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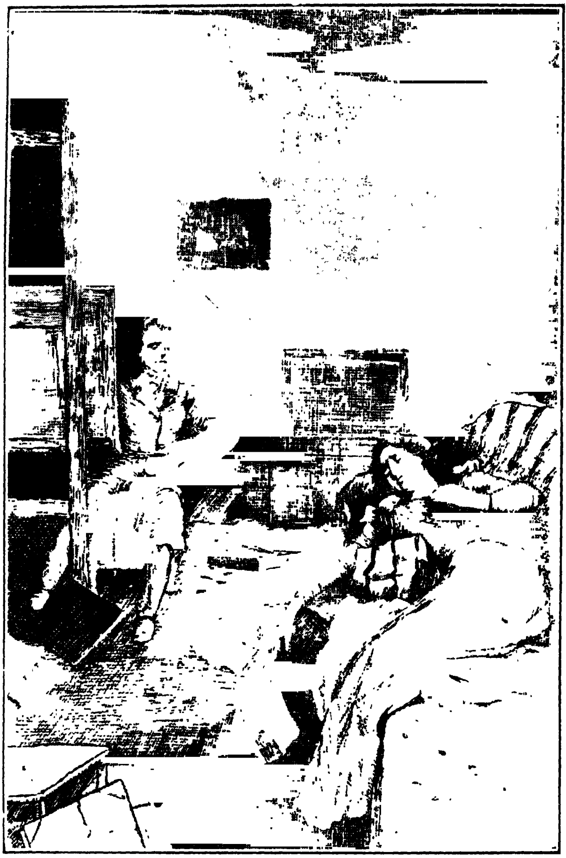

As she sank almost fainting on the studio sofa,
Agatha dropped the letter

THE WORKS OF

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
GEORGE SAINTSBURY

IN EIGHTEEN VOLUMES

VOLUME IV

BACHELOR'S ESTABLISHMENT

PIERRETTE
SIGN OF THE CAT AND RACKET
RED HOUSE IMAGINARY MISTRESS
MASSIMILLA DONI
THE PURSE

BIGELOW, BROWN & CO., INC.
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A BACHELOR'S ESTABLISHMENT

PREFACE

THE second volume—the third part—of *Les Célibataires* takes very high rank among its companions. As in most of his best books, Balzac has set at work divers favorite springs of action, and has introduced personages of whom he has elsewhere given, not exactly replicas—he never did that—but companion portraits. And he has once more justified the proceeding amply. Whether he has not also justified the reproach, such as it is, of those who say that to see the most congenial expression of his fullest genius, you must go to his bad characters and not to his good, readers shall determine for themselves after reading the book.

It was the product of the year 1842, when the author was at the ripest of his powers, and after which, with the exception of *Les Parents Pauvres*, he produced not much of his very best save in continuations and rehandlings of earlier efforts. He changed his title a good deal, and in that MS. correction of a copy of the *Comédie* which has been taken, perhaps without absolutely decisive authority, as the basis of the *Édition Définitive*, he adopted *La Rabouilleuse* as his latest favorite. This, besides its quaintness, has undoubted merit as fixing the attention on one at least of the chief figures of the book, while *Un Ménage de Garçon* only obliquely indicates the real purport of the novel. Jean-Jacques Rouget is a most unfortunate creature, who anticipates Baron Hulot as an example of absolute dependence on things of the flesh, *plus* a kind of cretinism, which Hulot, to do him justice, does not exhibit even in his worst degradation. But his "bachelor establishment," though undoubtedly useful for the purposes of the story, might have been changed for something else, and his personality have been considerably altered, without very much affecting the general drift of the fiction.

Flore Brazier, on the other hand, the *Rabouilleuse* herself, is essential, and with Maxence Gilet and Philippe Bridau forms the center of the action and the passion of the book. She ranks, indeed, with those few feminine types, Valérie Marneffe, La Cousine Bette, Eugénie Grandet, Béatrix, Mme.

de Maufrigneuse, and perhaps Esther Gobseck, whom Balzac has tried to draw at full length. It is to be observed that though quite without morals of any kind, she is not *ab initio* or intrinsically a she-fiend like Valérie or Lisbeth. She does not do harm for harm's sake, nor even directly to gratify spite, greed, or other purely unsocial and detestable passions. She is a type of feminine sensuality of the less ambitious and restless sort. Given a decent education, a fair fortune, a good-looking and vigorous husband to whom she had taken a fancy, and no special temptation, and she might have been a blameless, merry, " sonsy " *commère*, and have died in an odor of very reasonable sanctity. Poverty, ignorance, the Rougets (father and son), Maxence Gilet, and Philippe Bridau came in her way, and she lived and died as Balzac has shown her. He has done nothing more " inevitable "; few things more complete and satisfactory.

Maxence Gilet is a not much less remarkable sketch, though it is not easy to say that he is on the same level. Gilet is the man of distinct gifts, of some virtues, or caricatures of virtues, who goes to the devil through idleness, fullness of bread, and lack of any worthy occupation. He is extraordinarily unconventional for a French figure in fiction, even for a figure drawn by such a French genius as Balzac. But he is also hardly to be called a great type, and I do not quite see why he should have succumbed before Philippe as he did.

Philippe himself is more complicated, and, perhaps, more questionable. He is certainly one of Balzac's *fleurs du mal;* he is studied and personally conducted from beginning to end with an extraordinary and loving care; but is he quite " of a piece "? That he should have succeeded in defeating the combination against which his virtuous mother and brother failed is not an undue instance of the irony of life. The defeat of such adversaries as Flore and Max has, of course, the merit of poetical justice and the interest of " diamond cut diamond." But is not the terrible Philippe Bridau, the " Mephistopheles *à cheval* " of the latter part of the book, rather inconsistent with the commonplace ne'er-do-weel of the earlier? Not only does it require no unusual genius to waste money, when you have it, in the channels of the drinking-shop, the gaming-table, and elsewhere, to spunge for more on your mother and brother, to embezzle when they are squeezed dry, and to take to downright robbery when nothing else is left; but a person who, in the various circumstances and opportunities of Bridau, finds nothing better to do than these ordinary things, can hardly be a person of exceptional intellectual resource. There is here surely that sudden and unaccounted-for change of character which the second-rate novelist and dramatist may permit himself, but from which the first-rate should abstain.

This, however, may be an academic objection, and certainly the book is of first-class interest. The minor characters, the mother and brother, the luckless aunt with her combination at last turning up when the rascal Philippe has stolen her stake-money, the satellites and abettors of Max in the club of "La Désœuvrance," the slightly theatrical Spaniard, and all the rest of them, are excellent. The book is an eminently characteristic one—more so, indeed, than more than one of those in which people are often invited to make acquaintance with Balzac.

The third story of *Les Célibataires* has a rather more varied bibliographical history than the others. The first part, that dealing with the early misconduct of Philippe Bridau, was published separately, as *Les Deux Frères*, in the *Presse* during the spring of 1841, and a year or so later in volumes. It had nine chapters with headings. The volume form also included under the same title the second part, which, as *Un Ménage de Garçon en Province*, had been published in the same newspaper in the autumn of 1842. This had sixteen chapters in both issues, and in the volumes two part-headings —one identical with the newspaper title, and the other "À qui la Succession?" The whole book then took rank in the *Comédie* under the second title, *Un Ménage de Garçon*, and retained this during Balzac's life and long afterwards. In the *Édition Définitive*, as observed above, he had marked it as *La Rabouilleuse*, after having also thought of '*Le Bonhomme Rouget*. For English use, the better known, though not last or best title, is clearly preferable, as it can be translated, while *La Rabouilleuse* cannot. G. S.

A BACHELOR'S ESTABLISHMENT

To M. Charles Nodier,
Member of the French Academy,
Chief Librarian at the Arsenal.

Here, my dear Nodier, you have a book full of those incidents which escape the action of the law under the shelter of domestic privacy; but in which the finger of God, so often called Chance, takes the place of human justice, while the moral is not the less striking and instructive for being uttered by a satirist. The outcome, to my mind, is a great lesson for the Family, and for Motherhood. We shall perhaps discover too late the effects of diminished paternal power. That authority, which formerly ceased only on the father's death, constituted the one human tribunal at which domestic crimes could be tried, and on great occasions the Sovereign would ratify and carry out its decisions. However tender and kind the mother may be, she can no more supply that patriarchal rule than a woman can fill a man's place on the throne; when the exception occurs, the creature is a monster.

I have never, perhaps, drawn a picture which shows more clearly than this how indispensable the stability of marriage is to European Society, what the sorrows are of woman's weakness, what dangers are involved in unbridled self-interest. It is to be hoped that a society based solely on the power of money may tremble when it sees the impotence of Justice over the complications of a system which deifies success and condones every means to achieve it: That it may have prompt recourse to the Catholic Church for purification of the masses by religious feeling, and by some education other *than that of a lay University! Enough fine characters, enough instances of great and noble devotion will have been seen in my* Scenes of Military Life; *so I may be allowed here to show what depravity results from the exigencies of war in certain minds which dare to act in private life as they would on the field of battle.*

You have studied our times with a sagacious eye, and your philosophy betrays itself by more than one bitter reflection in the course of your elegant pages; you, better than anyone, have appreciated the mischief done to the spirit of our nation by four different political systems.

I could not, therefore, place this narrative under the protection of a more competent authority. Your name, perhaps, may defend this work against the outcry it is sure to raise. Where is there a sufferer who keeps silence when the surgeon uncovers his most burning wounds? The pleasure of dedicating this drama to you is enhanced by my pride in betraying your goodwill for him who here signs himself one of your sincere admirers,

De Balzac.

IN 1792 the citizens of Issoudun rejoiced in a doctor named Rouget, who was regarded as a very deep fox. Some bold folks asserted that he made his wife very unhappy, though she was the handsomest woman in the town. Perhaps this wife was rather a simpleton. In spite of the inquisitiveness of friends, the gossip of outsiders, and the evil-speaking of the envious, the circumstances of the household were little known. Dr. Rouget was one of the men of whom it is commonly said that "they are not easy to get on with." And so, as long as he lived, little was said about him, and he was treated civilly.

His wife, a Demoiselle Descoings, somewhat sickly as a girl—one reason, it was said, why the doctor married her—had first a son, and then a daughter, born as it happened ten years after her brother, and not expected by the doctor, it was always reported, though he was a medical man. This late-born daughter was named Agathe.

These facts are so simple and commonplace that the historian hardly seems justified in placing them in the forefront of his narrative; but if they remained unknown, a man of Dr. Rouget's temper would be condemned as a monster, as an unnatural father, whereas he simply obeyed certain evil promptings which many persons defend under the terrible axiom: A man must know his own mind. This masculine motto has wrought misery for many wives. The Descoings, the doctor's father and mother-in-law, wool-brokers, undertook alike the sale for landowners, or the purchase for wool-merchants, of the golden fleeces of Le Berry, and took commission from both parties. They grew rich over this business, and then avaricious—the moral of many lives.

Their son, Descoings, junior, a younger brother of Mme. Rouget's, did not like Issoudun. He went to seek his fortune in Paris, and set up as a grocer in the Rue Saint-Honoré. This was his ruin. But what is to be said? A grocer is attracted to his business by a magnetic force as great as the repulsion which renders it odious to artists. The social forces which make for this or that vocation have been insufficiently studied. It would be curious to know what leads a man to become a stationer rather than a baker, when he is no longer compelled, as among the Egyptians, to succeed to his father's craft. Love had helped to form Descoings's vocation. He had said to himself, "And I, too, will be a grocer!" when he had also said something else on seeing his master's wife, a beautiful creature, with whom he fell over head and ears in love. With no auxiliary but patience and a little money sent him by his father and mother, he married the widow of the worthy Master Bixiou, his predecessor. In 1792 Descoings was regarded as a prosperous man.

At that time the parents Descoings were still living. They had retired from wool, and invested their wealth in buying government stock—another Golden Fleece! Their son-in-law, almost sure erelong to be in mourning for his wife, sent his daughter to his brother-in-law's house in Paris, partly that she might see the capital, but also with a crafty purpose. Descoings had no children. Mme. Descoings, twelve years older than her husband, was in excellent health, but she was as fat as a thrush after the vintage; and the wily Rouget had enough medical skill to foresee that M. and Mme. Descoings, in contradiction to the philosophy of fairy-tales, would live happy and have no children. The couple might become devoted to Agathe. Now Dr. Rouget wanted to disinherit his daughter, and flattered himself it might be done if he transplanted her from home.

This young person, at that time the handsomest girl in Issoudun, was not in the least like either her father or her mother. Her birth had been the occasion of a mortal feud between Dr. Rouget and his intimate friend, M. Lousteau, formerly a sub-delegate, who had just left Issoudun. When a family migrates, the natives of a place so delightful as Issoudun have a right to inquire into the reasons of so unheard-of a step. To believe some sharp tongues, M. Rouget, a vindictive man, had sworn that Lousteau should die by his hand alone. From a doctor the speech seemed as deadly as a cannon-ball. When the National Assembly abolished delegates, Lousteau left, and never returned to Issoudun. After the removal of this family, Mme. Rouget spent all her days with Mme. Hochon, the ex-sub-delegate's sister, her daughter's godmother, and the only person to whom she confided her woes. And what little the citizens of Issoudun ever knew about the beautiful Mme. Rouget was told by this good soul, and not till after the doctor's death.

The first thing Mme. Rouget said when her husband spoke of sending Agathe to Paris was, "I shall never see my child again!"—"And she was sadly right," worthy Mme. Hochon would add.

The poor mother then became as yellow as a quince, and her condition by no means gave the lie to those who declared that Rouget was killing her by inches. The ways of her gawky ninny of a son must have contributed to the griefs of the unjustly accused mother. Never checked, or perhaps egged on by his father, the lad, who was altogether stupid, showed his mother none of the attention nor the respect due from a son. Jean-Jacques Rouget was like his father, but even worse; and the doctor was not very admirable, either morally or physically.

The advent of charming Agathe Rouget brought no good to her uncle Descoings. In the course of the week—or rather of the decade, for the Republic had been proclaimed—he was imprisoned on a hint from Robespierre to Fouquier-Tinville. Descoings, being rash enough to opine that the famine was unreal, was fool enough to communicate his opinion—he imagined that thought was free—to several of his customers, male and female, as he served them over the counter. Citoyenne Duplay, the wife of the carpenter with whom Robespierre lodged, and herself the *Grand Citoyen's* housekeeper, unhappily for Descoings, honored his shop with her custom. This *citoyenne* considered the grocer's views as an insult to Maximilian the First. Ill pleased as she was by the manners of the Descoings couple, this illustrious *tricoteuse* of the Jacobin Club regarded Citoyenne Descoings's beauty as a kind of aristocracy. She added venom to their language while repeating it to her benevolent and kind-hearted master. The grocer was arrested on the usual charge of "monopolizing."

Descoings in prison, his wife made a stir to obtain his release; but her efforts were so ill judged that any observer hearing her appeal to the arbiters of his fate might have supposed that all she asked was a decent way of getting rid of him. Mme. Descoings knew Bridau, one of the secretaries under Roland, Minister of the Interior, and the right-hand man of all who succeeded to that office. She brought Bridau into the field to save the grocer. This really incorruptible minister, one of those virtuous dupes who are always so admirably disinterested, took good care not to tamper with the men on whom Descoings's fate depended; he tried to explain! Now, to explain to the men of that time had about as much effect as though they had been asked to restore the Bourbons. The Girondin Minister, at that time combating Robespierre, said to Bridau, "What business is it of yours?" And each man to whom the worthy secretary applied made the same ruthless reply, "What business is it of yours?"

Bridau very prudently advised Mme. Descoings to keep quiet; but she, instead of conciliating Robespierre's housekeeper, spouted fire and flame against the informer; she went to see a member of the Convention, who was in fear for himself, and who said, "I will speak of it to Robespierre."

On this promise the grocer's wife rested, and her protector naturally did not speak. A few sugar-loaves, a few bottles of good liqueur offered to Citoyenne Duplay would have saved Descoings.

This little accident shows that in a revolution it is as dangerous to trust for safety to an honest man as to a scoundrel; one can rely only on one's self.

Though Descoings died, he had the honor, at any rate, of going to the scaffold with André de Chénier. There, no doubt, grocery and poetry embraced for the first time in the flesh; for they have always had, and will always have, their private relations. Descoings's execution made a far greater sensation than André de Chénier's. Thirty years elapsed before it was recognized that France had lost more by Chénier's death than by that of Descoings.

Robespierre's sentence had this good result—until 1830 grocers were still afraid of meddling in politics.

Descoings's shop was not more than a hundred yards from Robespierre's lodgings. The grocer's successor failed in business; César Birotteau, the famous perfumer, established himself in the house. But, as if the scaffold had infected the place with disaster, the inventor of the *Compound Sultana Paste* and *Eau Carminative* was also ruined. The solution of this problem is a matter for occult science. In the course of the few visits paid by the head clerk to the luckless Descoings's wife, he was struck by the calm, cold, artless beauty of Agathe Rouget. When he called to console the widow, who was so far inconsolable as to retire from the business after her second bereavement, he ended by marrying the lovely girl in the course of a "decade," as soon as her father could arrive, and he did not keep them waiting. The doctor, delighted at seeing things turn out even better than he had hoped, since his wife was the sole heiress of the Descoings, flew to Paris, not so much to be present at Agathe's marriage as to see that the settlements were drawn to his mind. Citizen Bridau, quite disinterested, and desperately in love, left this matter entirely to the perfidious doctor, who took full advantage of his son-in-law's infatuation, as will be seen in the course of this history.

Mme. Rouget, or, more accurately, the doctor, inherited all the estate, real and personal, of old M. and Mme. Descoings, who died within two years of each other. Finally, Rouget got the better of his wife, for she died early in 1799. And he had vineyards, and he bought farmland, and he acquired iron-works, and he sold wool!—His beloved son could never do anything; he intended that the boy should be a landed proprietor, and allowed him to grow up in wealth and folly, confident that he would know as much as the most learned of them all in so far as that he would live and die like other folks.

From the year 1799, the calculating heads of Issoudun said that old Rouget had thirty thousand francs a year. After his wife's death the doctor still led a dissolute life, but with more method, so to speak, and in the privacy of home life.

The doctor, a man of strong will, died in 1805. God knows what the good people of Issoudun had then to tell of the man's doings, and what stories were current of his horrible private life. Jean-Jacques Rouget, whom his father had of late kept tightly in hand, having discerned him to be a fool, remained unmarried for sufficient reasons, of which the explanation will form an important part of this story. His celibacy was in part the doctor's fault, as will be seen later.

It is now necessary to consider the results of the vengeance visited by the father on the daughter, whom he did not recognize as his, though you may take it for certain that she was his legitimate offspring. Nobody at Issoudun had observed one of those singular coincidences which make heredity a sort of maze in which science loses herself. Agathe was very like Dr. Rouget's mother. Just as gout is commonly observed to skip a generation, and to be transmitted from grandfather to grandson, so, not unfrequently, a likeness does the same as gout.

Thus Agathe's eldest child, who was like his mother, in character resembled his grandfather, Dr. Rouget. We will leave the solution of this problem also to the twentieth century, with that of the nomenclature of microscopic organisms, and our grandchildren will perhaps write as much more nonsense as our learned Societies have already produced on this obscure question.

Agathe Rouget was universally admired for one of those faces which, like that of Mary, the mother of the Lord, are forever virginal, even after marriage. Her portrait, still hanging in Bridau's studio, shows a perfectly oval face, spotlessly fair, without even a freckle, notwithstanding her golden hair. More than one artist, seeing the pure brow, the delicate nose, the shapely ear, the long lashes to eyes of the deepest blue, and infinitely mild—a face, in short, that is the embodiment of placidity—asks the great painter to this day, "Is that copied from one of Raphael's heads?"

No man ever made a better choice than did the Republican official when he married this girl. Agathe was the ideal housewife, trained by a country life, and never parted from her mother. She was pious without bigotry, and had no learning but such as the Church allows to women. And she was a perfect wife in the vulgar sense of the word; indeed, her ignorance of life involved her in more than one misfortune. The epitaph on the Roman matron, "She wrought needlework, and kept the house," is an excellent account of her pure, simple, and quiet life.

At the time of the Consulate, Bridau attached himself fanatically to Napoleon, who made him head of a department of state in 1804, a year before Rouget's death. Rich with a salary of twelve thousand francs and very handsome presents, Bridau cared not at all for the disgraceful proceedings by which the estate was wound up at Issoudun, and Agathe got nothing. Six months before his death old Rouget had sold part of his estate to his son, to whom he secured the remainder, in part by deed of gift, and in part as his direct heir. An advance on her prospective inheritance of a hundred thousand francs secured under her marriage settlement represented Agathe's share of her father's and mother's fortune.

Bridau idolized the Emperor. He devoted himself with the zeal of a fanatic to carrying out the vast conceptions of this modern demigod, who, finding everything in France in ruins, set to work to reconstruct everything. His subordinate never said, "Stay, enough." Schemes, drafts, reports, précis, he undertook the heaviest burdens, so happy was he to assist the Emperor. He loved him as a man, he adored him as a sovereign, and would never endure the slightest criticism of his deeds or his schemes.

From 1804 to 1808 the official resided in a large and handsome apartment on the Quai Voltaire, close to his office and the Tuileries. A cook and a man-servant composed the establishment in the days of Mme. Bridau's splendor. Agathe, always up the first, went to market, followed by her cook; while the man did the rooms she superintended the breakfast. Bridau never went to the office before eleven o'clock. As long as they both lived his wife found every day the same pleasure in preparing for him a perfect breakfast, the only meal he ate with enjoyment. All the year round, whatever the weather might be, Agathe watched her husband from the window on his way to the office, and never drew her head in till he disappeared round the corner of the Rue du Bac. She cleared the table herself, and looked round the rooms; then she dressed and played with the children, or took them for a walk, or received visitors till her husband returned. When the head-clerk brought home pressing work she would sit by his table in his study, as mute as a statue, and knitting as she watched him at work, sitting up as long as he did, and going to bed a few minutes before he went.

Sometimes they went to the play, sitting in the official box. On such occasions the pair dined at a restaurant; and the scene it presented always afforded Mme. Bridau the keen delight it gives to persons unfamiliar with Paris. Compelled, not unfrequently, to accept invitations to the huge formal dinners given to her husband as head of a department, and chief clerk of a section of the Ministry of the Interior—dinners which Bridau duly returned—Agathe then followed the expensive fashions of the day; but on coming in she gladly shed this ceremonial splendor, and relapsed at home into provincial simplicity. Once a week, on Thursdays, Bridau entertained his friends, and on Shrove-Tuesday he always gave a grand ball.

This brief record is the whole history of a married life which saw but three events—the birth of two children, one three years younger than the other, and Bridau's death, which took place in 1808; he was simply killed by night-work, just as the Emperor was about to promote him in his office, and to make him a Count and Privy Councilor. At this time Napoleon was devoting his attention to home administration; he overloaded Bridau with work, and finally undermined his valiant official's health. Napoleon, of whom Bridau had never asked the least thing, had inquired into his style of living and his fortune. On hearing that this devoted servant had nothing but his salary, he understood that here was one of those incorruptible creatures who gave dignity and moral tone to his rule, and he intended to surprise Bridau by some magnificent recompense. It was his anxiety to finish an immense piece of work before Napoleon should start for Spain that killed this worthy man, by bringing on an attack of acute fever.

On the Emperor's return, while in Paris for a few days preparing for the campaign of 1809, on hearing of Bridau's death, he exclaimed, "There are some men who can never be replaced!" Struck by a devotion that could never have expected such dazzling rewards as he reserved for his soldiers, Napoleon determined to create an Order, with handsome pensions attached, for his civil servants, as he had founded that of the Legion of Honor for the military. The impression made on him by Bridau's death suggested the formation of the Order of the Réunion; but he never had time to complete the organization of this aristocratic class, which is now so utterly forgotten that, on meeting with the name of this ephemeral order, most readers will wonder what was its badge; it was worn with a blue ribbon. The Emperor styled it the Order of the Réunion, with the intention of combining the Order of the Golden Fleece of Spain with that of the Golden Fleece of Austria. But Providence, as a Prussian diplomat said, was able to hinder such profanation.

The Emperor inquired into Mme. Bridau's circumstances. The two boys had each a full scholarship at the Lycée Impérial, and the Emperor charged all the cost of their education to his privy purse. He then entered Mme. Bridau's name on the Pension List for four thousand francs a year, intending, no doubt, to provide ultimately for her two sons.

After her marriage till her husband's death Mme. Bridau had no correspondence whatever with Issoudun. Immediately before the birth of her second boy she heard of her mother's death. When her father died—she knew he had loved her but little—the Emperor's coronation was imminent, and the ceremony gave her husband so much to do that she would not leave him. Jean-Jacques Rouget, her brother, had never written her a word since she had quitted Issoudun. Though grieved by this tacit repudiation by her family, Agathe at last thought but seldom of those who never thought of her at all. She received a letter once a year from her godmother, Mme. Hochon, and answered it in commonplace phrases, never heeding the warnings which the worthy and pious woman gave her in veiled hints.

Some time before Dr. Rouget's death, Mme. Hochon had written to her god-daughter that she would get nothing from her father, unless she armed M. Hochon with a power of attorney. Agathe hated the idea of worrying her brother. Whether Bridau supposed that this appropriation was in conformity with the common law of the province of Berry, or whether the clean-handed and upright husband shared his wife's magnanimity and indifference to pecuniary interests, he would not listen to Roguin, his attorney, who advised him to take advantage of his high position to dispute the will by which the father had succeeded in robbing his daughter of her legal share. Husband and wife thus sanctioned what was done at Issoudun. However, Roguin had led the official to reflect on the damage to his wife's fortune. The worthy man perceived that in the event of his death Agathe would have nothing to depend on. He then looked into his affairs, and found that between 1793 and 1805 he and his wife had been obliged to draw out about thirty thousand francs of the fifty thousand which old Rouget had given to his daughter. He now invested the remaining twenty thousand in the Funds, which then stood at forty, so Agathe had about two thousand francs a year in State securities. Thus, as a widow, Mme. Bridau could live very decently on six thousand francs a year. Still very provincial, she was about to dismiss the man-servant, keep only the cook, and move to another set of rooms; but Mme. Descoings, her intimate friend, who persisted in calling herself her aunt, gave up her apartment and came to live with Agathe, taking the departed Bridau's study for her bedroom. The two widows joined their incomes, and found themselves possessed of twelve thousand francs a year.

Such an arrangement seemed simple and natural. But nothing in life demands greater circumspection than arrangements which seem natural; we are always on our guard against what appears extraordinary; and so we see that men of great experience, lawyers, judges, physicians, and priests attach immense importance to such simple matters; and they are thought captious. The serpent under flowers is one of the finest emblems bequeathed to us by the ancients as a warning for our conduct. How often does a simpleton exclaim, as an excuse in his own eyes and those of others, "It was such a simple matter, that anyone would have been caught!"

In 1809 Mme. Descoings, who never told her age, was sixty-five years old. Spoken of in her day as La Belle Epicière, she was one of those rare women whom time spares, and owed to an excellent constitution the privilege of preserving her beauty, though, of course, it could no longer bear serious examination. Of middle height, plump, and fresh-colored, she had fine shoulders, and a warmly fair skin. Her light hair, tending to chestnut, showed no change of hue in spite of Descoings's disastrous end. She was extremely dainty, and liked cooking rich little dishes for her own eating; but though she seemed devoted to the kitchen, she was also very fond of the theater, and, moreover, she indulged a vice which she wrapped in the deepest mystery—she put into the lottery.

Is not the lottery, perhaps, the gulf which mythology has figured under the bottomless vat of the Danaids?

This woman—we may speak so of one who gambles in the lottery—spent rather too much in dress, no doubt, like all women who are so lucky as to remain youthful in advancing years; but with the exception of these little failings, she was the easiest creature to live with. Ready to agree with everybody, never contradictory, she was attractive by her gentle and contagious cheerfulness. She had especially one Parisian characteristic which bewitches retired clerks and traders—she understood a joke. If she did not marry a third husband, that, no doubt, was the fault of the times. During the wars of the Empire, marrying men found handsome and wealthy girls too readily to trouble their heads about a woman of sixty.

Mme. Descoings tried to cheer Mme. Bridau; she made her go often to the play, or out driving; she provided her with capital little dinners; she even tried to marry her to her son Bixiou. Alas! she was forced to confess to her the terrible secret that had been so jealously kept, by herself, by the departed Descoings, and by her lawyer. The youthful, dressy Mme. Descoings, who owned to no more than thirty-six, had a son of thirty-five named Bixiou, a widower, and Major of the Twenty-first Foot, who was afterwards killed at Dresden, as a colonel, leaving an only child, a boy. His mother, who never saw her grandson but in secret, spoke of the colonel as a son of her husband's by his first wife. Her confession was an act of expediency; the colonel's boy, who was at school at the Lycée Impérial with the two Bridaus, held a half-scholarship. This youth, very sharp and knowing even in his school-days, made a great reputation later as an artist and a wit.

Agathe cared for nothing on earth but her children, and would live only for them; she refused to marry again, alike from good sense and from faithful attachment. But a woman finds it easier to be a good wife than to be a good mother. A widow has two duties of a contradictory nature—she is a mother, and she ought to exert a father's power. Few women are strong enough to understand and play this double part. And so poor Agathe, with all her virtues, was the innocent cause of many misfortunes. As a result of her lack of insight, and the trustfulness habitual to lofty natures, Agathe was the victim of Mme. Descoings, who dragged her into overwhelming disaster. This woman had a fancy for sets of three numbers, and the lottery grants no credit to ticket-holders. As housekeeper, she could spend the money allotted to the marketing in such ventures, and gradually increased the debt in the hope of enriching her grandson, her dear Agathe, and the young Bridaus. When it amounted to ten thousand francs she staked higher sums, always hoping that the favorite combination, which had not yet come out in ten years, would cover the loss. Then the debt swelled rapidly. It reached the sum of twenty thousand francs; Mme. Descoings lost her head, and her numbers did not come out.

Then she wished to pledge her fortune in order to repay her niece, but her lawyer Roguin showed her that this honest scheme was impossible. The elder Rouget, at the death of his brother-in-law Descoings, had taken over his liabilities and assets, indemnifying the widow by a life-annuity, charged on Jean-Jacques Rouget's estate. No usurer would consent to lend twenty thousand francs to a woman of sixty-five on a life interest worth about four thousand, at a time when ten per cent. could be got anywhere. One morning Mme. Descoings threw herself at her niece's feet, and with many sobs confessed the state of affairs; Mme. Bridau did not reproach her. She sent away the man-servant and the cook; sold all but the most indispensable furniture; sold out three-quarters of her State securities, paid everything, and gave up her apartment.

One of the most hideous corners of Paris is, beyond doubt, the Rue Mazarine, between the crossing of the Rue Guénégaud, to where it opens into the Rue de la Seine behind the Palais de l'Institut. The tall, gray walls of the college and library presented to the city of Paris by Cardinal Mazarin cast chill shadows over this strip of street; the sun rarely shines on it, the northerly blast sweeps through it.

The poor ruined widow went to lodge on the third floor of a house in this damp, dark, cold spot.

Facing the house were the buildings of the Institute, where, at that time, were the dens of the wild beasts known to the townsfolk as artists, and to artists as *rapins*—daubers, art students. A man might go in a *rapin*, and might come out with the prize scholarship at Rome. This transformation was not effected without much amazing uproar at the time of year when the competitors were shut up in these cages. To take the prize, the aspiring sculptor had to execute, within a given time, a clay model of a statue; the painter, one of the pictures you may behold at the École des Beaux-arts; the musician had to compose a cantata; the architect, a design for a public building. At the time when these lines are penned, the menagerie has been transferred from those cold and gloomy buildings to the elegant Palace of the Fine Arts, a few yards from thence.

Mme. Bridau's windows commanded a view of these barred cells, a singularly dreary lookout. To the north the dome of the Institute closes in the prospect; looking up the street, the only delectation for the eye is the line of hackney cabs on the stand at the top of the Rue Mazarine. Indeed, the widow at last placed three boxes of earth outside her windows, in which she cultivated one of those aërial gardens, so obnoxious to the regulations of the police, which somewhat purify the light and air.

The house, backing against one in the Rue de Seine, is necessarily shallow, the staircase turns in a spiral. The third floor is the top: three windows and three rooms—a dining-room, a little sitting-room, and a bedroom; at the back, on the other side of the landing, a small kitchen; under the roof two boys' rooms, and a vast unused garret. Mme. Bridau chose this apartment for three reasons: the low rent, only four hundred francs, so she agreed for a nine years' lease; the nearness of her boys' school, for it was not far from the Lycée Impérial; and finally, it was in the quarter where she was accustomed to live. The interior of the rooms was in harmony with the building. The dining-room, hung with cheap flowered paper in yellow and green, with an un-polished tiled floor, had the barest necessary furniture—a table, two little sideboards, and six chairs brought from her old home. The drawing-room was graced by an Aubusson carpet, given to Bridau when his office was last refurnished. The widow placed in it that common mahogany furniture, finished with Egyptian heads, manufactured by the gross in 1806 by Jacob Desmalter, and covered with silk damask with white conventional roses.

Above the sofa, a portrait of Bridau in pastel, the work of a friend, attracted the eye at once. Though the art was not above criticism, the brow plainly showed the firmness of the unknown great citizen. The calm look of his eyes, at once proud and mild, was happily rendered; the sagacity to which the prudent lips bore witness, and the honest smile, the whole tone of the man of whom the Emperor spoke as *Justum et tenacem*, had been caught, if not with talent, at any rate with truth. As you looked at this portrait, you could see that this man had always done his duty. His countenance expressed the incorruptibility which must be granted to many of the men employed during the Republic.

Opposite, over a card-table, was the brilliantly-colored picture of the Emperor by Vernet, in which Napoleon is seen riding past swiftly, and followed by his escort. Agathe allowed herself the luxury of two large bird-cages—one full of canaries, and one of exotic birds; she had taken up this childlike fancy since her loss—irreparable to her, and to many others.

As to Agathe's bedroom, by the end of three months it had become, what it remained till the luckless day when she was obliged to leave it—a chaos which no description could reduce to order. Cats were at home in the armchairs; the birds, sometimes set at liberty, left their traces on all the furniture. The poor, kind soul strewed millet and groundsel for them in all parts of the room; the cats found titbits in broken saucers. Clothes lay about. It was an atmosphere of provincialism and fidelity. Everything that had belonged to Bridau was carefully treasured there; his writing apparatus was kept with the care which the widow of a knight would have devoted to his armor. This woman's touching worship may be understood from a single fact—she had wrapped a pen in a sealed packet and written on it, "The last pen used by my dear husband." The cup from which he had drunk for the last time was under glass on the chimney-shelf. At a later date caps and "fronts" crowned the glass shades that covered these treasured relics.

After Bridau's death, his young widow of five-and-thirty never betrayed a trace of vanity or womanly pride. Parted from the only man she had really known, esteemed, and loved, who had never caused her the smallest pang, she no longer felt herself a woman; she cared for nothing; she ceased to dress. Nothing could be more unaffected or more complete than this surrender of married happiness and personal care. Some souls are endowed by love with the power of merging their individuality in another; and when that other is gone, life is no longer possible. Agathe, who could henceforth live only for her children, felt the deepest grief at seeing how many privations they must suffer in consequence of her ruin. From the day when she moved to the Rue Mazarine there was a tinge of melancholy in her expression that was very touching. She did indeed count a little on the Emperor, but he could do no more than he was already doing; he allowed each boy, besides his scholarship, six hundred francs a year out of his privy purse.

As to the dashing Mme. Descoings, she had an apartment similar to her niece's on the second floor. She had assigned to Mme. Bridau a sum of a thousand crowns, to be taken as a first charge on her annuity; Roguin had taken care of this for Mme. Bridau, but it would be seven years before this slow repayment could undo the mischief. Roguin, instructed to replace the fifteen hundred francs in dividends, banked the sums he retained on this account. Mme. Descoings, reduced to twelve hundred francs a year, lived poorly enough with her niece. The two honest, helpless creatures had a woman in for the morning's work only. The aunt, who liked cooking, managed the dinner. In the evening, a few friends, clerks in the office for whom Bridau had found places, would come to play a game with the two widows.

Mme. Descoings still clung to her three numbers, which obstinately refused, as she said, ever to come out. She still hoped, by one turn of luck, to repay all she had surreptitiously borrowed from her niece. She loved the two little Bridaus better than her grandson Bixiou, so strongly did she feel that she had wronged them, and so greatly did she admire the sweetness of her niece, who, at the very worst, never spoke the lightest word of blame. And so it may be supposed that she spoiled Joseph and Philippe. Like all persons who have a vice to be forgiven, this old gambler in the Imperial lottery would treat them to little dinners, cramming them with dainties. A little later Joseph and Philippe could, with the greatest ease, extract from her little gifts of money; the younger to buy stumps, chalk, paper, and prints; the elder for apple-puffs, marbles, balls of string, and knives. Her passion had brought her down to being content with fifty francs a month for all expenses, that she might gamble with the remainder.

Mme. Bridau on her part, out of motherly affection, did not allow her expenses to exceed that sum. To punish herself for her foolish confidence, she now heroically cut off all her little enjoyments. It often happens to a timid soul and narrow intellect that a single experience of crushed feelings and aroused suspicions leads to such an extreme development of a failing that it acquires the consistency of a virtue. The Emperor might forget, she told herself; he might be killed in battle—her pension would die with him. She shuddered as she saw such probabilities of her children being left absolutely penniless. Incompetent as she was to understand Roguin's calculations, when he tried to prove to her that in seven years a charge of three thousand francs a year on Mme. Descoings's annuity would replace the securities she had sold, she put no trust in the lawyer, or her aunt, or the State; she relied only on herself and her own thrift. By saving a thousand crowns a year out of her pension, in ten years she would have thirty thousand francs, which would at any rate secure her children fifteen hundred francs a year. At six-and-thirty she had a right to hope that she might live twenty years, and by carrying out this system she might leave each of them enough for the bare necessities of life.

Thus the two widows had sunk from unreal opulence to voluntary penury—one under the influence of a vice, the other under the promptings of the purest virtue. None of all these trivial things are foreign to the deep lesson to be derived from this story, founded on the sordid interests of common life, but with a scope all the wider perhaps in consequence.

The view over the schools, the scampering art students in the street, the need for looking at the sky, if only to turn from the hideous outlook on every side of that moldy street; the countenance of the portrait, full of soul and dignity in spite of the amateurish handling; the association of the rich coloring, harmonized by age, of this quiet and peaceful home, the greenery of its hanging gardens, the poverty of the household, the mother's preference for her elder son, and her dislike to the younger boy's taste,—in short, the sum-total of the incidents and circumstances which form the prologue to the story, constituted perhaps the active causes to which we owe Joseph Bridau, one of the great painters of the modern French school.

Philippe, the elder of Bridau's two children, was strikingly like his mother. Though fair-haired and blue-eyed, he had a daring look which was often mistaken for high spirit and courage. Old Claparon, who had entered the office at the same time with Bridau, and was one of the faithful friends who came in the evening to play a game with the two widows, would say of Philippe two or three times in a month, as he patted his cheek, "Here is a brave little man, who can always say bo to a goose!" The child, thus encouraged, assumed a sort of pluck out of bravado. His temper having taken this bent, he became skilled in all physical exercises. By dint of fighting at school, he acquired the hardihood and scorn of pain which give rise to military courage, but, of course, he also acquired the greatest aversion for study; for a public school can never solve the difficult problem of developing equally and simultaneously the powers of the body and of the mind. Agathe inferred from his purely superficial resemblance to her that they must agree in mind, and firmly believed that she should some day find in him her own refined feeling, ennobled by a man's force of nature.

At the time when Mme. Bridau moved to the gloomy apartment in the Rue Mazarine, Philippe was fifteen, and the engaging ways of a youth at that age confirmed his mother's belief. Joseph, who was three years younger, was an ugly likeness of his father. In the first place, his bushy black hair was always ill-kempt whatever was done to it; while his brother, though he was never quiet, was always trim; then, by some inscrutable fatality—but a too persistent fatality grows into a habit—Joseph could never keep his clothes clean; dressed in a new suit, he made old clothes of them at once. The elder, out of personal vanity, took care of his things. Unconsciously, the mother accustomed herself to scold Joseph and hold up the example of his brother. So Agathe did not always show the same face to her two boys; and when she went to fetch them from school, she would say of Joseph, "I wonder what state his things will be in!" All these trifles drove her heart into the gulf of favoritism.

No one of all the very commonplace people who formed the two widows' visiting circle—neither old du Bruel, nor old Claparon, nor Desroches, senior, nor even the Abbé Loraux, Agathe's director, ever noticed Joseph's powers of observation. Possessed by this taste, the future colorist paid no heed to anything that concerned him; and so long as he was a child, this instinct looked so like stupidity that his father had been somewhat uneasy about him. The extraordinary size of his skull, and the breadth of his forehead, had at first led them to fear that the child had water on the brain. His face, still so rugged, and odd enough to be thought ugly by those who cannot see the intellectual purpose of a countenance, was, during his boyhood, rather pinched. The features, which developed later, seemed crushed together, and the intensity with which the child studied everything puckered them still more. Thus Philippe soothed all his mother's vanities, while Joseph never won her a compliment. While Joseph was silent and dreamy, Philippe could bring out those clever speeches and repartees which tempt parents to believe that their children will be remarkable men. The mother looked for wonders from Philippe, she founded no hopes on Joseph.

Joseph's predisposition to art was brought to light by a most commonplace incident. In 1812, during the Easter holidays, as he was returning from a walk in the Tuileries Gardens with his brother and Mme. Descoings, he saw a student scrawl a caricature of some professor on a wall, and admiration of this chalk sketch, full of sparkling fun, riveted him to the spot. On the following day the boy placed himself at a window to watch the students going in by the door in the Rue Mazarine; he stole downstairs, and slipped into the long courtyard of the Institute, where he saw a number of statues and busts, marble rough-hewn, terra-cotta figures, studies in plaster; he gazed at them in a fever of excitement, for his instinct was roused, his vocation seethed within him. He went into a large low room, the door standing open, and there saw a dozen or so of lads drawing a statue; he was at once the butt of their tricks.

"Pretty Dick! pretty Dick!" said the first to spy him, flinging some bread crumbs at him.

"Whose brat is that?"

"Heavens, how ugly he is!"

In short, for a quarter of an hour Joseph stood the horseplay of the studio—that of the great sculptor Chaudet; but after making game of him, the pupils were struck by his tenacity and his expression, and asked him what he wanted. Joseph replied that he very much wished to learn to draw; and thereupon everybody was by way of encouraging him. The boy, taken in by this friendly tone, explained that he was Mme. Bridau's son.

"Oh! then, indeed! If you are Mme. Bridau's son," they sang out from every corner of the studio, "you may become a great man. Hurrah for Mme. Bridau's son. Is your mother pretty? To judge from your pumpkin head as a specimen, she ought to be a sweet one to look at."

"So you want to be an artist," said the eldest student, leaving his place, and coming to Joseph to play him some trick. "But you must be plucky, you know, and put up with dreadful things. Yes, there are trials, tests that are enough to break your legs and arms. All these fellows that you see—well, every one of them has passed the tests. Now, that one, for instance, he went for seven days and night without food. Come, let's see if you are fit to become an artist?"

He took one of the boy's arms and placed it straight up in the air, then he set the other at an angle as if about to strike out.

"We call that the ordeal of the telegraph," said he. "If you stand like that without letting your arms sink, or changing your attitude for a quarter of an hour,—well, you will have shown that you have good pluck!"

"Now, little chap, show your mettle," said the others. "By Jove, you must go through something to become an artist."

Joseph, in all the good faith of a boy of thirteen, remained motionless for about five minutes, and all the pupils looked at him very gravely.

"Oh! your arm is sinking," said one.

"Come, steady!" said another.

"By Jove, the Emperor Napoleon stood for at least a month, just as you see him there," added a third, pointing to Chaudet's fine statue.

The Emperor was standing holding the Imperial scepter; and this work was thrown down in 1814 from the column it finished so nobly.

In about ten minutes the perspiration was standing on Joseph's brow. At this moment a little man came in, bald, pale, and fragile; respectful silence reigned in the studio.

"Now, then, you scamps, what are you about?" he asked, looking at the studio victim.

"The little chap is sitting to us," said the tall student who had placed Joseph in position.

"Are not you ashamed of torturing a poor child so?" said Chaudet, putting down Joseph's arms. "How long have you been standing there?" he asked, with a friendly pat on the boy's cheek.

"About a quarter of an hour."

"And what brings you here?"

"I want to be an artist."

"And where have you come from; whom do you belong to?"

"From mamma's."

"Oh, ho! from mamma's!" cried the pupils.

"Silence among the easels!" cried Chaudet. "What is your mother?"

"She is Mme. Bridau. My papa, who is dead, was a friend of the Emperor's. And if you will only teach me to draw, the Emperor will pay whatever you ask."

"His father was head of a department in the Ministry of the Interior," cried Chaudet, struck by a reminiscence. "And you want already to be an artist?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come here as often as you like; you may play here. Give him an easel, paper, and chalk, and leave him to himself. Remember, you pickles, that his father did me a service," said the sculptor. "Here, you, Well-rope, go and buy something nice—some cakes and sugar-plums," he added, giving some silver to the lad who had bullied Joseph. "We shall soon see if you are an artist by the way you munch cabbage," he went on, stroking Joseph's chin.

Then he went the round of his pupils, Joseph following him, listening and trying to understand. The treat was brought; all the lads, the sculptor himself, and the child had their share. Then Joseph was made much of, as he had before been made game of. This scene, in which the rough fun and good heart of the artist tribe were revealed to him, as he understood by instinct, made a prodigious impression on the boy. This glimpse of Chaudet the sculptor, snatched away by a too early death while the Emperor's patronage promised him glory, was like a vision to Joseph.

The child said nothing to his mother of this escapade, but every Sunday and Thursday he spent three hours in Chaudet's studio. Mme. Descoings, always ready to humor the cherubs' fancies, henceforth gave Joseph charcoal, red chalk, lithographs, and drawing-paper. At the Lycée Impérial the budding artist sketched the masters, took portraits of his schoolfellows, scrawled on the dormitory walls, and was astonishingly diligent in the drawing-class. Lemire, his master there, astounded not merely by his talent, but by the progress he made, came to speak to Mme. Bridau of her son's evident vocation. Agathe, a true provincial, and as ignorant of art as she was accomplished in housekeeping, was filled with alarms. When Lemire was gone, she burst into tears.

"Oh!" she cried, as Mme. Descoings came in, "I am undone! Joseph, whom I meant to make a clerk, who has his way ready made for him in the Ministry of the Interior, and guarded by the shade of his father, would have been at the head of an office by the time he was five-and-twenty.—Well, he is bent on being a painter—a beggar's trade. I always knew that boy would bring me nothing but trouble!"

Mme. Descoings had to confess that for some months past she had been encouraging Joseph in his passion and screening his stolen Sunday and Thursday visits to the School of Art. At the Salon, whither she had taken him, the little fellow's interest in the pictures was something miraculous.

"And if he understands painting at the age of thirteen, my dear, your Joseph will be a man of genius."

"I dare say; and see what genius brought his father to! To die, worked to death, at forty."

Late in the autumn, just as Joseph was reaching the age of fourteen, Agathe, in spite of Mme. Descoings's entreaties, went across to see Chaudet, and insist that her son should not be led into mischief. She found Chaudet in his blue overall, modeling his latest statue. He was barely civil in his reception of the widow of the man who had once done him a service in very critical circumstances, but his health was already undermined; he was working with the fevered energy which enables a man to do in a few moments things which it is difficult to achieve in as many months; he had just hit on a thing he had long been striving for, and handled his clay and modeling tool with hasty jerks which, to Agathe, in her ignorance, seemed to be those of a maniac. In any other frame of mind Chaudet would have laughed outright; but as he heard this mother blaspheming Art, bewailing the fate forced upon her son, and requesting that he might never more be admitted to the studio, he broke out in sacred fury.

"I am under obligations to your lamented husband; I hoped to make him some return by helping your son, by watching over your little Joseph's first step in the noblest of all careers!" he exclaimed. "Yes, madame, I may tell you, if you do not know it, that a great artist is a king, more than a king; for, in the first place, he is happier, and he is independent; he lives as he pleases; and besides, he rules over the world of imagination. Your son has a splendid future before him! Such talents as his are rare; they are not revealed so young in any artists but a Giotto, a Raphael, a Titian, a Rubens, a Murillo—for he will be a painter, I think, rather than a sculptor. Light of Heaven! If I had such a boy, I should be as happy as the Emperor is in being the father of the King of Rome!—Well, madame, you are mistress of your child's fate. Go, make an idiot of him, a man who will only put one leg before the other, a wretched scrivener; you will be committing murder! I only hope that, in spite of all your efforts, he will always remain an artist! A vocation is stronger than all the obstacles opposed to its working. A vocation!—the word means a call—Ah! it is election by God!

"But you will make your child miserable!"

He violently flung the handful of clay he had ceased to need into a tub, and said to his model, "That will do for to-day."

Agathe looked up, and saw a naked woman sitting on a stool, in a corner of the studio which had not yet come under her eye. At the sight she fled in horror.

"You are not to let little Bridau come here any more," said Chaudet to his pupils. "Madame his mother does not approve."

"Hoo-oo!" shouted the lads as Agathe closed the door.

"And Joseph has been going to that place!" said the poor woman, in consternation at what she had seen and heard.

As soon as the students of painting and sculpture heard that Mme. Bridau would not allow her son to become an artist, all their delight was to get Joseph to their own rooms. In spite of the promise extracted from him by his mother not to go any more to the Institute, the boy often stole into a studio that Regnauld used there, and was encouraged to daub canvas. When the widow tried to complain, Chaudet's pupils told her that Regnauld was not Chaudet, that she had not made them the guardians of monsieur her son, and laughed at her in a thousand ways. The rascally students composed and sang a ballad on Mme. Bridau in a hundred and thirty-seven verses.

On the evening of that melancholy day, Agathe refused to play cards, and sat in her armchair, a prey to such deep melancholy, that the tears welled up to her beautiful eyes.

"What is the matter, Mme. Bridau?" asked old Claparon.

"She believes that her son will have to beg his bread because he has the bump of painting," said Mme. Descoings. "But I have not the smallest misgiving as to my stepson's boy, little Bixiou, though he too has a passion for drawing. Men are made to fight their way."

"Madame is right," said Desroches, a hard, dry man, who in spite of his abilities had never been able to rise in his office. "I happily have but one son; for with my salary of eighteen hundred francs, and my wife, who makes barely twelve hundred by her license to sell stamps, what would have become of me? I have articled my boy to an attorney; he gets twenty-five francs a month and his breakfast, and I give him the same sum; he dines and sleeps at home. That is all he has; he must needs go on, and he will make his way. I have cut out more work for my youngster than if he were at college, and he will be an attorney some day; when I treat him to the play he is as happy as a king, he hugs me! Oh! I keep him tight! He has to account to me for all his money. You are too easy with your children. If your boy wants to try roughing it, let him alone! He will turn out all right."

"For my part," said du Bruel, a retired head-clerk who had just taken his pension, "my boy is but sixteen, and his mother worships him. But I would not listen to a vocation that declared itself at such an early age. I think boys want directing."

"You, monsieur, are rich; you are a man, and have but one child," said Agathe.

"On my honor," Claparon went on, "our children are our tyrants *(in hearts)*. Mine drives me mad; he has brought me to ruin, and at last I have given him up altogether *(independence)*. Well, he is all the better pleased, and so am I. The rascal was partly the death of his poor mother. He became a commercial traveler, and it was the very life for him; no sooner was he in the house than he wanted to be out of it; he never could rest, he never would learn. All I pray Heaven is that I may die without seeing him disgrace my name!—Those who have no children miss many pleasures, but they also escape many troubles."

"Just like a father!" said Agathe, beginning to cry again.

"What I tell you, my dear Mme. Bridau, is to prove to you that you must allow your boy to become a painter; otherwise you will lose your time——"

"If you were capable of keeping him in hand," said the harsh Desroches, "I would tell you to oppose his wishes; but, seeing you so weak with them, I say—let him daub and scribble."

"Lost!" said Claparon.

"What? Lost!" cried the unhappy mother.

"Oh yes, my *Independence in hearts*—that dry stick Desroches always makes me lose."

"Be comforted, Agathe," said Mme. Descoings; "Joseph will be a great man."

At the end of this discussion, which was like every earthly discussion, the widow's friends united in one opinion, which by no means put an end to her perplexities. She was advised to allow Joseph to follow his bent.

"And if he is not a man of genius," said du Bruel, who was civil to Agathe, "you can always get him a place."

On the landing Mme. Descoings, seeing out the three old clerks, called them the "three Sages of Greece."

"She worries herself too much," said du Bruel.

"She may think herself only too lucky that her boy will do anything!" said Claparon.

"If only God preserves the Emperor," said Desroches, "Joseph will be provided for elsewhere. So what has she to be anxious about?"

"She is afraid of everything where her children are concerned," replied Mme. Descoings.

"Well, dear little woman," she went on, as she re-entered the room, "you see they are all of one mind. What have you to cry for now?"

"Oh! if it were Philippe, I should have no fears. You do not know what goes on in those studios. They actually have naked women there!"

"But they have a fire, I hope," said Mme. Descoings.

A few days later news came of the disastrous rout at Moscow. Napoleon was returning to organize fresh armies and call on France for further sacrifices. Now the poor mother was tortured by very different alarms. Philippe, who did not like college, was positively bent on serving the Emperor. A review at the Tuileries, the last Napoleon ever held, of which Philippe was a spectator, had turned his head. At that period of military display the sight of the uniforms, the authority of an epaulette, had an irresistible fascination for some young men. Philippe believed himself to have the same taste for military service that his brother had for the arts.

Unknown to his mother, he wrote to the Emperor a petition in the following words:—

"SIRE,—I am the son of your Bridau; I am eighteen years old, and measure nearly six feet; I have stout legs, a good constitution, and I wish to be one of your soldiers. I appeal to your favor to be enrolled in the army, etc."

Within twenty-four hours the Emperor had sent Philippe to the Imperial Military School at Saint-Cyr; and six months later, in November 1813, he called him out as sub-lieutenant in a cavalry regiment. During part of the winter Philippe remained in depôt; but as soon as he had learned to ride he set out full of ardor. In the course of the campaign in France, he gained his lieutenancy in a skirmish of the advanced guard, when his headlong valor saved his colonel. The Emperor made him captain after the battle of La Fère-

Champenoise, and placed him on the staff. Stimulated by this promotion, at Montereau Philippe won the Cross. Then, having witnessed Napoleon's farewell at Fontainebleau, and being driven to fanaticism by the scene, Captain Philippe refused to serve under the Bourbons.

When he went home to his mother in July 1814, he found her a ruined woman. In the course of the long vacation Joseph's scholarship was canceled; and Mme. Bridau, whose pension had been paid out of the Emperor's privy purse, vainly applied for a clerkship for him in the offices of the Ministry of the Interior. Joseph, more than ever devoted to painting, was enchanted, and only besought his mother to allow him to go to M. Regnauld's studio, promising her that he would make a living. He was, he said, high enough in the second class at school, and could get on without rhetoric.

Philippe, a captain, and wearing an order at nineteen, after serving under Napoleon on two battlefields, immensely flattered his mother's pride; so, though he was rough, noisy, and in reality devoid of all merit but the vulgar courage of a slashing swordsman, to her he was the man of genius; while Joseph, who was small, sickly, and thin, with a rugged brow, who loved peace and quiet, and dreamed of fame as an artist, was doomed, as she declared, never to give her anything but worry and anxiety. The winter of 1814-15 was a good one for Joseph who, by the secret interest of Mme. Descoings and of Bixiou, a pupil of Gros, was admitted to work in that famous studio, whence proceeded so many different types of talent, and where he formed a close intimacy with Schinner.

Then came the great 20th of March; Captain Bridau, who joined the Emperor at Lyons and escorted him back to the Tuileries, was promoted to be major of the Dragon Guards. After the battle of Waterloo, where he was wounded, but slightly, and won the Cross of a Commander of the Legion of Honor, he next found himself with Maréchal Davoust at Saint-Denis, and not with the army of the Loire; thus, by the interest of Maréchal Davoust, he was allowed to retain his Cross and his rank in the army, but he was put upon half pay. Joseph, uneasy about the future, studied meanwhile with an ardor that made him ill more than once in the midst of the hurricane of public events.

"It is the smell of paint," Agathe would say to Mme. Descoings. "He ought to give up work that is so bad for his health."

All Agathe's anxieties were then centered in her son, the lieutenant-colonel. She saw him again in 1816, fallen from his pay and profits of about nine thousand francs a year as major in the Emperor's Dragoon Guards, to half-pay amounting to three hundred francs a month; she spent her little savings in furnishing for him the attic over the kitchen.

Philippe was one of the most assiduous Bonapartists that haunted the Café Lemblin, a thorough constitutional Bœotia. There he acquired the habits, manners, and style of living of half-pay officers; nay, he outdid them, as any young man of twenty was sure to do, solemnly vowing a mortal hatred of the Bourbons; he was not to be talked over, and even refused such opportunities as were offered him of employment in the field with his full rank. In his mother's eyes Philippe was showing great strength of character.

"His father could have done no better," said she.

Philippe could live on his half-pay. He would cost his mother nothing, while Joseph was entirely dependent on the two widows. From that moment Agathe's preference for Philippe was manifest. Hitherto it had been covert; but the persecution under which he suffered as a faithful adherent to the Emperor, the memory of the wound her darling son had received, his courage in adversity—which, voluntary as it was, seemed to her noble adversity—brought out Agathe's weakness. The words, "He is unfortunate," justified everything.

Joseph, whose nature overflowed with the childlike simplicity which is superabundant in the youthful artist-soul, and who had been brought up to admire his older brother, far from resenting his mother's favoritism, vindicated it by sharing in her worship of a "veteran" who had won Napoleon's Orders in two battles—of a man wounded at Waterloo. How could he doubt the superiority of this big brother, whom he had seen in the splendid green-and-gold uniform of the Dragoon Guards, at the head of his squadron on the Champ de Mai? And in spite of her preference, Agathe was a good mother. She loved Joseph, but not blindly; she simply did not understand him. Joseph worshiped his mother, whereas Philippe allowed her to adore him. Still, for her the dragoon moderated his military coarseness, while he never disguised his contempt for Joseph, though expressing it not unkindly. As he looked at his brother's powerful head, too large for a body kept thin by constant work, and still, at the age of seventeen, slight and weakly, he would call him "the brat." His patronizing ways would have been offensive but for the artist's indifference, in the belief, indeed, that a soldier always had a kind heart under his rough manners. The poor boy did not yet know that really first-rate military men are as gentle and polite as other superior persons. Genius is everywhere true to itself.

"Poor child!" Philippe would say to his mother. "Don't tease him; let him amuse himself." And this contempt was in his mother's eyes an evidence of brotherly affection.

"Philippe will always love and protect his brother," she thought.

In 1816 Joseph obtained his mother's permission to convert the loft adjoining his bedroom into a painting-room, and Mme. Descoings gave him a small sum to purchase such things as were indispensable to his "business" as a painter; for in the minds of the two widows painting was but a trade. Joseph, with the energy and zeal that are part of such a vocation, arranged everything in his humble studio with his own hands. The landlord, at Mme. Descoings's request, made a skylight in the roof. Thus the attic became a large room, and was painted chocolate-color by Joseph; he hung some sketches against the walls; Agathe, not very willingly, had a small cast-iron stove fixed; and Joseph could now work at home, not, however, neglecting Gros's studio or Schinner's.

The Constitutional party, consisting largely of half-pay officers and the Bonapartists, were at that time frequently engaged in riots round the House of Representatives, in the name of the Charter, which no one would hear of, and they plotted sundry conspiracies. Philippe, who must needs get mixed up in them, was arrested, but released for lack of evidence; but the War Minister cut off his half-pay, reducing him to what might be called punishment pay. France was no longer the place for him; Philippe would end by falling into some trap laid by the Government agents. There was at that time a great talk of these *agents provocateurs*. So, while Philippe was playing billiards in cafés suspected of disaffection, losing his time, and getting into a habit of drinking various liqueurs, Agathe lived in mortal terrors for the great man of the family.

The "three Sages of Greece" were too well used to walking the same way every evening, to mounting the stairs to the widows' rooms, and to finding the ladies always expecting them, and anxious to ask them the news of the day, ever to cease their visits; they came regularly to their game in the little green drawing-room. The Ministry of the Interior, thoroughly purged in 1816, had kept Claparon on its lists as one of the trimmers who murmur in an undertone the news from the *Moniteur*, adding, "Do not get me into trouble!" Desroches, dismissed soon after his senior du Bruel, was still fighting for his pension. These three friends, seeing Agathe's despair, advised her to send the colonel abroad.

"There is much talk of conspiracies, and your son, with his character, will be the victim of some such affair, for there is always someone to peach."

"The devil!" said du Bruel, in a low voice, and looking about him. "He is the stuff of which his Emperor used to make his marshals, and he ought not to give up his calling. Let him serve in the East, in the Indies——"

"But his health?" objected Agathe.

"Why does not he enter an office?" said Desroches. "So many private concerns are being started. I mean to get a place as head-clerk in an Assurance Company as soon as my pension is settled."

"Philippe is a soldier; he only cares for fighting," said Agathe the warlike.

"Then he should be a good boy, and apply for active service with——"

"This crew?" cried the widow. "Oh, you will never get me to suggest it!"

"You are wrong," replied du Bruel. "My son has just been helped on by the Duc de Navarreins. The Bourbons are very good to all who join them honestly. Your son will be appointed as lieutenant-colonel to a regiment."

"They will take none but noblemen in the cavalry, and he will never be full colonel," cried Mme. Descoings.

Agathe, in great alarm, implored Philippe to go abroad and offer his service to some foreign power. Any one of them would receive with favor an officer of the Emperor's staff.

"Serve with foreigners?" cried Philippe in horror.

Agathe embraced her son fervently, exclaiming, "He is his father all over."

"He is quite right," said Joseph. "A Frenchman is too proud of his column to lead any foreign columns. Besides, Napoleon may come back again yet."

To please his mother, a splendid idea occurred to Philippe: He might join General Lallemand in the United States, and co-operate in founding the Champ d'Asile, one of the most disastrous hoaxes ever perpetrated under the name of a National Fund. Agathe paid ten thousand francs, and went with her son to Le Havre to see him on board ship.

At the end of 1817, Agathe was managing to live on the six hundred francs a year left to her in government securities; then, by a happy inspiration, she invested at once the ten thousand francs that remained to her of her savings, and so had seven hundred francs a year more.

Joseph wished to contribute to her act of sacrifice; he went about dressed like a bum-bailiff, wearing thick shoes and blue socks; he wore no gloves; he burned coal instead of wood; he lived on bread, milk, and cheap cheese. The poor lad never heard a word of encouragement from anybody but old Mme. Descoings and from Bixiou, his schoolfellow and fellow-student, who was by this time employed in drawing capital little caricatures, besides having a small place in a government office.

"How glad I was to see the summer of 1818!" Bridau would often say when speaking of these hard times. "The sun saved my buying fuel."

He was already quite as good a colorist as Gros, and only went to his master for advice; he was thinking of riding a tilt at the classic school, of breaking free from Greek conventionality, and the leading strings which fettered an art whose birthright is nature as it is, in the omnipotence of its creativeness and its caprice. Joseph was making ready for the struggle which, from the day when he first exhibited at the Salon, was never more to cease.

It was a terrible year for them all. Roguin, the widows' notary, disappeared, taking with him all the money kept back during the past seven years from Mme. Descoings's annuity, which by this time ought to have been bringing them in two thousand francs a year. Three days after this catastrophe there came from New York a bill drawn on his mother by Colonel Philippe. The poor fellow, swindled like so many more, had lost everything in the scheme for the Champ d'Asile. This letter, by which Agathe, Mme. Descoings, and Joseph all were melted to tears, spoke of debts incurred at New York, where his companions in misfortune had stood surety for him.

"And it was all my doing that he went!" cried the poor mother, ingenious in finding excuses for Philippe's sins.

"I advise you not to send him often on such journeys," said old Mme. Descoings to her niece.

Mme. Descoings was heroic; she still paid Mme. Bridau a thousand crowns; but she also still paid regularly to keep up the three numbers which had never come out since 1799. At this time she began to doubt the honesty of the management. She accused the Government authorities, believing them quite capable of suppressing the issue of the three numbers in the drawing so as to keep up the frenzied deposits of the ticket-holders.

After a brief consideration of ways and means, it seemed impossible to raise a thousand francs without selling some shares. The two women talked of pledging their plate, some of their house-linen, or even part of the furniture that they could do without. Joseph, terrified by these plans, went to call on Gérard, and explained the situation; the great painter obtained a commission for him from the Master of the Royal Household to make two copies of the portrait of Louis XVIII., at the price of five hundred francs each. Though little addicted to liberality, Gros took his pupil to a shop where Joseph got all the necessary materials. But the thousand francs were to be paid only on delivery. Joseph set to work and painted four little pictures in ten days; these he sold to the dealers, and brought his mother a thousand francs; she could meet the bill. A week later, another letter from the colonel announced to his mother that he was sailing on board a packet, the captain having accepted his promise to pay. Philippe added that he would need at least a thousand francs more on disembarking at Le Havre.

"Well," said Joseph to his mother, "I shall have finished the copies; you can take him the thousand francs."

"Dear Joseph!" cried Agathe, embracing him with tears. "Then you really love that poor persecuted boy? He is our glory and all our hope! So young, so brave, and so unfortunate. Everything is against him; let us all three at any rate be on his side."

"Painting is good for something after all, you see," cried Joseph, happy at having at last won his mother's permission to become a great artist.

Mme. Bridau flew to meet her beloved son, Colonel Philippe. At Le Havre she walked every day to a point beyond the round tower built by Francis I., every day imagining fresh and dreadful alarms as she watched for the American packet. None but mothers know how this kind of torment revives their first motherhood. The vessel came in one fine morning in October 1819, without damage, without having met the slightest squall.

The air of his native land, and the sight of his mother, must always have some effect, even on the coarsest soul, especially after an exile full of disasters. Philippe gave way to an effusiveness of feeling which made Agathe think to herself, "How much this one loves me!"—Alas! the young officer loved but one creature in the world, and that was Colonel

Philippe. His ill-fortune in Texas, his stay in New York—a place where speculation and self-interest are carried to the highest pitch, where the coarsest selfishness becomes cynicism, where each man, living for himself alone, is compelled to tread his own path, where politeness does not exist—in short, the smallest incidents of his expedition had developed in Philippe all the bad tendencies of the disbanded trooper. He was a bully, a drinker, a smoker, assertive and rude; penury and privations had deteriorated him. Also, the colonel considered himself persecuted; the effect of this belief on a man of low intelligence is to make him an intolerant persecutor. To Philippe the whole universe began at his head and ended at his feet; the sun shone for him alone. To crown all, his experience of New York, interpreted by a man of action, had robbed him of every moral scruple.

With beings of his stamp there are but two modes of existence: they are believers, or they are unbelievers; they have all the virtues of an honest man, or they are carried away by every pressure of necessity; then they get into a habit of regarding their smallest interests, and every passing wish prompted by passion, as a necessity. On this plan a man may go far.

In appearance, but in appearance only, the colonel had preserved the blunt, frank, easy-going manner of a soldier. Thus he was a very dangerous man; he seemed as guileless as a child; but having no one to think of but himself, he never did anything without carefully considering what he had best do, much as a wily prosecutor considers every twist and turn of a tricky rogue. Words cost him nothing, and he would give you as many as you chose to believe. If a man should, unluckily, be so rash as to take exception to the explanations by which he would justify the discrepancies between his conduct and his speech, the colonel, who was a first-rate shot, who could challenge the most skillful swordsman, and who had the cool head of a man to whom life is a matter of indifference, was ready to demand satisfaction for the first sharp word. Pending that, he looked like a man so ready for blows as to make compromise impossible. His tall figure had become burly, his face was tanned during his stay in Texas, and he had caught the abrupt speech and peremptory tone of a man who means to be respected in the midst of the populace of New York.

Such as he was, plainly dressed, and his frame evidently hardened by his recent hard life, Philippe was a hero in his poor mother's eyes; but he had, in fact, become what the common people plainly describe as " a bad lot."

Mme. Bridau, startled by her darling son's destitute condition, had a complete outfit made for him at Le Havre; as she listened to the tale of his woes, she had not the heart to check his eating, drinking, and amusing himself, as a man was bound to drink and enjoy himself on his return from the Champ d'Asile.

The occupation of Texas by the remnant of the Grand Army was no doubt a splendid idea; but it was the men that were found wanting rather than the conditions, since Texas is now a republican state of great promise. The experiment made under the Restoration proved emphatically that the interests of the Liberals were purely selfish, and in no sense national; aiming at power, and at nothing else. Neither the material, the place, the idea, nor the goodwill was lacking, only the money and the support of that hypocritical party; they had vast sums at their disposal, and would give nothing when the reinstatement of an Empire was at stake.

Housewives of Agathe's stamp have the good sense which enables them to see through such political frauds. The hapless mother saw the truth as she heard her son's story; for, during his absence, her interest in the exile had led her to listen to the pompous announcements of the Constitutional newspapers, and to watch the vicissitudes of the braggart subscription, which yielded scarcely a hundred and fifty thousand francs when five or six millions were needed. The leaders of the Liberal party very soon discovered that they were, in fact, doing the job for Louis XVIII. by sending away the glorious remnant of the French army, and they abandoned to their fate the most devoted and ardent enthusiasts, who were the first to go. Agathe never was able to explain to Philippe that he had been the prey of fraud rather than of persecution. In her belief in her idol she accused herself of stupidity, and lamented the disasters of the times which had fallen on Philippe.

And it was true that, until now, in all his misfortunes he had been less a sinner than a victim to his fine temper and energy, to the Emperor's overthrow, to the duplicity of the Liberals and the vindictiveness of the Bourbons towards the Bonapartists. All through the week they spent at Le Havre—a horribly expensive week—she never dared hint that he should become reconciled to the King's government and call at the War Office; she had enough to do to get him away from Le Havre, where living is very dear, and back to Paris, when she had no money left but just enough for the journey. Mme. Descoings and Joseph, who met them as they alighted from the coach in the yard of the Messageries Royales, were shocked at the change in Agathe.

"Your mother has grown ten years older in two months," said the old lady to Joseph, in the midst of the embracing, while their two trunks were taken down.

"Well, Granny Descoings, and how are you?" was Philippe's tender greeting to the grocer's widow, whom Joseph affectionately addressed as Maman Descoings.

"We have no money to pay for the cab," said Agathe piteously.

"But I have," replied the young painter. "My brother is splendidly burnt!" he exclaimed, looking at Philippe.

"Yes, I am colored like a pipe. But you have not altered, little man."

Joseph, now one-and-twenty, and much appreciated by a few friends who had stood by him in evil days, felt his powers, and was conscious of his talent. In a little society of young men devoted to science, letters, politics, and philosophy, he represented painting; he was hurt by his brother's contemptuous tone, emphasized by an incivility; Philippe pulled his ear as if he were a mere child. Agathe observed the sort of chill which came over Mme. Descoings and Joseph after their first affectionate warmth, but she set matters right by speaking of the privations endured by Philippe during his exile.

Mme. Descoings, anxious to make a high day in honor of the return of the prodigal son, as she called him in her own mind, had prepared the best of dinners, to which she had invited old Claparon and the elder Desroches. All the friends of the family were invited, and came in the evening. Joseph had asked Léon Giraud, d'Arthez, Michel Chrestien, Fulgence Ridal, and Bianchon, his friends of the coterie. Mme. Descoings had told Bixiou—her stepson, as she called him—that the young people would play a game of écarté. The younger Desroches, sternly forced by his father to become a law-student, also joined the party. Du Bruel, Claparon, Desroches, and the Abbé Loraux stared at the traveler, frightened by his coarse face and manners, his voice husky with dram-drinking, his vulgar language and looks. While Joseph was setting out the card-tables, her most intimate friends gathered round Agathe and asked her—

"What do you intend to do with Philippe?"

"I do not know," said she. "But he is still determined not to serve under the Bourbons."

"It is very difficult to find him a place in France. If he will not re-enter the army, he will not easily find a pigeon-hole ready for him in the civil service," said old du Bruel. "And only to listen to him is enough to prove that he will never make a fortune, like my son, by writing plays."

Agathe's glance in reply was enough to make them all understand how anxious she was as to Philippe's prospects; and as neither of her friends had any suggestions to offer, they all kept silence. The exile, young Desroches, and Bixiou were playing écarté, a game that was then the rage.

"Maman Descoings, my brother has no money to play with," said Joseph, in the kind and stanch old lady's ear.

The gambler in the lottery went to fetch twenty francs, and gave them to the artist, who quietly slipped them into his brother's hand.

All the guests arrived. Two tables were set for boston, and the party grew lively. Philippe proved but a sorry player. After winning a good deal at first, he lost, till by eleven o'clock, he owed fifty francs to young Desroches and Bixiou. The noise and disputes over the écarté more than once disturbed the peaceful boston players, and they kept covert watch over Philippe. The colonel gave evidence of such a bad spirit that, in his last wrangle with young Desroches—who was not very good-tempered either—the elder Desroches, though his son was in the right, pronounced against him, and desired him to play no more. Mme. Descoings did the same with her grandson, who had begun firing such keen witticisms that Philippe did not understand them; still, they might have led this caustic satirist into danger if by chance one of his barbed arrows had pierced the colonel's dense intelligence.

"You must be tired," said Agathe to Philippe. "Come to your room."

"Traveling forms the young!" said Bixiou, smiling, when Agathe and the colonel were out of the room.

Joseph, who rose with the dawn and went early to rest, did not see the evening out. Next morning Agathe and her friend, as they laid breakfast in the front room, could not help thinking that evening company would cost them very dear if Philippe went on playing "that game," as Mme. Descoings phrased it. The old woman, now seventy-six years of age, proposed to sell her furniture, to give up her rooms on the second floor to the landlord—who was most willing to have them—to take Agathe's drawing-room for her bedroom, and to use the other room as a sitting- and dining-room in one. In this way they could save seven hundred francs a year. This retrenchment would enable them to allow Philippe fifty francs a month while he was looking out for something to do. Agathe accepted the sacrifice.

When the colonel came down, after his mother had asked him if he had been comfortable in his little room, the two widows laid the state of affairs before him. Mme. Descoings and Agathe, by combining their incomes, had five thousand three hundred francs a year, of which four thousand were Mme. Descoings's annuity. The old lady allowed Bixiou six hundred francs a year—for the last six months she had owned him to be her grandson—and six hundred to Joseph; the rest, with Agathe's income, was spent in housekeeping generally. All their savings were gone.

"Be quite easy," said the colonel; "I will look out for some appointment. I will cost you nothing. All I want is a crust and a crib for the present."

Agathe kissed her son, and his old friend slipped a hundred francs into his hand to pay the gambling debt of the evening before.

Within ten days the sale of the furniture, the giving up of the rooms, and the necessary changes in Agathe's dwelling were effected with the rapidity to be seen only in Paris. During these ten days Philippe regularly made himself scarce after breakfast, came in to dinner, went out in the evening, and did not come home to bed till midnight.

This was the plan of life into which the soldier fell almost mechanically, and which became a rooted habit; he had his boots blacked in the Pont Neuf for the two sous he would otherwise have spent in crossing by the Pont des Arts to the Palais Royal, where he took two liqueur glasses of brandy while reading the papers, an occupation absorbing him till mid-day; at about noon he made his way by the Rue Vivienne to the Café Minerve, at that time the headquarters of the Liberals, and there he played billiards with some retired fellow officers. There, while he won or lost, Philippe always got through three or four more glasses of various spirits, and then smoked ten régie cigars as he wandered and lounged about the streets. In the evening, after smoking a few pipes at the Estaminet Hollandais, he went up to the gambling tables at about ten. The waiter handed him a card and a pin; he consulted certain experienced players as to the state of the run on red or black, and staked ten francs at an opportune moment, never playing more than three times, whether he won or lost. When he had won, as he commonly did, he drank a tumbler of punch and made his way home to his attic; but by this time he would be talking of smashing up the Ultras and the bodyguard, and sing on the stairs, "Preserve the Empire from its foes."—His poor mother, as she heard him, would say, "Philippe is in good spirits this evening," and she would go up to give him a kiss, never complaining of the reek of punch, spirits, and tobacco.

"You ought to be pleased with me, my dear mother," said he one day towards the end of January. "I am sure I lead the most regular life!"

Philippe had dined out five times with some old comrades. These soldiers had talked over the state of their affairs, and discussed the hopes they founded on the building of a submarine vessel to be employed to deliver the Emperor. Among the fellow-officers he here met again, Philippe was particularly thick with a former captain of the Dragoon Guard named Giroudeau, in whose company he had first smelled gunpowder. This officer of dragoons was the cause of Philippe's completing what Rabelais calls the devil's outfit, and adding a fourth iniquity to his dram, his cigar, and his gambling.

One evening, at the beginning of February, Giroudeau took Philippe after dinner to the Gaîté Theater, to a box sent to a small theatrical paper belonging to his nephew Finot, for whom the old soldier kept the cashbox and the accounts, addressed and checked the papers. Dressed after the fashion of the Bonapartist officers of the Constitutional opposition, in loose, long coats with a square collar buttoned up to the chin, hanging to their heels, and decorated with the rosette, armed with a loaded cane hanging to the wrist by a plaited leather cord, the two troopers had treated themselves to a skinful, as they expressed it, and opened their hearts to each other as they went into the box. Through the haze of a considerable number of bottles of wine and "nips" of sundry liqueurs, Giroudeau pointed out to Philippe a plump and nimble little damsel on the stage, known as Florentine, whose favors and affections, as well as the box, were his through the all-powerful influence of the paper.

"But, dear me," said Philippe, "how far does she carry her favors for an old dappled-gray trooper like you?"

"Praise the Lord, I have never forgotten the old principles of our glorious uniform!" said Giroudeau. "I never spent two farthings on a woman."

"What next?" cried Philippe, with a finger to his left eye.

"Quite true," said Giroudeau. "But, between ourselves, the paper has something to do with it. To-morrow you will see, in two lines, the management will be advised to give Mlle. Florentine a *pas seul.*—On my word, my dear boy, I am very happy," said Giroudeau.

"Well," thought Philippe, "if this venerable Giroudeau, in spite of a skull as bare as your knee, his eight-and-forty years, his corporation, his face like a wine-grower, and his nose like a potato, can be sweetheart to a dancer, I ought to be the man for the first actress in Paris.—Where are such articles to be had?" he asked Giroudeau.

"I will take you this evening to see Florentine's humble home. Though my Dulcinea gets but fifty francs a month from the theater, thanks to a retired silk mercer named Cardot, who allows her five hundred francs a month, she is not so badly set up."

"Why—what?" said Philippe, jealous.

"Pooh!" said Giroudeau. "True love is blind."

After the play Giroudeau took Philippe to see Mlle. Florentine, who lived in the Rue de Crussol, a stone's-throw from the theater.

"We must behave," said Giroudeau; "Florentine has her mother with her. As you may suppose, I cannot afford to allow her one, and the good woman really is her mother. The woman was a doorkeeper, but she does not lack brains, and her name is Cabirolle. Call her madame; she is particular about that."

Florentine had at her house that evening a friend of hers, a certain Marie Godeschal, as lovely as an angel, as cold as a ballet-dancer, and a pupil of Vestris, who promised her the highest Terpsichorean distinctions. Mlle. Godeschal, who was anxious to come out at the Panorama-Dramatique, under the name of Mariette, counted on the patronage of a First Groom of the Chambers, to whom Vestris had long promised to present her. Vestris, as yet still in full vigor, did not think his pupil sufficiently advanced. Marie Godeschal was ambitious, and she made her assumed name of Mariette famous; but her ambition was praiseworthy. She had a brother, a clerk in Derville the lawyer's office. Orphans and poor, but loving each other truly, the brother and sister had seen life as it is in Paris; he wished to become an attorney so as to provide for his sister; she determined in cold blood to be a dancer, and to avail herself of her beauty as well as of her nimble legs to buy a connection for her brother. Apart from their affection for each other, from their interests and their life together, everything else was to them, as to the ancient Romans and the Hebrews, barbarian, foreign, and inimical. This beautiful affection, which nothing could ever change, explained Mariette's life to those who knew her well.

The brother and sister lived at this time on the eighth floor of a house in the Vieille Rue du Temple. Mariette had begun learning at the age of ten, and had now seen sixteen summers. Alas! for lack of a little dress her dainty beauty, hidden under an Angola shawl, perched on iron pattens, dressed in cotton print, and only moderately neat, could never be suspected by anyone but the Paris lounger in pursuit of *grisettes* and on the track of beauty under a cloud.

Philippe fell in love with Mariette. What Mariette found in Philippe was an officer of the Dragoon Guards and of the Emperor's staff, a young man of seven-and-twenty, and the delight of proving herself superior to Florentine by the evident superiority of Philippe to Giroudeau. Both Florentine and Giroudeau—he to give his comrade pleasure, and she to procure a protector for her friend—urged Mariette and Philippe to a "water-color marriage." The Parisian expression *à la détrempe* is equivalent to the words "morganatic marriage" applied to kings and queens.

Philippe, as they went out, explained to Giroudeau how poor he was.

"I will mention you to my nephew Finot," said Giroudeau. "Look here, Philippe, this is the day of black coats and fine words; we must knock under. The inkstand is all powerful now. It takes the place of gunpowder, and words are used instead of shot. After all, these little vermin of editors are very ingenious, and not bad fellows. Come to see me to-morrow at the office, by that time I will have spoken two words about you to my nephew. Before long you will have something to do on some newspaper. Mariette, who will have you now because she has nothing else—make no mistake on that point—no engagement, no hope of coming out, and whom I told that, like me, you were going in for journalism—Mariette will prove that she loves you for yourself, and you will believe her! Do as I do; keep her from rising as long as you can. I was so desperately in love that as soon as Florentine wanted to dance a *pas seul,* I begged Finot to write her up; but says my nephew to me, 'She is clever, is she not? Well, the day she first dances a step of her own she will show you across the doorstep.' That's Finot all over. Oh, you'll find him a wide-awake chap."

Next day, at about four o'clock Philippe made his way to the Rue du Sentier, and up to a small room on the entresol, where he found Giroudeau shut up like a wild beast in a sort of hencoop with a wicket; it contained a little stove, a little table, two little chairs, and some little billets for the fire. The whole apparatus was dignified by these magical words, *Office for Subscribers,* painted on the outside door in black letters, and the word *Cashier* in running hand on a board hung on the bars of the cage. Along the wall opposite the old trooper's coop was a bench, on which an old soldier was eating a snack; he had lost an arm, and Giroudeau addressed him as Coloquinte (Colocynth), by reason, no doubt, of the Egyptian hue of his face.

"Sweetly pretty!" said Philippe, looking about him. "What business have you here—you who rode in poor Colonel Chabert's charge at Eylau? In the devil's name! In all the devils' names! A superior officer . . ."

"Why, yes! Roo-ty too-too! A superior officer signing receipts in a newspaper office," said Giroudeau, settling his black silk skull-cap. "And what is more, I am the responsible editor of that rhodomontade," and he pointed to the paper.

"And I, who once went to Egypt, now go to the Stamp Office," said the pensioner.

"Silence, Coloquinte," said Giroudeau. "You are in the presence of a brave man who carried the Emperor's orders at the battle of Montmirail!"

"Pre-sent arms!" cried Coloquinte. "I lost my missing arm there."

"Coloquinte, mind the shop; I am going upstairs to my nephew."

The two soldiers went up to the fourth floor, to an attic at the end of a passage, and found a young man with cold, colorless eyes stretched on a shabby sofa. The civilian did not disturb himself, though he offered cigars to his uncle and his uncle's friend.

"My dear fellow," said Giroudeau, in a meek and gentle voice, "here is the valiant major of whom I spoke."

"What then?" said Finot, looking Philippe from head to foot, while the officer lost all his spirit, like Giroudeau, in the presence of the diplomat of the press.

"My dear boy," said Giroudeau, trying to play the uncle, "the colonel has just come from Texas."

"Oh! you were caught for Texas and the Champ d'Asile? You were very young, too, to turn soldier-plowman."

The sting of this witticism can be appreciated only by those who can remember the flood of prints, screens, clocks, bronzes, and casts to which the idea of the soldier-plowman gave rise, as a great allegory of the fate of Napoleon and his veterans, which at last found vent in various satirical songs. The idea was worth a million at least; you may still see the soldier-plowman on wallpapers in the depths of the provinces.

If this young man had not been Giroudeau's nephew, Philippe would have smacked his cheeks.

"Yes, I was caught for it; and I lost twelve thousand francs and my time," replied he, trying to force a smile.

"And you still love the Emperor?"

"He is my God!" replied Philippe Bridau.

"You are a Liberal?"

"I shall always side with the Constitutional Opposition. Oh, Foy! Manuel! Laffitte! There are men for you. They will rid us of these wretches who have sneaked in at the heels of the foreigners."

"Well, then," said Finot coldly, "you must take the benefit of your misfortunes, for you are a victim to the Liberals, my good fellow. Remain a Liberal if you are set on your opinions; but threaten the Liberals with divulging the madness of the Texas scheme. You never got a farthing of the national subscription, I suppose? Well, then, you are in a splendid position; ask for the accounts of the fund. This is what will happen: A fresh newspaper is now being started by the Opposition under the auspices of the deputies of the Left; you will be made cashier with a thousand crowns a year, a place for life. You have only to find twenty thousand francs as security; get them, and in a week you will have a berth. I will advise them to silence you by making them offer you the place—but cry out, and cry loud!"

Giroudeau allowed Philippe to go down a few steps before him, pouring out thanks as he went, and said to his nephew: "Well, you're a pretty fellow, you are! You let me hang on here with twelve hundred francs a year——"

"The paper will not live a year," replied Finot. "I have something better for you."

"By Heaven!" said Philippe to Giroudeau, "that nephew of yours is no fool. I had never thought of taking the benefit of my position, as he puts it."

That evening, at the Café Lemblin and the Café Minerve, Colonel Philippe broke out in abuse of the Liberals who sent a man to Texas, who talked gammon about the soldier-plowman, who left brave men to starve in misery after squeezing twenty thousand francs out of them, and driving them for two years from pillar to post.

"I mean to ask for an account of the money subscribed for the Champ d'Asile," he said to one of the regular customers at the Café Minerve, who repeated it to the journalists of the Left.

Philippe did not go home to the Rue Mazarine; he went to tell Mariette that he was about to be employed on a paper with ten thousand subscribers, in which her Terpsichorean ambitions should be ardently supported. Agathe and Mme. Descoings sat up for him in an agony of terror, for the Duc de Berry had that moment been assassinated.

The colonel walked in next day, a few minutes after breakfast. When his mother expressed her uneasiness at his absence, he flew into a passion, and asked if he were of age or no.

"By Heaven! I come in with good news, and you all look as solemn as hearses. The Duc de Berry is dead! Well, so much the better! There is one less of them.—I am going to be cashier in a newspaper office, with a thousand crowns a year, so you are free from all worry so far as I am concerned."

"Is it possible?" cried Agathe.

"Yes, if you can stand surety for twenty thousand francs. You have only to deposit your securities for thirteen hundred francs a year, and you will draw your half-year dividends all the same."

The two widows, who for two months past had been killing themselves with wondering what Philippe was doing, and how to find him employment, were so delighted at his prospects that they thought no more of the various difficulties of the hour. In the evening old du Bruel, Claparon, who was a dying man, and the inflexible Desroches, senior—the three Sages of Greece—were unanimous. They advised the widow to stand surety for her son. The paper having been started, most fortunately, before the murder of the Duc de Berry, escaped the blow struck at the press by M. Decazes. The widow Bridau's State securities for thirteen hundred francs of dividends were deposited as a pledge for Philippe, and he was appointed cashier. This good son then promised to pay the widows a hundred francs a month for his board and lodging, and was regarded as the best of good boys. Those who had thought ill of him congratulated Agathe.

"We judged him wrongly," they said.

Poor Joseph, not to be left in the lurch, tried to keep himself, and succeeded.

At the end of three months, the colonel—who ate and drank for four, who was very particular, and, under the pretext of his paying, led the two widows into expensive living—had not contributed a farthing. Neither his mother nor Mme. Descoings would remind him of his promise, out of delicate feeling. The year went by, and not one of the crown pieces, which Leon Gozlan picturesquely calls a tiger with five claws, had passed from Philippe's pocket to the housekeeping. On this point, to be sure, the colonel had silenced his scruples of conscience: he rarely dined at home.

"And, after all, he is happy," said his mother. "He is easy, he has an appointment."

Through the influence of the theatrical articles, written by Vernon, a friend of Bixiou's, of Finot's, and Giroudeau's, Mariette came out; not indeed at the Panorama-Dramatique, but at the Porte Saint-Martin, where she was a success even by the side of Bégrand. Among the directors of that theater there was just then a wealthy and luxurious general, who, being in love with an actress, had become an impresario for her sake. There are always in Paris men in love with some actress, dancer, or singer, who make themselves theatrical managers for love's sake. This general knew Philippe and Giroudeau. By the help of the two newspapers, Finot's and Philippe's, Mariette's début was arranged by the three officers, with all the greater ease because, as it would seem, such passions are always reciprocally helpful in matters of folly.

Bixiou, ever mischievous, had soon told his grandmother and the pious Agathe that Philippe the cashier, the bravest of the brave, was the lover of Mariette the famous dancer at the Porte Saint-Martin. The stale news fell like a thunder-clap on the two widows. In the first place, Agathe's religious sentiments made her look on the women of the stage as brands of hell, and then they both believed that such women ate gold, drank pearls, and devoured the finest fortunes.

"Why!" said Joseph to his mother, "do you suppose that Philippe would be such a fool as to give any money to Mariette? Such women only ruin rich men."

"There is a talk already of securing Mariette at the Opera-house," said Bixiou. "But don't be alarmed, Mme. Bridau; the corps diplomatique haunts the Porte Saint-Martin, and that handsome girl will soon throw over your son. They say there is an ambassador who is desperately in love with Mariette.—There is some other news. Old Claparon is dead, and is to be buried to-morrow; and his son, who is a banker, and rolling in gold and silver, has ordered a third-class funeral. The fellow has no breeding. Such a thing could not happen in China!"

Philippe, with an eye to profit, proposed to marry the dancer; but being on the eve of an engagement at the Opera, Mlle. Godeschal refused him, either because she guessed the colonel's motive, or because she understood that independence was necessary to her fortunes.

Throughout the remainder of this year Philippe came to see his mother twice a month at most. Where was he? At his office, at the theater, or with Mariette. No light was shed on his proceedings in the home in the Rue Mazarine.

Giroudeau, Finot, Bixiou, Vernon, and Lousteau saw him leading a life of pleasure. Philippe was at every party given by Tullia, one of the first singers at the Opera; by Florentine, who took Mariette's place at the Porte Saint-Martin; by Florine and Matifat, Coralie and Camusot. From four o'clock, when he left his office, he amused himself till midnight; for there was always some play arranged the day before, a good dinner given by somebody, an evening at cards, or a supper-party. Philippe lived in his element.

But this carnival, which lasted for eighteen months, was not devoid of cares. The fair Mariette on her début at the Opera, in January 1821, subjugated one of the most brilliant dukes of Louis XVIII's court. Philippe tried to hold his own against the duke; but, notwithstanding some luck at the gaming-table, as the month of April came round his passion compelled him to borrow from the cash-box of the newspaper. In the month of May he owed eleven thousand francs. In the course of that fatal month Mariette went to London, to make what she might out of the milords, while the temporary Opera-house was being built in the Rue Le Pelletier. Philippe the ill-starred still loved Mariette in spite of her flagrant infidelities—such things happen; she, on her part, had never seen anything in him but a rough and brainless soldier, the first rung of the ladder, on which she did not mean to stay long. Also, as she had foreseen the day when Philippe would have no more money, the dancer had been clever enough to secure supporters among journalists, which made it unnecessary for her to cling to Philippe; still, she felt the gratitude peculiar to women of her stamp to the man who had been the first to level the obstacles in the dreadful career of an actress.

Philippe, thus obliged to let his terrible mistress go to London without being able to follow her, returned to his winter quarters, to use his own expression, and came home to his attic in the Rue Mazarine; there he made many gloomy reflections as he went to bed and got up again. He felt it impossible to live otherwise than as he had been living for this year past. The luxury of Mariette's life, the dinners and suppers, the evenings spent behind the scenes, the high spirits of wits and journalists, the turmoil he had lived in, and all the flattering effect on his senses and on his vanity,—this existence, which is to be found only in Paris, and which offers some new sensation every day, had become more than a habit to Philippe; it was a necessity, like tobacco and drams. Indeed, he plainly perceived that he could not live without this constant enjoyment.

The idea of suicide passed through his mind, not on account of the deficit which would be discovered in his balance, but by reason of the impossibility of being with Mariette and living in the atmosphere of pleasures in which he had wallowed for the last twelvemonth. Full of these gloomy notions, he made his appearance, for the first time, in his brother's studio, and found Joseph at work, in a blue blouse, copying a picture for a dealer.

"So that is the way pictures are made?" said Philippe as an opening.

"No," said Joseph, "but that is the way they are copied."

"How much do you get for that?"

"Oh, never enough. Two hundred and fifty francs; but I study the master's method; I learn by it, I find out the secrets of the trade.—There is one of my pictures," he went on, pointing with the handle of his brush to a sketch of which the paint was still wet.

"And how much a year do you pocket now?"

"Unfortunately, I am as yet unknown excepting to the painters. Schinner is giving me a helping hand; he is to get me some work at the château de Presles, where I am going in October to paint some arabesques and borders and ornaments for the Comte de Sérizy, who pays very well. With pot-boilers like this, dealers' orders, I may make eighteen hundred to two thousand francs before long, all clear profit. But I shall send that picture in to the next exhibition; if it is liked, I am a made man. My friends think well of it."

"I am no judge," said Philippe in a quiet tone, which made Joseph look up at him.

"What is the matter?" he asked, seeing his brother look pale.

"I want to know how long it would take you to paint my portrait."

"Well, if I worked at nothing else, and the light were good, I could do it in three or four days."

"That is too long. I can only give you a day. My poor mother is so fond of me that I should wish to leave her my likeness. But say no more about it."

"Why, are you going away again?"

"Going, never to return," said Philippe with affected cheerfulness.

"Come, Philippe, my dear fellow, what ails you? If it is anything serious, I am a man, and I am not a simpleton. I am preparing for a hard struggle, and if discretion is needed I can hold my tongue."

"Can I rely upon it?"

"On my honor."

"You will never say a word to any living being?"

"Never."

"Well, then, I am going to blow my brains out."

"What, are you going to fight a duel?"

"I am going to kill myself."

"Why?"

"I have taken eleven thousand francs out of the cash-box, and I must give in my accounts to-morrow; my deposit-money will be diminished by half; my poor mother will be reduced to six hundred francs a year. That, after all, is nothing; I might be able later to give her back a fortune. But I am disgraced; I will not live disgraced."

"You will not be disgraced if you pay; but you will lose your place; you will have nothing left but the five hundred francs pension attached to your Cross. Still, you can live on five hundred francs."

"Good-by," cried Philippe, who hurried downstairs, and would not listen.

Joseph left his work, and went down to join his mother at breakfast; but Philippe's confession had spoiled his appetite. He took Mme. Descoings aside, and told her the dreadful news. The old woman gave a loud cry of dismay, dropped a pipkin full of milk that she had in her hand, and sank on to a chair. Agathe hurried in. With one exclamation and another, the fatal facts were told to the mother.

"He? To fail in honesty! Bridau's son has taken money that was intrusted to his keeping!"

The widow was trembling in every limb; her eyes seemed to grow larger in a fixed stare; she sat down, and burst into tears.

"Where is he?" she cried between her sobs. "Perhaps he has thrown himself into the Seine!"

"You must not despair," said Mme. Descoings, "because the poor boy has come in the way of a bad woman, and she made a fool of him. Dear me; that often happens! Until he came home Philippe had been so constantly unlucky, he had so few chances of being happy and loved, that we need not wonder at his passion for this creature. All passions lead to excess. I have something of the kind in my life for which I blame myself, and yet I think myself an honest woman. One fault does not constitute a vice! Besides, after all, only those who do nothing at all never make any mistakes."

Agathe was so overwhelmed by despair that the old lady and Joseph were obliged to make light of Philippe's crime by telling her that such things occur in every family.

"But he is eight-and-twenty," cried Agathe; "he is no longer a child!" a cry of anguish betraying what the poor woman thought of her son's conduct.

"I assure you, mother, that he thinks of nothing but your grief and the wrong he has done," said Joseph.

"Oh, great God! Bring him back. Only let him live, and I will forgive him all!" cried the poor mother, who in fancy beheld a horrible picture of Philippe dragged dead out of the river.

For some minutes awful silence reigned. The day was spent in dreadful suspense. All three flew to the sitting-room window at the least noise, and gave themselves up to endless conjectures.

While his family were in this despair, Philippe was calmly setting everything in order in his office. He had the impudence to hand in his accounts, saying that, for fear of mischance, he had kept eleven thousand francs at his lodgings. The rascal left at four o'clock, taking five hundred francs more from the cash-box, and coolly went up to the gambling tables, where he had not been seen since his appointment, for he had at least understood that a cashier must not frequent a gambling hell. His subsequent conduct will show that he resembled his grandfather Rouget rather than his admirable father. He might perhaps have made a good general; but in private life he was one of those deep-dyed scoundrels who shelter their audacity and their evil deeds behind the screen of strict legality, and under the reticence of the family roof.

Philippe was perfectly calm during this critical venture. At first he won, and picked up as much as six thousand francs; but he let himself be dazzled by the hope of ending his anxieties at one stroke. He left the game of trente-et-quarante on hearing that at the roulette table there had been a run of sixteen on the black; he staked five thousand francs on the red, and black turned up again for the seventeenth time. The colonel then staked his remaining thousand francs on the black, and won. Notwithstanding this astonishing intuition of the chances, his head was not clear; he felt this, and yet he would go on; but the spirit of divination which guides players, enlightening them by flashes, was already exhausted. It was now intermittent—the gamester's ruin. Intuition, like the rays of the sun, acts only in an inflexibly straight line; it can guess right only on condition of never diverting its gaze; the freaks of chance disturb it. Philippe lost everything. After so severe an ordeal the most reckless spirit or the boldest must collapse.

As he went home Philippe thought the less of his promise to kill himself, because he had never really meant it. He had forgotten his lost appointment, his impaired deposit-money, his mother, and Mariette—the cause of his ruin: he walked on mechanically. When he went in, his mother, bathed in tears, Mme. Descoings, and Joseph threw their arms round his neck, hugged him, and led him rejoicing to a seat by the fire.

"Good!" thought he; "the announcement has had its effect."

The wretch put on an appropriately dolorous face, with all the more ease because his evening's play had considerably upset him. On seeing her atrocious Benjamin pale and dejected, his mother knelt down by him, kissing his hands, pressing them to her heart, and looking long in his face with her eyes full of tears.

"Philippe," she said in a choked voice, "promise not to kill yourself; we will forget everything."

Philippe looked at his unnerved brother, at Mme. Descoings with a tear in her eye, and he said to himself, "They are good souls!" Then he lifted up his mother, seated her on his knee, clasped her to his heart, and whispered as he kissed her, "You have given me new life!"

Mme. Descoings contrived to produce a very good dinner, adding a couple of bottles of old wine and a little West Indian liqueur, a treasure remaining from her former stock-in-trade.

"Agathe, we must let him smoke his cigars," said she at dessert. And she handed Philippe some cigars.

The two poor souls believed that by giving this fellow every comfort he would learn to love his home and stay there, and they tried to accustom themselves to tobacco smoke, which they abominated. This immense sacrifice was not even suspected by Philippe.

Next day Agathe had aged by ten years. Her alarms once relieved, reflection followed, and the poor woman had not closed an eye throughout that dreadful night. She was now reduced to an income of six hundred francs. Mme. Descoings, like all fat women who love good eating, had an obstinate catarrh and cough, and was growing heavy; her step on the stairs sounded like a pavior's hammer, she might die at a moment's notice, and four thousand francs would perish with her. Was it not preposterous to count on that source of supply? What was to be done? What would become of her? Agathe, resolved to be a sick-nurse rather than to be a burden on her children, was not thinking of herself. But what would Philippe do, reduced to his five hundred francs of pension attached to the Cross of the Legion of Honor?

By contributing a thousand crowns a year for the last eleven years, Mme. Descoings had more than twice repaid her debt, and she was still sacrificing her grandson's interests to those of the Bridau family. Agathe, though all her strict and honest sentiments were outraged, in the midst of this dire disaster still could ask herself as she thought of her son, "Poor boy, could he help it? He is faithful to his oath as a soldier. It is my fault for not getting him married. If I had found him a wife, he would not have formed a connection with this dancer. He has such a strong nature! . . ."

The old tradeswoman, too, had reflected during the night as to the means of saving the honor of the family. At daybreak she got out of bed, and crept to her friend's room.

"It is not your part, nor Philippe's, to manage this delicate matter," said she. "Though our two old friends, Claparon and du Bruel, are dead, we still have old M. Desroches, who has good judgment, and I will go to him this morning. Desroches must report that Philippe has been the victim of his confidence in a friend, and that his weakness in such cases quite unfits him for the post of cashier. What has happened once may happen again: Philippe prefers to retire, thus he will not be dismissed."

Agathe, seeing in this official lie a cloak for Philippe's honor, at any rate in the eyes of strangers, embraced the old lady, who went out to settle the dreadful business. Philippe had slept the sleep of the just.

"She is a sharp one!" said he with a smile, when Agathe explained to her son why breakfast was late.

Old Desroches, the last friend left to these two poor women, still remembered, in spite of his hard nature, that it was Bridau who had given him his place, and he executed the delicate task proposed to him with the skill of an accomplished diplomat. He came to dine with the family, and to remind Agathe that she must go on the morrow to the Treasury in the Rue Vivienne to sign the transfer of the securities to be sold, and take out the coupons for six hundred francs, her remaining dividends. The old man did not leave this hapless household till he had obtained Philippe's signature to a petition to the Minister of War begging to be reinstated in active service. Desroches pledged his word to the two women that he would forward the petition through the departments of the War Office, and take advantage of the Duke's triumph over Philippe with the dancer to secure that great man's interest.

"Within three months he will be lieutenant-colonel in the Duc de Maufrigneuse's regiment, and you will be rid of him."

Desroches went home loaded with blessings by the two women and Joseph.

As to the newspaper, as Finot had prophesied, two months later it had ceased to appear. Thus, to the world, Philippe's defalcation had no results. But Agathe's motherly feeling had been deeply wounded. Her belief in her son once shaken, she lived in perpetual terrors, mitigated by satisfaction when she found that her sinister anticipations were unfounded.

When men like Philippe, gifted with personal courage, but moral cowards and sneaks, see the course of affairs around them following its usual channel after a plunge in which their moral status has almost perished, this acceptance of the situation by their family or friends is an encouragement. They are sure of impunity; their perverted mind, their gratified passions, lead them to consider how they succeeded in evading the social law, and they become atrociously clever. Thus, a fortnight after, Philippe, once more an idle man and a lounger, inevitably returned to the life of cafés, to his sittings relieved by drams, his long games of billiards with punch, his nightly visit to the gaming-tables, where he risked a small stake at a lucky moment, and pocketed such little winnings as sufficed to pay for his dissipations. He made a display of economy to deceive his mother and her friend, wore an almost filthy hat, hairless at the edges of the crown and brim, patched boots, a threadbare greatcoat, on which the red rosette scarcely showed, so darkened was it by long wear and soiled with splashes of spirits or of coffee. His greenish buckskin gloves lasted a long time, and he never cast off his satin stock till it looked like tow.

Mariette was this man's only love, and the dancer's faithlessness did much to harden his heart. Now and then, when he won more than he expected, or if he were supping with his friend Giroudeau, Philippe would court a Venus of the street, out of a sort of brutal scorn for all her sex. Still, he kept regular hours, breakfasted and dined at home, and came in every night at about one. Three months of this wretched life restored Agathe to some little confidence.

As for Joseph, who was at work on the splendid picture to which he owed his reputation, he lived in his studio. On the word of her grandson, who firmly believed in Joseph's triumph, Mme. Descoings lavished maternal care on the painter; she carried up his breakfast in the morning, ran his errands, blacked his boots. The artist never appeared till dinner-time, and gave his evenings to his friends of the Artistic Society. He also read a great deal; he was giving himself the thorough and serious education which a man gets only from himself, and which every man of talent does, in fact, give himself between the ages of twenty and thirty. Agathe, seeing so little of Joseph, and feeling no uneasiness about him, lived in Philippe only, since he alone gave her those alternations of rising fears and terrors allayed which are, to a certain extent, the very life of feeling, and as necessary to motherhood as love is.

Desroches, who came about once a week to call on the widow of his old friend and chief, could give her hopes: the Duc de Maufrigneuse had applied for Philippe to be appointed to his regiment, the War Minister had asked for a report; and as the name of Bridau was not to be found on any police-list or in any criminal trial, in the early part of the year Philippe would get his papers and orders to join. To succeed in this matter, Desroches had stirred up all his acquaintances; his inquiries at the head-office of the police led to his hearing that Philippe was to be seen every night in the gaming-houses; and he thought it wise to communicate the secret to Mme. Descoings, but to her alone, begging her to keep an eye on the future lieutenant-colonel, to whom any scandal might be ruin; for the moment, the War Minister would not be likely to ask whether Philippe were a gambler. And once enrolled under the regimental flag, the officer would give up a passion that was the result of want of occupation.

Agathe, who now had no company in the evening, read her prayers by the fire; while Mme. Descoings read her fortune by the cards, interpreting her dreams, and applying the rules of the *Cabala* to her stakes. The lighthearted and obstinate old woman never missed a drawing of lottery-tickets; she still staked on the same three numbers which had never yet been drawn. This set of numbers was now nearly twenty-one years old—it would soon be of age. Its holder based high hopes on this trivial fact. One of the numbers had never come out at any drawing of either of the wheels ever since the lottery was founded, so she staked heavily on this number, and on every combination of the three figures. The bottom mattress of her bed was the hiding-place for the poor old creature's savings; she unsewed it, pushed in the gold piece she had saved on her necessities, neatly wrapped in wool, and sewed it up again. She was resolved, at the last Paris drawing, to risk all her savings on the combinations of her cherished three numbers.

This passion, universally condemned, has never been duly studied. No one has understood this opium to poverty. Did not the lottery, the most puissant fairy in the world, give rise to magical hopes? The turn at roulette, which gives the player a vision of limitless gold and enjoyments, only lasted as long as a lightning flash; while the lottery gave five days of life to that glorious gleam. What social power can, in these days, make you happy for five days, and bestow on you in fancy all the delights of civilized life—for forty sous? Tobacco, a mania a thousand times more mischievous than gambling, destroys the body, undermines the intellect, stupefies the nation; the lottery caused no misfortunes of that kind. The passion was compelled to moderation by the interval between the drawings, and by the particular wheel the ticket-holder might affect. Mme. Descoings never staked on any but the Paris wheel. In the hope of seeing the three numbers drawn which she had kept in hand for twenty years, she had subjected herself to the greatest privations to enable her to stake freely on the last drawing of the year.

When she had cabalistic dreams—for all her dreams did not bear on the numbers of the lottery—she would go and tell them to Joseph; he was the only being who would listen to her, not merely without scolding her, but saying the kindly words by which artists can soothe a monomania. All really great minds respect and sympathize with genuine passions; they understand them, finding their root in the heart or the brain. As Joseph saw things, his brother loved tobacco and spirits, his old Maman Descoings loved lottery-tickets, his mother loved God, young Desroches loved lawsuits, old Desroches loved fly-fishing; everyone, said he, loves something. What he loved was ideal beauty in all things; he loved Byron's poetry, Géricault's painting, Rossini's music, Walter Scott's romances.

"Every man to his taste, maman," he would say, "but your three-pounder hangs fire."

"It will not miss. You shall be a rich man, and my little Bixiou as well!"

"Give it all to your grandson," cried Joseph. "After all, do you as you please."

"Oh, if it comes out, I shall have enough for everybody. To begin with, you shall have a fine studio; you shall not have to give up going to the Opera in order to pay your models and colormen.—Do you know, child," she went on, "that you have not given me a very creditable part in that picture of yours?"

Joseph, from motives of economy, had used Mme. Descoings as the model for a head in his splendid painting of a young courtesan introduced by an old woman to a Venetian senator. This work, a masterpiece of modern art, mistaken for a Titian by Gros himself, prepared the younger painters to recognize and proclaim Joseph's superiority in the Salon of 1823.

"Those who know you, know well what you are," said he gayly, "and why should you care about those who do not know you?"

In the last ten years the old woman's face had acquired the mellow tone of an Easter pippin. Her wrinkles had become set in the full flesh that had grown cold and pulpy. Her eyes, full of sparkle still, seemed animated by a youthful and eager thought, which might the more easily be regarded as one of greed, because there is always some little greed in a gambler. Her plump features betrayed deep dissimulation, and a dominant idea buried far down in her heart. Her passion required secretiveness. The movement of her lips gave a hint of gluttony. Thus, though she was in fact the worthy and kindhearted woman we have seen, the eye might be mistaken in her. She was a perfect model for the old woman Joseph wished to represent.

Coralie, a young actress of exquisite beauty, who died in the bloom of her youth, the mistress of a friend of Bridau's, Lucien de Rubempré, a young poet, had given him the idea of this subject. This fine work was sometimes called an imitation, but it was a splendid scene as a setting for three portraits. Michel Chrestien, a youthful member of the Artistic Society, had lent his Republican countenance as a model for the senator, and Joseph gave it some touches of maturity, as he slightly exaggerated the expression of Mme. Descoings's face.

This great picture, which was to become so famous, and to give rise to so much animosity, jealousy, and admiration, was only begun; Joseph, compelled to suspend his work on it, and to execute commissions for a living, was busy copying pictures by the old masters, thus studying all their methods; no painter handles his brush more learnedly. His good sense as an artist had counseled him to conceal from Mme. Descoings and from his mother the amount of money he was beginning to make, seeing that each had a road to ruin—one in Philippe, and the other in the lottery. The peculiar coolness shown by the soldier in his downfall, the way in which he had counted on his pretended purpose of suicide—which Joseph had seen through—the mistakes he had made in the career he ought never to have abandoned, in short, the smallest details of his conduct, had at last opened Joseph's eyes.

Such insight is rarely lacking in painters. Occupied day after day in the silence of the studio, in work which leaves the mind, to a certain extent, free, they grow in some sort womanly; their thoughts wander round the small facts of life, and detect their covert meaning.

Joseph had bought a fine old cabinet—they were yet the fashion—to decorate a corner of his studio, where the light played on the panels in relief, and gave luster to a masterpiece of some sixteenth-century craftsman. Inside it he found a secret drawer, where he hoarded a small sum in case of need. With the easy trustfulness of an artist, he was accustomed to keep the cash he allowed himself for pocket-money in a skull that lay on one of the divisions of this cabinet; but, since his brother's return, he found a constant discrepancy between the sums he spent and the balance left. The hundred francs a month melted with extraordinary rapidity. On finding nothing when he had spent but forty or fifty francs, the first time he said to himself, "My money has gone traveling post, it would seem!" The next time he carefully noted his expenses; but in vain did he count, like Robert Macaire, "Sixteen and five make twenty-three," it would not come right.

On finding it a third time still more seriously wrong, he mentioned the painful subject to his Maman Descoings, who loved him, as he felt, with that maternal affection, tender, trusting, credulous, and enthusiastic, which his mother did not feel, however kind she might be, and which is as needful to an artist at the opening of his career as a hen's care is to her chicks till they are fledged. To her only could he confide his horrible suspicions. He was as sure of his friends as of himself; Mme. Descoings would certainly never take anything to risk in the lottery; and the poor soul wrung her hands at the thought as he said, "Only Philippe could commit this petty household theft."

"Why does not he ask me for what he wants?" exclaimed Joseph, mixing the paints on his palette in utter confusion of colors, without heeding what he was doing. "Should I refuse to give him money?"

"But it is robbing an infant!" cried the old woman, with horror expressed in her face.

"No," replied Joseph, "he can have it; he is my brother; my purse is his; but he ought to ask me."

"Place a fixed sum of money there this morning and don't touch it," said Mme. Descoings; "I shall know who comes to the studio, and if nobody comes in but Philippe you will know for certain."

Thus, by next day, Joseph had proof of the forced loans levied on him by his brother. Philippe came up to the studio in his brother's absence and took the little cash he needed. The artist feared for his little hoard.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, I will catch you out, my fine rascal!" said he to Mme. Descoings with a laugh.

"Quite right; we ought to punish him, for I have found a deficit occasionally in my own purse. But, poor boy, he must have his tobacco; he has made a habit of it."

"Poor boy! and poor boy indeed!" retorted the artist. "I am beginning to agree with Fulgence and Bixiou—Philippe is always dragging at us. First he gets mixed up in a riot, and has to be sent to America, and that costs my mother twelve thousand francs; then he has not the wit to find anything in the wilds of the New World, and it costs just as much to get him home again; under the pretext of having repeated two words from Napoleon to a general, he believes himself a great soldier, and bound to sulk with the Bourbons; meanwhile he can travel, and amuse himself, and see the world! I am not to be caught with such bird-lime as the story of his woes; he does not look like a man who has not made himself comfortable wherever he was!

"Then my fine fellow has a capital place found for him; he lives like Sardanapalus with an opera girl, robs the till of a newspaper, and costs his mother another twelve thousand francs. Certainly, so far as I am concerned, what need I care? But Philippe will bring the poor mother to want. He treats me like the dirt under his feet because I never was in the Dragoon Guards! And it will be my part, perhaps, to maintain that poor dear mother in her old age, while, if he goes on as he has begun, the retired officer will end I don't know where.

"Bixiou said to me, 'Your brother is a nice rogue!' Well, your grandson is right; Philippe will play some reckless trick yet that will compromise the honor of the family, and then there will be ten or twelve thousand francs more to pay! He gambles every evening; when he comes in as drunk as a lord he drops pricked cards on the stairs, on which he has noted the turns of red and black. Old Desroches is doing all he can to get Philippe reinstated in the army; but, for my part, I believe he would be in despair at having to serve again. Could you have believed that a boy with such beautiful clear blue eyes, and a look like the Chevalier Bayard, would ever have turned out such a scoundrel?"

Notwithstanding the caution and coolness with which Philippe staked his money every evening, he was occasionally cleaned out, as players say. Then, prompted by an irresistible craving to have his stake for the evening, ten francs, he helped himself in the house to his brother's money, to any Mme. Descoings might leave about, or to his mother's. Once already the poor widow had seen through her first sleep a terrible vision: Philippe had come into her room and emptied the pocket of her dress of all the money in it. She had pretended to be asleep, but she had spent the rest of that night in tears. She saw the truth. "One fault does not constitute a vice," Mme. Descoings had said; but after constant lapses the vice was plainly visible. Agathe could no longer doubt; her best-beloved son had neither feeling nor honor.

The day after this dreadful vision, before Philippe went out after breakfast, she called him into her room and besought him in suppliant tones to ask her for the money he should need. But his demands became so frequent that now, for above a fortnight, Agathe's savings had been exhausted. She had not a farthing; she thought of seeking work. For several evenings she had discussed with Mme. Descoings the means of making money by her needle; indeed, the poor mother had already asked at a shop—Le Père de Famille—for fancy-work to fill in, an employment by which she might earn about a franc a day. In spite of her niece's absolute secrecy, the old woman had easily guessed the reasons for this eagerness to make money by such feminine arts. Indeed, the change in Agathe's appearance was sufficiently eloquent; her fresh complexion was faded, the skin was drawn over the temples and cheekbones, her forehead was seamed, her eyes lost their luster, some inward fire was evidently consuming her, and she spent the night in tears.

But what most deeply ravaged her was the necessity for silence as to her pain, her anxieties, and her apprehensions. She never went to sleep till Philippe had come in; she listened for him in the street; she had studied the differences in his voice, in his step, in the very tone of his cane rattling on the paving-stones. She knew everything, exactly the degree of intoxication that he had reached, quaking as she heard him stumble on the stairs. One night she had picked up some gold pieces on the spot where he had let himself fall. When he had drunk and won, his voice was husky and his stick dragged; but when he had lost, there was something short, crisp, and furious in his footstep; he would sing a tune in a clear voice, and carry his cane shouldered like a musket. At breakfast, if he had been winning, his expression was cheerful and almost affectionate; he jested coarsely, still he jested, with Mme. Descoings, with Joseph, and his mother; if he had lost, on the contrary, he was morose, his speech was curt and sharp, his gaze hard, and his gloom quite alarming.

This life of debauchery and the habit of drink left their mark day by day on the countenance that had once been so handsome. The veins in his face were purple, his features grew thick, his eyes lost their lashes, and looked dry. And then Philippe, careless of his person, carried with him the miasma of smoke and spirits, and a smell of muddy boots, which to a stranger would have seemed the last stamp of squalor.

"You ought to have a complete new suit of clothes from head to foot," said Mme. Descoings to Philippe one day early in December.

"And who is to pay for them?" said he bitterly. "My poor mother has not a sou; I have five hundred francs a year. It would cost a year's pension to buy me an outfit, and I have pledged it for three years to come . . ."

"What for?" said Joseph.

"A debt of honor. Giroudeau borrowed a thousand francs from Florentine to lend to me.—I am not well got up, it must be confessed; but when you remember that Napoleon is at St. Helena, and sells his plate to buy food, the soldiers that remain faithful to him may very well walk in boot-tops," said he, showing his boots without heels, and he walked off.

"He is not a bad fellow," said Agathe; "he has good feelings."

"He may love the Emperor and still keep himself clean," said Joseph. "If he took some care of himself and his clothes, he would look less like a tramp."

"Joseph, you ought to be indulgent to your brother," said Agathe. "You can do just what you like, while he certainly is out of his place."

"And why did he leave it?" asked Joseph. "What does it matter whether the flag shows Louis XVIII.'s bugs or Napoleon's cockyoly bird if the bunting flies for France? France is France! I would paint for the Devil. A soldier ought to fight, if he is a soldier, for love of the art. If he had stayed quietly in the army, by this time he would be a general."

"You are unjust," said Agathe. "Your father, who adored the Emperor, would have approved of what he did.

However, he agrees to rejoin the army. God alone knows what it costs your brother to commit what he considers an act of treason."

Joseph rose to go up to his studio; but Agathe took his hand, saying—

"Be good to your brother; he is so unfortunate."

When the artist entered his studio, followed by Mme. Descoings, who begged him to spare his mother's feelings, remarking how much she was altered, and what acute mental suffering this alteration betrayed, they found Philippe there, to their great surprise.

"Joseph, my boy," said he in an airy way, "I am desperately in want of money. By the piper! I owe thirty francs for cigars at the tobacconist's, and I dare not pass the cursed shop without paying. I have promised to pay at least ten times."

"All right! I like this way best," said Joseph. "Take it out of the death's head."

"Oh, I took all that last night after dinner."

"There were forty-five francs——"

"That is just what I made it," replied Philippe. "I found them there. Was that wrong?" he asked.

"No, my dear fellow, no," said the artist. "If you were rich, I should do as you do; only, before helping myself, I should ask if it were convenient to you."

"It is very humiliating to have to ask," replied Philippe. "I would sooner you should take it as I do, and say nothing. It shows more confidence. In the army, when a comrade dies, if he has a good pair of boots and you have a bad pair, you exchange with him."

"Yes, but you don't take them while he is alive!"

"A mere quibble!" retorted Philippe with a shrug. "So you have no money?"

"No," said Joseph, determined not to show his hoard.

"In a few days we shall all be rich," said the old woman.

"Oh yes! You really believe that your three numbers will come out on the 25th at the Paris drawing! You must put in a large stake if you mean to make us all rich."

"A natural ternion for two hundred francs will bring out three millions, to say nothing of the doublets and the single drawings."

"At fifteen thousand times the stake—yes, it is exactly two hundred francs!" cried Philippe.

The old woman bit her lip; she had dropped an imprudent hint.

In fact, as he went downstairs, Philippe was asking himself:—

"Where has that old witch hidden the money for her lottery tickets? It is sheer waste of money, and I could make such good use of it! On four stakes of fifty francs each I might make two hundred thousand francs. And it is far more certain than the drawing of three numbers in a lottery!"

He wondered where Mme. Descoings would be likely to hide her hoard.

On the eve of the great Church Festivals, Agathe always went to church and stayed there a long time, at confession no doubt, and in preparing for Communion. It was now Christmas Eve. Mme. Descoings would certainly go out to buy some extra treat for supper, but perhaps she would pay for her ticket at the same time. The lottery was drawn every five days, on the wheels, in turn, of Bordeaux, Lyons, Lille, Strasbourg, and Paris. The Paris drawing took place on the 25th of each month; the lists were closed at midnight on the 24th. The soldier studied the case, and set himself to watch.

At about noon Philippe came in. Mme. Descoings was gone out, but she had taken the door-key. This was no difficulty. Philippe, saying that he had forgotten something, begged the woman at the lodge to go to fetch a locksmith, who lived close by in the Rue Guénégaud, and who opened the door. Philippe's first idea was to search the bed; he unmade it, felt the mattresses before examining the frame, and in the bottom mattress he felt the gold pieces wrapped in paper. He had soon unsewn the ticking and picked out twenty napoleons; then, without wasting time in sewing it up again, he remade the bed neatly enough to prevent the old woman's observing anything wrong.

The gambler made off on a light foot, intending to play three times, at intervals of three hours, and for ten minutes only each time. The great gamblers, ever since 1786, when the gambling-houses were first opened, the formidable gamblers who were the terror of the bank, and who fairly ate money at the tables, to use the familiar expression in such places, never played by any other rule. But before achieving this experience they lost fortunes. All the philosophy of those who farmed the concern and all their profit was derived from the rules; from the non-liability of the bank; from ties called draws, of which half the winnings remained in its possession; and from the villainous fraud authorized by the State, which made it optional to take or reject the players' stakes. In a word, the bank, while refusing to play with a rich and cool hand, devoured the whole fortune of any player who was so persistently foolish as to allow himself to be intoxicated by the rapid whirl of its machinery, for the dealers at trente-et-quarante worked almost as fast as the roulette could.

Philippe had at last succeeded in acquiring that presence of mind which enables a commander-in-chief to keep a keen eye and a calm brain in the midst of the whirligig of things. He had achieved those high politics of gambling which, it may be said incidentally, enabled a thousand men in Paris to look night after night into a gulf without turning giddy.

With these four hundred francs Philippe was determined to make his fortune in the course of the day. He hid two hundred francs in his boots, and kept two hundred in his pocket. By three o'clock he was at the gambling-house, where the Palais-Royal theater now stands, where the bankers commonly held the largest reserve. Half an hour after he came out, having won seven thousand francs. He went to see Florentine, paid her five hundred francs that he owed her, and invited her to supper after the play at the Rocher de Cancale. On his way back, he went through the Rue du Sentier to tell his friend Giroudeau of the projected festivity.

At six o'clock Philippe had won twenty-five thousand francs, and at the end of ten minutes kept his word to himself and went away. In the evening, at ten, he had won seventy-five thousand francs. After the supper, which was splendid, Philippe, drunk and confident, returned to the tables at about midnight. Then, against the rule he had made, he played for an hour and doubled his winnings. The bank, from whom his mode of play had wrung a hundred and fifty thousand francs, watched him with curiosity.

"Will he go away, or will he stay?" the men asked each other by a glance. "If he stays, he is done for."

Philippe believed that luck was with him, and stayed. At three in the morning the hundred and fifty thousand francs had returned to the cash-box.

The colonel, who had drunk a good deal of grog while playing, went out in a state of intoxication, which the nipping cold aggravated to the utmost; but a waiter followed him, picked him up, and carried him to one of the horrible places where, inscribed on a lamp, the notice may be read, "Beds by the night." The waiter paid for the ruined gambler, who was laid on a bed in his clothes, and remained there till Christmas night. The managers of the gambling-houses treated regular customers and high players with respect.

Philippe did not wake till seven that evening, his mouth furred, his face swelled, and racked with nervous fever. His strong constitution enabled him to get on foot to his mother's home, whither he had unwittingly brought sorrow, despair, ruin, and death.

The day before, when dinner was ready, Mme. Descoings and Agathe waited two hours for Philippe. They did not sit down till seven o'clock. Agathe almost always went to her room at ten; but as she wished to attend midnight mass, she went to lie down directly after dinner. The old aunt and Joseph remained together in the little sitting-room which now served all purposes, and she begged him to work out the sum of her much-talked-of stake, her monster stake on the famous ternion. She meant to go for the double numbers and first drawings, so as to combine all the chances. After smacking her lips over the poetry of this master-stroke, and pouring out both cornucopias at the feet of her adopted favorite; after telling him all her dreams, proving that she could not fail to win, wondering only how she should endure such good fortune, or wait for it from midnight till ten next morning, Joseph, who did not see where the four hundred francs were to come from, mentioned the matter. The old woman smiled and led him into the old drawing-room, now her bedroom.

"You will see!" said she.

Mme. Descoings hastily stripped her bed, and went for her scissors to unstitch the mattress; she put on her spectacles, looked at the ticking, and found it unsewn. On hearing the old woman heave a sigh that came from the depths of her bosom, and seemed choked by the blood rushing to her heart, Joseph instinctively held out his arms to the poor old lottery-gambler, and laid her senseless on a chair, calling to his mother to come. Agathe sprang up, put on her dressing-gown, and hurried in; by the light of a tallow candle she applied every common remedy for a fainting fit—eau de Cologne on her aunt's temples, cold water on her forehead, burned feathers under her nose; at last she saw her revive.

"They were there this morning; he has taken them—that wretch!"

"What?" asked Joseph.

"I had twenty louis in my mattress, my savings for two years. Only Philippe can have taken them . . ."

"But when?" cried the mother, quite crushed; "he has not been in since breakfast."

"I should be glad to be mistaken," said the old woman. "But this morning, in Joseph's studio, when I spoke of my stake in the lottery I had a warning. I was wrong not to go down and take out my little lucky-penny and put it into the lottery at once. I meant to do it, and I forget what hindered me.—Good God! And I went to buy cigars for him!"

"But," said Joseph, "our front-door was locked. Besides, it is so vile that I will not believe it. Philippe watched you out, unsewed your mattress, premeditated——! No."

"I felt them there this morning when I made my bed after breakfast," said Mme. Descoings.

Agathe, quite horror-stricken, went downstairs to ask whether her son had come in during the day, and the door-keeper told her Philippe's fable. The mother, struck to the heart, came up again completely altered. As white as her cotton shift, she walked as we fancy ghosts may walk, noiselessly, slowly, as if by the impulse of a superhuman power, and yet almost mechanically. She held a candle in her hand, which lighted up her face and her eyes fixed in despair. Without knowing it, she had pushed her hair over her brow with her hands, and this detail made her so beautiful in her horror that Joseph stood riveted by this image of anguish, this vision of a statue of terror and dejection.

"Aunt," said she, "take my spoons and forks; I have six sets, that will make up the sum, for it was I who took it for Philippe; I thought I could replace it before you should find it out. Oh! I have suffered——!"

She sat down. Her dry fixed gaze wavered a little then.

"It is he who has done the trick," said Mme. Descoings in an undertone to Joseph.

"No, no," repeated Agathe. "Take the silver, sell it; it is of no use to me; we can use yours."

She went into her room, took up the plate-box, found it very light, opened it, and saw a pawn-ticket. The poor mother gave a dreadful cry. Joseph and Mme. Descoings hastened in, glanced at the box, and the mother's heroic falsehood was in vain. They all three stood silent, avoiding even a glance. At that moment, with a gesture almost of madness, Agathe laid her finger on her lips to seal the secret which no one would divulge. Then all three went back to the sitting-room fire.

"I tell you, my children, I am heartbroken," said Mme. Descoings. "My numbers will be drawn, I am quite positive! I am not thinking of myself, but of you two!—Philippe is a monster," she went on, turning to her niece. "He does not love you, in spite of all you have done for him. If you do not find some means to protect yourself, the wretch will turn you into the street. Promise me to sell your stock, realize the capital, and sink it in an annuity. By taking that step you will never be a burden on Joseph. M. Desroches wants to set up his son in an office, and the boy" (he was now six-and-twenty) "has found one. He will take your twelve thousand francs and pay you an annuity."

Joseph seized his mother's candlestick and hurried up to the studio; he came down with three hundred francs.

"Here, Maman Descoings," said he, offering her his little hoard, "it is no business of ours to inquire what you do with your money; we owe you what is missing, and here it is—almost all of it."

"I!—take your little treasure, the result of your privations, which distress me so much! Are you mad, Joseph?" cried the old woman, evidently torn by her stupid belief in the luck of her numbers in the State lottery, and what seemed to her the sacrilege of such a proceeding.

"Oh! do what you will with it," said Agathe, moved to tears by this action of her true son's.

Mme. Descoings took Joseph's head in her hands and kissed his forehead.

"My child, do not tempt me," she said; "I should only lose it. The lottery is a fool's game!"

Never was anything so heroical said in any of the obscure dramas of private life. Was it not, in fact, the triumph of affection over an inveterate vice?

At this minute the bells began to toll for midnight mass.

"Besides, it is too late," added the old woman.

"Oh!" cried Joseph; "here are your cabalistic calculations."

The magnanimous artist seized the tickets, flew downstairs, and away to pay the stake. When he was gone, Agathe and Mme. Descoings melted into tears.

"He is gone!" exclaimed the old gambler. "But it will all be his, for it is his money."

Joseph, unluckily, did not in the least know where to find the lottery-ticket offices, which those who frequented them knew as well in Paris as, in these days, smokers know the tobacco shops. The painter rushed wildly on, looking at the lamp signs. When he asked someone he met to tell him where there was a lottery-office, he was told that they were closed, but that one by the steps of the Palais Royal sometimes remained open a little later. The artist flew to the Palais Royal; the office was shut.

"Two minutes sooner and you could have paid in your stake," said one of the ticket-criers who stood at the bottom of the steps, shouting these strange words, "Twelve hundred francs for forty sous!" and selling ready numbered tickets.

By the glimmer of a street lamp and the lights in the Café de la Rotonde, Joseph examined these tickets to see whether by chance either of them bore Mme. Descoings's pet numbers; but he could not find one, and returned home in grief at having done in vain all that lay in his power to please the old woman, to whom he related his disappointments.

Agathe and her aunt went off to mass at Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Joseph went to bed. No one kept Christmas Eve. Mme. Descoings had lost her head; Agathe's heart was forever broken.

The two women rose late. Ten o'clock was striking when Mme. Descoings bestirred herself to get breakfast, which was not ready till half-past eleven. By that time the long frames hanging outside the lottery-ticket offices showed an array of figures. If Mme. Descoings had had her ticket, she would have gone by half-past nine o'clock to the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs to learn her fate, which was decided in a house next door to the offices of the Minister of Finance, on a spot now occupied by the Square and the Ventadour theater.

Every time the lottery was drawn, the curious could see at the door of this building a posse of old women, cooks, and old men, who at that time constituted as strange a spectacle as that of the stockholders forming a cue on the day when dividends are paid at the Treasury.

"Well, so you are rolling in riches!" exclaimed old Desroches, coming in just as Mme. Descoings was swallowing her last mouthful of coffee.

"How?" cried poor Agathe.

"Her three numbers have come out," said he, holding out a list of numbers written on a scrap of paper, such as office clerks kept by the hundred in the paper-tray on their desks.

Joseph read the list. Agathe read the list. Mme. Descoings read nothing. She fell back as if stricken by lightning; seeing her face change and hearing her cry, old Desroches and Joseph carried her to her bed. Agathe went for a doctor. The poor woman had fallen in a fit of apoplexy, and she did not recover consciousness till about four in the afternoon. Old Dr. Haudry, her physician, pronounced that, notwithstanding this amelioration, she would do well to settle her affairs and think of her religious duties. She had uttered but two words, "Three millions!"

Old Desroches, to whom Joseph explained the circumstances with the necessary reservations, spoke of numbers of lottery-gamblers who had in the same way missed a fortune on the day when by some fatality they had failed to pay up their stakes; still, he understood how mortal a blow this must be after twenty years of perseverance.

At five o'clock, when perfect silence reigned in the little dwelling, and when the dying woman, watched by Joseph at the foot of her bed, and Agathe at her pillow, was expecting her grandson, whom Desroches had gone to seek, the sound of Philippe's step and walking-stick echoed on the stairs.

"There he is, there he is!" cried Mme. Descoings, sitting up in bed, and suddenly recovering the use of her paralyzed tongue.

Agathe and Joseph were impressed by the impulse of horror which so vehemently roused the sick woman. Their miserable expectations were wholly justified by Philippe's appearance: by his purple, vacant face, his uncertain gait, and the horrible look of his eyes with deep red rims, glazed and yet wild-looking; he was shivering violently with fever, and his teeth chattered.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed. "Neither bit nor sup, and my throat is on fire. Well, what's up now? The foul fiend puts his hoof in all that concerns us. My old Descoings in bed, and making eyes at me as big as saucers——"

"Be silent, sir," said Agathe, rising. "At least you may respect the misery you have caused."

"Hallo! *Sir?*" said he, looking at his mother. "My dear little mother, that is not kind; do you no longer love your boy?"

"Are you worthy to be loved? Have you forgotten what you did yesterday? You may look out for a lodging for yourself; you shall no longer live with me. From to-morrow," she added, " for in such a state as you are in it would be difficult——"

" To turn me out?—So you are going to play the melodrama of the Banished Son?" he went on. " Dear, dear! Is that how you take it? Well, you are all a pretty pack of owls! What harm have I done? Cleaned out the old woman's mattress for her. We don't keep money in wool, deuce take it.—And where is the crime? Did not she take twenty thousand francs, I should like to know? Are not we her creditors? I have taken so much on account; that's all."

" Oh, God! oh, God!" cried the dying woman, clasping her hands in prayer.

" Hold your tongue!" said Joseph, rushing at his brother and clapping his hand over his mouth.

" Right about face, half turn to the left, you dirty little painter!" replied Philippe, laying his heavy hand on Joseph's shoulder, turning him round, and landing him in an armchair. " That is not the way to meddle with the mustache of a major of Dragoons of the Imperial Guard."

" She has repaid me all she owed me," cried Agathe, rising and turning an angry face to her son. " Besides, that is nobody's business but mine. You are killing her. Go," she added with a gesture that exhausted all her force, " and never let me see you again. You are a villain!"

" I am killing her?"

" Yes; her numbers were drawn in the lottery, and you stole the money she would have staked."

" Oh, if she is dying of a lost chance, then it is not I who am killing her," retorted the drunkard.

" Go, I say," said Agathe; " you fill me with horror. You have every vice! Good God, and is this my son?"

A hollow croak from Mme. Descoings's throat had aggravated Agathe's wrath.

" And yet I still love you, mother, though you are the cause of all my misfortunes," said Philippe. " And you can turn me out of doors on a Christmas Day, the birthday of

What d'ye call him—Jesus!—What did you do to grandpapa Rouget, your father, that he turned you out and disinherited you? If you had not offended him in some way, we should have been rich, and I should not have been reduced to the depths of misery. What did you do to your father, I should like to know, you who are so good? You see, I may be a very good boy, and be turned out of doors nevertheless—I, the glory of the family——"

"Its disgrace!" cried Mme. Descoings.

"Leave the room, or kill me!" cried Joseph, rushing on his brother with the fury of a lion.

"Good God! good God!" cried Agathe, trying to separate the brothers.

At this moment Bixiou and Dr. Haudry came in. Joseph had knocked down his brother, and Philippe was lying on the floor.

"He is a perfect wild beast!" he said. "Not a word, or I'll——"

"I will remember this," bellowed Philippe.

"A little family difference?" said Bixiou.

"Pick him up," said the physician; "he is as ill as the old lady; undress him, put him to bed, and pull his boots off."

"That is easily said," observed Bixiou. "But they must be cut off: his legs are swelled——"

Agathe brought a pair of scissors. When she had slit the boots, which at that time were worn outside tight-fitting trousers, ten gold pieces rolled out on to the floor.

"There—there is her money," muttered Philippe. "Blasted idiot that I am, I forgot the reserve fund! So I too missed fire!"

The delirium of high fever now came upon Philippe, who began to talk wildly. Joseph, with the help of the elder Desroches, who came in presently, and of Bixiou, got the wretched man up to his own room. Dr. Haudry was obliged to write a line begging the loan of a strait-waistcoat from the hospital, for his mania increased to such a pitch that they feared he might kill himself—he was like a madman.

By nine o'clock peace was restored. The Abbé Loraux and Desroches did what they could to comfort Agathe, who sat by her aunt's pillow, and never ceased crying; but she only listened and shook her head, preserving obstinate silence; only Joseph and Mme. Descoings knew the depth and extent of the inward wound.

"He will do better, mother," said Joseph at last, when Desroches and Bixiou were gone.

"Oh!" cried the poor woman, "but he is right. Philippe is right! My father cursed me; I have no right. . . . Here is the money," she went on to Mme. Descoings, adding Joseph's three hundred francs to the two hundred found in Philippe's possession. "Go and see if your brother wants something to drink," she said to Joseph.

"Will you keep a promise made to a dying woman?" asked the old woman, feeling that her mind was going.

"Yes, aunt."

"Then swear to me to hand over your money to that young Desroches for an annuity. You will miss my little income, and from all I hear you say I know you will let that wretch squeeze you to the last sou——"

"Aunt, I swear it."

The old woman died on the 31st December, five days after the fatal blow so innocently dealt her by the elder Desroches. The five hundred francs, all the money there was in the house, barely sufficed to pay the expenses of her funeral. She left a very little plate and furniture, of which Mme. Bridau paid the value to her grandson.

Reduced now to eight hundred francs a year, the annuity paid her by the younger Desroches—who concluded the purchase of a business, at present without clients, and took her twelve thousand francs as capital—Agathe gave up her rooms on the third floor and sold all but the most necessary furniture. When, at the end of a month, Philippe was convalescent, his mother coldly explained to him that the expenses of his illness had absorbed all her ready money; henceforth she must work for her living, and she entreated him in the most affectionate manner to rejoin the army and provide for himself.

"You might have saved yourself your sermon," said Philippe, looking at his mother with eyes cold from utter indifference. "I have very clearly seen that neither you nor my brother love me in the least. I am alone in the world now! Well, I prefer it so."

"Prove yourself worthy to be loved," replied the poor mother, wounded to the quick, "and we shall love you again."

"Fiddlesticks!" said he, interrupting her.

He took his old hat, all worn at the edges, and his stick, stuck the hat over his ear, and went downstairs whistling.

"Philippe! where are you off to without any money?" cried his mother, who was not able to restrain her tears. "Here——"

She held out a hundred francs done up in paper. Philippe came up the steps he had gone down and took the money.

"And you do not kiss me?" said she, melting into tears.

He clasped her to his breast, without any of the effusive feeling which alone gives value to a kiss.

"And where are you going?" said Agathe.

"To Florentine, Giroudeau's mistress. They really are friends!" he replied coarsely.

He went. Agathe returned to her room, her knees quaking, her eyes dim, her heart in a vise. She fell on her knees, besought God to protect her unnatural son, and abdicated the burden of motherhood.

In February 1822 Mme. Bridau had established herself in the bedroom formerly occupied by Philippe, over the kitchen of her third-floor rooms. The painter's bedroom and studio were on the opposite side of the landing. Seeing his mother reduced so low, Joseph was determined that she should be as comfortable as possible. After his brother had left he took the arrangement of the attic in hand, and gave it an artistic stamp. He put in a carpet; the bed, very simply arranged, but with exquisite taste, had a character of monastic simplicity. The walls, hung with cheap chintz, judiciously chosen of a color to harmonize with the furniture, which was cleaned to look like new, made the little room look neat and elegant. He had a door made to shut in the landing, and hung it with a curtain. The window was screened by a blind that subdued the light. Thus, though the poor mother's life was restricted to the simplest expression which a woman's life in Paris can be reduced to, Agathe was at any rate better off than anybody in a similar position, thanks to her son.

To spare his mother the worst fatigues of housekeeping, Joseph took her to dine every day at a table d'hôte in the Rue de Beaune frequented by ladies of respectability, deputies, and men of title, where the charge for each person was ninety francs a month. Agathe, having only the breakfast to provide, fell into the same habits for her son as she had kept up for his father. In spite of Joseph's pious fibs, she somehow found out that her dinner cost about a hundred francs a month. Horrified by this enormous expenditure, and never supposing that her son could earn much by "painting naked women," by the influence of her director, the Abbé Loraux, she obtained the promise of a place with seven hundred francs a year, in a lottery-ticket office granted by Government to the Comtesse de Bauvan, the widow of a Chouan leader.

These lottery offices, bestowed on widows who had friends at Court, not unfrequently were the whole support of a family who managed the business of it. But, under the Restoration, the difficulty of finding rewards in the gift of a constitutional Government for all the services that had been done, led to the practice of giving to impoverished ladies of rank not one, but two, such lottery-ticket offices, of which the emoluments might be from six to ten thousand francs. In such cases the widow of a general or a nobleman did not keep the ticket-office herself; she had managers with a sort of partnership. When these managers were unmarried men they could not help having a clerk under them, for the office always had to be kept open till midnight, and the accounts required by the Minister of Finance were very elaborate.

The Comtesse de Bauvan, to whom the Abbé Loraux explained Mme. Bridau's position, promised that if her present manager should leave, Agathe should have the reversion; meanwhile she bargained for a salary of six hundred francs for the widow. Compelled to be at her work by ten in the morning, poor Agathe had scarcely time to dine; she returned to her office at seven in the evening, and never stirred out again before midnight. Never once for two years did Joseph fail to call for his mother and take her home, and he often fetched her to dinner. His friends would see him leave the Opera, the Italiens, or the most splendid drawing-rooms, to be in the Rue Vivienne before midnight.

Agathe soon fell into the monotonously regular way of life, which often is a comfort and support to sorrow-stricken souls. In the morning, after tidying her room, where there were now no cats or little birds, she cooked the breakfast at a corner of her fireplace, and laid it in the studio, where she ate it with her son. She then arranged Joseph's bedroom, took off her fire, and brought her sewing into the studio, sitting by the little stove, and leaving the room if he had a visitor or a model. Though she knew nothing of art or its processes, she liked the stillness of the place. In this matter she made no advance; she affected nothing; she was always greatly astonished at the importance attached to color, composition, and drawing. When one of the members of Joseph's little club, or one of his artist friends, was discussing such matters—Schinner, Pierre Grassou, or Léon de Lora, a very young student then known by the name of Mistigris—she would come and look on attentively, and never discover what could give occasion to such big words and hot arguments.

She made her son's linen, mended his stockings and socks; even went so far as to clean his palette, collect his painting rags, and keep the studio in order. And seeing his mother so intelligently careful of these little details, Joseph loaded her with kindness. If the mother and son did not meet halfway on questions of art, they were closely united by affection.

The mother had a scheme. One morning when she had made much of Joseph while he was sketching an enormous picture—which he subsequently painted, but which fell flat—she ventured to say aloud—

"Oh, dear! I wonder what he is doing?"

"Who?"

"Philippe."

"By Jove! the fellow is having a hard time. It will do him good."

"But he has had hard times before, and perhaps that was what spoiled him for us. If he were happy, he would be good."

"My dear mother, you fancy that he was in distress while he was away, but you are mistaken; he lived at his ease in New York, as he still does here——"

"But if he were in want, near us, that would be dreadful——"

"Yes," said Joseph; "and for my part, I am willing to give him money, but I will not see him. He killed poor Aunt Descoings."

"Then you would not paint his portrait?"

"For you, mother, I would suffer martyrdom. I would remember only the one fact that he is my brother."

"His portrait as a captain of dragoons, on horseback?"

"Well, I have a fine horse there, copied from Gros, and I do not know what to do with it."

"Then go to his friend and find out what is become of him."

"I will."

Agathe rose; her scissors, everything fell on the floor; she came to kiss Joseph on his forehead and shed two tears on his hair.

"That boy is your passion," said he. "We all have our ill-starred passion!"

That evening Joseph went to the Rue du Sentier at about four o'clock, and there he found his brother, filling Giroudeau's place. The elder captain of dragoons had been transferred as cashier to a weekly paper managed by his nephew. Though Finot was still proprietor of the little daily paper for which he had issued shares, though the shares were all in his own hands, the ostensible owner and editor was a friend of his named Lousteau, the son, as it happened, of the subdelegate from Issoudun on whom Bridau's grandfather (Dr. Rouget) had wanted to be revenged, and consequently Mme. Hochon's nephew.

To oblige his uncle, Finot had given him Philippe as deputy, paying him, however, only half the salary. Every day at five o'clock Giroudeau checked the balance and carried off the money taken during the day. Coloquinte, the old soldier who served as messenger, and who ran the errands, also kept an eye on Major Philippe. Philippe, however, was behaving himself. A salary of six hundred francs and a pension of five hundred were enough for him to live on, all the more because a fire was provided for him during the day, and in the evenings he could go to the play on the free list, so he had nothing to pay for but food and lodging. Coloquinte was going out, loaded with stamped papers, and Philippe was brushing his green linen office cuffs, when Joseph walked in.

