

The Human Comedy
Scenes from Parisian Life
Part II

By

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Freeditorial 

A PRINCE OF BOHEMIA

“My dear friend,” said Mme. de la Baudraye, drawing a pile of manuscript from beneath her sofa cushion, “will you pardon me in our present straits for making a short story of something which you told me a few weeks ago?”

“Anything is fair in these times. Have you not seen writers serving up their own hearts to the public, or very often their mistress’ hearts when invention fails? We are coming to this, dear; we shall go in quest of adventures, not so much for the pleasure of them as for the sake of having the story to tell afterwards.”

“After all, you and the Marquise de Rochefide have paid the rent, and I do not think, from the way things are going here, that I ever pay yours.”

“Who knows? Perhaps the same good luck that befell Mme. de Rochefide may come to you.”

“Do you call it good luck to go back to one’s husband?”

“No; only great luck. Come, I am listening.”

And Mme. de la Baudraye read as follows:

“Scene—a splendid salon in the Rue de Chartres-du-Roule. One of the most famous writers of the day discovered sitting on a settee beside a very illustrious Marquise, with whom he is on such terms of intimacy, as a man has a right to claim when a woman singles him out and keeps him at her side as a complacent souffre-douleur rather than a makeshift.”

“Well,” says she, “have you found those letters of which you spoke yesterday? You said that you could not tell me all about him without them?”

“Yes, I have them.”

“It is your turn to speak; I am listening like a child when his mother begins the tale of Le Grand Serpentin Vert.”

“I count the young man in question in that group of our acquaintances which we are wont to style our friends. He comes of a good family; he is a man of infinite parts and ill-luck, full of excellent dispositions and most charming conversation; young as he is, he is seen much, and while awaiting better things, he dwells in Bohemia. Bohemianism, which by rights should be called the doctrine of the Boulevard des Italiens, finds its recruits among young men between twenty and thirty, all of them men of genius in their way, little known, it is true, as yet, but sure of recognition one day, and when that day comes, of great distinction. They are distinguished as it is at carnival time,

when their exuberant wit, repressed for the rest of the year, finds a vent in more or less ingenious buffoonery.

“What times we live in! What an irrational central power which allows such tremendous energies to run to waste! There are diplomatists in Bohemia quite capable of overturning Russia’s designs, if they but felt the power of France at their backs. There are writers, administrators, soldiers, and artists in Bohemia; every faculty, every kind of brain is represented there. Bohemia is a microcosm. If the Czar would buy Bohemia for a score of millions and set its population down in Odessa—always supposing that they consented to leave the asphalt of the boulevards—Odessa would be Paris with the year. In Bohemia, you find the flower doomed to wither and come to nothing; the flower of the wonderful young manhood of France, so sought after by Napoleon and Louis XIV., so neglected for the last thirty years by the modern Gerontocracy that is blighting everything else—that splendid young manhood of whom a witness so little prejudiced as Professor Tissot wrote, ‘On all sides the Emperor employed a younger generation in every way worthy of him; in his councils, in the general administration, in negotiations bristling with difficulties or full of danger, in the government of conquered countries; and in all places Youth responded to his demands upon it. Young men were for Napoleon the *missi hominici* of Charlemagne.’

“The word Bohemia tells you everything. Bohemia has nothing and lives upon what it has. Hope is its religion; faith (in oneself) its creed; and charity is supposed to be its budget. All these young men are greater than their misfortune; they are under the feet of Fortune, yet more than equal to Fate. Always ready to mount and ride an if, witty as a feuilleton, blithe as only those can be that are deep in debt and drink deep to match, and finally—for here I come to my point—hot lovers and what lovers! Picture to yourself Lovelace, and Henri Quatre, and the Regent, and Werther, and Saint-Preux, and Rene, and the Marechal de Richelieu—think of all these in a single man, and you will have some idea of their way of love. What lovers! Eclectic of all things in love, they will serve up a passion to a woman’s order; their hearts are like a bill of fare in a restaurant. Perhaps they have never read Stendhal’s *De l’Amour*, but unconsciously they put it in practice. They have by heart their chapters—Love-Taste, Love-Passion, Love-Caprice, Love-Crystalized, and more than all, Love-Transient. All is good in their eyes. They invented the burlesque axiom, ‘In the sight of man, all women are equal.’ The actual text is more vigorously worded, but as in my opinion the spirit is false, I do not stand nice upon the letter.

“My friend, madame, is named Gabriel Jean Anne Victor Benjamin George Ferdinand Charles Edward Rusticoli, Comte de la Palferine. The Rusticolis came to France with Catherine de Medici, having been ousted about that time

from their infinitesimal Tuscan sovereignty. They are distantly related to the house of Este, and connected by marriage to the Guises. On the day of Saint-Bartholomew they slew a goodly number of Protestants, and Charles IX. bestowed the hand of the heiress of the Comte de la Palferine upon the Rusticoli of that time. The Comte, however, being a part of the confiscated lands of the Duke of Savoy, was repurchased by Henri IV. when that great king so far blundered as to restore the fief; and in exchange, the Rusticoli—who had borne arms long before the Medici bore them to-wit, argent a cross flory azure (the cross flower-de-luced by letters patent granted by Charles IX.), and a count's coronet, with two peasants for supporters with the motto IN HOC SIGNO VINCIMUS—the Rusticoli, I repeat, retained their title, and received a couple of offices under the crown with the government of a province.

“From the time of the Valois till the reign of Richelieu, as it may be called, the Rusticoli played a most illustrious part; under Louis XIV. their glory waned somewhat, under Louis XV. it went out altogether. My friend's grandfather wasted all that was left to the once brilliant house with Mlle. Laguerre, whom he first discovered, and brought into fashion before Bouret's time. Charles Edward's own father was an officer without any fortune in 1789. The Revolution came to his assistance; he had the sense to drop his title, and became plain Rusticoli. Among other deeds, M. Rusticoli married a wife during the war in Italy, a Capponi, a goddaughter of the Countess of Albany (hence La Palferine's final names). Rusticoli was one of the best colonels in the army. The Emperor made him a commander of the Legion of Honor and a count. His spine was slightly curved, and his son was wont to say of him laughingly that he was un comte refait (contrefait).

“General Count Rusticoli, for he became a brigadier-general at Ratisbon and a general of the division on the field of Wagram, died at Vienna almost immediately after his promotion, or his name and ability would sooner or later have brought him the marshal's baton. Under the Restoration he would certainly have repaired the fortunes of a great and noble family so brilliant even as far back as 1100, centuries before they took the French title—for the Rusticoli had given a pope to the church and twice revolutionized the kingdom of Naples—so illustrious again under the Valois; so dexterous in the days of the Fronde, that obstinate Frondeurs though they were, they still existed through the reign of Louis XIV. Mazarin favored them; there was the Tuscan strain in them still, and he recognized it.

“Today, when Charles Edward de la Palferine's name is mentioned, not three persons in a hundred know the history of his house. But the Bourbons have actually left a Foix-Grailly to live by his easel.

“Ah, if you but knew how brilliantly Charles Edward accepts his obscure

position! how he scoffs at the bourgeois of 1830! What Attic salt in his wit! He would be the king of Bohemia, if Bohemia would endure a king. His verve is inexhaustible. To him we owe a map of the country and the names of the seven castles which Nodier could not discover.”

“The one thing wanting in one of the cleverest skits of our time,” said the Marquise.

“You can form your own opinion of La Palferine from a few characteristic touches,” continued Nathan. “He once came upon a friend of his, a fellow-Bohemian, involved in a dispute on the boulevard with a bourgeois who chose to consider himself affronted. To the modern powers that be, Bohemia is insolent in the extreme. There was talk of calling one another out.

“‘One moment,’ interposed La Palferine, as much Lauzun for the occasion as Lauzun himself could have been. ‘One moment. Monsieur was born, I suppose?’

“‘What, sir?’

“‘Yes, are you born? What is your name?’

“‘Godin.’

“‘Godin, eh!’ exclaimed La Palferine’s friend.

“‘One moment, my dear fellow,’ interrupted La Palferine. ‘There are the Trigaudins. Are you one of them?’

“‘Astonishment.

“‘No? Then you are one of the new dukes of Gaeta, I suppose, of imperial creation? No? Oh, well, how can you expect my friend to cross swords with you when he will be secretary of an embassy and ambassador some day, and you will owe him respect? Godin! the thing is non-existent! You are a nonentity, Godin. My friend cannot be expected to beat the air! When one is somebody, one cannot fight with a nobody! Come, my dear fellow—good-day.’

“‘My respects to madame,’ added the friend.

“Another day La Palferine was walking with a friend who flung his cigar end in the face of a passer-by. The recipient had the bad taste to resent this.

“‘You have stood your antagonist’s fire,’ said the young Count, ‘the witnesses declare that honor is satisfied.’

“La Palferine owed his tailor a thousand francs, and the man instead of going himself sent his assistant to ask for the money. The assistant found the unfortunate debtor up six pairs of stairs at the back of a yard at the further end

of the Faubourg du Roule. The room was unfurnished save for a bed (such a bed!), a table, and such a table! La Palferine heard the preposterous demand—‘A demand which I should qualify as illegal,’ he said when he told us the story, ‘made, as it was, at seven o’clock in the morning.’

“‘Go,’ he answered, with the gesture and attitude of a Mirabeau, ‘tell your master in what condition you find me.’

“The assistant apologized and withdrew. La Palferine, seeing the young man on the landing, rose in the attire celebrated in verse in *Britannicus* to add, ‘Remark the stairs! Pay particular attention to the stairs; do not forget to tell him about the stairs!’

“In every position into which chance has thrown La Palferine, he has never failed to rise to the occasion. All that he does is witty and never in bad taste; always and in everything he displays the genius of Rivarol, the polished subtlety of the old French noble. It was he who told that delicious anecdote of a friend of Laffitte the banker. A national fund had been started to give back to Laffitte the mansion in which the Revolution of 1830 was brewed, and this friend appeared at the offices of the fund with, ‘Here are five francs, give me a hundred sous change!’—A caricature was made of it.—It was once La Palferine’s misfortune, in judicial style, to make a young girl a mother. The girl, not a very simple innocent, confessed all to her mother, a respectable matron, who hurried forthwith to La Palferine and asked what he meant to do.

“‘Why, madame,’ said he, ‘I am neither a surgeon nor a midwife.’

“She collapsed, but three or four years later she returned to the charge, still persisting in her inquiry, ‘What did La Palferine mean to do?’

“‘Well, madame,’ returned he, ‘when the child is seven years old, an age at which a boy ought to pass out of women’s hands’—an indication of entire agreement on the mother’s part—‘if the child is really mine’—another gesture of assent—‘if there is a striking likeness, if he bids fair to be a gentleman, if I can recognize in him my turn of mind, and more particularly the Rusticoli air; then, oh—ah!’—a new movement from the matron—‘on my word and honor, I will make him a cornet of—sugar-plums!’

“All this, if you will permit me to make use of the phraseology employed by M. Sainte-Beuve for his biographies of obscurities—all this, I repeat, is the playful and sprightly yet already somewhat decadent side of a strong race. It smacks rather of the Parc-aux-Cerfs than of the Hotel de Rambouillet. It is a race of the strong rather than of the sweet; I incline to lay a little debauchery to its charge, and more than I should wish in brilliant and generous natures; it is gallantry after the fashion of the Marechal de Richelieu, high spirits and frolic carried rather too far; perhaps we may see in it the outrances of another age,

the Eighteenth Century pushed to extremes; it harks back to the Musketeers; it is an exploit stolen from Champcenetz; nay, such light-hearted inconstancy takes us back to the festooned and ornate period of the old court of the Valois. In an age as moral as the present, we are bound to regard audacity of this kind sternly; still, at the same time that ‘cornet of sugar-plums’ may serve to warn young girls of the perils of lingering where fancies, more charming than chastened, come thickly from the first; on the rosy flowery unguarded slopes, where trespasses ripen into errors full of equivocal effervescence, into too palpitating issues. The anecdote puts La Palferine’s genius before you in all its vivacity and completeness. He realizes Pascal’s *entre-deux*, he comprehends the whole scale between tenderness and pitilessness, and, like Epaminondas, he is equally great in extremes. And not merely so, his epigram stamps the epoch; the *accoucheur* is a modern innovation. All the refinements of modern civilization are summed up in the phrase. It is monumental.”

“Look here, my dear Nathan, what farrago of nonsense is this?” asked the Marquise in bewilderment.

“Madame la Marquise,” returned Nathan, “you do not know the value of these ‘precious’ phrases; I am talking Sainte-Beuve, the new kind of French.—I resume. Walking one day arm in arm with a friend along the boulevard, he was accosted by a ferocious creditor, who inquired:

“‘Are you thinking of me, sir?’

“‘Not the least in the world,’ answered the Count.

“Remark the difficulty of the position. Talleyrand, in similar circumstances, had already replied, ‘You are very inquisitive, my dear fellow!’ To imitate the inimitable great man was out of the question.—La Palferine, generous as Buckingham, could not bear to be caught empty-handed. One day when he had nothing to give a little Savoyard chimney-sweeper, he dipped a hand into a barrel of grapes in a grocer’s doorway and filled the child’s cap from it. The little one ate away at his grapes; the grocer began by laughing, and ended by holding out his hand.

“‘Oh, fie! monsieur,’ said La Palferine, ‘your left hand ought not to know what my right hand doth.’

“With his adventurous courage, he never refuses any odds, but there is wit in his bravado. In the Passage de l’Opera he chanced to meet a man who had spoken slightly of him, elbowed him as he passed, and then turned and jostled him a second time.

“‘You are very clumsy!’

“‘On the contrary; I did it on purpose.’

“The young man pulled out his card. La Palferine dropped it. ‘It has been carried too long in the pocket. Be good enough to give me another.’

“On the ground he received a thrust; blood was drawn; his antagonist wished to stop.

“‘You are wounded, monsieur!’

“‘I disallow the botte,’ said La Palferine, as coolly as if he had been in the fencing-saloon; then as he riposted (sending the point home this time), he added, ‘There is the right thrust, monsieur!’

“His antagonist kept his bed for six months.

“This, still following on M. Sainte-Beuve’s tracks, recalls the raffines, the fine-edged raillery of the best days of the monarchy. In this speech you discern an untrammelled but drifting life; a gaiety of imagination that deserts us when our first youth is past. The prime of the blossom is over, but there remains the dry compact seed with the germs of life in it, ready against the coming winter. Do you not see that these things are symptoms of something unsatisfied, of an unrest impossible to analyze, still less to describe, yet not incomprehensible; a something ready to break out if occasion calls into flying upleaping flame? It is the accidia of the cloister; a trace of sourness, of ferment engendered by the enforced stagnation of youthful energies, a vague, obscure melancholy.”

“That will do,” said the Marquise; “you are giving me a mental shower bath.”

“It is the early afternoon languor. If a man has nothing to do, he will sooner get into mischief than do nothing at all; this invariably happens in France. Youth at present day has two sides to it; the studious or unappreciated, and the ardent or passionne.”

“That will do!” repeated Mme. de Rochefide, with an authoritative gesture. “You are setting my nerves on edge.”

“To finish my portrait of La Palferine, I hasten to make the plunge into the gallant regions of his character, or you will not understand the peculiar genius of an admirable representative of a certain section of mischievous youth—youth strong enough, be it said, to laugh at the position in which it is put by those in power; shrewd enough to do no work, since work profiteth nothing; yet so full of life that it fastens upon pleasure—the one thing that cannot be taken away. And meanwhile a bourgeois, mercantile, and bigoted policy continues to cut off all the sluices through which so much aptitude and ability would find an outlet. Poets and men of science are not wanted.

“To give you an idea of the stupidity of the new court, I will tell you of something which happened to La Palferine. There is a sort of relieving officer

on the civil list. This functionary one day discovered that La Palferine was in dire distress, drew up a report, no doubt, and brought the descendant of the Rusticolis fifty francs by way of alms. La Palferine received the visitor with perfect courtesy, and talked of various persons at court.

“‘Is it true,’ he asked, ‘that Mlle. d’Orleans contributes such and such a sum to this benevolent scheme started by her nephew? If so, it is very gracious of her.’

“Now La Palferine had a servant, a little Savoyard, aged ten, who waited on him without wages. La Palferine called him Father Anchises, and used to say, ‘I have never seen such a mixture of besotted foolishness with great intelligence; he would go through fire and water for me; he understands everything—and yet he cannot grasp the fact that I can do nothing for him.’

“Anchises was despatched to a livery stable with instructions to hire a handsome brougham with a man in livery behind it. By the time the carriage arrived below, La Palferine had skilfully piloted the conversation to the subject of the functions of his visitor, whom he has since called ‘the unmitigated misery man,’ and learned the nature of his duties and his stipend.

“‘Do they allow you a carriage to go about the town in this way?’

“‘Oh! no.’

“At that La Palferine and a friend who happened to be with him went downstairs with the poor soul, and insisted on putting him into the carriage. It was raining in torrents. La Palferine had thought of everything. He offered to drive the official to the next house on his list; and when the almoner came down again, he found the carriage waiting for him at the door. The man in livery handed him a note written in pencil:

“‘The carriage has been engaged for three days. Count Rusticoli de la Palferine is too happy to associate himself with Court charities by lending wings to Royal beneficence.’

“La Palferine now calls the civil list the uncivil list.

“He was once passionately loved by a lady of somewhat light conduct. Antonia lived in the Rue du Helder; she had seen and been seen to some extent, but at the time of her acquaintance with La Palferine she had not yet ‘an establishment.’ Antonia was not wanting in the insolence of old days, now degenerating into rudeness among women of her class. After a fortnight of unmixed bliss, she was compelled, in the interest of her civil list, to return to a less exclusive system; and La Palferine, discovering a certain lack of sincerity in her dealings with him, sent Madame Antonia a note which made her famous.

“MADAME,—Your conduct causes me much surprise and no less distress. Not content with rending my heart with your disdain, you have been so little thoughtful as to retain a toothbrush, which my means will not permit me to replace, my estates being mortgaged beyond their value.

“Adieu, too fair and too ungrateful friend! May we meet again in a better world.

“CHARLES EDWARD.”

“Assuredly (to avail ourselves yet further of Sainte-Beuve’s Babylonish dialect), this far outpasses the raillery of Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*; it might be Scarron without his grossness. Nay, I do not know but that Moliere in his lighter mood would not have said of it, as of *Cyrano de Bergerac*’s best—‘This is mine.’ Richelieu himself was not more complete when he wrote to the princess waiting for him in the *Palais Royal*—‘Stay there, my queen, to charm the scullion lads.’ At the same time, Charles Edward’s humor is less biting. I am not sure that this kind of wit was known among the Greeks and Romans. Plato, possibly, upon a closer inspection approaches it, but from the austere and musical side—”

“No more of that jargon,” the Marquise broke in, “in print it may be enduring; but to have it grating upon my ears is a punishment which I do not in the least deserve.”

“He first met Claudine on this wise,” continued Nathan. “It was one of the unfilled days, when Youth is a burden to itself; days when youth, reduced by the overweening presumption of Age to a condition of potential energy and dejection, emerges therefrom (like Blondet under the Restoration), either to get into mischief or to set about some colossal piece of buffoonery, half excused by the very audacity of its conception. La Palferine was sauntering, cane in hand, up and down the pavement between the *Rue de Grammont* and the *Rue de Richelieu*, when in the distance he descried a woman too elegantly dressed, covered, as he phrased it, with a great deal of portable property, too expensive and too carelessly worn for its owner to be other than a princess of the court or of the stage, it was not easy at first to say which. But after July 1830, in his opinion, there is no mistaking the indications—the princess can only be a princess of the stage.

“The Count came up and walked by her side as if she had given him an assignation. He followed her with a courteous persistence, a persistence in good taste, giving the lady from time to time, and always at the right moment, an authoritative glance, which compelled her to submit to his escort. Anybody but La Palferine would have been frozen by his reception, and disconcerted by the lady’s first efforts to rid herself of her cavalier, by her chilly air, her curt speeches; but no gravity, with all the will in the world, could hold out long

against La Palferine's jesting replies. The fair stranger went into her milliner's shop. Charles Edward followed, took a seat, and gave his opinions and advice like a man that meant to pay. This coolness disturbed the lady. She went out.

"On the stairs she spoke to her persecutor.

"Monsieur, I am about to call upon one of my husband's relatives, an elderly lady, Mme. de Bonfalot—"

"Ah! Mme. de Bonfalot, charmed, I am sure. I am going there."

"The pair accordingly went. Charles Edward came in with the lady, every one believed that she had brought him with her. He took part in the conversation, was lavish of his polished and brilliant wit. The visit lengthened out. That was not what he wanted.

"Madame," he said, addressing the fair stranger, "do not forget that your husband is waiting for us, and only allowed us a quarter of an hour."

"Taken aback by such boldness (which, as you know, is never displeasing to you women), led captive by the conqueror's glance, by the astute yet candid air which Charles Edward can assume when he chooses, the lady rose, took the arm of her self-constituted escort, and went downstairs, but on the threshold she stopped to speak to him.

"Monsieur, I like a joke——"

"And so do I."

"She laughed.

"But this may turn to earnest," he added; "it only rests with you. I am the Comte de la Palferine, and I am delighted that it is in my power to lay my heart and my fortune at your feet."

"La Palferine was at that time twenty-two years old. (This happened in 1834.) Luckily for him, he was fashionably dressed. I can paint his portrait for you in a few words. He was the living image of Louis XIII., with the same white forehead and gracious outline of the temples, the same olive skin (that Italian olive tint which turns white where the light falls on it), the brown hair worn rather long, the black 'royale,' the grave and melancholy expression, for La Palferine's character and exterior were amazingly at variance.

"At the sound of the name, and the sight of its owner, something like a quiver thrilled through Claudine. La Palferine saw the vibration, and shot a glance at her out of the dark depths of almond-shaped eyes with purpled lids, and those faint lines about them which tell of pleasures as costly as painful fatigue. With those eyes upon her, she said—"Your address?"

"What want of address!"

“‘Oh, pshaw!’ she said, smiling. ‘A bird on the bough?’

“‘Good-bye, madame, you are such a woman as I seek, but my fortune is far from equaling my desire——’

“He bowed, and there and then left her. Two days later, by one of the strange chances that can only happen in Paris, he had betaken himself to a money-lending wardrobe dealer to sell such of his clothing as he could spare. He was just receiving the price with an uneasy air, after long chaffering, when the stranger lady passed and recognized him.

“‘Once for all,’ cried he to the bewildered wardrobe dealer, ‘I tell you I am not going to take your trumpet!’

“He pointed to a huge, much-dinted musical instrument, hanging up outside against a background of uniforms, civil and military. Then, proudly and impetuously, he followed the lady.

“From that great day of the trumpet these two understood one another to admiration. Charles Edward’s ideas on the subject of love are as sound as possible. According to him, a man cannot love twice, there is but one love in his lifetime, but that love is a deep and shoreless sea. It may break in upon him at any time, as the grace of God found St. Paul; and a man may live sixty years and never know love. Perhaps, to quote Heine’s superb phrase, it is ‘the secret malady of the heart’—a sense of the Infinite that there is within us, together with the revelation of the ideal Beauty in its visible form. This love, in short, comprehends both the creature and creation. But so long as there is no question of this great poetical conception, the loves that cannot last can only be taken lightly, as if they were in a manner snatches of song compared with Love the epic.

“To Charles Edward the adventure brought neither the thunderbolt signal of love’s coming, nor yet that gradual revelation of an inward fairness which draws two natures by degrees more and more strongly each to each. For there are but two ways of love—love at first sight, doubtless akin to the Highland ‘second-sight,’ and that slow fusion of two natures which realizes Plato’s ‘man-woman.’ But if Charles Edward did not love, he was loved to distraction. Claudine found love made complete, body and soul; in her, in short, La Palferine awakened the one passion of her life; while for him Claudine was only a most charming mistress. The Devil himself, a most potent magician certainly, with all hell at his back, could never have changed the natures of these two unequal fires. I dare affirm that Claudine not unfrequently bored Charles Edward.

“‘Stale fish and the woman you do not love are only fit to fling out of the window after three days,’ he used to say.

“In Bohemia there is little secrecy observed over these affairs. La Palferine used to talk a good deal of Claudine; but, at the same time, none of us saw her, nor so much as knew her name. For us Claudine was almost a mythical personage. All of us acted in the same way, reconciling the requirements of our common life with the rules of good taste. Claudine, Hortense, the Baroness, the Bourgeoise, the Empress, the Spaniard, the Lioness,—these were cryptic titles which permitted us to pour out our joys, our cares, vexations, and hopes, and to communicate our discoveries. Further, none of us went. It has been shown, in Bohemia, that chance discovered the identity of the fair unknown; and at once, as by tacit convention, not one of us spoke of her again. This fact may show how far youth possesses a sense of true delicacy. How admirably certain natures of a finer clay know the limit line where jest must end, and all that host of things French covered by the slang word *blague*, a word which will shortly be cast out of the language (let us hope), and yet it is the only one which conveys an idea of the spirit of Bohemia.

“So we often used to joke about Claudine and the Count—‘*Toujours Claudine?*’ sung to the air of *Toujours Gessle*.—‘What are you making of Claudine?’—‘How is Claudine?’

“‘I wish you all such a mistress, for all the harm I wish you,’ La Palferine began one day. ‘No greyhound, no basset-dog, no poodle can match her in gentleness, submissiveness, and complete tenderness. There are times when I reproach myself, when I take myself to task for my hard heart. Claudine obeys with saintly sweetness. She comes to me, I tell her to go, she goes, she does not even cry till she is out in the courtyard. I refuse to see her for a whole week at a time. I tell her to come at such an hour on Tuesday; and be it midnight or six o’clock in the morning, ten o’clock, five o’clock, breakfast time, dinner time, bed time, any particularly inconvenient hour in the day—she will come, punctual to the minute, beautiful, beautifully dressed, and enchanting. And she is a married woman, with all the complications and duties of a household. The fibs that she must invent, the reasons she must find for conforming to my whims would tax the ingenuity of some of us!... Claudine never wearies; you can always count upon her. It is not love, I tell her, it is infatuation. She writes to me every day; I do not read her letters; she found that out, but still she writes. See here; there are two hundred letters in this casket. She begs me to wipe my razors on one of her letters every day, and I punctually do so. She thinks, and rightly, that the sight of her handwriting will put me in mind of her.’

“La Palferine was dressing as he told us this. I took up the letter which he was about to put to this use, read it, and kept it, as he did not ask to have it back. Here it is. I looked for it, and found it as I promised.

“Monday (Midnight).

“Well, my dear, are you satisfied with me? I did not even ask for your hand, yet you might easily have given it to me, and I longed so much to hold it to my heart, to my lips. No, I did not ask, I am so afraid of displeasing you. Do you know one thing? Though I am cruelly sure that anything I do is a matter of perfect indifference to you, I am none the less extremely timid in my conduct: the woman that belongs to you, whatever her title to call herself yours, must not incur so much as the shadow of blame. In so far as love comes from the angels in heaven, from whom are no secrets hid, my love is as pure as the purest; wherever I am I feel that I am in your presence, and I try to do you honor.

“All that you said about my manner of dress impressed me very much; I began to understand how far above others are those that come of a noble race. There was still something of the opera girl in my gowns, in my way of dressing my hair. In a moment I saw the distance between me and good taste. Next time you will receive a duchess, you shall not know me again! Ah! how good you have been to your Claudine! How many and many a time I have thanked you for telling me those things! What interest lay in those few words! You have taken thought for that thing belonging to you called Claudine? This imbecile would never have opened my eyes; he thinks that everything I do is right; and besides, he is much too humdrum, too matter-of-fact to have any feeling for the beautiful.

“Tuesday is very slow of coming for my impatient mind! On Tuesday I shall be with you for several hours. Ah! when it comes I will try to think that the hours are months, that it will be so always. I am living in hope of that morning now, as I shall live upon the memory of it afterwards. Hope is memory that craves; and recollection, memory sated. What a beautiful life within life thought makes for us in this way!

“Sometimes I dream of inventing new ways of tenderness all my own, a secret which no other woman shall guess. A cold sweat breaks out over me at the thought that something may happen to prevent this morning. Oh, I would break with him for good, if need was, but nothing here could possibly interfere; it would be from your side. Perhaps you may decide to go out, perhaps to go to see some other woman. Oh! spare me this Tuesday for pity’s sake. If you take it from me, Charles, you do not know what he will suffer; I should drive him wild. But even if you do not want me, or you are going out, let me come, all the same, to be with you while you dress; only to see you, I ask no more than that; only to show you that I love you without a thought of self.

“Since you gave me leave to love you, for you gave me leave, since I am

yours; since that day I loved and love you with the whole strength of my soul; and I shall love you for ever, for once having loved you, no one could, no one ought to love another. And, you see, when those eyes that ask nothing but to see you are upon you, you will feel that in your Claudine there is a something divine, called into existence by you.

“Alas! with you I can never play the coquette. I am like a mother with her child; I endure anything from you; I, that was once so imperious and proud. I have made dukes and princes fetch and carry for me; aides-de-camp, worth more than all the court of Charles X. put together, have done my errands, yet I am treating you as my spoilt child. But where is the use of coquetry? It would be pure waste. And yet, monsieur, for want of coquetry I shall never inspire love in you. I know it; I feel it; yet I do as before, feeling a power that I cannot withstand, thinking that this utter self-surrender will win me the sentiment innate in all men (so he tells me) for the thing that belongs to them.

“Wednesday.

“Ah! how darkly sadness entered my heart yesterday when I found that I must give up the joy of seeing you. One single thought held me back from the arms of Death!—It was thy will! To stay away was to do thy will, to obey an order from thee. Oh! Charles, I was so pretty; I looked a lovelier woman for you than that beautiful German princess whom you gave me for an example, whom I have studied at the Opera. And yet—you might have thought that I had overstepped the limits of my nature. You have left me no confidence in myself; perhaps I am plain after all. Oh! I loathe myself, I dream of my radiant Charles Edward, and my brain turns. I shall go mad, I know I shall. Do not laugh, do not talk to me of the fickleness of women. If we are inconstant, you are strangely capricious. You take away the hours of love that made a poor creature’s happiness for ten whole days; the hours on which she drew to be charming and kind to all that came to see her! After all, you were the source of my kindness to him; you do not know what pain you give him. I wonder what I must do to keep you, or simply to keep the right to be yours sometimes.... When I think that you never would come here to me!... With what delicious emotion I would wait upon you!—There are other women more favored than I. There are women to whom you say, ‘I love you.’ To me you have never said more than ‘You are a good girl.’ Certain speeches of yours, though you do not know it, gnaw at my heart. Clever men sometimes ask me what I am thinking.... I am thinking of my self-abasement—the prostration of the poorest outcast in the presence of the Saviour.

“There are still three more pages, you see. La Palferine allowed me to take the letter, with the traces of tears that still seemed hot upon it! Here was proof of the truth of his story. Marcas, a shy man enough with women, was in ecstasies over a second which he read in his corner before lighting his pipe

with it.

“‘Why, any woman in love will write that sort of thing!’ cried La Palferine. ‘Love gives all women intelligence and style, which proves that here in France style proceeds from the matter and not from the words. See now how well this is thought out, how clear-headed sentiment is’—and with that he reads us another letter, far superior to the artificial and labored productions which we novelists write.

“One day poor Claudine heard that La Palferine was in a critical position; it was a question of meeting a bill of exchange. An unlucky idea occurred to her; she put a tolerably large sum in gold into an exquisitely embroidered purse and went to him.

“‘Who has taught you as to be so bold as to meddle with my household affairs?’ La Palferine cried angrily. ‘Mend my socks and work slippers for me, if it amuses you. So!—you will play the duchess, and you turn the story of Danae against the aristocracy.’

“He emptied the purse into his hand as he spoke, and made as though he would fling the money in her face. Claudine, in her terror, did not guess that he was joking; she shrank back, stumbled over a chair, and fell with her head against the corner of the marble chimney-piece. She thought she should have died. When she could speak, poor woman, as she lay on the bed, all that she said was, ‘I deserved it, Charles!’

“For a moment La Palferine was in despair; his anguish revived Claudine. She rejoiced in the mishap; she took advantage of her suffering to compel La Palferine to take the money and release him from an awkward position. Then followed a variation on La Fontaine’s fable, in which a man blesses the thieves that brought him a sudden impulse of tenderness from his wife. And while we are upon this subject, another saying will paint the man for you.

“Claudine went home again, made up some kind of tale as best she could to account for her bruised forehead, and fell dangerously ill. An abscess formed in the head. The doctor—Bianchon, I believe—yes, it was Bianchon—wanted to cut off her hair. The Duchesse de Berri’s hair is not more beautiful than Claudine’s; she would not hear of it, she told Bianchon in confidence that she could not allow it to be cut without leave from the Comte de Palferine. Bianchon went to Charles Edward. Charles Edward heard him with much seriousness. The doctor had explained the case at length, and showed that it was absolutely necessary to sacrifice the hair to insure the success of the operation.

“‘Cut off Claudine’s hair!’ cried he in peremptory tones. ‘No. I would sooner lose her.’

“Even now, after a lapse of four years, Bianchon still quotes that speech; we have laughed over it for half an hour together. Claudine, informed of the verdict, saw in it a proof of affections; she felt sure that she was loved. In the face of her weeping family, with her husband on his knees, she was inexorable. She kept the hair. The strength that came with the belief that she was loved came to her aid, the operation succeeded perfectly. There are stirrings of the inner life which throw all the calculations of surgery into disorder and baffle the laws of medical science.

“Claudine wrote a delicious letter to La Palferine, a letter in which the orthography was doubtful and the punctuation all to seek, to tell him of the happy result of the operation, and to add that Love was wiser than all the sciences.

“‘Now,’ said La Palferine one day, ‘what am I to do to get rid of Claudine?’

“‘Why, she is not at all troublesome; she leaves you master of your actions,’ objected we.

“‘That is true,’ returned La Palferine, ‘but I do not choose that anything shall slip into my life without my consent.’

“From that day he set himself to torment Claudine. It seemed that he held the bourgeoisie, the nobody, in utter horror; nothing would satisfy him but a woman with a title. Claudine, it was true, had made progress; she had learned to dress as well as the best-dressed woman of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; she had freed her bearing of the unhallowed traces; she walked with a chastened, inimitable grace; but this was not enough. This praise of her enabled Claudine to swallow down the rest.

“But one day La Palferine said, ‘If you wish to be the mistress of one La Palferine, poor, penniless, and without prospects as he is, you ought at least to represent him worthily. You should have a carriage and liveried servants and a title. Give me all the gratifications of vanity that will never be mine in my own person. The woman whom I honor with my regard ought never to go on foot; if she is bespattered with mud, I suffer. That is how I am made. If she is mine, she must be admired of all Paris. All Paris shall envy me my good fortune. If some little whipper-snapper seeing a brilliant countess pass in her brilliant carriage shall say to himself, “Who can call such a divinity his?” and grow thoughtful—why, it will double my pleasure.’

