the conference can be held here. I will leave David with you. The Cointets will come this evening, and you shall see if I can defend your interests.”

“Ah! monsieur, I should be very glad,” said Eve.

“Very well,” said Petit-Claud; “this evening, at seven o’clock.”

“Thank you,” said Eve; and from her tone and glance Petit-Claud knew that he had made great progress in his fair client’s confidence.

“You have nothing to fear; you see I was right,” he added. “Your brother is a hundred miles away from suicide, and when all comes to all, perhaps you will have a little fortune this evening. A *bonâ-fide* purchaser for the business has turned up.”

“If that is the case,” said Eve, “why should we not wait a while before binding ourselves to the Cointets?”

Petit-Claud saw the danger. “You are forgetting, madame,” he said, “that you cannot sell your business until you have paid M. Métivier; for a distress warrant has been issued.”

As soon as Petit-Claud reached home he sent for Cérizet, and when the printer’s foreman appeared, drew him into the embrasure of the window.

“To-morrow evening,” he said, “you will be the proprietor of the Séchards’ printing-office, and then there are those behind you who have influence enough to transfer

the license"; (then in a lowered voice), "but you have no mind to end in the hulks, I suppose?"

"The hulks! What's that? What's that?"

"Your letter to David was a forgery. It is in my possession. What would Henriette say in a court of law? I do not want to ruin you," he added hastily, seeing how white Cérizet's face grew.

"You want something more of me?" cried Cérizet.

"Well, here it is," said Petit-Claud. "Follow me carefully. You will be a master printer in Angoulême in two months' time . . . but you will not have paid for your business—you will not pay for it in ten years. You will work a long while yet for those that have lent you the money, and you will be the cat's-paw of the Liberal party. . . Now I shall draw up your agreement with Gannerac, and I can draw it up in such a way that you will have the business in your own hands one of these days. But—if the Liberals start a paper, if you bring it out, and if I am deputy public prosecutor, then you will come to an understanding with the Cointets and publish articles of such a nature that they will have the paper suppressed. . . . The Cointets will pay you handsomely for that service. . . . I know, of course, that you will be condemned and live on prison fare for a while, but you will be a hero, a victim of persecution; you will be a personage among the Liberals—a Sergeant Mercier, a Paul-Louis Courier, a Manuel on a small scale. I will take care that they leave you your license. In fact, on the day when the newspaper is suppressed, I will burn this letter before your eyes. . . . Your fortune will not cost you much."

A working man has the haziest notions as to the law with regard to forgery; and Cérizet, who beheld himself already in the dock, breathed again.

"In three years' time," continued Petit-Claud, "I shall be public prosecutor in Angoulême. You may have need of me some day; bear that in mind."

"It's agreed," said Cérizet, "but you don't know me. Burn that letter now and trust to my gratitude."

Petit-Claud looked Cérizet in the face. It was a duel in

which one man's gaze is a scalpel with which he essays to probe the soul of another, and the eyes of that other are a theater, as it were, to which all his virtue is summoned for display.

Petit-Claud did not utter a word. He lighted a taper and burned the letter. "He has his way to make," he said to himself.

"Here is one that will go through fire and water for you," said Cérizet.

David awaited the interview with the Cointets with a vague feeling of uneasiness; not, however, on account of the proposed partnership, nor for his own interests—he felt nervous as to their opinion of his work. He was in something the same position as a dramatic author before his judges. The inventor's pride in the discovery so nearly completed left no room for any other feelings.

At seven o'clock that evening, while Mme. du Châtelet, pleading a sick headache, had gone to her room in her unhappiness over the rumors of Lucien's departure; while M. le Comte, left to himself, was entertaining his guests at dinner—the tall Cointet and his stout brother, accompanied by Petit-Claud, opened negotiations with the competitor who had delivered himself up, bound hand and foot.

A difficulty awaited them at the outset. How was it possible to draw up a deed of partnership unless they knew David's secret? And if David divulged his secret, he would be at the mercy of the Cointets. Petit-Claud arranged that the deed of partnership should be first drawn up. Thereupon the tall Cointet asked to see some specimens of David's work, and David brought out the last sheets that he had made, guaranteeing the price of production.

"Well," said Petit-Claud, "there you have the basis of the agreement ready made. You can go into partnership on the strength of those samples, inserting a clause to protect yourselves in case the conditions of the patent are not fulfilled in the manufacturing process."

"It is one thing to make samples of paper on a small scale in your own room with a small mold, monsieur, and another

to turn out a quantity," said the tall Cointet, addressing David. "Quite another thing, as you may judge from this single fact. We manufacture colored papers. We buy parcels of coloring absolutely identical. Every cake of indigo used for 'bluing' our post-demy is taken from a batch supplied by the same maker. Well, we have never yet been able to obtain two batches of precisely the same shade. There are variations in the material which we cannot detect. The quantity and the quality of the pulp modify every question at once. Suppose that you have in a cauldron a quantity of ingredients of some kind (I don't ask to know what they are), you can do as you like with them, the treatment can be uniformly applied, you can manipulate, knead, and pestle the mass at your pleasure until you have a homogeneous substance. But who will guarantee that it will be the same with a batch of five hundred reams, and that your plan will succeed in bulk?"

David, Eve, and Petit-Claud looked at one another; their eyes said many things.

"Take a somewhat similar case," continued the tall Cointet after a pause. "You cut two or three trusses of meadow hay, and store it in a loft before 'the heat is out of the grass,' as the peasants say; the hay ferments, but no harm comes of it. You follow up your experiment by storing a couple of thousand trusses in a wooden barn—and, of course, the hay smoulders, and the barn blazes up like a lighted match. You are an educated man," continued Cointet; "you can see the application for yourself. So far, you have only cut your two trusses of hay; we are afraid of setting fire to our paper-mill by bringing in a couple of thousand trusses. In other words, we may spoil more than one batch, make heavy losses, and find ourselves none the better for laying out a good deal of money."

David was completely floored by this reasoning. Practical wisdom spoke in matter-of-fact language to theory, whose word is always for the future.

"Devil fetch me, if I'll sign such a deed of partnership!" the stout Cointet cried bluntly. "You may throw away your money if you like, Boniface; as for me, I shall keep

mine. Here is my offer—to pay M. Séchard's debts *and* six thousand francs, and another three thousand francs in bills at twelve and fifteen months," he added. "That will be quite enough risk to run.—We have a balance of twelve thousand francs against Métivier. That will make fifteen thousand francs.—That is all that I would pay for the secret if I were going to exploit it for myself. So this is the great discovery that you were talking about, Boniface! Many thanks! I thought you had more sense. No, you can't call this business."

"The question for you," said Petit-Claud, undismayed by the explosion, "resolves itself into this: 'Do you care to risk twenty thousand francs to buy a secret that may make rich men of you? Why, the risk usually is in proportion to the profit, gentlemen. You stake twenty thousand francs on your luck. A gambler puts down a louis at roulette for a chance of winning thirty-six, but he knows that the louis is lost. Do the same.'"