"Lord! Here is the brat," said Philippe. "Well, we will dine together; you shall come to the Opera, Florine and Florentine have a box. I am going with Giroudeau; you will be of the party, and I will introduce you to Nathan."

He took up his loaded cane, and wetted the end of a cigar.

"I cannot avail myself of your invitation; I must look after my mother. We dine at a table d'hôte."

"Well, and how is she, poor dear thing?"

"She is pretty well," said the painter. "I have made a new portrait of my father and one of Aunt Descoings. I have finished one of myself, and I should like to give my mother one of you in the uniform of the Imperial Dragoon Guards."

"All right."

"But you must come and sit——"

"I am obliged to be here, in this hencoop, every day from nine till five."

"Two Sundays will be enough."

"All right, young 'un," replied Napoleon's erewhile staff-officer, as he lighted his cigar at the porter's lamp.

When Joseph described Philippe's position to his mother, as they went together to their dinner in the Rue de Beaune, he felt her hand tremble on his arm; joy lighted up the faded face; the poor woman drew breath as though she had been relieved of some enormous burden. Next day she was full of little attentions for Joseph, prompted by her happiness and gratitude; she dressed his studio with flowers, and bought two vases.

The first Sunday when Philippe was to sit, Agathe took care to provide an excellent breakfast. She placed everything on the table, not forgetting a flask of brandy, not more than half full. She then hid herself behind a screen, in which she made a small hole. The ex-dragoon had sent his uniform the day before, and she could not refrain from hugging it. When Philippe mounted, in full dress, on one of the stuffed horses kept by saddlers, which Joseph had hired, Agathe, not to betray herself, was obliged to hide the slight noise of her weeping under the voices of the two brothers as they talked.

Philippe sat for two hours before and two hours after breakfast. At three in the afternoon he put on his ordinary dress, and, while smoking a cigar, again invited his brother to dine with him at the Palais Royal. He jingled the gold in his pockets.

"No," said Joseph. "You frighten me when I see you with gold about you."

"By Heaven! Then you still have a bad opinion of me here?" roared the lieutenant-colonel in a voice of thunder. "Do you think a man can never save?"

"No, no," said Agathe, coming out of her hiding-place, and kissing her son. "We will go and dine with him, Joseph."

Joseph dared not scold his mother; he dressed, and Philippe took them to the Rue Montorgueuil, where, at the Rocher de Cancale, he gave them a splendid dinner, for which the bill ran up to a hundred francs.

"The devil!" said Joseph uneasily. "With a salary of eleven hundred francs a year you manage, like Ponchard in the *Dame Blanche*, to save enough to purchase an estate!"

"Pooh, I am in luck," said the dragoon, who had drunk an enormous quantity of wine.

On hearing this speech, made on the doorstep just as they were getting into a hackney coach to go to the play—for Philippe had proposed to take his mother to the Circus, the only entertainment of the kind allowed her by her director—Joseph tightened his hand on his mother's arm. Agathe at once said she felt unwell, and declined to go to the theater, so Philippe took her and his brother to the Rue Mazarine. When she found herself alone with Joseph in their attic, she sat long lost in thought.

On the next Sunday Philippe came again to sit. This time his mother sat in the room with the brothers. She brought in the breakfast, and could ask the trooper various questions. She then learned that the nephew of her mother's old friend, Mme. Hochon, figured in a small way in literature. Philippe and his ally Giroudeau lived in the society of journalists, actresses, and publishers, and, as cashiers, met with some respect. Philippe, who always took drams of kirsch while sitting after breakfast, talked freely. He boasted of becoming a person of importance again erelong. But at a question from Joseph as to his pecuniary means he kept silence.

As it happened, the next day was a great holiday, and the paper was not to come out, so Philippe, to get the thing done with, proposed to come and sit again on the morrow. Joseph explained to him that the Salon would open before long, that he had not money enough to buy frames for his pictures, and could only earn it by finishing a copy of a Rubens required by a picture-dealer named Magus. The original belonged to a rich Swiss banker, who had lent it only for ten days. Next day would be the last; it was therefore absolutely necessary to put off the sitting till the following Sunday.

"And that is it?" said Philippe, looking at a painting by Rubens that stood on an easel.

"Yes," said Joseph. "That is worth twenty thousand francs. That is what genius can do. There are such squares of canvas that are worth a hundred thousand francs."

"Well, I like your copy best," said the dragoon.

"It is fresher," said Joseph, laughing; "but my copy is only worth one thousand francs. I must have to-morrow to give the old tone and look of the original, that they may be indistinguishable."

"Good-by, mother," said Philippe, embracing Agathe, "till next Sunday."

On the following day Elie Magus was to come for his copy. A friend of Joseph's, who often worked for the dealer, Pierre Grassou, wished to see the copy finished. To play him a trick, Joseph put his copy, glazed with a particular varnish, in the place of the original, which he set up on his easel. Pierre Grassou de Fougères was completely taken in, and amazed at this extraordinary imitation.

"Will you take in old Magus?" said Pierre Grassou.

"That remains to be seen," said Joseph.

But the dealer did not come, and it was late. Agathe was to dine with Mme. Desroches, who had just lost her husband; so Joseph proposed to Grassou to come and dine at his table d'hôte. On going out he left the key of the studio, as he always did, with the woman who kept the house door.

"I am going to sit to my brother this evening," said Philippe to this woman an hour later. "He will be in presently, and I will wait for him in the studio."

The woman gave him the key. Philippe went up, took the copy, thinking it was the original, came down, gave back the key, explaining that he had forgotten something, and went off with the Rubens to sell it for three thousand francs. He had taken the precaution of telling Elie Magus, from his brother, not to call till the next day. At night, when Joseph came in after fetching his mother from Mme. Desroches's, the porter told him of Philippe's vagaries, coming away almost as soon as he had gone in.

"If he has not had the good taste to take the copy, I am a ruined man!" exclaimed the painter, at once guessing the theft. He flew up the three flights of stairs and into the studio, and exclaimed, "Thank God! He has been what he will be to the end—a fool and a knave."

Agathe, who had followed Joseph, did not understand this exclamation; but when her son explained it, she simply stood still, dry-eyed.

"I have but one son!" she said in a weak voice.

"We have always avoided disgracing him before strangers," replied Joseph. "But we must now tell the porter he is never to be admitted. Henceforth we must carry our keys.—I will finish the portrait from memory, there is little to be done to it."

"Leave it as it is; it would make me too unhappy," replied his mother, stricken to the heart, and appalled by such meanness.

Philippe knew what the price of this copy was needed for, knew the gulf of difficulty into which he was flinging his brother, and nothing had deterred him. After this last crime, Agathe would never mention Philippe; her face assumed a look of bitter, deep, and concentrated despair. One thought was killing her.

"Some day," she said to herself, "we shall see the name of Bridau in the criminal courts."

Two months after this, just before Agathe entered on her duties at the lottery office, a soldier called one morning to see Mme. Bridau, who was at breakfast with Joseph, announcing himself as a friend of Philippe's on urgent business.

When Giroudeau mentioned his name the mother and son quailed, all the more because the ex-dragoon had a rough, weather-beaten sailor's countenance that was anything rather than reassuring. His ashy gray eyes, his piebald mustache, the remaining tufts of hair brushed up round his butter-colored bald head, had an indescribably unwholesome and licentious look. He wore an old iron-gray overcoat, with the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor; it was buttoned with difficulty over a stomach like a cook's, quite in keeping with a mouth that opened from ear to ear, and broad shoulders. This frame was carried on a pair of thin legs. His complexion, with the high color on the cheekbones, betrayed a jovial life. The lower part of his cheeks was deeply wrinkled, and overlapped his worn black velvet collar. Among other decorative touches, the ex-dragoon had in his ears an enormous pair of gold earrings.

"What a sot!" said Joseph to himself.

"Madame," said Finot's uncle and cashier, "your son is in such an unfortunate predicament that his friends cannot help applying to you to beg you to share the very considerable expenses he involves them in. He can no longer do his work for the paper; and Mlle. Florentine of the Porte Saint-Martin has given him a room in a miserable attic in the Rue Vendôme, where she lives. Philippe is dying; if you and his brother cannot pay for the doctor and the medicine, we shall be obliged, for his own sake and cure, to have him taken to the Capucins. But we will keep him ourselves for three hundred francs; he must positively have a nurse; he goes out in the evening while Mlle. Florentine is at the theater, and he takes irritant drinks, bad for his malady, and contrary to rule. And we are attached to him; it really makes us unhappy. The poor fellow has pledged his pension for three years; a substitute has been found for the moment to fill his place, and he gets no pay. But he will kill himself, madame, if we cannot put him in the asylum kept by Dr. Dubois. It is a decent place, and the charge is ten francs a day. Florentine and I will pay for half a month's treatment there, do you pay the rest. . . . Come, it will not be for more than two months."

"Indeed, monsieur, as a mother I cannot but be eternally grateful for all you are doing for my son," replied Agathe. "But that son has cut himself off from my affection; and as for money—I have none. To avoid being a burden on this son, who works night and day, and is killing himself, who deserves all his mother's love, I am going, the day after to-morrow, into a lottery-ticket office as assistant clerk.—At my age!"

"And you, young man?" said the trooper to Joseph. "Come, will not you do as much for your brother as a dancer at the Porte Saint-Martin and an old soldier——?"

"Look here!" said Joseph, out of patience. "Would you like me to tell you in the plainest language what was the purpose of your visit? You came to try to fleece us."

"Well, then, to-morrow your brother will go to the hospital."

"He will be very well looked after," said Joseph. "If ever I should be in the same plight, I should go there myself."

Giroudeau went away, much disappointed, but also very seriously grieved at having to send a man who had been on

Napoleon's staff at the battle of Montereau to the hospital of the Capucins.

Three months after this, one morning towards the end of July, Agathe, on her way to her office, crossing the Pont Neuf to save the toll of a sou on the Pont des Arts, saw a man lounging by the shops of the Quai de l'École as he walked along by the river parapet. He wore the livery of the second degree of poverty, and she was startled, for she thought he resembled Philippe.

There are, in fact, three degrees of poverty in Paris. First, that of the men who keep up appearances, and who have the future before them; the poverty of young men, artists, men of the world who are down on their luck. The symptoms of this kind of want are visible only to the microscope of the most practiced observer. These people constitute the knighthood of poverty; they still ride in a cab. In the second rank are old men, to whom everything is a matter of indifference, who, in the month of June, display the Cross of the Legion of Honor on an alpaca coat. This is the poverty of old annuitants, old clerks living at Sainte-Périne, careless now about their appearance. Last comes poverty in rags, the poverty of the common people, and the most poetical of all; studied by Callot and Hogarth, by Murillo, Charlet, Raffet, Gavarni, Meissonier; adored and cultivated by Art, especially at the Carnival!

The man in whom the unhappy Agathe fancied she recognized her son had, as it were, one foot on each of these two lowest steps. She saw a horribly starchless collar, a mangy hat, broken and patched boots, a threadbare overcoat with buttons that had lost their mold, while their empty gaping or twisted skins matched the torn pockets and greasy collar. Traces of flue on the cloth plainly revealed that if there were anything in those pockets, it could only be dust. Out of a pair of ripped iron-gray trousers the man drew hands as dirty as a workman's. Over his breast a knitted woolen undervest, tawny with long wear, of which the sleeves came below those of the coat, and the edge was pulled outside the trousers, served visibly and undoubtedly as a substitute for linen. Philippe wore a shade over his eyes of green silk stretched on wire. His head, almost bald, his color, and hollow cheeks showed that he had just come out of that dreadful hospital.

His blue military coat, though white at the seams, still displayed his rosette. Thus every passer-by looked at this veteran, a victim of the Government no doubt, with curiosity, mingled with pity; for the rosette attracted the eye, and suggested honorable fears for the Legion of Honor, even in the most rabid Ultras. At that time, though an attempt had been made to cast a slur on the Order by reckless promotions, not more than fifty-three thousand persons in France had the right to display it.

Agathe was thrilled to the marrow. Though she could not possibly love this son of hers, she still could suffer acutely through him. Touched by a last gleam of motherly feeling, she shed tears as she saw the dashing staff-officer make as though he would go into a tobacconist's to buy a cigar, and stop on the threshold; he had felt in his pockets and found nothing. Agathe hastily crossed the road, drew out her purse, pushed it into Philippe's hand, and fled as if she had committed a crime.

For two days after she could eat nothing; she constantly saw before her the horrible vision of her son dying of hunger in Paris.

"When he has spent the money in my purse, who will give him any?" thought she. "Giroudeau was not deceiving us; Philippe has just come out of the hospital."

She no longer saw her poor aunt's murderer, the scourge of the family, the domestic thief, the gambler, drunkard, low debauchee; what she saw was a discharged patient dying of hunger, a smoker bereft of tobacco. At seven-and-forty she looked like a woman of seventy. Her eyes grew dim in tears and prayer.

But this was not the last blow to be dealt her by this dreadful son; her worst anticipations were to be realized. A conspiracy was discovered of officers on service, and the paragraphs of the *Moniteur* containing the details of the arrests were shouted in the streets. In the recesses of her little coop, in the lottery office in the Rue Vivienne, Agathe heard the name of Philippe Bridau. She fainted away; and the head-clerk, understanding her grief and the necessity for her taking some action, gave her a fortnight's leave of absence.

"Ah, my dear! We, with our austerity, have driven him to this," she said to Joseph, as she went to lie down.

"I will go to see Desroches," said Joseph.

The artist went off to place his brother's case in the hands of Desroches, who was regarded as the craftiest and astutest attorney in Paris, and who had rendered good service to various persons of importance, among others to des Lupeaulx, at that time chief secretary in a Minister's office. Meanwhile Giroudeau came to call on the widow, who trusted him this time.

"Madame," said he, "find twelve thousand francs, and your son will be released for want of evidence. We have only to purchase the silence of two witnesses."

"I will get them," said the poor mother, not knowing how or whence.

Inspired by the danger, she wrote to her godmother, Mme. Hochon, to beg them of Jean-Jacques Rouget, to save Philippe. If Rouget should refuse, she entreated Mme. Hochon to lend her the money, promising to repay it in two years. By return of post she received the following letter:—

"My Dear Child,—Though your brother has, first and last, forty thousand francs a year, to say nothing of the money he has saved in the last seventeen years, which M. Hochon estimates at more than six hundred thousand francs, he will not spend two farthings on the nephews he has never seen. As for me—you cannot know that so long as my husband lives I shall never have six francs to call my own. Hochon is the greatest miser in Issoudun; I do not know what he does with his money; he does not give his grandchildren twenty francs in a year. To borrow it I should have to ask his leave, and he would not give it. I have not even attempted to speak with your brother, who keeps a woman, whose very humble servant he is. It is pitiable to see how the poor man is treated in his own house when he has a sister and nephews.

"I have hinted to you several times that your presence at Issoudun might save your brother, and rescue from the clutches of that hussy a fortune of forty or even sixty thousand francs a year; but you do not answer me, or seem not to have understood me. So I write to you to-day without any circumlocution. I sympathize deeply with the misfortune that has come upon you, but I can give you nothing but pity, my dearest child.

"This is why I can do nothing to help you: Hochon, at the age of eighty-five, eats his four meals a day, sups off hard-boiled eggs and salad, and is as brisk as a rabbit. I shall have lived all my days—for he will write my epitaph—without ever having had twenty francs in my purse. If you like to come to Issoudun to combat the influence of your brother's concubine, though there are good reasons why Rouget should not receive you into his house, I shall find it difficult to obtain my husband's permission to invite you to mine. Still, you can come; he will give way on that point. I know a way of getting what I want in some things, and that is by talking of my will. This seems to me so atrocious that I have never yet had recourse to it; but for you I would do the impossible. I hope your Philippe will get out of the scrape, especially if you have a good advocate; but come to Issoudun as soon as you can. Remember that your brother, at fifty-seven, is older and more frail than M. Hochon. So the case is urgent.

"Already there are rumors of a will depriving you of your inheritance; but by M. Hochon's account there is yet time to procure its revocation.

"Farewell, my little Agathe. God be with you. And rely on your godmother too, for she loves you.

"MAXIMILIENNE HOCHON, née LOUSTEAU."

"*P.S.*—Has my nephew Étienne, who writes for the papers, and is intimate, I am told, with your son Philippe, ever been to pay his respects to you?—But only come, and we will talk about him."

This letter gave Agathe much to think about; of course she showed it to Joseph, to whom she was obliged to confide Giroudeau's suggestion. The artist, who was cautious where his brother was concerned, pointed out to his mother that she ought to lay it all before Desroches. Struck by the truth of this remark, she and her son went next day, at six in the morning, to call on Desroches in the Rue de Bussy.

The lawyer, as lean as his father before him, with a harsh voice, a coarse skin, pitiless eyes, and a face like a ferret's licking the blood of murdered chickens off its lips, sprang like a tiger when he heard of Giroudeau's call.

"Bless me, Mother Bridau," he cried in his shrill, hard voice, "how long will you continue to be the dupe of your cursed scoundrel of a son? Do not give him a farthing. I will be responsible for Philippe; it is to save him in the future that I shall leave him to the sentence of the Superior Court. You quail at the idea of his being found guilty, but God grant that his counsel may fail to get him off. You, go to Issoudun; save your fortune and that of your children. If you do not succeed, if your brother has made his will in that woman's favor, and you cannot get him to revoke it—well, at any rate, collect the materials for proving undue influence, and I will conduct the case. But there! You are too good a woman to know how to find out the grounds for such an action. In the holidays I will go myself to Issoudun—if I possibly can."

And this "I will go myself" made the artist shiver in his skin.

Desroches winked at Joseph as a sign that he should let his mother go downstairs first, and detained him for an instant.

"Your brother is a base wretch; he, voluntarily or involuntarily, is the cause of the discovery of the conspiracy; for the rascal is so cunning that it is impossible to find out the truth about it. Fool or traitor—I leave you to choose between them. He will no doubt be placed under the eye of the detective police; but that is all. Be quite easy; I alone know even this much. Hurry off to Issoudun with your mother. You have all your wits; try to save the inheritance."

"Come, poor mother, Desroches is right," said Joseph, rejoining Agathe on the stairs. "I have sold my pictures;

let us set out for Le Berry, as you have a fortnight's leave."

Having written to her godmother to announce their arrival, Agathe and Joseph started next day for Issoudun, leaving Philippe to his fate. The diligence went down the Rue de l'Enfer to take the Orleans road. When Agathe saw the Luxembourg, whither Philippe had been transferred, she could not help saying—

"After all, but for the Allies he would not be there now!"

Many sons would have given an impatient shrug or smiled in pity; but Joseph, who was alone with her in the coupé of the diligence, threw his arm round her, and pressed her to his heart, saying, "Oh, mother! you are a mother as Raphael was a painter! And you always will be a dear goose of a mother!"

Aroused from her troubles by the amusement of the journey, Mme. Bridau was presently obliged to think of the purpose of her visit. Of course, she re-read Mme. Hochon's letter, which had so strongly excited Desroches. Struck by such words as "concubine" and "hussy," traced by the pen of an old woman of seventy, as pious as she was respectable, to designate the woman who was absorbing Jean-Jacques Rouget's fortune, while he himself was spoken of as a poor creature, she began to wonder how her presence at Issoudun could avail to save her inheritance. Joseph, an artist, poor and disinterested, knew little of the law, and his mother's exclamation puzzled him.

"Before sending us off to protect our inheritance, our friend Desroches would have done well to explain to us how we can be robbed of it," said he.

"So far as my memory serves me—but my head was full of the notion of Philippe in prison, without a pipe even perhaps, and on the eve of standing his trial before the Superior Court"—said Agathe, "I fancy Desroches said we were to collect materials for an action against undue influence if it should appear that my brother has made his will in favor of this—this—woman."

"A good joke for Desroches!" cried Joseph. "Well, if we can make nothing of it, I will ask him to go himself."

"Do not let us rack our brains for nothing," said Agathe. "When we are there, my godmother will advise us."

This conversation, held at the moment when, after changing coach at Orleans, Mme. Bridau and Joseph were entering the district of Sologne, sufficiently betrays the incapacity of both the artist and his mother to play the part the terrible attorney had assigned to them.

But on returning to Issoudun after an absence of thirty years, Agathe found the manners of the place so altered, that a slight sketch of the life of the town is indispensable. Without such a picture, it would be difficult to understand Mme. Hochon's real heroism in trying to help her goddaughter, or Jean-Jacques Rouget's extraordinary position.

Though the doctor had made his son regard Agathe as a stranger, still, in a brother, there was something rather extraordinary in living for thirty years without giving his sister any sign of his existence. This silence must evidently have its cause in some unusual circumstances which any relations but Agathe and Joseph would long since have insisted on knowing. And, in fact, there was a certain connection between the state of the town and the Bridaus' concerns, which will come to light in the course of this narrative

With all due respect to Paris, Issoudun is one of the oldest towns in France. Notwithstanding historical prejudice, which insists on regarding the Emperor Probus as the Noah of Gaul, Cæsar writes of the fine wine of Champ-Fort (de Campo Forti), one of the finest vintages of Issoudun. Rigord mentions the town in terms which allow of no doubt as to its large population and extensive commerce. Still, these two authorities would give Issoudun a moderate antiquity in comparison with its really immense age. Excavations, lately made by a learned archæologist of the town, M. Armand Pérément, have led to the discovery of a basilica of the fifth century—probably the only example in France—under the famous tower of Issoudun. This church preserves in the materials of which it is built the record of a previous civilization; for the stones are those of a Roman temple of earlier date. And, indeed, the researches of this antiquary show that Issoudun, like all French towns of which the name, ancient or modern, ends in dun = *dunum*, contains in its name a certificate of native origin. The syllable *dun*, attaching to every hill consecrated to the religion of the Druids, shows it to have been a Celtic military and religious center. The Romans then may have built at the foot of the Dun of the Gauls a temple to Isis; hence, according to Chaumon, the name of the town, Is-sous-dun (Is[is]-under-hill)—Is' being an abbreviated form of Isis.

Richard Cœur de Lion undoubtedly built the famous tower, where he coined money, over a basilica of the fifth century, the third sanctuary of the third religion of this ancient city. He made use of the church as a base which he needed to add to the height of his ramparts, and preserved it by covering it with his feudal fortifications as with a cloak. Issoudun next became the seat of the transient authority of the Routiers and Cottereaux, bands of brigands with which Henry II. opposed his son Richard when he rebelled as Count of Poitou. The history of Aquitaine, not having been written by the Benedictines, will now probably never be written, as there are no more Benedictines. Hence it is well to throw every possible light on these archæological obscurities whenever an opportunity offers.

There is still further evidence of the ancient importance of Issoudun in the use made of the little Tournemine River, which has been raised for a considerable distance on an aqueduct several yards above the natural level of the Théols, the stream that encircles the town. This work is, beyond question, due to Roman engineers. Finally, the quarter lying to the north of the castle is intersected by a road known for two thousand years as the Rue de Rome; and the inhabitants of the suburb, who are certainly of a quite distinct type in race, blood, and features, call themselves the direct descendants of the Romans. They are almost all vine-dressers, and singularly stern in their manners, owing, perhaps, to their origin, and perhaps also to their triumph over the Cottereaux and Routiers, whom they exterminated in the twelfth century in the plain of Charost.

After the outbreak in 1830, France was too much agitated to pay any attention to the rebellion among the vine-growers of Issoudun, which was very serious, though the details were never published, and for very good reasons. In the first place, the citizens of Issoudun would not allow any troops to enter the city. They chose to be responsible for it themselves, after the usage and traditions of the citizen-class in the Middle Ages. The authorities were forced to succumb to a populace supported by six or seven thousand vine-dressers, who had burned all the archives and the tax-offices, and who went from street to street, dragging about an excise officer of the octroi, saying at each lamp-chain, "This is the place to hang him."—The unhappy man was delivered from these wretches by the National Guard, who saved his life by taking him to prison on the pretext of trying him. The general of the forces only got in by coming to terms with the vine-dressers, and it needed some courage to walk through the mob; for as soon as he appeared outside the Town-hall a man of the Roman suburb put his pruning scythe—a large curved knife at the end of a pole used for lopping trees—round his neck, crying out, "No more tax-gatherers, or we yield nothing." And the laborer would have pruned off the head of a man whom sixteen years of fighting had spared, but for the prompt intervention of one of the leaders of the rebellion, who obtained a promise that the Chambers should be asked to suppress the "cellar-rats"—or excise men.

In the fourteenth century Issoudun could still boast of seventeen thousand inhabitants, the remnant of a population of nearly double that number in Rigord's time. Charles VII. had a residence there; it still exists, and was known as the Maison du Roy so late as the eighteenth century. This town, at that time the central mart of the wool-trade, supplied the greater part of Europe with the raw material, besides manufacturing it on a large scale into cloth, hats, and excellent gloves, called Chevreautin. In the time of Louis XIV. Issoudun, the birthplace of Baron and of Bourdaloue, was always mentioned as a home of elegance, pure French, and good society. Poupart, the priest, in his *History of Sancerre*, speaks of the inhabitants of Issoudun as remarkable among all the natives of Le Berry for their acumen and mother-wit.

At the present day this brilliancy and wit have totally disappeared. Issoudun, though its wide extent bears witness to its former importance, claims but twelve thousand souls, including the vine-dressers of four extensive suburbs—Saint-Paterne, Vilatte, Rome, and Les Alouettes, little towns in themselves. The inhabitants, like those of Versailles, have elbow-room in the streets. Issoudun still is the center of the wool-trade of Le Berry, a business now in danger from the improvements which are being generally introduced in the breed of sheep which the Berrichon will not adopt. The vineyards of Issoudun yield a wine which is consumed in two departments; and which, if it were only made as wine is made in Burgundy and Gascony, would be one of the best vintages in France. But, alas! "We do as our fathers did!"—that is the law of the land. So the vine-growers leave the stalks in the liquor during fermentation, which ruins the flavor of a wine that might be the source of renewed wealth, and an opening for the industry of the district. Thanks to the roughness communicated to the wine by the wood, and which is said to diminish with age, it may be kept for a century! This reason, assigned by the vine-grower, is important enough to the science of the manufacture to be recorded here; Guillaume le Breton has, in fact, celebrated this property in a few lines in his *Philippide.*

Thus the decay of Issoudun is accounted for by its perverse stagnation, carried to imbecility, as one single fact will show. When the direct road was contemplated from Paris to Toulouse, it was obvious that it should run from Vierzon to Châteauroux, past Issoudun. This is shorter than the line actually taken by Vatan. But the bigwigs of the town, and the Municipal Council of Issoudun—which, it is said, still sits—petitioned for its passing through Vatan; objecting that if their town lay on the highroad, the price of provisions would rise, and they might be obliged to pay thirty sous for a fowl.

No analogous act is recorded of any land but the wildest districts of Sardinia, a country formerly so populous and rich, and now so deserted. When King Charles Albert, with a laudable intent to civilize the land, proposed to connect Sassari, the second town in the island, with Cagliari, by a fine and magnificent highroad, the only road existing in this wild savannah, the direct line was planned to pass Bonorva, a district inhabited by a refractory race very like our subject Arab tribes, and, in fact, descended from the Moors. When they saw themselves within an ace of being caught by civilization, the savages of Bonorva, without taking the trouble to discuss the matter, signified their opposition to the plan. The Government disregarded this announcement. The first engineer who attempted to take a bee-line had a bullet in his brain, and died by his stake. No questions were asked; but the road made a bend that lengthens it by eight leagues.

At Issoudun the increasingly low price of the wine, all consumed on the spot, while gratifying the citizens' wish to live cheaply, is bringing about the ruin of the wine-growers, who are more and more oppressed by the cost of cultivation and the excise; in the same way, ruin threatens the wool-trade of the district, in consequence of the impossibility of improving the breed of sheep. The country folks have a rooted horror of every kind of change, even of that which may serve their interests.

A traveler from Paris found a laborer in the country who was dining off an enormous quantity of bread, cheese, and vegetables. He proved to him that by substituting a certain proportion of meat he would be nourished better and cheaper, he would do more work, and waste his capital of strength more slowly. The man of Le Berry admitted the accuracy of the calculation.—" But only consider the jaw, sir," said he.—" The jaw? "—" Why, yes, sir; how people would tattle! "

" He would have been the talk of the district," said the owner of the land on which the incident occurred. " They would think he was as rich as a townsman. In short, he is afraid of public opinion, of being pointed at, of being supposed to be ailing or ill.—That is what we all are in this part of the world."

Country-town folk often echo these last words with a feeling of covert pride.

And while ignorance and routine are insuperable in the country, where the peasantry are left to themselves, Issoudun, as a town, has settled into absolute social stagnation. Being obliged to make head against waning fortunes by sordid economy, each family lives for itself alone. Again, the society there is now forever bereft of the contrast that gives distinction to manners. The town is no longer the scene of that antagonism of two classes which gave vitality to the Italian states in the Middle Ages. Issoudun has no men of birth. The Cottereaux, the Routiers, the Jacquerie, the religious wars, and the Revolution have completely exterminated the nobility. The town is very proud of this triumph. To keep down the cost of living, Issoudun has persistently refused to be made a garrison town; thus it has lost that means of intercourse with the times, besides losing the profit that is derived from the presence of the military.

Until 1756 Issoudun was one of the gayest of garrison towns. A judicial drama, which was the talk of France at that time, deprived the town of its soldiery; the case of the lieutenant-general of the district against the Marquis de Chapt, whose son, a dragoon officer, was put to death, justly perhaps, but traitorously, for some amorous misdemeanor.

The occupation by the 44th half-brigade, forced upon it during the civil war, was not such as to reconcile the inhabitants to the soldier tribe.

Bourges, of which the population is annually diminishing, is a victim to the same social atrophy. Vitality is failing in these large bodies. The State is no doubt to blame. It is the duty of a government to detect such sores in the body politic, and to remedy them by sending men of energy to the affected spots to change the state of things. Alas! far from this, such fatal and funereal peacefulness is a source of satisfaction! Besides, how is it possible to send fresh chiefs or capable judges? Who nowadays would care to be buried in a district where he can earn no credit for the good to be done? If by chance an ambitious outsider is appointed to such a place, he is soon swamped by the power of inertia, and tunes himself to the pitch of the dreadful provincial life. Issoudun would have benumbed Napoleon.

As a result of this state of things, the district of Issoudun, in 1822, was under the administration of men all natives of Le Berry. Government authority was therefore nil or impotent, excepting in those cases, of course very rare, of which the evident importance demands the intervention of the law. M. Mouilleron, the public prosecutor, was related to everybody, and his deputy belonged to a family in the town. The president of the Criminal Court, before he had risen to such dignity, had made himself famous by one of those speeches which, in the provinces, crown a man with a fool's cap for the rest of his life. At the end of a case for the prosecution which would entail capital punishment, he said to the prisoner: "My poor Pierre, the case is clear; you will have your head cut off. Let that be a lesson to you." The superintendent of police, who had held the post ever since the Restoration, had relations all over the district.

Finally, not only had religion no influence whatever, but the curé was not respected. The townsfolk—Liberals, backbiters, and ignorant—repeated more or less absurd stories about the poor man's conduct to his housekeeper. The children went to his catechising all the same, and were admitted to their first Communion; all the same, there was a school; mass was said and festivals were kept; the taxes were paid, the only thing Paris requires of the provinces; and the Maire passed resolutions; but all these acts of social life were mere matters of routine. Thus the flabbiness of official life was in admirable harmony with the moral and intellectual condition of the place. The sequel of this narrative will show the results of a state of things less exceptional than might be supposed. Many towns in France, especially in the south, are very like Issoudun. And the state to which the triumph of the middle class had brought this town—the chief town of its district (or arrondissement)—awaits all France, and even Paris, if the citizen class continues to be master of the home and foreign policy of our country.

Now a word as to the topography of Issoudun. The town extends north and south on a hillside that curves towards the Châteauroux road. At the foot of the slope a canal was constructed at the time when the place was prosperous, to supply the factories, or to flood the trenches below the ramparts; it is known as La Rivière Forcée, the Borrowed Stream, its waters being diverted from the Théols. The borrowed stream forms an artificial branch, returning to the natural river below the Roman suburb at a point where it is met by the Tournemine and some other affluents. These little brooks of rushing water irrigate meadows of some extent, which lie on all sides below the yellow or white hills closely dotted with black specks, for such is the aspect of the vineland of Issoudun during seven months of the year. The vinedressers layer the vines every year, and leave nothing but a hideous stump, without any prop, at the bottom of a funnel of earth. Thus, on arriving from Vierzon, Vatan, or Châteauroux, the eye, wearied by the monotonous plain, is agreeably surprised by the appearance of the meadowland of Issoudun, the oasis of this part of the country, supplying vegetables for ten leagues round. Below the suburb of Rome stretches one vast market-garden exclusively devoted to kitchen produce, and divided into the Upper and Lower Baltan.

A broad, long avenue, with side-walks planted with poplars, leads from the town, across the fields, to an ancient convent called Frapesle, where an English garden—unique in the district—bears the high-sounding name of Tivoli. Here, on Sundays, fond couples wander to breathe their confidences.

Traces of the former splendor of Issoudun can, of course, be discerned by an attentive observer, and the most conspicuous are the divisions of the town. The castle, which of old was a town of itself, with its walls and moats, constitutes a distinct quarter even now, entered only through the old gates, or quitted by three bridges over the arms of the two rivers; this alone has the aspect of an old town. The walls still show their formidable masonry, here and there crowned with houses. Above the castle rises the tower which was the citadel. The conqueror of the town lying round these two fortified strongholds had still to take both the tower and the castle. Nor did the mastery of the castle secure that of the tower. The suburb of Saint-Paterne beyond the tower, shaped like a palette, and encroaching on the fields, is so large that it must in early ages have been the original township. Since the Middle Ages Issoudun, like Paris, has climbed the hill and spread outside the tower and the castle.

In 1822 this notion still derived some certainty from the existence of the beautiful Church of Saint-Paterne, only recently pulled down by the son of the man who purchased it from the nation. This building, one of the prettiest examples of Romanesque church architecture in France, was destroyed without anyone having drawn the porch front, which was in perfect preservation. The only voice that was raised to save the building found no echo, neither in the town nor in the department.

Though the castle-precincts of Issoudun have all the character of an old place, with its narrow streets and ancient houses, the town, properly so called, which was taken and burned again and again at different periods, and especially during the Fronde, when it was burned to the ground, has now a modern aspect. Broad streets, as compared with the other quarters, and well-built houses form a contrast with the ancient castle, striking enough to have earned Issoudun, in some geographies, the epithet of *pretty*.

In a town thus constituted, devoid even of commercial activity, of taste for the arts, of scientific interest, where everyone sits at home, it could not but happen—and it did in fact happen—that at the time of the Restoration, in 1816, when the war was over, many of the young men of the place had no career before them, and did not know what to do with themselves pending their marriage, or their coming into their parents' money. Bored to death at home, these young people found no means of diversion in the town; and since, as the proverb has it, young men must sow their wild oats, they performed the operation at the expense of the town itself. It was difficult to do much by broad daylight; they would have been recognized, and, the cup of their misdemeanors once full, they would at their first serious offense have found themselves in the hands of the police; so they very judiciously preferred to play their mischievous pranks at night. And thus, among these old ruins left by so many departed phases of civilization, a vestige of the farcical spirit that characterized the manners of the past flashed like a dying flame. These young men took their pleasure as Charles IX. and his courtiers, or Henry V. and his companions, were wont to take theirs, in a form of amusement common of old in many provincial towns.

Having become confederates by their need of mutual help and defense, and the desire to invent practical jokes, the friction of wits developed among them a pitch of mischievousness which is natural to the young, and may be noticed even in animals. Their confederacy gave them also the little enjoyment that comes of the mystery of a standing conspiracy. They called themselves "The Knights of Idlesse." All through the days these young monkeys were little saints; they affected excessive quietude; besides, they slept late in the mornings after nights when they had carried out some cruel trick. The Knights of Idlesse began by common practical jokes, such as unhooking and changing shop-signs, ringing at doors, hurling a cask left outside a door into a neighbor's cellar with a prodigious clatter, and waking the folks by a noise like the explosion of a mine. At Issoudun, as in many places, the way into the cellars is through a trapdoor close to the entrance from the street, closed by a huge lid with hinges, and fastened with a heavy padlock. These Bad Boys, at the end of 1816, had not got beyond the practical jokes played everywhere by young men and lads. But in January 1817 the Order of Idlesse had a Grand Master, and distinguished itself by certain pranks which until 1823 were the terror of Issoudun, or, at any rate, kept the citizens and craftsmen in perpetual alarms.

This leader was one Maxence Gilet, called Max for short; and his antecedents, no less than his strength and youth, destined him for the part. Maxence Gilet was supposed to be the natural son of Lousteau, Mme. Hochon's brother, the sub-delegate whose gallantries had left many memorials, and who had incurred, as we know, Dr. Rouget's hatred à propos of Agathe's birth. But before this quarrel the friendship between the two men had been so close that, to use a phrase of the country and period, where one went the other would go. So it was always said that Max might just as well be the doctor's son as Lousteau's; but he belonged to neither of them, for his father was a handsome young dragoon officer in garrison at Bourges. However, as a consequence of their intimacy, happily for the boy, the two men were always disputing for the paternity.

Max's mother, the wife of a clog-maker in the Roman suburb, was for her soul's destruction amazingly beautiful, with the beauty of a true Trasteverina, the only thing she had to bequeath to her boy. Mme. Gilet, before Max's birth in 1788, had long pined for this boon from Heaven, which was maliciously ascribed to the gallantries of the two men—no doubt to set them at loggerheads. Gilet, a hardened old sot, winked at his wife's misconduct by such collusion and tolerance as are not exceptional in the lowest class. The woman herself, hoping to secure their protection for the child, took good care not to enlighten the supposed fathers. In Paris she would have been a millionaire; at Issoudun she sometimes was well off, sometimes wretchedly poor, and at last scorned by all.

Mme. Hochon, M. Lousteau's sister, paid about ten crowns a year towards Max's schooling. This liberality, which Mme. Hochon could not allow herself in consequence of her husband's avarice, was naturally attributed to her brother, then living at Sancerre. When Dr. Rouget, whose son was not a success, observed how handsome Max was, he paid the school expenses of the " young rascal," as he called him, till 1805. As Lousteau had died in 1800, and the doctor seemed to gratify a feeling of pride by paying the boy's schooling for five years, the question of paternity remained unsettled.

Indeed, Maxence Gilet, the cause of many jests, was soon forgotten. And this is his story. In 1806, a year after Dr. Rouget's death, the boy, who seemed born to a life of adventure, and who was indeed gifted with extraordinary strength and agility, had committed a number of more or less rash acts of mischief. He and M. Hochon's grandsons were already in league to drive the tradesfolks to frenzy; he gathered all the neighbors' fruit before the owners, making nothing of scaling a wall. This imp had no match in athletic exercises; he played prisoner's base to perfection; he could have coursed and caught a hare. He had an eye worthy of Leather-Stocking, and had a passion for sport. Instead of doing his lessons, he passed all his time in shooting at a mark. He spent all the money he could extract from the old doctor in buying powder and shot for a worn-out pistol given to him by Gilet the clog-maker. Now, in the autumn of 1806, Max, by this time seventeen, committed an involuntary murder one evening at nightfall by coming upon a young woman in her garden, where he was stealing fruit, and frightening her into a miscarriage. Being threatened by the clog-maker with the guillotine—the old man no doubt wanted to be rid of him—Max ran off, and never stopped till he reached Bourges, joined a regiment on the march to Spain, and there enlisted. No further notice was taken of the young woman's death.

A lad of Max's disposition was certain to distinguish himself; and he did so, with such effect that, after three campaigns, he returned as a captain, for the little learning he had picked up had served him well. In 1809, in Portugal, he was left for dead on an English battery which his company had taken, but could not hold. Max, a prisoner, was sent by the English to the Spanish hulks at Cabrera, the worst of all.

An application was indeed made on his behalf to the Emperor for the Cross of the Legion of Honor and the rank of major, but Napoleon was just then in Austria; he kept all his favors for the dashing actions that were done under his own eye; he had no liking for men who were taken prisoners, and was not best pleased with the state of affairs in Portugal.

Max was left on the hulks from 1810 to 1814. In the course of those four years he was utterly demoralized; for the hulks were the galleys minus the crime and disgrace. In the first place, to secure his own freedom of action and defend himself against the corruption that was rampant in those foul prisons, unworthy of any civilized nation, the handsome young captain killed in duels—for duels were fought on a space six yards square—seven bullies and tyrants of whom he rid his ship, to the great joy of their victims.

Max reigned in the hulk, thanks to the prodigious skill he acquired in handling his weapons, to his personal strength and cleverness. But he, in his turn, committed some arbitrary acts, and had adherents who took his part and became his flatterers. In this school of misery, where embittered nature dreamed only of revenge, and where the sophistries hatched in these seething brains found a warrant for every evil purpose, Max became utterly depraved. He listened to the counsel of those who aimed at fortune at any price, and did not shrink from criminal deeds so long as they could be committed without proof.

At last, at the peace, he was released, perverted though guiltless, capable of becoming a great politician in public life, or a scoundrel in private life, as circumstances might direct.

On his return to Issoudun he heard of the deplorable end of his parents. Like all people who give way to their passions, and lead, as the saying goes, a short life and a merry one, the Gilets had died in hospital in the most dire poverty. Almost immediately after the news of Napoleon's landing at Cannes ran through France, Max thought he could not do better than go to Paris and ask for his Cross and his promotion. The marshal who was then at the head of the War Office remembered Captain Gilet's brave conduct in Portugal; he gave him his commission with the rank of major of infantry; but he could not obtain the Cross for him. "The Emperor says you will be sure to win it in the first fight," said the marshal. And, in fact, the Emperor put down the brave captain's name for that honor after the battle of Fleurus, where Gilet distinguished himself. After the battle of Waterloo, Gilet retired with the army on the Loire. When the revision took place, Marshal Feltre would grant him neither his promotion nor his Cross.

Napoleon's soldier came home to Issoudun in a state of exasperation that may be easily imagined; he refused to serve at all without his Cross and the rank of major. The authorities thought this a monstrous demand from a young man of five-and-twenty, who at that rate might be a colonel at thirty. So Max sent in his papers. Thus the major—for the Bonapartists recognized among themselves the promotions conferred in 1815—lost the pittance designated as half-pay that was doled out to the officers of the army of the Loire. At the sight of this handsome young fellow, whose whole possessions were twenty napoleons, Issoudun bestirred itself in his favor, and the Maire gave him a place in his office with a salary of six hundred francs. Max, after holding this appointment for about six months, retired of his own accord, and was succeeded by a captain named Carpentier, who, like himself, had remained faithful to Napoleon.

Gilet, already Grand Master of the Knights of Idlesse, had entered on a life which lost him the regard of the best families in the town; not that they said anything to him, for he was violent, and dreaded by everybody, even by those officers of the old army who had, like him, refused to serve, and had come home to plant cabbages in Le Berry.

The small affection felt for the Bourbons by the good folks of Issoudun is not surprising after what has here been said. And, in proportion to its size, there were more Bonapartists in this little town than anywhere else. As is well known, almost all the Bonapartists became Liberals. At Issoudun, or in the neighborhood, there were perhaps a dozen officers in the same position as Maxence, who liked him so well as to regard him as their chief; with the sole exception of Carpentier, his successor, and of a certain M. Mignonnet, ex-captain of the Artillery of the Guard. Carpentier, a cavalry officer, who had risen from the ranks, very soon married, thus allying himself with one of the most important families in the town—that of Borniche-Hérau. Mignonnet, a student of the École Polytechnique, had belonged to a corps which fancies itself superior to all others. There were in the Imperial armies two tones of feeling among the military. A strong party had an immense contempt for the mere citizen, the *péquin*, the plain-clothes-man, such as the noble felt for the villein, the conquering race for the conquered. These were not over-strict in observing the code of honor in their intercourse with civilians, and a man who had cut down a bourgeois was not too severely blamed. The others, and among them the artillery, as a result perhaps of its republicanism, did not adopt this view, which tended indeed to divide France into two parts—Military France and Civilian France. Hence, though Major Potel and Captain Renard, two officers living in the Roman quarter, whose views as to civilians never varied, were Maxence Gilet's friends through thick and thin, Major Mignonnet and Captain Carpentier sided with the townsfolks in regarding Max's conduct as unworthy of an " officer and a gentleman."

Major Mignonnet, a little dry man of much dignity, gave his mind to the problems which the steam-engine seemed likely to solve, and lived very simply in the quiet society of M. and Mme. Carpentier. His gentle manners and scientific pursuits gained him the consideration of the whole town. And it was currently said that these two gentlemen were *a very different sort* from Major Potel and Captain Renard, Maxence, and the rest who frequented the Café Militaire and kept up the rough manners and traditions of the Empire.

Thus, at the time when Mme. Bridau revisited Issoudun, Max was an outlaw from the citizen world. The young fellow indeed so far sentenced himself that he never intruded himself on the circle known as the club, and did not complain of the reprobation of which he was the object, though he was the youngest, and smartest, and best-dressed man in Issoudun, spent a good deal of money, and even had a horse—a creature as strange at Issoudun as Lord Byron's was at Venice.

It will presently be seen how it had come to pass that Maxence, poor and unholpen, had been enabled to become the man of fashion of Issoudun; for these disgraceful means, which earned him the contempt of timid or pious persons, were linked with the interests which had brought Agathe and Joseph from Paris. To judge from his braggart bearing and the expression of his countenance, Max cared little enough for public opinion; he no doubt counted on being revenged some day, and reigning over those who now scorned him.

Besides, though the better class might misprize him, the admiration his character commanded among the populace was a counterpoise to that opinion; his courage, his fine appearance, his decisiveness, delighted the mob; but, indeed, his depravity was not known to them, nor was its extent suspected even by the townsfolk.

Max, at Issoudun, played a part very similar to that of the armorer in *The Fair Maid of Perth;* he was the champion of Bonaparte and the Opposition. He was looked to on great occasions as the good men of Perth looked to Smith. A fray gave the hero and the victim of the hundred days his opportunity.

In 1819 a battalion commanded by some Royalist officers, lads just out of Maison Rouge, marched through Issoudun on their way to relieve the garrison at Bourges. Not knowing what to do in such a constitutional town, the officers went to pass the time at the Café Militaire. There is such a resort for soldiers in every provincial town. That of Issoudun, standing in a corner of the parade-ground under the walls, and kept by the widow of an officer, naturally served as a sort of club for the Bonapartists of the place, half-pay officers and others who were of Max's way of thinking, and who were allowed, by the feeling of the town, to display their adoration of the Emperor. After 1816 a banquet was held at Issoudun every year to celebrate the anniversary of Napoleon's coronation.

The first three Royalists who dropped in asked for newspapers, naming, among others, the *Quotidienne* and the *Drapeau Blanc.* But the opinions of the town, and especially of the Café Militaire, did not encourage Royalist newspapers. The café could only produce the *Commerce*, the name assumed for a few years by the *Constitutionnel* when that paper was suppressed by law. But since, in the first number published under that title, its leader opened with these words, "The *Commerce* is essentially constitutional in its views," it was still familiarly called the *Constitutionnel.* Every subscriber at once saw the joke which bid them pay no attention to the name over the door; the wine would be of the old tap.

The stout mistress perched at her desk told the Royalists that she had not the papers they asked for.

"What papers do you take, then?" said one of the officers, a captain.

The waiter, a small youth in a blue cloth jacket and a coarse linen apron, produced the *Commerce.*

"Oh! so that is your paper! Have you no other?"

"No," said the waiter, "that is the only one."

The captain tore the hostile sheet into fragments, threw it on the floor, and spat upon it, saying, "Bring the dominoes!"

Within ten minutes news of the insult offered to the Constitutional Opposition and Liberalism generally in the person of the sacrosanct paper, which waged war on the priesthood with the courage and wit we all know, was flying along the streets and flashing like light into every house; everyone was telling the tale. The same sentence rose to every lip: "Run and tell Max!"

Max was soon informed. The officers had not finished their game of dominoes when Max, accompanied by Major Potel and Captain Renard, entered the café; while a following of thirty young fellows, eager to see the end of the matter, remained, for the most part, outside in groups on the Parade. The café soon was full.

"Waiter, bring me my paper," said Max very quietly. Then a little comedy was played. The stout woman said in a timid and conciliatory tone—

"I have lent it, captain."

"Go and fetch it!" cried one of Max's companions.

"Cannot you do without the paper?" said the waiter. "We have not got it."

The young officers were laughing and stealing side-glances at the town party.

"It is torn up!" exclaimed a young Bonapartist, looking at the captain's feet.

"Who has dared to tear up the newspaper?" asked Max in a voice of thunder, his eyes flashing, and his arms crossed as he rose.

"And we have spit upon it, too," replied the three Royalists, rising and facing Max.

"You have insulted the whole town!" said Max, turning pale.

"Well, what of that?" said the youngest of the three.

With a neatness, a boldness, and a swiftness which the young men could not guard against, Max dealt two slaps to the foremost man as they stood, saying—

"Do you understand French?"

They went out to fight in the Allée de Frapesle, three against three. Potel and Renard would not hear of allowing Max to fight it out alone with the Royalists. Max killed his man; Potel wounded his so severely that the unhappy lad, a man of good birth, died next day in the hospital, whither they carried him. As for the third, he got off with a sword-cut, and wounded Captain Renard, his opponent. The battalion went on to Bourges that night. This affair, much talked about in the country, crowned Maxence Gilet as a hero.

The Knights of Idlesse, all young—the eldest was not five-and-twenty—admired Maxence. Some of them, far from sharing the rigid prudery of their families with regard to Max, envied him greatly, and thought him a very fortunate man. Under such a leader the Order did wonders. From the month of January 1817 not a week passed but the town was in a pother over some fresh prank. Max, as a point of honor, imposed certain conditions on the Knights; by-laws were drawn up. These young devils became as prompt as disciples of Amoros, as tough as kites, skilled in every kind of exercise, as strong and as dexterous as malefactors. They were adepts in the business of creeping over roofs, scaling house-walls, jumping and walking without a sound, spreading mortar, and building up doors. They had an arsenal of ladders, ropes, tools, and disguises. The Knights of Idlesse, in short, achieved the very ideal of ingenious mischief, not only in the execution, but in the invention of the tricks they played. They were at last inspired by that genius of malignity in which Panurge took such delight, which provokes everyone to laugh, and makes the victim so ridiculous that he dare not complain. The men, all respectably connected, had, of course, means of information in private houses which enabled them to obtain such intelligence as could serve them in the perpetration of their rascality.

One very cold night these demons incarnate carried a large stove out into the courtyard of a house, and stoked it so effectually that the fire lasted till morning. Then it was rumored in the town that M. So-and-so (a noted miser!) had been trying to warm his yard.

Sometimes they lay in ambush in the High Street, or the Rue Basse, the two arteries, as it were, of the town, into which run a great number of smaller cross streets. Squatting, each at the corner of a side street, under the wall, putting their heads out when every household was in its first sleep, they would shout in a tone of terror from one end of the town to the other—

"What is the matter? Oh, what is the matter?" The repeated question would rouse the citizens, who soon appeared in their shirts and night-caps, candle in hand, catechising each other, and holding the strangest colloquies with the most bewildered faces ever seen.

There was a poor bookbinder, very old, who believed in demons. Like most provincial artisans, he worked in a little low shop. The Knights, disguised as devils, invaded his shop at night, put him into his wastepaper box, and left him shrieking like three men at the stake. The poor man roused all the neighbors, to whom he related these apparitions of Lucifer, and the neighbors could never undeceive him. The binder very nearly went mad.

In the depth of a severe winter the confederates demolished the chimney-pot of the tax-collector, and replaced it in the course of the night; it was exactly the same; they made no noise, and left not the slightest trace of their work. The chimney was, however, so arranged inside as to fill the room with smoke. The tax-collector endured this for two months before discovering why his chimney, which had always worked properly and given him perfect satisfaction, should play such tricks; and he had to reconstruct it.

One day they stuffed trusses of straw sprinkled with sulphur, and greasy paper into the chimney of an old bigot, a friend of Mme. Hochon's. Next morning, on lighting her fire, the poor old lady, a quiet, gentle creature, thought she had lighted a volcano. The firemen came, the whole town rushed in; and as there were among the firemen some of the Knights of Idlesse, they deluged the poor soul's house, and put her in fear of drowning after the fear of fire. She fell ill of the shock.

When they wished to keep anyone up all night, under arms and in mortal terror, they sent anonymous letters warning him of a plan to rob him; then they crept one by one under his wall or past his windows whistling signals to each other.

One of their most successful hoaxes, which amused the town hugely, and is talked of to this day, was sending to all the possible heirs of a very miserly old woman, who was expected to leave a large fortune, a few lines announcing her death, and inviting them to come punctually at a certain hour, when seals would be affixed. About eighty persons arrived from Vatan, Saint-Florent, Vierzon; and the neighborhood, all in deep mourning, but in very good spirits—men with their wives, widows with their sons, children with their parents, some in gigs, some in basket-carriages, some in old tax-carts. Imagine the scenes between the old lady's servant and the first-comers! Then the consultation at the lawyer's!—it was like a riot in the town.

At last one day the Sous-préfet began to think this state of things intolerable, all the more so because it was impossible to ascertain who ventured to perpetrate these pleasantries. Suspicion, indeed, rested on the guilty youths; but as the National Guard was at that time a mere name at Issoudun, as there was no garrison, and as the lieutenant of police had not more than eight gendarmes at his command, and kept no patrol, it was impossible to obtain proofs. The Sous-préfet was at once placed on "the order of the night," to be treated as obnoxious. This functionary was in the habit of eating two new-laid eggs for breakfast. He kept fowls in his yard, and he crowned his mania for eating new-laid eggs by persisting on cooking them himself. Neither his wife, nor the maid, nor anyone, according to him, could cook an egg as it ought to be done; he watched the clock, and boasted that in this particular he could beat all the world. For two years he had boiled his own eggs with a success that was the subject of much jesting. Then, every night for a month the eggs were taken from his hens and hard-boiled eggs put in their place. The poor man was at his wits' end, and lost his reputation as the egg-boiling Sous-préfet. Finally, he had something else for breakfast.

Still, he never suspected the Knights of Idlesse; the trick was too neatly done. Max hit on a plan for greasing his stove-pipes every night with oil saturated with such vile odors that it was impossible to live in the house. Nor was this all; one morning his wife, wishing to attend mass, found her shawl stuck together inside by some glue so tenacious that she was obliged to go without it. The official begged to be transferred. His cowardice and submission established beyond question the occult and farcical sway of the Knights of Idlesse.

Between the Rue des Minimes and the Place Misère there existed at that time a part of the town inclosed between the Borrowed Stream at the bottom and the rampart above—the part extending from the Parade to the crockery market. This sort of misshapen square was occupied by wretched-looking houses, closely packed and divided by alleys so narrow that two persons could not walk abreast. This part of the town, a sort of Court of Miracles, was inhabited by poor people, or such as carried on the least profitable trades, lodging in the hovels and wretched tenements expressively designated as *maison borgnes*—purblind houses. It was, no doubt, at all times a spot accursed, the den of evil livers, for one of these lanes is called Rue du Bourreau, or Hangman's Alley. It is certain that the town executioner had here his house, with its red door, for more than five centuries. The executioner's man lives there still, if public report may be believed, for the townspeople never see him. None but the vine-dressers keep up any communication with this mysterious personage, who inherits from his predecessors the gift of healing fractures and wounds. The women of the town held high festival here of old, when the place gave itself the airs of a capital. Here dwelt the dealers in second-hand articles, which never seem to find a buyer, old-clothes venders, with their malodorous display; in short, all the mongrel population that herds in some such corner of almost every town, under the domination of one or two Jews.

At the corner of one of these dark passages, in the least dead-alive part of the suburb, there was, from 1815 till 1823, and perhaps even later, a beer-shop kept by a woman known as Mother Cognette. The beer-shop occupied a house not ill built of courses of white stone filled in with rubble and mortar, and consisting of one story and an attic. Over the door shone an immense branch of a fir-tree gleaming like Florentine bronze. As if this "bush" were not sufficiently explicit, the eye was caught by a blue board, fastened to the architrave, on which the words "Good March beer" were legible above a picture representing a soldier offering to a very lightly draped woman a jet of foam spouting from a jug into the glass she holds, and forming a curve like the arch of a bridge, the whole, so gorgeously colored as to make Delacroix faint.

The ground-floor consisted of a large front room, serving both as kitchen and dining-room; the provisions needed for carrying on the business hung to hooks from the rafters. Behind this room a ladder-stair went up to the first floor; but, at the foot of the stairs, was a door opening into a small narrow room, lighted from one of those provincial backyards which are more like a chimney, so narrow, dark, and high are they. This little room, screened by a lean-to, and hidden from all eyes by the surrounding walls, was the hall where the Bad Boys of Issoudun held their full court. Old Cognet ostensibly entertained the country people there on market days; in reality, he played host to the Knights of Idlesse.

This old Cognet, formerly a groom in some rich house, had married La Cognette, originally a cook in a good family. The suburb of Rome still uses a feminine form of the husband's name for the wife, in the Latin fashion, as in Italy and Poland. By combining their savings, Cognet and his wife had been able to buy this house and set up as tavern-keepers. La Cognette, a woman of about forty, tall and buxom, with a turn-up nose, an olive skin, hair as black as jet, brown eyes, round and bright, and an intelligent, merry face, had been chosen by Maxence Gilet to be the Léonarde of the Order for the sake of her good-humor and her talents as a cook. Cognet himself was about fifty-six, thick-set, submissive to his wife, and, to quote the joke she constantly repeated, he could not help seeing straight, for he was blind of one eye.

For seven years, from 1816 to 1823, neither husband nor wife ever let out a word as to what was done or plotted every night on their premises, and they were always very much attached to all the Knights. Their devotion was indeed perfect, but it may seem less admirable when we consider that their interest was a guarantee for their silence and affection. At whatever hour of the night the members of the Order came to La Cognette's, if they knocked in a particular way, Father Cognet, recognizing the signal, rose, lighted the fire and the candles, opened the door, and went to the cellar for wine laid in expressly for the Order, while his wife cooked them a first-rate supper, either before or after the exploits planned the night before, or during the day.

While Mme. Bridau was on her way from Orleans to Issoudun, the Knights of Idlesse were preparing one of their most famous tricks. An old Spaniard, a prisoner of war, who, at the peace, had remained in France, where he carried on a small trade in seeds, had come to market early, and had left his empty cart at the foot of the tower. Maxence was the first to arrive at the meeting-place fixed for the evening under the tower, and was presently asked in a low voice, "What is doing to-night?"

"Old Fario's cart is out there," replied he. "I almost broke my nose against it. Let us get it up the knoll to the foot of the tower, and after that we will see."

When Richard built the tower of Issoudun, he founded it, as has been said, on the remains of a basilica which occupied the site of the Roman temple and the Celtic Dun. These ruins, each representing a long series of centuries, formed a large mound, full of the monuments of three ages. Thus Richard Cœur de Lion's tower stands on the top of a cone sloping equally steeply on all sides, and to be ascended only by zigzag paths. To represent its position in a few words, the tower may be compared to the Obelisk of Luxor on its base. The base of the tower of Issoudun, concealing so many archæological treasures as yet unknown, is above eighty feet high on the side next the town. In an hour the cart had been taken to pieces and hoisted bit by bit to the top of the hill at the foot of the tower, by means something like that of the soldiers who carried the guns up the pass of Saint-Bernard. The cart was put together again, and all traces of the operations so carefully effaced that it would seem to have been carried there by the Devil, or by a stroke of a fairy's wand. After this great achievement, the Knights, being hungry and thirsty, made their way to La Cognette's, and were soon seated round the table in the low narrow room, laughing by anticipation at the face Fario would make when, at about ten o'clock in the morning, he should go to look for his cart.

The Knights, of course, did not play these antics every night. The talents of Sganarelle, Mascarille, and Scapin rolled into one would not have been able to invent three hundred and sixty-five practical jokes a year. In the first place, circumstances were not always favorable: the moon was too bright, or their last prank had been too annoying to sober folks; or one or another would refuse his co-operation when some relation was the chosen victim. But, though the rascals did not meet every night at La Cognette's, they saw each other every day, and were companions in such lawful pleasures as hunting or the vintage in autumn, and skating in winter.

Among this group of a score of youths who thus protested against the social somnolence of the town, some were more especially intimate with Max than the others, or made him their idol. A man of this temper often infatuates those younger than himself. Now Mme. Hochon's two grandsons, François Hochon and Baruch Borniche, were his devotees. The two boys regarded Max as almost a cousin, accepting the views of the neighbors as to his left-handed relationship to the Lousteaus. Max was free with his loans of money denied them by their grandfather Hochon for their amusements; he took them out shooting, and gave them some training; in fact, his influence over them was paramount to that of home. They both were orphans, and though of age, lived under the guardianship of their grandfather, in consequence of certain circumstances to be explained when the great M. Hochon appears on the scene.

At this moment François and Baruch—we will call them by their Christian names to make the story clearer—were seated, one on the right hand, and one on the left of Max, at the middle of the supper-table, that was wretchedly lighted by the fuliginous glimmer of four dips, eight to the pound. The party, consisting of not more than eleven of the Knights, had drunk a dozen to fifteen bottles of various wines. Baruch, whose name suggests a survival of Calvinism at Issoudun, said to Max at the moment when the wine had set all tongues wagging—

"You are about to be threatened at the very center——"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Max.

"Why, my grandmother has had a letter from Mme. Bridau, her god-daughter, announcing her arrival on a visit with her son. My grandmother arranged two rooms yesterday for their reception."

"And what is that to me?" said Max, taking up his glass, emptying it at a gulp, and setting it down on the table with a comical flourish.

Max was now four-and-thirty. One of the candles stood near him, and cast its light on his martial countenance, illuminating his forehead, and showing off his fair complexion, his flashing eyes, and his hair crisply waved, and as black as jet. This hair stood up strongly and naturally, curling back from his brow and temples, and clearly marking the outline of growth which our grandfathers called the five points. Notwithstanding such a striking contrast of black and white, Max had a very sweet face, deriving its charm from its shape, much like that given by Raphael to his Virgins' faces, and from a finely-shaped mouth, on which a gentle smile was apt to linger, a set expression which Max had gradually adopted. The fine color that flushes the faces of the Berrichons added to his genial look, and when he laughed outright he displayed two-and-thirty teeth worthy to grace the mouth of a fine lady. He was tall and well proportioned, neither stout nor thin. His hands, kept with care, were white and not unshapely, but his feet were those of the Roman suburb, of a foot soldier under the Empire. He would have made a fine general of division; he had shoulders that would have been the fortune of a field-marshal, and a breast broad enough to display all the Orders of Europe. Intelligence gave purpose to all his movements. And then, attractive by nature, like almost all children of a passion, the noble blood of his real father came out in him.

"But do not you know, Max," cried a youth at the bottom of the table, the son of a retired surgeon-major named Goddet, the best doctor in the town, "that Mme. Hochon's god-daughter is Rouget's sister? And if she and her son the painter are coming here, it is no doubt to get back her share of the old man's fortune, and then good-by to your harvest!"

Max frowned. Then with a glance that went from face to face all round the table, he studied the effect on his companions of this address, and again he said, "What is that to me?"

"But," François began again, "it seems to me that if old Rouget were to alter his will, supposing he has made one in favor of La Rabouilleuse . . ."

Here Max cut his faithful follower short with these words—

"When, on my arrival here, I heard you mentioned as one of the cinq-Hochons (cinq-cochons=five pigs), as the pun on your name has it—and has had it these thirty years—I told the man who called you so to shut up, my dear François, and that so emphatically, that no one at Issoudun has ever repeated that idiotic jest, at any rate not in my presence! And this is the return you make: you make use of a name of contempt in speaking of a woman you know me to be attached to."

Never had Max said so much as to his intimacy with the woman of whom François had just spoken by the nickname commonly given to her in Issoudun. As a former prisoner on the hulks, Max had enough experience, and as major in the Grenadier Guards he had learnt enough of honor, to understand the origin of the contempt for him in the town. He had never allowed anyone whatever to say a word to him with reference to Mlle. Flore Brazier, Jean-Jacques Rouget's servant-mistress, so vigorously designated by good Mme. Hochon as a hussy. Moreover, Max was well known to be too touchy to be spoken to on the subject unless he began it, and he never had begun it. In short, it was too dangerous to incur Max's anger or displeasure for even his most intimate friends to banter him about La Rabouilleuse.

When something was once said of a connection between Max and this girl in the presence of Major Potel and of Captain Renard, the two officers with whom he lived on terms of equality, Potel had replied—

"If he is Jean-Jacques Rouget's half-brother, why should he not live with him?"

"And besides," added Renard, "the girl is a morsel for a king; supposing he loves her, where is the harm? Does not young Goddet pay court to Mme. Fichet to make the daughter his wife as a reward for such a penance?"

After this well-merited lecture, François could not recover the thread of his ideas, and he was yet more at fault when Max gently added—

"Well, go on——"

"Certainly not!" cried François.

"You are angry for nothing, Max," said young Goddet. "Is it not an understood thing that here, at La Cognette's, we may all say what we please? Should we not all become the mortal foes of any one of us who remembered outside these walls anything that is said, thought, or done here? All the town speaks of Flore Brazier by the nickname of La Rabouilleuse; if François let it slip out by accident, is that a crime against the Order of Idlesse?"

"No," said Max, "only against our personal friendship. —But I thought better of it; I remembered we were in Idlesse. I told him to go on."

There was utter silence. The pause was so uncomfortable for all present that Max exclaimed: "I will go on for him" (sensation), "for all of you" (amazement), "and tell you what you are thinking" (great sensation). "You think that Flore, La Rabouilleuse, Flore Brazier, Daddy Rouget's housekeeper—for they call him *Père Rouget!*—an old bachelor, who will never have any children!—you think, I say, that this woman has supplied me with everything since I came to Issoudun. If I have three hundred francs a month to toss out of window; if I can treat you often as I am doing this evening, and have money to lend to you all, I must get the cash out of Mme. Brazier's purse? Well, then, by Heaven! Yes, and again yes.—Yes, Mlle Brazier has taken deadly aim at the old man's fortune."

"From father to son she will have richly earned it," said Goddet in his corner.

"You believe," Max went on, after smiling at Goddet's remark, "that I have laid a plot to marry Flore after the old man's death, and that then his sister, and this son, of whom I never heard till this instant, will endanger my future prospects?"

"That's it," cried François.

"So we all think round this table," said Baruch.

"Well, be calm, my boys," replied Max; "forewarned is forearmed. Now, I speak to the Knights of Idlesse. If, to be rid of these Parisians, I need the support of the Order, will you lend me a hand? Oh, within the limits we have prescribed for our pranks," he quickly added, seeing a slight hesitancy. "Do you suppose I want to murder or poison them?—Thank God, I am not a fool! And supposing, after all, that the Bridaus should win the day, and Flore should get no more than she has, I should be satisfied with that, do you hear? I like her well enough to prefer her to Mlle. Fichet, if Mlle. Fichet would have anything to say to me!"

Mlle. Fichet was the richest heiress of Issoudun, and the daughter's hand formed a large item in young Goddet's passion for her mother.

Plain speaking is so precious, that the eleven Knights rose as one man.

"You are of the right sort, Max!"

"That is something like, Max. We will be the Knights of Salvation."

"Down with the Bridaus!"

"We will bridle the Bridaus!"

"After all, a sweetheart has been known to have three husbands!"

"Deuce take it, old Lousteau was fond of Mme. Rouget, and there is less harm in courting a housekeeper free and unfettered!"

"And if old Rouget was Max's father more or less, it is all in the family!"

"Opinions are free!"

"Hurrah for Max!"

"Down with cant!"

"Let us drink the fair Flore's health!"

Such were the eleven answers, acclamations, or toasts that broke from the eleven Knights of Idlesse, the outcome, it must be owned, of their very low standard of morality. We see now what Max's object had been in establishing himself as Grand Master of the Order. While inventing practical jokes, and making himself agreeable to the youth of the principal families, Max hoped to secure their suffrages in the day of his rehabilitation. He rose with a grace, lifted his glass full of Bordeaux, and all awaited his next speech.

"For all the ill I wish you, I only hope you may all get wives to compare with the fair Flore! As to the incursion of relations, for the present I am not alarmed; and later, we shall see!"

"We must not forget Fario's cart!"

"Oh, that is safe enough, by Jove!" said Goddet.

"I will see to the fitting conclusion of that joke," cried Max. "Be early at the market, and come and let me know when the old fellow comes to look for his cart."

The clocks were striking half-past three in the morning; the Knights went away in silence to find their way home, hugging the wall, and not making a sound, all being shod with list shoes.

Max walked slowly up to the Place Saint-Jean in the upper part of the town, between the Porte Saint-Jean and the Porte Villate, the rich citizens' quarter. Major Gilet had dissembled his fears, but this news had hit him hard. Since his stay above or below decks he had acquired a power of dissimulation as great and deep as his depravement. In the first place, and above all, the forty thousand francs a year in land owned by Rouget was the whole of Gilet's passion for Flore Brazier, of that you may be sure! It may easily be seen from his mode of conduct what confidence she had led him to feel in her future fortune, as based on the old bachelor's affection. At the same time, the news that the legitimate heirs were on their way was enough to shake Max's faith in Flore's influence. The savings of the last seventeen years still stood in Rouget's name. Now if the will, which Flore declared had long since been executed in her favor, should be revoked, these savings at any rate might be secured if they were invested in the name of Mlle. Brazier.

"In all these seven years, that idiot of a girl has never spoken a word about nephews and a sister!" said Max to himself, as he turned out the Rue Marmouse into the Rue l'Avenier. "Seven hundred and fifty thousand francs in the hands of ten or twelve different notaries, at Bourges, Vierzon, and Châteauroux, cannot be drawn out or invested in State securities within a week without its being known in a land of 'jaw.' To begin with, we must pack off the relations; but once quit of them, we must make haste and secure that fortune. Well, I must think it over."

Max was tired. He went into Rouget's house with a latch-key, and crept noiselessly to bed, saying to himself, "To-morrow my ideas will be clearer."

It will not be useless here to explain whence the sultana of the Place Saint-Jean had obtained the nickname of La Rabouilleuse, and how she had gained the command of the Rouget establishment.

As he had advanced in years, the old doctor, father of Jean-Jacques and of Mme. Bridau, had become aware of his son's utter stupidity. He then held him very tight, trying to force him into habits which would take the place of wisdom; but by this means, without knowing it, he was preparing him to be tame under the first tyrant that might succeed in getting the halter round his neck. One day, as he rode home from his rounds, the wily and vicious old man saw a lovely little girl on the skirt of the water-meadow by the avenue to Tivoli. On hearing the horse, the child rose up from the bottom of one of the channels, which, seen from the height of Issoudun, look like silver ribbons on a green dress. Starting up like a naiad, the girl displayed to the doctor one of the sweetest virgin heads that ever painter dreamed of. Old Rouget, who knew the whole neighborhood, did not know this miracle of beauty. The child, almost naked, wore a tattered and scanty petticoat full of holes, and made of cheap woolen stuff, striped brown and white. A sheet of paper, fastened down by an osier withy, served her for a hat. Under this paper, scrawled over with strokes and O's, fully justifying its name of scribbling paper, was gathered up the most beautiful golden hair that any daughter of Eve could desire, fastened in a twist with a horse's curry-comb. Her pretty sunburnt bosom, scarcely covered by the rags of a handkerchief that had once been a bandanna, showed its whiteness below the sunburn. The petticoat, pulled through between the legs and fastened by a coarse pin, looked a good deal like a swimmer's bathing drawers. Her feet and legs, visible through the clear water, were characterized by a slenderness worthy of the sculptors of the Middle Ages. This fair body, from exposure to the sun, had a rosy hue which was not ungraceful; the neck and bosom were worthy to be covered by a silken shawl. Finally, the nymph had blue eyes, shaded by lashes whose expression would have brought a painter or a poet to his knees. The doctor, enough of an anatomist to know a lovely figure, perceived that all the arts would be losers if this exquisite person were destroyed by field labor.

"Where do you come from, little one? I never saw you before," said the old doctor of sixty-two.

The scene took place in the month of September 1799.

"I belong to Vatan," replied the girl.

On hearing a town accent, an ill-looking man, about two hundred yards away, standing in the upper waters of the stream, raised his head.

"Now, then, what are you at, Flore?" he called out. "Jabbering there instead of working; all the basketful will get off!"

"And what do you come here for from Vatan?" asked the doctor, not troubling himself about this interruption.

"I *rabouille* for my uncle Brazier there."

Rabouiller is a local word of Le Berry, which perfectly describes the process it is meant to represent—the action of stirring the waters of a brooklet by beating them with a sort of large racket made of the branch of a tree. The crayfish, frightened by the commotion, of which they fail to see the purpose, hastily escape up stream, and in their agitation rush into the nets, which the poacher has placed at a proper distance. Flore Brazier held her racket, or *rabouilloir*, with the unconscious grace of innocence.

"But has your uncle got leave to fish for crayfish?"

"Well, and aren't we under the Republic one and indivisible?" shouted Uncle Brazier from where he stood.

"We are under the Directory," said the doctor; "and I know of no law which will allow a man from Vatan to come and fish within the limits of the Commune of Issoudun." Then he said to Flore, "Is your mother living, child?"

"No, sir, and my father is in hospital at Bourges; he went mad after getting a sunstroke on his head in the fields——"

"How much do you earn?"

"Five sous a day all the season for crayfish—I goes to Braisne, ever so far, to beat the waters. Then in harvest-time, I gleans; and in winter, I spins."

"You are about twelve, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you like to come with me? You shall be well fed, nicely dressed, have pretty shoes——"

"No, no. My niece has got to stay wi' me. I have her in charge before God and man," said Uncle Brazier, who had come down to his niece and the doctor. "I am her guardian, I am."

The doctor preserved his gravity, suppressing a smile, which would certainly have been too much for anyone else at the sight of Uncle Brazier. This "guardian" had on a peasant's broad hat, ruined by the sun and rain, riddled like a cabbage leaf on which many caterpillars have resided, and sewn up with white cotton. Under this hat was a dark hollow face, in which mouth, nose, and eyes, were four darker patches. His worn jacket was like a piece of patchwork, and his trousers were of sacking.

"I am Dr. Rouget," said the physician; "and, since you are the child's guardian, bring her to my house, Place Saint-Jean; it will not be a bad day's work for you or for her either."

And without another word, feeling quite sure that he should see Uncle Brazier in due course with the pretty Rabouilleuse, Dr. Rouget spurred his horse on the road to Issoudun. And, in fact, just as he was sitting down to dinner, his cook announced Citoyen and Citoyenne Brazier.

"Sit down," said the doctor to the uncle and niece.

Flore and her guardian, both barefoot, looked round the doctor's dining-room with eyes amazed; and this was why.

The house, inherited by Rouget from old Descoings, stands in the middle of one side of the Place Saint-Jean, a long and very narrow square planted with a few sickly-looking lime trees. The houses here are better built than in any other part of the town, and Descoings's is one of the best. This house, facing M. Hochon's, has three windows on the front towards the square, on the first floor, and below them a carriage gate into the courtyard, behind which the garden lies. Under the archway of this carriage gate is a door into a large room with two windows to the street. The kitchen is behind this room, but cut off by a staircase leading to the first floor and attics above. At an angle with the kitchen are a woodhouse, a shed where the washing was done, stabling for two horses, and a coach-house; and above there are lofts for corn, hay, and oats, besides a room where the doctor's man-servant slept.

The room, so much admired by the little peasant girl and her uncle, was decorated with carved wood in the style executed under Louis XV., and painted gray, and a handsome marble chimney-piece, above which Flore could see herself in a large glass reaching to the ceiling, and set in a carved and gilt frame. On the panels, at intervals, hung a few pictures, the spoil of the abbeys of Déols, of Issoudun, of Saint-Gildas, of La Prée, of Chézal-Benoît, of Saint-Sulpice, and of the convents of Bourges and Issoudun, which had formerly been enriched by the liberality of kings and of the faithful with precious gifts and the finest works of the Renaissance. Thus, among the pictures preserved by Descoings and inherited by Rouget, there was a Holy Family by Albano, a Saint Jerome by Domenichino, a Head of Christ by Gian Bellini, a Virgin by Leonardo da Vinci, Christ bearing the Cross by Titian, from the Marchese di Belabre's collection—he who stood a siege and had his head cut off under Louis XIII.; a Lazarus by Veronese, a Marriage of the Virgin by the Priest of Genoa, two Church pictures by Rubens, and a copy from Perugino by Perugino himself, or by Raphael; finally, two Correggios and an Andrea del Sarto. The Descoings had chosen these from among three hundred, the spoils of churches, not in the least knowing their value, and selecting them solely for their better condition. Several had not merely magnificent frames, but were under glass. It was the beauty of the frames, and the value which the *panes* seemed to suggest, that had led to their choice.

Thus the furniture of the room was not devoid of the luxury so much prized in our days. though not at that time valued at Issoudun. The clock standing on the chimney-shelf between two superb silver chandeliers was distinguished by a solemn magnificence that betrayed the hand of Boule. The armchairs in carved wood, fitted with worsted-work done by devout ladies of rank, would be highly prized in these days, for they all bore coronets and coats of arms. Between the two windows stood a handsome console, brought from some château, and on it an enormous Chinese jar, in which the doctor kept his tobacco.

Neither Rouget, nor his son, nor the cook, nor the man-servant, took the least care of these treasures. They spit into a fireplace of beautiful workmanship, and the gilt moldings were variegated with verdigris. A pretty chandelier, partly of porcelain, was speckled, like the ceiling, with black spots, showing that the flies were at home there.. The Descoings had hung the windows with brocade curtains, stripped from the bed of some abbot. To the left of the door a cabinet worth some thousands of francs served as a sideboard.

"Now, Fanchette," said the doctor to his cook, "bring two glasses, and fetch us something good."

Fanchette, a sturdy country servant, who was regarded as superior even to La Cognette and th best cook in Issoudun, flew with an alacrity that testified to the doctor's despotic rule, and also to some curiosity on her part.

"What is an acre of vine-land worth in your parts?" said the doctor, pouring out a glass of wine for Brazier.

"A hundred crowns in hard cash."

"Well, leave your niece here as maid-servant; she shall have a hundred crowns for wages, and you, as her guardian, shall take the money——"

"Every year?" said Brazier, opening his eyes as large as saucers.

"I leave the matter to your conscience," replied the doctor. "She is an orphan. Till she is eighteen Flore will have none of the money."

"She is goin' on for twelve," said the uncle; "that makes it up to six acres of vine-land. But she is sweetly pretty, as mild as a lamb, very strong, very quick, very obedient. Poor creetur, she was the apple of his eye to my poor brother."

"And I will pay a year in advance," said the doctor.

"Lord A'mighty, make it two years, and us'll consider it settled. She will be better off with you than down at our place, for my wife whacks her, she can't abide her. There's only me that purtects her, poor dear little creetur—as innocent as a new-born babe!"

On hearing this speech, the doctor, struck by the word innocent, signed to Uncle Brazier, and led him out into the courtyard, and from thence into the garden, leaving the little Rabouilleuse looking at the table between Fanchette and

Jean-Jacques, who cross-questioned her, and to whom she artlessly related her meeting with the doctor.

"Well, honey, good-by," said Uncle Brazier on his return, kissing Flore on the forehead. "You may thank me for a good job in leaving you with this kind and generous father of the poor. You've got to obey him like as you would me. Be a very good girl, and do what he tells you."

"Get the room over mine ready," said the doctor to Fanchette. "This little Flora, who is certainly well named, will sleep there from this evening. To-morrow we will send for a shoemaker and a needlewoman. Now, lay a place for her at once; she will keep us company."

That evening nothing was talked of in Issoudun but the introduction of a little "Rabouilleuse" into Dr. Rouget's household. The nickname stuck to Mlle. Brazier in this land of mocking spirits, before, during, and after her rise to fortune.

The doctor aimed, no doubt, at doing for Flore, in a small way, what Louis XV. did on a large scale for Mme. de Romans: but he set to work too late. Louis XV. was still young, while the doctor was on the verge of old age.

From twelve years old to fourteen the charming peasant girl enjoyed unmixed happiness. Nicely dressed, in infinitely better clothes than the richest miss in Issoudun, she had a gold watch and trinkets, given her by the doctor to encourage her in her studies, for she had a master to teach her reading, writing, and account-keeping. But the almost animal life led by the peasantry had given Flore such an aversion for the bitter cup of learning, that the doctor got no further with her education.

His intentions with regard to this girl whom he was polishing, teaching, and training, with a care that was all the more pathetic, because he had been supposed incapable of tenderness, were variously interpreted by the vulgar gossips of the town, whose tattle gave rise, as in the matter of Agathe's and Max's parentage, to serious mistakes. It is not easy for the population of a town to disentangle the truth from a thousand conjectures in the midst of contradictory comments, and among all the hypotheses to which a single fact gives rise. In the provinces, as formerly among the politicians of *La Petite Provence* at the Tuileries, everything must be accounted for, and at last everybody knows everything. But each individual clings to the view of affairs that he prefers; that is the only true one, he can prove it, and believes his own version exclusively. Hence, notwithstanding the unscreened life and the espionage of a country town, the truth is often obscured, and can be detected only by the impartiality of the historian, or of a superior mind looking down from a higher point of view.

"What do you suppose that old ape wants, at his age, of a child of fifteen?" said one to another, two years after Flore's arrival.

"What indeed?" replied a third; "his high days are long since past and gone."

"My dear fellow, the doctor is disgusted with his idiot of a son, and he cannot get over his hatred of Agathe; in that dilemma perhaps he has been such a good boy these two years past in order to marry the girl; and he might have a boy by her, strong and sturdy and wide awake like Max," observed a wisehead.

"Get along! Do you suppose that after leading such a life as Lousteau and Rouget did between 1770 and 1787, a man of sixty-two is likely to have children? Not a bit of it; the old wretch has read his old testament, if only from a medical point of view, and he knows how King David warmed himself in his old age. That is all, my good fellow."

"They say that Brazier, when he is fuddled, boasts at Vatan that he stole the child," cried one of those people who prefer to believe the worst.

"Bless me! neighbor, and what won't folks say at Issoudun?"

From 1800 to 1805, for five years, the doctor had the pleasure of educating Flore without the worry which Mlle. de Romans is said to have given to Louis the Well-beloved by her ambitions and pretensions. The little Rabouilleuse was so happy, comparing the position she now was in with the life she would have led with her uncle, that she submitted, no doubt, to her master's requirements, as an Eastern slave does.

With all respect to the writers of idyls and to philanthropists, the sons of the soil have but vague notions of certain virtues; their scruples have their root in self-interest, not in any feeling for the good and beautiful; brought up to look forward to poverty, to incessant toil and want, the prospect makes them regard everything as allowable that can rescue them from the hell of hunger and everlasting labor, especially if it is not prohibited by law. If there are exceptions, they are rare. Virtue, socially speaking, is mated with ease, and begins with education. Flore Brazier was, therefore, an object of envy to every girl for six leagues round Issoudun, though in the eye of religion her conduct was in the highest degree reprehensible.

Flore, born in 1787, was brought up amid the Saturnalia of 1793 and 1798, whose lurid light was reflected on a land bereft of priesthood, worship, altars, or religious ceremonies, where marriage was a civil contract, and where revolutionary axioms left a deep impression, especially at Issoudun, where rebellion is traditional. Catholic worship was hardly re-established in 1802. The Emperor had some difficulty in finding priests; even in 1806 many a parish in France was still in widowhood, so slowly could a clergy decimated by the scaffold be reinstated after such violent dispersal. Hence, in 1802, there was nothing to accuse Flore but her own conscience. In Uncle Brazier's ward was not conscience likely to prove weaker than interest? Though the cynical doctor's age led him, as there is every reason to suppose, to respect this maiden of fifteen, she was not the less regarded as a very wide-awake young person. However, some people insisted on finding a certificate of innocence in the cessation of the doctor's care and kindness; for the last two years of his life he treated her with more than coldness.

Old Rouget had killed enough people to be able to foresee his own end. His notary, finding him on his deathbed, wrapped in the cloak of encyclopedist philosophy, urged him to do something for the young girl, then seventeen years old.

"Very good, make her of age, emancipate her," said he.

The reply is characteristic of this old man, who never failed to point his sarcasm with an allusion to the profession of the man he was answering. By veiling his evil deeds under a witticism he obtained forgiveness for them in a part of the world where wit always wins the day, especially when it is backed up by intelligent self-interest. The notary heard in this speech the concentrated hatred of a man whom Nature had balked of an intended debauch, and his revenge on the innocent object of his senile affection. This opinion was, to some extent, confirmed by the doctor's obduracy; he left nothing to La Rabouilleuse, saying with a bitter smile, "Her beauty is wealth enough!" when the notary again pressed the matter.

Jean-Jacques Rouget did not mourn for the old man, but Flore did. The doctor had made his son very unhappy, especially since he had come of age, which was in 1791; whereas he had given the little peasant girl the material happiness which is the ideal of laboring folk. When, after the old man was buried, Fanchette said to Flore, "Well, what is to become of you now that monsieur is gone?" Jean-Jacques's eyes beamed, and for the first time in his life his stolid face lighted up, seemed to shine with a flash of thought, and expressed a feeling.

"Leave her with me," said he to Fanchette, who was clearing the table.

Flore, at seventeen, still had that refinement of figure and face, that elegance of beauty which had bewitched the doctor; women of the world know how to preserve it, but in a peasant girl it fades as swiftly as the flowers of the field. At the same time, the tendency to become stout, which comes to all handsome country women when they do not lead a life of toil and privation in the open fields and sunshine, was already noticeable in Flore. Her bust was large, her round, white shoulders were richly molded and finely joined to a throat that already showed fat wrinkles. But the shape of her face was still pure, and her chin as yet delicately cut.

"Flore," said Jean-Jacques in agitated tones, "you are quite used to this house?"

"Yes, M. Jacques."

On the very verge of a declaration, the heir felt his tongue tied by the remembrance of the dead man but now laid in his grave, and wondered to what lengths his father's benevolence might have gone. Flore, looking at her new master, and incapable of imagining his simplicity, waited for some minutes for Jean-Jacques to proceed; but she presently left him, not knowing what to think of his obstinate silence. Whatever education she might have had from the doctor, it was many a day before she understood the character of his son, of whom this, in a few words, is the history.

At his father's death, Jacques, now thirty-seven years old, was as timid and as submissive to parental discipline as any boy of twelve. This timidity will account for his childhood, youth, and life to such readers as might not otherwise believe in such a character, or the facts of a story which is common, alas! in every rank of life—even among princes, for Sophie Dawes was taken up by the last of the Condés in a worse position than that of La Rabouilleuse. There are two kinds of timidity—timidity of mind, and timidity of the nerves; physical timidity, and moral timidity. Each is independent of the other. The body may be frightened and quake while the mind remains calm and bold, and *vice versâ.* This is the key to many eccentricities of conduct. When both kinds meet in the same man he will be good for nothing all his life. This utter timidity is that of the person of whom we say, "He is imbecile." Still, this imbecility sometimes covers great qualities though suppressed. To this double infirmity perhaps do we owe certain monks who have lived in ecstasy. This unhappy moral and physical disposition may be produced by the perfection of the bodily organs and of the soul, as well as by certain defects, as yet not fully studied.

Jean-Jacques's timidity arose from a certain torpor of his faculties, which a first-rate tutor, or a surgeon like Desplein, would have roused. In him, as in crétins, the sensual side of love had absorbed the strength and energy which his intelligence lacked, though he had sense enough to conduct himself through life. The violence of his passion, stripped of the ideal, in which it blossoms in other young men, added to his timidity. He never could make up his mind to go courting, to use a familiar expression, to any woman in Issoudun.

Now no young girl or woman could make advances to an undersized man, with a vulgar face, which two prominent green-gooseberry eyes would have made ugly enough, if pinched features and a sallow complexion had not made him look old before his time. In fact, the vicinity of a woman annihilated the poor boy, who was goaded by his passion as vehemently as he was bridled by the few notions he had derived from his education. Halting between two equal forces, he did not know what to say, and dreaded to be asked a question, so terrified was he at having to reply. Desire, which generally loosens a man's tongue, froze his.

So Jean-Jacques lived solitary and sought solitude, not finding it irksome. The doctor saw, too late to remedy them, the disastrous results of this temperament and character. He would gladly have seen his son married; but as that would have been to subject him to a rule which would soon be despotic, he could not but hesitate. Would not that be to hand over his fortune to the management of a stranger, an unknown woman? Now he well knew how difficult it is to foresee, from a study of a young girl, exactly what the woman's character may become. And so, while looking about him for a daughter-in-law whose education or whose ideas should be a sufficient guarantee, he tried to guide his son into the paths of avarice. Failing intelligence, he hoped thus to give this simpleton a guiding instinct. He began by accustoming him to a mechanical existence, and gave him fixed notions as to the investment of money; then he spared him the chief difficulties of the management of landed estate by leaving all his lands in capital order, and let on long leases. And for all that, the principal fact which was to be paramount in this poor creature's life escaped the doctor's penetration—Jean-Jacques was passionately in love with La Rabouilleuse.

Nothing could, indeed, be more natural. Flore was the only woman with whom the young man came in contact, the only woman he ever saw at his ease, gazing on her in secret, and watching her from hour to hour; for him Flore was the light of his father's house; without knowing it, she afforded him the only pleasures that gilded his youth. Far from being jealous of his father, he was delighted by the education he bestowed on Flore: was not the wife he needed an approachable woman who would need no courting? For passion, be it observed, brings insight with it; it can give a sort of intelligence to simpletons, fools, and idiots, especially during youth. In the least human soul we always find the animal instinct which, in its persistency, is like a thought.

Next day, Flore, who had meditated on her master's silence, expected some important communication; but, though he hovered about her, looking at her with covert amorous glances, Jean-Jacques found nothing to say. At last, at dessert, the master began again as he had begun yesterday.

"You are comfortable here?" he asked Flore.

"Yes, M. Jean."

"Well, stay then."

"Thank you, M. Jean."

This strange state of things lasted for three weeks. One night, when not a sound broke the stillness, Flore, waking by chance, heard the regular breathing of a man at her door, and was frightened at finding Jean-Jacques lying on the mat like a dog, having, no doubt, made some little hole at the bottom of the door to see into the room.

"He is in love with me," thought she; "but he will get the rheumatism at this game."

Next day Flore looked at her master in a marked way. This speechless and almost instinctive love had touched her; she no longer thought the poor simple creature so hideous, in spite of the ulcer-like spots on his temples and forehead, the terrible coronal of vitiated blood.

"You do not want to go back to the open fields, I suppose?" said Jean-Jacques, when they were alone.

"Why do you ask?" said she, looking at him.

"I wanted to know——" replied Rouget, turning the color of a boiled lobster.

"Do you want me to go?" she asked.

"No, mademoiselle."

"Well, then, what is it you want to know? You have some reason——"

"Yes, I wanted to know——"

"What?" said Flore.

"You would not tell me."

"Yes, on my word as an honest woman."

"Ah! That is the point," said Rouget, alarmed. "You are an honest woman?"

"By Heaven!"

"Yes—really?"

"Since I say it——!"

"Come, now. Are you the same now as you were when you stood there, barefoot, brought here by your uncle?"

"A pretty question, on my word!" exclaimed Flore, reddening.

The heir bent his head in silence, and did not look up again. Flore, astounded at finding her reply, so flattering to the man, received with such consternation, left the room.

Three days later, at the same hour, for they both seemed to regard the dessert as the scene of battle, Flore was the first to say to her master, "Are you vexed with me for anything?"

"No, mademoiselle," he replied. "No . . . on the contrary——"

"You seemed so much annoyed the other day at hearing that I was an honest girl——"

"No; I only wanted to know . . . but you would not tell me."

"On my honor," said she, "I will tell you the whole truth."

"The whole truth about . . . my father——" said he in a choked voice.

"Your father," said she, looking straight into her master's eyes, "was a good fellow; he loved a laugh. . . . Well, a little. . . . Poor dear man, it was not for want of will. And then he had some grievance against you, I don't know what, and he had intentions—oh! unfortunate intentions.—He often made me laugh; well! that is all. And what then?"

"Well, then, Flore," said the heir, taking the girl's hand, "since my father was nothing to you——"

"Why, what did you suppose he was to me?" she exclaimed, in the tone of a girl offended by an insulting suggestion.

"Well, then, listen to me."

"He was my benefactor, that was all. Ah! he would have liked to make me his wife . . . but——"

"But," said Rouget, taking her hand again, for she had pulled it away, "since he was nothing of the kind, you can stay here with me?"

"If you like," said she, looking down.

"No, no. It is if you like, *you*," replied Rouget. "Yes, you may be—mistress here. All that is here shall be yours; you shall take care of my fortune; it will be the same as your own. For I love you, and I always have loved you, from the moment when you first came in—here—there—barefoot."

Flore made no reply. The silence became awkward, and Jean-Jacques then uttered this odious argument—

"Come, it would be better than going back to the fields, wouldn't it?" he asked, with manifest eagerness.

"Dame! M. Jean, as you please," said she.

But notwithstanding this "as you please," poor Rouget was no forwarder. Men of that type must have a certainty. The effort it is to them to confess their love is so great, and costs them so dear, that they know they can never do it again. Hence their attachment to the first woman who accepts them.

Events can only be inferred from the results. Ten months after his father's death, Jean-Jacques was another man; his pallid, leaden-hued face, disfigured by little boils on the temples and forehead, had lighted up, grown clear-skinned, and acquired a rosy tinge. His countenance shone with happiness. Flore insisted on her master's taking the greatest care of his person, and made it a point of honor to herself that he should be neatly dressed; she would look after him as he went out for a walk, standing on the doorstep till he was out of sight. All the town observed this alteration, which had made a new creature of Jean-Jacques Rouget.

"Have you heard the news?" asked one and another in Issoudun.

"Why—what?"

"Jean has inherited everything from his father, even La Rabouilleuse——"

"Did you suppose that the old doctor was not sharp enough to leave his son a housekeeper?"

"She is a perfect treasure for Rouget, that is certain," was the general cry.

"She is a crafty one! She is very handsome; she will make him marry her."

"What luck that girl has had!"

"It is the luck that only comes to handsome girls."

"Pooh, nonsense! So you fancy. But there was my uncle, Borniche-Hérau; well, you have heard speak of Mlle. Ganivet; she was as ugly as the seven deadly sins, and he left her no less than a thousand crowns a year——"

"Bah! that was in 1778!"

"All the same, Rouget is a fool; his father left him at least forty thousand francs a year. He might have married Mlle. Hérau."

"The doctor tried that on, but she would have nothing to say to it; Rouget is too great an idiot——"

"An idiot! Women are very happy with men of that sort."

"Is your wife happy?"

Such were the comments current in Issoudun. Though, after the manners and customs of the provinces, the world began by laughing at this quasi-marriage, it ended by admiring Flore for devoting herself to this poor creature. This was how Flore Brazier rose to sovereignty over the house of Rouget, "from father to son," to quote the words of Goddet junior. It will now not be useless to sketch the history of her rule for the better information of other bachelors.

The only person in Issoudun to complain of Flore Brazier's installation as queen on Jean-Jacques Rouget's hearth was old Fanchette; she protested against such an immoral state of affairs, and took the part of outraged decency. To be sure, she felt humiliated at her age at having for her mistress a Rabouilleuse, a girl who had come to the house without a shoe to her foot. Fanchette had three hundred francs a year from securities in the Funds, for the doctor had made her invest her savings, and her late master had left her an annuity of a hundred crowns, so she could live comfortably; and she left the house nine months after her old master's funeral, on the 15th of April 1806. To the perspicacious reader, this will seem to mark the date when Flore ceased to be "an honest girl."

La Rabouilleuse, keen enough to foresee Fanchette's defection—for there is nothing like exercise of power to inculcate politics—had made up her mind to do without a maid. For the last six months she had, without betraying it, been studying the culinary arts which made Fanchette a *cordon bleu* worthy to cater to a doctor. As epicures, doctors may rank with bishops. Dr. Rouget had perfected Fanchette. In the country the lack of occupation, and the monotony of life, are apt to turn an active mind to cooking. Dinners are not so luxurious as in Paris, but they are better; the dishes are studied and thought out. Buried in the country, there are Carêmes in petticoats, undiscovered geniuses, who know how to turn out a simple dish of beans worthy of the approving nod with which Rossini welcomes a perfectly successful effort.

The doctor, while studying for his degree at Paris, had followed Rouelle's course of chemistry, and had picked up some notions, which he turned to account in culinary chemistry. He is remembered at Issoudun for various improvements little known beyond the limits of Le Berry. He discovered that an omelette is far more delicate when the white and yolk of the eggs are not beaten together in the rough-and-ready fashion in which most cooks perform the operation. By his recipe, the white should be beaten to a stiff froth, and the yolk added by degrees. Then it should not be cooked in a frying-pan, but in a *cagnard* of china or earthenware. A *cagnard* is a sort of thick dish on four feet, which, when it is placed on the charcoal stove, allows the air to surround it, and so prevent its cracking. In Touraine, the *cagnard* is called a *cauquemarre*. Rabelais, I think, speaks of a *cauquemarre* for cooking the *coquecigrues*, which shows the high antiquity of the utensil. The doctor had also discovered a way of preventing the burnt flavor of brown sauce; but this secret, which he unfortunately kept in his own kitchen, has been lost.

Flore, born with the gift of frying and roasting, the two arts which neither study nor experience can acquire, was soon Fanchette's superior. In making herself a *cordon bleu*, she was thinking of Jean-Jacques's comfort; still, she too, it must be owned, was not a little greedy. Like all uneducated persons, being unable to occupy her brain, she expended her energies in the house. She rubbed up the furniture, restored its luster, and kept everything throughout the house in a state of cleanliness worthy of Holland. She directed the avalanches of dirty linen, and the deluge known as a great wash, which, in the French provinces, takes place but three times a year. She examined the linen with a housewifely eye, and mended it with care. Then, anxious to initiate herself by degrees into the secrets of wealth, she mastered the small knowledge of business possessed by Rouget, and increased it by talking with M. Héron, the late doctor's notary. Thus she could give her little Jean-Jacques excellent advice. Sure, as she was, of remaining mistress of the position, she nursed the poor fellow's interests with as much care and parsimony as if they had been her own. She had nothing to fear from her uncle's demands. Two months after the doctor's death, Brazier died of a fall as he came out of the tavern where, since fortune had visited him, he passed all his time. Flore's father was also dead; thus she served her master with all the affection due from an orphan who was happy to be able to make herself a home and find some interest in life.

This period was paradise to poor Jean-Jacques, who acquired the easy habits of an animal existence, graced by a sort of monastic regularity. He slept very late in the morning; Flore, who was up at daybreak to buy provisions or do the work of the house, woke her master in time for him to find breakfast ready as soon as he was dressed. After breakfast, at about eleven o'clock, Jean-Jacques took a walk, chatted with anyone he met, came home by three o'clock to read the papers—that of the department, and a Paris paper, which he received three days after publication, greasy from thirty hands through which they had passed, dirty from the snuffy noses that smeared them, brown from the many tables they had lain on. Thus our bachelor got to the dinner-hour, and he spent as long a time as he could over it. Flore told him stories of the town, and all the current gossip she had picked up. By eight o'clock the lights were out. Early to bed is, in the country, a common form of saving in candles and firing, but it tends to stupefy folks by an abuse of bed; too much sleep deadens and stultifies the mind.

Such, for nine years, was the life of these two beings—a life at once busy and vacuous, of which the chief events were a few journeys to Bourges, to Vierzon, to Châteauroux, or even a little further, when neither M. Héron nor the notaries of those towns had any mortgages to offer. Rouget invested his money in first mortgages at five per cent., with substitution in favor of the wife when the lender should marry. He never advanced more than a third of the real value of the estate, and he had bills drawn to his order representing an additional two and a half per cent., for dates at intervals during the loan. These were the rules impressed on him by his father. Usury, the drag on peasant ambitions, is eating up the land, and this charge of seven and a half per cent. seemed so reasonable, that Jean-Jacques Rouget could pick and choose; for the notaries, who extracted handsome commissions from the clients for whom they got money so cheap, would give the old fellow notice.

During these nine years, Flore gradually, insensibly, and without intending it, had acquired absolute dominion over her master. From the first she treated Jean-Jacques with great familiarity; then, without failing in respect, she gained the upper hand by such manifest superiority of intelligence and power, that he became his servant's servant. This grown-up child went half-way to meet this dominion, by allowing himself to be so much waited on, that Flore treated him as a mother treats her son. And at last his feeling for her was that which makes a mother's care necessary to a child. But there were other and far stronger bonds. In the first place, Flore managed all business matters, and carried on the house.

Jean-Jacques relied on her so absolutely for every kind of stewardship that, without her, life would have seemed to him not difficult, but impossible. The woman had also become necessary to his existence; she humored all his fancies—she knew them so well! He liked to see the happy face that always smiled on him; the only face that ever had smiled on him, or that ever would smile on him! Her happiness, purely material, expressed by the common phrases that are the backbone of language in the households of Le Berry, and expansive in her splendid person, was, in a way, the reflection of his own. The state into which Jean-Jacques collapsed when he saw Flore clouded by some little annoyance betrayed to the woman the extent of her power; and she, to secure it, would try to exert it. In women of that kind use always means abuse. La Rabouilleuse, no doubt, made her master play his part in some of the scenes that lie buried in the mystery of private life, and of which Otway has shown a specimen in the midst of his tragedy of *Venice Preserved* between the Senator and Aquilina—a scene that gives the magnificence of horror. And then Flore saw herself so secure in her empire, that she never thought of getting the old bachelor to marry her, unfortunately for him and for herself.

By the end of 1815, at the age of twenty-seven, Flore was in the fullest bloom of her beauty. Buxom and fair, as white-skinned as a farmeress of Le Bessin, she was the ideal of what our forefathers would have called a splendid wench. Her beauty, somewhat of the inn-servant order, but filled-out and well fed, gave her some resemblance, apart from Mlle. Georges's imperial beauty, to that actress at her best. Flore had the same beautiful, dazzling white arms, the fullness of outline, the pulpy sheen, the delicious modeling, but all less classically severe. The expression of her face was tender and sweet. Her eye could not command respect, like that of the most beautiful Agrippine who has ever trod the boards of the Théâtre Français since Racine's time; it invited to sensual joys.

In 1816 La Rabouilleuse first saw Maxence Gilet, and fell in love with him at first sight. Her heart was pierced by the mythological dart—that admirable symbol of a natural fact which the Greeks inevitably represented thus, having never conceived of the chivalrous ideal and melancholy passion begotten of Christianity. Flore was at this time too handsome for Max to scorn such a conquest. And thus, at eight-and twenty, the girl first knew real love, idolatrous, infinite love, the love which includes every mode of loving from that of Gulnare to that of Medora. As soon as the penniless officer understood the respective positions of Flore and Jean-Jacques Rouget, he saw something better than a mere love affair in a connection with La Rabouilleuse. And so, for the better security of his future prospects, he was more than content to lodge under Rouget's roof, seeing how weakly a creature the old fellow was.

Flore's passion could not fail to have its influence on Jean-Jacques's life and surroundings. For a month Rouget, who had become excessively afraid of her, saw Flore's smiling and friendly face grown gloomy and cross. He endured the brunt of intentional ill-temper exactly like a married man whose wife is contemplating a betrayal. When in the midst of her most spiteful outbreaks the hapless man made so bold as to ask the cause of this change, her eyes flashed with fires of hatred, and her voice was hard with aggressive tones of scorn, such as poor Jean-Jacques had never met nor heard.

"By Heaven!" she exclaimed, "you have neither heart nor soul. For sixteen years have I been wasting my youth here, and I never discovered that you had a stone there!" and she struck her heart. "For two months past you have seen that brave major coming here, a victim to the Bourbons, who was cut out for a general, and who is down on his luck, driven into a hole of a place like this, where Fortune is too poor to go out walking. He is obliged to sit, stuck to a chair all day in an office, to earn what? Six hundred wretched francs—a handsome income! And you, who have six hundred and fifty-nine thousand francs in snug investments, and sixty thousand francs a year—not to say that, thanks to me, you don't spend a thousand crowns a year for everything included, even my clothes—in short, everything—you never think of offering him shelter here, where the whole top floor is empty! No, you would let rats and mice keep up a dance there rather than put a human being in, and he a man your father always regarded as his son!—Do you want to know what you are? Well, I will tell you—you are a fratricide! And you think I don't know why? You saw that I felt an interest in him, and that nettled you! For all that you seem such a blockhead, you have more cunning in you than the cunningest, and that is what you are. . . . Very well then, I do take an interest in him . . . a warm one at that . . ."

"But, Flore . . ."

"Oh, there is no 'but, Flore' in the case. You may go and look for another Flore—if you can find one!—For may this glass of wine poison me if I don't turn out of your hovel of a house! I shall have cost you nothing, thank God, during the twelve years I have stayed in it, and you have had your comforts cheap! Anywhere else I could have earned my living by working as I do here; washing, ironing, taking care of the linen, going to market, cooking, looking after your interests in every way, slaving to death from morning till night.—And this is what I get!"

"But, Flore . . ."

"Oh yes, Flore indeed! A pretty Flore you will get, at fifty-one, as you are, and in very bad health, and stooping so that it is frightful to see—I know all about it. And with all that you are not so very amusing . . ."

"But, Flore . . ."

"There, leave me in peace."

And she left the room, slamming the door with such violence that the house rang with it and seemed to shake on its foundations. Jean-Jacques Rouget opened it very gently, and more gently still went into the kitchen where Flore was muttering.

"But, Flore," said this sheep, "this is the very first I have heard of your wishes; how can you tell whether I will or will not?"

"In the first place," she went on, "we ought to have a man in the house. It is known that you have ten, fifteen, twenty thousand francs, and if anyone wanted to rob you we should be murdered. For my part, I have no wish to wake up one fine morning cut into four quarters, like the poor servant girl who was fool enough to try to defend her master. Well! But if it were known that we had a man on the premises who is as brave as Cæsar, and has the use of his hands—Max could settle three thieves while you were talking about it.—Well, I say, I should sleep easier. People will cram you with nonsense. Here, I am in love with him; there, I adore him! Do you know what you have got to say? Well, just tell them that you know all that, but that your father told you on his deathbed to take care of his poor Max. Then everyone must hold their tongue, for the flagstones of Issoudun could tell you that your father paid for his schooling—so there! For nine years I have eaten your bread . . ."

"Flore, Flore . . ."

"And more than one young fellow in this town has come to me a-courtin'—so there!—And one offers me a gold chain, and another a gold watch: 'Dear little Flore, if only you would come away from that old idiot of a Rouget,' that is the sort of thing they say of you! 'What, I! leave him?—I should think so! such an innocent as that.—Why, what would become of him?' I have always answered. 'No, no, where a Nanny is tethered she must eat . . .' "

"Yes, Flore, I have no one in the world but you, and I am only too happy. If it will give you pleasure, child, we will have Maxence Gilet in the house; he can eat with us . . ."

"By Heaven! I should hope so!"

"There, there, don't be angry . . ."

"Enough for one is enough for two," said she, laughing. "But now, if you are very nice, do you know what you will do, my dear old boy? You will take a turn in front of the Mairie at about four o'clock and manage to meet Major Gilet, and ask him to dinner. If he makes any difficulties, tell him it is to please me; he is too polite to refuse that. And then, over your dessert, if he talks of his misfortunes, or of the hulks—and you can surely have sense enough to lead up to the subject—you will offer him a home here. If he makes any objection, never mind; I will find a way to persuade him——"

As he slowly paced the Boulevard Baron, Rouget, so far as he was capable, thought over this incident. If he were to part with Flore—and the mere idea made him dizzy—what woman could he find to take her place? Marry? At his age he would be married for his money, and even more cruelly handled by a legitimate wife than he was by Flore. Moreover, the notion of being bereft of her affection, even if it were a delusion, was intolerably painful. So he was as charming to Major Gilet as he knew how to be. As Flore had wished, the invitation was given in the presence of witnesses, so as to leave Max's honor clear.

Flore and her master were reconciled; but from that day Jean-Jacques was aware of shades of demeanor proving a complete change in La Rabouilleuse's affection for him.

For about a fortnight Flore complained loudly to the tradespeople, at market, and to her gossips, of M. Rouget's tyranny in taking it into his head to have his natural half-brother under his roof. But no one was taken in by this farce, and Flore was considered an extremely shrewd and wily creature.

Old Rouget was made very happy by the installation of Max as a member of the household, for in him he had a companion who was most carefully attentive to him without servility. Gilet chatted, talked politics, and sometimes walked out with him.

As soon as the officer was quite at home, Flore refused to be cook any longer; "kitchen work spoiled her hands," she said. By desire of the Grand Master of the Order, La Cognette found a relation of her own, an old maid, whose master, a curé, had just died, leaving her nothing, an excellent cook, who would devote herself through life and death to Flore and Max. And, in the name of these two potentates, La Cognette could promise her relation a pension of three hundred francs after ten years of good, honest, and loyal service. La Védie, who was sixty, was remarkable for a face deeply marked by smallpox and of suitable ugliness.

When she assumed her functions Flore became Mlle. Brazier. She wore stays, she dressed in silk, in fine woolen stuffs, or in cambric, according to the season. She had collars, costly kerchiefs, embroidered caps and lace tuckers, wore dainty boots, and kept herself in an elegant and handsome style that made her look younger. She was now like a rough diamond that has been cut and set by the jeweler to show off its value. She was anxious to do Max credit. By the end of that year, 1817, she had procured a horse from Bourges, said to be of English breed, for the poor major, who was tired of going about on foot. Max had picked up in the neighborhood a man, a Pole named Kouski, formerly a lancer in the Imperial Guard, and now reduced to misery, who was only too glad to find a berth at M. Rouget's as the major's servant. Max was Kouski's idol, especially after the fray with the three Royalists. So after 1817 the Rouget household consisted of five persons, three of them idle; and the expenses amounted to about eight thousand francs a year.

By the time when Mme. Bridau came back to Issoudun to save her inheritance, as Maître Desroches expressed it, so seriously endangered, Père Rouget, as he was commonly called, had by degrees lapsed into an almost vegetative existence. To begin with, from the day when Max was at home in the house, Mme. Brazier kept house with quite Episcopal luxury. Rouget, thus led into high living, and tempted by the excellent dishes concocted by La Védie, ate more and more every day. Notwithstanding such abundant and nutritious feeding, he did not get fat. He grew every day more bent, like a man tired out—perhaps by the effort of digestion—and his eyes sank in puffy circles. Still, when, in his walks, anyone asked after his health: "I never was better in my life," was always his reply. As he had always been known to have a most limited intellect, the gradual deterioration of his faculties was not observed. His love for Flore was the one emotion that kept him alive; he existed only for her; his weakness before her knew no measure; he obeyed her every look and watched this creature's movements as a dog watches his master's least gesture. And, as Mme. Hochon said, Père Rouget, at fifty-seven, looked older than M. Hochon, who was eighty.

As may easily be supposed, Max's rooms were worthy of so charming a youth. And in six years, year by year, the major had made the comfort of his lodgings more perfect, and added grace to the smallest details, as much for his own sake as for Flore's. Still, it was only the comfort of Issoudun; painted floors, wall-papers of some elegance, mahogany furniture, mirrors in gilt frames, muslin curtains with red bands to loop them, an Arabian bedstead with curtains hung as a country upholsterer arranges them for a wealthy bride, and which then seemed the height of magnificence, but which are to be seen in the commonest fashion-plates, and are so general now that in Paris even petty dealers will not have them when they marry. Then—an unheard-of thing, which gave rise to much talk in Issoudun—there was matting on the stairs, to deaden noise no doubt! And, in fact, Max, as he came in before daybreak, woke nobody, and Rouget never suspected his lodger's share in the dark deeds of the Knights of Idlesse.

At about eight in the morning Flore, in a pretty pink-striped cotton wrapper and a lace cap, her feet in furred slippers, gently opened Max's bedroom door, but seeing him asleep, she stood a moment by the bed.

"He came in so late," thought she; "at half-past three. A man must be made of iron to be able to stand such racket as that! And isn't he strong too!—The love of a man! I wonder what they were doing last night!"

"You, my little Flore," said Max, waking as a soldier wakes, inured by the vicissitudes of war to find all his wits and his presence of mind however suddenly he may be roused.

"You are sleepy; I am going . . ."

"No, stay; there are serious things——"

"You have done something too mad last night?"

"Ah, pooh! The matter in hand concerns that old fool. Look here; you never mentioned his family. Well, they are coming here—his family is coming, to cut us out no doubt."

"Oh, I will give them a startler!" said Flore.

"Mlle. Brazier," said Max gravely, "matters are too serious to be taken at a rush. Send me up my coffee; I will have it in bed, where I will consider what proceedings we must take. . . . Come back at nine, and we will talk it over. Meanwhile behave as if you had heard nothing."

Startled by this news, Flore left Max, and went to make his coffee; but a quarter of an hour later Baruch rushed in and said to the Grand Master, "Fario is looking for his cart."

Max was dressed in five minutes, went downstairs, and with an air of lounging for his pleasure, made his way to the foot of the tower hill, where he saw a considerable crowd.

"What is the matter?" said Max, making his way through the mob to speak to the Spaniard.

Fario, a small, shriveled man, was ugly enough to have been a grandee. His very fiery, very small eyes, very close together, would have earned him at Naples a reputation for the evil eye. The little man seemed gentle because he was grave, quiet, and slow in his movements; and he was commonly spoken of as *bonhomme*, good old Fario. But his complexion, of the color of gingerbread, and his gentle manner, concealed from the ignorant, but betrayed to the knowing, his character as a half-Moorish peasant from Grenada, who had not yet been roused from his torpid indifference.

"But are you sure," said Max, after listening to the lamentations of the seed-merchant, "that you brought your cart? For, thank Heaven, we have no thieves in Issoudun . . ."

"I left it there . . ."

"But if the horse was harnessed to it, may he not have gone away with the cart?"

"There is my horse," said Fario, pointing to his steed standing harnessed about thirty yards off.

Max solemnly went to the spot, so as to be able by looking up to see the foot of the tower, for the people had collected at the bottom of the hill. Everybody followed him, and this was what the rascal wanted.

"Has anyone by mistake put a cart in his pocket?" cried François.

"Come, feel, turn them out!" said Baruch. Shouts of laughter rose on all sides. Fario swore; now in a Spaniard an oath means the last pitch of fury.

"Is yours a light cart?" asked Max.

"Light?" retorted Fario. "If all those who are laughing at me had it over their toes, their corns would not hurt them again."

"Well, but it must be devilish light," replied Max, pointing to the tower, "for it has flown to the top of the hill."

At these words all looked up, and for a moment there was almost a riot in the market-place. Everyone was pointing to this magical vehicle. Every tongue was wagging.

"The Devil has a care for the innkeepers, who are all doomed to perdition," said Goddet to the speechless owner; "he wants to teach you not to leave carts about instead of putting up at the inn."

At this speech the mob howled, for Fario was reckoned miserly.

"Come, my good man," said Max, "do not lose heart. We will go up and see how the cart got there. The deuce is in it! We will lend you a hand. Will you come, Baruch? —You," he added in a whisper to François, "clear everyone out of the way, and mind there is no one standing below when you see us at the top."

Fario, with Max, Baruch, and three more of the Knights, climbed up to the tower. During the scramble, which was not free from danger, Max remarked to Fario that there were no tracks, nor anything to show how the cart had been got up. And Fario began to believe in some magic; he had quite lost his head. On reaching the top and examining matters, the feat seriously seemed quite impossible.

"And however shall we get it down again?" said the Spaniard, whose little eyes expressed positive terror, while his tawny hollow face, which looked as if it could never change color, turned pale.

"Well," said Max, "I see no difficulty in that."

And taking advantage of Fario's bewilderment, he took the cart up by the shafts, giving it a tilt with his strong arms so as to give it impetus; then, at the moment when he let it go, he shouted in a voice of thunder, "Look out below!" But there was no danger. The crowd, warned by François, and eager with curiosity, had withdrawn to a little distance to see what was going on on the knoll. The cart smashed in picturesque style, broken into a thousand pieces.

"There, it is down again!" said Baruch.

"Ah, blackguards, thieves, villains!" yelled Fario. "It was you who got it up, I'll be bound!"

Max, Baruch, and their three comrades began to laugh at the Spaniard's abuse.

"We wanted to do you a service," said Max haughtily. "To save your damned cart·I ran the risk of going down on the top of it, and this is how you thank me. What country do you come from, pray?"

"From a country where we do not forgive an injury," replied Fario, quivering with rage. "My cart may serve you a turn to take you to the Devil! Unless," he added, as mild as a lamb, "you like to replace it by a new one?"

"We will talk about it," said Max, going down the hill.

When they were at the bottom, and had rejoined the first group of laughers, Max took Fario by the jacket-button, and said—

"Yes, my good Fario, I will make you a present of a splendid cart if you will give me two hundred and fifty francs; I won't guarantee that, like this one, it is warranted for a tumbler's trap."

This jest, however, touched Fario no more than if he were concluding an ordinary bargain.

"Dame!" he replied calmly, "you will give me francs enough to replace my poor cart, and you will never spend Père Rouget's money in a better cause."

Max turned white and lifted his formidable fist to strike Fario; but Baruch, who knew that such a blow would not fall only on the Spaniard, whisked him off like a feather, saying to Max in an undertone, "Don't play the fool!"

The major, recalled to order, began to laugh, and said to Fario, "Though I have by accident damaged your cart, you are trying to slander me, so we are quits."

"Not yet," muttered Fario. "But I am glad to have found out what my cart is worth!"

"Ah, ha! Max, you have found your match!" said a bystander, who was not a member of the Order.

"Good-by, M. Gilet; you have not heard the last of your clever trick!" said the Spaniard mounting his horse and disappearing in the midst of a loud hurrah!

"I will keep the iron tires for you," cried a wheelwright, who had come up to study the effects of the fall. One of the shafts was standing upright, planted in the ground like a tree.

Max was pale and thoughtful, stung to the heart by the Spaniard's speech. For five days at Issoudun Fario's cart was the talk of the town. It was fated to travel far, as young Goddet said, for it made the round of the province, where the pranks of Max and Baruch were much discussed. Hence, even a week after the event, the Spaniard was still the talk of the departments and the subject of much "jaw," a fact to which he was keenly alive. Max and La Rabouilleuse, too, as a result of the vindictive Spaniard's retort, were the subject of endless comments, whispered indeed at Issoudun, but loudly spoken at Bourges, at Vatan, at Vierzon, and at Châteauroux. Maxence Gilet knew the country well enough to imagine how envenomed these remarks must be.

"No one can hinder their talking," thought he. "Ah! that was a bad night's work."

"Well, Max," said François, taking his arm, "they are to be here to-night."

"Who?"

"The Bridaus. My grandmother has just had a letter from her goddaughter."

"Listen to me, my boy," said Max in his ear; "I have thought this business over very seriously. Neither Flore nor I must appear to have any ill-feeling towards the Bridaus. If the heirs leave Issoudun, it is your people, the Hochons, who must seem to be the cause. Study these Paris folks well; and when I have taken their measure, to-morrow at La Cognette's we will see what can be done with them, and how we can make a breach between them and your grandfather."

"The Spaniard has found the joint in Max's harness," said Baruch to his cousin François as they went in, looking at his friend entering Rouget's door.

While Max was thus occupied, Flore, notwithstanding her companion's counsel, had been unable to control her rage; without knowing whether she was seconding or interfering with Max's plans, she broke out against the poor old bachelor. When Jean-Jacques incurred his nurse's displeasure, he found himself suddenly bereft of all the little cares and vulgar petting which were the joy of his life. In short, Flore put her master in disgrace. No more little affectionate words with which she was wont to grace her conversation, in various tones, with more or less tender glances—my puss, my chicken, my good old dog, my spoilt boy. No more familiar *tu*. A *vous*, short and cold, and ironically respectful, would pierce the unhappy man's heart like a knife. This *vous* was a declaration of war.

Then, instead of helping him to dress, giving him his things, anticipating his wishes, looking at him with the sort of admiration women know how to convey—and the broader it is, the more gratifying—saying, "You are as fresh as a rose! Come, you look wonderfully well! How fine you are, old man!"—instead of entertaining him while he dressed with the fun and follies that amused him, Flore left him to manage for himself. If he called her, she would answer from the bottom of the stairs—

"Well, I can't do two things at once—get your breakfast and wait on you in your room. Aren't you old enough to dress yourself?"

"Good God! How have I offended her?" the old fellow wondered, on receiving one of these rebuffs, when he called for some hot water to shave himself.

"Védie, take up some hot water to monsieur," cried Flore.

"Védie?" said the poor man, bewildered by his dread of the wrath impending over him. "Védie, what is the matter with madame this morning?"

Flore insisted on being called madame by her master, by Védie, Kouski, and Max.

"She has heard something seemingly not much to your credit," replied Védie, putting on a very pathetic air. "You are very foolish, monsieur. There, I am but a poor servant, and you may tell me not to be poking my nose into your concerns; but you may hunt through all the women in the world, like the King in Holy Writ, and you will never find her like. You ought to kiss the place where she has set her foot. . . . I tell you, if you vex her, it will be enough to break your own heart! And there really were tears in her eyes."

Védie left the poor man quite annihilated; he sank into a chair, gazing into space like a man melancholy mad, and forgot to shave himself. These alternations of hot and cold affected the poor feeble creature, who lived only through his hold on love, like the deadly chill produced by a sudden passage from tropical heat to polar cold. They were moral pleurisies which exhausted him like so many illnesses. Flore only in the whole world could act upon him so, for her alone he was as kind as he was silly.

"What! You have not shaved yet?" said she, opening the door. She made Père Rouget start violently; from being pale and limp, he suddenly turned red for a moment, but dared not resent this attack.

"Your breakfast is waiting. But you may go down in your dressing-gown and slippers—you will breakfast by yourself."

And she vanished without waiting for a reply. To make the poor man breakfast alone was one of the punishments which most deeply distressed him; he liked to talk while he was eating. As he reached the bottom of the stairs, Rouget was seized with a fit of coughing, for excitement had stirred his rheum.

"Oh yes, you may cough!" said Flore in the kitchen, not caring whether her master heard her or no. "My word! the old wretch is strong enough to weather it without anyone troubling theirselves about him! If he ever coughs his soul up, it won't be in our time."

Such were the amenities with which La Rabouilleuse favored Rouget in her fits of rage. The poor man sat down in deep dejection at a corner of the table in the middle of the room, looking at his old furniture and old pictures with a desolate air.

"You might have put on a necktie!" said Flore, coming in. "Do you think a neck like yours is pretty to see—redder and more wrinkled than a turkey-cock's."

"But what have I done?" he asked, raising his pale green eyes full of tears, and confronting Flore's cold look.

"What have you done?" she echoed. "And you don't know? What a hypocrit Why, your sister Agathe—who is as much your sister as I am sister to the Tower of Issoudun, if you can believe your father, and who is nothing on earth to you—is coming from Paris with her son, that wretched tu'penny painter, and they're coming to see you——"

"My sister and nephews are coming to Issoudun?" said he, quite bewildered.

"Oh yes; you may pretend to be astonished to make me believe that you did not write to them to come! That is a very thin trick. Don't be afraid, we won't interfere with your Paris friends, for we shall have shaken the dust off our feet before they set theirs within these walls! Max and I shall be gone never to return! As to your will—I will tear it in four quarters under your nose, under your beard, do you hear? You may leave your goods to your family, as we are not your family. After that you will see whether you are loved, for your own sake, by people who have not seen you for thirty years, or have never seen you at all! Your sister will not fill my place—a double-distilled bigot!"

"If that is all, my pretty Flore," said the old man, "I shall see neither my sister nor my nephews. I swear to you solemnly that this is the first word I have heard of their arrival, and it is a got-up thing arranged by Mme. Hochon, the old bigot——!"

Max, who had heard Père Rouget's reply, suddenly came in, saying in a hectoring tone, "What is the matter?"

"My good Max," the old man went on, only too glad to purchase the major's adhesion, for by agreement with Flore, he was always to take Rouget's part, "I swear to you, by all that is sacred, that I have only this instant heard the news. I never wrote to my sister; my father made me promise to leave her nothing, to give it rather to the Church—in short, I refuse to see either my sister Agathe or her sons."

"Your father was wrong, my dear Jean-Jacques, and madame is yet more wrong," replied Max. "Your father had his own reasons—he is dead, his hatred ought to die with him. Your sister is your sister, your nephews are your nephews. You owe it to yourself to receive them cordially, and you owe it to us too. What would be said in Issoudun? Sss—thunder! I have enough on my shoulders: the only thing wanting is to give rise to a report that we keep you shut up, that you are not a free agent, that we have incensed you against your heirs, that we are trying to possess ourselves of your fortune. . . . The Devil may take me if I don't desert from the service at the very next calumny; one is quite enough!—Let us have breakfast."

Flore, as meek as a mouse, helped Védie to lay the table. Rouget, filled with admiration for Max, took him by both hands, led him into a window bay, and said to him in an undertone—

"Ah, Max, if I had a son, I should not love him so well as I love you. Flore was right in saying that you two are my family. . . . You have a sense of honor, Max, and all you have said is very right——"

"You ought to entertain your sister and your nephew," said Max, interrupting him, "but ought not to alter your will; thus you will satisfy your father and everybody else."

"Come, my little dears!" cried Flore, in cheerful tones, "the salmis will be cold. There, old boy, there is a wing for you," she said, smiling on Jean-Jacques.

At this speech the old fellow's long face lost its cadaverous tints, a treacly smile played on his flabby lips; but he coughed again, for the joy of being received again into favor excited him as greatly as being in disgrace. Flore sprang up, snatched a little cashmere shawl off her shoulders, and wrapped it round the old man's throat as a comforter, saying—

"It is silly to upset yourself so over trifles. Here, foolish old boy, that will do you good—it has been next my heart——"

"What a good soul!" said Rouget to Max, while Flore went off for a black velvet cap to cover the old fellow's almost bald head.

"As good as she is handsome," replied Max; "but a little hasty, like all those who carry their heart in their hand."

The reader may feel inclined to find fault with the crudities of this picture, and to think that the displays of La Rabouilleuse's temper are marked by some truths which the painter should leave in the shade? Well; this scene, a hundred times repeated with horrible variations, is in all its coarse and repulsive veraciousness the type of that which every woman will play, on whatever rung of the social ladder she may stand, if any kind of self-interest has diverted her from the path of obedience, and she has seized the reins of power. To women as to great politicians—the end justifies any means. Between Flore Brazier and a duchess, between the duchess and the richest tradesman's wife, between the tradesman's wife and the most splendidly kept woman, there are no differences but those due to education and to the atmosphere in which they live. A fine lady's sulks take the place of Flore's violence; in every rank bitter taunts, witty sarcasm, cold disdain, hypocritical whining, affected quarrels, are quite as successful as the low abuse of this Mme. Everard of Issoudun.

Max told the story of Fario with so much drollery that he made the old fellow laugh. Védie and Kouski, who had come up to listen to the tale, exploded in the passage. As for Flore, she laughed hysterically. After breakfast, while Jean-Jacques was reading the papers—for they now subscribed to the *Constitutionnel* and the *Pandore*—Max took Flore up to his room.

"Are you certain," said he, "that he has never made another will since he named you as his legatee?"

"He has no writing things," said she.

"He may have dictated one to some notary," said Max. "If he has not done so, we must be prepared for the contingency. So receive the Bridaus as well as possible; but meanwhile we must try, as soon as we can, to realize all the money out on mortgage. Our notaries will be only too glad to effect the transfers; that is what they eat and drink by. State securities are going up every day; we are to conquer Spain and deliver Ferdinand VII. from his Cortès, so next year they may perhaps be above par. So it will be a good stroke of business to invest the old man's seven hundred and fifty thousand francs in the Funds at 89. Only try and get them put into your name. It will always be something saved from the fire."

"A capital idea," said Flore.

"And as on eight hundred and ninety thousand francs he will draw fifty thousand francs a year, you must get him to borrow a hundred and forty thousand francs for two years, to be repaid in two installments. Thus in two years we shall be drawing a hundred thousand francs from Paris and ninety thousand here, so we risk nothing."

"Without you, my splendid Max, what would have become of us!" said she.

"Oh, to-morrow evening, at La Cognette's, after I have seen this Paris couple, I will find some means of making the Hochons themselves see them off the premises."

"Oh, you are so clever! You are an angel, a love of a man!"

The Place Saint-Jean is situated halfway down a street called La Grande Narette in the upper part, and La Petite Narette below. In Le Berry the word Narette means the same sort of highway as the Genoese *Salita*, a street built on a steep slope. Between the Place Saint-Jean and the Vilatte gate, the Narette is excessively steep. Old M. Hochon's house is opposite to that where lived Jean-Jacques Rouget. What was going on at Père Rouget's could often be seen out of the drawing-room window where Mme. Hochon sat, and *vice versâ* when the curtains were undrawn or the doors left open.

Hochon's house is so much like Rouget's that they were, no doubt, built by the same architect. Hochon, long ago the collector of taxes at Selles, was born at Issoudun, and returned thither to marry the sister of the sub-delegate, the gallant Lousteau, exchanging his post at Selles for a similar one at Issoudun. He had retired before 1787, and so escaped the storms of the Revolution, while fully supporting its principles, like all honest men who shout on the winning side. It was not for nothing that M. Hochon had a reputation for avarice. But would it not be mere vain repetition to describe him? One of the miserly acts, which made him famous, will, no doubt, be enough to paint M. Hochon at full length.

At the time of his daughter's marriage to a Borniche—she was since dead—it was necessary to give a dinner to the Borniche family. The bridegroom, who expected to inherit a fine fortune, died soon after of grief at having failed in business, and yet more at his father's and mother's refusal to help him. These old Borniches were still living, delighted to have seen M. Hochon take the guardianship of his grandchildren on account of his daughter's settlement, which he had succeeded in saving.

On the day when the marriage contract was to be signed, all the relations of both families had assembled in the drawing-room—the Hochons on one side, and the Borniches on the other, all in their Sunday best. In the midst of reading the contract, very solemnly performed by young Héron the notary, the cook came in and asked M. Hochon for some pack-thread to truss the turkey—an important item in the bill of fare. The old tax-collector pulled out of the depths of his coat-pocket an end of string, which had, no doubt, tied up some parcel, and gave it to her; but before the woman had reached the door, he called out, "Gritte, let me have it back!" Gritte is a local abbreviation of Marguerite.

This will enable you to understand M. Hochon, and the joke perpetrated by the town on the name of the family, consisting of the father, mother, and three children—*les cinq cochons*, the five pigs.

As years went by old Hochon became more and more niggardly and careful, and he was now eighty-five years of age. He was one of those who will stoop in the street, in the midst of an animated conversation, to pick up a pin, saying, "That is a woman's wage!" and stick it into his coat cuff. He complained bitterly of the inferior quality of cloth nowadays, remarking that his coat had lasted only ten years. Tall, lean, and bony, with a yellow complexion, speaking little, reading little, never fatiguing himself, as ceremonious as an Oriental, he maintained a rule of strict sobriety in his household, doling out food and drink to his fairly numerous family, consisting of his wife *née* Lousteau, of his grandson Baruch and granddaughter Adolphine, the heirs of the old Borniches, and of his other grandson, François Hochon.

His eldest son, caught for the army in 1813 by the levy of men of respectable birth who escaped the conscription, and who were enrolled under the name of guards of honor, was killed at the battle of Hanau. The heir-presumptive had married, very young, a rich woman, hoping thus to evade any call to arms; but then he ran through all his money, foreseeing the end. His wife, who followed the French army at a distance, died at Strasbourg in 1814, leaving debts which old Hochon would not pay, quoting to the creditors the axiom of a past code, "Women are minors."

So folks could still say *les cinq Hochons*, since the household consisted of three grandchildren and two grandparents; and the jest still survived, for in the country no jest grows too stale. Gritte, now sixty years old, managed all the work of the house.

The house, though spacious, was scantily furnished. However, Mme. Bridau could be very decently lodged in two rooms on the second floor. Old Hochon now repented of having kept two beds in these rooms, and belonging to each an old armchair in unvarnished wood, with a worsted-work seat, and a walnut wood table, on which stood a wide-mouthed water jug in a basin edged with blue. The old man kept his apples and winter pears, his quinces and medlars, on straw in these two rooms, where the rats and mice had a high time, and there was a strong flavor of fruit and mice. Mme. Hochon had everything cleaned; the paper, where it had fallen from the walls, was stuck on again with wafers; she furnished the windows with muslin blinds cut out of some old skirts of her own. Then, when her husband refused to buy two little list rugs, she placed her own bedside rug for her little Agathe, talking of this mother of past seven-and-forty as "Poor child!"

Mme. Hochon borrowed two bed-tables from the Borniches, and most daringly hired from a second-hand shop two old chests of drawers with brass handles. She possessed two pairs of candlesticks, made of some scarce wood by her father, who had had a passion for turning. From 1770 to 1780 it had been the fashion among rich people to learn a trade; and M. Lousteau the elder, head commissioner of subsidies, was a turner, as Louis XVI. was a locksmith. These candlesticks were decorated with rings in briar-root, peach, and apricot wood. Mme. Hochon risked these precious relics!

All these preparations and this great sacrifice added to M. Hochon's serious mien; he did not yet believe that the Bridaus would come.

On the very morning of the day made famous by the trick played on Fario, Mme. Hochon said to her husband after breakfast—

"I hope, Hochon, that you will make Mme. Bridau, my goddaughter, properly welcome." Then, after assuring herself that her grandchildren had left the room, she added: "I am mistress of my own fortune; do not compel me to indemnify Agathe by my will for an unpleasant reception."

"And do you suppose, madame," said Hochon gently, "that at my age I do not know how to behave with decent civility?"

"You know very well what I mean, old fox! Be kind to our guests, and remember how truly I love Agathe——"

"Yes, and you truly loved Maxence Gilet, who is going to swallow whole the fortune that ought to be your Agathe's. Ah! you cherished a serpent in your bosom then!—After all, the Rougets' money was fated to belong to some Lousteau or another."

Having made this allusion to the supposed parentage of Agathe and of Max, Hochon was about to leave the room; but old Mme. Hochon, still slender and upright, wearing a mob cap with bows, and her hair powdered, with a shot-silk petticoat, tight sleeves, and high-heeled slippers, set her snuff-box down on her little table, and said—

"Really, M. Hochon, how can a clever man like you repeat the nonsense which, unluckily, destroyed my poor friend's peace of mind, and cost my poor goddaughter her share of her father's fortune? Max Gilet is not my brother's son, and I often advised him to save the money he spent on him. And you know as well as I do that Mme. Rouget was virtue itself——"

"Well, the daughter is worthy of her mother, for she seems to me a great goose. After losing all her money, she brought up her sons so well that one of them is in prison awaiting his trial before the supreme court for a conspiracy *à la* Berton. As to the other—worse and worse! he is a painter.—If your protégés remain here till they have extracted that idiot Rouget from the clutches of La Rabouilleuse and Gilet, we shall get through more than one bushel of salt with them."

"That will do, M. Hochon; but you might wish them success!"

M. Hochon took up his hat and his ivory-handled cane, and went out, amazed by this alarming speech, for he had not supposed his wife to be so determined. Mme. Hochon, on her part, took her prayer-book to read the order of service, her great age hindering her from going to mass every morning. It was with difficulty that she got to church on Sundays and high festivals. Since receiving Agathe's reply she had added to her regular prayers a special intercession, beseeching God to open the eyes of Jean-Jacques Rouget, to bless Agathe, and to grant success to the undertaking to which she had been driven.

Concealing the fact from her two grandsons, whom she regarded as *parpaillots* (renegades), she had requested the curé to say masses for nine days, attended by her granddaughter, Adolphine Borniche, who put up her grandmother's prayers in the church as her proxy.

Adolphine, now eighteen, having stitched by her grandmother's side for seven years, in this chill home of methodical and melancholy regularity, was all the more ready to perform the *neuvaine*, because she hoped to inspire some tender feeling in Joseph Bridau, the painter so little understood by M. Hochon, and in whom she took a keen interest, were it only on account of the monstrous ideas her grandfather attributed to the young Paris artist.

Old people, wise people, the magnates of the town, and fathers of families, all approved of Mme. Hochon's conduct; and their good wishes for her goddaughter and for Agathe's sons were re-enforced by the secret contempt they had long felt for the proceedings of Maxence Gilet. So the advent of Père Rouget's sister and nephew gave rise to two factions in Issoudun: that of the older and upper citizen class, who could only watch events and hope for the best without helping matters; and that of the Knights of Idlesse and Max's partisans, who were, unfortunately, capable of doing much mischief to undermine the Parisians.

On this day, then, Agathe and Joseph got out of the coach at the office of the Messageries, Place Misère, at three in the afternoon. Though tired, Mme. Bridau felt young again at the sight of her native town, where at every step she found some reminiscence and impression of her girlhood. In the state of mind prevailing at Issoudun the arrival of the Parisians was known all over the town within ten minutes.

Mme. Hochon appeared at the front gate to receive her goddaughter, and kissed her as if she had been a child of her own. After seventy-two years of a life as empty as it was monotonous, with nothing to look back upon but the coffins of her three children, all dying in misfortune, she had cultivated a sort of artificial motherhood for the girl who, as she expressed it, had for sixteen years lived in her pocket. In the gloom of a provincial life she had cherished this old regard, this child's life, and all its memories, just as if Agathe were still with her, and she took a passionate interest in all that concerned the Bridaus.

Agathe was led in triumph into the drawing-room, where worthy M. Hochon stood as cold as a raked-out oven.

"Here is M. Hochon; how do you think he is looking?"

"Why, exactly as he did when I left him," said Agathe.

"Ah, it is evident you have come from Paris, you pay compliments," said the old man.

The family were introduced: first little Baruch Borniche, a tall youth of two-and-twenty; then little François Hochon, now twenty-four; and lastly, little Adolphine, who blushed, and did not know what to do with her hands, and especially with her eyes, for she did not wish to appear to stare at Joseph Bridau, who was anxiously examined by the two lads and by old Hochon, but from different points of view. The miser was reflecting, "He must have just come out of the hospital; he will eat like a fever-patient."

The two young men were saying to themselves, "What a brigand! What a head! We shall have our hands full!"

"Here is my son the painter, my good Joseph," said Agathe finally, introducing the artist.

There was a little sigh in the emphasis on the word "good," which betrayed Agathe's heart; she was thinking of the prisoner at the Luxembourg.

"He looks ill," cried Mme. Hochon; "he is not like you——"

"No, madame," said Joseph, with the rough simplicity of an artist, "I am like my father, only uglier!"

Mme. Hochon pressed Agathe's hand, which she was holding, and gave her a look. That grasp, that glance were meant to convey—

"Ah, my child, I quite understand your preferring that scapegrace Philippe."

"I never saw your father, my dear boy," replied Mme. Hochon aloud; "but that you are your mother's son is enough to make me love you. Besides you have talent, from what the late Mme. Descoings used to write to me; she was the only person to give me any news of you in these latter times."

"Talent?" said the artist; "no, not yet, but with time and perseverance I may some day win both glory and fortune."

"By painting?" said M. Hochon, with deep irony.

"Come, Adolphine," said Mme. Hochon, "go and see about getting the dinner served."

"Mother," said Joseph, "I will go and carry up our trunks, which have just come."

"Hochon, will you show M. Bridau the rooms," said the grandmother to François.

As dinner was not till four, and it was now but half-past three, Baruch went round the town giving news of the Bridaus's arrival, describing Agathe's dress, and, above all, Joseph, whose hollow cheeks and sickly, strongly-marked features were like the ideal portrait of a brigand. In every house that day Joseph was the sole subject of conversation.

"Old Rouget's sister must have met an ape somewhere before her son was born; he is just like a monkey."—"He has a face like a brigand, and eyes like a basilisk."—"They say he is extraordinary to behold, quite alarming."—"All Paris artists are the same."—"They are as spiteful as cunning asses, and as vicious as apes."—"It is in the nature of their calling."—"I have just seen M. Beaussier, who says he would not for worlds meet him at night in a wood. He saw him in the diligence."—"He has hollows in his face like a horse, and he waves his arms like a madman."—"That fellow is capable of any crime; it is his fault, perhaps, that his brother, who was a fine handsome man, has gone to the bad. Poor Mme. Bridau, she does not look very happy with him. Suppose we take advantage of his being here to have our likenesses drawn?"

The result of these opinions, sown broadcast in the town as if by the winds, was a devouring curiosity. All who had a right to call on the Hochons promised themselves that they would do so that evening, to inspect the Parisians. The arrival of these two persons in a stagnant town like Issoudun was as startling as the fall of the Log among the Frogs.

After placing his mother's luggage and his own in the two attic rooms, and looking around them, Joseph studied the silent house, where the stairs, walls, and panels, bare of adornment, shed a chill, and there was not a thing beyond what was strictly necessary. But when, on going downstairs, he found M. Hochon himself cutting a slice of bread for each person, he understood for the first time Molière's *Harpagon*.

"We should have done better at the inn," thought he.

The dinner confirmed his apprehensions. After a soup, so thin that quantity was evidently preferred to quality, a dish of bouilli was served—fresh-boiled beef—triumphantly wreathed with parsley. The vegetables cooked with it, served in a separate dish, were part of the bill of fare. The meat crowned the table, and was flanked by three other dishes; hard eggs on sorrel opposite the vegetables, and a salad, ready dressed with nut-oil, opposite little cups of custard flavored with burnt oats as a substitute for vanilla—as much like vanilla as chicory is like Mocha. Butter, and radishes on little plates at the opposite ends, black radishes and gherkins, completed the display, which Mme. Hochon highly approved. The good old lady nodded at her husband, as a hostess happy to see that, at any rate for the first day, he had done things in style. The old man responded with a look and shrug, easily interpreted to mean—

"You see what recklessness you lead me into!"

As soon as the bouilli had been dissected by M. Hochon into slices as thin as the sole of your slipper, it was removed to make way for three pigeons. The wine was of the vintage of 1811. At a hint from her grandmother, Adolphine had graced each end of the table with a bunch of flowers.

"Well, make the best of a bad job!" thought the artist, as he looked at the table. And he began to eat like a man who had breakfasted at Vierzon at six in the morning, off an execrable cup of coffee.

When Joseph had eaten his bread and asked for some more, M. Hochon rose, slowly felt for a key in the depths of his coat-pocket, opened a cupboard behind him, flourished the stump of a twelve-pound loaf, ceremoniously cut off another slice, which he divided in two, put it on a plate, and passed the plate across the table to the young painter, with the silence and composure of an old soldier, who says to himself at the beginning of a battle, "Well, I may be dead by to-night."

Joseph took half the slice, and understood that he must never again ask for more bread. No member of the family was surprised at this scene, which to Joseph seemed so preposterous.

The conversation went on. Agathe heard that the house she was born in, her father's house before he had inherited that of the Descoings, had been bought by the Borniches, and she expressed a wish to see it again.

"The Borniches will call this evening, no doubt," said her godmother. "All the town will come to inspect you," she added to Joseph, "and they will ask you to their houses."

For dessert the maid brought in the famous soft cheeses of Touraine and Le Berry, made of goats' milk, which so exactly reproduce, in a sort of niello, the veining of the vine-leaves on which they are served, that engraving might very well have been invented in Touraine. On each side of the little cheeses Gritte ceremoniously served some walnuts and some rocky biscuits.

"Come, Gritte, bring us some fruit," said Mme. Hochon.

"Madame, there is no rotten fruit left," replied Gritte.

Joseph shouted with laughter, as if he had been in his studio with his own companions, for he understood at once that the precaution of beginning first on damaged fruit had degenerated into a habit.

"Oh, we can eat it all the same!" said he, with the dash of spirit of a man who feels that he must speak.

"Pray go for some, M. Hochon," said the old lady.

M. Hochon, much annoyed by the artist's remark, fetched some small peaches, some pears, and late plums.

"Adolphine, go and cut some grapes," said Mme. Hochon to her granddaughter.

Joseph looked at the two young men with an expression that seemed to say, "And is it to such a diet as this that you owe your blooming appearance?"

Baruch understood this keen glance, and could not help smiling, for his cousin Hochon and he had displayed moderate appetites. The food at home was a matter of indifference to men who supped three times a week at La Cognette's. And just before dinner, Baruch had had notice that the Grand Master of the Order had summoned a full meeting at midnight to have a splendid supper, as he required their co-operation.

This banquet of welcome offered to his guests by old Hochon explains how necessary these midnight festivities were for the maintenance of these two great fellows, who had fine appetites, and who never missed one.

"We will have some liqueurs in the drawing-room," said

Mme. Hochon, rising, and signing to Joseph to give her his arm. They went out first, and she was able to say to the painter, "Well, my poor boy, your dinner will not give you an indigestion; but I had great difficulty in procuring it for you! You will find lenten fare here; just enough to eat to keep you alive, and that is all. So just make the best of it."