“La Palferine owned to us that he flung this programme at Claudine’s head simply to rid himself of her. As a result he was stupefied with astonishment for the first and probably the only time in his life.

“‘Dear,’ she said, and there was a ring in her voice that betrayed the great

agitation which shook her whole being, 'it is well. All this shall be done, or I will die.'

"She let fall a few happy tears on his hand as she kissed it.

"'You have told me what I must do to be your mistress still,' she added; 'I am glad.'

"'And then' (La Palferine told us) 'she went out with a little coquettish gesture like a woman that has had her way. As she stood in my garret doorway, tall and proud, she seemed to reach the stature of an antique sibyl.'

"All this should sufficiently explain the manners and customs of the Bohemia in which the young condottiere is one of the most brilliant figures," Nathan continued after a pause. "Now it so happened that I discovered Claudine's identity, and could understand the appalling truth of one line which you perhaps overlooked in that letter of hers. It was on this wise."

The Marquise, too thoughtful now for laughter, bade Nathan "Go on," in a tone that told him plainly how deeply she had been impressed by these strange things, and even more plainly how much she was interested in La Palferine.

"In 1829, one of the most influential, steady, and clever of dramatic writers was du Bruel. His real name is unknown to the public, on the play-bills he is de Cursy. Under the Restoration he had a place in the Civil Service; and being really attached to the elder branch, he sent in his resignation bravely in 1830, and ever since has written twice as many plays to fill the deficit in his budget made by his noble conduct. At that time du Bruel was forty years old; you know the story of his life. Like many of his brethren, he bore a stage dancer an affection hard to explain, but well known in the whole world of letters. The woman, as you know, was Tullia, one of the premiers sujets of the Academie Royale de Musique. Tullia is merely a pseudonym like du Bruel's name of de Cursy.

"For the ten years between 1817 and 1827 Tullia was in her glory on the heights of the stage of the Opera. With more beauty than education, a mediocre dancer with rather more sense than most of her class, she took no part in the virtuous reforms which ruined the corps de ballet; she continued the Guimard dynasty. She owed her ascendancy, moreover, to various well-known protectors, to the Duc de Rhetore (the Duc de Chaulieu's eldest son), to the influence of a famous Superintendent of Fine Arts, and sundry diplomatists and rich foreigners. During her apogee she had a neat little house in the Rue Chauchat, and lived as Opera nymphs used to live in the old days. Du Bruel was smitten with her about the time when the Duke's fancy came to an end in 1823. Being a mere subordinate in the Civil Service, du Bruel tolerated the Superintendent of Fine Arts, believing that he himself was really preferred.

After six years this connection was almost a marriage. Tullia has always been very careful to say nothing of her family; we have a vague idea that she comes from Nanterre. One of her uncles, formerly a simple bricklayer or carpenter, is now, it is said, a very rich contractor, thanks to her influence and generous loans. This fact leaked out through du Bruel. He happened to say that Tullia would inherit a fine fortune sooner or later. The contractor was a bachelor; he had a weakness for the niece to whom he is indebted.

“‘He is not clever enough to be ungrateful,’ said she.

“In 1829 Tullia retired from the stage of her own accord. At the age of thirty she saw that she was growing somewhat stouter, and she had tried pantomime without success. Her whole art consisted in the trick of raising her skirts, after Noblet’s manner, in a pirouette which inflated them balloon-fashion and exhibited the smallest possible quantity of clothing to the pit. The aged Vestris had told her at the very beginning that this temp, well executed by a fine woman, is worth all the art imaginable. It is the chest-note C of dancing. For which reason, he said, the very greatest dancers—Camargo, Guimard, and Taglioni, all of them thin, brown, and plain—could only redeem their physical defects by their genius. Tullia, still in the height of her glory, retired before younger and cleverer dancers; she did wisely. She was an aristocrat; she had scarcely stooped below the noblesse in her liaisons; she declined to dip her ankles in the troubled waters of July. Insolent and beautiful as she was, Claudine possessed handsome souvenirs, but very little ready money; still, her jewels were magnificent, and she had as fine furniture as any one in Paris.

“On quitting the stage when she, forgotten to-day, was yet in the height of her fame, one thought possessed her—she meant du Bruel to marry her; and at the time of this story, you must understand that the marriage had taken place, but was kept a secret. How do women of her class contrive to make a man marry them after seven or eight years of intimacy? What springs do they touch? What machinery do they set in motion? But, however comical such domestic dramas may be, we are not now concerned with them. Du Bruel was secretly married; the thing was done.

“Cursy before his marriage was supposed to be a jolly companion; now and again he stayed out all night, and to some extent led the life of a Bohemian; he would unbend at a supper-party. He went out to all appearance to a rehearsal at the Opera-Comique, and found himself in some unaccountable way at Dieppe, or Baden, or Saint-Germain; he gave dinners, led the Titanic thriftless life of artists, journalists, and writers; levied his tribute on all the greenrooms of Paris; and, in short, was one of us. Finot, Lousteau, du Tillet, Desroches, Bixiou, Blondet, Couture, and des Lupeaulx tolerated him in spite of his pedantic manner and ponderous official attitude.

But once married, Tullia made a slave of du Bruel. There was no help for it. He was in love with Tullia, poor devil.

“‘Tullia’ (so he said) ‘had left the stage to be his alone, to be a good and charming wife.’ And somehow Tullia managed to induce the most Puritanical members of du Bruel’s family to accept her. From the very first, before any one suspected her motives, she assiduously visited old Mme. de Bonfalot, who bored her horribly; she made handsome presents to mean old Mme. de Chisse, du Bruel’s great-aunt; she spent a summer with the latter lady, and never missed a single mass. She even went to confession, received absolution, and took the sacrament; but this, you must remember, was in the country, and under the aunt’s eyes.

“‘I shall have real aunts now, do you understand?’ she said to us when she came back in the winter.

“She was so delighted with her respectability, so glad to renounce her independence, that she found means to compass her end. She flattered the old people. She went on foot every day to sit for a couple of hours with Mme. du Bruel the elder while that lady was ill—a Maintenon’s stratagem which amazed du Bruel. And he admired his wife without criticism; he was so fast in the toils already that he did not feel his bonds.

“Claudine succeeded in making him understand that only under the elastic system of a bourgeois government, only at the bourgeois court of the Citizen-King, could a Tullia, now metamorphosed into a Mme. du Bruel, be accepted in the society which her good sense prevented her from attempting to enter. Mme. de Bonfalot, Mme. de Chisse, and Mme. du Bruel received her; she was satisfied. She took up the position of a well-conducted, simple, and virtuous woman, and never acted out of character. In three years’ time she was introduced to the friends of these ladies.

“‘And still I cannot persuade myself that young Mme. du Bruel used to display her ankles, and the rest, to all Paris, with the light of a hundred gas-jets pouring upon her,’ Mme. Anselme Popinot remarked naively.

“From this point of view, July 1830 inaugurated an era not unlike the time of the Empire, when a waiting woman was received at Court in the person of Mme. Garat, a chief-justice’s ‘lady.’ Tullia had completely broken, as you may guess, with all her old associates; of her former acquaintances, she only recognized those who could not compromise her. At the time of her marriage she had taken a very charming little hotel between a court and a garden, lavishing money on it with wild extravagance and putting the best part of her furniture and du Bruel’s into it. Everything that she thought common or ordinary was sold. To find anything comparable to her sparkling splendor, you could only look back to the days when Sophie Arnould, a Guimard, or a

Duthe, in all her glory, squandered the fortunes of princes.

“How far did this sumptuous existence affect du Bruel? It is a delicate question to ask, and a still more delicate one to answer. A single incident will suffice to give you an idea of Tullia’s crotchets. Her bed-spread of Brussels lace was worth ten thousand francs. A famous actress had another like it. As soon as Claudine heard this, she allowed her cat, a splendid Angora, to sleep on the bed. That trait gives you the woman. Du Bruel dared not say a word; he was ordered to spread abroad that challenge in luxury, so that it might reach the other. Tullia was very fond of this gift from the Duc de Rhetore; but one day, five years after her marriage, she played with her cat to such purpose that the coverlet—furbelows, flounces, and all—was torn to shreds, and replaced by a sensible quilt, a quilt that was a quilt, and not a symptom of the peculiar form of insanity which drives these women to make up by an insensate luxury for the childish days when they lived on raw apples, to quote the expression of a journalist. The day when the bed-spread was torn to tatters marked a new epoch in her married life.

“Cursy was remarkable for his ferocious industry. Nobody suspects the source to which Paris owes the patch-and-powder eighteenth century vaudevilles that flooded the stage. Those thousand-and-one vaudevilles, which raised such an outcry among the feuilletonistes, were written at Mme. du Bruel’s express desire. She insisted that her husband should purchase the hotel on which she had spent so much, where she had housed five hundred thousand francs’ worth of furniture. Wherefore Tullia never enters into explanations; she understands the sovereign woman’s reason to admiration.

“‘People made a good deal of fun of Cursy,’ said she; ‘but, as a matter of fact, he found this house in the eighteenth century rouge-box, powder, puffs, and spangles. He would never have thought of it but for me,’ she added, burying herself in the cushions in her fireside corner.

“She delivered herself thus on her return from a first night. Du Bruel’s piece had succeeded, and she foresaw an avalanche of criticisms. Tullia had her At Homes. Every Monday she gave a tea-party; her society was as select as might be, and she neglected nothing that could make her house pleasant. There was a bouillotte in one room, conversation in another, and sometimes a concert (always short) in the large drawing-room. None but the most eminent artists performed in the house. Tullia had so much good sense, that she attained to the most exquisite tact, and herein, in all probability, lay the secret of her ascendancy over du Bruel; at any rate, he loved her with the love which use and wont at length makes indispensable to life. Every day adds another thread to the strong, irresistible, intangible web, which enmeshes the most delicate fancies, takes captive every most transient mood, and binding them together, holds a man captive hand and foot, heart and head.

“Tullia knew Cursy well; she knew every weak point in his armor, knew also how to heal his wounds.

“A passion of this kind is inscrutable for any observer, even for a man who prides himself, as I do, on a certain expertness. It is everywhere unfathomable; the dark depths in it are darker than in any other mystery; the colors confused even in the highest lights.

“Cursy was an old playwright, jaded by the life of the theatrical world. He liked comfort; he liked a luxurious, affluent, easy existence; he enjoyed being a king in his own house; he liked to be host to a party of men of letters in a hotel resplendent with royal luxury, with carefully chosen works of art shining in the setting. Tullia allowed du Bruel to enthrone himself amid the tribe; there were plenty of journalists whom it was easy enough to catch and ensnare; and, thanks to her evening parties and a well-timed loan here and there, Cursy was not attacked too seriously—his plays succeeded. For these reasons he would not have separated from Tullia for an empire. If she had been unfaithful, he would probably have passed it over, on condition that none of his accustomed joys should be retrenched; yet, strange to say, Tullia caused him no twinges on this account. No fancy was laid to her charge; if there had been any, she certainly had been very careful of appearances.

“‘My dear fellow,’ du Bruel would say, laying down the law to us on the boulevard, ‘there is nothing like one of these women who have sown their wild oats and got over their passions. Such women as Claudine have lived their bachelor life; they have been over head and ears in pleasure, and make the most adorable wives that could be wished; they have nothing to learn, they are formed, they are not in the least prudish; they are well broken in, and indulgent. So I strongly recommend everybody to take the “remains of a racer.” I am the most fortunate man on earth.’

“Du Bruel said this to me himself with Bixiou there to hear it.

“‘My dear fellow,’ said the caricaturist, ‘perhaps he is right to be in the wrong.’

“About a week afterwards, du Bruel asked us to dine with him one Tuesday. That morning I went to see him on a piece of theatrical business, a case submitted to us for arbitration by the commission of dramatic authors. We were obliged to go out again; but before we started he went to Claudine’s room, knocked, as he always does, and asked for leave to enter.

“‘We live in grand style,’ said he, smiling; ‘we are free. Each is independent.’

“We were admitted. Du Bruel spoke to Claudine. ‘I have asked a few people to dinner to-day—’

“‘Just like you!’ cried she. ‘You ask people without speaking to me; I count for nothing here.—Now’ (taking me as arbitrator by a glance) ‘I ask you yourself. When a man has been so foolish as to live with a woman of my sort; for, after all, I was an opera dancer—yes, I ought always to remember that, if other people are to forget it—well, under those circumstances, a clever man seeking to raise his wife in public opinion would do his best to impose her upon the world as a remarkable woman, to justify the step he had taken by acknowledging that in some ways she was something more than ordinary women. The best way of compelling respect from others is to pay respect to her at home, and to leave her absolute mistress of the house. Well, and yet it is enough to awaken one’s vanity to see how frightened he is of seeming to listen to me. I must be in the right ten times over if he concedes a single point.’

“(Emphatic negative gestures from du Bruel at every other word.)

“‘Oh, yes, yes,’ she continued quickly, in answer to this mute dissent. ‘I know all about it, du Bruel, my dear, I that have been like a queen in my house all my life till I married you. My wishes were guessed, fulfilled, and more than fulfilled. After all, I am thirty-five, and at five-and-thirty a woman cannot expect to be loved. Ah, if I were a girl of sixteen, if I had not lost something that is dearly bought at the Opera, what attention you would pay me, M. du Bruel! I feel the most supreme contempt for men who boast that they can love and grow careless and neglectful in little things as time grows on. You are short and insignificant, you see, du Bruel; you love to torment a woman; it is your only way of showing your strength. A Napoleon is ready to be swayed by the woman he loves; he loses nothing by it; but as for such as you, you believe that you are nothing apparently, you do not wish to be ruled.—Five-and-thirty, my dear boy,’ she continued, turning to me, ‘that is the clue to the riddle.—“No,” does he say again?—You know quite well that I am thirty-seven. I am very sorry, but just ask your friends to dine at the Rocher de Cancale. I could have them here, but I will not; they shall not come. And then perhaps my poor little monologue may engrave that salutary maxim, “Each is master at home,” upon your memory. That is our character,’ she added, laughing, with a return of the opera girl’s giddiness and caprice.

“‘Well, well, my dear little puss; there, there, never mind. We can manage to get on together,’ said du Bruel, and he kissed her hands, and we came away. But he was very wroth.

“The whole way from the Rue de la Victoire to the boulevard a perfect torrent of venomous words poured from his mouth like a waterfall in flood; but as the shocking language which he used on occasion was quite unfit to print, the report is necessarily inadequate.

“‘My dear fellow, I will leave that vile, shameless opera dancer, a worn-out

jade that has been set spinning like a top to every operatic air; a foul hussy, an organ-grinder's monkey! Oh, my dear boy, you have taken up with an actress; may the notion of marrying your mistress never get a hold on you. It is a torment omitted from the hell of Dante, you see. Look here! I will beat her; I will give her a thrashing; I will give it to her! Poison of my life, she sent me off like a running footman.'

"By this time we had reached the boulevard, and he had worked himself up to such a pitch of fury that the words stuck in his throat.

"I will kick the stuffing out of her!'

"And why?'

"My dear fellow, you will never know the thousand-and-one fancies that slut takes into her head. When I want to stay at home, she, forsooth, must go out; when I want to go out, she wants me to stop at home; and she spouts out arguments and accusations and reasoning and talks and talks till she drives you crazy. Right means any whim that they happen to take into their heads, and wrong means our notion. Overwhelm them with something that cuts their arguments to pieces—they hold their tongues and look at you as if you were a dead dog. My happiness indeed! I lead the life of a yard-dog; I am a perfect slave. The little happiness that I have with her costs me dear. Confound it all. I will leave her everything and take myself off to a garret. Yes, a garret and liberty. I have not dared to have my own way once in these five years.'

"But instead of going to his guests, Cursy strode up and down the boulevard between the Rue de Richelieu and the Rue du Mont Blanc, indulging in the most fearful imprecations, his unbounded language was most comical to hear. His paroxysm of fury in the street contrasted oddly with his peaceable demeanor in the house. Exercise assisted him to work off his nervous agitation and inward tempest. About two o'clock, on a sudden frantic impulse, he exclaimed:

"These damned females never know what they want. I will wager my head now that if I go home and tell her that I have sent to ask my friends to dine with me at the Rocher de Cancale, she will not be satisfied though she made the arrangement herself.—But she will have gone off somewhere or other. I wonder whether there is something at the bottom of all this, an assignation with some goat? No. In the bottom of her heart she loves me!"

The Marquise could not help smiling.

"Ah, madame," said Nathan, looking keenly at her, "only women and prophets know how to turn faith to account.—Du Bruel would have me go home with him," he continued, "and we went slowly back. It was three o'clock. Before he appeared, he heard a stir in the kitchen, saw preparations

going forward, and glanced at me as he asked the cook the reason of this.

“‘Madame ordered dinner,’ said the woman. ‘Madame dressed and ordered a cab, and then she changed her mind and ordered it again for the theatre this evening.’

“‘Good,’ exclaimed du Bruel, ‘what did I tell you?’

“We entered the house stealthily. No one was there. We went from room to room until we reached a little boudoir, and came upon Tullia in tears. She dried her eyes without affectation, and spoke to du Bruel.

“‘Send a note to the Rocher de Cancale,’ she said, ‘and ask your guests to dine here.’

“She was dressed as only women of the theatre can dress, in a simply-made gown of some dainty material, neither too costly nor too common, graceful and harmonious in outline and coloring; there was nothing conspicuous about her, nothing exaggerated—a word now dropping out of use, to be replaced by the word ‘artistic,’ used by fools as current coin. In short, Tullia looked like a gentlewoman. At thirty-seven she had reached the prime of a Frenchwoman’s beauty. At this moment the celebrated oval of her face was divinely pale; she had laid her hat aside; I could see a faint down like the bloom of fruit softening the silken contours of a cheek itself so delicate. There was a pathetic charm about her face with its double cluster of fair hair; her brilliant gray eyes were veiled by a mist of tears; her nose, delicately carved as a Roman cameo, with its quivering nostrils; her little mouth, like a child’s even now; her long queenly throat, with the veins standing out upon it; her chin, flushed for the moment by some secret despair; the pink tips of her ears, the hands that trembled under her gloves, everything about her told of violent feeling. The feverish twitching of her eyebrows betrayed her pain. She looked sublime.

“Her first words had crushed du Bruel. She looked at us both, with that penetrating, impenetrable cat-like glance which only actresses and great ladies can use. Then she held out her hand to her husband.

“‘Poor dear, you had scarcely gone before I blamed myself a thousand times over. It seemed to me that I had been horribly ungrateful. I told myself that I had been unkind.—Was I very unkind?’ she asked, turning to me.—‘Why not receive your friends? Is it not your house? Do you want to know the reason of it all? Well, I was afraid that I was not loved; and indeed I was half-way between repentance and the shame of going back. I read the newspapers, and saw that there was a first night at the Varietes, and I thought you had meant to give the dinner to a collaborator. Left to myself, I gave way, I dressed to hurry out after you—poor pet.’

“Du Bruel looked at me triumphantly, not a vestige of a recollection of his orations contra Tullia in his mind.

“‘Well, dearest, I have not spoken to any one of them,’ he said.

“‘How well we understand each other!’ quoth she.

“Even as she uttered those bewildering sweet words, I caught sight of something in her belt, the corner of a little note thrust sidewise into it; but I did not need that indication to tell me that Tullia’s fantastic conduct was referable to occult causes. Woman, in my opinion, is the most logical of created beings, the child alone excepted. In both we behold a sublime phenomenon, the unvarying triumph of one dominant, all-excluding thought. The child’s thought changes every moment; but while it possesses him, he acts upon it with such ardor that others give way before him, fascinated by the ingenuity, the persistence of a strong desire. Woman is less changeable, but to call her capricious is a stupid insult. Whenever she acts, she is always swayed by one dominant passion; and wonderful it is to see how she makes that passion the very centre of her world.

“Tullia was irresistible; she twisted du Bruel round her fingers, the sky grew blue again, the evening was glorious. And ingenious writer of plays as he is, he never so much as saw that his wife had buried a trouble out of sight.

“‘Such is life, my dear fellow,’ he said to me, ‘ups and downs and contrasts.’

“‘Especially life off the stage,’ I put in.

“‘That is just what I mean,’ he continued. ‘Why, but for these violent emotions, one would be bored to death! Ah! that woman has the gift of rousing me.’

“We went to the Varietes after dinner; but before we left the house I slipped into du Bruel’s room, and on a shelf among a pile of waste papers found the copy of the Petites-Affiches, in which, agreeably to the reformed law, notice of the purchase of the house was inserted. The words stared me in the face—‘At the request of Jean Francois du Bruel and Claudine Chaffaroux, his wife——’ Here was the explanation of the whole matter. I offered my arm to Claudine, and allowed the guests to descend the stairs in front of us. When we were alone—‘If I were La Palferine,’ I said, ‘I would not break an appointment.’

“Gravely she laid her finger on her lips. She leant on my arm as we went downstairs, and looked at me with almost something like happiness in her eyes because I knew La Palferine. Can you see the first idea that occurred to her? She thought of making a spy of me, but I turned her off with the light jesting talk of Bohemia.

“A month later, after a first performance of one of du Bruel’s plays, we met in the vestibule of the theatre. It was raining; I went to call a cab. We had been delayed for a few minutes, so that there were no cabs in sight. Claudine scolded du Bruel soundly; and as we rolled through the streets (for she set me down at Florine’s), she continued the quarrel with a series of most mortifying remarks.

“‘What is this about?’ I inquired.

“‘Oh, my dear fellow, she blames me for allowing you to run out for a cab, and thereupon proceeds to wish for a carriage.’

“‘As a dancer,’ said she, ‘I have never been accustomed to use my feet except on the boards. If you have any spirit, you will turn out four more plays or so in a year; you will make up your mind that succeed they must, when you think of the end in view, and that your wife will not walk in the mud. It is a shame that I should have to ask for it. You ought to have guessed my continual discomfort during the five years since I married you.’

“‘I am quite willing,’ returned du Bruel. ‘But we shall ruin ourselves.’

“‘If you run into debt,’ she said, ‘my uncle’s money will clear it off some day.’

“‘You are quite capable of leaving me the debts and taking the property.’

“‘Oh! is that the way you take it?’ retorted she. ‘I have nothing more to say to you; such a speech stops my mouth.’

“Whereupon du Bruel poured out his soul in excuses and protestations of love. Not a word did she say. He took her hands, she allowed him to take them; they were like ice, like a dead woman’s hands. Tullia, you can understand, was playing to admiration the part of corpse that women can play to show you that they refuse their consent to anything and everything; that for you they are suppressing soul, spirit, and life, and regard themselves as beasts of burden. Nothing so provokes a man with a heart as this strategy. Women can only use it with those who worship them.

“She turned to me. ‘Do you suppose,’ she said scornfully, ‘that a Count would have uttered such an insult even if the thought had entered his mind? For my misfortune I have lived with dukes, ambassadors, and great lords, and I know their ways. How intolerable it makes bourgeois life! After all, a playwright is not a Rastignac nor a Rhetore——’

“Du Bruel looked ghastly at this. Two days afterwards we met in the foyer at the Opera, and took a few turns together. The conversation fell on Tullia.

“‘Do not take my ravings on the boulevard too seriously,’ said he; ‘I have a violent temper.’

“For two winters I was a tolerably frequent visitor at du Bruel’s house, and I followed Claudine’s tactics closely. She had a splendid carriage. Du Bruel entered public life; she made him abjure his Royalist opinions. He rallied himself; he took his place again in the administration; the National Guard was discreetly canvassed, du Bruel was elected major, and behaved so valorously in a street riot, that he was decorated with the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor. He was appointed Master of Requests and head of a department. Uncle Chaffaroux died and left his niece forty thousand francs per annum, three-fourths of his fortune. Du Bruel became a deputy; but beforehand, to save the necessity of re-election, he secured his nomination to the Council of State. He reprinted divers archaeological treatises, a couple of political pamphlets, and a statistical work, by way of pretext for his appointment to one of the obliging academies of the Institut. At this moment he is a Commander of the Legion, and (after fishing in the troubled waters of political intrigue) has quite recently been made a peer of France and a count. As yet our friend does not venture to bear his honors; his wife merely puts ‘La Comtesse du Bruel’ on her cards. The sometime playwright has the Order of Leopold, the Order of Isabella, the cross of Saint-Vladimir, second class, the Order of Civil Merit of Bavaria, the Papal Order of the Golden Spur,—all the lesser orders, in short, besides the Grand Cross.

“Three months ago Claudine drove to La Palferine’s door in her splendid carriage with its armorial bearings. Du Bruel’s grandfather was a farmer of taxes ennobled towards the end of Louis Quatorze’s reign. Cherin composed his coat-of-arms for him, so the Count’s coronet looks not amiss above a scutcheon innocent of Imperial absurdities. In this way, in the short space of three years, Claudine had carried out the programme laid down for her by the charming, light-hearted La Palferine.

“One day, just above a month ago, she climbed the miserable staircase to her lover’s lodging; climbed in her glory, dressed like a real countess of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to our friend’s garret. La Palferine, seeing her, said, ‘You have made a peeress of yourself I know. But it is too late, Claudine; every one is talking just now about the Southern Cross, I should like it see it!’

“‘I will get it for you.’

“La Palferine burst into a peal of Homeric laughter.

“‘Most distinctly,’ he returned, ‘I do not wish to have a woman as ignorant as a carp for my mistress, a woman that springs like a flying fish from the green-room of the Opera to Court, for I should like to see you at the Court of the Citizen King.’

“She turned to me.

“‘What is the Southern Cross?’ she asked, in a sad, downcast voice.

“I was struck with admiration for this indomitable love, outdoing the most ingenious marvels of fairy tales in real life—a love that would spring over a precipice to find a roc’s egg, or to gather the singing flower. I explained that the Southern Cross was a nebulous constellation even brighter than the Milky Way, arranged in the form of a cross, and that it could only be seen in southern latitudes.

“‘Very well, Charles, let us go,’ said she.

“La Palferine, ferocious though he was, had tears in his eyes; but what a look there was in Claudine’s face, what a note in her voice! I have seen nothing like the thing that followed, not even in the supreme touch of a great actor’s art; nothing to compare with her movement when she saw the hard eyes softened in tears; Claudine sank upon her knees and kissed La Palferine’s pitiless hand. He raised her with his grand manner, his ‘Rusticoli air,’ as he calls it—‘There, child!’ he said, ‘I will do something for you; I will put you—in my will.’

“Well,” concluded Nathan, “I ask myself sometimes whether du Bruel is really deceived. Truly there is nothing more comic, nothing stranger than the sight of a careless young fellow ruling a married couple, his slightest whims received as law, the weightiest decisions revoked at a word from him. That dinner incident, as you can see, is repeated times without number, it interferes with important matters. Still, but for Claudine’s caprices, du Bruel would be de Cursy still, one vaudevillist among five hundred; whereas he is in the House of Peers.”

“You will change the names, I hope!” said Nathan, addressing Mme. de la Baudraye.

“I should think so! I have only set names to the masks for you. My dear Nathan,” she added in the poet’s ear, “I know another case on which the wife takes du Bruel’s place.”

“And the catastrophe?” queried Lousteau, returning just at the end of Mme. de la Baudraye’s story.

“I do not believe in catastrophes. One has to invent such good ones to show that art is quite a match for chance; and nobody reads a book twice, my friend, except for the details.”

“But there is a catastrophe,” persisted Nathan.

“What is it?”

“The Marquise de Rochefide is infatuated with Charles Edward. My story excited her curiosity.”

“Oh, unhappy woman!” cried Mme. de la Baudraye.

“Not so unhappy,” said Nathan, “for Maxime de Trailles and La Palferine have brought about a rupture between the Marquis and Mme. Schontz, and they mean to make it up between Arthur and Beatrix.”

1839 - 1845.

A MAN OF BUSINESS

The word *lorette* is a euphemism invented to describe the status of a personage, or a personage of a status, of which it is awkward to speak; the French Academie, in its modesty, having omitted to supply a definition out of regard for the age of its forty members. Whenever a new word comes to supply the place of an unwieldy circumlocution, its fortune is assured; the word *lorette* has passed into the language of every class of society, even where the *lorette* herself will never gain an entrance. It was only invented in 1840, and derived beyond a doubt from the agglomeration of such swallows' nests about the Church of Our Lady of Loretto. This information is for etymologists only. Those gentlemen would not be so often in a quandary if mediaeval writers had only taken such pains with details of contemporary manners as we take in these days of analysis and description.

Mlle. Turquet, or Malaga, for she is better known by her pseudonym (See *La fausse Maitresse.*), was one of the earliest parishioners of that charming church. At the time to which this story belongs, that lighthearted and lively damsel gladdened the existence of a notary with a wife somewhat too bigoted, rigid, and frigid for domestic happiness.

Now, it so fell out that one Carnival evening Maitre Cardot was entertaining guests at Mlle. Turquet's house—Desroches the attorney, Bixiou of the caricatures, Lousteau the journalist, Nathan, and others; it is quite unnecessary to give any further description of these personages, all bearers of illustrious names in the *Comedie Humaine*. Young La Palferine, in spite of his title of Count and his great descent, which, alas! means a great descent in fortune likewise, had honored the notary's little establishment with his presence.

At dinner, in such a house, one does not expect to meet the patriarchal beef, the skinny fowl and salad of domestic and family life, nor is there any attempt at the hypocritical conversation of drawing-rooms furnished with highly respectable matrons. When, alas! will respectability be charming? When will the women in good society vouchsafe to show rather less of their

shoulders and rather more wit or geniality? Marguerite Turquet, the Aspasia of the Cirque-Olympique, is one of those frank, very living personalities to whom all is forgiven, such unconscious sinners are they, such intelligent penitents; of such as Malaga one might ask, like Cardot—a witty man enough, albeit a notary—to be well “deceived.” And yet you must not think that any enormities were committed. Desroches and Cardot were good fellows grown too gray in the profession not to feel at ease with Bixiou, Lousteau, Nathan, and young La Palferine. And they on their side had too often had recourse to their legal advisers, and knew them too well to try to “draw them out,” in lorette language.

Conversation, perfumed with seven cigars, at first was as fantastic as a kid let loose, but finally it settled down upon the strategy of the constant war waged in Paris between creditors and debtors.

Now, if you will be so good as to recall the history and antecedents of the guests, you will know that in all Paris, you could scarcely find a group of men with more experience in this matter; the professional men on one hand, and the artists on the other, were something in the position of magistrates and criminals hobnobbing together. A set of Bixiou’s drawings to illustrate life in the debtors’ prison, led the conversation to take this particular turn; and from debtors’ prisons they went to debts.

It was midnight. They had broken up into little knots round the table and before the fire, and gave themselves up to the burlesque fun which is only possible or comprehensible in Paris and in that particular region which is bounded by the Faubourg Montmartre, the Rue Chaussee d’Antin, the upper end of the Rue de Navarin and the line of the boulevards.

In ten minutes’ time they had come to an end of all the deep reflections, all the moralizings, small and great, all the bad puns made on a subject already exhausted by Rabelais three hundred and fifty years ago. It was not a little to their credit that the pyrotechnic display was cut short with a final squib from Malaga.

“It all goes to the shoemakers,” she said. “I left a milliner because she failed twice with my hats. The vixen has been here twenty-seven times to ask for twenty francs. She did not know that we never have twenty francs. One has a thousand francs, or one sends to one’s notary for five hundred; but twenty francs I have never had in my life. My cook and my maid may, perhaps, have so much between them; but for my own part, I have nothing but credit, and I should lose that if I took to borrowing small sums. If I were to ask for twenty francs, I should have nothing to distinguish me from my colleagues that walk the boulevard.”

“Is the milliner paid?” asked La Palferine.

“Oh, come now, are you turning stupid?” said she, with a wink. “She came this morning for the twenty-seventh time, that is how I came to mention it.”

“What did you do?” asked Desroches.

“I took pity upon her, and—ordered a little hat that I have just invented, a quite new shape. If Mlle. Amanda succeeds with it, she will say no more about the money, her fortune is made.”

“In my opinion,” put in Desroches, “the finest things that I have seen in a duel of this kind give those who know Paris a far better picture of the city than all the fancy portraits that they paint. Some of you think that you know a thing or two,” he continued, glancing round at Nathan, Bixiou, La Palferine, and Lousteau, “but the king of the ground is a certain Count, now busy ranging himself. In his time, he was supposed to be the cleverest, adroitest, canniest, boldest, stoutest, most subtle and experienced of all the pirates, who, equipped with fine manners, yellow kid gloves, and cabs, have ever sailed or ever will sail upon the stormy seas of Paris. He fears neither God nor man. He applies in private life the principles that guide the English Cabinet. Up to the time of his marriage, his life was one continual war, like—Lousteau’s, for instance. I was, and am still his solicitor.”

“And the first letter of his name is Maxime de Trailles,” said La Palferine.

“For that matter, he has paid every one, and injured no one,” continued Desroches. “But as your friend Bixiou was saying just now, it is a violation of the liberty of the subject to be made to pay in March when you have no mind to pay till October. By virtue of this article of his particular code, Maxime regarded a creditor’s scheme for making him pay at once as a swindler’s trick. It was a long time since he had grasped the significance of the bill of exchange in all its bearings, direct and remote. A young man once, in my place, called a bill of exchange the ‘asses’ bridge’ in his hearing. ‘No,’ said he, ‘it is the Bridge of Sighs; it is the shortest way to an execution.’ Indeed, his knowledge of commercial law was so complete, that a professional could not have taught him anything. At that time he had nothing, as you know. His carriage and horses were jobbed; he lived in his valet’s house; and, by the way, he will be a hero to his valet to the end of the chapter, even after the marriage that he proposes to make. He belonged to three clubs, and dined at one of them whenever he did not dine out. As a rule, he was to be found very seldom at his own address—”

“He once said to me,” interrupted La Palferine, “‘My one affectation is the pretence that I make of living in the Rue Pigalle.’”

“Well,” resumed Desroches, “he was one of the combatants; and now for the other. You have heard more or less talk of one Claparon?”

“Had hair like this!” cried Bixiou, ruffling his locks till they stood on end. Gifted with the same talent for mimicking absurdities which Chopin the pianist possesses to so high a degree, he proceeded forthwith to represent the character with startling truth.

“He rolls his head like this when he speaks; he was once a commercial traveler; he has been all sorts of things—”

“Well, he was born to travel, for at this minute, as I speak, he is on the sea on his way to America,” said Desroches. “It is his only chance, for in all probability he will be condemned by default as a fraudulent bankrupt next session.”