"I must have time to think it over," said the stout Cointet; "I am not so clever as my brother. I am a plain, straightforward sort of chap, that only knows one thing—how to print prayer-books at twenty sous and sell them for two francs. Where I see an invention that has only been tried once, I see ruin. You succeed with the first batch, you spoil the next, you go on, and you are drawn in; for once put an arm into that machinery, the rest of you follows," and he related an anecdote very much to the point—how a Bordeaux merchant had ruined himself by following a scientific man's advice, and trying to bring the Landes into cultivation; and followed up the tale with half-a-dozen similar instances of agricultural and commercial failures nearer home in the department of the Charente and Dordogne. He waxed warm over his recitals. He would not listen to another word. Petit-Claud's demurs, so far from soothing the stout Cointet, appeared to irritate him.

"I would rather give more for a certainty, if I made only a small profit on it," he said, looking at his brother. "It is my opinion that things have not gone far enough for business," he concluded.

“Still you came here for something, didn't you?” asked Petit-Claud. “What is your offer?”

“I offer to release M. Séchard, and, if his plan succeeds, to give him thirty per cent. of the profits,” the stout Cointet answered briskly.

“But, monsieur,” objected Eve, “how should we live while the experiments were being made? My husband has endured the disgrace of imprisonment already; he may as well go back to prison, it makes no difference now, and we will pay our debts ourselves——”

Petit-Claud laid a finger on his lips in warning.

“You are unreasonable,” said he, addressing the brothers. “You have seen the paper; M. Séchard's father told you that he had shut his son up, and that he had made capital paper in a single night from materials that must have cost a mere nothing. You are here to make an offer. Are you purchasers, yes or no?”

“Stay,” said the tall Cointet, “whether my brother is willing or no, I will risk this much myself. I will pay M. Séchard's debts, I will pay down six thousand francs over and above the debts, and M. Séchard shall have thirty per cent. of the profits. But mind this—if in the space of one year he fails to carry out the undertakings which he himself will make in the deed of partnership, he must return the six thousand francs, and we shall keep the patent and extricate ourselves as best we may.”

“Are you sure of yourself?” asked Petit-Claud, taking David aside.

“Yes,” said David. He was deceived by the tactics of the brothers, and afraid lest the stout Cointet should break off the negotiations on which his future depended.

“Very well, I will draft the deed,” said Petit-Claud, addressing the rest of the party. “Each of you shall have a copy to-night, and you will have all to-morrow morning in which to think it over. To-morrow afternoon at four o'clock, when the court rises, you will sign the agreement. You, gentlemen, will withdraw Métivier's suit, and I, for my part, will write to stop proceedings in the Court-Royal; we

will give notice on either side that the affair has been settled out of court."

David Séchard's undertakings were thus worded in the deed:—

"M. David Séchard, printer of Angoulême, affirming that he has discovered a method of sizing paper-pulp in the vat, and also a method of effecting a reduction of fifty per cent. in the price of all kinds of manufactured papers, by introducing certain vegetable substances into the pulp, either by intermixture of such substances with the rags already in use, or by employing them solely without the addition of rags: a partnership for working the patent to be presently applied for is entered upon by M. David Séchard and the firm of Cointet Brothers, subject to the following conditional clauses and stipulations."

One of the clauses was so drafted that David Séchard forfeited all his rights if he failed to fulfill his engagements within the year; the tall Cointet was particularly careful to insert that clause, and David Séchard allowed it to pass.

When Petit-Claud appeared with a copy of the agreement next morning at half-past seven o'clock, he brought news for David and his wife. Cérizet offered twenty-two thousand francs for the business. The whole affair could be signed and settled in the course of the evening. "But if the Cointets knew about it," he added, "they would be quite capable of refusing to sign the deed of partnership, of harassing you, and selling you up."

"Are you sure of payment?" asked Eve. She had thought it hopeless to try to sell the business; and now, to her astonishment, a bargain which would have been their salvation three months ago was concluded in this summary fashion.

"The money has been deposited with me," he answered succinctly.

"Why, here is magic at work!" said David, and he asked Petit-Claud for an explanation of this piece of luck.

"No," said Petit-Claud, "it is very simple. The merchants in L'Houmeau want a newspaper."

"But I am bound not to publish a paper," said David.

"Yes, you are bound, but is your successor?—However it is," he continued, "do not trouble yourself at all; sell the business, pocket the proceeds, and leave Cérizet to find his way through the conditions of sale—he can take care of himself."

"Yes," said Eve.

"And if it turns out that you may not print a newspaper in Angoulême," said Petit-Claud, "those who are finding the capital for Cérizet will bring out the paper in L'Houmeau."

The prospect of twenty-two thousand francs, of want now at end, dazzled Eve. The partnership and its hopes took a second place. And, therefore, M. and Mme. Séchard gave way on a final point of dispute. The tall Cointet insisted that the patent should be taken out in his name. He established beyond cavil that David's rights were perfectly defined in the deed of partnership, and that therefore the patent might be taken out in the name of any one of the partners. What difference could it make? The stout Cointet said the last word.

"He is finding the money for the patent; he is bearing the expenses of the journey—another two thousand francs over and above the rest of the expenses. He must take it out in his own name, or we will not stir in the matter."

The lynx gained a victory at all points. The deed of partnership was signed that afternoon at half-past four.

The tall Cointet politely gave Mme. Séchard a dozen thread-pattern forks and spoons and a beautiful Ternaux shawl, by way of pin-money, said he, and to efface any unpleasant impression made in the heat of discussion. The copies of the draft had scarcely been made out, Cachan had barely had time to send the documents to Petit-Claud, together with the three unlucky forged bills, when the Séchards heard a deafening rumble in the street, a dray from the Messageries stopped before the door, and Kolb's voice made the staircase ring again.



“Montame! montame! fifteen tausend vrancs, vrom Boiders” (Poitiers). “Goot money! vrom Monziere Lucien!”

“Fifteen thousand francs!” cried Eve, throwing up her arms.

“Yes, madame,” said the carman in the doorway, “fifteen thousand francs, brought by the Bordeaux coach, and they didn’t want any more neither! I have two men downstairs bringing up the bags. M. Lucien Chardon de Rubempré is the sender. I have brought up a little leather bag for you, containing five hundred francs in gold, and a letter it’s likely.”

Eve thought that she must be dreaming as she read:—

“MY DEAR SISTER,—Here are fifteen thousand francs. Instead of taking my life, I have sold it. I am no longer my own; I am only the secretary of a Spanish diplomatist; I am his creature. A new and dreadful life is beginning for me. Perhaps I should have done better to drown myself.

“Good-by. David will be released, and with the four thousand francs he can buy a little paper-mill, no doubt, and make his fortune. Forget me, all of you. This is the wish of your unhappy brother

“LUCIEN.”

“It is decreed that my poor boy should be unlucky in everything, and even when he does well, as he said himself,” said Mme. Chardon, as she watched the men piling up the bags.

“We have had a narrow escape!” exclaimed the tall Cointet, when he was once in the Place du Mûrier. “An hour later the glitter of the silver would have thrown a new light on the deed of partnership. Our man would have fought shy of it. We have his promise now, and in three months’ time we shall know what to do.”

That very evening, at seven o’clock, Cérizet bought the business, and the money was paid over, the purchaser undertaking to pay rent for the last quarter. The next day Eve

sent forty thousand francs to the Receiver-General, and bought two thousand five hundred francs of *rentes* in her husband's name. Then she wrote to her father-in-law and asked him to find a small farm, worth about ten thousand francs, for her near Marsac. She meant to invest her own fortune in this way.