The frank simplicity of the old lady, thus pronouncing judgment on her own house, pleased the painter.

"I shall have lived fifty years with that old man without ever having heard twenty crowns jingle in my purse. Oh, if it were not for the hope of saving your fortune, I would never have invited your mother and you to stay in my prison!"

"But how is it that you are still alive?" said the painter artlessly, with the light-heartedness that never deserts a French artist.

"Ah, indeed!" said she. "I pray."

Joseph felt a thrill as he heard these words, which gave the old woman such dignity in his eyes that he drew back two or three steps to look in her face; he saw it radiant, full of such tender serenity, that he said to her—

"I will paint your portrait——"

"No, no," said she. "I have hated life on earth too much to wish to remain on it in a picture."

As she spoke the sad words in a light tone, she took from a cupboard a flask containing black-currant brandy, a household liqueur prepared by herself, for she had had the recipe from the famous Sisterhood who also created the Issoudun cakes, one of the greatest achievements of French confectionery, which no *chef*, cook, pastry-cook, or confectioner has ever been able to imitate. M. de Rivière, the ambassador to Constantinople, ordered immense numbers every year for Mahmoud's seraglio. Adolphine held a small lacquer tray full of little old-fashioned glasses with an engraved pattern and a gilt rim; as her grandmother filled them, she carried them round.

"Glasses round.—Father will have some!" cried Agathe gayly, reminded of her young days by this time-honored ceremony.

"Hochon will go presently to his club to read the papers; we shall have a little time to ourselves," said the old lady in a low voice.

In fact, ten minutes later, the three women and Joseph were left to themselves in the drawing-room. Its floor was never polished, only swept, while the tapestried panels, in oak frames, with deep ogees and moldings, and all the simple heavy furniture, stood before Mme. Bridau exactly as she had left them. The Monarchy, the Revolution, the Empire, and the Restoration, respecters of few things, had respected this room, where their splendors and disasters had left not a trace.

"Ah, godmother, my life has been cruelly storm-tossed in comparison with yours!" exclaimed Mme. Bridau, surprised to see even a canary bird, which she had known alive, stuffed and standing on the chimney-shelf between the old clock and the old brass branched candlesticks and silver taper-stands.

"My child," replied the old lady, "storms are in the heart. The greater and the more needed is our resignation, the greater must our inmost struggles be.—But we will not talk of me, but of your affairs. You are indeed exactly opposite the foe," she went on, pointing to the windows of old Rouget's house.

"They are sitting down to dinner," remarked Adolphine.

The young girl, almost a recluse, was constantly looking out of window, hoping to catch some light shed by chance on the enormities ascribed to Maxence Gilet, to La Rabouilleuse, and to Jean-Jacques, of which a hint now and again reached her ears when she was sent away while they were discussed. The old lady now told her granddaughter to leave her with M. and Mme. Bridau till the first visitor should come.

"For I know my Issoudun," said she, looking at the two Parisians, "we shall have ten or twelve batches of inquisitive callers this evening."

Mme. Hochon had hardly had time to give them the events and particulars concerning the extraordinary influence exerted over Jean-Jacques Rouget by La Rabouilleuse and Maxence Gilet—not with the synthetic brevity with which they have here been narrated, but with the addition of a thousand comments, descriptions, and hypotheses lent to them by good and evil tongues in the town—when Adolphine announced the approach of the Borniches, the Beaussiers, the Lousteau-Prangins, the Fichets, the Goddet-Héraus, fourteen persons in all, who loomed in the distance.

"So, you see, my dear child," said the old lady in conclusion, "that it will be no small matter to drag this fortune out of the wolf's mouth——"

"It seems to me so difficult, with such a scoundrel as you have described, and a slut like that young witch, that it must be impossible," said Joseph. "We should have to remain at Issoudun a year at least to combat their influence and undo their power over my uncle.—No fortune is worth so much vexation, to say nothing of having to stoop to a thousand dishonorable tricks. My mother has but a fortnight's leave of absence; her appointment is a certainty, and she must not risk losing it. In the month of October I have some important work to do which Schinner has secured for me in a nobleman's house. And to me, madame, you see, fortune lies in my paint-brushes."

This speech was received with profound amazement. Mme. Hochon, though relatively superior to the place she lived in, did not believe in painting. She looked at her goddaughter, and again grasped her hand.

"This Maxence is a second edition of Philippe," said Joseph in his mother's ear; "but with more policy, more style than Philippe has.—Well, madame," he added aloud, "we shall not long put M. Hochon out of his way by staying here."

"Oh, you are young; you know nothing of the world," said the old lady. "In a fortnight, with a little political manœuvering, you may do something. Listen to my advice, and act as I may direct you."

"Oh, very gladly!" cried Joseph. "I am conscious of ineffable incapacity in domestic tactics; and I am sure I do not know what Desroches himself would advise us to do if, for instance, my uncle refuses to see us to-morrow."

Mmes. Borniche, Goddet-Hérau, Beaussier, Louisteau-Prangin, and Fichet, graced by their husbands, now came in.

After the usual greetings, and when the fourteen persons had found seats, Mme. Hochon could not avoid introducing to them her goddaughter Agathe and Joseph Bridau. Joseph remained on a sofa, and gave himself up to a covert study of the sixty faces which from half-past five till nine came to him gratis, as he said to his mother. And Joseph's attitude throughout this evening in regard to the patricians of Issoudun did nothing to alter the views of the little town in regard to him. Everyone left chilled by his ironical gaze, uncomfortable under his smile, or alarmed by his face, sinister, no doubt, to people who could not discern the eccentricity of genius.

At ten o'clock, when everybody went to bed, the old lady detained her goddaughter in her room till midnight. Then, knowing that they were alone, the two women, while telling each other the troubles of their lives, made an exchange of suffering. As she measured the vastness of the solitude in which all the powers of a beautiful soul had been spent unrecognized, as she heard the last utterances of an intelligence that had missed its opportunities, as she learnt the sorrows of a heart so essentially generous and charitable, but whose generosity and charity had never had full play, Agathe no longer regarded herself as the more unfortunate of the two, as she perceived how much mitigation and minor happiness her Paris life had afforded in the midst of the discipline appointed her by God.

"You who are so pious, godmother, tell me my faults," said she. "Tell me what it is that God is punishing me for."

"He prepares us, my child," replied the old lady as midnight struck.

At midnight the Knights of Idlesse were making their way, one by one, like shades, to meet under the trees of the Boulevard Baron, and walked to and fro, talking in low whispers.

"What is up?" was the first question of each newcomer.

"I fancy," said François, "that all Max intends is to give us a feed."

"No. Matters are looking awkward for him and La

Rabouilleuse. He has concocted some plot against these Parisians no doubt——"

"It would be good fun to pack them off again."

"My grandfather," said Baruch, "is in a fright already at having two more mouths to fill, and he would jump at any excuse——"

"Well, Knights!" cried Max in a low voice as he came up, "why are you gazing at the stars? They will not distill kirsch on our heads. To La Cognette's! To La Cognette's!"

"To La Cognette's!"

The shout as of one voice produced a fearful din, that swept across the little town like the hue of soldiers rushing on an assault; then utter silence fell. Next morning more than one person would say to his neighbor: "Did you hear that fearful yell last night at about one o'clock? I thought there was a fire somewhere."

A supper worthy of La Cognette cheered the eyes of the two-and-twenty guests, for the Order was present in all its numbers. At two in the morning, when they were beginning to *siroter*, a word of their own peculiar slang, fairly descriptive of the art of drinking in sips and slowly tasting the wine, Max addressed the meeting:—

"My dear boys, this morning, in consequence of the never-to-be-forgotten trick we played with Fario's cart, your Grand Master was so grossly insulted on a point of honor by that base corn-dealer, and a Spaniard to boot—Ah, those hulks!—that I am determined to let that miscreant feel the whole weight of my vengeance, within the strict limits of our sports. After considering the matter all day, I have hit on a plan for playing him a capital trick, a trick that is enough to drive him mad. While avenging the Order attacked in my person, we may feed certain animals worshiped by the Egyptians, little beasts which are, after all, God's creatures though men persecute them unjustly. Good comes of evil, and evil of good; such is the divine law! I require you each and all, under pain of your humble servant and Grand Master's displeasure, to procure, as secretly as possible, twenty rats, or if possible, lady rats expecting families by God's grace. You must collect your contingent within three days. If you can get more, the surplus will be acceptable. Keep these interesting rodents without food, for it is essential that the dear little beasts should be ravenously hungry. Observe, I include as rats mice and field-mice. If we multiply twenty by twenty-two, we shall have more than four hundred accomplices, who, when turned out in the old church of the Capuchins, where Fario has stored all the seed-corn he has just laid in, will consume a certain quantity of it. But we must look sharp!—Fario is to deliver a large parcel of seeds in a week; now what I want is that my Spanish friend, who is traveling round for orders, should find a fearful waste.

"Gentlemen, the merit of this invention is not mine," he went on, noting the signs of general approbation. "'Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.' This is an imitation of Samson's foxes in the Bible. But Samson was an incendiary, and consequently not a philanthropist; while we, like the Brahmins, are the protectors of a persecuted race. Mlle. Flore Brazier has already set all her mouse-traps, and Kouski, my right hand, is hunting field-mice.—I have spoken."

"I know," said Goddet junior, "where to get an animal as good as forty rats single-handed."

"What?"

"A squirrel."

"And I can contribute a small monkey who will eat corn till he bursts," said a novice.

"No good!" said Max. "It will be known where the beasts come from."

"In the course of the night," said young Beaussier, "we might bring in one pigeon from the pigeon-house of each farm in the neighborhood, by putting it through a hole made in the roof, and there soon would be thousands of pigeons."

"Well, then, for a week Fario's corn-store is the order of the night," said Gilet, smiling at the tall youth Beaussier junior. "You know that they are astir early at Saint-Paterne. Mind no one is to go there without having put the soles of his list-shoes on hind part before. Our good knight Beaussier, the inventor of the pigeon trick, takes the command. For my part, I will take care to leave my mark on the grain.

I leave it to you to be quarter-masters general to the forces of rats. If the shop-boy sleeps in the old church, his companions must make him drunk; and do it cleverly, so as to get him far away from the banquet to be provided for the rodents."

"And you say nothing about the Parisians?" asked Goddet.

"Oh!" said Max, "they must be studied. At the same time, I will give my fine fowling-piece, that came to me from the Emperor, a first-class article from the Versailles factory—it is worth two thousand francs—to anyone who will hit upon a plan for playing these Parisians some trick to get them into such bad odor with M. and Mme. Hochon that the old folks should pack them off, or that they should go of their own accord; without causing too much annoyance, however, to the ancestors of my good friends François and Baruch."

"All right, I will think it over," said young Goddet, who was passionately addicted to shooting.

"And if the inventor of the ploy does not want the gun, he may have my horse," added Maxence.

Thenceforth twenty brains were vainly racked to concoct some plan against Agathe and her son, in conformity with this programme. But the Devil alone, or some chance, could succeed; the conditions of the case made it so difficult.

Next morning Agathe and Joseph came downstairs a minute before the second breakfast at ten o'clock. The meal called the first breakfast consisted of a cup of milk and a slice of bread and butter, eaten in bed, or on getting up.

While waiting for Mme. Hochon, who, in spite of old age, carefully went through all the ceremonies employed in their toilet by the duchesses of Louis XV.'s reign, Joseph saw, on the threshold of the house opposite, Jean-Jacques Rouget standing squarely in the doorway. He, naturally, pointed him out to his mother, who could not recognize her brother, so little was he like what he had been when they parted.

"There is your brother," said Adolphine, who had given her grandmother her arm.

"What an idiot!" cried Joseph.

Agathe clasped her hands and looked up to heaven.

"What have they brought him to? Good Heavens! is that a man of fifty-seven?"

She wished to look at him attentively, and then saw Flore Brazier come up behind him, her hair dressed without a cap, and displaying, through the gauze of a handkerchief trimmed with lace, snowy shoulders and a dazzling bosom; she was dressed as elaborately as a rich courtesan, wearing a tightly fitting gown of grenadine—a silk stuff then very fashionable—with *gigot* sleeves, and magnificent bracelets on her wrists. A gold chain meandered over the bodice of La Rabouilleuse, who had brought Jean-Jacques his black silk cap that he might not catch cold—it was evidently a got-up scene.

"What a lovely woman!" cried Joseph. "Of a rare kind, too! Made to be painted, as we say! What flesh-tints, what splendid coloring! What a skin, what curves, and what shoulders! She is a magnificent Caryatid! And a perfect model for a Titian's Venus!"

To Adolphine and Mme. Hochon this might have been Greek; but Agathe, behind her son, made a sign to them as much as to say that she was accustomed to this jargon.

"You think a woman lovely who is robbing you of a fortune!" exclaimed Mme. Hochon.

"That does not prevent her being a splendid model! Exactly full enough, without the hips or bust having become coarse——"

"My dear, you are not in your studio," said Agathe. "Adophine is here——"

"To be sure, I beg pardon; but, really, all the way from Paris along the road I saw none but apes——"

"But, my dear godmother," said Agathe, "how can I see my brother? For if that creature is with him——"

"Pooh!" said Joseph. "I will go to see him. For, indeed, I don't think him quite such an idiot if he has wit enough to gladden his eyes with a Venus worthy of Titian."

"If he were not an idiot," said M. Hochon, coming in, "he would have married comfortably, have had a family, and you would have had no chance at all of his fortune. Some good comes out of evil."

"That is a good idea of your son's; he can go first to call on his uncle," said Mme. Hochon. "He will give him to understand if you go he must receive you alone."

"And so affront Mlle. Brazier?" said M. Hochon. "No, no, madame. Put up with this grievance. If you do not get the fortune, try to secure a legacy."

The Hochons were no match for Maxence Gilet. In the middle of breakfast the Pole arrived with a note from his master, M. Rouget, addressed to his sister, Mme. Bridau.

Here is the letter, which Mme. Hochon made her husband read:—

"MY DEAR SISTER,—

"I hear through strangers of your arrival at Issoudun. I can guess the reason for your preferring M. and Mme. Hochon's house to mine; but if you come to see me, you shall be received here as you ought to be. I should be the first to call on you but that my health compels me at present to keep the house. I offer you my affectionate respects. I should be delighted to meet your son, whom I shall hope to see at dinner with me to-day, for young men are less precise than women as to the company they meet. He will give me great pleasure by coming accompanied by Messrs. Baruch Borniche, and François Hochon.

"Your affectionate brother,

"J.-J. ROUGET."

"Say that we are at breakfast, that Mme. Bridau will send an answer presently, and the gentlemen accept the invitation," said M. Hochon to the maid. And the old man laid his finger on his lip to impress silence on all the party.

When the house-door was shut, M. Hochon, having no suspicion of the alliance between his grandsons and Maxence, shot one of his keenest glances at his wife and Agathe.

"He no more wrote that," said he, "than I am able to pay down twenty-five louis.—The soldier is our correspondent."

"What does it all mean?" said Mme. Hochon. "Never mind, we will answer it. You, monsieur," she added, turning to the painter, "will dine there, I hope; but if——"

The old lady stopped short at a look from her husband. Seeing the warmth of his wife's affection for Agathe, old Hochon feared lest she should leave her goddaughter some legacy in the event of her losing all the Rouget property. Though he was fifteen years the elder, the miser hoped to survive her, and to see himself one day master of everything. This hope was his ruling idea. So Mme. Hochon had rightly guessed that the way to extract some concessions from her husband was to threaten that she would make a will.

So M. Hochon sided with his guests. The Rouget fortune, which hung in the balance, was in fact enormous; and his sense of social justice made him wish to see it in the hands of the natural heirs rather than grabbed by disreputable outsiders. Again, the sooner the business was settled, the sooner would he be rid of his visitors. Since the struggle, which till now had been only a scheme of his wife's, had actually begun between the rightful heirs and the unrighteous schemers, M. Hochon's mind had waked up from the sleep induced by provincial life. Mme. Hochon was quite agreeably surprised when, that very morning, she understood, from some kindly expression of old Hochon's with regard to her goddaughter, that this competent and wily auxiliary was on the side of the Bridaus.

By noon the combined talents of M. and Mme. Hochon, of Agathe and Joseph—a good deal surprised to find the two old people so careful in their choice of words—had brought to birth the following reply for the especial benefit of Flore and Maxence:—

"My dear Brother,—

"If I have waited thirty years without revisiting this town, or keeping up any intercourse with anyone in it, not even with you, the fault lies not alone with the strange and false ideas my father had formed against me, but partly with the misfortunes and with the happiness of my life in Paris; for, though God made me a happy wife, He has sorely stricken me as a mother. You cannot but know that my son, your nephew Philippe, lies under a capital charge of treason in consequence of his devotion to the Emperor. Hence, you will not be surprised to hear that a widow, compelled to earn her living by accepting a humble employment in a lottery office, should have come to seek consolation and substantial help from those who have known her from her birth.

"The profession taken up by the son who is with me is one of those which demand great talent, great sacrifices, and long study before leading to any success. Glory precedes fortune in this career. Is not this as much as to say that even if Joseph makes his name famous, he will still be poor?

"I, your sister, my dear Jean-Jacques, would have endured in silence the effects of our father's injustice, but forgive me as a mother for reminding you that you have two nephews—one who has served on the Emperor's staff at the battle of Montereau, and fought with the Imperial Guard at Waterloo, and who is now in prison; the other who, from the age of thirteen, has been led by a vocation into a difficult though splendid career.

"So I thank you, my dear brother, with heartfelt warmth, for your letter, both on my own account and on Joseph's; he will certainly wait on you at your invitation. Ill health excuses everything, my dear Jean-Jacques; I will see you in your own house. A sister is always at home in her brother's house, whatever life he may choose to lead.

"Accept my affectionate regards,

"AGATHE ROUGET."

"There, the battle has begun. When you go there," said M. Hochon, "you can speak plainly to him about his nephews."

The letter was delivered by Gritte, who returned in ten minutes to report to her superiors all she had been able to see or hear, as is the custom in the provinces.

"Madame," said she, "since last evening, all that part of the house that madame had left——"

"Madame—who?" asked old Hochon.

"Oh, they call La Rabouilleuse madame over there," replied Gritte.

"She had left the drawing-room and everything that was about M. Rouget in a dreadful state; but since yesterday the house is all to rights again, as it was before M. Maxence came there. You could see yourself in everything. Védie told me that Kouski was out on horseback by six this morning; he came in about nine, bringing in provisions. Indeed, there is to be the best of dinners, a dinner fit for the Archbishop of Bourges. Little pans are standing in big pans, and everything in order in the kitchen. 'I mean to treat my nephew handsomely,' the old fellow said, and made them tell him all they were doing. The Rougets were highly flattered by the letter, it would seem; madame came out to tell me so. Oh, she is dressed! Such a dress! I never saw anything handsomer! Madame has diamonds in her ears—two diamonds worth a thousand crowns apiece, Védie told me—and lace! and rings on her fingers, and bracelets good enough for a shrine, and a silk gown fit for an altar-front! And then says she to me: 'Monsieur is delighted to think his sister is so ready and willing, and I hope she will allow us to entertain her as she deserves. And we look forward to her good opinion of us when she hears how welcome we make her son. And monsieur is most impatient to see his nephew.'—Madame had little black satin shoes and stockings! Oh, really wonderful. Like flowers on the silk, and holes like lace, and you see the pink flesh through. In short, she is up to the nines! With such a dear little apron in front of her, that Védie told me that apron alone cost two years of our wages——"

"Come, come, we must get ourselves up!" said the artist, smiling.

"Well, M. Hochon, and what are you thinking about?" said the old lady, when Gritte had left the room.

Mme. Hochon pointed to her husband sitting with his head in his hands, and his elbows on the arms of his chair, lost in thought.

"You have a Maître Bonin to deal with," said the old man. "You, young man, with your notions, are no match in a struggle with a scoundrel of such skill as Maxence. Whatever I may say, you are sure to make some blunder; but, at any rate, tell me this evening all you see, hear, and do. Go—and God be with you! Try to have a few minutes alone with your uncle. If, in spite of all you can do, you fail in that, it will throw some light on their scheme; but if you are alone with him for one instant—alone, without being overheard, mind you!—you must speak very plainly to him as to his position—which is not a becoming one—and plead your mother's cause."

At four o'clock Joseph crossed the straits which divided the Hochons' house from the Rougets', the avenue of sickly lime-trees, two hundred feet long, and as wide as the Grande Narette. When the nephew appeared, Kouski, in freshly blacked boots, black trousers, white waistcoat, and black coat, led the way to announce him.

The table was ready laid in the sitting-room, and Joseph, who easily identified his uncle, went straight up to him and embraced him, bowing to Flore and Maxence.

"We have never met since I came into the world, my dear uncle," said the painter gayly. "But better late than never."

"You are very welcome, my dear boy," said the old man, looking at his nephew with a bewildered air.

"Madame," said Joseph to Flore with an artist's enthusiasm, "this morning I was envying my uncle the pleasure he enjoys of admiring you every day."

"Is not she beautiful?" said the old man, his dull eyes almost sparkling.

"Beautiful enough to be a painter's model."

"Nephew," said the old man, his elbow being nudged by Flore, "this is M. Maxence Gilet, a man who served the Emperor, like your brother, in the Imperial Guard."

Joseph rose and bowed.

"Your brother, I think, was a dragoon, and I was only a mud-crusher," said Maxence.

"On horseback or on foot," observed Flore, "you risked your skin all the same."

Joseph studied Max as narrowly as Max studied Joseph. Max was dressed like the young men of fashion of the day, for he had his clothes from Paris. A pair of sky-blue cloth trousers, very fully plaited, made the best of his feet by showing only the tips of his boots and his spurs. His waist was firmly held by a white waistcoat with fancy gold buttons, laced behind to serve as a belt; this waistcoat, buttoning to the throat, set off his broad chest, and his black satin stock obliged him to hold his head up like a soldier. His black coat was extremely well cut. A handsome gold chain hung from his waistcoat pocket, where a flat watch scarcely showed. He was playing with one of the patent watchkeys just invented by Breguet.

"He is a very good-looking fellow!" said Joseph to himself, admiring as an artist the face full of life, the appearance of strength, and the keen gray eyes inherited by Max from his gentleman father. "My uncle must be a deadly old bore, and that handsome girl has sought compensation. It is a case of three in a boat, that is very clear."

At this moment Baruch and François came in.

"You have not yet seen the Tower of Issoudun?" said Flore to Joseph. "Well, if you like to take a little walk till dinner is ready, which will not be for an hour yet, we will show you the great curiosity of the town——"

"With pleasure," said the artist, unable to discern the smallest objection.

While Flore was putting on her bonnet, her gloves, and her cashmere shawl, Joseph suddenly caught sight of the pictures, and started to his feet as if some enchanter had touched him with his wand.

"Ah, ha! so you have pictures, uncle?" said he looking at the one that had struck him.

"Yes," said the old fellow, "they came to me from the Descoings, who, during the Revolution, bought up some of the pickings of the convents and churches of Le Berry."

But Joseph was not listening. He went from picture to picture.

"Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "Why, what a fine thing! That man did not spoil canvas. Bless me, why, better and better; as we see them at Nicolet's——"

"There are seven or eight more, very large ones, in the loft, that were kept for the sake of the frames," said Gilet.

"Let me see them," cried the artist, and Maxence took him to the loft.

Joseph came down in raptures. Max said a word in La Rabouilleuse's ear, and she led the old man to the window; Joseph caught these words spoken in an undertone, but still so that he could hear them—

"Your nephew is a painter; you can do nothing with these pictures. Be good-natured, and give them to him."

"It would seem," said Rouget, leaning on Flore's arm, and coming to the spot where his nephew stood in ecstasies before an Albano,—"it would seem that you are a painter——"

"Only a smudger as yet," said Joseph.

"Whatever is that?" said Flore.

"A beginner," said Joseph.

"Well," said Jean-Jacques, "if these pictures can be of any use to you in your business, I will give them to you . . . But without the frames. The frames are gilt, and then they are quaint; I will put——"

"Why, of course, uncle," cried Joseph, enchanted, "you will put copies into them, which I will send you, and which shall be of the same size."

"But that will take time, and you will want canvas and paints," said Flore. "It will cost you money. Come, Père Rouget, suppose you offer your nephew a hundred francs for each picture; there are twenty-seven here, and I think there are eleven more in the loft, which are enormous, and ought to cost double—say four thousand francs for the lot. Yes, your uncle may very well spend four thousand francs on the copies, since he is to keep the frames. You will have to get frames too, and they say the frames cost more than the pictures; there is gold on them. . . . I say, monsieur," Flore went on, shaking the old man's arm, "listen, that is not dear: your nephew will charge you four thousand francs for quite new pictures in the place of your old ones. . . . It is a civil way of making him a present of the money," said she in his ear. "He does not strike me as being very flush——"

"Very well, nephew, I will pay you four thousand francs for the copies——"

"No, no," said Joseph honestly. "Four thousand francs and the pictures is too much; for the pictures, you see, are of value."

"Why, accept it, booby," said Flore, "since he is your uncle . . ."

"Very well, I accept," said Joseph, quite bewildered, for he had recognized one picture as by Perugino.

So the artist looked quite gleeful as he went out, giving his arm to La Rabouilleuse, which perfectly suited Max's purpose. Neither Flore, nor Rouget, nor Max, nor anyone at Issoudun had any idea of the value of the pictures, and the wily Max believed that he had purchased very cheaply Flore's triumph as she marched proudly arm in arm with her master's nephew, on the best possible terms with him, in the eyes of the astonished townsfolk. People came to their doors to see the victory of La Rabouilleuse over the family. This astounding fact made the deep sensation on which Max had built his hopes. So when the uncle and nephew went in at about five, the talk in every household was of the perfect alliance between Flore and Max and Père Rouget's nephew. And the story of the gift of the pictures and the four thousand francs was all over the town already.

The dinner, to which Lousteau, one of the judges, and the Mayor of Issoudun, was invited, was really splendid; it was one of the country meals which last five hours. The finest wines gave spirit to the conversation. Over the dessert, at nine o'clock, the painter, seated between Flore and Max, opposite his uncle, was almost hail-fellow with the officer, whom he thought the best of good souls. At eleven o'clock Joseph went home, a little screwed. As to old Rouget, Kouski carried him to bed dead drunk; he had eaten like a traveling actor, and drunk like the sands of the desert.

"Well, now," said Max, left alone with Flore, "is not this better than sulking with them? The Bridaus are well received; they will get some little presents, and loaded with favors, they can only sing our praises; they will go quietly away, and leave us quietly where we are. To-morrow morning Kouski and I between us will take out all those pictures, and send them over for the painter to see them when he wakes; we will put the frames in the loft, and have the room repapered with one of those varnished papers, with scenes on it from Télémaque, such as I saw at M. Mouilleron's."

"Why, that will be ever so much prettier!" cried Flore.

Joseph did not wake till noon next day. From his bed he saw the pictures leaning one above another, having been brought in without his hearing anything. While he was examining them afresh, and recognizing them as masterpieces, studying the handling of each master, or finding their signatures, his mother went to thank her brother and to see him, urged to do so by old Hochon, who, knowing all the blunders committed by Joseph the evening before, despaired of the Bridaus' prospects.

"You have to deal with two very sharp customers. In all my life I never met with so sly a fox as that soldier. War is the making of these youths, it would seem. Joseph walked into the trap. He appeared arm in arm with La Rabouilleuse. They have shut his mouth, no doubt, with wine, some rubbishy pictures, and four thousand francs. Your artist has not cost Maxence dear."

The cunning old man had laid down a line of conduct for his wife's goddaughter, instructing her to seem to agree with Maxence and cajole Flore, so as to become to some extent familiar with her, and obtain a few minutes' talk alone with her brother. Mme. Bridau was very well received by Jean-Jacques, tutored by Flore. The old man was in bed, ill from the excesses of the previous evening. As Agathe could not attack him on serious questions at the very first moment, Max had thought it correct and handsome to leave the brother and sister to themselves. He had calculated judiciously. Poor Agathe found her brother so ill that she would not deprive him of Mlle. Brazier's attentions.

"Besides," she said to the old man, "I should wish to know the person to whom I am indebted for my brother's happiness."

These words gave the poor fellow evident pleasure; he rang and sent for Mlle. Brazier. Flore, as may be supposed, was not far off. The female antagonists exchanged salutes. La Rabouilleuse displayed the most obsequious care, the tenderest attentions; she thought monsieur's head was too low, and rearranged the pillows; she was like a wife of yesterday. And the old man overflowed with emotion.

"We owe you much gratitude, mademoiselle," said Agathe, "for all the marks of attachment you have so long given to my brother, and for the care with which you provide for his happiness."

"It is very true, my dear Agathe," said the old man, "she made me first know happiness; and she is a woman full of admirable qualities."

"And so, brother, you cannot reward her too highly; you ought to have made her your wife. Yes! I am too religious a woman not to wish that I might see you obey the precepts of religion. You would both be the happier if you were not at war with law and morality. I came here, my dear brother, to appeal for help in very great trouble; but do not imagine that we intended to make the slightest remarks on the way in which you may dispose of your fortune."

"Madame," said Flore, "we know that your father was unjust to you. Your brother can tell you," she added, staring hard at her victim, "that the only quarrels we have ever had, he and I, have been about you. I tell monsieur that he owes you part of the fortune of which you were robbed by my poor benefactor—for he was my benefactor, your father was," and she put on a tearful voice, "and I shall never forget him—but your brother, madame, has listened to reason——"

"Yes," said old Rouget, "when I make my will, you will not be forgotten——"

"We will not talk of that, brother; you do not know yet what my character is——"

From these beginnings the upshot of this first visit may be imagined. Rouget invited his sister to dinner for the next day but one.

During these three days the Knights of Idlesse caught an enormous number of rats, mice, and field-mice, which were turned out starving one fine night among the seed-corn, to the number of four hundred and thirty-six, among them many mothers with young. Not satisfied with having quartered these pensioners on Fario, the Knights made some holes in the roof of the old chapel, and put in ten pigeons brought from ten different farmsteads. The creatures held high festival, with all the greater freedom because Fario's boy was led away by another young rascal, with whom he drank from morning till night, taking no care whatever of his master's merchandise.

Mme. Bridau, in opposition to old Hochon's opinion, believed that her brother had not yet made his will; she purposed asking him what his intentions were with regard to Mlle. Brazier, on the first opportunity she might find of taking a walk with him alone; for Max and Flore constantly beguiled her with this hope, which was always deceived.

Though the Knights of the Order all tried to hit on a scheme for putting the two Parisians to flight, they devised nothing but impossible follies.

Hence at the end of a week, half of the time the Bridaus were to spend in Issoudun, they were no further forward than on the first day.

"Your lawyer does not know what a country town is," said old Hochon to Mme. Bridau. "What you came here to do cannot be done in fourteen days, nor in fourteen months. You would have to be constantly with your brother, and instill into him some ideas of religion. You can only undermine the fortress guarded by Flore and Maxence by sapping it through a priest. That is my opinion, and it is high time you should act on it."

"You have strange ideas of the priesthood," said Mme. Hochon to her husband.

"Oh!" cried the old man. "There you are, you godly people!"

"God will not bless any endeavor that is based on sacrilege," said Mme. Bridau. "To make use of religion for such a—— Oh! We should be worse than Flore!"

This conversation took place at breakfast, and François and Baruch both listened with open ears.

"Sacrilege!" cried old Hochon. "But if some good abbé, as clever as some I have known, understood the predicament in which you stand, he would not regard it as sacrilege to lead home to God your brother's erring soul, to bring him to true repentance for his sins, to persuade him to send away the woman who is the cause of the scandal—providing for her, of course—to point out to him that his conscience would rest in peace if he only left a few thousand francs a year to the archbishop's little seminary, and the remainder of his fortune to his legitimate heirs."

The passive obedience exacted by the old miser from his children, and handed down to his grandchildren, who had indeed been left to his guardianship, and for whom he was amassing a large fortune—doing by them, he was wont to say, as he would do by himself—did not allow of the faintest sign of astonishment or disapproval on the part of Baruch and François; but they exchanged glances full of meaning, telling each other how fatal this idea would be to Max's interests.

"The truth is, madame," said Baruch, "if you wish to inherit your brother's property, the only real way is this—you must remain at Issoudun as long as is necessary to employ him——"

"Mother," Joseph put in, "you will do well to write all this to Desroches. For my part, I look for nothing more from my uncle than what he has so kindly given me."

After assuring himself of the great value of the thirty-nine pictures, Joseph had carefully unmounted the canvases, had pasted paper over them, laid them one over another flat in a huge case, and addressed it by carrier to Desroches, to whom he meant to send a letter of advice. This precious load had been sent off the day before.

"You are cheaply paid off," said M. Hochon.

"But I shall have no difficulty in getting a hundred and fifty thousand francs for the pictures," said Joseph.

"A painter's notion," said M. Hochon, looking dubiously at Joseph.

"Listen," said Joseph, turning to his mother, "I am going to write to Desroches and explain the state of affairs here. If he advises you to stay, you shall stay. As to your place in the office, we can always find something else as good——"

"My dear boy," said Mme. Hochon, as they rose from table, "I do not know what your uncle's pictures may be, but they ought to be good, judging by the places they came from. If they are worth even forty thousand francs, a thousand francs apiece, tell nobody. Though my grandchildren are discreet and well brought up, they might, without meaning any mischief, talk about this supposed treasure-trove; all Issoudun would hear of it, and the foe must not suspect the truth. You really behave like a child!"

In point of fact, by mid-day many persons in Issoudun, and foremost of all Maxence Gilet, had been informed of Joseph's opinion, which led to a great hunt for old pictures that had lain forgotten, and to the disinterment of some execrable daubs. Max repented of having prompted the old man to give away the pictures; and his rage against the rightful heirs, on learning old Hochon's scheme, was increased by what he called his stupidity. Religious influence on this feeble creature was the only thing to be dreaded. Hence the warning given him by his two allies confirmed Max in his determination to realize all Rouget's mortgages, and to borrow on his land so as to invest in State securities at once. But he considered the necessity for getting rid of the Parisians as even more pressing. Now the talents of a Mascarille or a Scapin would have found this a hard problem to solve.

Flore, counseled by Max, began to say that monsieur tired himself too much by taking walks; that at his age he needed carriage exercise. This was necessary as a pretext for the expeditions to be made, without the neighbors knowing it, to Bourges, Vierzon, Châteauroux, and Vatan, wherever this scheme for calling in his investments might require that Rouget, Max, and Flore should go. So by the end of the week all Issoudun was startled by the news that Père Rouget had sent to Bourges for a carriage, a step which the Knights of Idlesse interpreted in favor of La Rabouilleuse. Flore and Max purchased a hideous traveling-chaise with rickety windows and a split leather hood, that had seen two-and-twenty years, and nine campaigns; this they bought at a sale on the death of a colonel, a great friend of Marshal Bertrand's, who, during the absence of the Emperor's faithful follower, had undertaken the charge of his estates in Le Berry. This vehicle, painted dark-green, was not unlike a barouche, but the pole had been altered and shafts substituted, so that it could be drawn by one horse. It was now one of those carriages which reduced fortunes have made so fashionable, which, indeed, were honestly designated as *demi-fortunes*, for they were originally called *seringues.* The lining of this *demi-fortune,* sold as a barouche, was moth-eaten; the trimmings were like a pensioner's stripes; it rattled like old iron; but it cost no more than four hundred and fifty francs, and Max bought of the troops in garrison at Bourges a strong, well-broken mare to draw it. He had this vehicle repainted dark-brown, and found a fairly good set of second-hand harness, and the town of Issoudun was agitated from top to bottom, on the watch for Père Rouget's " turn-out."

The first time the good man made use of his barouche the noise brought every household to the front door, and all the windows were full of peeping heads. The second time he drove as far as Bourges, where, to avoid all further trouble in connection with the transactions, advised—or, if you will, commanded—by Flore Brazier, he signed in the notary's office a power of attorney in favor of Maxence Gilet, enabling him to transfer all the moneys mentioned in the document. Flore undertook to settle with monsieur as to the loans in Issoudun and the immediate neighborhood. Rouget went to the first notary in Bourges and desired him to find him a hundred and forty thousand francs on the security of his land.

No one at Issoudun knew anything about these proceedings, so quietly and cleverly carried out. Max, a good horseman, could get to Bourges and back between five in the morning and five in the afternoon on his horse, and Flore never left the old man. Old Rouget had consented without demur to the alterations which Flore had suggested to him; but he insisted that the bond bearing fifty thousand francs a year interest should stand as life-interest only in Mlle. Brazier's name, and that the capital should remain his absolutely. The tenacity displayed by the old man in the private struggle which arose over this question made Max very uneasy, for he fancied he could discern in it some reflection inspired by the sight of his natural heirs.

In the midst of these great changes, which Max hoped to conceal from the prying townsfolk, he forgot the corn-dealer. Fario was preparing to deliver his orders, after much traveling and bargaining, with a view to raise the price of seed-corn. But the day after his return to Issoudun, living opposite the Capuchin chapel, he saw the roof black with pigeons. He cursed himself for having neglected to examine the roof, and hastily went across to his store-house, where he found half his corn devoured. Myriads of traces left by mice, rats, and field-mice betrayed another cause of the ruin. The church was a perfect Noah's ark. But the Spaniard turned as white as linen with fury when, on trying to calculate the extent of the loss and damage, he discovered that the lower strata of grain were soaked and sprouting, from a quantity of water having been injected into the heart of the corn-heaps by means of a tin tube—an idea of Max's. Pigeons and rats might be accounted for by animal instinct; but in this last piece of malice the hand of man was evident.

Fario sat down on an altar-step in a side chapel, and hid his head in his hands. After half an hour's meditations—a Spaniard's meditations—on looking up, he saw the squirrel which young Goddet had insisted on placing there as boarder, playing with its tail on the transom supporting the roof-beam. The Spaniard rose calmly, showing his shop-clerk a face as impassive as an Arab's. Fario made no lamentation. He went home, found some laborers to pack the good corn, and spread what was damp in the sun to dry, so as to save as much as possible; then he set to work to deliver his orders, calculating the loss at three-fifths. But as his own transactions had sent prices up, he lost again in repurchasing those three-fifths; thus his total loss was of more than half.

The corn-dealer, who had no enemies, unerringly attributed this piece of revenge to Gilet. It was clear to him that Max and some others, the inventors of so many nocturnal pranks, had undoubtedly dragged his cart up to the tower, and amused themselves by ruining him: his loss, indeed, amounted to a thousand crowns, almost all the capital he had laboriously accumulated since the peace. Inspired by the hope of revenge, the man put forth all the perseverance and acumen of a spy who has been promised a handsome reward. Lurking in ambush by night in the town, he obtained absolute proof of the proceedings of the Knights of Idlesse; he saw them, he counted them; he watched their trysts, and their suppers at La Cognette's; then he hid himself to witness one of their tricks, and became familiar with their nocturnal doings.

In spite of his rides and his anxieties, Max would not neglect this business of the night; in the first place, to prevent anyone suspecting the grand financial operations carried on with Père Rouget's investments; and, in the second place, to keep his friends up to the mark. Now the Order had agreed to achieve a stroke which should be talked of for years. On a certain night every watch-dog in the town and suburbs was to have a pill of poison. Fario overheard them as they came out of La Cognette's, chuckling beforehand over the success of this practical joke, and the universal mourning to be caused by this massacre of the innocents. Besides, what fears this general execution would give rise to, by hinting at sinister designs on the houses thus deprived of their guardians!

"Fario's cart will be quite forgotten perhaps," said Goddet.

Fario no longer needed this speech to confirm his suspicions; besides, he had laid his plans.

After a stay of three weeks, Agathe, like Mme. Hochon, recognized the truth of the old miser's views—it would take years to counteract the influence exerted over her brother by La Rabouilleuse and Max. Agathe had made no progress in Jean-Jacques's confidence; she had never been left alone with him. On the contrary, Mlle. Brazier triumphed over the heirs by taking Agathe out driving in the carriage, seated by her on the back seat, while M. Rouget and his nephew sat in front. Mother and son anxiously awaited a reply to their confidential letter to Desroches.

On the very eve of the day when the watch-dogs were to be poisoned, Joseph, who was dying of weariness at Issoudun, received two letters—one from Schinner, the great painter, whose age allowed of a closer and more intimate acquaintance than with Gros, their master, and the other from Desroches. This was the first, bearing the stamp of Beaumont-sur-Oise:—

"MY DEAR JOSEPH,—I have finished the most important paintings in the Château de Presles for the Count de Sérizy. I have left the borders and decorative panels; and I have so strongly recommended you to the Count, and to Grindot, his architect, that you have only to pack up your brushes and come. The prices agreed on will satisfy you. I am off to Italy with my wife, so you can have Mistigris to help you. The young rascal is clever; I place him at your service. He is as lively as a Pierrot already at the idea of enjoying himself at Presles. Farewell, my dear Joseph; if I am away and send nothing to the next Salon, you must fill my place. Yes, dear Jojo, your picture is a masterpiece, I am sure of it; but a masterpiece that will raise a hue and cry of 'Romanticism!' and you are preparing a life for yourself like that of the Devil in holy water. But, after all, as that rogue Mistrigis says—he transposes or puns on every proverb—life is bad to beat. What on earth are you doing at Issoudun? Farewell.—Your friend,

"SCHINNER."

This was Desroches's letter:—

"MY DEAR JOSEPH,—Your M. Hochon seems to me an old man of good sense, and you give me a high idea of his intelligence; he is perfectly right. And, since you ask my opinion, I think your mother should stay at Issoudun with Mme. Hochon, paying a small sum, say four hundred francs a year, as compensation for her board. Mme. Bridau, I should say, should be entirely guided by M. Hochon's advice. But your excellent mother will be full of scruples in opposition to people who have none, and whose conduct shows a masterly policy. That Maxence is a dangerous fellow, you are right there; he is a man of far stronger temper than Philippe. This rascal makes his vices serve his fortunes; he does not amuse himself for nothing, like your brother, whose follies were never of any use. All you tell me appalls me, for I could not do much by going to Issoudun. M. Hochon, acting through your mother, will be of more use than I can be.

"As for you, you may as well come home; you are of no good at all in a business requiring constant alertness, minute observation, servile attentions, discretion in speech, and dissimulation in looks,—all quite antipathetic to an artist. If they tell you there is no will, they have had one made a long time since, you may be sure. But wills are not irrevocable; and as long as your imbecile uncle lives, he will certainly be open to the influence of remorse and religion. Your fortune will be the result of a pitched battle between the Church and La Rabouilleuse. A moment will inevitably come when that woman will lose her power over the old man, and religion will be all-powerful. So long as your uncle has made nothing over to them by deed of gift, nor altered his investments and holdings, at the moment when religion gets the upper hand everything will be possible.

"You had better beg M. Hochon to keep an eye as far as possible on your uncle's possessions. It is important to ascertain whether he holds mortgages, and how and in whose name the deeds are drawn. It is so easy to fill an old man with fears for his life when he is stripping himself of his property in favor of strangers, that a rightful heir with a very little cunning can nip such spoliations in the bud. But is your mother, with her ignorance of the world, her disinterestedness, and her religious ideas, a likely person to manage such an intrigue?

"In short, I can only explain the position. What you have done so far must have given the alarm, and perhaps your antagonists are taking steps to protect themselves."

"That is what I call sound advice, kindly given!" cried M. Hochon, proud of finding himself appreciated by a Paris attorney.

"Oh, Desroches is a capital good fellow," said Joseph.

"It might be useful to show that letter to the two women," said the old man.

"Here it is," said Joseph, giving the letter to Hochon.

"As for me, I will be off to-morrow, and will go to take leave of my uncle."

"Ah!" said M. Hochon. "I see that in a postscript M. Desroches desires you to burn the letter."

"Burn it after showing it to my mother," said the painter.

Joseph Bridau dressed, crossed the little avenue, and was shown in to his uncle, who was just finishing breakfast. Max and Flore were at table with him.

"Do not disturb yourself, my dear uncle; I have come to take leave of you."

"You are going?" said Max with a look at Flore.

"Yes, I have some work to do at M. de Sérizy's château, and I am still all the more eager because he has a long enough arm to be of service to my poor brother with the Supreme Court."

"Well, well; work," said the old man, with a stupid look, and indeed Rouget seemed to Joseph extraordinarily altered. "You must work. I am sorry you are going——"

"Oh, my mother will remain some time yet," replied Joseph.

Max gave his lips a twist, which conveyed to the housekeeper, "They are going to act on the plan Baruch spoke of."

"I am very glad I came," Joseph went on, "for I have had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, and you have enriched my studio."

"Yes, indeed!" said La Rabouilleuse; "instead of enlightening your uncle as to the value of the pictures, which is said to be more than a hundred thousand francs, you packed them off to Paris pretty quick. Poor, dear man, he is like a child. . . . Why, I have just been told that there is at Bourges a little Poulet—I mean a Poussin—which was in the cathedral before the Revolution, and that alone is worth thirty thousand francs."

"That was not right, nephew," said the old man, at a nod from Max, which Joseph could not see.

"Come now, honestly," said the soldier, laughing, "on your honor, what do you suppose your pictures are worth? By Jove! you have jockeyed your uncle very prettily. Well, you had a right to do it. Uncles are made to be plundered. Nature bestowed no uncles on me; but, by all that's holy, if I had any, I would not spare them!"

"Did you know, monsieur," asked Flore of Rouget, "how much your pictures were worth?—How much did you say, M. Joseph?"

"Well," said the painter, turning as red as a beetroot, "the pictures are worth a good round sum."

"It is said that you valued them at a hundred and fifty thousand francs to M. Hochon. Is that true?"

"Yes," said the painter, as candid as a child.

"And had you any intention," said Flore to the old man, "of giving your nephew a hundred and fifty thousand francs?"

"Never, never," cried Rouget, on whom Flore had fixed a steady eye.

"It is quite easily settled," said the painter. "I will send them back to you, uncle."

"No, no, keep them," said the old fellow.

"I will send them back, uncle," repeated Joseph, offended by the insulting silence of Maxence Gilet and Flore Brazier. "I have in my brush the means of making my fortune, without owing anything to anybody—even to my uncle. I wish you good-day, mademoiselle. Good-morning, monsieur."

And Joseph recrossed the road in a state of irritation which an artist may conceive of. All the Hochon family were in the sitting-room. Seeing Joseph gesticulating and muttering to himself, they inquired what was the matter. Then, before Baruch and François, the painter, as open as the day, repeated the scene he had just gone through, which, in a couple of hours, was the talk of the whole town, everyone embroidering the story with more or less impudent additions. Some maintained that the painter had been roughly handled by Max, others that he had been insolent to Mlle. Brazier, and that Max had turned him out of the house.

"Oh, what a child your boy is!" said Hochon to Mme. Bridau. "The simple fellow has been fooled by a scene got up for the day when he should be leaving. Why, Max and La Rabouilleuse have known for this fortnight past what the value of the pictures is, since Joseph was so silly as to mention it in the presence of my grandsons, who were only too eager to repeat it to all the world. Your artist ought to have left without notice."

"My son is right to restore the pictures if they are so valuable," said Agathe.

"If they are worth two hundred thousand francs, by his account," said old Hochon, "he is an idiot for allowing himself to be compelled to return them; for, at any rate, you would have had that much of the property, whereas, as matters stand, you will get nothing!—And this is almost reason enough for your brother to refuse to see you again."

Between midnight and one in the morning the Knights of Idlesse began their distribution of free rations to the dogs of the town. This memorable expedition ended only at three in the morning, and then the mischievous wretches met for supper at La Cognette's. At half-past four, in the morning twilight, they crept home. At the instant when Max turned out of the Rue de l'Avenier into the Grand' Rue, Fario, in ambush in a recess, stabbed him with a knife, aiming straight at the heart, pulled out the weapon, and fled to the moat by La Villate, where he wiped the knife on his handkerchief. The Spaniard then rinsed the handkerchief in the Borrowed Stream, and quietly went home to Saint-Paterne, where he went to bed, getting in at a window he had left unfastened; his new shop-boy woke him next morning, finding him sound asleep.

Max as he fell uttered a fearful shriek, too genuine to be misunderstood. Lousteau-Prangin, the son of a magistrate, a distant relation of the late sub-delegate, and young Goddet, who both lived at the bottom of the Grand' Rue, ran up the street again as fast as they could fly, saying, "Max is being killed! Help!"—But not a dog barked, and the inhabitants, inured to the tricks of these night-birds, did not stir.

When the two Knights came up Max had fainted. It was necessary to call up M. Goddet the elder. Max had recognized Fario; but when, at five in the morning, he had fully recovered his wits, seeing himself surrounded by several persons, and feeling that the wound was not mortal, it suddenly struck him that he might take advantage of this attempted murder, and he exclaimed in a feeble voice, "I fancied I saw the eyes and face of that damned painter."

Upon this, Lousteau-Prangin ran off to fetch his father, the examining judge. Max was carried home by old Cognet, the younger Goddet, and two men whom they got out of bed. La Cognette and Goddet senior walked by the side of Max, who was laid on a mattress placed on two poles. M. Goddet would do nothing till Max was in his bed.

Those who carried him naturally looked across at Hochon's house while Kouski was getting up, and they saw the woman-servant sweeping. In this house, as in most country places, the door was opened at a very early hour. The only words Max had spoken had roused suspicion, and the surgeon called across the road—

"Gritte, is M. Joseph Bridau in bed?"

"Dear me," said she, "he went out at about half-past four; he walked up and down his room all night. I can't think what had taken him."

"A pretty fellow is your painter!" said one and another.

And the party went in, leaving the woman in consternation; she had seen Max lying on the mattress, his shirt stained with blood, apparently dying.

What had "taken" Joseph and disturbed him all night, every artist will understand. He pictured himself as the talk of Issoudun; he was supposed to be a sharper, anything but what he wanted to be—an honest fellow, a hard-working artist. He would have given his own picture to be able to fly like a swallow to Paris and fling his uncle's pictures in Max's face. To be the victim and be thought the spoiler! What a mockery! And so at daybreak he had rushed out of the house, and was pacing the avenue of poplars leading to Tivoli to walk off his excitement. While the innocent youth was promising himself, by way of consolation, never to set foot in the place again, Max was preparing for him a catastrophe full of horror to a sensitive mind.

As soon as M. Goddet had probed the wound, and ascertained that the knife, turned by a little pocketbook, had happily missed aim, though it had left a frightful gash, he did as all doctors do, and especially country surgeons—he gave himself airs of importance, and " could not answer for the patient's life." Then, after dressing the rascally soldier's wound, he went away. This medical verdict he repeated to La Rabouilleuse, to Jean-Jacques Rouget, to Kouski, and Védie. La Rabouilleuse went back to her dear Max drowned in tears, while Kouski and Védie informed the crowd assembled at the door that the captain was as good as done for. The result of this news was that above two hundred persons collected in groups on the Place Saint-Jean and in the upper and lower Narette.

" I shall not be in bed a month," said Max to Flore, " and I know who struck the blow. But we will take advantage of it to get rid of the Parisians. I said I fancied I had recognized the painter; so pretend that I am dying, and try to have Joseph Bridau arrested; we will give him a taste of prison for a couple of days. I think I know the mother well enough to feel sure that she will be off to Paris then, post-haste with her painter. Then we need no longer fear the volley of priests they talked of firing at our old idiot."

When Flore Brazier went down, she found the mob quite prepared to receive the impression she wished to make on them; she appeared before them with tears in her eyes, and remarked that the painter, " who for that matter looked bad enough for anything," had quarreled fiercely with Max the day before about the pictures he had " boned " from Père Rouget. " That brigand—for you have only to look in his face to feel sure—thinks that if Max were out of the way, his uncle would leave him his fortune. As if," added she, " a brother wasn't closer than a nephew! Max is Dr. Rouget's son; the old man owned up as much afore he died."

" Aye, he thought he could do the trick before he left; he planned it very neatly; he is going to-day," said one of the Knights of Idlesse.

" Max has not a single enemy in the town," observed another.

" Besides, Max recognized the painter," said La Rabouilleuse.

"Where is that damned Parisian? Let us find him," cried one and another.

"Find him? Why, he stole out of M. Hochon's house before daylight."

One of the Knights at once ran off to find M. Mouilleron. The crowd was still swelling, and voices grew threatening. Excited groups filled the whole of the Grande Narette; others stood in front of the Church of Saint-Jean. A mob filled the Villate gate where the lower Narette ends. It was impossible to stir above or below the Place Saint-Jean. It was like the fag-end of a procession. And MM. Lousteau-Prangin and Mouilleron, with the superintendent of police, the lieutenant of the gendarmerie, and his sergeant with two gendarmes, had some difficulty in getting to the spot, which they reached between two hedges of the populace, whose shouts and yells could not fail to prejudice them against the "Parisian," to whom circumstantial evidence pointed so strongly, though he was unjustly accused.

After an interview between Max and the lawyers, M. Mouilleron sent the superintendent of police and the sergeant, with one gendarme, to examine what, in the language of the police reports, is called the Scene of the Crime. Then Mouilleron and Lousteau-Prangin, escorted by the lieutenant, crossed from Père Rouget's house to M. Hochon's, which was guarded at the garden entrance by two gendarmes, while two more were posted at the street-door. The mob was still collecting; the whole town was in a hubbub in the Grand' Rue.

Gritte had long since flown, breathless with terror, to her master's room exclaiming—

"Monsieur, they are going to rob the house.—All the town is in a riot!—M. Maxence Gilet is killed; he is going to die!—And they say that it was M. Joseph that stabbed him!"

M. Hochon hastily dressed and came down; but seeing the furious crowd, he at once retreated within doors and barred the entrance. On questioning Gritte, he ascertained that his guest, after walking about all night in great excitement, had gone out before daylight, and that he had not come in. Much alarmed, he went to his wife's room; the noise had just roused her, and he told her the horrible report which, true or false, had brought all Issoudun out to the Place Saint-Jean.

"Of course he is innocent!" said Mme. Hochon.

"But before his innocence is proved, the mob may force their way in and rob us," said M. Hochon, who had turned ashy pale. He had gold in his cellars.

"And Agathe?"

"She is sleeping like a marmot."

"Ah, so much the better!" said Mme. Hochon; "I only wish she could sleep on till this matter is cleared up. Such a blow might kill the poor child."

But Agathe soon woke; she came down half-dressed, for Gritte's hints and concealments, when she questioned the woman, had sickened her heart and brain. She found Mme. Hochon pale, and her eyes full of tears, standing at one of the drawing-room windows with her husband.

"Courage, my child! God sends us all our troubles," said the old lady. "Joseph is accused——"

"Of what?"

"Of a wicked deed he cannot possibly have done," said Mme. Hochon.

On hearing the speech, and seeing the lieutenant of the watch come in with MM. Lousteau-Prangin and Mouilleron, Agathe fainted away.

"Look here," said M. Hochon to his wife and Gritte, "just carry Mme. Bridau away. Women are only a trouble under such circumstances. Go away, both of you, with her, and stay in your room.—Gentlemen, pray be seated," added the old man. "The mistake to which we owe this visit will, I hope, soon be cleared up."

"Even if it is a mistake," said M. Mouilleron, "the mob are so madly exasperated, and excited to such a pitch, that I am alarmed for the accused.—I wish I could get him to the courthouse, and soothe the public mind."

"Who could have imagined that M. Maxence Gilet was so much beloved?" said Lousteau-Prangin.

"There are twelve hundred people at this moment pouring out of the Roman suburb," said the lieutenant, "so one of my men has just told me—and shrieking for the assassin's death."

"Where is your guest?" asked M. Mouilleron.

"He is gone for a walk in the country, I believe," said Hochon.

"Call back Gritte," said the examining judge gravely. "I hoped that M. Bridau might not have left the house. You know, of course, that the crime was committed only a few yards from this house, just at daybreak?"

While M. Hochon went to fetch Gritte, the three functionaries exchanged glances full of meaning.

"I never took to that painter's face," said the lieutenant to M. Mouilleron.

"Listen to me," said the lawyer to Gritte, as she came in. "You saw M. Joseph Bridau go out this morning, I am told?"

"Yes, sir," replied she, shaking like a leaf.

"At what hour?"

"Directly after I got up; for he was tramping in his room all night, and he was dressed when I came down."

"Was it daylight?"

"Twilight."

"And he seemed excited?"

"I should think he did!—He seemed to me quite how-come-you-so."

"Send one of your men for my clerk," said Lousteau-Prangin to the lieutenant, "and tell him to bring forms——"

"Good God! don't be in a hurry," said M. Hochon. "The young man's excitement may be accounted for without any premeditated crime. He is starting for Paris to-day in consequence of a matter in which Gilet and Mme. Flore Brazier chose to doubt his honesty."

"Yes, the business about the pictures," said M. Mouilleron. "It was the cause of a vehement quarrel yesterday, and artists are always ready to catch fire under the thatch, as they say."

"Who in all Issoudun would have any interest in killing Max?" said Lousteau. "Nobody; no jealous husband, no one whatever, for the man has never injured anyone."

"But what was M. Gilet doing in the streets at half-past four in the morning?" said M. Hochon.

"Look here, M. Hochon, leave us to manage our own business," replied Mouilleron. "You do not know all. Max saw and knew your painter——"

At this instant a roar started from the bottom of the town, increasing as it rolled up the Grande Narette like the advance of a peal of thunder.

"Here he is!—here he is! They have got him!" These words stood out clearly above the deep bars of a terrific growl from the mob. In fact, poor Joseph Bridau, coming quietly home past the mill at Landrôle to be in time for breakfast, was seen as he reached the Place Misère by everybody at once. Happily for him, two men at arms came running down to rescue him from the mob of the Roman suburb, who had seized him roughly by the arms, threatening to kill him.

"Make way! Clear out!" said the gendarmes, calling two others to come and walk one in front and one behind Bridau.

"You see, monsieur," said one of the four who had taken hold of him, "our skin is in danger at this moment as much as yours. Innocent or guilty, we must protect you against the riot caused by the murder of Captain Gilet; these people will not be satisfied with accusing you; they believe you to be the assassin as sure as death. M. Gilet is worshiped by those men—look at them; they would love to execute justice on you themselves. We saw them in 1830 when they thrashed the excise men; it was no joke, I can tell you."

Joseph Bridau turned as pale as death, and collected all his strength to keep on his feet.

"After all," said he, "I had nothing to do with it. Come on!"

And he had to bear the cross! He was the object of yells, abuse, threats of death, at every step of the horrible walk from the Place Misère to the Place Saint-Jean. The gendarmes were obliged to draw their swords to intimidate the angry crowd who threw stones at them. The force barely escaped being hurt, and some of the missiles hit Joseph's legs, shoulders, and hat.

"Here we are," said one of the men, as they went into M. Hochon's room; "and it was not an easy job, Lieutenant."

"Now the next thing is to disperse this crowd, and I see but one way, gentlemen," said the officer to the magistrates. "It is to get M. Bridau to the Palais de Justice by making him walk between you. I and all my men will keep close round you. It is impossible to answer for what may happen when you are face to face with six thousand furious creatures."

"You are right," said M. Hochon, still quaking for his gold.

"If that is the best way you have at Issoudun of protecting innocence, I must congratulate you!" said Joseph. "I have already been within an ace of being stoned——"

"Do you want to see your host's house attacked and pillaged?" said the lieutenant. "Could we, with our swords, offer effectual resistance to a surge of men driven on by a posse of angry people who know nothing of the forms of justice?"

"Oh! come on, gentlemen; we will talk it out afterwards," said Joseph, who had recovered his presence of mind.

"Make way, my friends," said the lieutenant, "he is arrested; we are going to take him to the Palais de Justice."

"Respect the law, my good fellows!" said M. Mouilleron.

"Would not you sooner see him guillotined?" said one of the gendarmes to a menacing group.

"Aye, aye!" cried an infuriated bystander. "Guillotine him!"

"He is to be guillotined!" repeated some women.

At the bottom of the Grande Narette they were saying—

"They are taking him off to be guillotined; the knife was found upon him! Oh! the wretch!—That is your Parisian!—Why, he has crime written on his face!"

Though Joseph's blood seethed in his head, he walked from the Place Saint-Jean to the Palais de Justice with admirable coolness and dignity. He was, nevertheless, glad enough when he found himself in M. Lousteau-Prangin's office.

"I need hardly tell you, gentlemen, I suppose, that I am innocent," said he, addressing M. Mouilleron, M. Lousteau-Prangin, and the clerk. "I can only beg you to help me to prove my innocence. I know nothing about the matter——"

When the judge had explained to Joseph all the evidence against him, ending with Max's deposition, Joseph was astounded.

"Why," said he, "I did not leave the house till past five; I walked down the Grand' Rue, and at half-past five I was gazing at the front of your parish church of Saint-Cyr. I stopped to speak for a moment to the bell-ringer, who was about to toll the Angelus, asking him some questions about the building, which had struck me as quaint and unfinished. Then I crossed the vegetable market, where the women were already collecting. From thence I went by the Place Misère and the Pont-aux-Anes to the mill of Landrôle, where I quietly watched the ducks for five or six minutes; the miller's men must have noticed me. I saw some women coming to the washing-place; they must be there still; they began to laugh at me, remarking that I was no beauty; I replied that an ugly case might contain jewels. I went along the avenue as far as Tivoli, where I talked to the gardener. . . . Verify all these statements, and do not arrest me, I beg, for I give you my word of honor to remain in your office till you are convinced of my innocence."

This rational statement, made without hesitation, and with the ease of a man sure of his case, made some impression on the lawyers.

"Well, we must summons and find all these people," said M. Mouilleron, "but that is not to be done in a day. Make up your mind, in your own interest, to remain in the lock-up of the Palais de Justice."

"Then let me write to reassure my mother, poor woman.—Oh, you may read the letter!"

The request was too reasonable to be refused, and Joseph wrote these few lines:—

"Do not be uneasy, my dear mother; the mistake of which I am the victim will be easily cleared up, and I have given the clew. To-morrow, or perhaps this evening, I shall be free.

I embrace you; and say to M. and Mme. Hochon how grieved I am by this worry, which is indeed no fault of mine, for it is the result of some mistake which I do not yet understand."

When this letter arrived, Mme. Bridau was half-dead of nervous terrors, and the remedies M. Goddet was persuading her to sip had no effect whatever. But the reading of this letter was like a balm; after a few hysterical sobs Agathe sank into the quiescence that succeeds such a crisis.

When M. Goddet came again to see his patient, he found her regretting having left Paris.

"God is punishing me," said she, with tears in her eyes. "Oh, my dear godmother, ought I not to have trusted in Him, and have looked to His mercy for my brother's fortune?"

"Madame," said Hochon in her ear, "if your son is innocent, Max is an utter villain, and we shall not overmatch him in the business; so go back to Paris."

"And how is M. Gilet going on?" asked Mme. Hochon of the doctor.

"The wound is serious, but not mortal. A month of care, and he will be all right again. I left him writing to M. Mouilleron to request him to release your son," said he to Mme. Bridau. "Oh! Max is a good fellow. I told him what a state you were in; and then he remembered a detail of the murderer's dress, which proved to him that he could not be your son; the assassin had on list shoes, and it is perfectly certain that your son went out walking in boots."

"Ah! God forgive him the ill he has done me!"

At nightfall a man had left a note for Gilet, written in a feigned hand, and in these words:—

"Captain Gilet must not leave an innocent man in the hands of the law. The person who dealt the blow promises not to repeat it if M. Gilet delivers M. Joseph Bridau without denouncing the real culprit."

On reading this letter, which he burnt, Max wrote to M. Mouilleron a note mentioning the remark he had made to M. Goddet, begging him to release Joseph, and to come and see him that he might explain matters.

By the time this note reached M. Mouilleron, Lousteau-Prangin had already proved the truth of Joseph's account of himself, by the evidence of the bell-ringer, of a market-woman, of the washerwomen, the men of the mill, and the gardener from Frapesle. Max's letter finally demonstrated the innocence of the accused, whom M. Mouilleron himself escorted back to M. Hochon's. Joseph was received by his mother with such eager tenderness, that, like the husband in La Fontaine's fable, this poor misprized son was thankful to chance for an annoyance which had secured him such a demonstration of affection.

"Of course," said M. Mouilleron, with an all-knowing air, "I saw at once, by the way you faced the mob, that you were innocent; but in spite of my convictions, you see, when you know what Issoudun is, the best way to protect you was to take you to prison as we did. I must say you put a good face on the matter."

"I was thinking of something else," replied the artist simply. "I know an officer who told me that he was once arrested in Dalmatia under somewhat similar circumstances, on his way home from an early morning walk, by an excited mob.—The similarity struck me, and I was studying all those heads with the idea of painting a riot in 1793. . . . And then I was saying to myself, 'Greedy wretch! you have got no more than you deserve for coming fortune-hunting instead of painting in your studio——'"

"If you will allow me to offer you a piece of advice," said the public prosecutor, "you will get into a post-chaise this evening at eleven o'clock—the postmaster will let you have one—and get back to Paris by diligence from Bourges."

"That is my opinion too," said M. Hochon, who was dying to be rid of his guest.

"And it is my most earnest wish to be out of Issoudun, though I leave my only friend here," replied Agathe, taking Mme. Hochon's hand and kissing it. "When shall I see you again?"

"Ah! my child, we shall never meet again till we meet above! We have suffered so much here," she added, in an undertone, "that God will have pity on us."

A moment after, when M. Mouilleron had been over to see Max, Gritte greatly astonished M. and Mme. Hochon, Agathe, Joseph, and Adolphine by announcing a call from M. Rouget. Jean-Jacques had come to take leave of his sister, and to offer her the carriage to take her to Bourges.

"Ah, your pictures have done us an ill turn," said Agathe.

"Keep them, sister," said the old man, who did not yet believe in the value of the paintings.

"Neighbor Rouget," said M. Hochon, "our relations are our best friends and protectors, especially when they are such as your sister Agathe and your nephew Joseph."

"Perhaps so," said the old fellow, in bewilderment.

"You must be thinking of making a Christian end," said Mme. Hochon.

"Oh, Jean-Jacques, what a day this has been!" said Agathe.

"Will you accept my carriage?" asked Rouget.

"No, brother," replied Mme. Bridau. "Thank you, all the same. I wish you good health!"

Rouget allowed his sister and nephew to embrace him, then he went away after a cool leave-taking.

Baruch, at a word from his grandfather, had hurried off to the posting-house. At eleven that evening the two Parisians, packed into a wicker chaise with one horse ridden by a postilion, left Issoudun. Adolphine and Mme. Hochon had tears in their eyes; they alone regretted Agathe and Joseph.

"They are gone!" cried François Hochon, going into Max's room with La Rabouilleuse.

"Well, the trick is done!" said Max, weakened by fever.

"But what did you say to old Mouilleron?" asked François.

"I told him that I had almost given my assassin just cause to wait for me at a street corner; that the man was quite capable, if the law were at his heels, of killing me like a dog before he could be caught. In consequence, I begged Mouilleron and Prangin to pretend to be hunting him down, but in fact to leave the man alone, unless they wanted to see me a dead man."

"I hope now, Max," said Flore, "that you will remain quiet at night for some little time."

"Well, we are quit of the Parisians at any rate," cried Max. "The man who stabbed me did not imagine he was doing us such a good service."

Next day, with the exception of a few very quiet and reserved people who shared the views of M. and Mme. Hochon, all the town rejoiced over the departure of the Bridaus, though it was due to a deplorable mistake, as if the event were a triumph of the provinces over Paris. Some of Max's friends expressed themselves in hard terms.

"Well indeed! Did those Parisians imagine that we are all idiots, and that they had only to hold out a hat for fortunes to pour into it."

"They came in search of wool, and they have gone away shorn, for the nephew is not to his uncle's taste."

"And they had the advice of a Paris lawyer, if you please——"

"Oh, ho! They had laid a plan then?"

"Why, yes, a plan to get round Père Rouget; but the Parisians saw that they were not equal to it, and their lawyer won't laugh at the natives of Le Berry——"

"But it is abominable, you know!"

"That is your Parisian!"

"La Rabouilleuse saw that she was attacked, and she defended herself——"

"And quite right too!"

To everyone in the town Agathe and Joseph were "Parisians"—strangers—foreigners. They preferred Max and Flore.

With what satisfaction Agathe and Joseph found themselves at home in their little lodging in the Rue Mazarine may be imagined. In the course of the journey the artist had recovered his spirits, crushed for a time by the scene of his arrest, and by twenty hours in prison; but he could not rally his mother. Agathe could the less get over it, because the trial for military conspiracy before the Supreme Court was coming on.

Philippe's conduct, in spite of the skill of an advocate recommended by Desroches, gave rise to suspicions unfavorable to his reputation. So, as soon as Joseph had reported to Desroches all that had occurred at Issoudun, he started forthwith, accompanied by Mistigris, for the Count de Sérizy's château, so as to hear nothing of this trial, which lasted twenty days.

It is useless here to enlarge on facts which are part of contemporary history. Whether it was that he played a part dictated to him, or that he turned King's evidence, Philippe's sentence was to police surveillance for five years; and he was required to set out, the very day he was released, for Autun, the town assigned to him as his place of residence during those five years. This sentence was a form of detention similar to that of prisoners on parole, who are confined within the walls of a town.

On hearing that the Count de Sérizy, one of the peers appointed by the upper chamber to sit on the commission, was employing Joseph to decorate his house at Presles, Desroches craved an audience of this minister, and found him very well inclined to help Joseph, whose acquaintance he happened to have made. Desroches explained the pecuniary difficulties of the two brothers, mentioning the good service done by their father, and the way in which he had been forgotten under the Restoration.

" Such injustice as this, monsieur," said the attorney, " is a permanent source of irritation and discontent. You knew the father; then put it in the power of his sons to acquire a fortune."

He then briefly set forth the state of the family affairs at Issoudun, craving that the all-powerful vice-president of the council would take some steps to persuade the chief commissioner of police to transfer Philippe from Autun to Issoudun as a place of exile. Finally, he mentioned Philippe's abject poverty, and begged a pension of sixty francs a month, which the war office might, in common decency, grant to a retired lieutenant-colonel.

"I will get all you ask done," said the Count, "for it all seems to me quite just."

Three days after, Desroches, armed with the necessary warrants, went to fetch Philippe from the prison cell of the Supreme Court, and took him to his own house in the Rue de Béthizy. There the young attorney gave the dreadful soldier one of those unanswerable sermons in which a lawyer places things in their true light, using the crudest language to epitomize the facts of his clients' conduct, to analyze their ideas, and reduce them to the simplest expression, when he takes enough interest in a man to preach to him. After crushing the Emperor's staff-officer by accusing him of reckless dissipation, and of causing his mother's misfortunes and the death of old Mme. Descoings, he told him how matters stood at Issoudun, explaining them from his own point of view, and thoroughly unveiling the schemes and the character of Maxence Gilet and La Rabouilleuse. The political outlaw, who was gifted with keen perception in such matters, listened far more intently to this part of Desroches's lecture than to the first.

"This being the state of affairs," said the lawyer, "you may repair so much as is reparable of the mischief you have done to your excellent family—since you cannot restore to life the poor woman whose death lies at your door; but you alone can——"

"But how can I do it?" asked Philippe.

"I have interceded for you to be quartered at Issoudun instead of at Autun."

Philippe's face, grown very thin, and almost sinister, furrowed as it was by suffering and privation, was suddenly lighted up by a flash of satisfaction.

"You alone, I was saying, can rescue your uncle Rouget's fortune, of which, by this time, half, perhaps, has disappeared in the maw of that wolf called Gilet," Desroches went on. "You know all the facts; now you must act upon them. I suggest no scheme; I have no ideas on the subject. Besides, every plan might need modifying on the scene of action. You have a very strong adversary; the rascal is very astute, and the way in which he tried to get back the pictures given to

Joseph by your uncle, and succeeded in casting the odium of a crime on your poor brother, reveals an unscrupulous opponent. So be prudent; try to behave yourself in your own interest, if you cannot otherwise control yourself.—Without saying a word to Joseph, whose pride as an artist would rise in arms, I sent the pictures back to M. Hochon, writing to him to deliver them only to you.—Maxence Gilet is brave . . ."

"So much the better," said Philippe; "I trust to the rascal's courage to enable me to succeed, for a coward would go away from Issoudun."

"Very good. Now, think of your mother, whose love for you is worthy of worship; and of your brother, whom you have used as your milch-cow . . ."

"What! he mentioned those trifles to you?" cried Philippe.

"Come, come; I am a friend of the family, and I know more about you than they do."

"What do you know?" asked Philippe.

"You turned traitor to your fellow-conspirators . . ."

"I!" cried Philippe; "I! a staff-officer of the Emperor's! Get along! We took in the chamber of peers, the lawyers, the Government, and the whole blessed boiling! The King's men saw nothing but the blaze . . ."

"So much the better if it is true," replied the lawyer. "But, you see, the Bourbons cannot be overthrown; they have Europe on their side; and you should try to make your peace with the War Office—Oh! you will when you are a rich man. To grow rich, you and your brother must get hold of your uncle. If you want to bring a matter requiring so much skill, judgment, and patience to a good end, you have enough to keep your hands full all your five years——"

"No, no," interrupted Philippe, "the thing must be done quickly. That Gilet may get possession of my uncle's money and invest it in that woman's name, then all would be lost."

"Well, M. Hochon is a shrewd, clear-sighted man. Take his advice. You have your pass for the journey, your place is taken by the Orleans diligence for half-past seven, your trunk is packed.—Come to dinner."

"I have not a thing but what I stand up in," said Philippe, opening his wretched blue greatcoat. "But I want three things which I would ask you to beg my friend Giroudeau, Finot's uncle, to send after me—my cavalry sword, my rapier, and my pistols."

"You want a good deal besides," said the lawyer with a shudder, as he looked at his client. "You shall have three months' advanced pay to get you decent clothing."

"Hallo! are you here, Godeschal?" cried Philippe, recognizing Mariette's brother in Desroches's head-clerk.

"Yes; I have been with M. Desroches these two months."

"And he will stay here, I hope," said Desroches, "till he buys a practice."

"And Mariette?" asked Philippe, touched by the thought of her.

"She is waiting for the new house to be opened."

"It would not cost her much to see me once more," said Philippe. "However, as she pleases!"

After the scanty dinner, paid for by Desroches, who was giving his head-clerk his board, the two young lawyers saw the political outlaw into the coach, and wished him good luck.

On the 2nd of November, All Souls' Day, Philippe Bridau presented himself before the head of the police at Issoudun to have his pass countersigned on the day of his arrival; then, by that functionary's instructions, he found a lodging in the Rue de l'Avenier.

The news immediately spread through Issoudun that one of the officers involved in the late conspiracy was quartered in the town, and the sensation was all the greater because it was understood that this officer was the brother of the painter who had been unjustly arrested. Maxence Gilet, by this time quite recovered from his wound, had carried through the difficult business of calling in the moneys placed on mortgage by Père Rouget, and having them invested in the Funds. The loan of a hundred and forty thousand francs, raised by the old man on his land, had produced a great sensation, for in the country everything is known. On behalf of the Bridaus, M. Hochon, shocked at this necessity, questioned old M.

Héron, Rouget's notary, as to the object of this change of investments.

"If Père Rouget changes his mind, his heirs will owe me a votive offering," cried M. Héron. "But for me, the old man would have invested the capital of fifty thousand francs a year in the name of Maxence Gilet. But I told Mlle. Brazier that she had better be satisfied with the will, or risk an action for undue influence, seeing the abundant proof of their maneuvering afforded by the transfers made in every direction. To gain time I advised Maxence and his mistress to let people forget this sudden change in the old boy's habits."

"Ah! constitute yourself the ally and protector of the Bridaus, for they are penniless," said M. Hochon, who could not forgive Max for the terrors he had endured when fearing that his house would be pillaged.

Maxence Gilet and Flore Brazier, untouched by all misgiving, made light of the advent of old Rouget's elder nephew. The moment Philippe should cause them any anxiety, they knew they could transfer the securities to either of themselves by making Rouget sign a power of attorney. If he should alter his will, fifty thousand francs a year was a very handsome plum of consolation, especially after burdening the real estate with a mortgage of a hundred and forty thousand francs.

The morning after his arrival Philippe called on his uncle at about ten o'clock; he was bent on exhibiting himself in his dreadful old clothes. And, indeed, when the discharged patient from the hospital, the prisoner from the Luxembourg, entered the sitting-room, Flore Brazier felt her heart chill at his repulsive appearance. Gilet, too, felt that shock to the mind and feelings by which Nature warns us of some latent hostility or looming danger. While Philippe had acquired an indescribably sinister expression of countenance from his late misfortunes, his dress certainly added to the effect. The wretched blue overcoat was buttoned in military style up to his chin, for melancholy reasons indeed, but it showed too plainly what it was meant to hide. The edge of his trousers, fringed like a pensioner's coat, revealed abject squalor. His boots left damp blots of muddy water oozing from the gaping seams. The gray hat the colonel held showed a hideously greasy lining. His walking-stick, a cane that had lost its varnish, had stood, no doubt, in all the corners of the cafés of Paris, and its battered ferule must have dipped in many a mud-heap. From a stiff velvet collar that showed the paper lining, rose a head exactly like Frédéric Lemaître when made up for the last act of *La Vie d'un Joueur;* the break-down of a still powerful man was visible in a coppery complexion that looked green in patches. Such complexions are to be seen in the faces of debauchees who have spent many nights at play; their eyes are surrounded by a dark, sooty ring, the eyelids vinous rather than red, the brow ominous from all the ruin it betrays. Philippe's cheeks were furrowed and hollow, for he had scarcely recovered from his hospital treatment. His head was bald, a few locks left at the back ended by his ears. The pure blue of his glittering eyes had assumed a cold, steely hue.

"Good-morning, uncle," said he in a husky voice; "I am your nephew, Philippe Bridau. This is how the Bourbons treat a lieutenant-colonel, a veteran of the old army, a man who carried the Emperor's orders at the battle of Montereau. I should be ashamed if my greatcoat were to fall open, on mademoiselle's account. After all, it is the rule of the game! We chose to begin it again, and we are beaten.—I am residing in your town by orders of the police, on full pay and allowances of sixty francs a month. So the good people of Issoudun need not fear that I shall raise the price of victuals. —I see you are in good and fair company."

"Oh! so you are my nephew . . ." said Jean-Jacques.

"But pray ask the colonel to stay to breakfast," said Flore.

"No, madame, thank you," replied Philippe; "I have breakfasted. Besides, I would sooner cut my hand off than ask my uncle for a bit of bread or a single centime after what happened in this town to my brother and my mother. At the same time, I did not think it seemly that I should live in Issoudun without paying my respects to him now and then. But for the rest, you can do as you please," said he, holding out his hand, in which Rouget placed his for Philippe to shake, "just as you please; I shall take no exception so long as the honor of the Bridaus is untouched."

Gilet could watch the lieutenant-colonel at his leisure, for Philippe avoided looking in his direction in a very pointed way. Though the blood boiled in his veins, it was very important to Max that he should behave with that prudence of great diplomats which so often resembles cowardice, and not flare out like a young man; he sat calm and cold.

"It would not be seemly," said Flore, "that you should live on sixty francs a month under the very nose of your uncle with forty thousand francs a year, and who has behaved so handsome to M. Gilet, the captain here, his natural half-brother——"

"To be sure, Philippe," said the old fellow, "we must see about it."

At the introduction thus effected by Flore, Philippe bowed almost timidly to Gilet, who bowed too.

"Uncle, I have some pictures here to return to you. They are at M. Hochon's. You will, I hope, do me the pleasure of coming to identify them some day or other."

Having spoken these words in a dry tone, Lieutenant-Colonel Philippe Bridau went away.

His visit made a deeper impression on Flore's mind, and on Gilet's too, than mere dismay at the first sight of this dreadful old campaigner. As soon as Philippe had slammed the door with the violence of a supplanted heir, Flore and Gilet hid behind the curtains to watch him as he crossed over from his uncle's house to the Hochons'.

"What a blackguard!" said Flore, with a questioning glance at Gilet.

"Yes, unfortunately there were some men like that in the Emperor's armies; I settled seven of them on the hulks," said Gilet.

"I hope that you will pick no quarrel with this one," said Mlle. Brazier.

"That one!" retorted Max. "He is a mangy dog,—but he would like a bone," he added, addressing old Rouget. "If his uncle will trust my opinion, he will get rid of him with a present; he will not leave you in peace, Papa Rouget."

"He smelt of horrible tobacco," said the old man.

"He smelt your money too," said Flore in a peremptory tone. "My opinion is that you should decline to receive him."

"I am sure I am quite willing," said the old man.

"Monsieur," said Gritte, going into the room where the Hochon family were sitting after breakfast, "here is that M. Bridau you spoke about."

Philippe entered with much politeness, in the midst of perfect silence, produced by general curiosity. Mme. Hochon shuddered from head to foot on beholding the author of all Agathe's woes, and the cause of good old Mme. Descoings's death. Adolphine, too, was unpleasantly startled; Baruch and François looked at each other with surprise. Old Hochon preserved his presence of mind, and offered Mme. Bridau's son a seat.

"I have come," said Philippe, "to recommend myself to your good graces, for I have to arrange matters so as to live in this town for five years on sixty francs a month allowed me by France."

"It can be done," said M. Hochon.

Philippe talked on indifferent subjects, and conducted himself perfectly well. He spoke of Lousteau the journalist, the old lady's nephew, as a perfect eagle, and her favor was completely won when she heard him declare that the name of Lousteau would be famous. Then he did not hesitate to confess the errors of his ways; in reply to a friendly reproof administered by Mme. Hochon in an undertone, he said that he had thought much while in prison, and promised her to be quite another man for the future.

In response to a word from Philippe, M. Hochon went out with him. When the miser and the soldier were on the Boulevard Baron, at a spot where no one could overhear them, the colonel said—

"Monsieur, if you will take my word for it, we had better never discuss business or certain persons excepting when walking out in the country, or in places where we can talk without being heard. Maître Desroches impressed upon me how great is the power of gossip in a small town. I do not wish that you should be suspected of helping me by your advice, though Desroches enjoined on me that I should ask it, and I beg you to give it me freely. We have a powerful enemy opposed to us; we must neglect no precaution that may enable us to defeat him. To begin with, excuse me if I call no more. A little distance between us will leave you clear of any suspicion of influencing my conduct. When I require to consult you, I will walk past your house at half-past nine, just as you are finishing breakfast. If you see me carrying my stick as we shoulder arms, that will convey to you that we are to meet by chance at some spot where we may walk, and which you will tell me of."

"All that seems to me the idea of a prudent man who means to succeed," said the old man.

"And I shall succeed, monsieur. To begin with, can you tell me of any officers of the old army living here who are not allies of that Maxence Gilet, and with whom I may make acquaintance."

"There is a captain of the Artillery of the Guard, a M. Mignonnet, who was cadet from the École Polytechnique, a man of about forty, who lives quietly; he is a man of honor, and denounces Max, whose conduct seems to him unworthy of a soldier."

"Good!" said Philippe.

"There are not many officers of that stamp," M. Hochon went on. "I can think of no one else but a cavalry captain."

"That was my corps," said Philippe. "Was he in the Guards?"

"Yes," said M. Hochon. "In 1810 Carpentier was quartermaster-general of the Dragoons; he left that regiment and entered the Line as second lieutenant, where he rose to be captain."

"Giroudeau perhaps may know him," thought Philippe.

"M. Carpentier took the place at the Mairie which Maxence threw up, and he is a friend of Major Mignonnet's."

"And what can I do here for my living?"

"I believe that an insurance company is about to be started for the Department of the Cher; you might find employment there, but it would not be more than fifty francs a month at the best."

"That will do for me."

By the end of the week Philippe had a new coat, waistcoat, and trousers of blue Elbeuf cloth, bought on credit for monthly payments; boots too, leather gloves, and a hat. Giroudeau sent him some linen from Paris, his weapons, and a letter of introduction to Carpentier, who had served under the former captain of dragoons. This letter secured to Philippe Carpentier's good offices, and he introduced him to Mignonnet as a man of the highest merit and noblest character. Philippe soon won the admiration of these two worthy officers by confiding to them some details of the conspiracy for which he had been tried; it had been, as everyone knows, the last attempt of the old army to rebel against the Bourbons; for the case of the sergeants of La Rochelle falls under another category.

After 1822 the soldiery, who had learnt a lesson from the fate of the conspiracy of August the 19th, 1820, and of Berton's and Caron's plots, made up their mind to await the turn of events. This last scheme, the younger sister of that of the 19th of August, was identically the same, but recomposed of better elements. Like the first, it was kept absolutely secret from the King's Government. The conspirators, once more found out, were clever enough to reduce a really far-reaching enterprise to the semblance of a mere petty barrack mutiny. The north of France was to be the scene of this conspiracy, in which several regiments of cavalry, artillery, and infantry were implicated. The frontier fortresses were to be all seized at once by surprise. In the event of success, the treaties of 1815 were to be nullified by the immediate federation of Belgium, which was to be torn from the Holy Alliance as the outcome of a military compact among soldiers. Two thrones were at once to founder in this swift whirlwind.

Of this formidable scheme planned by clever heads, with which some great personages were mixed up, nothing came but a case for the Supreme Court. Philippe Bridau consented to screen his betters, who vanished at the moment when their plans were discovered—either by some treachery or by chance; and they, in their seats in the Chambers, had only promised their co-operation to crown success at the very heart of the Government.

To relate the scheme which the confessions of the Liberals, in 1830, divulged in all its depth, and in its immense ramifications, unknown to the initiated of the baser class, would be to intrude on the domain of history, and would lead to too long a digression. This outline will suffice to explain the twofold part played by Philippe. The Emperor's staff-officer was to have led an outbreak in Paris, intended merely to mask the real conspiracy and to keep the Government busy at its center, while the great movement took place in the north. Afterwards he was put forward to break the connection between the two plots by betraying only some unimportant secrets; his destitute appearance and broken health were admirably calculated to throw discredit and contempt on the enterprise in the eyes of the authorities. This part was well suited to the precarious position of this unprincipled gambler. Feeling that he had one foot in each party, the wily Philippe played the good apostle to the King's Government, and yet did not lose the esteem of men standing high in his own party; but he promised himself that at a future day he would follow up the line that might offer the greater advantages.

These revelations as to the vast extent of the real conspiracy made Philippe a man of the highest importance in the eyes of Carpentier and Mignonnet, for his devotedness showed a political sense worthy of the best days of the Convention. Thus, in a few days, the cunning Bonapartist became the friend of these two men, whose respectability cast its reflection on him. By the recommendation of M. Carpentier and M. Mignonnet he at once got the appointment mentioned by Hochon in the Mutual Insurance Society of the Department of the Cher. His work was to keep the books, as in a tax-collector's office, to fill in printed circulars with names and numbers, and send them off, and to issue policies of insurance; thus he was not employed for more than three hours daily.

Mignonnet and Carpentier secured the admission of this visitor to Issoudun to their club, where his air and manners, quite in accordance with the high opinion these two officers had formed of this leader of conspiracies, gained him the respect which is paid to often deceptive appearances. Philippe, whose conduct was the result of much deliberation, had meditated in prison on the disadvantages of a dissolute life. He had not needed Desroches's lecture to perceive the necessity for conciliating the good opinion of the townspeople by honest, decent, and cleanly conduct. Delighted to cast reflections on Max by living as respectably as Mignonnet, he also wished to lull Max by deceiving him as to his character. He meant to be looked upon as a nincompoop, by affecting disinterested generosity while circumventing the enemy and aiming at his uncle's fortune; whereas his mother and his brother, who were really disinterested, generous, and magnanimous, had been accused of cunning while acting with artless simplicity.

Philippe's greed had been fired in proportion to his uncle's wealth, which M. Hochon expatiated on in detail. In the first private conversation he had held with this old man they had fully agreed that, above all things, Philippe must not rouse Max's suspicions; for all would be lost if Max and Flore carried off their victim, even to Bourges.

Once a week Colonel Bridau dined with Captain Mignonnet, another day with Carpentier, and every Thursday with M. Hochon. He was soon invited to other houses, and by the end of three weeks had only his breakfast to pay for. He never mentioned his uncle, nor La Rabouilleuse, nor Gilet, unless it were to make some inquiry with reference to his mother's or Joseph's stay in the town. Finally, the three officers, the only men wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honor—Philippe having the superior decoration of the rosette, which gave him a marked superiority in everybody's eyes, very noticeable in a country town—would take their daily walk together at the same hour before dinner, keeping themselves to themselves, to use a homely phrase.

This attitude, this reserve and calm demeanor, produced an excellent effect in Issoudun. Max's adherents all looked upon Philippe as a *sabreur*, a swashbuckler, an expression used by soldiers to attribute the coarsest kind of courage to a superior officer, while denying him the capacity for command.

"He is a very respectable man," said the elder Goddet to Max.

"Pooh!" replied Captain Gilet, "his behavior before the Court shows him to be either a dupe or a spy; he is, as you say, fool enough to have been the dupe of those who were playing for high stakes."

After getting his appointment, Philippe, aware of the gossip of the place, was anxious to conceal certain facts as far as possible from his neighbors' knowledge; he therefore took rooms in a house at the end of the Faubourg Saint-Paterne, with a very large garden attached. There, in perfect secrecy, he could practice sword-play with Carpentier, who had been instructor in a regiment of foot before his promotion to the Imperial Guard. After having thus recovered his old superiority, Philippe learned from Carpentier certain secret tricks which would enable him to meet the most accomplished opponent without any fear. He next took to pistol practice with Mignonnet and Carpentier, for amusement, as he said, but in reality to lead Maxence to believe that, in the event of a duel, he relied on that weapon. Whenever Philippe met Gilet he expected him to salute, and replied by lifting the front of his hat with his finger in a cavalier fashion, as a colonel does to a private.

Maxence Gilet never gave any sign of annoyance or dissatisfaction; he never uttered a single word on the subject at La Cognette's, where he still had little suppers, though since Fario's knife-thrust the nocturnal pranks were for a time pretermitted. Still, at the end of a certain time, Lieutenant-Colonel Bridau's contempt for Major Gilet was a patent fact, and discussed by some of the Knights of Idlesse who were less closely attached to Maxence than were Baruch, François, and two or three more. It was a matter of general surprise to see Max, the vehement and fiery, behaving so meekly. No one at Issoudun, not even Potel or Renard, ventured to mention so delicate a matter to Gilet. Potel, really disturbed by such a public misunderstanding between two officers of the old guard, represented Max as quite capable of hatching some plot in which the colonel might get the worst of it. By Potel's account some new pitfall might be expected, after what Max had done to be rid of the mother and brother—for the Fario affair was no longer a mystery. M. Hochon had not failed to expose Gilet's atrocious game to all the wise heads of the town. M. Mouilleron, too, the hero of a piece of town gossip, had confidentially revealed the name of Gilet's would-be murderer, if only to find out the causes of Fario's hatred of Max, so as to keep justice on the alert in case of further events. Thus, while discussing the colonel's attitude towards Max, and endeavoring to guess what might come of this antagonism, the town regarded them by anticipation as adversaries.

Philippe, who was anxiously investigating the details of his brother's arrest, and the antecedent history of Gilet and La Rabouilleuse, ended by forming a somewhat intimate alliance with Fario, who was his neighbor. After carefully studying the Spaniard, Philippe thought he might trust a man of his temper. Their hatred was so absolutely in unison that Fario placed himself at Philippe's service, and told him all he knew of the feats of the Knights of Idlesse. Philippe, on his part, promised that, if he should succeed in obtaining such influence over his uncle as Gilet now exerted, he would indemnify Fario for all his losses, and thus secured his fidelity. Maxence had therefore a formidable enemy to meet —someone who could talk to him, as they say in those parts. The town of Issoudun, excited by rumor, foresaw a struggle between these two men who, be it observed, held each other in utter contempt.

One morning, towards the end of November, Philippe, meeting M. Hochon at noon in the Avenue de Frapesle, said to him—

"I have discovered that your grandsons Baruch and François are the intimate allies of Maxence Gilet. The young rogues take part at night in all the pranks played in the town. And so, through them, Maxence knew everything that went on in your house when my brother and mother were staying with you."

"And what proof have you of anything so shocking?"

"I heard them talking at night as they came out of a tavern. Your two grandsons each owe Maxence a thousand crowns. The villain desired the poor boys to find out what our plans are. He reminded them that it was you who proposed to besiege my uncle through the priesthood, and said that no one could advise me but you—for happily, he regards me as a mere fighting cock."

"What! My grandchildren . . ."

"Watch them," said Philippe; "you will see them coming home to the Place Saint-Jean at two or three in the morning, as sodden as champagne-corks, and walking with Maxence."

"So that is why the rascals are so abstemious!" said M. Hochon.

"Fario told me something of their nocturnal habits," said Philippe. "But for him I should never have guessed it.—My uncle is evidently oppressed by the most horrible tyranny, to judge from the few words my Spaniard overheard Max saying to your boys. I suspect that Max and La Rabouilleuse have a plan for grabbing the State securities for fifty thousand francs a year and going off to be married I don't know where, after plucking that wing from the pigeon. It is high time to find out what is going on in my uncle's house; but I do not know how to set about it."

"I will think it over," said the old man.

Philippe and M. Hochon then went opposite ways, seeing other people approaching.

Never, at any period of his life, had Jean-Jacques Rouget been so miserable as since his nephew Philippe's first visit. Flore, in great terror, had a presentiment of some danger hanging over Max. Tired of her master, and fearing that he would live to a great age, as her criminal practices had so little effect on him, she hit on the very simple plan of leaving the place and going to Paris to be married to Maxence, after extracting from Rouget the bonds bearing fifty thousand francs a year. The old fellow, warned not indeed by any care for his heirs, nor by personal avarice, but by his passion for Flore, refused to give her the securities, pointing out that he had left her everything. The unhappy man knew how devotedly she loved Maxence, and he foresaw that she would desert him as soon as she should be rich enough to marry. When, after lavishing her tenderest coaxing, Flore found her request denied, she tried severity; she never spoke to her master, she sent Védie to wait upon him, and the woman one morning found the old man with his eyes red from having wept all night. For a week Père Rouget had his breakfast alone, and Heaven knows how!

So, the day after his conversation with M. Hochon, when Philippe paid his uncle a second visit, he found him much altered. Flore remained in the room near the old man, on whom she shed glances, speaking kindly to him, and playing the farce so well, that Philippe understood the dangers of the situation merely from the solicitude paraded for his benefit. Gilet, whose policy it was to avoid any collision with Philippe, did not appear. After studying Père Rouget and Flore with a keen eye, the colonel decided on a bold stroke.

"Good-by, my dear uncle," he said, rising, so as to seem about to leave.

"Oh, do not go yet," cried the old man, who was basking in Flore's pretended affection. "Dine with us, Philippe."

"I will, if you will first take an hour's walk with me."

"Monsieur is very ailing," said Mlle. Brazier. "He would not go out driving just now," she added, turning to the old man, and looking at him with the fixed gaze that sometimes quells a madman.

Philippe took Flore by the arm, made her look at him, and gazed at her just as fixedly as she had stared at her victim.

"Tell me, mademoiselle," said he, "am I to infer that my uncle is not free to come for a walk alone with me?"

"Of course he is, monsieur," said Flore, who could hardly make any other reply.

"Well, then, come, uncle. Now, mademoiselle, give him his hat and stick."

"But, as a rule, he never goes out without me. **Do you,** monsieur?"

"Yes, Philippe, yes; I always want her——"

"We had better go in the carriage," said Flore.

"Yes, let us go in the carriage," cried the old man in his anxiety to reconcile his two tyrants.

"Uncle, you will come for a walk, and with me, or I come here no more. For the town will be in the right; you are under Mlle. Flore Brazier's thumb.—My uncle loves you, well and good," he went on, fixing a leaden eye on Flore. "You do not love him—that too is quite in order. But that you should make the old man miserable? There we draw the line. Those who want to inherit a fortune must earn it.—Now, uncle, are you coming?"

Philippe saw an agony of hesitancy depicted on the face of the poor helpless creature, whose eyes wandered first to Flore and then to his nephew.

"So that is how it stands!" said the colonel. "Very good! Good-by, uncle. As for you, mademoiselle—your servant!"

He turned round quickly as he reached the door, and again detected a threatening gesture from Flore to his uncle.

"Uncle," said he, "if you will come for a walk with me, I will meet you at your door. I am going to M. Hochon for ten minutes. . . . If you and I do not get our walk, I will back myself to send some people walking I could name."

And Philippe crossed the avenue to call on the Hochons.

Anyone can imagine the scene in the family which resulted from Philippe's revelation to M. Hochon. At nine o'clock that morning old M. Héron had made his appearance with a bundle of papers, and found a fire in the large room, lighted by the master's orders, quite against the general rule. Mme. Hochon, dressed at this unconscionable hour, was sitting in her armchair by the fire. The two grandsons, warned by Adolphine of a storm gathering over their heads since yesterday, had been ordered to stay at home. Having been summoned by Gritte, they were chilled by the paraphernalia of ceremony displayed by their grandparents, whose cold wrath had hung over them for the past twenty-four hours.

"Do not rise for them," said the old man to M. Héron. "You see before you two wretches unworthy of forgiveness."

"Oh! grandpapa!" said François.

"Silence," said the solemn old man. "I know all about your life at night and your intimacy with M. Maxence Gilet; but you will not meet him again at La Cognette's at one in the morning, for you are not to go out of this house again till you set out for your respective destinations.—So you ruined Fario? You have many a time been within an ace of finding yourselves in a criminal court?—Be silent!" he exclaimed, seeing Baruch open his mouth. "You both owe money to M. Maxence, who for six years past has been supplying you with it for your debaucheries.—Listen, now, to the accounts of my guardianship; we will talk afterwards. You will see from these documents whether you can play tricks with me, play tricks on the family and the laws of family honor by betraying the secrets of the house, and repeating to M. Maxence Gilet what is said and done in it! For a thousand crowns you play the spy! For ten thousand you would no doubt commit murder? Indeed, did you not almost kill Mme. Bridau? for M. Gilet knew full well that it was Fario who had stabbed him when he accused my guest M. Joseph Bridau of the attempt. And when that gallows-bird committed such a crime, it was because he had learnt from you that Mme. Agathe intended to remain here.—You, my grandsons, to play the spy for such a man! You, street-bullies! Did you not know that your worthy chief already, in 1806, had caused the death of a poor young creature? I will have no assassins or robbers in my house. You will just pack up your things and go elsewhere to be hanged!"

The two young men were as white and rigid as plaster images.

"Begin, M. Héron," said the miser to the notary.

The old lawyer read out an account of Hochon's guardianship, whence it appeared that the entire unencumbered fortune of the two Borniche children amounted to seventy thousand francs, the money settled on their mother; but

M. Hochon had lent his daughter considerable sums, and, as representing the lenders, had a lien on part of his grandchildren's fortune. The share remaining to Baruch came to twenty thousand francs.

"There, you are a rich man," said his grandfather. "Take your money and walk alone! I remain free to bestow my wealth and Mme. Hochon's—for she agrees with me on every point in this matter—on whomsoever I please, on our dear Adolphine. Yes, she shall marry a peer's son if we choose, for she will have all we possess!"

"And a very fine fortune it is," added M. Héron.

"M. Maxence Gilet will indemnify you!" said Mme. Hochon.

"I see myself scraping twenty-sous pieces together for such a couple of ne'er-do-weels!" exclaimed M. Hochon.

"Forgive me," stammered Baruch.

"*Forgive me this once, and never no more*," repeated the old man, mocking the voice of a child. "Yes, and if I forgive you, off you go to M. Maxence to tell him what has befallen you and put him on his guard. . . . No, no, my little gentlemen. I shall have means of knowing how you conduct yourselves. As you behave, I shall behave. It is not by the good conduct of a day or of a month that I shall judge you, but by that of many years. I am strong on my feet, hale and hearty. I hope to live long enough to see which way you go.—You, the capitalist," he added to Baruch, "will go to Paris to study banking with M. Mongenod. Woe to you there if you do not walk straight; they will keep an eye on you. Your money is in the hands of Mongenod & Sons; here is a check on them for the whole sum. So now release me by signing your account, which is closed by a receipt in full," said he, taking the paper out of Héron's hands and giving it to Baruch.

"As for you, François Hochon, you owe me money instead of having any to receive," said the old man, addressing his other grandson. "M. Héron, will you read him his statement; it is clear—quite clear."

The reading took place in utter silence.

"I am sending you to Poitiers, with six hundred francs a year, to study law," said his grandfather, when the notary ended. "I was prepared to make life easy for you; now you must become an advocate to make your living. Ah, ha! my young rascals, for six years you have taken me in! Well, it took me just an hour in my turn to overtake you. I have seven-league boots!"

Just as old M. Héron was leaving, carrying with him the signed releases, Gritte announced M. le Colonel Philippe Bridau. Mme. Hochon left the room, taking her grandsons with her "to the confessional," as old Hochon expressed it, and to ascertain what effect this scene had had on them.

Philippe and the old man went to the window and talked in low tones.

"I have been considering the position of your affairs," said M. Hochon, looking across to the house opposite. "I have just been talking them over with M. Héron. The bond bearing fifty thousand francs' interest can only be sold by the holder himself, or by his order. Now, since you came, your uncle has signed no such order in any lawyer's office; and as he has not been out of Issoudun, he has signed none elsewhere. If he gave anyone a power of attorney in this place, we should know of it at once; if he did it elsewhere, we should hear of it all the same, for it would have to be stamped, and our good M. Héron has means of information. So if the old man should go out of the town, follow him, find out where he has been, and we will take steps to discover what he has done."

"The power has not been given," said Philippe. "They are trying for it, but I hope to prevent its being executed. No, it will *not* be executed!" cried Philippe, seeing his uncle appear on his doorstep. He pointed him out to M. Hochon, and hastily told him of the events—so trivial and so important—of his visit to Rouget. "Maxence is afraid of me," he added, "but he cannot keep out of my way. Mignonnet tells me that all the officers of the old army keep high festival at Issoudun every year on the anniversary of the Emperor's coronation. Well, then, two days hence Max and I must meet."

"If he can get the power of attorney by the morning of the 1st of December, he will be off to Paris by the mail, and leave the anniversary to take care of itself."

"True; then I must get hold of my uncle; but I have an eye that settles idiots," said Philippe, making M. Hochon quail under a villainous glare.

"If they are allowing him to walk out with you, Maxence has no doubt hit on some other plan for winning the game," said the old miser.

"Oh! Fario is on the watch," replied Philippe, "and not only he. The Spaniard discovered for me, in the neighborhood of Vatan, one of my old soldiers to whom I once did a service. No one suspects that Benjamin Bourdet is at the Spaniard's orders, and Fario has placed one of his horses at Benjamin's service."

"If you were to kill the monster who perverted my grandsons, you would be really doing a good action."

"By this time, thanks to me, all Issoudun knows what M. Maxence has been at by night for these six years past," replied Philippe, "and tongues are wagging about him pretty freely. Morally he is a ruined man."

The moment Philippe had left his uncle, Flore went to Max's room to relate to him the smallest details of the visit paid by this audacious nephew.

"What is to be done?" said she.

"Before having recourse to extreme measures, which would be a duel with that long corpse of a man," replied Maxence, "we must play for double or quits by a daring stroke. Let the old simpleton go out with his nephew."

"But that great hound does not beat about the bush," cried Flore; "he will call a spade a spade."

"Just attend to me," said Maxence, in his most strident tones. "Do you suppose that I have not listened at doors and considered our position? Send to old Cognet for a conveyance and a horse, now, this minute! All must be done in five minutes. Put all that is yours into the cart, take Védie, and be off to Vatan; take the twenty thousand francs he has in his desk. If I bring the old boy to Vatan, do not consent to return here till he has signed the power of attorney. Then

I will sneak off to Paris while you come back to Issoudun. —When Jean-Jacques comes in from his walk and finds that you are gone, he will lose his head and want to run after you. Very good—and I will talk to him then!"

While this plot was being laid, Philippe, arm in arm with his uncle, had taken him for a walk on the Boulevard Baron.

"There are two great schemers at loggerheads," said old Hochon to himself, watching the colonel supporting his uncle. "I am curious to see the end of this game, where the stake is ninety thousand francs a year."

"My dear uncle," said Philippe, whose phraseology had some flavor of his Paris associates, "you are in love with that minx, and you show devilish good taste, for she is a stunning armful. Instead of cosseting you, she makes you trot round like her footman—and that again is natural enough; she would like to see you six feet under the daisies to marry Maxence, whom she worships——"

"Yes, Philippe, I know all that, but I love her all the same."

"Well, I have sworn by my mother's body—and she is your sister, sure enough," Philippe went on,—"to make your Rabouilleuse as pliant as my glove. and just what she must have been before that blackguard, who is unworthy ever to have served in the Imperial Guard, came sponging on your household——"

"Oh! if you could only do that!" said the old man.

"It is easy enough," replied Philippe, cutting him short. "I will kill Maxence like a dog—but—on one condition."

"What is that?" asked old Rouget, looking at his nephew with a blank expression.

"Do not sign the power of attorney they are asking for before the 3rd of December; drag on only till then. Those two vultures want your license to sell out your stock for fifty thousand francs a year, solely to go and get married in Paris, and there have a high time with your million."

"I am very much afraid of it," said Rouget.

"Well, then, whatever they may do to you, put off signing it till next week."

"Yes, but when Flore talks to me she upsets me so that it turns my brain. I tell you, she has a way of looking at me that makes her blue eyes seem like Paradise, and I am no longer my own master, particularly as there are days when she leaves me in disgrace."

"Well, if she is all honey, just be satisfied to promise her the document, and give me notice the day before you sign it. Maxence will never be your representative—unless he has killed me. If I kill him, you may take me to live with you in his place, and I will make your beauty dance at a word or a look. Yes, Flore shall be fond of you, or, by God, if she vexes you, I will give her a hiding."

"Oh! that I would never allow. A blow to Flore would fall on my heart."

"And yet it is the only way to train a woman or a horse. A man who makes himself feared is loved and obeyed. This is all I wanted to say in your private ear.—Good-morning, gentlemen," said he to Mignonnet and Carpentier. "I am taking my uncle for a little walk, you see, and trying to teach him; for we live in an age when the young people are obliged to educate their grandparents."

Greetings were exchanged.

"You behold in my dear uncle the results of an unfortunate passion," the colonel went on. "He is about to be despoiled of his fortune and left stripped like Baba—you know to whom I allude. The good man knows of the plot, but he cannot make up his mind to do without his Nanna for a few days to baffle her," and Philippe frankly explained the position in which his uncle stood.

"You see, gentlemen," said he in conclusion, "that there are not two ways of setting my uncle free. Colonel Bridau must kill Major Gilet, or Major Gilet must kill Colonel Bridau. The day after to-morrow is the anniversary of the Emperor's coronation; I count on you so to arrange the seats at the banquet that I may be opposite to Major Gilet. You will, I hope, do me the honor to act as my seconds."

"We will put you in the chair and sit on each side of you. Max, as vice-president, will be opposite to you." said Mignonnet.

"Oh, the scoundrel will have Major Potel and Captain Renard for his seconds," said Carpentier. "In spite of all that is rumored in the town about his nocturnal excursions, those two capital fellows have stood by him before now; they will be faithful to him——"

"You see, uncle, how well the pot is simmering," said Philippe. "Sign nothing before the 3rd, for, by the day after, you shall be free, happy, adored by Flore, and rid of your finance minister."

"You do not know him, nephew," exclaimed Rouget in dismay. "Max has killed nine men in duels."

"Yes, but he was not robbing them of a hundred thousand francs a year," replied Philippe.

"A bad conscience spoils a man's hand," said Mignonnet sententiously.

"Within a few days," said Philippe, "you and La Rabouilleuse will be living together like hearts *à la fleur d'orange*, as soon as she has got over her grief; for she will wriggle like a worm, and yelp, and melt into tears, but let the tap run!"

The two officers supported Philippe's arguments, and tried their utmost to put some heart into Père Rouget, with whom they walked for about two hours. At last Philippe escorted his uncle home, saying as his last word: "Come to no decision without consulting me. I know what women are. I paid for one more dearly than Flore will ever cost you. And she taught me how to manage the fair sex for the rest of my days. Women are just naughty children; they are inferior animals to men; we must make them afraid of us, for our worst fate is to be led by the nose by those little brutes!"

It was about two in the afternoon when the old man went in. Kouski opened the door to him, in tears, or, at any rate, in obedience to Maxence's orders, seeming to weep.

"What is the matter?" asked Jean-Jacques.

"Oh, monsieur! madame is gone away with Védie."

"Go-o-one?" said the old man, in a voice of anguish.

The blow was so tremendous, that Rouget sat down on one of the steps of the stairs. A moment after, he rose, looked in the sitting-room, in the kitchen, went up to his own room, walked through all the bedrooms, came back into the sitting-room, sank into an armchair, and burst into tears.

"Where is she?" he cried, in the midst of sobs. "Where is she? Where is Max?"

"I do not know," replied Kouski. "The major went out without saying a word."

Gilet, very astutely, had thought it diplomatic to wander round the town. By leaving the old man alone in his despair, he made him feel how deserted he was, and so made him amenable to his counsels. But to hinder Philippe from supporting his uncle at this crisis, Max had desired Kouski to let no one into the house. Flore being away, the old man had neither bit nor bridle, and the situation was excessively critical.

During his walk through the town Max saw himself avoided by many persons who, only the day before, would have been most eager to come and shake hands with him. There was a general reaction against him. The feats of the Knights of Idlesse were on every tongue. The story of Joseph Bridau's arrest, which was now explained, cast dishonor on Max, whose life and deeds had, in this one day, met with their due reward. Gilet met Major Potel, who was looking for him, and who was quite beside himself.

"What is wrong, Potel?"

"My dear fellow, the Imperial Guard is blackguarded all through the town! The very clerks are abusing you, and that rebounds on me, and goes to my heart."

"What are they complaining of?" asked Max.

"Of the tricks you played at night."

"As if a little amusement were forbidden——"

"Oh! that is nothing," said Potel.

Potel was an officer of the stamp of those who said to a burgomaster, "Pooh! if we burn your town, we will pay for it!" so he was not much concerned by the pranks of the Order.

"What else?" said Gilet.

"The Guard is divided against itself! That is what breaks my heart. It is Bridau who has unchained the town against you. The Guard against the Guard? No; that is all wrong. You cannot retreat, Max; you must meet Bridau. I declare I longed to pick a quarrel with that great scoundrel, and settle him out of hand; then these black coats would not have seen the Guard against the Guard. In war I say nothing against it; two brave fellows have a squabble, they fight it out, and there are no counter-jumpers by to laugh them to scorn.—No, that long rascal never was in the Guards. A man of the Guard ought not to behave so before all these townsfolk against another man of the Guard. Oh! the Guard is scoffed at, and at Issoudun too, where it used to be respected!"

"Come, Potel, do not fuss over nothing," said Max. "Even if you should not see me at the anniversary dinner——"

"What! you are not coming to Lacroix's the day after to-morrow?" cried Potel, interrupting his friend. "Why, you will be called a coward; you will seem to be keeping out of Bridau's way! No, no. The foot grenadiers of the Guard must not retreat before the dragoons of the Guard! Arrange your other business as you will, but be there!"

"One more to send to the shades?" said Max. "Come, I think I can manage my business and be there too.—For," said he to himself, "the power of attorney must not be made out to me. As old Héron said, that would look too much like robbery."

The lion, thus entangled in the net laid for him by Philippe Bridau, set his teeth with an inward quiver; he avoided the eye of the persons he met, and went home by the Boulevard Villate, muttering as he walked. "Before I fight I will get those securities," said he to himself. "If I fall, that money, at any rate, shall not go to that Philippe. I will have it placed in Flore's name. By my advice the child must go straight to Paris; and there, if she likes, she may marry the son of some marshal who has had the sack.

I will have the power of attorney made out to Baruch, who will not transfer the stock without my orders."

We must do Max the justice to say that he never looked calmer than when his blood and brain were seething. Never in any soldier were the qualities that make a great general combined in a higher degree. If he had not been checked in his career by being taken prisoner, the Emperor would have found in this fellow a man of the sort needful to a vast enterprise.

On going into the room where the victim of all these tragi-comic scenes still sat sobbing, Max inquired the cause of his despair; he was greatly astonished; he knew nothing; he heard, with well-acted surprise, of Flore's departure, and cross-questioned Kouski to throw some light on the purpose of this unaccountable journey.

"Madame just said this," said Kouski; "I was to tell monsieur that she had taken the twenty thousand francs in gold that were in his desk, thinking that monsieur would not grudge it her as wages for these two-and-twenty years."

"As wages?" said Rouget.

"Yes," said Kouski. "'Oh, I shall never come back!' She went away saying so to Védie—for poor Védie, who is greatly attached to monsieur, was putting it to madame. 'No, no,' says she, 'he has not the least affection for me; he let his nephew treat me like the scum of the earth!' and she was crying too—ever so!"

"What do I care for Philippe!" cried the old man, whom Max was watching. "Where is Flore? How can we find out where she is?"

"Philippe, whose advice you are so ready to take, will help you," said Maxence coldly.

"Philippe?" said the old man; "what can he do with the poor child? There is no one but you, my good Max, who can find Flore; she will come with you; you will bring her back to me."

"I do not wish to find myself in antagonism with M. Bridau," said Max.

"By Heaven!" cried Rouget, "if that is all—he has promised me that he will kill you."

"Ah, ha!" laughed Gilet, "we will see——"

"My dear fellow," said the old man, "find Flore; tell her I will do whatever she wishes——"

"She must have been seen passing by somewhere in the town," said Maxence to Kouski. "Serve dinner, put everything on the table, and then go from place to place, making inquiries, and tell us at dessert what road Mlle. Brazier has taken."

This order soothed the poor man for a minute; for he was whimpering like a child that has lost its nurse. At this moment, Max, whom Rouget hated as the cause of all his misfortunes, appeared to him as an angel. A passion like Rouget's for Flore is strangely like a child's. At six o'clock the Pole, who had simply taken a walk, came in and announced that Flore had set out for Vatan.

"Madame is gone back to her native place, that is clear," said Kouski.

"Will you come to Vatan this evening?" asked Max of the old man. "The road is bad, but Kouski drives well, and you will make up your quarrel better at eight o'clock this evening than to-morrow morning."

"Let us be off," cried Rouget.

"Put the horse in very quietly, and try to prevent the town hearing all about this foolish business, for M. Rouget's dignity," said Max. "Saddle my horse, and I will ride ahead," he added in Kouski's ear.

M. Hochon had already sent news of Mlle. Brazier's departure to Philippe Bridau, who rose from table at M. Mignonnet's to hurry back to the Place Saint-Jean, for he guessed at once the purpose of this skillful strategy. When Philippe went to his uncle's door Kouski called to him out of a first floor window that M. Rouget could receive no one.

"Fario," said he to the Spaniard, who was walking in the Grande Narette, "go and tell Benjamin to set out on horseback; I must positively know where my uncle and Maxence are going."

"They are putting the horse to the barouche," said Fario, who had been watching Rouget's house.

"If they start for Vatan," replied Philippe, "find a second horse for me, and return with Benjamin to M. Mignonnet's house."

"What do you propose doing?" asked M. Hochon, who came out of his house on seeing Philippe and Fario on the Place.

"A general's skill, my dear M. Hochon, consists not merely in keeping a sharp lookout on the enemy's movements, but also in guessing his intentions from his movements, and constantly modifying his own plan as fast as the foe upsets it by some unexpected tactics. Look here; if my uncle and Maxence go out together in the chaise, they are going to Vatan; Maxence will have promised to reconcile him to Flore, who *fugit ad salices*—for this maneuver is General Virgil's. If this is their game, I don't know what I shall do. But I have the night before me, for my uncle cannot sign a power of attorney at ten o'clock at night; notaries are in bed.

"If, as the pawing of a second horse suggests to me, Max is going ahead to give Flore her instructions before she sees my uncle—as seems necessary and probable—the rascal is done for! You will see how we play a return match in the game of inheritance, we soldiers. And since, for this last hand in the game, I need an assistant, I am going back to Mignonnet's to make arrangements with my friend Carpentier."

After shaking hands with M. Hochon, Philippe went down the Petite Narette to see Major Mignonnet. Ten minutes later, M. Hochon saw Maxence set out at a hard gallop; and being curious, as old men are, he was so much interested that he remained standing at the window waiting to hear the rattle of the *demi-fortune*, which was soon audible. Rouget's impatience brought him out twenty minutes after Max. Kouski, in obedience to his real master, was driving slowly—at any rate in the town.

"If they get off to Paris, all is lost!" said M. Hochon to himself.

At this moment a little boy from the Roman suburb came to M. Hochon's door; he had a letter for Baruch. The old man's two grandsons, very humble since the morning, had of their own accord stayed at home. Reflecting on the future, they well understood how wise they would be to humor their grandparents. Baruch could not but know how great his grandfather Hochon's influence would be over his grandfather and grandmother Borniche; M. Hochon would not fail to secure the lion's share of all their money to Adolphine if his conduct should justify them in founding their hopes on such a grand marriage as they had threatened him with that morning. Baruch, being much richer than François, had much to lose; so he was in favor of complete submission, making no conditions but that his debt to Max should be paid.

François's prospects were entirely in his grandfather's hands; he had no fortune to look for but from him, since, from the account of his guardianship, the youth was his debtor. So the two young men made solemn promises, their repentance being stimulated by their damaged prospects, and Mme. Hochon had reassured them as to the money they owed to Maxence.

"You have played the fool!" said she. "Repair the mischief by good conduct, and M. Hochon will be mollified."

Thus, when François had read the letter over Baruch's shoulder, he said in his ear—

"Ask grandpapa what he thinks of it."

"Here," said Baruch, handing the letter to the old man.

"Read it to me; I have not got my spectacles."

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—

"I hope you will not hesitate, in the serious position in which I am placed, to do me a service by accepting the office of M. Rouget's attorney. Pray be at Vatan by nine o'clock to-morrow. I shall no doubt send you to Paris; but be quite easy, I will give you money for the journey, and join you erelong, for I am almost certain to be obliged to leave Issoudun on the 3rd of December. Adieu; I rely on your friendship, and you may rely on mine. MAXENCE."

"God be praised!" said M. Hochon, "that idiot's fortune is safe from the clutches of those devils!"

"It must be so, since you say it," observed Mme. Hochon, "and I thank God for it; He no doubt has heard my prayers. The triumph of the wicked is always brief."

"Go to Vatan, and accept the office of attorney to M. Rouget," said the old man to Baruch. "You will be desired to transfer stock bearing fifty thousand francs' interest to the name of Mlle. Brazier. Set out for Paris, but stop at Orleans, and wait till you hear from me. Tell no one whatever where you put up, and go to the last inn you see in the Faubourg Bannier, even if it is but a carrier's house of call."

"Hey day!" cried François, who had rushed to the window at the sound of carriage-wheels in the Grande Narette; "here is something new! Père Rouget and M. Philippe have come home together in the carriage, Benjamin and M. Carpentier following them on horseback——"

"I will go across," cried M. Hochon, his curiosity getting the upper hand of every other feeling.

M. Hochon found old Rouget in his room, writing the following letter from his nephew's dictation:—

"MADEMOISELLE,—

"If you do not set out the instant you receive this letter to return to me, your conduct will show so much ingratitude for all my kindness, that I shall revoke my will in your favor, and leave my whole fortune to my nephew Philippe. You must also understand that if M. Gilet is with you at Vatan, he can never again live under my roof. I intrust this letter to M. Carpentier to be delivered to you, and I hope you will listen to his advice, for he will speak to you as I should myself.

"Yours affectionately,
"J.-J. ROUGET."

"Captain Carpentier and I happened to meet my uncle," said Philippe to M. Hochon with bitter irony. "He was so foolish as to intend going to Vatan to seek Mlle. Brazier and Major Gilet. I explained to my uncle that he was running head foremost into a trap. Will not that woman throw him over as soon as he shall have signed the power of attorney she insists on to enable her to transfer to herself the stock for fifty thousand francs a year? By writing this letter, will he not see her back here to-night, under his roof—the fair deserter! I promise I will make mademoiselle as pliant as a reed for the rest of her life, if only my uncle will allow me to take the place of M. Gilet, who, in my opinion, is certainly not in the right place here. Am I not right?—And my uncle wrings his hands!"

"My good neighbor," said M. Hochon, "you have taken the best means for securing peace in your house. If you will listen to me, you will destroy your will, and then you will see Flore once more all that she was in former days."

"No; she will never forgive me for making her so unhappy," said the old man, weeping; "she will never love me again."

"Yes, she will love you, and heartily too," said Philippe. "I will see to that."

"But open your eyes, man!" said M. Hochon to Rouget. "They only want to rob you and desert you!"

"Oh, if I were only sure of that!" said the poor creature.

"Look here. This is a letter written by Maxence to my grandson Borniche," said old Hochon. "Read it."

"The wretch!" exclaimed Carpentier, as he heard the letter which Rouget read through his tears.

"Is that clear enough, uncle?" asked Philippe. "I tell you, bind the minx to you by interest and you will be adored—as you can be—half thread and half cotton!"

"She is too fond of Maxence; she will throw me over!" said the old man piteously.

"I tell you, uncle, by the day after to-morrow either I or Maxence will have ceased to leave our tracks on the streets of Issoudun——"

"Well," said the poor fellow, "go, M. Carpentier; if you promise me that she will come back, go. You are a man to be depended on; say to her all you think fit in my name."

"Captain Carpentier will whisper in her ear that I am having a lady here from Paris who is a little gem of youth and beauty," said Philippe, "and the minx will come back as fast as she can drive."

The captain set out, driving himself in the old chaise; Benjamin accompanied him on horseback, for Kouski was not to be found. Though the two officers had threatened him with an action and the loss of his place, the Pole had fled to Vatan on a hired horse, to warn Maxence and Flore of their adversary's bold game.

Carpentier, who did not choose to return with La Rabouilleuse, was to ride back on Benjamin's horse when he had carried out his mission.

On hearing of Kouski's desertion, Philippe said to Benjamin—

"You can take his place here this evening. Try to climb up at the back of the chaise without being seen by Flore, so as to be here by the time she is."

"Things are shaping, Daddy Hochon!" said the colonel. "There will be fun at the banquet the day after to-morrow."

"And you will settle yourself here," said the old miser.

"I have told Fario to send in all my things. I shall sleep in the room that opens on the same landing as Gilet's; my uncle agrees."

"Oh! what will come of all this?" cried the old man in dismay.

"Mlle. Flore Brazier will come of it, within a few hours, as mild as a Paschal lamb," replied M. Hochon.

"God grant it!" said Jean-Jacques, drying away his tears.

"It is now seven o'clock," said Philippe. "The queen of your heart will be here by about half-past eleven. You will see no more of Gilet; will you not be as happy as a Pope?—If you want me to succeed," Philippe added in M. Hochon's ear, "remain with us till that she-ape comes; you will help me to keep the old fellow at the sticking-point; and then, between us, we can make Mlle. La Rabouilleuse understand where her true interests lie."

M. Hochon kept Philippe company, seeing that there was sense in his request; but they both had their hands full, for

Père Rouget gave himself up to childish lamentations, which were not checked by the arguments Philippe repeated ten times over—

"Well, uncle, if Flore comes back and is affectionate to you, you will admit that I am right. You will be made much of; you will keep your income; you will be guided for the future by my advice, and all will go on like Paradise."

When at half-past eleven the sound of wheels was heard in the Grande Narette, the question was whether the carriage had returned empty or full. Rouget's face wore an expression of indescribable anguish, which gave way to the reaction of excessive joy when, as the chaise turned to come in, he saw in it the two women.

"Kouski," said Philippe, giving his hand to Flore to get out, "you are dismissed from M. Rouget's service. You are not to sleep here to-night, so pack your things; Benjamin here will fill your place."

"So you are master?" said Flore, with a sneer.

"By your leave!" retorted Philippe, holding Flore's hand as in a vise. "Come with me; we have to *rabouiller* our hearts, you and I."

Philippe led the woman, dumfounded, out a few yards on to the Place Saint-Jean.

"Now, my beauty; the day after to-morrow Gilet will be sent to the shades below by this right arm," said the officer, holding it out, "or he will have caught me off my guard. If I fall, you will be the mistress in my uncle's house—*bene sit!* If I am left standing on my pegs, you have got to keep him in happiness of the very first quality. Otherwise, I know plenty of *Rabouilleuses* in Paris, prettier than you, without any injustice to you, for they are but seventeen; they would make my uncle very happy, and not fail to take my part. Begin your task this very evening, for if the old man is not as lively as a chaffinch to-morrow, I have only one thing to say to you—and mark my words—There is only one way of killing a man without the law having a word to say to it, and that is by fighting a duel; but when it comes to a woman —I know three ways of getting rid of her. There, my pigeon!"

All through this address Flore had been shaking like an ague-patient.

"Kill Max——?" she said, looking at Philippe in the moonlight.

"Now, go. See, here is my uncle . . ."

In fact, old Rouget, in spite of all that M. Hochon could say, had come out into the street to take Flore by the hand, as a miser might have sought his treasure. He led her into the house and into his room, and locked the door.

"This is good Saint-Lambert's Day, those who leave must stay away," said Benjamin to the Pole.

"Oh, my master will shut all your mouths," retorted Kouski, going off to join Max, who put up at the Hotel de la Poste.

Next day, from nine till eleven, all the women were gossiping at the house-doors. All through the town nothing was talked of but the wonderful revolution carried out the day before in Père Rouget's household. The upshot of these discussions was everywhere the same.

"What will happen between Max and Colonel Bridau at the Anniversary banquet to-morrow?"

To Védie, Philippe spoke a few words—"An annuity of six hundred francs—or dismissal!" which reduced her to neutrality for the time between two such formidable powers as Philippe and Flore.

Knowing Max's life to be imperiled, Flore was sweeter to old Rouget than even in the early days of their housekeeping. Alas! in love affairs, interested fraud overrides sincerity, and that is why so many men pay clever beguilers so dear. La Rabouilleuse remained invisible next morning till breakfast time, when she came down, giving her arm to Père Rouget. The tears rose to her eyes as she saw in Max's seat the terrible veteran with his gloomy blue eyes and ominously calm face.

"What ails you, mademoiselle?" said he, after wishing his uncle good-morning.

"What ails her, nephew, is that she cannot bear the idea of your fighting Major Gilet——"

"I have not the slightest wish to kill your Gilet," replied

Philippe. "He has only to clear out of Issoudun and ship himself to America with a parcel of merchandise; I should be the first to advise you to give him some money to invest in the best class of goods, and to wish him good luck! He will make a fortune, and it would be more creditable than running riot through the town o' nights—not to mention playing the devil in your house."

"Well, that is very handsome, eh!" said Rouget, turning to Flore.

"To A-me-ri-ca!" said she, sobbing.

"He would be better off kicking his heels in New York than tucked up in a deal box in France. But, of course, you may say he is a crack hand; he may kill me!" remarked the colonel.

"Will you allow me to speak to him?" said Flore, in a quite humble and submissive tone, to Philippe.

"Certainly, and he may come and take away all his things. But I shall stay with my uncle meanwhile; for I do not intend to leave the old man any more," replied Philippe.

"Védie," called Flore, "run to the Poste, woman, and tell the major that I beg him to——"

"To come and fetch away his things," said Philippe, interrupting Flore.

"Yes, yes, Védie. That will be the best excuse for asking him to come; I want to speak to him."

Fear so completely overpowered hatred in this woman, and her dismay at meeting a strong and ruthless will, when hitherto she had always met with adulation, was so great, that she was beginning to give way before Philippe, as poor old Rouget had given way before her. She awaited with anxiety Védie's return; but Védie came back with a positive refusal from Max, who begged Mlle. Brazier to send all his possessions to the Hotel de la Poste.

"Will you let me take them to him?" she asked old Rouget.

"Yes—but you promise to come back?" said the old man.

"If mademoiselle is not here by midday, at one o'clock you will give me a power of attorney to transfer your securities," said Philippe, looking at Flore. "Take Védie for the sake of appearances, mademoiselle. Henceforth we must guard my uncle's honor."

Flore could get nothing out of Maxence. The major, in his disgust at having allowed himself to be ousted from his disgraceful position before the eyes of the whole town, was too proud to retreat before Philippe. La Rabouilleuse combated his arguments by proposing to her lover that they should fly together to America; but Gilet, who did not want Flore without Père Rouget's fortune, while he would not let the woman see to the bottom of his heart, persisted in saying that he meant to kill Philippe.

"We have committed a stupid blunder," said he. "We ought to have gone, all three of us, to spend the winter in Paris. But how could we imagine from looking at that gaunt carcass that things would turn out as they have done? Events have come with such a rush, that it has turned my brain. I took the colonel for a swashbuckler without two ideas: that was my mistake. Since I was not sharp enough in the first instance to double like a hare, I should be a coward now if I yielded an inch to the colonel; he has ruined me in the opinion of the town; only his death can rehabilitate me."

"Go to America with forty thousand francs. I will find some way of getting rid of that savage; I will join you there; it will be much wiser . . ."

"What would people think of me?" he exclaimed, stung by the thought of the "jaw." "No. Besides, I have already settled nine. That fellow can be no great duelist, it seems to me. He left school to go into the army; he was always in the wars till 1815, since that he has been traveling in America; so my bulldog can never have set foot in a fencing school, while I have no match at sword-play. The cavalry sword is his arm; I shall seem magnanimous by proposing it—for I shall try to make him insult me, and I will make short work of him. Decidedly that is the best thing to do. Be easy; we shall be masters again the day after to-morrow."

Thus with Max a foolish point of honor outweighed rational policy. Flore was at home by one o'clock, and shut herself into her room to cry at her ease. All that day gossip wagged its tongue freely in Issoudun, for a duel between Maxence and Philippe was considered inevitable.

"Ah! M. Hochon," said Mignonnet, who met the old man on the Boulevard Baron, where the captain was walking with Carpentier, "we are very anxious, for Gilet is equally strong with all weapons."

"Never mind," said the old provincial diplomat, "Philippe has managed the whole business very well—and I never should have believed that that long, free-and-easy rascal would have succeeded so quickly. Those two fellows rolled up to meet each other like two storm-clouds——"

"Oh," said Carpentier, "Philippe is a very deep customer. His conduct before the Supreme Court was a masterpiece of skill."

"Hallo! Captain Renard," said a townsman, "they say that wolves do not eat each other, but it seems that Max is going to try a ripping match with Colonel Bridau. It will be no child's play between men of the old Guard!"

"And you can laugh at it, you townsmen. Because the poor fellow liked a lark at night, you owe him a grudge," said Major Potel. "But Gilet is a man who could never stay in such a hole as Issoudun without finding something to do."

"Well, well, gentlemen," said another, "Max and the colonel have played the game out. Was not the colonel bound to avenge his brother Joseph? Do you remember Max's treachery towards that poor fellow?"

"Bah! an artist!" said Renard.

"But Père Rouget's leavings are in the balance. They say that M. Gilet was about to pounce on fifty thousand francs a year when the colonel went to live under his uncle's roof."

"Gilet—steal anybody's money?—Look here, M. Canivet, do not say that anywhere but here, or we will make you eat your words without any sauce to them."

But worthy Colonel Bridau had the good wishes of all the townspeople.

On the morrow, at about four o'clock, the officers of the Imperial army who resided at Issoudun, or in the neighborhood, were walking to and fro on the market-place, in front of an eating-house kept by one Lacroix, waiting for Philippe Bridau. The banquet in honor of the anniversary of the Coronation was fixed for five o'clock, military time. Several groups were discussing Maxence's affairs and his eviction from Rouget's house, for the private soldiers had also agreed to hold a meeting at a tavern on the Place. Of all the officers, Potel and Renard alone attempted to defend their friend.

"Is it our part to interfere in what goes on between two heirs?" said Renard.

"Max is soft to women," remarked Potel the cynic.

"Swords will be drawn before long," said a retired sub-lieutenant, who now cultivated a market-garden in the upper Baltan. "Though M. Maxence was a fool to go to live with Père Rouget, he would be a coward to take his dismissal like a servant without asking the reason."

"Certainly," replied Mignonnet dryly. "When an act of folly fails, it becomes a crime."

Max, who presently joined the old Bonapartist soldiers, was received with very significant silence. Potel and Renard each took an arm, and led Max a little way off to talk to him. At this moment Philippe appeared in the distance in full dress; he dragged his cane with an imperturbable air that contrasted with the deep attention Max was obliged to give to what his two last friends were saying. Philippe shook hands with Mignonnet, Carpentier, and a few others. This reception, so unlike that which Max had just met with, finally dispelled from the mind of the latter certain dawnings of cowardice—or of prudence, if you please—to which Flore's entreaties, and, above all, her affection, had given rise when at last he had been left face to face with himself."

"We will fight," said he to Captain Renard, "and to the death! So talk to me no more; leave me to play my part out."

After these words, spoken in a fever of excitement, the three men rejoined the other groups of officers. Max bowed first to Bridau, who returned the compliment with a very cold stare.

"Come, gentlemen; to dinner," said Major Potel.

"And to drink to the imperishable glory of the little Crophead, who is now in the paradise of the brave," cried Renard.

All the party, feeling that the business of dinner would put them in better countenance, understood the little light-horse captain's intentions. They hurried into the long, low dining-room of the Restaurant Lacroix, of which the windows looked out on the market-place. Each guest at once took his seat at table, and the adversaries found themselves face to face, as Philippe had requested. Several of the youth of the town, especially the ex-Knights of Idlesse, somewhat uneasy as to what might take place at this dinner, walked about outside, discussing the critical position in which Philippe had contrived to place Maxence Gilet. They deplored the collision, while admitting that a duel was necessary.

All went well till dessert, though the two fighting men kept a sort of watch on each other, not far removed from uneasiness, in spite of the apparent cheerfulness of the meal. Pending the quarrel, which both, no doubt, were meditating, Philippe was admirably cool, and Max boisterously gay; but, to the connoisseur, each was playing a part.

When dessert was on the table, Philippe said—

"Fill your glasses, my friends; I claim permission to propose our first toast."

"He said 'My friends'; do not fill your glass," said Renard in Max's ear.

But Max poured out some wine.

"The Grand Army!" cried Philippe with genuine enthusiasm.

"The Grand Army!" was repeated like one word by every voice.

At this moment in the doorway there appeared eleven private soldiers, among them Benjamin and Kouski, who all repeated, "The Grand Army!"

"Come in, boys; we are going to drink to *his* health," said Major Potel.

The old soldiers came in, and remained standing behind the officers.

"You see, he is not really dead!" said Kouski to an old sergeant, who had, no doubt, been deploring the Emperor's long agony, now at last ended.

"I claim the second toast," said Major Mignonnet.

A few of the dessert dishes were disturbed to keep up appearances. Mignonnet rose.

"To those who tried to re-instate *his* son!" said he.

Everyone, with the exception of Maxence Gilet, lifted his glass to Philippe Bridau.

"It is my turn," said Max, rising.

"Max!—it is Max!" they were saying outside. Deep silence reigned within and on the market-place, for Gilet's temper led them to expect some provocation.

"May we *all* meet here again this day twelvemonth!" and he bowed ironically to Philippe.

"He is coming on!" said Kouski to his neighbor.

"The Paris police did not allow you to hold such banquets as this," said Major Potel to Philippe.

"Why the devil need you speak of the police to Colonel Bridau?" asked Maxence Gilet insolently.

"Major Potel meant no harm on *his* part," said Philippe, with a bitter smile. The silence was so complete that a fly would have been heard if there had been any.

"The police is sufficiently afraid of me," said Philippe, "to have sent me to Issoudun, a place where I have had the good luck to find a few of the right old sort. But it must be confessed that there is not much amusement to be found here. For a man who was not averse to the ladies I have come off but badly. However, I will save my money for the pretty dears—for I am not one of the men who find their fortune in a feather-bed, and Mariette of the opera-house cost me no end of money."

"Is it for my benefit that you say that, my dear colonel," said Max, firing a glance like an electric shock at Philippe.

"If the cap fits, Major Gilet."

"Colonel, my two friends here, Renard and Potel, will call to-morrow morning——"

"On Mignonnet and Carpentier," interrupted Philippe, waving his hand to his two neighbors.

"Now," said Max, "go on with the toasts."

Neither of the antagonists had raised his voice above the ordinary tone of conversation; nothing was solemn but the silence in which they were heard.

"Look here, you fellows," said Philippe, looking at the privates, "remember, our affairs are no concern of the townfolks!—Not a word of what has just been said; it must remain a secret with the old Guard."

"They will obey orders, colonel," said Renard; "I will answer for them."

"Long live the youngster! May he reign in France!" cried Potel.

"Death to the Englishman!" added Carpentier, and this toast was enthusiastically drunk.

"Shame on Hudson Lowe!" said Captain Renard.

The dessert went off very well, with ample libations. The two antagonists regarded it as a point of honor that this duel, in which an immense fortune was at stake, while the combatants were both men so noted for their courage, should have no feature in common with a vulgar quarrel. Two gentlemen, in the best sense, could not have behaved better than Max and Philippe. The expectations of the young men and townspeople who had gathered on the marketplace were disappointed.

All the guests, as brother-soldiers, kept the secret of the episode at dessert. At ten o'clock the two principals were informed that the sword was the weapon decided on. The spot selected for the meeting was behind the apse of the Capuchin chapel, at eight next morning. Goddet, who had been present at the dinner, having formerly served as surgeon-major, had been requested to attend. Whatever came of it, the seconds agreed that the fighting was not to last for more than ten minutes.

At eleven o'clock that night, to the colonel's great surprise, just as he was going to bed, M. Hochon brought his wife over to see him.

"We know what is happening," said the old lady, her eyes full of tears, "and I have come to beseech you not to go out to-morrow morning without saying your prayers. Lift up your soul to God."

"Yes, madame," said Philippe, to whom old Hochon was signaling from behind his wife.

"That is not all," said Agathe's godmother; "I put myself in your poor mother's place, and I have deprived myself of my most precious possession. Look here!" and she held out to Philippe a tooth fastened to a piece of black velvet embroidered with gold, to which two ends of green ribbon were sewn; after showing it to Philippe, she replaced it in a little bag. "It is a relic of Saint-Solange, the patron saint of Le Berry; I saved it at the time of the Revolution; wear it on your breast to-morrow."

"Can it protect me against a sword-stroke?" asked Philippe.

"Yes," replied the old lady.

"Then I can no more wear that paraphernalia than I could wear a breastplate," cried Agathe's son.

"What does he mean?" asked Mme. Hochon of her husband.

"He says it is not fair play," replied old Hochon.

"Very well; say no more about it," said she. "I will pray for you."

"Well, madame, a mouthful of prayers and a straight thrust can do no harm," said the colonel, making as though he would pierce M. Hochon through the heart.

The old lady insisted on kissing Philippe on the forehead. Then, as she went out, she gave Benjamin ten crowns, all the money she had, to induce him to sew the relic into his master's trousers-pocket. Which Benjamin did, not believing in the virtue of the bone—for his master, said he, had a much larger one to pick with Gilet—but because he was bound to fulfill a commission so handsomely paid for. Mme. Hochon went home firmly trusting in Saint-Solange.

At eight next morning, in overcast weather, Max, with his two seconds and Kouski, arrived on the little plot of grass which at that time surrounded the apse of the old Capuchin church. There they found Philippe and his party with

Benjamin. Potel and Mignonnet measured twenty-five paces. At each end of the line the two men marked a crease with a spade. Neither of the combatants could retreat beyond the mark under pain of cowardice; each man was to stand on his line, and advance as far as he pleased, when the seconds cried "Go!"

"Shall we take our coats off?" said Philippe coldly to Gilet.

"By all means, colonel," said Maxence, with the confidence of an old hand.

The two men kept on only their trousers, the flesh showing pink through their cambric shirts. Armed with cavalry swords, carefully chosen of the same weight—about three pounds, and the same length—three feet, the two men took their stand, their swords pointed downwards, awaiting the signal. Both were so calm, that in spite of the cold their muscles quivered no more than if they had been of bronze. Goddet, the four seconds, and the two soldiers felt an involuntary thrill.

"They are a fine couple!"

The exclamation broke from Major Potel.

At the moment when the word "Go!" was spoken, Maxence caught sight of Fario's ominous face; he was looking at them from the hole made by the Knights of the Order to put the pigeons through into his store. Those eyes, from which hatred and revenge shot like two showers of flame, dazzled Max.

The colonel made straight for his antagonist, putting himself on guard in such a way as to secure the advantage. Experts in the art of killing know that the more skillful of two swordsmen can take the upper hand, to use an expression that suggests by a figure of speech the effect of the superior guard. This attitude. which allows a man in some degree to see what is coming, so effectually proclaims a duelist of the first class that a sense of his own inferiority sank deep into Max's soul, producing that flutter of mind which is the ruin of a gambler when, face to face with a master-hand or a man in luck, he is disconcerted, and plays worse than usual.

"Ah, the wretch!" said Max to himself. "He is more than my match. I am done for!"

Max tried a circular flourish, wielding his sword with the skill of a player at single stick; he wanted to dazzle Philippe's eye and strike his weapon, so as to disarm him; but at the first touch he felt that the colonel had a wrist of iron, as flexible as a steel spring. Maxence had to find some other stroke; and he, wretched man, wanted to think, while Philippe, whose eyes sparkled more vividly than the flashing steel, parried every attack as coolly as a fencing master in pads in a school of arms.

Between two men, when both are so skillful as these combatants, the issue depends on a circumstance somewhat like that which decides the event of the horrible kicking matches among the common people, known as the *Savate*. The victory depends on a false move, on a mistake in the distance, as sudden as a lightning flash, which must be followed up instantly. For a certain time, as short to the spectators as it seems long to the adversaries, the fight consists in watchfulness, absorbing every power of mind and body, but hidden under feints apparently so slow and so cautious that it might be supposed that neither of the men meant business. This instant, followed by a swift and decisive struggle, is agonizing to the skilled beholder. Max presently parried badly, and the colonel struck the sword out of his hand.

"Pick it up!" he said, pausing in the fight. "I am not the man to kill a disarmed foe."

It was the sublime of ruthlessness. This generosity showed such certain superiority that it was regarded as the cleverest design by the lookers-on. In fact, when Max took up his guard again he had lost his presence of mind, and again, of course, found himself below the high guard which threatened him while covering his adversary. Then he hoped to retrieve his shameful defeat by a daring blow; he no longer tried to guard himself; he took his sword in both hands and rushed furiously on the colonel, to wound him mortally, while allowing himself to be killed. Though Philippe received a sword-stroke which cut his forehead and part of his face, he split Max's skull obliquely by a terrible swashing cut, intended to break the murderous blow Max meant to deal him. These two frantic cuts ended the fight in nine minutes. Fario came down to feast his eyes on the sight of his enemy's death-struggle, for in a man so powerful as Max the muscles twitch frightfully. Philippe was carried to his uncle's house.

Thus died one of those men destined to achieve great things if he had but remained in the position to which he was fitted; a man who was a spoilt child of nature, endowed with courage, cool blood, and the political astuteness of a Cæsar Borgia. But education had not given him that loftiness of mind and conduct without which no achievement is possible in any walk of life. He was not regretted, for the insidious action of his adversary—a more worthless creature than himself—had succeeded in lowering him in public regard. His death put an end to the exploits of the Knights of Idlesse, to the great satisfaction of the town of Issoudun. Philippe got into no trouble in consequence of this duel, which indeed appeared to be the outcome of divine vengeance, and of which the details were discussed through all the neighborhood with unanimous praise of the two antagonists.

"They ought to have killed each other," said M. Mouilleron. "That would have been a good riddance for the Government."

Flore Brazier's position would have been a very embarrassing one but for the severe illness produced by Max's death; she had an attack on the brain, complicated by dangerous inflammation, brought on by the fatigues and shocks of the last three days. If she had been in her usual health, she might perhaps have fled from the house where, just beneath her, in Max's room and Max's bed, lay Max's murderer. For three months she hovered between life and death under the treatment of M. Goddet, who also attended Philippe.

As soon as Philippe could hold a pen he wrote the following letters:—

"To M. Desroches, Attorney-at-Law.

"I have already killed the more venomous of the two beasts, not without getting a hole in my head from a sword-cut, but the rascal happily struck with a dead hand. There remains another viper with whom I must try to come to some understanding, for to my uncle she is as his very gizzard. I was much afraid lest this Rabouilleuse, who is devilish handsome, should take herself off, for my uncle would have gone after her; but the shock which came upon her at an evil moment has nailed her to her bed. If God were gracious to me, He would take her to Himself while she repents of her sins. Meanwhile, thanks to M. Hochon—the old man is well—I have the doctor on my side, named Goddet, a good apostle, who opines that an uncle's inheritance is better placed in his nephew's hands than in those of such a minx. M. Hochon exerts some influence over one Fichet, who has a rich daughter, on whom Goddet has an eye as a wife for his son; so that the thousand-franc note that has been dangled before him for curing my nut has little to do with his devotion. This Goddet, formerly surgeon-major in the Third Line Regiment, has also been 'talked to' by my friends, two brave officers, Mignonnet and Carpentier, so that he is humbugging his other patient.

"'There is a God after all, you see, my dear,' says he, feeling her pulse. 'You have caused a great misfortune: you must repair the mischief. The hand of God is in all this.' [What the hand of God is made to do is incredible!] 'Religion is religion; submit, be resigned; to begin with, it will calm your mind, and do as much to cure you as my drugs. Above all, remain here to take care of your master. And then, forgive! Forgiveness is the law of the Christian.'