“Very much at sea!” exclaimed Malaga.

“For six or seven years this Claparon acted as man of straw, cat’s paw, and scapegoat to two friends of ours, du Tillet and Nucingen; but in 1829 his part was so well known that—”

“Our friends dropped him,” put in Bixiou.

“They left him to his fate at last, and he wallowed in the mire,” continued Desroches. “In 1833 he went into partnership with one Cerizet—”

“What! he that promoted a joint-stock company so nicely that the Sixth Chamber cut short his career with a couple of years in jail?” asked the lorette.

“The same. Under the Restoration, between 1823 and 1827, Cerizet’s occupation consisted in first putting his name intrepidly to various paragraphs, on which the public prosecutor fastened with avidity, and subsequently marching off to prison. A man could make a name for himself with small expense in those days. The Liberal party called their provincial champion ‘the courageous Cerizet,’ and towards 1828 so much zeal received its reward in ‘general interest.’

“‘General interest’ is a kind of civic crown bestowed on the deserving by the daily press. Cerizet tried to discount the ‘general interest’ taken in him. He came to Paris, and, with some help from capitalists in the Opposition, started as a broker, and conducted financial operations to some extent, the capital being found by a man in hiding, a skilful gambler who overreached himself, and in consequence, in July 1830, his capital foundered in the shipwreck of the Government.”

“Oh! it was he whom we used to call the System,” cried Bixiou.

“Say no harm of him, poor fellow,” protested Malaga. “D’Estourny was a good sort.”

“You can imagine the part that a ruined man was sure to play in 1830 when

his name in politics was ‘the courageous Cerizet.’ He was sent off into a very snug little sub-prefecture. Unluckily for him, it is one thing to be in opposition—any missile is good enough to throw, so long as the flight lasts; but quite another to be in office. Three months later, he was obliged to send in his resignation. Had he not taken it into his head to attempt to win popularity? Still, as he had done nothing as yet to imperil his title of ‘courageous Cerizet,’ the Government proposed by way of compensation that he should manage a newspaper; nominally an Opposition newspaper, but Ministerialist in petto. So the fall of this noble nature was really due to the Government. To Cerizet, as manager of the paper, it was rather too evident that he was as a bird perched on a rotten bough; and then it was that he promoted that nice little joint-stock company, and thereby secured a couple of years in prison; he was caught, while more ingenious swindlers succeeded in catching the public.”

“We are acquainted with the more ingenious,” said Bixiou; “let us say no ill of the poor fellow; he was nabbed; Couture allowed them to squeeze his cash-box; who would ever have thought it of him?”

“At all events, Cerizet was a low sort of fellow, a good deal damaged by low debauchery. Now for the duel I spoke about. Never did two tradesmen of the worst type, with the worst manners, the lowest pair of villains imaginable, go into partnership in a dirtier business. Their stock-in-trade consisted of the peculiar idiom of the man about town, the audacity of poverty, the cunning that comes of experience, and a special knowledge of Parisian capitalists, their origin, connections, acquaintances, and intrinsic value. This partnership of two ‘dabblers’ (let the Stock Exchange term pass, for it is the only word which describes them), this partnership of dabblers did not last very long. They fought like famished curs over every bit of garbage.

“The earlier speculations of the firm of Cerizet and Claparon were, however, well planned. The two scamps joined forces with Barbet, Chaboisseau, Samanon, and usurers of that stamp, and bought up hopelessly bad debts.

“Claparon’s place of business at that time was a cramped entresol in the Rue Chabannais—five rooms at a rent of seven hundred francs at most. Each partner slept in a little closet, so carefully closed from prudence, that my head-clerk could never get inside. The furniture of the other three rooms—an ante-chamber, a waiting-room, and a private office—would not have fetched three hundred francs altogether at a distress-warrant sale. You know enough of Paris to know the look of it; the stuffed horsehair-covered chairs, a table covered with a green cloth, a trumpery clock between a couple of candle sconces, growing tarnished under glass shades, the small gilt-framed mirror over the chimney-piece, and in the grate a charred stick or two of firewood which had lasted them for two winters, as my head-clerk put it. As for the office, you can

guess what it was like—more letter-files than business letters, a set of common pigeon-holes for either partner, a cylinder desk, empty as the cash-box, in the middle of the room, and a couple of armchairs on either side of a coal fire. The carpet on the floor was bought cheap at second-hand (like the bills and bad debts). In short, it was the mahogany furniture of furnished apartments which usually descends from one occupant of chambers to another during fifty years of service. Now you know the pair of antagonists.

“During the first three months of a partnership dissolved four months later in a bout of fisticuffs, Cerizet and Claparon bought up two thousand francs’ worth of bills bearing Maxime’s signature (since Maxime was his name), and filled a couple of letters to bursting with judgments, appeals, orders of the court, distress-warrants, application for stay of proceedings, and all the rest of it; to put it briefly, they had bills for three thousand two hundred francs odd centimes, for which they had given five hundred francs; the transfer being made under private seal, with special power of attorney, to save the expense of registration. Now it so happened at this juncture, Maxime, being of ripe age, was seized with one of the fancies peculiar to the man of fifty—”

“Antonia!” exclaimed La Palferine. “That Antonia whose fortune I made by writing to ask for a toothbrush!”

“Her real name is Chocardelle,” said Malaga, not over well pleased by the fine-sounding pseudonym.

“The same,” continued Desroches.

“It was the only mistake Maxime ever made in his life. But what would you have, no vice is absolutely perfect?” put in Bixiou.

“Maxime had still to learn what sort of a life a man may be led into by a girl of eighteen when she is minded to take a header from her honest garret into a sumptuous carriage; it is a lesson that all statesmen should take to heart. At this time, de Marsay had just been employing his friend, our friend de Trailles, in the high comedy of politics. Maxime had looked high for his conquests; he had no experience of untitled women; and at fifty years he felt that he had a right to take a bite of the so-called wild fruit, much as a sportsman will halt under a peasant’s apple-tree. So the Count found a reading-room for Mlle. Chocardelle, a rather smart little place to be had cheap, as usual—”

“Pooh!” said Nathan. “She did not stay in it six months. She was too handsome to keep a reading-room.”

“Perhaps you are the father of her child?” suggested the lorette.

Desroches resumed.

“Since the firm bought up Maxime’s debts, Cerizet’s likeness to a bailiff’s officer grew more and more striking, and one morning after seven fruitless attempts he succeeded in penetrating into the Count’s presence. Suzon, the old man-servant, albeit he was by no means in his novitiate, at last mistook the visitor for a petitioner, come to propose a thousand crowns if Maxime would obtain a license to sell postage stamps for a young lady. Suzon, without the slightest suspicion of the little scamp, a thoroughbred Paris street-boy into whom prudence had been rubbed by repeated personal experience of the police-courts, induced his master to receive him. Can you see the man of business, with an uneasy eye, a bald forehead, and scarcely any hair on his head, standing in his threadbare jacket and muddy boots—”

“What a picture of a Dun!” cried Lousteau.

“—standing before the Count, that image of flaunting Debt, in his blue flannel dressing-gown, slippers worked by some Marquise or other, trousers of white woolen stuff, and a dazzling shirt? There he stood, with a gorgeous cap on his black dyed hair, playing with the tassels at his waist—”

“‘Tis a bit of genre for anybody who knows what the pretty little morning room, hung with silk and full of valuable paintings, where Maxime breakfasts,” said Nathan. “You tread on a Smyrna carpet, you admire the sideboards filled with curiosities and rarities fit to make a King of Saxony envious—”

“Now for the scene itself,” said Desroches, and the deepest silence followed.

“‘Monsieur le Comte,’ began Cerizet, ‘I have come from a M. Charles Claparon, who used to be a banker—’

“‘Ah! poor devil, and what does he want with me?’

“‘Well, he is at present your creditor for a matter of three thousand two hundred francs, seventy-five centimes, principal, interest, and costs—’

“‘Coutelier’s business?’ put in Maxime, who knew his affairs as a pilot knows his coast.

“‘Yes, Monsieur le Comte,’ said Cerizet with a bow. ‘I have come to ask your intentions.’

“‘I shall only pay when the fancy takes me,’ returned Maxime, and he rang for Suzon. ‘It was very rash of Claparon to buy up bills of mine without speaking to me beforehand. I am sorry for him, for he did so very well for such a long time as a man of straw for friends of mine. I always said that a man must really be weak in his intellect to work for men that stuff themselves with millions, and to serve them so faithfully for such low wages. And now

here he gives me another proof of his stupidity! Yes, men deserve what they get. It is your own doing whether you get a crown on your forehead or a bullet through your head; whether you are a millionaire or a porter, justice is always done you. I cannot help it, my dear fellow; I myself am not a king, I stick to my principles. I have no pity for those that put me to expense or do not know their business as creditors.—Suzon! my tea! Do you see this gentleman?’ he continued when the man came in. ‘Well, you have allowed yourself to be taken in, poor old boy. This gentleman is a creditor; you ought to have known him by his boots. No friend nor foe of mine, nor those that are neither and want something of me, come to see me on foot.—My dear M. Cerizet, do you understand? You will not wipe your boots on my carpet again’ (looking as he spoke at the mud that whitened the enemy’s soles). ‘Convey my compliments and sympathy to Claparon, poor buffer, for I shall file this business under the letter Z.’

“All this with an easy good-humor fit to give a virtuous citizen the colic.

“‘You are wrong, Monsieur le Comte,’ retorted Cerizet, in a slightly peremptory tone. ‘We will be paid in full, and that in a way which you may not like. That is why I came to you first in a friendly spirit, as is right and fit between gentlemen—’

“‘Oh! so that is how you understand it?’ began Maxime, enraged by this last piece of presumption. There was something of Talleyrand’s wit in the insolent retort, if you have quite grasped the contrast between the two men and their costumes. Maxime scowled and looked full at the intruder; Cerizet not merely endured the glare of cold fury, but even returned it, with an icy, cat-like malignance and fixity of gaze.

“‘Very good, sir, go out—’

“‘Very well, good-day, Monsieur le Comte. We shall be quits before six months are out.’

“‘If you can steal the amount of your bill, which is legally due I own, I shall be indebted to you, sir,’ replied Maxime. ‘You will have taught me a new precaution to take. I am very much your servant.’

“‘Monsieur le Comte,’ said Cerizet, ‘it is I, on the contrary, who am yours.’

“Here was an explicit, forcible, confident declaration on either side. A couple of tigers confabulating, with the prey before them, and a fight impending, would have been no finer and no shrewder than this pair; the insolent fine gentleman as great a blackguard as the other in his soiled and mud-stained clothes.

“Which will you lay your money on?” asked Desroches, looking round at

an audience, surprised to find how deeply it was interested.

“A pretty story!” cried Malaga. “My dear boy, go on, I beg of you. This goes to one’s heart.”

“Nothing commonplace could happen between two fighting-cocks of that calibre,” added La Palferine.

“Pooh!” cried Malaga. “I will wager my cabinet-maker’s invoice (the fellow is dunning me) that the little toad was too many for Maxime.”

“I bet on Maxime,” said Cardot. “Nobody ever caught him napping.”

Desroches drank off a glass that Malaga handed to him.

“Mlle. Chocardelle’s reading-room,” he continued, after a pause, “was in the Rue Coquenard, just a step or two from the Rue Pigalle where Maxime was living. The said Mlle. Chocardelle lived at the back on the garden side of the house, beyond a big dark place where the books were kept. Antonia left her aunt to look after the business—”

“Had she an aunt even then?” exclaimed Malaga. “Hang it all, Maxime did things handsomely.”

“Alas! it was a real aunt,” said Desroches; “her name was—let me see _____”

“Ida Bonamy,” said Bixiou.

“So as Antonia’s aunt took a good deal of the work off her hands, she went to bed late and lay late of a morning, never showing her face at the desk until the afternoon, some time between two and four. From the very first her appearance was enough to draw custom. Several elderly men in the quarter used to come, among them a retired coach-builder, one Croizeau. Beholding this miracle of female loveliness through the window-panes, he took it into his head to read the newspapers in the beauty’s reading-room; and a sometime custom-house officer, named Denisart, with a ribbon in his button-hole, followed the example. Croizeau chose to look upon Denisart as a rival. ‘Monsieur,’ he said afterwards, ‘I did not know what to buy for you!’

“That speech should give you an idea of the man. The Sieur Croizeau happens to belong to a particular class of old man which should be known as ‘Coquerels’ since Henri Monnier’s time; so well did Monnier render the piping voice, the little mannerisms, little queue, little sprinkling of powder, little movements of the head, prim little manner, and tripping gait in the part of Coquerel in *La Famille Improvisée*. This Croizeau used to hand over his halfpence with a flourish and a ‘There, fair lady!’

“Mme. Ida Bonamy the aunt was not long in finding out through a servant

that Croizeau, by popular report of the neighborhood of the Rue de Buffault, where he lived, was a man of exceeding stinginess, possessed of forty thousand francs per annum. A week after the instalment of the charming librarian he was delivered of a pun:

“‘You lend me books (livres), but I give you plenty of francs in return,’ said he.

“A few days later he put on a knowing little air, as much as to say, ‘I know you are engaged, but my turn will come one day; I am a widower.’

“He always came arrayed in fine linen, a cornflower blue coat, a paduasoy waistcoat, black trousers, and black ribbon bows on the double soled shoes that creaked like an abbe’s; he always held a fourteen franc silk hat in his hand.

“‘I am old and I have no children,’ he took occasion to confide to the young lady some few days after Cerizet’s visit to Maxime. ‘I hold my relations in horror. They are peasants born to work in the fields. Just imagine it, I came up from the country with six francs in my pocket, and made my fortune here. I am not proud. A pretty woman is my equal. Now would it not be nicer to be Mme. Croizeau for some years to come than to do a Count’s pleasure for a twelvemonth? He will go off and leave you some time or other; and when that day comes, you will think of me... your servant, my pretty lady!’

“All this was simmering below the surface. The slightest approach at love-making was made quite on the sly. Not a soul suspected that the trim little old foggy was smitten with Antonia; and so prudent was the elderly lover, that no rival could have guessed anything from his behavior in the reading-room. For a couple of months Croizeau watched the retired custom-house official; but before the third month was out he had good reason to believe that his suspicions were groundless. He exerted his ingenuity to scrape an acquaintance with Denisart, came up with him in the street, and at length seized his opportunity to remark, ‘It is a fine day, sir!’

“Whereupon the retired official responded with, ‘Austerlitz weather, sir. I was there myself—I was wounded indeed, I won my Cross on that glorious day.’

“And so from one thing to another the two drifted wrecks of the Empire struck up an acquaintance. Little Croizeau was attached to the Empire through his connection with Napoleon’s sisters. He had been their coach-builder, and had frequently dunned them for money; so he gave out that he ‘had had relations with the Imperial family.’ Maxime, duly informed by Antonia of the ‘nice old man’s’ proposals (for so the aunt called Croizeau), wished to see him. Cerizet’s declaration of war had so far taken effect that he of the yellow kid

gloves was studying the position of every piece, however insignificant, upon the board; and it so happened that at the mention of that 'nice old man,' an ominous tinkling sounded in his ears. One evening, therefore, Maxime seated himself among the book-shelves in the dimly lighted back room, reconnoitred the seven or eight customers through the chink between the green curtains, and took the little coach-builder's measure. He gauged the man's infatuation, and was very well satisfied to find that the varnished doors of a tolerably sumptuous future were ready to turn at a word from Antonia so soon as his own fancy had passed off.

"And that other one yonder?" asked he, pointing out the stout fine-looking elderly man with the Cross of the Legion of Honor. 'Who is he?'

"A retired custom-house officer.'

"The cut of his countenance is not reassuring,' said Maxime, beholding the Sieur Denisart.

"And indeed the old soldier held himself upright as a steeple. His head was remarkable for the amount of powder and pomatum bestowed upon it; he looked almost like a postilion at a fancy ball. Underneath that felted covering, moulded to the top of the wearer's cranium, appeared an elderly profile, half-official, half-soldierly, with a comical admixture of arrogance,—altogether something like caricatures of the Constitutionnel. The sometime official finding that age, and hair-powder, and the conformation of his spine made it impossible to read a word without spectacles, sat displaying a very creditable expanse of chest with all the pride of an old man with a mistress. Like old General Montcornet, that pillar of the Vaudeville, he wore earrings. Denisart was partial to blue; his roomy trousers and well-worn greatcoat were both of blue cloth.

"How long is it since that old foggy came here?" inquired Maxime, thinking that he saw danger in the spectacles.

"Oh, from the beginning,' returned Antonia, 'pretty nearly two months ago now.'

"Good," said Maxime to himself, 'Cerizet only came to me a month ago.—Just get him to talk,' he added in Antonia's ear; 'I want to hear his voice.'

"Pshaw,' said she, 'that is not so easy. He never says a word to me.'

"Then why does he come here?' demanded Maxime.

"For a queer reason,' returned the fair Antonia. 'In the first place, although he is sixty-nine, he has a fancy; and because he is sixty-nine, he is as methodical as a clock face. Every day at five o'clock the old gentleman goes to dine with her in the Rue de la Victoire. (I am sorry for her.) Then at six

o'clock, he comes here, reads steadily at the papers for four hours, and goes back at ten o'clock. Daddy Croizeau says that he knows M. Denisart's motives, and approves his conduct; and in his place, he would do the same. So I know exactly what to expect. If ever I am Mme. Croizeau, I shall have four hours to myself between six and ten o'clock.'

"Maxime looked through the directory, and found the following reassuring item:

"DENISART,* retired custom-house officer, Rue de la Victoire.

"His uneasiness vanished.

"Gradually the Sieur Denisart and the Sieur Croizeau began to exchange confidences. Nothing so binds two men together as a similarity of views in the matter of womankind. Daddy Croizeau went to dine with 'M. Denisart's fair lady,' as he called her. And here I must make a somewhat important observation.

"The reading-room had been paid for half in cash, half in bills signed by the said Mlle. Chocardelle. The quart d'heure de Rabelais arrived; the Count had no money. So the first bill of three thousand francs was met by the amiable coach-builder; that old scoundrel Denisart having recommended him to secure himself with a mortgage on the reading-room.

"'For my own part,' said Denisart, 'I have seen pretty doings from pretty women. So in all cases, even when I have lost my head, I am always on my guard with a woman. There is this creature, for instance; I am madly in love with her; but this is not her furniture; no, it belongs to me. The lease is taken out in my name.'

"You know Maxime! He thought the coach-builder uncommonly green. Croizeau might pay all three bills, and get nothing for a long while; for Maxime felt more infatuated with Antonia than ever."

"I can well believe it," said La Palferine. "She is the bella Imperia of our day."

"With her rough skin!" exclaimed Malaga; "so rough, that she ruins herself in bran baths!"

"Croizeau spoke with a coach-builder's admiration of the sumptuous furniture provided by the amorous Denisart as a setting for his fair one, describing it all in detail with diabolical complacency for Antonia's benefit," continued Desroches. "The ebony chests inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold wire, the Brussels carpets, a mediaeval bedstead worth three thousand francs, a Boule clock, candelabra in the four corners of the dining-room, silk curtains, on which Chinese patience had wrought pictures of birds, and hangings over

the doors, worth more than the portress that opened them.

“‘And that is what you ought to have, my pretty lady.—And that is what I should like to offer you,’ he would conclude. ‘I am quite aware that you scarcely care a bit about me; but, at my age, we cannot expect too much. Judge how much I love you; I have lent you a thousand francs. I must confess that, in all my born days, I have not lent anybody that much——’

“He held out his penny as he spoke, with the important air of a man that gives a learned demonstration.

“That evening at the Varietes, Antonia spoke to the Count.

“‘A reading-room is very dull, all the same,’ said she; ‘I feel that I have no sort of taste for that kind of life, and I see no future in it. It is only fit for a widow that wishes to keep body and soul together, or for some hideously ugly thing that fancies she can catch a husband with a little finery.’

“‘It was your own choice,’ returned the Count. Just at that moment, in came Nucingen, of whom Maxime, king of lions (the ‘yellow kid gloves’ were the lions of that day) had won three thousand francs the evening before. Nucingen had come to pay his gaming debt.

“‘Ein writ of attachment haf shoost peen served on me by der order of dot teufel Glabaron,’ he said, seeing Maxime’s astonishment.

“‘Oh, so that is how they are going to work, is it?’ cried Maxime. ‘They are not up to much, that pair——’

“‘It makes not,’ said the banker, ‘bay dem, for dey may apply demselves to oders pesides, und do you harm. I dake dees bretty voman to vitness dot I haf baid you dees morning, long pefore dat writ vas serfed.’”

“Queen of the boards,” smiled La Palferine, looking at Malaga, “thou art about to lose thy bet.”

“Once, a long time ago, in a similar case,” resumed Desroches, “a too honest debtor took fright at the idea of a solemn declaration in a court of law, and declined to pay Maxime after notice was given. That time we made it hot for the creditor by piling on writs of attachment, so as to absorb the whole amount in costs——”

“Oh, what is that?” cried Malaga; “it all sounds like gibberish to me. As you thought the sturgeon so excellent at dinner, let me take out the value of the sauce in lessons in chicanery.”

“Very well,” said Desroches. “Suppose that a man owes you money, and your creditors serve a writ of attachment upon him; there is nothing to prevent all your other creditors from doing the same thing. And now what does the

court do when all the creditors make application for orders to pay? The court divides the whole sum attached, proportionately among them all. That division, made under the eye of a magistrate, is what we call a contribution. If you owe ten thousand francs, and your creditors issue writs of attachment on a debt due to you of a thousand francs, each one of them gets so much per cent, 'so much in the pound,' in legal phrase; so much (that means) in proportion to the amounts severally claimed by the creditors. But—the creditors cannot touch the money without a special order from the clerk of the court. Do you guess what all this work drawn up by a judge and prepared by attorneys must mean? It means a quantity of stamped paper full of diffuse lines and blanks, the figures almost lost in vast spaces of completely empty ruled columns. The first proceeding is to deduct the costs. Now, as the costs are precisely the same whether the amount attached is one thousand or one million francs, it is not difficult to eat up three thousand francs (for instance) in costs, especially if you can manage to raise counter applications.”

“And an attorney always manages to do it,” said Cardot. “How many a time one of you has come to me with, ‘What is there to be got out of the case?’”

“It is particularly easy to manage it if the debtor eggs you on to run up costs till they eat up the amount. And, as a rule, the Count’s creditors took nothing by that move, and were out of pocket in law and personal expenses. To get money out of so experienced a debtor as the Count, a creditor should really be in a position uncommonly difficult to reach; it is a question of being creditor and debtor both, for then you are legally entitled to work the confusion of rights, in law language—”

“To the confusion of the debtor?” asked Malaga, lending an attentive ear to this discourse.

“No, the confusion of rights of debtor and creditor, and pay yourself through your own hands. So Claparon’s innocence in merely issuing writs of attachment eased the Count’s mind. As he came back from the Varietes with Antonia, he was so much the more taken with the idea of selling the reading-room to pay off the last two thousand francs of the purchase-money, because he did not care to have his name made public as a partner in such a concern. So he adopted Antonia’s plan. Antonia wished to reach the higher ranks of her calling, with splendid rooms, a maid, and a carriage; in short, she wanted to rival our charming hostess, for instance—”

“She was not woman enough for that,” cried the famous beauty of the Circus; “still, she ruined young d’Esgrignon very neatly.”

“Ten days afterwards, little Croizeau, perched on his dignity, said almost exactly the same thing, for the fair Antonia’s benefit,” continued Desroches.

“‘Child,’ said he, ‘your reading-room is a hole of a place. You will lose your complexion; the gas will ruin your eyesight. You ought to come out of it; and, look here, let us take advantage of an opportunity. I have found a young lady for you that asks no better than to buy your reading-room. She is a ruined woman with nothing before her but a plunge into the river; but she had four thousand francs in cash, and the best thing to do is to turn them to account, so as to feed and educate a couple of children.’

“‘Very well. It is kind of you, Daddy Croizeau,’ said Antonia.

“‘Oh, I shall be much kinder before I have done. Just imagine it, poor M. Denisart has been worried into the jaundice! Yes, it has gone to the liver, as it usually does with susceptible old men. It is a pity he feels things so. I told him so myself; I said, “Be passionate, there is no harm in that, but as for taking things to heart—draw the line at that! It is the way to kill yourself.”—Really, I would not have expected him to take on so about it; a man that has sense enough and experience enough to keep away as he does while he digests his dinner—’

“‘But what is the matter?’ inquired Mlle. Chocardelle.

“‘That little baggage with whom I dined has cleared out and left him! ... Yes. Gave him the slip without any warning but a letter, in which the spelling was all to seek.’

“‘There, Daddy Croizeau, you see what comes of boring a woman—’

“‘It is indeed a lesson, my pretty lady,’ said the guileful Croizeau. ‘Meanwhile, I have never seen a man in such a state. Our friend Denisart cannot tell his left hand from his right; he will not go back to look at the “scene of his happiness,” as he calls it. He has so thoroughly lost his wits, that he proposes that I should buy all Hortense’s furniture (Hortense was her name) for four thousand francs.’

“‘A pretty name,’ said Antonia.

“‘Yes. Napoleon’s stepdaughter was called Hortense. I built carriages for her, as you know.’

“‘Very well, I will see,’ said cunning Antonia; ‘begin by sending this young woman to me.’

“Antonia hurried off to see the furniture, and came back fascinated. She brought Maxime under the spell of antiquarian enthusiasm. That very evening the Count agreed to the sale of the reading-room. The establishment, you see, nominally belonged to Mlle. Chocardelle. Maxime burst out laughing at the idea of little Croizeau’s finding him a buyer. The firm of Maxime and Chocardelle was losing two thousand francs, it is true, but what was the loss

compared with four glorious thousand-franc notes in hand? 'Four thousand francs of live coin!—there are moments in one's life when one would sign bills for eight thousand to get them,' as the Count said to me.

"Two days later the Count must see the furniture himself, and took the four thousand francs upon him. The sale had been arranged; thanks to little Croizeau's diligence, he pushed matters on; he had 'come round' the widow, as he expressed it. It was Maxime's intention to have all the furniture removed at once to a lodging in a new house in the Rue Tronchet, taken in the name of Mme. Ida Bonamy; he did not trouble himself much about the nice old man that was about to lose his thousand francs. But he had sent beforehand for several big furniture vans.

"Once again he was fascinated by the beautiful furniture which a wholesale dealer would have valued at six thousand francs. By the fireside sat the wretched owner, yellow with jaundice, his head tied up in a couple of printed handkerchiefs, and a cotton night-cap on top of them; he was huddled up in wrappings like a chandelier, exhausted, unable to speak, and altogether so knocked to pieces that the Count was obliged to transact his business with the man-servant. When he had paid down the four thousand francs, and the servant had taken the money to his master for a receipt, Maxime turned to tell the man to call up the vans to the door; but even as he spoke, a voice like a rattle sounded in his ears.

"It is not worth while, Monsieur le Comte. You and I are quits; I have six hundred and thirty francs fifteen centimes to give you!"

"To his utter consternation, he saw Cerizet, emerged from his wrappings like a butterfly from the chrysalis, holding out the accursed bundle of documents.

"When I was down on my luck, I learned to act on the stage,' added Cerizet. 'I am as good as Bouffe at old men.'

"I have fallen among thieves!' shouted Maxime.

"No, Monsieur le Comte, you are in Mlle. Hortense's house. She is a friend of old Lord Dudley's; he keeps her hidden away here; but she has the bad taste to like your humble servant.'

"If ever I longed to kill a man,' so the Count told me afterwards, 'it was at that moment; but what could one do? Hortense showed her pretty face, one had to laugh. To keep my dignity, I flung her the six hundred francs. "There's for the girl," said I.'"

"That is Maxime all over!" cried La Palferine.

"More especially as it was little Croizeau's money," added Cardot the

profound.

“Maxime scored a triumph,” continued Desroches, “for Hortense exclaimed, ‘Oh, if I had only known that it was you!’”

“A pretty ‘confusion’ indeed!” put in Malaga. “You have lost, milord,” she added turning to the notary.

And in this way the cabinetmaker, to whom Malaga owed a hundred crowns, was paid.

PARIS, 1845.

GAUDISSERT II.

To know how to sell, to be able to sell, and to sell. People generally do not suspect how much of the stateliness of Paris is due to these three aspects of the same problem. The brilliant display of shops as rich as the salons of the noblesse before 1789; the splendors of cafes which eclipse, and easily eclipse, the Versailles of our day; the shop-window illusions, new every morning, nightly destroyed; the grace and elegance of the young men that come in contact with fair customers; the piquant faces and costumes of young damsels, who cannot fail to attract the masculine customer; and (and this especially of late) the length, the vast spaces, the Babylonish luxury of galleries where shopkeepers acquire a monopoly of the trade in various articles by bringing them all together,—all this is as nothing. Everything, so far, has been done to appeal to a single sense, and that the most exacting and jaded human faculty, a faculty developed ever since the days of the Roman Empire, until, in our own times, thanks to the efforts of the most fastidious civilization the world has yet seen, its demands are grown limitless. That faculty resides in the "eyes of Paris."

Those eyes require illuminations costing a hundred thousand francs, and many-colored glass palaces a couple of miles long and sixty feet high; they must have a fairyland at some fourteen theatres every night, and a succession of panoramas and exhibitions of the triumphs of art; for them a whole world of suffering and pain, and a universe of joy, must resolve through the boulevards or stray through the streets of Paris; for them encyclopaedias of carnival frippery and a score of illustrated books are brought out every year, to say nothing of caricatures by the hundred, and vignettes, lithographs, and prints by the thousand. To please those eyes, fifteen thousand francs' worth of gas must blaze every night; and, to conclude, for their delectation the great city yearly spends several millions of francs in opening up views and planting trees. And

even yet this is as nothing—it is only the material side of the question; in truth, a mere trifle compared with the expenditure of brain power on the shifts, worthy of Moliere, invented by some sixty thousand assistants and forty thousand damsels of the counter, who fasten upon the customer's purse, much as myriads of Seine whitebait fall upon a chance crust floating down the river.

Gaudissart in the mart is at least the equal of his illustrious namesake, now become the typical commercial traveler. Take him away from his shop and his line of business, he is like a collapsed balloon; only among his bales of merchandise do his faculties return, much as an actor is sublime only upon the boards. A French shopman is better educated than his fellows in other European countries; he can at need talk asphalt, Bal Mabilie, polkas, literature, illustrated books, railways, politics, parliament, and revolution; transplant him, take away his stage, his yardstick, his artificial graces; he is foolish beyond belief; but on his own boards, on the tight-rope of the counter, as he displays a shawl with a speech at his tongue's end, and his eye on his customer, he puts the great Talleyrand into the shade; he is a match for a Monroe and a Moliere to boot. Talleyrand in his own house would have outwitted Gaudissart, but in the shop the parts would have been reversed.

An incident will illustrate the paradox.

Two charming duchesses were chatting with the above-mentioned great diplomatist. The ladies wished for a bracelet; they were waiting for the arrival of a man from a great Parisian jeweler. A Gaudissart accordingly appeared with three bracelets of marvelous workmanship. The great ladies hesitated. Choice is a mental lightning flash; hesitate—there is no more to be said, you are at fault. Inspiration in matters of taste will not come twice. At last, after about ten minutes the Prince was called in. He saw the two duchesses confronting doubt with its thousand facets, unable to decide between the transcendent merits of two of the trinkets, for the third had been set aside at once. Without leaving his book, without a glance at the bracelets, the Prince looked at the jeweler's assistant.

"Which would you choose for your sweetheart?" asked he.

The young man indicated one of the pair.

"In that case, take the other, you will make two women happy," said the subtlest of modern diplomatists, "and make your sweetheart happy too, in my name."

The two fair ladies smiled, and the young shopman took his departure, delighted with the Prince's present and the implied compliment to his taste.

A woman alights from her splendid carriage before one of the expensive shops where shawls are sold in the Rue Vivienne. She is not alone; women

almost always go in pairs on these expeditions; always make the round of half a score of shops before they make up their minds, and laugh together in the intervals over the little comedies played for their benefit. Let us see which of the two acts most in character—the fair customer or the seller, and which has the best of it in such miniature vaudevilles?

If you attempt to describe a sale, the central fact of Parisian trade, you are in duty bound, if you attempt to give the gist of the matter, to produce a type, and for this purpose a shawl or a chatelaine costing some three thousand francs is a more exacting purchase than a length of lawn or dress that costs three hundred. But know, oh foreign visitors from the Old World and the New (if ever this study of the physiology of the Invoice should be by you perused), that this selfsame comedy is played in haberdashers' shops over a barege at two francs or a printed muslin at four francs the yard.

And you, princess, or simple citizen's wife, whichever you may be, how should you distrust that good-looking, very young man, with those frank, innocent eyes, and a cheek like a peach covered with down? He is dressed almost as well as your—cousin, let us say. His tones are soft as the woolen stuffs which he spreads before you. There are three or four more of his like. One has dark eyes, a decided expression, and an imperial manner of saying, "This is what you wish"; another, that blue-eyed youth, diffident of manner and meek of speech, prompts the remark, "Poor boy! he was not born for business"; a third, with light auburn hair, and laughing tawny eyes, has all the lively humor, and activity, and gaiety of the South; while the fourth, he of the tawny red hair and fan-shaped beard, is rough as a communist, with his portentous cravat, his sternness, his dignity, and curt speech.

These varieties of shopmen, corresponding to the principal types of feminine customers, are arms, as it were, directed by the head, a stout personage with a full-blown countenance, a partially bald forehead, and a chest measure befitting a Ministerialist deputy. Occasionally this person wears the ribbon of the Legion of Honor in recognition of the manner in which he supports the dignity of the French drapers' wand. From the comfortable curves of his figure you can see that he has a wife and family, a country house, and an account with the Bank of France. He descends like a *deus ex machina*, whenever a tangled problem demands a swift solution. The feminine purchasers are surrounded on all sides with urbanity, youth, pleasant manners, smiles, and jests; the most seeming-simple human products of civilization are here, all sorted in shades to suit all tastes.