The tall Cointet's plot was formidably simple. From the very first he considered that the plan of sizing the pulp in the vat was impracticable. The real secret of fortune lay in the composition of the pulp, in the cheap vegetable fiber as a substitute for rags. He made up his mind, therefore, to lay immense stress on the secondary problem of sizing the pulp, and to pass over the discovery of cheap raw material, and for the following reasons.

The Angoulême paper-mills manufacture paper for stationers. Notepaper, foolscap, crown, and post-demy are all necessarily sized; and these papers have been the pride of the Angoulême mills for a long while past, stationery being the speciality of the Charente. This fact gave color to the Cointets' urgency upon the point of sizing in the pulping-trough; but, as a matter of fact, they cared nothing for this part of David's researches. The demand for writing-paper is exceedingly small compared with the almost unlimited demand for unsized paper for printers. As Boniface Cointet traveled to Paris to take out the patent in his own name, he was projecting plans that were like to work a revolution in his paper-mill. Arrived in Paris, he took up his quarters with Métivier, and gave his instructions to his agent. Métivier was to call upon the proprietors of newspapers, and offer to deliver paper at prices below those quoted by all other houses; he could guarantee in each case that the paper should be a better color, and in every way superior to the best kinds hitherto in use. Newspapers are always supplied by contract; there would be time before the present contracts expired to complete all the subterranean operations with buyers, and to obtain a monopoly of the trade. Cointet calculated that he could rid himself of Séchard while Métivier was taking orders from the principal Paris newspapers, which even then consumed two hundred

reams daily. Cointet naturally offered Métivier a large commission on the contracts, for he wished to secure a clever representative on the spot, and to waste no time in traveling to and fro. And in this manner the fortunes of the firm of Métivier, one of the largest houses in the paper trade, were founded. The tall Cointet went back to Angoulême to be present at Petit-Claud's wedding, with a mind at rest as to the future.

Petit-Claud had sold his professional connection, and was only waiting for M. Milaud's promotion to take the public prosecutor's place, which had been promised to him by the Comtesse du Châtelet. The public prosecutor's second deputy was appointed first deputy to the Court of Limoges, the Keeper of the Seals sent a man of his own to Angoulême, and the post of first deputy was kept vacant for a couple of months. The interval was Petit-Claud's honeymoon.

While Boniface Cointet was in Paris, David made a first experimental batch of unsized paper far superior to that in common use for newspapers. He followed it up with a second batch of magnificent vellum paper for fine printing, and this the Cointets used for a new edition of their diocesan prayer-book. The material had been privately prepared by David himself; he would have no helpers but Kolb and Marion.

When Boniface came back the whole affair wore a different aspect; he looked at the samples, and was fairly satisfied.

"My good friend," he said, "the whole trade of Angoulême is in crown paper. We must make the best possible crown paper at half the present price; that is the first and foremost question for us."

Then David tried to size the pulp for the desired paper, and the result was a harsh surface with grains of size distributed all over it. On the day when the experiment was concluded and David held the sheets in his hand, he went away to find a spot where he could be alone and swallow his bitter disappointment. But Boniface Cointet went in search of him and comforted him. Boniface was delightfully amiable.

“Do not lose heart,” he said; “go on! I am a good fellow, I understand you; I will stand by you to the end.”

“Really,” David said to his wife at dinner, “we are with good people; I should not have expected that the tall Cointet would be so generous.” And he repeated his conversation with his wily partner.

Three months were spent in experiments. David slept at the mill; he noted the effects of various preparations upon the pulp. At one time he attributed his non-success to an admixture of rag-pulp with his own ingredients, and made a batch entirely composed of the new material; at another, he endeavored to size pulp made exclusively from rags; persevering in his experiments under the eyes of the tall Cointet, whom he had ceased to mistrust, until he had tried every possible combination of pulp and size. David lived in the paper-mill for the first six months of 1823—if it can be called living, to leave food untasted, and go in neglect of person and dress. He wrestled so desperately with the difficulties, that anybody but the Cointets would have seen the sublimity of the struggle, for the brave fellow was not thinking of his own interests. The moment had come when he cared for nothing but the victory. With marvelous sagacity he watched the unaccountable freaks of the semi-artificial substances called into existence by man for ends of his own; substances in which nature had been tamed, as it were, and her tacit resistance overcome; and from these observations drew great conclusions; finding, as he did, that such creations can only be obtained by following the laws of the more remote affinities of things, of “a second nature,” as he called it, in substances.

Towards the end of August he succeeded to some extent in sizing the paper pulp in the vat; the result being a kind of paper identical with a make in use for printers’ proofs at the present day—a kind of paper that cannot be depended upon, for the sizing itself is not always certain. This was a great result, considering the condition of the paper trade in 1823, and David hoped to solve the final difficulties of the problem, but—it had cost ten thousand francs.

Singular rumors were current at this time in Angoulême and L'Houmeau. It was said that David Séchard was ruining the firm of Cointet Brothers. Experiments had eaten up twenty thousand francs; and the result, said gossip, was wretchedly bad paper. Other manufacturers took fright at this, hugged themselves on their old-fashioned methods, and, being jealous of the Cointets, spread rumors of the approaching fall of that ambitious house. As for the tall Cointet, he set up the new machinery for making lengths of paper in a ribbon, and allowed people to believe that he was buying plant for David's experiments. Then the cunning Cointet used David's formula for pulp, while urging his partner to give his whole attention to the sizing process; and thousands of reams of the new paper were despatched to Métivier in Paris.

When September arrived, the tall Cointet took David aside, and, learning that the latter meditated a crowning experiment, dissuaded him from further attempts.

"Go to Marsac, my dear David, see your wife, and take a rest after your labors; we don't want to ruin ourselves," said Cointet in the friendliest way. "This great triumph of yours, after all, is only a starting-point. We shall wait now for a while before trying any new experiments. To be fair! see what has come of them. We are not merely paper-makers, we are printers besides and bankers, and people say that you are ruining us."

David Séchard's gesture of protest on behalf of his good faith was sublime in its simplicity.

"Not that fifty thousand francs thrown into the Charente would ruin us," said Cointet, in reply to the mute protest, "but we do not wish to be obliged to pay cash for everything in consequence of slanders that shake our credit; *that* would bring us to a standstill. We have reached the term fixed by our agreement, and we are bound on either side to think over our position."

"He is right," thought David. He had forgotten the routine work of the business, thoroughly absorbed as he had been in experiments on a large scale.

David went to Marsac. For the past six months he had

gone over on Saturday evening, returning again to L'Houmeau on Tuesday morning. Eve, after much counsel from her father-in-law, had bought a house called the Verberie, with three acres of land and a croft planted with vines, which lay like a wedge in the old man's vineyard. Here, with her mother and Marion, she lived a very frugal life, for five thousand francs of the purchase-money still remained unpaid. It was a charming little domain, the prettiest bit of property in Marsac. The house, with a garden before it and a yard at the back, was built of white tufa ornamented with carvings, cut without great expense in that easily wrought stone, and roofed with slate. The pretty furniture from the house in Angoulême looked prettier still at Marsac, for there was not the slightest attempt at comfort or luxury in the country in those days. A row of orange-trees, pomegranates, and rare plants stood before the house on the side of the garden, set there by the last owner, an old general who died under M. Marron's hands.