"This Goddet has promised that he will keep La Rabouilleuse in bed for three months. Perhaps the woman will insensibly become accustomed to our living under the same roof. I have secured the cook on my side. The abominable old thing tells her mistress that Max would have made life very hard for her. She declares that she heard the dead man say that if after the old man's death he should be obliged to marry Flore, he did not mean to clog his career with a hussy. And the cook even insinuated that Max would have found means to get rid of her.

"So all is well. My uncle, by old Hochon's advice, has destroyed his will."

"To M. Giroudeau, at Mlle. Florentine's, Rue de Vendôme au Marais.

"MY OLD COMRADE,—Find out whether that little puss Césarine is engaged, and try to persuade her to be in readiness to come to Issoudun as soon as I ask her. The little slut must then start by return of post. She must get herself up respectably, and shed everything that smacks of the side-scenes; she would have to figure in the country as the daughter of a brave soldier killed on the field of honor. So the primmest behavior, a schoolgirl fit-out, and first-class virtue,—these are the order of the day. If I should need her, and if she is a success, at my uncle's death she shall have fifty thousand francs. If she is busy, explain the case to Florentine, and find me, between you, some little walking lady who can play the part.

"I had my scalp peeled in the duel with my fortune-grabber, and it has given my eye a twist. I will tell you all about it. Ah! old man, we will see good times yet, and have plenty of fun with others—not the same others. If you can forward me five hundred flimsies, I can find use for them. Ta-ta, old cock. Light your pipe with this document. It must be understood that the officer's daughter hails from Châteauroux, and professes to be in need of help. However, I hope not to be obliged to have recourse to this dangerous game. Remember me to Mariette and all our friends."

Agathe, on hearing from Mme. Hochon, hastened to Issoudun, and was received by her brother, who gave her Philippe's old room. The poor mother, whose heart was soft again towards her villainous son, enjoyed a few happy days while hearing the citizens of Issoudun sing the colonel's praises.

"After all, dear child," said Mme. Hochon on the day of Agathe's arrival, "youth must have its day. The follies of soldiers who served the Emperor cannot be the same as those of sons looked after by respectable fathers. If only you could know all the tricks that wretch Max would play here by night! Now, thanks to your son, Issoudun breathes and sleeps in peace. Judgment came late to Philippe, but it came; as he told us, three months' imprisonment in the Luxembourg leaves a little ballast in the brain; in short, his conduct here has delighted M. Hochon, and he has won general respect. If your son can but remain a little while out of the way of the temptations of Paris, he will end by giving you every satisfaction."

Agathe, as she heard these comforting words, looked at her godmother with eyes full of happy tears.

Philippe played the good boy to his mother; he wanted to make use of her. This astute diplomatist did not want to have recourse to Césarine unless he found himself the object of Flore's aversion. He understood that Flore was an admirable tool, molded by Maxence, and to his uncle a habit of life; he meant to make use of her rather than of a Parisian, who might have made the old man marry her. Just as Fouché advised Louis XVIII. to lie between Napoleon's sheets rather than to grant the Charter, Philippe would have liked to lie quietly between Gilet's sheets. Still, he did not wish to cast a slur on the reputation he had just made in the province. Now, to carry on Max's relations with La Rabouilleuse would be as odious on his part as on the woman's. He might, without discredit, live under his uncle's roof and at his uncle's expense, in consideration of his relationship; but he could have nothing to say to Flore unless she were rehabilitated. In the meshes of these difficulties, the admirable plan occurred to him of making La Rabouilleuse his aunt. So, with this scheme unrevealed, he begged his mother to go to see the woman and show her some affection, treating her as a sister-in-law.

" I confess, my dear mother," said he, with a sanctimonious air, and looking at M. and Mme. Hochon, who had come to sit with their dear Agathe, " that my uncle's way of life is unseemly; he has only to legalize matters to win the respect of the town for Mlle. Brazier. Would it not be better for her to be Mme. Rouget than the housekeeper-mistress of an old bachelor? Is it not a simpler matter to acquire legal rights by marriage than to try to oust a family of legitimate heirs?

—If you, M. Hochon, or some worthy priest, would speak of this affair, it would put an end to the scandal that offends respectable people. Then Mlle. Brazier would be made happy by finding herself welcomed by you as a sister and by me as an aunt."

Next day Mme. Hochon and Agathe stood by Mlle. Flore Brazier's bedside, where they set forth to the invalid and to Rouget all Philippe's admirable sentiments. The colonel was lauded throughout the town as a man of lofty and excellent character, especially in his conduct with regard to Flore. For a whole month the advantages to be derived from her marriage with old Rouget were impressed on Flore by Père Goddet, her doctor,—a powerful influence over the mind of a patient—by good Mme. Hochon speaking in behalf of religion, and by the gentle and pious Agathe.

Then when, fascinated by the idea of being Mme. Rouget and a respectable and respected citizen's wife, she was only eager to be well and celebrate the wedding, it was not difficult to make her understand that she could not become one of the old family of Rouget by turning Philippe out of doors.

"And, after all," said old Goddet, "is it not to him that you owe this high preferment? Max would never have allowed you to marry Père Rouget. And then," he whispered in her ear, "if you have children, will not Max be avenged? The Bridaus will get nothing."

Two months after the fatal event, in February 1823, the invalid, by the advice of all about her, and implored by Rouget, received Philippe, whose scar made her weep, but whose manner to her, softened almost to affection, soothed her greatly. By Philippe's desire he was left alone with his future aunt.

"My dear girl," said the soldier, "I, from the first, have advised that you should marry my uncle; and if you consent, it can be done as soon as you are recovered——"

"So I am told," said she.

"It is only natural that as circumstances compelled me to do you an injury, I want to do you as much good as possible. A fortune, a position, and a family are worth more than you have lost. At my uncle's death you would not long have been that fellow's wife, for I have heard from his friends that he had no happy lot in store for you! Look here, my dear child, let us understand each other. We will all live happily. You are to be my aunt—nothing but my aunt.

"You must take care that my uncle does not forget me in his will; on my part, you shall see how I will have you provided for in the settlements. Keep calm, think it over; we will speak of it again. As you see, the most sensible people, all the town, advise you to abandon an illegal position; and nobody objects to your seeing me. Everyone understands that in life sentiment must give way to interest. You will be handsomer than ever on your marriage day. Your illness, by leaving you pale, has given you a distinguished air. If my uncle were not so desperately in love with you, on my honor," said he, rising and kissing her hand, "you would be the wife of Colonel Bridau."

Philippe went away, leaving this last speech in Flore's mind to arouse a vague idea of revenge, which smiled on the woman, who was almost happy at having seen this terrible personage at her feet. Philippe had just played, in little, the scene that Richard III. plays with the queen he has lately made a widow. The upshot of the scene shows that interest wrapped up in feeling strikes very deeply into the heart, and dispels the most genuine grief. This is how, in private life, Nature allows herself to accomplish what in works of genius is a master-stroke of art; interest is the means by which she works, the genius of money.

Thus, in the beginning of April 1823, Jean-Jacques Rouget's room presented the spectacle of a magnificent dinner in honor of the signing of a marriage-contract between Mlle. Flore Brazier and the old bachelor. No one was at all surprised. The guests were M. Héron; the four witnesses—MM. Mignonnet, Carpentier, Hochon, and the elder Goddet; the Maire and the parish priest; Agathe Bridau, Mme. Hochon, and her friend Mme. Borniche, that is to say, the two old women who were authoritative in Issoudun. And the bride was keenly alive to this concession, won for her by Philippe, the ladies regarding it as a mark of protection needed by a penitent damsel. Flore was dazzlingly beautiful. The Curé, who had for a fortnight been catechizing the ignorant Rabouilleuse, was to give her next morning her first communion.

This wedding was the subject of the following article, published in the *Journal du Cher* at Bourges, and in the *Journal de l'Indre* at Châteauroux:—

"*Issoudun.*

"The religious movement is making progress in Le Berry. All the friends of the Church and respectable people in this town collected yesterday to witness a ceremony, by which one of the chief landowners in this part of the country put an end to a scandalous state of affairs dating from a time when religion was a dead letter in these parts. This issue, due to the enlightened zeal of the ecclesiastics of this town, will, we hope, find imitators, and put an end to these discreditable unsanctified unions, begun at the most disastrous period of the Revolutionary misrule.

"One thing is noteworthy in the case of which we write: it was brought about by the urgency of a colonel of the Imperial Army, quartered in our town by a sentence of the Supreme Court, who, by this marriage, may forfeit his uncle's fortune. Such disinterestedness is rare enough in our day to deserve to be made public."

Under the contract Rouget settled on Flore a sum of a hundred thousand francs, and an annuity in case of widowhood of thirty thousand francs. After the wedding, which was splendid, Agathe went back to Paris, the happiest of mothers, and there gave to Joseph and Desroches what she called the good news.

"Your son is much too deep not to lay hands on her inheritance," replied the attorney, when he had heard Mme. Bridau out. "And you and your poor Joseph will never have a farthing of your brother's fortune."

"You will always be the same—you and Joseph—always unjust to that poor boy," said his mother. "His conduct before the Court was that of a great politician. He succeeded in saving a great many heads!—Philippe's errors are the outcome of want of occupation; his great powers lie idle; but he has learnt how injurious faults of conduct must be to a man who wants to rise in the world, and he has ambition, I am sure; nor am I the only person who believes in his future. M. Hochon is firmly convinced that Philippe has a high destiny."

"Oh, yes," said Desroches, "if he chooses to apply his utterly perverse intelligence to making a fortune he will succeed, for he is capable of anything, and men of that stamp get on fast."

"And why should he not succeed by honest means?" said Mme. Bridau.

"You will see," answered Desroches. "Lucky or unlucky, Philippe will always be the man of the Rue Mazarine, the murderer of Mme. Descoings, the household thief. But be easy; he will seem perfectly honest in the eyes of the world."

On the day after the marriage Philippe took Mme. Rouget by the arm, when his uncle had gone upstairs to dress, for the couple had come down to breakfast, Flore in a wrapper, and the old man in his dressing-gown.

"Aunt-in-law," said he, leading her into a window recess, "you are now a member of the family. Thanks to me, the lawyers have taken care of you. Now come! no nonsense. I mean to play the game with the cards on the table. I know all the tricks you could play me, and I shall keep a sharper eye on you than any duenna. As to what goes on in the house, I shall sit there, by Heaven! like a spider in the middle of its web.—Now this will show you that while you were in bed, unable to move hand or foot, I could have had you turned out of doors without a sou. Read this."

And he held out to Flore the following letter:—

"MY DEAR BOY,—Florentine, who has at last come out at the Opera, in the new house, in a *pas de trois* with Mariette and Tullia, has never forgotten you, any more than Florine, who has finally thrown over Lousteau and taken up with Nathan. These two sly-boots have found you the sweetest creature in the world, a child of seventeen, as pretty as an

English girl, as prim as a lady at her tricks, as cunning as Desroches, as trustworthy as Godeschal; and Mariette has rigged her out, and wishes you good luck. There is no woman living who could hold her own against this angel, concealing a demon; she will be able to play any part, to get round your uncle, and make him crazy with love. She has the heavenly expression that poor Coralie had; she can cry, she has a voice that would extract a thousand-franc note from a heart of the hardest granite, and the hussy swigs down champagne with the best of us. She is a jewel of a girl; she is under obligations to Mariette, and is anxious to make some return. After gulping down the fortunes of two Englishmen, one Russian, and a Roman prince, Mlle. Esther is just now in very low water. If you give her ten thousand francs, she will be content. She said just now, 'Well, I have never had a citizen to wheedle; it will be practice for me!' Finot knows her well, Bixiou, Des Lepeaulx, all our set, in fact. If there were any fortunes left in France, she would be the most famous courtesan of modern times.

"My style smacks of Nathan, Bixiou, and Finot, who are playing the fool with the above-named Esther, in the most splendid rooms you can imagine, which have just been arranged *à la Florine* by old Lord Dudley, Marsay's real father, whom the clever little actress has quite bowled over, thanks to the costume of her new part. Tullia is still with the Duc de Rhétoré, Mariette with the Duc de Maufrigneuse, so they between them can get you a ticket-of-leave on the King's fête day. Try to have your uncle safe under the daisies by next Saint-Louis' Day, come back with the fortune, and spend some of it with Esther and your old friends, who sign in a body to remind you of their existence.

"NATHAN, FLORINE, BIXIOU, FINOT, MARIETTE,
"FLORENTINE, GIROUDEAU, TULLIA."

This letter quivered in Mme. Rouget's hands in a way that betrayed her agitation of mind and body. The aunt dared not look at the nephew, who fixed on her a pair of eyes full of terrible expression.

"I have full confidence in you," said he. "You see that I have; but I must have something in return. I made you my aunt in order to marry you some day. You are worth quite as much as Esther to my uncle. A year hence we must go to Paris, the only place where beauty can live. You will enjoy yourself rather more than you do here, for it is a perpetual carnival. I shall rejoin the army, and be made a general, and you will be a great lady. That is your future; work it out.—But I must have a pledge of our alliance. Within one month you must procure for me my uncle's power of attorney under the pretext of relieving you and him alike of the cares of money. One month after I must have a special power to transfer his stock. When once the securities are in my name, we shall have an equal interest in marrying each other some day. All that, my fair aunt, is plain and precise. There must be no ambiguity between you and me. I may marry my aunt-in-law after a year's widowhood, whereas I could not marry a disreputable nobody."

He left the room without awaiting her answer. When, an hour later, Védie came in to clear away the breakfast, she found her mistress pale and in a perspiration in spite of the cool season. Flore was feeling like a woman who has fallen to the bottom of a precipice; she saw nothing before her but blackness, and on that blackness, as in some dark beyond, flitted monstrous things, indistinctly seen, and filling her with terror. She felt the damp chill of these caverns. She was instinctively afraid of this man, and nevertheless a voice cried to her that she deserved to have him for her master. She could not struggle against fate; Flore Brazier, for decency's sake, had rooms in Père Rouget's house, but Mme. Rouget belonged to her husband, and so was bereft of the inestimable independence that a housekeeper-mistress preserves.

In this dreadful position she hoped she might have a child; but in the last five years Jean-Jacques had become absolutely decrepit. This marriage was to the poor old man what Louis XII.'s second marriage was to him. Again, the constant watchfulness of such a man as Philippe, who had nothing to do, for he gave up his employment, made any kind of vengeance impossible. Benjamin was an innocent but devoted spy. La Védie quaked in Philippe's presence. Flore was alone and helpless. To crown all, she was afraid of death; without knowing how Philippe could make away with her she guessed that the suspicion of a coming heir would be her death-warrant; the sound of that voice, the covert flash of that gambler's eye, the soldier's slightest movement—treating her as he did with the politest brutality—made her shudder. As to the power of attorney demanded by the ferocious colonel, who was a hero in the eyes of Issoudun, he had it as soon as he asked for it; for Flore fell under his dominion as France had fallen under that of Napoleon.

Rouget meanwhile, like a moth whose feet are caught in the burning wax of a taper, was fast wasting his remaining strength; and his nephew, looking on at this lingering death, was as unmoved as the diplomatists who, in 1814, watched the convulsions of Imperial France.

Philippe, who had no belief in Napoleon II., then wrote the following letter to the War Minister, and Mariette got it delivered by the Duc de Maufrigneuse:—

"MONSEIGNEUR,—

"Napoleon no longer lives. I remained faithful to him after taking the oath; but now I am at liberty to offer my services to his Majesty. If your Excellency would condescend to explain my conduct to his Majesty, the King will understand that it has conformed to the laws of honor, if not to those of the realm. The King, who thought it but natural that his aide-de-camp, General Rapp, should mourn for his former master, will no doubt be equally indulgent to me. Napoleon was my benefactor.

"I therefore entreat your Excellency to take into consideration my request for employment with my full rank, assuring you of my entire submission. This will show you, monseigneur, that the King will find me the most faithful of his subjects.

"Accept, I beg, the expression of respect with which I have the honor to remain

"Your Excellency's
"Most obedient and most humble servant,
"PHILIPPE BRIDAU.

"Formerly Major of Brigade in the Dragoon Guards; Officer of the Legion of Honor, under surveillance of the State Police at Issoudun."

With this letter was a request for permission to visit Paris on urgent private affairs, supported by Mouilleron, who annexed letters from the Maire, the Sous-préfet, and the superintendent of police at Issoudun, who all spoke in praise of Philippe, and dwelt on the article written on the occasion of his uncle's marriage.

A fortnight later, at the time when the picture exhibition was opened, Philippe received the permit he had asked for, and a letter, in which the War Minister informed him that, by the King's orders, he was, as a first favor, reinstated on the Army List as lieutenant-colonel.

Philippe moved to Paris with his aunt and old Rouget, whom he carried off to the treasury three days after their arrival to sign the transfer of the State bond, which thus became his own property. The feeble old man and La Rabouilleuse were flung by their nephew into frantic dissipations and the dangerous company of indefatigable actresses, journalists, artists, and women of equivocal character, among whom Philippe had spent his youth, and where old Rouget found Rabouilleuses enough to be the death of him. Giroudeau undertook that Père Rouget should die the happy death made famous since, it is said, by a Marshal of France. Lolotte, one of the handsomest "walking ladies" at the Opera, was Rouget's bewitching assassin. The old man died after a splendid supper given by Florentine; and whether the supper or Mlle. Lolotte finished off the old provincial, it is difficult to decide. Lolotte ascribed his death to a slice of *pâté de foie gras;* and as the Strasbourg pie could make no rejoinder, it is taken as proved that the good man died of indigestion.

Mme. Rouget found herself in her element in this excessively free-and-easy society; but Philippe gave her Mariette for a chaperon, and she did not allow the widow to play the fool, though her mourning was lightened by some flirtations.

In October 1823 Philippe, armed with a power of attorney from his aunt, returned to Issoudun to wind up his uncle's estate, a business quickly accomplished, for in March 1824 he was in Paris with sixteen hundred thousand francs, the net value in hard cash of his deceased uncle's estate, not inclusive of the valuable pictures, which had never been moved from old Hochon's keeping. Philippe banked his money with Mongenod & Son, the house in which young Baruch Borniche had found a berth, and of whose solvency and honesty old Hochon had given a satisfactory report. This firm took the sixteen hundred thousand francs at six per cent. per annum, on condition of three months' notice being given previous to withdrawal of the capital.

One fine day Philippe went to request his mother's presence at his marriage, the witnesses being Giroudeau, Finot, Nathan, and Bixiou. By the marriage contract Mme. Rouget, widow, settled all her possessions on her husband in the event of her dying childless. There were no letters of formal announcement, no party, no display, for Philippe had his own schemes; he took rooms for his wife in the Rue Saint-Georges, an apartment sold ready furnished by Lolotte, which Mme. Bridau the younger thought delightful, but where her husband rarely set foot.

Without letting anybody know what he was doing, Philippe purchased for two hundred and fifty thousand francs a house in the Rue de Clichy, at a time when no one suspected the value which property in that part of the town would attain —a magnificent mansion, for which he paid fifty thousand crowns down, the rest to be paid off in two years. He spent enormous sums on the interior and in furnishing it, devoting to this his whole income for two years. The splendid pictures, cleaned and restored, and valued at three hundred thousand francs, were displayed to full advantage.

The accession of Charles X. had raised to greater favor than ever the Duc de Chaulieu's family; and his eldest son, the Duc de Rhétoré, often met Philippe at Tullia's. In the person of Charles X. the elder branch of the Bourbons supposed itself to be definitely seated on the throne, and it followed the advice given at an earlier time by Marshal

Gouvion Saint-Cyr to secure the attachment of the soldiers of the Empire. Philippe, who, no doubt, gave valuable information as to the conspiracies of 1820 and 1822, was appointed lieutenant-colonel in the Duc de Maufrigneuse's regiment. This delightful grand gentleman felt himself under an obligation to help the man who had robbed him of Mariette. The *corps de ballet* were not without some knowledge of this promotion.

It had, moreover, been decided by the wisdom of Charles X.'s privy council that his Royal Highness the Dauphin should assume a slight touch of Liberalism. Hence the great Philippe, now the satellite of the Duc de Maufrigneuse, was presented not only to the Dauphin, but also to the Dauphiness, who was not ill disposed towards blunt manners and military men with a character for fidelity. Philippe quite appreciated the Dauphin's part, and he took advantage of the first performance of this assumed Liberalism to get himself appointed aid-de-camp to a marshal in favor at Court.

In January 1827 Philippe, transferred to the King's Body-guard as lieutenant-colonel of the regiment to which the Duc de Maufrigneuse had been appointed, solicited the honor of being allowed to assume a title. Under the Restoration ennoblement became almost a right of the commoners who were promoted to the Guards. Colonel Bridau, having just bought the estate of Brambourg, craved permission to entail the property with the title of Count. This favor he obtained by taking advantage of his connections in the highest circles, appearing with a gorgeous display of carriages and liveries, in short, with the air and style of a lord.

No sooner did Philippe, lieutenant-colonel of the most dashing cavalry regiment of the Guards, see his name in the Army List as Count de Brambourg than he took to hanging about the house of Lieutenant-General the Comte de Soulanges, and paying attention to his youngest daughter Mlle. Amélie de Soulanges. The insatiable Philippe, supported by the mistresses of the most influential men, next craved the honor of being made aid-de-camp to Monseigneur the Dauphin. He had the audacity to say to the Dauphiness that "an old officer, wounded in many a battle and familiar with war on a grand scale, might on occasion be of use to his Royal Highness."

Philippe, who could take the tone of any servility, was, in these high circles, exactly what he ought to be, just as he had been a second Mignonnet at Issoudun. He lived in the greatest style, gave splendid entertainments and dinners, admitting to his house none of his old friends whose position might compromise his prospects. Thus he was pitiless to the companions of his debaucheries. He refused point-blank when Bixiou asked him to speak a word in favor of Giroudeau, who wished to rejoin the service when Florentine threw him over.

"He cannot behave himself," said Philippe.

"So that was what he said of me!" cried Giroudeau. "And I relieved him of his uncle!"

"We will serve him out," said Bixiou.

Philippe wanted to marry Mlle. Amélie de Soulanges, to be made a general, and to have the command of a regiment of the Body-guard. He asked for so much that, to keep him quiet, he was made Commander of the Legion of Honor, and of the Order of Saint-Louis.

One evening Agathe and Joseph, walking homewards in the rain, saw Philippe drive past in uniform, covered with Orders; he was lounging in a corner of his handsome *coupé*, lined with yellow silk, and with a coat-of-arms on the panel surmounted by a count's coronet, on his way to an entertainment at the Élysée-Bourbon; he splashed his mother and brother, recognizing them with a patronizing nod.

"He is going it; he is going it! the old rogue!" said Joseph to his mother. "At the same time he might send us something better than the mud in our faces."

"He is in such a splendid position, so far above us, that we must not owe him a grudge if he forgets us," said Mme. Bridau. "To climb so steep a hill, he must have so many obligations to fulfill, so many sacrifices to make, that he may well be unable to come to see us even while thinking of us."

"My dear fellow," said the Duc de Maufrigneuse one evening to the new Comte de Brambourg, "I am sure that your proposal will be taken in good part; but to marry Mlle. Amélie de Soulanges you must be a free man. What have you done with your wife?"

"My wife?" said Philippe, with a gesture, a look, an accent such as Frédéric Lemaître afterwards conceived of in one of his most terrible parts. "Alas! I have the melancholy certainty of losing her. She has not a week to live. Ah! my dear duke, you do not know what it is to have married beneath you! A woman who had been a cook, who has the tastes of a cook, and who brings dishonor on me,—I am much to be pitied. But I have had the honor of explaining the situation to Madame the Dauphiness; the necessity arose some time since for saving a million of francs, which my uncle had left by will to this creature. Happily, my wife has taken to drams; at her death I become the possessor of a million in the hands of Messrs. Mongenod; I have more than thirty thousand francs in the five per cents.; and my estate—entailed—which brings in forty thousand francs a year. If, as everything leads us to suppose, M. de Soulanges receives a marshal's baton, I, with the title of Comte de Brambourg, am in a position to become general and a peer of France. It will be a fitting retirement for an aid-de-camp to the Dauphin."

After the Salon of 1823 the painter to the King, one of the kindest-hearted men of his day, had obtained for Joseph's mother a lottery-ticket office in the neighborhood of the Halle. Subsequently Agathe was fortunate enough to be able to exchange, without paying any premium, with the holder of a similar office in the Rue de Seine, in a house where Joseph took a studio. The widow now, in her turn, employed a clerk, and cost her son nothing. Still, in 1828, though at the head of a very good lottery office, which she owed to Joseph's fame, Mme. Bridau did not yet believe in his glory—which, indeed, was hotly disputed, as all true glory is. The great painter, always struggling with his passions, wanted much; he could not earn enough to keep up the luxury required by his position in society, and by his distinguished eminence in the younger school. Though he had warm adherents in his friends of the Art Society, and in Mlle. des Touches, he did not appeal to the Philistine. This creature, in whose hands the money lies nowadays, never loosens his purse-strings for talent that can be questioned; and Joseph saw the classicists and the Institute arrayed against him, with critics who waited on these two powers. Besides, the Comte de Brambourg affected amazement when anyone spoke to him of Joseph. So the courageous artist, though upheld by Gros and Gérard, who secured him the Cross during the Salon of 1827, had few commissions. If the Minister of the Interior and the Royal Establishments were little inclined to purchase his large pictures, the dealers and wealthy foreigners still less cared to be burdened with them. Besides, as we know, Joseph allows himself to be rather too much led away by fancy, and the result is an inequality of work, of which his enemies take advantage to dispute his talent.

"Painting on the heroic scale is in a bad way," said his friend Pierre Grassou, as he turned out daubs to the taste of the Philistines, whose rooms were ill suited to large canvases.

"What you want is a cathedral to decorate," Schinner would say, "then you would reduce criticism to silence by some great work."

All these speeches, which frightened good Agathe, con firmed her first opinion of Joseph and Philippe. Facts were on the side of the woman, who was still so entirely provincial; was not Philippe, her favorite child, at last the great man of the family? She looked on the sins of the boy's youth as the aberrations of genius. Joseph, whose efforts left her unmoved—for she saw too much of them in their early state to admire them when finished—seemed to her no further forward in 1828 than in 1816. Poor Joseph owed money; he was crushed under the weight of debt; he had taken up a thankless calling that brought no returns. In short, Agathe could not imagine why an Order should have been bestowed on Joseph.

Philippe, with strength enough never to go to the gaming table, and invited to *Madame's* entertainments, the splendid colonel, who at reviews and in processions rode past in a gorgeous uniform, gaudy with two red ribbons, realized Agathe's maternal dreams. One day at a public ceremonial Philippe had wiped out the odious picture of his poverty on the Quai de l'École, by passing his mother on the same spot, preceding the Dauphin, with his aigrette, and his shako, and his pelisse splendid with gold-lace and fur. While to the artist she had become a sort of devoted Gray Sister, Agathe no longer felt herself a mother excepting to the dashing aid-de-camp to his Royal Highness Monseigneur the Dauphin. In her pride of Philippe she could have believed that she owed her easier means to him, forgetting that the lottery office had come to her through Joseph.

One day Agathe saw her poor artist so much worried by the heavy total of his colorman's bill, that, while cursing the arts, she longed to release him from his debts. The poor woman, who kept house on the proceeds of her lottery tickets, took good care never to ask Joseph for a farthing. Thus, she had no money; but she trusted to Philippe's kind heart and purse. For three years, from day to day, she had expected a visit from her son; she pictured him bringing her an enormous sum, and rejoiced in advance over the delight of giving it to Joseph, whose opinion of Philippe remained unchanged, as did that of Desroches.

So, without Joseph's knowledge, she wrote to Philippe the following letter:—

"To M. le Comte de Brambourg.

"My dear Philippe,—For five years you have never given your mother the smallest thought. That is not kind. You ought to remember the past, if only for the sake of your excellent brother. Joseph now is in need of money, while you are swimming in opulence; he works, while you rush from party to party. You possess the whole of my brother's fortune. In short, from what little Borniche tells me, you have two hundred thousand francs a year. Well, then, come and see Joseph. In the course of your visit leave in the death's-head a score of thousand-franc notes. You owe us that much, Philippe; your brother will nevertheless feel himself much obliged to you, to say nothing of the pleasure you will give your mother.

"AGATHE BRIDAU *née* ROUGET."

Two days after the maid brought up to the studio, where poor Agathe had just breakfasted with Joseph, the following dreadful note:—

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—I cannot marry Mlle. Amélie de Soulanges with a handful of walnut shells, when behind the name of Comte de Brambourg there lies that of your son

"PHILIPPE BRIDAU."

As she sank almost fainting on the studio sofa, Agathe dropped the letter. The slight rustle of the paper as it fell, and Agathe's low but terrible cry, startled Joseph, who was painting away vehemently on a sketch. He looked round the edge of his canvas to see what was happening. Seeing his mother lying there, the painter put down his palette and brushes, and flew to raise her, almost a corpse. He took Agathe in his arms, carried her on to the bed in her room, and sent the maid to fetch his friend Bianchon. As soon as Joseph could question his mother, she confessed her letter to Philippe and his reply to her. The artist went to pick up the note, of which the concise brutality had broken the frail heart of the poor mother by overturning the towering edifice raised by her maternal preference.

Joseph came back to his mother's bedside, and had the wit to be silent. He never mentioned his brother during the three weeks while his poor mother lay, not ill indeed, but dying. Indeed, Bianchon, who came every day and attended the poor woman with the devotion of a true friend, told Joseph the truth on the first day.

"At her age," said he, "and in the position in which your mother will find herself, we must only try to make death as easy to her as possible."

Agathe, indeed, felt herself so surely called to God, that on the very next day she begged the religious care of old Abbé Loraux, her spiritual director for two-and-twenty years. As soon as she was alone with him, after pouring all her sorrow into his heart, she repeated what she had said to her godmother, what she was constantly saying—

"How have I angered God? Do I not love Him with all my soul? Have I not walked in the way of salvation? What is my sin? And if I am so guilty of an error I am unconscious of, have I time now to repair it?"

"No," said the old man in a mild voice. "Alas! your life seems blameless, and your soul unspotted; but God's eye, poor suffering woman, is more penetrating than that of His ministers. I myself see clearly now, but too late—for you have blinded me till now."

As she heard this speech, uttered by lips from which hitherto no words but those of peace and honey had fallen for her, Agathe sat up in bed, with wide eyes full of terror and distress.

"Speak, speak!" she cried.

"Be comforted," said the old priest. "From the manner of your punishment you may look for forgiveness. God is severe in this world only on His chosen few. Woe unto those whose misdeeds find favoring chances; they will be kneaded again in human form till they in their turn are sternly punished for mere mistakes and ripen into food for heaven. Your life, my daughter, has been one long mistake. You fell into the pit you dug for yourself, for we always fail on the side we ourselves have weakened. You gave all your heart to a wretch in whom you saw your glory, and you have misprized the child who is your true glory. Your injustice has been so deep that you have not observed this striking contrast; your means of living even have come to you from Joseph, while your other son has constantly plundered you. Your poorer son, who loves you without the reward of equal tenderness, gives you your daily bread; while the rich man, who has never cared for you, and who scorns you, longs for your death."

"Oh! for that matter——" she put in.

"Yes," the priest went on, "your humble condition interferes with the schemes of his pride.—As a mother, this is your crime! As a woman, your sufferings and sorrows promise you the joy and peace of the Lord. Your son Joseph is so noble, that his affection has never been diminished by the injustice of your favoritism; love him as he deserves. Give him your whole heart during these last days. And pray for him—I will go and pray for you."

The mother's eyes, unsealed by so firm a hand, looked back with a retrospective glance on the whole of her past life. Enlightened by this sudden flash, she perceived the involuntary wrong she had done, and melted into tears. The old priest was so much moved by the spectacle of an erring and repentant creature, sinning solely by ignorance, that he left the room not to betray his compassion.

About two hours after the confessor's departure, Joseph came into his mother's room. He had been to a friend to borrow the necessary money to pay his most pressing debts, and he crept in on tiptoe, believing that his mother was asleep. He then sat down in an armchair, without being seen by the sick woman.

A sob, broken by the words, "Will he ever forgive me?" made Joseph start up with the cold perspiration down his back, for he thought his mother was in the delirium that precedes death.

"What is the matter, mother?" he cried, terrified to see her eyes red with weeping and her woe-stricken face.

"Oh, Joseph! can you forgive me, my child?" cried she.

"What do you mean?" asked the artist.

"I have not loved you as you deserved——"

"What a preposterous idea!" cried he. "You have not loved me——? Have we not lived together these seven years? Have you not kept house for me for seven years? Do I not see you every day? Do I not hear your voice? Are you not the gentle and indulgent sharer of my poverty?—You do not understand painting! Well, but that is not to be taught. And only yesterday I was saying to Grassou, 'The thing that comforts me in all my struggles is that I have such a good mother; she is just what an artist's wife ought to be; she takes care of everything; she looks after all my creature comforts without making any fuss——'"

"No, Joseph, no. You have loved me, and I have never returned you tenderness for tenderness. Oh! how I wish I might live! . . . Give me your hand."

Agathe took her son's hand, kissed and held it to her heart, gazing at him for a long time, her blue eyes radiant with the affection she had hitherto always kept for Philippe. The painter, who had studied expression, was so struck by the change, and saw so plainly that his mother's heart had opened to him, that he put his arms round her and held her clasped for some seconds, saying like a crazy creature, "Oh, mother, mother!"

"Ah, I feel I am forgiven!" said she. "God must surely ratify a son's forgiveness of his mother."

"You must keep calm; do not worry yourself. It is all over now. I feel that I am enough loved at this moment for all the past," cried Joseph, laying his mother gently on the pillows.

During a fortnight, while life and death were contending for the saintly creature, she had for Joseph such looks, such impulses of soul and expressions of gesture, as revealed love so perfect that a whole life seemed contained in each outburst. The mother now thought only of her son; she counted herself as nothing, and, upheld by love, no longer felt her sufferings. She made artless speeches like a child's. D'Arthez, Michel Chrestien, Fulgence Ridal, Pierre Grassou, and Bianchon came to keep Joseph company, and often held discussions in an undertone in the sick woman's room.

"Oh! how I wish I knew what was meant by color!" she exclaimed one evening when she heard them talking about a picture.

Joseph's conduct on his part was sublime towards his mother; he scarcely left her room; he cherished Agathe in his heart; he responded to her tenderness with equal tenderness. It was to the painter's friends one of those beautiful spectacles which can never be forgotten. These men, who all were examples of the union of real talent and noble character, were for Joseph and his mother all that they ought to be—angels who prayed with him and wept with him—not that they said prayers or shed tears, but they were one with him in thought and act. Joseph, an artist as noble in feeling as in gifts, read in certain of his mother's looks a longing hidden deep in her heart; and he said one day to d'Arthez, "She was too fond of that robber Philippe not to want to see him again before she dies . . ."

Joseph requested Bixiou, who was a figure in the Bohemian world which Philippe would occasionally frequent, to make that infamous parvenu promise to assume, out of pity, some show of affection, so as to wrap the poor mother's heart in a shroud graced by illusion. Bixiou, as a student of human nature, a misanthropic scoffer, was ready and willing to undertake such a mission. When he had explained Agathe's situation to the Comte de Brambourg, who received him in a bedroom hung with yellow silk damask, the colonel burst out laughing—

"What the devil do you want me to do there?" cried he. "The only service the good woman can do me is to kick the bucket as soon as possible, for she would cut a bad figure at my wedding with Mlle. de Soulanges. The less family I have to show, the better for me! As you may well suppose, I only wish I could bury the name of Bridau under all the tombstones in Père-Lachaise.

"My brother ruins me by proclaiming my real name to the world. But you, at any rate, are too clever not to understand my position. Come, now—if you were to be elected deputy, you have a ready tongue of your own; you would be as much feared as Chauvelin, and you might be made Comte Bixiou, Director of the Beaux Arts. If you had achieved that, and if your grandmother Descoings were still alive, how would you like to have that good woman at your elbow—a woman like Mme. Saint-Léon? Would you offer her your arm in the Tuileries? Would you introduce her to the noble family you might seek to enter? By Heaven! I tell you, you would wish her six feet under ground, packed in a wrapper of lead.—Come, breakfast with me, and we will talk of something else. I am a parvenu, my dear fellow, and I know it. I do not mean to display my baby-clothes!—My son, now, will be luckier than I; he will be a fine gentleman. The rascal will wish me dead, and I quite expect it, or he will be no son of mine."

He rang the bell; a footman came in, to whom he said—

"My friend will breakfast with me. Send up something elegant."

"But the fashionable world would not see you in your mother's room," retorted Bixiou. "What would it cost you to pretend to love the poor woman for a few hours?"

"All my eye!" said Philippe, with a wink. "They have sent you. I am an old bird, and not to be caught with chaff. My mother wants to conjure me with her last breath to fork out something for Joseph! Thank you for nothing."

When Bixiou repeated this scene to Joseph, the poor painter felt chilled to the very soul.

"Does Philippe know that I am ill?" said Agathe in a lamentable voice the evening of the very day when Bixiou had given an account of his errand.

Joseph left the room choked with tears. The Abbé Loraux, who was at the patient's side, took her hand and pressed it as he replied, "Alas! my child, you have never had but one son."

On hearing these words, which she understood, Agathe had an attack that was the beginning of the end. She died twenty hours after. In the wanderings of her mind before death the words escaped her, "Whom does Philippe take after?"

Joseph alone followed his mother to the grave. Philippe had gone to Orleans on regimental business, scared from Paris by the following letter, addressed to him by Joseph as their mother breathed her last:—

"WRETCH,—My poor mother is dead of the shock your letter caused. Put on mourning. But pretend to be ill; I will not have her murderer to stand at my side by her coffin.

"JOSEPH B."

The painter, who had lost all heart for his painting, though his deep grief perhaps needed the sort of mechanical diversion that work brings with it, was surrounded by friends, who agreed among themselves not to leave him to solitude. Thus Bixiou, who loved Joseph as truly as a scoffer can love anyone, was one of a group of friends in Joseph's studio one day, a fortnight after the funeral. At this moment the maid bustled in, and handed to Joseph a letter, brought, as she said, by an old woman who would wait for the answer in the porter's lodge:—

"MONSIEUR,—Whom I do not venture to call my brother, I must apply to you, were it only by reason of the name I bear——"

Joseph turned the page, and looked at the signature at the end. These words, "Comtesse Flore de Brambourg," made his blood run chill, for he foresaw some fresh abomination of his brother's doing.

"That wretch," said he, "would outdevil the Devil! And *that* is a man of honor—*that* can hang a peck of tinsel on its breast—*that* spreads its tail at Court instead of being flogged at the cart's tail!—And this precious scoundrel is M. le Comte!"

"There are many like him," said Bixiou.

"And besides that, this Rabouilleuse deserves nothing from me," Joseph went on. "She is not worth a curse; she would have left me to have my head chopped off like a fowl without ever saying 'He is innocent.'"

As Joseph tossed away the letter, Bixiou nimbly caught it, and read it aloud:—

"—Is it becoming that Mme. la Comtesse de Brambourg, whatever her faults may be, should be sent to die in a hospital? If that is to be my fate, if that is the Count's wish and yours, so be it; but then, as you are a friend of Dr. Bianchon's, get his introduction to get me into a hospital. The woman who takes you this letter, monsieur, has been eleven days running to the Hôtel de Brambourg in the Rue de Clichy without being able to obtain any help from my husband. The state in which I am prevents my employing an attorney so as to obtain by law what is due to me and to die in peace. Indeed, nothing can save me; I know it. So if you will positively have nothing to say to your unhappy sister-in-law, give me money enough to enable me to put an end to my days; for your brother, I see, wishes my death, and always has wished it. Though he told me he knew three certain ways of killing a woman, I had not the wit to foresee the means he has taken.

"If so be you should honor me with a little assistance, and judge for yourself of the misery I am in, I am living in the Rue du Houssay, at the corner of the Rue Chantereine, on the fifth floor. If I do not pay my arrears of rent to-morrow, I must turn out. And where am I to go, monsieur? May I sign myself,

"Your sister-in-law,
"COMTESSE FLORE DE BRAMBOURG."

"What a foul pit of infamy!" said Joseph. "What is there behind it?"

"Have the woman up first; that will be a worthy preface to the story, no doubt," said Bixiou.

A minute after there appeared on the scene a woman whom Bixiou described as walking rags. She was, in fact, a mass of clothes and old gowns, one over another, bordered with mud from the weather, the whole mounted on thick legs and splay feet, with patched stockings and shoes, from which the water oozed through many cracks. To crown this mass of rubbish was such a head as Charlet has given to his sweepers, helmeted with a hideous bandanna, worn threadbare even in the creases.

"What is your name?" asked Joseph, while Bixiou sketched the woman as she stood, leaning on an umbrella of the year II. of the Republic.

"Mme. Gruget, at your service. I have drawed my dividends in my day, my little gentleman," said she to Bixiou, whose covert smile offended her. "If my pore girl hadn't been so unlucky as to be too fond of a man, I shouldn't look so as you see me. She made a hole in the water, saving your presence, my pore Ida. And then I was fool enough to go in for lottery tickets, four numbers, and sticking to them, and that is why at seventy years old, my good monsieur, I am sick-nurse at ten sous a day and my food——"

"But not your clothes," said Bixiou. "My grandmother dressed herself, besides keeping up a snug little ternion."

"But out of my ten sous I have to pay for a furnished room . . ."

"And what has she got—this lady you are nursing?"

"She has got nothing, monsieur, by way of money, I mean; for she has got some complaint that frightens the doctors.—She owes me sixty days' pay, and that is why I stay with her. Her husband, who is a count—for she is a countess—will pay the bill, no doubt, when she is dead, and counting on that, I have lent her all I had . . . But I have nothing left, and I have put everything up the spout. She owes me forty-seven francs and twelve sous, besides the thirty francs wages, and as she wants to choke herself off with charcoal: 'That is not right,' says I—more by token I told the woman in the lodge to keep an eye on her while I was out, for she is capable of throwing herself out of window."

"But what is the matter with her?" said Joseph.

"Well, sir, the doctor came from the Sisters; but as to what is the matter," said Mme. Gruget, with a prudish air—"he said she must go to the hospital—and she wouldn't get over it."

"We will go and see about it," said Bixiou.

"Here," said Joseph, "here are ten francs."

After putting his hand into the famous death's-head and taking out all his change, the painter walked to the Rue Mazarine, where he took a hackney cab and went off to Bianchon, whom he fortunately found at home, while Bixiou set out for the Rue de Bussy to fetch their friend Desroches. The four friends met an hour after in the Rue du Houssay.

"That Mephistopheles on horseback called Philippe Bridau," said Bixiou to his three friends as they climbed the stairs, "has steered his bark in a cunning way to get rid of his wife. Our friend Lousteau, as you know, only too glad to get a thousand-franc note every month from Philippe, kept Mme. Bridau in the company of Florine, Mariette, Tullia, and La Val-Noble. As soon as Philippe saw his Rabouilleuse accustomed to dress and expensive pleasures, he gave her no more money, but left her to make it—you may imagine how. Thus by the end of eighteen months Philippe left his wife to sink a little lower, from quarter to quarter; and at last, by the help of a splendid young subaltern, he suggested to her a taste for dram-drinking. As he rose his wife sank, and the Countess is now in the kennel. The woman born in the fields is hard to kill; I do not know how Philippe set to work to get rid of her. I am curious to study this little drama, for I owe the fellow a revenge. Alas! my friends," Bixiou went on, in a tone that left his three companions doubtful whether he spoke in joke or in earnest, "to get rid of a man you have only to inoculate him with a vice.

"'She loved balls too well and that was her death,' said Victor Hugo. There you are. My grandmother loved lottery gambling; Père Rouget loved a petticoat, and Lolotte was the death of him! Mme. Bridau, poor creature, loved Philippe, and by Philippe she has perished. Oh, Vice! Vice! —My friends, do you know what vice is? It is the Bonneau of death."

"Then you will die of a jest!" said Desroches, smiling at Bixiou.

Above the fourth floor the young men mounted one of those upright stairways like ladders which lead up to the attics of many houses in Paris. Though Joseph, who had seen Flore so handsome, was prepared for a dreadful contrast, he could not conceive of the hideous spectacle that presented itself to his artistic gaze. Under the sharp slope of a garret, with no paper on the walls, and on a camp-bed, with a meager mattress stuffed perhaps with flock, the three men saw a woman as green as a body two days drowned, and as emaciated as a consumptive patient within two hours of death. This malodorous carcass wore a common checked handkerchief bound round a head bereft of hair. The caverns of her hollow eyes were red, and the lids like the skin that lines an eggshell. As to the form that had once been so beautiful, it was a squalid skeleton.

On seeing her visitors, Flore drew across her bosom a rag of muslin that had probably been a window-blind, for it was edged with rust from the iron rod. The furniture consisted of two chairs, a wretched chest of drawers, on which a tallow candle was set in a potato, some dishes strewn on the floor, and an earthen fire-pot in the corner of an otherwise empty hearth. Bixiou saw the remains of the half-quire of paper purchased at the grocer's for the letter which the two women had no doubt concocted between them. The word loathsome is but a positive degree for which there is no superlative to express the effect produced by this abject scene.

When the dying woman saw Joseph, two large tears fell down her cheeks.

"She can still weep," said Bixiou. "A strange sight indeed—tears flowing from a bag of dominoes. It explains Moses's miracle."

"Is not she dried up!" cried Joseph.

"By the fires of repentance," said Flore. "I can have no priest, I have nothing, not even a crucifix to see the Image of God. Oh! monsieur," she went on, uplifting arms like two carved wooden sticks, "I have been very wicked, but God never punished anyone as He has punished me! Philippe killed Max, who had bidden me to do horrible things, and now he is killing me too. God is using him as a scourge for me! Behave yourself well, for we all have our Philippe."

"Leave me alone with her," said Bianchon; "I want to find out if her complaint is curable."

"If she can be cured, Philippe Bridau will be mad with rage," said Desroches. "I will have an affidavit prepared as to the state his wife is in; he has not taken any steps against her for adultery; she has all her conjugal rights; he must face the scandal of a trial. First of all, we will have Mme. la Comtesse conveyed to Dr. Dubois's Home for the Sick in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis; she will there be nursed in luxury. Then I shall call upon the Count for reinstatement under her husband's roof."

"Bravo, Desroches!" cried Bixiou. "What joy to be able to do good that will hurt so much!"

Ten minutes later Bianchon came down and said to his friends: "I am off at once to Desplein; he can save this woman by an operation. Ah! he will see that she is taken good care of, for the habit of drinking spirits has developed in her a splendid disease that we thought was extinct."

"You wretch of a doctor, get along! As if she had but one disease," said Bixiou.

But Bianchon was already in the courtyard, so great was his haste to go and tell the grand news to Desplein. Two hours later Joseph's unhappy sister-in-law was carried to the private hospital founded by Dr. Dubois, which was subsequently bought by the city of Paris.

Three weeks later the *Hospital Gazette* contained an account of one of the boldest attempts of modern surgery in operating on a patient mentioned under the initials F. B. The subject died, much more of the weakness consequent on prolonged privations than as a result of the operation.

The Comte de Brambourg at once went in deep mourning to call on the Comte de Soulanges, and inform him of the melancholy loss he had sustained. It was whispered in the fashionable world that the Comte de Soulanges was allowing his daughter to marry a *parvenu* of distinguished merit, who was to be made Maréchal de Camp and colonel of a regiment of the Body-guard. De Marsay announced the news to Rastignac, who spoke of it at a supper at the Rocher de Cancale where he met Bixiou.

"That shall never be!" said the cunning artist to himself.

If among the friends Philippe had cut adrift there were some who, like Giroudeau, could not revenge themselves, he had proved himself unwary in offending Bixiou, whose wit secured him a reception everywhere, and who never forgave a slight. Now at the Rocher de Cancale, in the presence of highly respectable persons at supper there, Philippe had replied when Bixiou asked him to invite him to the Hôtel de Brambourg, "You may come to my house when you are a minister."

"Must I also become a Protestant to get into your house?" replied Bixiou lightly; but he said to himself, "Though you may be a Goliath, I have a sling, and plenty of stones to fling."

Next day the practical joker dressed at the house of an actor, a friend of his, and was metamorphosed by the omnipotent art of "make-up" into a secularized priest in green spectacles; then he took a fly and drove to the house of the Comte de Soulanges. Bixiou, treated by Philippe as a buffoon, meant to play a trick on him.

Being admitted by the Comte de Soulanges on his urgent plea that he had an important matter to lay before the Count, Bixiou played the part of a venerable personage charged with an important secret. In an assumed voice he related the history of the dead Countess's illness, of which Bianchon had given him the particulars, that of Agathe's death, that of old Rouget's death, of which the Comte de Brambourg had boasted, and that of old Mme. Descoings's end; the story of the "loan" from the cash-box of the newspaper, and the facts as to Philippe's general conduct in his worst times.

"M. le Comte, do not give him your daughter till you have made every inquiry; question his former friends—Bixiou, Captain Giroudeau, and others."

Three months after this the Comte de Brambourg entertained a party at supper: du Tillet, Nucingen, Rastignac, Maxime de Trailles, and de Marsay. The host was taking very easily the half-consolatory speeches made to him by guests concerning his rupture with the house of Soulanges.

"You can do better," said Maxime.

"What fortune would be expected to qualify a man to marry a demoiselle de Grandlieu?" asked Philippe of de Marsay.

"To qualify you?—They would not let you have the ugliest of the six for less than ten million francs," replied de Marsay insolently.

"Pooh!" said Rastignac; "but with two hundred thousand francs a year you may have Mlle. de Langeais, the Marquis's daughter; she is ugly, she is thirty, and has not a sou of her own. That ought to satisfy you."

"I shall have ten millions within two years' time," replied Philippe Bridau.

"It is January 16th, 1829," cried du Tillet, smiling. "I have been working for ten years, and I have not so much, not I."

"We will advise each other, and you will see how I manage money matters."

"Why, how much have you altogether?" asked Nucingen.

"If I sold my securities and everything, excepting my estate and this house, which I could not and will not risk, as they are secured by entail, I could certainly handle three millions."

Nucingen and du Tillet looked at each other; then after this keen flash, du Tillet said to Philippe—

"My dear Count, we will work in partnership if you like."

De Marsay caught the glance that du Tillet had shot at Nucingen, and which said, "Those millions are ours!"

In fact, these two great financiers were at the very center of political affairs, enabling them to gamble on the Bourse at a given date and with absolute certainty, against Philippe, when the chances would seem to him to be in his favor, while in reality they were in theirs.

The chance came. In July 1830 du Tillet and Nucingen had enabled the Comte de Brambourg to make fifteen hundred thousand francs; he no longer distrusted them, and thought their advice sound. Philippe, who had risen by the Restoration, and who was misled by intense contempt for civilians, believed in the success of the new decrees, and would play for a rise; while Nucingen and du Tillet, who expected a Revolution, played against him for a fall. But the two shrewd partners affected to agree with Colonel the Comte de Brambourg, and seemed to share his convictions; they held out hopes of his doubling his millions, and arranged to win them from him. Philippe fought like a man to whom victory means four million francs. His zeal was so conspicuous that he was ordered to return to Saint-Cloud with the Duc de Maufrigneuse to sit in council. This mark of favor saved Philippe: for he wanted, on July 25th, to sweep the boulevards with a charge of cavalry, and he would no doubt have fallen to a bullet from his friend Giroudeau, who commanded a body of the adversary.

Within a month nothing of his immense fortune remained to Colonel Bridau but his mansion, his estate, his pictures, and furniture. He was fool enough too, as he said, to believe in the re-establishment of the elder branch, to which he remained faithful till 1834. Then, on seeing Giroudeau a colonel, Philippe, prompted by very intelligible jealousy, rejoined the service. In 1835 he, unfortunately, was appointed to the command of a regiment in Algiers, where for three years he was left in a post of danger, hoping to win his general's epaulettes; but a malignant influence—that of General Giroudeau—left him where he was. Philippe, by this time grown hard, carried military severity to an extreme, and was detested in spite of his Murat-like bravery.

At the beginning of the fatal year 1839, while turning to harry the Arabs in the course of a retreat before superior numbers, he rushed on the foe, supported by one company only. They fell upon a body of Arabs; the struggle was bloody, frightful, hand to hand, and very few of the French horse escaped. Seeing that their colonel was surrounded, those who were at some little distance did not deem it wise to perish in a vain attempt to rescue him. They heard his shout, "Help! Your colonel!—A colonel of the Empire!" followed by fearful cries, but they got back to their regiment. Philippe died a horrible death, for they cut off his head, when he fell hacked almost to pieces by yataghans.

Joseph, who was married about this time by the good offices of the Comte de Sérizy to the daughter of an old millionaire farmer, inherited the house and the estate of Brambourg, which his brother had been unable to sell, though he would gladly have deprived him of his inheritance. What gave the painter most pleasure was the fine collection of pictures. Joseph, whose father-in-law adds daily to his hoards, has already an income of sixty thousand francs. Though he paints splendid pictures, and is always doing services to his fellow-artists, he is not yet a member of the Institute. In consequence of a clause in the parchment of entail, he is now Comte de Brambourg, which often makes him burst out laughing among his friends in his studio.

"Fine birds make fine feathers," his friend Léon de Lora will then remark; for even now that he is famous as a landscape painter, he has not given up his old trick of perverting proverbs, and he told Joseph *à propos* of the modesty with which he accepted the favors of fortune, "Never mind. A feast is as good as enough."

Paris, ***November*** **1842.**

PIERRETTE

PREFACE

WRITTEN, as it was, for Countess Anna de Hanska, Balzac's step-daughter of the future, while she was still very young, *Pierrette* partakes necessarily of the rather elaborate artificiality of all attempts to suit the young person, of French attempts in particular, and it may perhaps be said of Balzac's attempts most of all. It belongs, in a way, to the Arcis series—the series which also includes the fine *Ténébreuse Affaire* and the unfinished *Député d'Arcis*—but is not very closely connected therewith. The picture of the brother and sister Rogron, with which it opens, is in one of Balzac's best-known styles, and is executed with all his usual mastery both of the minute and of the at least partially repulsive, showing also that strange knowledge of the *bourgeois de Paris* which, somehow or other, he seems to have attained by dint of unknown forgatherings in his ten years of apprenticeship. But when we come to *Pierrette* herself, the story is, I think, rather less satisfying. Her persecutions and her end, and the devotion of the faithful Brigaut and the rest, are pathetic no doubt, but tend (I hope it is not heartless to say it) just a very little towards *sensiblerie*. The fact is that the thing is not quite in Balzac's line.

Pierrette, which was earlier called *Pierrette Lorrain*, was issued in 1840, first in the *Siècle*, and then in volume form, published by Souverain. In both issues it had nine chapter or book divisions with headings. With the other *Célibataires* it entered the *Comédie* as a *Scène de la Vie de Province* in 1843.

G. S.

PIERRETTE

To Mlle. Anna de Hanska.

Dear child,—You, the joy of a whole house, you, whose white or rose-colored cape flutters in the summer like a will-o'-the-wisp through the arbors of Wierzchownia, followed by the wistful eyes of your father and mother—how can I dedicate to you a tale full of sadness? But is it not well to tell you of sorrows such as a girl so fondly loved as you are will never know? For some day your fair hands may take them comfort. It is so difficult, Anna, to find in the picture of our manners any incident worthy to meet your eye, that an author has no choice; but perhaps you may discern how happy you are from reading this tale sent by

Your old friend,

De Balzac.

IN October 1827, at break of day, a youth of about sixteen, whose dress proclaimed him to be what modern phraseology insolently calls a proletarian, was standing on a little square in the lower part of the town of Provins. At this early hour he could, without being observed, study the various houses set round the Place in an oblong square. The mills on the streams of Provins were already at work. Their noise, repeated by the echoes from the upper town, and harmonizing with the sharp air and the clear freshness of the morning, bewrayed the perfect silence—so complete that the clatter of a diligence was audible, still a league away on the highroad.

The two longer rows of houses, divided by an arched avenue of lime-trees, are artless in style, confessing the peaceful and circumscribed life of the townsfolk. In this part of the town there are no signs of trade. At that time there was hardly a carriage-gate suggesting the luxury of the rich—or if there were, it rarely turned on its hinges—excepting that of M. Martener, a doctor, who was obliged to keep and use a cab. Some of the fronts were graced by a long vine stem, others with climbing roses growing up to the first floor, and scenting the windows with their large scattered bunches of flowers. One end of this Square almost joins the High Street of the lower town; the other end is shut in by a street parallel with the High Street, and the gardens beyond run down to one of the two rivers that water the valley of Provins.

At this end, the quietest part of the Place, the young workman recognized the house that had been described to him—a front of white stone, scored with seams to represent joins in the masonry, and windows with light iron balconies, decorated with rosettes painted yellow, and closed with gray Venetian shutters. Above this front—a ground floor and a first floor only—three attic windows pierce a slate-roof, and on one of the gables twirls a brand-new weather-cock. This modern weather-cock represents a sportsman aiming at a hare. The front door is reached up three stone steps. On one side of the door an end of leaden pipe spouts dirty water into a little gutter, revealing the kitchen; on the other, two windows, carefully guarded by gray wooden shutters in which heart-shaped holes are cut to admit a little light, seemed to our youth to be those of the dining-room. In the basement secured by the three steps, under each window is an air-opening into the cellars, closed by painted iron shutters pierced with holes in a pattern. Everything was then quite new. An observer, looking at this house freshly repaired, its still raw splendor contrasting with the antique aspect of all the rest, would at once have seen in it the mean ideas and perfect contentment of a retired tradesman.

The young fellow gazed at every detail with an expression of pleasure mingled with sadness; his eyes wandered from the kitchen to the garret with a look that denoted meditation. The pink gleams of sunshine showed in one of the attic windows a cotton curtain which was wanting to the others. Then the lad's face brightened completely; he withdrew a few steps, leaned his back against a lime-tree, and sang, in the drawling tones peculiar to the natives of the West, this ballad of Brittany, published by Bruguière, a composer to whom we owe some charming airs. In Brittany the young swains of the villages sing this song to newly-married couples on their wedding day—

> "We come to wish you every happiness,
> To th' maister at your side,
> As well as to the bride.
>
> "You, mistress bride, are bound for life and death,
> With a bright golden chain,
> That none may break in twain.
>
> "Now you to fairs and junkets go no more;
> Nay, you must stay at home,
> While we may dance and roam.
>
> "And do you know how trusty you must be,
> And faithful to your mate,
> To love him rathe and late?
>
> "Then take this posy I have made for you.
> Alack! for happy hours
> Must perish like these flowers."

This national air, as sweet as that arranged by Chateaubriand to the words *Ma sœur, te souvient-il-encore?* sung in a little town of La Brie in Champagne, could not fail to arouse irresistible memories in a native of Brittany, so faithfully does it paint the manners, the simplicity, the scenery of that noble old province. There is in it an intangible melancholy, caused by the realities of life, which is deeply touching. And is not this power to awaken a whole world of grave, sweet, sad things by a familiar and often cheerful strain, characteristic of those popular airs which are the superstitions of music, if we accept the word superstition as meaning what remains from the ruin of nations, the flotsam left by revolutions?

As he ended the first verse, the workman, who never took his eyes off the curtain in the attic, saw no one astir. While he was singing the second, it moved a little. As he sang the words, "Take this posy," a young girl's face was seen.

A fair hand cautiously opened the window, and the girl nodded to the wanderer as he ended with the melancholy reflection contained in the two last lines—

"Alack! for happy hours
Must perish like these flowers."

The lad suddenly took from under his jacket, and held up to her, a golden-yellow spray of a flower very common in Brittany, which he had picked no doubt in a field in La Brie, where it is somewhat rare—the flower of the furze.

"Why, is it you, Brigaut?" said the girl in a low voice.

"Yes, Pierrette, yes. I am living in Paris; I am walking about France; but I might settle down here, since you are here."

At this moment the window-fastening of the room on the first floor, below Pierrette's, was heard to creak. The girl showed the greatest alarm, and said to Brigaut, "Fly!"

The young fellow jumped like a frog to a bend in the street, round a mill, before entering the wider street that is the artery of the lower town; but in spite of his agility, his hobnailed shoes, ringing on the paving-cobbles of Provins, made a noise easily distinguished from the music of the mill, and heard by the individual who opened the window.

This person was a woman. No man ever tears himself from the delights of his morning slumbers to listen to a minstrel in a round jacket. None but a maid is roused by a love song. And this was a maid—and an old maid. When she had thrown open her shutters with the action of a bat, she looked about her on all sides, and faintly heard Brigaut's steps as he made his escape. Is there on earth anything more hideous than the matutinal apparition of an ugly old maid at her window? Of all the grotesque spectacles that are the amusement of travelers as they go through little towns, is it not the most unpleasing? It is too depressing, too repulsive to be laughed at.

This particular old maid, whose ear was so keen, appeared bereft of the artifices of all kinds that she used to improve herself; she had no front of false hair, and no collar. Her headgear was the frightful little caul of black sarcenet which old women draw over their skull, showing beyond her nightcap, which had been pushed aside in her sleep. This untidiness gave her head the sinister appearance ascribed by painters to witches. The temples, ears, and nape, scarcely concealed, betrayed their withered leanness, the coarse wrinkles were conspicuous for a redness that did not charm the eye, and that was thrown into relief by the comparative whiteness of a bedgown tied at the throat with twisted tapes. The gaps where this bedgown fell open revealed a chest like that of some old peasant woman careless of her ugliness. The fleshless arm might have been a stick covered with stuff. Seen at the window, the lady appeared tall by reason of the strength and breadth of her face, which reminded the spectator of the extravagant size of some Swiss countenances. The chief characteristic of the features, which presented a singular lack of harmony, was a hardness of line, a harshness of coloring, and a lack of feeling in the expression which would have filled a physiognomist with disgust. These peculiarities, visible now, were habitually modified by a sort of business smile, and a vulgar stupidity which aped good-nature so successfully that the people among whom she lived might easily have supposed her to be a kind woman.

She and her brother shared the ownership of this house. The brother was sleeping so soundly in his room that the Opera-house orchestra would not have roused him; and the power of that orchestra is famous! The old maid put her head out of the window, and raised her eyes to that of the attic—eyes of a cold pale blue, with short lashes set in lids that were almost always swollen. She tried to see Pierrette; but recognizing the futility of the attempt, she withdrew into her room with a movement not unlike that of a tortoise hiding its head after putting it out of its shell. The shutters were closed again, and the silence of the Square was no more disturbed but by peasants coming into the town, or early risers. When there is an old maid in the house a watch-dog is not needed; not the smallest event occurs without her seeing it, commenting on it, and deducing every possible consequence. Thus this incident was destined to give rise to serious inferences, and to be the opening of one of those obscure dramas which are played out in the family, but which are none the less terrible for being unseen—if indeed the name of drama may be applied to this tragedy of home-life.

Pierrette did not get into bed again. To her Brigaut's arrival was an event of immense importance. During the night—the Eden of the wretched—she escaped from the annoyances and fault-finding she had to endure all day. Like the hero of some German or Russian ballad, to her sleep seemed a happy life, and the day a bad dream. This morning, for the first time in three years, she had had a happy waking. The memories of infancy had sweetly sung their poetry to her soul. She had heard the first verse in her dreams; the second had roused her with a start; at the third she had doubted—the unfortunate are of the school of Saint Thomas; at the fourth verse, standing at her window, barefoot, and in her shift, she had recognized Brigaut, the friend of her childhood.

Yes, that was indeed the short square jacket with quaint little tails and pockets swinging just over the hips, the classical blue-cloth jacket of the Breton; the waistcoat of coarse knit, the linen shirt buttoned with a golden heart, the wide-rolled collar, the earrings, heavy shoes, trousers of blue drill, mottled in streaks of lighter shades; in short, all the humble and durable items of a poor Breton's costume. The large white horn buttons of the jacket and waistcoat had set Pierrette's heart beating. At the sight of the branch of furze the tears had started to her eyes; then a spasm of terror clutched her heart, crushing the flowers of remembrance that had blossomed for a moment. It struck her that her cousin might have heard her rise and go to the window. She knew the old woman, and made the signal of alarm to Brigaut, which the poor boy had hastened to obey without understanding it. Does not this instinctive obedience betray one of those innocent and mastering affections such as are to be seen once in an age, on this earth where they bloom, like the aloe-trees on Isola Bella, but two or three times in a century? Anyone seeing Brigaut fly would have admired the artless heroism of a most artless love.

Jacques Brigaut was worthy of Pierrette Lorrain, who was now nearly fourteen—two children! Pierrette could not help weeping as she saw him take to his heels with the terror inspired by her warning gesture.

She then sat down in a rickety armchair, in front of a looking-glass above a little table. On this she set her elbows, and remained pensive for an hour, trying to recall the Marais, the hamlet of Pen-Hoël, the adventurous voyages on a pond in a boat untied from an old willow-tree by little Jacques; then the old faces—her grandmother and grandfather, her mother's look of suffering, and General Brigaut's handsome head; a whole childhood of careless joy! And this again was a dream—the lights of happiness against a gray background.

She had fine light-brown hair, all in disorder, under a little nightcap tumbled in her sleep, a little cambric cap with frills that she herself had made On each side curls fell over her temples, escaping from their gray papers. At the back of her head a thick plait hung down to her shoulders. The excessive pallor of her face showed that she was a victim to a girlish ailment to which medical science gives the pretty name of chlorosis, which robs the blood of its natural hue, disturbing the appetite, and betraying much disorderment of the whole system. This waxen hue was apparent in all the flesh-tints. The whiteness of her neck and shoulders, the colorlessness of an etiolated plant, accounted for the thinness of her arms crossed in front of her. Pierrette's feet even looked weak and shrunken by disease; her shift, falling only to her calf, showed the relaxed sinews, blue veins, and bloodless muscles. As the cold air chilled her, her lips turned purple. The mournful smile that parted her fairly delicate mouth showed teeth of ivory whiteness, even and small, pretty transparent teeth, in harmony with well-shaped ears and a nose that was elegant, if a little sharp; her face, though perfectly round, was very sweet. All the life of this charming countenance lay in the eyes; the iris, of a bright snuff-brown mottled with black, shone with golden lights round a deep bright retina. Pierrette ought to have been gay; she was sad. Her vanished gayety lingered in the vivid modeling of her eyes, in the ingenuous form of her brow, and the molding of her short chin. The long eyelashes lay like brushes on the cheeks worn by debility; the whiteness, too lavishly diffused, gave great purity to the lines and features of her countenance. The ear was a little masterpiece of modeling; it might have been of marble.

Pierrette suffered in many ways. Perhaps you would like to have her story? Here it is.

Pierrette's mother was a Demoiselle Auffray of Provins, half-sister to Mme. Rogron, the mother of the present owners of this house. M. Auffray, after marrying for the first time at the age of eighteen, took a second wife at the age of sixty-nine. The child of his first marriage was an only daughter, ugly enough, who, when she was sixteen, married an innkeeper of Provins named Rogron. By his second marriage old Auffray had another daughter, but she was very pretty. Thus the quaint result was an enormous difference in age between M. Auffray's two daughters. The child of his first wife was fifty when the second was born. By the time her father gave her a sister Mme. Rogron had two children of her own, both of full age.

The uxorious old man's younger child was married for love, at eighteen, to a Breton officer named Lorrain, a captain in the Imperial Guard. Love often begets ambition. The captain, eager to get his colonelcy, exchanged into the line. While the major and his wife, comfortable enough with the allowance given them by M. and Mme. Auffray, were living handsomely in Paris, or running about Germany as the Emperor's wars or truces might guide them, old Auffray, a retired grocer at Provins, died suddenly, before he had time to make his will. The good man's estate was so cleverly manipulated by the innkeeper and his wife that they absorbed the larger part of it, leaving to old Auffray's widow no more than the house in the little Square and a few acres of land. This widow, little Mme. Lorrain's mother, was but eight-and-thirty when her husband died. Like many other widows, she had an unwholesome wish to marry again. She sold to her stepdaughter, old Mme. Rogron, the land

and house she had inherited under her marriage settlement, to marry a young doctor named Néraud, who ran through her fortune, and she died of grief in great poverty two years afterwards.

Thus Mme. Lorrain's share of the Auffray property had in great part disappeared, being reduced to about eight thousand francs.

Major Lorrain died on the field of honor at Montereau, leaving his widow, then one-and-twenty, burdened with a little girl fourteen months old, and with no fortune but the pension she could claim from Government, and whatever money might come to her from M. and Mme. Lorrain, tradespeople at Pen-Hoël, a town of La Vendée, in the district known as Le Marais. These Lorrains, the parents of the deceased officer, and Pierrette's paternal grandfather and grandmother, sold building-timber, slates, tiles, cornices, pipes, and the like. Their business was a poor one, either from their incapacity or from ill luck, and brought them in a bare living. The failure of the great house of Colinet at Nantes, brought about by the events of 1814, which caused a sudden fall in the price of colonial produce, resulted in a loss to them of eighty thousand francs they had placed on deposit. Their daughter-in-law was therefore warmly received; the major's widow brought with her a pension of eight hundred francs, an enormous sum at Pen-Hoël. When her half-sister and brother-in-law Rogron sent her the eight thousand francs due to her, after endless formalities, prolonged by distance, she placed the money in the Lorrains' hands, taking a mortgage, however, on a little house they owned at Nantes, let for a hundred crowns a year, and worth, perhaps, ten thousand francs.

Young Mme. Lorrain died there after her mother's second and luckless marriage, in 1819, and almost at the same time as her mother. This daughter of the old man and his young wife was small, fragile, and delicate; the damp air of the Marais did not agree with her. Her husband's family, eager to keep her there, persuaded her that nowhere else in the world would she find a place healthier or pleasanter than the Marais, the scene of Charette's exploits. She was so well taken care of, nursed, and coaxed, that her death brought honor to the Lorrains.

Some persons asserted that Brigaut, an old Vendéen, one of those men of iron who served under Charette, Mercier, the Marquis de Montauran, and the Baron du Guénic in the wars against the Republic, counted for much in young Mme. Lorrain's submission. If this were so, it was certainly for the sake of a most loving and devoted soul. And, indeed, all Pen-Hoël could see that Brigaut, respectfully designated as the Major—having held that rank in the Royalist army—spent his days and his evenings in the Lorrains' sitting-room by the side of the Emperor's Major's widow. Towards the end the curé of Pen-Hoël allowed himself to speak of this matter to old Mme. Lorrain; he begged her to persuade her daughter-in-law to marry Brigaut, promising to get him an appointment as justice of the peace to the district of Pen-Hoël, by the intervention of the Vicomte de Kergarouët. But the poor woman's death made the scheme useless.

Pierrette remained with her grandparents, who owed her four hundred francs a year, naturally spent on her maintenance. The old people, now less and less fit for business, had an active and pushing rival in trade, whom they could only abuse, without doing anything to protect themselves. The major, their friend and adviser, died six months after young Mme. Lorrain, perhaps of grief, or perhaps of his wounds; he had had seven-and-twenty. Their bad neighbor, as a good man of business, now aimed at ruining his rivals, so as to extinguish all competition. He got the Lorrains to borrow on their note of hand, foreseeing that they could never pay, and so forced them, in their old age, to become bankrupt. Pierrette's mortgage was second to a mortgage held by her grandmother, who clung to her rights to secure a morsel of bread for her husband. The house at Nantes was sold for nine thousand five hundred francs, and the costs came to fifteen hundred francs. The remaining eight thousand francs came to Mme. Lorrain, who invested them in a mortgage in order to live at Nantes in a sort of almshouse, like that of Sainte-Périne in Paris, called Saint-Jacques, where the two old people found food and lodging at a very moderate rate.

As it was impossible that they should take with them their little destitute grandchild, the old Lorrains bethought them of her uncle and aunt Rogron, to whom they wrote. The Rogrons of Provins were dead. Thus the letter from the Lorrains to the Rogrons would seem to be lost. But if there is anything here below which can take the place of Providence, is it not the General Post Office? The genius of the Post, immeasurably superior to that of the Public, outdoes in inventiveness the imagination of the most brilliant novelist. As soon as the Post has charge of a letter, worth, on delivery, from three to ten sous, if it fails at once to find him or her to whom it should be delivered, it displays a mercenary solicitude which has no parallel but in the boldest duns. The Post comes, goes, hunts through the eighty-six departments. Difficulties incite the genius of its officials, who, not unfrequently, are men of letters, and who then throw themselves into the pursuit with the ardor of the mathematicians at the National Observatory; they rummage the kingdom. At the faintest gleam of hope the Paris offices are on the alert again. You often sit amazed as you inspect the scrawls that meander over the letter, back and front—the glorious evidence of the administrative perseverance that animates the Post Office. If a man were to undertake what the Post has accomplished, he would have spent ten thousand francs in traveling, in time and in money, to recover twelve sous. The Post certainly has more intelligence than it conveys.

The letter written by the Lorrains to M. Rogron, who had been dead a year, was transmitted by the Post to M. Rogron, his son, a haberdasher in the Rue Saint-Denis, Paris. This is where the genius of the Post Office shines. An heir is always more or less puzzled to know whether he has really scraped up the whole of his inheritance, whether he has not forgotten some debt or some fragments. The Revenue guesses everything; it even reads character. A letter addressed to old Rogron of Provins was bound to pique the curiosity of Rogron *junior* of Paris, or of

Mlle. Rogron, his heirs. So the Revenue earned its sixty centimes.

The Rogrons, towards whom the Lorrains held out beseeching hands though they were in despair at having to part from their granddaughter, thus became the arbiters of Pierrette Lorrain's fate. It is indispensable, therefore, to give some account of their antecedents and their character.

Old Rogron, the innkeeper at Provins, on whom old Auffray had bestowed the child of his first marriage, was hot-faced, with a purple-veined nose, and cheeks which Bacchus had overlaid with his crimson and bulbous blossoms. Though stout, short, and pot-bellied, with stumpy legs and heavy hands, he had all the shrewdness of the Swiss innkeeper, resembling that race. His face remotely suggested a vast hail-stricken vineyard. Certainly he was not handsome; but his wife was like him. Never were a better matched couple. Rogron liked good living and to have pretty girls to wait on him. He was one of the sect of Egoists whose ways are brutal, and who give themselves up to their vices and do their will in the face of Israel. Greedy, mercenary, and by no means refined, obliged to be the purveyor to his own fancies, he ate up all he earned till his teeth failed him. Then avarice remained. In his old age he sold his inn, collected, as we have seen, all his father-in-law's leavings, and retired to the little house in the Square, which he bought for a piece of bread of old Auffray's widow, Pierrette's grandmother.

Rogron and his wife owned about two thousand francs a year, derived from the letting of twenty-seven plots of land in the neighborhood of Provins, and the interest on the price of their inn, which they had sold for twenty thousand francs. Old Auffray's house, though in a very bad state, was used as it was for a dwelling by the innkeepers, who avoided repairing it as they would have shunned the plague; old rats love cracks and ruins. The retired publican, taking a fancy for gardening, spent his savings in adding to his garden; he extended it to the bank of the river, making a long square shut in by two walls, and ending with a stone embankment, below which the water-plants, left to run wild, displayed their abundant flowers.

Early in their married life the Rogron couple had a son and a daughter, with two years between them; everything degenerates; their children were hideous. Put out to nurse in the country as cheaply as possible, these unhappy little ones came home with the wretched training of village life, having cried long and often for their foster-mother, who went to work in the fields, and who left them meanwhile shut up in one of the dark, damp, low rooms which form the dwelling of the French peasant. By this process the children's features grew thick, and their voices harsh; they were far from flattering their mother's vanity, and she tried to correct them of their bad habits by a severity which, by comparison with their father's, seemed tenderness itself. They were left to play in the yards, stables, and outhouses of the inn, or to run about the town; they were sometimes whipped; sometimes they were sent to their grandfather Auffray, who loved them little. This injustice was one of the reasons that encouraged the Rogrons to secure a large share of the "old rascal's" leavings. Meanwhile, however, Rogron sent his boy to school; and he paid a man, one of his carters, to save the lad from the conscription. As soon as his daughter Sylvie was twelve years old, he sent her to Paris as an apprentice in a house of business. Two years later, his son Jérôme-Denis was packed off by the same road. When his friends the carriers, who were his allies, or the inn customers asked him what he meant to do with his children, old Rogron explained his plans with a brevity which had this advantage over the statements of most fathers, that it was frank—

"When they are of an age to understand me, I shall just give them a kick you know where, saying, 'Be off and make your fortune,'" he would reply, as he drank, or wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Then looking at the inquirer with a knowing wink, "Ha, ha!" he would add, "they are not greater fools than I am. My father gave me three kicks, I shall give them but one. He put a louis into my hand, I will give them ten; so they will be better off than I was. That's the right way. And after I am gone, what is left will be left; the notaries will find them fast enough. A pretty joke, indeed, if I am to keep myself short for the children's sake! They owe their being to me; I have brought them up; I ask nothing of them; they have not paid me back, heh, neighbor? I began life as a carter, and that did not hinder me from marrying that old rascal Auffray's daughter."

Sylvie was placed as an apprentice, with a premium of a hundred crowns for her board, with some tradespeople in the Rue Saint-Denis, natives of Provins. Two years later she was paying her way; though she earned no money, her parents had nothing to pay for her food and lodging. This, in the Rue Saint-Denis, is called being "at par." Two years later Sylvie was earning a hundred crowns a year. In the course of that time her mother had sent her a hundred francs for pocket-money. Thus, at the age of nineteen, Mlle. Sylvie Rogron was independent. When she was twenty, she was second "young lady" in the house of Julliard, raw-silk merchants, at the sign of the Ver Chinois (or Silkworm), in the Rue Saint-Denis.

The history of the brother was like the sister's. Little Jérôme-Denis Rogron was placed with one of the largest wholesale mercers in the Rue Saint-Denis, the Maison Guépin at the Trois Quenouilles. While Sylvie, at twenty-one, was forewoman with a thousand francs a year, Jérôme-Denis, better served by luck, was, at eighteen, head shop-clerk, earning twelve hundred, with the Guépins, also natives of Provins. The brother and sister met every Sunday and holiday, and spent the day in cheap amusements. They dined outside Paris; they went to Saint-Cloud, Meudon, Belleville, or Vincennes.

At the end of 1815 they united the money they had earned by the sweat of their brow, and bought of Mme. Guénée the business and goodwill of a famous house, the Sœur de Famille, one of the best known retail haberdashers. The sister kept the cash, the shop, and the accounts; the brother was both buyer and head-clerk, as Sylvie was for some time her own forewoman. In 1821, after five years' hard work, competition had become so lively in the haberdashery business that the brother and sister had scarcely been able to pay off the purchase-money and keep up the reputation of the house.

Though Sylvie Rogron was at this time but forty, her ugliness, her constant toil, and a peculiarly crabbed expression, arising as much from the shape of her features as from her anxieties, made her look like a woman of fifty. Jérôme-Denis Rogron, at the age of thirty-eight, had the most idiotic face that ever bent over a counter to a customer. His low forehead, crushed by fatigue, was seamed by three arid furrows. His scanty gray hair, cut very short, suggested the unutterable stupidity of a cold-blooded animal; in the gaze of his blue-gray eyes there was neither fire nor mind. His round, flat face aroused no sympathy, and did not even bring a smile to the lips of those who study the varieties of Parisian physiognomy; it was depressing. And while, like his father, he was short and thick, his shape, not having the coarse obesity of the innkeeper, showed in every detail an absurd flabbiness. His father's excessive redness gave place in him to the flaccid lividness acquired by people who live in airless backshops, in the barred coops that serve as counting-houses, always folding and unfolding skeins of thread, paying or receiving money, harrying clerks, or repeating the same phrases to customers. The small intelligence of this brother and sister had been completely sunk in mastering their business, in debit and credit, and in the study of the rules and customs of the Paris market. Thread, needles, ribbon, pins, buttons, tailors' trimming, in short, the vast list of articles constituting Paris haberdashery, had filled up their memory. Letters to write and answer, bills and stock-taking, had absorbed all their capabilities.

Outside their line of business they knew absolutely nothing; they did not even know Paris. To them Paris was something spread out round the Rue Saint-Denis. Their narrow nature found its field in their shop. They knew very well how to nag their assistants and shop-girls and find them at fault. Their joy consisted in seeing all their hands as busy on the counters as mice's paws, handling the goods or folding up the pieces. When they heard seven or eight young voices of lads and girls simpering out the time-honored phrases with which shop-assistants reply to a customer's remarks, it was a fine day, nice weather. When ethereal blue brought life to Paris, and Parisians out walking thought of no haberdashery but what they wore, "Bad weather for business," the silly master would observe. The great secret, which made Rogron the object of his apprentices' admiration, was his art in tying, untying, re-tying, and making up a parcel. Rogron could pack a parcel and look out at what was going on in the street, or keep an eye on his shop to its furthest depths; he had seen everything by the time he handed it to the buyer, saying, "Madame—nothing more this morning?"

But for his sister, this simpleton would have been ruined. Sylvie had good sense and the spirit of trade. She advised her brother as to his purchases from the manufacturers, and relentlessly sent him off to the other end of France to make a sou of profit on some article. The shrewdness, of which every woman possesses more or less, having no duty to do for her heart, she had utilized it in speculation. Stock to be paid for! this thought was the piston that worked this machine and gave it appalling energy. Rogron was never more than head-assistant; he did not understand his business as a whole; personal interest, the chief motor of the mind, had not carried him forward one step. He often stood dismayed when his sister desired him to sell some article at a loss, foreseeing that it would go out of fashion; and afterwards he guilelessly admired her. He did not reason well or ill; he was incapable of reasoning; but he had sense enough to submit to his sister, and he did so for a reason that had nothing to do with business. "She is the eldest," he would say. Physiologists and moralists may possibly find in such a persistently solitary life, reduced to satisfying mere needs, and deprived of money and pleasure in youth, an explanation of the animal expression of face, the weak brain, and idiotic manner of this haberdasher. His sister had always hindered his marrying, fearing perhaps that she might lose her influence in the house, and seeing a source of expense and ruin in a wife certainly younger, and probably less hideous, than herself.

Stupidity may betray itself in two ways—it is talkative or it is mute. Mute stupidity may be endured; but Rogron's was talkative. The tradesman had fallen into the habit of scolding his assistants, of expatiating to them on the minutiæ of the haberdashery business and selling to "the trade," ornamenting his lectures with the flat jokes that constitute the *bagout*, the gab of the shops. (This word *bagout*, used formerly to designate the stereotyped repartee, has given way before the soldier's slang word *blague*, or humbug.) Rogron, to whom his little domestic audience were bound to listen, Rogron, very much pleased with himself, had finally adopted a set of phrases of his own. The chatterbox believed himself eloquent. The need for explaining to customers the thing they want, for finding out their wishes, for making them want the thing they do not want, loosens the tongue of the counter-jumper. The retail dealer at last acquires the faculty of pouring out sentences in which words have no meaning, but which answer their purpose. Then he can explain to his customers methods of manufacture unknown to them, and this gives him a sort of short-lived superiority over the purchaser; but apart from the thousand and one explanations necessitated by the thousand and one articles he sells, he is, so far as thought is concerned, like a fish on straw in the sunshine.

Rogron and Sylvie—a pair of machines illicitly baptized—had neither potentially nor actively the feelings which give life to the heart. These two beings were utterly dry and tough, hardened by toil, by privations, by the remembrance of their sufferings during a long and weariful apprenticeship. Neither he nor she had pity for any misfortune. They were not implacable, but impenetrable with regard to anybody in difficulties. To them virtue, honor, loyalty, every human feeling was epitomized in the regular payment of their accounts. Close-fisted, heartless, and sordidly thrifty, the brother and sister had a terrible reputation among the traders of the Rue Saint-Denis.

But for their visits to Provins, whither they went thrice a year, at times when they could shut the shop for two or three days, they would never have got shop-lads and girls. But old Rogron packed off to his children every unhappy creature intended by its parents to go into trade; he carried on for them a business in apprentices in Provins, where he vaunted with much vanity his children's fortune. The parents, tempted by the remote hope of having their son or daughter well taught and well looked after, and the chance of seeing a child some day step into Rogron junior's business, sent the youth who was in the way to the house kept by the old bachelor and old maid. But as soon as the apprentices, man or maid, for whom the fee of a hundred crowns was always paid, saw any way of escaping from these galleys, they fled with a glee which added to the terrible notoriety of the Rogrons. The indefatigable innkeeper always supplied them with fresh victims.

From the age of fifteen Sylvie Rogron, accustomed to grimace over the counter, had two faces—the amiable mask of the saleswoman and the natural expression of a shriveled old maid. Her assumed countenance was a marvelous piece of mimicry; she smiled all over; her voice turned soft and insinuating, and held the customers under a commercial spell. Her real face was what she had shown between the two half-opened shutters. It would have scared the bravest of the Cossacks of 1815, though they dearly loved every variety of Frenchwoman.

When the letter came from the Lorrains, the Rogrons, in mourning for their father, had come into possession of the house they had almost stolen from Pierrette's grandmother, of the innkeeper's acquired land, and finally of certain sums derived from usurious loans in mortgages on land in the hands of peasant owners whom the old drunkard hoped to dispossess. The charge on the business was paid off. The Rogrons had stock to the value of about sixty thousand francs in the shop, about forty thousand francs in their cash-box or in assets, and the value of their goodwill. Seated on the bench, covered with striped green worsted velvet, and fitted into a square recess behind the cash-desk, with just such another desk opposite for the forewoman, the brother and sister held council as to their plans. Every tradesman hopes to retire. If they realized their whole stock and business, they ought to have about a hundred and fifty thousand francs, without counting their inheritance from old Rogron. Thus by investing in the funds the capital at their disposal, each of them would have three to four thousand francs a year, even if they devoted the price of the business—which would no doubt be paid in installments—to restoring their paternal home. So they might go to Provins and live there in a house of their own.

Their forewoman was the daughter of a rich farmer at Donnemarie, who was burdened with nine children; thus he was obliged to place them all in business, for his wealth, divided among nine, would be little enough for each. But in five years the farmer lost seven of his children, consequently the forewoman had become an interesting person; so much so, that Rogron had attempted, but vainly, to make her his wife. The young lady manifested an aversion for the master which nullified all his maneuvers. On the other hand, Mlle. Sylvie did not encourage the plan; she even opposed her brother's marriage, and wanted rather to have so clever a woman as their successor. Rogron's marriage she postponed till they should be settled at Provins.

No passer-by can understand the motive-power that underlies the cryptogamic lives of certain shopkeepers; as we look at them we wonder, "On what, and why do they live? What becomes of them? Where did they come from?" We lose ourselves in vacancy as we try to account for them. To discover the little poetry that germinates in these brains and vivifies these existences, we must dig into them; but we soon reach the tufa on which everything rests. The Paris shopkeeper feeds on hopes more or less likely to be realized, and without which he would evidently perish: one dreams of building or managing a theater, another struggles for the honors of the Mairie; this one has a castle in the air three leagues from Paris, a so-called park, where he plants colored plaster statues and arranges fountains that look like an end of thread, and spends immense sums; that one longs for promotion to the higher grades of the National Guard. Provins, an earthly paradise, excited in the two haberdashers the fanaticism which the inhabitants of every pretty town in France feel for their home. And to the glory of Champagne, it may be said that this affection is amply justified. Provins, one of the most charming spots in France, rivals Frangistan and the valley of Cashmere; not only has it all the poetry of Saadi, the Homer of Persia, but it also has pharmaceutical treasures for medical science. The Crusaders brought roses from Jericho to this delightful valley, where, by some chance, the flowers developed new qualities without losing anything of their color. And Provins is not only the Persia of France; it might be Baden, Aix, Bath; it has mineral waters.

This is the picture seen year after year, which now and again appeared in a vision to the haberdashers on the muddy pavement of the Rue Saint-Denis.

After crossing the gray flats that lie between La Ferté-Gaucher and Provins—a desert, but a fertile one, a desert of wheat—you mount a hill. Suddenly, at your feet, you see a town watered by two rivers; at the bottom of the slope spreads a green valley broken by graceful lines and retreating distances. If you come from Paris you take Provins lengthways; you see the everlasting French highroad running along the foot of the hill and close under it, owning its blind man and its beggars, who throw in an accompaniment of lamentable voices when you pause to gaze at this unexpectedly picturesque tract of land. If you arrive from Troyes, you come in from the plain. The castle and the old town, with its rampart, climb the shelves of the hill. The new town lies below.

There are upper and lower Provins; above, a town in the air, with steep streets and fine points of view, surrounded by hollow roads like ravines between rows of walnut-trees, furrowing the narrow hilltop with deep cuttings: a silent town this, clean and solemn, overshadowed by the imposing ruins of the stronghold; then, below, a town of mills, watered by the Voulzie and the Durtain, two rivers of Brie, narrow, sluggish, and deep; a town of inns and trade, of retired tradespeople, traversed by diligences, chaises, and heavy carts. These two towns—or this town—with its historical associations, with the melancholy of its ruins, the gayety of its valley, its delightful ravines full of unkempt hedgerows and wildflowers, its river, terraced with gardens, has so sure a hold on the love of its children that they behave like the sons of Auvergne, of Savoy, of France. Though they leave Provins to seek their fortune, they always come back to it. The phrase, "To die in one's burrow," made for rabbits and faithful souls, might be taken by the natives of Provins as their motto.

And so the two Rogrons thought only of their beloved Provins. As he sold thread, the brother saw the old town. While packing cards covered with buttons, he was gazing at the valley. He rolled and unrolled tape, but he was following the gleaming course of the rivers. As he looked at his pigeon-holes he was climbing the sunk roads whither of old he fled to evade his father's rage, to eat walnuts, and to cram on blackberries. The little Square at Provins above all filled his thoughts; he would beautify the house; he dreamed of the front he would rebuild, the bedrooms, the sitting-room, the billiard-room, the dining-room; then of the kitchen garden, which he would turn into an English garden with a lawn, grottoes, fountains, statues, and what not.

The rooms in which the brother and sister slept on the second floor of the house, three windows wide and six stories high—there are many such in the Rue Saint-Denis—had no furniture beyond what was strictly necessary; but not a soul in Paris had finer furniture than this haberdasher. As he walked in the streets he would stand in the attitude of an ecstatic, looking at the handsome pieces on show, and examining hangings with which he filled his house. On coming home he would say to his sister, "I saw a thing in such or such a shop that would just do for us!" The next day he would buy another, and invariably he gave up one month the choice of the month before. The revenue would not have paid for his architectural projects; he wanted everything, and always gave the preference to the newest thing. When he studied the balconies of a newly built house, and the doubtful attempts at exterior decoration, he thought the moldings, sculpture, and ornament quite out of place. "Ah!" he would say to himself, "those fine things would look much better at Provins than they do there." As he digested his breakfast on his doorstep, leaning his back against the shop side, with a hazy eye the haberdasher saw a fantastic dwelling, golden in the sunshine of his dream; he walked in a garden, listening to his fountain as it splashed in a shower of diamonds on a round flag of limestone. He played billiards on his own table; he planted flowers.

When his sister sat, pen in hand, lost in thought, and forgetting to scold the shopmen, she was seeing herself receiving the townsfolk of Provins, gazing at herself in the tall mirrors of her drawing-room, and wearing astounding caps. Both brother and sister were beginning to think that the atmosphere of the Rue Saint-Denis was unwholesome, and the smell of the mud in the market made them long for the scent of the roses of Provins. They suffered alike from home-sickness and monomania, both thwarted by the necessity for selling their last remnants of thread, reels of silk, and buttons. The promised land of the valley of Provins attracted these Israelites all the more strongly because they had for a long time really suffered, and had crossed with gasping breath the sandy deserts of haberdashery.

The letter from the Lorrains arrived in the middle of a meditation on that beautiful future. The haberdashers scarcely knew their cousin Pierrette Lorrain. The settlement of Auffray's estate, long since, by the old innkeeper, had taken place when they were going into business, and Rogron never said much about his money matters. Having been sent to Paris so young, the brother and sister could hardly remember their aunt Lorrain. It took them an hour of genealogical discussion to recall their aunt, the daughter of their grandfather Auffray's second wife, and their mother's half-sister. They then remembered that Mme. Lorrain's mother was the Mme. Néraud who had died of grief. They concluded that their grandfather's second marriage had been a disastrous thing for them, the result being the division of Auffray's estate between two families. They had, indeed, heard sundry recriminations from their father, who was always somewhat of the grudging publican. The pair studied the Lorrains' letter through the medium of these reminiscences, which were not in Pierrette's favor. To take charge of an orphan, a girl, a cousin, who in any case would be their heiress in the event of their neither of them marrying,—this was matter for discussion. The question was regarded from every point of view. In the first place, they had never seen Pierrette. Then it would be very troublesome to have a young girl to look after. Would they not be binding themselves to provide for her? It would be impossible to send her away if they did not like her. Would they not have to find her a husband? And if, after all, Rogron could find " a shoe to fit him " among the heiresses of Provins, would it not be better to keep all they had for his children? The shoe that would fit her brother, according to Sylvie, was a rich girl, stupid and ugly, who would allow her sister-in-law to rule her. The couple decided that they would refuse.

Sylvie undertook to reply. Business was sufficiently pressing to retard this letter, which she did not deem urgent, and indeed the old maid thought no more about it when the forewoman consented to buy the business and stock-in-trade of the Sœur de Famille.

Sylvie Rogron and her brother had gone to settle in Provins four years before the time when Brigaut's appearance brought so much interest into Pierrette's life. But the doings of these two persons in the country require a description no less than their life in Paris; for Provins was fated to be as evil an influence for Pierrette as her cousins' commercial antecedents.

When a small tradesman who has come to Paris from the provinces returns to the country from Paris, he inevitably brings with him some notions; presently he loses them in the habits of the place where he settles down, and where his fancies for innovations gradually sink. Hence come those slow, small, successive changes which are gradually scratched by Paris on the surface of country-town life, and which are the essential stamp of the change of a retired shopkeeper into a confirmed provincial. This change is a real distemper. No small tradesman can pass without a shock from perpetual talk to utter silence, from the activity of his Paris life to the stagnation of the country. When the good folks have earned a little money, they spend a certain amount on the passion they have so long been hatching, and work off the last spasms of an energy which cannot be stopped short at will. Those who have never cherished any definite plan, travel, or throw themselves into the political interests of the municipality. Some go out shooting or fishing, and worry their farmers and tenants. Some turn usurers, like old father Rogron, or speculate, like many obscure persons.

The dream of this brother and sister is known to you; they wanted to indulge their magnificent fancy for handling the trowel, for building a delightful house. This fixed idea had graced the Square of lower Provins with the frontage which Brigaut had just been examining, the interior arrangements of the house, and its luxurious furniture. The builder drove never a nail in without consulting the Rogrons, without making them sign the plans and estimates, without explaining in lengthy detail the structure of the object under discussion, where it was made, and the various prices. As to anything unusual, it had always been introduced by M. Tiphaine or Mme. Julliard the younger, or M. Garceland, the Maire. Such a resemblance with some wealthy citizen of Provins always carried the day in the builder's favor.

"Oh, if M. Garceland has got one we will have it!" said Mlle. Sylvie. "It must be right; he had good taste."

"Sylvie, he suggests we should have ovolos in the cornice of the passage."

"You call that an ovolo?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"But why? What a queer name! I never heard it before."

"But you have seen them?"

"Yes."

"Do you know Latin?"

"No."

"Well, it means egg-shaped; the ovolo is egg-shaped."

"You are a queer crew, you architects!" cried Rogron. "That, no doubt, is the reason you charge so much; you don't throw away your egg-shells!"

"Shall we paint the passage?" asked the builder.

"Certainly not!" cried Sylvie. "Another five hundred francs!"

"But the drawing-room and the stairs are so nice, it is a pity not to decorate the passage," said the builder. "Little Mme. Lesourd had hers painted last year."

"And yet her husband, being crown prosecutor, cannot stay at Provins——"

"Oh! he will be President of the Courts here some day," said the builder.

"And what do you think is to become of M. Tiphaine then?"

"M. Tiphaine! He has a pretty wife; I am not uneasy about him. M. Tiphaine will go to Paris."

"Shall we paint the corridor?"

"Yes; the Lesourds will, at any rate, see that we are as good as they are," said Rogron.

The first year of their residence in Provins was wholly given up to these discussions, to the pleasure of seeing the workmen busy, to the surprises and information of all kinds that they got by it, and to the attempts made by the brother and sister to scrape acquaintance with the most important families in the town.

The Rogrons had never had any kind of society; they had never gone out of their shop; they knew literally no one in Paris, and they thirsted for the pleasures of visiting. On their return they found first M. and Mme. Julliard, of the Ver Chinois, with their children and grandchildren; then the Guépin family, or, to be exact, the Guépin clan; the grandson still kept the shop of the Trois Quenouilles; and finally, Mme. Guénée, who had sold them the business of the Sœur de Famille; her three daughters were married in Provins. These three great tribes—the Julliards, the Guépins, and the Guénées—spread over the town like couch-grass on a lawn. M. Garceland, the Maire, was M. Guépin's son-in-law. The curé, M. l'Abbé Péroux, was own brother to

Mme. Julliard, who was a Péroux. The President of the Court, M. Tiphaine, was brother to Mme. Guénée, who signed herself "*née* Tiphaine."

The queen of the town was Mme. Tiphaine junior, the handsome only daughter of Mme. Roguin, who was the wealthy wife of a notary of Paris; but he was never mentioned. Delicate, pretty, and clever, married to a provincial husband by the express management of her mother, who would not have her with her, and had taken her from school only a few days before her marriage, Mélanie felt herself an exile at Provins, where she behaved admirably well. She was already rich, and had great expectations. As to M. Tiphaine, his old father had advanced his eldest daughter, Mme. Guénée, so much money on account of her share of the property, that an estate worth eight thousand francs a year, at about five leagues from Provins, would fall to the President. Thus the Tiphaines, who had married on twenty thousand francs a year, exclusive of the President's salary and residence, expected some day to have twenty thousand francs a year more. They were not out of luck, people said.

Mme. Tiphaine's great and only object in life was to secure her husband's election as deputy. Once in Paris, the deputy would be made judge, and from the Lower Court she promised herself he should soon be promoted to the High Court of Justice. Hence she humored everybody's vanity, and strove to please; more difficult still, she succeeded. The young woman of two-and-twenty received twice a week, in her handsome house in the old town, all the citizen class of Provins. She had not yet taken a single awkward step on the slippery ground where she stood. She gratified every conceit, patted every hobby; grave with serious folks, and a girl with girls, of all things a mother with the mothers, cheerful with the young wives, eager to oblige, polite to all; in short, a pearl, a gem, the pride of Provins. She had not yet said the word, but all the electors of the town awaited the day when their dear President should be old enough, to nominate him at once. Every voter, sure of his talents, made him his man and his patron. Oh yes, M.

Tiphaine would get on; he would be Keeper of the Seals, and he would promote the interests of Provins.

These were the means by which Mme. Tiphaine had been so fortunate as to obtain her ascendency over the little town of Provins. Mme. Guénée, M. Tiphaine's sister, after seeing her three daughters married—the eldest to M. Lesourd, the public prosecutor; the second to M. Martener, the doctor; and the third to M. Auffray, the notary—had herself married again M. Galardon, the collector of taxes. Mmes. Lesourd, Martener, and Auffray, and their mother Mme. Galardon, regarded the President as the wealthiest and cleverest man in the family. The public prosecutor, M. Tiphaine's nephew by marriage, had the greatest interest in getting his uncle to Paris, so as to be made President himself. Hence these four ladies—for Mme. Galardon adored her brother—formed a little court about Mme. Tiphaine, taking her opinion and advice on every subject.

Then M. Julliard's eldest son, married to the only daughter of a rich farmer, was taken with a sudden passion, a *grande passion*, secret and disinterested, for the President's wife—that angel dropped from the sky of Paris. Mélanie, very wily, incapable of burdening herself with a Julliard, but perfectly capable of keeping him as an Amadis and making use of his folly, advised him to start a newspaper to which she was the Egeria. So for two years now Julliard, animated by his romantic passion, had managed a paper and run a diligence for Provins. The newspaper, entitled *La Ruche* (*The Beehive*), included literary, archæological, and medical papers concocted in the family. The advertisements of the district paid the expenses; the subscriptions—about two hundred—were all profit. Melancholy verses sometimes appeared in it, unintelligible to the country people, and addressed "To Her!!!" with the three points of admiration. Thus the young Julliard couple, singing the merits of Mme. Tiphaine, had allied the clan Julliard to that of the Guénées. Thenceforward the President's drawing-room, of course, led the society of the town. The very few aristocrats who lived at Provins met in a single house in the old town, that of the old Comtesse de Bréautey.

During the first six months after their transplanting, the Rogrons, by favor of their old-time connection with the Julliards, the Guépins, and the Guénées, and by emphasizing their relationship to M. Auffray, the notary—a great grand-nephew of their grandfather's—were received at first by Mme. Julliard the elder and Mme. Galardon; then, not without difficulty, they found admission to the beautiful Mme. Tiphaine's drawing-room. Everybody wished to know something about the Rogrons before inviting them to call. It was a little difficult to avoid receiving tradespeople of the Rue Saint-Denis, natives of Provins, who had come back to spend their money there. Nevertheless, the instinct of society is always to bring together persons of similar fortune, education, manners, acquaintance, and character. Now the Guépins, the Guénées, and the Julliards were of a higher grade, and of older family, than the Rogrons—the children of a money-lending innkeeper who could not be held blameless in his private life, nor with regard to the Auffray inheritance. Auffray, the notary, Mme. Galardon's son-in-law, knew all about it; the estate had been wound up in his predecessor's office. Those older merchants, who had retired twelve years since, had found themselves on the level of education, breeding, and manners of the circle to which Mme. Tiphaine imparted a certain stamp of elegance, of Paris varnish. Everything was homogeneous; they all understood each other, and knew how to conduct themselves, and talk so as to be agreeable to the rest. They knew each other's characters, and were accustomed to agree. Having been once received by M. Garceland, the Maire, the Rogrons flattered themselves that they should soon be on intimate terms with the best society of the town. Sylvie learnt to play boston. Rogron, far too stupid to play any game, twirled his thumbs and swallowed his words when once he had talked about his house. But the words acted like medicine; they seemed to torture him cruelly; he rose, he looked as if he were about to speak; he took fright and sat down again, his lips comically convulsed. Sylvie unconsciously displayed her nature at games. Fractious and complaining whenever she lost, insolently triumphant when she won, contentious and fretful, she irritated her adversaries and her partners, and was a nuisance to everybody.

Eaten up with silly and undisguised envy, Rogron and his sister tried to play a part in a town where a dozen families had formed a net of close meshes; all their interests, all their vanities made, as it were, a slippery floor on which newcomers had to tread very cautiously to avoid running up against something or getting a fall. Allowing that the rebuilding of their house might cost thirty thousand francs, the brother and sister between them would still have ten thousand francs a year. They fancied themselves very rich, bored their acquaintance to death with their talk of future splendor, and so gave the measure of their meanness, their crass ignorance, and their idiotic jealousy. The evening they were introduced to Mme. Tiphaine the beauty—who had already watched them at Mme. Garceland's, at her sister-in-law's, Mme. Galardon's, and at the elder Mme. Julliard's—the queen of Provins said in a confidential tone to Julliard junior, who remained alone with her and the President a few minutes after everyone was gone—

"You all seem to be much smitten with these Rogrons?"

"I!" said the Amadis of Provins; "they bore my mother; they overpower my wife; and when Mlle. Sylvie was sent, thirty years ago, as an apprentice to my father, even then he could not endure her."

"But I have a very great mind," said the pretty lady, putting a little foot on the bar of the fender, "to give them to understand that my drawing-room is not an inn-parlor."

Julliard cast up his eyes to the ceiling as much as to say—"Dear Heaven, what wit, what subtlety!"

"I wish my company to be select, and if I admit the Rogrons it will certainly not be that."

"They have no heart, no brain, no manners," said the President. "When after having sold thread for twenty years, as my sister did, for instance——"

"My dear, your sister would not be out of place in any drawing-room," said Mme. Tiphaine, in a parenthesis.

"If people are so stupid as to remain haberdashers to the end," the President went on; "if they do not cast their skin; if they think that 'Comtes de Champagne' means 'accounts for wine,' as the Rogrons did this evening, they should stay at home."

"They are noisome!" said Julliard. "You might think there was only one house in Provins. They want to crush us, and, after all, they have hardly enough to live on."

"If it were only the brother," said Mme. Tiphaine, "we might put up with him. He is not offensive. Give him a Chinese puzzle, and he would sit quietly in a corner. It would take him the whole winter to put up one pattern. But Mlle. Sylvie! What a voice—like a hyena with a cold! What lobster's claws! Do not repeat anything of this, Julliard."

When Julliard was gone, the little lady said to her husband—

"My dear, there are enough of the natives that I am obliged to receive; these two more would be the death of me; and with your permission, we will deprive ourselves of the pleasure."

"You are the mistress in your own house," said the President, "but we shall make many enemies. The Rogrons will join the Opposition, which hitherto has had no solidity in Provins. That Rogron is already hanging on to Baron Gouraud and Vinet, the lawyer."

"Heh!" said Mélanie, with a smile, "they will do you service then. Where there are no enemies, there is no triumph. A Liberal conspiracy, an illegal society, a fight of some kind, would bring you into the foreground."

The President looked at his young wife with a sort of alarmed admiration.

Next day everyone at Mme. Garceland's said in everyone else's ear that the Rogrons had not had a success at Mme. Tiphaine's, and her remark about the inn-parlor was much applauded. Mme. Tiphaine took a month before returning Mlle. Sylvie's visit. This rudeness is much remarked on in the country. Then, at Mme. Tiphaine's, when playing boston with the elder Mme. Julliard, Sylvie made a most unpleasant scene about a splendid *misère* hand, on which her erewhile mistress caused her to lose—maliciously and on purpose, she declared. Sylvie, who loved to play nasty tricks on others, could never accept a return in kind. Mme. Tiphaine, therefore, set the example of making up the card-parties before the Rogrons arrived, so that Sylvie was reduced to wandering from table to table, watching others play, while they looked at her askance with meaning glances. At old Mme. Julliard's whist was now the game, and Sylvie could not play it. The old maid at last understood that she was an outlaw, but without understanding the reason. She believed herself to be an object of jealousy to everybody.

Erelong the Rogrons were asked nowhere; but they persistently spent their evenings at various houses. Clever people made game of them, without venom, quite mildly, leading them to talk utter nonsense about the ovolos in their house, and about a certain cellaret for liqueurs, matchless in Provins. Meanwhile they gave themselves the final blow. Of course, they gave a few sumptuous dinners, as much in return for the civilities they had received as to show off their splendor. The guests came solely out of curiosity. The first dinner was given to M. and Mme. Tiphaine, with whom the Rogrons had not once dined; to MM. and Mmes. Julliard, father and son, mother and daughter-in-law; to M. Lesourd, M. le Curé, M. and Mme. Galardon. It was one of those provincial spreads, where the guests sit at table from five o'clock till nine. Mme. Tiphaine had introduced the grand Paris style to Provins, the well-bred guests going away as soon as coffee had been served. She had some friends that evening at home, and tried to steal away, but the Rogrons escorted the couple to the very street; and when they returned, bewildered at having failed to keep the President and his wife, the other guests explained Mme. Tiphaine's good taste, and imitated it with a promptitude that was cruel in a country-town.

"They will not see our drawing-room lighted up!" cried Sylvie, "and candle-light is like rouge to it."

The Rogrons had hoped to give their guests a surprise. No one hitherto had been admitted to see this much-talked-of house. And all the frequenters of Mme. Tiphaine's drawing-room impatiently awaited her verdict as to the marvels of the "*Palais* Rogron."

"Well," said little Mme. Martener, "you have seen the Louvre? Tell us all about it."

"But all—like the dinner—will not amount to much."

"What is it like?"

"Well, the front door, of which we were, of course, required to admire the gilt-iron window frames that you all know, opens into a long passage through the house, dividing it unequally, since there is but one window to the street on the right, and two on the left. At the garden end this passage has a glass door to steps leading down to the lawn, a lawn with a decorative pedestal supporting a plaster cast of the Spartacus, painted to imitate bronze. Behind the kitchen the architect has contrived a little pantry under the staircase, which we were not spared seeing. The stair, painted throughout like yellow-veined marble, is a hollow spiral, just like the stairs that in a café lead from the ground floor to the entresol. This trumpery structure of walnut wood, really dangerously light, and with banisters picked out with brass, was displayed to us as one of the seven wonders of the world. The way to the cellars is beneath.

"On the other side of the passage, looking on the street, is the dining-room, opening by folding doors into the drawing-room, of the same size, but looking on to the garden."

"So there is no hall?" said Mme. Auffray.

"The hall, no doubt, is the long passage where you stand in a draught," replied Mme. Tiphaine. "We have had the eminently national, liberal, constitutional, and patriotic notion," she went on, "of making use only of wood grown in France! In the dining-room, the floor, laid in a neat pattern, is of walnut wood. The sideboards, table, and chairs are also in walnut. The window curtains are of white cotton with red borders, looped back with vulgar ropes over enormous pegs with elaborate dull-gilt rosettes, the mushroom-like object standing out against a reddish paper. These magnificent curtains run on rods ending in huge scrolls, and are held up by lions' claws in stamped brass, one at the top of each plait.

"Over one of the sideboards is a regular café clock, draped, as it were, with a sort of napkin in bronze gilt, an idea that quite enchants the Rogrons. They tried to make me admire this device; and I could find nothing better to say than that if it could ever be proper to hang a napkin round a clock face, it was, no doubt, in a dining-room. On this sideboard are two large lamps, like those which grace the counters of grand restaurants. Over the other is a highly decorative barometer, which seems to play an important part in their existence; Rogron gazes at it as he might gaze at his bride-elect. Between the windows the builder has placed a white earthenware stove in a hideously ornate niche. The walls blaze with a splendid paper in red and gold, such as you will see in these same restaurants, and Rogron chose it there no doubt on the spot.

"Dinner was served in a set of white-and-gold china; the dessert service is bright blue with green sprigs; but they opened the china closet to show us that they had another service of stoneware for everyday use. The linen is in large cupboards facing the sideboards. Everything is varnished, shining, new, and harsh in color. Still, I could accept the dining-room; it has a character of its own which, though not pleasing, is fairly representative of that of the owners; but there is no enduring the five engravings—those black-and-white things against which the Minister of the Interior ought really to get a decree; they represent Poniatowski leaping into the Elster, the Defense of the Barrière de Clichy, Napoleon himself pointing a gun, and two prints of Mazeppa, all in gilt frames of a vulgar pattern suitable to the prints, which are enough to make one loathe popularity. Oh! how much I prefer Mme. Julliard's pastels representing fruits, those capital pastels which were done in the time of Louis XV., and which harmonize with the nice old dining-room and its dark, rather worm-eaten panels, which are at least characteristic of the country, and suit the heavy family silver, the antique china, and all our habits. The country is provincial; it becomes ridiculous when it tries to ape Paris. You may perhaps retort, '*Vous êtes orfèvre, M. Josse!*'—'You are to the manner born.' But I prefer this old room of my father-in-law Tiphaine's, with its heavy curtains of green-and-white damask, its Louis XV. chimney-piece, its scroll pattern pier glass, its old beaded mirrors and time-honored card-tables; my jars of old Sèvres, old blue, mounted in old gilding; my clock with its impossible flowers, my out-of-date chandelier, and my tapestried furniture, to all the splendor of their drawing-room."

"What is it like?" said M. Martener, delighted with the praise of the country so ingeniously brought in by the pretty Parisienne.

"The drawing-room is a fine red—as red as Mlle. Sylvie when she is angry at losing a *misère*."

"Sylvie-red," said the President, and the word took its place in the vocabulary of the district.

"The window-curtains—red! the furniture—red! the chimney-piece—red marble veined with yellow! the candelabra and clock—red marble veined with yellow, and mounted in a heavy vulgar style; Roman lamp-brackets supported on Greek foliage! From the top of the clock a lion stares down on you, stupidly, as the Rogrons stare; a great good-natured lion, the ornamental lion so called, which will long continue to dethrone real lions; he spends his life clutching a black ball exactly like a deputy of the Left. Perhaps it is a Constitutional allegory. The dial of this clock is an extraordinary piece of work.

"The chimney glass is framed with appliqué ornaments, which look poor and cheap, though they are a novelty. But the upholsterer's genius shines most in a panel of red stuff of which the radiating folds all center in a rosette in the middle of the chimney-board—a romantic poem composed expressly for the Rogrons, who display it with ecstasy. From the ceiling hangs a chandelier, carefully wrapped in a green cotton shroud, and with a reason; it is in the very worst taste, raw-toned bronze, with even more detestable tendrils of brown gold. Under it a round tea-table of marble, with more yellow than ever in the red, displays a shining metal tray, on which glitter cups of painted china—such painting!

—arranged round a cut-glass sugar-basin, so bold in style that our grandchildren will open their eyes in amazement at the gilt rings round the edge and the diamond pattern on the sides, like a medieval quilted doublet, and at the tongs for taking the sugar, which probably no one will ever use.

"This room is papered with red flock-paper imitating velvet, divided into panels by a beading of gilt brass, finished at the corners with enormous palms. A chromo-lithograph hangs on each panel, framed most elaborately in plaster casting of garlands to imitate fine wood-carving. The furniture of elm-root, upholstered with satin-cloth, classically consists of two sofas, two large easy-chairs, six armchairs, and six light chairs. The console is graced by an alabaster vase, called *à la Medicis*, under a glass shade, and by the much-talked-of liqueur-case. We were told often enough that 'there is not such another in Provins.' In each window bay, hung with splendid red silk curtains besides, stands a card-table. The carpet is Aubusson; the Rogrons have not failed to get hold of the crimson ground with medallions of flowers, the vulgarest of all the common patterns.

"The room looks uninhabited; there are no books or prints —none of the little things that furnish a table," and she looked at her own table covered with fashionable trifles, albums, and the pretty toys that were given her. "There are no flowers, none of the little nothings that fade and are renewed. It is all as cold and dry as Mlle. Sylvie. Buffon is right in saying that the style is the man, and certainly drawing-rooms have a style!"

Pretty Mme. Tiphaine went on with her description by epigrams; and from this specimen, it is easy to imagine the rooms in which the brother and sister really lived on the first floor, which they also displayed to their guests. Still, no one could conceive of the foolish expenses into which the cunning builder had dragged the Rogrons; the moldings of the doors, the elaborate inside shutters, the plaster ornaments on the cornices, the fancy painting, the brass-gilt knobs and bells, the ingenious smoke-consuming fireplaces, the contrivances for the prevention of damp, the sham inlaid wood on the staircase, the elaborate glass and smith's work—

in short, all the fancy-work which adds to the cost of building, and delights the common mind, had been lavished without stint.

No one would go to the Rogrons' evenings; their pretensions were still-born. There were abundant reasons for refusing; every day was taken up by Mme. Garceland, Mme. Galardon, the two Julliard ladies, Mme. Tiphaine, the Sous-préfet, etc. The Rogrons thought that giving dinners was all that was needed to get into society; they secured some young people who laughed at them, and some diners-out, such as are to be found in every part of the world; but serious people quite gave them up. Sylvie, alarmed at the clear loss of forty thousand francs swallowed up without any return in the house she called her dear house, wanted to recover the sum by economy. So she soon ceased to give dinners that cost from thirty to forty francs, without the wine, as they failed to realize her hope of forming a circle—a thing as difficult to create in the country as it is in Paris. Sylvie dismissed her cook, and hired a country girl for the coarser work. She herself cooked "to amuse herself."

Thus, fourteen months after their return home, the brother and sister had drifted into a life of isolation and idleness. Her banishment from "the world" had roused in Sylvie's soul an intense hatred of the Tiphaines, Julliards, Auffrays, and Garcelands—in short, of everybody in Provins society, which she stigmatized as a *clique*, with which she was on the most distant terms. She would gladly have set up a rival circle; but the second-rate citizen class was composed entirely of small tradespeople, never free but on Sundays and holidays; or of persons in ill-odor, like Vinet, the lawyer, and Dr. Néraud; or of rank Bonapartists, like General Gouraud; and Rogron very rashly made friends with these, though the upper set had vainly warned him against them. The brother and sister were obliged to sit together by the fire of their dining-room stove, talking over their business, the faces of their customers, and other equally amusing matters.

The second winter did not come to an end without their being almost crushed by its weight of dullness. They had the greatest difficulty in spending the hours of their day. As they went to bed at night, they thought, "One more over!" They spun out the morning by getting up late and dressing slowly. Rogron shaved himself every morning; he examined his face and described to his sister the changes he fancied he noted in it; he squabbled with the maid over the temperature of the hot water; he wandered into the garden to see if the flowers were sprouting; he ventured down to the river-bank, where he had built a summerhouse; he examined the woodwork of the house. Had it warped? Had the settling split any of the panels? Was the paint wearing well? Then he came in to discuss his anxieties as to a sick hen, or some spot where the damp had left stains, talking to his sister, who affected hurry in laying the table while she scolded the maid. The barometer was the most useful article in the house to Rogron; he consulted it for no reason, tapped it familiarly like a friend, and then said, "Vile weather!" to which his sister would reply, "Pooh, the weather is quite seasonable." If anybody called, he would boast of the excellence of this instrument.

Their breakfast took up some little time. How slowly did these two beings masticate each mouthful. And their digestion was perfect; they had no cause to fear cancer of the stomach. By reading the *Ruche* and the *Constitutionnel* they got on to noon. They paid a third of the subscription to the Paris paper with Vinet and Colonel Gouraud. Rogron himself carried the paper to the colonel, who lived in the Square, lodging with M. Martener; the soldier's long stories were an immense delight to him. Rogron could only wonder why the colonel was considered dangerous. He was such an idiot as to speak to him of the ostracism under which he lived, and retail the sayings of the "clique." God only knows what the colonel—who feared no one and was as redoubtable with the pistol as with the sword—had to say of "La Tiphaine" and "her Julliard," of the ministerial officials of the upper town—"men brought over by foreigners, capable of anything to stick in their places, cooking the lists of votes at the elections to suit themselves," and the like.

At about two o'clock Rogron sallied forth for a little walk. He was quite happy when a shopkeeper, standing at his door, stopped him with a "How d'ye do, Père Rogron?" He gossiped, and asked, "What news in the town?" heard and repeated scandal, or the tittle-tattle of Provins. He walked to the upper town, or in the sunk roads, according to the weather. Sometimes he met other old men airing themselves in like manner. Such meetings were happy events.

There were at Provins certain men who were out of conceit with the life of Paris, learned and modest men, living with their books. Imagine Rogron's frame of mind when he listened to a supernumerary judge named Desfondrilles, more of an archæologist than a lawyer, saying to a man of education, old M. Martener, the doctor's father, as he pointed to the valley—

"Will you tell me why the idlers of all Europe flock to Spa rather than to Provins, when the waters of Provins are acknowledged to be superior by the whole French faculty of medicine, and to have effects and an energy worthy of the medical properties of our roses?"

"What do you expect?" replied the man of the world, "it is one of the caprices of Caprice, and just as inexplicable. The wines of Bordeaux were unknown a hundred years ago. Maréchal Richelieu, one of the grandest figures of the last century, the Alcibiades of France, was made governor of Guyenne. His chest was delicate—the world knew why—the wine of the country strengthened and restored him to health. Bordeaux at once made a hundred millions of francs a year, and the Marshal extended the Bordeaux district as far as Angoulême and as far as Cahors, in short, to forty leagues in every direction! Who knows where the vineyards of Bordeaux end?—And there is no equestrian statue of the Marshal at Bordeaux!"

"Ah! if such an event should take place at Provins in this century or the next," M. Desfondrilles went on, "I hope that either on the little Square in the lower town, or on the castle, or somewhere in the upper town, some bas-relief would be seen representing the head of M. Opoix, the rediscoverer of the mineral waters of Provins!"

"But, my dear sir, it would perhaps be impossible to rehabilitate Provins," said old M. Martener. "The town is bankrupt."

At this Rogron opened his eyes wide, and exclaimed—

"What!"

"Provins was formerly a capital which, in the twelfth century, held its own as a rival to Paris, when the Counts of Champagne held their court here as King René held his in Provence," replied the man of learning. "In those days civilization, pleasure, poetry, elegance, women—in short, all the splendor of social life was not exclusively restricted to Paris. Towns find it as hard as houses of business to rise again from ruin. Nothing is left to Provins but the fragrance of its historic past and that of its roses—and a sous-préfecture."

"Oh! to think what France might be if she still had all her feudal capitals!" said Desfondrilles. "Can our sous-préfets fill the place of the poetic, gallant, and warlike race of Thibault, who made Provins what Ferrara was in Italy, what Weimar was in Germany, and what Munich would like to be in our day?"

"Provins was a capital?" asked Rogron.

"Why, where have you dropped from?" said Desfondrilles, the archæologist.

The lawyer struck the pavement of the upper town where they were standing with his stick: "Do not you know," he cried, "that all this part of Provins is built on crypts?"

"Crypts?"

"Yes, to be sure, crypts of unaccountable loftiness and extent. They are like cathedral aisles, full of pillars."

"M. Desfondrilles is writing a great antiquarian work in which he intends to describe these singular structures," said old Martener, seeing the lawyer mount his hobby.

Rogron came home enchanted to think that his house stood in this valley. The crypts of Provins kept him occupied for five or six days in exploring them, and for several evenings afforded a subject of conversation to the old couple. Thus

Rogron generally picked up something about old Provins, about the intermarriages of the families, or some stale political news which he retailed to his sister. And a hundred times over in the course of his walk—several times even of the same person—he would ask, "Well, what is the news? What has happened lately?" When he came in he threw himself on a sofa in the drawing-room as if he were tired out, but really he was only weary of his own weight.

He got on to dinner-time by going twenty times to and fro between the drawing-room and the kitchen, looking at the clock, opening and shutting doors. So long as the brother and sister spent the evenings in other houses they got through the hours till bedtime, but after they were reduced to staying at home the evening was a desert to traverse. Sometimes people on their way home, after spending the evening out, as they crossed the little Place, heard sounds in the Rogrons' house as if the brother were murdering the sister; they recognized them as the terrific yawns of a haberdasher driven to bay. The two machines had nothing to grind with their rusty wheels, so they creaked.

The brother talked of marrying, but with a sense of despair. He felt himself old and worn; a wife terrified him. Sylvie, who understood the need for a third person in the house, then remembered their poor cousin, for whom no one in Provins had ever inquired, for everybody supposed that little Mme. Lorrain and her daughter were both dead. Sylvie Rogron never lost anything; she was too thoroughly an old maid to mislay anything, whatever it might be. She affected to have found the letter from the Lorrains so as to make it natural that she should mention Pierrette to her brother, and he was almost happy at the possibility of having a little girl about the house. Sylvie wrote to the old Lorrains in a half-business-like, half-affectionate tone, attributing the delay in her answer to the winding up of their affairs, to their move back to Provins, and settling there. She affected to be anxious to have her little cousin with her, allowing it to be understood that if M. Rogron should not marry, Pierrette would some day inherit twelve thousand francs a year. It would be needful to have been, like

Nebuchadnezzar, to some extent a wild beast, shut up in a cage in a beast-garden with nothing to prey on but butcher's meat brought in by the keeper, or else a retired tradesman with no shop-clerks to nag, to imagine the impatience with which the brother and sister awaited their cousin Lorrain. Three days after the dispatch of the letter they were already wondering when the child would arrive.

Sylvie discerned in her so-called generosity to her penniless cousin a means of changing the views of Provins society with regard to herself. She called on Mme. Tiphaine, who had stricken them with her disapproval, and who aimed at creating an upper class at Provins, like that at Geneva, and blew the trumpet to announce the advent of her cousin Pierrette, the child of Colonel Lorrain, pitying her woes, and congratulating herself as a lucky woman on having a pretty young heiress to introduce in society.

"You have been a long time discovering her," remarked Mme. Tiphaine, who sat enthroned on a sofa by her fireside.

Mme. Garceland, in a few words spoken in an undertone during a deal, revived the story of the Auffray property. The notary related the innkeeper's iniquities.

"Where is the poor little thing?" asked the President politely.

"In Brittany," said Rogron.

"But Brittany is a wide word!" remarked M. Lesourd, the public prosecutor.

"Her grandfather and grandmother wrote to us.—When was it, my dear?" asked Rogron.

Sylvie, absorbed in asking Mme. Garceland where she had bought the stuff for her dress, did not foresee the effect of her answer, and said, "Before we sold our business."

"And you answered three days ago, Mlle. Sylvie!" exclaimed the notary.

Sylvie turned as red as the hottest coals in the fire.

"We wrote to the Institution of Saint-Jacques," replied Rogron.

"There is a sort of asylum there for old people," said a lawyer, who had been supernumerary judge at Nantes.

"But she cannot be there, for they only take in persons who are past sixty."

"She is there with her grandmother Lorrain," said Rogron.

"She had a little money, the eight thousand francs left her by your father—no, I mean your grandfather," said the notary, blundering intentionally.

"Indeed!" said Rogron, looking stupid, and not understanding this sarcasm.

"Then you knew nothing of your first cousin's fortune or position?" asked the President.

"If M. Rogron had known it, he would not have left her in a place which is no more than a respectable workhouse," said the judge severely. "I remember now that a house belonging to M. and Mme. Lorrain was sold at Nantes under an execution; and Mlle. Lorrain lost her claims, for I was the commissioner in charge."

The notary spoke of Colonel Lorrain, who, if he were alive, would indeed be astonished to think of his child being in an institution like that of Saint-Jacques. The Rogrons presently withdrew, thinking the world very spiteful. Sylvie perceived that her news had had no success; she had ruined herself in everybody's opinion; henceforth she had no hope of making her way in the higher society of Provins.

From that day the Rogrons no longer dissembled their hatred of the great citizen-families of Provins, and of all their adherents. The brother now repeated all the Liberal fables which Lawyer Vinet and Colonel Gouraud had crammed him with about the Tiphaines, the Guénées, the Garcelands, the Guépins, and the Julliards.

"I tell you what, Sylvie, I don't see why Mme. Tiphaine should turn a cold shoulder on the Rue Saint-Denis: the best of her beauty was made there. Mme. Roguin, her mother, is a cousin of the Guillaumes of the Cat and Racket, who gave over their business to their son-in-law, Joseph Lebas. Her father is that notary, that Roguin, who failed in 1819, and ruined the Birotteaus. So Mme. Tiphaine's money is stolen wealth; for what is a notary's wife who takes her own settlement out of the fire and allows her husband to become a fraudulent bankrupt? A pretty thing indeed! Ah! I understand! She got her daughter married to live here at Provins through her connection with the banker du Tillet. And these people are proud!—Well! However, that is what the world is!"

On the day when Denis Rogron and his sister Sylvie thus broke out in abuse of the "clique," they had, without knowing it, become persons of importance, and were on the highroad to having some society; their drawing-room was on the point of becoming a center of interests which only needed a stage. The retired haberdasher assumed historical and political dignity, for, still without knowing it, he gave strength and unity to the hitherto unstable elements of the Liberal party at Provins. And this was the way of it: The early career of the Rogrons had been anxiously observed by Colonel Gouraud and the advocate Vinet, who had been thrown together by their isolation and their agreement of ideas. These two men professed equal patriotism, and for the same reasons—they wanted to acquire importance. But though they were anxious to be leaders, they lacked followers. The Liberals of Provins comprised an old soldier who sold lemonade; an innkeeper; M. Cournant, a notary, M. Auffray's rival; M. Néraud, a physician, Dr. Martener's rival; and some independent persons, farmers scattered about the neighborhood, and holders of national stock. The colonel and the lawyer, glad to attract an idiot whose money might help them in their maneuvers, who would support their subscriptions, who, in some cases, would take the bull by the horns, and whose house would be useful as a town-hall for the party, took advantage of the Rogrons' hostility towards the aristocrats of the place. The colonel, the lawyer, and Rogron had a slight bond in their joint subscription to the *Constitutionnel;* it would not be difficult for the colonel to make a Liberal of the ex-haberdasher, though Rogron knew so little of political history that he had not heard of the exploits of Sergeant Mercier; he thought he was a friend and brother.

The impending arrival of Pierrette hastened the hatching of certain covetous dreams to which the ignorance and folly of the old bachelor and old maid had given rise. The colonel, seeing that Sylvie had lost all chance of getting her foot into the circle of the Tiphaines, had an idea. Old soldiers have seen so many horrors in so many lands, so many naked corpses grimacing hideously on so many battlefields, that an ugly face has no terrors for them, so the colonel took steady aim at the old maid's fortune. This officer, a short, fat man, wore rings in his ears, which were already graced by bushy tufts of hair. His floating gray whiskers were such as in 1799 had been called "fins." His large, good-natured, red face was somewhat frost-bitten, as were those of all who escaped at the Beresina. His huge, prominent stomach had the flattened angle below characteristic of an old cavalry officer; Gouraud had commanded the second regiment of Hussars. His gray mustache covered a huge mouth—a perfect trap—the only word to describe that abyss; he did not eat, he devoured! A sword-cut had shortened his nose. His speech was in consequence thick and deeply nasal, like that ascribed to Capuchin friars. His hands, which were small, short, and broad, were such as make a woman say, "You have the hands of a thorough scamp." His legs, below such a huge body, looked frail. Within this active but clumsy body lay a cunning spirit, entire experience of life and things, hidden under the apparent carelessness of a soldier, and utter contempt for the conventionalities of society. Colonel Gouraud had the pension of the Cross of the Legion of Honor, and two thousand four hundred francs a year as half-pay—a thousand crowns a year in all for his whole income.

The lawyer, tall and lean, had no talent but his political opinions, and no income but the meager profits of his business. At Provins solicitors plead their own cases. In view of his opinions, the Court listened with small favor to Maître Vinet; and the most Liberal farmers, when entangled in lawsuits, would rely on an attorney in favor with the Bench rather than employ Vinet. This man was said to have led astray a rich girl living near Coulommiers, and to have compelled her parents to let her marry him. His wife was one of the Chargebœufs, an old family of nobles in La Brie, who took their name from the exploit of a squire in Saint Louis's expedition to Egypt. She had incurred her parents' displeasure, and they, to Vinet's knowledge, had arranged to leave their whole fortune to their eldest son, charged, no doubt, with a reversion in favor of his sister's children. Thus this man's first ambitious scheme came to nothing. The lawyer, soon haunted by poverty, and ashamed of not having enough to enable his wife to keep up appearances, had made vain efforts to get his foot into a ministerial career; but the rich branch of the Chargebœufs refused to assist him. These Royalists were strictly moral, and disapproved of a compulsory marriage; besides, their would-be relation's name was Vinet; how could they favor anyone so common? So the lawyer was handed on from one branch to another when he tried to utilize his wife's interest with her relations. Mme. Vinet found no assistance but from one of the family, a widowed Mme. Chargebœuf, with a daughter, quite poor, who lived at Troyes. And a day came when Vinet remembered the kind reception his wife met with from this lady.

Rejected by the whole world, full of hatred of his wife's family, of the Government which refused him an appointment, and of the society of Provins, which would have nothing to say to him, Vinet accepted his poverty. His venom fermented and gave him energy to endure. He became a Liberal on perceiving that his fortune was bound up with the triumph of the Opposition, and vegetated in a wretched little house in the upper town, which his wife seldom quitted. This girl, born to a better fate, lived absolutely alone in her home with her one child. There are cases of poverty nobly met and cheerfully endured; but Vinet, eaten up by ambition, and feeling that he had wronged a young creature, cherished a dark indignation; his conscience expanded to admit every means to success. His face, still young, changed for the worse. People were sometimes terrified in Court at the sight of his flat viperine head, with its wide mouth, and eyes that glittered through his spectacles; at hearing his sharp, shrill, rasping voice, that wrung their nerves. His muddy complexion, patchy with sickly hues of yellow and green, revealed his suppressed ambitions, his perpetual mortification and hidden penury. He could argue and harangue; he had no lack of point and imagery; he was learned and crafty. Accustomed to indulge his imagination for the sake of rising by hook or by crook, he might have made a politician. A man who hesitates at nothing so long as it is legal is a strong man, and in this lay Vinet's strength.

This coming athlete of parliamentary debate—one of the men who were to proclaim the supremacy of the House of Orleans—had a disastrous influence over Pierrette's fate. At present he wanted to provide himself with a weapon by founding a newspaper at Provins. After having studied the Rogrons from afar, with the assistance of the colonel, he ended by reckoning on the brother. And this time he reckoned with his host; his poverty was to come to an end after seven dolorous years, during which more than one day had come round without bread. On the day when Gouraud announced to Vinet, on the little Square, that the Rogrons had broken with the citizen aristocracy and official circles of the old town, the lawyer nudged him significantly in the ribs.

"This wife or that, ugly or handsome, it must be all the same to you," said he. "You should marry Mlle. Rogron, and then we could get something done here——"

"I was thinking of it. But they have sent for the daughter of poor Colonel Lorrain—their heiress," said Gouraud.

"You could make them leave you their money by will. You would have a very nicely fitted house."

"And the child, after all! Well, we shall see," said the colonel, with a jocose and deeply villainous leer, which showed a man of Vinet's temper how small a thing a little girl was in the eyes of this old soldier.

Since her grandparents had gone into the asylum where they were forlornly ending their days, Pierrette, young and full of pride, was so dreadfully miserable at living there on charity, that she was happy to learn that she had some rich connections. On hearing that she was leaving, Brigaut, the major's son, the companion of her childhood, who was now a joiner's apprentice at Nantes, came to give her the money needful for her journey by coach—sixty francs, all the savings of his odd earnings painfully hoarded; Pierrette accepted it with the sublime indifference of true friendship, showing that she, in similar circumstances, would have been hurt by thanks. Brigaut had gone every Sunday to Saint-Jacques to play with Pierrette, and to comfort her. The sturdy young workman had already gone through his delightful apprenticeship to the perfect and devoted care that we give to the object of our involuntary choice and affection. More than once ere now, Pierrette and he, on a Sunday, sitting in a corner of the garden, had sketched their childish dreams on the veil of the future; the young craftsman, mounted on his plane, traveled round the world, making a fortune for Pierrette, who waited for him.

So, in the month of October 1824, when Pierrette had almost completed her eleventh year, she was placed in the care of the guard of the diligence from Nantes to Paris by the two old people and the young apprentice, all three dreadfully sad. The guard was requested to put her into the coach for Provins, and to take great care of her. Poor Brigaut! he ran after the diligence like a dog, looking at his dear Pierrette as long as he could. In spite of the child's signals, he ran on for a league beyond the town, and when he was exhausted, his eyes sent a last tearful glance at Pierrette, who cried when she could see him no more. Pierrette put her head out of the window, and discerned her friend standing squarely, and watching the heavy vehicle that left him behind.

The Lorrains and Brigaut had so little knowledge of life that the little Bretonne had not a sou left when she arrived in Paris. The guard, to whom the child prattled of rich relations, paid her expenses at an inn in Paris, made the guard of the Troyes coach repay him, and desired him to deliver Pierrette to her family and collect the debt, exactly as if she were a parcel by carrier.

Four days after leaving Nantes, at about nine o'clock one Monday evening, a kind, burly old guard of the Messageries Royales took Pierrette by the hand, and, while the coach was unloading in the High Street such passengers and parcels as were to be deposited at Provins, he led her, with no luggage but two frocks, two pairs of stockings, and two shifts, to the house pointed out to him by the office clerk as that of Mlle. Rogron.

"Good-morning, mademoiselle, and gents all," said the guard. "I have brought you a cousin of yours, and here she be, and a pretty dear too. You have forty-seven francs to pay. Though your little girl has no weight of baggage, please to sign my way-book."

Mlle. Sylvie and her brother gave way to their delight and astonishment.

"Begging your pardon," said the guard, "my coach is waiting—sign my sheet and give me forty-seven francs and sixty centimes, and what you please for me and the guard from Nantes, for we have taken as much care of her as if she were our own. We have paid out for her bed and food, her place in the coach here, and other little things."

"Forty-seven francs and twelve sous?" exclaimed Sylvie.

"You're never going to beat me down?" cried the guard.

"But where is the invoice?" said Rogron.

"The invoice!—Here is my way-bill."

"You can talk afterwards, pay now!" said Sylvie to her brother; "you see, you cannot help paying."

Rogron went to fetch forty-seven francs twelve sous.

"And nothing for us—for my pal and me?" said the guard.

Sylvie produced a two-franc piece from the depths of her old velvet bag, where her keys lurked in bunches.

"Thank you—keep it," said the man. "We would rather have looked after the little girl for her own sake." He took up his sheet and went out, saying to the servant girl: "A nice place this is! There are crocodiles of that sort without going to Egypt for 'em."

"Those people are horribly coarse!" said Sylvie, who had heard his speech.

"*Dame!* they took care of the child," replied Adèle, with her hands on her hips.

"We are not obliged to live with him," said Rogron.

"Where is she to sleep?" asked the maid.

Such was the reception that met Pierrette Lorrain on her arrival at her cousins' house, while they looked at her with a bewildered air. She was flung on their hands like a parcel, with no transition between the wretched room in which she had lived with her grandparents and her cousins' dining-room, which struck her as palatial. She stood there mute and shy. To anyone but these retired haberdashers, the little Bretonne would have been adorable in her frock of coarse blue serge, a pink cotton apron, her blue stockings, thick shoes, and white kerchief; her little red hands were covered by knitted mittens of red wool edged with white that the guard had bought for her. Her little Brittany cap, which had been washed in Paris—it had got tumbled in the course of the journey from Nantes—really looked like a glory round her bright face. This native cap, made of fine cambric, with a stiff lace border ironed into flat plaits, deserves a description, it is so smart and so simple. The light, filtered through the muslin and lace, casts a half shadow, a twilight softness, on the face; it gives it the virginal grace which painters try to find on their palettes, and which Léopold Robert has succeeded in lending to the Raphael-like face of the woman holding a child in his picture of the *Reapers*. Within this setting of broken lights shone an artless rose and white face, beaming with vigorous health. The heat of the room brought the blood to her head, and it suffused the edge of her tiny ears with fire, tingeing her lips and the tip of a finely cut nose, while by contrast it made her bright complexion look whiter than before.

"Well, have you nothing to say to us?" said Sylvie. "I am your cousin Sylvie, and that is your cousin Denis."

"Are you hungry?" asked Rogron.

"When did you leave Nantes?" asked Sylvie.

"She is dumb," said Rogron.

"Poor child, she has very few clothes to her back!" observed sturdy Adèle, as she untied the bundle wrapped in a handkerchief belonging to old Lorrain.

"Kiss your cousin," said Sylvie. Pierrette kissed Rogron.

"Yes, kiss your cousin," said Rogron. Pierrette kissed Sylvie.

"She is scared by the journey, poor little thing; perhaps she is sleepy," said Adèle.

Pierrette felt a sudden and invincible aversion for her two relations, a feeling she had never before known. Sylvie and the maid went to put the little girl to bed in the room on the second floor where Brigaut was to see the cotton curtain. There were in this attic a small bed with a pole painted blue, from which hung a cotton curtain, a chest of drawers of walnut wood, with no marble top, a smaller table of the same wood, a looking-glass, a common bed-table, and three wretched chairs. The walls and sloping roof to the front were covered with a cheap blue paper flowered with black. The floor was painted and waxed, and struck cold to the feet. There was no carpet but a thin bedside rug made of selvages. The chimney-shelf, of cheap marble, was graced with a mirror, two candlesticks of copper gilt, and a vulgar alabaster vase with two pigeons drinking to serve as handles; this Sylvie had had in her room in Paris.

"Shall you be comfortable here, child?" asked Sylvie.

"Oh! it is beautiful!" replied the little girl in her silvery treble.

"She is not hard to please," muttered the sturdy peasant woman to herself. "I had better warm the bed, I suppose?" she asked.

"Yes," said Sylvie, "the sheets may be damp."

Adèle brought a head kerchief of her own when she came up with the warming-pan; and Pierrette, who had hitherto slept in sheets of coarse Brittany linen, was amazed at the fine, soft cotton sheets. When the little girl was settled and in bed, Adèle, as she went downstairs, could not help exclaiming, "All her things put together are not worth three francs, mademoiselle!"

Since adopting her system of strict economy, Sylvie always made the servant sit in the dining-room, so as to have but one lamp and one fire. When Colonel Gouraud and Vinet came, Adèle withdrew to her kitchen. Pierrette's arrival kept them talking for the rest of the evening.

"We must get her some clothes to-morrow," said Sylvie. "She has hardly a stitch."

"She has no shoes but those thick ones she had on, and they weigh a pound," said Adèle.

"They wear them so in those parts," said Rogron.

"How she looked at the room, which is none so fine neither, for a cousin of yours, mademoiselle!"

"So much the better; hold your tongue. You see she is delighted with it."

"Lord above us! what shifts! They must rub her skin raw. But none of these things are of any use," said Adèle, turning out the contents of Pierrette's bundle.

Till ten o'clock master, mistress, and maid were busy deciding of what stuff and at what price the shifts should be made, how many pairs of stockings and of what quality, and how many under-petticoats would be needed, and calculating the cost of Pierrette's wardrobe.

"You will not get off for less than three hundred francs," said Rogron to his sister, as he carried the price of each article in his head from long practice, and added up the total from memory.

"Three hundred francs!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"Yes, three hundred; work it out yourself."

The brother and sister began again, and made it three hundred francs without the sewing.

"Three hundred francs at one cast of the net!" cried Sylvie, who went to bed on the idea so ingeniously expressed by this proverbial figure of speech.

Pierrette was one of those children of love whom love has blessed with tenderness, cheerfulnesss, brightness, generosity, and devotedness; nothing had as yet chilled or crushed her heart; it was almost wildly sensitive, and the way she was received by her relations weighed on it painfully. Though Brittany had to her been a home of poverty, it had also been a home of affection. Though the old Lorrains were the most unskilful traders, they were the simplest, most loving, most caressing souls in the world, as all disinterested people are. At Pen-Hoël their little granddaughter had had no teaching but that of nature. Pierrette went as she would in a boat on the pools, she ran about the village or the fields with her companion Jacques Brigaut, exactly like Paul and Virginia. Both the children, spoiled and petted by everyone, and as free as the air, ran after the thousand joys of childhood; in summer they went to watch the fishermen, they caught insects, plucked flowers, and gardened; in winter they made slides, built smart snow-palaces and snow-men, or made snowballs to pelt each other. They were everywhere welcome; everybody smiled on them.

When it was time that they should learn something, misfortunes came. Jacques, left destitute by his father's death, was apprenticed by his relations to a cabinet-maker, and maintained by charity, as Pierrette was soon after in the asylum of Saint-Jacques. But even in this almshouse, pretty little Pierrette had been made much of, loved, and kindly treated by all. The child, thus accustomed to so much affection, no longer found, in the home of these longed-for and wealthy relations, the look, the tone, the words, the manner which she had hitherto met with in everyone, even in the guards of the diligences. Thus her amazement, already great, was complicated by the changed moral atmosphere into which she had been plunged. The heart can turn suddenly cold and hot as the body can. The poor child longed to cry without knowing what for. She was tired, and she fell asleep.

Accustomed to rise very early, like all country-bred children, Pierrette awoke next morning two hours before the cook. She dressed, trotted about her room over her cousin's head, looked out on the little Square, and was going downstairs; she was astonished at the splendor of the staircase; she examined every detail—the rosettes, the brass-work, the moldings, the painting, etc. Then she went down; she could not open the garden door, so she came up again; went down once more when Adèle was about, and sprang into the garden. She took possession of it, ran to the river, was amazed by the summerhouse, went into the summerhouse; she had enough to see and wonder at in all she saw till her cousin Sylvie was up. During breakfast Sylvie said to her—

"So it was you, little bird, who were trotting up and downstairs at daybreak, and making such a noise? You woke me so completely that I could not get to sleep again. You must be very quiet, very good, and learn to play without making a sound. Your cousin does not like noise."

"And you must take care about your feet," said Rogron. "You went into the summerhouse with muddy shoes, and left your footsteps printed on the floor. Your cousin likes everything to be clean. A great girl like you ought to be cleanly. Were you not taught to be clean in Brittany? To be sure, when I went there to buy flax it was dreadful to see what savages they were!—She has a fine appetite at any rate," said Rogron, turning to his sister; "you might think that she had not seen food these three days."

And so, from the very first, Pierrette felt hurt by her cousins' remarks, hurt without knowing why. Her frank and upright nature, hitherto left to itself, had never been used to reflect; incapable, therefore, of understanding wherein her cousins were wrong, she was doomed to tardy enlightenment through suffering.

After breakfast, the couple, delighted by Pierrette's astonishment, and eager to enjoy it, showed her their fine drawing-room, to teach her to respect its splendor. Unmarried people, as a result of their isolation, and prompted by the craving for something to interest them, are led to supply the place of natural affections by artificial affections—the love of dogs, cats, or canary birds, of their servant or their spiritual director. Thus Rogron and Sylvie had an immoderate affection for the house and furniture that had cost them so much. Sylvie had taken to helping Adèle every morning, being of opinion that the woman did not know how to wipe furniture, to brush it, and make it look like new. This cleaning was soon her constant occupation. Thus, far from diminishing in value, the furniture was improved. Then the problem was to use it without wearing it out, without staining it, without scratching the wood or chilling the polish. This idea erelong became an old maid's monomania. Sylvie kept in a closet woolen rags, wax, varnish, and brushes; she learnt to use them as skillfully as a polisher; she had feather brooms and dusters, and she could rub without fear of hurting herself, she was so strong! Her clear, blue eye, as cold and hard as steel, constantly peered under the furniture, and you were more likely to find a tender chord in her heart than a speck of flue under a chair.