Just one word as to the natural effects of architecture, optical science, and house decoration; one short, decisive, terrible word, of history made on the spot. The work which contains this instructive page is sold at number 76 Rue de Richelieu, where above an elegant shop, all white and gold and crimson

velvet, there is an entresol into which the light pours straight from the Rue de Menars, as into a painter's studio—clean, clear, even daylight. What idler in the streets has not beheld the Persian, that Asiatic potentate, ruffling it above the door at the corner of the Rue de la Bourse and the Rue de Richelieu, with a message to deliver *urbi et orbi*, "Here I reign more tranquilly than at Lahore"? Perhaps but for this immortal analytical study, archaeologists might begin to puzzle their heads about him five hundred years hence, and set about writing quartos with plates (like M. Quatremere's work on Olympian Jove) to prove that Napoleon was something of a Sofi in the East before he became "Emperor of the French." Well, the wealthy shop laid siege to the poor little entresol; and after a bombardment with banknotes, entered and took possession. The Human Comedy gave way before the comedy of cashmeres. The Persian sacrificed a diamond or two from his crown to buy that so necessary daylight; for a ray of sunlight shows the play of the colors, brings out the charms of a shawl, and doubles its value; 'tis an irresistible light; literally, a golden ray. From this fact you may judge how far Paris shops are arranged with a view to effect.

But to return to the young assistants, to the beribboned man of forty whom the King of the French receives at his table, to the red-bearded head of the department with his autocrat's air. Week by week these *meritus Gaudissarts* are brought in contact with whims past counting; they know every vibration of the cashmere chord in the heart of woman. No one, be she lady or lorette, a young mother of a family, a respectable tradesman's wife, a woman of easy virtue, a duchess or a brazen-fronted ballet-dancer, an innocent young girl or a too innocent foreigner, can appear in the shop, but she is watched from the moment when she first lays her fingers upon the door-handle. Her measure is taken at a glance by seven or eight men that stand, in the windows, at the counter, by the door, in a corner, in the middle of the shop, meditating, to all appearance, on the joys of a bacchanalian Sunday holiday. As you look at them, you ask yourself involuntarily, "What can they be thinking about?" Well, in the space of one second, a woman's purse, wishes, intentions, and whims are ransacked more thoroughly than a traveling carriage at a frontier in an hour and three-quarters. Nothing is lost on these intelligent rogues. As they stand, solemn as noble fathers on the stage, they take in all the details of a fair customer's dress; an invisible speck of mud on a little shoe, an antiquated hat-brim, soiled or ill-judged bonnet-strings, the fashion of the dress, the age of a pair of gloves. They can tell whether the gown was cut by the intelligent scissors of a Victorine IV.; they know a modish gewgaw or a trinket from Froment-Meurice. Nothing, in short, which can reveal a woman's quality, fortune, or character passes unremarked.

Tremble before them. Never was the Sanhedrim of Gaudissarts, with their chief at their head, known to make a mistake. And, moreover, they communicate their conclusions to one another with telegraphic speed, in a

glance, a smile, the movement of a muscle, a twitch of the lip. If you watch them, you are reminded of the sudden outbreak of light along the Champs-Elysees at dusk; one gas-jet does not succeed another more swiftly than an idea flashes from one shopman's eyes to the next.

At once, if the lady is English, the dark, mysterious, portentous Gaudissart advances like a romantic character out of one of Byron's poems.

If she is a city madam, the oldest is put forward. He brings out a hundred shawls in fifteen minutes; he turns her head with colors and patterns; every shawl that he shows her is like a circle described by a kite wheeling round a hapless rabbit, till at the end of half an hour, when her head is swimming and she is utterly incapable of making a decision for herself, the good lady, meeting with a flattering response to all her ideas, refers the question to the assistant, who promptly leaves her on the horns of a dilemma between two equally irresistible shawls.

"This, madame, is very becoming—apple-green, the color of the season; still, fashions change; while as for this other black-and-white shawl (an opportunity not to be missed), you will never see the end of it, and it will go with any dress."

This is the A B C of the trade.

"You would not believe how much eloquence is wanted in that beastly line," the head Gaudissart of this particular establishment remarked quite lately to two acquaintances (Duronceret and Bixiou) who had come trusting in his judgment to buy a shawl. "Look here; you are artists and discreet, I can tell you about the governor's tricks, and of all the men I ever saw, he is the cleverest. I do not mean as a manufacturer, there M. Fritot is first; but as a salesman. He discovered the 'Selim shawl,' an absolutely unsalable article, yet we never bring it out but we sell it. We keep always a shawl worth five or six hundred francs in a cedar-wood box, perfectly plain outside, but lined with satin. It is one of the shawls that Selim sent to the Emperor Napoleon. It is our Imperial Guard; it is brought to the front whenever the day is almost lost; il se vend et ne meurt pas—it sells its life dearly time after time."

As he spoke, an Englishwoman stepped from her jobbed carriage and appeared in all the glory of that phlegmatic humor peculiar to Britain and to all its products which make believe they are alive. The apparition put you in mind of the Commandant's statue in Don Juan, it walked along, jerkily by fits and starts, in an awkward fashion invented in London, and cultivated in every family with patriotic care.

"An Englishwoman!" he continued for Bixiou's ear. "An Englishwoman is our Waterloo. There are women who slip through our fingers like eels; we

catch them on the staircase. There are lorettes who chaff us, we join in the laugh, we have a hold on them because we give credit. There are sphinx-like foreign ladies; we take a quantity of shawls to their houses, and arrive at an understanding by flattery; but an Englishwoman!—you might as well attack the bronze statue of Louis Quatorze! That sort of woman turns shopping into an occupation, an amusement. She quizzes us, forsooth!"

The romantic assistant came to the front.

"Does madame wish for real Indian shawls or French, something expensive or——"

"I will see." (Je veraie.)

"How much would madame propose——"

"I will see."

The shopman went in quest of shawls to spread upon the mantle-stand, giving his colleagues a significant glance. "What a bore!" he said plainly, with an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders.

"These are our best quality in Indian red, blue, and pale orange—all at ten thousand francs. Here are shawls at five thousand francs, and others at three."

The Englishwoman took up her eyeglass and looked round the room with gloomy indifference; then she submitted the three stands to the same scrutiny, and made no sign.

"Have you any more?" (Havaivod'hote?) demanded she.

"Yes, madame. But perhaps madame has not quite decided to take a shawl?"

"Oh, quite decided" (trei-deycidai).

The young man went in search of cheaper wares. These he spread out solemnly as if they were things of price, saying by his manner, "Pay attention to all this magnificence!"

"These are much more expensive," said he. "They have never been worn; they have come by courier direct from the manufacturers at Lahore."

"Oh! I see," said she; "they are much more like the thing I want."

The shopman kept his countenance in spite of inward irritation, which communicated itself to Duronceret and Bixiou. The Englishwoman, cool as a cucumber, appeared to rejoice in her phlegmatic humor.

"What price?" she asked, indicating a sky-blue shawl covered with a pattern of birds nestling in pagodas.

"Seven thousand francs."

She took it up, wrapped it about her shoulders, looked in the glass, and handed it back again.

"No, I do not like it at all." (Je n'ame pointe.)

A long quarter of an hour went by in trying on other shawls; to no purpose.

"This is all we have, madame," said the assistant, glancing at the master as he spoke.

"Madame is fastidious, like all persons of taste," said the head of the establishment, coming forward with that tradesman's suavity in which pomposity is agreeably blended with subservience. The Englishwoman took up her eyeglass and scanned the manufacturer from head to foot, unwilling to understand that the man before her was eligible for Parliament and dined at the Tuileries.

"I have only one shawl left," he continued, "but I never show it. It is not to everybody's taste; it is quite out of the common. I was thinking of giving it to my wife. We have had it in stock since 1805; it belonged to the Empress Josephine."

"Let me see it, monsieur."

"Go for it," said the master, turning to a shopman. "It is at my house."

"I should be very much pleased to see it," said the English lady.

This was a triumph. The splenetic dame was apparently on the point of going. She made as though she saw nothing but the shawls; but all the while she furtively watched the shopmen and the two customers, sheltering her eyes behind the rims of her eyeglasses.

"It cost sixty thousand francs in Turkey, madame."

"Oh!" (hau!)

"It is one of seven shawls which Selim sent, before his fall, to the Emperor Napoleon. The Empress Josephine, a Creole, as you know, my lady, and very capricious in her tastes, exchanged this one for another brought by the Turkish ambassador, and purchased by my predecessor; but I have never seen the money back. Our ladies in France are not rich enough; it is not as it is in England. The shawl is worth seven thousand francs; and taking interest and compound interest altogether, it makes up fourteen or fifteen thousand by now —"

"How does it make up?" asked the Englishwoman.

"Here it is, madame."

With precautions, which a custodian of the Dresden Grune Gewolbe might have admired, he took out an infinitesimal key and opened a square cedar-wood box. The Englishwoman was much impressed with its shape and plainness. From that box, lined with black satin, he drew a shawl worth about fifteen hundred francs, a black pattern on a golden-yellow ground, of which the startling color was only surpassed by the surprising efforts of the Indian imagination.

"Splendid," said the lady, in a mixture of French and English, "it is really handsome. Just my ideal" (ideol) "of a shawl; it is very magnificent." The rest was lost in a madonna's pose assumed for the purpose of displaying a pair of frigid eyes which she believed to be very fine.

"It was a great favorite with the Emperor Napoleon; he took——"

"A great favorite," repeated she with her English accent. Then she arranged the shawl about her shoulders and looked at herself in the glass. The proprietor took it to the light, gathered it up in his hands, smoothed it out, showed the gloss on it, played on it as Liszt plays on the pianoforte keys.

"It is very fine; beautiful, sweet!" said the lady, as composedly as possible.

Duronceret, Bixiou, and the shopmen exchanged amused glances. "The shawl is sold," they thought.

"Well, madame?" inquired the proprietor, as the Englishwoman appeared to be absorbed in meditations infinitely prolonged.

"Decidedly," said she; "I would rather have a carriage" (une voteure).

All the assistants, listening with silent rapt attention, started as one man, as if an electric shock had gone through them.

"I have a very handsome one, madame," said the proprietor with unshaken composure; "it belonged to a Russian princess, the Princess Narzicof; she left it with me in payment for goods received. If madame would like to see it, she would be astonished. It is new; it has not been in use altogether for ten days; there is not its like in Paris."

The shopmen's amazement was suppressed by profound admiration.

"I am quite willing."

"If madame will keep the shawl," suggested the proprietor, "she can try the effect in the carriage." And he went for his hat and gloves.

"How will this end?" asked the head assistant, as he watched his employer offer an arm to the English lady and go down with her to the jobbed brougham.

By this time the thing had come to be as exciting as the last chapter of a novel for Duronceret and Bixiou, even without the additional interest attached to all contests, however trifling, between England and France.

Twenty minutes later the proprietor returned.

"Go to the Hotel Lawson (here is the card, 'Mrs. Noswell'), and take an invoice that I will give you. There are six thousand francs to take."

"How did you do it?" asked Duronceret, bowing before the king of invoices.

"Oh, I saw what she was, an eccentric woman that loves to be conspicuous. As soon as she saw that every one stared at her, she said, 'Keep your carriage, monsieur, my mind is made up; I will take the shawl.' While M. Bigorneau (indicating the romantic-looking assistant) was serving, I watched her carefully; she kept one eye on you all the time to see what you thought of her; she was thinking more about you than of the shawls. Englishwomen are peculiar in their distaste (for one cannot call it taste); they do not know what they want; they make up their minds to be guided by circumstances at the time, and not by their own choice. I saw the kind of woman at once, tired of her husband, tired of her brats, regretfully virtuous, craving excitement, always posing as a weeping willow...."

These were his very words.

Which proves that in all other countries of the world a shopkeeper is a shopkeeper; while in France, and in Paris more particularly, he is a student from a College Royal, a well-read man with a taste for art, or angling, or the theatre, and consumed, it may be, with a desire to be M. Cunin-Gridaine's successor, or a colonel of the National Guard, or a member of the General Council of the Seine, or a referee in the Commercial Court.

"M. Adolphe," said the mistress of the establishment, addressing the slight fair-haired assistant, "go to the joiner and order another cedar-wood box."

"And now," remarked the shopman who had assisted Duronceret and Bixiou to choose a shawl for Mme. Schontz, "now we will go through our old stock to find another Selim shawl."

PARIS, November 1844.

UNCONSCIOUS COMEDIANS

Leon de Lora, our celebrated landscape painter, belongs to one of the

noblest families of the Roussillon (Spanish originally) which, although distinguished for the antiquity of its race, has been doomed for a century to the proverbial poverty of hidalgos. Coming, light-footed, to Paris from the department of the Eastern Pyrenees, with the sum of eleven francs in his pocket for all viaticum, he had in some degree forgotten the miseries and privations of his childhood and his family amid the other privations and miseries which are never lacking to “rapins,” whose whole fortune consists of intrepid vocation. Later, the cares of fame and those of success were other causes of forgetfulness.

If you have followed the capricious and meandering course of these studies, perhaps you will remember Mistigris, Schinner’s pupil, one of the heroes of “A Start in Life” (Scenes from Private Life), and his brief apparitions in other Scenes. In 1845, this landscape painter, emulator of the Hobbemas, Ruysdaels, and Lorraines, resembles no more the shabby, frisky rapin whom we then knew. Now an illustrious man, he owns a charming house in the rue de Berlin, not far from the hotel de Brambourg, where his friend Brideau lives, and quite close to the house of Schinner, his early master. He is a member of the Institute and an officer of the Legion of honor; he is thirty-six years old, has an income of twenty thousand francs from the Funds, his pictures sell for their weight in gold, and (what seems to him more extraordinary than the invitations he receives occasionally to court balls) his name and fame, mentioned so often for the last sixteen years by the press of Europe, has at last penetrated to the valley of the Eastern Pyrenees, where vegetate three veritable Loras: his father, his eldest brother, and an old paternal aunt, Mademoiselle Urraca y Lora.

In the maternal line the painter has no relation left except a cousin, the nephew of his mother, residing in a small manufacturing town in the department. This cousin was the first to bethink himself of Leon. But it was not until 1840 that Leon de Lora received a letter from Monsieur Sylvestre Palafox-Castal-Gazonal (called simply Gazonal) to which he replied that he was assuredly himself,—that is to say, the son of the late Leonie Gazonal, wife of Comte Fernand Didas y Lora.

During the summer of 1841 cousin Sylvestre Gazonal went to inform the illustrious unknown family of Lora that their little Leon had not gone to the Rio de la Plata, as they supposed, but was now one of the greatest geniuses of the French school of painting; a fact the family did not believe. The eldest son, Don Juan de Lora assured his cousin Gazonal that he was certainly the dupe of some Parisian wag.

Now the said Gazonal was intending to go to Paris to prosecute a lawsuit which the prefect of the Eastern Pyrenees had arbitrarily removed from the usual jurisdiction, transferring it to that of the Council of State. The worthy

provincial determined to investigate this act, and to ask his Parisian cousin the reason of such high-handed measures. It thus happened that Monsieur Gazonal came to Paris, took shabby lodgings in the rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, and was amazed to see the palace of his cousin in the rue de Berlin. Being told that the painter was then travelling in Italy, he renounced, for the time being, the intention of asking his advice, and doubted if he should ever find his maternal relationship acknowledged by so great a man.

During the years 1843 and 1844 Gazonal attended to his lawsuit. This suit concerned a question as to the current and level of a stream of water and the necessity of removing a dam, in which dispute the administration, instigated by the abutters on the river banks, had meddled. The removal of the dam threatened the existence of Gazonal's manufactory. In 1845, Gazonal considered his cause as wholly lost; the secretary of the Master of Petitions, charged with the duty of drawing up the report, had confided to him that the said report would assuredly be against him, and his own lawyer confirmed the statement. Gazonal, though commander of the National Guard in his own town and one of the most capable manufacturers of the department, found himself of so little account in Paris, and he was, moreover, so frightened by the costs of living and the dearness of even the most trifling things, that he kept himself, all this time, secluded in his shabby lodgings. The Southerner, deprived of his sun, execrated Paris, which he called a manufactory of rheumatism. As he added up the costs of his suit and his living, he vowed within himself to poison the prefect on his return, or to minotaurize him. In his moments of deepest sadness he killed the prefect outright; in gayer mood he contented himself with minotaurizing him.

One morning as he ate his breakfast and cursed his fate, he picked up a newspaper savagely. The following lines, ending an article, struck Gazonal as if the mysterious voice which speaks to gamblers before they win had sounded in his ear: "Our celebrated landscape painter, Leon de Lora, lately returned from Italy, will exhibit several pictures at the Salon; thus the exhibition promises, as we see, to be most brilliant." With the suddenness of action that distinguishes the sons of the sunny South, Gazonal sprang from his lodgings to the street, from the street to a street-cab, and drove to the rue de Berlin to find his cousin.

Leon de Lora sent word by a servant to his cousin Gazonal that he invited him to breakfast the next day at the Cafe de Paris, but he was now engaged in a matter which did not allow him to receive his cousin at the present moment. Gazonal, like a true Southerner, recounted all his troubles to the valet.

The next day at ten o'clock, Gazonal, much too well-dressed for the occasion (he had put on his bottle-blue coat with brass buttons, a frilled shirt, a white waistcoat and yellow gloves), awaited his amphitryon a full hour,

stamping his feet on the boulevard, after hearing from the master of the cafe that “these gentlemen” breakfasted habitually between eleven and twelve o’clock.

“Between eleven and half-past,” he said when he related his adventures to his cronies in the provinces, “two Parisians dressed in simple frock-coats, looking like nothing at all, called out when they saw me on the boulevard, ‘There’s our Gazonal!’”

The speaker was Bixiou, with whom Leon de Lora had armed himself to “bring out” his provincial cousin, in other words, to make him pose.

“‘Don’t be vexed, cousin, I’m at your service!’ cried out that little Leon, taking me in his arms,” related Gazonal on his return home. “The breakfast was splendid. I thought I was going blind when I saw the number of bits of gold it took to pay that bill. Those fellows must earn their weight in gold, for I saw my cousin give the waiter thirty sous—the price of a whole day’s work!”

During this monstrous breakfast—advisedly so called in view of six dozen Osten oysters, six cutlets a la Soubise, a chicken a la Marengo, lobster mayonnaise, green peas, a mushroom pasty, washed down with three bottles of Bordeaux, three bottles of Champagne, plus coffee and liqueurs, to say nothing of relishes—Gazonal was magnificent in his diatribes against Paris. The worthy manufacturer complained of the length of the four-pound bread-loaves, the height of the houses, the indifference of the passengers in the streets to one another, the cold, the rain, the cost of hackney-coaches, all of which and much else he bemoaned in so witty a manner that the two artists took a mighty fancy to cousin Gazonal, and made him relate his lawsuit from beginning to end.

“My lawsuit,” he said in his Southern accent and rolling his r’s, “is a very simple thing; they want my manufactory. I’ve employed here in Paris a dolt of a lawyer, to whom I give twenty francs every time he opens an eye, and he is always asleep. He’s a slug, who drives in his coach, while I go afoot and he splashes me. I see now I ought to have had a carriage! On the other hand, that Council of State are a pack of do-nothings, who leave their duties to little scamps every one of whom is bought up by our prefect. That’s my lawsuit! They want my manufactory! Well, they’ll get it! and they must manage the best they can with my workmen, a hundred of ‘em, who’ll make them sing another tune before they’ve done with them.”

“Two years. Ha! that meddling prefect! he shall pay dear for this; I’ll have his life if I have to give mine on the scaffold—”

“Which state councillor presides over your section?”

“A former newspaper man,—doesn’t pay ten sous in taxes,—his name is

Massol.”

The two Parisians exchanged glances.

“Who is the commissioner who is making the report?”

“Ha! that’s still more queer; he’s Master of Petitions, professor of something or other at the Sorbonne,—a fellow who writes things in reviews, and for whom I have the profoundest contempt.”

“Claude Vignon,” said Bixiou.

“Yes, that’s his name,” replied Gazonal. “Massol and Vignon—there you have Social Reason, in which there’s no reason at all.”

“There must be some way out of it,” said Leon de Lora. “You see, cousin, all things are possible in Paris for good as well as for evil, for the just as well as the unjust. There’s nothing that can’t be done, undone, and redone.”

“The devil take me if I stay ten days more in this hole of a place, the dullest in all France!”

The two cousins and Bixiou were at this moment walking from one end to the other of that sheet of asphalt on which, between the hours of one and three, it is difficult to avoid seeing some of the personages in honor of whom Fame puts one or the other of her trumpets to her lips. Formerly that locality was the Place Royale; next it was the Pont Neuf; in these days this privilege had been acquired by the Boulevard des Italiens.

“Paris,” said the painter to his cousin, “is an instrument on which we must know how to play; if we stand here ten minutes I’ll give you your first lesson. There, look!” he said, raising his cane and pointing to a couple who were just then coming out from the Passage de l’Opera.

“Goodness! who’s that?” asked Gazonal.

That was an old woman, in a bonnet which had spent six months in a show-case, a very pretentious gown and a faded tartan shawl, whose face had been buried twenty years of her life in a damp lodge, and whose swollen hand-bag betokened no better social position than that of an ex-portress. With her was a slim little girl, whose eyes, fringed with black lashes, had lost their innocence and showed great weariness; her face, of a pretty shape, was fresh and her hair abundant, her forehead charming but audacious, her bust thin,—in other words, an unripe fruit.

“That,” replied Bixiou, “is a rat tied to its mother.”

“A rat!—what’s that?”

“That particular rat,” said Leon, with a friendly nod to Mademoiselle

Ninette, “may perhaps win your suit for you.”

Gazonal bounded; but Bixiou had held him by the arm ever since they left the cafe, thinking perhaps that the flush on his face was rather vivid.

“That rat, who is just leaving a rehearsal at the Opera-house, is going home to eat a miserable dinner, and will return about three o’clock to dress, if she dances in the ballet this evening—as she will, to-day being Monday. This rat is already an old rat for she is thirteen years of age. Two years from now that creature may be worth sixty thousand francs; she will be all or nothing, a great danseuse or a marcheuse, a celebrated person or a vulgar courtesan. She has worked hard since she was eight years old. Such as you see her, she is worn out with fatigue; she exhausted her body this morning in the dancing-class, she is just leaving a rehearsal where the evolutions are as complicated as a Chinese puzzle; and she’ll go through them again to-night. The rat is one of the primary elements of the Opera; she is to the leading danseuse what a junior clerk is to a notary. The rat is—hope.”

“Who produces the rat?” asked Gazonal.

“Porters, paupers, actors, dancers,” replied Bixiou. “Only the lowest depths of poverty could force a child to subject her feet and joints to positive torture, to keep herself virtuous out of mere speculation until she is eighteen years of age, and to live with some horrible old crone like a beautiful plant in a dressing of manure. You shall see now a procession defiling before you, one after the other, of men of talent, little and great, artists in seed or flower, who are raising to the glory of France that every-day monument called the Opera, an assemblage of forces, wills, and forms of genius, nowhere collected as in Paris.

“I have already seen the Opera,” said Gazonal, with a self-sufficient air.

“Yes, from a three-francs-sixty-sous seat among the gods,” replied the landscape painter; “just as you have seen Paris in the rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, without knowing anything about it. What did they give at the Opera when you were there?”

“Guillaume Tell.”

“Well,” said Leon, “Matilde’s grand DUO must have delighted you. What do you suppose that charming singer did when she left the stage?”

“She—well, what?”

“She ate two bloody mutton-chops which her servant had ready for her.”

“Pooh! nonsense!”

“Malibran kept up on brandy—but it killed her in the end. Another thing!

You have seen the ballet, and you'll now see it defiling past you in its everyday clothes, without knowing that the face of your lawsuit depends on a pair of those legs."

"My lawsuit!"

"See, cousin, here comes what is called a *marcheuse*."

Leon pointed to one of those handsome creatures who at twenty-five years of age have lived sixty, and whose beauty is so real and so sure of being cultivated that they make no display of it. She was tall, and walked well, with the arrogant look of a dandy; her toilet was remarkable for its ruinous simplicity.

"That is *Carabine*," said Bixiou, who gave her, as did Leon, a slight nod to which she responded by a smile.

"There's another who may possibly get your prefect turned out."

"A *marcheuse*!—but what is that?"

"A *marcheuse* is a rat of great beauty whom her mother, real or fictitious, has sold as soon as it was clear she would become neither first, second, nor third *danseuse*, but who prefers the occupation of *coryphee* to any other, for the main reason that having spent her youth in that employment she is unfitted for any other. She has been rejected at the minor theatres where they want *danseuses*; she has not succeeded in the three towns where ballets are given; she has not had the money, or perhaps the desire to go to foreign countries—for perhaps you don't know that the great school of dancing in Paris supplies the whole world with male and female dancers. Thus a rat who becomes a *marcheuse*,—that is to say, an ordinary *figurante* in a ballet,—must have some solid attachment which keeps her in Paris: either a rich man she does not love or a poor man she loves too well. The one you have just seen pass will probably dress and redress three times this evening,—as a princess, a peasant-girl, a Tyrolese; by which she will earn about two hundred francs a month."

"She is better dressed than my prefect's wife."

"If you should go to her house," said Bixiou, "you would find there a chamber-maid, a cook, and a man-servant. She occupies a fine apartment in the rue Saint-Georges; in short, she is, in proportion to French fortunes of the present day compared with those of former times, a relic of the eighteenth century 'opera-girl.' *Carabine* is a power; at this moment she governs du Tillet, a banker who is very influential in the Chamber of Deputies."

"And above these two rounds in the ballet ladder what comes next?" asked Gazonal.

"Look!" said his cousin, pointing to an elegant caleche which was turning

at that moment from the boulevard into the rue Grange-Bateliere, “there’s one of the leading danseuses whose name on the posters attracts all Paris. That woman earns sixty thousand francs a year and lives like a princess; the price of your manufactory all told wouldn’t suffice to buy you the privilege of bidding her good-morning a dozen times.”

“Do you see,” said Bixiou, “that young man who is sitting on the front seat of her carriage? Well, he’s a viscount who bears a fine old name; he’s her first gentleman of the bed-chamber; does all her business with the newspapers; carries messages of peace or war in the morning to the director of the Opera; and takes charge of the applause which salutes her as she enters or leaves the stage.”

“Well, well, my good friends, that’s the finishing touch! I see now that I knew nothing of the ways of Paris.”

“At any rate, you are learning what you can see in ten minutes in the Passage de l’Opera,” said Bixiou. “Look there.”

Two persons, a man and a woman, came out of the Passage at that moment. The woman was neither plain nor pretty; but her dress had that distinction of style and cut and color which reveals an artist; the man had the air of a singer.

“There,” said Bixiou, “is a baritone and a second danseuse. The baritone is a man of immense talent, but a baritone voice being only an accessory to the other parts he scarcely earns what the second danseuse earns. The danseuse, who was celebrated before Taglioni and Ellsler appeared, has preserved to our day some of the old traditions of the character dance and pantomime. If the two others had not revealed in the art of dancing a poetry hitherto unperceived, she would have been the leading talent; as it is, she is reduced to the second line. But for all that, she fingers her thirty thousand francs a year, and her faithful friend is a peer of France, very influential in the Chamber. And see! there’s a danseuse of the third order, who, as a dancer, exists only through the omnipotence of a newspaper. If her engagement were not renewed the ministry would have one more journalistic enemy on its back. The corps de ballet is a great power; consequently it is considered better form in the upper ranks of dandyism and politics to have relations with dance than with song. In the stalls, where the habitues of the Opera congregate, the saying ‘Monsieur is all for singing’ is a form of ridicule.”

A short man with a common face, quite simply dressed, passed them at this moment.

“There’s the other half of the Opera receipts—that man who just went by; the tenor. There is no longer any play, poem, music, or representation of any kind possible unless some celebrated tenor can reach a certain note. The tenor

is love, he is the Voice that touches the heart, that vibrates in the soul, and his value is reckoned at a much higher salary than that of a minister. One hundred thousand francs for a throat, one hundred thousand francs for a couple of ankle-bones,—those are the two financial scourges of the Opera.”

“I am amazed,” said Gazonal, “at the hundreds of thousands of francs walking about here.”

“We’ll amaze you a good deal more, my dear cousin,” said Leon de Lora. “We’ll take Paris as an artist takes his violoncello, and show you how it is played,—in short, how people amuse themselves in Paris.”

“It is a kaleidoscope with a circumference of twenty miles,” cried Gazonal.

“Before piloting monsieur about, I have to see Gaillard,” said Bixiou.

“But we can use Gaillard for the cousin,” replied Leon.

“What sort of machine is that?” asked Gazonal.

“He isn’t a machine, he is a machinist. Gaillard is a friend of ours who has ended a miscellaneous career by becoming the editor of a newspaper, and whose character and finances are governed by movements comparable to those of the tides. Gaillard can contribute to make you win your lawsuit—”

“It is lost.”

“That’s the very moment to win it,” replied Bixiou.

When they reached Theodore Gaillard’s abode, which was now in the rue de Menars, the valet ushered the three friends into a boudoir and asked them to wait, as monsieur was in secret conference.

“With whom?” asked Bixiou.

“With a man who is selling him the incarceration of an unseizable debtor,” replied a handsome woman who now appeared in a charming morning toilet.

“In that case, my dear Suzanne,” said Bixiou, “I am certain we may go in.”

“Oh! what a beautiful creature!” said Gazonal.

“That is Madame Gaillard,” replied Leon de Lora, speaking low into his cousin’s ear. “She is the most humble-minded woman in Paris, for she had the public and has contented herself with a husband.”

“What is your will, messeigneurs?” said the facetious editor, seeing his two friends and imitating Frederic Lemaitre.

Theodore Gaillard, formerly a wit, had ended by becoming a stupid man in consequence of remaining constantly in one centre,—a moral phenomenon frequently to be observed in Paris. His principal method of conversation

consisted in sowing his speeches with sayings taken from plays then in vogue and pronounced in imitation of well-known actors.

“We have come to blague,” said Leon.

““Again, young men”” (Odry in the Saltimbaouques).

“Well, this time, we’ve got him, sure,” said Gaillard’s other visitor, apparently by way of conclusion.

“Are you sure of it, pere Fromenteau?” asked Gaillard. “This is the eleventh time you’ve caught him at night and missed him in the morning.”

“How could I help it? I never saw such a debtor! he’s a locomotive; goes to sleep in Paris and wakes up in the Seine-et-Oise. A safety lock I call him.” Seeing a smile on Gaillard’s face he added: “That’s a saying in our business. Pinch a man, means arrest him, lock him up. The criminal police have another term. Vidoeq said to his man, ‘You are served’; that’s funnier, for it means the guillotine.”

A nudge from Bixiou made Gazonal all eyes and ears.

“Does monsieur grease my paws?” asked Fromenteau of Gaillard, in a threatening but cool tone.

““A question that of fifty centimes”” (Les Saltimbaouques), replied the editor, taking out five francs and offering them to Fromenteau.

“And the rascallions?” said the man.

“What rascallions?” asked Gaillard.

“Those I employ,” replied Fromenteau calmly.

“Is there a lower depth still?” asked Bixiou.

“Yes, monsieur,” said the spy. “Some people give us information without knowing they do so, and without getting paid for it. I put fools and ninnies below rascallions.”

“They are often original, and witty, your rascallions!” said Leon.

“Do you belong to the police?” asked Gazonal, eyeing with uneasy curiosity the hard, impassible little man, who was dressed like the third clerk in a sheriff’s office.

“Which police do you mean?” asked Fromenteau.

“There are several?”

“As many as five,” replied the man. “Criminal, the head of which was Vidoeq; secret police, which keeps an eye on the other police, the head of it

being always unknown; political police,—that's Fouche's. Then there's the police of Foreign Affairs, and finally, the palace police (of the Emperor, Louis XVIII., etc.), always squabbling with that of the quai Malaquais. It came to an end under Monsieur Decazes. I belonged to the police of Louis XVIII.; I'd been in it since 1793, with that poor Contenson."

The four gentlemen looked at each other with one thought: "How many heads he must have brought to the scaffold!"

"Now-a-days, they are trying to get on without us. Folly!" continued the little man, who began to seem terrible. "Since 1830 they want honest men at the prefecture! I resigned, and I've made myself a small vocation by arresting for debt."

"He is the right arm of the commercial police," said Gaillard in Bixiou's ear, "but you can never find out who pays him most, the debtor or the creditor."

"The more rascally a business is, the more honor it needs. I'm for him who pays me best," continued Fromenteau addressing Gaillard. "You want to recover fifty thousand francs and you talk farthings to your means of action. Give me five hundred francs and your man is pinched to-night, for we spotted him yesterday!"

"Five hundred francs for you alone!" cried Theodore Gaillard.

"Lizette wants a shawl," said the spy, not a muscle of his face moving. "I call her Lizette because of Beranger."

"You have a Lizette, and you stay in such a business!" cried the virtuous Gazonal.

"It is amusing! People may cry up the pleasures of hunting and fishing as much as they like but to stalk a man in Paris is far better fun."

"Certainly," said Gazonal, reflectively, speaking to himself, "they must have great talent."

"If I were to enumerate the qualities which make a man remarkable in our vocation," said Fromenteau, whose rapid glance had enabled him to fathom Gazonal completely, "you'd think I was talking of a man of genius. First, we must have the eyes of a lynx; next, audacity (to tear into houses like bombs, accost the servants as if we knew them, and propose treachery—always agreed to); next, memory, sagacity, invention (to make schemes, conceived rapidly, never the same—for spying must be guided by the characters and habits of the persons spied upon; it is a gift of heaven); and, finally, agility, vigor. All these facilities and qualities, monsieur, are depicted on the door of the Gymnase-Amoros as Virtue. Well, we must have them all, under pain of losing the

salaries given us by the State, the rue de Jerusalem, or the minister of Commerce.”

“You certainly seem to me a remarkable man,” said Gazonal.

Fromenteau looked at the provincial without replying, without betraying the smallest sign of feeling, and departed, bowing to no one,—a trait of real genius.

“Well, cousin, you have now seen the police incarnate,” said Leon to Gazonal.

“It has something the effect of a dinner-pill,” said the worthy provincial, while Gaillard and Bixiou were talking together in a low voice.

“I’ll give you an answer to-night at Carabine’s,” said Gaillard aloud, re-seating himself at his desk without seeing or bowing to Gazonal.

“He is a rude fellow!” cried the Southerner as they left the room.

“His paper has twenty-two thousand subscribers,” said Leon de Lora. “He is one of the five great powers of the day, and he hasn’t, in the morning, the time to be polite. Now,” continued Leon, speaking to Bixiou, “if we are going to the Chamber to help him with his lawsuit let us take the longest way round.”

“Words said by great men are like silver-gilt spoons with the gilt washed off; by dint of repetition they lose their brilliancy,” said Bixiou. “Where shall we go?”

“Here, close by, to our hatter?” replied Leon.

“Bravo!” cried Bixiou. “If we keep on in this way, we shall have an amusing day of it.”

“Gazonal,” said Leon, “I shall make the man pose for you; but mind that you keep a serious face, like the king on a five-franc piece, for you are going to see a choice original, a man whose importance has turned his head. In these days, my dear fellow, under our new political dispensation, every human being tries to cover himself with glory, and most of them cover themselves with ridicule; hence a lot of living caricatures quite new to the world.”