David was enjoying his holiday sitting under an orange-tree with his wife, and father, and little Lucien, when the bailiff from Mansle appeared. Cointet Brothers gave their partner formal notice to appoint an arbitrator to settle disputes, in accordance with a clause in the agreement. The Cointets demanded that the six thousand francs should be refunded, and the patent surrendered in consideration of the enormous outlay made to no purpose.

"People say that you are ruining them," said old Séchard. "Well, well, of all that you have done, that is the one thing that I am glad to know."

At nine o'clock the next morning Eve and David stood in Petit-Claud's waiting-room. The little lawyer was the guardian of the widow and orphan by virtue of his office, and it seemed to them that they could take no other advice. Petit-Claud was delighted to see his clients, and insisted that M. and Mme. Séchard should do him the pleasure of breakfasting with him.

"Do the Cointets want six thousand francs of you?" he asked, smiling. "How much is still owing of the purchase-money of the Verberie?"

"Five thousand francs, monsieur," said Eve, "but I have two thousand——"

"Keep your money," Petit-Claud broke in. "Let us see, five thousand—why, you want quite another ten thousand francs to settle yourselves in comfortably down yonder. Very good, in two hours' time the Cointets shall bring you fifteen thousand francs——"

Eve started with surprise.

"If you will renounce all claims to the profits under the deed of partnership, and come to an amicable settlement," said Petit-Claud. "Does that suit you?"

"Will it really be lawfully ours?" asked Eve.

"Very much so," said the lawyer, smiling. "The Cointets have worked you trouble enough; I should like to make an end to their pretensions. Listen to me; I am a magistrate now, and it is my duty to tell you the truth. Very good. The Cointets are playing you false at this moment, but you are in their hands. If you accept battle, you might possibly gain the lawsuit which they will bring. Do you wish to be where you are now after ten years of litigation? Experts' fees and expenses of arbitration will be multiplied, the most contradictory opinions will be given, and you must take your chance. And," he added, smiling again, "there is no attorney here that can defend you, so far as I see. My successor has not much ability. There, a bad compromise is better than a successful lawsuit."

"Any arrangements that will give us a quiet life will do for me," said David.

Petit-Claud called to his servant.

"Paul! go and ask M. Ségaud, my successor, to come here.—He shall go to see the Cointets while we breakfast," said Petit-Claud, addressing his former clients, "and in a few hours' time you will be on your way home to Marsac, ruined, but with minds at rest. Ten thousand francs will bring you in another five hundred francs of income, and you will live comfortably on your bit of property."

Two hours later, as Petit-Claud had prophesied, Maître Ségaud came back with an agreement duly drawn up and

signed by the Cointets, and fifteen notes each for a thousand francs.

"We are much indebted to you," said Séchard, turning to Petit-Claud.

"Why, I have just this moment ruined you," said Petit-Claud, looking at his astonished former clients. "I tell you again, I have ruined you, as you will see as time goes on; and I know you, you would rather be ruined than wait for a fortune which perhaps might come too late."

"We are not mercenary, monsieur," said Madame Eve. "We thank you for giving us the means of happiness; we shall always feel grateful to you."

"Great heavens! don't call down blessings on *me!*" cried Petit-Claud. "It fills me with remorse; but to-day, I think, I have made full reparation. If I am a magistrate, it is entirely owing to you; and if anybody is to feel grateful, it is I. Good-by."

As time went on, Kolb changed his opinion of Séchard senior; and as for the old man, he took a liking to Kolb when he found that, like himself, the Alsacien could neither write nor read a word, and that it was easy to make him tipsy. The old "bear" imparted his ideas on vine-culture and the sale of a vintage to the ex-cuirassier, and trained him with a view to leaving a man with a head on his shoulders to look after his children when he should be gone; for he grew childish at the last, and great were his fears as to the fate of his property. He had chosen Courtois the miller as his confidant. "You will see how things will go with my children when I am underground. Lord! it makes me shudder to think of it."

Old Séchard died in the month of March 1829, leaving about two hundred thousand francs in land. His acres added to the Verberie made a fine property, which Kolb had managed to admiration for some two years.

David and his wife found nearly a hundred thousand crowns in gold in the house. The department of the Char-ente had valued old Séchard's money at a million; rumor, as usual, exaggerating the amount of a hoard. Eve and David



had barely thirty thousand francs of income when they added their little fortune to the inheritance; they waited a while, and so it fell out that they invested their capital in Government securities at the time of the Revolution of July.

Then, and not until then, could the department of the Charente and David Séchard form some idea of the wealth of the tall Cointet. Rich to the extent of several millions of francs, the elder Cointet became a deputy, and is at this day a peer of France. It is said that he will be Minister of Commerce in the next Government; for in 1842 he married Mlle. Popinot, daughter of M. Anselme Popinot, one of the most influential statesmen of the dynasty, deputy and mayor of an arrondissement in Paris.

David Séchard's discovery has been assimilated by the French manufacturing world, as food is assimilated by a living body. Thanks to the introduction of materials other than rags, France can produce paper more cheaply than any other European country. Dutch paper, as David foresaw, no longer exists. Sooner or later it will be necessary, no doubt, to establish a Royal Paper Manufactory; like the Gobelins, the Sèvres porcelain works, the Savonnerie, and the Imprimerie royale, which so far have escaped the destruction threatened by bourgeois vandalism.

David Séchard, beloved by his wife, father of two boys and a girl, has the good taste to make no allusion to his past efforts. Eve had the sense to dissuade him from following his terrible vocation; for the inventor, like Moses on Mount Horeb, is consumed by the burning bush. He cultivates literature by way of recreation, and leads a comfortable life of leisure, befitting the landowner who lives on his own estate. He has bidden farewell forever to glory, and bravely taken his place in the class of dreamers and collectors; for he dabbles in entomology, and is at present investigating the transformations of insects which science only knows in the final stage.

Everybody has heard of Petit-Claud's success as attorney-general; he is the rival of the great Vinet of Provins, and it is his ambition to be President of the Court-Royal of Poitiers.

Cérizet has been in trouble so frequently for political offenses that he has been a good deal talked about; and as one of the boldest *enfants perdus* of the Liberal party he was nicknamed the "Brave Cérizet." When Petit-Claud's successor compelled him to sell his business in Angoulême, he found a fresh career on the provincial stage, where his talents as an actor were like to be turned to brilliant account. The chief stage heroine, however, obliged him to go to Paris to find a cure for love among the resources of science, and there he tried to curry favor with the Liberal party.

As for Lucien, the story of his return to Paris belongs to the *Scenes of Parisian Life*.



## **THE ATHEIST'S MASS**

[*La Messe de l'Athée* appeared first in the *Chronique de Paris* for January 4, 1836; next year joined the other *Études Philosophiques*, and in 1844 the *Vie Privée* and the *Comédie*.]

## THE ATHEIST'S MASS

*This is dedicated to Auguste Borget by his friend  
De Balzac.*

**B**IANCHON, a physician to whom science owes a fine system of theoretical physiology, and who, while still young, made himself a celebrity in the medical school of Paris, that central luminary to which European doctors do homage, practiced surgery for a long time before he took up medicine. His earliest studies were guided by one of the greatest of French surgeons, the illustrious Desplein, who flashed across science like a meteor. By the consensus even of his enemies, he took with him to the tomb an incommunicable method. Like all men of genius, he had no heirs; he carried everything in him, and carried it away with him. The glory of a surgeon is like that of an actor; they live only so long as they are alive, and their talent leaves no trace when they are gone. Actors and surgeons, like great singers too, like the executants who by their performance increase the power of music tenfold, are all the heroes of a moment.