After what had passed at Mme. Tiphaine's, Sylvie could not possibly shirk the outlay of three hundred francs. During the first week Sylvie was wholly occupied, and Pierrette constantly amused by the frocks to be ordered and tried on, the shifts and petticoats to be cut out and made by needlewomen working by the day. Pierrette did not know how to sew.

"She has been nicely brought up!" cried Rogron. "Do you know nothing, child?"

Pierrette, who only knew how to love, answered but by a pretty childish shrug.

"What did you do all day in Brittany?" asked Rogron.

"I played," she replied guilelessly. "Everybody played with me. Grandmamma and grandpapa—and everybody told me stories. Oh! they were very fond of me."

"Indeed!" replied Rogron, "and so you lived like a lady."

Pierrette did not understand this tradesman's wit. She opened her eyes wide.

"She is as stupid as a wooden stool," said Sylvie to Mlle. Borain, the best workwoman in Provins.

"So young!" said the needlewoman, looking at Pierrette, whose delicate little face looked up at her with a knowing expression.

Pierrette liked the workwomen better than her cousins; she put on pretty airs for them, watched them sewing, said quaint things—the flowers of childhood, such as Rogron and Sylvie had already silenced by fear, for they liked to impress all dependents with wholesome alarm. The sewing-women were charmed with Pierrette. The outfit, however, was not achieved without some terrible interjections.

"That child will cost us the eyes in our heads!" said Sylvie to Rogron.

"Hold yourself up child, do. The deuce is in it! the clothes are for you, not for me." said she to Pierrette, when she was being measured or fitted.

"Come, let Mlle. Borain do her work; you won't pay her day's wages!" she exclaimed, seeing the child ask the head needlewoman to do something for her.

"Mademoiselle," asked Mlle. Borain, "must this seam be back-stitched?"

"Yes; make everything strongly; I do not want to have such a piece of work again in a hurry."

But it was the same with the little cousin as with the house. Pierrette was to be as well dressed as Mme. Garceland's little girl. She had fashionable little boots of bronze kid, like the little Tiphaine girl. She had very fine cotton stockings, stays by the best maker, a frock of blue rep, a pretty cape lined with white silk, all in rivalry with young Mme. Julliard's little girl. And the underclothes were as good as the outside show, Sylvie was so much afraid of the keen and scrutinizing eye of the mothers of children. Pierrette had pretty shifts of fine calico. Mlle. Borain said that Madame the Sous-préfète's little girls wore cambric drawers with embroidery and frilling—the latest thing, in short; Pierrette had frilled drawers. A charming drawn bonnet was ordered for her of blue velvet lined with white satin, like the little Martener girl's. Thus Pierrette was the smartest little person in Provins. On Sunday, on coming out from church, all the ladies kissed her. Mmes. Tiphaine, Garceland, Galardon, Auffray, Lesourd, Martener, Guépin, and Julliard doted on the sweet little Bretonne. This excitement flattered old Sylvie's vanity, and in her lavishness she thought less of Pierrette than of gratified pride.

However, Sylvie was fated to find offense in her little cousin's success, and this was how it came about: Pierrette was asked out, and, still to triumph over her neighbors, Sylvie allowed her to go. Pierrette was called for to play games and have dolls' dinner-parties with these ladies' children. Pierrette was a much greater success than the Rogrons; Mlle. Sylvie was aggrieved that Pierrette was in demand at other houses, but that no one came to see Pierrette at home. The artless child made no secret of her enjoyment at the houses of the Tiphaines, the Marteners, the Galardons, the Julliards, the Lesourds, the Auffrays, and the Garcelands, whose kindness contrasted strangely with the vexatiousness of her cousins. A mother would have been glad of her child's happiness; but the Rogrons had taken Pierrette to please themselves, not to please her; their feelings, far from being paternal, were tainted with egoism and a sort of commercial interest.

The beautiful outfit, the fine Sunday clothes, and the everyday frocks began Pierrette's misfortunes. Like all children free to amuse themselves and accustomed to follow the dictates of fancy, she wore out her shoes, boots, and frocks with frightful rapidity, and, above all, her frilled drawers. A mother when she scolds her child thinks of the child only; she is only hard when driven to extremities, and when the child is in the wrong; but in this great clothes question, the cousins' money was the first consideration; that was the real point, and not Pierrette. Children have a dog-like instinct for discerning injustice in those who rule them; they feel without fail whether they are tolerated or loved. Innocent hearts are more alive to shades than to contrasts; a child that does not yet understand evil knows when you offend the sense of beauty bestowed on it by nature. The lessons that Pierrette brought upon herself as to the behavior of a well-bred young lady, as to modesty and economy, were the corollary of this main idea—"Pierrette is ruining us."

These scoldings, which had a fatal issue for Pierrette, led the old couple back into the familiar commercial ruts from which their home-life at Provins had led them to wander, and in which their nature could expand and blossom. After being used to domineer, to make remarks, to give orders, to scold their clerks sharply, Rogron and his sister were perishing for lack of victims. Small natures require despotism to exercise their sinews, as great souls thirst for equality to give play to their heart. Now narrow minds can develop as well through persecution as through benevolence; they can assure themselves of their power by tyrannizing cruelly or beneficently over others; they go the way their nature guides them. Add to this the guidance of interest, and you will have the key to most social riddles. Pierrette now became very necessary to her cousins' existence. Since her arrival the Rogrons had been absorbed in her outfit, and then attracted by the novelty of companionship. Every new thing, a feeling, or even a tyranny, must form its set, its creases. Sylvie began by calling Pierrette "my child"; she gave up "my child" for "Pierrette" unqualified. Her reproofs, at first sourly gentle, became hard and sharp. As soon as they had started on this road, the brother and sister made rapid progress. They were no longer dull. It was not a deliberate scheme of malice and cruelty; it was the instinct of unreasoning tyranny. They believed that they were doing good to Pierrette, as of old to their apprentices.

Pierrette, whose sensitiveness was genuine, noble, and overstrung, the very antipodes of the Rogrons' aridity, had a horror of being blamed; it struck her so cruelly that tears rose at once to her large, clear eyes. She had a hard struggle to suppress her engaging liveliness, which charmed everyone out of the house. She might indulge it before the mothers of her little friends; but at home, by the end of the first month, she began to sit silent, and Rogron asked her if she were ill. At this strange question she flew off to the bottom of the garden to cry by the river, into which her tears fell, as she was one day to fall in the torrent of society.

In spite of her care, the little girl tore her best rep frock at Mme. Tiphaine's, where she had gone to play one fine day. She at once burst into tears, foreseeing the scolding that awaited her at home. On being questioned, she let fall a few words about her terrible cousin Sylvie in the midst of her tears. Pretty Mme. Tiphaine had some stuff to match, and she herself put in a new front breadth. Mlle. Rogron heard of the trick, as she called it, played on her by that limb of a little girl. From that day she would never let Pierrette visit any of the ladies.

The new life which Pierrette was to lead at Provins was fated to fall into three very distinct phases. The first lasted three months, during which she enjoyed a kind of happiness, divided between the old people's cold caresses, and the scoldings, which she found scorching. The prohibition that kept her from seeing her little friends, emphasizing the necessity for beginning to learn everything that a well-brought-up girl should know, put an end to the first phase of Pierrette's life at Provins, the only period when she found existence endurable.

The domestic changes produced at the Rogrons' house by Pierrette's residence there were studied by Vinet and the colonel with the cunning of a fox bent on getting into a fowl-house, and uneasy at discovering a new creature on the scene. They both paid calls at long intervals, so as not to scare Mlle. Sylvie; they found various excuses for chatting with Rogron, and made themselves masters of the situation with an air of reserve and dignity that the great Tartuffe might have admired. The colonel and the lawyer spent at the Rogrons' the evening of the very day when Sylvie had refused, in very harsh terms, to let Pierrette go to Mme. Tiphaine's. On hearing of her refusal, the colonel and the lawyer looked at each other as folks who knew their Provins.

"She positively tried to make a fool of you?" said the lawyer. "We warned Rogron long ago of what has now happened. There is no good to be got out of those people."

"What can you expect of the Anti-national Party?" cried the colonel, curling up his mustache and interrupting Vinet. "If we had tried to get you away from them, you might have thought that we had some malicious motive for speaking to you so. But why, mademoiselle, if you are fond of a little game, should you not play boston in the evenings at home in your own house? Is it impossible to find anyone in the place of such idiots as the Julliards? Vinet and I play boston; we will find a fourth. Vinet might introduce his wife to you; she is very nice, and she is one of the Chargebœufs. You will not be like those apes in the upper town; you will not expect a good little housewife, who is compelled by her family's disgraceful conduct to do all her own housework, to dress like a duchess,—and she has the courage of a lion and the gentleness of a lamb."

Sylvie Rogron displayed her long yellow teeth in a smile at the colonel, who endured the horrible phenomenon very well, and even assumed a flattering air.

"If there are but four of us, we cannot play boston every evening," replied she.

"Why, where else have I to go—an old soldier like me who has nothing to do, and lives on his pension? The lawyer is free every evening. Besides, you will have company, I promise you," he added, with a mysterious air.

"You have only to declare yourselves frankly opposed to the Ministerial party in Provins, and hold your own against them," said Vinet. "You would see how popular you would be in Provins; you would have a great many people on your side. You would make the Tiphaines furious by having an Opposition salon. Well, then, let us laugh at others, if others laugh at us. The 'clique' do not spare you, I can tell you."

"What do they say?" asked Sylvie.

In country towns there is always more than one safety-valve by which gossip finds a vent from one set into another. Vinet had heard all that had been said about the Rogrons in the drawing-rooms from which the haberdashers had been definitively banished. The supernumerary judge Desfondrilles, the archæologist, was of neither party. This man, like some other independent members of society, repeated everything he heard, out of provincial habit, and Vinet had had the benefit of his chit-chat. The malicious lawyer repeated Mme. Tiphaine's pleasantries with added venom. As he revealed the practical jokes of which Sylvie and Rogron had been the unconscious victims, he stirred the rage and aroused the revengeful spirit of these two arid souls, craving some aliment for their mean passions.

A few days later Vinet brought his wife, a well-bred woman, shy, neither plain nor pretty, very meek, and very conscious of her misfortune. Mme. Vinet was fair, rather worn by the cares of her penurious housekeeping, and very simply dressed. No woman could have better pleased Sylvie. Mme. Vinet put up with Sylvie's airs, and gave way to her like a woman accustomed to give way. On her round forehead, her rose-pink cheeks, in her slow, gentle eyes, there were traces of those deep reflections, that clear-sighted thoughtfulness, which women who are used to suffering bury under perfect silence. The influence of the colonel, displaying for Sylvie's behoof *courtieresque* graces that seemed wrung from his soldierly roughness, with that of the wily Vinet, soon made itself felt by Pierrette. The child, the pretty squirrel, shut up in the house, or going out only with old Sylvie, was every instant checked by a "Don't touch that, Pierrette!" and by incessant sermons on holding herself up. Pierrette stooped and held her shoulders high; her cousin wanted her to be as straight as herself, and she was like a soldier presenting arms to his colonel; she would sometimes give her little slaps on her back to make her hold herself up. The free and light-hearted child of the Marais learnt to measure her movements and imitate an automaton.

One evening, which marked the beginning of the second period, Pierrette, whom the three visitors had not seen in the drawing-room during the evening, came to kiss her cousins and courtesy to the company before going to bed. Sylvie coldly offered her cheek to the pretty little thing, as if to be kissed and have done with it. The action was so cruelly significant that tears started from Pierrette's eyes.

"Have you pricked yourself, my little Pierrette," said the abominable Vinet.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Sylvie severely.

"Nothing," said the poor child, going to kiss Rogron.

"Nothing?" repeated Sylvie. "You cannot be crying for nothing?"

"What is it, my little pet?" said Mme. Vinet.

"My rich cousin Sylvie does not treat me so well as my poor grandmother!"

"Your grandmother stole your money," said Sylvie, "and your cousin will leave you hers."

The colonel and Vinet exchanged covert glances.

"I would rather be robbed and loved," said Pierrette.

"Very well, you shall be sent back to the place you came from."

"But what has the dear child done?" asked Mme. Vinet.

Vinet fixed his eye on his wife, with that terrible cold, fixed stare that belongs to those who rule despotically. The poor lonely woman, unceasingly punished for not having the one thing required of her—namely, a fortune—took up her cards again.

"What has she done?" cried Sylvie, raising her head with a jerk so sudden, that the yellow wallflowers in her cap were shaken. "She does not know what to do next to annoy us. She opened my watch to examine the works, and touched the wheel, and broke the mainspring. Madame listens to nothing. All day long I am telling her to take care what she is about, and I might as well talk to the lamp."

Pierrette, ashamed of being reprimanded in the presence of strangers, went out of the room very gently.

"I cannot think how to quell that child's turbulence," said Rogron.

"Why, she is old enough to go to school," said Mme. Vinet.

Another look from Vinet silenced his wife, to whom he had been careful not to confide his plans and the colonel's with regard to the bachelor couple.

"That is what comes of taking charge of other people's children," cried Gouraud. "You might have some of your own yet, you or your brother; why do you not both marry?"

Sylvie looked very sweetly at the colonel; for the first time in her life she beheld a man to whom the idea that she might marry did not seem absurd.

"Mme. Vinet is right!" cried Rogron, "that would keep Pierrette quiet. A master would not cost much."

The colonel's speech so entirely occupied Sylvie that she did not answer her brother.

"If only you would stand the money for the Opposition paper we were talking about, you might find a tutor for your little cousin in the responsible editor. We could get that poor schoolmaster who was victimized by the encroachments of the priests. My wife is right; Pierrette is a rough diamond that needs polishing," said Vinet to Rogron.

"I fancied that you were a Baron," said Sylvie to the colonel, after a long pause, while each player seemed meditative.

"Yes. But having won the title in 1814, after the battle of Nangis, where my regiment did wonders, how could I find the money or the assistance needed to get it duly registered? The barony, like the rank of general, which I won in 1815, must wait for a revolution to secure them to me."

"If you could give a mortgage as your guarantee for the money," said Rogron presently, "I could do it."

"That could be arranged with Cournant," replied Vinet. "The newspaper would lead to the colonel's triumph, and make your drawing-room more powerful than those of Tiphaine and Co."

"How is that?" asked Sylvie.

At this moment, while Mme. Vinet was dealing, and the lawyer explaining all the importance that the publication of an independent paper for the district of Provins must confer on Rogron, the colonel, and himself, Pierrette was bathed in tears. Her heart and brain were agreed; she thought Sylvie far more to blame than herself. The little Bretonne instinctively perceived how unfailing charity and benevolence should be. She hated her fine frocks and all that was done for her. She paid too dear for these benefits. She cried with rage at having given her cousins a hold over her, and determined to behave in such a way as to reduce them to silence, poor child! Then she saw how noble Brigaut had been to give her his savings. She thought her woes had reached a climax, not knowing that at that moment new misfortunes were being plotted in the drawing-room.

A few days later Pierrette had a writing-master. She was to learn to read, write, and do sums. Pierrette's education involved the house of Rogron in fearful disaster. There was ink on the tables, on the furniture, and on her clothes; writing-books and pens strewn everywhere, powder on the upholstery, books torn and dog's-eared while she was learning her lessons. They already spoke to her—and in what a way!—of the necessity for earning her living and being a burden on no one. As she heard these dreadful warnings, Pierrette felt a burning in her throat; she was choking, her heart beat painfully fast. She was obliged to swallow down her tears; for each one was reckoned with as an offense against her magnanimous relations. Rogron had found the occupation that suited him. He scolded Pierrette as he had formerly scolded his shopmen; he would fetch her in from the midst of her play to compel her to study; he heard her repeat her lessons; he was the poor child's fierce tutor. Sylvie, on her part, thought it her duty to teach Pierrette the little she knew of womanly accomplishments.

Neither Rogron nor his sister had any gentleness of nature. These narrow souls, finding a real pleasure in bullying the poor little thing, changed unconsciously from mildness to the greatest severity. This severity was, they said, the consequence of the child's obstinacy; she had begun too late to learn, and was dull of apprehension. Her teachers did not understand the art of giving lessons in a form suited to the pupil's intelligence, which is what should distinguish private from public education. The fault lay far less with Pierrette than with her cousins. It took her an immensely long time to learn the beginnings. For the merest trifle she was called stupid and silly, foolish and awkward. Incessantly ill-used by hard words, Pierrette never met any but cold looks from the two old people. She fell into the stolid dullness of a sheep; she dared do nothing when she found her actions misjudged, misunderstood, misinterpreted. In everything she awaited Sylvie's orders, and the expression of her cousin's will, keeping her thoughts to herself and shutting herself up in passive obedience. Her bright color began to fade. Sometimes she complained of aches and pains. When Sylvie asked her, Where? the poor child, who felt generally ailing, replied, "All over."

"Was ever such a thing heard of as aching all over? If you were ill all over, you would be dead!" retorted Sylvie.

"You may have a pain in your chest," said Rogron the expositor, "or in your teeth, or your head, or your feet, or your stomach, but no one ever had pains everywhere. What do you mean by 'all over'? Pain all over is pain nowhere. Do you know what you are doing? You are talking for talking's sake."

Pierrette at last never spoke, finding that her artless girlish remarks, the flowers of her opening mind, were met with commonplace retorts which her good sense told her were ridiculous.

"You are always complaining, and you eat like a fasting friar!" said Rogron.

The only person who never distressed this sweet fragile flower was the sturdy servant Adèle. Adèle always warmed the little girl's bed, but in secret, since one evening when, being discovered in the act of thus "spoiling" her master's heiress, she was scolded by Sylvie.

"Children must be hardened; that is the way to give them strong constitutions. Have we been any the worse for it, my brother and I?" said Sylvie. "You will make Pierrette a peeky coddle!"—*une picheline,* a word of the Rogron vocabulary to designate weakly and complaining persons.

The little angel's caressing expressions were regarded as mere acting. The roses of affection that budded so fresh and lovely in this young soul, and longed to open to the day, were mercilessly crushed. Pierrette felt the hardest blows on the tenderest spots of her heart. If she tried to soften these two savage natures by her pretty ways, she was accused of expressing her tenderness out of self-interest. "Tell me plainly what you want," Rogron would exclaim roughly; "you are certainly not coaxing me for nothing."

Neither the sister nor brother recognized affection, and Pierrette was all affection.

Colonel Gouraud, anxious to please Mlle. Rogron, declared her right in all that concerned Pierrette. Vinet no less supported the old cousins in their abuse of Pierrette; he ascribed all the reported misdeeds of this angel to the obstinacy of the Breton character, and said that no power, no strength of will, could ever conquer it. Rogron and his sister were flattered with the utmost skill by these two courtiers, who had at last succeeded in extracting from Rogron the surety money for the newspaper, the *Provins Courrier*, and from Sylvie five thousand francs, as a shareholder. The colonel and Vinet now took the field. They disposed of a hundred shares at five hundred francs each to the electors who held State securities, and whom the Liberal journals filled with alarms, to farmers, and to persons who were called independent. They even extended their ramifications over the whole department, and beyond it, to some adjacent townships. Each shareholder subscribed for the paper, of course. Then the legal and other advertisements were divided between the *Ruche* and the *Courrier*. The first number contained a grandiloquent column in praise of Rogron, who was represented as the Laffitte of Provins.

As soon as the public mind found a leader, it became easy to perceive that the coming elections would be hotly contested. Mme. Tiphaine was in despair.

"Unfortunately," said she, as she read an article attacking her and M. Julliard, "unfortunately, I forgot that there is always a rogue not far away from a dupe, and that folly always attracts a clever man of the fox species."

As soon as the newspaper was to be seen for twenty leagues round, Vinet had a new coat and boots, and a decent waistcoat and trousers. He displayed the famous white hat affected by Liberals, and showed his collar and cuffs. His wife engaged a servant, and appeared dressed as became the wife of an influential man; she wore pretty caps.

Vinet, out of self-interest, was grateful. He and his friend Cournant, notary to the Liberal side, and Auffray's opponent, became the Rogrons' advisers, and did them two great services. The leases granted by old Rogron, their father, in 1815, under unfortunate circumstances, were about to fall in. Horticulture and market-gardening had lately developed enormously in the Provins district. The pleader and the notary made it their business to effect an increase of fourteen hundred francs a year on granting the new leases. Vinet also won for them two lawsuits against two villages, relating to plantations of trees, in which the loss of five hundred poplars was involved. The money for the poplars, with the Rogrons' savings, which for the last three years had amounted to six thousand francs deposited at compound interest, was skillfully laid out in the purchase of several plots of land. Finally, Vinet proposed and carried out the eviction of certain peasant proprietors, to whom Rogron, the elder, had lent money, and who had killed themselves with cultivating and manuring their land to enable them to repay it, but in vain.

Thus the damage done to the Rogrons' capital by the reconstruction of their house was to a great extent remedied. Their estates in the immediate neighborhood of the town, chosen by their father as innkeepers know how to choose, cut up into small holdings of which the largest was less than five acres, and let to perfectly solvent tenants, themselves owners of some plots of land mortgaged to secure the farm rents, brought in at Martinmas, in November 1826, five thousand francs. The taxes were paid by the tenants, and there were no buildings to repair or insure against fire.

The brother and sister each possessed four thousand six hundred francs in the five per cents.; and as their selling value was above par, Vinet exhorted them to invest the money in land, promising them—seconded by the notary—that they should not lose a farthing of interest by the transfer.

By the end of this second period life was so intolerable to Pierrette—the indifference of all about her, the senseless fault-finding and lack of affection in her cousins became so virulent, she felt so plainly the cold chill of the tomb blowing upon her, that she entertained the daring project of going away, on foot, with no money, to Brittany to rejoin her grandfather and grandmother. Two events prevented this: Old Lorrain died, and Rogron was appointed Pierrette's guardian by a family council held at Provins. If her old grandmother had died first, it is probable that Rogron, advised by Vinet, would have called upon the grandfather to repay the child's eight thousand francs, and have reduced him to beggary.

"Why, you may inherit Pierrette's money," said Vinet with a hideous smile. "You never can tell who will live or who will die."

Enlightened by this speech, Rogron left the widow Lorrain no peace as Pierrette's debtor till he had made her secure to the little girl the capital of the eight thousand francs by a deed of gift, of which he paid the cost.

Pierrette was strangely affected by this loss. Just as the blow fell on her she was to be prepared for her first Communion, the other event which by its obligations tied her to Provins. This necessary and simple ceremony was to bring about great changes for the Rogrons. Sylvie learnt that the curé, M. Péroux, was instructing the little Julliards, the Lesourds, Garcelands, and others. She made it therefore a point of honor to put Pierrette under the guidance of the Abbé Péroux's superior, M. Habert, a man who was said to belong to the Jesuit Congregation—very zealous for the interests of the Church, much dreaded in Provins, and hiding immense ambition under the strictest severity of principle. This priest's sister, an unmarried woman of about thirty, had a school for girls in the town. The brother and sister were much alike; both lean, sallow, atrabilious, with black hair.

Pierrette, a Bretonne nurtured in the practice and poetry of the Catholic faith, opened her heart and ears to the teaching of this imposing priest. Suffering predisposes the mind to devoutness; and most young girls, prompted by instinctive tenderness, lean towards mysticism, the obscurer side of religion. So the priest sowed the seed of the Gospel and the dogmas of the Church in good ground. He completely changed Pierrette's frame of mind. Pierrette loved Jesus Christ as presented to girls in the Sacrament, as a celestial bridegroom; her moral and physical sufferings now had their meaning; she was taught to see the hand of God in everything. Her soul, so cruelly stricken in this house, while she could not accuse her cousins, took refuge in the sphere whither fly all who are wretched, borne on the wings of the three Christian virtues. She gave up the idea of flight. Sylvie, amazed at the alteration produced in Pierrette by M. Habert, became curious. And so, while preparing the child for her first Communion, M. Habert won to God the hitherto wandering soul of Mlle. Sylvie. Sylvie became a bigot.

Denis Rogron, over whom the supposed Jesuit could get no hold—for at that time the spirit of his late lamented Majesty Constitution the First was in some simpletons supreme above that of the Church—Denis remained faithful to Colonel Gouraud, Vinet, and Liberalism.

Mlle. Rogron, of course, made acquaintance with Mlle. Habert, with whom she was in perfect sympathy. The two old maids loved each other like two loving sisters. Mlle. Habert proposed to take Pierrette under her care, and spare Sylvie the trouble and vexations of educating a child; but the brother and sister replied that Pierrette's absence would make the house feel too empty. The Rogrons' attachment to their little cousin seemed excessive.

On seeing Mlle. Habert in possession, Colonel Gouraud and Vinet ascribed to the ambitious priest, on his sister's behalf, the matrimonial scheme imagined by the colonel.

"Your sister wants to see you married," said the lawyer to the ex-haberdasher.

"And to whom?" said Rogron.

"To that old sibyl of a schoolmistress," cried the colonel, curling his mustache.

"She has said nothing to me about it," said Rogron blankly.

A woman so determined as Sylvie was sure to make great progress in the ways of salvation. The priest's influence soon grew in the house, supported as it was by Sylvie, who managed her brother. The two Liberals, very legitimately alarmed, understood that if the priest had determined to get Rogron for his sister's husband—a far more suitable match than that of Sylvie and the colonel—he would urge Sylvie to the excessive practice of religion, and make Pierrette go into a convent. They would thus lose the reward of eighteen months of efforts, meanness, and flattery. They took a terrible dumb hatred of the priest and his sister, and yet, if they were to keep up with them step for step, they felt the necessity of remaining on good terms with them.

M. and Mlle. Habert, who played both whist and boston, came every evening. Their assiduity excited that of the others. The lawyer and the soldier felt that they were pitted against adversaries stronger than themselves, a preconception which M. Habert and his sister fully shared. This situation was in itself a battle. Just as the colonel gave to Sylvie a foretaste of the unhoped-for joys of an offer of marriage—for she had brought herself to regard Gouraud as a man worthy of her—so Mlle. Habert wrapped the retired haberdasher in the cotton wool of her attentions, her speeches, and her looks. Neither party could say to itself the great word of great politicians, "Divide the spoil!" each insisted on the whole prize.

Besides, the two wily foxes of the Opposition at Provins—an Opposition that was growing in strength—were rash enough to believe themselves stronger than the Priesthood; they were the first to fire. Vinet, whose gratitude was stirred up by the claw-fingers of self-interest, went to fetch Mlle. de Chargebœuf and her mother. The two women, who had about two thousand francs a year, lived very narrowly at Troyes. Mlle. Bathilde de Chargebœuf was one of those splendid women who believe in marrying for love, and change their minds toward their five-and-twentieth year on finding themselves still unwedded. Vinet succeeded in persuading Mme. de Chargebœuf to combine her two thousand francs with the thousand crowns he was making now that the newspaper was started, and to come and live with him at Provins, where Bathilde, he said, might marry a simpleton named Rogron, and, so clever as she was, rival handsome Mme. Tiphaine.

The re-enforcement of Vinet's household and ideas by the arrival of Mme. and Mlle. de Chargebœuf gave the utmost cohesion to the Liberal party. This coalition brought consternation to the aristocracy of Provins and the Tiphaine party. Mme. de Bréautey, in dismay at seeing two women of family so misled, begged them to come to see her. She bewailed the blunders committed by the Royalists, and was furious with those of Troyes on learning the poverty of this mother and daughter.

"What! was there no old country gentleman who would marry that dear girl, born to rule a château?" cried she. "They have let her run to seed, and now she will throw herself at the head of a Rogron!"

She hunted the department through, and failed to find one gentleman who would marry a girl whose mother had but two thousand francs a year. Then the "clique" of the Tiphaines and the Sous-préfet also set to work, but too late, to discover such a man. Mme. de Bréautey inveighed loudly against the selfishness that was eating up France, the result of materialism and of the power conferred on money by the laws; the nobility was nothing in these days! Beauty was nothing! Rogrons and Vinets were defying the King of France!

Bathilde had the indisputable advantage over her rival not merely of beauty, but of dress. She was dazzlingly fair. At five-and-twenty her fully-developed shoulders and splendid modeling were exquisitely full. The roundness of her throat, the slenderness of her articulations, the splendor of her fine fair hair, the charm of her smile, the elegant shape of her head, the dignity and outline of her face, her fine eyes under a well-molded brow, her calm and well-bred movements, and her still girlish figure, all were in harmony. She had a fine hand and a narrow foot. Her robust health gave her, perhaps, the look of a handsome inn-servant; "but that should be no fault in a Rogron's eyes," said pretty Mme. Tiphaine.

The first time Mlle. de Chargebœuf was seen she was dressed simply enough. Her dress of brown merino, edged with green embroidery, was cut low; but a kerchief of tulle, neatly drawn down by invisible strings, covered her shoulders, back, and bust, a little open at the throat, though fastened by a brooch and chain. Under this fine network Bathilde's beauty was even more attractive, more suggestive. She took off her velvet bonnet and her shawl on entering, and showed pretty ears with gold eardrops. She had a little cross and heart on black velvet round her neck, which contrasted with its whiteness like the black that fantastic nature sets round the tail of a white Angora cat. She was expert in all the arts of girls on their promotion: twisting her fingers to arrange curls that are not out of place, displaying her wrists by begging Rogron to button her cuff, which the hapless man, quite dazzled, bluntly refused to do, hiding his agitation under assumed indifference. The bashfulness of the only passion our haberdasher was ever to know in his life always gave it the demeanor of hatred. Sylvie, as well as Céleste

Habert, misunderstood it; not so the lawyer, the superior man of this company of simpletons, whose only enemy was the priest, for the colonel had long been his ally.

Gouraud, on his part, thenceforth behaved to Sylvie as Bathilde did to Rogron. He appeared in clean linen every evening; he wore velvet collars, which gave effect to his martial countenance, set off by the corners of his white shirt collar; he adopted white drill waistcoats, and had a new frockcoat made of blue cloth, on which his red rosette was conspicuous, and all under pretense of doing honor to the fair Bathilde. He never smoked after two o'clock. His grizzled hair was brushed down in a wave over his ocher-colored skull. In short, he assumed the appearance and attitude of a party chief, of a man who was prepared to rout the enemies of France—in one word, the Bourbons—with tuck of drum.

The satanical pleader and the cunning colonel played a still more cruel trick on M. and Mlle. Habert than that of introducing the beautiful Mlle. de Chargebœuf, who was pronounced by the Liberal party and by the Bréauteys to be ten times handsomer than the beautiful Mme. Tiphaine. These two great country-town politicians had it rumored from one to another that M. Habert agreed with them on all points. Provins before long spoke of him as a "Liberal priest." Called up before the bishop, M. Habert was obliged to give up his evenings with the Rogrons, but his sister still went there. Thenceforth the Rogron drawing-room was a fact and a power.

And so, by the middle of that year, political intrigues were not less eager than matrimonial intrigues in the Rogrons' rooms. While covert interests, buried out of sight, were fighting wildly for the upper hand, the public struggle won disastrous notoriety. Everybody knows that the Villèle ministry was overthrown by the elections of 1826. In the Provins constituency, Vinet, the Liberal candidate—for whom M. Cournant had obtained his qualification by the purchase of some land of which the price remained unpaid—came very near beating M. Tiphaine. The President had a majority of only two.

Mmes. Vinet and de Chargebœuf, Vinet and the colonel, were sometimes joined by M. Cournant and his wife; then by Néraud, the doctor, a man whose youth had been very "stormy," but who now took serious views of life; he had devoted himself to science, it was said, and if the Liberals were to be believed, was a far cleverer man than M. Martener. To the Rogrons their triumph was as inexplicable as their ostracism had been.

The handsome Bathilde de Chargebœuf, to whom Vinet spoke of Pierrette as an enemy, was horribly disdainful to the child. The humiliation of this poor victim was necessary to the interest of all. Mme. Vinet could do nothing for the little girl who was being brayed in the mortar of the pitiless egotisms which the lady at last understood. But for her husband's imperative desire she would never have come to the Rogrons; it grieved her too much to see their ill-usage of the pretty little thing who clung to her, understanding her secret goodwill, and begged her to teach her such or such a stitch or embroidery pattern. Pierrette had shown that when she was thus treated she understood and succeeded to admiration. But Mme. Vinet was no longer of any use, so she came no more.

Sylvie, who still cherished the notion of marriage, now regarded Pierrette as an obstacle. Pierrette was nearly fourteen; her sickly fairness, a symptom that was quite overlooked by the ignorant old maid, made her lovely. Then Sylvie had the bright idea of indemnifying herself for the expenses caused by Pierrette by making a servant of her. Vinet, as representing the interests of the Chargebœufs, Mlle. Habert, Gouraud, all the influential visitors, advised Sylvie by all means to dismiss Adèle. Could not Pierrette cook and keep the house in order? When there was too much to be done, she need only engage the colonel's housekeeper, a very accomplished person, and one of the best cooks in Provins. Pierrette ought to learn to cook and to polish the floors, said the baleful lawyer, to sweep, keep the house neat, go to market, and know the price of things. The poor little girl, whose unselfishness was as great as her generosity, offered it herself, glad to pay thus for the hard bread she ate under that roof.

Adèle went. Thus Pierrette lost the only person who might perhaps have protected her. Strong as she was, from that hour she was crushed body and soul. The old people had less mercy on her than on a servant: she was their property! She was scolded for mere nothings, for a little dust left on the corner of a chimney-shelf or a glass shade. These objects of luxury that she had so much admired became odious to her. In spite of her anxiety to do right, her relentless cousin Sylvie always found some fault with everything she did. In two years Pierrette never heard a word of praise or of affection. Her whole happiness consisted in not being scolded. She submitted with angelic patience to the dark moods of these two unmarried beings, to whom the gentler feelings were all unknown, and who made her suffer every day from her dependency. This life in which the young girl was gripped, as it were, between the two haberdashers as in the jaws of a vise, increased her malady. She had such violent fits of inexplicable distress, such sudden bursts of secret grief, that her physical development was irremediably checked. And thus, by slow degrees, through terrible though concealed sufferings, Pierrette had come to the state in which the friend of her childhood had seen her as he stood on the little Square and greeted her with his Breton ballad.

Before entering on the story of the domestic drama in the Rogrons' house, to which Brigaut's arrival gave rise, it will be necessary, to avoid digressions, to account for the lad's settling at Provins, since he is in some sort a silent personage on the stage.

Brigaut, as he fled, was alarmed not merely by Pierrette's signal, but also by the change in his little friend; hardly could he recognize her, but for the voice, eyes, and movements which recalled his lively little playfellow, at once so gay and so loving. When he had got far away from the house, his legs quaked under him, his spine felt on fire! He had seen the shadow of Pierrette, and not Pierrette herself. He made his way up to the old town thoughtful and uneasy, till he found a spot whence he could see the Place and the house where Pierrette lived; he gazed at it sadly, lost in thought as infinite as the troubles into which we plunge without knowing where they may end. Pierrette was ill; she was unhappy; she regretted Brittany! What ailed her? All these questions passed again and again through Brigaut's mind, and racked his breast, revealing to him the extent of his affection for his little adopted sister.

It is very rarely that a passion between two children of different sexes remains permanent. The charming romance of Paul and Virginia no more solves the problem of this strange moral fact than does that of Brigaut and Pierrette. Modern history offers the single illustrious exception of the sublime Marchesa di Pescara and her husband, who, destined for each other by their parents at the age of fourteen adored each other, and were married. Their union gave to the sixteenth century the spectacle of boundless conjugal affection, never clouded. The Marchesa, a widow at four-and-thirty, beautiful, witty, universally beloved, refused monarchs, and buried herself in a convent, where she never saw, never heard, anyone but nuns.

Such perfect love as this blossomed suddenly in the heart of the poor Breton artisan. Pierrette and he had so often been each other's protectors, he had been so happy in giving her the money for her journey, he had almost died of running after the diligence, and Pierrette had not known it! The memory of it had often warmed him during the chill hours of his toilsome life these three years past. He had improved himself for Pierrette; he had learnt his craft for Pierrette; he had come to Paris for Pierrette, intending to make a fortune for her. After being there a fortnight, he could no longer control his longing to see her; he had walked from Saturday evening till Monday morning. He had intended to return to Paris, but the pathetic appearance of his little friend held him fast to Provins. A wonderful magnetism—still disputed, it is true, in spite of so many instances—acted on him without his knowing it; and tears filled his eyes, while they also dimmed Pierrette's sight. If to her he was Brittany and all her happy childhood, to him Pierrette was life! At sixteen Brigaut had not yet learnt to draw or give the section of a molding; there were many things he did not know; but at piecework he had earned from four to five francs a day. So he could live at Provins; he would be within reach of Pierrette; he would finish learning his business by working under the best cabinetmaker in the town, and watch over the little girl.

Brigaut made up his mind at once. He flew back to Paris, settled his accounts, collected his pass, his luggage, and his tools. Three days later he was working for M. Frappier, the best carpenter in Provins. Energetic workmen, steady, and averse to turbulency and taverns, are rare enough to make a master glad to get a young fellow like Brigaut. To conclude his story on that score, by the end of a fortnight he was foreman, lodging and boarding with Frappier, who taught him arithmetic and linear drawing. The carpenter lived in the High Street, about a hundred yards from the little oblong Place, at the end of which stood the Rogrons' house.

Brigaut buried his love in his heart, and was not guilty of the smallest indiscretion. He got Mme. Frappier to tell him the history of the Rogrons; from her he learnt how the old innkeeper had set to work to get the money left by old Auffray. Brigaut was fully informed as to the character of the haberdasher and his sister. One morning he met Pierrette at market with Mlle. Sylvie, and shuddered to see her with a basket on her arm full of provisions. He went to see Pierrette again at church on Sunday, where the girl appeared in all her best; there, for the first time, Brigaut understood that Pierrette was Mlle. Lorrain.

Pierrette saw her friend, but she made him a mysterious signal to keep himself out of sight. There was a world of meaning in this gesture, as in that by which, a fortnight since she had bidden him vanish. What a fortune he would have to make in ten years to enable him to marry the companion of his childhood, to whom the Rogrons would leave a house, a hundred acres of land, and twelve thousand francs a year, not to mention their savings! The persevering Breton would not tempt fortune till he had acquired the knowledge he still lacked. So long as it was theory alone, it was all the same whether he learnt in Paris or at Provins, and he preferred to remain near Pierrette, to whom he also proposed to explain his plans and the sort of help she might count on. Finally, he would certainly not leave her till he understood the secret of the pallor which had already dimmed the life of the feature which generally retains it longest—the eyes; till he knew what caused the sufferings that gave her the look of a girl bowing before the scythe of Death, and about to be cut down.

Her two pathetic signals, which were not false to their friendship, but which enjoined the greatest caution, struck terror into the lad's heart. Evidently Pierrette desired him to wait, and not to try to see her, or there would be danger and peril for her. As she came out of church she gave him a look, and Brigaut saw that her eyes were full of tears. The Breton would more easily have squared the circle than have guessed what had happened in the Rogrons' house since his arrival.

It was not without lively apprehensions that Pierrette came down from her room that day when Brigaut had plunged into her morning dream like another dream. Having risen and opened her window, Mlle. Rogron must have heard the song and its words—compromising, no doubt, in the ears of an old maid; but Pierrette knew nothing of the causes that made her cousin so alert. Sylvie had good reasons for getting up and running to the window. For about a week past strange secret events and cruel pangs of feeling had agitated the principal figures in the Rogron salon. These unknown events, carefully concealed by all concerned, were to fall on Pierrette like an icy avalanche.

The realm of mysteries, which ought perhaps to be called the foul places of the human heart, lies at the bottom of the greatest revolutions, political, social, or domestic; but in speaking of them it may be extremely useful to explain that their algebraical expression, though accurate, is not faithful so far as form is concerned. These deep calculations do not express themselves so brutally as history reports them. Any attempt to relate the circumlocutions, the rhetorical involutions, the long colloquies, in which the mind designedly darkens the light it casts, the honeyed words, diluting the venom of certain insinuations, would mean writing a book as long as the noble poem called *Clarissa Harlowe.*

Mlle. Habert and Mlle. Rogron were equally desirous of marrying; but one was ten years younger than the other, and probability allowed Céleste Habert to think that her children would inherit the Rogrons' whole fortune. Sylvie was almost forty-two, an age at which marriage has its risks. In confiding their ideas to each other to secure mutual approbation, Céleste Habert, on a hint from the vindictive Abbé, had enlightened Sylvie as to the possibilities of the position. The colonel, a violent man, with the health of a soldier, a burly bachelor of forty-five, would no doubt act on the moral of all fairy tales: they lived happy, and had many children. This form of happiness alarmed Sylvie; she was afraid of dying—a fear which tortures unmarried women to the utmost.

But the Martignac ministry was now established—the second victory which upset the Villèle administration. Vinet's party held their head high in Provins. Vinet, now the leading advocate of La Brie, carried all before him, to use a colloquialism. Vinet was a personage; the Liberals prophesied his advancement; he would certainly be a deputy or public prosecutor. As to the colonel, he would be mayor of Provins. Oh! to reign as Mme. Garceland reigned, to be the mayoress! Sylvie could not resist this hope; she determined to consult a doctor, though it might cover her with ridicule. The two women, one triumphant, and the other sure of having her in leading-strings, invented one of those stratagems which women advised by a priest are so clever in planning. To consult M. Néraud, the Liberal physician, M. Martener's rival, would be a blunder. Céleste Habert proposed to Sylvie to hide her in a dressing-closet while she, Mlle. Habert, consulted M. Martener, who attended the school, on her own account. Whether he were Céleste's accomplice or no, Martener told his client that there was some, though very little, danger for a woman of thirty.

"But with your constitution," he added, "you have nothing to fear."

"And if a woman is past forty?" asked Mlle. Céleste Habert.

"A woman of forty who has been married and had children need fear nothing."

"But an unmarried woman, perfectly well conducted—for example, Mlle. Rogron?"

"Well conducted! There can be no doubt," said M. Martener. "In such a case the safe birth of a child is a miracle which God certainly works sometimes, but rarely."

"And why?" asked Céleste Habert.

Whereupon the doctor replied in a terrific pathological description, explaining that the elasticity bestowed by Nature on the muscles and joints in youth ceased to exist at a certain age, particularly in women whose occupations had made them sedentary for some years, like Mlle. Rogron.

"And so, after forty no respectable woman ought to marry?"

"Or she should wait," replied the doctor. "But then it is hardly a marriage; it is a partnership. What else could it be?"

In short, it was proved by this consultation, clearly, scientifically, seriously, and rationally, that after the age of forty a virtuous maiden should not rush into matrimony.

When M. Martener had left, Mlle. Céleste Habert found Mlle. Rogron green and yellow, her eyes dilated,—in fact, in a frightful state.

"Then you truly love the colonel?" said she.

"I still hoped," said the old maid.

"Well, then, wait," said Mlle. Habert, who knew that time would be avenged on the colonel.

The morality of this marriage was also doubtful. Sylvie went to sound her conscience in the confessional. The stern dictator expounded the views of the Church, which regards marriage only as a means of propagating the race, reprobates second marriages, and scorns passions that have no social aim. Sylvie Rogron's perplexity was great. These mental struggles gave strange force to her passion, and lent it the unaccountable charm which forbidden joys have always had for women since the time of Eve.

Mlle. Rogron's disturbed state could not escape the lawyer's keen eye. One evening, after cards, Vinet went up to his dear friend Sylvie, took her hand, and led her to sit down with him on one of the sofas.

"Something ails you," he said in her ear.

She gloomily bent her head. The pleader let Rogron leave the room, sat alone with the old maid, and got her to make a clean breast of it.

"Well played, Abbé! But you have played my game for me," he said to himself after hearing of all the private consultations Sylvie had held, of which the last was the most alarming.

This sly legal fox was even more terrible in his explanations than the doctor had been; he advised the marriage, but only ten years hence for greater safety. The lawyer vowed that all the Rogron fortune should be Bathilde's. He rubbed his hands, and his very face grew sharper as he ran after Mme. and Mlle. de Chargebœuf, whom he had left to start homewards with their servant armed with a lantern.

The influence exerted by M. Habert, the physician of the soul, was entirely counteracted by Vinet, the physician of the purse. Rogron was by no means devout, so the man of the Church and the man of the Law, the two black gowns, pulled him opposite ways. When he heard of the victory carried off by Mlle. Habert, who hoped to marry Rogron, over Sylvie, hanging between the fear of death and the joy of becoming a baroness, Vinet perceived the possibility of removing the colonel from the scene of battle. He knew Rogron well enough to find some means of making him marry the fair Bathilde. Rogron had not been able to resist the blandishments of Mlle. de Chargebœuf; Vinet knew that the first time Rogron should be alone with Bathilde and himself their engagement would be settled. Rogron had come to the point of staring at Mlle. Habert, so shy was he of looking at Bathilde.

Vinet had just seen how much Sylvie was in love with the colonel. He understood the depth of such a passion in an old maid, no less eaten up by bigotry, and he soon hit on a plan for ruining at one blow both Pierrette and the colonel, getting rid of one by means of the other.

Next morning, on coming out of Court, he met the colonel and Rogron walking together, their daily habit.

When these three men were seen together, their conjunction always made the town talk. This triumvirate, held in horror by the Sous-préfet, the Bench, and the Tiphaine partisans, made a triad of which the Liberals of Provins were proud. Vinet edited the *Courrier* single-handed; he was the head of the party; the colonel, the responsible manager of the paper, was its arm; Rogron, with his money, formed the sinews; he was considered as the link between the managing committee at Provins and the managing committee in Paris. To hear the Tiphaines, these three men were always plotting something against the Government, while the Liberals admired them as defenders of the people. When the lawyer saw Rogron returning to the Square, brought homewards by the dinner-hour, he took the colonel's arm and hindered him from accompanying the ex-haberdasher.

"Look here, colonel," said he, "I am going to take a great weight off your shoulders. You can do better than marry Sylvie; if you go to work the right way, in two years' time you may marry Pierrette Lorrain."

And he told him the results of the Jesuit's maneuvering.

"What a clever stroke—and reaching so far!" said the colonel.

"Colonel," said Vinet gravely, "Pierrette is a charming creature; you may be happy for the rest of your days. You have such splendid health, that such a match would not, for you, have the usual drawbacks of an ill-assorted marriage; still, do not imagine that this exchange of a terrible life for a pleasant one will be easy to effect. To convert your lady-love into your confidante is a maneuver as dangerous as, in your profession, it is to cross a river under the enemy's fire. Keen as you are as a cavalry officer, you must study the position, and carry out your tactics with the superior skill which has won us our present position. If I should one day be public prosecutor, you may command the department, Ah! if only you had a vote, we should be further on our way. I might have bought the votes of those two officials by indemnifying them for the loss of their places, and we should have had a majority. I should be sitting by Dupin, Casimir-Périer, and——"

The colonel had for some time past been thinking of Pierrette, but he hid the thought with deep dissimulation; his roughness to Pierrette was only on the surface. The child could not imagine why the man who called himself her father's old comrade treated her so ill, when, if he met her alone, he put his hand under her chin and gave her a fatherly caress. Ever since Vinet had confided to him Mlle. Sylvie's terror of marriage, Gouraud had sought opportunities of seeing Pierrette alone, and then the rough officer was as mild as a cat; he would tell her how brave her father was, and say what a misfortune for her his death had been.

A few days before Brigaut's arrival, Sylvie had found Gouraud and Pierrette together. Jealousy had then entered into her soul with monastic vehemence. Jealousy, which is above all passions credulous and suspicious, is also that in which fancy has most power; but it does not lend wit, it takes it away; and in Sylvie jealousy gave birth to very strange ideas. She conceived that the man who had sung the words "Mistress Bride" to Pierrette must be the colonel; and Sylvie thought she had reason to ascribe this serenade to the colonel, because during the last week Gouraud's manner seemed to have undergone a change. This soldier was the only man who, in the solitude in which she had lived, had ever troubled himself about her; hence she watched him with all her eyes, all her understanding; and by dint of indulging in hopes alternately flourishing and blighted, she had given them so much scope that they produced the effect on her of a moral mirage. To use a fine but vulgar expression, by dint of looking she often saw nothing. By turns she rejected and struggled victoriously against the notion of this chimerical rivalry. She instituted comparisons between herself and Pierrette; she was forty, and her hair was gray; Pierrette was a deliciously white little girl, with eyes tender enough to bring warmth to a dead heart. She had heard it said that men of fifty were fond of little girls like Pierrette.

Before the colonel had sown his wild oats and frequented the Rogrons' drawing-room, Sylvie had heard at the Tiphaines' parties strange reports of Gouraud and his doings. Old maids in love have the exaggerated Platonic notions which girls of twenty are apt to profess; they have never lost the hard-and-fast ideas which cling to all who have no experience of life, nor learnt how social forces modify, erode, and coerce such fine and lofty notions. To Sylvie the idea of being deceived by her colonel was a thought that hammered at her brain.

So from the hour, that morning, which every celibate spends in bed between waking and rising, the old maid had thought of nothing but herself and Pierrette, and the song which had aroused her by the words, "Mistress Bride." Like a simpleton, instead of peeping at the lover through the Venetian shutters, she had opened her window, without reflecting that Pierrette would hear her. If she had but had the common wit of a spy, she would have seen Brigaut, and the fateful drama then begun would not have taken place.

Pierrette, weak as she was, removed the wooden bars which fastened the kitchen shutters, opened the shutters, and hooked them back, then she opened the passage door leading into the garden. She took the various brooms needed for sweeping the carpet, the dining-room floor, the passage, the stairs, in short, for cleaning everything with such care and exactitude as no servant, not even a Dutch one, would give to her work; she hated the least reproof. To her, happiness consisted in seeing Sylvie's little blue eyes, colorless and cold, with a look—not indeed of satisfaction, that they never wore—only calm when she had examined everything with the owner's eye, the inscrutable glance which sees what escapes the keenest observer.

By the time Pierrette returned to the kitchen her skin was moist; then she put everything in order, lighted the stove so as to have live charcoal, made the fire in her cousins' rooms, and put hot water for their toilet, though she had none for hers. She laid the table for breakfast and lighted the dining-room stove. For all these various tasks she had to go to the cellar to fetch brushwood, leaving a cool place to go to a hot one, or a hot place to go into the cold and damp. These sudden changes, made with the reckless haste of youth, merely to avoid a hard word, or to obey some order, aggravated the state of her health beyond remedy. Pierrette did not know that she was ill. Still she felt the beginnings of sufferings; she had strange longings, and hid them; a passion for raw salad. which she devoured in secret. The innocent child had no idea that this state meant serious disease, and needed the greatest care. Before Brigaut's arrival, if Néraud, who might accuse himself of her grandmother's death, had revealed this mortal peril to the little girl, she would have smiled; she found life too bitter not to smile at death. But within these last few minutes, she, who added to her physical ailments the Breton homesickness—a moral sickness so well known, that colonels of regiments reckon on it in the Bretons who serve in their regiments—she loved Provins. The sight of that gold-colored flower, that song, the presence of the friend of her childhood, had revived her as a plant long deprived of water recovers after hours of rain. She wanted to live; she did not believe that she had suffered!

She timidly stole into Sylvie's room, lighted the fire, left the hot-water pot, spoke a few words, went to awaken her guardian, and then ran downstairs to take in the milk, the bread, and the other provisions supplied by the tradesmen. She stood for some time on the doorstep, hoping that Brigaut would have the wit to return; but Brigaut was already on the road to Paris. She had dusted the drawing-room and was busy in the kitchen, when she heard her cousin Sylvie coming downstairs. Mlle. Rogron made her appearance in a Carmelite gray silk dressing-gown, on her head a tulle cap decorated with bows, her false curls put on askew, her night-dress showing above the wrapper, her feet slipshod in her slippers. She inspected everything, and came to her little cousin, who was waiting to know what they would have for breakfast.

"So there you are, Miss Ladylove!" said Sylvie to Pierrette, in a half-merry, half-mocking tone.

"I beg your pardon, cousin?"

"You crept into my room like a sneak and out again in the same way; but you must have known that I should have something to say to you."

"To me?"

"You have had a serenade this morning like a princess, neither more nor less."

"A serenade?" exclaimed Pierrette.

"A serenade?" echoed Sylvie, mimicking her. "And you have a lover."

"Cousin, what do you mean by a lover?" Sylvie evaded the question, and said—

"Do you dare to say, mademoiselle, that a man did not come under our windows and talk to you of marriage!"

Persecution had taught Pierrette the cunning indispensable to slaves; she boldly replied, "I do not know what you mean——"

"Dog——" added the old maid in vinegar tones.

"Cousin," said Pierrette humbly.

"And you did not get up, I suppose, and did not go barefoot to your window? Enough to give you some bad illness. Well, catch it, and serve you right!—And I suppose you did not talk to your lover?"

"No, cousin."

"I knew you had a great many faults, but I did not know you told lies. Think of what you are about, mademoiselle. You will have to tell your cousin Denis and me all about the scene of this morning, and explain it too; otherwise your guardian will have to take strong measures."

The old maid, devoured by jealousy and curiosity, was trying intimidation. Pierrette did as all people must who are enduring beyond their strength—she kept silence. Silence is to all creatures thus attacked the only means of salvation; it fatigues the Cossack charges of the envious, the enemy's savage rushes; it results in a crushing and complete victory. What is more complete than silence? It is final. Is it not one of the modes of the Infinite?

Sylvie looked stealthily at Pierrette. The child colored; but instead of flushing all over, the red lay in patches on her cheeks, in burning spots of symptomatic hue. On seeing these signals of ill-health, a mother would at once have changed her note; she would have taken the child on her knee, have questioned her, have acquired long since a thousand proofs of Pierrette's perfect and beautiful innocence, have suspected her weakness, and understood that the blood and humors diverted from their course were thrown back on the lungs after disturbing the digestive functions. Those eloquent scarlet patches would have warned her of imminent and mortal danger. But an old maid to whom the feelings that guard the family, the needs of childhood, the care required in early womanhood were all unknown, could have none of the indulgence and the pity that are inspired by the thousand incidents of married and maternal life. The sufferings of misery, instead of softening her heart, had made it callous.

"She blushes—she has done wrong!" thought Sylvie. So Pierrette's silence received the worst construction.

"Pierrette," said she, "before your cousin Denis comes down we will have a little talk.—Come," she went on in a milder tone. "Shut the door to the street. If anyone comes, they will ring; we shall hear."

In spite of the damp fog rising from the river, Sylvie led Pierrette along the graveled path that zigzagged between the grass-plots, to the edge of the terrace built in a so-called picturesque style of broken rockwork planted with flags and other water-plants. The old cousin now changed her tactics; she would try to catch Pierrette by gentleness. The hyena would play the cat.

"Pierrette," said she, "you are no longer a child; you will soon set foot in your fifteenth year, and it would not be at all astonishing if you had a lover."

"But, cousin," said Pierrette, raising her eyes of angelic sweetness to her cousin's cold, sour face, for Sylvie had put on her saleswoman expression, "what is a lover?"

It was impossible to Sylvie to define to her brother's ward with accuracy and decency what she meant by a lover;

instead of regarding the question as the result of adorable innocence, she treated it as mendacious.

"A lover, Pierrette, is a man who loves you and wishes to marry you."

"Ah!" said Pierrette. "In Brittany when two persons are agreed, we call the young man a suitor!"

"Well, understand that there is not the smallest harm in confessing your feeling for a man, my child. The harm is in secrecy. Have you, do you think, taken the fancy of any man who comes here?"

"I do not think so."

"You do not love one of them?"

"No one."

"Quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Look me in the face, Pierrette.'

Pierrette looked at her cousin.

"And yet a man spoke to you from the Square this morning?"

Pierrette looked down.

"You went to your window, you opened it, and spoke to him."

"No, cousin; I wanted to see what the weather was like, and I saw a countryman on the Square."

"Pierrette, since your first Communion you have improved greatly, you are obedient and pious, you love your relations and God; I am pleased with you, but I never have told you so for fear of inflaming your pride."

The horrible woman mistook the dejection, the submission, the silence of wretchedness for virtues! One of the sweetest things that bring comfort to the sufferer, to martyrs, to artists, in the midst of the Divine wrath roused in them by envy and hatred, is to meet with praise from some quarter whence they have always had blame and bad faith. So Pierrette looked up at her cousin with attentive eyes, and felt ready to forgive her all the pain she had caused her.

"But if it is all mere hypocrisy, if I am to find in you a serpent I have cherished in my bosom, you would be an infamous, a horrible creature!"

"I do not think I have anything to blame myself for," said Pierrette, feeling a dreadful pang at her heart on this sudden transition from unexpected praise to the terrible accent of the hyena.

"You know that lying is a mortal sin?"

"Yes, cousin."

"Well, then, you stand before God!" said the old maid, pointing with a solemn gesture to the gardens and the sky. "Swear to me that you do not know that countryman."

"I will not swear," said Pierrette.

"Ah! he was not a countryman! Little viper!"

Pierrette fled across the garden like a startled fawn, appalled by this moral dilemma. Her cousin called her in an awful voice.

"The bell," she replied.

"What a sly little wretch!" said Sylvie to herself. "She has a perverse nature, and I am sure now that the little serpent has twisted herself round the colonel. She has heard us say that he is a baron. A baroness, indeed! Little fool! Oh! I will be rid of her by placing her as an apprentice, and pretty soon too!"

Sylvie was so lost in thought that she did not see her brother coming down the walk and contemplating the mischief done by the frost to his dahlias.

"Well, Sylvie, what are you thinking about there? I thought you were looking at the fishes; sometimes they jump out of the water."

"No," said she.

"Well, how did you sleep?" and he proceeded to tell her his dreams of the past night. "Do not you think that my face looks patchy?" a favorite word with the Rogrons. Since Rogron had loved—nay, we will not profane the word—had desired Mlle. de Chargebœuf, he had been very anxious about his appearance and himself.

At this moment Pierrette came down the steps and called to them that breakfast was ready. On seeing her little cousin, Sylvie's complexion turned green and yellow; all her bile rose. She examined the passage, and said that Pierrette ought to have polished it with foot-brushes.

"I will polish it if you wish," replied the angel, not knowing how injurious this form of labor is to a young girl.

The dining-room was above blame. Sylvie sat down, and all through breakfast affected to want things that she never would have thought of in a calmer frame of mind, seeking for them simply to make Pierrette rise to fetch them, and always just as the poor child was beginning to eat. But mere nagging was not enough; she sought some subject for fault-finding, and fumed with internal rage at finding none. If they had been eating eggs, she would certainly have complained of the boiling of hers. She hardly replied to her brother's silly talk, and yet she looked only at him; her eyes avoided Pierrette, who was keenly aware of this behavior.

Pierrette brought in the coffee for her cousins in a large silver cup, which served to heat the milk in, mixed with cream, in a saucepan of hot water. The brother and sister then added, to their taste, the black coffee which was made by Sylvie. When she had carefully prepared this dainty, Sylvie detected in it a faint cloud of coffee dust; she carefully skimmed it off the tawny mixture and looked at it, leaning over it to examine it more minutely. Then the storm burst.

"What is the matter?" asked Rogron.

"The matter! Miss, here, has put ashes in my coffee. Ashes in coffee are so nice! . . . Well, well! It is not astonishing; no one can do two things at once. Much she was thinking of the coffee! A blackbird might have flown through the kitchen, and she would not have heeded it this morning! How should she see the ashes flying? And then —only her cousin's!—Much she cares about it!"

She went on in this way, while she elaborately laid on the edge of her plate some fine coffee that had passed through the filter, mixed with some grains of sugar that had not melted.

"But, cousin, that is coffee," said Pierrette.

"So I am a liar now?" exclaimed Sylvie, looking at Pierrette, and scorching her by a fearful flash that her eyes could dart when she was angry.

These temperaments, which passion has never exhausted, have at command a great supply of the vital fluid. This phenomenon of extreme brightness in her eye under the influence of rage was all the more confirmed in Mlle. Rogron because formerly, in her shop, she had had occasion to try the power of her gaze by opening her eyes enormously wide, always to fill her dependents with salutary terror.

"I will teach you to give me the lie," she went on; "you, who deserve to be sent away from table to feed by yourself in the kitchen."

"What is the matter with you both?" cried Rogron. "You are as cross as two sticks this morning."

"Oh, my lady knows what I mean! I am giving her time to make up her mind before speaking to you about it, for I am much kinder to her than she deserves."

Pierrette looked through the window out on to the Square, so as not to meet her cousin's eyes, which frightened her.

"She pays no more heed than if I were talking to this sugar-basin! And she has sharp ears too; she can speak from the top of the house to answer someone below. . . . She is that perverse! Your ward is aggravating beyond words, and you need look for nothing good from her; do you hear me, Rogron?"

"What has she done that is so wicked?" asked her brother.

"At her age, too! It is beginning young!" cried the old maid in a fury.

Pierrette rose to clear away, just to keep herself in countenance; she did not know which way to look. Though such language was nothing new to her, she never could get used to it. Her cousin's rage made her feel as though she had committed some crime. She wondered what her rage would be if she knew of Brigaut's escapade. Perhaps they would keep Brigaut away. All the thousand ideas of a slave crowded on her at once, thoughts swift and deep, and she resolved to resist by absolute silence as to an incident in which her conscience could see no evil.

She had to endure words so cruel, so harsh, insinuations so insulting, that on her return to the kitchen she was seized with cramp in the stomach and a violent attack of sickness. She dared not complain; she was not sure of getting any care. She turned pale and faint, said that she felt ill, and went up to bed, clinging to the banisters at every step, and believing that her last hour had come. "Poor Brigaut!" thought she.

"She is ill," said Rogron.

"She ill! It is all meagrims," said Sylvie, loud enough to be overheard. "She was not ill this morning, I can tell you!"

This last shot was too much for Pierrette, who crept to bed in tears, praying to God to remove her from this world.

For a month past Rogron had no longer carried the *Constitutionnel* to Gouraud; the colonel obsequiously came to fetch the newspaper, to make talk, and take Rogron out when the weather was fine. Sylvie, sure of seeing the colonel, and being able to question him, dressed herself coquettishly. The old maid thought she achieved this by putting on a green gown, a little yellow cashmere shawl bordered with red, and a white bonnet with meager gray feathers. At the hour when the colonel was due, she settled herself in the drawing-room with her brother, making him keep on his dressing-gown and slippers.

"It is a fine morning, colonel," said Rogron, hearing Gouraud's heavy step; "but I am not dressed, my sister perhaps wanted to go out, she left me to mind the house; wait for me."

Rogron went off, leaving Sylvie with the colonel.

"Where are you going? you are dressed like a goddess," observed Gouraud, seeing a certain solemnity of expression on the old maid's battered face.

"Yes, I was going out; but as the child is not well, I must stay at home."

"What is the matter with her?"

"I do not know; she asked to go to bed."

Gouraud's cautiousness, not to say his distrust, was constantly on the alert as a result of his collusion with Vinet.

The lawyer evidently had the best of it. He edited the paper, he ruled it as a master, and applied the profits to the editing; whereas the colonel, the responsible stalking-horse, got little enough. Who was to be the député? Vinet. Who the great electioneer? Vinet. Who was always consulted? Vinet.

Then he knew, at least as well as Vinet, the extent and depth of the passion consuming Rogron for the fair Bathilde de Chargebœuf. This passion was becoming a mania, as all the lowest passions of men do. Bathilde's voice made the old bachelor thrill. Rogron, thinking only of his desire, concealed it; he dared not hope for such a match. The colonel, to sound him, had told Rogron that he was about to propose for Bathilde's hand; Rogron had turned pale at the mere thought of such a formidable rival; he had become cold to Gouraud, almost hostile. Thus Vinet in every way ruled the roast, while he, the colonel, was tied to the house only by the doubtful bond of a love which, on his part, was but feigned, and on Sylvie's as yet unconfessed. When the lawyer had divulged the priest's maneuver and advised him to throw over Sylvie and pay his addresses to Pierrette, Vinet had humored his inclinations; still, as the colonel analyzed the true purport of this suggestion, and examined the ground on which he stood, he fancied he could discern in his ally some hope of making mischief between him and Sylvie, and taking advantage of the old maid's fears to make the whole of Rogron's fortune fall into Mlle. de Chargebœuf's hands.

Hence, when Rogron left him alone with Sylvie, the colonel's acumen seized on the slight indications which betrayed some uneasiness in Sylvie. He saw that she had planned to be under arms and alone with him for a minute. Gouraud, who already vehemently suspected Vinet of playing him some malignant trick, ascribed this conference to a secret suggestion of this legal ape; he put himself on guard, as when he had been making a reconnaissance in the enemy's country, keeping an eye on the whole prospect, listening for the least sound, his mind alert, his hand on his weapon. It was the colonel's weakness never to believe a word said by a woman; and when the old maid spoke of Pierrette, and said she was in bed at midday, he concluded that Sylvie had simply put her in disgrace in her room out of jealousy.

"The child is growing very pretty," said he, in an indifferent tone.

"Yes, she will be pretty," replied Mlle. Rogron.

"You ought now to send her to a shop in Paris," added the colonel. "She would make a fortune. They look out for very pretty girls now in the milliners' shops."

"Is that really your advice?" asked Sylvie, in an anxious voice.

"Good! I have hit it!" thought the colonel. "Vinet's advice that Pierrette and I should marry by-and-by was only intended to place me in this old witch's black-books.—Why," he said aloud, "what do you expect to do with her? Do you not see a perfectly lovely girl, Bathilde de Chargebœuf, of noble birth, well connected, and left to become an old maid. No one will have anything to say to her. Pierrette has nothing; she will never marry. Do you suppose that youth and beauty have any attraction for me, for instance?—for me, who, as Captain of Artillery in the Imperial Guard from the first day when the Emperor had a guard, have had my feet in every capital in Europe, and known the prettiest women in them all?—Youth and beauty—they are deuced common and silly. Don't talk of them to me!

"At eight-and-forty," he went on, adding to his age, "when a man has gone through the retreat from Moscow and the dreadful campaign in France, his loins are a bit weary; I am an old fellow. Now, a wife like you would cosset me and take care of me; her fortune, added to my few thousand francs of pension, would secure me suitable comfort for my old age, and I should like her a thousand times better than a minx who would give me no end of trouble, who would be thirty and have her passions when I should be sixty and have the rheumatism. At my time of life we think of these things. And, between you and me, I may add that if I marry, I should hope to have no children."

Sylvie's face was transparent to the colonel all through this speech, and her reply was enough to assure him of Vinet's perfidy.

"So you are not in love with Pierrette?" she exclaimed.

"Bless me! Are you crazy, my dear Sylvie?" cried he. "When we have lost all our teeth, is it the time to crack nuts? Thank God, I still have my wits, and know myself."

Sylvie would not then say more about herself; she thought herself very wily in using her brother's name.

"My brother," said she, "had thought of your marrying her."

"Your brother can never have had such a preposterous notion. A few days ago, to find out his secret, I told him that I was in love with Bathilde; he turned as white as your collar."

"Is he in love with Bathilde?" said Sylvie.

"Madly! And Bathilde certainly loves only his money."—("One for you, Vinet," thought Gouraud).—"What should have made him speak of Pierrette?—No, Sylvie," he went on, taking her hand and pressing it with meaning, "since you have led to the subject"—he went close to her—"well"—he kissed her hand; he was a cavalry colonel, and had given proofs of courage—"know this: I want no wife but you. Though the marriage will look like a marriage for money, I feel true affection for you."

"But it was I who wished that you should marry Pierrette; and if I were to give her my money—what then, colonel?"

"But I do not want to have a wretched home, or to see, ten years hence, some young whippersnapper, such as Julliard, hovering round my wife, and writing verses to her in the newspaper. I am too much a man on that score; I will never marry a woman out of all proportion too young."

"Well, colonel, we will talk that over seriously," said Sylvie, with a glance she thought amorous, and which was very like that of an ogress. Her cold, raw purple lips parted over her yellow teeth, and she fancied she was smiling.

"Here I am," said Rogron, and he led away the colonel, who bowed courteously to the old maid.

Gouraud was determined to hasten his marriage with Sylvie, and so become master of the house; promising himself that, through the influence he would acquire over Sylvie during the honeymoon, he would get rid both of Bathilde and of Céleste Habert. So, as they walked, he told Rogron that he had been making fun of him the other day; that he had no intentions of winning Bathilde's heart, not being rich enough to take a wife who had no money. Then he confided his projects; he had long since chosen Sylvie for her admirable qualities; in short, he aspired to the honor of becoming his brother-in-law.

"Oh, colonel! Oh, Baron! If only my consent were needed, it would be done as soon as legal delays should allow!" cried Rogron, delighted to find himself relieved of this terrible rival.

Sylvie spent the whole morning examining her own rooms to see if there were accommodation for a couple. She determined on building a second story for her brother, and having the first floor for herself and her husband; but she also promised herself, in accordance with the notions of every old maid, to put the colonel to some tests, so as to judge of his heart and habits before making up her mind. She still had doubts, and wanted to make sure that Pierrette had no intimacy with the colonel.

At dinner-time the girl came down to lay the cloth. Sylvie had been obliged to do the cooking, and had spotted her gown, exclaiming, "Curse Pierrette!" For it was evident, indeed, that if Pierrette had cooked the dinner, Sylvie would not have had a grease-stain on her silk dress.

"So here you are, you little coddle. You are like the blacksmith's dog that sleeps under the forge and wakes at the sound of a saucepan. So you want me to believe that you are ill, you little story-teller!"

The one idea, "You did not confess the truth as to what took place this morning, therefore everything you say is a lie," was like a hammer with which Sylvie was prepared to hit incessantly on Pierrette's head and heart.

To Pierrette's great astonishment, Sylvie sent her, after dinner, to dress for the evening. The liveliest imagination is no match for the energy which suspicion gives to the mind of an old maid. In such a case, the old maid beats politicians, attorneys and notaries, bill-brokers and misers. Sylvie promised herself that she would consult Vinet after looking well about her. She meant to keep Pierrette in the room, so as to judge for herself by the child's face whether the colonel had told the truth.

The first to come were Mme. de Chargebœuf and her daughter. By her cousin Vinet's advice, Bathilde had dressed with twice her usual elegance. She wore a most becoming blue cotton-velvet gown, the clear kerchief as before, bunches of grapes in garnets and gold for earrings, her hair in ringlets, the artful necklet, little black satin shoes, gray silk stockings, and suède gloves, and then queenly airs and girlish coquettishness enough to catch every Rogron in the river. Her mother, calm and dignified, had preserved, as had Bathilde, a certain aristocratic impertinence by which these two women redeemed everything, betraying the spirit of their caste. Bathilde was gifted with superior intelligence, though Vinet alone had been able to discern it after the two months that these ladies had spent in his house. When he had sounded the depths of this girl, depressed by the uselessness of her youth and beauty, but enlightened by the contempt she felt for the men of a period when money was their sole idol, Vinet exclaimed in surprise—

"If I had but married you, Bathilde, by this time I should have been Keeper of the Seals; I would have called myself Vinet de Chargebœuf, and have sat on the Right."

Bathilde had no vulgar aims in her wish to be married; she would not marry for motherhood, nor for the sake of having a husband; she would marry to be free, to have a "responsible publisher," as it were—to be called madame, and to act as men act. Rogron to her was a name; she thought she could make something of this imbecile creature—a député, who might vote while she pulled the wires; she wanted to be revenged on her family, who had paid little heed to a penniless girl. Vinet, admiring and encouraging her ideas, had greatly extended and strengthened them.

"My dear cousin," said he, explaining to her the influence exerted by women, and pointing out the sphere of action proper to them, "do you suppose that Tiphaine, a profoundly mediocre man, can by his own merits rise to sit on the lower bench in Paris? It is Mme. Tiphaine who got him returned as deputy; it is she who will carry him to Paris. Her mother, Mme. Roguin, is a cunning body, who does what she pleases with du Tillet the banker, one of Nucingen's chief allies, both of them close friends of Keller's; and these three houses do great services to the Government or its most devoted adherents; the offices are on the best possible terms with these lynxes of the financial world, and men like those know all Paris. There is nothing to hinder Tiphaine from rising to be Presiding Judge of one of the higher Courts.—Marry Rogron; we will make him deputy for Provins as soon as I have secured for myself some other constituency in Seine-et-Marne. Then you will have a receivership—one of those places where Rogron will have nothing to do but to sign his name. We will stick to the Opposition if it triumphs; but if the Bourbons remain in power, O how gently we will incline towards the Center! Besides, Rogron will not live forever, and you can marry a title by-and-by. And then, if you are in a good position, the Chargebœufs will help us. Your poverty—like mine—has, no doubt, enabled you to estimate what men are worth; they are to be made use of only as post-horses. A man or a woman can take us from one stage to the next!"

Vinet had made a little Catherine de' Medici of Bathilde. He left his wife at home, happy with her two children, and always attended Mme. de Chargebœuf and Bathilde to the Rogrons'. He appeared in all his glory as the tribune of Champagne. He wore neat gold spectacles, a silk waistcoat, a white cravat, black trousers, thin boots, a black coat made in Paris, a gold watch and chain. Instead of the Vinet of old—pale, lean, haggard, and gloomy—he exhibited the Vinet of the day, in all the bravery of a political personage; sure of his luck, he trod with the decision peculiar to a busy advocate familiar with the caverns of justice. His small, cunning head was so smartly brushed, and his clean-shaven chin gave him such a finished though cold appearance, that he looked quite pleasing, in the style of Robespierre. He might certainly become a delightful public prosecutor, with an elastic, dangerous, and deadly flow of eloquence, or an orator, with all the subtlety of Benjamin Constant. The acrimony and hatred which had formerly animated him had turned to perfidious softness. The poison had become medicine.

"Good-evening, my dear, how are you?" said Mme. de Chargebœuf to Sylvie.

Bathilde went straight to the fireplace, took off her hat, looked at herself in the glass, and put her pretty foot on the bar of the fender to display it to Rogron.

"What ails you, monsieur?" said she, looking at him. "You give me no greeting? Well, indeed! I may put on a velvet frock for your benefit . . ."

She stopped Pierrette, bidding her put her hat on a chair, and the girl took it from her, Bathilde resigning it to her as though Pierrette had been the housemaid.

Men are thought very fierce, and so are tigers; but neither tigers, nor vipers, nor diplomats, nor men of law, nor executioners, nor kings, can in their utmost atrocities come near the gentle cruelty, the poisoned sweetness, the savage scorn of young ladies to each other when certain of them think themselves superior to others in birth, fortune, or grace, and when marriage is in question, or precedence, or, in short, any feminine rivalry. The "Thank you, mademoiselle," spoken by Bathilde to Pierrette, was a poem in twelve cantos.

Her name was Bathilde, the other's was Pierrette; she was a Chargebœuf, the other a Lorrain! Pierrette was undersized and fragile, Bathilde was tall and full of vitality! Pierrette was fed by charity, Bathilde and her mother lived on their own money! Pierrette wore a stuff frock with a deep tucker, Bathilde dragged the serpentine folds of her blue velvet; Bathilde had the finest shoulders in the department, and an arm like a queen's, Pierrette's shoulder-blades and arms were skinny; Pierrette was Cinderella, Bathilde the fairy; Bathilde would get married, Pierrette would die a maid! Bathilde was worshiped, Pierrette had no one to love her! Bathilde had her hair dressed—she had taste, Pierrette hid her hair under a little cap, and knew nothing of the fashions! *Epilogue*—Bathilde was everything, Pierrette was nothing. The proud little Bretonne perfectly understood this cruel poem.

"Good-evening, child," said Mme. de Chargebœuf from the summit of her grandeur, and with an accent given by her narrow pinched nose.

Vinet put the crowning touch to these insulting civilities by looking at Pierrette and saying, on three notes, "Oh, oh, oh! How fine we are this evening, Pierrette!"

"I!" said the poor child. "You should say that to your cousin, not to me. She is beautiful!"

"Oh, my cousin is always beautiful," replied the lawyer. "Do not you say so, Père Rogron?" he added, turning to the master of the house, and shaking hands with him.

"Yes," said Rogron.

"Why force him to say what he does not think? I never was to his taste," replied Bathilde, placing herself in front of Rogron. "Is not that the truth?—Look at me."

Rogron looked at her from head to foot, and gently closed his eyes, like a cat when its poll is scratched.

"You are too beautiful," said he, "too dangerous to look at."

"Why?"

Rogron gazed at the fire-logs and said nothing.

At this moment Mlle. Habert came, followed by the colonel. Céleste Habert, everybody's enemy now, had none but Sylvie on her side; but each one showed her all the greater consideration, politeness, and amiable attention because all were undermining her, so that she doubted between this display of civil interest and the distrust which her brother had implanted in her. The priest, though standing apart from the theater of war, guessed everything; and so, when he perceived that his sister's hopes were at an end, he became one of the Rogrons' most formidable antagonists.

The reader can at once imagine what Mlle. Habert was like on being told that even if she had not been mistress—arch-mistress—of a school, she would still always have looked like a governess. Governesses have a particular way of putting on their caps. Just as elderly Englishwomen have monopolized the fashion of turbans, so governesses have the monopoly of these caps; the crown of the cap towers above the flowers, the flowers are more than artificial; stored carefully in a wardrobe, this cap is always new and always old, even on the first day. These old maids make it a point of honor to be like a painter's lay-figure; they sit on their haunches, not on their chairs. When they are spoken to they turn their whole body; and when their gowns creak, we are tempted to believe that the springs of the machinery are out of order. Mlle. Habert, a type of her kind, had a hard eye, a set mouth, and under her chin, furrowed with wrinkles, the limp and crumpled capstrings wagged and frisked as she moved. She had an added charm in two moles, rather large and rather brown, with hairs that she left to grow like untied clematis. Finally, she took snuff, and without grace.

They sat down to the toil of boston. Sylvie had opposite to her Mlle. Habert, and the colonel sat on one side, opposite Mme. de Chargebœuf. Bathilde placed herself near her mother and Rogron. Sylvie put Pierrette between herself and the colonel. Rogron opened another card-table in case M. Néraud should come, and M. Cournant and his wife. Vinet and Bathilde could both play whist, which was M. and Mme. Cournant's game. Ever since the Chargebœuf ladies—as they say in Provins—had been in the habit of coming to the Rogrons, the two lamps blazed on the chimney-piece between the candelabra and the clock, and the tables were lighted by wax lights at two francs a pound, which, however, was paid by winnings at cards.

"Now, Pierrette, my child, take your sewing," said Sylvie with treacherous gentleness, seeing her watch the colonel's play.

In public she always pretended to treat Pierrette very kindly. This mean deceit irritated the honest Bretonne, and made her despise her cousin. Pierrette fetched her embroidery; but as she set the stitches, she looked now and then at the colonel's game. Gouraud seemed not to know that there was a little girl at his side. Sylvie began to think this indifference extremely suspicious. At a certain moment in the game the old maid declared *misère* in hearts; the pool was full of counters, and there were twenty-seven sous in it besides. The Cournants and Néraud had come. The old supernumerary judge, Desfondrilles—a man in whom the Minister of Justice had discerned the qualifications for a judge when appointing him examining magistrate, but who was never thought clever enough for a superior position—had for the last two months forsaken the Tiphaines, and shown a leaning towards Vinet's party. He was now standing in front of the fire, holding up his coat-tails, and gazing at the gorgeous drawing-room in which Mlle. de Chargebœuf shone; for the setting of crimson looked as if it had been contrived on purpose to show off the beauty of this magnificent young woman. Silence reigned; Pierrette watched the play, and Sylvie's attention was diverted by the excitement of the game.

"Play that," said Pierrette to the colonel, pointing to a heart.

The colonel led from a sequence in hearts; the hearts lay between him and Sylvie; the colonel forced the ace, though it was guarded in Sylvie's hand by five small cards.

"It is not fair play! Pierrette saw my hand, and the colonel allowed her to advise him!"

"But, mademoiselle," said Céleste, "it was the colonel's game to lead hearts since he found that you had one!"

The speech made Desfondrilles smile; he was a keen observer, who amused himself with watching all the interests at stake in Provins, where he played the part of *Rigaudin* in Picard's play of *La Maison en Loterie.*

"It was the colonel's game," Cournant put in, without knowing anything about it.

Sylvie shot at Mlle. Habert a look of old maid against old maid, villainous but honeyed.

"Pierrette, you saw my hand," said Sylvie, fixing her eyes on the girl.

"No, cousin."

"I was watching you all," said the archæological judge; "I can bear witness that the little girl saw no one's hand but the colonel's."

"Pooh! these little girls know very well how to steal a glance with their sweet eyes," said Gouraud in alarm.

"Indeed!" said Sylvie.

"Yes," replied Gouraud; "she may have looked over your hand to play you a trick. Was it not so, my beauty?"

"No," said the honest Bretonne. "I am incapable of such a thing! In that case I should have followed my cousin's game."

"You know very well that you are a story-teller and a little fool into the bargain," said Sylvie. "Since what took place this morning, who can believe a word you say? You are a . . ."

Pierrette did not wait to hear her cousin end the sentence in her presence. Anticipating a torrent of abuse, she rose, went out of the room without a light, and up to her room. Sylvie turned pale with rage, and muttered between her teeth, "I will pay her out!"

"Will you pay your losses?" said Mme. de Chargebœuf.

At this moment poor Pierrette hit her head against the passage door which the judge had left open.

"Good! That serves her right!" cried Sylvie.

"What has happened?" asked Desfondrilles.

"Nothing that she does not deserve," replied Sylvie.

"She has given herself some severe blow," said Mlle. Habert.

Sylvie tried to evade paying her stakes by rising to see what Pierrette had done; but Mme. de Chargebœuf stopped her.

"Pay us first," said she, laughing; "by the time you return you will have forgotten all about it."

This suggestion, based on the bad faith the ex-haberdasher showed in the matter of her gambling debts, met with general approval. Sylvie sat down and thought no more of Pierrette; and no one was surprised at her indifference. All the evening Sylvie was absent-minded. When cards were over, at about half-past nine, she sank into an easy-chair by the fire, and only rose to take leave of her guests. The colonel tortured her; she did not know what to think about him.

"Men are so false!" said she to herself as she fell asleep.

Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow against the edge of the door, just over her ear, where girls part their hair to put the forepart into curl-papers. Next morning there was a bad purple-veined bruise.

"God has punished you," said Sylvie at breakfast; "you disobeyed me, you showed a great want of respect in not listening to me, and in going away in the middle of my sentence. You have no more than you deserve."

"Still," said Rogron, "you should put on a rag dipped in salt and water."

"Pooh! It is nothing!" said Sylvie.

The poor child had come to the point when she thought her guardian's remark a proof of interest.

The week ended as it had begun, in constant torment. Sylvie became ingenious, and carried her refinement of tyranny to an extreme pitch. The Illinois, Cherokees, and Mohicans might have learnt of her. Pierrette dared not complain of her indefinite misery and the pain she suffered in her head. At the bottom of Sylvie's displeasure lay the girl's refusal to tell anything about Brigaut; and Pierrette, with Breton obstinacy, was determined to keep a very natural silence. Everyone can imagine what a glance she gave Brigaut, who, as she believed, would be lost to her if he were discovered, and whom she instinctively longed to keep near her, happy in knowing that he was at Provins. What a delight to her to see Brigaut again! The sight of the companion of her childhood was to her like the view an exile gets from afar of his native land; she looked on him as a martyr gazes at the sky when, during his torments, his eyes, blessed with double sight, see through to heaven.

Pierrette's parting glance had been so perfectly intelligible to the major's son, that while he planed his boards, opened his compasses, took his measurements, and fitted his pieces, he racked his brains for some means of corresponding with Pierrette. Brigaut at last hit on this extremely simple plan. At a certain hour at night Pierrette must let down a string, and he would tie a letter to the end of it. In the midst of her terrible sufferings from two maladies, an abscess which was forming in her head, and her general discomposure, Pierrette was sustained by the idea of corresponding with Brigaut. The same desire agitated both hearts; though apart, they understood each other! At every pang that made her heart flutter, at every pain that shot through her brain, Pierrette said to herself, "Brigaut is at hand!" and then she could suffer without complaining.

On the next market-day after their first meeting in the church, Brigaut looked out for his little friend. Though he saw that she was pale, and trembling like a November leaf about to drop from the bough, without losing his head he went to bargain for some fruit at the stall where the terrible Sylvie was beating down the price of her purchases. Brigaut contrived to slip a note into Pierrette's hand, and he did it naturally, while jesting with the market woman, and with all the dexterity of a rake, as if he had never done anything else, so coolly did he manage it, in spite of the hot blood that sang in his ears and surged boiling from his heart, almost bursting the veins and arteries. On the surface he had the determination of an old housebreaker, and within the quaking heart of innocence, like mothers sometimes in their mortal anguish, when they are gripped between two dangers, between two precipices. Pierrette felt Brigaut's dizziness; she crushed the paper into her apron pocket; the pallor of her cheeks changed to the cherry redness of a fierce fire. These two children each unconsciously went through sensation enough for ten commonplace love-affairs. That instant left in their souls a wellspring of emotions. Sylvie, who did not recognize the Breton accent, could not suspect a lover in Brigaut, and Pierrette came home with her treasure.

The letters of these two poor children were destined to serve as documents in a horrible legal squabble; for, but for that fatal circumstance, they never would have been seen. This is what Pierrette read that evening in her room:—

"My dear Pierrette,—At midnight, when everybody is asleep, but when I shall be awake for your sake, I will come every night under the kitchen window. You can let down out of your window a string long enough to reach me, which will make no noise, and tie to the end of it whatever you want to write to me. I will answer you in the same way. I knew that you had been taught to read and write by those wretched relations who were to do you so much good, and who are doing you so much harm! You, Pierrette, the daughter of a colonel who died for France, are compelled by these monsters to cook for them! That is how your pretty color and your fine health have vanished. What has become of my Pierrette? What have they done to her? I can see plainly that you are not happy.

"Oh! Pierrette, let us go back to Brittany. I can earn enough to give you everything you need; you may have three francs a day, for I earn from four to five, and thirty sous are plenty for me. Oh! Pierrette, how I have prayed to God for you since seeing you again. I have asked Him to give me all your pain, and to grant you all the pleasures.

"What have you to do with them that they keep you? Your grandmother is more to you than they are. These Rogrons are venomous; they have spoilt all your gayety. You do not even walk at Provins as you used to move in Brittany. Let us go home to Brittany. In short, here I am to serve you, to do your bidding; and you must tell me what you wish. If you want money, I have sixty crowns of ours, and I shall have the grief of sending them to you by the string instead of kissing your dear hands respectfully when I give you the money. Ah! my dear Pierrette, the blue sky has now for a long time been dark to me. I have not had two hours of joy since I put you into that ill-starred diligence; and when I saw you again, like a shade, that witch of a cousin disturbed our happiness. However, we shall have the comfort of praying to God together every Sunday; He will perhaps hear us the better. Not good-by, dear Pierrette, only till to-night."

This letter agitated her so greatly that she sat for above an hour reading and re-reading it; but she reflected, not without pain, that she had nothing to write with. So she made up her mind to the difficult expedition from her attic to the dining-room, where she could find ink, pen, and paper; and she accomplished it without waking Sylvie. A few minutes before midnight she had finished this letter, which was also produced in Court:—

"My Friend,—Oh yes, my friend! For there is no one but you, Jacques, and my grandmother, who loves me. God forgive me, but you are the only two persons I love, one as much as the other, neither more nor less. I was too little to remember my mother; but you, Jacques, and my grandmother, and my grandfather, too, God rest his soul, for he suffered much from his ruin, which was mine too—in short, you are the only two remaining, and I love you as much as I am wretched! So to know how much I love you, you would have to know how much I suffer; but I do not wish that—it would make you too unhappy. I am spoken to as you would not speak to a dog; I am treated as if I were dirt; and in vain I examine myself as if I were before God, I cannot see that I am in fault towards them. Before you sang the bride's song to me I saw that God was good in my misery; for I prayed to Him to take me out of this world, and as I felt very ill, I said to myself, 'God has heard me!'

"But since you have come, Brigaut, I want to go away with you to Brittany to see my grandmamma, who loves me, though they tell me she has robbed me of eight thousand francs. Brigaut, if they are really mine, can you get them? But it is all a lie; if we had eight thousand francs, grandmamma would not be at Saint-Jacques. I would not trouble that good saintly woman's last days by telling her of my miseries; it would be enough to kill her. Ah! if she could know that they make her grandchild wash the pots and pans—she who would say to me, 'Leave that alone, my darling,' when I tried to help her in her troubles; 'leave it, leave it, my pet; you will spoil your pretty little hands.' Well, my nails are clean at any rate! Many times I cannot carry the market basket, and the handle saws my arm as I come home from market.

"At the same time, I do not think that my cousins are cruel; but it is their way always to be scolding, and it would seem that I can never get away from them. My cousin Rogron is my guardian. One day when I meant to run away, as I was too miserable, and I told them so, my cousin Sylvie answered that the police would go after me, that the law was on my guardian's side; and I saw very clearly that cousins can no more take the place of our father and mother than the Saints can take the place of God.—My poor Jacques, what use could I make of your money? Keep it for our journey. Oh! how I have thought of you and Pen-Hoël and the large pool. We ate our cake first, out there, for I think I am getting worse. I am very ill, Jacques. I have such pains in my head that I could scream, and in my back and my bones; something round my loins that half kills me; and I have no appetite but for nasty things, leaves and roots, and I like the smell of printed paper. There are times when I should cry if I were alone, for I may not do anything as I wish; I am not even allowed to cry. I have to hide myself to offer up my tears to Him from whom we receive those mercies which we call our afflictions. Was it not He who inspired you with the good idea of coming to sing the bride's song under my window?—Oh! Jacques, cousin Sylvie, who heard you, told me I had a lover. If you will be my lover, love me very much; I promise always to love you, as in the past, and to be your faithful servant,

"PIERRETTE LORRAIN.

"You will always love me, won't you?"

The girl had taken a crust of bread from the kitchen, in which she made a hole to stick her letter in, so as to weight the thread. At midnight, after opening her window with excessive caution, she let down her note with the bread, which could make no noise by tapping against the wall or the shutters. She felt the thread pulled by Brigaut, who broke it, and then went stealthily away. When he was in the middle of the Square she could see him, though indistinctly, in the starlight; but he could gaze at her in the luminous band projected by the candle. The two young things remained there for an hour, Pierrette signaling to him to go away, he going and she remaining, and he returning to his post, while Pierrette again waved to him to be gone. This was several times repeated, till the girl shut her window, got into bed, and blew out her light.

Once in bed, she went to sleep, happy though suffering; she had Brigaut's letter under her pillow. She slept the sleep of the persecuted, a sleep blessed by the angels, the sleep of golden and faraway glories full of the arabesques of heaven, which Raphael dreamed of and drew.

Her delicate physical nature was so responsive to her moral nature that Pierrette rose next morning as glad and light as a lark, beaming and gay. Such a change could not escape Sylvie's eye; this time, instead of scolding her, she proceeded to watch her with the cunning of a raven.

"What makes her so happy?" was suggested by jealousy, and not by tyranny. If Sylvie had not been possessed by the idea of the colonel, she would certainly have said as usual, "Pierrette, you are very turbulent, or very heedless of what is said to you." The old maid determined to spy on Pierrette, as only old maids can spy. The day passed in gloom and silence, like the hour before a storm.

"So you are no longer so ailing, miss?" said Sylvie at dinner. "Did I not tell you that she shams it all to worry us?" she exclaimed, turning to her brother, without waiting for Pierrette's reply.

"On the contrary, cousin, I have a sort of fever——"

"What sort of fever? You are as gay as a linnet. You have seen someone again perhaps?"

Pierrette shuddered, and kept her eyes on her plate.

"*Tartuffe!*" cried Sylvie. "At fourteen! Already! What a nature! Why, you will be a wretch indeed!"

"I do not know what you mean," replied Pierrette, raising her fine luminous hazel eyes to her cousin's face.

"This evening," said Sylvie, "you will remain in the dining-room to sew by a candle. You are in the way in the drawing-room, and I will not have you looking over my hand to advise your favorites."

Pierrette did not flinch.

"Hypocrite!" exclaimed Sylvie as she left the room.

Rogron, who could not understand what his sister was talking about, said to Pierrette, "What is the matter between you two? Try, Pierrette, to please your cousin; she is most indulgent, most kind; and if she is put out with you, certainly you must be wrong. Why do you squabble? For my part, I like a quiet life. Look at Mlle. Bathilde; you should try to copy her."

Pierrette could bear it all; Brigaut would come, beyond doubt, at midnight to bring his answer, and this hope was her viaticum for the day. But she was exhausting her last strength. She did not go to sleep; she sat up listening to the clocks strike the hours, and fearing to make a sound. At last twelve struck; she softly opened her window, and this time she used a string she had made long enough by tying several bits together. She heard Brigaut's step, and when she drew up the string she read the following letter, which filled her with joy:—

"My dear Pierrette,—If you are in such pain, you must not tire yourself by sitting up for me. You will be sure to hear me call like a *Chouan*. My father luckily taught me to imitate their cry. So I shall repeat it three times, and you will know that I have come, and that you must let down the string, but I shall not come again for some few days. I hope then to have good news for you. Oh! Pierrette, not death! What are you thinking of? All my heart quaked; I thought I was dead myself at the mere idea. No, my Pierrette, you shall not die; you shall live happy, and soon be rescued from your persecutors. If I should not succeed in what I am attempting, to save you, I would go to the lawyers and declare in the face of heaven and earth how you are treated by your cruel relations.

"I am certain that you have only to endure a few days more: take patience. Pierrette, Brigaut is watching over you, as he did in the days when we went to slide on the pond, and I pulled you out of the deep hole where we were so nearly lost together. Good-by, my dear Pierrette; in a few days we shall be happy, please God. Alas! I dare not tell you of the only thing that may hinder our meeting. But God loves us! So in a few days I shall be able to see my dear Pierrette in liberty, without a care, without anyone hindering my looking at you, for I am very hungry to see you, O Pierrette! Pierrette, who condescend to love me and to tell me so. Yes, Pierrette, I will be your lover, but only when I have earned the grand fortune you deserve, and till then I will be no more to you than a devoted servant whom you may command. Adieu.

"JACQUES BRIGAUT."

This was what the young fellow did not tell Pierrette. He had written the following letter to Mme. Lorrain at Nantes:—

"MME. LORRAIN,—Your granddaughter will die, killed by ill-usage, if you do not come to claim her back. I hardly knew her again; and to enable you to judge for yourself of the state of things, I inclose in this letter one from Pierrette to me. You are reported here to have your grandchild's fortune, and you ought to justify yourself on this point. In short, if you can, come quickly; we may yet be happy, and later you will find Pierrette dead.—I remain, with respect, your humble servant,

"JACQUES BRIGAUT.

"At M. Frappier's, Master joiner, Grand' Rue, Provins."

Brigaut only feared lest Pierrette's grandmother might be dead.

Though this letter from him, whom in her innocence she called her lover, was almost inexplicable to Pierrette, she accepted it with virgin faith. Her heart experienced the feeling which travelers in the desert know when they see from afar the palm grove round a well. In a few days her miseries would be ended, Brigaut said it; she slept on the promise of her childhood's friend; and yet, she laid this letter with the former one, a dreadful thought found dreadful expression—

"Poor Brigaut," said she to herself, "he does not know the hole I have my feet in!"

Sylvie had heard Pierrette; she had also heard Brigaut below the window; she sprang up, rushed to look out on the Square through the shutter slats, and saw a man going away towards the house where the colonel lived. In front of that Brigaut stopped. The old maid gently opened her door, went upstairs, was amazed at seeing a light in Pierrette's room, peeped through the keyhole, and could see nothing.

"Pierrette," said she, "are you ill?"

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, startled.

"Then why have you a light in your room at midnight? Open your door. I must know what you are about."

Pierrette, barefoot, opened the door, and Sylvie saw the skein of twine which Pierrette, never dreaming of being caught, had neglected to put away. Sylvie pounced upon it.

"What do you use that for?"

"Nothing, cousin."

"Nothing?" said she. "Very good. Lies again! You will not find that the way to heaven. Go to bed; you are cold."

She asked no more, but disappeared, leaving Pierrette terror-stricken by such leniency. Instead of an outbreak, Sylvie had suddenly made up her mind to steal a march on the colonel and Pierrette, to possess herself of the letters, and confound the couple who were deceiving her. Pierrette, inspired by danger, put the two letters inside her stays and covered them with calico.

This was the end of the loves of Pierrette and Brigaut.

Pierrette was glad of her friend's decision, for Sylvie's suspicions would be disconcerted by having nothing to feed on. And, in fact, Sylvie spent three nights out of her bed and three evenings in watching the innocent colonel, without discovering anything in Pierrette's room, or in the house or out of it, that hinted at their having any understanding. She sent Pierrette to confession, and took advantage of her absence to hunt through everything in the child's room as dexterously and as keenly as the spies and searchers at the gates of Paris. She found nothing. Her rage rose to the climax of human passion. If Pierrette had been present, she would certainly have beaten her without ruth. To a woman of this temper, jealousy was not so much a feeling as a possession; she breathed, she felt her heart beat, she had emotions in a way hitherto completely unknown to her; at the least movement she was on the alert, she listened to the faintest sounds, she watched Pierrette with gloomy concentration.

"That little wretch will be the death of me!" she would say.

Sylvie's severity to the child became at last the most refined cruelty, and aggravated the miserable state in which Pierrette lived. The poor little thing was constantly in a fever, and the pain in her head became intolerable. By the end of a week she displayed to the frequenters of the Rogrons' house a face of suffering which must certainly have softened any less cruel egotism; but Dr. Néraud, advised perhaps by Vinet, did not call for more than a week. The colonel, suspected by Sylvie, was afraid she might break off their marriage if he showed the smallest anxiety about Pierrette; Bathilde accounted for her indisposition by simple causes, in no way dangerous.

At last, one Sunday evening, when the drawing-room was full of company, Pierrette could not endure the pain; she fainted completely away; and the colonel, who was the first to observe that she had lost consciousness, lifted her up and carried her on to a sofa.

"She did it on purpose," said Sylvie, looking at Mlle. Habert and the other players.

"Your cousin is very ill, I assure you," said the colonel.

"She was very well in your arms," retorted Sylvie, with a hideous smile.

"The colonel is right," said Mme. de Chargebœuf; "you ought to send for a doctor. This morning in church everyone was talking of Mlle. Lorrain's state as they came out—it is obvious."

"I am dying," said Pierrette.

Desfondrilles called to Sylvie to unfasten the girl's frock. Sylvie complied, saying, "It is all a sham!"

She undid the dress, and was going to loosen the stays. Then Pierrette found superhuman strength; she sat up, and exclaimed, "No, no; I will go to bed."

Sylvie had touched her stays, and had felt the papers. She allowed Pierrette to escape, saying to everybody, "Well, do you think she is so very ill? It is all put on; you could never imagine the naughtiness of that child."

She detained Vinet at the end of the evening; she was furious, she was bent on revenge; she was rough with the colonel as he bid her good-night. Gouraud shot a glance at Vinet that seemed to pierce him to the very bowels, and mark the spot for a bullet. Sylvie begged Vinet to remain. When they were alone, the old maid began—

"Never in my life, nor in all my days, will I marry the colonel!"

"Now that you have made up your mind, I may speak. The colonel is my friend; still, I am yours rather than his. Rogron has done me services I can never forget. I am as firm a friend as I am an implacable enemy. Certainly, when once I am in the Chamber you will see how I shall rise, and I will make Rogron a Receiver-General.—Well, swear to me never to repeat a word of our conversation!" Sylvie nodded assent. "In the first place, our gallant colonel is an inveterate gambler."

"Indeed!" said Sylvie.

"But for the difficulties this passion has got him into, he might perhaps have been a Marshal of France," the lawyer went on. "So he might squander all your fortune. But he is a deep customer. Do not believe that married people have or have not children, and you know what will happen to you. No. If you wish to marry, wait till I am in the Chamber, and then you can marry old Desfondrilles, who will be

President of the Court here. To revenge yourself, make your brother marry Mlle. de Chargebœuf; I will undertake to get her consent; she will have two thousand francs a year, and you will be as nearly connected with the Chargebœufs as I am. Take my word for it, the Chargebœufs will call us cousins some day."

"Gouraud is in love with Pierrette," replied Sylvie.

"He is quite capable of it," said Vinet; "and quite capable of marrying her after your death."

"A pretty little scheme!" said she.

"I tell you, he is as cunning as the Devil. Make your brother marry, and announce that you intend to remain unmarried and leave your money to your nephews or nieces; you will thus hit Pierrette and Gouraud by the same blow, and you will see how foolish he will look."

"To be sure," cried the old maid; "I can catch them. She shall go into a shop, and will have nothing. She has not a penny. Let her do as we did, and work."

Vinet having got his idea in Sylvie's head, and knowing her obstinacy, left the house. The old maid ended by thinking that the plan was her own.

Vinet found the colonel outside, smoking a cigar while he waited for him.

"Hold hard!" said the colonel. "You have pulled me to pieces, but there are stones enough in the ruins to bury you."

"Colonel!"

"There is no 'colonel' in the case. I am going to lead you a dance. In the first place, you will never be a deputy——"

"Colonel!"

"I can command ten votes, and the election depends on——"

"Colonel, just listen to me. Is there no one in the world but old Sylvie? I have just been trying to clear you. You are accused and proved guilty of writing to Pierrette; she has seen you coming out of your house at midnight to stand below the girl's window——"

"Well imagined!"

"She means her brother to marry Bathilde, and will keep her fortune for their children."

"Will Rogron have any?"

"Yes," said Vinet. "But I promise to find you a young and agreeable woman with a hundred and fifty thousand francs.—Are you mad? Can you and I afford to quarrel? Things have turned against you in spite of me; but you do not know me."

"Well, we must learn to know each other," replied the colonel. "Give me a wife with fifty thousand crowns before the elections—otherwise, your servant. I do not like awkward bedfellows, and you have pulled all the blankets to your side. Good-night."

"You will see," said Vinet, shaking hands affectionately with the colonel.

At about one in the morning three clear, low hoots, like those of an owl, admirably mimicked, sounded in the Place; Pierrette heard them in her fever sleep. She got up, quite damp, opened her window, saw Brigaut, and threw out a ball of silk, to which he tied a letter.

Sylvie, excited by the events of the evening and her own deliberations, was not asleep; she was taken in by the owl's cry.

"Ah! what a bird of ill-omen!—But, hark! Pierrette is out of bed. What does she want?"

On hearing the attic window open, Sylvie rushed to her own window and heard Brigaut's paper rustle against the shutters. She tied her jacket strings, and nimbly mounted the stairs to Pierrette's room; she found her untying the silk from round the letter.

"So I have caught you!" cried the old maid, going to the window, whence she saw Brigaut take to his heels. "Give me that letter."

"No, cousin," said the girl, who, by one of the stupendous inspirations of youth, and sustained by her spirit, rose to the dignity of resistance which we admire in the history of some nations reduced to desperation.

"What, you will not?" cried Sylvie, advancing on her cousin, and showing her a hideous face full of hatred, and distorted by rage.

Pierrette drew back a step or two to have time to clutch her letter in her hand, which she kept shut with invincible strength. On seeing this, Sylvie seized Pierrette's delicate white hand in her lobster's claws, and tried to wrench it open. It was a fearful struggle, an infamous struggle, as everything is that dares to attack thought, the only treasure that God has set beyond the reach of power, and keeps as a secret bond between the wretched and Himself.

The two women, one dying, the other full of vigor, looked steadfastly at each other. Pierrette's eyes flashed at her torturer such a look as the Templar's who received on his breast the blows from a mace in the presence of Philippe le Bel. The King could not endure that fearful gleam, and retired appalled by it; Sylvie, a woman, and a jealous woman, answered that magnetic glance by an ominous glare. Awful silence reigned. The Bretonne's clenched fingers, resisted her cousin's efforts with the tenacity of a steel vise. Sylvie wrung Pierrette's arm, and tried to open her hand; as this had no effect, she vainly set her nails in the flesh. Finally, madness re-enforced her anger; she raised Pierrette's fist to her teeth to bite her fingers and subdue her by pain. Pierrette still defied her with the terrifying gaze of innocence. The old maid's fury was roused to such a pitch that she was blind to all else; gripping Pierrette's arm, she beat the girl's fist on the window-sill, and on the marble chimney-piece, as we beat a nut to crack it and get at the kernel.

"Help, help!" cried Pierrette; "I am being killed."

"So you scream, do you, when I find you with a lover in the middle of the night?"

And she hit again and again without mercy.

"Help, help!" cried Pierrette, whose fist was bleeding.

At this moment there were violent blows on the street door. Both equally exhausted, the two women ceased.

Rogron, aroused and anxious, not knowing what was happening, had got out of bed, gone to his sister's room, and not found her; then he was alarmed, went down and opened the door, and was almost upset by Brigaut, followed by what seemed a phantom.

At the same instant Sylvie's eyes fell on Pierrette's stays; she remembered having felt the papers in them; she threw herself on them like a tiger on his prey, twisted the stays round her hand, and held them up with a smile, as an Iroquois smiles at his foe before scalping him.

"I am dying——" said Pierrette, dropping on her knees. "Who will save me?"

"I will," cried a woman with white hair, turning on Pierrette an aged, parchment face in which a pair of gray eyes sparkled.

"Ah, grandmother, you have come too late!" cried the poor child, melting into tears.

Pierrette went to fall on her bed, bereft of all her strength, and half killed by the reaction, which in a sick girl was inevitable after such a violent struggle. The tall withered apparition took her in her arms as a nurse takes a child, and went out, followed by Brigaut, without saying a word to Sylvie, at whom, by a tragic glance, she hurled majestic accusation. The sight of this dignified old woman in her Breton costume, shrouded in her coiffe, which is a sort of long cloak made of black cloth, and accompanied by the terrible Brigaut, appalled Sylvie; she felt as if she had seen death.

She went downstairs, heard the door shut, and found herself face to face with her brother, who said to her, "They have not killed you then?"

"Go to bed," said Sylvie. "To-morrow morning we will see what is to be done."

She got into bed again, unpicked the stays, and read Brigaut's two letters, which utterly confounded her. She went to sleep in the strangest perplexity, never dreaming of the terrible legal action to which her conduct was to give rise.

Brigaut's letter to the widow Lorrain had found her in the greatest joy, which was checkered when she read it. The poor old woman, now past seventy, had been dying of grief at having to live without Pierrette at her side; she only comforted herself for her loss by the belief that she had sacrificed herself to her grandchild's interests. She had one of those ever-young hearts to which self-sacrifice gives strength and vitality. Her old husband, whose only joy Pierrette had been, had grieved for the child; day after day he had looked for her and missed her. It was an old man's sorrow; the sorrow old men live on, and die of at last.

Everybody can therefore imagine the joy felt by this poor woman, shut up in an almshouse, on hearing of one of those actions which, though rare, still are heard of in France.

After his failure François Joseph Collinet, the head of the house of Collinet, sailed for America with his children. He was a man of too much good feeling to sit down at Nantes, ruined and bereft of credit, in the midst of the disasters caused by his bankruptcy. From 1814 till 1824 this brave merchant, helped by his children and by his cashier, who remained faithful to him and lent him the money to start again, valiantly worked to make a second fortune. After incredible efforts, that were crowned by success, by the eleventh year he was able to return to Nantes and rehabilitate himself, leaving his eldest son at the head of the American house. He found Mme. Lorrain of Pen-Hoël at Saint-Jacques, and beheld the resignation with which the most hapless of his fellow-victims endured her penury.

"God forgive you!" said the old woman, "since you give me on the brink of the grave the means of securing my grandchild's happiness. I, alas! can never see my poor old man's credit re-established."

M. Collinet had brought to his creditor her capital and interest at trade rates, altogether about forty-two thousand francs. His other creditors, active, wealthy, and capable men, had kept themselves above water, while the Lorrains' overthrow had seemed to old Collinet irremediable; he had now promised the widow that he would rehabilitate her husband's good name, finding that it would involve an expenditure of only about forty thousand francs more. When this act of generous restitution became known on 'Change at Nantes, the authorities were eager to reopen its doors to

Collinet before he had surrendered to the Court at Rennes; but the merchant declined the honor, and submitted to all the rigor of the Commercial Code.

Mme. Lorrain, then, had received forty-two thousand francs the day before the post brought her Brigaut's letters. As she signed her receipt, her first words were—

"Now I can live with my Pierrette, and let her marry poor Brigaut, who will make a fortune out of my money!"

She could not sit still; she fussed and fidgeted, and wanted to set out for Provins. And when she had read the fatal letters, she rushed out into the town like a mad thing, asking how she could get to Provins with the swiftness of lightning. She set out by mail when she heard of the Governmental rapidity of that conveyance. From Paris she took the Troyes coach; she had arrived at eleven that evening at Frappier's, where Brigaut, seeing the old Bretonne's deep despair, at once promised to fetch her granddaughter, after describing Pierrette's state in a few words. Those few words so alarmed the old woman that she could not control her impatience; she ran out to the Square. When Pierrette screamed, her grandmother's heart was pierced by the cry as keenly as was Brigaut's. The two together would no doubt have roused all the inhabitants, if Rogron, in sheer terror, had not opened the door. This cry of a girl in extremity filled the old woman with strength as great as her horror; she carried her dear Pierrette all the way to Frappier's, where his wife had hastily arranged Brigaut's room for Pierrette's grandmother. So in this miserable lodging, on a bed scarcely made, they laid the poor child; she fainted away, still keeping her hand closed, bruised and bleeding as it was, her nails set in the flesh. Brigaut, Frappier, his wife, and the old woman contemplated Pierrette in silence, all lost in unutterable astonishment.

"Why is her hand covered with blood?" was the grandmother's first question.

Pierrette, overcome by the sleep which follows such an extreme exertion of strength, and knowing that she was safe from any violence, relaxed her fingers. Brigaut's letter fell out as an answer.

"They wanted to get my letter," said Brigaut, falling on his knees and picking up the note he had written, desiring his little friend to steal softly out of the Rogrons' house. He piously kissed the little martyr's hand.

Then there was a thing which made the joiners shudder: it was the sight of old Mme. Lorrain, a sublime specter, standing by her child's bedside. Horror and vengeance fired with fierce expression the myriad wrinkles that furrowed her skin of ivory yellow; on her brow, shaded by thin gray locks, sat divine wrath. With the powerful intuition granted to the aged as they approach the tomb, she read all Pierrette's life, of which indeed she had been thinking all the way she had come.

She understood the malady that threatened the life of her darling. Two large tears gathered painfully in her gray-and-white eyes, which sorrow had robbed of lashes and eyebrows; two beads of grief that gave a fearful moisture to those eyes, and swelled and rolled over those withered cheeks without wetting them.

"They have killed her!" she said at last, clasping her hands.

She dropped on her knees, which hit two sharp blows on the floor; she was making a vow, no doubt, to Sainte-Anne d'Auray, the most powerful Madonna of Brittany.

"A doctor from Paris," she next said to Brigaut. "Fly there, Brigaut. Go!"

She took the artisan by the shoulders and turned him round with a despotic gesture.

"I was coming at any rate, my good Brigaut," she said, calling him back. "I am rich.—Here!" She untied the ribbon that fastened to her bodice across her bosom, took out a paper, in which were wrapped forty-two bank-notes, and said, "Take as much as you need; bring back the greatest doctor in Paris."

"Keep that," said Frappier; "he could not change a bank-note at this hour. I have money; the diligence will pass presently, he will be sure to find a place in it. But would it not be better first to consult M. Martener, who will give us the name of a Paris physician? The diligence is not due for an hour; we have plenty of time."

Brigaut went off to rouse M. Martener. He brought the doctor back with him, not a little surprised to find Mlle. Lorrain at Frappier's. Brigaut described to him the scene that had just taken place at the Rogrons'. The loquacity of a despairing lover threw light on this domestic drama, though the doctor could not suspect its horrors or its extent. Martener gave Brigaut the address of the famous Horace Bianchon, and Jacques and his master left the room on hearing the approach of the diligence.

M. Martener sat down, and began by examining the bruises and wounds on the girl's hand, which hung out of bed.

"She did not hurt herself in such a way," said he.

"No, the dreadful creature I was so unhappy as to trust her with was torturing her," said the grandmother. "My poor Pierrette was crying out, 'Help! Murder!' It was enough to touch the heart of an executioner."

"But why?" said the doctor, feeling Pierrette's pulse. "She is very ill," he went on, bringing the light close to the bed. "We shall hardly save her," said he, after looking at her face. "She must have suffered terribly, and I cannot understand their having left her without care."

"It is my intention," said the old woman, "to appeal to justice. Had these people, who wrote to ask me for my granddaughter, saying that they had twelve thousand francs a year, any right to make her their cook and give her work far beyond her strength?"

"They did not choose to see that she was obviously suffering from one of the ailments to which young girls are sometimes subject, and needed the greatest care!" cried M. Martener.

Pierrette was roused, partly by the light held by Mme. Frappier so as to show her face more clearly, and partly by the dreadful pain in her head, caused by reactionary collapse after her struggle.

"Oh, M. Martener, I am very ill," said she, in her pretty voice.

"Where is the pain, my child?" said the doctor.

"There," she replied, pointing to a spot on her head above the left ear.

"There is an abscess!" cried the doctor, after feeling Pierrette's head for some time, and questioning her as to the pain. "You must tell us everything, my dear, to enable us to cure you. Why is your hand in this state? You did not injure it like this yourself."

Pierrette artlessly told the tale of her struggle with her cousin Sylvie.

"Make her talk to you," said the doctor to her grandmother, "and learn all about it. I will wait till the surgeon arrives from Paris, and we will call in the head surgeon of the hospital for a consultation. It seems to me very serious. I will send a soothing draught to give mademoiselle some sleep. She needs rest."

The old Bretonne, left alone with her grandchild, made her tell everything, by exerting her influence over her, and explaining to her that she was rich enough for all three, so that Brigaut need never leave them. The poor child confessed all her sufferings, never dreaming of the lawsuit she was leading up to. The monstrous conduct of these two loveless beings, who knew nothing of family affection, revealed to the old woman worlds of torment, as far from her conception as the manners of the savage tribes must have been to the first travelers who penetrated the savannahs of America.

Her grandmother's presence, and the certainty of living with her for the future in perfect ease, lulled Pierrette's mind as the draught lulled her body. The old woman watched by her, kissing her brow, hair, and hands, as the holy women may have kissed Jesus while laying Him in the sepulcher.

By nine in the morning M. Martener went to the President of the Courts, and related to him the scene of the past night between Sylvie and Pierrette, the moral and physical torture, the cruelty of every kind inflicted by the Rogrons on their ward, and the two fatal maladies which had been developed by this ill-usage. The President sent for the notary, M. Auffray, a connection of Pierrette's on her mother's side.

At this moment the war between the Vinet party and the Tiphaine party was at its height. The gossip circulated in Provins by the Rogrons and their adherents as to the well-known liaison between Mme. Roguin and du Tillet the banker, and the circumstances of M. Roguin's bankruptcy—Mme. Tiphaine's father was said to have committed forgery—hit all the more surely because, though it was scandal, it was not calumny. Such wounds pierced to the bottom of things; they attacked self-interest in its most vital part. These statements, repeated to the partisans of Tiphaine by the same speakers who also reported to the Rogrons all the sarcasms uttered by the " beautiful Mme. Tiphaine " and her friends, added fuel to their hatred, complicated as it was with political feeling.

The irritation caused in France at that time by party spirit, which had waxed excessively violent, was everywhere bound up, as it was at Provins, with imperiled interests and offended and antagonistic private feelings. Each coterie eagerly pounced on anything that might damage its rival. Party animosity was not less implicated than personal conceit in even trivial questions, which were often carried to great lengths. A whole town threw itself into some dispute, raising it to the dignity of a political contest. And so the President discerned, in the action between Pierrette and the Rogrons, a means of confuting, discrediting, and humiliating the owners of that drawing-room where plots were hatched against the monarchy, and where the Opposition newspaper had had its birth.

He sent for the public prosecutor. Then M. Lesourd, M. Auffray the notary—appointed the legal guardian of Pierrette—and the President of the Court discussed in the greatest privacy, with M. Martener, what steps could be taken. The legal guardian was to call a family council (a formality of French law), and, armed with the evidence of the three medical men, would demand the dismissal of Rogron from his guardianship. The case thus formulated would be brought before the tribunal, and then M. Lesourd would get it carried into the Criminal Court by demanding an inquiry.

By mid-day all Provins was in a stir over the strange reports of what had taken place at the Rogrons' in the course of the past night. Pierrette's screams had been remotely heard in the Square, but they had not lasted long; no one had got up; but everybody had asked in the morning, " Did you hear the noise and screaming at about one o'clock? What was it? " Gossip and comment had given such magnitude to the horrible drama that a crowd collected in front of Frappier's shop, everybody cross-questioning the honest joiner, who described the girl's arrival at his house with her hand bleeding and her fingers mangled.

At about one in the afternoon a post-chaise, containing Dr. Bianchon, by whom sat Brigaut, stopped at Frappier's door, and Mme. Frappier went off to the hospital to fetch M. Martener and the head surgeon. Thus the reports heard in the town received confirmation.

The Rogrons were accused of having intentionally maltreated their young cousin, and endangered her life. The news reached Vinet at the Law Courts; he left his business and hurried to the Rogrons'. Rogron and his sister had just finished breakfast. Sylvie had avoided telling her brother of her defeat during the night; she allowed him to question her, making no reply but: " It does not concern you." And she bustled to and fro between the kitchen and dining-room to avoid all discussion.

She was alone when Vinet walked in.

" Do you know nothing of what is going on? " asked the lawyer.

" No," said Sylvie.

" You are going to have a criminal action brought against you for the way in which matters stand with Pierrette."

" A criminal action! " said Rogron, coming in. " Why? What for? "

" In the first place," said Vinet, looking at Sylvie, " tell me exactly, without subterfuge, all that took place last night, as though you were before God, for there is some talk of cutting off Pierrette's hand."

Sylvie turned ashy pale and shivered.

"Then there was something!" said the lawyer.

Mlle. Rogron told the story, trying to justify herself; but on being cross-questioned, related all the details of the horrible conflict.

"If you have only broken her fingers, you will only appear in the Police Court; but if her hand has to be amputated, you will find yourself brought up at the Assizes. The Tiphaines will do anything to get you there."

Sylvie, more dead than alive, confessed her jealousy, and, which was even harder to bring out, how her suspicions had blundered.

"What a case for trial!" exclaimed Vinet. "You and your brother may be ruined by it; you will be thrown over by many of your friends even if you gain it. If you do not come out clear, you will have to leave Provins."

"Oh! my dear M. Vinet—you who are such an able lawyer," cried Rogron, horrified, "advise us, save us!"

Vinet dexterously fomented the fears of these two fools to the utmost, and declared positively that Mme. and Mlle. de Chargebœuf would hesitate to go to their house again. To be forsaken by these two ladies would be a fatal condemnation. In short, after an hour of magnificent maneuvering, it was agreed that in order to induce Vinet to save the Rogrons, he must have an interest at stake in defending him in the eyes of all Provins. In the course of the evening Rogron's engagement to marry Mlle. de Chargebœuf was to be announced. The banns were to be published on Sunday. The marriage-contract would at once be drawn up by Cournant, and Mlle. Rogron would figure in it as abandoning, in consideration of this alliance, the capital of her share of the estate by a deed of gift to her brother, reserving only a life-interest. Vinet impressed on Rogron and his sister the necessity of having a draft of this deed drawn up two or three days before that event, so as to put Mme. and Mlle. de Chargebœuf under the necessity, in public opinion, of continuing their visits to the Rogrons.

"Sign that contract, and I will undertake to get you out of the scrape," said the lawyer. "It will no doubt be a hard fight, but I will go into it body and soul, and you will owe me a very handsome taper."

"Yes, indeed," said Rogron.

By half-past eleven the lawyer was empowered to act for them, alike as to the contract and as to the management of the case. At noon the President was informed that a summons was applied for by Vinet against Brigaut and the widow Lorrain for abducting Pierrette Lorrain, a minor, from the domicile of her guardian. Thus the audacious Vinet took up the offensive, putting Rogron in the position of a man having the law on his side. This, indeed, was the tone in which the matter was commented on in the Law Courts. The President postponed hearing the parties till four o'clock. The excitement of the town over all these events need not be described. The President knew that the medical consultation would be ended by three o'clock; he wished that the legal guardian should appear armed with the physicians' verdict.

The announcement of Rogron's engagement to the fair Bathilde de Chargebœuf, and the deed of gift added by Sylvie to the contract, promptly made the Rogrons two enemies—Mlle. Habert and the colonel, who thus saw all their hopes dashed. Céleste Habert and the colonel remained ostensibly friends to the Rogrons, but only to damage them more effectually. So, as soon as M. Martener spoke of the existence of an abscess on the brain in the haberdashers' hapless victim, Céleste and the colonel mentioned the blow Pierrette had given herself that evening when Sylvie had driven her out of the room, and remembered Mlle. Rogron's cruel and barbarous remarks. They related various instances of the old maid's utter indifference to her ward's sufferings. Thus these friends of the couple admitted serious wrong, while affecting to defend Sylvie and her brother.

Vinet had foreseen this storm; but Mlle. de Chargebœuf was about to acquire the whole of the Rogrons' fortune, and he promised himself that in a few weeks he should see her living in the nice house on the Place, and reign conjointly with her over Provins; for he was already scheming for a coalition with the Bréauteys to serve his own ambitions, From twelve o'clock till four all the ladies of the Tiphaine faction—the Garcelands, the Guépins, the Julliards, Mmes. Galardon, Guénée, and the Sous-préfet's wife—all sent to inquire after Mlle. Lorrain. Pierrette knew nothing whatever of this commotion in the town on her behalf. In the midst of acute suffering she felt ineffably happy at finding herself between her grandmother and Brigaut, the objects of her affection. Brigaut's eyes were constantly full of tears, and the old woman petted her beloved grandchild.

God knows the grandmother spared the three men of science none of the details she had heard from Pierrette about her life with the Rogrons! Horace Bianchon expressed his indignation in unmeasured terms. Horrified by such barbarity, he insisted that the other doctors of the town should be called in; so M. Néraud was present, and was requested, as being Rogron's friend, to contradict if he could the terrible inferences derived from the consultation, which, unfortunately for Rogron, were unanimously subscribed to. Néraud, who was already credited with having made Pierrette's maternal grandmother die of grief, was in a false position, of which Martener adroitly took advantage, delighted to overwhelm the Rogrons, and also to compromise M. Néraud, his antagonist. It is needless to give the text of this document, which also was produced at the trial. If the medical terms of Molière's age were barbarous, those of modern medicine have the advantage of such extremely plain speaking, that an account of Pierrette's maladies, though natural, and unfortunately common, would shock the ear. The verdict was indisputably final, attested by so famous a name as that of Horace Bianchon.

After the Court sitting was over, the President remained in his place, while Pierrette's grandmother came in with M. Auffray, Brigaut, and a considerable crowd. Vinet appeared alone. This contrast struck the spectators, including a vast number of merely inquisitive persons. Vinet, who had kept his gown on, raised his hard face to the President, settling his spectacles as he began in his harsh, sawing tones to set forth that certain strangers had made their way into the house of M. and Mlle. Rogron by night, and had carried away the girl Lorrain, a minor. Her guardian claimed the protection of the Court to recover his ward.

M. Auffray, as the guardian appointed by the Court, rose to speak.

"If M. le Président," said he, "will take into his consideration this consultation, signed by one of the most eminent Paris physicians, and by all the doctors and surgeons of Provins, he will perceive how unreasonable is M. Rogron's claim, and what sufficient reasons induced the minor's grandmother to release her at once from her tormentors. The facts are these: A deliberate consultation, signed unanimously by a celebrated Paris doctor, sent for in great haste, and by all the medical authorities of the town, ascribe the almost dying state of the ward to the ill-treatment she had received at the hands of the said Rogron and his sister. As a legal formality a family council will be held, with the least possible delay, and consulted on the question whether the guardian ought not to be held disqualified for his office. We petition that the minor shall not be sent back to her guardian's house, but shall be placed in the hands of any other member of the family whom M. le Président may see fit to designate."

Vinet wanted to reply, saying that the document of the consultation ought to be communicated to him that he might contravene it.

"Certainly not to Vinet's side," said the President severely, "but perhaps to the public prosecutor. The case is closed."

At the foot of the petition the President wrote the following injunction:—

"Inasmuch as that by a consultation unanimously signed by the medical faculty of this town and by Dr. Bianchon of the medical faculty of Paris, it is proved that the girl Lorrain, a minor, claimed by her guardian Rogron, is in a very serious state of sickness brought on by the ill-usage and cruelty inflicted on her in the house of her guardian and his sister,

"We, President of the Lower Court of Justice at Provins,

"Decree on the petition, and enjoin that until the family council shall have been held which, as the provisional guardian appointed by the law declares, is at once to be convened, the said minor shall not re-enter her guardian's residence, but shall be transferred to that of the guardian appointed by the law.

"And in the second place, in consideration of the minor's present state of health, and the traces of violence which, in the opinion of the medical men, are to be seen on her person, we commission the chief physician and chief surgeon of the Hospital of Provins to attend her; and in the event of the cruelty being proved to have been constant, we reserve all the rights and powers of the law, without prejudice to the civil action taken by Auffray, the legalized temporary guardian."

This terrible injunction was pronounced by M. le Président Tiphaine with a loud voice and distinct utterance.

"Why not the hulks at once?" said Vinet. "And all this fuss about a little girl who carried on an intrigue with a carpenter's apprentice! If this is the way the case is conducted," he added insolently, "we shall apply for other judgment on the plea of legitimate suspicions."

Vinet left the Court, and went to the chief leaders of his party to explain the position of Rogron, who had never given his little cousin a finger-flip, and whom the tribunal had treated, he declared, less as Pierrette's guardian than as the chief voter in Provins.

To hear him, the Tiphaines were making much ado about nothing. The mountain would bring forth a mouse. Sylvie, an eminently religious and well-conducted person, had detected an intrigue between her brother's ward and a carpenter's boy, a Breton named Brigaut. The young rascal knew very well that the girl would have a fortune from her grandmother, and wanted to tamper with her. . . . Vinet to talk of tampering! . . . Mlle. Rogron, who had kept the letters in which this little slut's wickedness was made clear, was not so much to blame as the Tiphaines tried to make her seem. Even if she had been betrayed into violence to obtain a letter, which could easily be accounted for by the irritation produced in her by Breton obstinacy, in what was Rogron to blame?

The lawyer thus made the action a party matter, and contrived to give it political color. And so, from that evening, there were differences of opinion on the question.

"If you hear but one bell, you hear but one note," said the wise-heads. "Have you heard what Vinet has to say? He explains the case very well."

Frappier's house was regarded as unsuitable for Pierrette on account of the noise, which would cause her much pain in the head. Her removal from thence to her appointed guardian's house was as desirable from a medical as from a legal point of view. This business was effected with the utmost care, and calculated to make a great sensation. Pierrette was placed on a stretcher with many mattresses, carried by two men, escorted by a Gray Sister holding in her hand a bottle of ether, followed by her grandmother, Briguat, Mme. Auffray, and her maid. The people stood at the windows and in the doors to see the little procession pass. No doubt the state in which Pierrette was seen and her death-like pallor gave immense support to the party adverse to the Rogrons. The Auffrays were bent on showing to all the town how right the President had been in pronouncing his injunction. Pierrette and her grandmother were established on the second floor of M. Auffray's house. The notary and his wife lavished on them the generosity of the amplest hospitality; they made a display of it. Pierrette was nursed by her grandmother, and M. Martener came to see her again the same evening, with the surgeon.

From that evening dated much exaggeration on both sides. The Rogrons' room was crowded. Vinet had worked up the Liberal faction in the matter. The two Chargebœuf ladies dined with the Rogrons, for the marriage-contract was to be signed forthwith. Vinet had had the banns put up at the Mairie that morning. He treated the business of Pierrette as a mere trifle. If the Court of Provins could not judge it dispassionately, the superior Court would judge of the facts, said he, and the Auffrays would think twice before rushing into such an action. Then the connection between the Rogrons and the Chargebœufs was of immense weight with certain people. To them the Rogrons were as white as snow, and Pierrette an excessively wicked little girl whom they had cherished in their bosom.

In Mme. Tiphaine's drawing-room vengeance was taken on the horrible scandals the Vinet party had promulgated for the last two years. The Rogrons were monsters, and the guardian would find himself in the Criminal Court. In the Square, Pierrette was perfectly well; in the upper town, she must infallibly die; at the Rogrons', she had a few scratches on her hand; at Mme. Tiphaine's, she had her fingers smashed; one would have to be cut off.

Next day the *Courrier de Provins* had an extremely clever article, well written, a masterpiece of innuendo mixed up with legal demurs, which placed the Rogrons above suspicion. The *Ruche*, which came out two days later, could not reply without risk of libel; but it said that in a case like the present, the best thing was to leave justice to take its course.

The family council was constituted by the Justice of the Peace of the Provins district, as the legal President, in the first place, of Rogron and the two Auffrays, Pierrette's next-of-kin; then of M. Ciprey, a nephew of Pierrette's maternal grandmother. He added to these M. Habert, the young girl's director, and Colonel Gouraud, who had always given himself out to be a comrade of her father's, Colonel Lorrain. The Justice's impartiality was highly applauded in including in this family council M. Habert and the colonel, whom all the town regarded as great friends of the Rogrons. In the difficult position in which he found himself, Rogron begged to be allowed the support of Maître Vinet on the occasion. By this maneuver, evidently suggested by Vinet, he succeeded in postponing the meeting of the family council till the end of December.

At that date the President and his wife were in Paris, living with Mme. Roguin, in consequence of the sitting of the Chambers. Thus the Ministerial party at Provins was bereft of its head. Vinet had already quietly made friends with the worthy examining judge, M. Desfondrilles, in case the business should assume the penal or criminal aspect that Tiphaine had endeavored to give it.

For three hours Vinet addressed the family council; he proved an intrigue between Brigaut and Pierrette, to justify Mlle. Rogron's severity; he pointed out how natural it was that the guardian should have left his ward under the control of a woman; he dwelt on his client's non-interference in the mode of Pierrette's education as conducted by Sylvie. But in spite of Vinet's efforts, the meeting unanimously decided on abolishing Rogron's guardianship. M. Auffray was appointed Pierrette's guardian, and M. Ciprey her legal guardian.

They heard the evidence given by Adèle the maid, who incriminated her former master and mistress; by Mlle. Habert, who repeated Sylvie's cruel remarks the evening when Pierrette had given herself the dreadful blow that everybody had heard, and the comments on Pierrette's health made by Mme. de Chargebœuf. Brigaut produced the letter he had received from Pierrette, which established their innocence. It was proved that the deplorable state in which the minor now was resulted from the neglect of her guardian, who was responsible in all that related to his ward. Pierrette's illness had struck everybody, even persons in the town who did not know the family. Thus the charge of cruelty against Rogron was fully sustained. The matter would be made public.

By Vinet's advice Rogron put in a protest against the confirmation by the Court of the decision of the family council. The Minister of Justice now intervened, in consequence of the increasingly critical condition of Pierrette Lorrain. This singular case, though put on the lists forthwith, did not come up for trial till near the month of March 1828.

By that time the marriage of Rogron to Mlle. de Chargebœuf was an accomplished fact. Sylvie was living on the second floor of the house, which had been arranged to accommodate her and Mme. de Chargebœuf; for the first floor was entirely given up to Mme. Rogron. The beautiful Mme. Rogron now succeeded to the beautiful Mme. Tiphaine. The effect of this marriage was enormous. The town no longer came to Mlle. Sylvie's salon, but to the beautiful Mme. Rogron's.

M. Tiphaine, the President of the Provins Court, pushed by his mother-in-law, and supported by du Tillet and by Nucingen, the Royalist bankers, found an opportunity of being useful to the Ministry. He was one of the most highly respected speakers of the Center, was made a judge of the Lower Court in the Seine district, and got his nephew Lesourd nominated President in his place at Provins. This appointment greatly annoyed M. Desfondrilles, still an archæologist, and more supernumerary than ever. The Keeper of the Seals sent a protégé of his own to fill Lesourd's place. Thus M. Tiphaine's promotion did not lead to any advancement in the legal forces at Provins.

Vinet took advantage of these circumstances very cleverly. He had always told the good folks of Provins that they were only serving as a step-ladder to Mme. Tiphaine's cunning and ambition. The President laughed in his sleeve at his friends. Mme. Tiphaine secretly disdained the town of Provins; she would never come back to it.

M. Tiphaine *père* presently died; his son inherited the estate of Le Fay, and sold his handsome house in the upper town to M. Julliard. This sale showed how little he intended to come back to Provins. Vinet was right! Vinet had been a true prophet! These facts had no little influence on the action relating to Rogron's guardianship.

The horrible martyrdom so brutally inflicted on Pierrette by two imbecile tyrants—which led, medically speaking, to her being subjected by M. Martener, with Bianchon's approval, to the terrible operation of trepanning; the whole dreadful drama, reduced to judicial statements, was left among the foul medley known to lawyers as outstanding cases. The action dragged on through the delays and inextricable intricacies of "proceedings," constantly checked by the quibbles of a contemptible lawyer, while the calumniated Pierrette languished in suffering from the most terrible pains known to medical science. We could not avoid these details as to the strange variations in public opinion and the slow march of justice, before returning to the room where she was living—where she was dying.

M. Martener and the whole of the Auffray family were in a very few days completely won by Pierrette's adorable temper, and by the old Bretonne, whose feelings, ideas, and manners bore the stamp of an antique Roman type. This matron of the Marais was like one of Plutarch's women.

The doctor desired to contend with Death, at least, for his prey; for from the first the Paris and the provincial physicians had agreed in regarding Pierrette as past saving. Then began between the disease and the doctor, aided by Pierrette's youth, one of those struggles which medical men alone know; the reward, in the event of success, is neither in the pecuniary profit, nor even in the rescued sufferer; it lies in sweet satisfaction of conscience, and in a sort of ideal and invisible palm of victory gathered by every true artist from the joyful certainty of having achieved a fine work. The physician makes for healing as the artist makes for the beautiful, urged on by a noble sentiment which we call virtue. This daily recurring battle had extinguished in this man, though a provincial, the squalid irritation of the warfare going on between the Vinet party and the Tiphaines, as happens with men who have to fight it out with great suffering.

M. Martener had at first wished to practice his profession in Paris; but the activity of the great city, the callousness produced at last in a doctor's mind by the terrific number of sick people and the multitude of serious cases, had appalled his gentle soul, which was made for a country life. He was in bondage, too, to his pretty birthplace. So he had come back to Provins to marry and settle there, and take almost tender care of a population he could think of as a large family. All the time Pierrette was ill he could not bear to speak of her illness. His aversion to reply when everyone asked for news of the poor child was so evident, that at last nobody questioned him about her. Pierrette was to him what she could not help being—one of those deep, mysterious poems, immense in its misery, such as occur in the terrible life of a physician. He had for this frail girl an admiration of which he would betray the secret to no one.

This feeling for his patient was infectious, as all true sentiments are; M. and Mme. Auffray's house, so long as Pierrette lived in it, was peaceful and still. Even the children, who of old had had such famous games with Pierrette, understood, with childlike grace, that they were not to be noisy or troublesome. They made it a point of honor to be good because Pierrette was ill.

M. Auffray's house is in the upper town, below the ruined castle; built, indeed, on one of the cliff-like knolls formed by the overthrow of the old ramparts. From thence the residents have a view over the valley as they walk in a little orchard supported by the thick walls rising straight up from the lower town. The roofs of the houses rise to the level of the wall that upholds this garden. Along this terrace is a walk ending at the glass-door of M. Auffray's study. At the other end are a vine-covered arbor and a fig-tree, sheltering a round table, a bench, and some chairs, all painted green.

Pierrette had a room over that of her new guardian. Mme. Lorrain slept there on a camp-bed by her grandchild's side. From her window Pierrette could see the beautiful valley of Provins, which she hardly knew—she had so rarely been out of the Rogrons' sinister dwelling. Whenever it was fine, she liked to drag herself, on her grandmother's arm, as far as this arbor. Brigaut, who now did no work, came three times a day to see his little friend; he was absorbed in grief, which made him indifferent to life; he watched for M. Martener with the eagerness of a spaniel, always went in with him and came out with him.

It would be difficult to imagine all the follies everyone was ready to commit for the dear little invalid. Her grandmother, drunk with grief, hid her despair; she showed the child the same smiling face as at Pen-Hoël. In her wish to delude herself, she made her a Breton cap such as Pierrette had worn when she came to Provins, and put it on her;

the girl then looked to her more like herself; she was sweet to behold, with her face framed in the aureole of cambric edged with starched lace. Her face, as white as fine white porcelain, her forehead on which suffering set a semblance of deep thoughtfulness, the purity of outline refined by sickness, the slowness and occasional fixity of her gaze, all made Pierrette a master-work of melancholy.

The child was waited on with fanatical devotion; she was so tender, so loving. Mme. Martener had sent her piano to Mme. Auffray, her sister, thinking it might amuse Pierrette, to whom music was rapture. It was a poem to watch her listening to a piece by Weber, Beethoven, or Hérold, her eyes raised to heaven in silence, regretting, no doubt, the life she felt slipping from her. M. Péroux the curé, and M. Habert, her two priestly comforters, admired her pious resignation.

Is it not a strange fact, worthy of the attention alike of philosophers and of mere observers, that a sort of seraphic perfection is characteristic of youths and maidens marked amid the crowd with the red cross of death, like saplings in a forest? He who has witnessed such a death can never remain or become an infidel. These beings exhale, as it were, a heavenly fragrance, their looks speak of God, their voice is eloquent in the most trivial speech, and often sounds like a divine instrument, expressing the secrets of futurity. When M. Martener congratulated Pierrette on having carried out some disagreeable prescription, this angel would say in the presence of all, and with what a look!—

"I wish to live, dear M. Martener, less for my own sake than for my grandmother's, for my poor Brigaut's, and for you all, who will be sorry when I die."

The first time she took a walk, in the month of November, under a bright Martinmas sun, escorted by all the family, Mme. Auffray asked her if she were tired.

"Now that I have nothing to bear but the pain God sends me, I can endure it. I find strength to bear suffering in the joy of being loved."

This was the only time she ever alluded, even so remotely, to her horrible martyrdom at the Rogrons'; she never spoke of them; and as the remembrance could not fail to be painful, no one mentioned their name.

"Dear Mme. Auffray," said she one day at noon on the terrace, while gazing at the valley lighted up by brilliant sunshine and dressed in the russet tints of autumn, "my dying days in your house will have brought me more happiness than all the three years before."

Mme. Auffray looked at her sister, Mme. Martener, and said to her in a whisper—

"How she would have loved!"

And, indeed, Pierrette's tone and look gave her words unutterable meaning.

M. Martener kept up a correspondence with Dr. Bianchon, and tried no serious treatment without his approbation. He hoped first to restore the girl to normal health, and then to enable the abscess to discharge itself through the ear. The more acute her pain was, the more hopeful he felt. With regard to the first point he had some success, and that was a great triumph. For some days Pierrette recovered her appetite, and could satisfy it with substantial food, for which her unhealthy state had hitherto given her great aversion; her color improved, but the pain in her head was terrible. The doctor now begged the great physician, his consultee, to come to Provins. Bianchon came, stayed two days, and advised an operation; he threw himself into all poor Martener's anxiety, and went himself to fetch the famous Desplein. So the operation was performed by the greatest surgeon of ancient or modern times; but this terrible augur said to Martener as he went away with Bianchon, his best-beloved pupil—

"You can save her only by a miracle. As Horace has told you, necrosis has set in. At that age the bones are still so tender."

The operation was performed early in March 1828. All that month M. Martener, alarmed by the fearful torments Pierrette endured, made several journeys to Paris; he consulted Desplein and Bianchon, to whom he even suggested a treatment resembling that known as lithotrity—the insertion of a tubular instrument into the skull, by which a heroic remedy might be introduced to arrest the progress of decay. The daring Desplein dared not attempt this surgical feat, which only despair had suggested to Martener.

When the doctor returned from his last journey to Paris, his friends thought him crestfallen and gloomy. One fatal evening he was compelled to announce to the Auffray family, to Mme. Lorrain, to the confessor, and to Brigaut, who were all present, that science could do no more for Pierrette, that her life was in the hands of God alone. Her grandmother took a vow and begged the curé to say, every morning at daybreak, before Pierrette rose, a Mass which she and Brigaut would attend.

The case came up for trial. While the Rogrons' victim lay dying, Vinet was calumniating her to the Court. The Court ratified the decision of the family council, and the lawyer immediately appealed. The newly appointed public prosecutor delivered an address which led to an inquiry. Rogron and his sister were obliged to find sureties to avoid being sent to prison. The inquiry necessitated the examination of Pierrette herself. When M. Desfondrilles went to the Auffrays' house, Pierrette was actually dying; the priest was at her bedside, and she was about to take the last sacrament. At that moment she was entreating all the assembled family to forgive her cousins as she herself forgave them, saying, with excellent good sense, that judgment in such cases belonged to God alone.

"Grandmother," said she, "leave all you possess to Brigaut"—Brigaut melted into tears—"and," Pierrette went on, "give a thousand francs to good Adèle, who used to warm my bed on the sly. If she had stayed with my cousins, I should be alive . . ."

It was at three o'clock on Easter Tuesday, on a beautiful day, that this little angel ceased to suffer. Her heroical grandmother insisted on sitting by her all night with the priests, and sewing her winding-sheet on her with her old hands. Towards evening Brigaut left the house and went back to Frappier's.

"I need not ask you the news, my poor boy," said the carpenter.

"Père Frappier—yes; it is all over with her, and not with me!"

The apprentice looked round the workshop at all the wood store with gloomy but keen eyes.

"I understand, Brigaut," said the worthy Frappier. "There—that is what you want," and he pointed to some two-inch oak planks.

"Do not help me, M. Frappier," said the Breton. "I will do it all myself."

Brigaut spent the night in planing and joining Pierrette's coffin, and more than once he ripped off with one stroke a long shaving wet with his tears. His friend Frappier smoked and watched him. He said nothing to him but these few words when his man put the four sides together—

"Make the lid to slide in a groove, then her poor friends will not hear you nail it down."

At daybreak Brigaut went for lead to line the coffin. By a singular coincidence the sheets of lead cost exactly the sum he had given to Pierrette for her journey from Nantes to Provins. The brave Breton, who had borne up under the dreadful pain of making a coffin for the beloved companion of his childhood, overlaying each funereal board with all his memories, could not endure this coincidence; he turned faint, and could not carry the lead; the plumber accompanied him, and offered to go with him and solder down the top sheet as soon as the body should be laid in the coffin.

The Breton burned his plane and all the tools he had used for the work, he wound up his accounts with Frappier, and bade him good-by.

The heroism which enabled the poor fellow, like the grandmother, to busy himself with doing the last services to the dead, led to his intervening in the crowning scene which put a climax to the Rogrons' tyranny.

Brigaut and the plumber arrived at M. Auffray's just in time to decide by brute force a horrible and shameful legal question. The chamber of the dead was full of people, and presented a strange scene to the two workmen. The Rogrons stood hideous by the victim's corpse to torture it even in death. The body of the poor girl, sublime in its beauty, lay on her grandmother's camp-bed. Pierrette's eyes were closed, her hair smoothly braided, her body sewn into a winding-sheet of coarse cotton.

By this bed, her hair in disorder, on her knees with outstretched hands and a flaming face, old Mme. Lorrain was crying out—

"No, no; it shall never be!"

At the foot of the bed were the guardian M. Auffray, the curé M. Péroux, and M. Habert. Tapers were still burning. Opposite the grandmother stood the hospital surgeon and M. Néraud, supported by the smooth-tongued and formidable Vinet. A registrar was present. The surgeon had on his dissecting apron; one of his assistants had opened his roll of instruments and was handing him a scalpel.

This scene was disturbed by the noise made by the fall of the coffin, which Brigaut and the plumber dropped; and by Brigaut himself, who, entering first, was seized with horror on seeing old Mme. Lorrain in tears.

"What is the matter?" asked Brigaut, placing himself by her side, and convulsively clutching a chisel he had brought with him.

"The matter!" said the old woman. "They want to open my child's body, to split her skull—to rend her heart after her death as they did in her lifetime!"

"Who?" said Brigaut, in a voice to crack the drum of the lawyer's ears.

"The Rogrons."

"By the God above us——!"

"One moment, Brigaut," said M. Auffray, seeing the Breton brandish his chisel.

"M. Auffray," said Brigaut, as pale as the dead girl, "I listen to you because you are M. Auffray. But at this moment I would not listen to——"

"Justice!" Auffray put in.

"Is there such a thing as Justice?" cried Brigaut.

"That—that is Justice!" he went on, threatening the lawyer, the surgeon, and the clerk with his chisel that flashed in the sunlight.