“If everybody gets glory, who can be famous?” said Gazonal.

“Fame! none but fools want that,” replied Bixiou. “Your cousin wears the cross, but I’m the better dressed of the two, and it is I whom people are looking at.”

After this remark, which may explain why orators and other great statesmen no longer put the ribbon in their buttonholes when in Paris, Leon

showed Gazonal a sign, bearing, in golden letters, the illustrious name of “Vital, successor to Finot, manufacturer of hats” (no longer “hatter” as formerly), whose advertisements brought in more money to the newspapers than those of any half-dozen vendors of pills or sugarplums,—the author, moreover, of an essay on hats.

“My dear fellow,” said Bixiou to Gazonal, pointing to the splendors of the show-window, “Vital has forty thousand francs a year from invested property.”

“And he stays a hatter!” cried the Southerner, with a bound that almost broke the arm which Bixiou had linked in his.

“You shall see the man,” said Leon. “You need a hat and you shall have one gratis.”

“Is Monsieur Vital absent?” asked Bixiou, seeing no one behind the desk.

“Monsieur is correcting proof in his study,” replied the head clerk.

“Hein! what style!” said Leon to his cousin; then he added, addressing the clerk: “Could we speak to him without injury to his inspiration?”

“Let those gentlemen enter,” said a voice.

It was a bourgeois voice, the voice of one eligible to the Chamber, a powerful voice, a wealthy voice.

Vital deigned to show himself, dressed entirely in black cloth, with a splendid frilled shirt adorned with one diamond. The three friends observed a young and pretty woman sitting near the desk, working at some embroidery.

Vital is a man between thirty and forty years of age, with a natural joviality now repressed by ambitious ideas. He is blessed with that medium height which is the privilege of sound organizations. He is rather plump, and takes great pains with his person. His forehead is getting bald, but he uses that circumstance to give himself the air of a man consumed by thought. It is easy to see by the way his wife looks at him and listens to him that she believes in the genius and glory of her husband. Vital loves artists, not that he has any taste for art, but from fellowship; for he feels himself an artist, and makes this felt by disclaiming that title of nobility, and placing himself with constant premeditation at so great a distance from the arts that persons may be forced to say to him: “You have raised the construction of hats to the height of a science.”

“Have you at last discovered a hat to suit me?” asked Leon de Lora.

“Why, monsieur! in fifteen days?” replied Vital, “and for you! Two months would hardly suffice to invent a shape in keeping with your countenance. See, here is your lithographic portrait: I have studied it most carefully. I would not

give myself that trouble for a prince; but you are more; you are an artist, and you understand me.”

“This is one of our greatest inventors,” said Bixiou presenting Gazonal. “He might be as great as Jacquart if he would only let himself die. Our friend, a manufacturer of cloth, has discovered a method of replacing the indigo in old blue coats, and he wants to see you as another great phenomenon, because he has heard of your saying, ‘The hat is the man.’ That speech of yours enraptured him. Ah! Vital, you have faith; you believe in something; you have enthusiasm for your work.”

Vital scarcely listened; he grew pale with pleasure.

“Rise, my wife! Monsieur is a man of science.”

Madame Vital rose at her husband’s gesture. Gazonal bowed to her.

“Shall I have the honor to cover your head?” said Vital, with joyful obsequiousness.

“At the same price as mine,” interposed Bixiou.

“Of course, of course; I ask no other fee than to be quoted by you, messieurs—Monsieur needs a picturesque hat, something in the style of Monsieur Lousteau’s,” he continued, looking at Gazonal with the eye of a master. “I will consider it.”

“You give yourself a great deal of trouble,” said Gazonal.

“Oh! for a few persons only; for those who know how to appreciate the value of the pains I bestow upon them. Now, take the aristocracy—there is but one man there who has truly comprehended the Hat; and that is the Prince de Bethune. How is it that men do not consider, as women do, that the hat is the first thing that strikes the eye? And why have they never thought of changing the present system, which is, let us say it frankly, ignoble? Yes, ignoble; and yet a Frenchman is, of all nationalities, the one most persistent in this folly! I know the difficulties of a change, messieurs. I don’t speak of my own writings on the matter, which, as I think, approach it philosophically, but simply as a hatter. I have myself studied means to accentuate the infamous head-covering to which France is now enslaved until I succeed in overthrowing it.”

So saying he pointed to the hideous hat in vogue at the present day.

“Behold the enemy, messieurs,” he continued. “How is it that the wittiest and most satirical people on earth will consent to wear upon their heads a bit of stove-pipe?—as one of our great writers has called it. Here are some of the infections I have been able to give to those atrocious lines,” he added, pointing to a number of his creations. “But, although I am able to conform them to the character of each wearer—for, as you see, there are the hats of a doctor, a

grocer, a dandy, an artist, a fat man, a thin man, and so forth—the style itself remains horrible. Seize, I beg of you, my whole thought—”

He took up a hat, low-crowned and wide-brimmed.

“This,” he continued, “is the old hat of Claude Vignon, a great critic, in the days when he was a free man and a free-liver. He has lately come round to the ministry; they’ve made him a professor, a librarian; he writes now for the Debats only; they’ve appointed him Master of Petitions with a salary of sixteen thousand francs; he earns four thousand more out of his paper, and he is decorated. Well, now see his new hat.”

And Vital showed them a hat of a form and design which was truly expressive of the juste-milieu.

“You ought to have made him a Punch and Judy hat!” cried Gazonal.

“You are a man of genius, Monsieur Vital,” said Leon.

Vital bowed.

“Would you kindly tell me why the shops of your trade in Paris remain open late at night,—later than the cafes and the wineshops? That fact puzzles me very much,” said Gazonal.

“In the first place, our shops are much finer when lighted up than they are in the daytime; next, where we sell ten hats in the daytime we sell fifty at night.”

“Everything is queer in Paris,” said Leon.

“Thanks to my efforts and my successes,” said Vital, returning to the course of his self-laudation, “we are coming to hats with round headpieces. It is to that I tend!”

“What obstacle is there?” asked Gazonal.

“Cheapness, monsieur. In the first place, very handsome silk hats can be built for fifteen francs, which kills our business; for in Paris no one ever has fifteen francs in his pocket to spend on a hat. If a beaver hat costs thirty, it is still the same thing—When I say beaver, I ought to state that there are not ten pounds of beaver skins left in France. That article is worth three hundred and fifty francs a pound, and it takes an ounce for a hat. Besides, a beaver hat isn’t really worth anything; the skin takes a wretched dye; gets rusty in ten minutes under the sun, and heat puts it out of shape as well. What we call ‘beaver’ in the trade is neither more nor less than hare’s-skin. The best qualities are made from the back of the animal, the second from the sides, the third from the belly. I confide to you these trade secrets because you are men of honor. But whether a man has hare’s-skin or silk on his head, fifteen or thirty francs in

short, the problem is always insoluble. Hats must be paid for in cash, and that is why the hat remains what it is. The honor of vestural France will be saved on the day that gray hats with round crowns can be made to cost a hundred francs. We could then, like the tailors, give credit. To reach that result men must resolve to wear buckles, gold lace, plumes, and the brims lined with satin, as in the days of Louis XIII. and Louis XIV. Our business, which would then enter the domain of fancy, would increase tenfold. The markets of the world should belong to France; Paris will forever give the tone to women's fashions, and yet the hats which all Frenchmen wear to-day are made in every country on earth! There are ten millions of foreign money to be gained annually for France in that question—"

"A revolution!" cried Bixiou, pretending enthusiasm.

"Yes, and a radical one; for the form must be changed."

"You are happy after the manner of Luther in dreaming of reform," said Leon.

"Yes, monsieur. Ah! if a dozen or fifteen artists, capitalists, or dandies who set the tone would only have courage for twenty-four hours France would gain a splendid commercial battle! To succeed in this reform I would give my whole fortune! Yes, my sole ambition is to regenerate the hat and disappear."

"The man is colossal," said Gazonal, as they left the shop; "but I assure you that all your originals so far have a touch of the Southerner about them."

"Let us go this way," said Bixiou pointing to the rue Saint-Marc.

"Do you want to show me something else?"

"Yes; you shall see the usurers of rats, marchouses and great ladies,—a woman who possesses more terrible secrets than there are gowns hanging in her window," said Bixiou.

And he showed Gazonal one of those untidy shops which made an ugly stain in the midst of the dazzling show-windows of modern retail commerce. This shop had a front painted in 1820, which some bankrupt had doubtless left in a dilapidated condition. The color had disappeared beneath a double coating of dirt, the result of usage, and a thick layer of dust; the window-panes were filthy, the door-knob turned of itself, as door-knobs do in all places where people go out more quickly than they enter.

"What do you say of that? First cousin to Death, isn't she?" said Leon in Gazonal's ear, showing him, at the desk, a terrible individual. "Well, she calls herself Madame Nourrisson."

"Madame, how much is this guipure?" asked the manufacturer, intending to compete in liveliness with the two artists.

“To you, monsieur, who come from the country, it will be only three hundred francs,” she replied. Then, remarking in his manner a sort of eagerness peculiar to Southerners, she added, in a grieved tone, “It formerly belonged to that poor Princess de Lamballe.”

“What! do you dare exhibit it so near the palace?” cried Bixiou.

“Monsieur, they don’t believe in it,” she replied.

“Madame, we have not come to make purchases,” said Bixiou, with a show of frankness.

“So I see, monsieur,” returned Madame Nourrisson.

“We have several things to sell,” said the illustrious caricaturist. “I live close by, rue de Richelieu, 112, sixth floor. If you will come round there for a moment, you may perhaps make some good bargains.”

Ten minutes later Madame Nourrisson did in fact present herself at Bixiou’s lodgings, where by that time he had taken Leon and Gazonal. Madame Nourrisson found them all three as serious as authors whose collaboration does not meet with the success it deserves.

“Madame,” said the intrepid hoaxer, showing her a pair of women’s slippers, “these belonged formerly to the Empress Josephine.”

He felt it incumbent on him to return change for the Prince de Lamballe.

“Those!” she exclaimed; “they were made this year; look at the mark.”

“Don’t you perceive that the slippers are only by way of preface?” said Leon; “though, to be sure, they are usually the conclusion of a tale.”

“My friend here,” said Bixiou, motioning to Gazonal, “has an immense family interest in ascertaining whether a young lady of a good and wealthy house, whom he wishes to marry, has ever gone wrong.”

“How much will monsieur give for the information,” she asked, looking at Gazonal, who was no longer surprised by anything.

“One hundred francs,” he said.

“No, thank you!” she said with a grimace of refusal worthy of a macaw.

“Then say how much you want, my little Madame Nourrisson,” cried Bixiou catching her round the waist.

“In the first place, my dear gentlemen, I have never, since I’ve been in the business, found man or woman to haggle over happiness. Besides,” she said, letting a cold smile flicker on her lips, and enforcing it by an icy glance full of catlike distrust, “if it doesn’t concern your happiness, it concerns your fortune;

and at the height where I find you lodging no man haggles over a ‘dot’—Come,” she said, “out with it! What is it you want to know, my lambs?”

“About the Beunier family,” replied Bixiou, very glad to find out something in this indirect manner about persons in whom he was interested.

“Oh! as for that,” she said, “one louis is quite enough.”

“Why?”

“Because I hold all the mother’s jewels and she’s on tenter-hooks every three months, I can tell you! It is hard work for her to pay the interest on what I’ve lent her. Do you want to marry there, simpleton?” she added, addressing Gazonal; “then pay me forty francs and I’ll talk four hundred worth.”

Gazonal produced a forty-franc gold-piece, and Madame Nourrisson gave him startling details as to the secret penury of certain so-called fashionable women. This dealer in cast-off clothes, getting lively as she talked, pictured herself unconsciously while telling of others. Without betraying a single name or any secret, she made the three men shudder by proving to them how little so-called happiness existed in Paris that did not rest on the vacillating foundation of borrowed money. She possessed, laid away in her drawers, the secrets of departed grandmothers, living children, deceased husbands, dead granddaughters,—memories set in gold and diamonds. She learned appalling stories by making her clients talk of one another; tearing their secrets from them in moments of passion, of quarrels, of anger, and during those cooler negotiations which need a loan to settle difficulties.

“Why were you ever induced to take up such a business?” asked Gazonal.

“For my son’s sake,” she said naively.

Such women almost invariably justify their trade by alleging noble motives. Madame Nourrisson posed as having lost several opportunities for marriage, also three daughters who had gone to the bad, and all her illusions. She showed the pawn-tickets of the Mont-de-Piete to prove the risks her business ran; declared that she did not know how to meet the “end of the month”; she was robbed, she said,—robbed.

The two artists looked at each other on hearing that expression, which seemed exaggerated.

“Look here, my sons, I’ll show you how we are done. It is not about myself, but about my opposite neighbour, Madame Mahuchet, a ladies’ shoemaker. I had loaned money to a countess, a woman who has too many passions for her means,—lives in a fine apartment filled with splendid furniture, and makes, as we say, a devil of a show with her high and mighty airs. She owed three hundred francs to her shoemaker, and was giving a dinner

no later than yesterday. The shoemaker, who heard of the dinner from the cook, came to see me; we got excited, and she wanted to make a row; but I said: 'My dear Madame Mahuchet, what good will that do? you'll only get yourself hated. It is much better to obtain some security; and you save your bile.' She wouldn't listen, but go she would, and asked me to support her; so I went. 'Madame is not at home.'—'Up to that! we'll wait,' said Madame Mahuchet, 'if we have to stay all night,'—and down we camped in the antechamber. Presently the doors began to open and shut, and feet and voices came along. I felt badly. The guests were arriving for dinner. You can see the appearance it had. The countess sent her maid to coax Madame Mahuchet: 'Pay you to-morrow!' in short, all the snares! Nothing took. The countess, dressed to the nines, went to the dining-room. Mahuchet heard her and opened the door. Gracious! when she saw that table sparkling with silver, the covers to the dishes and the chandeliers all glittering like a jewel-case, didn't she go off like soda-water and fire her shot: 'When people spend the money of others they should be sober and not give dinner-parties. Think of your being a countess and owing three hundred francs to a poor shoemaker with seven children!' You can guess how she railed, for the Mahuchet hasn't any education. When the countess tried to make an excuse ('no money') Mahuchet screamed out: 'Look at all your fine silver, madame; pawn it and pay me!'—'Take some yourself,' said the countess quickly, gathering up a quantity of forks and spoons and putting them into her hands. Downstairs we rattled!—heavens! like success itself. No, before we got to the street Mahuchet began to cry—she's a kind woman! She turned back and restored the silver; for she now understood that countess' poverty—it was plated ware!"

"And she forked it over," said Leon, in whom the former Mistigris occasionally reappeared.

"Ah! my dear monsieur," said Madame Nourrisson, enlightened by the slang, "you are an artist, you write plays, you live in the rue du Helder and are friends with Madame Anatolia; you have habits that I know all about. Come, do you want some rarity in the grand style,—Carabine or Mousqueton, Malaga or Jenny Cadine?"

"Malaga, Carabine! nonsense!" cried Leon de Lora. "It was we who invented them."

"I assure you, my good Madame Nourrisson," said Bixiou, "that we only wanted the pleasure of making your acquaintance, and we should like very much to be informed as to how you ever came to slip into this business."

"I was confidential maid in the family of a marshal of France, Prince d'Ysembourg," she said, assuming the airs of a Dorine. "One morning, one of the most beplumed countesses of the Imperial court came to the house and

wanted to speak to the marshal privately. I put myself in the way of hearing what she said. She burst into tears and confided to that booby of a marshal—yes, the Conde of the Republic is a booby!—that her husband, who served under him in Spain, had left her without means, and if she didn't get a thousand francs, or two thousand, that day her children must go without food; she hadn't any for the morrow. The marshal, who was always ready to give in those days, took two notes of a thousand francs each out of his desk, and gave them to her. I saw that fine countess going down the staircase where she couldn't see me. She was laughing with a satisfaction that certainly wasn't motherly, so I slipped after her to the peristyle where I heard her say to the coachman, 'To Leroy's.' I ran round quickly to Leroy's, and there, sure enough, was the poor mother. I got there in time to see her order and pay for a fifteen-hundred-franc dress; you understand that in those days people were made to pay when they bought. The next day but one she appeared at an ambassador's ball, dressed to please all the world and some one in particular. That day I said to myself: 'I've got a career! When I'm no longer young I'll lend money to great ladies on their finery; for passion never calculates, it pays blindly.' If you want subjects for a vaudeville I can sell you plenty."

She departed after delivering this tirade, in which all the phases of her past life were outlined, leaving Gazonal as much horrified by her revelations as by the five yellow teeth she showed when she tried to smile.

"What shall we do now?" he asked presently.

"Make notes," replied Bixiou, whistling for his porter; "for I want some money, and I'll show you the use of porters. You think they only pull the gatecord; whereas they really pull poor devils like me and artists whom they take under their protection out of difficulties. Mine will get the Montyon prize one of these days."

Gazonal opened his eyes to their utmost roundness.

A man between two ages, partly a graybeard, partly an office-boy, but more oily within and without, hair greasy, stomach puffy, skin dull and moist, like that of the prior of a convent, always wearing list shoes, a blue coat, and grayish trousers, made his appearance.

"What is it, monsieur?" he said with an air which combined that of a protector and a subordinate.

"Ravenouillet—His name is Ravenouillet," said Bixiou turning to Gazonal. "Have you our notebook of bills due with you?"

Ravenouillet pulled out of his pocket the greasiest and stickiest book that Gazonal's eyes had ever beheld.

“Write down at three months’ sight two notes of five hundred francs each, which you will proceed to sign.”

And Bixiou handed over two notes already drawn to his order by Ravenouillet, which Ravenouillet immediately signed and inscribed on the greasy book, in which his wife also kept account of the debts of the other lodgers.

“Thanks, Ravenouillet,” said Bixiou. “And here’s a box at the Vaudeville for you.”

“Oh! my daughter will enjoy that,” said Ravenouillet, departing.

“There are seventy-one tenants in this house,” said Bixiou, “and the average of what they owe Ravenouillet is six thousand francs a month, eighteen thousand quarterly for money advanced, postage, etc., not counting the rents due. He is Providence—at thirty per cent, which we all pay him, though he never asks for anything.”

“Oh, Paris! Paris!” cried Gazonal.

“I’m going to take you now, cousin Gazonal,” said Bixiou, after indorsing the notes, “to see another comedian, who will play you a charming scene gratis.”

“Who is it?” said Gazonal.

“A usurer. As we go along I’ll tell you the debut of friend Ravenouillet in Paris.”

Passing in front of the porter’s lodge, Gazonal saw Mademoiselle Lucienne Ravenouillet holding in her hand a music score (she was a pupil of the Conservatoire), her father reading a newspaper, and Madame Ravenouillet with a package of letters to be carried up to the lodgers.

“Thanks, Monsieur Bixiou!” said the girl.

“She’s not a rat,” explained Leon to his cousin; “she is the larva of the grasshopper.”

“Here’s the history of Ravenouillet,” continued Bixiou, when the three friends reached the boulevard. “In 1831 Massol, the councillor of state who is dealing with your case, was a lawyer-journalist who at that time never thought of being more than Keeper of the Seals, and deigned to have King Louis-Philippe on his throne. Forgive his ambition, he’s from Carcassonne. One morning there entered to him a young rustic of his parts, who said: ‘You know me very well, Mossoo Massol; I’m your neighbour the grocer’s little boy; I’ve come from down there, for they tell me a fellow is certain to get a place if he comes to Paris.’ Hearing these words, Massol shuddered, and said to himself

that if he were weak enough to help this compatriot (to him utterly unknown) he should have the whole department prone upon him, his bell-rope would break, his valet leave him, he should have difficulties with his landlord about the stairway, and the other lodgers would assuredly complain of the smell of garlic pervading the house. Consequently, he looked at his visitor as a butcher looks at a sheep whose throat he intends to cut. But whether the rustic comprehended the stab of that glance or not, he went on to say (so Massol told me), 'I've as much ambition as other men. I will never go back to my native place, if I ever do go back, unless I am a rich man. Paris is the antechamber of Paradise. They tell me that you who write the newspapers can make, as they say, 'fine weather and foul'; that is, you have things all your own way, and it's enough to ask your help to get any place, no matter what, under government. Now, though I have faculties, like others, I know myself: I have no education; I don't know how to write, and that's a misfortune, for I have ideas. I am not seeking, therefore, to be your rival; I judge myself, and I know I couldn't succeed there. But, as you are so powerful, and as we are almost brothers, having played together in childhood, I count upon you to launch me in a career and to protect me—Oh, you must; I want a place, a place suitable to my capacity, to such as I am, a place where I can make my fortune.' Massol was just about to put his compatriot neck and crop out of the door with some brutal speech, when the rustic ended his appeal thus: 'I don't ask to enter the administration where people advance like tortoises—there's your cousin, who has stuck in one post for twenty years. No, I only want to make my debut.'—'On the stage?' asked Massol only too happy at that conclusion.—'No, though I have gesture enough, and figure, and memory. But there's too much wear and tear; I prefer the career of porter.' Massol kept his countenance, and replied: 'I think there's more wear and tear in that, but as your choice is made I'll see what I can do'; and he got him, as Ravenouillet says, his first 'cordon.'"

"I was the first master," said Leon, "to consider the race of porter. You'll find knaves of morality, mountebanks of vanity, modern sycophants, septembriseurs, disguised in philanthropy, inventors of palpitating questions, preaching the emancipation of the negroes, improvement of little thieves, benevolence to liberated convicts, and who, nevertheless, leave their porters in a condition worse than that of the Irish, in holes more dreadful than a mud cabin, and pay them less money to live on than the State pays to support a convict. I have done but one good action in my life, and that was to build my porter a decent lodge."

"Yes," said Bixiou, "if a man, having built a great cage divided into thousands of compartments like the cells of a beehive or the dens of a menagerie, constructed to receive human beings of all trades and all kinds, if that animal, calling itself the proprietor, should go to a man of science and say:

‘I want an individual of the bimanous species, able to live in holes full of old boots, pestiferous with rags, and ten feet square; I want him such that he can live there all his life, sleep there, eat there, be happy, get children as pretty as little cupids, work, toil, cultivate flowers, sing there, stay there, and live in darkness but see and know everything,’ most assuredly the man of science could never have invented the porter to oblige the proprietor; Paris, and Paris only could create him, or, if you choose, the devil.”

“Parisian creative powers have gone farther than that,” said Gazonal; “look at the workmen! You don’t know all the products of industry, though you exhibit them. Our toilers fight against the toilers of the continent by force of misery, as Napoleon fought Europe by force of regiments.”

“Here we are, at my friend the usurer’s,” said Bixiou. “His name is Vauvinet. One of the greatest mistakes made by writers who describe our manners and morals is to harp on old portraits. In these days all trades change. The grocer becomes a peer of France, artists capitalize their money, vaudevillists have incomes. A few rare beings may remain what they originally were, but professions in general have no longer either their special costume or their formerly fixed habits and ways. In the past we had Gobseck, Gigounet, Samonon,—the last of the Romans; to-day we rejoice in Vauvinet, the good-fellow usurer, the dandy who frequents the greenroom and the lorettes, and drives about in a little coupe with one horse. Take special note of my man, friend Gazonal, and you’ll see the comedy of money, the cold man who won’t give a penny, the hot man who snuffs a profit; listen to him attentively!”

All three went up to the second floor of a fine-looking house on the boulevard des Italiens, where they found themselves surrounded by the elegances then in fashion. A young man about twenty-eight years of age advanced to meet them with a smiling face, for he saw Leon de Lora first. Vauvinet held out his hand with apparent friendliness to Bixiou, and bowed coldly to Gazonal as he motioned them to enter his office, where bourgeois taste was visible beneath the artistic appearance of the furniture, and in spite of the statuettes and the thousand other little trifles applied to our little apartments by modern art, which has made itself as small as its patrons.

Vauvinet was dressed, like other young men of our day who go into business, with extreme elegance, which many of them regard as a species of prospectus.

“I’ve come for some money,” said Bixiou, laughing, and presenting his notes.

Vauvinet assumed a serious air, which made Gazonal smile, such difference was there between the smiling visage that received them and the

countenance of the money-lender recalled to business.

“My dear fellow,” said Vauvinet, looking at Bixiou, “I should certainly oblige you with the greatest pleasure, but I haven’t any money to loan at the present time.”

“Ah, bah!”

“No; I have given all I had to—you know who. That poor Lousteau went into partnership for the management of a theatre with an old vaudevillist who has great influence with the ministry, Ridal; and they came to me yesterday for thirty thousand francs. I’m cleaned out, and so completely that I was just in the act of sending to Cerizet for a hundred louis, when I lost at lansquenet this morning, at Jenny Cadine’s.”

“You must indeed me hard-up if you can’t oblige this poor Bixiou,” said Leon de Lora; “for he can be very sharp-tongued when he hasn’t a sou.”

“Well,” said Bixiou, “I could never say anything but good of Vauvinet; he’s full of goods.”

“My dear friend,” said Vauvinet, “if I had the money, I couldn’t possibly discount, even at fifty per cent, notes which are drawn by your porter. Ravenouillet’s paper isn’t in demand. He’s not a Rothschild. I warn you that his notes are worn thin; you had better invent another firm. Find an uncle. As for a friend who’ll sign notes for us there’s no such being to be found; the matter-of-factness of the present age is making awful progress.”

“I have a friend,” said Bixiou, motioning to Leon’s cousin. “Monsieur here; one of the most distinguished manufacturers of cloth in the South, named Gazonal. His hair is not very well dressed,” added Bixiou, looking at the touzled and luxuriant crop on the provincial’s head, “but I am going to take him to Marius, who will make him look less like a poodle-dog, an appearance so injurious to his credit, and to ours.”

“I don’t believe in Southern securities, be it said without offence to monsieur,” replied Vauvinet, with whom Gazonal was so entertained that he did not resent his insolence.

Gazonal, that extremely penetrating intellect, thought that the painter and Bixiou intended, by way of teaching him to know Paris, to make him pay the thousand francs for his breakfast at the Cafe de Paris, for this son of the Pyrenees had never got out of that armor of distrust which incloses the provincial in Paris.

“How can you expect me to have outstanding business at seven hundred miles from Paris?” added Vauvinet.

“Then you refuse me positively?” asked Bixiou.

“I have twenty francs, and no more,” said the young usurer.

“I’m sorry for you,” said the joker. “I thought I was worth a thousand francs.”

“You are worth two hundred thousand francs,” replied Vauvinet, “and sometimes you are worth your weight in gold, or at least your tongue is; but I tell you I haven’t a penny.”

“Very good,” replied Bixiou; “then we won’t say anything more about it. I had arranged for this evening, at Carabine’s, the thing you most wanted—you know?”

Vauvinet winked an eye at Bixiou; the wink that two jockeys give each other when they want to say: “Don’t try trickery.”

“Don’t you remember catching me round the waist as if I were a pretty woman,” said Bixiou, “and coaxing me with look and speech, and saying, ‘I’ll do anything for you if you’ll only get me shares at par in that railroad du Tillet and Nucingen have made an offer for?’ Well, old fellow, du Tillet and Nucingen are coming to Carabine’s to-night, where they will meet a number of political characters. You’ve lost a fine opportunity. Good-bye to you, old carrot.”

Bixiou rose, leaving Vauvinet apparently indifferent, but inwardly annoyed by the sense that he had committed a folly.

“One moment, my dear fellow,” said the money-lender. “Though I haven’t the money, I have credit. If your notes are worth nothing, I can keep them and give you notes in exchange. If we can come to an agreement about that railway stock we could share the profits, of course in due proportion and I’ll allow you that on—”

“No, no,” said Bixiou, “I want money in hand, and I must get those notes of Ravenouillet’s cashed.”

“Ravenouillet is sound,” said Vauvinet. “He puts money into the savings-bank; he is good security.”

“Better than you,” interposed Leon, “for HE doesn’t stipend lorettes; he hasn’t any rent to pay; and he never rushes into speculations which keep him dreading either a rise or fall.”

“You think you can laugh at me, great man,” returned Vauvinet, once more jovial and caressing; “you’ve turned La Fontaine’s fable of ‘Le Chene et le Roseau’ into an elixir—Come, Gubetta, my old accomplice,” he continued, seizing Bixiou round the waist, “you want money; well, I can borrow three thousand francs from my friend Cerizet instead of two; ‘Let us be friends, Cinna!’ hand over your colossal cabbages,—made to trick the public like a

gardener's catalogue. If I refused you it was because it is pretty hard on a man who can only do his poor little business by turning over his money, to have to keep your Ravenouillet notes in the drawer of his desk. Hard, hard, very hard!"

"What discount do you want?" asked Bixiou.

"Next to nothing," returned Vauvinet. "It will cost you a miserable fifty francs at the end of the quarter."

"As Emile Blondet used to say, you shall be my benefactor," replied Bixiou.

"Twenty per cent!" whispered Gazonal to Bixiou, who replied by a punch of his elbow in the provincial's oesophagus.

"Bless me!" said Vauvinet opening a drawer in his desk as if to put away the Ravenouillet notes, "here's an old bill of five hundred francs stuck in the drawer! I didn't know I was so rich. And here's a note payable at the end of the month for four hundred and fifty; Cerizet will take it without much diminution, and there's your sum in hand. But no nonsense, Bixiou! Hein? to-night, at Carabine's, will you swear to me—"

"Haven't we re-friended?" said Bixiou, pocketing the five-hundred-franc bill and the note for four hundred and fifty. "I give you my word of honor that you shall see du Tillet, and many other men who want to make their way—their railway—to-night at Carabine's."

Vauvinet conducted the three friends to the landing of the staircase, cajoling Bixiou on the way. Bixiou kept a grave face till he reached the outer door, listening to Gazonal, who tried to enlighten him on his late operation, and to prove to him that if Vauvinet's follower, Cerizet, took another twenty francs out of his four hundred and fifty, he was getting money at forty per cent.

When they reached the asphalt Bixiou frightened Gazonal by the laugh of a Parisian hoaxer,—that cold, mute laugh, a sort of labial north wind.

"The assignment of the contract for that railway is adjourned, positively, by the Chamber; I heard this yesterday from that marcheuse whom we smiled at just now. If I win five or six thousand francs at lansquenet to-night, why should I grudge sixty-five francs for the power to stake, hey?"

"Lansquenet is another of the thousand facets of Paris as it is," said Leon. "And therefore, cousin, I intend to present you to-night in the salon of a duchess,—a duchess of the rue Saint-Georges, where you will see the aristocracy of the lorettes, and probably be able to win your lawsuit. But it is quite impossible to present you anywhere with that mop of Pyrenean hair; you

look like a porcupine; and therefore we'll take you close by, Place de la Bourse, to Marius, another of our comedians—”

“Who is he?”

“I'll tell you his tale,” said Bixiou. “In the year 1800 a Toulousian named Cabot, a young wig-maker devoured by ambition, came to Paris, and set up a shop (I use your slang). This man of genius,—he now has an income of twenty-four thousand francs a year, and lives, retired from business, at Libourne,—well, he saw that so vulgar and ignoble a name as Cabot could never attain celebrity. Monsieur de Parny, whose hair he cut, gave him the name of Marius, infinitely superior, you perceive, to the Christian names of Armand and Hippolyte, behind which patronymics attacked by the Cabot evil are wont to hide. All the successors of Cabot have called themselves Marius. The present Marius is Marius V.; his real name is Mongin. This occurs in various other trades; for ‘Botot water,’ and for ‘Little-Virtue’ ink. Names become commercial property in Paris, and have ended by constituting a sort of ensign of nobility. The present Marius, who takes pupils, has created, he says, the leading school of hair-dressing in the world.

“I've seen, in coming through France,” said Gazonal, “a great many signs bearing the words: ‘Such a one, pupil of Marius.’”

“His pupils have to wash their hands after every head,” said Bixiou; “but Marius does not take them indifferently; they must have nice hands, and not be ill-looking. The most remarkable for manners, appearance, and elocution are sent out to dress heads; and they come back tired to death. Marius himself never turns out except for titled women; he drives his cabriolet and has a groom.”

“But, after all, he is nothing but a barber!” cried Gazonal, somewhat shocked.

“Barber!” exclaimed Bixiou; “please remember that he is captain in the National Guard, and is decorated for being the first to spring into a barricade in 1832.”

“And take care what you say to him: he is neither barber, hair-dresser, nor wig-maker; he is a director of salons for hair-dressing,” said Leon, as they went up a staircase with crystal balusters and mahogany rail, the steps of which were covered with a sumptuous carpet.

“Ah ca! mind you don't compromise us,” said Bixiou. “In the antechamber you'll see lacqueys who will take off your coat, and seize your hat, to brush them; and they'll accompany you to the door of the salons to open and shut it. I mention this, friend Gazonal,” added Bixiou, slyly, “lest you might think they were after your property, and cry ‘Stop thief!’”

“These salons,” said Leon, “are three boudoirs where the director has collected all the inventions of modern luxury: lambrequins to the windows, jardinieres everywhere, downy divans where each customer can wait his turn and read the newspapers. You might suppose, when you first go in, that five francs would be the least they’d get out of your waistcoat pocket; but nothing is ever extracted beyond ten sous for combing and frizzing your hair, or twenty sous for cutting and frizzing. Elegant dressing-tables stand about among the jardinieres; water is laid on to the washstands; enormous mirrors reproduce the whole figure. Therefore don’t look astonished. When the client (that’s the elegant word substituted by Marius for the ignoble word customer),—when the client appears at the door, Marius gives him a glance which appraises him: to Marius you are a head, more or less susceptible of occupying his mind. To him there’s no mankind; there are only heads.”

“We let you hear Marius on all the notes of his scale,” said Bixiou, “and you know how to follow our lead.”

As soon as Gazonal showed himself, the glance was given, and was evidently favourable, for Marius exclaimed: “Regulus! yours this head! Prepare it first with the little scissors.”

“Excuse me,” said Gazonal to the pupil, at a sign from Bixiou. “I prefer to have my head dressed by Monsieur Marius himself.”

Marius, much flattered by this demand, advanced, leaving the head on which he was engaged.

“I am with you in a moment; I am just finishing. Pray have no uneasiness, my pupil will prepare you; I alone will decide the cut.”

Marius, a slim little man, his hair frizzed like that of Rubini, and jet black, dressed also in black, with long white cuffs, and the frill of his shirt adorned with a diamond, now saw Bixiou, to whom he bowed as to a power the equal of his own.