Desplein is a case in proof of this resemblance in the destinies of such transient genius. His name, yesterday so famous, to-day almost forgotten, will survive in his special department without crossing its limits. For must there not be some extraordinary circumstances to exalt the name of a professor from the history of Science to the general history of the human race? Had Desplein that universal command of knowledge which makes a man the living word, the great figure of his age? Desplein had a godlike eye; he saw into the sufferer and his malady by an intuition, natural or acquired, which enabled him to grasp the diagnostics peculiar to the individual, to determine the very time, the hour, the minute when an operation should be performed, making due allowance for atmospheric conditions and peculiarities of individual temperament. To proceed thus, hand in hand

with nature, had he then studied the constant assimilation by living beings of the elements contained in the atmosphere, or yielded by the earth to man who absorbs them, deriving from them a particular expression of life? Did he work it all out by the power of deduction and analogy, to which we owe the genius of Cuvier? Be this as it may, this man was in all the secrets of the human frame; he knew it in the past and in the future, emphasizing the present.

But did he epitomize all science in his own person as Hippocrates did and Galen and Aristotle? Did he guide a whole school towards new worlds? No. Though it is impossible to deny that this persistent observer of human chemistry possessed the antique science of the Magés, that is to say, knowledge of the elements in fusion, the causes of life, life antecedent to life, and what it must be in its incubation or ever it is, it must be confessed that, unfortunately, everything in him was purely personal. Isolated during his life by his egoism, that egoism is now suicidal of his glory. On his tomb there is no proclaiming statue to repeat to posterity the mysteries which genius seeks out at its own cost.

But perhaps Desplein's genius was answerable for his beliefs, and for that reason mortal. To him the terrestrial atmosphere was a generative envelope; he saw the earth as an egg within its shell; and not being able to determine whether the egg or the hen first was, he would not recognize either the cock or the egg. He believed neither in the antecedent animal nor the surviving spirit of man. Desplein had no doubts; he was positive. His bold and unqualified atheism was like that of many scientific men, the best men in the world, but invincible atheists—atheists such as religious people declare to be impossible. This opinion could scarcely exist otherwise in a man who was accustomed from his youth to dissect the creature above all others—before, during, and after life; to hunt through all his organs without ever finding the individual soul, which is indispensable to religious theory. When he detected a cerebral center, a nervous center, and a center for aërating the blood—the

two first so perfectly complementary that in the latter years of his life he came to a conviction that the sense of hearing is not absolutely necessary for hearing, nor the sense of sight for seeing, and that the solar plexus could supply their place without any possibility of doubt—Desplein, thus finding two souls in man, confirmed his atheism by this fact, though it is no evidence against God. This man died, it is said, in final impenitence, as do, unfortunately, many noble geniuses, whom God may forgive.

The life of this man, great as he was, was marred by many meannesses, to use the expression employed by his enemies; who were anxious to diminish his glory, but which it would be more proper to call apparent contradictions. Envious people and fools, having no knowledge of the determinations by which superior spirits are moved, seize at once on superficial inconsistencies, to formulate an accusation and so to pass sentence on them. If, subsequently, the proceedings thus attacked are crowned with success, showing the correlation of the preliminaries and the results, a few of the vanguard of calumnies always survive. In our own day, for instance, Napoleon was condemned by our contemporaries when he spread his eagle's wings to alight in England: only 1822 could explain 1804 and the flatboats at Boulogne.

As, in Desplein, his glory and science were invulnerable, his enemies attacked his odd moods and his temper, whereas, in fact, he was simply characterized by what the English call eccentricity. Sometimes very handsomely dressed, like Crébillon the tragical, he would suddenly affect extreme indifference as to what he wore; he was sometimes seen in a carriage, and sometimes on foot. By turns rough and kind, harsh and covetous on the surface, but capable of offering his whole fortune to his exiled masters—who did him the honor of accepting it for a few days—no man ever gave rise to such contradictory judgments. Although to obtain a black ribbon, which physicians ought not to intrigue for, he was capable of dropping a prayer-book out of his pocket at Court, in his heart he mocked at everything; he had a deep contempt for men, after studying them from above and below, after detecting their genuine expression when per-



forming the most solemn and the meanest acts of their lives.

The qualities of a great man are often federative. If among these colossal spirits one has more talent than wit, his wit is still superior to that of a man of whom it is simply stated that "he is witty." Genius always presupposes moral insight. This insight may be applied to a special subject; but he who can see a flower must be able to see the sun. The man who on hearing a diplomat he had saved ask, "How is the Emperor?" could say, "The courtier is alive; the man will follow!"—that man is not merely a surgeon or a physician, he is prodigiously witty also. Hence a patient and diligent student of human nature will admit Desplein's exorbitant pretensions, and believe—as he himself believed—that he might have been no less great as a minister than he was as a surgeon.

Among the riddles which Desplein's life presents to many of his contemporaries, we have chosen one of the most interesting, because the answer is to be found at the end of the narrative, and will avenge him for some foolish charges.

Of all the students in Desplein's hospital, Horace Bianchon was one of those to whom he most warmly attached himself. Before being a house surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu, Horace Bianchon had been a medical student lodging in a squalid boarding-house in the Quartier Latin, known as the Maison Vauquer. This poor young man had felt there the gnawing of that burning poverty which is a sort of crucible from which great talents are to emerge as pure and incorruptible as diamonds, which may be subjected to any shock without being crushed. In the fierce fire of their unbridled passions they acquire the most impeccable honesty, and get into the habit of fighting the battles which await genius with the constant work by which they coerce their cheated appetites.

Horace was an upright young fellow, incapable of tergiversation on a matter of honor, going to the point without waste of words, and as ready to pledge his cloak for a friend as to give him his time and his night hours. Horace,

in short, was one of those friends who are never anxious as to what they may get in return for what they give, feeling sure that they will in their turn get more than they give. Most of his friends felt for him that deeply-seated respect which is inspired by unostentatious virtue, and many of them dreaded his censure. But Horace made no pedantic display of his qualities. He was neither a puritan nor a preacher; he could swear with a grace as he gave his advice, and was always ready for a jollification when occasion offered. A jolly companion, not more prudish than a trooper, as frank and outspoken—not as a sailor, for nowadays sailors are wily diplomats—but as an honest man who has nothing in his life to hide, he walked with his head erect, and a mind content. In short, to put the facts into a word, Horace was the Pylades of more than one Orestes—creditors being regarded as the nearest modern equivalent to the Furies of the ancients.

He carried his poverty with the cheerfulness which is perhaps one of the chief elements of courage, and, like all people who have nothing, he made very few debts. As sober as a camel and active as a stag, he was steadfast in his ideas and his conduct.

The happy phase of Bianchon's life began on the day when the famous surgeon had proof of the qualities and the defects which, these no less than those, make Doctor Horace Bianchon doubly dear to his friends. When a leading clinical practitioner takes a young man to his bosom, that young man has, as they say, his foot in the stirrup. Desplein did not fail to take Bianchon as his assistant to wealthy houses, where some complimentary fee almost always found its way into the student's pocket, and where the mysteries of Paris life were insensibly revealed to the young provincial; he kept him at his side when a consultation was to be held, and gave him occupation; sometimes he would send him to a watering-place with a rich patient; in fact, he was making a practice for him. The consequence was that in the course of time the Tyrant of surgery had a devoted ally. These two men—one at the summit of honor and of his science, enjoying an immense fortune and

an immense reputation; the other a humble Omega, having neither fortune nor fame—became intimate friends.