"My good fellow," said the curé, "M. Rogron's lawyer has appealed to Justice. His client lies under a serious accusation, and it is impossible to refuse a suspected person the means of clearing himself. According to M. Rogron's advocate, if this poor child died of the abscess on the brain, her former guardian must be regarded as guiltless; for it is proved that Pierrette for a long time concealed the blow she had given herself——"

"That will do!" said Brigaut.

"My client——" Vinet began.

"Your client," cried the Breton, "shall go to hell, and I to the scaffold; for if one of you makes an attempt to touch her whom your client killed—if that sawbones does not put his knife away, I will strike him dead."

"This is overt resistance," said Vinet; "we shall lay it before the Court."

The five strangers withdrew.

"Oh, my son!" said the old woman, starting up and throwing her arms round Brigaut's neck, "let us bury her at once; they will come back."

"When once the lead is soldered," said the plumber, "perhaps they will not dare."

M. Auffray hurried off to his brother-in-law, M. Lesourd, to try to get this matter settled. Vinet wished for nothing better. Pierrette once dead, the action as to the guardianship, which was not yet decided, must die a natural death, without any possibility of argument either for or against the Rogrons; the question remained an open one. So the shrewd lawyer had perfectly foreseen the effect his demand would produce.

At noon M. Desfondrilles reported to the Bench on the inquiry relating to the Rogrons, and the Court pronounced a verdict of no case, on self-evident grounds.

Rogron dared not show his face at Pierrette's funeral, though all the town was present. Vinet tried to drag him there; but the ex-haberdasher feared the excitement of universal reprobation.

Brigaut, after seeing the grave filled up in which Pierrette was laid, left Provins and went on foot to Paris. He addressed a petition to the Dauphiness to be allowed, in consideration of his father's name, to enlist in the Royal Guard, and was soon afterwards enrolled. When an expedition was fitted out for Algiers, he again wrote to the Dauphiness, begging to be ordered on active service. He was then sergeant; Marshal Bourmont made him sub-lieutenant of the Line. The major's son behaved like a man seeking death. But death has hitherto respected Jacques Brigaut, who has distinguished himself in all the recent expeditions without being once wounded. He is now at the head of a battalion in the Line. There is not a more taciturn or a better officer. Off duty he is speechless, walks alone, and lives like a machine. Everyone understands and respects some secret sorrow. He has forty-six thousand francs, left him by old Mme. Lorrain, who died in Paris in 1829.

Vinet was elected député in 1830, and the services he has done to the new Government have earned him the place of Prosecutor-General. His influence is now so great that he will always be returned as député. Rogron is Receiver-General in the town where Vinet exercises his high functions, and by a singular coincidence M. Tiphaine is the chief President of the Supreme Court there; for the Judge unhesitatingly attached himself to the new dynasty of July. The ex-beautiful Mme. Tiphaine lives on very good terms with the beautiful Mme. Rogron. Vinet and President Tiphaine agree perfectly.

As to Rogron, utterly stupid, he says such things as this—

"Louis Philippe will never be really King till he can create nobles."

This speech is obviously not his own.

His failing health allows Mme. Rogron to hope that erelong she may be free to marry General the Marquis de Montriveau, a peer of France, who is governor of the department, and attentive to her. Vinet is always in a hurry to condemn a man to death; he never believes in the innocence of the accused. This man, born to be a public prosecutor, is considered one of the most amiable men of his district, and is not less successful in Paris and in the Chamber; at Court he is the exquisite courtier.

General Baron Gouraud, that noble relic of our glorious armies, has married—as Vinet promised that he should—a Demoiselle Matifat, five-and-twenty years of age, the daughter of a druggist in the Rue des Lombards, who had a fortune of fifty thousand crowns. He is Governor—as Vinet prophesied—of a department close to Paris. He was made a peer of France as the reward of his conduct in the riots under Casimir-Périer's Ministry. Baron Gouraud was one of the generals who took the Church of Saint-Merry, delighted to "rap the knuckles" of the civilians who had bullied them for fifteen years; and his zeal won him the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honor.

None of those who were implicated in Pierrette's death have any remorse. M. Desfondrilles is still an archæologist; but, to promote his own election, Attorney-General Vinet took care to have him appointed President of the Court. Sylvie holds a little court, and manages her brother's affairs; she lends at high interest, and does not spend more than twelve hundred francs a year.

From time to time, in the little Square, when some son of Provins comes home from Paris to settle there, and is seen coming out of Mlle. Rogron's house, some former partisan of the Tiphaines will say, "The Rogrons had a very sad affair once about a ward . . ."

"A mere party question," President Desfondrilles replies. "Monstrous tales were given out. Out of kindness of heart they took this little Pierrette to live with them, a nice child enough, without a penny; just as she was growing up she had some intrigue with a joiner's apprentice, and would come to her window barefoot to talk to the lad, who used to stand just there, do you see? The lovers sent each other notes by means of a string. As you may suppose, in her state, and in the months of October and November, that was quite enough to upset a little pale-faced girl. The Rogrons behaved admirably; they never claimed their share of the child's inheritance; they gave everything to the grandmother. The moral of it all, my friends, is that the Devil always punishes us for a good action."

"Oh! this is quite another story; old Frappier told it in a very different way!"

"Old Frappier consults his cellar more than his memory," remarked a frequenter of Mlle. Rogron's drawing-room.

"But then old M. Habert——"

"Oh! you know about his share in the matter?"

"No."

"Why, he wanted to get his sister married to M. Rogron, the Receiver-General."

Two men daily think of Pierrette—Dr. Martener and Major Brigaut, who alone know the terrible truth.

To give that truth immense proportions, it is enough to recall the fact that if we change the scene to the Middle Ages, and to the vast theater of Rome, a sublime girl, Beatrice Cenci, was dragged to the scaffold for reasons and by intrigues almost the same as those which brought Pierrette to the tomb. Beatrice Cenci found none to defend her but an artist—a painter. And to-day history and living people, on the evidence of Guido Reni's portrait, condemn the Pope, and regard Beatrice as one of the most pathetic victims of infamous passions and factions.

And we may agree that the law would be a fine thing for social roguery, if there were no God.

November 1830.

AT THE SIGN OF THE CAT AND RACKET

PREFACE

In the very interesting preface, dated July 1842, which Balzac prefixed to the first collection of the *Comédie Humaine,* he endeavors, naturally enough, to represent the division into *Scènes de la Vie Parisienne,* etc., as a rational and reasoned one. Although not quite arbitrary, it was of course to a great extent determined by considerations which were not those of design; and we did not require the positive testimony which we find in the Letters to tell us that in the author's view, as well as in our own, not a few of the stories might have been shifted over from one division to another, and have filled their place just as well in the other as in the one.

La Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote, however, which originally bore the much less happy title of *Gloire et Malheur,* was a *Scène de la Vie Privée* from the first, and it bears out better than some of its companions its author's expressed intention of making these " scenes " represent youth, whether Parisian or Provincial. Few of Balzac's stories have united the general suffrage for touching grace more than this; and there are few better examples of his minute Dutch-painting then the opening passages, or of his unconquerable delight in the details of business than his sketch of M. Guillaume's establishment and its ways. The French equivalent of the *Complete Tradesman* of Defoe lasted much longer than his English counterpart; but, except in the smaller provincial towns, he is said to be uncommon now. As for the plot, if such a stately name can be given to so delicate a sketch, it is of course open to downright British judgment to pronounce the self-sacrifice of Lebas more ignoble than touching, the conduct of Théodore too childish to deserve the excuses sometimes possible for passionate inconstancy, and the character of Augustine angelically idiotic. This last outrage, if it were committed, would indeed only be an instance of the irreconcilable difference which almost to the present day divides English and French ideas of ideally perfect girlhood, and of that state of womanhood which corresponds thereto. The *candeur adorable* which the Frenchman adores and exhibits in the girl; the uncompromising, though mortal, passion of the woman; are too different from any ideal that we have entertained, except for a very short period in the eighteenth century. But there are few more pathetic and charming impersonations of this other ideal than Augustine de Sommervieux.

As for bibliography, the *Avant-Propos* (of which Momus may perhaps say that it is both a little too discursive and a little too apologetic) dates itself. I do not know whether there may be any interest for some readers in the fact that it originally appeared not in the *first*, but in the *last* " livraison " of the first volume of the complete edition of the *Comédie*. *La Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote*, under the title above referred to, saw the light first with other *Scènes de la Vie Privée* in 1830. But it was not dated as of the previous year till five years later, in its third edition; while the title was not changed till the great collection itself.

G. S.

AT THE SIGN OF THE CAT AND RACKET

Dedicated to Mlle. Marie de Montheau.

HALFWAY down the Rue Saint-Denis, almost at the corner of the Rue du Petit-Lion, there stood formerly one of those delightful houses which enable historians to reconstruct old Paris by analogy. The threatening walls of this tumbledown abode seemed to have been decorated with hieroglyphics. For what other name could the passerby give to the X's and V's which the horizontal or diagonal timbers traced on the front, outlined by little parallel cracks in the plaster? It was evident that every beam quivered in its mortices at the passing of the lightest vehicle. This venerable structure was crowned by a triangular roof of which no example will, ere long, be seen in Paris. This covering, warped by the extremes of the Paris climate, projected three feet over the roadway, as much to protect the threshold from the rainfall as to shelter the wall of a loft and its sill-less dormer window. This upper story was built of planks, overlapping each other like slates, in order, no doubt, not to overweight the frail house.

One rainy morning in the month of March, a young man, carefully wrapped in his cloak, stood under the awning of a shop opposite this old house, which he was studying with the enthusiasm of an antiquary. In point of fact, this relic of the civic life of the sixteenth century offered more than one problem to the consideration of an observer. Each story presented some singularity; on the first floor four tall, narrow windows, close together, were filled as to the lower panes with boards, so as to produce the doubtful light by which a clever salesman can ascribe to his goods the color his customers inquire for. The young man seemed very scornful of this essential part of the house; his eyes had not yet rested on it. The windows of the second floor, where the Venetian blinds were drawn up, revealing little dingy muslin curtains behind the large Bohemian glass panes, did not interest him either. His attention was attracted to the third floor, to the modest sash-frames of wood, so clumsily wrought that they might have found a place in the Museum of Arts and Crafts to illustrate the early efforts of French carpentry. These windows were glazed with small squares of glass so green that, but for his good eyes, the young man could not have seen the blue-checked cotton curtains which screened the mysteries of the room from profane eyes. Now and then the watcher, weary of his fruitless contemplation, or of the silence in which the house was buried, like the whole neighborhood, dropped his eyes towards the lower regions. An involuntary smile parted his lips each time he looked at the shop, where, in fact, there were some laughable details.

A formidable wooden beam, resting on four pillars, which appeared to have bent under the weight of the decrepit house, had been encrusted with as many coats of different paint as there are of rouge on an old duchess's cheek. In the middle of this broad and fantastically carved joist there was an old painting representing a cat playing rackets. This picture was what moved the young man to mirth. But it must be said that the wittiest of modern painters could not invent so comical a caricature. The animal held in one of its forepaws a racket as big as itself, and stood on its hind legs to aim at hitting an enormous ball, returned by a man in a fine embroidered coat. Drawing, color, and accessories, all were treated in such a way as to suggest that the artist had meant to make game of the shop-owner and of the passing observer. Time, while impairing this artless painting, had made it yet more grotesque by introducing some uncertain features which must have puzzled the conscientious idler. For instance, the cat's tail had been eaten into in such a way that it might now have been taken for the figure of a spectator—so long, and thick, and furry were the tails of our forefathers' cats. To the right of the picture, on an azure field which ill disguised the decay of the wood, might be read the name "Guillaume," and to the left, "Successor to Master Chevrel." Sun and rain had worn away most of the gilding parsimoniously applied to the letters of this superscription, in which the U's and V's had changed places in obedience to the laws of old-world orthography.

To quench the pride of those who believe that the world is growing cleverer day by day, and that modern humbug surpasses everything, it may be observed that these signs, of which the origin seems so whimsical to many Paris merchants, are the dead pictures of once living pictures by which our roguish ancestors contrived to tempt customers into their houses. Thus the Spinning Sow, the Green Monkey, and others, were animals in cages whose skill astonished the passerby, and whose accomplishments prove the patience of the fifteenth-century artisan. Such curiosities did more to enrich their fortunate owners than the signs of "Providence," "Good-faith," "Grace of God," and "Decapitation of John the Baptist," which may still be seen in the Rue Saint-Denis.

However, our stranger was certainly not standing there to admire the cat, which a minute's attention sufficed to stamp on his memory. The young man himself had his peculiarities. His cloak, folded after the manner of an antique drapery, showed a smart pair of shoes, all the more remarkable in the midst of the Paris mud because he wore white silk stockings, on which the splashes betrayed his impatience. He had just come, no doubt, from a wedding or a ball; for at this early hour he had in his hand a pair of white gloves, and his black hair, now out of curl, and flowing over his shoulders, showed that it had been dressed *à la Caracalla,* a fashion introduced as much by David's school of painting as by the mania for Greek and Roman styles which characterized the early years of this century.

In spite of the noise made by a few market gardeners, who, being late, rattled past towards the great market-place at a gallop, the busy street lay in a stillness of which the magic charm is known only to those who have wandered through deserted Paris at the hours when its roar, hushed for a moment, rises and spreads in the distance like the great voice of the sea. This strange young man must have seemed as curious to the shopkeeping folk of the "Cat and Racket" as the "Cat and Racket" was to him. A dazzlingly white cravat made his anxious face look even paler than it really was. The fire that flashed in his black eyes, gloomy and sparkling by turns, was in harmony with the singular outline of his features, with his wide, flexible mouth, hardened into a smile. His forehead, knit with violent annoyance, had a stamp of doom. Is not the forehead the most prophetic feature of a man? When the stranger's brow expressed passion the furrows formed in it were terrible in their strength and energy; but when he recovered his calmness, so easily upset, it beamed with a luminous grace which gave great attractiveness to a countenance in which joy, grief, love, anger, or scorn blazed out so contagiously that the coldest man could not fail to be impressed.

He was so thoroughly vexed by the time when the dormer window of the loft was suddenly flung open, that he did not observe the apparition of three laughing faces, pink and white and chubby, but as vulgar as the face of Commerce as it is seen in sculpture on certain monuments. These three faces, framed by the window, recalled the puffy cherubs floating among the clouds that surround God the Father. The apprentices snuffed up the exhalations of the street with an eagerness that showed how hot and poisonous the atmosphere of their garret must be. After pointing to the singular sentinel, the most jovial, as he seemed, of the apprentices retired and came back holding an instrument whose hard metal pipe is now superseded by a leather tube; and they all grinned with mischief as they looked down on the loiterer, and sprinkled him with a fine white shower of which the scent proved that three chins had just been shaved. Standing on tiptoe, in the farthest corner of their loft, to enjoy their victim's rage, the lads ceased laughing on seeing the haughty indifference with which the young man shook his cloak, and the intense contempt expressed by his face as he glanced up at the empty window frame.

At this moment a slender white hand threw up the lower half of one of the clumsy windows on the third floor by the aid of the sash runners, of which the pulley so often suddenly gives way and releases the heavy panes it ought to hold up. The watcher was then rewarded for his long waiting. The face of a young girl appeared, as fresh as one of the white cups that bloom on the bosom of the waters, crowned by a frill of tumbled muslin, which gave her head a look of exquisite innocence. Though wrapped in brown stuff, her neck and shoulders gleamed here and there through little openings left by her movements in sleep. No expression of embarrassment detracted from the candor of her face, or the calm look of eyes immortalized long since in the sublime works of Raphael; here were the same grace, the same repose as in these Virgins, and now proverbial. There was a delightful contrast between the cheeks of that face on which sleep had, as it were, given high relief to a superabundance of life, and the antiquity of the heavy window with its clumsy shape and black sill. Like those day-blowing flowers, which in the early morning have not yet unfurled their cups, twisted by the chills of night, the girl, as yet hardly awake, let her blue eyes wander beyond the neighboring roofs to look at the sky; then, from habit, she cast them down on the gloomy depths of the street, where they immediately met those of her adorer. Vanity, no doubt, distressed her at being seen in undress; she started back, the worn pulley gave way, and the sash fell with the rapid run which in our day has earned for this artless invention of our forefathers an odious name.[1] The vision had disappeared. To the young man the most radiant star of morning seemed to be hidden by a cloud.

During these little incidents the heavy inside shutters that protected the slight windows of the shop of the "Cat and Racket" had been removed as if by magic. The old door with its knocker was opened back against the wall of the entry by a man-servant, apparently coeval with the sign, who, with a shaking hand, hung upon it a square of cloth, on which were embroidered in yellow silk the words: "Guillaume, Successor to Chevrel." Many a passerby would have found it difficult to guess the class of trade carried on by M. Guillaume. Between the strong iron bars which protected his shop windows on the outside, certain packages, wrapped in brown linen, were hardly visible, though as numerous as herrings swimming in a shoal. Notwithstanding the primitive aspect of the Gothic front, M. Guillaume, of all the merchant clothiers in Paris, was the one whose stores were always the best provided, whose connections were the most extensive, and whose commercial honesty never lay under the slightest suspicion. If some of his brethren in business made a contract with the Government, and had not the required quantity of cloth, he was always ready to deliver it, however large the number of pieces tendered for. The wily dealer knew a thousand ways of extracting the largest profits without being obliged, like them, to court patrons, cringing to them, or making them costly presents. When his fellow-tradesmen could only pay in good bills of long date, he would mention his notary as an accommodating man, and managed to get a second profit out of the bargain, thanks to this arrangement, which had made it a proverb among the traders of the Rue Saint-Denis: "Heaven preserve you from M. Guillaume's notary!" to signify a heavy discount.

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[1] Fenêtre à la Guillotine.

The old merchant was to be seen standing on the threshold of his shop, as if by a miracle, the instant the servant withdrew. M. Guillaume looked at the Rue Saint-Denis, at the neighboring shops, and at the weather, like a man disembarking at Havre, and seeing France once more after a long voyage. Having convinced himself that nothing had changed while he was asleep, he presently perceived the stranger on guard, and he, on his part, gazed at the patriarchal draper as Humboldt may have scrutinized the first electric eel he saw in America. M. Guillaume wore loose black velvet breeches, pepper-and-salt stockings, and square-toed shoes with silver buckles. His coat, with square-cut fronts, square-cut tails, and square-cut collar, clothed his slightly bent figure in greenish cloth, finished with white metal buttons, tawny from wear. His gray hair was so accurately combed and flattened over his yellow pate that it made it look like a furrowed field. His little green eyes, that might have been pierced with a gimlet, flashed beneath arches faintly tinged with red in the place of eyebrows. Anxieties had wrinkled his forehead with as many horizontal lines as there were creases in his coat. This colorless face expressed patience, commercial shrewdness, and the sort of wily cupidity which is needful in business. At that time these old families were less rare than they are now, in which the characteristic habits and costume of their calling, surviving in the midst of more recent civilization, were preserved as cherished traditions, like the antediluvian remains found by Cuvier in the quarries.

The head of the Guillaume family was a notable upholder of ancient practices; he might be heard to regret the Provost of Merchants, and never did he mention a decision of the Tribunal of Commerce without calling it the *Sentence of the Consuls.* Up and dressed the first of the household, in obedience, no doubt, to these old customs, he stood sternly awaiting the appearance of his three assistants, ready to scold them in case they were late. These young disciples of Mercury knew nothing more terrible than the wordless assiduity with which the master scrutinized their faces and their movements on Monday in search of evidence or traces of their pranks. But at this moment the old clothier paid no heed to his apprentices; he was absorbed in trying to divine the motive of the anxious looks which the young man in silk stockings and a cloak cast alternately at his signboard and into the depths of his shop. The daylight was now brighter, and enabled the stranger to discern the cashier's corner inclosed by a railing and screened by old green silk curtains, where were kept the immense ledgers, the silent oracles of the house. The too inquisitive gazer seemed to covet this little nook, and to be taking the plan of a dining-room at one side, lighted by a skylight, whence the family at meals could easily see the smallest incident that might occur at the shop-door. So much affection for his dwelling seemed suspicious to a trader who had lived long enough to remember the law of maximum prices; M. Guillaume naturally thought that this sinister personage had an eye to the till of the Cat and Racket. After quietly observing the mute duel which was going on between his master and the stranger, the eldest of the apprentices, having seen that the young man was stealthily watching the windows of the third floor, ventured to place himself on the stone flag where M. Guillaume was standing. He took two steps out into the street, raised his head, and fancied that he caught sight of Mlle. Augustine Guillaume in hasty retreat. The draper, annoyed by his assistant's perspicacity, shot a side glance at him; but the draper and his amorous apprentice were suddenly relieved from the fears which the young man's presence had excited in their minds. He hailed a hackney cab on its way to a neighboring stand, and jumped into it with an air of affected indifference. This departure was a balm to the hearts of the other two lads, who had been somewhat uneasy as to meeting the victim of their practical joke.

"Well, gentlemen, what ails you that you are standing there with your arms folded?" said M. Guillaume to his three neophytes. "In former days, bless you, when I was in Master Chevrel's service, I should have overhauled more than two pieces of cloth by this time."

"Then it was daylight earlier," said the second assistant, whose duty this was.

The old shopkeeper could not help smiling. Though two of these young fellows, who were confided to his care by their fathers, rich manufacturers at Louviers and at Sedan, had only to ask and to have a hundred thousand francs the day when they were old enough to settle in life, Guillaume regarded it as his duty to keep them under the rod of an old-world despotism, unknown nowadays in the showy modern shops, where the apprentices expect to be rich men at thirty. He made them work like negroes. These three assistants were equal to a business which would harry ten such clerks as those whose sybaritical tastes now swell the columns of the budget. Not a sound disturbed the peace of this solemn house, where the hinges were always oiled, and where the meanest article of furniture showed the respectable cleanliness which reveals strict order and economy. The most waggish of the three youths often amused himself by writing the date of its first appearance on the Gruyère cheese which was left to their tender mercies at breakfast, and which it was their pleasure to leave untouched. This bit of mischief, and a few others of the same stamp, would sometimes bring a smile on the face of the younger of

Guillaume's two daughters, the pretty maiden who has just now appeared to the bewitched man in the street.

Though each of the apprentices, even the eldest, paid a round sum for his board, not one of them would have been bold enough to remain at the master's table when dessert was served. When Mme. Guillaume talked of dressing the salad, the hapless youths trembled as they thought of the thrift with which her prudent hand dispensed the oil. They could never think of spending a night away from the house without having given, long before, a plausible reason for such an irregularity. Every Sunday, each in his turn, two of them accompanied the Guillaume family to Mass at Saint-Leu, and to vespers. Mlles. Virginie and Augustine, simply attired in cotton print, each took the arm of an apprentice and walked in front, under the piercing eye of their mother, who closed the little family procession with her husband, accustomed by her to carry two large prayer-books, bound in black morocco. The second apprentice received no salary. As for the eldest, whose twelve years of perseverance and discretion had initiated him into the secrets of the house, he was paid eight hundred francs a year as the reward of his labors. On certain family festivals he received as a gratuity some little gift, to which Mme. Guillaume's dry and wrinkled hand alone gave value—netted purses, which she took care to stuff with cotton wool, to show off the fancy stitches, braces of the strongest make, or heavy silk stockings. Sometimes, but rarely, this prime minister was admitted to share the pleasures of the family when they went into the country, or when, after waiting for months, they made up their mind to exert the right acquired by taking a box at the theater to command a piece which Paris had already forgotten.

As to the other assistants, the barrier of respect which formerly divided a master draper from his apprentices was so firmly established between them and the old shopkeeper, that they would have been more likely to steal a piece of cloth than to infringe this time-honored etiquette. Such reserve may now appear ridiculous; but these old houses were a school of honesty and sound morals. The masters adopted their apprentices. The young man's linen was cared for, mended, and often replaced by the mistress of the house. If an apprentice fell ill, he was the object of truly maternal attention. In a case of danger the master lavished his money in calling in the most celebrated physicians, for he was not answerable to their parents merely for the good conduct and training of the lads. If one of them, whose character was unimpeachable, suffered misfortune, these old tradesmen knew how to value the intelligence he had displayed, and they did not hesitate to intrust the happiness of their daughters to men whom they had long trusted with their fortunes. Guillaume was one of these men of the old school, and if he had their ridiculous side, he had all their good qualities; and Joseph Lebas, the chief assistant, an orphan without any fortune, was in his mind destined to be the husband of Virginie, his elder daughter. But Joseph did not share the symmetrical ideas of his master, who would not for an empire have given his second daughter in marriage before the elder. The unhappy assistant felt that his heart was wholly given to Mlle. Augustine, the younger. In order to justify this passion, which had grown up in secret, it is necessary to inquire a little further into the springs of the absolute government which ruled the old cloth-merchant's household.

Guillaume had two daughters. The elder, Mlle. Virginie, was the very image of her mother. Mme. Guillaume, daughter of the Sieur Chevrel, sat so upright in the stool behind her desk, that more than once she had heard some wag bet that she was a stuffed figure. Her long, thin face betrayed exaggerated piety. Devoid of attractions or of amiable manners, Mme. Guillaume commonly decorated her head—that of a woman near on sixty—with a cap of a particular and unvarying shape, with long lappets, like that of a widow. In all the neighborhood she was known as the "portress nun." Her speech was curt and her movements had the stiff precision of a semaphore. Her eye, with a gleam in it like a cat's, seemed to spite the world because she was so ugly. Mlle. Virginie, brought up, like her younger sister, under the domestic rule of her mother, had reached the age of eight-and-twenty. Youth mitigated the graceless effect which her likeness to her mother sometimes gave to her features, but maternal austerity had endowed her with two great qualities which made up for everything. She was patient and gentle. Mlle. Augustine, who was but just eighteen, was not like either her father or her mother. She was one of those daughters whose total absence of any physical affinity with their parents makes one believe in the adage: God gives children. Augustine was little, or, to describe her more truly, delicately made. Full of gracious candor, a man of the world could have found no fault in the charming girl beyond a certain meanness of gesture or vulgarity of attitude, and sometimes a want of ease. Her silent and placid face was full of the transient melancholy which comes over all young girls who are too weak to dare to resist their mother's will.

The two sisters, always plainly dressed, could not gratify the innate vanity of womanhood but by a luxury of cleanliness which became them wonderfully, and made them harmonize with the polished counters and the shining shelves, on which the old man-servant never left a speck of dust, and with the old-world simplicity of all they saw about them. As their style of living compelled them to find the elements of happiness in persistent work, Augustine and Virginie had hitherto always satisfied their mother, who secretly prided herself on the perfect characters of her two daughters. It is easy to imagine the results of the training they had received. Brought up to a commercial life, accustomed to hear nothing but dreary arguments and calculations about trade, having studied nothing but grammar, bookkeeping, a little Bible-history, and the history of France in Le Ragois, and never reading any book but those their mother would sanction, their ideas had not acquired much scope. They knew perfectly how to keep house; they were familiar with the prices of things; they understood the difficulty of amassing money; they were economical, and had a great respect for the qualities that make a man of business. Although their father was rich, they were as skilled in darning as in embroidery; their mother often talked of having them taught to cook, so that they might know how to order a dinner and scold a cook with due knowledge. They knew nothing of the pleasures of the world; and, seeing how their parents spent their exemplary lives, they very rarely suffered their eyes to wander beyond the walls of their hereditary home, which to their mother was the whole universe. The meetings to which family anniversaries gave rise filled in the future of earthly joy to them.

When the great drawing-room on the second floor was to be prepared to receive company—Mme. Roquin, a Demoiselle Chevrel, fifteen months younger than her cousin, and bedecked with diamonds; young Rabourdin, employed in the Finance Office; M. César Birotteau, the rich perfumer, and his wife, known as Mme. César; M. Camusot, the richest silk mercer in the Rue des Bourdonnais, with his father-in-law, M. Cardot, two or three old bankers, and some immaculate ladies—the arrangements, made necessary by the way in which everything was packed away—the plate, the Dresden china, the candlesticks, and the glass—made a variety in the monotonous lives of the three women, who came and went and exerted themselves as nuns would to receive their bishop. Then, in the evening, when all three were tired out with having wiped, rubbed, unpacked, and arranged all the gauds of the festival, as the girls helped their mother to undress, Mme. Guillaume would say to them, "Children, we have done nothing to-day."

When, on very great occasions, "the portress nun" allowed dancing, restricting the games of boston, whist, and backgammon within the limits of her bedroom, such a concession was accounted as the most unhoped felicity, and made them happier than going to the great balls, to two or three of which Guillaume would take the girls at the time of the Carnival.

And once a year the worthy draper gave an entertainment, when he spared no expense. However rich and fashionable the persons invited might be, they were careful not to be absent; for the most important houses on the Exchange had recourse to the immense credit, the fortune, or the time-honored experience of M. Guillaume. Still, the excellent merchant's two daughters did not benefit as much as might be supposed by the lessons the world has to offer to young spirits. At these parties, which were indeed set down in the ledger to the credit of the house, they wore dresses the shabbiness of which made them blush. Their style of dancing was not in any way remarkable, and their mother's surveillance did not allow of their holding any conversation with their partners beyond Yes and No. Also, the law of the old sign of the Cat and Racket commanded that they should be home by eleven o'clock, the hour when balls and fêtes begin to be lively. Thus their pleasures, which seemed to conform very fairly to their father's position, were often made insipid by circumstances which were part of the family habits and principles.

As to their usual life, one remark will sufficiently paint it. Mme. Guillaume required her daughters to be dressed very early in the morning, to come down every day at the same hour, and she ordered their employments with monastic regularity. Augustine, however, had been gifted by chance with a spirit lofty enough to feel the emptiness of such a life. Her blue eyes would sometimes be raised as if to pierce the depths of that gloomy staircase and those damp store-rooms. After sounding the profound cloistral silence, she seemed to be listening to remote, inarticulate revelations of the life of passion, which accounts feelings as of higher value than things. And at such moments her cheek would flush, her idle hands would lay the muslin sewing on the polished oak counter, and presently her mother would say in a voice, of which even the softest tones were sour, "Augustine, my treasure, what are you thinking about?" It is possible that two romances discovered by Augustine in the cupboard of a cook Mme. Guillaume had lately discharged--*Hippolyte Comte de Douglas* and *Le Comte de Comminges*—may have contributed to develop the ideas of the young girl, who had devoured them in secret, during the long nights of the past winter.

And so Augustine's expression of vague longing, her gentle voice, her jasmine skin, and her blue eyes had lighted in poor Lebas's soul a flame as ardent as it was reverent. From an easily understood caprice, Augustine felt no affection for the orphan; perhaps because she did not know that he loved her. On the other hand, the senior apprentice, with his long legs, his chestnut hair, his big hands and powerful frame, had found a secret admirer in Mlle. Virginie, who, in spite of her dower of fifty thousand crowns, had as yet no suitor. Nothing could be more natural than these two passions at cross-purposes, born in the silence of the dingy shop, as violets bloom in the depths of a wood. The mute and constant looks which made the young people's eyes meet by sheer need of change in the midst of persistent work and cloistered peace, were sure, sooner or later, to give rise to feelings of love. The habit of seeing always the same face leads insensibly to our reading there the qualities of the soul, and at last effaces all its defects.

"At the pace at which that man goes, our girls will soon have to go on their knees to a suitor!" said M. Guillaume to himself, as he read the first decree by which Napoleon drew in advance on the conscript classes.

From that day the old merchant, grieved at seeing his eldest daughter fade, remembered how he had married Mlle. Chevrel under much the same circumstances as those of Joseph Lebas and Virginie. A good bit of business, to marry off his daughter, and discharge a sacred debt by repaying to an orphan the benefit he had formerly received from his predecessor under similar conditions! Joseph Lebas, who was now three-and-thirty, was aware of the obstacle which a difference of fifteen years placed between Augustine and himself. Being also too clear-sighted not to understand M. Guillaume's purpose, he knew his inexorable principles well enough to feel sure that the second would never marry before the elder. So the hapless assistant, whose heart was as warm as his legs were long and his chest deep, suffered in silence.

This was the state of affairs in the tiny republic which, in the heart of the Rue Saint-Denis, was not unlike a dependency of La Trappe. But to give a full account of events as well as of feelings, it is needful to go back to some months before the scene with which this story opens. At dusk one evening, a young man passing the darkened shop of the Cat and Racket had paused for a moment to gaze at a picture which might have arrested every painter in the world. The shop was not yet lighted, and was as a dark cave beyond which the dining-room was visible. A hanging lamp shed the yellow light which lends such charm to pictures of the Dutch school. The white linen, the silver, the cut glass, were brilliant accessories, and made more picturesque by strong contrasts of light and shade. The figures of the head of the family and his wife, the faces of the apprentices, and the pure form of Augustine, near whom a fat chubby-cheeked maid was standing, composed so strange a group; the heads were so singular, and every face had so candid an expression; it was so easy to read the peace, the silence, the modest way of life in this family, that to an artist accustomed to render nature, there was something hopeless in any attempt to depict this scene, come upon by chance. The stranger was a young painter, who, seven years before, had gained the first prize for painting. He had now just come back from Rome. His soul, full-fed with poetry; his eyes, satiated with Raphael and Michael Angelo, thirsted for real nature after long dwelling in the pompous land where art has everywhere left something grandiose. Right or wrong, this was his personal feeling. His heart, which had long been a prey to the fire of Italian passion, craved one of those modest and meditative maidens whom in Rome he had unfortunately seen only in painting. From the enthusiasm produced in his excited fancy by the living picture before him, he naturally passed to a profound admiration for the principal figure; Augustine seemed to be pensive, and did not eat; by the arrangement of the lamp the light fell full on her face, and her bust seemed to move in a circle of fire, which threw up the shape of her head and illuminated it with almost supernatural effect. The artist involuntarily compared her to an exiled angel dreaming of heaven. An almost unknown emotion, a limpid, seething love flooded his heart. After remaining a minute, overwhelmed by the weight of his ideas, he tore himself from his bliss, went home, ate nothing, and could not sleep.

The next day he went to his studio, and did not come out of it till he had placed on canvas the magic of the scene of which the memory had, in a sense, made him a devotee; his happiness was incomplete till he should possess a faithful portrait of his idol. He went many times past the house of the Cat and Racket; he even ventured in once or twice, under a disguise, to get a closer view of the bewitching creature that Mme. Guillaume covered with her wing. For eight whole months, devoted to his love and to his brush, he was lost to the sight of his most intimate friends, forgetting the world, the theater, poetry, music, and all his dearest habits. One morning Girodet broke through all the barriers with which artists are familiar, and which they know how to evade, went into his room, and woke him by asking, "What are you going to send to the Salon?" The artist grasped his friend's hand, dragged him off to the studio, uncovered a small easel picture and a portrait. After a long and eager study of the two masterpieces, Girodet threw himself on his comrade's neck and hugged him, without speaking a word. His feelings could only be expressed as he felt them—soul to soul.

"You are in love?" said Girodet.

They both knew that the finest portraits by Titian, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci, were the outcome of the enthusiastic sentiments by which, indeed, under various conditions, every masterpiece is engendered. The artist only bent his head in reply.

"How happy are you to be able to be in love, here, after coming back from Italy! But I do not advise you to send such works as these to the Salon," the great painter went on. "You see, these two works will not be appreciated. Such true coloring, such prodigious work, cannot yet be understood; the public is not accustomed to such depths. The pictures we paint, my dear fellow, are mere screens. We should do better to turn rhymes, and translate the antique poets! There is more glory to be looked for there than from our luckless canvases!"

Notwithstanding this charitable advice, the two pictures were exhibited. The *Interior* made a revolution in painting. It gave birth to the pictures of genre which pour into all our exhibitions in such prodigious quantity that they might be supposed to be produced by machinery. As to the portrait, few artists have forgotten that lifelike work; and the public, which as a body is sometimes discerning, awarded it the crown which Girodet himself had hung over it. The two pictures were surrounded by a vast throng. They fought for places, as women say. Speculators and moneyed men would have covered the canvas with double Napoleons, but the artist obstinately refused to sell or to make replicas. An enormous sum was offered him for the right of engraving them, and the print-sellers were not more favored than the amateurs.

Though these incidents occupied the world, they were not of a nature to penetrate the recesses of the monastic solitude in the Rue Saint-Denis. However, when paying a visit to Mme. Guillaume, the notary's wife spoke of the exhibition before Augustine, of whom she was very fond, and explained its purpose. Mme. Roquin's gossip naturally inspired Augustine with a wish to see the pictures, and with courage enough to ask her cousin secretly to take her to the Louvre. Her cousin succeeded in the negotiations she opened with Mme. Guillaume for permission to release the young girl for two hours from her dull labors. Augustine was thus able to make her way through the crowd to see the crowned work. A fit of trembling shook her like an aspen leaf as she recognized herself. She was terrified, and looked about her to find Mme. Roquin, from whom she had been separated by a tide of people. At that moment her frightened eyes fell on the impassioned face of the young painter. She at once recalled the figure of a loiterer whom, being curious, she had frequently observed, believing him to be a new neighbor.

"You see how love has inspired me," said the artist in the timid creature's ear, and she stood in dismay at the words.

She found supernatural courage to enable her to push through the crowd and join her cousin, who was still struggling with the mass of people that hindered her from getting to the picture.

"You will be stifled!" cried Augustine. "Let us go."

But there are moments, at the Salon, when two women are not always free to direct their steps through the galleries. By the irregular course to which they were compelled by the press, Mlle. Guillaume and her cousin were pushed to within a few steps of the second picture. Chance thus brought them, both together, to where they could easily see the canvas made famous by fashion, for once in agreement with talent. Mme. Roquin's exclamation of surprise was lost in the hubbub and buzz of the crowd; Augustine involuntarily shed tears at the sight of this wonderful study. Then, by an almost unaccountable impulse, she laid her finger on her lips, as she perceived quite near her the ecstatic face of the young painter. The stranger replied by a nod, and pointed to Mme. Roquin, as a spoil-sport, to show Augustine that he had understood. This pantomime struck the young girl like hot coals on her flesh; she felt quite guilty as she perceived that there was a compact between herself and the artist. The suffocating heat, the dazzling sight of beautiful dresses, the bewilderment produced in Augustine's brain by the truth of coloring, the multitude of living or painted figures, the profusion of gilt frames, gave her a sense of intoxication which doubled her alarms. She would perhaps have fainted if an unknown rapture had not surged up in her heart to vivify her whole being, in spite of this chaos of sensations. She nevertheless believed herself to be under the power of the Devil, of whose awful snares she had been warned by the thundering words of preachers. This moment was to her like a moment of madness. She found herself accompanied to her cousin's carriage by the young man, radiant with joy and love. Augustine, a prey to an agitation new to her experience, an intoxication which seemed to abandon her to nature, listened to the eloquent voice of her heart, and looked again and again at the young painter, betraying the emotion that came over her. Never had the bright rose of her cheeks shown in stronger contrast with the whiteness of her skin. The artist saw her beauty in all its bloom, her maiden modesty in all its glory. She herself felt a sort of rapture mingled with terror at thinking that her presence had brought happiness to him whose name was on every lip, and whose talent lent immortality to transient scenes. She was loved! It was impossible to doubt it. When she no longer saw the artist, these simple words still echoed in her ear, "You see how love has inspired me!" And the throbs of her heart, as they grew deeper, seemed a pain, her heated blood revealed so many unknown forces in her being. She affected a severe headache to avoid replying to her cousin's questions concerning the pictures; but on their return Mme. Roquin could not forbear from speaking to Mme. Guillaume of the fame that had fallen on the house of the Cat and Racket, and Augustine quaked in every limb as she heard her mother say that she should go to the Salon to see her house there. The young girl again declared herself suffering, and obtained leave to go to bed.

"That is what comes of sight-seeing," exclaimed M. Guillaume—"a headache. And is it so very amusing to see in a picture what you can see any day in your own street? Don't talk to me of your artists! Like writers, they are a starveling crew. Why the devil need they choose my house to flout it in their pictures?"

"It may help to sell a few ells more of cloth," said Joseph Lebas.

This remark did not protect art and thought from being condemned once again before the judgment-seat of trade. As may be supposed, these speeches did not infuse much hope into Augustine, who, during the night, gave herself up to the first meditations of love. The events of the day were like a dream, which it was joy to recall to her mind. She was initiated into the fears, the hopes, the remorse, all the ebb and flow of feeling which could not fail to toss a heart so simple and so timid as hers. What a void she perceived in this gloomy house! What a treasure she found in her soul! To be the wife of a genius, to share his glory! What ravages must such a vision make in the heart of a girl brought up among such a family! What hopes must it raise in a young creature who, in the midst of sordid elements, had pined for a life of elegance! A sunbeam had fallen into the prison. Augustine was suddenly in love. So many of her feelings were soothed that she succumbed without reflection. At eighteen does not love hold a prism between the world and the eyes of a young girl? She was incapable of suspecting the hard facts which result from the union of a loving woman with a man of imagination, and she believed herself called to make him happy, not seeing any disparity between herself and him. To her the future would be as the present. When, next day, her father and mother returned from the Salon, their dejected faces proclaimed some disappointment. In the first place, the painter had removed the two pictures; and then Mme. Guillaume had lost her cashmere shawl. But the news that the pictures had disappeared from the walls since her visit revealed to Augustine a delicacy of sentiment which a woman can always appreciate, even by instinct.

On the morning when, on his way home from a ball, Théodore de Sommervieux—for this was the name which fame had stamped on Augustine's heart—had been squirted on by the apprentices while awaiting the appearance of his artless little friend, who certainly did not know that he was there; the lovers had seen each other for the fourth time only since their meeting at the Salon. The difficulties which the rule of the house placed in the way of the painter's ardent nature gave added violence to his passion for Augustine.

How could he get near to a young girl seated in a counting-house between two such women as Mlle. Virginie and Mme. Guillaume? How could he correspond with her when her mother never left her side? Ingenious, as lovers are, to imagine woes, Théodore saw a rival in one of the assistants, to whose interests he supposed the others to be devoted. If he should evade these sons of Argus, he would yet be wrecked under the stern eyes of the old draper or of Mme. Guillaume. The very vehemence of his passion hindered the young painter from hitting on the ingenious expedients which, in prisoners and in lovers, seem to be the last effort of intelligence spurred by a wild craving for liberty, or by the fire of love. Théodore wandered about the neighborhood with the restlessness of a madman, as though movement might inspire him with some device. After racking his imagination, it occurred to him to bribe the blowsy waiting-maid with gold. Thus a few notes were exchanged at long intervals during the fortnight following the ill-starred morning when M. Guillaume and Théodore had so scrutinized one another. At the present moment the young couple had agreed to see each other at a certain hour of the day, and on Sunday, at Saint-Leu, during Mass and vespers. Augustine had sent her dear Théodore a list of the relations and friends of the family, to whom the young painter tried to get access, in the hope of interesting, if it were possible, in his love affairs, one of these souls absorbed in money and trade, to whom a genuine passion must appear a quite monstrous speculation, a thing unheard of. Nothing, meanwhile, was altered at the sign of the Cat and Racket. If Augustine was absent-minded, if, against all obedience to the domestic code, she stole up to her room to make signals by means of a jar of flowers, if she sighed, if she were lost in thought, no one observed it, not even her mother. This will cause some surprise to those who have entered into the spirit of the household, where an idea tainted with poetry would be in startling contrast to persons and things, where no one could venture on a gesture or a look which would not be seen and analyzed. Nothing, however, could be more natural: the quiet bark that navigated the stormy waters of the Paris Exchange, under the flag of the Cat and Racket, was just now in the toils of one of these tempests which, returning periodically, might be termed equinoctial. For the last fortnight the five men forming the crew, with Mme. Guillaume and Mlle. Virginie, had been devoting themselves to the hard labor known as stock-taking.

Every bale was turned over, and the length verified to ascertain the exact value of the remnant. The ticket attached to each parcel was carefully examined to see at what time the piece had been bought. The retail price was fixed. M. Guillaume, always on his feet, his pen behind his ear, was like a captain commanding the working of the ship. His sharp tones, spoken through a trap-door, to inquire into the depths of the hold in the cellar-store, gave utterance to the barbarous formulas of trade-jargon, which find expression only in cipher. "How much H.N.Z.?"—"All sold."—"What is left of Q.X.?"—"Two ells."—"At what price?"

—"Fifty-five three."—"Set down A. at three, with all of J.J., all of M.P., and what is left of V.D.O."—A hundred other injunctions equally intelligible were spouted over the counters like verses of modern poetry, quoted by romantic spirits, to excite each other's enthusiasm for one of their poets. In the evening Guillaume, shut up with his assistant and his wife, balanced his accounts, carried on the balance, wrote to debtors in arrears, and made out bills. All three were busy over this enormous labor, of which the result could be stated on a sheet of foolscap, proving to the head of the house that there was so much to the good in hard cash, so much in goods, so much in bills and notes; that he did not owe a sou; that a hundred or two hundred thousand francs were owing to him; that the capital had been increased; that the farmlands, the houses, or the investments were extended, or repaired, or doubled. Whence it became necessary to begin again with increased ardor, to accumulate more crown-pieces, without its ever entering the brain of these laborious ants to ask—"To what end?"

Favored by this annual turmoil, the happy Augustine escaped the investigations of her Argus-eyed relations. At last, one Saturday evening, the stock-taking was finished. The figures of the sum-total showed a row of 0s long enough to allow Guillaume for once to relax the stern rule as to dessert which reigned throughout the year. The shrewd old draper rubbed his hands, and allowed his assistants to remain at table. The members of the crew had hardly swallowed their thimbleful of some home-made liqueur, when the rumble of a carriage was heard. The family party were going to see *Cendrillon* at the Variétés, while the two younger apprentices each received a crown of six francs, with permission to go wherever they chose, provided they were in by midnight.

Notwithstanding this debauch, the old cloth-merchant was shaving himself at six next morning, put on his maroon-colored coat, of which the glowing lights afforded him perennial enjoyment, fastened a pair of gold buckles on the knee-straps of his ample satin breeches; and then, at about seven o'clock, while all were still sleeping in the house, he made his way to the little office adjoining the shop on the first floor. Daylight came in through a window, fortified by iron bars, and looking out on a small yard surrounded by such black walls that it was very like a well. The old merchant opened the iron-lined shutters, which were so familiar to him, and threw up the lower half of the sash window. The icy air of the courtyard came in to cool the hot atmosphere of the little room, full of the odor peculiar to offices. The merchant remained standing, his hand resting on the greasy arm of a large cane chair lined with morocco, of which the original hue had disappeared; he seemed to hesitate as to seating himself. He looked with affection at the double desk, where his wife's seat, opposite his own, was fitted into a little niche in the wall. He contemplated the numbered boxes, the files, the implements, the cash box—objects all of immemorial origin, and fancied himself in the room with the shade of Master Chevrel. He even pulled out the high stool on which he had once sat in the presence of his departed master. This stool, covered with black leather, the horsehair showing at every corner—as it had long done, without, however, coming out—he placed with a shaking hand on the very spot where his predecessor had put it, and then, with an emotion difficult to describe, he pulled a bell, which rang at the head of Joseph Lebas's bed. When this decisive blow had been struck, the old man, for whom, no doubt, these reminiscences were too much, took up three or four bills of exchange, and looked at them without seeing them.

Suddenly Joseph Lebas stood before him.

"Sit down there," said Guillaume, pointing to the stool.

As the old master draper had never yet bid his assistant be seated in his presence, Joseph Lebas was startled.

"What do you think of these notes?" asked Guillaume.

"They will never be paid."

"Why?"

"Well, I heard that the day before yesterday Étienne & Co. had made their payments in gold."

"Oh, oh!" said the draper. "Well, one must be very ill to show one's bile. Let us speak of something else.—Joseph, the stock-taking is done."

"Yes, monsieur, and the dividend is one of the best you have ever made."

"Do not use new-fangled words. Say the profits, Joseph. Do you know, my boy, that this result is partly owing to you? And I do not intend to pay you a salary any longer. Mme. Guillaume has suggested to me to take you into partnership.—'Guillaume and Lebas'; will not that make a good business name? We might add, 'and Co.' to round off the firm's signature."

Tears rose to the eyes of Joseph Lebas, who tried to hide them.

"Oh, M. Guillaume, how have I deserved such kindness? I only do my duty. It was so much already that you should take an interest in a poor orph——"

He was brushing the cuff of his left sleeve with his right hand, and dared not look at the old man, who smiled as he thought that this modest young fellow no doubt needed, as he had needed once on a time, some encouragement to complete his explanations.

"To be sure," said Virginie's father, "you do not altogether deserve this favor, Joseph. You have not so much confidence in me as I have in you. (The young man looked up quickly.) You know all the secrets of the cash-box. For the last two years I have told you of almost all my concerns. I have sent you to travel in our goods. In short, I have nothing on my conscience as regards you. But you—you have a soft place, and you have never breathed a word of it." Joseph Lebas blushed. "Ah, ha!" cried Guillaume, "so you thought you could deceive an old fox like me? When you knew that I had scented the Lecocq bankruptcy?"

"What, monsieur?" replied Joseph Lebas, looking at his master as keenly as his master looked at him, "you knew that I was in love?"

"I know everything, you rascal," said the worthy and cunning old merchant, pulling the assistant's ear. "And I forgive you—I did the same myself."

"And you will give her to me?"

"Yes—with fifty thousand crowns; and I will leave you as much by will, and we will start on our new career under the name of a new firm. We will do good business yet, my boy!" added the old man, getting up and flourishing his arms. "I tell you, son-in-law, there is nothing like trade. Those who ask what pleasure is to be found in it are simpletons. To be on the scent of a good bargain, to hold your own on 'Change, to watch as anxiously as at the gaming table whether Étienne & Co. will fail or no, to see a regiment of Guards march past all dressed in your cloth, to trip your neighbor up—honestly, of course!—to make the goods cheaper than others can; then to carry out an undertaking which you have planned, which begins, grows, totters, and succeeds! to know the workings of every house of business as well as a minister of police, so as never to make a mistake; to hold up your head in the midst of wrecks, to have friends by correspondence in every manufacturing town; is not that a perpetual game, Joseph? That is life, that is! I shall die in that harness, like old Chevrel, but taking it easy now, all the same."

In the heat of his eager rhetoric, old Guillaume had scarcely looked at his assistant, who was weeping copiously. "Why, Joseph, my poor boy, what is the matter?"

"Oh, I love her so! M. Guillaume, that my heart fails me; I believe——"

"Well, well, boy," said the old man, touched, "you are happier than you know, by Gad! For she loves you. I know it."

And he blinked his little green eyes as he looked at the young man.

"Mlle. Augustine! Mlle. Augustine!" exclaimed Joseph Lebas in his rapture.

He was about to rush out of the room when he felt himself clutched by a hand of iron, and his astonished master spun him round in front of him once more.

"What has Augustine to do with this matter?" he asked, in a voice which instantly froze the luckless Joseph.

"Is it not she that—that—I love?" stammered the assistant.

Much put out by his own want of perspicacity, Guillaume sat down again, and rested his long head in his hands to consider the perplexing situation in which he found himself. Joseph Lebas, shamefaced and in despair, remained standing.

"Joseph," the draper said with frigid dignity, "I was speaking of Virginie. Love cannot be made to order, I know. I know, too, that you can be trusted. We will forget all this. I will not let Augustine marry before Virginie.—Your interest will be ten per cent."

The young man, to whom love gave I know not what power of courage and eloquence, clasped his hand, and spoke in his turn—spoke for a quarter of an hour, with so much warmth and feeling, that he altered the situation. If the question had been a matter of business, the old tradesman would have had fixed principles to guide his decision; but, tossed a thousand miles from commerce, on the ocean of sentiment, without a compass, he floated, as he told himself, undecided in the face of such an unexpected event. Carried away by his fatherly kindness, he began to beat about the bush.

"Deuce take it, Joseph, you must know that there are ten years between my two children. Mlle. Chevrel was no beauty, still she has had nothing to complain of in me. Do as I did. Come, come, don't cry. Can you be so silly? What is to be done? It can be managed perhaps. There is always some way out of a scrape. And we men are not always devoted Celadons to our wives—you understand? Mme. Guillaume is very pious. . . . Come. By Gad, boy, give your arm to Augustine this morning as we go to Mass."

These were the phrases spoken at random by the old draper, and their conclusion made the lover happy. He was already thinking of a friend of his as a match for Mlle. Virginie, as he went out of the smoky office, pressing his future father-in-law's hand, after saying with a knowing look that all would turn out for the best.

"What will Mme. Guillame say to it?" was the idea that greatly troubled the worthy merchant when he found himself alone.

At breakfast Mme. Guillaume and Virginie, to whom the draper had not as yet confided his disappointment, cast meaning glances at Joseph Lebas, who was extremely embarrassed. The young assistant's bashfulness commended him to his mother-in-law's good graces. The matron became so cheerful that she smiled as she looked at her husband, and allowed herself some little pleasantries of time-honored acceptance in such simple families. She wondered whether Joseph or Virginie were the taller, to ask them to compare their height. This preliminary fooling brought a cloud to the master's brow, and he even made such a point of decorum that he desired Augustine to take the assistant's arm on their way to Saint-Leu. Mme. Guillaume, surprised at this manly delicacy, honored her husband with a nod of approval. So the procession left the house in such order as to suggest no suspicious meaning to the neighbors.

"Does it not seem to you, Mlle. Augustine," said the assistant, and he trembled, "that the wife of a merchant whose credit is as good as M. Guillaume's, for instance, might enjoy herself a little more than madame your mother does? Might wear diamonds—or keep a carriage? For my part, if I were to marry, I should be glad to take all the work, and see my wife happy. I would not put her into the counting-house. In the drapery business, you see, a woman is not so necessary now as formerly. M. Guillaume was quite right to act as he did—and besides, his wife liked it. But so long as a woman knows how to turn her hand to the bookkeeping, the correspondence, the retail business, the orders, and her housekeeping, so as not to sit idle, that is enough. At seven o'clock, when the shop is shut, I shall take my pleasures, go to the play, and into company.—But you are not listening to me."

"Yes, indeed, M. Joseph. What do you think of painting? That is a fine calling."

"Yes. I know a master house-painter, M. Lourdois. He is well-to-do."

Thus conversing, the family reached the Church of Saint-Leu. There Mme. Guillaume reasserted her rights, and, for the first time, placed Augustine next to herself, Virginie taking her place on the fourth chair, next to Lebas. During the sermon all went well between Augustine and Théodore, who, standing behind a pillar, worshiped his Madonna with fervent devotion; but at the elevation of the Host, Mme. Guillaume discovered, rather late, that her daughter Augustine was holding her prayer-book upside down. She was about to speak to her strongly, when, lowering her veil, she interrupted her own devotions to look in the direction where her daughter's eyes found attraction. By the help of her spectacles she saw the young artist, whose fashionable elegance seemed to proclaim him a cavalry officer on leave rather than a tradesman of the neighborhood. It is difficult to conceive of the state of violent agitation in which Mme. Guillaume found herself—she, who flattered herself on having brought up her daughters to perfection—on discovering in Augustine a clandestine passion of which her prudery and ignorance exaggerated the perils. She believed her daughter to be cankered to the core.

"Hold your book right way up, miss," she muttered in a low voice, tremulous with wrath. She snatched away the telltale prayer-book and returned it with the letter-press right way up. "Do not allow your eyes to look anywhere but at your prayers," she added, "or I shall have something to say to you. Your father and I will talk to you after church."

These words came like a thunderbolt on poor Augustine. She felt faint; but, torn between the distress she felt and the dread of causing a commotion in church, she bravely concealed her anguish. It was, however, easy to discern the stormy state of her soul from the trembling of her prayer-book, and the tears which dropped on every page she turned. From the furious glare shot at him by Mme. Guillaume the artist saw the peril into which his love affair had fallen; he went out, with a raging soul, determined to venture all.

"Go to your room, miss!" said Mme. Guillaume, on their return home; "we will send for you, but take care not to quit it."

The conference between the husband and wife was conducted so secretly that at first nothing was heard of it. Virginie, however, who had tried to give her sister courage by a variety of gentle remonstrances, carried her good nature so far as to listen at the door of her mother's bedroom, where the discussion was held, to catch a word or two. The first time she went down to the lower floor she heard her father exclaim, "Then, madame, do you wish to kill your daughter?"

"My poor dear!" said Virginie, in tears, "papa takes your part."

"And what do they want to do to Théodore?" asked the innocent girl.

Virginie, inquisitive, went down again; but this time she stayed longer; she learned that Joseph Lebas loved Augustine. It was written that on this memorable day, this house, generally so peaceful, should be a hell. M. Guillaume brought Joseph Lebas to despair by telling him of Augustine's love for a stranger. Lebas, who had advised his friend to become a suitor for Mlle. Virginie, saw all his hopes wrecked. Mlle. Virginie, overcome by hearing that Joseph had, in a way, refused her, had a sick headache. The dispute that had arisen from the discussion between M. and Mme. Guillaume, when, for the third time in their lives, they had been of antagonistic opinions, had shown itself in a terrible form. Finally, at half-past four in the afternoon, Augustine, pale, trembling, and with red eyes, was haled before her father and mother. The poor child artlessly related the too brief tale of her love. Reassured by a speech from her father, who promised to listen to her in silence, she gathered courage as she pronounced to her parents the name of Théodore de Sommervieux, with a mischievous little emphasis on the aristocratic *de*. And yielding to the unknown charm of talking of her feelings, she was brave enough to declare with innocent decision that she loved M. de Sommervieux, that she had written to him, and she added, with tears in her eyes: "To sacrifice me to another man would make me wretched."

"But, Augustine, you cannot surely know what a painter is?" cried her mother with horror.

"Mme. Guillaume!" said the old man, compelling her to silence.—"Augustine," he went on, "artists are generally little better than beggars. They are too extravagant not to be always a bad sort. I served the late M. Joseph Vernet, the late M. Lekain, and the late M. Noverre. Oh, if you could only know the tricks played on poor Father Chevrel by that M. Noverre, by the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, and especially by M. Philidor! They are a set of rascals; I know them well! They all have a gab and nice manners. Ah, your M. Sumer——, Somm——"

"De Sommervieux, papa."

"Well, well, de Sommervieux, well and good. He can never have been half so sweet to you as M. le Chevalier de Saint-Georges was to me the day I got a verdict of the consuls against him. And in those days they were gentlemen of quality."

"But, father, M. Théodore is of good family, and he wrote me that he is rich; his father was called Chevalier de Sommervieux before the Revolution."

At these words M. Guillaume looked at his terrible better-half, who, like an angry woman, sat tapping the floor with her foot while keeping sullen silence; she avoided even casting wrathful looks at Augustine, appearing to leave to M. Guillaume the whole responsibility in so grave a matter, since her opinion was not listened to. Nevertheless, in spite of her apparent self-control, when she saw her husband giving way so mildly under a catastrophe which had no concern with business, she exclaimed—

"Really, monsieur, you are so weak with your daughters! However——"

The sound of a carriage, which stopped at the door, interrupted the rating which the old draper already quaked at. In a minute Mme. Roquin was standing in the middle of the room, and looking at the actors in this domestic scene: "I know all, my dear cousin," said she, with a patronizing air.

Mme. Roquin made the great mistake of supposing that a Paris notary's wife could play the part of a favorite of fashion.

"I know all," she repeated, "and I have come into Noah's Ark, like the dove, with the olive-branch. I read that allegory in the *Génie du Christianisme*," she added, turning to Mme. Guillaume; "the allusion ought to please you, cousin. Do you know," she went on, smiling at Augustine, "that M. de Sommervieux is a charming man? He gave me my portrait this morning, painted by a master's hand. It is worth at least six thousand francs." And at these words she patted M. Guillaume on the arm. The old draper could not help making a grimace with his lips which was peculiar to him.

"I know M. de Sommervieux very well," the Dove ran on. "He has come to my evenings this fortnight past, and made them delightful. He has told me all his woes, and commissioned me to plead for him. I know since this morning that he adores Augustine, and he shall have her. Ah, cousin, do not shake your head in refusal. He will be created Baron, I can tell you, and has just been made Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, by the Emperor himself, at the Salon. Roquin is now his lawyer, and knows all his affairs. Well! M. Sommervieux has twelve thousand francs a year in good landed estate. Do you know that the father-in-law of such a man may get a rise in life—be mayor of his arrondissement, for instance. Have we not seen M. Dupont become a Count of the Empire, and a senator, all because he went as mayor to congratulate the Emperor on his entry into Vienna? Oh, this marriage must take place! For my part, I adore the dear young man. His behavior to Augustine is only met with in romances. Be easy, little one, you shall be happy, and every girl will wish she were in your place. Mme. la Duchesse de Carigliano, who comes to my 'At Homes,' raves about M. de Sommervieux. Some spiteful people say she only comes to me to meet him; as if a duchess of yesterday was doing too much honor to a Chevrel, whose family have been respected citizens these hundred years!

"Augustine," Mme. Roquin went on, after a short pause, "I have seen the portrait. Heavens! How lovely it is! Do you know that the Emperor wanted to have it? He laughed, and said to the deputy high constable that if there were many women like that at his Court while all the kings visited it, he should have no difficulty about preserving the peace of Europe. Is not that a compliment?"

The tempests with which the day had begun were to resemble those of Nature, by ending in clear and serene weather. Mme. Roquin displayed so much address in her harangue, she was able to touch so many strings in the dry hearts of M. and Mme. Guillaume, that at last she hit on one which she could work upon. At this strange period commerce and finance were more than ever possessed by the crazy mania for seeking alliance with rank; and the generals of the Empire took full advantage of this desire. M. Guillaume, as a singular exception, opposed this deplorable craving. His favorite axioms were that, to secure happiness, a woman must marry a man of her own class; that everyone was punished sooner or later for having climbed too high; that love could so little endure under the worries of a household, that both husband and wife needed sound good qualities to be happy; that it would not do for one to be far in advance of the other, because, above everything, they must understand each other; if a man spoke Greek and his wife Latin, they might come to die of hunger. He had himself invented this sort of adage. And he compared such marriages to old-fashioned materials of mixed silk and wool, in which the silk always at last wore through the wool. Still, there is so much vanity at the bottom of man's heart that the prudence of the pilot who steered the Cat and Racket so wisely gave way before Mme. Roquin's aggressive volubility. Austere Mme. Guillaume was the first to see in her daughter's affection a reason for abdicating her principles and for consenting to receive M. de Sommervieux, whom she promised herself she would put under severe inquisition.

The old draper went to look for Joseph Lebas, and inform him of the state of affairs. At half-past six, the dining-room immortalized by the artist saw, united under its skylight, M. and Mme. Roquin, the young painter and his charming Augustine, Joseph Lebas, who found his happiness in patience, and Mlle. Virginie, convalescent from her headache. M. and Mme. Guillaume saw in perspective both their children married, and the fortunes of the Cat and Racket once more in skillful hands. Their satisfaction was at its height when, at dessert, Théodore made them a present of the wonderful picture which they had failed to see, representing the interior of the old shop, and to which they all owed so much happiness.

"Isn't it pretty!" cried Guillaume. "And to think that anyone would pay thirty thousand francs for that!"

"Because you can see my lappets in it," said Mme. Guillaume.

"And the cloth unrolled!" added Lebas; "you might take it up in your hand."

"Drapery always comes out well," replied the painter. "We should be only too happy, we modern artists, if we could touch the perfection of antique drapery."

"So you like drapery!" cried old Guillaume. "Well, then, by Gad! shake hands on that, my young friend. Since you can respect trade, we shall understand each other. And why should it be despised? The world began with trade, since Adam sold Paradise for an apple. He did not strike a good bargain though!" And the old man roared with honest laughter, encouraged by the champagne, which he sent round with a liberal hand. The band that covered the young artist's eyes was so thick that he thought his future parents amiable. He was not above enlivening them by a few jests in the best taste. So he too pleased everyone. In the evening, when the drawing-room, furnished with what Mme. Guillaume called "everything handsome," was deserted, and while she flitted from the table to the chimney-piece, from the candelabra to the tall candlesticks, hastily blowing out the wax-lights, the worthy draper, who was always clear-sighted when money was in question, called Augustine to him, and seating her on his knee, spoke as follows:—

"My dear child, you shall marry your Sommervieux since you insist; you may, if you like, risk your capital in happiness. But I am not going to be hoodwinked by the thirty thousand francs to be made by spoiling good canvas. Money that is lightly earned is lightly spent. Did I not hear that hare-brained youngster declare this evening that money was made round that it might roll. If it is round for spendthrifts, it is flat for saving folks who pile it up. Now, my child, that fine gentleman talks of giving you carriages and diamonds! He has money, let him spend it on you; so be it. It is no concern of mine. But as to what I can give you, I will not have the crown-pieces I have picked up with so much toil wasted in carriages and frippery. Those who spend too fast never grow rich. A hundred thousand crowns, which is your fortune, will not buy up Paris. It is all very well to look forward to a few hundred thousand francs to be yours some day; I shall keep you waiting for them as long as possible, by Gad! So I took your lover aside, and a man who managed the Lecocq bankruptcy had not much difficulty in persuading the artist to marry under a settlement of his wife's money on herself. I will keep an eye on the marriage contract to see that what he is to settle on you is safely tied up. So now, my child, I hope to be a grandfather, by Gad! I will begin at once to lay up for my grandchildren; but swear to me, here and now, never to sign any papers relating to money without my advice; and if I go soon to join old Father Chevrel, promise to consult young Lebas, your brother-in-law."

"Yes, father, I swear it."

At these words, spoken in a gentle voice, the old man kissed his daughter on both cheeks. That night the lovers slept as soundly as M. and Mme. Guillaume.

Some few months after this memorable Sunday the high altar of Saint-Leu was the scene of two very different weddings. Augustine and Théodore appeared in all the radiance of happiness, their eyes beaming with love, dressed with elegance, while a fine carriage waited for them. Virginie, who had come in a good hired fly with the rest of the family, humbly followed her younger sister, dressed in the simplest fashion, like a shadow necessary to the harmony of the picture. M. Guillaume had exerted himself to the utmost in the church to get Virginie married before Augustine, but the priests, high and low, persisted in addressing the more elegant of the two brides. He heard some of his neighbors highly approving the good sense of Mlle. Virginie, who was making, as they said, the more substantial match, and remaining faithful to the neighborhood; while they fired a few taunts, prompted by envy of Augustine, who was marrying an artist and a man of rank; adding, with a sort of dismay, that if the Guillaumes were ambitious, there was an end to the business. An old fan-maker having remarked that such a prodigal would soon bring his wife to beggary, Father Guillaume prided himself *in petto* for his prudence in the matter of marriage settlements. In the evening, after a splendid ball, followed by one of those substantial suppers of which the memory is dying out in the present generation, M. and Mme. Guillaume remained in a fine house belonging to them in the Rue du Colombier, where the wedding had been held; M. and Mme. Lebas returned in their fly to the old home in the Rue Saint-Denis, to steer the good ship Cat and Racket. The artist, intoxicated with happiness, carried off his beloved Augustine, and eagerly lifting her out of their carriage when it reached the Rue des Trois-Frères, led her to an apartment embellished by all the arts.

The fever of passion which possessed Théodore made a year fly over the young couple without a single cloud to dim the blue sky under which they lived. Life did not hang heavy on the lovers' hands. Théodore lavished on every day inexhaustible *fioriture* of enjoyment, and he delighted to vary the transports of passion by the soft languor of those hours of repose when souls soar so high that they seem to have forgotten all bodily union. Augustine was too happy for reflection; she floated on an undulating tide of rapture; she thought she could not do enough by abandoning herself to sanctioned and sacred married love; simple and artless, she had no coquetry, no reserves, none of the dominion which a worldly-minded girl acquires over her husband by ingenious caprice; she loved too well to calculate for the future, and never imagined that so exquisite a life could come to an end. Happy in being her husband's sole delight, she believed that her inextinguishable love would always be her greatest grace in his eyes, as her devotion and obedience would be a perennial charm. And, indeed, the ecstasy of love had made her so brilliantly lovely that her beauty filled her with pride, and gave her confidence that she could always reign over a man so easy to kindle as M. de Sommervieux. Thus her position as a wife brought her no knowledge but the lessons of love.

In the midst of her happiness, she was still the simple child who had lived in obscurity in the Rue Saint-Denis, and she never thought of acquiring the manners, the information, the tone of the world she had to live in. Her words being the words of love, she revealed in them, no doubt, a certain pliancy of mind and a certain refinement of speech; but she used the language common to all women when they find themselves plunged in passion, which seems to be their element. When, by chance, Augustine expressed an idea that did not harmonize with Théodore's, the young artist laughed, as we laugh at the first mistakes of a foreigner, though they end by annoying us if they are not corrected.

In spite of all this love-making, by the end of this year, as delightful as it was swift, Sommervieux felt one morning the need for resuming his work and his old habits. His wife was expecting their first child. He saw some friends again. During the tedious discomforts of the year when a young wife is nursing an infant for the first time, he worked, no doubt, with zeal, but he occasionally sought diversion in the fashionable world. The house which he was best pleased to frequent was that of the Duchesse de Carigliano, who had at last attracted the celebrated artist to her parties. When Augustine was quite well again, and her boy no longer required the assiduous care which debars a mother from social pleasures, Théodore had come to the stage of wishing to know the joys of satisfied vanity to be found in society by a man who shows himself with a handsome woman, the object of envy and admiration.

To figure in drawing-rooms with the reflected luster of her husband's fame, and to find other women envious of her, was to Augustine a new harvest of pleasures; but it was the last gleam of conjugal happiness. She first wounded her husband's vanity when, in spite of vain efforts, she betrayed her ignorance, the inelegance of her language, and the narrowness of her ideas. Sommervieux's nature, subjugated for nearly two years and a half by the first transports of love, now, in the calm of less new possession, recovered its bent and habits, for a while diverted from their channels. Poetry, painting, and the subtle joys of imagination have inalienable rights over a lofty spirit. These cravings of a powerful soul had not been starved in Théodore during these two years; they had only found fresh pasture. As soon as the meadows of love had been ransacked, and the artist had gathered roses and cornflowers as the children do, so greedily that he did not see that his hands could hold no more, the scene changed. When the painter showed his wife the sketches for his finest compositions he heard her exclaim, as her father had done, "How pretty!" This tepid admiration was not the outcome of conscientious feeling, but of her faith on the strength of love.

Augustine cared more for a look than for the finest picture. The only sublime she knew was that of the heart. At last Théodore could not resist the evidence of the cruel fact—his wife was insensible to poetry, she did not dwell in his sphere, she could not follow him in all his vagaries, his inventions, his joys and his sorrows; she walked groveling in the world of reality, while his head was in the skies. Common minds cannot appreciate the perennial sufferings of a being who, while bound to another by the most intimate affections, is obliged constantly to suppress the dearest flights of his soul, and to thrust down into the void those images which a magic power compels him to create. To him the torture is all the more intolerable because his feeling towards his companion enjoins, as its first law, that they should have no concealments, but mingle the aspirations of their thought as perfectly as the effusions of their soul. The demands of Nature are not to be cheated. She is as inexorable as necessity, which is, indeed, a sort of social nature. Sommervieux took refuge in the peace and silence of his studio, hoping that the habit of living with artists might mold his wife and develop in her the dormant germs of lofty intelligence which some superior minds suppose must exist in every being. But Augustine was too sincerely religious not to take fright at the tone of artists. At the first dinner Théodore gave, she heard a young painter say, with the childlike lightness, which to her was unintelligible, and which redeems a jest from the taint of profanity, " But, madame, your Paradise cannot be more beautiful than Raphael's Transfiguration!—Well, and I got tired of looking at that."

Thus Augustine came among this sparkling set in a spirit of distrust which no one could fail to see. She was a restraint on their freedom. Now, an artist who feels restraint is pitiless; he stays away, or laughs it to scorn. Mme. Guillaume, among other absurdities, had an excessive notion of the dignity she considered the prerogative of a married woman; and Augustine, though she had often made fun of it, could not help a slight imitation of her mother's primness. This extreme propriety, which virtuous wives do not always avoid, suggested a few epigrams in the form of sketches, in which the harmless jest was in such good taste that Sommervieux could not take offense; and even if they had been more severe, these pleasantries were after all only reprisals from his friends. Still, nothing could seem a trifle to a spirit so open as Théodore's to impressions from without. A coldness insensibly crept over him, and inevitably spread. To attain conjugal happiness we must climb a hill whose summit is a narrow ridge, close to a steep and slippery descent; the painter's love was falling down it. He regarded his wife as incapable of appreciating the moral considerations which justified him in his own eyes for his singular behavior to her, and believed himself quite innocent in hiding from her thoughts she could not enter into, and peccadilloes outside the jurisdiction of a bourgeois conscience. Augustine wrapped herself in sullen and silent grief. These unconfessed feelings placed a shroud between the husband and wife which could not fail to grow thicker day by day. Though her husband never failed in consideration for her, Augustine could not help trembling as she saw that he kept for the outer world those treasures of wit and grace that he formerly would lay at her feet. She soon began to find a sinister meaning in the jocular speeches that are current in the world as to the inconstancy of men. She made no complaints, but her demeanor conveyed reproach.

Three years after her marriage this pretty young woman, who dashed past in her handsome carriage, and lived in a sphere of glory and riches to the envy of heedless folk incapable of taking a just view of the situations of life, was a prey to intense grief. She lost her color; she reflected; she made comparisons; then sorrow unfolded to her the first lessons of experience. She determined to restrict herself bravely within the round of duty, hoping that by this generous conduct she might sooner or later win back her husband's love. But it was not so. When Sommervieux, tired with work, came in from his studio, Augustine did not put away her work so quickly but that the painter might find his wife mending the household linen, and his own, with all the care of a good housewife. She supplied generously and without a murmur the money needed for his lavishness; but in her anxiety to husband her dear Théodore's fortune, she was strictly economical for herself and in certain details of domestic management. Such conduct is incompatible with the easy-going habits of artists, who, at the end of their life, have enjoyed it so keenly that they never inquire into the causes of their ruin.

It is useless to note every tint of shadow by which the brilliant hues of their honeymoon were overcast till they were lost in utter blackness. One evening poor Augustine, who had for some time heard her husband speak with enthusiasm of the Duchesse de Carigliano, received from a friend certain malignantly charitable warnings as to the nature of the attachment which Sommervieux had formed for this celebrated flirt of the Imperial Court. At one-and-twenty, in all the splendor of youth and beauty, Augustine saw herself deserted for a woman of six-and-thirty. Feeling herself so wretched in the midst of a world of festivity which to her was a blank, the poor little thing could no longer understand the admiration she excited, or the envy of which she was the object. Her face assumed a different expression. Melancholy tinged her features with the sweetness of resignation and the pallor of scorned love. Erelong she too was courted by the most fascinating men; but she remained lonely and virtuous. Some contemptuous words which escaped her husband filled her with incredible despair. A sinister flash showed her the breaches which, as a result of her sordid education, hindered the perfect union of her soul with Théodore's; she loved him well enough to absolve him and condemn herself. She shed tears of blood, and perceived, too late, that there are mésalliances of the spirit as well as of rank and habits. As she recalled the early raptures of their union, she understood the full extent of that lost happiness, and accepted the conclusion that so rich a harvest of love was in itself a whole life, which only sorrow could pay for. At the same time, she loved too truly to lose all hope. At one-and-twenty she dared undertake to educate herself, and make her imagination, at least, worthy of that she admired. "If I am not a poet," thought she, "at any rate, I will understand poetry."

Then, with all the strength of will, all the energy which every woman can display when she loves, Mme. de Sommervieux tried to alter her character, her manners, and her habits; but by dint of devouring books and learning undauntedly, she only succeeded in becoming less ignorant. Lightness of wit and the graces of conversation are a gift of nature, or the fruit of education begun in the cradle. She could appreciate music and enjoy it, but she could not sing with taste. She understood literature and the beauties of poetry, but it was too late to cultivate her refractory memory. She listened with pleasure to social conversation, but she could contribute nothing brilliant. Her religious notions and home-grown prejudices were antagonistic to the complete emancipation of her intelligence. Finally, a foregone conclusion against her had stolen into Théodore's mind, and this she could not conquer. The artist would laugh at those who flattered him about his wife, and his irony had some foundation; he so overawed the pathetic young creature that, in his presence, or alone with him, she trembled. Hampered by her too eager desire to please, her wits and her knowledge vanished in one absorbing feeling. Even her fidelity vexed the unfaithful husband, who seemed to bid her do wrong by stigmatizing her virtue as insensibility. Augustine tried in vain to abdicate her reason, to yield to her husband's caprices and whims, to devote herself to the selfishness of his vanity. Her sacrifices bore no fruit. Perhaps they had both let the moment slip when souls may meet in comprehension. One day the young wife's too sensitive heart received one of those blows which so strain the bonds of feeling that they seem to be broken. She withdrew into solitude. But before long a fatal idea suggested to her to seek counsel and comfort in the bosom of her family.

So one morning she made her way towards the grotesque façade of the humble, silent home where she had spent her childhood. She sighed as she looked up at the sash-window, whence one day she had sent her first kiss to him who now shed as much sorrow as glory on her life. Nothing was changed in the cavern, where the drapery business had, however, started on a new life. Augustine's sister filled her mother's old place at the desk. The unhappy young woman met her brother-in-law with his pen behind his ear; he hardly listened to her, he was so full of business. The formidable symptoms of stock-taking were visible all round him; he begged her to excuse him. She was received coldly enough by her sister, who owed her a grudge. In fact, Augustine, in her finery, and stepping out of a handsome carriage, had never been to see her but when passing by. The wife of the prudent Lebas, imagining that want of money was the prime cause of this early call, tried to keep up a tone of reserve which more than once made Augustine smile. The painter's wife perceived that, apart from the cap and lappets, her mother had found in Virginie a successor who could uphold the ancient honor of the Cat and Racket. At breakfast she observed certain changes in the management of the house which did honor to Lebas's good sense; the assistants did not rise before dessert; they were allowed to talk, and the abundant meal spoke of ease without luxury. The fashionable woman found some tickets for a box at the Français, where she remembered having seen her sister from time to time. Mme. Lebas had a cashmere shawl over her shoulders, of which the value bore witness to her husband's generosity to her. In short, the couple were keeping pace with the times. During the two-thirds of the day she spent there, Augustine was touched to the heart by the equable happiness, devoid, to be sure, of all emotion, but equally free from storms, enjoyed by this well-matched couple. They had accepted life as a commercial enterprise, in which, above all, they must do credit to the business. Not finding any great love in her husband, Virginie had set to work to create it. Having by degrees learned to esteem and care for his wife, the time that his happiness had taken to germinate was to Joseph Lebas a guarantee of its durability. Hence, when Augustine plaintively set forth her painful position, she had to face the deluge of commonplace morality which the traditions of the Rue Saint-Denis furnished to her sister.

"The mischief is done, wife," said Joseph Lebas; "we must try to give our sister good advice." Then the clever tradesman ponderously analyzed the resources which law and custom might offer Augustine as a means of escape at this crisis; he ticketed every argument, so to speak, and arranged them in their degrees of weight under various categories, as though they were articles of merchandise of different qualities; then he put them in the scale, weighed them, and ended by showing the necessity for his sister-in-law's taking violent steps which could not satisfy the love she still had for her husband; and, indeed, the feeling had revived in all its strength when she heard Joseph Lebas speak of legal proceedings. Augustine thanked them, and returned home even more undecided than she had been before consulting them. She now ventured to go to the house in the Rue du Colombier, intending to confide her troubles to her father and mother; for she was like a sick man who, in his desperate plight, tries every prescription, and even puts faith in old wives' remedies.

The old people received their daughter with an effusiveness that touched her deeply. Her visit brought them some little change, and that to them was worth a fortune. For the last four years they had gone their way in life like navigators without a goal or a compass. Sitting by the chimney corner, they would talk over their disasters under the old law of *maximum*, of their great investments in cloth, of the way they had weathered bankruptcies, and, above all, the famous failure of Lecocq, M. Guillaume's battle of Marengo. Then, when they had exhausted the tale of lawsuits, they recapitulated the sums-total of their most profitable stock-takings, and told each other old stories of the Saint-Denis quarter. At two o'clock old Guillaume went to cast an eye on the business at the Cat and Racket; on his way back he called at all the shops, formerly the rivals of his own, where the young proprietors hoped to inveigle the old draper into some risky discount, which, as was his wont, he never refused point-blank. Two good Normandy horses were dying of their own fat in the stables of the big house; Mme. Guillaume never used them but to drag her on Sundays to High Mass at the parish church. Three times a week the worthy couple kept open house. By the influence of his son-in-law Sommervieux, M. Guillaume had been named a member of the Consulting Board for the Clothing of the Army. Since her husband had stood so high in office, Mme. Guillaume had decided that she must receive; her rooms were so crammed with gold and silver ornaments, and furniture, tasteless but of undoubted value, that the simplest room in the house looked like a chapel. Economy and expense seemed to be struggling for the upper hand in every accessory. It was as though M. Guillaume had looked to a good investment, even in the purchase of a candlestick. In the midst of this bazaar, where splendor revealed the owners' want of occupation, Sommervieux's famous picture filled the place of honor, and in it M. and Mme. Guillaume found their chief consolation, turning their eyes, harnessed with eye-glasses, twenty times a day on this presentment of their past life, to them so active and amusing. The appearance of this mansion and these rooms, where everything had an aroma of staleness and mediocrity, the spectacle offered by these two beings, cast away, as it were, on a rock far from the world and the ideas which are life, startled Augustine; she could here contemplate the sequel of the scene of which the first part had struck her at the house of Lebas—a life of stir without movement, a mechanical and instinctive existence like that of the beaver; and then she felt an indefinable pride in her troubles, as she reflected that they had their source in eighteen months of such happiness as, in her eyes, was worth a thousand lives like this; its vacuity seemed to her horrible. However, she concealed this not very charitable feeling, and displayed for her parents her newly-acquired accomplishments of mind, and the ingratiating tenderness that love had revealed to her, disposing them to listen to her matrimonial grievances. Old people have a weakness for this kind of confidences. Mme. Guillaume wanted to know the most trivial details of that alien life, which to her seemed almost fabulous. The travels of Baron de la Houtan, which she began again and again and never finished, told her nothing more unheard-of concerning the Canadian savages.

"What, child, your husband shuts himself into a room with naked women! And you are so simple as to believe that he draws them?"

As she uttered this exclamation, the grandmother laid her spectacles on a little work-table, shook her skirts, and clasped her hands on her knees, raised by a foot-warmer, her favorite pedestal.

"But, mother, all artists are obliged to have models."

"He took good care not to tell us that when he asked leave to marry you. If I had known it, I would never have given my daughter to a man who followed such a trade. Religion forbids such horrors; they are immoral. And at what time of night do you say he comes home?"

"At one o'clock—two——"

The old folks looked at each other in utter amazement.

"Then he gambles?" said M. Guillaume. "In my day only gamblers stayed out so late."

Augustine made a face that scorned the accusation.

"He must keep you up through dreadful nights waiting for him," said Mme. Guillaume. "But you go to bed, don't you? And when he has lost, the wretch wakes you."

"No, mamma, on the contrary, he is sometimes in very good spirits. Not unfrequently, indeed, when it is fine, he suggests that I should get up and go into the woods."

"The woods! At that hour? Then have you such a small set of rooms that his bedroom and his sitting-rooms are not enough, and that he must run about? But it is just to give you cold that the wretch proposes such expeditions. He wants to get rid of you. Did one ever hear of a man settled in life, a well-behaved, quiet man galloping about like a warlock?"

"But, my dear mother, you do not understand that he must have excitement to fire his genius. He is fond of scenes which——"

"I would make scenes for him, fine scenes!" cried Mme. Guillaume, interrupting her daughter. "How can you show any consideration to such a man? In the first place, I don't like his drinking water only; it is not wholesome. Why does he object to see a woman eating? What queer notion is that? But he is mad. All you tell us about him is impossible. A man cannot leave his home without a word, and never come back for ten days. And then he tells you he has been to Dieppe to paint the sea. As if anyone painted the sea! He crams you with a pack of tales that are too absurd."

Augustine opened her lips to defend her husband; but Mme. Guillaume enjoined silence with a wave of her hand, which she obeyed by a survival of habit, and her mother went on in harsh tones: "Don't talk to me about the man! He never set foot in a church excepting to see you and to be married. People without religion are capable of anything. Did Guillaume ever dream of hiding anything from me, of spending three days without saying a word to me, and of chattering afterwards like a blind magpie?"

"My dear mother, you judge superior people too severely. If their ideas were the same as other folks', they would not be men of genius."

"Very well, then let men of genius stop at home and not get married. What! A man of genius is to make his wife miserable? And because he is a genius it is all right! Genius, genius! It is not so very clever to say black one minute and white the next, as he does, to interrupt other people, to dance such rigs at home, never to let you know which foot you are to stand on, to compel his wife never to be amused unless my lord is in gay spirits, and to be dull when he is dull."

"But, mother, the very nature of such imaginations——"

"What are such 'imaginations'?" Mme. Guillaume went on, interrupting her daughter again. "Fine ones his are, my word! What possesses a man that all on a sudden, without consulting a doctor, he takes it into his head to eat nothing but vegetables? If indeed it were from religious motives, it might do him some good—but he has no more religion than a Huguenot. Was there ever a man known who, like him, loved horses better than his fellow-creatures, had his hair curled like a heathen, laid statues under muslin coverlets, shut his shutters in broad day to work by lamplight? There, get along; if he were not so grossly immoral, he would be fit to shut up in a lunatic asylum. Consult M. Loraux, the priest at Saint-Sulpice, ask his opinion about it all, and he will tell you that your husband does not behave like a Christian."

"Oh, mother, can you believe——?"

"Yes, I do believe. You loved him, and you can see none of these things. But I can remember in the early days after your marriage. I met him in the Champs-Élysées. He was on horseback. Well, at one minute he was galloping as hard as he could tear, and then pulled up to a walk. I said to myself at that moment, 'There is a man devoid of judgment.'"

"Ah, ha!" cried M. Guillaume, "how wise I was to have your money settled on yourself with such a queer fellow for a husband!"

When Augustine was so imprudent as to set forth her serious grievances against her husband, the two old people were speechless with indignation. But the word "divorce" was erelong spoken by Mme. Guillaume. At the sound of the word divorce the apathetic old draper seemed to wake up. Prompted by his love for his daughter, and also by the excitement which the proceedings would bring into his uneventful life, Father Guillaume took up the matter. He made himself the leader of the application for a divorce, laid down the lines of it, almost argued the case; he offered to be at all the charges, to see the lawyers, the pleaders, the judges, to move heaven and earth. Mme. de Sommervieux was frightened, she refused her father's services, said she would not be separated from her husband even if she were ten times as unhappy, and talked no more about her sorrows.

After being overwhelmed by her parents with all the little wordless and consoling kindnesses by which the old couple tried in vain to make up to her for her distress of heart, Augustine went away, feeling the impossibility of making a superior mind intelligible to weak intellects. She had learned that a wife must hide from everyone, even from her parents, woes for which it is so difficult to find sympathy. The storms and sufferings of the upper spheres are appreciated only by the lofty spirits who inhabit there. In every circumstance we can only be judged by our equals.

Thus poor Augustine found herself thrown back on the horror of her meditations, in the cold atmosphere of her home. Study was indifferent to her, since study had not brought her back her husband's heart. Initiated into the secret of these souls of fire, but bereft of their resources, she was compelled to share their sorrows without sharing their pleasures. She was disgusted with the world, which to her seemed mean and small as compared with the incidents of passion. In short, her life was a failure.

One evening an idea flashed upon her that lighted up her dark grief like a beam from heaven. Such an idea could never have smiled on a heart less pure, less virtuous than hers. She determined to go to the Duchesse de Carigliano, not to ask her to give her back her husband's heart, but to learn the arts by which it had been captured: to engage the interest of this haughty fine lady for the mother of her lover's children; to appeal to her and make her the instrument of her future happiness, since she was the cause of her present wretchedness.

So one day Augustine, timid as she was, but armed with supernatural courage, got into her carriage at two in the afternoon to try for admittance to the boudoir of the famous coquette, who was never visible till that hour. Mme. de Sommervieux had not yet seen any of the ancient and magnificent mansions of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. As she made her way through the stately corridors, the handsome staircases, the vast drawing-rooms—full of flowers, though it was in the depth of winter, and decorated with the taste peculiar to women born to opulence or to the elegant habits of the aristocracy, Augustine felt a terrible clutch at her heart; she coveted the secrets of an elegance of which she had never had an idea; she breathed an air of grandeur which explained the attraction of the house for her husband. When she reached the private rooms of the Duchesse she was filled with jealousy and a sort of despair, as she admired the luxurious arrangement of the furniture, the draperies, and the hangings. Here disorder was a grace, here luxury affected a certain contempt of splendor. The fragrance that floated in the warm air flattered the sense of smell without offending it. The accessories of the rooms were in harmony with a view, through plate-glass windows, of the lawns in a garden planted with evergreen trees. It was all bewitching, and the art of it was not perceptible. The whole spirit of the mistress of these rooms pervaded the drawing-room where Augustine awaited her. She tried to divine her rival's character from the aspect of the scattered objects; but there was here something as impenetrable in the disorder as in the symmetry, and to the simple-minded young wife all was a sealed letter. All that she could discern was that, as a woman, the Duchesse was a superior person. Then a painful thought came over her.

"Alas! And is it true," she wondered, "that a simple and loving heart is not all-sufficient to an artist; that to balance the weight of these powerful souls they need a union with feminine souls of a strength equal to their own? If I had been brought up like this siren, our weapons at least might have been equal in the hour of struggle."

"But I am not at home!" The sharp, harsh words, though spoken in an undertone in the adjoining boudoir, were heard by Augustine, and her heart beat violently.

"The lady is in there," replied the maid.

"You are an idiot! Show her in," replied the Duchesse, whose voice was sweeter, and had assumed the dulcet tones of politeness. She evidently now meant to be heard.

Augustine shyly entered the room. At the end of the dainty boudoir she saw the Duchesse lounging luxuriously on an ottoman covered with brown velvet and placed in the center of a sort of apse outlined by soft folds of white muslin over a yellow lining. Ornaments of gilt bronze, arranged with exquisite taste, enhanced this sort of daïs, under which the Duchesse reclined like a Greek statue. The dark hue of the velvet gave relief to every fascinating charm. A subdued light, friendly to her beauty, fell like a reflection rather than a direct illumination. A few rare flowers raised their perfumed heads from costly Sèvres vases. At the moment when this picture was presented to Augustine's astonished eyes, she was approaching so noiselessly that she caught a glance from those of the enchantress. This look seemed to say to someone whom Augustine did not at first perceive, "Stay; you will see a pretty woman, and make her visit less of a bore."

On seeing Augustine, the Duchesse rose and made her sit down by her.

"And to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, madame?" she said with a most gracious smile.

"Why all this falseness?" thought Augustine, replying only with a bow.

Her silence was compulsory. The young woman saw before her a superfluous witness of the scene. This personage was, of all the colonels in the army, the youngest, the most fashionable, and the finest man. His face, full of life and youth, but already expressive, was further enhanced by a small mustache twirled up into points, and as black as jet, by a full imperial, by whiskers carefully combed, and a forest of black hair in some disorder. He was whisking a riding whip with an air of ease and freedom which suited his self-satisfied expression and the elegance of his dress; the ribbons attached to his buttonhole were carelessly tied, and he seemed to pride himself much more on his smart appearance than on his courage. Augustine looked at the Duchesse de Carigliano, and indicated the colonel by a sidelong glance. All its mute appeal was understood.

"Good-by, then, M. d'Aiglemont, we shall meet in the Bois de Boulogne."

These words were spoken by the siren as though they were the result of an agreement made before Augustine's arrival, and she winged them with a threatening look that the officer deserved perhaps for the admiration he showed in gazing at the modest flower, which contrasted so well with the haughty Duchesse. The young fop bowed in silence, turned on the heels of his boots, and gracefully quitted the boudoir. At this instant, Augustine, watching her rival, whose eyes seemed to follow the brilliant officer, detected in that glance a sentiment of which the transient expression is known to every woman. She perceived with the deepest anguish that her visit would be useless; this lady, full of artifice, was too greedy of homage not to have a ruthless heart.

"Madame," said Augustine in a broken voice, "the step I am about to take will seem to you very strange; but there is a madness of despair which ought to excuse anything. I understand only too well why Théodore prefers your house to any other, and why your mind has so much power over his. Alas! I have only to look into myself to find more than ample reasons. But I am devoted to my husband, madame. Two years of tears have not effaced his image from my heart, though I have lost him. In my folly I dared to dream of a contest with you; and I have come to you to ask you by what means I may triumph over yourself. Oh, madame," cried the young wife, ardently seizing the hand which her rival allowed her to hold, "I will never pray to God for my own happiness with so much fervor as I will beseech Him for yours, if you will help me win back Sommervieux's regard—I will not say his love. I have no hope but in you. Ah! tell me how you could please him, and make him forget the first days——" At these words Augustine broke down, suffocated with sobs she could not suppress. Ashamed of her weakness, she hid her face in her handkerchief, which she bathed with tears.

"What a child you are, my dear little beauty!" said the Duchesse, carried away by the novelty of such a scene, and touched, in spite of herself, at receiving such homage from the most perfect virtue perhaps in Paris. She took the young wife's handkerchief, and herself wiped the tears from her eyes, soothing her by a few monosyllables murmured with gracious compassion. After a moment's silence the Duchesse, grasping poor Augustine's hands in both her own—hands that had a rare character of dignity and powerful beauty—said in a gentle and friendly voice: "My first warning is to advise you not to weep so bitterly; tears are disfiguring. We must learn to deal firmly with the sorrows that make us ill, for love does not linger long by a sickbed. Melancholy, at first, no doubt, lends a certain attractive grace, but it ends by dragging the features and blighting the loveliest face. And besides, our tyrants are so vain as to insist that their slaves should be always cheerful."

"But, madame, it is not in my power not to feel. How is it possible, without suffering a thousand deaths, to see the face which once beamed with love and gladness turn chill, colorless, and indifferent? I cannot control my heart!"

"So much the worse, sweet child. But I fancy I know all your story. In the first place, if your husband is unfaithful to you, understand clearly that I am not his accomplice. If I was anxious to have him in my drawing-room, it was, I own, out of vanity; he was famous, and he went nowhere. I like you too much already to tell you all the mad things he has done for my sake. I will only reveal one, because it may perhaps help us to bring him back to you, and to punish him for the audacity of his behavior to me. He will end by compromising me. I know the world too well, my dear, to abandon myself to the discretion of a too superior man. You should know that one may allow them to court one, but marry them—that is a mistake! We women ought to admire men of genius, and delight in them as a spectacle, but as to living with them? Never.—No, no. It is like wanting to find pleasure in inspecting the machinery of the Opera instead of sitting in a box to enjoy its brilliant illusions. But this misfortune has fallen on you, my poor child, has it not? Well, then, you must try to arm yourself against tyranny."

"Ah, madame, before coming in here, only seeing you as I came in, I already detected some arts of which I had no suspicion"

"Well, come and see me sometimes, and it will not be long before you have mastered the knowledge of these trifles, important, too, in their way. Outward things are, to fools, half of life; and in that matter more than one clever man is a fool, in spite of all his talent. But I dare wager you never could refuse your Théodore anything!"

"How refuse anything, madame, if one loves a man?"

"Poor innocent, I could adore you for your simplicity. You should know that the more we love the less we should allow a man, above all, a husband, to see the whole extent of our passion. The one who loves most is tyrannized over, and, which is worse, is sooner or later neglected. The one who wishes to rule should——"

"What, madame, must I then dissimulate, calculate, become false, form an artificial character, and live in it? How is it possible to live in such a way? Can you——" she hesitated; the Duchesse smiled.

"My dear child," the great lady went on in a serious tone, "conjugal happiness has in all times been a speculation, a business demanding particular attention. If you persist in talking passion while I am talking marriage, we shall soon cease to understand each other. Listen to me," she went on, assuming a confidential tone. "I have been in the way of seeing some of the superior men of our day. Those who have married have for the most part chosen quite insignificant wives. Well, those wives governed them, as the Emperor governs us; and if they were not loved, they were at least respected. I like secrets—especially those which concern women—well enough to have amused myself by seeking the clew to the riddle. Well, my sweet child, those worthy women had the gift of analyzing their husbands' nature; instead of taking fright, like you, at their superiority, they very acutely noted the qualities they lacked, and either by possessing those qualities, or by feigning to possess them, they found means of making such a handsome display of them in their husbands' eyes that in the end they impressed them. Also, I must tell you, all these souls which appear so lofty have just a speck of madness in them, which we ought to know how to take advantage of. By firmly resolving to have the upper hand and never deviating from that aim, by bringing all our actions to bear on it, all our ideas, our cajolery, we subjugate these eminently capricious natures, which, by the very mutability of their thoughts, lend us the means of influencing them."

"Good Heavens!" cried the young wife in dismay. "And this is life. It is a warfare——"

"In which we must always threaten," said the Duchesse, laughing. "Our power is wholly factitious. And we must never allow a man to despise us; it is impossible to recover from such a descent but by odious maneuvering. Come," she added, "I will give you a means of bringing your husband to his senses."

She rose with a smile to guide the young and guileless apprentice to conjugal arts through the labyrinth of her palace. They came to a back-staircase, which led up to the reception rooms. As Mme. de Carigliano pressed the secret spring-lock of the door she stopped, looking at Augustine with an inimitable gleam of shrewdness and grace. "The Duc de Carigliano adores me," said she. "Well, he dare not enter by this door without my leave. And he is a man in the habit of commanding thousands of soldiers. He knows how to face a battery, but before me—he is afraid!"

Augustine sighed. They entered a sumptuous gallery, where the painter's wife was led by the Duchesse up to the portrait painted by Théodore of Mlle. Guillaume. On seeing it, Augustine uttered a cry.

"I knew it was no longer in my house," she said, "but—here——!"

"My dear child, I asked for it merely to see what pitch of idiocy a man of genius may attain to. Sooner or later I should have returned it to you, for I never expected the pleasure of seeing the original here face to face with the copy. While we finish our conversation I will have it carried down to your carriage. And if, armed with such a talisman, you are not your husband's mistress for a hundred years, you are not a woman, and you deserve your fate."

Augustine kissed the Duchesse's hand, and the lady clasped her to her heart, with all the more tenderness because she would forget her by the morrow. This scene might perhaps have destroyed forever the candor and purity of a less virtuous woman than Augustine, for the astute politics of the higher social spheres were no more consonant to Augustine than the narrow reasoning of Joseph Lebas, or Mme. Guillaume's vapid morality. Strange are the results of the false positions into which we may be brought by the slightest mistake in the conduct of life! Augustine was like an Alpine cowherd surprised by an avalanche; if he hesitates, if he listens to the shouts of his comrades, he is almost certainly lost. In such a crisis the heart steels itself or breaks.

Mme. de Sommervieux returned home a prey to such agitation as it is difficult to describe. Her conversation with the Duchesse de Carigliano had roused in her mind a crowd of contradictory thoughts. Like the sheep in the fable, full of courage in the wolf's absence, she preached to herself, and laid down admirable plans of conduct; she devised a thousand coquettish stratagems; she even talked to her husband, finding, away from him, all the springs of true eloquence which never desert a woman; then, as she pictured to herself Théodore's clear and steadfast gaze, she began to quake. When she asked whether monsieur were at home her voice shook. On learning that he would not be in to dinner, she felt an unaccountable thrill of joy. Like a criminal who has appealed against sentence of death, a respite, however short, seemed to her a lifetime. She placed the portrait in her room, and waited for her husband in all the agonies of hope. That this venture must decide her future life, she felt too keenly not to shiver at every sound, even the low ticking of the clock, which seemed to aggravate her terrors by doling them out to her. She tried to cheat time by various devices. The idea struck her of dressing in a way which would make her exactly like the portrait. Then, knowing her husband's restless temper, she had her room lighted up with unusual brightness, feeling sure that when he came in curiosity would bring him there at once. Midnight had struck when, at the call of the groom, the street gate was opened, and the artist's carriage rumbled in over the stones of the silent courtyard.

"What is the meaning of this illumination?" asked Théodore in glad tones, as he came into her room.

Augustine skillfully seized the auspicious moment; she threw herself into her husband's arms, and pointed to the portrait. The artist stood rigid as a rock, and his eyes turned alternately on Augustine, on the accusing dress. The frightened wife, half-dead, as she watched her husband's changeful brow—that terrible brow—saw the expressive furrows gathering like clouds; then she felt her blood curdling in her veins when, with a glaring look, and in a deep hollow voice, he began to question her—

"Where did you find that picture?"

"The Duchesse de Carigliano returned it to me."

"You asked her for it?"

"I did not know that she had it."

The gentleness, or rather the exquisite sweetness of this angel's voice, might have touched a cannibal, but not an artist in the clutches of wounded vanity.

"It is worthy of her!" exclaimed the painter in a voice of thunder. "I will be revenged!" he cried, striding up and down the room. "She shall die of shame; I will paint her! Yes, I will paint her as Messalina stealing out at night from the palace of Claudius."

"Théodore!" said a faint voice.

"I will kill her."

"My dear——"

"She is in love with that little cavalry colonel, because he rides well——"

"Théodore!"

"Let me be!" said the painter in a tone almost like a roar.

It would be odious to describe the whole scene. In the end the frenzy of passion prompted the artist to acts and words which any woman not so young as Augustine would have ascribed to madness.

At eight o'clock next morning Mme. Guillaume, surprising her daughter, found her pale, with red eyes, her hair in disorder, holding a handkerchief soaked with tears, while she gazed at the floor strewn with the torn fragments of a dress and the broken pieces of a large gilt picture-frame. Augustine, almost senseless with grief, pointed to the wreck with a gesture of deep despair.

"I don't know that the loss is very great!" cried the old mistress of the Cat and Racket. "It was like you, no doubt; but I am told that there is a man on the boulevard who paints lovely portraits for fifty crowns."

"Oh, mother!"

"Poor child, you are quite right," replied Mme. Guillaume, who misinterpreted the expression of her daughter's glance at her. "True, my child, no one ever can love you as fondly as a mother. My darling, I guess it all; but confide your sorrows to me, and I will comfort you. Did I not tell you long ago that the man was mad! Your maid has told me pretty stories. Why, he must be a perfect monster!"

Augustine laid a finger on her white lips, as if to implore a moment's silence. During this dreadful night misery had led her to that patient resignation which in mothers and loving wives transcends in its effects all human energy, and perhaps reveals in the heart of women the existence of certain chords which God has withheld from men.

An inscription engraved on a broken column in the cemetery at Montmartre states that Mme. de Sommervieux died at the age of twenty-seven. In the simple words of this epitaph one of the timid creature's friends can read the last scene of a tragedy. Every year, on the second of November, the solemn day of the dead, he never passes this youthful monument without wondering whether it does not need a stronger woman than Augustine to endure the violent embrace of genius?

"The humble and modest flowers that bloom in the valley," he reflects, "perish perhaps when they are transplanted too near the skies, to the region where storms gather and the sun is scorching."

THE RED HOUSE

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THE RED HOUSE

To M. le Marquis de Custine.

ONCE upon a time (I forget the exact year) a Parisian banker, who had very extensive business relations with Germany, gave a dinner party in honor of one of the friends that merchants make in this place and that by correspondence, a sort of friendship that subsists for a long while between men who have never met. The friend, the senior partner of some considerable firm in Nuremberg, was a stout, good-natured German, a man of learning and of taste, more particularly in the matter of tobacco pipes. He was a typical Nuremberger, with a pleasant, broad countenance and a massive, square forehead, with a few stray fair hairs here and there; a typical German, a son of the stainless and noble Fatherland, so fertile in honorable characters, preserving its manners uncorrupted even after seven invasions. The stranger laughed simply, listened attentively, and drank with marked enjoyment, seeming to like champagne perhaps as well as the pale red wines of the Johannisberg. Like nearly every German in nearly every book, he was named Hermann; and in the quality of a man who does nothing with levity, he was comfortably seated at the banker's table, eating his way through the dinner with the Teutonic appetite renowned all over Europe, and thorough indeed was his manner of bidding adieu to all the works of the great Carême.

The master of the house had invited several intimate friends to do honor to his guest. These were for the most part capitalists or merchants, interspersed with a few pretty and agreeable women, whose light, graceful talk and frank manner harmonized with German open-heartedness. And, indeed, if you could have seen, as I had the pleasure of seeing, this blithe gathering of folk who had sheathed the active claws employed in raking in wealth, that they might make the best of an opportunity of enjoying the pleasures of life, you would scarcely have found it in your heart to grudge high rates of interest or to revile defaulters. A man cannot always be in mischief. Even in the society of pirates, for instance, there must surely be a pleasant hour now and then when you may feel at your ease beneath the black flag.

"Oh, I do hope that before M. Hermann goes he will tell us another dreadful, thrilling German story!"

The words were uttered over the dessert by a pale, fair-haired young lady, who had doubtless been reading Hoffmann's tales and Sir Walter Scott's novels. She was the banker's only daughter, an irresistibly charming girl, whose education was being finished at the Gymnase; she was wild about the plays given there. The dinner party had just reached the period of lazy content and serene disinclination to talk that succeeds an excellent dinner in the course of which somewhat heavy demands have been made upon the digestion; when the guests lean back in their chairs and play idly with the gilded knife blades, while their wrists repose lightly on the table edge; the period of decline when some torment apple pips, or knead a crumb of bread between thumb and finger, when the sentimental write illegible initials among the débris of the dessert, and the penurious count the stones on their plates, and arrange them round the edge, as a playwright marshals the supernumeraries at the back of the stage. These are minor gastronomical pleasures which Brillat-Savarin has passed over unnoticed, exhaustively as he has treated his subject in other respects.

The servants had disappeared. The dessert, like a squadron after an action, was quite disorganized, disarrayed, forlorn. In spite of persistent efforts on the part of the mistress of the house, the various dishes strayed about the table. People fixed their eyes on the Swiss views that adorned the gray walls of the dining-room. No one felt it tedious. The man has yet to be found who can mope while he digests a good dinner. At that time we like to sit steeped in an indescribable calm, a sort of golden mean between the two extremes of the thinker's musings and the sleek content of the ruminating brute, which should be termed the physical melancholy of gastronomy.

So the party turned spontaneously towards the worthy German, all of them delighted to listen to a tale, even if it should be a dull one. During this beatific pause, the mere sound of the voice of the one who tells the story is soothing to our languid senses; it is one more aid to passive enjoyment. As an amateur of pictures, I watched the faces, bright with smiles, lit up by the light of the tapers and flushed with good cheer; the different expressions produced piquant effects among the sconces, the porcelain baskets of fruit, and the crystal glasses.

One face, exactly opposite, particularly struck my imagination. It belonged to a middle-sized man, tolerably stout and jovial-looking; who from his manner and appearance seemed to be a stockbroker, and, so far as one could see, gifted with no extraordinary amount of brains. Hitherto I had not noticed him, but at that moment his face, obscured, to be sure, by a bad light, seemed to me to undergo a total change; it took a cadaverous hue, veined with purple streaks. You might have taken it for the ghastly countenance of a man in the death agony. Impassive as a painted figure in a diorama, he was staring stupidly at the facets of a crystal decanter stopper, but he certainly took no heed of them; he seemed to be deep in some visionary contemplation of the future or of the past. A long scrutiny of this dubious-looking face made me think.

"Is he ill?" I asked myself. "Has he taken too much wine? Is he ruined by the fall of the Funds? Is he thinking how to cheat his creditors?—Look!" I said to the lady who sat next to me, calling her attention to the stranger's face, "that is a budding bankruptcy, is it not?"

"Oh!" she answered, "if it were, he would be in better spirits." Then, with a graceful toss of her head, she added: "If that individual ever ruins himself, I will take the news to Pekin myself. He is a rather eccentric old gentleman worth a million in real estate; he used to be a contractor to the Imperial armies. He married again, as a business speculation, but he makes his wife very happy for all that. He has a pretty daughter, whom for a very long time he would not recognize; but when his son died by a sad accident in a duel, he was obliged to take her home, for he was not likely to have any more children. So all at once the poor girl became one of the richest heiresses in Paris. The loss of his only son threw the poor dear man into great grief, and he still shows signs of it at times."

As she spoke the army contractor looked up, and our eyes met; his expression made me shudder, it was so gloomy and so sad. Assuredly a whole life was summed up in that glance. Then in a moment he looked cheerful. He took up the glass stopper, put it unthinkingly into the mouth of the water decanter that stood on the table in front of him, and turned smilingly towards M. Hermann. The man was positively beaming with full-fed content, and had, no doubt, not two ideas in his head; he had been thinking of nothing! I was in some sort ashamed to have thrown away my powers of divination *in animâ vili*, to have taken this thick-skulled capitalist as a subject. But while I was making my phrenological observations in pure waste, the good-natured German had flicked a few grains of snuff off his face and begun his story.

It would be a passably difficult matter to give it in the same words, with his not infrequent interruptions and wordy digressions; so I have written it after my own fashion, omitting these defects of the Nuremberger's narrative, and helping myself to such elements of poetry and interest as it may possess, emulating the modesty of other writers who omit the formula *translated from the German* from their title pages.

I

THE IDEA AND THE DEED

"Towards the end of Vendémiaire, in the year VII. of the Republican era (a date that corresponds to the 20th of October, present style), two young men were making their way towards Andernach, a little town on the left bank of the Rhine, a few leagues from Coblentz. The travelers had set out from Bonn that morning, and now the day was drawing to a close. At that particular time a French army under command of General Augereau was keeping in check the Austrians on the right bank of the river. The headquarters of the Republican division were at Coblentz, and one of the demi-brigades belonging to Augereau's corps was quartered in Andernach.

"The two wayfarers were Frenchmen. At first sight of their blue and white uniforms, with red velvet facings, their sabers, and, above all, their caps covered with green oilcloth and adorned with a tricolor cockade, the German peasants themselves might have known them for a pair of army surgeons, men of science and of sterling worth, popular for the most part not only in the army, but also in the countries occupied by French troops. At that time many young men of good family, torn from their medical studies by General Jourdan's conscription law, not unnaturally preferred to continue their studies on the battlefield to compulsory service in the ranks, a life ill-suited to their antecedents and unwarlike ambitions. Men of this stamp, studious, serviceable, peaceably inclined, did some good among so many evils, and found congenial spirits among the learned of the various countries invaded by the ruthless affranchisement of the Republic.

"These two, provided with a route of the road, and with assistant-surgeons' commissions signed by La Coste and Bernadotte, were on their way to join the demi-brigade to which they were attached. Both belonged to well-to-do families in Beauvais, and traditions of gentle breeding and of provincial integrity had been a part of their inheritance. A curiosity quite natural in youth had brought them to the seat of war before the time fixed for entrance on active service, and they had come by the diligence as far as Strasbourg. Maternal prudence had suffered them to leave home with a very scanty supply of money, but they felt rich in the possession of a few louis; and, indeed, at a time when assignats had reached the lowest point of depreciation, those few louis meant wealth, for gold was at a high premium.

"The two assistant-surgeons, aged twenty years at most, gave themselves up to the romance of their situation with all the enthusiasm of youth. They had traversed the Palatinate from Strasbourg to Bonn in the quality of artists, philosophers, and observers. When we have a scientific career before us, there are, in truth, at that age many natures within us; and even while making love or traveling about, an assistant-surgeon should be laying the foundations of his future fame and fortune. Accordingly, the pair had been carried away by the profound admiration that every well-read man must feel at the sight of the scenery of Swabia and the banks of the Rhine between Mayence and Cologne. They saw a vigorous and fertile country, an undulating green landscape full of strong contrasts and of memories of feudal times, and everywhere scarred by fire and sword. Louis XIV. and Turenne once before laid that fair land in ashes; heaps of ruins bear witness to the pride, or, it may be, to the prudence of the monarch of Versailles, who razed the wonderful castles which once were the glory of this part of Germany. You arrive at some conception of the German mind; you understand its dreaminess and its mysticism from this wonderful forest-land of theirs, full of remains of the Middle Ages, picturesque, albeit in ruins.

"The two friends had made some stay in Bonn with two objects in view—scientific knowledge and pleasure. The grand hospital of the Gallo-Batavian army and of Augereau's division had been established in the Electoral palace itself, and thither the two novices had gone to see their comrades, to deliver letters of recommendation to their chiefs, and to make their first acquaintance with the life of army surgeons. But with the new impressions, there as elsewhere, they parted with some of their national prejudices, and discovered that France had no monopoly of beautiful public buildings and landscapes. The marble columns that adorn the Electoral palace took them by surprise; they admired the magnificence of German architecture and found fresh treasures of ancient and modern art at every step.

"Now and again in the course of their wanderings toward Andernach their way led them over some higher peak among the granite hills. Through a clear space in the forest, or a chasm in the rocks, they caught a glimpse of the Rhine, a picture framed in the gray stone, or in some setting of luxuriant trails of green leaves. Every valley, field-path, and forest was filled with autumn scents that conduce to musings and with signs of the aging of the year; the tree-tops were turning golden, taking warmer hues and shades of brown; the leaves were falling, but the sky was blue and cloudless overhead; the roads were dry, and shone like threads of gold across the country in the late afternoon sunlight.

"Half a league from Andernach the country through which the two friends were traveling lay in a silence as deep as if there were no war laying waste the beautiful land. They were following a goat track among the steep crags of bluish granite that rise like walls above the eddying Rhine, and before very long were descending the sloping sides of the ravine above the little town, nestling coyly at its foot on the river bank,. its picturesque quay for the Rhine boatmen.

"'Germany is a very beautiful country!' cried one of the two, Prosper Magnan by name, as he caught sight of the painted houses of Andernach lying close together like eggs in a basket, among the trees and flower gardens.

"For a few minutes they looked at the high-pitched roofs with their projecting beams, at the balconies and wooden staircases of all those peaceful dwellings, and at the boats swaying in the current by the quay."

When M. Hermann mentioned the name of Prosper Magnan, my opposite neighbor, the army contractor, snatched up the decanter, poured himself out a glass of water, and drank it down at a gulp. This proceeding recalled my attention to him; I thought I saw a slight quiver in his hands and a trace of perspiration on his forehead.

"What is the army contractor's name?" I inquired of my gracious neighbor.

"His name is Taillefer," said she.

"Are you feeling unwell?" I exclaimed, as this unaccountable being turned pale.

"Not at all, not at all," he said, with a courteous gesture of acknowledgment. "I am listening," he said, with a nod to the rest of the party, for all eyes were turned at once upon him.

"I forget the other young man's name," said M. Hermann. "But, at any rate, from Prosper Magnan's confidences I learned that his friend was dark, lively, and rather thin. If you have no objection, I will call him Wilhelm for the sake of clearness in the story." And the good German took up his tale again, after baptizing a French assistant-surgeon with a German name, totally regardless of local color and of the demands of Romanticism.

"So by the time these two young fellows reached Andernach night had fallen; and they, fancying that it was too late to report themselves to their chiefs, make themselves known and obtain billets in a place already full of soldiers, made up their minds to spend their last night of freedom in an inn, about a hundred paces outside the town. They had seen it from the crags above, and had admired the warm colors of the house, heightened by the glow of the sunset. The whole building was painted red, and produced a piquant effect in the landscape, whether it was seen against the crowd of houses in the town, or as a mass of bright color against a background of forest trees, or a patch of scarlet by the gray water's edge. Doubtless the inn owed its external decoration, and consequently its name, to the whim of the builder in some forgotten time. The color had come to be literally a matter of custom to successive owners, for the inn had a name among the Rhine boatmen who frequented it. The sound of horses' hoofs brought the landlord of the Red House to the threshold.

"'*Pardieu!* gentlemen,' cried he, 'a little later you would have had to sleep out of doors like most of your countrymen bivouacking yonder at the other end of Andernach. The house is full. If you positively must have a bed to sleep in, I have only my own room to offer you. As for the horses, I can lay down some litter in a corner of the yard for them; my stables are full of christened men this day.—The gentlemen will be from France?' he went on after a brief pause.

"'From Bonn,' cried Prosper, 'and we have had nothing to eat since morning.'

"'Oh! as to victuals,' said the landlord, jerking his head, 'people come to the Red House for ten leagues round for wedding feasts. You shall have a banquet fit for a prince, fish from the Rhine! That tells you everything.'

"When they had given over their tired beasts into the host's care, they left him to shout in vain for the stable folk, and went into the public room of the inn. It was so full of dense white clouds blown from the pipes of a roomful of smokers, that at first they could not make out what kind of company they had fallen among; but after they had sat for a while at a table, and put in practice the patience of traveled philosophers who know when it is useless to make a fuss, they gradually made out the inevitable accessories of a German inn. The stove, the clock, the tables, pots of beer and long pipes, loomed out through the tobacco smoke; so did the faces of the motley crew, Jews, Germans, and what not, with one or two rough boatmen thrown in.

"The epaulettes of a few French officers shone through the thick mist, and spurs and sabers clanked incessantly upon the flagstones. Some were playing at cards, the rest quarreled among themselves, or were silent, ate, or drank, and came or went. A stout little woman, who wore the black velvet cap, blue stomacher embroidered with silver, the pincushion, bunch of keys, silver clasps, and plaited hair of the typical German landlady (a costume made so familiar in all its details by a host of prints that it is too well known to need description), came to the two friends and soothed their impatience, while she stimulated their interest in their supper with very remarkable skill.

"Gradually the noise diminished, the travelers went off one by one, the clouds of tobacco smoke cleared away. By the time that the table was set for the assistant-surgeons, and the classic carp from the Rhine appeared, it was eleven o'clock, and the room was empty. Through the stillness of the night it was possible to hear faint noises of horses stamping or crunching their provender, the ripple of the Rhine, the vague indefinable sounds in an inn full of people when everyone has retired to rest. Doors and windows opened or shut; there was an inarticulate murmur of voices, or a name was called out in some room overhead. During this time of silence and of commotion, while the two Frenchmen were eating their supper and the landlord engaged in extolling Andernach, the meal, his Rhine wine, his wife, and the Republican army, for the benefit of his guests, the three heard, with a certain degree of interest, the hoarse shouts of boatmen and the rattling sound of a boat being moored alongside the quay. The innkeeper, doubtless accustomed to be hailed by the guttural cries of the boatmen, hurried out, and soon came in again with a short, stout man, a couple of the boat's crew following them with a heavy valise and several packages. As soon as the baggage was deposited in the room, the short man picked up his valise and seated himself without ceremony at the table opposite the two surgeons.

" 'You can sleep on board,' said he to the boatmen, 'as the inn is full. All things considered, that will be the best way.'

" 'All the provisions I have in the house are here before you, sir,' said the landlord, and he indicated the Frenchmen's supper. 'I have not a crust of bread, and not so much as a bone——'

" 'And no sauerkraut?'

" 'Not so much as would fill my wife's thimble! As I had the honor of telling you just now, you can have no bed but the chair you are sitting on, and this is the only unoccupied room.'

"At these words the short personage glanced at the landlord, at the room, and at the two Frenchmen, caution and alarm equally visible in the expression of his countenance.

"At this point," said M. Hermann, interrupting himself, "I should tell you that we never knew this stranger's real name, nor his history; we found out from his papers that he came from Aix-la-Chapelle, that he had assumed the name of Walhenfer, and owned a rather large pin factory somewhere near Neuwied—that was all.

"He wore, like other manufacturers in that part of the world, an ordinary cloth overcoat, waistcoat and breeches of dark-green velvet, high boots, and a broad leather belt. His face was perfectly round, his manners frank and hearty, and during the evening he found it very difficult to disguise some inward apprehensions, or, it may be, cruel anxieties. The innkeeper always said that the German merchant was flying the country, and I learned later on that his factory had been burned down through one of the unlucky accidents so frequent in time of war. But in spite of the uneasy look that his face generally wore, its natural expression denoted good humor and good nature. He had good features, and a particularly noticeable personal trait was a thick neck, so white in contrast with a black cravat, that Wilhelm jokingly pointed it out to Prosper——"

Here M. Taillefer drank another glass of water.

" Prosper courteously invited the merchant to share their supper, and Walhenfer fell to without more ado, like a man who is conscious that he can repay a piece of civility. He set down his valise on the floor, put his feet upon it, took off his hat, drew his chair to the table, and laid down his gloves beside him, together with a pair of pistols, which he carried in his belt. The landlord quickly laid a cover for him, and the three began to satisfy their hunger silently enough.

" The room was so close and the flies so troublesome, that Prosper besought the landlord to open the window that looked out upon the quay to let in fresh air. This window was fastened by an iron bar that dropped into a socket on either side of the window frame, and for greater security a nut fastened to each of the shutters received a bolt. It so happened that Prosper watched the landlord unfasten the window.

" But since I am going into these particulars," M. Hermann remarked, " I ought to describe the internal arrangements of the house; for the whole interest of the story depends on an accurate knowledge of the place.

" There were two entrance doors in the room where these three personages were sitting. One opened on to the road that followed the river bank to Andernach, and, as might be expected, just opposite the inn, there was a little jetty where the boat which the merchant had hired for his voyage was moored at that moment. The other door gave admittance to the inn-yard, a court shut in by very high walls, and at the moment full of horses and cattle, for human beings occupied the stables.

"The house door had been so carefully bolted and barred that, to save time, the landlord had opened the street door of the sitting-room to admit the merchant and the boatmen, and now, when he had opened the window at Prosper Magnan's instance, he set to work to shut this door, slipping the bolts and screwing the nuts.

"The landlord's bedroom, where the friends were to sleep, was next to the public room of the inn, and only separated from the kitchen, where the host and hostess were probably to pass the night, by a sufficiently thin partition wall. The maid-servant had just gone out to find a nook in some manger, or in the corner of a hayloft somewhere or other. It will be readily understood that the public room, the landlord's bedroom, and the kitchen were in a manner apart from the rest of the inn. The deep barking of two great dogs in the yard indicated that the house had vigilant and wakeful guardians.

"'How quiet it is, and what a glorious night,' said Wilhelm, looking out at the sky when the landlord had bolted the door. There was not a sound to be heard at the moment save the rippling of the water.

"'Gentlemen,' said the merchant, addressing the Frenchmen, 'allow me to offer you a bottle or two of wine to wash down your carp. A glass will refresh us after a tiring day. By the look of you and the condition of your clothes, I can see that, like myself, you have come a good way.'

"The two friends accepted the proposal, and the landlord went out through the kitchen to the cellar, doubtless situated beneath that part of the establishment. About the time that five venerable bottles appeared upon the table, the landlord's wife had finished serving the supper. She gave a housewife's glance over the dishes and round the room, assured herself that the travelers had everything they were likely to want, and went back to the kitchen. The four boon companions, for the host was asked to join the party, did not hear her go off to bed; but before long, in the pauses of the chat over the wine, there came an occasional very distinct sound of snoring from the loft above the kitchen where she was sleeping, a sound rendered still more resonant by reason of the thin plank floor. This made the guests smile, and the landlord smiled still more.

"Towards midnight, when there was nothing left on the table but cheese and biscuits, dried fruit, and good wine, the whole party, and the young Frenchmen more particularly, grew communicative. They talked about their country, their studies, and the war. After a while the conversation grew lively. Prosper Magnan drew tears to the merchant's eyes when, with a Picard's frankness and the simplicity of a kindly and affectionate nature, he began to imagine what his mother would be doing while he, her son, was here on the bank of the Rhine.

"'It is just as if I can see her,' he said; 'she is reading the evening prayer, the last thing at night! She will not forget me, I know; she is sure to say, "Where is my poor Prosper, I wonder?" Then if she has won a few sous at cards—of *your* mother perhaps,' he added, jogging Wilhelm's elbow—'she will be putting them in the big red jar, where she keeps the money she is saving up to buy those thirty acres that lie within her own little bit of land at Lescheville. The thirty acres will be worth something like sixty thousand francs. Good meadow land it is! Ah! if I were to have it some day, I would live all the rest of my life at Lescheville, and want nothing better! How often my father wanted those thirty acres and the nice little stream that winds along through the fields! And, after all, he died and could not buy the land. . . . I have played there many and many a time!'

"'M. Walhenfer, haven't you also your *hoc erat in votis?*' asked Wilhelm.

"'Yes, sir, yes! But it all came to me as it was, and now . . .' the good man stopped short and said no more.

"'For my own part,' said the landlord, whose countenance was slightly flushed, 'I bought a bit of meadow last year that I had set my mind on these ten years past.'

"So they chatted on, as folk will talk when wine has unloosed their tongues, and struck up one of those travelers' friendships that we are little chary of making on a journey, in such a sort that when they rose to go to their room Wilhelm offered his bed to the merchant.

"'You can take the offer without hesitation,' he said, 'for Prosper and I can sleep together. It will not be the first time nor the last either, I expect. You are the oldest among us, and we ought to honor old age.'

"'Pooh!' said the landlord, 'there are several mattresses on our bed, one can be laid on the floor for you,' and he went to shut the window with the usual clatter caused by this precaution.

"'I accept your offer,' said the merchant, addressing Wilhelm. 'I confess,' he added, lowering his voice, and looking at the friends, 'that I wanted you to make it. I feel that I cannot trust my boatmen; and I am not sorry to find myself in the company of two decent young fellows, two French military men, moreover, for the night. I have a hundred thousand francs in gold and diamonds in that valise.'

"The two younger men received this incautious communication with a discreet friendliness that reassured the worthy German. The landlord helped his guests to shift one of the mattresses, and, when things had been arranged as comfortably as possible, wished them a good night and went off to bed. The merchant and the surgeons joked each other about their pillows. Prosper put Wilhelm's case of surgical instruments, as well as his own, under the mattress, to raise the end and supply the place of a bolster, just as Walhenfer, in an access of extreme caution, bestowed his valise under his bolster.

"'We are both going to sleep on our fortunes—you on your money, and I on my case of instruments! It remains to be seen whether my case will bring me in as much money as you have made.'

"'You may hope so,' said the merchant. 'Honest work will accomplish most things, but you must have patience.'

"Before very long Walhenfer and Wilhelm fell asleep. But whether it was because his bed was too hard, or he himself was over-tired and wakeful, or through some unlucky mood of mind, Prosper Magnan lay broad awake. Imperceptibly his thoughts took an ill turn. He could think of nothing but that hundred thousand francs beneath the merchant's pillow. For him a hundred thousand francs was a vast fortune ready-made. He began by laying out the money in endless ways, building castles in the air, as we are all apt to do with so much enjoyment just before we drop off to sleep, when indistinct and hazy ideas arise in our minds, and not seldom night and silence give a magical vividness to our thoughts.

"In these visions Prosper Magnan overtopped his mother's ambitions; he bought the thirty acres of meadow, and married a young lady in Beauvais, to whose hand he could not aspire at present owing to inequality of fortune. With this wealth he planned out a whole pleasant lifetime, saw himself the prosperous father of a family, rich, looked up to in the neighborhood, possibly even Mayor of Beauvais. The Picard head was on fire; he cast about for the means of realizing these dreams of his. With extraordinary warmth of imagination he set himself to plan out a crime, and gold and diamonds were the most vivid and distinct portion of a vision of the merchant's death; the glitter dazzled him. His heart beat fast. He had committed a crime, no doubt, by harboring such thoughts as these. The spell of the gold was upon him; his moral nature was intoxicated by insidious reasonings. He asked himself whether there was any reason why the poor German should live, and imagined how it would have been if he had never existed. To put it briefly, he plotted out a way to do the deed with complete impunity.

"The Austrians held the other bank of the Rhine; a boat lay there under the windows; there were boatmen there; he could cut the man's throat, fling him into the Rhine, escape with the valise through a casement, bribe the boatmen, and go over to the Austrian side. He even went so far as to count upon his surgeon's dexterity with the knife; he knew of a way of decapitating his victim before the sleeper could utter a single shriek . . ."

M. Taillefer wiped his forehead at this point, and again he drank a little water.

"Then Prosper Magnan rose—slowly and noiselessly. He assured himself that he had awakened nobody, dressed and went into the public room. Then, with the fatal lucidity of mind that suddenly comes at certain crises, with the heightened power of intuition and strength of will that is never lacking to criminals or to prisoners in the execution of their designs, he unscrewed the iron bars, and drew them from their sockets, and set them against the wall without the slightest sound, hanging with all his weight on to the shutters lest they should creak as they turned on their hinges. In the pale moonlight he could dimly see the objects in the room where Wilhelm and Walhenfer were sleeping.

"Then, he told me, he stopped short for a moment. His heart beat so hard and so heavily, that the sound seemed to ring through the room, and he stood like one dismayed as he heard it. He began to fear for his coolness; his hands shook, he felt as if he were standing on burning coals. But so fair a prospect depended upon the execution of his design, that he saw something like a providence in this dispensation of fate that had brought the merchant thither. He opened the window, went back to his room, took up his case, and looked through it for an instrument best adapted to his purpose.

"'And when I stood by the bed' (he told me this), 'I asked God for His protection, unthinkingly.'

"He had just raised his arm, and was summoning all his strength for the blow, when something like a voice cried within him, and he thought he saw a light. He flung down the surgical instrument on his bed, fled into the next room, and stood at the window. A profound horror of himself came over him, and feeling how little he could trust himself, fearing to yield to the fascination that held him, he sprang quickly out of the window and walked along by the Rhine, acting as sentinel, as it were, before the inn. Again and again he walked restlessly to and from Andernach, often also his wanderings led him to the slope of the ravine which they had descended that afternoon to reach the inn; but so deep was the silence of the night, and so strong his dread of arousing the watch-dogs, that he kept away from the Red House, and lost sight altogether more than once of the window that he had left open. He tried to weary himself out, and so to induce sleep. Yet, as he walked to and fro under the cloudless sky, watching the brilliant stars, it may be that the pure night air and the melancholy lapping of the water wrought upon him, and restored him by degrees to moral sanity. Sober reason completed the work and dispelled that short-lived madness. His education, the precepts of religion, and, above all things (so he told me), visions of the homely life that he had led beneath his father's roof, got the better of his evil thoughts. He thought and pondered for long, his elbow resting on a boulder by the side of the Rhine; and when he turned to go in again, he could not only have slept, so he said, but have watched over millions of gold.

"When his honesty emerged strengthened and triumphant from that ordeal, he knelt in joy and ecstasy to thank God; he felt as happy, light-hearted, and content as on the day when he took the sacrament for the first time, and felt not unworthy of the angels because he had spent the day without sin in word, or thought, or deed.

"He went back again to the inn, shut the window without care to move noiselessly, and went to bed at once. Mind and body were utterly exhausted, and sleep overcame him. He had scarcely laid his head on the mattress before the dreamy drowsiness that precedes sound slumber crept over him; when the senses grow torpid, conscious life ebbs away, thought grows fragmentary, and the last communications of sense to the brain are like the impressions of a dream.

"'How close the air is!' said Prosper to himself. 'It is just as if I were breathing a damp mist . . .'

"Dimly he sought to account for this state of things by attributing it to the difference between the outside temperature in the pure country air and the closed room; but before long he heard a constantly recurring sound, very much like the slow drip of water from a leaking tap. On an impulse of panic terror, he thought of rising and calling the landlord, or the merchant, or Wilhelm; but, for his misfortune, he bethought himself of the wooden clock in the next room, fancied that the sound was the beat of the pendulum, and dropped off to sleep with this dim and confused idea in his head."

"Do you want some water, M. Taillefer?" asked the master of the house, seeing the banker take up the empty decanter mechanically.

M. Hermann went on with his story after the slight interruption of the banker's reply.

"The next morning," he went on, "Prosper Magnan was awakened by a great noise. It seemed to him that he had heard shrill cries, and he felt that violent nervous tremor which we experience when we wake to a painful sensation that began during slumber. The thing that takes place in us when we 'wake with a start,' to use the common expression, has been insufficiently investigated, though it presents interesting problems to physiological science. The terrible shock, caused it may be by the too sudden reunion of the two natures in us that are almost always apart while we sleep, is usually momentary, but it was not so for the unlucky young surgeon. The horror grew, and his hair bristled hideously all at once, when he saw a pool of blood between his own mattress and Walhenfer's bedstead. The unfortunate German's head was lying on the floor, the body was still on the bed, all this blood had drained from the neck. Prosper Magnan saw Walhenfer's eyes unclosed and staring, saw red on the sheets that he had slept in, and even on his own hands, saw his own surgeon's knife on the bed, and fainted away on the blood-stained floor.

"'I was punished already for my thoughts,' he said to me afterwards.

"When he came to himself again, he was sitting in a chair in the public room of the inn, a group of French soldiers round about him, and an inquisitive and interested crowd.

He stared in dull bewilderment at a Republican officer who was busy taking down the depositions of several witnesses and drawing up an official report; he recognized the landlord and his wife, the two boatmen, and the maid-servant. The surgical instrument used by the murderer——"

Here M. Taillefer coughed, drew out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his forehead. His movements were so natural, that I alone noticed them; indeed, all eyes were fixed on M. Hermann with a kind of greedy interest. The army contractor leant his elbow on the table, propped his head on his right hand, and looked fixedly at Hermann. From that time forward I saw no involuntary signs of agitation nor of interest in the tale, but his face was grave and corpse-like; he looked just as he had done while he was playing with the decanter stopper.

" The surgical instrument used by the murderer lay on the table, beside the case with Prosper's pocket-book and papers. The crowd looked by turns at the young surgeon and at these convincing proofs of his guilt; he himself appeared to be dying; his dull eyes seemed to have no power of sight in them. A confused murmur outside made it evident that a crowd had gathered about the inn, attracted by the news of the murder, and perhaps by a wish to catch a sight of the criminal. The tramp of the sentries posted under the windows and the clanking of their weapons rose over the whispered talk of the populace. The inn itself was shut up, the courtyard was silent and deserted.

" The gaze of the officer who was drawing up the report was intolerable; Prosper Magnan felt someone grasp his hand; looked up to see who it was that stood by him among that unfriendly crowd, and recognized, by the uniform that he wore, the senior surgeon of the demi-brigade quartered in Andernach. So keen and merciless were those eyes, that the poor young fellow shuddered, and his head dropped on to the back of the chair. One of the men held vinegar for him to inhale, and Prosper regained consciousness at once; but his haggard eyes were so destitute of life and intelligence, that the senior surgeon felt his pulse, and spoke to the officer.

"'Captain,' he said, 'it is impossible to examine the man just now——'

"'Very well. Take him away,' returned the captain, cutting the surgeon short, and speaking to a corporal who stood behind the junior's chair.

"'Confounded scoundrel!' the man muttered; 'try at least to hold up your head before these German beggars, to save the honor of the Republic.'

"Thus adjured, Prosper Magnan came to his senses, rose, and went forward a few paces; but when the door opened, when he felt the outer air, and saw the people crowding up, all his strength failed him, his knees bent under him, he tottered.

"'The confounded sawbones deserves to be put an end to twice over!—March, can't you!' said the two men on either side of him, on whom he leant.

"'Oh, the coward! the coward! Here he comes! here he comes! . . . There he is!'

"The words were uttered as by one voice, the clamorous voice of the mob who hemmed him in, insulting and reviling him at every step. During the time that it took to go from the inn to the prison, the trampling feet of the crowd and the soldiers who guarded him, the muttered talk of those about him, the sky above, the morning air, the streets of Andernach, the rippling murmur of the current of the Rhine, all reached him as dull, vague impressions, confused and dim, like all his experiences since his awakening. At times he thought that he had ceased to exist, so he told me afterwards.

"I myself was in prison just then," said M. Hermann, interrupting himself. "We are all enthusiasts at twenty. I was on fire to defend my country, and commanded a volunteer troop raised in and about Andernach. A short time previously, I managed to fall in one night with a French detachment of eight hundred men. There were two hundred of us at the most; my scouts had betrayed me. I was thrown into the prison at Andernach while they debated whether or no to have me shot by way of a warning to the country. The French, moreover, talked of reprisals, but the murder for which they had a mind to avenge themselves on me turned out to have been committed outside the Electorate. My father had obtained a reprieve of three days, to make application for my pardon to General Augereau, who granted it.

“ So I saw Prosper Magnan as soon as he came into the prison at Andernach, and the first sight of him filled me with the deepest pity for him. Haggard, exhausted, and bloodstained though he was, there was a certain frankness in his face that convinced me of his innocence, and made a deep impression upon me. It was as if Germany stood there visibly before me—the prisoner with the long, fair hair and blue eyes, was for my imagination the very personification of the prostrate Fatherland,—this was no murderer, but a victim. As he went past my window, a sad, bitter smile lit up his face for a moment, as if a transitory gleam of sanity crossed a disordered brain. Such a smile would surely not be seen on a murderer’s lips. When I next saw the turnkey, I asked him about his new prisoner.

“ ‘ He hasn’t said a word since he went into his cell. He sits there with his head on his hands, and sleeps or thinks about his trouble. From what I hear the Frenchmen saying, they will settle his case to-morrow, and he will be shot within twenty-four hours.’

“ That evening I lingered a little under his windows during the short time allowed for exercise in the prison yard. We talked together, and he told me very simply the story of his ill-luck, giving sufficiently straightforward answers to my different questions. After that conversation I no longer doubted his innocence. I asked and obtained the favor of spending a few hours in his company, and saw him in this way several times. The poor boy let me into the secret of his thoughts without reserve. In his own opinion, he was at once innocent and guilty. He remembered the hideous temptation which he had found strength to resist, and was afraid that he had committed the murder planned while he was awake in an access of somnambulism.

“ ‘ But how about your companion? ’ said I.

“ ‘ Oh, Wilhelm is incapable!——’ he cried vehemently.

He did not even finish the sentence. I grasped his hand at the warm-hearted outburst, so fraught with youth and virtue.

"'I expect he was frightened when he woke,' he said; 'he must have lost his presence of mind and fled——'

"'Without waking you?' I asked. 'Why, in that case your defense is soon made, for Walhenfer's valise will not have been stolen.'

"All at once he burst into tears.

"'Oh, yes, yes!' he cried; 'I am not guilty. I cannot have killed him. I remember the dreams I had. I was at school, playing at prisoner's base. I could not have cut his throat while I was dreaming of running about.'

"But in spite of the gleams of hope that quieted his mind somewhat at times, he still felt crushed by the weight of remorse. There was no blinking the fact he had raised his arm to strike the blow. He condemned himself, and considered that he was morally guilty after committing the crime in imagination.

"'And yet, I am not a bad fellow,' he cried. 'Oh, poor mother! Perhaps just now she is happily playing at cards with her friends in the little tapestried room at home. If she knew that I had so much as raised my hand to take another man's life—Oh! it would kill her! And I am in prison, and accused of murder! If I did not kill the man, I shall certainly be the death of my mother!'

"He shed no tears as he spoke. In a wild fit of frenzy, not uncommon among Picards, he sprang up, and if I had not forcibly restrained him, would have dashed his head against the wall.

"'Wait until you have been tried,' I said. 'You will be acquitted; you are innocent. And your mother——'

"'My mother,' he cried wildly; 'my mother will hear that I have been accused of murder, that is the main point. You always hear things like that in little places, and my poor mother will die of grief. Besides, I am not innocent. Do you care to know the whole truth! I feel that I have lost the virginity of my conscience.'

"With those terrible words, he sat down, folded his arms across his chest, bowed his head, and fixed his eyes gloomily on the floor. Just then the turnkey came to bid me return to my cell; but loth to leave my companion when his discouragement seemed at its blackest, I clasped him in a friendly embrace. 'Be patient,' I said, 'perhaps it will all come right. If an honest man's opinion can silence your doubts, I tell you this—that I esteem you and love you. Accept my friendship, and repose on my heart, if you cannot feel at peace with your own.'

"On the following day, about nine o'clock, a corporal and four fusiliers came for the assistant-surgeon. I heard the sound of the soldiers' footsteps, and went to the window; our eyes met as he crossed the court. Never shall I forget the glance fraught with so many thoughts and forebodings, nor the resignation and indescribably sad and melancholy sweetness in his expression. In that dumb swift transference of thought, my friend conveyed his testament to me; he left his lost life to the one friend who was beside him at the last.

"That night must have been very hard to live through, a very lonely night for him; but perhaps the pallor that overspread his face was a sign of a newly acquired stoicism, based on a new view of himself. Perhaps he felt purified by remorse, and thought to expiate his sin in this anguish and shame. He walked with a firm step; and I noticed that he had removed the accidental stains of blood that soiled his clothing the night before.

"'Unluckily I stained my hands while I was asleep; I always was an uneasy sleeper,' he had said, a dreadful despair in the tones of his voice.

"I was told that he was about to be tried by a court-martial. The division was to go forward in two days' time, and the commandant of the demi-brigade meant to try the criminal on the spot before leaving Andernach.

"While that court-martial was sitting, I was in an agony of suspense. It was noon before they brought Prosper Magnan back to prison. I was taking my prescribed exercise when he came; he saw me, and rushed into my arms.

"'I am lost!' he said. 'Lost beyond hope! Everyone here must look on me as a murderer——'

"Then he raised his head proudly. 'This injustice has completely given me back my innocence,' he said. 'If I had lived, my life must always have been troubled, but my death shall be without reproach. But is there anything beyond?'

"The whole eighteenth century spoke in that sudden questioning. He was absorbed in thought.

"'But what did you tell them? What did they ask you?' I cried. 'Did you not tell them the simple truth as you told it to me?'

"He gazed at me for a minute, then after the brief, dreadful pause, he answered with a feverish readiness of speech—

"'First of all they asked me—"Did you go out of the inn during the night?"—"Yes," I told them.—"How did you get out?"—I turned red, and answered, "Through the window."—"Then you must have opened it?"—"Yes," I said.—"You set about it very cautiously; the landlord heard nothing!"—I was like one stupefied all the time. The boatmen swore that they had seen me walking, sometimes towards Andernach, sometimes towards the forest. I went to and fro many times, they said. I had buried the gold and diamonds. As a matter of fact the valise has not been found. Then, the whole time, I myself was struggling against remorse. Whenever I opened my mouth to speak, a merciless voice seemed to cry, "*You meant to do it!*" Everything was against me, even myself! . . . They wanted to know about my comrade, and I completely exonerated *him*. Then they said, "One of you four must be guilty—you or your comrade, the innkeeper or his wife. All the doors and windows were shut fast this morning!" When they said that,' he went on, 'I had no voice, no strength, no spirit left in me. I was more sure of my friend than of myself; I saw very well that they thought us both equally guilty of the murder, and I was the clumsier one of the two. I tried to explain the thing by somnambulism; I tried to clear my friend; then I got muddled, and it was all over with me. I read my sentence in the judges' eyes. Incredulous smiles stole across their faces. That is all. The suspense is over. I am to be shot to-morrow—— I do not think of myself now,' he said, 'but of my poor mother.'

"He stopped short and looked up to heaven. He shed no tears; his eyes were dry and contracted with pain.

"Frédéric! . . .

"Ah! I remember now! The other one was called Frédéric . . . Frédéric! Yes, I am sure that was the name," M. Hermann exclaimed triumphantly.

I felt the pressure of my fair neighbor's foot; she made a sign to me, and looked across at M. Taillefer. The sometime army contractor's hand drooped carelessly over his eyes, but through the fingers we thought we saw a smoldering blaze in them.

"Eh?" she said in my ear, "and now suppose that his name is Frédéric?"

I gave the lady a side glance of entreaty to be silent. Hermann went on with his tale.

"'It is cowardly of Frédéric to leave me to my fate. He must have been afraid. Perhaps he is hiding in the inn, for both our horses were there in the yard that morning.—What an inexplicable mystery it is!' he added, after a pause. 'Somnambulism, somnambulism! I never walked in my sleep but once in my life, and then I was not six years old. And I am to go out of this,' he went on, striking his foot against the earth, 'and take with me all the friendship that there is in the world! Must I die twice over, doubting the friendship that began when we were five years old, and lasted through our school life and our student days! Where is Frédéric?'

"The tears filled his eyes. We cling more closely to a sentiment than to our life, it seems!

"'Let us go in again,' he said; 'I would rather be in my cell. I don't mean them to see me crying. I shall go bravely to my death, but I cannot play the hero in season and out of season, and I confess that I am sorry to leave my life, my fair life, and my youth. I did not sleep last night; I remembered places about my home when I was a child; I saw myself running about in the meadows, perhaps it was the memories of those fields that led to my ruin.— I had a future before me' (he interrupted himself). 'A dozen men, a sub-lieutenant who will cry, "Ready! present! fire!" a roll of drums, and disgrace; that is my future now! Ah! there is a God, there is a God, or all this would be too nonsensical.'

"Then he grasped my arm, put his arms about me, and held me tightly to him.

"'Ah! you are the last human soul to whom I can pour out my soul. *You* will be free again! You will see your mother! I do not know whether you are rich or poor, but no matter for that, you are all the world for me. . . . They cannot keep the fighting up forever. Well and good then, when they make peace, go to Beauvais. If my mother survives the disastrous news of my death, you will find her out and tell her "He was innocent," to comfort her. 'She will believe you,' he went on. 'I shall write to her as well, but you will carry my last look to her; you shall tell her how that you were the last friend whom I embraced before I died. Ah! how she will love you, my poor mother, you who have stood my friend at the last!' He was silent for a moment or two, the burden of his memories seemed too heavy for him to bear. 'Here they are all strangers to me,' he said, 'the other surgeons and the men, and they all shrink from me in horror. But for you, my innocence must remain a secret between me and Heaven.'

"I vowed to fulfill his last wishes as a sacred charge. He felt that my heart went out to him, and was touched by my words. A little later the soldiers came back to take him before the court-martial again. He was doomed.