“That is only an ordinary head,” he said to Leon, pointing to the person on whom he was operating,—“a grocer, or something of that kind. But if we devoted ourselves to art only, we should lie in Bicetre, mad!” and he turned back with an inimitable gesture to his client, after saying to Regulus, “Prepare monsieur, he is evidently an artist.”

“A journalist,” said Bixiou.

Hearing that word, Marius gave two or three strokes of the comb to the ordinary head and flung himself upon Gazonal, taking Regulus by the arm at the instant that the pupil was about to begin the operation of the little scissors.

“I will take charge of monsieur. Look, monsieur,” he said to the grocer,

“reflect yourself in the great mirror—if the mirror permits. Ossian!”

A lacquey entered, and took hold of the client to dress him.

“You pay at the desk, monsieur,” said Marius to the stupefied grocer, who was pulling out his purse.

“Is there any use, my dear fellow,” said Bixiou, “in going through this operation of the little scissors?”

“No head ever comes to me uncleaned,” replied the illustrious hair-dresser; “but for your sake, I will do that of monsieur myself, wholly. My pupils sketch out the scheme, or my strength would not hold out. Every one says as you do: ‘Dressed by Marius!’ Therefore, I can give only the finishing strokes. What journal is monsieur on?”

“If I were you, I should keep three or four Mariuses,” said Gazonal.

“Ah! monsieur, I see, is a feuilletonist,” said Marius. “Alas! in dressing heads which expose us to notice it is impossible. Excuse me!”

He left Gazonal to overlook Regulus, who was “preparing” a newly arrived head. Tapping his tongue against his palate, he made a disapproving noise, which may perhaps be written down as “titt, titt, titt.”

“There, there! good heavens! that cut is not square; your scissors are hacking it. Here! see there! Regulus, you are not clipping poodles; these are men—who have a character; if you continue to look at the ceiling instead of looking only between the glass and the head, you will dishonor my house.”

“You are stern, Monsieur Marius.”

“I owe them the secrets of my art.”

“Then it is an art?” said Gazonal.

Marius, affronted, looked at Gazonal in the glass, and stopped short, the scissors in one hand, the comb in the other.

“Monsieur, you speak like a—child! and yet, from your accent, I judge you are from the South, the birthplace of men of genius.”

“Yes, I know that hair-dressing requires some taste,” replied Gazonal.

“Hush, monsieur, hush! I expected better things of YOU. Let me tell you that a hair-dresser,—I don’t say a good hair-dresser, for a man is, or he is not, a hair-dresser,—a hair-dresser, I repeat, is more difficult to find than—what shall I say? than—I don’t know what—a minister?—(Sit still!) No, for you can’t judge by ministers, the streets are full of them. A Paganini? No, he’s not great enough. A hair-dresser, monsieur, a man who divines your soul and your habits, in order to dress your hair conformably with your being, that man has

all that constitutes a philosopher—and such he is. See the women! Women appreciate us; they know our value; our value to them is the conquest they make when they have placed their heads in our hands to attain a triumph. I say to you that a hair-dresser—the world does not know what he is. I who speak to you, I am very nearly all that there is of—without boasting I may say I am known—Still, I think more might be done—The execution, that is everything! Ah! if women would only give me *carte blanche*!—if I might only execute the ideas that come to me! I have, you see, a hell of imagination!—but the women don't fall in with it; they have their own plans; they'll stick their fingers or combs, as soon as my back is turned, through the most delicious edifices—which ought to be engraved and perpetuated; for our works, monsieur, last unfortunately but a few hours. A great hair-dresser, hey! he's like *Careme* and *Vestris* in their careers. (Head a little this way, if you please, *SO*; I attend particularly to front faces!) Our profession is ruined by bunglers who understand neither the epoch nor their art. There are dealers in wigs and essences who are enough to make one's hair stand on end; they care only to sell you bottles. It is pitiable! But that's business. Such poor wretches cut hair and dress it as they can. I, when I arrived in Paris from *Toulouse*, my ambition was to succeed the great *Marius*, to be a true *Marius*, to make that name illustrious. I alone, more than all the four others, I said to myself, 'I will conquer, or die.' (There! now sit straight, I am going to finish you.) I was the first to introduce elegance; I made my salons the object of curiosity. I disdain advertisements; what advertisements would have cost, monsieur, I put into elegance, charm, comfort. Next year I shall have a quartette in one of the salons to discourse music, and of the best. Yes, we ought to charm away the ennui of those whose heads we dress. I do not conceal from myself the annoyances to a client. (Look at yourself!) To have one's hair dressed is fatiguing, perhaps as much so as posing for one's portrait. *Monsieur* knows perhaps that the famous *Monsieur Humbolt* (I did the best I could with the few hairs *America* left him—science has this in common with savages, that she scalps her men clean), that illustrious savant, said that next to the suffering of going to be hanged was that of going to be painted; but I place the trial of having your head dressed before that of being painted, and so do certain women. Well, monsieur, my object is to make those who come here to have their hair cut or frizzed enjoy themselves. (Hold still, you have a tuft which must be conquered.) A Jew proposed to supply me with Italian cantatrices who, during the interludes, were to depilate the young men of forty; but they proved to be girls from the *Conservatoire*, and music-teachers from the *Rue Montmartre*. There you are, monsieur; your head is dressed as that of a man of talent ought to be. *Ossian*," he said to the lacquey in livery, "dress monsieur and show him out. Whose turn next?" he added proudly, gazing round upon the persons who awaited him.

“Don’t laugh, Gazonal,” said Leon as they reached the foot of the staircase, whence his eye could take in the whole of the Place de la Bourse. “I see over there one of our great men, and you shall compare his language with that of the barber, and tell me which of the two you think the most original.”

“Don’t laugh, Gazonal,” said Bixiou, mimicking Leon’s intonation. “What do you suppose is Marius’s business?”

“Hair-dressing.”

“He has obtained a monopoly of the sale of hair in bulk, as a certain dealer in comestibles who is going to sell us a pate for three francs has acquired a monopoly of the sale of truffles; he discounts the paper of that business; he loans money on pawn to clients when embarrassed; he gives annuities on lives; he gambles at the Bourse; he is a stockholder in all the fashion papers; and he sells, under the name of a certain chemist, an infamous drug which, for his share alone, gives him an income of thirty thousand francs, and costs in advertisements a hundred thousand yearly.”

“Is it possible!” cried Gazonal.

“Remember this,” said Bixiou, gravely. “In Paris there is no such thing as a small business; all things swell to large proportions, down to the sale of rags and matches. The lemonade-seller who, with his napkin under his arm, meets you as you enter his shop, may be worth his fifty thousand francs a year; the waiter in a restaurant is eligible for the Chamber; the man you take for a beggar in the street carries a hundred thousand francs worth of unset diamonds in his waistcoat pocket, and didn’t steal them either.”

The three inseparables (for one day at any rate) now crossed the Place de la Bourse in a way to intercept a man about forty years of age, wearing the Legion of honor, who was coming from the boulevard by way of the rue Neuve-Vivienne.

“Hey!” said Leon, “what are you pondering over, my dear Dubourdieu? Some fine symbolic composition? My dear cousin, I have the pleasure to present to you our illustrious painter Dubourdieu, not less celebrated for his humanitarian convictions than for his talents in art. Dubourdieu, my cousin Palafox.”

Dubourdieu, a small, pale man with melancholy blue eyes, bowed slightly to Gazonal, who bent low as before a man of genius.

“So you have elected Stidmann in place of—” he began.

“How could I help it? I wasn’t there,” replied Lora.

“You bring the Academy into disrepute,” continued the painter. “To choose such a man as that! I don’t wish to say ill of him, but he works at a trade.

Where are you dragging the first of arts,—the art those works are the most lasting; bringing nations to light of which the world has long lost even the memory; an art which crowns and consecrates great men? Yes, sculpture is priesthood; it preserves the ideas of an epoch, and you give its chair to a maker of toys and mantelpieces, an ornamentationist, a seller of bric-a-brac! Ah! as Chamfort said, one has to swallow a viper every morning to endure the life of Paris. Well, at any rate, Art remains to a few of us; they can't prevent us from cultivating it—”

“And besides, my dear fellow, you have a consolation which few artists possess; the future is yours,” said Bixiou. “When the world is converted to our doctrine, you will be at the head of your art; for you are putting into it ideas which people will understand—when they are generalized! In fifty years from now you'll be to all the world what you are to a few of us at this moment,—a great man. The only question is how to get along till then.”

“I have just finished,” resumed the great artist, his face expanding like that of a man whose hobby is stroked, “an allegorical figure of Harmony; and if you will come and see it, you will understand why it should have taken me two years to paint it. Everything is in it! At the first glance one divines the destiny of the globe. A queen holds a shepherd's crook in her hand,—symbolical of the advancement of the races useful to mankind; she wears on her head the cap of Liberty; her breasts are sixfold, as the Egyptians carved them—for the Egyptians foresaw Fourier; her feet are resting on two clasped hands which embrace a globe,—symbol of the brotherhood of all human races; she tramples cannon under foot to signify the abolition of war; and I have tried to make her face express the serenity of triumphant agriculture. I have also placed beside her an enormous curled cabbage, which, according to our master, is an image of Harmony. Ah! it is not the least among Fourier's titles to veneration that he has restored the gift of thought to plants; he has bound all creation in one by the signification of things to one another, and by their special language. A hundred years hence this earth will be much larger than it is now.”

“And how will that, monsieur, come to pass?” said Gazonal, stupefied at hearing a man outside of a lunatic asylum talk in this way.

“Through the extending of production. If men will apply The System, it will not be impossible to act upon the stars.”

“What would become of painting in that case?” asked Gazonal.

“It would be magnified.”

“Would our eyes be magnified too?” said Gazonal, looking at his two friends significantly.

“Man will return to what he was before he became degenerate; our six-foot men will then be dwarfs.”

“Is your picture finished?” asked Leon.

“Entirely finished,” replied Dubourdieu. “I have tried to see Hiclar, and get him to compose a symphony for it; I wish that while viewing my picture the public should hear music a la Beethoven to develop its ideas and bring them within range of the intellect by two arts. Ah! if the government would only lend me one of the galleries of the Louvre!”

“I’ll mention it, if you want me to do so; you should never neglect an opportunity to strike minds.”

“Ah! my friends are preparing articles; but I am afraid they’ll go too far.”

“Pooh!” said Bixiou, “they can’t go as far as the future.”

Dubourdieu looked askance at Bixiou, and continued his way.

“Why, he’s mad,” said Gazonal; “he is following the moon in her courses.”

“His skill is masterly,” said Leon, “and he knows his art, but Fourierism has killed him. You have just seen, cousin, one of the effects of ambition upon artists. Too often, in Paris, from a desire to reach more rapidly than by natural ways the celebrity which to them is fortune, artists borrow the wings of circumstance, they think they make themselves of more importance as men of a specialty, the supporters of some ‘system’; and they fancy they can transform a clique into the public. One is a republican, another Saint-Simonian; this one aristocrat, that one Catholic, others juste-milieu, middle ages, or German, as they choose for their purpose. Now, though opinions do not give talent, they always spoil what talent there is; and the poor fellow whom you have just seen is a proof thereof. An artist’s opinion ought to be: Faith in his art, in his work; and his only way of success is toil when nature has given him the sacred fire.”

“Let us get away,” said Bixiou. “Leon is beginning to moralize.”

“But that man was sincere,” said Gazonal, still stupefied.

“Perfectly sincere,” replied Bixiou; “as sincere as the king of barbers just now.”

“He is mad!” repeated Gazonal.

“And he is not the first man driven man by Fourier’s ideas,” said Bixiou. “You don’t know anything about Paris. Ask it for a hundred thousand francs to realize an idea that will be useful to humanity,—the steam-engine for instance,—and you’ll die, like Salomon de Caux, at Bicetre; but if the money is wanted for some paradoxical absurdity, Parisians will annihilate themselves and their

fortune for it. It is the same with systems as it is with material things. Utterly impracticable newspapers have consumed millions within the last fifteen years. What makes your lawsuit so hard to win, is that you have right on your side, and on that of the prefect there are (so you suppose) secret motives.”

“Do you think that a man of intellect having once understood the nature of Paris could live elsewhere?” said Leon to his cousin.

“Suppose we take Gazonal to old Mere Fontaine?” said Bixiou, making a sign to the driver of a citadine to draw up; “it will be a step from the real to the fantastic. Driver, Vieille rue du Temple.”

And all three were presently rolling in the direction of the Marais.

“What are you taking me to see now?” asked Gazonal.

“The proof of what Bixiou told you,” replied Leon; “we shall show you a woman who makes twenty thousand francs a year by working a fantastic idea.”

“A fortune-teller,” said Bixiou, interpreting the look of the Southerner as a question. “Madame Fontaine is thought, by those who seek to pry into the future, to be wiser in her wisdom than Mademoiselle Lenormand.”

“She must be very rich,” remarked Gazonal.

“She was the victim of her own idea, as long as lotteries existed,” said Bixiou; “for in Paris there are no great gains without corresponding outlays. The strongest heads are liable to crack there, as if to give vent to their steam. Those who make much money have vices or fancies,—no doubt to establish an equilibrium.”

“And now that the lottery is abolished?” asked Gazonal.

“Oh! now she has a nephew for whom she is hoarding.”

When they reached the Vieille rue du Temple the three friends entered one of the oldest houses in that street and passed up a shaking staircase, the steps of which, caked with mud, led them in semi-darkness, and through a stench peculiar to houses on an alley, to the third story, where they beheld a door which painting alone could render; literature would have to spend too many nights in suitably describing it.

An old woman, in keeping with that door, and who might have been that door in human guise, ushered the three friends into a room which served as an ante-chamber, where, in spite of the warm atmosphere which fills the streets of Paris, they felt the icy chill of crypts about them. A damp air came from an inner courtyard which resembled a huge air-shaft; the light that entered was gray, and the sill of the window was filled with pots of sickly plants. In this

room, which had a coating of some greasy, fuliginous substance, the furniture, the chairs, the table, were all most abject. The floor tiles oozed like a water-cooler. In short, every accessory was in keeping with the fearful old woman of the hooked nose, ghastly face, and decent rags who directed the “consulters” to sit down, informing them that only one at a time could be admitted to Madame.

Gazonal, who played the intrepid, entered bravely, and found himself in presence of one of those women forgotten by Death, who no doubt forgets them intentionally in order to leave some samples of Itself among the living. He saw before him a withered face in which shone fixed gray eyes of wearying immobility; a flattened nose, smeared with snuff; knuckle-bones well set up by muscles that, under pretence of being hands, played nonchalantly with a pack of cards, like some machine the movement of which is about to run down. The body, a species of broom-handle decently covered with clothes, enjoyed the advantages of death and did not stir. Above the forehead rose a coif of black velvet. Madame Fontaine, for it was really a woman, had a black hen on her right hand and a huge toad, named Astaroth, on her left. Gazonal did not at first perceive them.

The toad, of surprising dimensions, was less alarming in himself than through the effect of two topaz eyes, large as a ten-sous piece, which cast forth vivid gleams. It was impossible to endure that look. The toad is a creature as yet unexplained. Perhaps the whole animal creation, including man, is comprised in it; for, as Lassailly said, the toad exists indefinitely; and, as we know, it is of all created animals the one whose marriage lasts the longest.

The black hen had a cage about two feet distant from the table, covered with a green cloth, to which she came along a plank which formed a sort of drawbridge between the cage and the table.

When the woman, the least real of the creatures in this Hoffmanesque den, said to Gazonal: “Cut!” the worthy provincial shuddered involuntarily. That which renders these beings so formidable is the importance of what we want to know. People go to them, as they know very well, to buy hope.

The den of the sibyl was much darker than the antechamber; the color of the walls could scarcely be distinguished. The ceiling, blackened by smoke, far from reflecting the little light that came from a window obstructed by pale and sickly vegetations, absorbed the greater part of it; but the table where the sorceress sat received what there was of this half-light fully. The table, the chair of the woman, and that on which Gazonal was seated, formed the entire furniture of the little room, which was divided at one end by a sort of loft where Madame Fontaine probably slept. Gazonal heard through a half-opened door the bubbling murmur of a soup-pot. That kitchen sound, accompanied by

a composite odor in which the effluvia of a sink predominated, mingled incongruous ideas of the necessities of actual life with those of supernatural power. Disgust entered into curiosity.

Gazonal observed one stair of pine wood, the lowest no doubt of the staircase which led to the loft. He took in these minor details at a glance, with a sense of nausea. It was all quite otherwise alarming than the romantic tales and scenes of German drama lead one to expect; here was suffocating actuality. The air diffused a sort of dizzy heaviness, the dim light rasped the nerves. When the Southerner, impelled by a species of self-assertion, gazed firmly at the toad, he felt a sort of emetic heat at the pit of his stomach, and was conscious of a terror like that a criminal might feel in presence of a gendarme. He endeavoured to brace himself by looking at Madame Fontaine; but there he encountered two almost white eyes, the motionless and icy pupils of which were absolutely intolerable to him. The silence became terrifying.

“Which do you wish, monsieur, the five-franc fortune, the ten-franc fortune, or the grand game?”

“The five-franc fortune is dear enough,” replied the Southerner, making powerful efforts not to yield to the influence of the surroundings in which he found himself.

At the moment when Gazonal was thus endeavouring to collect himself, a voice—an infernal voice—made him bound in his chair; the black hen clucked.

“Go back, my daughter, go back; monsieur chooses to spend only five francs.”

The hen seemed to understand her mistress, for, after coming within a foot of the cards, she turned and resumed her former place.

“What flower do you like best?” asked the old woman, in a voice hoarsened by the phlegm which seemed to rise and fall incessantly in her bronchial tubes.

“The rose.”

“What color are you fond of?”

“Blue.”

“What animal do you prefer?”

“The horse. Why these questions?” he asked.

“Man derives his form from his anterior states,” she said sententiously. “Hence his instincts; and his instincts rule his destiny. What food do you like best to eat,—fish, game, cereals, butcher’s meat, sweet things, vegetables, or fruits?”

“Game.”

“In what month were you born?”

“September.”

“Put out your hand.”

Madame Fontaine looked attentively at the lines of the hand that was shown to her. It was all done seriously, with no pretence of sorcery; on the contrary, with the simplicity a notary might have shown when asking the intentions of a client about a deed. Presently she shuffled the cards, and asked Gazonal to cut them, and then to make three packs of them himself. After which she took the packs, spread them out before her, and examined them as a gambler examines the thirty-six numbers at roulette before he risks his stake. Gazonal's bones were freezing; he seemed not to know where he was; but his amazement grew greater and greater when this hideous old woman in a green bonnet, stout and squat, whose false front was frizzed into points of interrogation, proceeded, in a thick voice, to relate to him all the particular circumstances, even the most secret, of his past life: she told him his tastes, his habits, his character; the thoughts of his childhood; everything that had influenced his life; a marriage broken off, why, with whom, the exact description of the woman he had loved; and, finally, the place he came from, his lawsuit, etc.

Gazonal at first thought it was a hoax prepared by his companions; but the absolute impossibility of such a conspiracy appeared to him almost as soon as the idea itself, and he sat speechless before that truly infernal power, the incarnation of which borrowed from humanity a form which the imagination of painters and poets has throughout all ages regarded as the most awful of created things,—namely, a toothless, hideous, wheezing hag, with cold lips, flattened nose, and whitish eyes. The pupils of those eyes had brightened, through them rushed a ray,—was it from the depths of the future or from hell?

Gazonal asked, interrupting the old creature, of what use the toad and the hen were to her.

“They predict the future. The consulter himself throws grain upon the cards; Bilouche comes and pecks it. Astaroth crawls over the cards to get the food the client holds for him, and those two wonderful intelligences are never mistaken. Will you see them at work?—you will then know your future. The cost is a hundred francs.”

Gazonal, horrified by the gaze of Astaroth, rushed into the antechamber, after bowing to the terrible old woman. He was moist from head to foot, as if under the incubation of some evil spirit.

“Let us get away!” he said to the two artists. “Did you ever consult that sorceress?”

“I never do anything important without getting Astaroth’s opinion,” said Leon, “and I am always the better for it.”

“I’m expecting the virtuous fortune which Bilouche has promised me,” said Bixiou.

“I’ve a fever,” cried Gazonal. “If I believed what you say I should have to believe in sorcery, in some supernatural power.”

“It may be only natural,” said Bixiou. “One-third of all the lorettes, one-fourth of all the statesmen, and one-half of all artists consult Madame Fontaine; and I know a minister to whom she is an Egeria.”

“Did she tell you about your future?” asked Leon.

“No; I had enough of her about my past. But,” added Gazonal, struck by a sudden thought, “if she can, by the help of those dreadful collaborators, predict the future, how came she to lose in the lottery?”

“Ah! you put your finger on one of the greatest mysteries of occult science,” replied Leon. “The moment that the species of inward mirror on which the past or the future is reflected to their minds become clouded by the breath of a personal feeling, by an idea foreign to the purpose of the power they are exerting, sorcerers and sorceresses can see nothing; just as an artist who blurs art with political combinations and systems loses his genius. Not long ago, a man endowed with the gift of divining by cards, a rival to Madame Fontaine, became addicted to vicious practices, and being unable to tell his own fate from the cards, was arrested, tried, and condemned at the court of assizes. Madame Fontaine, who predicts the future eight times out of ten, was never able to know if she would win or lose in a lottery.”

“It is the same thing in magnetism,” remarked Bixiou. “A man can’t magnetize himself.”

“Heavens! now we come to magnetism!” cried Gazonal. “Ah ca! do you know everything?”

“Friend Gazonal,” replied Bixiou, gravely, “to be able to laugh at everything one must know everything. As for me, I’ve been in Paris since my childhood; I’ve lived, by means of my pencil, on its follies and absurdities, at the rate of five caricatures a month. Consequently, I often laugh at ideas in which I have faith.”

“Come, let us get to something else,” said Leon. “We’ll go to the Chamber and settle the cousin’s affair.”

“This,” said Bixiou, imitating Odry in “Les Funambules,” “is high comedy, for we will make the first orator we meet pose for us, and you shall see that in those halls of legislation, as elsewhere, the Parisian language has but two tones,—Self-interest, Vanity.”

As they got into their citadine, Leon saw in a rapidly driven cabriolet a man to whom he made a sign that he had something to say to him.

“There’s Publicola Masson,” said Leon to Bixiou. “I’m going to ask for a sitting this evening at five o’clock, after the Chamber. The cousin shall then see the most curious of all the originals.”

“Who is he?” asked Gazonal, while Leon went to speak to Publicola Masson.

“An artist-pedicure,” replied Bixiou, “author of a ‘Treatise on Corporistics,’ who cuts your corns by subscription, and who, if the Republications triumph for six months, will assuredly become immortal.”

“Drives his carriage!” ejaculated Gazonal.

“But, my good Gazonal, it is only millionaires who have time to go afoot in Paris.”

“To the Chamber!” cried Leon to the coachman, getting back into the carriage.

“Which, monsieur?”

“Deputies,” replied Leon, exchanging a smile with Bixiou.

“Paris begins to confound me,” said Gazonal.

“To make you see its immensity,—moral, political, and literary,—we are now proceeding like the Roman cicerone, who shows you in Saint Peter’s the thumb of the statue you took to be life-size, and the thumb proves to be a foot long. You haven’t yet measured so much as a great toe of Paris.”

“And remark, cousin Gazonal, that we take things as they come; we haven’t selected.”

“This evening you shall sup as they feasted at Belshazzar’s; and there you shall see our Paris, our own particular Paris, playing lansquenet, and risking a hundred thousand francs at a throw without winking.”

A quarter of an hour later the citadine stopped at the foot of the steps going up to the Chamber of Deputies, at that end of the Pont de la Concorde which leads to discord.

“I thought the Chamber unapproachable?” said the provincial, surprised to find himself in the great lobby.

“That depends,” replied Bixiou; “materially speaking, it costs thirty sous for a citadine to approach it; politically, you have to spend rather more. The swallows thought, so a poet says, that the Arc de Triomphe was erected for them; we artists think that this public building was built for us,—to compensate for the stupidities of the Theatre-Francais and make us laugh; but the comedians on this stage are much more expensive; and they don’t give us every day the value of our money.”

“So this is the Chamber!” cried Gazonal, as he paced the great hall in which there were then about a dozen persons, and looked around him with an air which Bixiou noted down in his memory and reproduced in one of the famous caricatures with which he rivalled Gavarni.

Leon went to speak to one of the ushers who go and come continually between this hall and the hall of sessions, with which it communicates by a passage in which are stationed the stenographers of the “Moniteur” and persons attached to the Chamber.

“As for the minister,” replied the usher to Leon as Gazonal approached them, “he is there, but I don’t know if Monsieur Giraud has come. I’ll see.”

As the usher opened one side of the double door through which none but deputies, ministers, or messengers from the king are allowed to pass, Gazonal saw a man come out who seemed still young, although he was really forty-eight years old, and to whom the usher evidently indicated Leon de Lora.

“Ha! you here!” he exclaimed, shaking hands with both Bixiou and Lora. “Scamps! what are you doing in the sanctuary of the laws?”

“Parbleu! we’ve come to learn how to blague,” said Bixiou. “We might get rusty if we didn’t.”

“Let us go into the garden,” said the young man, not observing that Gazonal belonged to the party.

Seeing that this new-comer was well-dressed, in black, the provincial did not know in which political category to place him; but he followed the others into the garden contiguous to the hall which follows the line of the quai Napoleon. Once in the garden the *ci-devant* young man gave way to a peal of laughter which he seemed to have been repressing since he entered the lobby.

“What is it?” asked Leon de Lora.

“My dear friend, to prove the sincerity of the constitutional government we are forced to tell the most frightful lies with incredible self-possession. But as for me, I’m freakish; some days I can lie like a prospectus; other days I can’t be serious. This is one of my hilarious days. Now, at this moment, the prime minister, being summoned by the Opposition to make known a certain

diplomatic secret, is going through his paces in the tribune. Being an honest man who never lies on his own account, he whispered to me as he mounted the breach: 'Heaven knows what I shall say to them.' A mad desire to laugh overcame me, and as one mustn't laugh on the ministerial bench I rushed out, for my youth does come back to me most unseasonably at times."

"At last," cried Gazonal, "I've found an honest man in Paris! You must be a very superior man," he added, looking at the stranger.

"Ah ca! who is this gentleman?" said the ci-devant young man, examining Gazonal.

"My cousin," said Leon, hastily. "I'll answer for his silence and his honor as for my own. It is on his account we have come here now; he has a case before the administration which depends on your ministry. His prefect evidently wants to ruin him, and we have come to see you in order to prevent the Council of State from ratifying a great injustice."

"Who brings up the case?"

"Massol."

"Good."

"And our friends Giraud and Claude Vignon are on the committee," said Bixiou.

"Say just a word to them," urged Leon; "tell them to come to-night to Carabine's, where du Tillet gives a fete apropos of railways,—they are plundering more than ever on the roads."

"Ah ca! but isn't your cousin from the Pyrenees?" asked the young man, now become serious.

"Yes," replied Gazonal.

"And you did not vote for us in the last elections?" said the statesman, looking hard at Gazonal.

"No; but what you have just said in my hearing has bribed me; on the word of a commandant of the National Guard I'll have your candidate elected—"

"Very good; will you guarantee your cousin?" asked the young man, turning to Leon.

"We are forming him," said Bixiou, in a tone irresistibly comic.

"Well, I'll see about it," said the young man, leaving his friends and rushing precipitately back to the Chamber.

"Who is that?" asked Gazonal.

“The Comte de Rastignac; the minister of the department in which your affair is brought up.”

“A minister! Isn’t a minister anything more than that?”

“He is an old friend of ours. He now has three hundred thousand francs a year; he’s a peer of France; the king has made him a count; he married Nucingen’s daughter; and he is one of the two or three statesmen produced by the revolution of July. But his fame and his power bore him sometimes, and he comes down to laugh with us.”

“Ah ca! cousin; why didn’t you tell us you belonged to the Opposition?” asked Leon, seizing Gazonal by the arm. “How stupid of you! One deputy more or less to Right or Left and your bed is made.”

“We are all for the Others down my way.”

“Let ‘em go,” said Bixiou, with a facetious look; “they have Providence on their side, and Providence will bring them back without you and in spite of themselves. A manufacturer ought to be a fatalist.”

“What luck! There’s Maxime, with Canalis and Giraud,” said Leon.

“Come along, friend Gazonal, the promised actors are mustering on the stage,” said Bixiou.

And all three advanced to the above-named personages, who seemed to be sauntering along with nothing to do.

“Have they turned you out, or why are you idling about in this way?” said Bixiou to Giraud.

“No, while they are voting by secret ballot we have come out for a little air,” replied Giraud.

“How did the prime minister pull through?”

“He was magnificent!” said Canalis.

“Magnificent!” repeated Maxime.

“Magnificent!” cried Giraud.

“So! so! Right, Left, and Centre are unanimous!”

“All with a different meaning,” observed Maxime de Trailles.

Maxime was the ministerial deputy.

“Yes,” said Canalis, laughing.

Though Canalis had already been a minister, he was at this moment tending toward the Right.

“Ah! but you had a fine triumph just now,” said Maxime to Canalis; “it was you who forced the minister into the tribune.”

“And made him lie like a charlatan,” returned Canalis.

“A worthy victory,” said the honest Giraud. “In his place what would you have done?”

“I should have lied.”

“It isn’t called lying,” said Maxime de Trailles; “it is called protecting the crown.”

So saying, he led Canalis away to a little distance.

“That’s a great orator,” said Leon to Giraud, pointing to Canalis.

“Yes and no,” replied the councillor of state. “A fine bass voice, and sonorous, but more of an artist in words than an orator. In short, he’s a fine instrument but he isn’t music, consequently he has not, and he never will have, the ear of the Chamber; in no case will he ever be master of the situation.”

Canalis and Maxime were returning toward the little group as Giraud, deputy of the Left Centre, pronounced this verdict. Maxime took Giraud by the arm and led him off, probably to make the same confidence he had just made Canalis.

“What an honest, upright fellow that is,” said Leon to Canalis, nodding towards Giraud.

“One of those upright fellows who kill administrators,” replied Canalis.

“Do you think him a good orator?”

“Yes and no,” replied Canalis; “he is wordy; he’s long-winded, a plodder in argument, and a good logician; but he doesn’t understand the higher logic, that of events and circumstances; consequently he has never had, and never will have, the ear of the Chamber.”

At the moment when Canalis uttered this judgment on Giraud, the latter was returning with Maxime to the group; and forgetting the presence of a stranger whose discretion was not known to them like that of Leon and Bixiou, he took Canalis by the hand in a very significant manner.

“Well,” he said, “I consent to what Monsieur de Trailles proposes. I’ll put the question to you in the Chamber, but I shall do it with great severity.”

“Then we shall have the house with us, for a man of your weight and your eloquence is certain to have the ear of the Chamber,” said Canalis. “I’ll reply to you; but I shall do it sharply, to crush you.”

“You could bring about a change of the cabinet, for on such ground you can do what you like with the Chamber, and be master of the situation.”

“Maxime has trapped them both,” said Leon to his cousin; “that fellow is like a fish in water among the intrigues of the Chamber.”

“Who is he?” asked Gazonal.

“An ex-scoundrel who is now in a fair way to become an ambassador,” replied Bixiou.

“Giraud!” said Leon to the councillor of state, “don’t leave the Chamber without asking Rastignac what he promised to tell you about a suit you are to render a decision on two days hence. It concerns my cousin here; I’ll go and see you to-morrow morning early about it.”

The three friends followed the three deputies, at a distance, into the lobby.

“Cousin, look at those two men,” said Leon, pointing out to him a former minister and the leader of the Left Centre. “Those are two men who really have ‘the ear of the Chamber,’ and who are called in jest ministers of the department of the Opposition. They have the ear of the Chamber so completely that they are always pulling it.”

“It is four o’clock,” said Bixiou, “let us go back to the rue de Berlin.”

“Yes; you’ve now seen the heart of the government, cousin, and you must next be shown the ascarides, the taenia, the intestinal worm,—the republican, since I must needs name him,” said Leon.

When the three friends were once more packed into their hackney-coach, Gazonal looked at his cousin and Bixiou like a man who had a mind to launch a flood of oratorical and Southern bile upon the elements.

“I distrusted with all my might this great hussy of a town,” he rolled out in Southern accents; “but since this morning I despise her! The poor little province you think so petty is an honest girl; but Paris is a prostitute, a greedy, lying comedian; and I am very thankful not to be robbed of my skin in it.”

“The day is not over yet,” said Bixiou, sententiously, winking at Leon.

“And why do you complain in that stupid way,” said Leon, “of a prostitution to which you will owe the winning of your lawsuit? Do you think you are more virtuous than we, less of a comedian, less greedy, less liable to fall under some temptation, less conceited than those we have been making dance for you like puppets?”

“Try me!”

“Poor lad!” said Leon, shrugging his shoulders, “haven’t you already

promised Rastignac your electoral influence?"

"Yes, because he was the only one who ridiculed himself."

"Poor lad!" repeated Bixiou, "why slight me, who am always ridiculing myself? You are like a pug-dog barking at a tiger. Ha! if you saw us really ridiculing a man, you'd see that we can drive a sane man mad."

This conversation brought Gazonal back to his cousin's house, where the sight of luxury silenced him, and put an end to the discussion. Too late he perceived that Bixiou had been making him pose.

At half-past five o'clock, the moment when Leon de Lora was making his evening toilet to the great wonderment of Gazonal, who counted the thousand and one superfluities of his cousin, and admired the solemnity of the valet as he performed his functions, the "pedicure of monsieur" was announced, and Publicola Masson, a little man fifty years of age, made his appearance, laid a small box of instruments on the floor, and sat down on a small chair opposite to Leon, after bowing to Gazonal and Bixiou.

"How are matters going with you?" asked Leon, delivering to Publicola one of his feet, already washed and prepared by the valet.

"I am forced to take two pupils,—two young fellows who, despairing of fortune, have quitted surgery for corporistics; they were actually dying of hunger; and yet they are full of talent."

"I'm not asking you about pedestrial affairs, I want to know how you are getting on politically."

Masson gave a glance at Gazonal, more eloquent than any species of question.

"Oh! you can speak out, that's my cousin; in a way he belongs to you; he thinks himself legitimist."

"Well! we are coming along, we are advancing! In five years from now Europe will be with us. Switzerland and Italy are fermenting finely; and when the occasion comes we are all ready. Here, in Paris, we have fifty thousand armed men, without counting two hundred thousand citizens who haven't a penny to live upon."

"Pooh," said Leon, "how about the fortifications?"

"Pie-crust; we can swallow them," replied Masson.

"In the first place, we sha'n't let the cannon in, and, in the second, we've got a little machine more powerful than all the forts in the world,—a machine, due to a doctor, which cured more people during the short time we worked it than the doctors ever killed."