The great Desplein told his house surgeon everything; the disciple knew whether such or such a woman had sat on a chair near the master, or on the famous couch in Desplein's surgery, on which he slept; Bianchon knew the mysteries of that temperament, a compound of the lion and the bull, which at last expanded and enlarged beyond measure the great man's torso, and caused his death by degeneration of the heart. He studied the eccentricities of that busy life, the schemes of that sordid avarice, the hopes of the politician who lurked behind the man of science; he was able to foresee the mortifications that awaited the only sentiment that lay hid in a heart that was steeled, but not of steel.

One day Bianchon spoke to Desplein of a poor water-carrier of the Saint-Jacques district, who had a horrible disease caused by fatigue and want; this wretched Auvergnat had had nothing but potatoes to eat during the dreadful winter of 1821. Desplein left all his visits, and at the risk of killing his horse, he rushed off, followed by Bianchon, to the poor man's dwelling, and saw, himself, to his being removed to a sick house, founded by the famous Dubois in the Faubourg Saint-Denis. Then he went to attend the man, and when he had cured him he gave him the necessary sum to buy a horse and a water-barrel. This Auvergnat distinguished himself by an amusing action. One of his friends fell ill, and he took him at once to Desplein, saying to his benefactor, "I could not have borne to let him go to anyone else!"

Rough customer as he was, Desplein grasped the water-carrier's hand, and said, "Bring them all to me."

He got the native of Cantal into the Hôtel-Dieu, where he took the greatest care of him. Bianchon had already observed in his chief a predilection for Auvergnats, and especially for water-carriers; but as Desplein took a sort of pride in his cures at the Hôtel-Dieu, the pupil saw nothing very strange in that.

One day, as he crossed the Place Saint-Sulpice, Bianchon caught sight of his master going into the church at about

nine in the morning. Desplein, who at that time never went a step without his cab, was on foot, and slipped in by the door in the Rue du Petit-Lion, as if he were stealing into some house of ill-fame. The house surgeon, naturally possessed by curiosity, knowing his master's opinions, and being himself a rabid follower of Cabanis (*Cabaniste en dyable*, with the *y*, which in Rabelais seems to convey an intensity of devilry)—Bianchon stole into the church, and was not a little astonished to see the great Desplein, the atheist, who had no mercy on the angels—who give no work to the lancet, and cannot suffer from fistula or gastritis—in short, this audacious scoffer kneeling humbly, and where? In the Lady Chapel, where he remained through the mass, giving alms for the expenses of the service, alms for the poor, and looking as serious as though he were superintending an operation.

“He has certainly not come here to clear up the question of the Virgin's delivery,” said Bianchon to himself, astonished beyond measure. “If I had caught him holding one of the ropes of the canopy on Corpus Christi day, it would be a thing to laugh at; but at this hour, alone, with no one to see—it is surely a thing to marvel at!”

Bianchon did not wish to seem as though he were spying the head surgeon of the Hôtel-Dieu; he went away. As it happened, Desplein asked him to dine with him that day, not at his own house, but at a restaurant. At dessert Bianchon skillfully contrived to talk of the mass, speaking of it as mummerly and a farce.

“A farce,” said Desplein, “which has cost Christendom more blood than all Napoleon's battles and all Broussais' leeches. The mass is a papal invention, not older than the sixth century, and based on the *Hoc est corpus*. What floods of blood were shed to establish the Fête-Dieu, the Festival of Corpus Christi—the institution by which Rome established her triumph in the question of the Real Presence, a schism which rent the Church during three centuries! The wars of the Count of Toulouse against the Albigenes were the tail-end of that dispute. The Vaudois and the Albigenes refused to recognize this innovation.”

In short, Desplein was delighted to disport himself in his most atheistical vein; a flow of Voltairian satire, or, to be accurate, a vile imitation of the *Citateur*.

"Hallo! where is my worshiper of this morning?" said Bianchon to himself.

He said nothing; he began to doubt whether he had really seen his chief at Saint-Sulpice. Desplein would not have troubled himself to tell Bianchon a lie, they knew each other too well; they had already exchanged thoughts on quite equally serious subjects, and discussed systems *de natura rerum*, probing or dissecting them with the knife and scalpel of incredulity.

Three months went by. Bianchon did not attempt to follow the matter up, though it remained stamped on his memory. One day that year, one of the physicians of the Hôtel-Dieu took Desplein by the arm, as if to question him, in Bianchon's presence.

"What were you doing at Saint-Sulpice, my dear master?" said he.

"I went to see a priest who has a diseased knee-bone, and to whom the Duchesse d'Angoulême did me the honor to recommend me," said Desplein.

The questioner took this defeat for an answer; not so Bianchon.

"Oh, he goes to see damaged knees in church!--He went to mass," said the young man to himself.

Bianchon resolved to watch Desplein. He remembered the day and hour when he had detected him going into Saint-Sulpice, and resolved to be there again next year on the same day and at the same hour, to see if he should find him there again. In that case the periodicity of his devotions would justify a scientific investigation; for in such a man there ought to be no direct antagonism of thought and action.

Next year, on the said day and hour, Bianchon, who had already ceased to be Desplein's house surgeon, saw the great man's cab standing at the corner of the Rue de Tournon and the Rue du Petit-Lion, whence his friend jesuitically crept along by the wall of Saint-Sulpice, and once more

attended mass in front of the Virgin's altar. It was Desplein, sure enough! The master-surgeon, the atheist at heart, the worshiper by chance. The mystery was greater than ever; the regularity of the phenomenon complicated it. When Desplein had left, Bianchon went to the sacristan, who took charge of the chapel, and asked him whether the gentleman were a constant worshiper.

"For twenty years that I have been here," replied the man, "M. Desplein has come four times a year to attend this mass. He founded it."

"A mass founded by him!" said Bianchon, as he went away. "This is as great a mystery as the Immaculate Conception—an article which alone is enough to make a physician an unbeliever."

Some time elapsed before Doctor Bianchon, though so much his friend, found an opportunity of speaking to Desplein of this incident of his life. Though they met in consultation, or in society, it was difficult to find an hour of confidential solitude when, sitting with their feet on the fire-dogs and their head resting on the back of an arm-chair, two men tell each other their secrets. At last, seven years later, after the Revolution of 1830, when the mob invaded the Archbishop's residence, when Republican agitators spurred them on to destroy the gilt crosses which flashed like streaks of lightning in the immensity of the ocean of houses; when Incredulity flaunted itself in the streets, side by side with Rebellion, Bianchon once more detected Desplein going into Saint-Sulpice. The doctor followed him, and knelt down by him without the slightest notice or demonstration of surprise from his friend. They both attended this mass of his founding.

"Will you tell me, my dear fellow," said Bianchon, as they left the church, "the reason for your fit of monkishness? I have caught you three times going to mass—You! You must account to me for this mystery, explain such a flagrant disagreement between your opinions and your conduct. You do not believe in God, and yet you attend mass? My dear master, you are bound to give me an answer."

"I am like a great many devout people—men who on the surface are deeply religious, but quite as much atheists as you or I can be."