"I know nothing of the formalities or circumstances that attend a sentence of this kind; I do not know whether there is any appeal, nor whether the young surgeon's defense was made according to rule and precedent, but he prepared to go to his death early on the morrow, and spent that night in writing to his mother.

"'We shall both be set free to-day,' he said, smiling, when I went the next day to see him. 'The general has signed your pardon, I hear.'

"I said nothing, and gazed at him to engrave his features on my memory.

"A look of loathing crossed his face, and he said, 'I have been a miserable coward! All night long I have been praying the very walls for mercy,' and he looked round his cell. 'Yes, yes,' he went on, 'I howled with despair, I rebelled against this, I have been through the most fearful inward conflict. . . . I was alone! . . . Now I am thinking of what others will say of me—Courage is like a garment that we put on. I must go decently to my death. . . . And so . . .'"

II

A DOUBLE RETRIBUTION

"Oh! do not tell us any more!" cried the girl who had asked for the story, cutting short the Nuremberger. "I want to live in suspense, and to believe that he was saved. If I were to know to-night that they shot him, I should not sleep. You must tell me the rest to-morrow."

We rose. M. Hermann offered his arm to my fair neighbor, who asked as she took it, "They shot him, did they not?"

"Yes. I was there."

"What, monsieur, you could——"

"He wished it, madame. It is something very ghastly to attend the funeral of a living man, your own friend, who is not guilty of the crime laid to his charge. The poor young fellow never took his eyes off me. He seemed to have no life but mine left. 'He wished,' he said, 'that I should bear his last sigh to his mother.'"

"Well, and did you see her?"

"After the Peace of Amiens I went to France to take the glad tidings 'He was innocent!' That pilgrimage was like a sacred duty laid upon me. But Mme. Magnan was dead, I found; she had died of consumption. I burned the letter I had brought for her, not without deep emotion. Perhaps you will laugh at my German high-flown sentimentality; but for me there was a tragedy most sublimely sad in the eternal silence which was about to swallow up those farewells uttered in vain from one grave to another grave, and heard by none, like the cry of some traveler in the desert surprised by a beast of prey."

Here I broke in with a "How if someone were to bring you face to face with one of the men in this drawing-room, and say, 'There is the murderer!' would not that be another tragedy? And what would you do?"

M. Hermann took up his hat and went.

"You are acting like a young man, and very thoughtlessly," said the lady. "Just look at Taillefer; there he sits in a low chair by the fire, Mlle. Fanny is handing him a cup of coffee; he is smiling. How could a murderer display such quiet self-possession as that, after a story that must have been torture to him? He looks quite patriarchal, does he not?"

"Yes; but just ask him if he has been with the army in Germany!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?" and with the audacity rarely lacking in womankind when occasion tempts, or curiosity gets the better of her, my fair neighbor went across to the army contractor.

"Have you been in Germany, M. Taillefer?" quoth she.

Taillefer all but dropped his saucer.

"I, madame?—No, never."

"Why, what is that you are saying, Taillefer?" protested the banker, chiming in. "You were in the Wagram campaign, were you not—on the victualing establishment?"

"Oh yes!" answered Taillefer; "I was there, that once."

"You are wrong about him; he is a good sort of man," decided the lady when she came back to me.

"Very well," said I to myself, "before this evening is over I will drive the murderer out of the mire in which he is hiding."

There is a phenomenon of consciousness that takes place daily beneath our eyes, so commonplace that no one notices it, and yet there are astounding depths beneath it. Two men meet in a drawing-room who have some cause to disdain or to hate each other; perhaps one of them knows something which is not to the credit of the other; perhaps it is a condition of things that is kept a secret; perhaps one of them is meditating a revenge; but both of them are conscious of the gulf that divides them, or that ought to divide them. Before they know it, they are watching each other and absorbed in each other; some subtle emanation of their thought seems to distill from every look and gesture; they have a magnetic influence. Nor can I tell which has the more power of attraction—revenge or crime, hatred or contempt. Like some priest who cannot consecrate the house where an evil spirit abides, the two are ill at ease and suspicious; one of them, it is hard to say which, is polite, and the other sullen; one of them turns pale or red, and the other trembles, and it often happens that the avenger is quite as cowardly as the victim. For very few of us have the nerve to cause pain, even if it is necessary pain, and many a man passes over a matter or forgives from sheer hatred of fuss or dread of making a tragical scene.

With this inter-susceptibility of minds, and apprehensiveness of thought and feeling, there began a mysterious struggle between the army contractor and me. Ever since my interruption of M. Hermann's story he had shunned my eyes. Perhaps in like manner he looked none of the party in the face. He was chatting now with the inexperienced Fanny, the banker's daughter; probably, like all criminals. he felt a longing to take shelter with innocence, as if the mere proximity of innocence might bring him peace for a little. But though I stood on the other side of the room, I still listened to all that he said; my direct gaze fascinated him. When he thought he could glance at me in turn, unnoticed, our eyes met, and his eyelids fell directly. Taillefer found this torture intolerable, and hastened to put a stop to it by betaking himself to a card-table. I backed his opponent, hoping to lose my money. It fell out as I had wished. The other player left the table, I cut in, and the guilty man and I were now face to face.

"Monsieur," I said, as he dealt the cards, "will you be so good as to begin a fresh score?" He swept his counters from right to left somewhat hastily. The lady, my neighbor at dinner, passed by; I gave her a significant glance.

"M. Frédéric Taillefer," I asked, addressing my opponent, "are you related to a family in Beauvais with whom I am well acquainted?"

"Yes, sir." He let the cards fall, turned pale, hid his face in his hands, begged one of his backers to finish the game for him, and rose.

"It is too warm here," he gasped; "I am afraid . . ."

He did not finish his sentence. An expression of horrible anguish suddenly crossed his face, and he hurried out of the room; the master of the house following him with what appeared to be keen anxiety. My neighbor and I looked at each other, but her face was overcast by indescribable sadness; there was a tinge of bitterness in it.

"Is your behavior very merciful?" she asked, as I rose from the card-table, where I had been playing and losing. She drew me into the embrasure of the window as she spoke. "Would you be willing to accept the power of reading all hearts if you could have it? Why interfere with man's justice or God's? We may escape the one; we shall never escape the other. Is the prerogative of a President of a Court of Assize so enviable? And you have all but done the executioner's office as well——"

"After sharing and stimulating my curiosity," I said, "you are lecturing me!"

"You have made me think," she answered.

"So it is to be peace to scoundrels, and woe to the unfortunate, is it? Let us down on our knees and worship gold! But shall we change the subject?" I said with a laugh. "Please look at the young lady who is just coming into the room."

"Well?"

"I met her three days ago at a ball at the Neapolitan embassy, and fell desperately in love. For pity's sake, tell me who she is. No one could tell me——"

"That is Mlle. Victorine Taillefer!"

Everything swam before my eyes; I could scarcely hear the tones of the speaker's voice.

"Her stepmother brought her home only a while ago from the convent where she has been finishing her education somewhat late. . . . For a long time her father would not recognize her. She comes here to-day for the first time. She is very handsome—and very rich!"

A sardonic smile went with the words. Just as she spoke, we heard loud cries that seemed to come from an adjoining room; stifled though they were, they echoed faintly through the garden.

"Is not that M. Taillefer's voice?" I asked. We both listened intently to the sounds, and fearful groans reached our ears. Just then our hostess hurried towards us and closed the window.

"Let us avoid scenes," she said to us. "If Mlle. Taillefer were to hear her father, it would be quite enough to send her into a fit of hysterics."

The banker came back to the drawing-room, looked for Victorine, and spoke a few low words in her ear. The girl sprang at once towards the door with an exclamation, and vanished. This produced a great sensation. The card parties broke up; everyone asked his neighbor what had happened. The buzz of talk grew louder, and groups were formed.

"Has M. Taillefer——?" I began.

"Killed himself?" put in my sarcastic friend. "You would wear mourning for him with a light heart, I can see."

"But what can have happened to him?"

"Poor man!" (it was the lady of the house who spoke) "he suffers from a complaint—I cannot recollect the name of it, though M. Brousson has told me about it often enough—and he has just had a seizure."

"What kind of complaint is it?" asked an examining magistrate suddenly.

"Oh, it is something dreadful," she answered; "and the doctors can do nothing for him. The agony must be terrible. Taillefer had a seizure, I remember, once, poor man, when he was staying with us in the country; I was obliged to go to a neighbor's house so as not to hear him; his shrieks are fearful; he tries to kill himself; his daughter had to have him put into a strait-waistcoat and tied down to his bed. Poor man! he says there are live creatures in his head gnawing his brain; it is a horrible, sawing, shooting pain that throbs through every nerve. He suffers so fearfully with his head that he did not feel the blisters that they used to apply at one time to draw the inflammation; but M. Brousson, his present doctor, forbade this; he says that it is nervous inflammation, and puts leeches on the throat, and applies laudanum to the head; and, indeed, since they began this treatment the attacks have been less frequent; he seldom has them oftener than once a year, in the late autumn. When he gets over one of these seizures, Taillefer always says that he would rather be broken on the wheel than endure such agony again."

"That looks as if he suffered considerably!" said a stockbroker, the wit of the party.

"Oh! last year he very nearly died," the lady went on. "He went alone to his country house on some urgent business; there was no one at hand, perhaps, for he lay stiff and stark, like one dead, for twenty-two hours. They only saved his life by a scalding hot bath."

"Then is it some kind of tetanus?" asked the stockbroker

"I do not know," returned she. "He has had the complaint nearly thirty years; it began while he was with the army. He says that he had a fall on a boat, and a splinter got into his head, but Brousson hopes to cure him. People say that in England they have found out a way of treating it with prussic acid, and that you run no risks——"

A shrill cry, louder than any of the preceding ones, rang through the house. The blood ran cold in our veins.

"There!" the banker's wife went on, "that is just what I was expecting every moment. It makes me start on my chair and creep through every nerve. But—it is an extraordinary thing!—poor Taillefer, suffering such unspeakable pain as he does, never runs any risk of his life! He eats and drinks as usual whenever he has a little respite from that ghastly torture. . . . Nature has such strange freaks.

Some German doctor once told him that it was a kind of gout in the head; and Brousson's opinion was pretty much the same."

I left the little group about our hostess and went out with Mlle. Taillefer. A servant had come for her. She was crying.

"*Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" she sobbed; "how can my father have offended Heaven to deserve such suffering as this? . . . So kind as he is."

I went downstairs with her, and saw her into the carriage; her father was lying doubled up inside it. Mlle. Taillefer tried to smother the sound of her father's moaning by covering his mouth with a handkerchief. Unluckily, he saw me, and his drawn face seemed further distorted, a scream of agony rent the air, he gave me a dreadful look, and the carriage started.

That dinner party and the evening that followed it were to exercise a painful influence on my life and on my views. Honor and my own scruples forbade me to connect myself with a murderer, no matter how good a husband and father he might be, and so I must needs fall in love with Mlle. Taillefer. It was well-nigh incredible how often chance drew me to visit at houses where I knew I might meet Victorine. Again and again, when I had pledged myself to renounce her society, the evening would find me hovering about her. The pleasures of this life were immense. It gave the color of an illicit passion to this unforbidden love, and a chimerical remorse filled up the measure of my bliss. I scorned myself when I greeted Taillefer, if by accident he was with his daughter; but, after all, I bowed to him.

Unluckily, in fact, Victorine, being something more than a pretty girl, was well read, charming, and gifted in no small degree, without being in the least a blue-stocking, without the slightest taint of affectation. There is a certain reserve in her light talk, and a pensive graciousness about her that no one could resist. She liked me, or, at any rate, she allowed me to think so; there was a certain smile that she kept for me; for me the tones of her voice grew sweeter still.

Oh! she cared about me, but she worshiped her father; she would praise his kindness to me, his gentleness, his various perfections, and all her praises were like so many daggers thrust into my heart.

At length I all but became an accessory after the fact, an accomplice in the crime which had laid the foundation of the wealth of the Taillefers. I was fain to ask for Victorine's hand. I fled. I traveled abroad. I went to Germany and to Andernach. But I came back again, and Victorine was looking thinner and paler than her wont. If she had been well and in good spirits, I should have been safe; but now the old feeling for her was rekindled with extraordinary violence.

Fearing lest my scruples were degenerating into monomania, I resolved to convene a Sanhedrim of consciences that should not have been tampered with, and so to obtain some light on this problem of the higher morality and philosophy. The question had only become more complex since my return.

So the day before yesterday I assembled those among my friends whom I looked upon as notably honest, scrupulous, and honorable. I asked two Englishmen, a secretary to the Embassy and a Puritan; a retired Minister, in the character of matured worldly wisdom; a few young men still under the illusions of inexperience; a priest, an elderly man; my old guardian, a simple-hearted being, who gave me the best account of his management of my property that ever trustee has been known to give in the annals of the Palais; an advocate, a notary, and a judge,—in short, all social opinions were represented, and all practical wisdom. We had begun by a good dinner, good talk, and a deal of mirth; and over the dessert I told my story plainly and simply (suppressing the name of my lady-love), and asked for sound counsel.

"Give me your advice," I said to my friends as I came to an end. "Go thoroughly into the question as if it were a point of law. I will have an urn and billiard-balls brought round, and you shall vote for or against my marriage, the secrecy of the ballot shall be scrupulously observed."

Deep silence prevailed all at once. Then the notary declined to act.

"There is a contract to draw up," he alleged.

Wine had had a quietening effect on my guardian; indeed, it clearly behooved me to find a guardian for *him* if he was to reach his home in safety.

"I see how it is!" I said to myself. "A man who does not give me an opinion is telling me pretty forcibly what I ought to do."

There was a general movement round the table. A landowner, who had subscribed to a fund for putting a headstone to General Foy's grave and providing for his family, exclaimed—

"'Even, as virtue, crime hath its degrees.'"

"The babbler," said the minister in a low voice, as he nudged my elbow.

"Where is the difficulty?" asked a duke, whose property consisted of lands confiscated from Protestants after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

The advocate rose to his feet.

"In law," opined the mouthpiece of Justice, "the case before us presents no difficulty whatever. M. le Duc is right! Is there not a statute of limitations? Begin to inquire into the origins of a fortune, and where should we all of us be? This is a matter of conscience, and not of law. If you must drag the case before some tribunal, the confessional is the proper place in which to hear it."

And the Code incarnate, having said his say, sat down and drank a glass of champagne. The man intrusted with the interpretation of the Gospel, the good priest, spoke next.

"God has made us weak," he said with decision. "If you love the criminal's heiress, marry her; but content yourself with her mother's property, and give her father's money to the poor."

"Why, in all likelihood the father only made a great match because he had made money first," cried one of the pitiless quibblers that you meet with everywhere. "And it is just the same with every little bit of good fortune—it all came of his crime!"

"The fact that the matter can be discussed is enough to decide it! There are some things which a man cannot weigh and ponder," cried my guardian, thinking to enlighten the assembly by this piece of drunken gravity.

"True!" said the secretary to the Embassy.

"True!" exclaimed the priest, each meaning quite differently.

A doctrinaire, who escaped being elected by a bare hundred and fifty votes out of a hundred and fifty-five rose next.

"Gentlemen," said he, "this phenomenal manifestation of the intellectual nature is one of the most strongly marked instances of an exception to the normal condition of things, the rules which society obeys. The decision, therefore, on an abnormal case should be an extemporaneous effort of the conscience, a sudden conception, a delicate discrimination of the inner consciousness, not unlike the flashes of insight that constitute perception in matters of taste. . . . Let us put it to the vote."

"Yes, let us put it to the vote," cried the rest of the party.

Each was provided with two billiard-balls—one white, the other red. White, the color of virginity, was to proscribe marriage; red to count in favor of it. My scruples prevented me from voting. My friends being seventeen in number, nine made a decisive majority. We grew excited and curious as each dropped his ball into the narrow-mouthed wicker basket, which holds the numbered balls when players draw for their places at pool, for there was a certain novelty in this process of voting by ballot on a nice point of conduct. When the basket was turned out there were nine white balls. To me this did not come as a surprise; but it occurred to me to count up the young men of my own age among this Court of Appeal. There were exactly nine of these casuists; one thought had been in all their minds.

"Aha!" I said to myself, "there was a unanimous feeling against the marriage in their minds, and a no less unanimous verdict in favor of it among the rest! Here is a fix, and how am I to get out of it?"

"Where does the father-in-law live?" one of my schoolfellows, less crafty than the rest, asked carelessly.

"There is no longer a father-in-law in the case!" I exclaimed. "A while ago my conscience spoke sufficiently plainly to make your verdict superfluous. And if it speaks more uncertainly to-day, here are the inducements that led me to waver. Here is the tempter—this letter that I received two months ago"; and I drew a card from my pocketbook and held it up.

"*You are requested to be present,*" so it ran, "*at the funeral and burial service of*

M. Jean-Frédéric Taillefer

of the firm of Taillefer and Company, sometime contractor of provisions to the Army, late Chevalier of the Legion of Honor and of the Order of the Golden Spur, Captain of the First Company of Grenadiers of the National Guard, Paris: who died on May 1st, at his home in the Rue Joubert. The interment will take place," and so forth, and so forth.

"*On behalf of,*" and so forth.

"What am I to do now?" I continued. "I will just put the question roughly before you. There is unquestionably a pool of blood on Mlle. Taillefer's estates. Her father's property is one vast *Aceldama*. . . . Granted! But, then, Prosper Magnan has no representatives, and I could not find any traces of the family of the pin-maker who was murdered that night at Andernach. To whom should the fortune be returned? And ought it all to be returned? Have I any right to betray a secret discovered by accident, to add a severed human head to an innocent girl's marriage portion, to give her ugly dreams, to destroy her pleasant illusions, to kill the father she loved a second time, by telling her that there is a dark stain on all her wealth?

"I have borrowed a *Dictionary of Cases of Conscience* from an old ecclesiastic, and found therein no solution whatever of my doubts. Can you make a religious foundation for the souls of Prosper Magnan and Walhenfer and Taillefer now midway through this nineteenth century of ours? And as for endowing a charitable institution or awarding periodic prizes to virtue—most of our charitable institutions appear to me to be harboring scoundrels, and the prize of virtue would fall to the greatest rogues.

"And not only so. Would these investments, more or less gratifying to vanity, be any reparation? And is it my place to make any? Then I am in love, passionately in love. My love has come to be my life. If, without any apparent reason, I propose that a young girl, accustomed to splendor and elegance, and a life abundant in all the luxuries art can devise, a girl who indolently enjoys Rossini's music at the Bouffons,—if to her I should propose that she should rob herself of fifteen hundred thousand francs for the benefit of aged imbeciles and problematical scrofula patients, she would laugh and turn her back upon me, or her confidante would take me for a wag who makes jokes in poor taste. If in an ecstasy of love I extol the charms of humble life in a cottage by the Loire, if I ask her to give up, for my sake, her life in Paris, it would be a virtuous lie to begin with, and probably would end in a sad experience for me, for I should lose the girl's heart; she is passionately fond of dancing and of pretty dresses, and, for the time being, of me. Enter some smart stripling of an officer with a nicely curled mustache, who shall play the piano, rave about Byron, and mount a horse gracefully, and I shall be supplanted. What is to be done? Gentlemen, advise me, for pity's sake?"

Then one of the party, who hitherto had not breathed a word, the Englishman with a Puritanical cast of face, not unlike the father of Jeanie Deans, shrugged his shoulders.

"Idiot that you were," he said. "What made you ask him if he came from Beauvais?"

PARIS, *May* 1831.

THE IMAGINARY MISTRESS

[*La Fausse Maîtresse* first appeared in the *Siècle* in December 1841, being divided into five chapters. In its first book appearance it had ten chapters.]

THE IMAGINARY MISTRESS

Dedicated to the Comtesse Clara Maffei.

IN the month of September 1835, one of the richest heiresses of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Mlle. du Rouvre, the only child of the Marquis du Rouvre, married Count Adam Mitgislas Laginski, a young Polish exile.

I allow myself to spell the names as they are pronounced, to spare the reader the sight of the fortifications of consonants by which, in the Slav languages, the vowels are protected, no doubt to secure them against loss, seeing how few they are.

The Marquis du Rouvre had dissipated almost the whole of one of the finest fortunes of the nobility, to which he had formerly owed his alliance with a Mlle. de Ronquerolles. Hence Clémentine had for her uncle, on her mother's side, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, and for her aunt Mme. de Sérizy. On her father's side she possessed another uncle in the eccentric person of the Chevalier du Rouvre, the younger son of the house, an old bachelor who had grown rich by speculations in land and houses.

The Marquis de Ronquerolles was so unhappy as to lose both his children during the visitation of cholera. Mme. de Sérizy's only son, a young officer of the highest promise, was killed in Africa at the fight by the Macta. In these days rich families run the risk of ruining their children if they have too many, or of becoming extinct if they have but one or two, a singular result of the Civil Code not foreseen by Napoleon. Thus, by accident, and in spite of M. du Rouvre's reckless extravagances for Florine, one of the most charming of Paris actresses, Clémentine had become an heiress. The Marquis de Ronquerolles, one of the most accomplished of diplomats of the new dynasty, his sister, Mme. de Sérizy, and the Chevalier du Rouvre agreed that, to rescue their fortunes from the Marquis's clutches, they would leave them to their niece, to whom they each promised ten thousand francs a year on her marriage.

It is quite unnecessary to say that the Pole, though a refugee, cost the French Government absolutely nothing. Count Adam belonged to one of the oldest and most illustrious families of Poland, connected with most of the princely houses of Germany, with the Sapiéhas, the Radziwills, the Mniszechs, the Rzewuskis, the Czartoryskis, the Leszinskis, the Lubomirskis, in short all the great Sarmatian *skis*. But a knowledge of heraldry is not a strong point in France under Louis Philippe, and such nobility could be no recommendation to the bourgeoisie then in power. Besides, when, in 1833, Adam made his appearance on the Boulevard des Italiens, at Frascati's, at the Jockey Club, he led the life of a man who, having lost his political prospects, falls back on his vices and his love of pleasure. He was taken for a student.

The Polish nationality, as the result of an odious Government reaction, had fallen as low as the Republicans had tried to think it high. The strange struggle of Movement against Resistance—two words which thirty years hence will be inexplicable—made a farce of what ought to have been so worthy: the name, that is, of a vanquished nation to which France gave hospitality, for which entertainments were devised, for which everyone danced or sang by subscription; a nation, in short, which at the time when, in 1796, Europe was fighting France, had offered her six thousand men, and such men!

Do not conclude from this that I mean to represent the Emperor Nicholas as being in the wrong as regards Poland, or Poland as regards the Emperor Nicholas. In the first place, it would be a silly thing enough to slip a political discussion into a tale which ought to interest or to amuse. Besides, Russia and Poland were equally right: one for aiming at unity of Empire, the other for desiring to be free again. It may be said, in passing, that Poland might have conquered Russia by the influence of manners instead of beating her with weapons; thus imitating the Chinese, who at last Chinesified the Tartars, and who, it is to be hoped, will do the same by the English. Poland ought to have *polished* the Russians; Poniatowski had tried it in the least temperate district of the Empire. But that gentleman was a misunderstood king—all the more so because he did not perhaps understand himself.

How was it possible not to hate the poor people who were the cause of the horrible deceit committed on the occasion of the review when all Paris was eager to rescue Poland? People affected to regard the Poles as allies of the Republican party, forgetting that Poland was an aristocratic republic. Thenceforth the party of wealth poured ignoble contempt on the Pole, who had been deified but a few days since. The wind of a riot has always blown the Parisians round from north to south under every form of government. This weathercock temper of Paris opinion must be remembered if we would understand how, in 1835, the name of Pole was a word of ridicule among the race who believe themselves to be the wittiest and politest in the world, and its central luminary, in a city which, at this day, wields the scepter of art and literature.

There are, alas! two types of Polish refugees—the republican Pole, the son of Lelewel, and the noble Pole, of the party led by Prince Czartoryski. These two kinds of Pole are as fire and water, but why blame them? Are not such divisions always to be observed among refugees whatever nation they belong to, and no matter what country they go to? They carry their country and their hatreds with them. At Brussels two French émigrés priests expressed the greatest aversion for each other; and when one of them was asked his reasons, he replied, pointing to his companion in misery, "He is a Jansenist!" Dante, in his exile, would gladly have stabbed any adversary of the *Bianchi*. In this lies the reason of the attacks made on the venerable Prince Adam Czartoryski by the French radicals, and that of the disapproval shown to a section of the Polish emigrants by the Cæsars of the counter and the Alexanders by letters patent.

In 1834, Adam Mitgislas Laginski was the butt of Parisian witticisms.—"He is a nice fellow though he is a Pole," said Rastignac.—"All the Poles are great lords," said

Maxime de Trailles, "but this one pays his gambling debts; I begin to think that he must have had an estate."

And without offense to the exiles, it may be remarked that the levity, the recklessness, the fluidity of the Sarmatian character justified the calumnies of the Parisians, who, indeed, in similar circumstances, would be exactly like the Poles. The French aristocracy, so admirably supported by the Polish aristocracy during the Revolution, certainly made no equivalent return to those who were forced to emigrate in 1832. We must have the melancholy courage to say that, in this, the Faubourg Saint-Germain remains Poland's debtor.

Was Count Adam rich, was he poor, was he an adventurer? The problem long remained unsolved. Diplomatic circles, faithful to their instructions, imitated the silence observed by the Emperor Nicholas, who at that time counted every Polish émigré as dead. The Tuileries, and most of those who took their cue from thence, gave an odious proof of this characteristic policy dignified by the name of prudence. A Russian prince, with whom they had smoked many cigars at the time of the emigration, was ignored because, as it seemed, he had fallen into disgrace with the Emperor Nicholas.

Thus placed between the prudence of the Court and that of diplomatic circles, Poles of good family lived in the Biblical solitude of *Super flumina Babylonis*, or frequented certain drawing-rooms which served as neutral territory for every variety of opinion. In a city of pleasure like Paris, where amusement is to be had in every rank, Polish recklessness found twice as many pretexts as it needed for leading a dissipated bachelor life. Besides, it must be said, Adam had against him at first both his appearance and his manners.

There are two types of Pole, as there are two types of Englishwoman. When an Englishwoman is not a beauty, she is horribly ugly—and Count Adam belongs to the second category. His face is small, somewhat sour, and looks as if it had been squeezed in a vice. His short nose, fair hair, red mustache and beard give him the expression of a goat; all the more so because he is short and thin, and his eyes, tinged with dingy yellow, startle you by the oblique leer which Virgil's line has made famous. How is it that, in spite of such unfavorable conditions, he has such exquisite manners and style? The solution of this mystery is given by his dress, that of a finished dandy, and by the education he owes to his mother, a Radziwill. If his courage carries him to the point of rashness, his mind is not above the current and trivial pleasantries of Paris conversation; still, he does not often find a young fellow who is his superior among men of fashion. These young men nowadays talk far too much of horses, income taxes, and deputies, for French conversation to be what it once was. Wit needs leisure, and certain inequalities of position. Conversation is better perhaps at Petersburg and at Vienna than it is in Paris. Equals need no subtleties; they tell each other everything straight out, just as it is. Hence the ironical laughers of Paris could scarcely discern a man of family in a light-hearted student, as he seemed, who in talking passed carelessly from one subject to another, who pursued amusement with all the more frenzy because he had just escaped from great perils, and who, having left the country where his family was known, thought himself at liberty to lead an irresponsible life without risking a loss of consideration.

One fine day in 1834, Adam bought a large house in the Rue de la Pépinière. Six months later it was on as handsome a footing as the richest houses in Paris. Just at the time when Laginski was beginning to be taken seriously, he saw Clémentine at the Italian opera, and fell in love with her. A year later he married her. Mme. d'Espard's circle set the fashion of approval. Mothers of families then learned, too late, that ever since the year 900 the Laginskis had ranked with the most illustrious families of the North. By a stroke of prudence, most unlike a Pole, the young Count's mother had, at the beginning of the rebellion, mortgaged her estates for an immense sum advanced by two Jewish houses, and invested in the French funds. Count Adam Laginski had an income of more than eighty thousand francs. This put an end to the astonishment expressed in some drawing-rooms at the rashness of Mme. de Sérizy, of old de Ronquerolles, and of the Chevalier du Rouvre in yielding to their niece's mad passion.

As usual, the world rushed from one extreme to the other. During the winter of 1836, Count Adam became the fashion, and Clémentine Laginska one of the queens of Paris. Mme. de Laginska, at the present time, is one of the charming group of young married women among whom shine Mmes. de Lestorade, de Portenduère, Marie de Vandenesse, du Guénic, and de Maufrigneuse, the very flower of Paris society, who live high above the parvenus, bourgeois, and wire-pullers of recent politics.

This preamble was needful to define the sphere in which was carried through one of those sublime efforts less rare than the detractors of the present time imagine,—pearls hidden in rough shells, and lost in the depths of that abyss, that ocean, that never-resting tide called the World—the Age—Paris, London, or Petersburg—whichever you will.

If ever the truth that architecture is the expression of the manners of a race was fully demonstrated, is it not since the revolution of 1830, under the reign of the House of Orleans? Great fortunes have shrunk in France, and the majestic mansions of our fathers are constantly being demolished and replaced by a sort of tenement houses, in which a peer of France of July dwells on the third floor, over some newly-enriched empiric. Styles are mingled in confusion. As there is no longer any Court, any nobility to set a "tone," no harmony is to be seen in the productions of art. On the other hand, architecture has never found more economical tricks for imitating what is genuine and thorough, never displayed more ingenuity and resource in arrangement. Ask an artist to deal with a strip of the garden of an old "hôtel" now destroyed, and he will build you a little Louvre crushed under its ornamentation; he will give you a courtyard, stables, and, if you insist, a garden; inside he contrives such a number of little rooms and corridors, and cheats the eye so effectually, that you fancy yourself comfortable; in fact, there are so many bedrooms that a ducal retinue can live and move in what was only the bake-house of a president of a law court.

The Comtesse Laginska's house is one of these modern structures, with a courtyard in front and a garden behind. To the right of the courtyard are the servants' quarters, balanced on the left by the stables and coach-houses. The porter's lodge stands between two handsome gates. The chief luxury of this house consists in a delightful conservatory at the end of a boudoir on the ground floor, where all the beautiful reception-rooms are. It was a philanthropist driven out of England who built this architectural gem, constructed the conservatory, planned the garden, varnished the door, paved the out-buildings with brick, filled the windows with green glass, and realized a vision like that—in due proportion—of George IV. at Brighton. The inventive, industrious, and ready Paris artisan had carved his doors and window frames; his ceilings were imitated from those of the Middle Ages or of Venetian palaces, and there was a lavish outlay of marble slabs in external paneling. Steinbock and François Souchet had carved the cornices of the doors and chimney shelves; Schinner had painted the ceilings with the brush of a master. The wonders of the stairs—marble as white as a woman's arm—defied those of the Hôtel Rothschild.

In consequence of the disturbances, the price of this folly was not more than eleven hundred thousand francs. For an Englishman this was giving it away. All this splendor, called princely by people who do not know what a real prince is, stood in the garden of a contractor—a Crœsus of the Revolution, who had died at Brussels a bankrupt after a sudden convulsion of the Bourse. The Englishman died at Paris—died of Paris—for to many people Paris is a disease; sometimes it is several diseases. His widow, a Methodist, had a perfect horror of the nabob's little house—this philanthropist had been a dealer in opium. The virtuous widow ordered that the scandalous property should be sold just at the time when the disturbances made peace doubtful on any terms. Count Adam took advantage of the opportunity; and you shall be told how it happened, for nothing could be less consonant with his lordly habits.

Behind this house, built of stone fretted like a melon, spreads the green velvet of an English lawn, shaded at the further end by an elegant clump of exotic trees, among which rises a Chinese pavilion with its mute bells and pendent gilt eggs. The greenhouse and its fantastic decorations screen the outer wall on the south side. The other wall, opposite the greenhouse, is hung with creepers grown in arcades over poles and cross-beams painted green. This meadow, this realm of flowers, these graveled paths, this mimic forest, these aërial trellises cover an area of about twenty-five square perches, of which the present value would be four hundred thousand francs, as much as a real forest. In the heart of this silence won from Paris, birds sing; there are blackbirds, nightingales, bullfinches, chaffinches, and numbers of sparrows. The conservatory is a vast flowerbed, where the air is loaded with perfume, and where you may walk in winter as though summer was blazing with all its fires. The means by which an atmosphere is produced at will of the tropics, China or Italy, are ingeniously concealed from view. The pipes in which the boiling water circulates—the steam, hot air, what not—are covered with soil, and look like garlands of growing flowers.

The boudoir is spacious. On a small plot of ground the miracle wrought by the Paris fairy called Architecture is to produce everything on a large scale. The young Countess's boudoir was the pride of the artist to whom Count Adam intrusted the task of redecorating the house. To sin there would be impossible, there are too many pretty trifles. Love would not know where to alight amid work-tables of Chinese carving, where the eye can find thousands of droll little figures wrought in the ivory—the outcome of the toil of two families of Chinese artists; vases of burnt topaz mounted on filigree stands; mosaics that invite to theft; Dutch pictures, such as Schinner now paints again; angels imagined as Steinbock conceives of them (but does not always work them out himself); statuettes executed by geniuses pursued by creditors (the true interpretation of the Arab myths); sublime first sketches by our greatest artists; fronts of carved chests let into the wainscot, and alternating with the inventions of Indian embroidery; gold-colored curtains draped over the doors from an architrave of black oak wrought with the swarming figures of a hunting scene; chairs and tables worthy of Mme. de Pompadour; a Persian carpet, and so forth. And finally, as a crowning touch, all this splendor, seen under a softened light filtering in through lace curtains, looks all the more beautiful. On a marble slab, among some antiques, a lady's whip, with a handle carved by Mlle. de Fauveau, shows that the Countess is fond of riding.

Such is a boudoir in 1837, a display of property to divert the eye, as though ennui threatened to invade the most restless and unresting society in the world. Why is there nothing individual, intimate, nothing to invite reverie and repose?—Why?—Because no one is sure of the morrow, and everyone enjoys life as a prodigal spends a life-interest.

One morning Clémentine affected a meditative air, as she lounged on one of those deep siesta chairs from which we cannot bear to rise, so cleverly has the upholsterer who invented them contrived to fit them to the curves of laziness and the comfort of the *Dolce far niente.* The doors to the conservatory were open, admitting the scent of vegetation and the perfumes of the tropics. The young wife watched Adam, who was smoking an elegant narghileh, the only form of pipe she allowed in this room. Over the other door, curtains, caught back by handsome ropes, showed two magnificent rooms beyond: one in white and gold, resembling that of the Hôtel Forbin-Janson; the other in the taste of the Renaissance. The dining-room, unrivaled in Paris by any but that of the Baron de Nucingen, is at the end of a corridor, with a ceiling and walls decorated in a medieval style. This corridor is reached, on the courtyard front, through a large anteroom, through whose glass door the splendor of the stairs is seen.

The Count and Countess had just breakfasted; the sky was a sheet of blue without a cloud; the month of April was drawing to a close. The household had already known two years of happiness, and now, only two days since, Clémentine had discovered in her home something resembling a secret, a mystery. A Pole, let it be repeated to his honor, is generally weak in the presence of a woman; he is so full of tenderness that, in Poland, he becomes her inferior; and though Polish women are admirable creatures, a Pole is even more quickly routed by a Parisienne. Hence, Count Adam, pressed hard with questions, had not enough artless cunning to sell his secret dear to his wife. With a woman there is always something to be got for a secret; and she likes you the better for it, as a rogue respects an honest man whom he has failed to take in. The Count, more ready with his sword than with his tongue, only stipulated that he should not be required to answer till he had finished his narghileh full of *tombakī*.

"When we were traveling," said she, "you replied to every difficulty by saying, 'Paz will see to that!' You never wrote to anybody but Paz. On my return, everyone refers me to *the Captain*. I want to go out.—The Captain! Is there a bill to be paid?—The Captain. If my horse's pace is rough, they will speak to Captain Paz. In short, here I feel as if it were a game of dominoes; everywhere Paz! I hear no one talked of but Paz, but I can never see Paz. What is Paz? Let our Paz be brought to see me."

"Then is not everything as it ought to be?" said the Count, relinquishing the mouthpiece of his narghileh.

"Everything is so quite what it ought to be that if we had two hundred thousand francs a year we should be ruined by living in the way we do with a hundred and ten thousand," said she. She pulled the bell-handle embroidered in tent-stitch, a marvel of skill. A man-servant dressed like a minister at once appeared.

"Tell M. le Capitaine Paz that I wish to speak to him," said she.

"If you fancy you will find anything out in that way——," said Count Adam with a smile.

It may be useful to say that Adam and Clémentine, married in December 1835, after spending the winter in Paris, had during 1836 traveled in Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. They returned home in November, and during the winter just past the Countess had for the first time received her friends, and then had discovered the existence—the almost speechless and unacknowledged, but most useful presence—of a factotum whose person seemed to be invisible—this Captain Paz or Paç.

"M. le Capitaine Paz begs Mme. la Comtesse to excuse him; he is round at the stables, and in a dress which does not allow of his coming at this minute. But as soon as he is dressed Count Paz will come," said the man-servant.

"Why, what was he doing?"

"He was showing Constantine how to groom the Countess's horse; the man did not do it to his mind," replied the servant.

The Countess looked at the man; he was quite serious, and took good care not to imply by a smile the comment which inferiors so often allow themselves on a superior who seems to have descended to their level.

"Ah, he was brushing down Cora?"

"You are not riding out this morning, madame?" said the servant; but he got no answer, and went.

"Is he a Pole?" asked Clémentine of her husband, who bowed affirmatively.

Clémentine lay silent, examining Adam. Her feet, almost at full length on a cushion, her head in the attitude of a bird listening on the edge of its nest to the sounds of the grove, she would have seemed charming to the most *blasé* of men. Fair and slight, her hair curled *à l'Anglaise*, she looked like one of the almost fabulous figures in *Keepsakes*, especially as she was wrapped in a morning gown of Persian silk, of which the thick folds did not so effectually disguise the graces of her figure and the slenderness of her waist, as that they could not be admired through the thick covering of flowers and embroidery. As she crossed the brightly colored stuff over her chest, the hollow of her throat remained visible, the white skin contrasting in tone with the handsome lace trimming over the shoulders. Her eyes, fringed with black lashes, emphasized the expression of curiosity that puckered a pretty mouth. On her well-formed brow were traced the characteristic curves of the Paris woman, willful, light-hearted, well educated, but invulnerable to vulgar temptations. Her hands, almost transparent, hung from each arm of her deep chair; the taper fingers, curved at the tips, showed nails like pink almonds that caught the light.

Adam smiled at his wife's impatience, gazing at her with a look which conjugal satiety had not yet made lukewarm. This slim little Countess had known how to be mistress in her own house, for she scarcely acknowledged Adam's admiration. In the glances she stole at him there was perhaps a dawning consciousness of the superiority of a Parisienne to this spruce, lean, and red-haired Pole.

"Here comes Paz," said the Count, hearing a step that rang in the corridor.

The Countess saw a tall, handsome man come in, well built, bearing in his features the marks of the grief which comes of strength and misfortune. Paz had dressed hastily in one of those tightly fitting coats, fastened by braid straps and oval buttons, which used to be called *polonaises.* Thick, black hair, but ill-kempt, covered his squarely shaped head, and Clémentine could see his broad forehead as shiny as a piece of marble, for he held his peaked cap in his hand. That hand was like the hand of the Hercules carrying the infant Mercury. Robust health bloomed in a face equally divided by a large Roman nose, which reminded Clémentine of the handsome Trasteverini. A black silk stock put a finishing touch of martial appearance to this mystery of near six feet high, with jet-black eyes as lustrous as an Italian's. The width of his full trousers, hiding all but the toes of his boots, showed that Paz still was faithful to the fashions of Poland. Certainly, to a romantic woman, there must have been something burlesque in the violent contrast observable between the Captain and the Count, between the little Pole with his narrow frame and this fine soldier, between the carpet-knight and the knight servitor.

"Good-morning, Adam," he said to the Count with familiarity.

Then he bowed gracefully, asking Clémentine in what way he could serve her.

"Then you are Laginski's friend?" asked the lady.

"For life and death," replied Paz, on whom the young

Count shed his most affectionate smile, as he exhaled his last fragrant puff of smoke.

"Well, then, why do you not eat with us? Why did you not accompany us to Italy and to Switzerland? Why do you hide yourself so as to avoid the thanks I owe you for the constant services you do us?" said the young Countess, with a sort of irritation, but without the slightest feeling.

In fact, she detected a kind of volunteer slavery on the part of Paz. At that time such an idea was inseparable from a certain disdain for a socially amphibious creature, a being at once secretary and bailiff, neither wholly bailiff nor wholly secretary, some poor relation—inconvenient as a friend.

"The fact is, Countess," he replied with some freedom, "that no thanks are owing to me. I am Adam's friend, and I find my pleasure in taking charge of his interests."

"And is it for your pleasure too that you remain standing?" said Count Adam.

Paz sat down in an armchair near the doorway.

"I remember having seen you on the occasion of our marriage, and sometimes in the courtyard," said the lady; "but why do you, a friend of Adam's, place yourself in a position of inferiority?"

"The opinion of the Paris world is to me a matter of indifference," said he. "I live for myself, or, if you choose, for you two."

"But the opinion of the world as regards my husband's friend cannot be a matter of indifference to me——"

"Oh, madame, the world is easily satisfied by one word: Eccentric—say that."

After a short pause he asked, "Do you propose going out?"

"Will you come to the Bois?" said the Countess.

"With pleasure," and so saying Paz bowed and went out.

"What a good soul! He is as simple as a child," said Adam.

"Tell me now how you became friends," said Clémentine.

"Paz, my dearest, is of a family as old, as noble, and as illustrious as our own. At the time of the fall of the Pazzi a member of that family escaped from Florence into

Poland, where he settled with some little fortune, and founded the family of the Paz, on which the title of Count was conferred.

"This family, having distinguished itself in the days of our royal republic, grew rich. The cutting from the tree felled in Italy grew with such vigor that there are several branches of the house of the Counts Paz. It will not, therefore, surprise you to be told that there are rich and poor members of the family. Our Paz is the son of a poor branch. As an orphan, with no fortune but his sword, he served under the Grand Duke Constantine at the time of our Revolution. Carried away by the Polish party, he fought like a Pole, like a patriot, like a man who has nothing—three reasons for fighting well. In the last skirmish, believing his men were following him, he rushed on Russian battery, and was taken prisoner. I was there. This feat of courage roused my blood. 'Let us go and fetch him!' cried I to my horsemen. We charged the battery like freebooters, and I rescued Paz, I being the seventh. We were twenty when we set out, and eight when we came back, including Paz.

"When Warsaw was betrayed we had to think of escaping from the Russians. By a singular chance Paz and I found ourselves together at the same hour and in the same place on the other side of the Vistula. I saw the poor Captain arrested by some Prussians, who at that time had made themselves bloodhounds for the Russians. When one has fished a man out of the Styx, one gets attached to him. This new danger threatening Paz distressed me so much that I allowed myself to be taken with him, intending to be of service to him. Two men can sometimes escape when one alone is lost. Thanks to my name and some family connection with those on whom our fate depended—for we were then in the power of the Prussians—my flight was winked at. I got my dear Captain through as a common soldier and a servant of my house, and we succeeded in reaching Dantzic. We stowed ourselves in a Dutch vessel sailing for England, where we landed two months later.

"My mother had fallen ill in England, and awaited me there; Paz and I nursed her till her death, which was accelerated by the disasters to our cause.

"We then left England, and I brought Paz to France; in such adversities two men become brothers. When I found myself in Paris with sixty-odd thousand francs a year, not to mention the remains of a sum derived from the sale of my mother's diamonds and the family pictures, I wished to secure a living to Paz before giving myself up to the dissipations of Paris life. I had discerned some sadness in the Captain's eyes, sometimes even a suppressed tear floated there. I had had opportunities of appreciating his soul, which is thoroughly noble, lofty, and generous. Perhaps it was painful to him to find himself bound by benefits to a man six years younger than himself without being able to repay him. I, careless and light-hearted as a boy, might ruin myself at play, or let myself be ensnared by some woman; Paz and I might some day be sundered. Though I promised myself that I would always provide for all his needs, I foresaw many chances of forgetting, or being unable to pay Paz an allowance. In short, my angel, I wished to spare him the discomfort, the humiliation, the shame of having to ask me for money, or of seeking in vain for his comrade in some day of necessity. *Dunque*, one morning after breakfast, with our feet on the fire-dogs, each smoking his pipe, after many blushes, and with many precautions, till I saw he was looking at me quite anxiously, I held out to him a bond to bearer producing two thousand four hundred francs interest yearly——"

"Clémentine rose, seated herself on Adam's knees, and putting her arm round his neck, kissed him on the brow, saying:

"Dear heart, how noble I think you! And what did Paz say?"

"Thaddeus?" said the Count. "He turned pale and said nothing."

"Thaddeus—is that his name?"

"Yes.—Thaddeus folded up the paper and returned it to me, saying, 'I thought, Adam, that we were as one in life and death, and that we should never part; do you wish to see no more of me?'—'Oh,' said I, 'is that the way you take it? Well, then, say no more about it. If I am ruined, you will be ruined.'—Said he, 'You are not rich enough to live as a Laginski should; and do you not need a friend to take care of your concerns, who will be father and brother to you, and a trusted confidant?' My dear girl, Paz, as he uttered the words, spoke with a calmness of tone and look which covered a motherly feeling, but which betrayed the gratitude of an Arab, the devotion of a dog, and the friendship of a savage, always ready and always unassuming. On my honor! I took him in our Polish fashion, laying my hand on his shoulder, and I kissed him on the lips. 'For life and death, then,' said I. 'All I have is yours, do just as you will.'

"It was he who found me this house for almost nothing. He sold my shares when they were high, and bought when they were low, and we purchased this hovel out of the difference. He is a connoisseur in horses, and deals in them so well that my stable has cost me very little, and yet I have the finest beasts and the prettiest turn-out in Paris. Our servants, old Polish soldiers whom he found, would pass through the fire for us. While I seem to be ruining myself, Paz keeps my house with such perfect order and economy that he has even made good some losses at play, the follies of a young man. My Thaddeus is as cunning as two Genoese, as keen for profit as a Polish Jew, as cautious as a good housekeeper. I have never been able to persuade him to live as I did when I was a bachelor. Sometimes it has needed the gentle violence of friendship to induce him to come to the play when I was going alone, or to one of the dinners I was giving at an eating-house to a party of congenial companions. He does not like the life of drawing-rooms."

"Then what does he like?" asked Clémentine.

"He loves Poland, and weeps over her. His only extravagance has been money sent, more in my name than in his own, to some of our poor exiles."

"Dear, how fond I shall be of that good fellow," said the Countess. "He seems to me as simple as everything that is truly great."

"All the pretty things you see here," said Adam, praising his friend, with the most generous security, "have been found by Paz; he has bought them at sales, or by some chance. Oh! he is keener at a bargain than a trader. If you see him rubbing his hands in the courtyard, it is because he has exchanged a good horse for a better. He lives in me; his delight is to see me well dressed in a dazzlingly smart carriage. He performs all the duties he imposes on himself without fuss or display. One night I had lost twenty thousand francs at whist. 'What will Paz say?' thought I to myself as I reached home. Paz gave me the sum, not without a sigh; but he did not blame me even by a look. This sigh checked me more than all the remonstrances of uncles, wives, or mothers in similar circumstances. 'You regret the money?' I asked him.—'Oh, not for you, nor for myself; no, I was only thinking that twenty poor relations of mine could have lived on it for a year.'

"The family of Paz, you understand, is quite equal to that of Laginski, and I have never regarded my dear Paz as an inferior. I have tried to be as magnanimous in my degree as he in his. I never go out or come in without going to Paz, as if he were my father. My fortune is his. In short, Thaddeus knows that at this day I would rush into danger to rescue him, as I have done twice before."

"That is not a small thing to say, my dear," remarked the Countess. "Devotion is a lightning-flash. Men devote themselves in war, but they no longer devote themselves in Paris."

"Well, then," said Adam, "for Paz I am always in war. Our two natures have preserved their asperities and their faults, but the mutual intimacy of our souls has tightened the bonds, already so close, of our friendship. A man may save his comrade's life, and kill him afterwards if he finds him a bad companion; but we have gone through what makes friendship indissoluble. There is between us that constant exchange of pleasing impressions on both sides which makes friendship, from that point of view, a richer joy, perhaps, than love."

A pretty little hand shut the Count's mouth so suddenly that the movement was almost a blow.

"Yes, indeed, my darling," said he. "Friendship knows nothing of the bankruptcy of sentiment, the insolvency of pleasures. Love, after giving more than it has, ends by giving less than it receives?"

"On both sides alike then," said Clémentine, smiling.

"Yes," said Adam. "While friendship can but increase. You need not pout. We, my angel, are as much friends as lovers; we, at least, I hope, have combined the two feelings in our happy marriage."

"I will explain to you what has made you two such good friends," said Clémentine. "The difference in your lives arises from a difference in your tastes, and not from compulsory choice; from preference, and not from the necessity of position. So far as a man can be judged from a glimpse, and from what you tell me, in this instance the subaltern may at times be the superior."

"Oh! Paz is really my superior," replied Adam simply. "I have no advantage over him but that of luck."

His wife kissed him for this generous avowal.

"The perfect skill with which he conceals the loftiness of his soul is an immense superiority," the Count went on. "I say to him, 'You are a fly fellow; you have vast domains in your mind to which you retire.' He has a right to the title of Count Paz; in Paris he will only be called Captain."

"In short, a Florentine of the Middle Ages has resuscitated after three centuries," said the Countess. "There is something of Dante in him, and something of Michael Angelo."

"Indeed, you are right; he is at heart a poet," replied Adam.

"And so I am married to two Poles," said the young Countess, with a gesture resembling that of a genius on the stage.

"Darling child!" said Adam, clasping Clémentine to him, "you would have distressed me very much if you had not liked my friend. We were both afraid of that, though he was delighted at my marrying. You will make him very happy by telling him that you love him—oh! as an old friend."

"Then I will go to dress; it is fine, we will all three go out," said Clémentine, ringing for her maid.

Paz led such an underground life that all the fashion of Paris wondered who it was that accompanied Clémentine Laginska when they saw her driving to the Bois and back between him and her husband. During the drive Clémentine had insisted that Thaddeus was to dine with her. This whim of a despotic sovereign compelled the Captain to make an unwonted toilet. On returning from her drive Clémentine dressed with some coquettish care, in such a way as to produce an effect even on Adam as she entered the room where the two friends were awaiting her.

"Count Paz," said she, "we will go to the opera together."

It was said in the tone which from a woman conveys, "If you refuse, we shall quarrel."

"With pleasure, madame," replied the Captain. "But as I have not a Count's fortune, call me Captain."

"Well, then, Captain, give me your arm," said she, taking it and leading him into the dining-room with a suggestion of the caressing familiarity which enraptures a lover.

The Countess placed the Captain next her, and he sat like a poor sub-lieutenant dining with a wealthy general. Paz left it to Clémentine to talk, listening to her with all the air of deference to a superior, contradicting her in nothing, and waiting for a positive question before making any reply. In short, to the Countess he seemed almost stupid, and her graces all fell flat before this icy gravity and diplomatic dignity. In vain did Adam try to rouse him by saying: "Come, cheer up, Captain. It might be supposed that you were not at home. You must have laid a bet that you would disconcert Clémentine?" Thaddeus remained heavy and half-asleep.

When the three were alone at dessert the Captain explained that his life was planned diametrically unlike that of other people; he went to bed at eight o'clock, and rose at daybreak; and he thus excused himself, saying he was very sleepy.

"My intention in taking you to the opera was only to amuse you, Captain; but do just as you please," said Clémentine, a little nettled.

"I will go," said Paz.

"Duprez is singing in *William Tell,*" said Adam. "Would you prefer the *Variétés?*"

The Captain smiled and rang the bell; the man-servant appeared. "Tell Constantine," said Paz, "to take out the large carriage instead of the coupé.—We cannot sit comfortably in it," he added, turning to the Count.

"A Frenchman would not have thought of that," said Clémentine, smiling.

"Ah, but we are Florentines transplanted to the North!" replied Thaddeus, with a meaning and an expression which showed that his dullness at dinner had been assumed.

But by a very conceivable want of judgment, there was too great a contrast between the involuntary self-betrayal of this speech and the Captain's attitude during dinner. Clémentine examined him with one of those keen flashes by which a woman reveals at once her surprise and her observancy. Thus, during the few minutes while they were taking their coffee in the drawing-room, silence reigned—an uncomfortable silence for Adam, who could not divine its cause. Clémentine no longer disturbed Thaddeus. The Captain, for his part, retired again into military rigidity, and came out of it no more, either on the way, or in the box, where he affected to be asleep.

"You see, madame, that I am very dull company," said he, during the ballet in the last act of *William Tell.* "Was I not right to 'stick to my last,' as the proverb says?"

"On my word, my dear Captain, you are neither a coxcomb nor a chatterbox; you are perhaps a Pole."

"Leave me then to watch over your pleasures," he replied, "to take care of your fortune and your house; that is all I am good for."

"Tartufe! begone!" cried Adam, smiling. "My dear, he is full of heart, well informed—he could, if he chose, hold his own in any drawing-room. Clémentine, do not believe what his modesty tells you."

"Good-night, Countess. I have proved my willingness, and now will avail myself of your carriage to go to bed at once. I will send it back for you."

Clémentine bowed slightly, and let him go without replying.

"What a bear!" said she to the Count. "You are much, much nicer."

Adam pressed his wife's hand unseen.

"Poor, dear Thaddeus, he has endeavored to be a foil when many men would have tried to seem more attractive than I."

"Oh!" said she, "I am not sure that was not intentional; his behavior would have mystified an ordinary woman."

Half an hour later, while Boleslas, the groom, was calling "Gate," and the coachman, having turned the carriage to drive in, was waiting for the gates to be opened, Clémentine said to the Count:

"Where does the Captain roost?"

"Up there," said Adam, pointing to an elegantly constructed attic extending on both sides of the gateway with a window looking on to the street. "His rooms are over the coach-houses."

"And who lives in the other half?"

"No one as yet," replied Adam. "The other little suite, over the stables, will do for our children and their tutor."

"He is not in bed," said the Countess, seeing a light in the Captain's room when the carriage was under the pillared portico—copied from that at the Tuileries, and taking the place of the ordinary zinc awning painted to imitate striped ticking.

Paz, in his dressing-gown, and pipe in hand, was watching Clémentine as she disappeared into the hall. The day had been a cruel one to him. And this is the reason: Thaddeus had felt a fearful shock to his heart on the day when, Adam having taken him to the opera to pronounce his opinion, he first saw Mlle. du Rouvre; and again, when he saw her in the Maire's office and at Saint-Thomas d'Aquin, and recognized in her the woman whom a man must love to the exclusion of all others—for Don Juan himself preferred one among the *mille e tre!*

Hence Paz had strongly advocated the classical bridal tour after the wedding. Fairly easy all the time while Clémentine was absent, his tortures began again on the return of the happy couple. And this was what he was thinking as he inhaled his latakia from a cherry-stem pipe, six feet long, a gift from Adam: "Only I and God, who will reward me for suffering in silence, may ever know how I love her! But how can I manage to avoid alike her love or her hatred?"

And he sat thinking, thinking, over this problem of the strategy of love.

It must not be supposed that Thaddeus lived bereft of all joy in the midst of his pain. The triumphant cunning of this day was a source of secret satisfaction. Since the Count's return with his wife, day by day he felt ineffable happiness in seeing that he was necessary to the couple, who, but for him, would have rushed inevitably into ruin. What fortune can hold out against the extravagance of Paris life? Clémentine, brought up by a reckless father, knew nothing of household management, which nowadays the richest women and the highest in rank are obliged to undertake themselves. Who in these days can afford to keep a steward? Adam, on his part, as the son of one of the great Polish nobles who allowed themselves to be devoured by the Jews, and who was incapable of husbanding the remains of one of the most enormous fortunes in Poland—where fortunes were enormous—was not of a temper to restrict either his own fancies or his wife's. If he had been alone he would probably have ruined himself before his marriage. Paz had kept him from gambling on the Bourse, and does not that say all?

Consequently, when he found that, in spite of himself, he was in love with Clémentine, Paz had not the choice of leaving the house and traveling to forget his passion. Gratitude, the clew to the mystery of his life, held him to the house where he alone could act as man of business to this heedless couple. Their long absence made him hope for a calmer spirit; but the Countess came back more than ever lovely, having acquired that freedom of thought which marriage confers on the Paris woman, and displaying all the charms of a young wife, with the indefinable something which comes of happiness, or of the independence allowed her by a man as trusting, as chivalrous, and as much in love as Adam was.

The consciousness of being the working hub of this magnificent house, the sight of Clémentine stepping out of her carriage on her return from a party, or setting out in the morning for the Bois de Boulogne, a glimpse of her on the boulevards in her pretty carriage, like a flower in its nest of leaves, filled poor Thaddeus with deep, mysterious ecstasies which blossomed at the bottom of his heart without the slightest trace appearing in his features. How, during these five months, should the Countess ever have seen the Captain? He hid from her, concealing the care he took to keep out of her way.

Nothing is so near divine love as a hopeless love. Must not a man have some depth of soul thus to devote himself in silence and obscurity? This depth, where lurks the pride of a father—or of God—enshrines the worship of love for love's sake, as power for power's sake was the watchword of the Jesuits; a sublime kind of avarice, since it is perennially generous, and modeled indeed on the mysterious Being of the first principles of the world. Is not their result Nature? And Nature is an enchantress; she belongs to man, to the poet, the painter, the lover; but is not the Cause superior to Nature in the sight of certain privileged souls, and some stupendous thinkers? The Cause is God. In that sphere of Causes dwelt the spirits of Newton, of Laplace, of Kepler, of Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Buffon, of the true poets and saints of the second century of our era, of Saint Theresa of Spain and the sublime mystics. Every human emotion contains some analogy with the frame of mind in which the Effect is neglected in favor of the Cause, and Thaddeus has risen to the height whence all things look different. Abandoned to the unspeakable joys of creative energy, Thaddeus was, in love, what we recognize as greatest in the records of genius.

"No, she is not altogether deceived," thought he, as he watched the smoke curl from his pipe. "She might involve me in an irremediable quarrel with Adam if she spited me;

and if she should flirt to torment me, what would become of me?"

The fatuity of this hypothesis was so unlike the Captain's modest nature, and his somewhat German shyness, that he was vexed with himself for its having occurred to him, and went to bed determined to await events before taking any decisive steps.

Next morning Clémentine breakfasted very well without Thaddeus, and made no remark on his disobedience. That day, as it happened, was her day for being "at home," and this, with her, demanded a royal display. She did not observe the absence of Captain Paz, on whom devolved all the arrangements for these great occasions.

"Well and good!" said Paz to himself, as he heard the carriages rumble out at two in the morning; "the Countess was only prompted by a Parisian's whim or curiosity."

So the Captain fell back into his regular routine, disturbed for a day by this incident. Clémentine, diverted by the details of life in Paris, seemed to have forgotten Paz. For do you suppose that it is a mere trifle to reign over this inconstant city? Do you imagine, by any chance, that a woman risks nothing but her fortune at that absorbing game?

The winter is to a woman of fashion what, of yore, a campaign was to the soldiers of the Empire. What a work of art—of genius—is a costume or a head-dress created to make a sensation! A fragile, delicate woman wears her hard and dazzling armor of flowers and diamonds, silk and steel, from nine in the evening till two or often three in the morning. She eats little, to attract the eye by her slender shape; she cheats the hunger that attacks her during the evening with debilitating cups of tea, sweet cakes, heating ices, or heavy slices of pastry. The stomach must submit to the commands of vanity. She awakes late, and thus everything is in contradiction to the laws of Nature, and Nature is ruthless.

No sooner is she up than the woman of fashion begins to dress for the morning, planning her dress for the afternoon. Must she not receive and pay visits, and go to the

Bois on horseback or in her carriage? Must she not always be practicing the drill of smiles, and fatigue her brain in inventing compliments which shall seem neither stale nor studied? And it is not every woman who succeeds. And then you are surprised, when you see a young woman, whom the world has welcomed in her freshness, faded and blighted at the end of three years. Six months spent in the country are barely enough to heal the wounds inflicted by the winter. We hear nothing talked of but dyspepsia and strange maladies, unknown to women who devote themselves to their household. Formerly a woman was sometimes seen; now she is perpetually on the stage.

Clémentine had to fight her way; she was beginning to be quoted, and amid the cares of this struggle between her and her rivals there was hardly a place for love of her husband! Thaddeus might well be forgotten. However, a month later, in May, a few days before her departure to stay at Ronquerolles in Burgundy, as she was returning from her drive she saw Thaddeus in a side alley of the Champs-Élysées,—Thaddeus, carefully dressed, and in raptures at seeing his Countess so beautiful in her phaeton, with champing horses, splendid liveries; in short, the dear people he admired so much.

"There is the Captain," said she to Adam.

"Happy fellow!" said the Count. "These are his great treats! There is not a smarter turn-out than ours, and he delights in seeing everybody envying us our happiness. You have never noticed him before, but he is there almost every day."

"What can he be thinking of?" said Clémentine.

"He is thinking at this moment that the winter has cost a great deal, and that we shall save a little by staying with your old uncle Ronquerolles," said Adam.

The Countess had the carriage stopped in front of Paz, and desired him to take the seat by her side in the carriage. Thaddeus turned as red as a cherry.

"I shall poison you," he said; "I have just been smoking cigars."

"And does not Adam poison me?" she replied quickly.

"Yes, but he is Adam," replied the Captain.

"And why should not Thaddeus enjoy the same privilege?" said the Countess with a smile.

This heavenly smile had a power which was too much for his heroic resolutions; he gazed at Clémentine with all the fire of his soul in his eyes, but tempered by the angelic expression of his gratitude—that of a man who lived solely by gratitude. The Countess folded her arms in her shawl, leaned back pensively against the cushions, crumpling the feathers of her handsome bonnet, and gazed out at the passers-by. This flash from a soul so noble, and hitherto so resigned, appealed to her feelings. What, after all, was Adam's great merit? Was it not natural that he should be brave and generous? But the Captain!—Thaddeus possessed, or seemed to possess, an immense superiority over Adam. What sinister thoughts distressed the Countess when she once more observed the contrast between the fine, complete physical nature which distinguished Thaddeus and the frail constitution which, in her husband, betrayed the inevitable degeneration of aristocratic families which are so mad as to persist in intermarrying! But the Devil alone knew these thoughts, for the young wife sat with vague meditation in her eyes, saying nothing till they reached home.

"You must dine with us, or I shall be angry with you for having disobeyed me," said she as she went in. "You are Thaddeus to me, as you are to Adam. I know the obligations you feel to him, but I also know all we owe to you. In return for two impulses of generosity which are so natural, you are generous at all hours and day after day.—My father is coming to dine with us, as well as my uncle Ronquerolles and my aunt de Sérizy; dress at once," she said, pressing the hand he offered to help her out of the carriage.

Thaddeus went to his room to dress, his heart at once rejoicing and oppressed by an agonizing flutter. He came down at the last moment, and all through dinner played his part of a soldier fit for nothing but to fulfill the duties of a steward. But this time Clémentine was not his dupe. His look had enlightened her. Ronquerolles, the cleverest of ambassadors next to Talleyrand, and who served de Marsay so well during his short ministry, was informed by his niece of the high merits of Count Paz, who had so modestly made himself his friend's steward.

"And how is it that this is the first time I have ever seen Count Paz?" asked the Marquis de Ronquerolles.

"Eh! he is very sly and underhand," replied Clémentine, with a look at Paz to desire him to change his demeanor.

Alas! it must be owned, at the risk of making the Captain less interesting to the reader, Paz, though superior to his friend Adam, was not a man of strong temper. He owed his apparent superiority to his misfortunes. In his days of poverty and isolation at Warsaw he had read and educated himself, had compared and thought much; but the creative power which makes a great man he did not possess—can it ever be acquired? Paz was great only through his feelings, and there could rise to the sublime; but in the sphere of sentiment, being a man of action rather than of ideas, he kept his thoughts to himself. His thoughts, then, did nothing but eat his heart out.

And what, after all, is an unuttered thought?

At Clémentine's speech the Marquis de Ronquerolles and his sister exchanged glances, with a side look at their niece, Count Adam, and Paz. It was one of those swift dramas which are played only in Italy or in Paris. Only in these two parts of the world—excepting at all courts—can the eyes say as much. To infuse into the eye all the power of the soul, to give it the full value of speech and throw a poem or a drama into a single flash, excessive servitude or excessive liberty is needed.

Adam, the Marquis du Rouvre, and the Countess did not perceive this flash of observation between a past coquette and an old diplomatist; but Paz, like a faithful dog, understood its forecast. It was, you must remember, an affair of two seconds. To describe the hurricane that ravaged the Captain's heart would be too elaborate for these days.

"What! The uncle and aunt already fancy that she perhaps loves me?" said he to himself. "My happiness then depends only on my own audacity.—And Adam! . . ."

Ideal love and mere desire, both quite as potent as friendship and gratitude, rent his soul, and for a moment love had the upper hand. This poor heroic lover longed to have his day! Paz became witty; he intended to please, and in answer to some question from M. de Ronquerolles he sketched in grand outlines the Polish rebellion. Thus, at dessert, Paz saw Clémentine hanging on his lips, regarding him as a hero, and forgetting that Adam, after sacrificing a third of his immense fortune, had taken the risks of exile. At nine o'clock, having taken coffee, Mme. de Sérizy kissed her niece on the forehead and took leave, carrying off Count Adam with an assertion of authority, and leaving the Marquis du Rouvre and M. de Ronquerolles, who withdrew ten minutes later. Paz and Clémentine were left together.

"I will bid you good-night, madame," said Thaddeus; "you will join them at the opera."

"No," replied she. "I do not care for dancing, and they are giving an odious ballet this evening, *The Revolt of the Seraglio.*"

There was a moment's silence.

"Two years ago Adam would not have gone without me," she went on, without looking at Paz.

"He loves you to distraction——" Thaddeus began.

"Oh! it is because he loves me to distraction that by to-morrow he will perhaps have ceased to love me!" exclaimed the Countess.

"The women of Paris are inexplicable," said Thaddeus. "When they are loved to distraction, they want to be loved rationally; when they are loved rationally, they accuse a man of not knowing how to love."

"And they are always right, Thaddeus," she replied with a smile. "I know Adam well; I owe him no grudge for it; he is fickle, and, above all, a great gentleman; he will always be pleased to have me for his wife, and will never thwart me in any of my tastes; but——"

"What marriage was ever without a but?" said Thaddeus gently, trying to give the Countess's thoughts another direction.

The least conceited man would perhaps have had the thought which nearly drove this lover mad, "If I do not tell her that I love her," said he to himself, "I am an idiot!"

There was silence between these two, one of those terrible pauses which seem bursting with thoughts. The Countess fixed a covert gaze on Paz, and Paz watched her in a mirror. Sitting back in his armchair, like a man given up to digestion, in the attitude of an old man or an indifferent husband, the Captain clasped his hands over his stomach, and mechanically twirled his thumbs, looking stupidly at their rapid movement.

"But say something good about Adam!" exclaimed Clémentine. "Tell me that he is not fickle, you who know him so well."

The appeal was sublime.

"This is the opportunity for raising an insurmountable barrier between us," thought the unhappy Paz, devising a heroic lie.—"Something good?" he said aloud. "I love him too well, you would not believe me. I am incapable of telling you any evil of him. . . . And so . . . madame, I have a hard part to play between you two."

Clémentine looked down, fixing her eyes on his patent-leather shoes.

"You Northerners have mere physical courage, you have no constancy in your decisions," said she in a low tone.

"What are you going to do alone, madame?" replied Paz, with a perfectly ingenuous expression.

"You are not going to keep me company?"

"Forgive me for leaving you."

"Why! where are you going?"

"I am going to the circus; it is the first night, in the Champs-Élysées, and I must not fail to be there. . . ."

"Why not?" asked Clémentine, with a half-angry flash.

"Must I lay bare my heart?" he replied, coloring, "and confide to you what I conceal from my dear Adam, who believes that I love Poland alone?"

"What! our dear, noble Captain has a secret?"

"A disgrace which you will understand, and for which you can comfort me."

"A disgrace!—You? . . ."

"Yes, I—Count Paz, am madly in love with a girl who was touring round France with the Bouthor family, people who have a circus after the pattern of Franconi's, but who only perform at fairs! I got her an engagement from the manager of the Cirque-Olympique."

"Is she handsome?" asked the Countess.

"In my eyes," he replied sadly. "Malaga, that is her name to the public, is strong, nimble, and supple. Why do I prefer her to every other woman in the world?—Indeed, I cannot tell you. When I see her with her black hair tied back with blue ribbons that float over her bare olive-tinted shoulders, dressed in a white tunic with a gilt border, and silk tights which make her appear a living Greek statue, her feet in frayed satin slippers, flourishing flags in her hand to the sound of a military band, and flying through an enormous hoop covered with paper which crashes in the air—when her horse rushes round at a gallop, and she gracefully drops on to him again, applauded, honestly applauded, by a whole people—well, it excites me."

"More than a woman at a ball?" said Clémentine, with insinuating surprise.

"Yes," said Paz in a choked voice. "This splendid agility, this unfailing grace in constant peril, seem to me the greatest triumph of woman. Yes, madame, Cinti and Malibran, Grisi and Taglioni, Pasta and Elsler, all who reign or ever reigned on the boards, seem to me unworthy to untie Malaga's shoe-strings—Malaga, who can mount or dismount a horse at a mad gallop, who slips under him from the left to reappear on the right, who flutters about the most fiery steed like a white will-o'-the-wisp, who can stand on the tip of one toe and then drop, sitting with her feet hanging, on a horse still galloping round, and who finally stands on his back without any reins, knitting a stocking, beating eggs, or stirring an omelet, to the intense admiration of the people, the true people, the peasantry and soldiers. During the walk round, madame, that enchanting Columbine used to carry chairs balanced on the tip of her nose, the prettiest Greek nose I ever saw. Malaga is dexterity personified. Her strength is Herculean; with her tiny fist or her little foot she can shake off three or four men. She is the goddess of athletics."

"She must be stupid."

"Oh!" cried Paz, "she is as amusing as the heroine of *Peveril of the Peak.* As heedless as a gypsy, she says everything that comes into her head; she cares no more for the future than you care for the halfpence you throw to a beggar, and she lets out really sublime things. Nothing will ever convince her that an old diplomat is a handsome young man, and a million of francs would not make her change her opinion. Her love for a man is a perpetual flattery. Enjoying really insolent health, her teeth are two and thirty Oriental pearls set in coral. Her 'snout'—so she calls the lower part of her face—is, as Shakespeare has it, as fresh and sweet as a heifer's muzzle. And it can give bitter pain! She respects fine men, strong men—an Adolphus, an Augustus, an Alexander—acrobats and tumblers. Her teacher, a horrible Cassandro, thrashed her unmercifully; it cost thousands of blows to give her such agility, grace, and intrepidity."

"You are drunk with Malaga!" said the Countess.

"Her name is Malaga only on the posters," said Paz, with a look of annoyance. "She lives in the Rue Saint-Lazare, in a little apartment on the third floor, in velvet and silk, like a princess. She leads two lives—one as a dancer, and one as a pretty woman."

"And does she love you?"

"She loves me—you will laugh—solely because I am a Pole. She sees in every Pole a Poniatowski, as he is shown in the print, jumping into the Elster; for to every Frenchman the Elster, in which it is impossible to drown, is a foaming torrent which swallowed up Poniatowski.—And with all this I am very unhappy, madame——"

Clémentine was touched by a tear of rage in the Captain's eye.

"You love the extraordinary, you men," said she.

"And you?" asked Thaddeus.

"I know Adam so well that I know he could forget me for some acrobatic tumbler like your Malaga. But where did you find her?"

"At Saint-Cloud, last September, at the fair. She was standing in a corner of the platform covered with canvas where the performers walk round. Her comrades, all dressed as Poles, were making a terrible Babel. I saw her silent and dreamy, and fancied I could guess that her thoughts were melancholy. Was there not enough to make her so—a girl of twenty? That was what touched me."

The Countess was leaning in a bewitching attitude, pensive, almost sad.

"Poor, poor Thaddeus!" she exclaimed. And with the good-fellowship of a really great lady, she added, not without a meaning smile, "Go; go to the circus!"

Thaddeus took her hand and kissed it, dropping a hot tear, and then went out. After having invented a passion for a circus-rider, he must give it some reality. Of his whole story nothing had been true but the minute's attention he had given to the famous Malaga, the rider of the Bouthor troupe at Saint-Cloud; her name had just caught his eye on an advertisement of the circus. The clown, bribed by a single five-franc piece, had told Paz that the girl was a foundling, or had perhaps been stolen.

Thaddeus now went to the circus and saw the handsome horsewoman again. For ten francs, a groom—they fill the place of dressers at a circus—informed him that Malaga's name was Marguerite Turquet, and that she lived in the Rue des Fossés-du-Temple, on a fifth floor.

Next day, with death in his soul, Paz found his way to that quarter, and asked for Mlle. Turquet, in summer the understudy of the principal rider at the cirque, and in winter, "a super" in a Boulevard theater.

"Malaga!" shouted the doorkeeper, rushing into the attic, "here is a fine gentleman for you! He is asking Chapuzot all about you; and Chapuzot is cramming him to give me time to let you know."

"Thank you, Mme. Chapuzot; but what will he say to find me ironing my gown?"

"Pooh, stuff! When a man is in love, he loves everything about you."

"Is he an Englishman? They are fond of horses."

"No. He looks to me like a Spaniard."

"So much the worse. The Spaniards are down in the market they say.—Stay here, Mme. Chapuzot, I shall not look so left to myself."

"Who were you wanting, monsieur?" said the woman, opening the door to Thaddeus.

"Mlle. Turquet."

"My child," said the porter's wife, wrapping her shawl round her, "here is somebody asking for you."

A rope on which some linen was airing knocked off the Captain's hat.

"What is your business, monsieur?" asked Malaga, picking it up.

"I saw you at the circus; you remind me, mademoiselle, of a daughter I lost; and out of affection for my Héloïse, whom you are so wonderfully like, I should wish to be of use to you if you will allow me."

"Well, to be sure! But sit down, M. le Général," said Mme. Chapuzot. "You cannot say fairer—nor handsomer."

"I am not by way of love-making, my good lady," said Paz. "I am a father in deep distress, eager to be cheated by a likeness."

"And so I am to pass as your daughter?" said Malaga, very roguishly, and without suspecting the absolute truth of the statement.

"Yes," said Paz. "I will come sometimes to see you; and that the illusion may be perfect, I will place you in handsome lodgings, nicely furnished——"

"I shall have furniture of my own?" said Malaga, looking at Mme. Chapuzot.

"And servants," Paz went on; "and live quite at your ease."

Malaga looked at the stranger from under her brow.

"From what country are you, monsieur?"

"I am a Pole."

"Then I accept," said she.

Paz went away, promising to call again.

"That is a tough one!" said Marguerite Turquet, looking at Mme. Chapuzot. "But I am afraid this man is wheedling me to humor some fancy. Well, I will risk it."

A month after this whimsical scene, the fair circus-rider was established in rooms charmingly furnished by Count Adam's upholsterer, for Paz wished that his folly should be talked about in the Laginski household. Malaga, to whom the adventure was like an Arabian Nights' dream, was waited on by the Chapuzot couple—at once her servants and her confidants. The Chapuzots and Marguerite Turquet expected some startling climax; but at the end of three months, neither Malaga nor the Chapuzots could account for the Polish Count's fancy. Paz would spend about an hour there once a week, during which he sat in the drawing-room, never choosing to go either into Malaga's boudoir nor into her bedroom, which, in fact, he never entered in spite of the cleverest maneuvering on her part and on that of the Chapuzots. The Count inquired about the little incidents that varied the horsewoman's life, and on going away he always left two forty-franc pieces on the chimney-shelf.

"He looks dreadfully bored," said Mme. Chapuzot.

"Yes," replied Malaga, "that man is as cold as frost after a thaw."

"He is a jolly good fellow, all the same," cried Chapuzot, delighted to see himself dressed in blue Elbeuf cloth, and as smart as a minister's office messenger.

Paz, by his periodical tribute, made Marguerite Turquet an allowance of three hundred and twenty francs a month. This sum, added to her small earnings at the circus, secured her a splendid existence as compared with her past squalor. Strange tales were current among the performers at the circus as to Malaga's good fortune. The girl's vanity allowed her rent to be stated at sixty thousand francs, instead of the modest six thousand which her rooms cost the prudent Captain. According to the clowns and supers, Malaga ate off silver plate; and she certainly came to the circus in pretty burnouses, in shawls, and elegant scarfs. And, to crown all, the Pole was the best fellow a circus-rider could come across; never tiresome, never jealous, leaving Malaga perfect freedom.

"Some women are so lucky!" said Malaga's rival. "Such a thing would never happen to me, though I bring in a third of the receipts."

Malaga wore smart "coal-scuttles," and sometimes gave herself airs in a carriage in the Bois de Boulogne, where the youth of fashion began to observe her. In short, Malaga was talked about in the flash world of equivocal women, and her good fortune was attacked by calumny. She was reported to be a somnambulist, and the Pole was said to be a magnetizer in search of the Philosopher's Stone. Other comments of a far more venomous taint made Malaga more inquisitive than Psyche; she reported them, with tears, to Paz.

"When I owe a woman a grudge," said she to conclude, "I do not culumniate her, I do not say that a man magnetizes her to find stones. I say that she is a bad lot, and I prove it. Why do you get me into trouble?"

Paz was cruelly speechless.

Mme. Chapuzot succeeded at last in discovering his name and title. Then, at the Hôtel Laginski, she ascertained some positive facts: Thaddeus was unmarried, he was not known to have a dead daughter either in Poland or France. Malaga could not help feeling a thrill of terror.

"My dear child," said Mme. Chapuzot, "that monster——"

A man who was satisfied with gazing at a beautiful creature like Malaga—gazing at her by stealth—from under his brows—not daring to come to any decision—without any confidence; such a man, in Mme. Chapuzot's mind, must be a monster. "That monster is breaking you in, to lead you on to something illegal or criminal. God above us! if you were to be brought up at the Assizes—and it makes me shudder from head to foot to think of it, I quake only to speak of it—or in the Criminal Court, and your name was in the newspapers! . . . Do you know what I should do in your place? Well, in your place, to make all safe, I should warn the police."

One day, when mad notions were fermenting in Malaga's brain, Paz having laid his gold pieces on the velvet chimney-shelf, she snatched up the money and flung it in his face, saying, "I will not take stolen money!"

The Captain gave the gold to the Chapuzots, and came no more.

Clémentine was spending the summer on the estate of her uncle, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, in Burgundy.

When the troupe at the circus no longer saw Thaddeus in his seat, there was a great talk among the artists. Malaga's magnanimity was regarded as folly by some, as cunning by others. The Pole's behavior, as explained to the most experienced of the women, seemed inexplicable. In the course of a single week, Thaddeus received thirty-seven letters from women of the town. Happily for him, his singular reserve gave rise to no curiosity in fashionable circles, and remained the subject of discussion in the flash set only.

Two months later, the handsome rider, swamped in debt, wrote to Count Paz the following letter, which the dandies of the day regarded as a masterpiece:

"You, whom I still venture to call my friend, will you not take pity on me after what passed between us, which you took so ill? My heart disowns everything that could hurt your feelings. If I was so happy as to make you feel some charm when you sat near me, as you used to do, come again . . . otherwise, I shall sink into despair. Poverty has come upon me already, and you do not know what stupid things it brings with it. Yesterday I lived on a herring for two sous and one sou's worth of bread. Is that a breakfast for the woman you love? The Chapuzots have left me after seeming so devoted to me. Your absence has shown me the shallowness of human attachment. A bailiff, who turned a deaf ear to me, has seized everything on behalf of the landlord, who has no pity, and of the jeweler, who will not wait even ten days; for with you men, credit vanishes with confidence. What a position for a woman who has nothing to reproach herself for but a little amusement! My dear friend, I have taken everything of any value to my uncle's; I have nothing left but my memory of you, and the hard weather is coming on. All through the winter I shall have no fire, since nothing but melodrama is played at the Boulevard, in which I have nothing to do but tiny parts, which do not show a woman off. How could you misunderstand my noble feelings towards you, for, after all, we have not two ways of expressing our gratitude? How is it that you, who seemed so pleased to see me comfortable, could leave me in misery? Oh, my only friend on earth, before I go back to travel from fair to fair with the Bouthors—for so, at any rate, I can make my living—forgive me for wanting to know if I have really lost you forever. If I should happen to think of you just as I was jumping through the hoop, I might break my legs by missing time. Come what may, I am yours for life.

"MARGUERITE TURQUET."

"This letter," exclaimed Thaddeus, shouting with laughter, "is well worth my ten thousand francs."

Clémentine came home on the following day, and Paz saw her once more, lovelier and more gracious than ever. During dinner the Countess preserved an air of perfect indifference towards Thaddeus, but a scene took place between the Count and his wife after their friend had left. Thaddeus, with an affectation of asking Adam's advice, had left Malaga's letter in his hands, as if by accident.

"Poor Thaddeus!" said Adam to his wife, after seeing Paz make his escape. "What a misfortune for a man of his superior stamp to be the plaything of a ballet-girl of the lowest class! He will love anything; he will degrade himself; he will be unrecognizable before long. Here, my dear, read that," and he handed her Malaga's letter.

Clémentine read the note, which smelt of tobacco, and tossed it away with disgust.

"However thick the bandage over his eyes may be, he must have found something out. Malaga must have played him some faithless trick."

"And he is going back to her!" cried Clémentine. "He will forgive her! You men can have no pity for any but those horrible women!"

"They want it so badly!" said Adam.

"Thaddeus did himself justice—by keeping to himself!" said she.

"Oh, my dearest, you go too far," said the Count, who, though he was at first delighted to lower his friend in his wife's eyes, would not the death of the sinner.

Thaddeus, who knew Adam well, had begged for absolute secrecy; he had only spoken, he said, as an excuse for his dissipations, and to beg his friend to allow him to have a thousand crowns for Malaga.

"He is a man of great pride," Adam went on.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, to have spent no more than ten thousand francs on her, and to wait for such a letter as that to rouse him before taking her the money to pay her debts! For a Pole, on my honor! . . ."

"But he may ruin you!" said Clémentine in the acrid tone of a Parisian woman when she expresses her cat-like distrustfulness.

"Oh! I know him," said Adam. "He would sacrifice Malaga to us."

"We shall see," replied the Countess.

"If it were needful for his happiness, I should not hesitate to ask him to give her up. Constantine tells me that during the time he was seeing her, Paz, usually so sober, sometimes came in quite fuddled. If he allowed himself to take to drink, I should be as much grieved as if he were my son."

"Do not tell me any more!" cried the Countess with another gesture of disgust.

Two days later the Captain could see in her manner, in the tone of her voice, in her eyes, the terrible results of Adam's betrayal. Scorn had opened gulfs between him and this charming woman. And he fell forthwith into deep melancholy, devoured by this thought, "You have made yourself unworthy of her." Life became a burden to him; the bright sunshine was gloomy in his eyes. Nevertheless, under these floods of bitter thought, he had some happy moments: he could now give himself up without danger to his admiration for the Countess, who never paid him the slightest attention when, at a party, hidden in a corner, mute, all eyes and all heart, he did not lose one of her movements, not a note of her song when she sang. He lived in this enchanting life: he might himself groom the horse that she was to ride, and devote himself to the management of her splendid house with redoubled care for its interests.

These unspoken joys were buried in his heart like those of a mother, whose child never knows anything of his mother's heart: for is it knowledge so long as even one thing remains unknown? Was not this finer than Petrarch's chaste passion for Laura, which, after all, was well repaid by a wealth of glory, and by the triumph of the poety she had inspired? Was not the emotion which Assas felt in dying, in truth a whole life? This emotion Paz felt every day without dying, but also without the guerdon of immortality.

What is there in love that Paz, notwithstanding these secret delights, was consumed by sorrow? The Catholic religion has so elevated love that she has married it inseparably, so to speak, to esteem and generosity. Love does not exist apart from the fine qualities of which man is proud, and so rarely are we loved if we are contemned that Thaddeus was perishing of his self-inflicted wounds. Only to hear her say that she could have loved him, and then to die! The hapless lover would have thought his life well paid for. The torments of his previous position seemed to him preferable to living close to her, loading her with his generosity without being appreciated or understood. In short, he wanted the price of his virtue.

He grew thin and yellow, and fell so thoroughly ill, consumed by low fever, that during the month of January he kept his bed, though refusing to see a physician. Count Adam grew extremely uneasy about his poor Thaddeus. The Countess then was so cruel as to say, when they were together one day, "Let him alone; do not you see that he has some Olympian remorse?"

This speech stung Thaddeus to the courage of despair;

he got up, went out, tried some amusement, and recovered his health.

In the month of February Adam lost a rather considerable sum at the Jockey Club, and, being afraid of his wife, he begged Thaddeus to place this sum to the account of his extravagance for Malaga.

"What is there strange in the notion that the ballet-girl should have cost you twenty thousand francs? It concerns no one but me. Whereas, if the Countess should know that I had lost it at play, I should fall in her esteem, and she would be in alarm for the future."

"This to crown all!" cried Thaddeus, with a deep sigh.

"Ah! Thaddeus, this service would make us quits if I were not already the debtor."

"Adam, you may have children. Give up gambling," said his friend.

"Twenty thousand francs more that Malaga has cost us!" exclaimed the Countess some days after, on discovering Adam's generosity to Paz. "And ten thousand before—that is thirty thousand in all! Fifteen hundred francs a year, the price of my box at the Italian opera, a whole fortune to many people. . . . Oh! you Poles are incomprehensible!" cried she, as she picked some flowers in her beautiful conservatory. "You care no more than that!"

"Poor Paz——"

"Poor Paz, poor Paz!" she echoed, interrupting him. "What good does he do us? I will manage the house myself! Give him the hundred louis a year that he refused, and let him make his own arrangements with the Olympic Circus."

"He is of the greatest use to us; he has saved us at least forty thousand francs this year. In short, my dearest, he has placed a hundred thousand francs for us in Nucingen's bank, and a steward would have netted them."

Clémentine was softened, but she was not the less hard on Thaddeus.

Some days after she desired Paz to come to her in her boudoir, where, a year since, she had been startled by comparing him with the Count. This time she received him alone, without any suspicion of danger.

"My dear Paz," said she, with the careless familiarity of fine folks to their inferiors, "if you love Adam as you say you do, you will do one thing which he will never ask, but which I, as his wife, do not hesitate to require of you——"

"It is about Malaga?" said Thaddeus with deep irony.

"Well, yes, it is," she said. "If you want to end your days with us, if you wish that we should remain friends, give her up. How can an old soldier——"

"I am but five and thirty, and have not a gray hair!"

"You look as if you had," said she, "and that is the same thing. How can a man so capable of putting two and two together, so superior . . ."

What was horrible was that she spoke the word with such an evident intention of rousing in him the nobleness of soul which she believed to be dead.

"So superior as you are," she went on, after a little pause, which a gesture from Paz forced upon her, "allow yourself to be entrapped like a boy. Your affair with her has made Malaga famous.—Well! My uncle wanted to see her, and he saw her. My uncle is not the only one; Malaga is very ready to receive all these gentlemen.—I believe you to be high-minded.—Take shame to yourself! Come, would she be an irreparable loss to you?"

"Madame, if I knew of any sacrifice by which I might recover your esteem, it would soon be made; but to give up Malaga is not a sacrifice——"

"In your place that is what I should say if I were a man," replied Clémentine. "Well, but if I take it as a great sacrifice, there is nothing to be angry at."

Paz went away, fearing he might do some mad act; he felt his brain invaded by crazy notions. He went out for a walk, lightly dressed in spite of the cold, but failed to cool the burning of his face and brow. "I believed you to be high-minded!" He heard the words again and again. "And scarcely a year ago," said he to himself, "to hear Clémentine, I had beaten the Russians single-handed!" He thought of quitting the Laginski household, of asking to be sent on service in the Spahi regiment, and getting himself killed in Africa; but a dreadful fear checked him: "What would become of them without me? They would soon be ruined. Poor Countess, what a horrible life it would be for her to be reduced even to thirty thousand francs a year! Come," said he to himself, "since she can never be yours, courage, finish your work!"

As all the world knows, since 1830 the Carnival in Paris has grown to prodigious proportions, making it European, and burlesque, and animated to a far greater degree than the departed carnivals of Venice. Is this because, since fortunes have so enormously diminished, Parisians have thought of amusing themselves collectively, just as in their clubs they have a drawing-room without any mistress of the house, without politeness, and quite cheap? Be this as it may, the month of March was prodigal of those balls, where dancing, farce, coarse fun, delirium, grotesque figures, and banter made keen by Paris wit, achieved gigantic results. This madness had its Pandemonium at that time in the Rue Saint-Honoré, and its Napoleon in Musard, a little man born to rule an orchestra as tremendous as the rampant mob, and to conduct a galop—that whirl of witches at their Sabbath, and one of Auber's triumphs, for the galop derived its form and its poetry from the famous galop in *Gustavus*. May not this vehement finale serve as a symbol of an age when, for fifty years, everything has rushed on with the swiftness of a dream?

Now, our grave Thaddeus, bearing an immaculate image in his heart, went to Malaga to invite her, the queen of carnival dancing, to spend an evening at Musard's as soon as he learned that the Countess, disguised to the teeth, was intending to come with two other young ladies, escorted by their husbands, to see the curious spectacle of one of these monster balls. On Shrove Tuesday night, in the year of grace 1838, at four o'clock in the morning, the Countess, wrapped in a black domino, and seated on a bench of one of the amphitheaters of the Babylonian hall where Valentino has since given his concerts, saw Thaddeus, dressed as Robert Macaire, leading the circus-rider in the costume of a savage, her head dressed with nodding plumes like a horse at a coronation, and leaping among the groups like a perfect Jack-o'-lantern.

"Oh!" exclaimed Clémentine to her husband, "you Poles are not men of character. Who would not have felt sure of Thaddeus? He gave me his word, not knowing that I should be here and see all without being seen."

Some days after this she invited Paz to dinner. After dinner Adam left them together, and Clémentine scolded Thaddeus in such a way as to make him feel that she would no longer have him about the house.

"Indeed, madame," said Thaddeus humbly, "you are quite right. I am a wretch; I had pledged my word. But what can I do? I put off the parting with Malaga till after the Carnival. . . . And I will be honest with you; the woman has so much power over me . . ."

"A woman who gets herself turned out of Musard's by the police, and for such dancing?"

"I admit it; I sit condemned; I will quit your house. But you know Adam. If I hand over to you the conduct of your affairs, you will have to exert great energy. Though I have the vice of Malaga, I know how to keep an eye on your concerns, how to manage your household, and superintend the smallest details. Allow me then to remain till I have seen you qualified to continue my system of management. You have now been married three years, and are safe from the first follies consequent on the honeymoon. The ladies of Paris society, even with the highest titles, understand very well in these days how to control a fortune and a household. . . . Well, as soon as I am assured, not of your capacity, but of your firmness, I will leave Paris."

"It is Thaddeus of Warsaw that speaks, not Thaddeus of the circus. Come back to us cured."

"Cured?—Never!" said Paz, his eyes fixed on Clémentine's pretty feet. "You cannot know, Countess, all the spice, the unexpectedness there is in that woman's wit." And feeling his courage fail him, he added, "There is not a single woman of fashion, with her prim airs, who is worth that frank young animal nature."

"In fact, I should not choose to have anything in me of the animal!" said the Countess, with a flashing look like an adder in a rage.

After that day Count Paz explained to Clémentine all her affairs, made himself her tutor, taught her the difficulties of managing her property, the real cost of things, and the way to avoid being too extensively robbed by her people. She might trust Constantine, and make him her major-domo. Thaddeus had trained Constantine. By the month of May he thought the Countess perfectly capable of administering her fortune; for Clémentine was one of those clear-sighted women whose instincts are alert, with an inborn genius for household rule.

The situation thus naturally brought about by Thaddeus took a sudden turn most distressing for him, for his sufferings were not so light as he made them seem. The hapless lover had not reckoned with accident. Adam fell very seriously ill. Thaddeus, instead of leaving, installed himself as his friend's sick-nurse. His devotedness was indefatigable. A woman who had had an interest in looking through the telescope of foresight would have seen in the Captain's heroism the sort of punishment which noble souls inflict on themselves to subdue their involuntary thoughts of sin; but women see everything or nothing, according to their frame of mind; love is their sole luminary.

For forty-five days Paz watched and nursed Mitgislas without seeming to have a thought of Malaga, for the excellent reason that he never did think of her. Clémentine, seeing Adam at death's door, and yet not dead, had a consultation of the most famous doctors.

"If he gets through this," said the most learned of the physicians, "it can only be by an effort of nature. It lies with those who nurse him to watch for the moment and aid nature. The Count's life is in the hands of his attendants."

Thaddeus went to communicate this verdict to Clémentine, who was sitting in the Chinese pavilion, as much to rest after her fatigues as to leave the field free for the doctors, and not to be in their way. As he trod the graveled paths leading from the boudoir to the rockery on which the Chinese summer-house was built, Clémentine's lover felt as though he were in one of the gulfs described by Alighieri. The unhappy man had never foreseen the chance of becoming Clémentine's husband, and he had bogged himself in a swamp of mud. When he reached her his face was set, sublime in its despair. Like Medusa's head, it communicated terror.

"He is dead?" said Clémentine.

"They have given no hope; at least, they leave it to nature. Do not go in just yet. They are still there, and Bianchon himself is examining him."

"Poor fellow!—I wonder whether I have ever worried him," she said.

"You have made him very happy; be quite easy on that point," said Thaddeus; "and you have been indulgent to him——"

"The loss will be irreparable."

"But, dear lady, supposing the Count should die, had you not formed your opinion of him?"

"I do not love him blindly," she said; "but I loved as a wife ought to love her husband."

"Then," said Thaddeus, in a voice new to Clémentine's experience of him, "you ought to feel less regret than if you were losing one of those men who are a woman's pride, her love, her whole life! You may be frank with such a friend as I am. . . . I shall regret him—I! Long before your marriage I had made him my child, and I have devoted my life to him. I shall have no interest left on earth. But life still has charms for a widow of four and twenty."

"Why, you know very well that I love no one," said she, with the roughness of sorrow.

"You do not know yet what it is to love," said Thaddeus.

"Oh! husband for husband, I have sense enough to prefer a child like my poor Adam to a superior man. For nearly a month now we have been asking ourselves, 'Will he live?' These fluctuations have prepared me, as they have you, for this end. I may be frank with you?—Well, then, I would give part of my life to save Adam's. Does not independence for a woman, here in Paris, mean liberty to be gulled by the pretence of love in men who are ruined or profligate? I have prayed God to spare me my husband—so gentle, such a good fellow, so little fractious, and who was beginning to be a little afraid of me."

"You are honest, and I like you the better for it," said Thaddeus, taking Clémentine's hands, which she allowed him to kiss. "In such a solemn moment there is indescribable satisfaction in finding a woman devoid of hypocrisy. It is possible to talk to you.—Consider the future; supposing God should not listen to you—and I am one of those who are most ready to cry to Him: Spare my friend!—for these fifty nights past have not made my eyes heavy, and if thirty days and thirty nights more care are needed, you, madame, may sleep while I watch. I will snatch him from death, if, as they say, he can be saved by care. But if, in spite of you, in spite of me, the Count is dead. Well, then, if you were loved, or worshiped, by a man whose heart and character were worthy of yours——"

"I have perhaps madly wished to be loved, but I have never met——"

"Supposing you were mistaken."

Clémentine looked steadily at Thaddeus, suspecting him less of loving her than of a covetous dream; she poured contempt on him by a glance, measuring him from head to foot, and crushed him with two words, "Poor Malaga!" pronounced in those tones such as fine ladies alone can find in the gamut of their contempt.

She rose and left Thaddeus fainting, for she did not turn round, but walked with great dignity back to her boudoir, and thence up to her husband's room.

An hour later Paz returned to the sick man's bedside, and gave all his care to the Count, as though he had not received his own death-blow.

From that dreadful moment he became silent; he had a duel to fight with disease, and he carried it through in a way that excited the admiration of the doctors. At any hour his eyes were always beaming like two lamps. Without showing the slightest resentment towards Clémentine, he listened to her thanks without accepting them; he seemed deaf. He had said to himself, "She shall owe Adam's life to me!" and these words he had, as it were, written in letters of fire in the sick man's room.

At the end of a fortnight Clémentine was obliged to give up some of the nursing, or risk falling ill from so much fatigue. Paz was inexhaustible. At last, about the end of August, Bianchon, the family doctor, answered for the Count's life:

"Ah, madame," said he to Clémentine, "you are under not the slightest obligation to me. But for his friend we could not have saved him!"

On the day after the terrible scene in the Chinese pavilion, the Marquis de Ronquerolles had come to see his nephew, for he was setting out for Russia with a secret mission; and Paz, overwhelmed by the previous evening, had spoken a few words to the diplomat.

On the very day when Count Adam and his wife went out for the first time for a drive, at the moment when the carriage was turning from the steps, an orderly came into the courtyard and asked for Count Paz. Thaddeus, who was sitting with his back to the horses, turned round to take a letter bearing the stamp of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and put it into the side-pocket of his coat, with a decision which precluded any questions on the part of Clémentine or Adam. It cannot be denied that persons of good breeding are masters of the language that uses no speech. Nevertheless, as they reached the Porte Maillot, Adam, assuming the privilege of a convalescent whose whims must be indulged, said to Thaddeus:

"There can be no indiscretions between two brothers who love each other as you and I do; you know what is in that letter; tell me, I am in a fever of curiosity."

Clémentine looked at Thaddeus as an angry woman can, and said to her husband, "He has been so sulky with me these two months that I shall take good care not to press him."

"Oh dear me!" replied Thaddeus, "as I cannot hinder the newspapers from publishing it, I may very well reveal the secret. The Emperor Nicholas does me the favor of appointing me captain on service in a regiment starting with the Khiva Expedition."

"And you are going?" cried Adam.

"I shall go, my dear fellow. I came as captain, and as captain I return. Malaga might lead me to make a fool of myself. We shall dine together to-morrow for the last time. If I did not set out in September for St. Petersburg, I should have to travel overland, and I am not rich. I must leave Malaga her little independence. How can I fail to provide for the future of the only woman who has understood me? Malaga thinks me a great man! Malaga thinks me handsome! Malaga may perhaps be faithless, but she would go through——"

"Through a hoop for you, and fall on her feet on horseback!" said Clémentine sharply.

"Oh, you do not know Malaga," said the Captain, with deep bitterness, and an ironical look which made Clémentine uneasy and silent.

"Farewell to the young trees of this lovely Bois de Boulogne, where Parisian ladies drive, and the exiles wander who have found a home here. I know that my eyes will never again see the green trees of the Allée de Mademoiselle, or of the Route des Dames, nor the acacias, nor the cedar at the Ronds-points.

"On the Asiatic frontier, obedient to the schemes of the great Emperor I have chosen to be my master, promoted perhaps to command an army, for sheer courage, for constantly risking my life, I may indeed regret the Champs-Elysées where you, once, made me take a place in the carriage, by your side.—Finally, I shall never cease to regret the severity of Malaga—of the Malaga I am at this moment thinking of."

This was said in a tone that made Clémentine shiver.

"Then you love Malaga very truly?" she said.

"I have sacrificed for her the honor we never sacrifice——"

"Which?"

"That which we would fain preserve at any cost in the eyes of the idol we worship."

After this speech Thaddeus kept impenetrable silence; he broke it only when, as they drove down the Champs-Élysées, he pointed to a wooden structure and said, "There is the circus!"

Before their last dinner he went to the Russian Embassy for a few minutes, and from thence to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and he started for Le Havre next morning before the Countess and Adam were up.

"I have lost a friend," said Adam, with tears in his eyes, as he learned that Count Paz was gone, "a friend in the truest sense of the word, and I cannot think what has made him flee from my house as if it were the plague. We are not the sort of friends to quarrel over a woman," he went on, looking full at Clémentine, "and yet all he said yesterday about Malaga—But he never laid the tip of his finger on the girl."

"How do you know?" asked Clémentine.

"Well, I was naturally curious to see Mlle. Turquet, and the poor girl cannot account for Thaddeus's extraordinary reserve———"

"That is enough," said the Countess, going off to her own room, and saying to herself, "I have surely been the victim of some sublime hoax."

She had scarcely made the reflection, when Constantine placed in her hands the following letter, which Thaddeus had scrawled in the night:

"COUNTESS,—To go to be killed in the Caucasus, and to bear the burden of your scorn, is too much; a man should die unmutilated. I loved you from the first time I saw you, as a man loves the woman he will love forever, even when she is faithless—I, under obligations to Adam, whom you chose and married—I, so poor, the volunteer steward, devoted to your household. In this dreadful catastrophe I found a delightful existence. To be an indispensable wheel in the machine, to know myself useful to your luxury and comfort, was a source of joy to me; and if that joy had been keen when Adam alone was my care, think what it must have been when the woman I worshiped was at once the cause and the effect! I have known all the joys of motherhood in my love; and I accepted life on those terms. Like the beggars on the high roads, I built myself a hut of stones on the skirts of your beautiful home, but without holding out my hand for alms. I, poor and unhappy, but blinded by Adam's happiness, I was the donor. Yes, you were hedged in by a love as pure as that of a guardian angel; it watched while you slept; it caressed you with a look as you passed by; it was glad merely to exist; in short, you were the sunshine of home to the hapless exile who is now writing to you, with tears in his eyes, as he recalls the happiness of those early days.

"At the age of eighteen, with no one to love me, I had chosen as an ideal mistress a charming woman at Warsaw, to whom I referred all my thoughts and my wishes, the queen of my days and nights. This woman knew nothing of it, but why inform her? For my part, what I loved was love.

"You may fancy, from this adventure of my boyhood, how happy I was, living within the sphere of your influence, grooming your horse, picking out new gold pieces for your purse, superintending the splendor of your table and your entertainments, seeing you eclipse fortunes greater than your own by my good management. With what zeal did I not rush round Paris when Adam said to me, 'Thaddeus, *she* wants this or that!' It was one of those joys for which there are no words. You have now and again wished for some trifle within a certain time which has compelled me to feats of expedition, driving for six or seven hours in a cab; and what happiness it has been to walk in your service. When I have watched you smiling in the midst of your flowers without being seen by you, I have forgotten that no one loved me—in short, at such moments I was but eighteen again.

"Sometimes, when my happiness turned my brain, I would go at night and kiss the spot where your feet had left, for me, a luminous trace, just as of old I had stolen, with a thief's miraculous skill, to kiss a key which Countess Ladislas had touched on opening a door. The air you breathed was embalmed; to me it was fresh life to breathe it; and I felt, as they say is the case in the tropics, overwhelmed by an atmosphere surcharged with creative elements. I must tell you all these things to account for the strange fatuity of my involuntary thoughts. I would have died sooner than divulge my secret.

"You may remember those few days when you were curious, when you wanted to see the worker of the wonders which had at last struck you with a surprise. I believed—forgive me, madame—I believed that you would love me. Your kindliness, your looks—interpreted by a lover—seemed fraught with so much danger to me that I took up Malaga, knowing that there are liaisons which no woman can forgive; I took the girl up at the moment when I saw that my love was inevitably infectious. Overwhelm me now with the scorn which you poured upon me so freely when I did not deserve it; but I think I may be quite sure that if, on the evening when your aunt took the Count out, I had said what I have here written, having once said it I should have been like the tame tiger who has at last set his teeth in living flesh, and who scents warm blood. . . .

"Midnight.

"I could write no more, the memory of that evening was too vivid! Yes, I was then in a delirium! I saw expectancy in your eyes; victory and its crimson banners may have burned in mine and fascinated yours. My crime was to think such things—and perhaps wrongly. You alone can be judge of that fearful scene when I succeeded in crushing love, desire, the most stupendous forces of manhood under the icy hand of gratitude which must be eternal. Your terrible scorn punished me. You have showed me that neither disgust nor contempt can ever be got over. I love you like a madman. I must have gone away if Adam had died. There is all the more reason since Adam is saved. I did not snatch my friend from the grave to betray him. And, indeed, my departure is the due punishment for the thought that came to me that I would let him die when the physicians said his life depended on his attendants.

"Farewell, madame; in leaving Paris I lose everything, but you lose nothing in parting with yours most faithfully,

"THADDEUS PAZ."

"If my poor Adam says he has lost a friend, what have I lost?" thought Clémentine, sitting dejected, with her eyes fixed on a flower in the carpet.

This is the note which Constantine delivered privately to his master:

"MY DEAR MITGISLAS,—Malaga has told me all. For the sake of your happiness, never let a word escape you in Clémentine's presence as to your visits to the circus-rider; let her still believe that Malaga costs me a hundred thousand francs. With the Countess's character she will not forgive you either your losses at play or your visits to Malaga.—I am not going to Khiva, but to the Caucasus. I have a fit of spleen, and at the pace I mean to go, in three months I shall be Prince Paz, or dead. Farewell; though I have drawn sixty thousand francs out of Nucingen's, we are quits.

"THADDEUS."

"Idiot that I am! I very nearly betrayed myself just now by speaking of the circus-rider!" said Adam to himself.

Thaddeus has been gone three years, and the papers do not as yet mention any Prince Paz. Countess Laginska takes a keen interest in the Emperor Nicholas's expeditions; she is a Russian at heart, and reads with avidity all the news from that country. Once or twice a year she says to the Ambassador, with an affectation of indifference, "Do you know what has become of our poor friend Paz?"

Alas! most Parisian women, keen-eyed and subtle as they are supposed to be, pass by—and always will pass by—such an one as Paz without observing him. Yes, more than one Paz remains misunderstood; but, fearful thought! some are misunderstood even when they are loved. The simplest woman in the world requires some little coxcombry in the greatest man; and the most heroic love counts for nothing if it is uncut; it needs the arts of the polisher and the jeweler.

In the month of January 1842, Countess Laginska, beautified by gentle melancholy, inspired a mad passion in the Comte de la Palférine, one of the most audacious bucks of Paris at this day. La Palférine understood the difficulty of conquering a woman guarded by a chimera; to triumph over this bewitching woman, he trusted to a surprise, and to the assistance of a woman who, being a little jealous of Clémentine, would lend herself to plot the chances of the adventure.

Clémentine, incapable with all her wit of suspecting such treachery, was so imprudent as to go with this false friend to the masked ball at the opera. At about three in the morning, carried away by the excitement of the ball, Clémentine, for whom la Palférine had exhausted himself in attentions, consented to sup with him, and was getting into the lady's carriage. At this critical moment she was seized by a strong arm, and in spite of her cries placed in her own carriage, which was standing with the door open, though she did not know that it was waiting.

"He has not left Paris!" she exclaimed, recognizing Thaddeus, who ran off when he saw the carriage drive away with the Countess.

Had ever another woman such a romance in her life?

Clémentine is always hoping to see Paz again.

Paris, *January* 1842.

MASSIMILLA DONI

MASSIMILLA DONI

To Jacques Strunz.

My dear Strunz:—It would be ungrateful on my part did I not set your name at the head of one of the two stories that I could never have written but by your complaisance and painstaking. Receive this as a friendly confession of the efforts you made (perhaps not altogether successfully) to initiate me into the mystery of musical science. You have taught me, at the least, the sum of the difficulties and laborious work genius must bury in those poems which are for us the source of pleasures divine. You have also given me the opportunity of more than once laughing at the expense of a pretending connoisseur.

I have been taxed with my ignorance, but those so doing were little aware that I had taken counsel of one of our foremost musical critics, and knew not that I had the benefit of his best endeavor. Perhaps I was an inaccurate amanuensis. Should this be so I were indeed a traitor of a translator unknowingly, and still I will ever sign myself one of your friends.

De Balzac.

AS everyone versed in such matters must know, the nobility of Venice is the first in Europe. Its *Livre d'Or* (Golden Book) dates prior to the Crusades, from an epoch when Venice, a survivor of Imperial and Christian Rome, which had thrown itself into the water to escape the barbarians, was even then all-puissant and illustrious; the capital of the world of commerce and politics. This brilliant nobility, with a few exceptions, has gone to utter ruin. Among the gondoliers who serve the English—and who may in this read their own future fate as written of history—there are descendants of long-dead Doges bearing names that are older than those of their sovereigns. Upon some bridge as you sweep past it, if you ever visit Venice, you may admire some handsome girl in tattered garments, a poor child that maybe is a member of one of the most patrician of families. In a nation that has so fallen, it may well be supposed that certain strange characters may be encountered. It cannot astonish that sparks should flash out among ashes.

The nobility of Venice and those of Geneva, the same as those of Poland in earlier days, bore no titles. The name of Quirini, Doria, Brignole, Morosini, Sauli, Mocenigo, Fieschi, Cornaro, or Spinola was sufficient for the haughtiest pride. But all things become corrupt. At this time some of these families have titles. Even at a time when the nobility of the aristocratic republic were each the peer of the other, the title of prince was, in fact, given at Genoa to a member of the family of Doria, sovereigns of the principality of Amalfi. A similar title was used in Venice, having a precedent of ancient legitimacy in Facino Cane, Prince of Varese.

The last Cane of the elder branch left Venice thirty years preceding the fall of the Republic, condemned for various crimes. In the twentieth year of the present century it was represented by a young man by the name of Emilio, and an ancient palace long regarded as one of the chief ornaments of the Grand Canal. This scion of Fair Venice had for his sole fortune the useless palace and an income of fifteen hundred francs a year, the rental of a country-house on the Brenta. This small income spared the handsome Emilio the disgrace of accepting, as was done by many nobles, the indemnity of one franc per day, due to each poverty-stricken patrician by the stipulations of the cession to Austria.

At the beginning of winter this young noble was still staying in a country-house at the base of the Tyrolean Alps; it had been bought by the Duchess Cataneo the spring before. The furniture was, like that of all Italian palaces, rich with handsome silks, hung with exquisite taste, while valuable paintings were favorably hung. There were some by that priest of Genoa known as *il Capucino,* and several by Leonardo da Vinci, Carlo Dolci, Tintoretto, and Titian.

The sloping gardens were filled with the marvels that money has caused to be made. Grottoes of rock and patterns of shells—artistic lunacy—fairy terraces, arbors not too light, where the cypress with his tall trunk, the three-cornered pines, and the melancholy olive were intermingled with orange trees, laurels, myrtles, and pools of clear water in which swam blue and golden fishes. It matters not what may be said in favor of the popular English garden, with its unartificial prettiness, yet these trees pruned into the shapes of parasols and birds, the yews being clipped into still more fantastic shapes; this art of luxury, combined natural and artificial court graces; those waterfalls down marble steps, the water so lightly spread that it resembled a gauzy scarf blown aside by the wind and quickly renewed; the bronze statues which silently inhabited the glades; the noble mansion a landmark on every side, uprearing its light outline to the foot of the Alps—the living thoughts animating the marble, the bronze, the trees, this lavish prodigality was in perfect keeping with the love of a duchess and a gallant youth; for it is a poem removed far from the coarse aims of brutish nature.

In this palace of the fairies, where one might expect to see a negro slave, wearing a scarlet sash, holding an umbrella over the Duchess's head with one hand, while supporting her long train with the other, this Duchess Cataneo accepted the firmans of Victorine and wore the latest French modes. She had on a fine lawn dress, a wide straw hat, soft shoes, stockings of thread lace that the gentlest zephyr would have wafted away, and over her shoulders a black lace shawl. The one thing that could not have been understood in Paris, where every woman is incased in her dress as a dragon-fly is sheathed in its ring-like armor, was the perfect freedom with which this lovely daughter of Tuscany wore her French drapery; she had Italianized it. The utmost seriousness is accorded her skirt by the Frenchwoman; an Italian scarcely gives it a thought. She does not seek self-protection by a demure glance, for she knows her only armor is assured in a devoted love, a passion as sacred in her own estimation as it is in others'.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, after a ramble, and near a table still strewn with the remnants of an elegant breakfast, the Duchess, who was lolling in a low chair, gave him the freedom of these muslin draperies, not bestowing a frown upon him each time he stirred. Emilio, who was seated by her side, holding one of her hands between both of his, gazed at her in rapt adoration. Ask not if they loved; they loved only too well. They were not conning the same book, as did Paolo and Francesca; not so, for Emilio dared not say: "Let us read."

The glint of those eyes, the gray irises gleaming with streaks of gold starting from the center like beams of light, making her gaze a sweet, star-like radiance, so thrilled him with a nervous rapture that it became almost a spasm. The mere sight of the luxuriant black hair crowning the adored head, kept in due bounds by a band of gold, would cause a singing in his ears, the mad rush of the blood through his veins seeming as if it would burst his heart.

Massimilla, heiress of the Doni, of Florence, was married to the Sicilian Duke Cataneo. Her mother, now dead, had hoped, by fostering this marriage, to leave her daughter rich and happy in the Florentine manner. She thought that her daughter, who emerged from a convent to embark in life, would attain, under love's guidance, the sacred union of heart with heart, which, in a woman of Italy, is the all and all. But Massimilla Doni, in her convent, had acquired a genuine liking for a religious life, and, after pledging her troth to the Duke Cataneo, she had the Catholic content to be his wife.

Here was an untenable position. Cataneo considered himself absurd as a husband, he only looked for a duchess; when Massimilla took umbrage at his indifference, he with much *sang-froid* bade her look up some *cavaliere servente*, going so far as to offer his services in introducing her to some pretty youths from which to choose. The Duchess wept; he made his exit.

Massimilla gazed about her in the world that crowded her. She was taken by her mother to the various drawing-rooms of the ambassadors, to the Cascine—anywhere that it was likely young men might be met; she found none to her mind, and determined on travel. Then her mother died; she inherited her property, assumed mourning, and wended to Venice. There she saw Emilio, who, in passing her box at the opera, exchanged a glance of meaning with her. This was all. The Venetian was dumfounded, while the Duchess heard a whisper in her ear: "This is he!"

Emilio was introduced to the Duchess by the Signora Vulpato; he was the constant attendant in her box throughout the winter. Never was a love more ardent in two hearts, never so timid in its advances. The two children were each afraid of the other. Massimilla was not a coquette. She had not a second string to her bow—no *secondo,* no *terzo,* no *patito.*

This handsome pair had now been at the Rivalta for six months. Aged twenty, Massimilla had not abandoned her religious principles to her passion without a severe struggle. Still, although slowly, they had yielded; she was ready at any moment to consummate the love union her mother had made her understand, as she now sat, her hand caressed in that of Emilio.

She was unconscious of the misfortune, a torture to Emilio, which raised up a curious barrier between them. Massimilla, though very young, had the majestic mien ascribed by mythology to Juno, the only goddess which tradition has left without a lover; for Diana, the chaste Diana, loved! Only Jupiter himself could hold his own with his better-half goddess, the fashion upon which English ladies model themselves.

Emilio had placed his mistress far too high ever to touch her. Perhaps a year hence he might not be a victim to this grand mistake which only attacks very young or very old men. But like as the archer who shoots beyond the mark is as far from hitting it as the one whose arrow falls short, so the Duchess found herself between a husband, who knew he was so far from being able to reach the target that he had stopped trying to get there, and a lover who was carried so far past it by the wing-feather of an angel that he could not get back at it. Massimilla could be happy with desire, not understanding its issue; but her lover, sorrowful in his joy, would occasionally obtain a promise from his so-beloved that was perilously near the verge of what many women call "the gulf," and found himself compelled to be satisfied by picking the flowers around the edge, not having more courage than to pluck off the petals, and smothering his love-pangs in his breast.

They had rambled out together that morning, singing such a hymn of love as was repeated by the birds among the branches. Upon their return, the youth, whose state can only be likened to the cherubs who are represented by the painters as having nothing between their heads and their wings, had become so inflamed by passion as to venture a doubt as to the entire devotion of the Duchess, endeavoring to bring her to say:

"What proof can I give you?"

The question had been put with a regal air, and Memmi ardently kissed the handsome, guileless hand. Then he jumped up in a fury with himself and left Massimilla. The Duchess still reclined in her voluptuous attitude on the couch; but now she shed tears, wondering why so young, so fair as she was, she could not give pleasure to Emilio. Memmi, on the other side, banged his head against the trunks of trees like a hooded falcon. But now came a servant in pursuit of the young Venetian to hand him a letter just come by express.

Marco Vendramini—pronounced also Vendramin in Venetian, which drops many final letters—his only friend, wrote informing him that Facino Cane had died in a Paris hospital. Full proofs of this were at hand, and so the Cane-Memmi were princes of Varese. A more important item to him, he thought, was the engagement at the Fenice of the great tenor Genovese and the no less famous Signora Tinti.

He ran to communicate this glorious tidings to the Duchess, who knew nothing of the curious story which made La Tinti such an object of interest in Italy, so Emilio briefly related it.

This great and famous singer had been but a waiting-maid at a tavern, whose marvelous voice had captivated a wealthy Sicilian noble while traveling. This girl's loveliness —she was then but twelve years of age—being the peer of her voice, her patron had had her brought up in the like manner to which Louis XV. had Mlle. de Romans educated. He then waited most patiently until Clara's voice had been fully trained by an expert professor, by which time she was sixteen, before demanding aught of the treasure so successfully cultivated. La Tinti had made her début last year, and had made captive the three most fastidious capitals in Italy.

"I am quite certain that her great lord is not my husband," said the Duchess.

The equipage was soon ordered and Massimilla set out for Venice for the opening of the season. One evening in November, the new Prince of Varese watched the elegant gondola, navigated by men in livery, belonging to Massimilla; he could not help a retrospective glance at his life: he, whose only servant was an old gondolier of his father's.

"What a farce in fortune! A prince, with fifteen hundred francs a year! Owner of one of the finest palaces in the world, unable to dispose of the statues, wood-work, paintings, sculpture, which, by an Austrian decree, had been made inalienable. To live on a foundation made of driven piles of campeachy wood worth over a million francs, and yet possessing no furniture! Owning gorgeous galleries, and yet living in an attic over the highest arabesque cornice, built of marble brought hither from the Morea—that country through which a Memmius marched as a conqueror in the days of the Romans! To behold the effigies of his ancestors recumbent on their tombs of costly marble in one of the finest churches in Venice, in a chapel adorned with paintings by Titian, Tintoretto, Palma, Bellini, Paul Veronese—and yet debarred the selling a marble Memmi to the English for bread for the living Prince Varese! Genovese, the noted tenor, could earn more in one season by his warbling, the capital the interest of which would be an income this son of the Memmi could live on. Genovese smokes an Eastern hookah, but the Prince of Varese cannot have even enough cigars!" He tossed the end he was smoking into the water.

The Prince di Varese obtained his cigars at the Duchess's mansion; he would have been enraptured to lay at her feet the riches of the world. It was at her house that he made his only meal, for his whole income was expended on his clothes and his seat at the Fenice. His father's old gondolier was paid by him one hundred francs a year for his wage; to make this sum serve his necessities he could only obtain rice for food. Beside this Emilio retained enough to get himself a cup of black coffee every morning at Florian's to keep him in a state of nervous excitement until the evening; he hoped that this habit, carried to excess, would as surely be his death, in due time, as the use of opium would ultimately kill his friend Vendramin.

"And I am a prince!"

Speaking these words Memmi threw Vendramin's letter into the lagoon, not even stopping to read the conclusion of it; it floated off like a paper-boat launched by a child.

"See, now; Emilio," he muttered to himself, "is but three-and-twenty. He is a better man than Lord Wellington, who has the gout, than the Regent, who has paralysis, than the epileptic royal house of Austria, than the King of France, who——"

But as he thought of the King of France Emilio knit his brow, his skin of ivory became saffron-hued, his eyes filled with tears which hung adown his long lashes. He raised a hand, handsome enough to be painted by Titian, and pushed back his clustering brown hair, and gazed once more at Massimilla's gondola.

"And this impertinent mockery of fate comes even into my affairs of the heart," said he. "My soul and imagination are full of precious talents, yet Massimilla will none of them; she is a Florentine, she will cast me off. I sit by her side a figure of ice, yet her voice and glance fire me with celestial desire! Ah, well, either my highness will end my days with a charge from a pistol, else will the heir of the Cane follow Father Carmagnola's example. We will turn sailors, pirates; it will be really amusing to see how long we can escape the hangman."

Emilio had a vision of the days when the Memmi palace had light streaming forth from every window, when the strains of music were carried afar over the Adriatic gulf, when gondolas by the hundred were made fast to its mooring-posts, the while graceful masked figures and the republican magnates elbowed each other up the wave-kissed marble steps; of the time when its galleries and halls were crowded by intriguers and their victims; when the great banqueting-hall was filled with jolly revelers, the balconies with musicians, and when it seemed to embrace all the populace of Venice, laughing and gesticulating.

Some of the greatest sculptors of many ages had chiseled the brackets of bronze that supported the long-necked, pot-bellied China vases, and the chandeliers holding a thousand candles. Not a country but had given some contribution to the magnificence that ornamented walls and ceilings. But now the panels had been stripped of the splendid arras. Gone the Turkey carpets, the crystal vases brilliant with flowers, the statues, the paintings; no more joy, no more money, the one means of happiness. The London of the Middle Ages, Venice, was crumbling stone by stone, man by man. The prophetic green weed, kissed by the sea and flung by the sea at the feet of every mansion, was, to the Prince, the black border hung by nature, a token of death. But, alas! as a finality, a famous English poet had descended upon fair Venice as a raven upon a corpse, and had croaked out in poetic song—the first, the last word of social humanity—the refrain of a *de profundis.* English poetry! Flung in the face of the city that was the birthplace of the poetry of Italy! Wretched Venice!

Think, then, of the astonishment evinced by Emilio when aroused from his reverie by old Carmagnola crying:

"Serenissimo, the palace is on fire, else have the old Doges arisen from their tombs! See, there are lights showing in the windows of the highest balcony!"

Prince Emilio believed that his dream had become fact by the wave of some magic wand. It was dusk, so without being observed, the old gondolier was able to assist his master ashore, unnoticed by a hustling corps of servants who were buzzing around the landing like bees around a hive. Emilio stole into the great hall, giving upon the finest flight of stairs in the whole of Venice, up which he noiselessly ran to investigate this so strange occurrence.

Prince Emilio made his way to his own bedroom, which he was charmed to find had been made beautifully elegant. He seated himself in a cozy chair of gilded wood, and drew up to where an appetizing cold supper awaited him, and without more ado he began to eat.

"There can but be one Massimilla in all this world. Who but she could have thought out this surprise?" he reflected. "She has learned that I am now a prince. It may be that Duke Cataneo is dead, leaving her his fortune; if so, she is doubly as wealthy as before, and she will marry me!"

It gave him appetite. He ate in such manner as would have caused envy in an invalid Crœsus, could such have seen him, and he drank copiously of full-bodied port wine.

"Now can I understand the wise little look she wore as she said: 'Till this evening.' Will she come and break the spell, I wonder? What a fine bed! Such a pretty lamp, too! Really a Florentine idea!"

When Emilio had finished the bottle of port, eaten half a fish, and the greater portion of a French *pâté*, he felt drawn by longing to his bed. Perhaps he had a double attack of intoxication. He pulled aside the coverlet, opened the clothes, then, after doffing his attire in a pretty dressing-room, he lay down to meditate on destiny.

"Ah! I forgot poor Carmagnola, but doubtless my butler and chef will see to him," said he.

Just then in came a waiting-maid, lightly humming a scrap from *Il Barbiere;* she flung a lady's night-dress on a chair, the whole paraphernalia for the night, and said, when this was done:

"Here they are!"

And there entered a young lady dressed in the latest *mode* *de Paris*. She might have sat for some fancy English portrait to be engraved for a "Forget-me-not," an "Assembly of Beauties," or a "Book of Beauty."

The Prince quivered with delight, alloyed with fear, for, you must remember, he was in love with Massimilla. But his blood was fired with desire. It agitated him, but did not infuse his soul with that celestially warm glow always felt on a word or look from the Duchess. But the woman was not alone.

The Prince beheld one of those forms believed in by no one when depicted from real life, where we wonder at them, to an imaginary life of mere literary description. The stranger's attire, like that of all Neapolitans, showed five colors, if the black of his hat may be accounted as one; his trousers were olive-brown, a red vest was covered with gilt buttons, his coat had a shade of green, his linen was more yellow than white. His eyes were like glass beads. His nose resembled the ace of clubs, and was awfully long and knobby; it did its very best, in fact, to hide a gash it were a horrible misnomer to dignify with the name of mouth; in this three or four tusks could be seen, endowed, apparently, each with a motion fitting to the rest of the features. His obese ears drooped of their own weight, and gave a whimsical look of a hound to the creature.

Some Hippocrates had doubtless prescribed metallic medicaments to the extent of tainting his skin a blackish hue. His skull was Gothic and was barely supplied with a few, thin white hairs, which, like spun glass, crowned this grewsome face, covered with red blotches. Lastly, though the man was thin and but of medium height, his arms were long and shoulders broad. Despite this hideous aspect, and although he appeared to be about seventy, he did not lack a kind of Cyclopean nobility. His manners were aristocratic and his demeanor that of a man confident in his wealth.

His history could be read, engraved on the mud degraded by ignoble passions from the noble clay. Here was to be seen a man of gentle birth, who, wealthy from his youth up, had given his body over to debauchery for the sake of vulgar enjoyment. Debauchery had replaced the human being with a vile one made after its own likeness. Thousands of bottles of wine had made their way down the cavernous archway under that preposterous nose, but they had left their lees upon his lips. Slow and labored digestion had rotted away his teeth. The light of his eyes had become dimmed by the lamps of the gaming table. The blood, tainted with impurities, had impaired the nervous system. His intellect had deteriorated under the task of digestion upon his life-force. Finally, the passions of purchased love had thinned his hair. Every vice, like a greedy heir, had marked its possession on some portion of this living corpse. The student of Nature will detect in her jests the most ironical. For instance, toads she puts in close vicinity with flowers; she had placed this thing by the rose of love.

"Will you play the violin to-night, my dear Duke?" said the woman, as she loosed a cord to let fall a handsome portière over the door.

"Play the violin!" said Emilio to himself, "what has occurred in this my palace? Am I sleeping? I am here in that woman's bed, and yet she evidently thinks she is in her own house! She has taken off her mantle! Have I, as does Vendramin, inhaled fumes of opium? Am I, too, in one of those ravishing dreams of Venice, such as it was three centuries back?"

The unknown beauty, seated in front of a dressing-table, brilliant under wax-lights, was unfastening her lingerie with quiet calmness.

"Ring for Julia," said she, "I want to get my dress off."

At that moment the Duke noticed that the supper had been tampered with; he glanced about the room, and soon discovered the trousers belonging to the Prince, hanging over a chair-back at the foot of the bed.

"I will not ring, Clarina!" exclaimed the Duke, in a voice shrill in its fury. "I will not play the violin to-night, nor to-morrow night, nor, in fact, ever again——"

"Ta, ta, ta, ta," sang Clarina, on the octaves of one note, flying from one to the other with the ease of a nightingale.

"In spite of that voice, which is the envy of your patron saint, Claire, you are absolutely too impudent, you hussy."

"You have not brought me up to give ear to such abuse!" said she with an assumption of pride.

"Did I bring you up to hide a man in your bed? You are not worthy of either my generosity or hate!"

"A man!—in my bed!" cried Clara, nervously looking around.

"And that, too, after eating our supper as if he were at home!" added the Duke.

"Am I not at home?" exclaimed Emilio. "I am the Prince of Varese; this is my palace."

Saying this, Emilio sat up in bed, his handsome patrician head in a frame of flowered drapery.

First, Clarina laughed, a rushing fit of glee which seizes a young girl when she comes across a ludicrous adventure funny in the extreme. But her laughter soon ceased as she noted what a fine, handsome, and hale-looking young man he was, although but lightly attired; the madness of desire seized her in turn, as it had already done with Emilio; and, as she had no one whom to adore, no qualms of reason bridled her sudden fancy— that of a Sicilian woman in love.

"Though this is the Palazzo Memmi," said the Duke, "I must thank your highness to leave." As he spoke he took upon himself the distant irony of the polished noble and added, "I am at home here."

"Allow me to inform you, Monsieur the Duke, that you are in my bedroom, and not your own," Clarina said at length, as she recovered herself. "If you entertain any suspicions of my virtue, at least give me the benefit of my crime——"

"Suspicions? Say proof positive, my angel!"

"But I swear my innocence," Clarina made answer.

"Explain, then, what do I see in your bed?"

"Old ghost!" said Clarina. "Is it that you believe your eyes before my assertion, if so you have ceased to love me. Go, do not weary my ears! You hear? Then begone, Monsieur the Duke. This young Prince will readily recoup you the million francs you have expended on me."

"I won't repay anything," muttered Emilio in an undertone.

"But there is nothing due him! A million is too cheap for Clara Tinti when the adorer is so precious ugly. Now, get out," she added to the Duke. "You it was that first dismissed me; now it is I that dismiss you. We are quits."

As the old Duke made a gesture as though to dispute this command, given with a manner equal to Semiramis's best (the part in which La Tinti had earned her renown), the prima donna made a dash at the old monkey and ejected him out the door.

"If you do not leave me in quiet for to-night we never again meet. Understand, too, that *my* never counts for more than yours," said she.

"Quiet?" retorted the Duke with a bitter laugh. "My dear idol, it appears the rather that I leave you *con agitata!*"

The Duke went.

To Emilio this mean acquiescence was no surprise.

Clarina bounded like a fawn from the door to the bed.

"A prince, poor, young, beautiful!" she exclaimed. "Truly, it is a perfect fairy-tale."

La Tinti perched herself on the bed with the innocent glee of an animal, the plant yearning for the sun, the airy undulations of a branch awaiting the zephyr. While unbuttoning the cuffs of her sleeves she commenced singing, not as she sung when winning applause at the Fenice, but a tender warbling, resonant with emotion. Her song was a soft breeze wafting the caresses of her love to his heart.

She stole a timid glance at Emilio, who was quite as much embarrassed as herself, for this lady of the stage had now lost all the boldness that had brightened her eyes and given decision to both voice and gestures as she had dismissed the Duke. She was as humble as a courtesan who has fallen in love.

To depict La Tinti you must call to mind one of our leading French singers when she came out in *Il Fazzoletto*, Garcia's[1] opera, then being sung by an Italian company at the theater on the Rue Louvois. She was so extremely handsome that a poor guardsman of Naples had committed suicide in despair of winning her. La Tinti, whose name was something like that of the famous French singer, was just seventeen, and the unlucky Prince three and-twenty. What fateful hand of mockery had deemed it a jest to bring the match so near the powder? Here were a fragrant room hung with rose-colored silk bright with numberless wax-lights, a bed draped in lace, a dumb palace—Venice! Two young and handsome creatures! Every ravishing delight at once.

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[1] Father of Mme. Malibran and composer of *The Caliph of Bagdad.*

Emilio grasped hastily at his trousers, sprang out of bed, ran into the dressing-room, donned his clothes, came back and hurried toward the door. While dressing he thought:

"Massimilla, beloved daughter of the Doni, you in whom the beauty of Italy is a hereditary prerogative; you that are of equal worth to the portrait of Margherita, one of the so few pictures entirely painted by Raphael to his undying glory! My lovely and saintly mistress, shall I have earned you if I flee not from this abyss of flowery temptation? Should I be worthy you if I profaned a heart that is solely yours? No; I will not be caught in that vulgar snare spread for me by my rebellious senses! This girl has her Duke, be mine the Duchess!"

As he lifted the portière he heard a moan. The heroic lover turned around and saw Clarina on her knees, her face hidden in the bedclothes, choking with sobs. Will it be believed? The singer was infinitely lovelier as she knelt, her face unseen, than she was in her confusion and a glowing countenance. The hair drooping over her shoulders, the attitude of a Magdalen, the disorder of her partially unbuttoned dress, the whole living picture had been arranged by the Devil, who, as you are well aware, is a great colorist.

The Prince clasped an arm around the weeping girl, who slipped from his grasp like a snake, clinging to one foot, which she pressed to her bosom.

"Will you please tell me," said he, jerking his foot from her embrace, "how you come to be here in my palace? How the impecunious Emilio——"

"Emilio Memmi!" exclaimed La Tinti, as she arose. "You said you were a prince!"

"A prince since yesterday."

"You are in love with the Duchess Cataneo!" said she, looking him over from head to foot.

Emilio stood dumb, seeing that the prima donna was smiling at him through her tears.

"Your highness perhaps does not know that the man who had me trained for the stage, the Duke, is himself Cataneo. Nor that your friend Vendramin, desiring to serve you, rented your palace to him for three thousand francs during my season at the Fenice. My dear idol of my desire!" continued she, seizing his hand and drawing him nearer to her, "why fly from me, for whom most men would take the risk of broken bones? See, then, love is always love. It is the same in every place; the sun of our souls; we can warm ourselves wherever it may shine, and here—now—it is high noon. If I do not satisfy you, then tomorrow kill me! But I know I shall live, for I am a daisy!"

Emilio decided to remain. When with a gesture signifying his acquiescence, he noticed a thrill quiver through Clarina, seeming to him like a spark from hell. Never before had love come to him in so subtle a form. At that instant Carmagnola whistled loudly.

"What can he wish with me?" said the Prince.

But bewildered by love, Emilio disregarded the old gondolier's oft-repeated signals.

If you have never traveled in Switzerland, you maybe will read this pen-picture with pleasure. If you have clambered among those mountains you will be glad to be again reminded of its scenery.

In that land of the sublime, in the heart of a bowlder riven by a chasm, a valley as broad as the Avenue de Neuilly in Paris, but six hundred feet deep and cut into ravines, flows a torrent from some fearful height of the Saint-Gothard on the Simplon, which has formed a pool, how wide or how deep I cannot tell, bordered by split-up cliffs of gneiss upon the top of which meadows are found, with pine trees and great elms—where also grow the violet and strawberry. Here and there a chalet, at the window a rosy-cheeked Swiss girl with yellow hair. As is the mood of the sky so is the water of the lakelet, blue and green: blue, though, as is the sapphire—green as an emerald. There is naught in the world can give such an idea of depth, peace, immensity, heavenly love, eternal happiness, even to the least observant of travelers, the most hurried courier, the most common grocer, as this liquid diamond into which the snow trickles through its own channel, after accumulating on the highest Alps, bored through the live rock, whence it escapes below without a ripple of sound. The limpid sheet of water which overhangs the cascade descends so gently that not a ripple agitates the surface which reflects the chaise as you drive past. The postilion cracks his whip, you pass a crag, cross a bridge: suddenly arises a terrific uproar of waterfalls tumbling one upon another. The water has taken a gigantic leap and is desiccated into a hundred falls, is dashed to finest spray upon the rugged bowlders; a thousand sparkling jets fall from the heights that overtop the ravine and fall precisely in the center of the path that has been cut by the most forceful of active forces.

If you have formed a succinct idea of this landscape, you may see in the waters that slept the passion that Emilio bore the Duchess; in the cascades, leaping like a flock of sheep, lies the idea of his amorous passion, shared with La Tinti. In the midst of his torrent of love a rock was upreared against which he broke. Like Sisyphus, the Prince was always under the stone.

"What under heaven does the Duke with his violin?" he wondered.

"Is it to him I owe this sweet symphony?" he asked Clarina.

"Dear child," for she could read that Emilio was but a child. "My dear child, that man who is at least a hundred and eighteen in the parish-register of vice, but only forty-seven in that of the Church, has one sole joy remaining in life. A fact, all else is smashed, everything is in rags and tatters, his soul, mind, nerves, heart—all in man that can furnish an emotion or impulse, reminding him of heaven in desire or enjoyment, is fast bound in music, or really by one of the effects produced by music, a perfect unison of two voices or of a voice with the top open string of his violin. That old ape sits on my knee, takes his—instrument—he can play fairly well—makes the notes, and I, I imitate them. When at length the instant arrives that it is impossible to distinguish the tone from the violin and that produced by my throat, then does this old man become ecstatic, his dull eyes become light with their last remaining fire, he is happy, intoxicated, he rolls upon the floor in a drunkenness of rapture.

"There is the cause of his giving Genovese so large a price. His is the only tenor voice which, and that only occasionally, forms a perfect unison with mine. We really do exactly sing together perhaps once, perhaps twice (or the Duke imagines that we do, the same thing), and for this imagined pleasure he has become the owner of Genovese; for he is his. The tenor cannot be engaged by any theatrical manager unless I, also, am engaged, nor am I allowed to sing save with him. This is the whim that was the occasion of the Duke's bringing me up, to gratify this caprice; I am indebted to him for my talent, beauty, fortune, undoubtedly. He will die of an attack of perfect unison.

"Only the sense of hearing has survived his other faculties; this is the one thread binding him to life. Many a vigorous sprig shoots from a rotten stump. They say there are many men such as he. The Blessed Virgin keep them.

"But you, you are not like this! You can do all you desire—all *I* want you to do, I know!"

About daylight the Prince crept away from her side; he found old Carmagnola lying, sleeping, across the doorway.

"Altezza," said he, "the Duchess sends you this letter."

He handed Emilio a dainty three-corner folded note. The Prince felt faint. He returned to the chamber, fell into a chair, his sight failed, and his hand was shaking as he read:

"My dear Emilio:—Your gondola stopped at your palace. Was it that you were unaware that Cataneo had taken it for Tinti? As you love me, go at once to Vendramin, who informs me that he has a chamber prepared for you at his house. What can I do? Is it possible that I should remain in Venice where Tinti and my husband may be seen together? Say, shall we not return to Friuli? Write but one word to say what letter it was that you cast into the lagoon.

"MASSIMILLA."

The writing, the perfume pervading the paper, revived a myriad of memories in Emilio's mind. The sun of a fervent, single love cast his radiant beams upon the blue deeps, gathered in a fathomless pool, where they shone star-like. The youth could not keep back the tears that sprung to his eyes, for in the languid state caused by his night's satiety he was overwhelmed by the thoughts of that so pure divinity.

While she yet slept, his weeping was heard by Clarina. She sat up in bed, noticed the dejection of her prince, arose and flung herself at his knees.

"An attendant waits an answer," said Carmagnola, as he pushed the portière aside.

"Miserable that you are, you have undone me!" exclaimed Emilio, and he pushed La Tinti away with his foot.

Her entreating look, as she fondled the cruel foot, so begged an explanation that Emilio kicked her unmanly away, so wrathful was he at still finding himself in the toils of the passion that was the cause of his fall.

"You told me to slay you—then die, poisoned viper," said he.

He quit the palace and jumped into the waiting gondola.

"Now pull!" he cried to Carmagnola.

"To where?"

"Where you like!"

The mind of the master was divined by that of the gondolier. By many a circuitous turning he brought the gondola to the steps of a marvelous palace, which you will surely admire when you visit Venice; no traveler but must stop to gaze upon those windows, each of a different design to the others, contesting as to which is the more fantastic.

The lace-work balconies, the corners finished in high, willowy, twisted columns; the string-courses worked by so spirited a chisel that no forms are visible in the stone arabesques. How alluring the doorway! what an air of mystery in the arcade leading to the stairway! One must admire the steps carpeted in an everlasting pattern, one that shall last as long as Venice itself—as gorgeous as though wrought in a Turkish loom—but composed only of marbles inlaid in the same substance, but ivory-white. On entering, marble, wood, and silk could be seen, all showing exquisite marvels of the craftsman's art. Here the Duchess had collected Venetian furniture of antique style; the ceilings had been restored by a master hand.

Emilio swung open a door of carved oak, went down the vaulted hallway, running from front to rear of a Venetian palace, and finally stopped before a door that made his heart increase its beats, it was so strangely familiar. He was perceived by a lady's-maid, who gave him entrance into a library where the Prince found the Duchess prostrate before a Madonna.

He had come to confess and beg forgiveness. Massimilla, praying, had converted him. He and God—naught else dwelt in that heart.

The Duchess arose and, without affectation, held out her hand. Emilio did not take it.

"Did you not see Gianbattista yesterday?" asked she.

"No," he responded.

"That ill-luck has caused me a night of wretchedness. I was afraid of your meeting the Duke—I know his perversity so well. Why did Vendramin rent him your palace?"

"Was it not a good thought, Milla? Your Prince is a pauper!"

The faith of Massimilla in him was so perfect, so beautiful and lovely was she, so glad in his near presence, that the Prince became, as it were, suddenly awake. He went through the experience of a horrid dream, one that often torments people of a lively turn, in which, after finding himself in a ballroom crowded with women in full dress, he becomes all at once aware that he is stark naked, not having on even a shirt. Shame and fear in turn possess him, nothing but awaking can end his misery. So stood Emilio's soul in the presence of his mistress. None but himself knew this, for Massimilla clothed him so completely in virtues that her lover, the one she so adored, was incapable of being stained. Emilio had not taken her hand, so the Duchess ran her fingers through the hair that had so recently been kissed by the prima donna. Thus she discovered that his hand was clammy, his forehead damp.

"What ails you?" she asked, in a tender, flute-like voice.

"Never until this instant have I known the extent of my love for you," he answered.

"Well, my idol, what would you that I should do?" said she.

"Why should she ask me that? What have I done?" he pondered.

"Emilio, say, what letter was that you threw into the canal?"

"Vendramin's. I had not read it to the end, else should I not have gone to my palace and there met the Duke; for it most likely would have informed me all about the matter."

Massimilla became pallid, but a caress reassured her.

"Stay all day with me; we will go to the opera together. We will not go to Friuli; your company will help me endure the presence of Cataneo," said Massimilla.

Though this could but be torment to her lover, he consented with seeming ecstasy.

If anything can give realism to a foretaste of the sufferings the damned must undergo on finding themselves so unworthy of God, is it not the state of a young man, not entirely polluted, in the presence of a mistress he adores, as he brings into that sanctuary of the divinity he worships the putrid air of the prostitute, and still perceives on his lips the vile taste of infidelity?

Baader has observed, like some Catholic writers, the intimate resemblance between heavenly and human love, and in his lectures illumined things divine by an imagining of erotic love. The piquant flavor of coquettish spice does not spur on affection so much as a gentle, tender sympathy.

The *chic* of a trifler in love makes too clear the mark of apposition; it may be transient, it is still unpleasant; but an intimate comprehension depicts a true fusion of souls. The unhappy Emilio was impressed with this unspoken divination which had led the Duchess to pity a fault to her unknown.

Massimilla could permit herself an expansiveness, for she knew that her love was strong in its absence of any sensual aspect. She bravely poured forth her angelic soul; she stripped it bare, the same as, during that diabolical night, La Tinti had unblushingly displayed the soft, voluptuous lines of her body, and her firm, pretty, elastic flesh. To Emilio it seemed as though a conflict was on between the heavenly love of this so pure soul and that of the vehement, passionate, muscular Sicilian.

The day was spent in deep meditations and longing looks. The depths of tenderness were carefully gauged and found to be bottomless. Modesty, who once forgot herself with Love, is the mother of Coquetry, but she needed not to place her hand before her eyes as she looked upon these lovers. For a crowning happiness, an orgy of joy, Massimilla pillowed her lover's head in her white arms; now and again she would coyly press her lips to his, as a bird dips its beak in the translucent crystal of a spring, anon gazing around lest it should be seen. Their fancy wrought upon this kiss, which caused them tumultuous and vibrating rushes of feeling as fevered their blood, as a composer develops a musical fantasy on one idea.

In the evening the lovers went to the theater. The manner of Italian life is on this wise: in the morning, love; in the evening, music; at night, repose. Is it not far preferable, this existence, to that of a land where everyone exhausts his lungs and strength in politics without contributing to the course of affairs as much real benefit as a grain of sand forms in a cloud of dust? Liberty in those so curious countries consists in the right to squabble about public concerns, to look after one's self, to squander time on some patriotic doing, each one more foolish and futile than the last. Here, at Venice, to the contrary, love and its thousand vagaries, the luscious business of genuine happiness, engrosses each moment of time.

There love is regarded as such a matter of course that the Duchess began to be looked upon as a monstrosity; for despite her violent attachment for Emilio, everyone was confident of her immaculate purity. As for the young man, he was looked upon as a victim to the rigid virtue of his lady love, and the women expressed their pity for the ill-used one. But yet none blamed Massimilla, for Italy is as religious as she is amorous.

Massimilla's box on each recurring evening was the cynosure of every opera-glass; each woman whispered to her lover as she studied the Duchess and her lover:

" How far have they gone? "

Then would the lover make study of Emilio, endeavoring to trace some evidence of success; but finding only an expression of a pure, devoted, but dejected love. Then as the visits between box and box were made would be muttered by the men to the ladies:

" La Cataneo is not yet Emilio's."

" But she is foolish, she will tire him out," answered the older women.

" Perhaps! " [1] would the young wives answer with that so solemn accent which Italians can give to that great word —the grand answer to so many questions.

It came that some women were indignant, the whole affair was badly judged, it was very wrong that religion should be allowed to smother love.

" My angel, give your love to that poor Emilio," said the Signora Vulpato to the Duchess, meeting her on the stairs, as they were leaving.