“How you talk!” exclaimed Gazonal, whose flesh began to creep at Publicola’s air and manner.

“Ha! that’s the thing we rely on! We follow Saint-Just and Robespierre; but we’ll do better than they; they were timid, and you see what came of it; an emperor! the elder branch! the younger branch! The Montagnards didn’t lop the social tree enough.”

“Ah ca! you, who will be, they tell me, consul, or something of that kind, tribune perhaps, be good enough to remember,” said Bixiou, “that I have asked your protection for the last dozen years.”

“No harm shall happen to you; we shall need wags, and you can take the place of Barere,” replied the corn-doctor.

“And I?” said Leon.

“Ah, you! you are my client, and that will save you; for genius is an odious privilege, to which too much is accorded in France; we shall be forced to annihilate some of our greatest men in order to teach others to be simple citizens.”

The corn-cutter spoke with a semi-serious, semi-jesting air that made Gazonal shudder.

“So,” he said, “there’s to be no more religion?”

“No more religion of the State,” replied the pedicure, emphasizing the last words; “every man will have his own. It is very fortunate that the government is just now endowing convents; they’ll provide our funds. Everything, you see, conspires in our favour. Those who pity the peoples, who clamor on behalf of proletarians, who write works against the Jesuits, who busy themselves about the amelioration of no matter what,—the communists, the humanitarians, the philanthropists, you understand,—all these people are our advanced guard. While we are storing gunpowder, they are making the tinder which the spark of a single circumstance will ignite.”

“But what do you expect will make the happiness of France?” cried Gazonal.

“Equality of citizens and cheapness of provisions. We mean that there will be no persons lacking anything, no millionaires, no suckers of blood and victims.”

“That’s it!—maximum and minimum,” said Gazonal.

“You’ve said it,” replied the corn-cutter, decisively.

“No more manufacturers?” asked Gazonal.

“The state will manufacture. We shall all be the usufructuaries of France; each will have his ration as on board ship; and all the world will work according to their capacity.”

“Ah!” said Gazonal, “and while awaiting the time when you can cut off the heads of aristocrats—”

“I cut their nails,” said the radical republican, putting up his tools and finishing the jest himself.

Then he bowed very politely and went away.

“Can this be possible in 1845?” cried Gazonal.

“If there were time we could show you,” said his cousin, “all the personages of 1793, and you could talk with them. You have just seen Marat; well! we know Fouquier-Tinville, Collot d’Herbois, Robespierre, Chabot, Fouché, Barras; there is even a magnificent Madame Roland.”

“Well, the tragic is not lacking in your play,” said Gazonal.

“It is six o’clock. Before we take you to see Odry in ‘Les Saltimbanques’ to-night,” said Leon to Gazonal, “we must go and pay a visit to Madame Cadine,—an actress whom your committee-man Massol cultivates, and to whom you must therefore pay the most assiduous court.”

“And as it is all important that you conciliate that power, I am going to give you a few instructions,” said Bixiou. “Do you employ workwomen in your manufactory?”

“Of course I do,” replied Gazonal.

“That’s all I want to know,” resumed Bixiou. “You are not married, and you are a great—”

“Yes!” cried Gazonal, “you’ve guessed my strong point, I’m a great lover of women.”

“Well, then! if you will execute the little manoeuvre which I am about to prescribe for you, you will taste, without spending a farthing, the sweets to be found in the good graces of an actress.”

When they reached the rue de la Victoire where the celebrated actress lived, Bixiou, who meditated a trick upon the distrustful provincial, had scarcely finished teaching him his role; but Gazonal was quick, as we shall see, to take a hint.

The three friends went up to the second floor of a rather handsome house, and found Madame Jenny Cadine just finishing dinner, for she played that night in an afterpiece at the Gymnase. Having presented Gazonal to this great

power, Leon and Bixiou, in order to leave them alone together, made the excuse of looking at a piece of furniture in another room; but before leaving, Bixiou had whispered in the actress's ear: "He is Leon's cousin, a manufacturer, enormously rich; he wants to win a suit before the Council of State against his prefect, and he thinks it wise to fascinate you in order to get Massol on his side."

All Paris knows the beauty of that young actress, and will therefore understand the stupefaction of the Southerner on seeing her. Though she had received him at first rather coldly, he became the object of her good graces before they had been many minutes alone together.

"How strange!" said Gazonal, looking round him disdainfully on the furniture of the salon, the door of which his accomplices had left half open, "that a woman like you should be allowed to live in such an ill-furnished apartment."

"Ah, yes, indeed! but how can I help it? Massol is not rich; I am hoping he will be made a minister."

"What a happy man!" cried Gazonal, heaving the sigh of a provincial.

"Good!" thought she. "I shall have new furniture, and get the better of Carabine."

"Well, my dear!" said Leon, returning, "you'll be sure to come to Carabine's to-night, won't you?—supper and lansquenet."

"Will monsieur be there?" said Jenny Cadine, looking artlessly and graciously at Gazonal.

"Yes, madame," replied the countryman, dazzled by such rapid success.

"But Massol will be there," said Bixiou.

"Well, what of that?" returned Jenny. "Come, we must part, my treasures; I must go to the theatre."

Gazonal gave his hand to the actress, and led her to the citadine which was waiting for her; as he did so he pressed hers with such ardor that Jenny Cadine exclaimed, shaking her fingers: "Take care! I haven't any others."

When the three friends got back into their own vehicle, Gazonal endeavoured to seize Bixiou round the waist, crying out: "She bites! You're a fine rascal!"

"So women say," replied Bixiou.

At half-past eleven o'clock, after the play, another citadine took the trio to the house of Mademoiselle Seraphine Sinet, better known under the name of

Carabine,—one of those pseudonyms which famous lorettes take, or which are given to them; a name which, in this instance, may have referred to the pigeons she had killed.

Carabine, now become almost a necessity for the banker du Tillet, deputy of the Left, lived in a charming house in the rue Saint-Georges. In Paris there are many houses the destination of which never varies; and the one we now speak of had already seen seven careers of courtesans. A broker had brought there, about the year 1827, Suzanne du Val-Noble, afterwards Madame Gaillard. In that house the famous Esther caused the Baron de Nucingen to commit the only follies of his life. Florine, and subsequently, a person now called in jest “the late Madame Schontz,” had scintillated there in turn. Bored by his wife, du Tillet bought this modern little house, and there installed the celebrated Carabine, whose lively wit and cavalier manners and shameless brilliancy were a counterpoise to the dulness of domestic life, and the toils of finance and politics.

Whether du Tillet or Carabine were at home or not at home, supper was served, and splendidly served, for ten persons every day. Artists, men of letters, journalists, and the habitués of the house supped there when they pleased. After supper they gambled. More than one member of both Chambers came there to buy what Paris pays for by its weight in gold,—namely, the amusement of intercourse with anomalous untrammelled women, those meteors of the Parisian firmament who are so difficult to class. There wit reigns; for all can be said, and all is said. Carabine, a rival of the no less celebrated Malaga, had finally inherited the salon of Florine, now Madame Raoul Nathan, and of Madame Schontz, now wife of Chief-Justice du Ronceret.

As he entered, Gazonal made one remark only, but that remark was both legitimate and legitimist: “It is finer than the Tuileries!” The satins, velvets, brocades, the gold, the objects of art that swarmed there, so filled the eyes of the wary provincial that at first he did not see Madame Jenny Cadine, in a toilet intended to inspire respect, who, concealed behind Carabine, watched his entrance observingly, while conversing with others.

“My dear child,” said Leon to Carabine, “this is my cousin, a manufacturer, who descended upon me from the Pyrenees this morning. He knows nothing of Paris, and he wants Massol to help him in a suit he has before the Council of State. We have therefore taken the liberty to bring him—his name is Gazonal—to supper, entreating you to leave him his full senses.”

“That’s as monsieur pleases; wine is dear,” said Carabine, looking Gazonal over from head to foot, and thinking him in no way remarkable.

Gazonal, bewildered by the toilets, the lights, the gilding, the chatter of the

various groups whom he thought to be discussing him, could only manage to stammer out the words: “Madame—madame—is—very good.”

“What do you manufacture?” said the mistress of the house, laughing.

“Say laces and offer her some guipure,” whispered Bixiou in Gazonal’s ear.

“La-ces,” said Gazonal, perceiving that he would have to pay for his supper. “It will give me the greatest pleasure to offer you a dress—a scarf—a mantilla of my make.”

“Ah, three things! Well, you are nicer than you look to be,” returned Carabine.

“Paris has caught me!” thought Gazonal, now perceiving Jenny Cadine, and going up to her.

“And I,” said the actress, “what am I to have?”

“All I possess,” replied Gazonal, thinking that to offer all was to give nothing.

Massol, Claude Vignon, du Tillet, Maxime de Trailles, Nucingen, du Bruel, Malaga, Monsieur and Madame Gaillard, Vauvinet, and a crowd of other personages now entered.

After a conversation with the manufacturer on the subject of his suit, Massol, without making any promises, told him that the report was not yet written, and that citizens could always rely on the knowledge and the independence of the Council of State. Receiving that cold and dignified response, Gazonal, in despair, thought it necessary to set about seducing the charming Jenny, with whom he was by this time in love. Leon de Lora and Bixiou left their victim in the hands of that most roguish and frolicsome member of the anomalous society,—for Jenny Cadine is the sole rival in that respect of the famous Dejazet.

At the supper-table, where Gazonal was fascinated by a silver service made by the modern Benvenuto Cellini, Froment-Meurice, the contents of which were worthy of the container, his mischievous friends were careful to sit at some distance from him; but they followed with cautious eye the manoeuvres of the clever actress, who, being attracted by the insidious hope of getting her furniture renewed, was playing her cards to take the provincial home with her. No sheep upon the day of the Fete-Dieu ever more meekly allowed his little Saint John to lead him along than Gazonal as he followed his siren.

Three days later, Leon and Bixiou, who had not seen Gazonal since that evening, went to his lodgings about two in the afternoon.

“Well, cousin,” said Leon, “the Council of State has decided in favour of your suit.”

“Maybe, but it is useless now, cousin,” said Gazonal, lifting a melancholy eye to his two friends. “I’ve become a republican.”

“What does that mean?” asked Leon.

“I haven’t anything left; not even enough to pay my lawyer,” replied Gazonal. “Madame Jenny Cadine has got notes of hand out of me to the amount of more money than all the property I own—”

“The fact is Cadine is rather dear; but—”

“Oh, but I didn’t get anything for my money,” said Gazonal. “What a woman! Well, I’ll own the provinces are not a match for Paris; I shall retire to La Trappe.”

“Good!” said Bixiou, “now you are reasonable. Come, recognize the majesty of the capital.”

“And of capital,” added Leon, holding out to Gazonal his notes of hand.

Gazonal gazed at the papers with a stupefied air.

“You can’t say now that we don’t understand the duties of hospitality; haven’t we educated you, saved you from poverty, feasted you, and amused you?” said Bixiou.

“And fooled you,” added Leon, making the gesture of gamins to express the action of picking pockets.

FERRAGUS, CHIEF OF THE DEVORANTS

CHAPTER I. MADAME JULES

Certain streets in Paris are as degraded as a man covered with infamy; also, there are noble streets, streets simply respectable, young streets on the morality of which the public has not yet formed an opinion; also cut-throat streets, streets older than the age of the oldest dowagers, estimable streets, streets always clean, streets always dirty, working, laboring, and mercantile streets. In short, the streets of Paris have every human quality, and impress us, by what we must call their physiognomy, with certain ideas against which we are defenceless. There are, for instance, streets of a bad neighborhood in which you could not be induced to live, and streets where you would willingly

take up your abode. Some streets, like the rue Montmartre, have a charming head, and end in a fish's tail. The rue de la Paix is a wide street, a fine street, yet it wakens none of those gracefully noble thoughts which come to an impressible mind in the middle of the rue Royale, and it certainly lacks the majesty which reigns in the Place Vendome.

If you walk the streets of the Ile Saint-Louis, do not seek the reason of the nervous sadness that lays hold upon you save in the solitude of the spot, the gloomy look of the houses, and the great deserted mansions. This island, the ghost of fermiers-generaux, is the Venice of Paris. The Place de la Bourse is voluble, busy, degraded; it is never fine except by moonlight at two in the morning. By day it is Paris epitomized; by night it is a dream of Greece. The rue Traversiere-Saint-Honore—is not that a villainous street? Look at the wretched little houses with two windows on a floor, where vice, crime, and misery abound. The narrow streets exposed to the north, where the sun never comes more than three or four times a year, are the cut-throat streets which murder with impunity; the authorities of the present day do not meddle with them; but in former times the Parliament might perhaps have summoned the lieutenant of police and reprimanded him for the state of things; and it would, at least, have issued some decree against such streets, as it once did against the wigs of the Chapter of Beauvais. And yet Monsieur Benoiston de Chateauneuf has proved that the mortality of these streets is double that of others! To sum up such theories by a single example: is not the rue Fromentin both murderous and profligate!

These observations, incomprehensible out of Paris, will doubtless be understood by musing men of thought and poesy and pleasure, who know, while rambling about Paris, how to harvest the mass of floating interests which may be gathered at all hours within her walls; to them Paris is the most delightful and varied of monsters: here, a pretty woman; farther on, a haggard pauper; here, new as the coinage of a new reign; there, in this corner, elegant as a fashionable woman. A monster, moreover, complete! Its garrets, as it were, a head full of knowledge and genius; its first storeys stomachs repleted; its shops, actual feet, where the busy ambulating crowds are moving. Ah! what an ever-active life the monster leads! Hardly has the last vibration of the last carriage coming from a ball ceased at its heart before its arms are moving at the barriers and it shakes itself slowly into motion. Doors open; turning on their hinges like the membrane of some huge lobster, invisibly manipulated by thirty thousand men or women, of whom each individual occupies a space of six square feet, but has a kitchen, a workshop, a bed, children, a garden, little light to see by, but must see all. Imperceptibly, the articulations begin to crack; motion communicates itself; the street speaks. By mid-day, all is alive; the chimneys smoke, the monster eats; then he roars, and his thousand paws begin to ramp. Splendid spectacle! But, O Paris! he who has not admired your

gloomy passages, your gleams and flashes of light, your deep and silent cul-de-sacs, who has not listened to your murmurings between midnight and two in the morning, knows nothing as yet of your true poesy, nor of your broad and fantastic contrasts.

There are a few amateurs who never go their way heedlessly; who savor their Paris, so to speak; who know its physiognomy so well that they see every wart, and pimple, and redness. To others, Paris is always that monstrous marvel, that amazing assemblage of activities, of schemes, of thoughts; the city of a hundred thousand tales, the head of the universe. But to those few, Paris is sad or gay, ugly or beautiful, living or dead; to them Paris is a creature; every man, every fraction of a house is a lobe of the cellular tissue of that great courtesan whose head and heart and fantastic customs they know so well. These men are lovers of Paris; they lift their noses at such or such a corner of a street, certain that they can see the face of a clock; they tell a friend whose tobacco-pouch is empty, "Go down that passage and turn to the left; there's a tobacconist next door to a confectioner, where there's a pretty girl." Rambling about Paris is, to these poets, a costly luxury. How can they help spending precious minutes before the dramas, disasters, faces, and picturesque events which meet us everywhere amid this heaving queen of cities, clothed in posters,—who has, nevertheless, not a single clean corner, so complying is she to the vices of the French nation! Who has not chanced to leave his home early in the morning, intending to go to some extremity of Paris, and found himself unable to get away from the centre of it by the dinner-hour? Such a man will know how to excuse this vagabondizing start upon our tale; which, however, we here sum up in an observation both useful and novel, as far as any observation can be novel in Paris, where there is nothing new,—not even the statue erected yesterday, on which some young gamin has already scribbled his name.

Well, then! there are streets, or ends of streets, there are houses, unknown for the most part to persons of social distinction, to which a woman of that class cannot go without causing cruel and very wounding things to be thought of her. Whether the woman be rich and has a carriage, whether she is on foot, or is disguised, if she enters one of these Parisian defiles at any hour of the day, she compromises her reputation as a virtuous woman. If, by chance, she is there at nine in the evening the conjectures that an observer permits himself to make upon her may prove fearful in their consequences. But if the woman is young and pretty, if she enters a house in one of those streets, if the house has a long, dark, damp, and evil-smelling passage-way, at the end of which flickers the pallid gleam of an oil lamp, and if beneath that gleam appears the horrid face of a withered old woman with fleshless fingers, ah, then! and we say it in the interests of young and pretty women, that woman is lost. She is at the mercy of the first man of her acquaintance who sees her in that Parisian

slough. There is more than one street in Paris where such a meeting may lead to a frightful drama, a bloody drama of death and love, a drama of the modern school.

Unhappily, this scene, this modern drama itself, will be comprehended by only a small number of persons; and it is a pity to tell the tale to a public which cannot enter into its local merit. But who can flatter himself that he will ever be understood? We all die unknown—'tis the saying of women and of authors.

At half-past eight o'clock one evening, in the rue Pagevin, in the days when that street had no wall which did not echo some infamous word, and was, in the direction of the rue Soly, the narrowest and most impassable street in Paris (not excepting the least frequented corner of the most deserted street),—at the beginning of the month of February about thirteen years ago, a young man, by one of those chances which come but once in life, turned the corner of the rue Pagevin to enter the rue des Vieux-Augustins, close to the rue Soly. There, this young man, who lived himself in the rue de Bourbon, saw in a woman near whom he had been unconsciously walking, a vague resemblance to the prettiest woman in Paris; a chaste and delightful person, with whom he was secretly and passionately in love,—a love without hope; she was married. In a moment his heart leaped, an intolerable heat surged from his centre and flowed through all his veins; his back turned cold, the skin of his head crept. He loved, he was young, he knew Paris; and his knowledge did not permit him to be ignorant of all there was of possible infamy in an elegant, rich, young, and beautiful woman walking there, alone, with a furtively criminal step. She in that mud! at that hour!

The love that this young man felt for that woman may seem romantic, and all the more so because he was an officer in the Royal Guard. If he had been in the infantry, the affair might have seemed more likely; but, as an officer of rank in the cavalry, he belonged to that French arm which demands rapidity in its conquests and derives as much vanity from its amorous exploits as from its dashing uniform. But the passion of this officer was a true love, and many young hearts will think it noble. He loved this woman because she was virtuous; he loved her virtue, her modest grace, her imposing saintliness, as the dearest treasures of his hidden passion. This woman was indeed worthy to inspire one of those platonic loves which are found, like flowers amid bloody ruins, in the history of the middle-ages; worthy to be the hidden principle of all the actions of a young man's life; a love as high, as pure as the skies when blue; a love without hope and to which men bind themselves because it can never deceive; a love that is prodigal of unchecked enjoyment, especially at an age when the heart is ardent, the imagination keen, and the eyes of a man see very clearly.

Strange, weird, inconceivable effects may be met with at night in Paris. Only those who have amused themselves by watching those effects have any idea how fantastic a woman may appear there at dusk. At times the creature whom you are following, by accident or design, seems to you light and slender; the stockings, if they are white, make you fancy that the legs must be slim and elegant; the figure though wrapped in a shawl, or concealed by a pelisse, defines itself gracefully and seductively among the shadows; anon, the uncertain gleam thrown from a shop-window or a street lamp bestows a fleeting lustre, nearly always deceptive, on the unknown woman, and fires the imagination, carrying it far beyond the truth. The senses then bestir themselves; everything takes color and animation; the woman appears in an altogether novel aspect; her person becomes beautiful. Behold! she is not a woman, she is a demon, a siren, who is drawing you by magnetic attraction to some respectable house, where the worthy bourgeoisie, frightened by your threatening step and the clack of your boots, shuts the door in your face without looking at you.

A vacillating gleam, thrown from the shop-window of a shoemaker, suddenly illuminated from the waist down the figure of the woman who was before the young man. Ah! surely, she alone had that swaying figure; she alone knew the secret of that chaste gait which innocently set into relief the many beauties of that attractive form. Yes, that was the shawl, and that the velvet bonnet which she wore in the mornings. On her gray silk stockings not a spot, on her shoes not a splash. The shawl held tightly round the bust disclosed, vaguely, its charming lines; and the young man, who had often seen those shoulders at a ball, knew well the treasures that the shawl concealed. By the way a Parisian woman wraps a shawl around her, and the way she lifts her feet in the street, a man of intelligence in such studies can divine the secret of her mysterious errand. There is something, I know not what, of quivering buoyancy in the person, in the gait; the woman seems to weigh less; she steps, or rather, she glides like a star, and floats onward led by a thought which exhales from the folds and motion of her dress. The young man hastened his step, passed the woman, and then turned back to look at her. Pst! she had disappeared into a passage-way, the grated door of which and its bell still rattled and sounded. The young man walked back to the alley and saw the woman reach the farther end, where she began to mount—not without receiving the obsequious bow of an old portress—a winding staircase, the lower steps of which were strongly lighted; she went up buoyantly, eagerly, as though impatient.

“Impatient for what?” said the young man to himself, drawing back to lean against a wooden railing on the other side of the street. He gazed, unhappy man, at the different storeys of the house, with the keen attention of a detective searching for a conspirator.

It was one of those houses of which there are thousands in Paris, ignoble, vulgar, narrow, yellowish in tone, with four storeys and three windows on each floor. The outer blinds of the first floor were closed. Where was she going? The young man fancied he heard the tinkle of a bell on the second floor. As if in answer to it, a light began to move in a room with two windows strongly illuminated, which presently lit up the third window, evidently that of a first room, either the salon or the dining-room of the apartment. Instantly the outline of a woman's bonnet showed vaguely on the window, and a door between the two rooms must have closed, for the first was dark again, while the two other windows resumed their ruddy glow. At this moment a voice said, "Hi, there!" and the young man was conscious of a blow on his shoulder.

"Why don't you pay attention?" said the rough voice of a workman, carrying a plank on his shoulder. The man passed on. He was the voice of Providence saying to the watcher: "What are you meddling with? Think of your own duty; and leave these Parisians to their own affairs."

The young man crossed his arms; then, as no one beheld him, he suffered tears of rage to flow down his cheeks unchecked. At last the sight of the shadows moving behind the lighted windows gave him such pain that he looked elsewhere and noticed a hackney-coach, standing against a wall in the upper part of the rue des Vieux-Augustins, at a place where there was neither the door of a house, nor the light of a shop-window.

Was it she? Was it not she? Life or death to a lover! This lover waited. He stood there during a century of twenty minutes. After that the woman came down, and he then recognized her as the one whom he secretly loved. Nevertheless, he wanted still to doubt. She went to the hackney-coach, and got into it.

"The house will always be there and I can search it later," thought the young man, following the carriage at a run, to solve his last doubts; and soon he did so.

The carriage stopped in the rue de Richelieu before a shop for artificial flowers, close to the rue de Menars. The lady got out, entered the shop, sent out the money to pay the coachman, and presently left the shop herself, on foot, after buying a bunch of marabouts. Marabouts for her black hair! The officer beheld her, through the window-panes, placing the feathers to her head to see the effect, and he fancied he could hear the conversation between herself and the shop-woman.

"Oh! madame, nothing is more suitable for brunettes: brunettes have something a little too strongly marked in their lines, and marabouts give them just that flow which they lack. Madame la Duchesse de Langeais says they give a woman something vague, Ossianic, and very high-bred."

“Very good; send them to me at once.”

Then the lady turned quickly toward the rue de Menars, and entered her own house. When the door closed on her, the young lover, having lost his hopes, and worse, far worse, his dearest beliefs, walked through the streets like a drunken man, and presently found himself in his own room without knowing how he came there. He flung himself into an arm-chair, put his head in his hands and his feet on the andirons, drying his boots until he burned them. It was an awful moment,—one of those moments in human life when the character is moulded, and the future conduct of the best of men depends on the good or evil fortune of his first action. Providence or fatality?—choose which you will.

This young man belonged to a good family, whose nobility was not very ancient; but there are so few really old families in these days, that all men of rank are ancient without dispute. His grandfather had bought the office of counsellor to the Parliament of Paris, where he afterwards became president. His sons, each provided with a handsome fortune, entered the army, and through their marriages became attached to the court. The Revolution swept the family away; but one old dowager, too obstinate to emigrate, was left; she was put in prison, threatened with death, but was saved by the 9th Thermidor and recovered her property. When the proper time came, about the year 1804, she recalled her grandson to France. Auguste de Maulincour, the only scion of the Carbonnon de Maulincour, was brought up by the good dowager with the triple care of a mother, a woman of rank, and an obstinate dowager. When the Restoration came, the young man, then eighteen years of age, entered the Maison-Rouge, followed the princes to Ghent, was made an officer in the body-guard, left it to serve in the line, but was recalled later to the Royal Guard, where, at twenty-three years of age, he found himself major of a cavalry regiment,—a splendid position, due to his grandmother, who had played her cards well to obtain it, in spite of his youth. This double biography is a compendium of the general and special history, barring variations, of all the noble families who emigrated having debts and property, dowagers and tact.

Madame la Baronne de Maulincour had a friend in the old Vidame de Pamiers, formerly a commander of the Knights of Malta. This was one of those undying friendships founded on sexagenary ties which nothing can weaken, because at the bottom of such intimacies there are certain secrets of the human heart, delightful to guess at when we have the time, insipid to explain in twenty words, and which might make the text of a work in four volumes as amusing as the Doyen de Killerine,—a work about which young men talk and judge without having read it.

Auguste de Maulincour belonged therefore to the faubourg Saint-Germain

through his grandmother and the vidame, and it sufficed him to date back two centuries to take the tone and opinions of those who assume to go back to Clovis. This young man, pale, slender, and delicate in appearance, a man of honor and true courage, who would fight a duel for a yes or a no, had never yet fought upon a battle-field, though he wore in his button-hole the cross of the Legion of honor. He was, as you perceive, one of the blunders of the Restoration, perhaps the most excusable of them. The youth of those days was the youth of no epoch. It came between the memories of the Empire and those of the Emigration, between the old traditions of the court and the conscientious education of the bourgeoisie; between religion and fancy-balls; between two political faiths, between Louis XVIII., who saw only the present, and Charles X., who looked too far into the future; it was moreover bound to accept the will of the king, though the king was deceiving and tricking it. This unfortunate youth, blind and yet clear-sighted, was counted as nothing by old men jealously keeping the reins of the State in their feeble hands, while the monarchy could have been saved by their retirement and the accession of this Young France, which the old doctrinaires, the emigres of the Restoration, still speak of slightly. Auguste de Maulincour was a victim to the ideas which weighed in those days upon French youth, and we must here explain why.

The Vidame de Pamiers was still, at sixty-seven years of age, a very brilliant man, having seen much and lived much; a good talker, a man of honor and a gallant man, but who held as to women the most detestable opinions; he loved them, and he despised them. Their honor! their feelings! Ta-ra-ra, rubbish and shams! When he was with them, he believed in them, the *ci-devant* "monstre"; he never contradicted them, and he made them shine. But among his male friends, when the topic of the sex came up, he laid down the principle that to deceive women, and to carry on several intrigues at once, should be the occupation of those young men who were so misguided as to wish to meddle in the affairs of the State. It is sad to have to sketch so hackneyed a portrait, for has it not figured everywhere and become, literally, as threadbare as that of a grenadier of the Empire? But the vidame had an influence on Monsieur de Maulincour's destiny which obliges us to preserve his portrait; he lectured the young man after his fashion, and did his best to convert him to the doctrines of the great age of gallantry.

The dowager, a tender-hearted, pious woman, sitting between God and her vidame, a model of grace and sweetness, but gifted with that well-bred persistency which triumphs in the long run, had longed to preserve for her grandson the beautiful illusions of life, and had therefore brought him up in the highest principles; she instilled into him her own delicacy of feeling and made him, to outward appearance, a timid man, if not a fool. The sensibilities of the young fellow, preserved pure, were not worn by contact without; he remained so chaste, so scrupulous, that he was keenly offended by actions and

maxims to which the world attached no consequence. Ashamed of this susceptibility, he forced himself to conceal it under a false hardihood; but he suffered in secret, all the while scoffing with others at the things he revered.

It came to pass that he was deceived; because, in accordance with a not uncommon whim of destiny, he, a man of gentle melancholy, and spiritual in love, encountered in the object of his first passion a woman who held in horror all German sentimentalism. The young man, in consequence, distrusted himself, became dreamy, absorbed in his griefs, complaining of not being understood. Then, as we desire all the more violently the things we find difficult to obtain, he continued to adore women with that ingenuous tenderness and feline delicacy the secret of which belongs to women themselves, who may, perhaps, prefer to keep the monopoly of it. In point of fact, though women of the world complain of the way men love them, they have little liking themselves for those whose soul is half feminine. Their own superiority consists in making men believe they are their inferiors in love; therefore they will readily leave a lover if he is inexperienced enough to rob them of those fears with which they seek to deck themselves, those delightful tortures of feigned jealousy, those troubles of hope betrayed, those futile expectations,—in short, the whole procession of their feminine miseries. They hold Sir Charles Grandison in horror. What can be more contrary to their nature than a tranquil, perfect love? They want emotions; happiness without storms is not happiness to them. Women with souls that are strong enough to bring infinitude into love are angelic exceptions; they are among women what noble geniuses are among men. Their great passions are rare as masterpieces. Below the level of such love come compromises, conventions, passing and contemptible irritations, as in all things petty and perishable.

Amid the hidden disasters of his heart, and while he was still seeking the woman who could comprehend him (a search which, let us remark in passing, is one of the amorous follies of our epoch), Auguste met, in the rank of society that was farthest from his own, in the secondary sphere of money, where banking holds the first place, a perfect being, one of those women who have I know not what about them that is saintly and sacred,—women who inspire such reverence that love has need of the help of a long familiarity to declare itself.

Auguste then gave himself up wholly to the delights of the deepest and most moving of passions, to a love that was purely adoring. Innumerable repressed desires there were, shadows of passion so vague yet so profound, so fugitive and yet so actual, that one scarcely knows to what we may compare them. They are like perfumes, or clouds, or rays of the sun, or shadows, or whatever there is in nature that shines for a moment and disappears, that

springs to life and dies, leaving in the heart long echoes of emotion. When the soul is young enough to nurture melancholy and far-off hope, to find in woman more than a woman, is it not the greatest happiness that can befall a man when he loves enough to feel more joy in touching a gloved hand, or a lock of hair, in listening to a word, in casting a single look, than in all the ardor of possession given by happy love? Thus it is that rejected persons, those rebuffed by fate, the ugly and unfortunate, lovers unrevealed, women and timid men, alone know the treasures contained in the voice of the beloved. Taking their source and their element from the soul itself, the vibrations of the air, charged with passion, put our hearts so powerfully into communion, carrying thought between them so lucidly, and being, above all, so incapable of falsehood, that a single inflection of a voice is often a revelation. What enchantments the intonations of a tender voice can bestow upon the heart of a poet! What ideas they awaken! What freshness they shed there! Love is in the voice before the glance avows it. Auguste, poet after the manner of lovers (there are poets who feel, and poets who express; the first are the happiest), Auguste had tasted all these early joys, so vast, so fecund. SHE possessed the most winning organ that the most artful woman of the world could have desired in order to deceive at her ease; she had that silvery voice which is soft to the ear, and ringing only for the heart which it stirs and troubles, caresses and subjugates.

And this woman went by night to the rue Soly through the rue Pagevin! and her furtive apparition in an infamous house had just destroyed the grandest of passions! The vidame's logic triumphed.

"If she is betraying her husband we will avenge ourselves," said Auguste.

There was still faith in that "if." The philosophic doubt of Descartes is a politeness with which we should always honor virtue. Ten o'clock sounded. The Baron de Maulincour remembered that this woman was going to a ball that evening at a house to which he had access. He dressed, went there, and searched for her through all the salons. The mistress of the house, Madame de Nucingen, seeing him thus occupied, said:—

"You are looking for Madame Jules; but she has not yet come."

"Good evening, dear," said a voice.

Auguste and Madame de Nucingen turned round. Madame Jules had arrived, dressed in white, looking simple and noble, wearing in her hair the marabouts the young baron had seen her choose in the flower-shop. That voice of love now pierced his heart. Had he won the slightest right to be jealous of her he would have petrified her then and there by saying the words, "Rue Soly!" But if he, an alien to her life, had said those words in her ear a thousand times, Madame Jules would have asked him in astonishment what he meant.

He looked at her stupidly.

For those sarcastic persons who scoff at all things it may be a great amusement to detect the secret of a woman, to know that her chastity is a lie, that her calm face hides some anxious thought, that under that pure brow is a dreadful drama. But there are other souls to whom the sight is saddening; and many of those who laugh in public, when withdrawn into themselves and alone with their conscience, curse the world while they despise the woman. Such was the case with Auguste de Maulincour, as he stood there in presence of Madame Jules. Singular situation! There was no other relation between them than that which social life establishes between persons who exchange a few words seven or eight times in the course of a winter, and yet he was calling her to account on behalf of a happiness unknown to her; he was judging her, without letting her know of his accusation.

Many young men find themselves thus in despair at having broken forever with a woman adored in secret, condemned and despised in secret. There are many hidden monologues told to the walls of some solitary lodging; storms roused and calmed without ever leaving the depths of hearts; amazing scenes of the moral world, for which a painter is wanted. Madame Jules sat down, leaving her husband to make a turn around the salon. After she was seated she seemed uneasy, and, while talking with her neighbor, she kept a furtive eye on Monsieur Jules Desmarets, her husband, a broker chiefly employed by the Baron de Nucingen. The following is the history of their home life.

Monsieur Desmarets was, five years before his marriage, in a broker's office, with no other means than the meagre salary of a clerk. But he was a man to whom misfortune had early taught the truths of life, and he followed the strait path with the tenacity of an insect making for its nest; he was one of those dogged young men who feign death before an obstacle and wear out everybody's patience with their own beetle-like perseverance. Thus, young as he was, he had all the republican virtue of poor peoples; he was sober, saving of his time, an enemy to pleasure. He waited. Nature had given him the immense advantage of an agreeable exterior. His calm, pure brow, the shape of his placid, but expressive face, his simple manners,—all revealed in him a laborious and resigned existence, that lofty personal dignity which is imposing to others, and the secret nobility of heart which can meet all events. His modesty inspired a sort of respect in those who knew him. Solitary in the midst of Paris, he knew the social world only by glimpses during the brief moments which he spent in his patron's salon on holidays.