And he poured out a torrent of epigrams on certain political personages, of whom the best known gives us, in this century, a new edition of Molière's *Tartufe*.

"All that has nothing to do with my question," retorted Bianchon. "I want to know the reason for what you have just been doing, and why you founded this mass."

"Faith! my dear boy," said Desplein, "I am on the verge of the tomb; I may safely tell you about the beginning of my life."

At this moment Bianchon and the great man were in the Rue des Quatre-Vents, one of the worst streets in Paris. Desplein pointed to the sixth floor of one of the houses looking like obelisks, of which the narrow door opens into a passage with a winding staircase at the end, with windows appropriately termed "borrowed lights"—or, in French, *jours de souffrance*. It was a greenish structure; the ground floor occupied by a furniture dealer, while each floor seemed to shelter a different and independent form of misery. Throwing up his arm with a vehement gesture, Desplein exclaimed—

"I lived up there for two years."

"I know! Arthez lived there; I went up there almost every day during my first youth; we used to call it then the pickle-jar of great men! What then?"

"The mass I have just attended is connected with some events which took place at the time when I lived in the garret where you say Arthez lived; the one with the window where the clothes line is hanging with linen over a pot of flowers. My early life was so hard, my dear Bianchon, that I may dispute the palm of Paris suffering with any man living. I have endured everything: hunger and thirst, want of money, want of clothes, of shoes, of linen, every cruelty that penury can inflict. I have blown on my frozen fingers in that *pickle-jar of great men*, which I should like to see again, now, with you. I worked through a whole winter, seeing my head steam, and perceiving the atmosphere of my

own moisture as we see that of horses on a frosty day. I do not know where a man finds the fulcrum that enables him to hold out against such a life.

“I was alone, with no one to help me, no money to buy books or to pay the expenses of my medical training; I had not a friend; my irascible, touchy, restless temper was against me. No one understood that this irritability was the distress and toil of a man who, at the bottom of the social scale, is struggling to reach the surface. Still, I had, as I may say to you, before whom I need wear no draperies, I had that ground-bed of good feeling and keen sensitiveness which must always be the birthright of any man who is strong enough to climb to any height whatever, after having long trampled in the bogs of poverty. I could obtain nothing from my family, nor from my home, beyond my inadequate allowance. In short, at that time, I breakfasted off a roll which the baker in the Rue du Petit-Lion sold me cheap because it was left from yesterday or the day before, and I crumbled it into milk; thus my morning meal cost me but two sous. I dined only every other day in a boarding-house where the meal cost me sixteen sous. You know as well as I what care I must have taken of my clothes and shoes. I hardly know whether in later life we feel grief so deep when a colleague plays us false, as we have known, you and I, on detecting the mocking smile of a gaping seam in a shoe, or hearing the armhole of a coat split. I drank nothing but water; I regarded a café with distant respect. Zoppi's seemed to me a promised land where none but the Lucullus of the *pays Latin* had a right of entry. ‘Shall I ever take a cup of coffee there with milk in it?’ said I to myself, ‘or play a game of dominoes?’

“I threw into my work the fury I felt at my misery. I tried to master positive knowledge so as to acquire the greatest personal value, and merit the position I should hold as soon as I could escape from nothingness. I consumed more oil than bread; the light I burned during these endless nights cost me more than food. It was a long duel, obstinate, with no sort of consolation. I found no sympathy anywhere. To have friends, must we not form con-



nections with young men, have a few sous so as to be able to go tippling with them and meet them where students congregate? And I had nothing! And no one in Paris can understand that nothing means *nothing*. When I even thought of revealing my beggary, I had that nervous contraction of the throat which makes a sick man believe that a ball rises up from the esophagus into the larynx.

“In later life I have met people born to wealth who, never having wanted for anything, had never even heard this problem in the rule of three: A young man is to crime as a five-franc piece is to *x*.—These gilded idiots say to me, ‘Why did you get into debt? Why did you involve yourself in such onerous obligations?’ They remind me of the princess who, on hearing that the people lacked bread, said, ‘Why do not they buy cakes?’ I should like to see one of these rich men, who complain that I charge too much for an operation,—yes, I should like to see him alone in Paris without a sou, without a friend, without credit, and forced to work with his five fingers to live at all! What would he do? Where would he go to satisfy his hunger?

“Bianchon, if you have sometimes seen me hard and bitter, it was because I was adding my early sufferings on to the insensibility, the selfishness of which I have seen thousands of instances in the highest circles; or, perhaps, I was thinking of the obstacles which hatred, envy, jealousy, and calumny raised up between me and success. In Paris, when certain people see you ready to set your foot in the stirrup, some pull your coat-tails, others loosen the buckle of the strap that you may fall and crack your skull; one wrenches off your horse’s shoes, another steals your whip, and the least treacherous of them all is the man whom you see coming to fire his pistol at you point-blank.

“You yourself, my dear boy, are clever enough to make acquaintance before long with the odious and incessant warfare waged by mediocrity against the superior man. If you should drop five-and-twenty louis one day, you will be accused of gambling on the next, and your best friends will report that you have lost twenty-five thousand. If you have a headache, you will be considered mad. If you are a little

hasty, no one can live with you. If, to make a stand against this armament of pygmies, you collect your best powers, your best friends will cry out that you want to have everything, that you aim at domineering, at tyranny. In short, your good points will become your faults, your faults will be vices, and your virtues crimes.

“If you save a man, you will be said to have killed him; if he reappears on the scene, it will be positive that you have secured the present at the cost of the future. If he is not dead, he will die. Stumble, and you fall! Invent anything of any kind and claim your rights, you will be crotchety, cunning, ill-disposed to rising younger men.

“So, you see, my dear fellow, if I do not believe in God, I believe still less in man. But do not you know in me another Desplein, altogether different from the Desplein whom everyone abuses?—However, we will not stir that mud-heap.

“Well, I was living in that house, I was working hard to pass my first examination, and I had no money at all. You know. I had come to one of those moments of extremity when a man says, ‘I will enlist.’ I had one hope. I expected from my home a box full of linen, a present from one of those old aunts who, knowing nothing of Paris, think of your shirts while they imagine that their nephew with thirty francs a month is eating ortolans. The box arrived while I was at the schools; it had cost forty francs for carriage. The porter, a German shoemaker living in a loft, had paid the money and kept the box. I walked up and down the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain-des-Près and the Rue de l’École de Médecine without hitting on any scheme which would release my trunk without the payment of the forty francs, which of course I could pay as soon as I should have sold the linen. My stupidity proved to me that surgery was my only vocation. My good fellow, refined souls, whose powers move in a lofty atmosphere, have none of that spirit of intrigue that is fertile in resource and device; their good genius is chance; they do not invent, things come to them.

“At night I went home at the very moment when my

fellow lodger also came in—a water-carrier named Bourgeat, a native of Saint-Flour. We knew each other as two lodgers do who have rooms off the same landing, and who hear each other sleeping, coughing, dressing, and so at last become used to one another. My neighbor informed me that the landlord, to whom I owed three-quarters' rent, had turned me out; I must clear out next morning. He himself was also turned out on account of his occupation. I spent the most miserable night of my life. Where was I to get a messenger who could carry my few chattels and my books? How could I pay him and the porter? Where was I to go? I repeated these unanswerable questions again and again, in tears, as madmen repeat their tunes. I fell asleep; poverty has for its friend heavenly slumbers full of beautiful dreams.