" I do love him with my whole strength," answered Massimilla.

" Why, then, does he not look happy? "

Massimilla replied by a slight shrug of her shoulders.

Now in France we—France as the increasing mania for things English and English proprieties has made it—cannot form an idea of the interest, serious interest, taken by

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[1] The Italian *forse*—a universal exclamation.

Venetian society in this affair. Only Vendramin knew Emilio's secret: it was jealously kept between these two nobles, who displayed, for private enjoyment, their coats-of-arms in combination with the motto: *Non amici, frates*--not friends, brothers.

As in every capital in Italy, so especially in Venice, the first night of the operatic season is an event. The Fenice was crowded. But in Italy a woman does not attend the theater to make a show of herself, as in other countries; the box is absolutely as private as her own chamber—she is its mistress. Elegantly draped with silk curtains, she reigns the queen of that dimly-lighted closet; no children, no relatives, no Argus eyes whatever are there to watch. Each box is freehold property, worth a considerable sum of money; some indeed are valued at over thirty thousand lire; one family, the Litta, possess three adjoining ones.

When the men are admitted each takes his seat on one of the couches as he arrives; thus the first-comer, of course, is next to the mistress of the apartment; when all the seats are occupied, should another visitor enter, then the one who has been the longest there arises, bids his adieux, and departs. Each then moves up one, so that in turn each is next the queen.

The box belonging to the Duchess was on the parquet-tier, or as the Venetians have it, *pepiano*. There she occupied a place which allowed the brilliant light from the stage to illumine her face, which stood out against the somber background. The noble Florentine attracted every eye by her wide, high brow, snow-white, and wearing a coronet of black hair that gave her an imperial appearance; by the delicate chiselings of her features, which resembled the gentle tenderness of Andrea del Sarto's heads; by the exquisite outline of her face, the velvet eyes, nay, the setting themselves, which proclaimed the bliss of a woman dreaming of happiness, though loving, still pure; at once fascinating, dignified.

In place of *Moses in Egypt* being given, in which La Tinti was to have sung with Genovese, *Il Barbiere* was substituted; thus the famous tenor was to appear without the celebrated soprano. It was announced by the manager that it was necessary to change the operas in consequence of La Tinti being seriously indisposed. The Duke was not visible in the theater.

Was Clarina's illness genuine, or was this a scheme of the management to secure two full houses by bringing Genovese and La Tinti out on separate occasions? Emilio could form an opinion of his own while others discussed the matter. The announcement gave him some little remorse, for he well remembered the singer's beauty and her vehement passion; but the Duke's absence was a cause for gratulation for both Prince and Duchess.

And Genovese, why, he sang in such manner as effectually exorcised all remembrance of a blissful night passed in the illicit enjoyment of love, and prolonged the blessed happiness of this so joyous day. Only too glad to alone receive the applause of the house, the tenor made his best efforts; he used every phase of his great powers which have achieved the fame of all Europe. Genovese, who was now but three and twenty, was born at Bergamo; he was a pupil of Velutis, in love with his art, a fine man, handsome, quick to comprehend the spirit in a part, and was developing into that great artist whose destiny is to win fortune and renown. He had a raging success—a term only really true in Italy, where the applause of an audience becomes a frenzy when a singer conduces to its enjoyment.

A number of the friends of the Prince came to chat over the news and to congratulate him on succeeding to his title. The sudden indisposition of La Tinti was much commented on, as it was only last evening that at the Vulpatos', whither she had been taken by the Duke, she had sung in her usual fine style, with health as apparently sound. At the Café Florian, it was rumored that Genovese was violently smitten with Clarina; that she did her utmost to avoid his attentions, and that the manager had vainly endeavored to obtain her consent to appear with him. On the other hand, the Austrian Duke claimed that it was the Duke who was ill and that the prima donna was acting as his nurse; Genovese, he said, had been given orders to make amends to the public.

The visit of the Austrian general to the Duchess was owing to the fact that a French physician had arrived in Venice, who was desirous of an introduction to her.

The Prince, who could see Vendramin strolling around the *parterre*, took this occasion to join him and have a few moments of confidential talk, as he had not seen him for the past three months. As they walked round the aisle which forms the division between the seats in the parquet from the lower tier of boxes, he had an opportunity of noting the reception the Duchess gave the foreigner.

"Who is the Frenchman?" inquired the Prince.

"A physician who has been summoned by Cataneo, who is anxious to know the length of his span of life," said Vendramin. "The Frenchman is awaiting Malfatti, whom he is to meet in consultation."

Like every Italian woman who is in love, the Duchess kept her eyes on Emilio—for in that country a woman is so wholly engrossed in her lover that one scarce ever sees an expressive look cast at any other person.

"*Caro*," said the Prince to his friend, "don't forget that I slept at your house last night."

"Have you then triumphed?" asked Vendramin, putting his arm around Emilio's waist.

"No; but I hope at some time to be happy with Massimilla."

"Eh, well! then you will excite more envy than any living man. The Duchess is the most perfect woman in Italy. I see things through the radiancy meted out by opium; it is perhaps owing to this that to me she seems the acme of expressed art; nature, unknowingly, has made of her a picture by Raphael. Your passion seems to cause no concern to Cataneo, since he has paid me the thousand crowns which I am to hand over to you."

"So," said Emilio. "Well, remember whatever you may hear, that I sleep at your house every night. Come, for every moment I am away from her, when I might be with her, is torture to me."

Emilio seated himself in the rear of the box and kept silence, listening, enchanted by her wit and grace, to the

Duchess. It was not for vanity's sake, but out of love for him, that Massimilla was prodigal of her charming speech, gemmed with Italian wit; her irony struck at things, not persons; her laughter was only caused by the laughable; the merest trifles were seasoned with Attic salt. In any other country she might have been tiresome.

But Italians are, eminently so, an intelligent people; they do not care to make show of their talents when such is not demanded. Their chatter is artless and without strain; it does not fence under the hand of the fencing-master, each one brandishing his own foil, as in France, and who, if he cannot find aught to say, must sit humiliated. Here conversation sparkles with a delicate satire, subtle and graceful, that touches lightly on familiar facts. Instead of an epigram an Italian can glance or smile in a meaning unutterable. They believe, and they are right in this, that to be expected to understand thoughts when they seek only enjoyment is a great bore. Indeed, La Vulpato once said to Massimilla:

"If you love him, you could not talk so well."

Emilio did not join in the small talk; he looked on and listened. Foreigners might have judged from this reserve that the Prince was a person of little intelligence, a common impression of such an Italian who is in love, whereas he was only a lover head over ears in rapture.

Vendramin took a seat by Emilio, facing the Frenchman, who, being a stranger, occupied the place of honor opposite the Duchess.

"Is that gentleman intoxicated?" said the physician in a low voice to Massimilla, as he glanced at Vendramin.

"Yes," was the simple answer.

In that land of amours every passion contains its own excuse; gracious indulgence is granted all forms of error. The Duchess breathed a profound sigh, while pain was expressed on her features.

"You will observe many strange things in our country, monsieur," she continued. "Vendramin exists only by opium, this one lives only in love, that other one is buried in science. Most young men have a passion for some ballet-dancer;

their elders are misers. Thus each of us creates for himself some form of happiness or madness."

"The reason is simply because you are all trying to avoid having any fixed ideas; a revolution would be an effectual cure," the physician made answer. "The Genoese regrets his republic; the Milanese hungers for independence; your Piedmontese strongly desires a constitutional form of government; the Roman cries for liberty——"

"Of which it understands nothing," interrupted the Duchess. "Alas! we have in Italy a number of men who are idiotic enough to desire your Code, by which woman's influence is sacrificed. A great number of my compatriots have to read your French books—all trashy rhodomontade."

"Trashy!" cried the Frenchman.

"See, now, monsieur, what can you discover in a book that is better than we have in our hearts?" said the Duchess. "Italy is mad."

"I fail to see that because a country prefers to be its own ruler it is therefore mad!" exclaimed the physician.

"Gracious Heaven!" cried the Duchess, with enthusiasm, "does not that mean purchasing by much bloodshed the dreadful right of being able to quarrel over crazy notions, the same as you do?"

"Then you approve of despotism?" asked the physician.

"Why then should I not give my approval to a plan of government which, in debarring us of books and absurd politics, leaves the men wholly to us?"

"I had an idea that Italians were more patriotic than that," said the Frenchman.

Massimilla laughed in such a sly, mocking manner that her questioner was unable to detect any difference between mockery or serious meaning, neither could he distinguish her real opinion from sarcastic criticism.

"Then you are not a Liberal?" said he.

"May Heaven preserve me!" she answered. "I cannot think of anything that shows worse taste in a woman than to hold such opinions. Could you now love a woman whose heart was occupied by all mankind?"

"All lovers are naturally aristocrats," the Austrian general said, with a smile.

"As I entered the theater," went on the Frenchman, "the first person I saw was yourself. I remarked to his excellency that if any woman could personify a nation, that woman was yourself. I am thus pained to learn that although you possess the beauty, you do not possess the spirit of constitutionalism."

"You are bound, are you not," said the Duchess, motioning to the ballet just being danced, "to find that all our dancers are detestable and our singers horrid? But London and Paris steal from us all our great stars. Paris judges them, London pays them. Genovese and La Tinti will not be ours again for six months."

At this moment the Austrian left the box. Vendramin, the Prince, and the other Italians smilingly exchanged glances, and stole a look at the French physician. He felt that he had done or said some incongruous thing and felt some doubt of himself—a rare thing for a Frenchman. But the enigma was speedily solved.

"Can you believe that it would be prudent of us to speak our minds in the presence of our master?" asked Emilio.

"Here you are in a country of slaves," said the Duchess, in such a tone and a so drooping head which immediately added to her countenance that look for which the physician had vainly looked.

"Vendramin," she continued, speaking so that none but the stranger could hear her, "took to opium-smoking, a horrible idea which an Englishman gave him, who, for totally different reasons to his, wanted an easy death; not death as men gaze on it in the form of a skeleton, but death tagged out in the frippery you Frenchmen call a flag, a virgin shape crowned with laurel and flowers. The figure of a maiden is seen in a cloud of gunpowder smoke borne along on a cannon-ball's flight—otherwise she is laid out on a bed between two courtesans; or, perhaps, she is seen rising in the vapor of a steaming bowl of punch, or maybe in the dazzling blaze of a diamond—a diamond in its native form as carbon.

"Whenever Vendramin wishes, he may, for three Austrian lire, be a Venetian captain, he can navigate the galleys of the Republic, he can conquer the gilded domes of Constantinople. There he can recline on the divans among the Sultan's wives in the seraglio, the while the Grand Turk himself is the vassal of his Venetian victor. Then he returns to Venice; he restores his palace by the treasures of which he despoiled the Ottoman Empire. He can quit the Oriental women for the trebly masked intrigues of his much-beloved Venetians; he can fancy that he is fearful of the jealousy which has ceased to have being.

"For three zevanziger he is able to transport himself into the Council of Ten; he can wield their awful power, and departs from the palace of the Doges to sleep under the guardianship of a pair of flashing eyes; or to climb a balcony to which a fair hand has affixed a silken ladder. He has a woman to love, one to whom opium lends such bewitching grace and ravishing charms that we women of flesh and blood can never emulate.

"Anon he turns over, and finds himself confronted by the fearful frown of a senator, who grasps a dagger. He hears the poniard plunged into the heart of his mistress. She dies smiling on him, for she has saved his life.

"And she is a happy woman," added the Duchess, glancing at Emilio.

"He makes his escape and hastens to command the Dalmatians to conquer the coast of Illyria for Venice the beloved. He wins forgiveness by his glory; he has a happy domestic life—home, a winter evening, a young wife, sweet children, whom he sees praying to St. Marco, an old nurse their guardian.

"Yes, for three francs' worth of opium he replenishes our empty arsenal, he takes note of the convoys of merchandise entering port, to be distributed to the four quarters of the globe. The force of modern industry and commerce reign no more in London, but here in his own Venice, where the hanging-gardens of Semiramis, the Temple of Jerusalem, Rome's marvels, live once more.

"He gives to the glories of the Middle Ages the added help of the power of steam; by new masterpieces of art under the wing of Venice, who protected it in time past. Monuments, nations crowd his little brain, yet is there room for all. Empires, cities, revolutions, come and disappear in an hour, while only Venice expands and grows; his Venice is the mistress of the seas. She has a population of two millions, holds the scepter of Italy, is the master of the Mediterranean and the Indies!"

"What an opera is the brain of man! What an unplumbed gulf! yea, even to those who, as Gall did, have mapped it out," exclaimed the physician.

"My dear Duchess," said Vendramin, "do not omit to mention the last service that my elixir does me. After listening to ravishing voices and imbibing music at every pore, after I have tasted the keenest delights of Mahomet's paradise, I see then nothing but the most terrible images. I dream of my beloved Venice full of the distorted faces of children, like the dying; of women covered with fearful wounds—torn, shrinking; of men strangled and crushed by the coppered sides of great vessels; I see Venice as she is in reality—festooned in crêpe, naked, robbed, destitute. Pallid phantoms promenade her streets.

"Already the soldiers of Austria grin above me, already my visionary life is merging into my real existence; while six months ago my real life was the bad dream, and that of opium held passion and happiness, great affairs of moment and interests of state. Alas! In my grief I see the sun breaking over my tomb, truth and falsehood blend in a flickering light, neither darkness nor day, but which embraces both."

"Now you see that there is too much patriotism in this head," said the Prince, placing his hand on the heavy, black curly hair that fell over Vendramin's forehead.

"Oh, if he really loves us he will quit the use of his dreadful opium!" said Massimilla.

"I will cure your friend," said the Frenchman.

"Do this and we will love you," said the Duchess. "But we will love you still more, if, on your return to France, you do not calumniate us. We unhappy Italians are already too much crushed by foreign domination to be fairly judged —for we have known yours," she added, smiling.

"But it was more generous than is Austria's," exclaimed the physician eagerly.

"Austria squeezes and returns us nothing: you squeezed to extend and beautify our towns; you gave us stimulation by giving us an army. You had an idea that you could keep Italy, they are expecting they may lose it, therein lies the difference.

"The Austrians provide us what we may term a sort of torpor as stultifying and debasing as themselves; you swamped us by your over-violent energy. But what matters it whether death comes by narcotic or a tonic? Is it not death, just the same, Monsieur the Doctor?"

"Unhappy Italy. To me she is a lovely woman whom France should protect by taking her for his mistress," cried the Frenchman.

"But you could not love us as we would be loved," said the Duchess, smiling. "We desire freedom. The liberty that I wish, though, is not that of your illiberal bourgeois kind which slays all art. I beg," said she in a ringing tone that echoed around the box, "I mean that I would beg for the resuscitation of every Italian republic: their nobles, citizens, the particular privileges for each caste. I would revive the old aristocratic republics with their internecine fights and rivalries that were the conception of our noblest art, that was the making of politics and upreared the great princely houses. When the acts of one government are spread over a vast extent of country they are frittered into nothingness. The republics of Italy were Europe's glory of the Middle Ages. Why, then, has Italy gone under while the Swiss, once her servants, triumph?"

"The republics of Switzerland were good housewives," said the doctor, "they busied themselves about their own matters and were without any reason for showing envy of each other. Your republics were proud queens, they would sooner sell themselves than show courtesy to a neighbor; now they are fallen too low ever to rise again. The Guelphs triumph."

"Do not waste all your pity on us," said the Duchess, in a voice that startled the two friends. "We still remain supreme. Even now in her profound misfortune Italy rules through the better class that throngs her cities.

"Unhappily most of her talented ones came to a knowledge of life so early that they lay supine in poverty-stricken joys. And for those who are agreeable to play the somber game for immortality, they well know how to clutch your gold and force your applause. Grieved over as this land is for its fallen state by idiotic travelers and hypocritical poets—its character traduced by politicians—here, where all appears so languid, feeble, ruinous, not old so much as worn, there yet remain great minds in all departments of life; genius, which shoots forth vigorous suckers like as an old vine-stock shoots out canes that afterward bear delicious fruit.

"This people of ancient rulers yet gives birth to kings: Lagrange, Volta, Rasori, Canova, Rossini, Bartolini, Galvani, Vigano, Beccaria, Cicognara, Corvetto. These Italians are chiefs of the scientific heights whereon they stand, of the arts to which they are devoted. It is unnecessary to speak of our singers and musicians who ravish all Europe in their wonderful perfection; Taglioni, Paganini, and so on. Italy remains the ruler of the world. The world will ever come to her in worship.

"To-night do you go to Florian's; in Capraja you will discover one of our brightest men who loves to remain unknown. No one else, save my master, the Duke, has such a knowledge of music as he possesses; he is known here by everyone as *il Fanatico.*"

For some time the Italians eagerly listened to the gage of words between the Duchess and the Frenchman; her eloquence confounded them, and they one by one took their leave to carry the news to other coteries, that La Cataneo had easily defeated the French physician and proved him in the wrong on the question of Italy. This formed the talk of the evening.

Soon after the Frenchman found only himself with the Duchess and Prince Emilio; he saw that they wanted to be alone and he bade farewell. Massimilla bowed with such a sweep of the neck as placed them so far apart, that it might have brought upon her this man's hatred if he had been able to withstand the charms of her eloquence and beauty.

By this toward the close of the opera, Emilio and Massimilla found themselves alone, they clasped each other's hands and listened to the strains of that delightful duet which ends *Il Barbiere.*

" Music alone can give expression to love," said the Duchess, moved by that strain as by two rapturous nightingales.

In Emilio's eye a tear glistened; Massimilla, with the same sublimity of beauty that halos Raphael's Saint-Cecilia, pressed his hand, their knees touched, it seemed as though there was the bloom of a kiss upon her lips. The heart of the Prince seemed surcharged to bursting as the tide of blood rushed there; he beheld on her face a gleam of joy like as when a summer's day shines down upon the golden grain of harvest. He felt as if he heard a choir of angel voices. He would have given his life could he but have felt the fierce fire of passion with which at this time last night the odious Clarina had fired him; now he was scarcely sensible of possessing a body.

Massimilla was much distressed at seeing this tear. She ascribed its origin, in her artlessness, to what she had said of Genovese's *cavatina.*

" But, *carino,*" she whispered in Emilio's ear, " are you not superior to every expression of love, as the cause is better than the effect? "

After having handed Massimilla into her gondola, Emilio awaited Vendramin to go with him to Florian's.

The Café Florian at Venice is an institution hard to designate. There merchants transact their business; lawyers use it to talk over their difficult cases. It is an Exchange, green-room, newspaper office, club, confessional, all in one. It is so suited to the wants of the Venetians that many wives never learn the business of their husbands, for when they wish to write a letter they use Florian's for that purpose.

Of course the genus spy is there, but this only serves to whet the wit of the Venetians, who here use the discretion once so celebrated. Numbers of persons put in their whole time at Florian's. Florian's is in fact so necessary to some men that they even go there between the acts at the opera, and leave the ladies under their charge in the boxes.

As the two friends threaded the narrow streets of the Merceria they did not talk, people were too many, but, turning into the Piazza di San Marco, the Prince remarked:

"Let us not go direct to the café. I want to talk to you, let us stroll around."

He told all about his position and his adventure with Clarina. Vendramin promised that if Emilio, whom he thought had a despair almost akin to madness, would only give him a free hand to deal with Massimilla he would cure him. This gleam of hope came just in time to prevent Emilio from drowning himself on that very night, for, as he recollected the cantatrice, he felt an awful desire to visit her again.

Soon the two friends went to Florian's and entered an inner chamber; there they listened to the town gossip of some of the leading men. The most interesting was, first, the eccentricities of Lord Byron, of whom the Venetians made much fun; and afterward, Cataneo's attachment to La Tinti, for which they were unable to assign any reason, though twenty were suggested. Then came Genovese's début, and, lastly, the tilt between the Duchess and the French physician.

It was when the discussion had grown music-mad that Duke Cataneo entered. He bowed to Emilio most courteously, and this appeared so perfectly natural that none seemed to notice it, while Emilio as courteously returned it. Cataneo, looking around to see if anyone was present whom he knew, at last recognized Vendramin and gave him greeting; he bowed to a wealthy patrician, his banker; and then to the one who chanced to be speaking, a famous fanatic in music, the friend of the Contessa Albrizzo; not unlike a number of those who frequented Florian's, his habit of life was totally unknown. No one knew aught of him more than he himself chose to disclose.

This was Capraja, the nobleman named by the Duchess to the French doctor. This Venetian was of the race of dreamers with a powerful mind that could divine all things. He was a theorist, eccentric, and cared less for celebrity than he would have done for a broken pipe.

His existence was in accord with his ideas. At about ten o'clock, every morning, Capraja appeared beneath the *Procuratie*, but none knew whence he came. He sauntered about Venice smoking cigars. He regularly attended the Fenice, where he sat in the parquet stalls; between acts he strolled over to Florian's, took three or four cups of coffee there each day; his evening he ended at the café, and did not leave until about two in the morning. Twelve hundred francs a year was his full outlay; he only ate one meal a day, which he partook of at a restaurant in the Merceria; at a stated hour each day the master-cook had his dinner ready for him, served at a little table in a rear room; the confectioner's daughter prepared his stuffed oysters, found his cigars, and took care of his money. It was owing to his counsel that this young girl never encouraged a lover, although she was decidedly pretty; she lived a steady life and wore the old costume of the Venetians. This pure-bred Venetian, when Capraja first interested himself in her, was twelve years old; when he died she was six and twenty. Although he never so much as kissed her hand or forehead, she was yet very fond of him; but she had no idea as to his intentions in regard to her. It came that this girl attained as much influence with him as has a mother with her child. She let him know when he needed clean linen; one day he would arrive minus his shirt, and she would hand him a clean one to don the next morning.

Never did he glance at a woman, either at the theater or when promenading. He was descended from an old patrician family, but never thought his rank added to his dignity. When the night was come, though, after twelve o'clock, he awoke from his apathy and showed by his conversation that he had seen and heard everything that had taken place. This gentle Diogenes, half-Turk, half-Venetian, who was incapable of giving explanation of his theories, was stoutly built, short and fat; he had the sharp nose of a Doge, an eye inquisitive and satirical, and a discreet, smiling mouth. When he died, then it became known that he had lived in a small hut near San Benedetto.

He possessed two millions of francs in the Funds of various countries of Europe, and the interest, which had lain undrawn on the securities since their purchase in 1814, had vastly increased his original capital. The whole of this was left to the confectioner's daughter.

"Genovese," he was remarking, "will work wonders. I don't know whether he really comprehends the grand aim of music or only sings instinctively; but he is the only singer with whom I have been absolutely satisfied. I shall not die without having heard a *cadenza*[1] executed like those I have sometimes heard in my dreams, when I have awakened with a sensation that the sounds were in the air surrounding me. The clear *cadenza* is the acme of art; an arabesque adorning the chief room of the house; too little, it becomes nothing; a shade too much, it becomes confusion.

"The *cadenza* is set to arouse the soul to a thousand sleeping ideas—it ascends, takes its flight through space, scatters seed upon the air to be received in our ears to bloom in the heart. If you believe me, Raphael gave the preference to music of poetry in his painting of Saint-Cecilia. In this he was right; music appeals to the heart, writing is offered to the intellect; its thoughts, like scent, is a direct communication. The voice of the singer does not thrust itself upon the mind, nor yet upon the memory of delights; it stirs sensation, thought's first principle.

"It is a shame that the people compel musicians to add words to their expressions, factitious emotions—though if this be not done it is all unintelligible to the vulgar. So it remains that the *cadenza* is the sole object remaining to the lovers of pure music; those devoted to art unfettered.

"A sorcerer crowned my brow and guided me through the ivory-door by which we gain access to the mysterious dreamland. To Genovese it is due that I was enabled to escape from my old husk for a few minutes; short minutes, perhaps, by actual count of time, but long when measured by sensation. A short springtime, with its perfume of roses, was accorded me when I was again young—and beloved."

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[1] At that time the *cadenza* was an impromptu finale.—TRANSLATOR.

"But, see then, *caro* Capraja," said the Duke, "there is in music a yet more magical effect than is found in the *cadenza*."

"What?" asked Capraja.

"The true unison of two voices or of a violin and a human voice—the tone of the former of which most nearly resembles the latter," replied Cataneo.

"On this perfect concord we are borne to life's very heart; we float on the surge of that element which resuscitates rapture, which carries man up into the midst of that luminous sphere whence his soul commands the whole universe. You still require a *thema*, Capraja; but for my part the unalloyed element is sufficient. For you the current must flow through all the myriad channels of the machine, thence to fall in glistening cascades; the pellucid, tranquil pool contents me. My eye looks upon a lake without a ripple. I embrace the infinite."

"Say no more, Cataneo," said Capraja with hauteur. "What! Is it that you fail to see the fairy who swiftly drives through the sparkling air and gathers and binds in harmony's golden thread the gems of melody so smilingly poured upon us?

"Have you then never experienced the touch of her magic wand when she cries to Curiosity: 'Awake!' Up from the depths of our brain a divinity arises all radiant; she lightly touches Memory, fingering it as an organist does his keys; she brings us the roses of past days, divinely kept and still fresh. The mistress of our youth is revivified, she strokes the young man's hair; the heart overfull runs over; the flowery banks are seen laved by the torrent of love. Each burning bush we knew burst forth anew in flame; it repeats the heavenly strain we once heard and understood. The voice rolls on; it rapidly embraces those fleeting horizons; they melt away; these vanish and are superseded by newer, more profound joys—a future unrevealed, to which the fairy points as she reascends to the blue empyrean."

"And you," responded Cataneo, "you have never seen the direct ray of a star shining in the vista above; you have never climbed that ray that guides one to the skies, to the very center of that first cause which moves worlds?"

The game which the Duke and Capraja were playing was unknown to their hearers.

"The voice of Genovese thrills every fiber," said Capraja.

"La Tinti's fires the blood," the Duke responded.

"That *cavatina* is a blessed paraphrase of love," Capraja continued. "Ah! Rossini was young when he wrote that interpretation of bubbling ecstasy. My heart was charged with renewed blood, a thousand desires tingled in my veins; never has the fairy waved such beautiful arms, smiled more alluringly; never did she more cunningly lift her tunic to display an ankle as she raised the curtain that conceals my other life!"

"To-morrow, old friend," said Cataneo, "you shall ride on the back of a glistening white swan, who will give you sight of the most lovely country; the springtime shall be seen as children see it. You shall repose on silk of crimson, gazed upon by a Madonna; you will feel like a happy lover kissed by a nymph, whose bare feet you will see, but who will presently disappear. Genovese's voice will be that swan, if he is able to combine it with its Leda—Clarina's voice. For to-morrow night *Moses in Egypt* is to be performed—the greatest son of Italy's grandest opera."

The company present, not wishing to be the victims of mysticism, did not take any part in the conversation. The French doctor and Vendramin were the only ones who listened to them for a few minutes. The opium smoker could enter into their imaginative flights; the keys of the mansion were in his possession—the palace through which they wandered. The doctor endeavored to and did understand, for his was a genius of the Pleiades of a Paris medical school, whence evolves, in the case of a true physician, the metaphysician, the expert analyst.

"Do you understand them?" said Emilio to Vendramin, as they emerged from the café at two o'clock in the morning.

"Yes, my dear fellow," said Vendramin, as they wended their way to his house. "Those two men belong to the legion of unearthly spirits to whom it is permitted here below to throw off their fleshly wraps; they can take flight on magic's shoulder to the blue empyrean in which celestial wonders are created by the intellectual life. Their art enables them to soar whither your great love bears you, the whither opium transports me. None can then understand them but those who resemble them. The Duke and Capraja were acquainted in Naples—there Cataneo was born; they are crazy on the subject of music."

"But what about that curious system that Capraja was anxious to explain to Cataneo?" said the Prince. "Can you guess that?"

"Yes," Vendramin replied. "Capraja's great friend is from Cremona. He is a musician and is staying in the Capello palace; he has a theory that sound echoes to an element in man analogous to that producing the phenomenon of light and which creates ideas. In his idea, man has within him keys that are in accord and acted upon by sound; these correspond to his nerve-centers, and thence sensation and ideas take their rise. Capraja looks upon the arts as a collection of effects, which he can harmonize within himself; he takes all external nature, and a further mysterious nature, which he terms the inner life, and compounds them. He embraces all the ideas of this instrument-maker, who is now engaged in composing an opera.

"Try and conceive a sublime creation in which the wonders of the visible universe are reproduced with immeasurable grandeur, with vividness, rapidity, vastness; wherein is an infinity of sensation, whither certain privileged natures may penetrate, then you may form an inadequate idea of the ecstatic bliss which Cataneo and Capraja spoke of; each was a poet for himself alone. It is only in the intellect that so soon as a man rises above the circle of plastic art—a mere imitation—that he enters that sphere of transcendent abstraction where he understands all as an elementary principle; but that man then becomes unintelligible to ordinary intelligence."

"That is the explanation of my love for Massimilla," said Emilio. "My dear friend, there is in me a power which flames up under the fire of her glance or at her lightest touch, and wafts me into a universe of light where effects are produced that I cannot, dare not reveal. Often it has seemed to me that her delicate skin has impressed flowers upon mine as her hand lay in mine. Her words play on that inner key of which you have spoken. My brain is excited with desire; it stirs that invisible world in place of exciting my apathetic flesh; the atmosphere becomes rosy and sparkling; perfumes, unknown to my outer senses, but of great potency, relax my sinews; roses wreathe around my temples; my inanition becomes so great that I feel as though my life-blood was escaping through an opened artery."

"Smoking opium has the like effect on me," replied Vendramin.

"Do you desire to die, then?" exclaimed Emilio, alarmed.

"With Venice!" said Vendramin, motioning with his hand in the direction of St. Mark's. "Can you perceive a single pinnacle that is erect? Can you not understand that the sea awaits its prey?"

The Prince inclined his head; he could not further speak of love to his friend.

To understand the meaning of a free country you must have traveled in a conquered nation.

When they arrived at the Vendramin palace they noticed a gondola moored at the water-gate. The Prince put his arm around and affectionately embraced Vendramin, and said:

"A good night to you, my dear boy."

"What! a woman? for me; when I only sleep with Venice," cried Vendramin.

At this moment the gondolier, who leaned against a pillar, recognized the man he was looking for; he muttered in Emilio's ear:

"The Duchess, monseigneur."

Emilio sprang into the gondola, when a pair of soft arms dragged him upon the cushions with a force of iron; there he felt the heaving bosom of an ardent woman. He was no longer Emilio; he was Clarina's lover. His thoughts and sensations were so confused that he yielded like one stupefied by her first kiss.

"Forgive the trickery, my love," said the Sicilian. "I shall die if you go not with me."

And the gondola sped over the discreet water.

At half-past seven of the following evening the audience was again assembled, each in his respective place, in the theater, with the exception of those occupying the parquet, who sat where chance placed them. Old Capraja was in Cataneo's box.

The Duke paid a call to the Duchess previous to the overture; he made it a point to stand behind her and left the front seat next the Duchess to Emilio. He made a few trifling remarks with the politeness of a stranger, and without a tinge of irony or sarcasm. But in spite of every effort he made to appear amiable and at home, the Prince could not disguise his profoundly anxious expression. A bystander might have given jealousy as the cause for the change in his usually placid countenance.

The Duchess without doubt reciprocated Emilio's feelings; she appeared gloomy and depressed. Between two sulky people the Duke was fidgety, and he took the chance of the French doctor's entrance to slip away.

"Monsieur," said Cataneo to the physician, before letting fall the portière over the box entrance, "to-night you will hear a great musical poem, which is not easy to be understood at a first hearing. In leaving you with the Duchess I am aware that you can have no more competent instructor, for she is a pupil of mine."

The same as the Duke, the doctor was struck by the expression shown on the countenances of the lovers, a look of pining despair.

"Then does an Italian opera need a guide?" he asked of Massimilla, smiling.

Her position as the mistress of the box was recalled to her by this question, so the Duchess attempted to disperse the clouds that shadowed her brow; she replied with eager haste, in order to open up a conversation in which she might give vent to her concealed irritation.

"This is more an oratorio than opera, monsieur," said she, "a work not without resemblance to a grand edifice; it will be with pleasure that I act as your guide. Trust me that you cannot give too much of your mind to our great Rossini, for you require to be equally a poet and musician to properly appreciate the whole theme of such a work.

"You pertain to a race whose language and spirit are too practical to receive such music without an effort; but, then, France is too intellectual to not learn how to love it, and cultivate it, and likewise to succeed in that as in everything else that she attempts. It further must be admitted that the music created by Lulli, Rameau, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Cimarosa, Paisiello, and Rossini, and as it will be written by the future geniuses, is a new art, unknown to former generations; they lacked our variety of instruments, they, too, were unaware of the harmony upon which melody's flowers now bloom as in some rich soil.

"A novel art demands the study of the public, that study to be of a sort that develops the feeling to which music makes appeal. This sentiment as yet scarcely exists among you: a nation given over to theories of philosophy, analysis, discussion, and always being torn by civil disturbances. Modern music needs peace, perfect peace, being the language of loving, lofty souls, inclined to a sentiment of emotional aspirations.

"This language, more full by a thousand times than that of words, is to speech what thought becomes in its utterance; sensations are awakened and primitive ideas are born in that portion of us in which such have their conception. One of the greatest truths of music is this power over our inmost being.

"Every other art gives a definite creation to the soul; those of music are indefinite—infinite. The poet's ideas we must needs accept, so also those of the painter's picture, the statue of the sculptor, but in music each interprets to himself the will of the sorrow, his happiness, his hope, his despair. Now other arts give bounds to our mind by attaching it to a preconceived figure, while music frees it and allows it to roam over all nature, it alone having this power of expansion. You will hear how I interpret Rossini's *Moses*."

She bent over to the Frenchman so that she might be heard only by him.

"Moses is the liberator of a race in slavery!" said she. "Bear this in mind and you will understand the religious hope that the Fenice will show in listening to the prayer of the delivered Hebrews, and with what thunderous applause it will respond."

Emilio sank into a rear seat when the leader lifted his bow. The physician by a nod was notified to take the vacancy. But the Frenchman was more interested in trying to learn what had gone amiss between the two lovers than to enter the domain of music created by the man whom all Italy applauded; for it was the day of the triumph of Rossini in his own land. He watched the Duchess and observed how she was speaking in an enforced, feverish excitement. She recalled to him the dignity in sadness, the physical control that he had so admired in the Niobe at Florence; but yet her soul shone out through the warm blush of her cheek; her eyes seemed to dry away the tears by her scorching fires, though their anxiety was hidden under a cloak of pride. Her controlled grief was soothed, it seemed, when she gazed at Emilio, who never removed his eyes off her; it was readily seen that she was trying to disguise some mute despair. Her feelings, in the state they were, gave an enhanced height to the loftiness of her soul.

As most women who are under the trend of some absorbing agitation, she had somewhat of the Pythoness and acted beyond her usual restrictions—though she was still beautiful and calm. It was the figure of her ideas that was wrung by desperation, and not the features of her face. Perhaps it was that she wished to shine with all her intellect to give charm to life and keep her lover from death.

When the three chords in C-major had been given by the orchestra, there written by the composer to announce the opening of the overture—for the real overture is that great movement which begins with this severe attack and which ends only when the light appears at Moses's command—the Duchess was unable to restrain a little convulsive start, which showed how entirely the music was in accord with her veiled distress.

"Those three chords cause the blood to freeze," said she. "They announce trouble. Hearken carefully to this introduction—the awful lamentations of a nation smitten by the hand of God. What a wail! The King, the Queen, their first-born son, every dignity of the country bewails; they are wounded in their pride, their conquests; they are checked in their avarice. *Dear* Rossini! You did well to fling this bone to the Tedeschi to gnaw, who declared that we possessed neither harmony nor science!

"Now you listen to the sinister melody that has been engrafted on this deep composition of harmony by the *maestro;* it is more than worthy of comparison with the most technical structures of the Germans, but without their fatigue and tiresomeness.

"You French will understand when this oratorio is given in your capital, you who carried through such a revolution of bloodshed, this noble dirge of the victims on whom God is avenging his own people. Only an Italian could have written this pregnant, inexhaustible theme—really Dantesque. Is it nothing, think you, to behold such a vision of vengeance even for one instant? Handel, Sebastian Bach, all the old German masters, your grand Beethoven even, down on your knees! Here is the queen of arts—Italy is triumphant."

The Duchess had thus spoken while the curtain was being raised. Now the physician heard the sublime symphony introducing the great Biblical drama. It is written to express a nation's sufferings. In its expression suffering is universal, so especially physical suffering. Thus the man of genius, as he was, felt that there must be no variety of ideas, the musician had hit on the leading theme, he worked it out in various keys, he grouped the choruses and the *dramatis personæ* to bring out the theme through resolutions and cadences of wonderful structure. The power is found in its simplicity.

"There is something that is relentless in that slow phrase; it is cold and weird: it resembles an iron bar, wielded by some executioner of Heaven, as it drops in regular rhythm on the limbs of its victims.

"As we hear it passing from C-minor into G-minor, returning to C and thence to the dominant, G, whence it starts anew, and *fortissimo* on the tonic, B-flat, resolving into F-major and returning to C-minor; in each key, more than ever terrible; chilly, somber, we are forced as a finality to enter into the impression that the composer intends."

As a fact, the Frenchman was profoundly moved when this combined grief exploded in the cry:

"O Nume d'Israel,
Se brami in libertà
Il popol tuo fedel,
Di lui di noi pietà!"

(O Lord of Israel,
If Thou wouldst see in liberty
Thy faithful people,
Deign to have pity upon them and us.)

"There could never be a greater synthesis made up of natural effects; nature could not give a grander idealization.

"In a great national disaster for a long time each one laments for himself only, but soon, from out the crowd, there and here arises a more emphatic exclamation of anguish, until at length, when all have experienced the falling misery, it bursts out like a storm. When all can perceive the universal trouble, then the low murmurs of the people change to impatient cries. Thus Rossini has proceeded.

"After the outburst in C-major comes Pharaoh, who sings his grand *recitative*, '*Mano ultrice di un Dio*' (God's avenging hand); the original theme is here repeated with more signal expression; now all Egypt begs help from Moses."

Taking advantage of the pause necessary for the entrance of Moses and Aaron, the Duchess gave this great introduction the interpretation:

"What, they weep!" she added passionately. "They have done much evil. Egyptians, expiate your sins; expiate those of your insensate Court! What wonderful skill the painter has displayed in making use of every somber tone in music, of all that is gloomiest on the palette of music! What clinging darkness! What mists! Does not your very soul mourn? Is not the blackness of the land palpable to you? Can you not feel that all nature is wrapped in darkest shadow? Here are no palms, no palaces of Egypt, there is no landscape. And think what balm to your mind will be in the profound religious strain of the celestial physician who will stop this cruel plague! With what skill is everything done to bring the finish of that glorious invocation of Moses to God.

"By a scientific lucubration which Capraja could explain this prayer to Heaven is only accompanied by the brass; this is what gives the solemnity of its religious features.

"Not only is this plan noble in its position, but notice the fertility of genius in its resources; Rossini acquires fresh beauty from the very obstacle he has erected. He keeps the strings in reserve to display the daylight when darkness is succeeded by it; in doing this he has achieved one of the grandest effects ever found in music. Such a result had never previously been known, until this inimitable genius led the way, to be obtained by a simple *recitative*. Thus far we have had neither an *aria* or duet. The poet relied only on the force of the idea, the vivid imagery, the realism of the declamation. This scene of despair, the darkness that can be felt, those cries of anguish; the musical picture in all is as fine as the *Deluge* by your great Poussin."

Moses waved his staff and it was light.

"Monsieur, does not the music here vie with the sun, whose radiance it has borrowed; with nature, whose phenomena it gives in every detail?" the Duchess continued, in a low voice.

"Here art reaches its acme; beyond this can no musician go. Can you not hear Egypt awaking after its long somnolence? Joy comes with the day. In what work, ancient or modern, can you find so grand a phrase? The highest gladness contrasted with profoundest woe! What exclamations! What joyful tones! Now the oppressed minds breathe again. What delirium in that orchestral *tremolo!* What a fine *tutti!* that is a delivered people rejoicing. Are you not thrilled with joy?"

The physician, who was startled by the contrast, clapped his hands; he was truly carried away by his enthusiasm for one of the grandest compositions of modern music.

"*Bravo, la Doni!*" said Vendramin, who had heard the Duchess.

"Now that the overture is ended, you have gone through a great sensation," cried the Duchess, turning to the Frenchman. "Your heart beats; down in your imagination you behold a lovely sunrise; it floods a whole continent with light that before was cold and dark. Would you learn the method employed by the musician, that to-morrow you may admire him for the secrets of his handicraft after the enjoying of his works to-night? What, think you, causes that effect of daylight—so sudden, so mystical, yet so complete? It consists of the simple chord of C, many times reiterated, and only varied by its fourth and sixth. This reveals his magic touch.

"The morning of imagery is really and absolutely the same as the natural dawn; for light is one and the same in everything, ever alike in itself--its effects only vary with the thing on which it falls.

"Is it not so?

"Well, then, the musician has chosen as his fundamental bass, for its sole *motif*, a simple chord in C. The sun first sheds light upon the mountain heights, and afterward in the valleys. So the chord is first heard in the treble of the violins in Northern lightness; it spreads through the orchestra; one by one it awakens the instruments; it courses among them. Just as light glides from one object to the next, giving color as it goes, so does the music, and calls forth each rill of harmony till they join in the current of the *tutti.*

"Up to this the violins are silent, but now they give the signal with their light *tremolo*, slightly *agitato*, like the dawn's first rays. That bright, lively movement caresses the soul, and is skillfully supported by bass chords, as well as by a vague fanfare of the trumpets, confined to their lower notes; thus giving a vivid reality of the last cool shadows lingering in the valleys while the earlier warm rays tinge the peaks.

"Now the wind is gradually added to support the harmony. The voices join in with delightful sighs of surprise. At length flares out the brass, the trumpets sound; light, the source of all harmony, bathes all nature; every resource of music is brought out with turbulence—it is the splendor of the Eastern sun. Even the triangle, with its ever-recurring C, calls to our minds the shrill note, the joyous rhythm of early risen birds.

"The same key newly handled by the master thus expresses nature's every joy, the while it soothes the sorrow it had uttered before.

"There is the sterling-mark of real genius—Unity. It is the same: it is different. In the one same phrase we can trace a thousand varied woes, the despair of a whole people. In the one same chord we experience the various trifles of awakening nature—each expression of a nation's joy. These two tremendous themes are joined together as one by that prayer to an ever-living God, the maker of all things, the author alike of that joy and woe.

"Now, is not the introduction alone a grand poem?"

"It is, indeed," said the Frenchman.

"Next comes a quintet as Rossini only can give us. If ever he was justified in giving vent to that light, mellow, flowery grace for which the Italian music is often blamed, is it not in this graceful movement by which each one expresses gladness? The people who were enslaved are now delivered, and yet a passion in danger must needs make moan. The son of Pharaoh loves a Jewess, but this Jewess must leave him.

"The thing that gives the ravishing grace to this quintet is a return to love's homelier feelings, after the great pictures of two immense national emotions—general misery, universal joy, given forth with the magic force impressed upon them by Divine vengeance, and with the miraculous inspiration of the Bible. Now was I not right?" added Massimilla, as the fine *stretto* finished:

"Voci di giubilo,
D' in'orno eccheggino,
Di pace l' Iride
Per noi spunto."

(Sound around us
The cries of joy,
While o'er us dawns
The rainbow of peace.)

"With what deep skill has the composer constructed this phrase!" she continued, after awaiting a reply. "He commences with a horn solo, divinely sweet, accompanied by *arpeggios* on the harps; for the first voices we shall hear in this great piece of concerted music are those of Moses and Aaron returning thanks to the true God. The strain reverts to the sublimity of the invocation; it is soft and simple and blends, notwithstanding, with the joys of the heathen.

"This transition combines the celestial and terrestrial in such a manner as could only have been the device of genius; it gives a tinge of color to the quintet *en ardante* that I can only liken it to the glow shown by Titian on his Divine Persons. Did you notice the exquisite weft of the voices? the skillful débuts by which the composer has gathered them about the theme given sound by the orchestra? the scientific progressions which make us ready to grasp the festal *allegro?* Did not you obtain a glance, as one might say, of dancing ones, the dazzling whirl of a whole people rescued from bondage? When the clarionet gives the signal for the *stretto*—'*Voci di giubilo*'—so bright, so gay, your soul was it not then filled with the sacred fiery joy such as King David in the Psalms speaks of, when he ascribes it to the hills?"

"Yes, it would make a right pretty dance-tune," said the physician.

"French! French! always French!" exclaimed the Duchess, stopped in her exultation by this keen thrust. "Yes;

undoubtedly you would be capable of taking that marvelous outpouring of grand and dainty rejoicing and turning it into a rigadoon. Sublime poetry cannot find mercy in your eyes. The loftiest genius—saints, kings, disasters—everything the most holy must bend beneath the chastisement of your caricatures. And the making vulgar of noble music by converting it into a dance-tune is caricaturing it. With you, wit kills soul as argument slays reason."

During the *recitative* of Osiride and Membrea they all sat in silence. These plot to annul the order issued by Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go.

"Have I given you vexation?" asked the physician of the Duchess. "I shall be in despair. Your words are like a magic wand; they unlock the pigeon-holes of my brain; they kindle new ideas, let loose by this sublime music."

"No," she answered, "you have applauded our great composer in your own way. With you, Rossini will be a success by his wit and sensual gifts. It may be, let us hope it, that he will find a few noble souls, in love with the ideal, to properly appreciate the sublime, the height of his music. Ah, now we have the famous duet between Elcia and Osiride!" she cried, and she continued, during the respite caused by three salvoes of applause which hailed La Tinti, who just now made her first appearance on the stage:

"If it should be that La Tinti clearly understands the part of Elcia, you will hear the frenzied wail of a woman torn by her love for her race, and that of love for one of her people's oppressors, the while Osiride, filled with mad adoration for his lovely vassal, tries to detain her. The work is constructed as much on this idea as on that of Pharaoh's resistance to God and liberty; this must be thoroughly entered into or you cannot comprehend this stupendous opera. What can be more dramatic than the Prince's love for this Jewess; it almost justifies treason to the power of the oppressor.

"Here, then, is what is expressed by this bold and marvelous poem in music; each nation has been stamped by Rossini with a fantastic individuality, for they are attributed with a historic grandeur subscribed to by every imagination. The songs of the Hebrews, their trust in God, are ever in contrast with the shrieks of rage of Pharaoh and his futile efforts, as represented by this powerful hand.

"At this moment Osiride thinks only of love; he hopes to detain his mistress by the reminiscences of their pleasures as lovers; he tries to conquer the feeling for her people. Here, then, we find delicious languor, a glowing sweetness, voluptuous suggestiveness; Oriental love displayed in the *aria* '*Ah! se puoi cosi lasciarmi*' (If you have courage to leave me, you will break my heart), sung by Osiride; and '*Ma perchè cosi straziarmi?*' Elcia's reply. No; two hearts in such a melodious unison could never part," she went on, turning to look at the Prince.

"But now the lovers are suddenly interrupted by the exultant voices of the Hebrews as they journey in the distance; this recalls Elcia. Hear what a delightfully inspiriting *allegro* is in the theme of this march as they start for the desert. None, save Rossini, can cause reed and brass to express so much. And is not the art that can best express 'my native land' truly nearer heaven than the others? That clarion-call moves me each time so profoundly that I cannot find words to let you know how cruel it is to an enslaved people to see those freed ones march away!"

The eyes of the Duchess were filled with tears; she listened thus to the grand *motif* which really is the masterpiece of the opera.

"'*Dov' è mai quel core amante*'" (What heart that loves but will partake my anguish), she murmured in Italian as La Tinti commenced the lovely *aria* of the *stretto* in which she implores pity for her sorrow. "But, say, what has happened? The parquet is in a turmoil——"

"Genovese is bellowing like a stag," replied the Prince.

As a matter of fact, this duet, the first with La Tinti, was utterly spoiled by Genovese's complete breakdown. His so excellent method, rivaling that of Crescentini and Veluti, appeared to have completely deserted him. A *sostenuto* in the wrong place, an embellishment carried to excess, spoiled the effect; for a strident climax—forte—without a due *crescendo*, the sound of an outpouring of water tumbling through a suddenly opened sluice-gate, showed a willful neglect of all the canons of good taste.

The parquet was in the greatest excitement. The Venetian populace believed there was a deliberate plot between Genovese and his friends; La Tinti was recalled and received frenzied applause, while Genovese had a hint or so which warned him of the hostile feelings of the audience. During this scene, so highly amusing to a Frenchman, La Tinti was had to the front eleven times to receive alone the plaudits of the house, Genovese, all but hissed, not daring to offer her his hand—the doctor made a remark to the Duchess about the *stretto* of the duet.

" Rossini, in this place," said he, " ought to have expressed the direst sorrow; on the contrary, I discover an airy movement, a sense of ill-timed cheerfulness."

" You are right," said she. " This error results from a tyrannical custom which all composers must obey. It was his prima donna he was thinking the most of, not of Elcia, when he wrote that *stretto*. But this evening I could throw myself into the situation so fully that, even if La Tinti had been more than usually brilliant, the passage, lively as it is, would have been to me full of melancholy."

The physician looked attentively from the Prince to the Duchess, but was unable to guess at the reason that held them apart; that which made the duet seem so heart-rending.

" Here comes a splendid theme, Pharaoh scheming against the Hebrews. The grand *aria*, '*A rispettarmi apprenda*,' is a triumph for Carthagenova, who will express in superb phrasing the offended pride and the King's duplicity. The Throne will speak: He withdraws the concession he had made, he arms himself with anger.

" Pharaoh rises to his feet to grasp the prey that is escaping! Rossini has never written anything grander in style; or aught stamped with more irresistible, living energy. It is a finished work, grandly supported by an accompaniment of marvelous instrumentation; but so indeed is every portion of this opera. Youth's vigor illumines the least detail."

The whole house rose to applaud this fine movement, which was thoroughly appreciated by the Venetians, as being so magnificently interpreted by the singer.

"In the *finale*," said the Duchess, "you hear a repetition of the march, this is expressive of the joy of deliverance and of faith in God, who allows His people to rush off gladly to wander in the desert! Whose lungs but would be refreshed by the aspirations of a whole race released from slavery?

"O ye loving, living melodies! Glory to the grand genius who has known how to utter such noble thoughts! That march is the essence of war, it proclaims that the God of armies is on the side of this nation.

"How filled are those strains of thanksgiving with deep feeling. The imagery of the Bible has arisen in our minds; this most glorious musical *scena* enables us to realize one of the most stupendous dramas of that solemn, ancient world. The religious tone given in some of the voice parts, the manner of their entrance, one by one, to form a group with each other and the rest—give expression to all we have or ever can imagine of the sacred mysteries of that early age of manhood.

"And yet this finely concerted piece is only a development of the theme of the march into all its musical outcome. That theme is the inspiring element, alike of the orchestra and voices, the *aria*, the brilliant orchestration which supports it.

"Elcia now joins the crowd; here, to give shade to the joyful spirit of his number, Rossini causes her to utter her regrets. Hearken to her *duettino* with Amenofi; did ever blighted love express itself in sweeter song? The grace of a *notturno* fills it with the secret grief of a hopeless love. It is sad, sad! The desert will indeed be to her a desert!

"Afterward comes the fierce conflict between the Egyptians and Hebrews. All their joy is dashed, their march is stopped by the Egyptians. Pharaoh's edict is proclaimed in a phrase hollow and drear, the leading *motif* of the *finale;* in fancy we hear the tramp of that great Egyptian army as it surrounds the sacred phalanx of the true God, curling about it as a huge African serpent envelops its prey. But note the beauty of the lament of the duped and disappointed Hebrews! It is, though, less Hebrew than Italian. A superb phrase presages Pharaoh's arrival, his presence brings face to face the leaders and all the moving passions of the drama. The conflict of sentiments in that sublime *stretto* is admirable, that in which the wrath of Moses meets that of the two Pharaohs. What a medley of voices, what unchained fury!

"No subject with equal grandeur was ever conceived by a composer. That famous *finale* of *Don Giovanni* at best only shows us the libertine at outs with his victims who implore Heaven's vengeance; but here the world's dominions seek to defeat God. Here are two nations face to face; and Rossini has made marvelous use of the every means he has at command. He succeeds in giving the uproar of a tremendous storm which forms, as it were, the background to most horrible imprecations; yet he does not make it absurd. It is achieved by using chords in triple time and oft repeated; it molds a rhythm of somber musical emphasis grand in its monotony, so persistently repeated as to become absolutely overpowering. The Egyptians' terror at the pillar of fire and the cries for vengeance of the Hebrews require a delicate manipulation of harmony in the masses; see then how he makes the progression of the instrumentation follow the fugue of the chorus. In the midst of that deluge of fire the *allegro assai* in C-minor is terrific.

"You must needs confess," said Massimilla, at the time when Moses brings down the rain of fire by lifting his rod, where the musician brings out the full power of the orchestra and that of the stage, "that never did music more completely express so full an idea of distress and confusion."

"Which has spread to the parquet," said the Frenchman.

"What now? Most certainly the parquet is in a state of tremendous excitement," said the Duchess.

In the *finale*, Genovese, who had fixed his eyes on La Tinti, gesticulated with such ridiculous flourishes that the parquet became suddenly enraged at having their enjoyment thus interrupted. To Italian ears nothing is so exasperating as a contrast between good and bad singing. The manager appeared on the stage to inform the house that Genovese, in answer to his remarks to him, had said that he was unaware in what manner he had given offense to the public, as at this same instant he had tried his utmost to reach the acme of perfection of his art.

"Let him be as bad to-day as he was yesterday—that would be good enough for us!" roared out Capraja in fury.

This exclamation restored good humor to the house.

The ballet, contrary to the usual Italian style, attracted but little attention. The subject of Genovese's strange acting and the manager's unhappy speech formed the text of conversation in every box. Those having the *entre* behind the scenes at once left the auditorium to learn the mystery of this curious performance. Soon it became rumored about that La Tinti had caused a terrible scene with Genovese, her colleague, and had accused the tenor of being insanely jealous of her success; that he had tried to prevent it by his preposterous behavior, and had actually endeavored to spoil the performance by pretending a passionate devotion to her. The prima donna was weeping bitterly over the catastrophe. She said she had been trying to fascinate her lover, who was somewhere in the house, though she had not been able to locate him.

Unless one understands the peaceful, humdrum round of daily life in the Venice of to-day, so lacking in incident that the altercation between two lovers, or, it may be, the huskiness of the voice of a singer, becomes the note of conversation, it becomes impossible to realize the excitement in the theater and at the Café Florian, for it took on as much importance as the discussion of politics does in England. La Tinti was in love! La Tinti had been hampered in her performance! Genovese was either crazy or malignant of set purpose—he was actuated by the artist's jealousy so well known and familiar to Italians. Here was a mine to be worked by eager discussion.

The parquet was in a ferment of talk such as that on the Bourse; such a turmoil could not fail to astound a Frenchman accustomed to the quietude of the theaters in

Paris. The boxes were in a ferment like the buzz of swarming bees.

One man alone remained pensive in the hubbub. Emilio Memmi, his eyes fixed on Massimilla, his back turned to the stage, seemed, in his melancholy expression, to live on her look; not once had he glanced at the prima donna.

"I need not ask, *caro carino*," said Vendramin to Emilio, "what result my negotiations had. Your pure, saintly Massimilla has been supremely kind; she has been, in fact, La Tinti."

The Prince made reply by a negative shake of his head, full of profound sadness.

"Your love, then, has not yet descended from the spaces in ether in which you soar," said Vendramin, who was under the excitation of opium. "Not yet has it materialized. This morning, the same as for six months past, you could feel flowers opening their perfumed petals under the dome of your skull, which was an expanse grand in proportions. Your whole blood rushed to your throbbing heart, that seemed to rise to choke your throat. There—in there," said he, lightly touching Emilio's breast, "you experienced rapturous feelings. Massimilla's voice thrilled in your soul like waves of rippling light; her touch gave freedom to a thousand captive joys: they sprang from the convolutions of your brain and gathered around you in clouds, they bore your etherealized being through the blue air in a blaze of purple to far beyond the snowy peaks, to where the pure love of angels abides.

"Her smile, the kisses of her lips, tore off that venomous vestment and consumed the last remaining traces of your earthly nature. Her eyes, twin stars, changed you into a light without shadow. Together you kneeled down on heaven's palm-branches, there awaiting the opening of the gates of paradise; but they swung heavy on their hinges; you became impatient, you struck at them, but you could not reach them. Your hand could only touch clouds which were more elusive than your desires. Your companion, radiant and adorned with white roses, as a bride of heaven, wept at your anguish. It may have been that she was saying, in soft melodious tones, sweet litanies to the Virgin, the while the devilish cravings of the flesh were tormenting you with their indecent howlings: you have disdained the heavenly fruits of my ecstasy which is shortening my life, but in which I live."

"Your exaltations, my dear Vendramin," answered Emilio, calmly, "are much below reality. Who can in any way describe that absolute physical exhaustion in which we, who abuse the dreams of pleasure, are left; which leaves in the soul an eternal longing, but the spirit in complete possession of its faculties? But this torment of Tantalus's I am weary of; to-night is my last on earth. After one other last attempt, our Mother shall again possess her child—my last sigh shall be received by the Adriatic——"

"Are you crazy?" exclaimed Vendramin. "No, you are mad; for the crisis we despise is madness; it is the remembrance of a former existence reacting on our being of the present. I have been taught that by the good fairies of my dreams, that and much beside!

"You would have one being made of the Duchess and La Tinti; do not this, dear Emilio; take each separately, it is the wiser course. Only Raphael could unite form and idea. You would be the Raphael of love, but chance does not obey orders. Raphael was a *coup*, a lucky-stroke, of God's creation. It was preordained by Him that form and the ideal should be in antagonism; if it were otherwise naught could exist. If the first cause possesses more energy than the result, nothing can come of it. We must live either on the earth or in the heavens. Stay in heaven, it will always be too soon to descend to earth."

"I will accompany the Duchess home," said the Prince. "I shall make one final attempt—afterward."

"Afterward!" exclaimed Vendramin, anxiously. "Promise to call for me at Florian's."

"I will."

This dialogue had been held in modern Greek, a language unfamiliar to the Duchess, although Emilio and Vendramin, like most Venetians, spoke it perfectly. And also to the Frenchman, who, quite without the little circle consisting of the Duchess, Emilio, and Vendramin, yet had a glimmering of the truth, for he interpreted aright these Italian glances, by turns sly or keen, veiled or sidelong, which accompanied their speech. The Duchess had urged Vendramin, by an earnest entreaty, to suggest this to Emilio, for she also suspected her lover's misery which he endured in that frigid empyrean in which he wandered—but she had no suspicions of La Tinti.

" These two young men are mad," said the physician.

" As regards the Prince," said the Duchess, " trust me to cure him. But for Vendramin, he must be wholly incurable if he cannot comprehend this divine music."

" If you would let me know the cause of their madness I could cure both," said the Frenchman.

" And since when have great physicians ceased to read the minds of men? " said she, ironically.

The ballet had now been ended for some time; the second act of *Moses* was about to begin. The parquet was quite at attention. It was rumored about that the Duke Cataneo had given Genovese a lecturing; that he had represented to him the injury he was working Clarina, the *diva* of the day. The second act would be superb.

" The Egyptian Prince and his father are on the stage," said the Duchess. " They have yielded again, and, though they are insulting the Hebrews, they tremble with rage. The son is congratulated by his father on his approaching marriage; his son is in despair at this fresh obstacle, but it only adds new fervor to his love which is opposed by everything. Genovese and Carthagenova are singing admirably. You note that the tenor is making peace with the house. How he brings out the beauty of the music! The theme of the son on the tonic, repeated by the father in the dominant, is truly in accord with that simple, serious plan which pervades the whole score; its soberness makes the endless variation of the music still more marvelous. All Egypt is there.

" In all modern music I do not think there exists a composition more truly noble. The majestic solemnity of a king is fully expressed in that wonderful theme; it is in harmony with that grand style which stamps the opera all through. That idea of a son of Pharaoh pouring out his griefs on the bosom of his father, surely could not be so admirably represented as in this noble imagery. For yourself, do you not feel a knowledge of that splendor we are accustomed to ascribe to that monarch of antiquity?"

"Indeed it is sublime music," said the Frenchman.

"The *aria* which the Queen will now sing, '*Pace mia smarrita*,' belongs to those *bravura* airs which must be introduced by every composer, though they detract from the general scheme of the opera; but unless the prima donna be duly flattered, an opera would more like than not never see the light. Still this musical *sop* is so fine itself that on every page it is given as it is written; it is so remarkably brilliant that the leading lady dare not substitute her favorite show-piece, such as is often done in operas.

"But now comes the really most striking movement of the score: the duet between Osiride and Elcia in the subterranean chamber, whither he has concealed her to withhold her from the departing Israelites and whence he intends to fly Egypt with her himself. But Aaron intrudes upon the lovers, he has been to warn Amatthea, and here we have the greatest of all quartettes—'*Mi manca la voce, mi sento morire.*' This '*Mi manca la voce*' is a masterpiece that will survive time itself—that destroyer of fashion in music—for it speaks the language of the soul which can never change. Mozart in his famous *finale* to *Don Giovanni* holds his own; Marcello does the same by his psalm, '*Cœli en arrant gloriam Dei*'; Cimarosa by his *aria*, '*Pria che spunti*'; Beethoven by his symphony in C-minor; Pergolesi by his '*Stabat Mater*'; Rossini will live in his '*Mi manca la voce.*'

"The thing most to be admired in Rossini is his command of the variety in construction, he has here had recourse to the old construction of the canon in unison to produce the required effect; he brings in the voices and they become blended in the same melody. As the style of the lovely melodies was new he set them in ancient framing; to give still more relief he silences the orchestra, and the voices he accompanies by the harps alone. It were impossible to display a greater ingenuity of detail or to produce a greater general effect. Oh, dear! another disturbance!" said the Duchess.

Genovese, now that La Tinti was again on the stage, was but a caricature of himself, although he had sung excellently in his duet with Carthagenova. He had sunk from the great singer to the most wretched chorus singer.

Now arose the most formidable uproar that had ever echoed to the roof of the Fenice. It was only subdued in response to the demand of Clarina· she, rendered furious at the difficulties caused by the stubbornness of Genovese, sang "*Mi manca la voce*" as it can never again be sung. The enthusiasm was tremendous; the house forgot its indignation and rage in absolute, acute enjoyment.

"She drowns my soul in purple radiance!" said Capraja, as he waved his handkerchief in a blessing to *La Diva* Tinti.

"Heaven shower all its blessings on your head," cried out a gondolier.

"Pharaoh," said the Duchess, "will now revoke his commands." (The parquet had become calm again.) "He will be overwhelmed by Moses even while upon his throne, who will declare to him that every first-born son in Egypt shall taste death; he sings out that strain of vengeance which proclaims thunders from heaven, while the clarion notes of the Hebrews are heard above it. You must clearly understand though that this *aria* is by Pacini; it is introduced by Carthagenova in the place of that written by Rossini. Doubtless that *aria*, '*Paventa*,' will retain its place in the score; the chance it gives the basso of displaying his voice is too good to be lost, and here expression instead of science carries the day. But, anyway, the *aria* is filled with grand menace, and it is possible that not for long we may be allowed the privilege of hearing it."

A thunderous clapping and cries of bravo hailed the song, followed by a deep, thinking silence; it was thoroughly Venetian and significant; nothing could have been more so, this turmoil and its sudden suppression.

"It is unnecessary to speak of the coronation march which announces the enthroning of Osiride, which is intended as a challenge to Moses, it only needs hearing to be comprehended. The celebrated Beethoven has never written anything finer. This march, filled as it is with earthly pomp, is in marked contrast to that of the Israelites. By comparing them you will see the purpose of the music.

"Elcia declares her love in the presence of the two leaders of the Hebrews; she then renounces it in the exquisite *aria* '*Porge la destra amata*' (Give to another the hand your adored one loves). Ah! what anguish! Just look at the house!"

The parquet was shouting *bravos*, as Genovese left the stage.

"Now freed from her deplored lover, we hear La Tinti sing: '*O desolata Elcia*'—that overpowering *cavatina* which is so expressive of love disapproved by God."

"Where art thou, Rossini?" cried Cataneo. "Would that he could hear the music invented by his genius so superbly rendered," he continued. "Is not Clarina worthy of him?" he asked Capraja. "To be able to give light to those notes by such flashes of flame which, starting from the lungs, feed on some unknown matter in the air, which are taken in by our ears and which bear us upward, onward in a heavenly rapture of love, she must be God!"

"She resembles that gorgeous Indian plant, which, deserting earth, absorbs invisible nutriment from the atmosphere, its spiral blossoms of white shed such fragrant vapors that fill the brain with ravishing dreams," replied Capraja.

When she was recalled, La Tinti appeared alone; a storm of applause greeted her; thousands of kisses were blown from as many finger-tips; she was pelted with roses; a wreath was even made of the flowers ravished from the ladies' hats—nearly all of which came from Paris.

The *cavatina* was encored.

"With what eagerness must Capraja have looked forward for this *aria*, in his passion for embellishments, which derives its whole success from the manner of its execution," said Massimilla. "Rossini has, one may say, given over the reins to the fancy of the singer. Here *cadenza* and expression mean everything; with a poor voice, or a feeble interpretation, it would be worthless—the throat alone is responsible for this *aria's* effects. The singer must display the intensest anguish, the anguish of a woman who beholds her lover dying before her eyes.

" La Tinti makes the roof resound with her *alt* notes; here Rossini, leaving the singer free to do her utmost, writes it in the simplest, clearest style. Then for a crowning effect he composes those heart-rending cries: '*Tormenti! Affanni! Smanie!*' What grief, what pain is in those runs. And, you see, La Tinti has brought down the house."

Bewildered by this worshiping adoration of a vast theater for the source of its pleasures, the Frenchman had a glimpse at the real Italian nature. But neither the Duchess nor the two young men paid the least attention to this ovation.

Clarina again began.

The Duchess had a fear that this was the last time she would ever behold Emilio. As for the Prince, he was in the presence of the divinity who uplifted him to the heavens; he had no knowledge of where he was; he heard no longer the voice of the woman who had initiated him into the mysterious sensuality of earthly pleasures, for a profound dejection caused a tingling in his ears; he heard a chorus of plaintive voices which seemed partly drowned in a tempest of pouring rain.

As to Vendramin, he saw himself in a costume of ancient Venice, gazing down upon the ceremony of the *Bucentaure.* The Frenchman very plainly perceived that some painful mystery had arisen between the Duchess and Emilio, and he was racking his brain in the conjecture as to what it might be.

The scene had changed.

In the center of a fine picture, which depicted the Desert and the Red Sea, the Egyptians and Hebrews made their evolutions, but without producing any effect on the four persons occupying the box of the Duchess. But when the first chords of the harps gave the prelude to the hymn of the delivered Israelites, the Prince and Vendramin rose and stood leaning against the opposite sides of the box, while the Duchess supported her head on her hand, resting her elbow on the velvet ledge.

Comprehending from this little stir the importance of this justly famous chorus, the Frenchman listened, as did all the house, with undivided attention.

With one accord the audience shouted for an encore.

"I feel as if I were celebrating Italy's liberation," thought a Milanese.

"Music, such as this, lifts up heads that are bowed; it revives the hope of the most indifferent," said one from Romagna.

"In this scene," said Massimilla, whose emotion was discernible, "science is put aside. This masterpiece was dictated by inspiration alone; it emanated from the soul of the composer like a cry of love! The accompaniment consists solely of harps—only at the last refrain of this divine theme does the orchestra appear. Never can Rossini rise higher than in this prayer; he will do, undoubtedly, work quite as good, he can never excel it; the sublime always equals itself; but this hymn is one of those things that will remain sublime forever. The only companion for such a conception may be found in Marcello's grand psalms, that noble Venetian, who was to music what Giotto was to painting. The majesty of the theme is only to be compared with the noblest inventions ever created by religious writers, as it unfolds itself in episodes of inexhaustible melody.

"How simple the structure! The attack is opened by Moses in G-minor, which ends in a *cadenza* in B-flat, thus allowing the entrance of the chorus, at first *pianissimo*, in the same key of B-flat, resolving itself into G-minor. Three times does this splendid treatment of the voices recur, and it ends its last strophe in a *stretto* in G-major of a most overpowering and majestic effect. It is a nation released from slavery; we feel it in this hymn, as it rises toward heaven, where it is met by the like strains falling from the higher spheres. With joy the stars make response to this ecstasy of a liberated earth. The rhythm in its rounded fullness, the deliberate dignity of the modulations which lead up to the outburst of praise and thanksgiving, its measured return, cause pictures of celestial joys in the soul. Can you not imagine that you see the heavens open; that you there behold angels swinging sistrums of gold, seraphims prostrated, waving their fragrant censers; the archangels resting upon their flaming swords with which they have vanquished the heathen?

"The secret of this music in its refreshing effect on the soul is that of but few works of human genius, I think; for the time it bears us into the infinite; it is within us; we see it in those melodies as boundless as those hymns sung round the throne of God. Rossini's genius carries us to prodigious heights, whence we gaze down upon our promised land; our eyes are fascinated by the divine light, and we gaze enraptured into limitless space. The last strain of Elcia brings a feeling, as it were, of earth-born passion, for she has nearly recovered from her sorrow, with this psalm of thanksgiving. This, see you, is another touch of genius.

"Aye, sing," cried the Duchess, as she listened to the last stanza with a somber enthusiasm like that given to it by the singers. "Sing! You are free!"

The words were spoken in such a tone of voice as made the physician start. With the intention of diverting Massimilla from her bitter reflections, he engaged her in argument in which the French excel, at the time that a furore of excitement recalling La Tinti was at its highest.

"Madame," said he, "to-morrow I shall come again with a more comprehensive understanding of this great work, thanks to you for your explanation, in its structural effects; you have often mentioned the color of the music; now, as an analyst and materialist, I must acknowledge that I have always rejected the affectation of a number of enthusiasts, who would have us believe that music is painting with tones. It would be, would it not? the same as Raphael's admirers speaking of him as singing in colors."

"In the language of musicians," answered the Duchess, "painting awakens our souls to certain associations or definite images in our minds; now these memories and forms have each their respective colors—sad or lively. You do but fight for a word, that is all. Capraja's theory is that each instrument has its task, its mission; that it appeals to a particular feeling, the same as each color is allied to a certain idea in our souls. Take a pattern in gold on a ground of blue, does that arouse the same sensation in you as a red pattern on green or black? So in music there are no forms, no expressions of emotion—these are simply artistic; but no one gazes on them with indifference. Again, does not the oboe possess that peculiar tone always associated by us with the open country, the same it has in common with most wind instruments? The brass gives a suggestion of martial ideas, it arouses violent and, at times, even a furious feeling. The strings, which derive their material from the organic world, appeal to the finest fibers of our being—they reach the heart's depths.

"In speaking as I did of the somber hue, the coldness of tone in the introduction to *Moses*, I was, it seems to me, quite as justified as your critics are when they allude to 'color' in a writer's work. You confess to a nervous style, a pallid style, a gay or bright-colored style, do you not? Art can paint with words, sound, color, lines, shape. The means are manifold, the result one.

"An Italian architect could give us the same feeling by constructing an esplanade through, between and under, gloomy, damp glades of tall, thick trees from whence we emerge suddenly upon a valley filled with streams, flowers, and mills, all radiant in the sunshine, as that created in us by the overture to *Moses in Egypt*.

"At their greatest the arts are but an exposition of nature's grand scenery.

"Go and talk with Capraja, you will be astonished at what he will teach you; for myself, I am not learned enough to propound the philosophy of music. He can inform you how every instrument that depends on the touch of man for its expression and temperament of tone is superior to color as a means of expression, which must needs remain fixed, or speech which has its limits. The language of music is infinite: it includes all, it expresses everything. Can you now see in what lies the pre-eminence of the work to which you have just listened?

"I can explain it in a few words. Music is of two kinds: one petty, poor, second-rate, never varying, its base the hundred or so phrasings which all musicians understand, a babbling which is more or less pleasant, the life that most composers live. As we hear their would-be melodies, their themes, which gave much or little satisfaction, and of which not a trace is left in our minds, we know that by a century's end they are entirely forgotten.

"But nations have preserved from time's birth until our own day certain phrases which they have guarded as sacred treasures; these have contained an epitome of their manners and instincts; they embrace, I might say, their history. Hark to one of those primitive strains—take the Gregorian chant as an example; it is, in sacred song, the heritage of the remotest races; in it you will lose yourself in deep dreams. Despite the severe simplicity of the rudimentary relics, strange, but portentous, conceptions will unfold before you. Once or twice in a century, never more frequent, a Homer of music arises; he is granted by God the guerdon of being ahead of his age. These men can concert melodies full to overflowing of facts accomplished, pregnant by massive poetry. Remember this, think of it. The thought, a germ, often turned over, will prove fruitful; melody, not harmony, it is that will weather the attack of time.

"The music in this oratorio is filled with a world of grand and holy things. An opera with that introduction and ending with that invocation is not mortal; it is as immortal as the Easter hymn, '*O filii et filiæ,*' as the '*Dies iræ*' of the dead, as every song must be which in every country has outlived its splendor, its happiness, its dead prosperity."

As the Duchess left her box she wiped away the tears which clearly showed that she was thinking of the Venice that is no more; Vendramin kissed her hand.

The performance closed in a chaos of turbulence. Hisses and abuse were showered upon Genovese, while a paroxysm of frenzy greeted La Tinti as applause. For a long time the Venetians had not experienced so enlivening an evening. The antagonism aroused had warmed and invigorated them, for such is never wanting in Italy, where the smallest towns have ever thrived on the diverse interests of two opposing factions. In every place the Guelfs and Ghibellines; at Verona, the Capulets and Montagues; at Bologna, the Geremei and Lomelli; at Genoa, the Fieschi and Doria; at every place the patricians and the populace, and the senate and tribunes of the Roman republic; at Florence, the Medici and the Passi; at Milan, the Sforza and the Visconti; at Rome, the Orsini and the Colonna; in fact, everywhere and upon all occasions the same impulse exists.

Already upon the streets there were "Genovists" and "Tintists."

The Duchess was escorted by the Prince; the former was still more depressed by the loves of Osiride; she dreaded a similar disaster to herself. She clung the closer to Emilio, as though trying to keep him next her heart.

"Remember your promise," said Vendramin; "I shall look for you in the square."

As Vendramin took the Frenchman's arm purposing a walk together on the Piazzo San Marco, as he awaited the Prince:

"I shall but be too glad if he does not come," said he.

This formed the subject for a discourse between them, and Vendramin considered it a favorable opportunity in which to consult the physician. He told him of the peculiar situation in which Emilio was placed.

As every Frenchman does on every occasion, the Frenchman laughed. Vendramin was angry, for he viewed the matter very seriously, but he became mollified when that disciple of Majendie, of Cuvier, of Dupuytren, and of Brossais said that most surely he could cure the Prince of his high-falutin rhapsodies, that he could dispel the celestial poetry he had wrapped about Massimilla as by a cloud.

"A pleasant form of misfortune!" said he. "The ancients were not quite the fools we believe them to be from their heaven of crystal and their ideas of physics, which in the fable of Ixion is symbolical of that power which annuls the body and creates the spirit lord of all."

Presently Vendramin and the physician met Genovese and, accompanying him, the fantastic Capraja. The august melomaniac was anxiously trying to learn the cause of the tenor's *fiasco*. Genovese, when questioned, spoke very rapidly, the same as all men do who become intoxicated in the bursting forth of ideas caused in them by a passion.

"Yes, signori, I love her; I adore her with such frenzy as I never thought I could experience, since I have become tired of women. Women play the devil with art. Work and pleasure can never get along together. Clarina fancies me jealous of her success; she believes I attempted to hamper her triumph at Venice; but in the wings I was clapping and shouting *diva* louder than any person in the house."

"Even so," said Cataneo, as he joined them, "but that does not account for your becoming, from a divine singer, one of the most execrable ones that ever pumped air through his larynx, without adding any of the charm which fascinates and ravishes us."

"I!" said the virtuoso. "I a poor singer! I who am the equal of the greatest masters?"

But now the doctor and Vendramin, Capraja, Cataneo, and Genovese had arrived at the piazetta. It was midnight. The glistening bay, in its outline of the Saint-Georges and Saint-Paul churches, at the end of the Giudecca, at the juncture of the beginning of the Grand Canal, that has its mysterious inchoation under the *Dogana* and the Santa Maria della Salute church, lay beautiful and placid. The moon shone on the barques alongside the Rive des Esclavons. There is no tide to the waters of Venice, and they seemed to be alive, dancing, as they were, in myriads of spangles. No singer had ever a more resplendent stage.

Genovese seemed to call upon the heavens and the earth as witnesses, as he made an emphatic gesture; then he commenced to sing, accompanied only by the lapping wavelets, "*Ombra adoratta*," the *chef-d'œuvre* of Crescentini.

This air, as it rose up amidst the statues of Saint-Theodore and Saint-Georges, right in the breast of sleeping Venice, which were radiant in the moonlight, the words, so peculiarly harmonizing with the scene, the melancholy passion of the singer, bound the Italians and the Frenchman as by a spell.

Vendramin's face became wet with tears at the first notes. Capraja stood as motionless as one of the statues in the ducal palazzo. Cataneo showed some emotion. The Frenchman was pensive, he was taken quite by surprise; he seemed like a scientific man face to face with a phenomenon which has upset the axioms upon which he is founded. These four so different minds, with so little faith; these that believed in nothing but themselves for themselves, with nothing to follow, who looked upon their existence as at best a chanceling and fortuitous being, like the petty life of a plant or a bug, gained a glimpse of heaven. No music could so surely deserve the epitaph—divine. Those so soothing notes were poured forth and bathed their souls in soft and languorous airs. These vapors, which seemed to the listeners to be almost visible, resembling the marble forms around them in the silvery rays of the moon, had angels seated upon them, waving their wings in love and adoration. The simple, artless melody penetrated the soul like a ray of light. It was a sacred passion!

But the vanity of the tenor awakened them like a sudden blow.

"Say, now, am I a poor singer?" he cried as he finished the air.

His audience regretted that the instrument was not a heavenly thing. It was no more, this angelic song, than the outcome of a man's wounded pride! The singer experienced nothing, thought nothing of the pious feelings and divine imagery that he had created in the others; not more, in reality, than Paganini's violin can understand what he makes it declare. They, in imagination, had seen Venice lifting its shroud and giving utterance to song—and here it was but the result of a tenor's *fiasco!*

"Can you guess what such a phenomenon means?" the Frenchman asked Capraja; he wished to make him talk, as the Duchess had alluded to him as being a deep thinker.

"What phenomenon?" said Capraja.

"Genovese, who, in the absence of La Tinti, is most admirable, and when singing with her makes the braying of a donkey."

"He obeys a supernatural law of which one of your chemists might be prepared to give the mathematical formula, and which the succeeding generation may probably express in a report filled with *x*, *a*, and *b*, stirred up among a number of algebraic signs, nodes, and quips that give one the colic; for, as a fact, the greatest mathematics ever conceived add nothing to our sum-total of happiness.

"If an artist becomes so unfortunately full of the passion that he would fain express, he cannot fulfill his desire because then he is the real thing and no longer its image. Art is the work of the brain, not the heart. When a subject possesses you, then you are no longer its master, but its slave; you are a king besieged by his people. When you have too keen a feeling, at the instant you wish to represent that feeling, you cause an insurrection of sense against the faculty of government."

"May we not be able to convince ourselves of this truth by some further experiment?" said the doctor.

"Cataneo," said Capraja to his friend, "contrive to bring your tenor and the prima donna together again."

"Very well, gentlemen," replied the Duke, "sup with me. We ought to effect a reconciliation between Genovese and La Clarina; if not, the season is ruined for Venice."

The invitation was accepted.

"Gondoliers!" called Cataneo.

"One moment," said Vendramin, "Memmi is awaiting me at Florian's; I cannot leave him to himself; if we do not make him tipsy to-night, he will kill himself to-morrow."

"*Corpo santo!*" cried the Duke. "I must keep that young man alive, if only for the future prospects of my line. I will also invite him."

They all returned to Florian's, where an eager and stormy discussion was going on in the crowd, to which an end was put by the tenor's arrival. By a window in a corner, gloomy, in a fixed gaze and dejected attitude, stood the Prince, looking at the balcony, the very image of dismal despair.

"That crazy fellow," said the physician in French to

Vendramin, "knows not what he wants. That man can create in Massimilla Doni a being apart from the rest of creation; he possesses her in the skies in the midst of an ideal splendor that no earthly power can make real. He sees his mistress always sublime, ever pure; he always hears within him what we heard by the sea; he lives forever in the light of a pair of eyes which create for him the warmth and golden radiance that halos the Virgin in the *Assumption* by Titian, after Raphael had invented it for him and revealed it to him in the *Transfiguration*, and this man wishes to smear the poem. My advice is that he makes a combination in one woman of his sensual delights and his divine worship. In short, like all and every one of us, he must be given a mistress.

"He had a divinity, and the miserable creature insists that it shall be a female! I can assure monsieur that he will resign heaven. I won't answer, though, for it that he may not at the last die of despair.

"O, ye faces of women, so daintily outlined in a pure and lovely oval, which reminds us of art's creations where it has very successfully rivaled nature! Celestial feet that cannot walk; a form so slender that an earthly breeze would break; a frail shape which cannot conceive; virgins that visited our dreams when we grew out of childhood, those we adored in secret, and worshiped without hope, clothed in the ray of some unwearying, voluptuous desire; maidens whom we shall never again behold, but the smiles from whom remain ever supreme, throughout our lives, what hog of Epicurus will insist on dragging you down to the filth of this world!

"The sun, monsieur, gives heat and light to the world only because it is placed at a distance of thirty-three millions of leagues away. Come nearer to it and science warns you that it is not really hot nor luminous—for science is of some use," he added, turning to Capraja.

"For a Frenchman and a doctor, that is not so bad," said Capraja, as he patted the foreigner on his shoulder. "In those few words you have solved the question which Europeans have least understood in the whole of Dante—

his Beatrice. Yes, Beatrice, that ideal form, the queen of the poet's phantasies, chosen in preference to all the elect, consecrated by tears, deified in his memory, always young in the fact of his perpetual desire!"

"Prince," said the Duke to Emilio, "come and sup with me. It is impossible you should refuse the poor Neapolitan from whom you have stolen both his wife and his mistress."

This broad Neapolitan jest, spoken as it was with aristocratic grace, made Emilio smile; he permitted the Duke to take his arm and lead him thither.

Already Cataneo had sent a messenger to his house from the café.

As the Palazzo Memmi was on the Grand Canal, but a short distance away from Santa Maria della Salute, the way thither was either by gondola or on foot by passing around the Rialto. The four guests would not hear of separation, so all walked; the infirmities of the Duke compelled his making use of a gondola.

Toward two o'clock in the morning the passers-by would have seen the light pouring out of every window of the Palazzo Memmi and across the Grand Canal; they would have heard also the delightful overture to *Semiramide*, performed at the base of the stairway by the orchestra from the Fenice, in serenading La Tinti.

The company was at supper on the third-floor gallery. From the balcony La Tinti in return sang "*Buona sera*," Almavida's *aria* in *Il Barbiere*, the while the steward of the Duke distributed largess from his master to the impecunious artists, and bade them to dinner on the coming day. These civilities are expected of great lords who protect singers, and of fine ladies who have their tenors and bassos. In such cases there is naught for it but to marry the whole *corps de théâtre*.

Cataneo did things in great style; he was the banker for the manager; this season alone had cost him two thousand crowns.

The palace had been furnished by him; he had wines from every country and had imported a French chef. The supper, therefore, was a royal banquet.

All through the meal the Prince, who was seated next to La Tinti, was vividly alive to what is termed by the poets "the darts of love."

As the thought of God is sometimes obscured in clouds of doubt in the consciences of solitary thinkers, so was the transcendental vision of Massimilla eclipsed to the sight of Emilio.

Clarina believed herself the happiest woman in the world; knew it when she saw that Emilio was in love with her. She felt assured of keeping him, and her delight was plain to be seen in her countenance; her beauty was so radiant, so dazzling, that none of the men could refrain from expressing their admiration as they lifted their glasses; it was impossible to resist a courtly bow to her.

"The Duchess cannot be placed in comparison with La Tinti," said the Frenchman, who had already forgotten his theories under the burning glance of the eyes of the Sicilian.

The tenor ate and drank perfunctorily; he appeared to only wish to identify his life with that of the prima donna; he seemed to have lost that keen sense of enjoyment so characteristic of Italian male vocalists.

"Come, signorina," said the Duke, looking imploringly at Clarina, "and you, *caro primo uomo*," he continued to Genovese, "let your voices unite in one true sound. Give us the C of *Qual portento*, when the light comes in the oratorio we have just listened to, and thus convince my old friend Capraja that the unison is far superior to any embellishment of harmony."

"I will bear her away from that Prince whom she loves; she worships him, it is apparent in her eyes," muttered Genovese to himself.

The astonishment of the guests can only be imagined when, after hearing him in the open air, he began to bray, coo, mew, squeak, guggle, bellow, bark, thunder, squeal, shriek, and produced sounds even which can only be described as a hoarse rattle; he went, in fact, through a non-understandable farce; what time his face was transfigured with an expression of rapture, like a martyr, as painted by Zurbaran or Murillo, a Titian or Raphael. The universal yell of laughter became changed to nearly tragic gravity when they comprehended that Genovese was terribly in earnest.

La Tinti saw that her associate was enamored of her; that he had spoken the truth when on the stage with her in that land of falsehood.

"*Poverino!*" she whispered, as she stroked the hand of the Prince beneath the table.

"By the holies!" exclaimed Capraja, "please let me know what score you are reading at this time—murderer of Rossini? Pray instruct us of what you are thinking—what demon is it that struggles in your throat?"

"Demon!" cried Genovese, "nay, the rather say: God of music. My eyes, like St. Cecilia's, see angels pointing with their fingers to show me the staff of the score writ in fiery notes; I am trying to keep pace with them. *Per Dio!* do you not comprehend? My being is filled with inspiration; it crowds my heart, my lungs; my soul and my throat possess the one life.

"Have you never heard in a dream the most entrancing strains, the thoughts of unborn musicians who have utilized pure sound, which has been hidden by nature in everything—sounds which we, more or less truthfully, bring forth, employing the instruments we use to create groups of various colors? These in dream-concerts are heard free of every imperfection of those performers whom it is impossible shall be all emotion, all soul. And I, I give you that perfection and you upbraid me!

"You are as crazy as the parquet at the Fenice when they hissed me! I have contempt for the vulgar crowd who are unable to mount with me to those alps where I reign over art—I make my appeal to remarkable men, to a Frenchman—why, he is gone!"

"Half an hour since," said Vendramin.

"It is a pity. Perhaps he might have understood me, as worthy Italians, lovers of art, do not——"

"There you go!" said Capraja, smiling and giving a light tap on the tenor's head. "Ride away on the celestial Ariosto's hippogrif; chase, then, your dazzling chimera, musical *teriaki* as you are!"

For a truth, everyone else believed that Genovese was simply drunk, and they let him talk without paying any attention to him. It was only Capraja that understood the case put by the French physician.

The wine of Cyprus had loosened every tongue, and each one pranced around on his own particular hobby; meanwhile the Frenchman was in a gondola awaiting the Duchess, to whom he had forwarded a note written by Vendramin.

Massimilla made her appearance in her night-wrapper; she had been so alarmed at the Prince's adieu and further startled by the hope suggested in the letter.

"Madame," said the Frenchman, as he handed her to a seat, desiring the gondolier to start, "at this instant the life of Prince Emilio is in jeopardy and only yourself can save him."

"What must be done?" she asked.

"Ah! Will you resign yourself to perform a degrading act—despite the noblest face in Italy? Is it that you can descend from your heaven of azure into the bed of a courtesan? In short, can an angel of refinement as you are, of such true and unspotted beauty, beseem yourself to imagine what the love of a Tinti can be—put yourself in her place so much as to deceive Emilio's ardor, and who is too much intoxicated to be altogether clear of sight?"

"And is that all?" said she, with a smile that betrayed to the Frenchman one view of the delicious nature of an Italian woman in love which he had not before perceived. "I will out-Tinti La Tinti if necessary to save the life of my friend."

"Then you will blend two species of love into one; he now sees them as separated from each other, divided by mountains of poetic imaginings; these will melt away like snow upon a glacier under the fierce rays of a midsummer sun."

"I shall be your debtor throughout eternity," said the Duchess soberly.

When the Frenchman returned to the hall, he showed a look of satisfaction which Emilio, who was absorbed by La Tinti, did not observe; the banquet had now become an orgy and was stamped with Venetian frenzy. The Prince was promising himself a further indulgence in the ravishing delights he had already tasted, while La Tinti, a genuine Sicilian, was idly floating on the sweet current of a maddening passion now on the verge of being again gratified.

When the Frenchman whispered a few words to Vendramin, La Tinti was evidently troubled.

" What are you plotting? " she asked the friend of the Prince.

" Are you a good girl? " inquired the doctor in her ear, assuming the operator's sternness.

These words thrust themselves into her understanding as though struck by a dagger in her heart.

" It is to save Emilio's life," added Vendramin.

" Come here," said the doctor to Clarina.

The poor singer arose and walked to the end of the table, seating herself between the doctor and Vendramin, and looking like a criminal in the presence of the confessor and executioner.

She held out for a long time, but at length she yielded, out of love for Emilio.

The last words of the doctor were:

" And you must cure Genovese."

As she returned around the table she spoke a few words to the tenor. Then she went to the Prince, she placed her arms around his neck, she kissed his hair, a despairing expression on her face, noticed by the only two who seemed to have any sense remaining, Vendramin and the doctor, and then vanished into her chamber.

Emilio, who noticed that Genovese had left the table, while Cataneo and Capraja were engrossed in a long-winded argument on music, then crept to the door of the bedroom, raised the portière, and slipped in like an eel into the mud.

" But see you, Cataneo," said Capraja, " you have extracted the last particle of physical enjoyment, now here you are, strung on wires like a harlequin of cardboard, all patterned with scars, and never making a move except the string of perfect unison is pulled."

" And you, my Capraja, you who have squeezed dry every idea—are you not also in the same boat? You only exist by riding the hobby-horse of a *roulade;* is it not so?"

"I? I possess the whole world!" exclaimed Capraja, with the gesture of a sovereign and an extended hand.

"And I have devoured it!" answered the Duke.

The Prince's sleep was disturbed by a dream, next morning, after a night of unalloyed happiness. On his heart he felt the trickling of pearls let fall by an angel: he awoke, and found himself laved in the tears of Massimilla Doni. He lay in her arms and she had watched him as he slept.

The same evening, though La Tinti would not let him arise until two o'clock in the afternoon—a thing which is considered very bad for a tenor voice—Genovese, at the Fenice, sang most divinely his part in *Semiramide.*

Together with La Tinti he was many times recalled, new diadems were presented, the parquet was delirious with joy; the tenor had done with trying to charm the prima donna by the angelic method.

Vendramin was the only one whom the physician could not cure. Love for a country that no longer exists is a passion beyond remedy. This young Venetian, who by living in his republic of the thirteenth century and in the embrace of that pernicious harlot known as opium, when he found himself in this work-a-day world, brought thither by reaction, at last succumbed, pitied and regretted by his friends.

How shall the conclusion of this adventure be given, for it is so disastrously humdrum. One word is enough for those who adore the ideal:

The Duchess was big with child.

The Peri, the naiads, the fays, the sylphs of ancient lore, the Muses of Greece, the Marble Virgins of the Certosa at Pavia, Michael Angelo's *Day and Night,* the little angels which Bellini was the first to place at the feet of his church paintings, and which Raphael painted so exquisitely in his *Virgin with the Donor,* and the shivering *Madonna of Dresden,* Orcagna's exquisite *Maidens* in the church of San-Michele, Florence; the celestial choir round the tomb of Saint-Sebaldus, Nuremberg; the *Virgins* of the Duomo at

Milan, the whole population of a hundred Gothic cathedrals, all the race of beings who burst through their moldiness to visit you, all grand imaginative artists—each and all of these angelic and disembodied maidens gathered about Massimilla's bed and wept.

PARIS, *May* 25, 1839.

THE PURSE

[*La Bourse* appeared in the second edition of the *Scènes de la Vie Privée*, published in May 1832. In 1835 it was moved over to the *Scènes de la Vie Parisienne*, but when the full *Comédie* took shape it was moved back again.]

THE PURSE

To Sofka.

Have you observed, mademoiselle, that the painters and sculptors of the Middle Ages, when they placed two figures in adoration, one on each side of a fair Saint, never failed to give them a family likeness? When you here see your name among those that are dear to me, and under whose auspices I place my works, remember that touching harmony, and you will see in this not so much an act of homage as an expression of the brotherly affection of your devoted servant,

De Balzac.

FOR souls to whom effusiveness is easy there is a delicious hour that falls when it is not yet night, but is no longer day; the twilight gleam throws softened lights or tricksy reflections on every object, and favors a dreamy mood which vaguely weds itself to the play of light and shade. The silence which generally prevails at that time makes it particularly dear to artists, who grow contemplative, stand a few paces back from the pictures on which they can no longer work, and pass judgment on them, rapt by the subject whose most recondite meaning then flashes on the inner eye of genius. He who has never stood pensive by a friend's side in such an hour of poetic dreaming can hardly understand its inexpressible soothingness. Favored by the clear-obscure, the material skill employed by art to produce illusion entirely disappears. If the work is a picture, the figures represented seem to speak and walk; the shade is shadow, the light is day; the flesh lives, eyes move, blood flows in their veins, and stuffs have a changing sheen. Imagination helps the realism of every detail, and only sees the beauties of the work. At that hour illusion reigns despotically; perhaps it wakes at nightfall! Is not illusion a sort of night to the mind, which we people with dreams? Illusion then unfolds its wings, it bears the soul aloft to the world of fancies, a world full of voluptuous imaginings, where the artist forgets the real world, yesterday and the morrow, the future—everything down to its miseries, the good and the evil alike.

At this magic hour a young painter, a man of talent, who saw in art nothing but Art itself, was perched on a step-ladder which helped him to work at a large high painting, now nearly finished. Criticising himself, honestly admiring himself, floating on the current of his thoughts, he then lost himself in one of those meditative moods which ravish and elevate the soul, soothe it, and comfort it. His reverie had no doubt lasted a long time. Night fell. Whether he meant to come down from his perch, or whether he made some ill-judged movement, believing himself to be on the floor—the event did not allow of his remembering exactly the cause of his accident—he fell, his head struck a footstool, he lost consciousness and lay motionless during a space of time of which he knew not the length.

A sweet voice roused him from the stunned condition into which he had sunk. When he opened his eyes the flash of a bright light made him close them again immediately; but through the mist that veiled his senses he heard the whispering of two women, and felt two young, two timid hands on which his head was resting. He soon recovered consciousness, and by the light of an old-fashioned Argand lamp he could make out the most charming girl's face he had ever seen, one of those heads which are often supposed to be a freak of the brush, but which to him suddenly realized the theories of the ideal beauty which every artist creates for himself and whence his art proceeds. The features of the unknown belonged, so to say, to the refined and delicate type of Prudhon's school, but had also the poetic sentiment which Girodet gave to the inventions of his fantasy. The freshness of the temples, the regular arch of the eyebrows, the purity of outline, the virginal innocence so plainly stamped on every feature of her countenance, made the girl a perfect creature. Her figure was slight and graceful, and frail in form. Her dress, though simple and neat, revealed neither wealth nor penury.

As he recovered his senses, the painter gave expression to his admiration by a look of surprise, and stammered some confused thanks. He found a handkerchief pressed to his forehead, and above the smell peculiar to a studio, he recognized the strong odor of ether, applied no doubt to revive him from his fainting fit. Finally he saw an old woman, looking like a marquise of the old school, who held the lamp and was advising the young girl.

"Monsieur," said the younger woman in reply to one of the questions put by the painter during the few minutes when he was still under the influence of the vagueness that the shock had produced in his ideas, "my mother and I heard the noise of your fall on the floor, and we fancied we heard a groan. The silence following on the crash alarmed us, and we hurried up. Finding the key in the latch, we happily took the liberty of entering, and we found you lying motionless on the ground. My mother went to fetch what was needed to bathe your head and revive you. You have cut your forehead—there. Do you feel it?"

"Yes, I do now," he replied.

"Oh, it will be nothing," said the old mother. "Happily your head rested against the lay-figure."

"I feel infinitely better," replied the painter. "I need nothing further but a hackney cab to take me home. The porter's wife will go for one."

He tried to repeat his thanks to the two strangers; but at each sentence the elder lady interrupted him, saying, "To-morrow, monsieur, pray be careful to put on leeches, or to be bled, and drink a few cups of something healing. A fall may be dangerous."

The young girl stole a look at the painter and at the pictures in the studio. Her expression and her glances revealed perfect propriety; her curiosity seemed rather absence of mind, and her eyes seemed to speak the interest which women feel, with the most engaging spontaneity, in everything which causes us suffering. The two strangers seemed to forget the painter's works in the painter's mishap. When he had reassured them as to his condition they left, looking at him with an anxiety that was equally free from insistence and from familiarity, without asking any indiscreet questions, or trying to incite him to any wish to visit them. Their proceedings all bore the hall-mark of natural refinement and good taste. Their noble and simple manners at first made no great impression on the painter, but subsequently, as he recalled all the details of the incident, he was greatly struck by them.

When they reached the floor beneath that occupied by the painter's studio, the old lady gently observed, "Adélaïde, you left the door open."

"That was to come to my assistance," said the painter, with a grateful smile.

"You came down just now, mother," replied the young girl, with a blush.

"Would you like us to accompany you all the way downstairs?" asked the mother. "The stairs are dark."

"No thank you, indeed, madame; I am much better."

"Hold tightly by the rail."

The two women remained on the landing to light the young man, listening to the sound of his steps.

In order to set forth clearly all the exciting and unexpected interest this scene might have for the young painter, it must be told that he had only a few days since established his studio in the attics of this house, situated in the darkest and, therefore, the most muddy part of the Rue de Suresnes, almost opposite the Church of the Madeleine, and quite close to his rooms in the Rue des Champs-Élysées. The fame his talent had won him having made him one of the artists most dear to his country, he was beginning to feel free from want, and, to use his own expression, was enjoying his last privations. Instead of going to his work in one of the studios near the city gates, where the moderate rents had hitherto been in proportion to his humble earnings, he had gratified a wish that was new every morning, by sparing himself a long walk, and the loss of much time, now more valuable than ever.

No man in the world would have inspired feelings of greater interest than Hippolyte Schinner if he would ever have consented to make acquaintance; but he did not lightly intrust to others the secrets of his life. He was the idol of a necessitous mother, who had brought him up at the cost of the severest privations. Mlle. Schinner, the daughter of an Alsatian farmer, had never been married. Her tender soul had been cruelly crushed, long ago, by a rich man, who did not pride himself on any great delicacy in his love affairs. The day when, as a young girl, in all the radiance of her beauty and all the triumph of her life, she suffered, at the cost of her heart and her sweet illusions, the disenchantment which falls on us so slowly and yet so quickly—for we try to postpone as long as possible our belief in evil, and it seems to come too soon—that day was a whole age of reflection, and it was also a day of religious thought and resignation. She refused the alms of the man who had betrayed her, renounced the world, and made a glory of her shame. She gave herself up entirely to her motherly love, seeking in it all her joys in exchange for the social pleasures to which she bid farewell. She lived by work, saving up a treasure in her son. And, in after years, a day, an hour repaid her amply for the long and weary sacrifices of her indigence.

At the last exhibition her son had received the Cross of the Legion of Honor. The newspapers, unanimous in hailing an unknown genius, still rang with sincere praises. Artists themselves acknowledged Schinner as a master, and dealers covered his canvases with gold pieces. At five-and-twenty Hippolyte Schinner, to whom his mother had transmitted her woman's soul, understood more clearly than ever his position in the world. Anxious to restore to his mother the pleasures of which society had so long robbed her, he lived for her, hoping by the aid of fame and fortune to see her one day happy, rich, respected, and surrounded by men of mark. Schinner had therefore chosen his friends among the most honorable and distinguished men. Fastidious in the selection of his intimates, he desired to raise still further a position which his talent had placed high. The work to which he had devoted himself from boyhood, by compelling him to dwell in solitude—the mother of great thoughts—had left him the beautiful beliefs which grace the early days of life. His adolescent soul was not closed to any of the thousand bashful emotions by which a young man is a being apart, whose heart abounds in joys, in poetry, in virginal hopes, puerile in the eyes of men of the world, but deep because they are single-hearted.

He was endowed with the gentle and polite manners which speak to the soul, and fascinate even those who do not understand them. He was well made. His voice, coming from his heart, stirred that of others to noble sentiments, and bore witness to this true modesty by a certain ingenuousness of tone. Those who saw him felt drawn to him by that attraction of the moral nature which men of science are happily unable to analyze; they would detect in it some phenomenon of galvanism, or the current of I know not what fluid, and express our sentiments in a formula of ratios of oxygen and electricity.

These details will perhaps explain to strong-minded persons and to men of fashion why, in the absence of the porter whom he had sent to the end of the Rue de la Madeleine to call him a coach, Hippolyte Schinner did not ask the man's wife any questions concerning the two women whose kindness of heart had shown itself in his behalf. But though he replied Yes or No to the inquiries, natural under the circumstances, which the good woman made as to his accident, and the friendly intervention of the tenants occupying the fourth floor, he could not hinder her from following the instinct of her kind; she mentioned the two strangers, speaking of them as prompted by the interests of her policy and the subterranean opinions of the porter's lodge.

"Ah," said she, "they were, no doubt, Mlle. Leseigneur and her mother, who have lived here these four years. We do not yet know exactly what these ladies do; in the morning, only till the hour of noon, an old woman who is half deaf, and who never speaks any more than a wall, comes in to help them; in the evening, two or three old gentlemen, with loops of ribbon, like you, monsieur, come to see them, and often stay very late. One of them comes in a carriage with servants, and is said to have sixty thousand francs a year.

However, they are very quiet tenants, as you are, monsieur; and economical! they live on nothing, and as soon as a letter is brought they pay for it. It is a queer thing, monsieur, the mother's name is not the same as the daughter's. Ah, but when they go for a walk in the Tuileries mademoiselle is very smart, and she never goes out but she is followed by a lot of young men; but she shuts the door in their face, and she is quite right. The proprietor would never allow——"

The coach having come, Hippolyte heard no more, and went home. His mother, to whom he related his adventure, dressed his wound afresh, and would not allow him to go to the studio next day. After taking advice, various treatments were prescribed, and Hippolyte remained at home three days. During this retirement his idle fancy recalled vividly, bit by bit, the details of the scene that had ensued on his fainting fit. The young girl's profile was clearly projected against the darkness of his inward vision; he saw once more the mother's faded features, or he felt the touch of Adélaïde's hands. He remembered some gesture which at first had not greatly struck him, but whose exquisite grace was thrown into relief by memory; then an attitude, or the tones of a melodious voice, enhanced by the distance of remembrance, suddenly rose before him, as objects plunging to the bottom of deep waters come back to the surface.

So, on the day when he could resume work, he went early to his studio; but the visit he undoubtedly had a right to pay to his neighbors was the true cause of his haste; he had already forgotten the pictures he had begun. At the moment when a passion throws off its swaddling clothes, inexplicable pleasures are felt, known to those who have loved. So some readers will understand why the painter mounted the stairs to the fourth floor but slowly, and will be in the secret of the throbs that followed each other so rapidly in his heart at the moment when he saw the humble brown door of the rooms inhabited by Mlle. Leseigneur. This girl, whose name was not the same as her mother's, had aroused the young painter's deepest sympathies; he chose to fancy some similarity between himself and her as to their position, and attributed to her misfortunes of birth akin to his own. All the time he worked

Hippolyte gave himself very willingly to thoughts of love, and made a great deal of noise to compel the two ladies to think of him, as he was thinking of them. He stayed late at the studio and dined there; then, at about seven o'clock, he went down to call on his neighbors.

No painter of manners has ventured to initiate us—perhaps out of modesty—into the really curious privacy of certain Parisian existences, into the secret of the dwellings whence emerge such fresh and elegant toilets, such brilliant women, who, rich on the surface, allow the signs of very doubtful comfort to peep out in every part of their home. If, here, the picture is too boldly drawn, if you find it tedious in places, do not blame the description, which, is, indeed, part and parcel of the story; for the appearance of the rooms inhabited by his two neighbors had a great influence on the feelings and hopes of Hippolyte Schinner.

The house belonged to one of those proprietors in whom there is a foregone and profound horror of repairs and decoration, one of the men who regard their position as Paris house-owners as a business. In the vast chain of moral species, these people hold a middle place between the miser and the usurer. Optimists in their own interests, they are all faithful to the Austrian *status quo*. If you speak of moving a cupboard or a door, of opening the most indispensable air-hole, their eyes flash, their bile rises, they rear like a frightened horse. When the wind blows down a few chimney-pots they are quite ill, and deprive themselves of an evening at the Gymnase or the Porte-Saint-Martin Theater, "on account of repairs." Hippolyte, who had seen the performance gratis of a comical scene with M. Molineux as concerning certain decorative repairs in his studio, was not surprised to see the dark greasy paint, the oily stains, spots, and other disagreeable accessories that varied the woodwork. And these stigmata of poverty are not altogether devoid of poetry in an artist's eyes.

Mlle. Leseigneur herself opened the door. On recognizing the young artist she bowed, and at the same time, with Parisian adroitness, and with the presence of mind that pride can lend, she turned round to shut a door in a glass partition through which Hippolyte might have caught sight of some linen hung by lines over patent ironing stoves, an old camp-bed, some wood-embers, charcoal, irons, a filter, the household crockery, and all the utensils familiar to a small household. Muslin curtains, fairly white, carefully screened this lumber-room—a *capharnaüm*, as the French call such a domestic laboratory,—which was lighted by windows looking out on a neighboring yard.

Hippolyte, with the quick eye of an artist, saw the uses, the furniture, the general effect and condition of this first room, thus cut in half. The more honorable half, which served both as anteroom and dining-room, was hung with an old salmon-rose-colored paper, with a flock border, the manufacture of Reveillon, no doubt; the holes and spots had been carefully touched over with wafers. Prints representing the battles of Alexander, by Lebrun, in frames with the gilding rubbed off, were symmetrically arranged on the walls. In the middle stood a massive mahogany table, old-fashioned in shape, and worn at the edges. A small stove, whose thin straight pipe was scarcely visible, stood in front of the chimney-place, but the hearth was occupied by a cupboard. By a strange contrast the chairs showed some remains of former splendor; they were of carved mahogany, but the red morocco seats, the gilt nails and reeded backs, showed as many scars as an old sergeant of the Imperial Guard.

This room did duty as a museum of certain objects, such as are never seen but in this kind of amphibious household; nameless objects with the stamp at once of luxury and penury. Among other curiosities Hippolyte noticed a splendidly finished telescope, hanging over the small discolored glass that decorated the chimney. To harmonize with this strange collection of furniture there was, between the chimney and the partition, a wretched sideboard of painted wood, pretending to be mahogany, of all woods the most impossible to imitate. But the slippery red quarries, the shabby little rugs in front of the chairs, and all the furniture, shone with the hard-rubbing cleanliness which lends a treacherous luster to old things by making their defects, their age, and their long service still more conspicuous. An indescribable odor pervaded the room, a mingled smell of the exhalations from the lumber-room, and the vapors of the dining-room, with those from the stairs, though the window was partly open. The air from the street fluttered the dusty curtains, which were carefully drawn so as to hide the window bay, where former tenants had testified to their presence by various ornamental additions—a sort of domestic fresco.

Adélaïde hastened to open the door of the inner room, where she announced the painter with evident pleasure. Hippolyte, who, of yore, had seen the same signs of poverty in his mother's house, noted them with the singular vividness of impression which characterizes the earliest acquisitions of memory, and entered into the details of this existence better than anyone else would have done. As he recognized the facts of his life as a child, the kind young fellow felt neither scorn for disguised misfortune nor pride in the luxury he had lately conquered for his mother.

" Well, monsieur, I hope you no longer feel the effects of your fall," said the old lady, rising from an antique armchair that stood by the chimney, and offering him a seat.

" No, madame. I have come to thank you for the kind care you gave me, and above all mademoiselle, who heard me fall."

As he uttered this speech, stamped with the exquisite stupidity given to the mind by the first disturbing symptoms of true love, Hippolyte looked at the young girl. Adélaïde was lighting the Argand lamp, no doubt that she might get rid of a tallow candle fixed in a large copper flat-candlestick, and graced with a heavy fluting of grease from its guttering. She answered with a slight bow, carried the flat candlestick into the anteroom, came back, and after placing the lamp on the chimney-shelf, seated herself by her mother, a little behind the painter, so as to be able to look at him at her ease, while apparently much interested in the burning of the lamp; the flame, checked by the damp in a dingy chimney, sputtered as it struggled with a charred and badly trimmed wick. Hippolyte, seeing the large mirror that decorated the chimney-piece, immediately fixed his eyes on it to admire Adélaïde.

Thus the girl's little stratagem only served to embarrass them both.

While talking with Mme. Leseigneur, for Hippolyte called her so, on the chance of being right, he examined the room, but unobtrusively and by stealth.

The Egyptian figures on the iron fire-dogs were scarcely visible, the hearth was so heaped with cinders; two brands tried to meet in front of a sham log of fire-brick, as carefully buried as a miser's treasure could ever be. An old Aubusson carpet, very much faded, very much mended, and as worn as a pensioner's coat, did not cover the whole of the tiled floor, and the cold struck to his feet. The walls were hung with a reddish paper, imitating figured silk with a yellow pattern. In the middle of the wall opposite the windows the painter saw a crack, and the outline marked on the paper of double-doors, shutting off a recess where Mme. Leseigneur slept no doubt, a fact ill disguised by a sofa in front of the door. Facing the chimney, above a mahogany chest of drawers of handsome and tasteful design, was the portrait of an officer of rank, which the dim light did not allow him to see well; but from what he could make out he thought that the fearful daub must have been painted in China. The window-curtains of red silk were as much faded as the furniture, in red and yellow worsted work, if this room "contrived a double debt to pay." On the marble top of the chest of drawers was a costly malachite tray, with a dozen coffee cups magnificently painted, and made, no doubt, at Sèvres. On the chimney-shelf stood the omnipresent Empire clock: a warrior driving the four horses of a chariot, whose wheels bore the numbers of the hours on its spokes. The tapers in the tall candlesticks were yellow with smoke, and at each corner of the shelf stood a porcelain vase crowned with artificial flowers full of dust and stuck into moss.

In the middle of the room Hippolyte remarked a card-table ready for play, with new packs of cards. For an observer there was something heartrending in the sight of this misery painted up like an old woman who wants to falsify her face. At such a sight every man of sense must at once have stated to himself this obvious dilemma—either these two women are honesty itself, or they live by intrigue and gambling. But on looking at Adélaïde, a man so pure-minded as Schinner could not but believe in her perfect innocence, and ascribe the incoherence of the furniture to honorable causes.

"My dear," said the old lady to the young one, "I am cold; make a little fire, and give me my shawl."

Adélaïde went into a room next the drawing-room, where she no doubt slept, and returned bringing her mother a cashmere shawl, which when new must have been very costly; the pattern was Indian; but it was old, faded, and full of darns, and matched the furniture. Mme. Leseigneur wrapped herself in it very artistically, and with the readiness of an old woman who wishes to make her words seem truth. The young girl ran lightly off to the lumber-room and reappeared with a bundle of small wood, which she gallantly threw on the fire to revive it.

It would be rather difficult to reproduce the conversation which followed among these three persons. Hippolyte, guided by the tact which is almost always the outcome of misfortune suffered in early youth, dared not allow himself to make the least remark as to his neighbors' situation, as he saw all about him the signs of ill-disguised poverty. The simplest question would have been an indiscretion, and could only be ventured on by old friendship. The painter was nevertheless absorbed in the thought of this concealed penury, it pained his generous soul; but knowing how offensive every kind of pity may be, even the friendliest, the disparity between his thoughts and his words made him feel uncomfortable.

The two ladies at first talked of painting, for women easily guess the secret embarrassment of a first call; they themselves feel it perhaps, and the nature of their mind supplies them with a thousand devices to put an end to it. By questioning the young man as to the material exercise of his art, and as to his studies, Adélaïde and her mother emboldened him to talk. The indefinable nothings of their chat, animated by kind feeling, naturally led Hippolyte to flash forth remarks or reflections which showed the character of his habits and of his mind. Trouble had prematurely faded the old lady's face, formerly handsome, no doubt; nothing was left but the more prominent features, the outline, in a word, the skeleton of a countenance of which the whole effect indicated great shrewdness with much grace in the play of the eyes, in which could be discerned the expression peculiar to women of the old Court; an expression that cannot be defined in words. Those fine and mobile features might quite as well indicate bad feelings, and suggest astuteness and womanly artifice carried to a high pitch of wickedness, as reveal the refined delicacy of a beautiful soul.

Indeed, the face of a woman has this element of mystery to puzzle the ordinary observer, that the difference between frankness and duplicity, the genius for intrigue and the genius of the heart, is there inscrutable. A man gifted with a penetrating eye can read the intangible shade of difference produced by a more or less curved line, a more or less deep dimple, a more or less prominent feature. The appreciation of these indications lies entirely in the domain of intuition; this alone can lead to the discovery of what everyone is interested in concealing. The old lady's face was like the room she inhabited; it seemed as difficult to detect whether this squalor covered vice or the highest virtue, as to decide whether Adélaïde's mother was an old coquette accustomed to weigh, to calculate, to sell everything, or a loving woman, full of noble feeling and amiable qualities. But at Schinner's age the first impulse of the heart is to believe in goodness. And indeed, as he studied Adélaïde's noble and almost haughty brow, as he looked into her eyes full of soul and thought, he breathed, so to speak, the sweet and modest fragrance of virtue. In the course of the conversation he seized an opportunity of discussing portraits in general, to give himself a pretext for examining the frightful *pastel*, of which the color had flown, and the chalk in many places fallen away.

"You are attached to that picture for the sake of the likeness, no doubt, mesdames, for the drawing is dreadful?" he said, looking at Adélaïde.

"It was done at Calcutta, in great haste," replied the mother, in an agitated voice.

She gazed at the formless sketch with the deep absorption which memoirs of happiness produce when they are roused and fall on the heart like a beneficent dew to whose refreshing touch we love to yield ourselves up; but in the expression of the old lady's face there were traces too of perennial regret. At least, it was thus that the painter chose to interpret her attitude and countenance, and he presently sat down again by her side.

"Madame," he said, "in a very short time the colors of that pastel will have disappeared. The portrait will only survive in your memory. Where you will see the face that is dear to you, others will see nothing at all. Will you allow me to reproduce the likeness on canvas? It will be more permanently recorded then than on that sheet of paper. Grant me, I beg, as a neighborly favor, the pleasure of doing you this service. There are times when an artist is glad of a respite from his greater undertakings by doing work of less lofty pretensions, so it will be a recreation for me to paint that head."

The old lady flushed as she heard the painter's words and Adélaïde shot one of those glances of deep feeling which seem to flash from the soul. Hippolyte wanted to feel some tie linking him with his two neighbors, to conquer a right to mingle in their life. His offer, appealing as it did to the liveliest affections of the heart, was the only one he could possibly make; it gratified his pride as an artist, and could not hurt the feelings of the ladies. Mme. Leseigneur accepted, without eagerness or reluctance, but with the self-possession of a noble soul, fully aware of the character of bonds formed by such an obligation, while, at the same time, they are its highest glory as a proof of esteem.

"I fancy," said the painter, "that the uniform is that of a naval officer?"

"Yes," she said, "that of a captain in command of a vessel. M. de Rouville—my husband—died at Batavia in consequence of a wound received in a fight with an English ship they fell in with off the Asiatic coast. He commanded a frigate of fifty-six guns, and the *Revenge* carried ninety-six. The struggle was very unequal, but he defended his ship so bravely that he held out till nightfall and got away. When I came back to France Bonaparte was not yet in power, and I was refused a pension. When I applied again for it, quite lately, I was sternly informed that if the Baron de Rouville had emigrated I should not have lost him; that by this time he would have been rear-admiral; finally, his Excellency quoted I know not what decree of forfeiture. I took this step, to which I was urged by my friends, only for the sake of my poor Adélaïde. I have always hated the idea of holding out my hand as a beggar in the name of a grief which deprives a woman of voice and strength. I do not like this money valuation for blood irreparably spilt——"

"Dear mother, this subject always does you harm."

In response to this remark from Adélaïde, the Baronne Leseigneur bowed, and was silent.

"Monsieur," said the young girl to Hippolyte, "I had supposed that a painter's work was generally fairly quiet?"

At this question Schinner colored, remembering the noise he had made. Adélaïde said no more, and spared him a falsehood by rising at the sound of a carriage stopping at the door. She went into her own room, and returned carrying a pair of tall gilt candlesticks, with partly burned wax candles, which she quickly lighted, and without waiting for the bell to ring, she opened the door of the outer room, where she set the lamp down. The sound of a kiss given and received found an echo in Hippolyte's heart. The young man's impatience to see the man who treated Adélaïde with so much familiarity, was not immediately gratified; the newcomers had a conversation, which he thought very long, in an undertone, with the young girl.

At last Mlle. de Rouville returned, followed by two men, whose costume, countenance, and appearance are a long story.

The first, a man of about sixty, wore one of the coats invented, I believe, for Louis XVIII., then on the throne, in which the most difficult problem of the sartorial art had been solved by a tailor who ought to be immortal. That artist certainly understood the art of compromise, which was the moving genius of that period of shifting politics. Is it not a rare merit to be able to take the measure of the time? This coat, which the young men of the present day may conceive to be fabulous, was neither civil nor military, and might pass for civil or military by turns. *Fleurs-de-lis* were embroidered on the lapels of the back skirts. The gilt buttons also bore *fleurs-de-lis;* on the shoulders a pair of straps cried out for useless epaulettes; these military appendages were there like a petition without a recommendation. This old gentleman's coat was of dark blue cloth, and the buttonhole had blossomed into many colored ribbons. He, no doubt, always carried his hat in his hand—a three-cornered cocked hat, with a gold cord—for the snowy wings of his powdered hair showed not a trace of its pressure. He might have been taken for not more than fifty years of age, and seemed to enjoy robust health. While wearing the frank and loyal expression of the old émigrés, his countenance also hinted at the easy habits of a libertine, at the light and reckless passions of the Musketeers formerly so famous in the annals of gallantry. His gestures, his attitude, and his manner proclaimed that he had no intention of correcting himself of his royalism, of his religion, or of his love affairs.

A really fantastic figure came in behind this specimen of "Louis XIV.'s light infantry"—a nickname given by the Bonapartists to these venerable survivors of the Monarchy. To do it justice it ought to be made the principal object in the picture, and it is but an accessory. Imagine a lean, dry man, dressed like the former, but seeming to be only his reflection, or his shadow, if you will. The coat, new on the first, on the second was old; the powder in his hair looked less white, the gold of the *fleurs-de-lis* less bright, the shoulder straps more hopeless and dog's-eared; his intellect seemed more feeble, his life nearer the fatal term than in the former. In short, he realized Rivarol's witticism on Champcenetz, "He is the moonlight of me." He was simply his double, a paler and poorer double, for there was between them all the difference that lies between the first and last impressions of a lithograph.

This speechless old man was a mystery to the painter, and always remained a mystery. The *Chevalier*, for he was a *Chevalier*, did not speak, nobody spoke to him. Was he a friend, a poor relation, a man who followed at the old gallant's heels as a lady companion does at an old lady's? Did he fill a place midway between a dog, a parrot, and a friend? Had he saved his patron's fortune, or only his life? Was he the Trim to another Captain Toby? Elsewhere, as at the Baronne de Rouville's, he always piqued curiosity without satisfying it. Who, after the Restoration, could remember the attachment which, before the Revolution, had bound this man to his friend's wife, dead now these twenty years?

The leader, who appeared the least dilapidated of these wrecks, came gallantly up to Mme. de Rouville, kissed her hand, and sat down by her. The other bowed and placed himself not far from his model, at a distance represented by two chairs. Adélaïde came behind the old gentleman's armchair and leaned her elbows on the back, unconsciously imitating the attitude given to Dido's sister by Guérin in his famous picture.

Though the gentleman's familiarity was that of a father, his freedom seemed at the moment to annoy the young girl.

"What, are you sulky with me?" he said.

Then he shot at Schinner one of those side-looks full of shrewdness and cunning, diplomatic looks, whose expression betrays the discreet uneasiness, the polite curiosity of well-bred people, and seems to ask, when they see a stranger, "Is he one of us?"

"This is our neighbor," said the old lady, pointing to Hippolyte. "Monsieur is a celebrated painter, whose name must be known to you in spite of your indifference to the arts."

The old man saw his friend's mischievous intent in suppressing the name, and bowed to the young man.

"Certainly," said he. "I heard a great deal about his pictures at the last Salon. Talent has immense privileges," he added, observing the artist's red ribbon. "That distinction, which we must earn at the cost of our blood and long service, you win in your youth; but all glory is of the same kindred," he said, laying his hand on his Cross of Saint-Louis.

Hippolyte murmured a few words of acknowledgment, and was silent again, satisfied to admire with growing enthusiasm the beautiful girl's head that charmed him so much. He was soon lost in contemplation, completely forgetting the extreme misery of the dwelling. To him Adélaïde's face stood out against a luminous atmosphere. He replied briefly to the questions addressed to him, which, by good luck, he heard, thanks to a singular faculty of the soul which sometimes seems to have a double consciousness. Who has not known what it is to sit lost in sad or delicious meditation, listening to its voice within, while attending to a conversation or to reading? An admirable duality which often helps us to tolerate a bore! Hope, prolific and smiling, poured out before him a thousand visions of happiness; and he refused to consider what was going on around him. As confiding as a child, it seemed to him base to analyze a pleasure.

After a short lapse of time he perceived that the old lady and her daughter were playing cards with the old gentleman. As to the satellite, faithful to his function as a shadow, he stood behind his friend's chair watching his game, and answering the player's mute inquiries by little approving nods, repeating the questioning gestures of the other countenance.

"Du Halga, I always lose," said the gentleman.

"You discard badly," replied the Baronne de Rouville.

"For three months now I have never won a single game," said he.

"Have you the aces?" asked the old lady.

"Yes, one more to mark," said he.

"Shall I come and advise you?" said Adélaïde.

"No, no. Stay where I can see you. By Gad, it would be losing too much not to have you to look at!"

At last the game was over. The gentleman pulled out his purse, and, throwing two louis d'or on the table, not without temper—

"Forty francs," he exclaimed, "the exact sum.—Deuce take it! It is eleven o'clock."

"It is eleven o'clock," repeated the silent figure, looking at the painter.

The young man, hearing these words rather more distinctly than all the others, thought it time to retire. Coming back to the world of ordinary ideas, he found a few commonplace remarks to make, took leave of the Baroness, her daughter, and the two strangers, and went away, wholly possessed by the first raptures of true love, without attempting to analyze the little incidents of the evening.

On the morrow the young painter felt the most ardent desire to see Adélaïde once more. If he had followed the call of his passion, he would have gone to his neighbors' door at six in the morning, when he went to his studio. However, he still was reasonable enough to wait till the afternoon. But as soon as he thought he could present himself to Mme. de Rouville, he went downstairs, rang, blushing like a girl, shyly asked Mlle. Leseigneur, who came to let him in, to let him have the portrait of the Baron.

"But come in," said Adélaïde, who had no doubt heard him come down from the studio.

The painter followed, bashful and out of countenance, not knowing what to say, happiness had so dulled his wit. To see Adélaïde, to hear the rustle of her skirt, after longing for a whole morning to be near her, after starting up a hundred times—"I will go down now"—and not to have gone; this was to him life so rich that such sensations, too greatly prolonged, would have worn out his spirit. The heart has the singular power of giving extraordinary value to mere nothings. What joy it is to a traveler to treasure a blade of grass, an unfamiliar leaf, if he has risked his life to pluck it! It is the same with the trifles of love.

The old lady was not in the drawing-room. When the young girl found herself there, alone with the painter, she brought a chair to stand on, to take down the picture; but perceiving that she could not unhook it without setting her foot on the chest of drawers, she turned to Hippolyte, and said with a blush—

"I am not tall enough. Will you get it down?"

A feeling of modesty, betrayed in the expression of her face and the tones of her voice, was the real motive of her request; and the young man, understanding this, gave her one of those glances of intelligence which are the sweetest language of love. Seeing that the painter had read her soul, Adélaïde cast down her eyes with the instinct of reserve which is the secret of a maiden's heart. Hippolyte, finding nothing to say, and feeling almost timid, took down the picture, examined it gravely, carrying it to the light at the window, and then went away, without saying a word to Mlle. Leseigneur but, "I will return it soon."

During this brief moment they both went through one of those storms of agitation of which the effects in the soul may be compared to those of a stone flung into a deep lake. The most delightful waves of thought rise and follow each other, indescribable, repeated, and aimless, tossing the heart like the circular ripples, which for a long time fret the waters, starting from the point where the stone fell.

Hippolyte returned to the studio bearing the portrait. His easel was ready with a fresh canvas, and his palette set, his brushes cleaned, the spot and the light carefully chosen. And till the dinner hour he worked at the painting with the ardor artists throw into their whims. He went again that evening to the Baronne de Rouville's, and remained from nine till eleven. Excepting the different subjects of conversation, this evening was exactly like the last. The two old men arrived at the same hour, the same game of piquet was played, the same speeches made by the players, the sum lost by Adélaïde's friend was not less considerable than on the previous evening; only Hippolyte, a little bolder, ventured to chat with the young girl.

A week passed thus, and in the course of it the painter's feelings and Adélaïde's underwent the slow and delightful transformation which bring two souls to a perfect understanding. Every day the look with which the girl welcomed her friend grew more intimate, more confiding, gayer, and more open; her voice and manner became more eager and more familiar. They laughed and talked together, telling each other their thoughts, speaking of themselves with the simplicity of two children who have made friends in a day, as much as if they had met constantly for three years. Schinner wished to be taught piquet. Being ignorant and a novice, he, of course, made blunder after blunder, and, like the old man, he lost almost every game. Without having spoken a word of love the lovers knew that they were all in all to one another. Hippolyte enjoyed exerting his power over his gentle little friend, and many concessions were made to him by Adélaïde, who, timid and devoted to him, was quite deceived by the assumed fits of temper, such as the least skilled lover and the most guileless girl can affect; and which they constantly play off, as spoilt children abuse the power they owe to their mother's affection. Thus all familiarity between the girl and the old Count was soon put a stop to. She understood the painter's melancholy, and the thoughts hidden in the furrows on his brow, from the abrupt tone of the few words he spoke when the old man unceremoniously kissed Adélaïde's hands or throat.

Mlle. Leseigneur, on her part, soon expected her lover to give her a short account of all his actions; she was so unhappy, so restless when Hippolyte did not come, she scolded him so effectually for his absence, that the painter had to give up seeing his other friends, and now went nowhere. Adélaïde allowed the natural jealousy of women to be perceived when she heard that sometimes at eleven o'clock, on quitting the house, the painter still had visits to pay, and was to be seen in the most brilliant drawing-rooms of Paris. This mode of life, she assured him, was bad for his health; then, with the intense conviction to which the accent, the emphasis, and the look of one we love lend so much weight, she asserted that a man who was obliged to expend his time and the charms of his wit on several women at once could not be the object of any very warm affection. Thus the painter was led, as much by the tyranny of his passion as by the exactions of a girl in love, to live exclusively in the little apartment where everything attracted him.

And never was there a purer or more ardent love. On both sides the same trustfulness, the same delicacy, gave their passions increase without the aid of those sacrifices by which many persons try to prove their affection. Between these two there was such a constant interchange of sweet emotion that they knew not which gave or received the most.

A spontaneous affinity made the union of their souls a close one. The progress of this true feeling was so rapid that two months after the accident to which the painter owed the happiness of knowing Adélaïde, their lives were one life. From early morning the young girl, hearing footsteps overhead, could say to herself, "He is there." When Hippolyte went home to his mother at the dinner hour he never failed to look in on his neighbors, and in the evening he flew there at the accustomed hour with a lover's punctuality. Thus the most tyrannical woman or the most ambitious in the matter of love could not have found the smallest fault with the young painter. And Adélaïde tasted of unmixed and unbounded happiness as she saw the fullest realization of the ideal of which, at her age, it is so natural to dream.

The old gentleman now came more rarely; Hippolyte, who had been jealous, had taken his place at the green table, and shared his constant ill-luck at cards. And sometimes, in the midst of his happiness, as he considered Mme. de Rouville's disastrous position—for he had had more than one proof of her extreme poverty—an importunate thought would haunt him. Several times he had said to himself as he went home, "Strange! twenty francs every evening?" and he dared not confess to himself his odious suspicions.

He spent two months over the portrait, and when it was finished, varnished, and framed, he looked upon it as one of his best works. Mme. la Baronne de Rouville had never spoken of it again. Was this from indifference or pride? The painter would not allow himself to account for this silence. He joyfully plotted with Adélaïde to hang the picture in its place when Mme. de Rouville should be out. So one day, during the walk her mother usually took in the Tuileries, Adélaïde for the first time went up to Hippolyte's studio, on the pretext of seeing the portrait in the good light in which it had been painted. She stood speechless and motionless, but in ecstatic contemplation, in which all a woman's feelings were merged. For are they not all comprehended in boundless admiration for the man she loves? When the painter, uneasy at her silence, leaned forward to look at her, she held out her hand, unable to speak a word, but two tears fell from her eyes. Hippolyte took her hand, and covered it with kisses; for a minute they looked at each other in silence, both longing to confess their love, and not daring. The painter kept her hand in his, and the same glow, the same throb, told them that their hearts were both beating wildly. The young girl, too greatly agitated, gently drew away from Hippolyte, and said with a look of the utmost simplicity—

"You will make my mother very happy."

"What! only your mother?" he asked.

"Oh, I am too happy."

The painter bent his head and remained silent, frightened at the vehemence of the feelings which her tones stirred in his heart. Then, both understanding the perils of the situation, they went downstairs and hung up the picture in its place. Hippolyte dined for the first time with the Baroness, who, greatly overcome, and drowned in tears, must needs embrace him.

In the evening the old émigré, the Baron de Rouville's old comrade, paid the ladies a visit to announce that he had just been promoted to the rank of vice-admiral. His voyages by land over Germany and Russia had been counted as naval campaigns. On seeing the portrait he cordially shook the painter's hand, and exclaimed, "By Gad! though my old hulk does not deserve to be perpetuated, I would gladly give five hundred pistoles to see myself as like as that is to my dear old Rouville."

At this hint the Baroness looked at her young friend and smiled, while her face lighted up with an expression of sudden gratitude. Hippolyte suspected that the old admiral wished to offer him the price of both portraits while paying for his own. His pride as an artist, no less than his jealousy perhaps, took offense at the thought, and he replied—

"Monsieur, if I were a portrait-painter I should not have done this one."

The admiral bit his lip, and sat down to cards.

The painter remained near Adélaïde, who proposed a dozen hands of piquet, to which he agreed. As he played he observed in Mme. de Rouville an excitement over her game which surprised him. Never before had the old Baroness manifested so ardent a desire to win, or so keen a joy in fingering the old gentleman's gold pieces. During the evening evil suspicions troubled Hippolyte's happiness, and filled him with distrust. Could it be that Mme. de Rouville lived by gambling? Was she playing at this moment to pay off some debt, or under the pressure of necessity? Perhaps she had not paid her rent. That old man seemed shrewd enough not to allow his money to be taken with impunity. What interest attracted him to this poverty-stricken house, he who was rich? Why, when he had formerly been so familiar with Adélaïde, had he given up the rights he had acquired, and which were perhaps his due?

These involuntary reflections prompted him to watch the old man and the Baroness, whose meaning looks and certain sidelong glances cast at Adélaïde displeased him. "Am I being duped?" was Hippolyte's last idea—horrible, scathing, for he believed it just enough to be tortured by it. He determined to stay after the departure of the two old men, to confirm or to dissipate his suspicions. He drew out his purse to pay Adélaïde; but, carried away by his poignant thoughts, he laid it on the table, falling into a reverie of brief duration; then, ashamed of his silence, he rose, answered some commonplace question from Mme. de Rouville, and went close up to her to examine the withered features while he was talking to her.

He went away, racked by a thousand doubts. He had gone down but a few steps when he turned back to fetch the forgotten purse.

"I left my purse here!" he said to the young girl.

"No," she said, reddening.

"I thought it was there," and he pointed to the card-table. Not finding it, in his shame for Adélaïde and the Baroness, he looked at them with a blank amazement that made them laugh, turned pale, felt his waistcoat, and said, "I must have made a mistake. I have it somewhere no doubt."

In one end of the purse there were fifteen louis d'or, and in the other some small change. The theft was so flagrant, and denied with such effrontery, that Hippolyte no longer felt a doubt as to his neighbors' morals. He stood still on the stairs, and got down with some difficulty; his knees shook, he felt dizzy, he was in a cold sweat, he shivered, and found himself unable to walk, struggling, as he was, with the agonizing shock caused by the destruction of all his hopes. And at this moment he found lurking in his memory a number of observations, trifling in themselves, but which corroborated his frightful suspicions, and which, by proving the certainty of this last incident, opened his eyes as to the character and life of these two women.

Had they really waited till the portrait was given them before robbing him of his purse? In such a combination the theft was even more odious. The painter recollected that for the last two or three evenings Adélaïde, while seeming to examine with a girl's curiosity the particular stitch of the worn silk netting, was probably counting the coins in the purse, while making some light jests, quite innocent in appearance, but no doubt with the object of watching for a moment when the sum was worth stealing.

"The old admiral has perhaps good reasons for not marrying Adélaïde, and so the Baroness has tried——"

But at this hypothesis he checked himself, not finishing his thought, which was contradicted by a very just reflection, "If the Baroness hopes to get me to marry her daughter," thought he, "they would not have robbed me."

Then, clinging to his illusions, to the love that already had taken such deep root, he tried to find a justification in some accident. "The purse must have fallen on the floor," said he to himself, "or I left it lying on my chair. Or, perhaps, I have it about me—I am so absent-minded!" He searched himself with hurried movements, but did not find the ill-starred purse. His memory cruelly retraced the fatal truth, minute by minute. He distinctly saw the purse lying on the green cloth; but then, doubtful no longer, he excused Adélaïde, telling himself that persons in misfortune should not be so hastily condemned. There was, of course, some secret behind this apparently degrading action. He would not admit that that proud and noble face was a lie.

At the same time the wretched rooms rose before him, denuded of the poetry of love which beautifies everything; he saw them dirty and faded, regarding them as emblematic of an inner life devoid of honor, idle and vicious. Are not our feelings written, as it were, on the things about us?

Next morning he rose, not having slept. The heartache, that terrible malady of the soul, had made rapid inroads. To lose the bliss we dreamed of, to renounce our whole future, is a keener pang than that caused by the loss of known happiness, however complete it may have been; for is not Hope better than Memory? The thoughts into which our spirit is suddenly plunged are like a shoreless sea, in which we may swim for a moment, but where our love is doomed to drown and die. And it is a frightful death. Are not our feelings the most glorious part of our life? It is this partial death which, in certain delicate or powerful natures, leads to the terrible ruin produced by disenchantment, by hopes and passions betrayed. Thus it was with the young painter. He went out at a very early hour to walk under the fresh shade of the Tuileries, absorbed in his thoughts, forgetting everything in the world.

There by chance he met one of his most intimate friends, a schoolfellow and studio-mate, with whom he had lived on better terms than with a brother.

"Why, Hippolyte, what ails you?" asked François Souchet, the young sculptor who had just won the first prize, and was soon to set out for Italy.

"I am most unhappy," replied Hippolyte gravely.

"Nothing but a love affair can cause you grief. Money, glory, respect—you lack nothing."

Insensibly the painter was led into confidences, and confessed his love. The moment he mentioned the Rue de Suresnes, and a young girl living on the fourth floor, "Stop, stop," cried Souchet lightly. "A little girl I see every morning at the Church of the Assumption, and with whom I have a flirtation. But, my dear fellow, we all know her. The mother is a Baroness. Do you really believe in a Baroness living up four flights of stairs? Brrr! Why, you are a relic of the golden age! We see the old mother here, in this avenue, every day; why, her face, her appearance, tell everything. What, have you not known her for what she is by the way she holds her bag?"

The two friends walked up and down for some time, and several young men who knew Souchet or Schinner joined them. The painter's adventure, which the sculptor regarded as unimportant, was repeated by him.

"So he, too, has seen that young lady!" said Souchet.

And then there were comments, laughter, innocent mockery, full of the liveliness familiar to artists, but which pained Hippolyte frightfully. A certain native reticence made him uncomfortable as he saw his heart's secret so carelessly handled, his passion rent, torn to tatters, a young and unknown girl, whose life seemed to be so modest, the victim of condemnation, right or wrong, but pronounced with such reckless indifference. He pretended to be moved by a spirit of contradiction, asking each for proofs of his assertions, and their jests began again.

"But, my dear boy, have you seen the Baroness's shawl?" asked Souchet.

"Have you ever followed the girl when she patters off to church in the morning?" said Joseph Bridau, a young dauber in Gros's studio.

"Oh, the mother has among other virtues a certain gray gown, which I regard as typical," said Bixiou, the caricaturist.

"Listen, Hippolyte," the sculptor went on. "Come here at about four o'clock, and just study the walk of both mother and daughter. If after that you still have doubts! well, no one can ever make anything of you; you will be capable of marrying your porter's daughter."

Torn by the most conflicting feelings, the painter parted from his friends. It seemed to him that Adélaïde and her mother must be superior to these accusations, and at the bottom of his heart he was filled with remorse for having suspected the purity of this beautiful and simple girl. He went to his studio, passing the door of the rooms where Adélaïde was, and conscious of a pain at his heart which no man can misapprehend. He loved Mlle. de Rouville so passionately that, in spite of the theft of the purse, he still worshiped her. His love was that of the Chevalier de Grieux admiring his mistress, and holding her as pure, even on the cart which carries such lost creatures to prison. "Why should not my love keep her the purest of women? Why abandon her to evil and to vice without holding out a rescuing hand to her?"

The idea of this mission pleased him. Love makes a gain of everything. Nothing tempts a young man more than to play the part of a good genius to a woman. There is something inexplicably romantic in such an enterprise which appeals to a highly strung soul. Is it not the utmost stretch of devotion under the loftiest and most engaging aspect? Is there not something grand in the thought that we love enough still to love on when the love of others dwindles and dies?

Hippolyte sat down in his studio, gazed at his picture without doing anything to it, seeing the figures through tears that swelled in his eyes, holding his brush in his hand, going up to the canvas as if to soften down an effect, but not touching it. Night fell, and he was still in this attitude. Roused from his moodiness by the darkness, he went downstairs, met the old admiral on the way, looked darkly at him as he bowed, and fled.

He had intended going in to see the ladies, but the sight of Adélaïde's protector froze his heart and dispelled his purpose. For the hundredth time he wondered what interest could bring this old prodigal, with his eighty thousand francs a year, to this fourth story, where he lost about forty francs every evening; and he thought he could guess what it was.

The next and following days Hippolyte threw himself into his work, to try to conquer his passion by the swift rush of ideas and the ardor of composition. He half succeeded. Study consoled him, though it could not smother the memories of so many tender hours spent with Adélaïde.

One evening, as he left his studio, he saw the door of the ladies' rooms half open. Somebody was standing in the recess of the window, and the position of the door and the staircase made it impossible that the painter should pass without seeing Adélaïde. He bowed coldly, with a glance of supreme indifference; but judging of the girl's suffering by his own, he felt an inward shudder as he reflected on the bitterness which that look and that coldness must produce in a loving heart. To crown the most delightful feast which ever brought joy to two pure souls, by eight days of disdain, of the deepest and most utter contempt!—A frightful conclusion. And perhaps the purse had been found, perhaps Adélaïde had looked for her friend every evening.

This simple and natural idea filled the lover with fresh remorse; he asked himself whether the proofs of attachment given him by the young girl, the delightful talks, full of love that had so charmed him, did not deserve at least an inquiry; were not worthy of some justification. Ashamed of having resisted the promptings of his heart for a whole week, and feeling himself almost a criminal in this mental struggle, he called the same evening on Mme. de Rouville.

All his suspicions, all his evil thoughts vanished at the sight of the young girl, who had grown pale and thin.

"Good Heavens! what is the matter?" he asked her, after greeting the Baroness.

Adélaïde made no reply, but she gave him a look of deep melancholy, a sad, dejected look, which pained him.

"You have, no doubt, been working hard," said the old lady. "You are altered. We are the cause of your seclusion. That portrait had delayed some pictures essential to your reputation."

Hippolyte was glad to find so good an excuse for his rudeness.

"Yes," he said, "I have been very busy, but I have been suffering——"

At these words Adélaïde raised her head, looked at her lover, and her anxious eyes had now no hint of reproach.

"You must have thought us quite indifferent to any good or ill that may befall you?" said the old lady.

"I was wrong," he replied. "Still, there are forms of pain which we know not how to confide to anyone, even to a friendship of older date than that with which you honor me."

"The sincerity and strength of friendship are not to be measured by time. I have seen old friends who had not a tear to bestow on misfortune," said the Baroness, nodding sadly.

"But you—what ails you?" the young man asked Adélaïde.

"Oh, nothing," replied the Baroness, "Adélaïde has sat up late for some nights to finish some little piece of woman's work, and would not listen to me when I told her that a day more or less did not matter——"

Hippolyte was not listening. As he looked at these two noble, calm faces, he blushed for his suspicions, and ascribed the loss of his purse to some unknown accident.

This was a delicious evening to him, and perhaps to her too. There are some secrets which young souls understand so well. Adélaïde could read Hippolyte's thoughts. Though he could not confess his misdeeds, the painter knew them, and he had come back to his mistress more in love, and more affectionate, trying thus to purchase her tacit forgiveness. Adélaïde was enjoying such perfect, such sweet happiness, that she did not think she had paid too dear for it with all the grief that had so cruelly crushed her soul. And yet, this true concord of hearts, this understanding so full of magic charm, was disturbed by a little speech of Mme. de Rouville's.

"Let us have our little game," she said, "for my old friend Kergarouët will not let me off."

These words revived all the young painter's fears; he colored as he looked at Adélaïde's mother, but he saw nothing in her countenance but the expression of the frankest good-nature; no double meaning marred its charm; its keenness was not perfidious, its humor seemed kindly, and no trace of remorse disturbed its equanimity.

He sat down to the card-table. Adélaïde took side with the painter, saying that he did not know piquet, and needed a partner.

All through the game Mme. de Rouville and her daughter exchanged looks of intelligence, which alarmed Hippolyte all the more because he was winning; but at last a final hand left the lovers in the old lady's debt.

To feel for some money in his pocket the painter took his hands off the table, and he then saw before him a purse which Adélaïde had slipped in front of him without his noticing it; the poor child had the old one in her hand, and, to keep her countenance, was looking into it for the money to pay her mother. The blood rushed to Hippolyte's heart with such force that he was near fainting.

The new purse, substituted for his own, and which contained his fifteen gold louis, was worked with gilt beads. The rings and tassels bore witness to Adélaïde's good taste, and she had no doubt spent all her little hoard in ornamenting this pretty piece of work. It was impossible to say with greater delicacy that the painter's gift could only be repaid by some proof of affection. Hippolyte, overcome with happiness, turned to look at Adélaïde and her mother, and saw that they were tremulous with pleasure and delight at their little trick. He felt himself mean, sordid, a fool; he longed to punish himself, to rend his heart. A few tears rose to his eyes; by an irresistible impulse he sprang up, clasped Adélaïde in his arms, pressed her to his heart, and stole a kiss; then with the simple heartiness of an artist, "I ask her for my wife!" he exclaimed, looking at the Baroness.

Adélaïde looked at him with half-wrathful eyes, and Mme. de Rouville, somewhat astonished, was considering her reply, when the scene was interrupted by a ring at the bell. The old vice-admiral came in, followed by his shadow, and Mme. Schinner. Having guessed the cause of the grief her son vainly endeavored to conceal, Hippolyte's mother had made inquiries among her friends concerning Adélaïde. Very justly alarmed by the calumnies which weighed on the young girl, unknown to the Comte de Kergarouët, whose name she learnt from the porter's wife, she went to report them to the vice-admiral; and he, in his rage, declared "he would crop all the scoundrels' ears for them."

Then, prompted by his wrath, he went on to explain to Mme. Schinner the secret of his losing intentionally at cards, because the Baroness's pride left him none but these ingenious means of assisting her.

When Mme. Schinner had paid her respects to Mme. de

Rouville, the Baroness looked at the Comte de Kergarouët, at the Chevalier du Halga—the friend of the departed Comtesse de Kergarouët—at Hippolyte and Adélaïde, and said, with the grace that comes from the heart, "So we are a family party this evening."

PARIS, *May* 1832.