“Next morning, just as I was swallowing my little bowl of bread soaked in milk, Bourgeat came in and said to me in his vile Auvergne accent—

“*Mouchieur l'Étudiant*, I am a poor man, a foundling from the hospital at Saint-Flour, without either father or mother, and not rich enough to marry. You are not fertile in relations either, nor well supplied with the ready? Listen, I have a hand-cart downstairs which I have hired for two sous an hour; it will hold all our goods; if you like, we will try to find lodgings together, since we are both turned out of this. It is not the earthly paradise, when all is said and done.’

“‘I know that, my good Bourgeat,’ said I. ‘But I am in a great fix. I have a trunk downstairs with a hundred francs’ worth of linen in it, out of which I could pay the landlord and all I owe to the porter, and I have not a hundred sous.’

“‘Pooh! I have a few dibs,’ replied Bourgeat joyfully, and he pulled out a greasy old leather purse. ‘Keep your linen.’

“Bourgeat paid up my arrears and his own, and settled with the porter. Then he put our furniture and my box of linen in his cart, and pulled it along the street, stopping in front of every house where there was a notice board. I went

up to see whether the rooms to let would suit us. At midday we were still wandering about the neighborhood without having found anything. The price was the great difficulty. Bourgeat proposed that we should eat at a wine shop, leaving the cart at the door. Towards evening I discovered, in the Cour de Rohan, Passage du Commerce, at the very top of a house next the roof, two rooms with a staircase between them. Each of us was to pay sixty francs a year. So there we were housed, my humble friend and I. We dined together. Bourgeat, who earned about fifty sous a day, had saved a hundred crowns or so; he would soon be able to gratify his ambition by buying a barrel and a horse. On learning my situation—for he extracted my secrets with a quiet craftiness and good nature, of which the remembrance touches my heart to this day—he gave up for a time the ambition of his whole life; for twenty-two years he had been carrying water in the street, and he now devoted his hundred crowns to my future prospects.”

Desplein at these words clutched Bianchon's arm tightly. “He gave me the money for my examination fees! That man, my friend, understood that I had a mission, that the needs of my intellect were greater than his. He looked after me, he called me his boy, he lent me money to buy books, he would come in softly sometimes to watch me at work, and took a mother's care in seeing that I had wholesome and abundant food, instead of the bad and insufficient nourishment I had been condemned to. Bourgeat, a man of about forty, had a homely, mediæval type of face, a prominent forehead, a head that a painter might have chosen as a model for that of Lycurgus. The poor man's heart was big with affections seeking an object; he had never been loved but by a poodle that had died some time since, of which he would talk to me, asking whether I thought the Church would allow masses to be said for the repose of its soul. His dog, said he, had been a good Christian, who for twelve years had accompanied him to church, never barking, listening to the organ without opening his mouth, and crouching beside him in a way that made it seem as though he were praying too.

“This man centered all his affections in me; he looked upon me as a forlorn and suffering creature, and he became, to me, the most thoughtful mother, the most considerate benefactor, the ideal of the virtue which rejoices in its own work. When I met him in the street, he would throw me a glance of intelligence full of unutterable dignity; he would affect to walk as though he carried no weight, and seemed happy in seeing me in good health and well dressed. It was, in fact, the devoted affection of the lower classes, the love of a girl of the people transferred to a loftier level. Bourgeat did all my errands, woke me at night at any fixed hour, trimmed my lamp, cleaned our landing; as good as a servant as he was as a father, and as clean as an English girl. He did all the housework. Like Philopœmen, he sawed our wood, and gave to all he did the grace of simplicity while preserving his dignity, for he seemed to understand that the end ennobles every act.

“When I left this good fellow, to be house surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu, I felt an indescribable, dull pain, knowing that he could no longer live with me; but he comforted himself with the prospect of saving up money enough for me to take my degree, and he made me promise to go to see him whenever I had a day out: Bourgeat was proud of me. He loved me for my own sake, and for his own. If you look up my thesis, you will see that I dedicated it to him.

“During the last year of my residence as house surgeon I earned enough to repay all I owed to this worthy Auvergnat by buying him a barrel and a horse. He was furious with rage at learning that I had been depriving myself of spending money, and yet he was delighted to see his wishes fulfilled; he laughed and scolded, he looked at his barrel, at his horse, and wiped away a tear, as he said, ‘It is too bad. What a splendid barrel! You really ought not. Why, that horse is as strong as an Auvergnat!’

“I never saw a more touching scene. Bourgeat insisted on buying for me the case of instruments mounted in silver which you have seen in my room, and which is to me the most precious thing there. Though enchanted with my first success, never did the least sign, the least word, escape

him which might imply, 'This man owes all to me!' And yet, but for him, I should have died of want; he had eaten bread rubbed with garlic that I might have coffee to enable me to sit up at night.

"He fell ill. As you may suppose, I passed my nights by his bedside, and the first time I pulled him through; but two years after he had a relapse; in spite of the utmost care, in spite of the greatest exertions of science, he succumbed. No king was ever nursed as he was. Yes, Bianchon, to snatch that man from death I tried unheard-of things. I wanted him to live long enough to show him his work accomplished, to realize all his hopes, to give expression to the only need for gratitude that ever filled my heart, to quench a fire that burns in me to this day.

"Bourgeat, my second father, died in my arms," Desplein went on, after a pause, visibly moved. "He left me everything he possessed by a will he had had made by a public scrivener, dating from the year when we had gone to live in the Cour de Rohan.

"This man's faith was perfect; he loved the Holy Virgin as he might have loved his wife. He was an ardent Catholic, but never said a word to me about my want of religion. When he was dying he entreated me to spare no expense that he might have every possible benefit of clergy. I had a mass said for him every day. Often, in the night, he would tell me of his fears as to his future fate; he feared his life had not been saintly enough. Poor man! he was at work from morning till night. For whom, then, is Paradise—if there be a Paradise? He received the last sacrament like the saint that he was, and his death was worthy of his life.

"I alone followed him to the grave. When I had laid my only benefactor to rest, I looked about to see how I could pay my debt to him; I found he had neither family nor friends, neither wife nor child. But he believed. He had a religious conviction; had I any right to dispute it? He had spoken to me timidly of masses said for the repose of the dead; he would not impress it on me as a duty, thinking that it would be a form of repayment for his services.

As soon as I had money enough I paid to Saint-Sulpice the requisite sum for four masses every year. As the only thing I can do for Bourgeat is thus to satisfy his pious wishes, on the days when that mass is said, at the beginning of each season of the year, I go for his sake and say the required prayers; and I say with the good faith of a skeptic—'Great God, if there is a sphere which Thou hast appointed after death for those who have been perfect, remember good Bourgeat; and if he should have anything to suffer, let me suffer it for him, that he may enter all the sooner into what is called Paradise.'

"That, my dear fellow, is as much as a man who holds my opinions can allow himself. But God must be a good fellow; He cannot owe me any grudge. I swear to you, I would give my whole fortune if faith such as Bourgeat's could enter my brain."

Bianchon, who was with Desplein all through his last illness, dares not affirm to this day that the great surgeon died an atheist. Will not those who believe like to fancy that the humble Auvergnat came to open the gate of heaven to his friend, as he did that of the earthly temple on whose pediment we read the words—"A grateful country to its great men."

PARIS, *January* 1836.