There were passions in this young man, as in most of the men who live in that way, of amazing profundity,—passions too vast to be drawn into petty incidents. His want of means compelled him to lead an ascetic life, and he conquered his fancies by hard work. After paling all day over figures, he

found his recreation in striving obstinately to acquire that wide general knowledge so necessary in these days to every man who wants to make his mark, whether in society, or in commerce, at the bar, or in politics or literature. The only peril these fine souls have to fear comes from their own uprightness. They see some poor girl; they love her; they marry her, and wear out their lives in a struggle between poverty and love. The noblest ambition is quenched perforce by the household account-book. Jules Desmarets went headlong into this peril.

He met one evening at his patron's house a girl of the rarest beauty. Unfortunate men who are deprived of affection, and who consume the finest hours of youth in work and study, alone know the rapid ravages that passion makes in their lonely, misconceived hearts. They are so certain of loving truly, all their forces are concentrated so quickly on the object of their love, that they receive, while beside her, the most delightful sensations, when, as often happens, they inspire none at all. Nothing is more flattering to a woman's egotism than to divine this passion, apparently immovable, and these emotions so deep that they have needed a great length of time to reach the human surface. These poor men, anchorites in the midst of Paris, have all the enjoyments of anchorites; and may sometimes succumb to temptations. But, more often deceived, betrayed, and misunderstood, they are rarely able to gather the sweet fruits of a love which, to them, is like a flower dropped from heaven.

One smile from his wife, a single inflection of her voice sufficed to make Jules Desmarets conceive a passion which was boundless. Happily, the concentrated fire of that secret passion revealed itself artlessly to the woman who inspired it. These two beings then loved each other religiously. To express all in a word, they clasped hands without shame before the eyes of the world and went their way like two children, brother and sister, passing serenely through a crowd where all made way for them and admired them.

The young girl was in one of those unfortunate positions which human selfishness entails upon children. She had no civil status; her name of "Clemence" and her age were recorded only by a notary public. As for her fortune, that was small indeed. Jules Desmarets was a happy man on hearing these particulars. If Clemence had belonged to an opulent family, he might have despaired of obtaining her; but she was only the poor child of love, the fruit of some terrible adulterous passion; and they were married. Then began for Jules Desmarets a series of fortunate events. Every one envied his happiness; and henceforth talked only of his luck, without recalling either his virtues or his courage.

Some days after their marriage, the mother of Clemence, who passed in society for her godmother, told Jules Desmarets to buy the office and good-

will of a broker, promising to provide him with the necessary capital. In those days, such offices could still be bought at a modest price. That evening, in the salon as it happened of his patron, a wealthy capitalist proposed, on the recommendation of the mother, a very advantageous transaction for Jules Desmarets, and the next day the happy clerk was able to buy out his patron. In four years Desmarets became one of the most prosperous men in his business; new clients increased the number his predecessor had left to him; he inspired confidence in all; and it was impossible for him not to feel, by the way business came to him, that some hidden influence, due to his mother-in-law, or to Providence, was secretly protecting him.

At the end of the third year Clemence lost her godmother. By that time Monsieur Jules (so called to distinguish him from an elder brother, whom he had set up as a notary in Paris) possessed an income from invested property of two hundred thousand francs. There was not in all Paris another instance of the domestic happiness enjoyed by this couple. For five years their exceptional love had been troubled by only one event,—a calumny for which Monsieur Jules exacted vengeance. One of his former comrades attributed to Madame Jules the fortune of her husband, explaining that it came from a high protection dearly paid for. The man who uttered the calumny was killed in the duel that followed it.

The profound passion of this couple, which survived marriage, obtained a great success in society, though some women were annoyed by it. The charming household was respected; everybody feted it. Monsieur and Madame Jules were sincerely liked, perhaps because there is nothing more delightful to see than happy people; but they never stayed long at any festivity. They slipped away early, as impatient to regain their nest as wandering pigeons. This nest was a large and beautiful mansion in the rue de Menars, where a true feeling for art tempered the luxury which the financial world continues, traditionally, to display. Here the happy pair received their society magnificently, although the obligations of social life suited them but little.

Nevertheless, Jules submitted to the demands of the world, knowing that, sooner or later, a family has need of it; but he and his wife felt themselves, in its midst, like green-house plants in a tempest. With a delicacy that was very natural, Jules had concealed from his wife the calumny and the death of the calumniator. Madame Jules, herself, was inclined, through her sensitive and artistic nature, to desire luxury. In spite of the terrible lesson of the duel, some imprudent women whispered to each other that Madame Jules must sometimes be pressed for money. They often found her more elegantly dressed in her own home than when she went into society. She loved to adorn herself to please her husband, wishing to show him that to her he was more than any social life. A true love, a pure love, above all, a happy love! Jules, always a lover, and more

in love as time went by, was happy in all things beside his wife, even in her caprices; in fact, he would have been uneasy if she had none, thinking it a symptom of some illness.

Auguste de Maulincour had the personal misfortune of running against this passion, and falling in love with the wife beyond recovery. Nevertheless, though he carried in his heart so intense a love, he was not ridiculous; he complied with all the demands of society, and of military manners and customs. And yet his face wore constantly, even though he might be drinking a glass of champagne, that dreamy look, that air of silently despising life, that nebulous expression which belongs, though for other reasons, to blasés men,—men dissatisfied with hollow lives. To love without hope, to be disgusted with life, constitute, in these days, a social position. The enterprise of winning the heart of a sovereign might give, perhaps, more hope than a love rashly conceived for a happy woman. Therefore Maulincour had sufficient reason to be grave and gloomy. A queen has the vanity of her power; the height of her elevation protects her. But a pious bourgeoisie is like a hedgehog, or an oyster, in its rough wrappings.

At this moment the young officer was beside his unconscious mistress, who certainly was unaware that she was doubly faithless. Madame Jules was seated, in a naive attitude, like the least artful woman in existence, soft and gentle, full of a majestic serenity. What an abyss is human nature! Before beginning a conversation, the baron looked alternately at the wife and at the husband. How many were the reflections he made! He recomposed the “Night Thoughts” of Young in a second. And yet the music was sounding through the salons, the light was pouring from a thousand candles. It was a banker’s ball,—one of those insolent festivals by means of which the world of solid gold endeavored to sneer at the gold-embossed salons where the faubourg Saint-Germain met and laughed, not foreseeing the day when the bank would invade the Luxembourg and take its seat upon the throne. The conspirators were now dancing, indifferent to coming bankruptcies, whether of Power or of the Bank. The gilded salons of the Baron de Nucingen were gay with that peculiar animation that the world of Paris, apparently joyous at any rate, gives to its fetes. There, men of talent communicate their wit to fools, and fools communicate that air of enjoyment that characterizes them. By means of this exchange all is liveliness. But a ball in Paris always resembles fireworks to a certain extent; wit, coquetry, and pleasure sparkle and go out like rockets. The next day all present have forgotten their wit, their coquetry, their pleasure.

“Ah!” thought Auguste, by way of conclusion, “women are what the vidame says they are. Certainly all those dancing here are less irreproachable actually than Madame Jules appears to be, and yet Madame Jules went to the rue Soly!”

The rue Soly was like an illness to him; the very word shrivelled his heart.

“Madame, do you ever dance?” he said to her.

“This is the third time you have asked me that question this winter,” she answered, smiling.

“But perhaps you have never answered it.”

“That is true.”

“I knew very well that you were false, like other women.”

Madame Jules continued to smile.

“Listen, monsieur,” she said; “if I told you the real reason, you would think it ridiculous. I do not think it false to abstain from telling things that the world would laugh at.”

“All secrets demand, in order to be told, a friendship of which I am no doubt unworthy, madame. But you cannot have any but noble secrets; do you think me capable of jesting on noble things?”

“Yes,” she said, “you, like all the rest, laugh at our purest sentiments; you calumniate them. Besides, I have no secrets. I have the right to love my husband in the face of all the world, and I say so,—I am proud of it; and if you laugh at me when I tell you that I dance only with him, I shall have a bad opinion of your heart.”

“Have you never danced since your marriage with any one but your husband?”

“Never. His arm is the only one on which I have leaned; I have never felt the touch of another man.”

“Has your physician never felt your pulse?”

“Now you are laughing at me.”

“No, madame, I admire you, because I comprehend you. But you let a man hear your voice, you let yourself be seen, you—in short, you permit our eyes to admire you—”

“Ah!” she said, interrupting him, “that is one of my griefs. Yes, I wish it were possible for a married woman to live secluded with her husband, as a mistress lives with her lover, for then—”

“Then why were you, two hours ago, on foot, disguised, in the rue Soly?”

“The rue Soly, where is that?”

And her pure voice gave no sign of any emotion; no feature of her face

quivered; she did not blush; she remained calm.

“What! you did not go up to the second floor of a house in the rue des Vieux-Augustins at the corner of the rue Soly? You did not have a hackney-coach waiting near by? You did not return in it to the flower-shop in the rue Richelieu, where you bought the feathers that are now in your hair?”

“I did not leave my house this evening.”

As she uttered that lie she was smiling and imperturbable; she played with her fan; but if any one had passed a hand down her back they would, perhaps, have found it moist. At that instant Auguste remembered the instructions of the vidame.

“Then it was some one who strangely resembled you,” he said, with a credulous air.

“Monsieur,” she replied, “if you are capable of following a woman and detecting her secrets, you will allow me to say that it is a wrong, a very wrong thing, and I do you the honor to say that I disbelieve you.”

The baron turned away, placed himself before the fireplace and seemed thoughtful. He bent his head; but his eyes were covertly fixed on Madame Jules, who, not remembering the reflections in the mirror, cast two or three glances at him that were full of terror. Presently she made a sign to her husband and rising took his arm to walk about the salon. As she passed before Monsieur de Maulincour, who at that moment was speaking to a friend, he said in a loud voice, as if in reply to a remark: “That woman will certainly not sleep quietly this night.” Madame Jules stopped, gave him an imposing look which expressed contempt, and continued her way, unaware that another look, if surprised by her husband, might endanger not only her happiness but the lives of two men. Auguste, frantic with anger, which he tried to smother in the depths of his soul, presently left the house, swearing to penetrate to the heart of the mystery. Before leaving, he sought Madame Jules, to look at her again; but she had disappeared.

What a drama cast into that young head so eminently romantic, like all who have not known love in the wide extent which they give to it. He adored Madame Jules under a new aspect; he loved her now with the fury of jealousy and the frenzied anguish of hope. Unfaithful to her husband, the woman became common. Auguste could now give himself up to the joys of successful love, and his imagination opened to him a career of pleasures. Yes, he had lost the angel, but he had found the most delightful of demons. He went to bed, building castles in the air, excusing Madame Jules by some romantic fiction in which he did not believe. He resolved to devote himself wholly, from that day forth, to a search for the causes, motives, and keynote of this mystery. It was a

tale to read, or better still, a drama to be played, in which he had a part.

CHAPTER II. FERRAGUS

A fine thing is the task of a spy, when performed for one's own benefit and in the interests of a passion. Is it not giving ourselves the pleasure of a thief and a rascal while continuing honest men? But there is another side to it; we must resign ourselves to boil with anger, to roar with impatience, to freeze our feet in the mud, to be numbed, and roasted, and torn by false hopes. We must go, on the faith of a mere indication, to a vague object, miss our end, curse our luck, improvise to ourselves elegies, dithyrambics, exclaim idiotically before inoffensive pedestrians who observe us, knock over old apple-women and their baskets, run hither and thither, stand on guard beneath a window, make a thousand suppositions. But, after all, it is a chase, a hunt; a hunt in Paris, a hunt with all its chances, minus dogs and guns and the tally-ho! Nothing compares with it but the life of gamblers. But it needs a heart big with love and vengeance to ambush itself in Paris, like a tiger waiting to spring upon its prey, and to enjoy the chances and contingencies of Paris, by adding one special interest to the many that abound there. But for this we need a many-sided soul—for must we not live in a thousand passions, a thousand sentiments?

Auguste de Maulincour flung himself into this ardent existence passionately, for he felt all its pleasures and all its misery. He went disguised about Paris, watching at the corners of the rue Pagevin and the rue des Vieux-Augustins. He hurried like a hunter from the rue de Menars to the rue Soly, and back from the rue Soly to the rue de Menars, without obtaining either the vengeance or the knowledge which would punish or reward such cares, such efforts, such wiles. But he had not yet reached that impatience which wrings our very entrails and makes us sweat; he roamed in hope, believing that Madame Jules would only refrain for a few days from revisiting the place where she knew she had been detected. He devoted the first days therefore, to a careful study of the secrets of the street. A novice at such work, he dared not question either the porter or the shoemaker of the house to which Madame Jules had gone; but he managed to obtain a post of observation in a house directly opposite to the mysterious apartment. He studied the ground, trying to reconcile the conflicting demands of prudence, impatience, love, and secrecy.

Early in the month of March, while busy with plans by which he expected to strike a decisive blow, he left his post about four in the afternoon, after one of those patient watches from which he had learned nothing. He was on his

way to his own house whither a matter relating to his military service called him, when he was overtaken in the rue Coquilliere by one of those heavy showers which instantly flood the gutters, while each drop of rain rings loudly in the puddles of the roadway. A pedestrian under these circumstances is forced to stop short and take refuge in a shop or cafe if he is rich enough to pay for the forced hospitality, or, if in poorer circumstances, under a portecochere, that haven of paupers or shabbily dressed persons. Why have none of our painters ever attempted to reproduce the physiognomies of a swarm of Parisians, grouped, under stress of weather, in the damp portecochere of a building? First, there's the musing philosophical pedestrian, who observes with interest all he sees,—whether it be the stripes made by the rain on the gray background of the atmosphere (a species of chasing not unlike the capricious threads of spun glass), or the whirl of white water which the wind is driving like a luminous dust along the roofs, or the fitful disgorgements of the gutter-pipes, sparkling and foaming; in short, the thousand nothings to be admired and studied with delight by loungers, in spite of the porter's broom which pretends to be sweeping out the gateway. Then there's the talkative refugee, who complains and converses with the porter while he rests on his broom like a grenadier on his musket; or the pauper wayfarer, curled against the wall indifferent to the condition of his rags, long used, alas, to contact with the streets; or the learned pedestrian who studies, spells, and reads the posters on the walls without finishing them; or the smiling pedestrian who makes fun of others to whom some street fatality has happened, who laughs at the muddy women, and makes grimaces at those of either sex who are looking from the windows; and the silent being who gazes from floor to floor; and the working-man, armed with a satchel or a paper bundle, who is estimating the rain as a profit or loss; and the good-natured fugitive, who arrives like a shot exclaiming, "Ah! what weather, messieurs, what weather!" and bows to every one; and, finally, the true bourgeois of Paris, with his unfailing umbrella, an expert in showers, who foresaw this particular one, but would come out in spite of his wife; this one takes a seat in the porter's chair. According to individual character, each member of this fortuitous society contemplates the skies, and departs, skipping to avoid the mud,—because he is in a hurry, or because he sees other citizens walking along in spite of wind and slush, or because, the archway being damp and mortally catarrhal, the bed's edge, as the proverb says, is better than the sheets. Each one has his motive. No one is left but the prudent pedestrian, the man who, before he sets forth, makes sure of a scrap of blue sky through the rifting clouds.

Monsieur de Maulincour took refuge, as we have said, with a whole family of fugitives, under the porch of an old house, the court-yard of which looked like the flue of a chimney. The sides of its plastered, nitrified, and mouldy walls were so covered with pipes and conduits from all the many floors of its

four elevations, that it might have been said to resemble at that moment the cascates of Saint-Cloud. Water flowed everywhere; it boiled, it leaped, it murmured; it was black, white, blue, and green; it shrieked, it bubbled under the broom of the portress, a toothless old woman used to storms, who seemed to bless them as she swept into the street a mass of scraps an intelligent inventory of which would have revealed the lives and habits of every dweller in the house,—bits of printed cottons, tea-leaves, artificial flower-petals faded and worthless, vegetable parings, papers, scraps of metal. At every sweep of her broom the old woman bared the soul of the gutter, that black fissure on which a porter's mind is ever bent. The poor lover examined this scene, like a thousand others which our heaving Paris presents daily; but he examined it mechanically, as a man absorbed in thought, when, happening to look up, he found himself all but nose to nose with a man who had just entered the gateway.

In appearance this man was a beggar, but not the Parisian beggar,—that creation without a name in human language; no, this man formed another type, while presenting on the outside all the ideas suggested by the word “beggar.” He was not marked by those original Parisian characteristics which strike us so forcibly in the paupers whom Charlet was fond of representing, with his rare luck in observation,—coarse faces reeking of mud, hoarse voices, reddened and bulbous noses, mouths devoid of teeth but menacing; humble yet terrible beings, in whom a profound intelligence shining in their eyes seems like a contradiction. Some of these bold vagabonds have blotched, cracked, veiny skins; their foreheads are covered with wrinkles, their hair scanty and dirty, like a wig thrown on a dust-heap. All are gay in their degradation, and degraded in their joys; all are marked with the stamp of debauchery, casting their silence as a reproach; their very attitude revealing fearful thoughts. Placed between crime and beggary they have no compunctions, and circle prudently around the scaffold without mounting it, innocent in the midst of crime, and vicious in their innocence. They often cause a laugh, but they always cause reflection. One represents to you civilization stunted, repressed; he comprehends everything, the honor of the galleys, patriotism, virtue, the malice of a vulgar crime, or the fine astuteness of elegant wickedness. Another is resigned, a perfect mimer, but stupid. All have slight yearnings after order and work, but they are pushed back into their mire by society, which makes no inquiry as to what there may be of great men, poets, intrepid souls, and splendid organizations among these vagrants, these gypsies of Paris; a people eminently good and eminently evil—like all the masses who suffer—accustomed to endure unspeakable woes, and whom a fatal power holds ever down to the level of the mire. They all have a dream, a hope, a happiness,—cards, lottery, or wine.

There was nothing of all this in the personage who now leaned carelessly

against the wall in front of Monsieur de Maulincour, like some fantastic idea drawn by an artist on the back of a canvas the front of which is turned to the wall. This tall, spare man, whose leaden visage expressed some deep but chilling thought, dried up all pity in the hearts of those who looked at him by the scowling look and the sarcastic attitude which announced an intention of treating every man as an equal. His face was of a dirty white, and his wrinkled skull, denuded of hair, bore a vague resemblance to a block of granite. A few gray locks on either side of his head fell straight to the collar of his greasy coat, which was buttoned to the chin. He resembled both Voltaire and Don Quixote; he was, apparently, scoffing but melancholy, full of disdain and philosophy, but half-crazy. He seemed to have no shirt. His beard was long. A rusty black cravat, much worn and ragged, exposed a protuberant neck deeply furrowed, with veins as thick as cords. A large brown circle like a bruise was strongly marked beneath his eyes, He seemed to be at least sixty years old. His hands were white and clean. His boots were trodden down at the heels, and full of holes. A pair of blue trousers, mended in various places, were covered with a species of fluff which made them offensive to the eye. Whether it was that his damp clothes exhaled a fetid odor, or that he had in his normal condition the "poor smell" which belongs to Parisian tenements, just as offices, sacristies, and hospitals have their own peculiar and rancid fetidness, of which no words can give the least idea, or whether some other reason affected them, those in the vicinity of this man immediately moved away and left him alone. He cast upon them and also upon the officer a calm, expressionless look, the celebrated look of Monsieur de Talleyrand, a dull, wan glance, without warmth, a species of impenetrable veil, beneath which a strong soul hides profound emotions and close estimation of men and things and events. Not a fold of his face quivered. His mouth and forehead were impassible; but his eyes moved and lowered themselves with a noble, almost tragic slowness. There was, in fact, a whole drama in the motion of those withered eyelids.

The aspect of this stoical figure gave rise in Monsieur de Maulincour to one of those vagabond reveries which begin with a common question and end by comprising a world of thought. The storm was past. Monsieur de Maulincour presently saw no more of the man than the tail of his coat as it brushed the gate-post, but as he turned to leave his own place he noticed at his feet a letter which must have fallen from the unknown beggar when he took, as the baron had seen him take, a handkerchief from his pocket. The young man picked it up, and read, involuntarily, the address: "To Monsieur Ferragusse, Rue des Grands-Augustains, corner of rue Soly."

The letter bore no postmark, and the address prevented Monsieur de Maulincour from following the beggar and returning it; for there are few passions that will not fail in rectitude in the long run. The baron had a

presentiment of the opportunity afforded by this windfall. He determined to keep the letter, which would give him the right to enter the mysterious house to return it to the strange man, not doubting that he lived there. Suspicions, vague as the first faint gleams of daylight, made him fancy relations between this man and Madame Jules. A jealous lover supposes everything; and it is by supposing everything and selecting the most probable of their conjectures that judges, spies, lovers, and observers get at the truth they are looking for.

“Is the letter for him? Is it from Madame Jules?”

His restless imagination tossed a thousand such questions to him; but when he read the first words of the letter he smiled. Here it is, textually, in all the simplicity of its artless phrases and its miserable orthography,—a letter to which it would be impossible to add anything, or to take anything away, unless it were the letter itself. But we have yielded to the necessity of punctuating it. In the original there were neither commas nor stops of any kind, not even notes of exclamation,—a fact which tends to undervalue the system of notes and dashes by which modern authors have endeavored to depict the great disasters of all the passions:—

Henry,—Among the many sacrifices I imposed upon myself for your sake was that of not giving you any news of me; but an irresistible voice now compels me to let you know the wrong you have done me. I know beforehand that your soul hardened in vice will not pity me. Your heart is deaf to feeling. Is it deaf to the cries of nature? But what matter? I must tell you to what a dreadful point you are guilty, and the horror of the position to which you have brought me. Henry, you knew what I suffered from my first wrong-doing, and yet you plunged me into the same misery, and then abandoned me to my despair and suffering. Yes, I will say it, the belief I had that you loved me and esteemed me gave me courage to bare my fate. But now, what have I left? Have you not made me lose all that was dear to me, all that held me to life; parents, friends, honor, reputation,—all, I have sacrificed all to you, and nothing is left me but shame, reproach, and—I say this without blushing—poverty. Nothing was wanting to my misfortunes but the certainty of your contempt and hatred; and now I have them I find the courage that my project requires. My decision is made; the honor of my family commands it. I must put an end to my sufferings. Make no remarks upon my conduct, Henry; it is awful, I know, but my condition obliges me. Without help, without support, without one friend to comfort me, can I live? No. Fate has decided for me. So in two days, Henry, two days, Ida will have ceased to be worthy of your regard. Oh, Henry! oh, my friend! for I can never change to you, promise me to forgive me for what I am going to do. Do not forget that you have driven me to it; it is your work, and you must judge it. May heaven not punish you for all your crimes. I ask your pardon on my knees, for I feel nothing is wanting to my misery but the sorrow

of knowing you unhappy. In spite of the poverty I am in I shall refuse all help from you. If you had loved me I would have taken all from your friendship; but a benefit given by pity my soul refuses. I would be baser to take it than he who offered it. I have one favor to ask of you. I don't know how long I must stay at Madame Meynardie's; be generous enough not to come there. Your last two visits did me a harm I cannot get over. I cannot enter into particulars about that conduct of yours. You hate me,—you said so; that word is written on my heart, and freezes it with fear. Alas! it is now, when I need all my courage, all my strength, that my faculties abandon me. Henry, my friend, before I put a barrier forever between us, give me a last proof of your esteem. Write me, answer me, say you respect me still, though you have ceased to love me. My eyes are worthy still to look into yours, but I do not ask an interview; I fear my weakness and my love. But for pity's sake write me a line at once; it will give me the courage I need to meet my troubles. Farewell, rather of all my woes, but the only friend my heart has chosen and will never forget.

Ida.

This life of a young girl, with its love betrayed, its fatal joys, its pangs, its miseries, and its horrible resignation, summed up in a few words, this humble poem, essentially Parisian, written on dirty paper, influenced for a passing moment Monsieur de Maulincour. He asked himself whether this Ida might not be some poor relation of Madame Jules, and that strange rendezvous, which he had witnessed by chance, the mere necessity of a charitable effort. But could that old pauper have seduced this Ida? There was something impossible in the very idea. Wandering in this labyrinth of reflections, which crossed, recrossed, and obliterated one another, the baron reached the rue Pagevin, and saw a hackney-coach standing at the end of the rue des Vieux-Augustins where it enters the rue Montmartre. All waiting hackney-coaches now had an interest for him.

“Can she be there?” he thought to himself, and his heart beat fast with a hot and feverish throbbing.

He pushed the little door with the bell, but he lowered his head as he did so, obeying a sense of shame, for a voice said to him secretly:—

“Why are you putting your foot into this mystery?”

He went up a few steps, and found himself face to face with the old portress.

“Monsieur Ferragus?” he said.

“Don't know him.”

“Doesn't Monsieur Ferragus live here?”

“Haven’t such a name in the house.”

“But, my good woman—”

“I’m not your good woman, monsieur, I’m the portress.”

“But, madame,” persisted the baron, “I have a letter for Monsieur Ferragus.”

“Ah! if monsieur has a letter,” she said, changing her tone, “that’s another matter. Will you let me see it—that letter?”

Auguste showed the folded letter. The old woman shook her head with a doubtful air, hesitated, seemed to wish to leave the lodge and inform the mysterious Ferragus of his unexpected visitor, but finally said:—

“Very good; go up, monsieur. I suppose you know the way?”

Without replying to this remark, which he thought might be a trap, the young officer ran lightly up the stairway, and rang loudly at the door of the second floor. His lover’s instinct told him, “She is there.”

The beggar of the porch, Ferragus, the “orther” of Ida’s woes, opened the door himself. He appeared in a flowered dressing-gown, white flannel trousers, his feet in embroidered slippers, and his face washed clean of stains. Madame Jules, whose head projected beyond the casing of the door in the next room, turned pale and dropped into a chair.

“What is the matter, madame?” cried the officer, springing toward her.

But Ferragus stretched forth an arm and flung the intruder back with so sharp a thrust that Auguste fancied he had received a blow with an iron bar full on his chest.

“Back! monsieur,” said the man. “What do you want there? For five or six days you have been roaming about the neighborhood. Are you a spy?”

“Are you Monsieur Ferragus?” said the baron.

“No, monsieur.”

“Nevertheless,” continued Auguste, “it is to you that I must return this paper which you dropped in the gateway beneath which we both took refuge from the rain.”

While speaking and offering the letter to the man, Auguste did not refrain from casting an eye around the room where Ferragus received him. It was very well arranged, though simply. A fire burned on the hearth; and near it was a table with food upon it, which was served more sumptuously than agreed with the apparent conditions of the man and the poorness of his lodging. On a sofa in the next room, which he could see through the doorway, lay a heap of gold,

and he heard a sound which could be no other than that of a woman weeping.

“The paper belongs to me; I am much obliged to you,” said the mysterious man, turning away as if to make the baron understand that he must go.

Too curious himself to take much note of the deep examination of which he was himself the object, Auguste did not see the half-magnetic glance with which this strange being seemed to pierce him; had he encountered that basilisk eye he might have felt the danger that encompassed him. Too passionately excited to think of himself, Auguste bowed, went down the stairs, and returned home, striving to find a meaning in the connection of these three persons,—Ida, Ferragus, and Madame Jules; an occupation equivalent to that of trying to arrange the many-cornered bits of a Chinese puzzle without possessing the key to the game. But Madame Jules had seen him, Madame Jules went there, Madame Jules had lied to him. Maulincour determined to go and see her the next day. She could not refuse his visit, for he was now her accomplice; he was hands and feet in the mysterious affair, and she knew it. Already he felt himself a sultan, and thought of demanding from Madame Jules, imperiously, all her secrets.

In those days Paris was seized with a building-fever. If Paris is a monster, it is certainly a most mania-ridden monster. It becomes enamored of a thousand fancies: sometimes it has a mania for building, like a great seigneur who loves a trowel; soon it abandons the trowel and becomes all military; it arrays itself from head to foot as a national guard, and drills and smokes; suddenly, it abandons military manoeuvres and flings away cigars; it is commercial, care-worn, falls into bankruptcy, sells its furniture on the place de Chatelet, files its schedule; but a few days later, lo! it has arranged its affairs and is giving fetes and dances. One day it eats barley-sugar by the mouthful, by the handful; yesterday it bought “papier Weymen”; to-day the monster’s teeth ache, and it applies to its walls an alexipharmatic to mitigate their dampness; to-morrow it will lay in a provision of pectoral paste. It has its manias for the month, for the season, for the year, like its manias of a day.

So, at the moment of which we speak, all the world was building or pulling down something,—people hardly knew what as yet. There were very few streets in which high scaffoldings on long poles could not be seen, fastened from floor to floor with transverse blocks inserted into holes in the walls on which the planks were laid,—a frail construction, shaken by the brick-layers, but held together by ropes, white with plaster, and insecurely protected from the wheels of carriages by the breastwork of planks which the law requires round all such buildings. There is something maritime in these masts, and ladders, and cordage, even in the shouts of the masons. About a dozen yards from the hotel Maulincour, one of these ephemeral barriers was erected before a house which was then being built of blocks of free-stone. The day after the

event we have just related, at the moment when the Baron de Maulincour was passing this scaffolding in his cabriolet on his way to see Madame Jules, a stone, two feet square, which was being raised to the upper storey of this building, got loose from the ropes and fell, crushing the baron's servant who was behind the cabriolet. A cry of horror shook both the scaffold and the masons; one of them, apparently unable to keep his grasp on a pole, was in danger of death, and seemed to have been touched by the stone as it passed him.

A crowd collected rapidly; the masons came down the ladders swearing and insisting that Monsieur de Maulincour's cabriolet had been driven against the boarding and so had shaken their crane. Two inches more and the stone would have fallen on the baron's head. The groom was dead, the carriage shattered. 'Twas an event for the whole neighborhood, the newspapers told of it. Monsieur de Maulincour, certain that he had not touched the boarding, complained; the case went to court. Inquiry being made, it was shown that a small boy, armed with a lath, had mounted guard and called to all foot-passengers to keep away. The affair ended there. Monsieur de Maulincour obtained no redress. He had lost his servant, and was confined to his bed for some days, for the back of the carriage when shattered had bruised him severely, and the nervous shock of the sudden surprise gave him a fever. He did not, therefore, go to see Madame Jules.

Ten days after this event, he left the house for the first time, in his repaired cabriolet, when, as he drove down the rue de Bourgogne and was close to the sewer opposite to the Chamber of Deputies, the axle-tree broke in two, and the baron was driving so rapidly that the breakage would have caused the two wheels to come together with force enough to break his head, had it not been for the resistance of the leather hood. Nevertheless, he was badly wounded in the side. For the second time in ten days he was carried home in a fainting condition to his terrified grandmother. This second accident gave him a feeling of distrust; he thought, though vaguely, of Ferragus and Madame Jules. To throw light on these suspicions he had the broken axle brought to his room and sent for his carriage-maker. The man examined the axle and the fracture, and proved two things: First, the axle was not made in his workshop; he furnished none that did not bear the initials of his name on the iron. But he could not explain by what means this axle had been substituted for the other. Secondly, the breakage of the suspicious axle was caused by a hollow space having been blown in it and a straw very cleverly inserted.

"Eh! Monsieur le baron, whoever did that was malicious!" he said; "any one would swear, to look at it, that the axle was sound."

Monsieur de Maulincour begged the carriage-maker to say nothing of the affair; but he felt himself warned. These two attempts at murder were planned

with an ability which denoted the enmity of intelligent minds.

“It is war to the death,” he said to himself, as he tossed in his bed,—“a war of savages, skulking in ambush, of trickery and treachery, declared in the name of Madame Jules. What sort of man is this to whom she belongs? What species of power does this Ferragus wield?”

Monsieur de Maulincour, though a soldier and brave man, could not repress a shudder. In the midst of many thoughts that now assailed him, there was one against which he felt he had neither defence nor courage: might not poison be employed ere long by his secret enemies? Under the influence of fears, which his momentary weakness and fever and low diet increased, he sent for an old woman long attached to the service of his grandmother, whose affection for himself was one of those semi-maternal sentiments which are the sublime of the commonplace. Without confiding in her wholly, he charged her to buy secretly and daily, in different localities, the food he needed; telling her to keep it under lock and key and bring it to him herself, not allowing any one, no matter who, to approach her while preparing it. He took the most minute precautions to protect himself against that form of death. He was ill in his bed and alone, and he had therefore the leisure to think of his own security,—the one necessity clear-sighted enough to enable human egotism to forget nothing!

But the unfortunate man had poisoned his own life by this dread, and, in spite of himself, suspicion dyed all his hours with its gloomy tints. These two lessons of attempted assassination did teach him, however, the value of one of the virtues most necessary to a public man; he saw the wise dissimulation that must be practised in dealing with the great interests of life. To be silent about our own secret is nothing; but to be silent from the start, to forget a fact as Ali Pacha did for thirty years in order to be sure of a vengeance waited for for thirty years, is a fine study in a land where there are few men who can keep their own counsel for thirty days. Monsieur de Maulincour literally lived only through Madame Jules. He was perpetually absorbed in a sober examination into the means he ought to employ to triumph in this mysterious struggle with these mysterious persons. His secret passion for that woman grew by reason of all these obstacles. Madame Jules was ever there, erect, in the midst of his thoughts, in the centre of his heart, more seductive by her presumable vices than by the positive virtues for which he had made her his idol.

At last, anxious to reconnoitre the position of the enemy, he thought he might without danger initiate the vidame into the secrets of his situation. The old commander loved Auguste as a father loves his wife’s children; he was shrewd, dexterous, and very diplomatic. He listened to the baron, shook his head, and they both held counsel. The worthy vidame did not share his young friend’s confidence when Auguste declared that in the time in which they now lived, the police and the government were able to lay bare all mysteries, and

that if it were absolutely necessary to have recourse to those powers, he should find them most powerful auxiliaries.

The old man replied, gravely: "The police, my dear boy, is the most incompetent thing on this earth, and government the feeblest in all matters concerning individuals. Neither the police nor the government can read hearts. What we might reasonably ask of them is to search for the causes of an act. But the police and the government are both eminently unfitted for that; they lack, essentially, the personal interest which reveals all to him who wants to know all. No human power can prevent an assassin or a poisoner from reaching the heart of a prince or the stomach of an honest man. Passions are the best police."

The vidame strongly advised the baron to go to Italy, and from Italy to Greece, from Greece to Syria, from Syria to Asia, and not to return until his secret enemies were convinced of his repentance, and would so make tacit peace with him. But if he did not take that course, then the vidame advised him to stay in the house, and even in his own room, where he would be safe from the attempts of this man Ferragus, and not to leave it until he could be certain of crushing him.

"We should never touch an enemy until we can be sure of taking his head off," he said, gravely.

The old man, however, promised his favorite to employ all the astuteness with which Heaven had provided him (without compromising any one) in reconnoitring the enemy's ground, and laying his plans for future victory. The Commander had in his service a retired Figaro, the wiliest monkey that ever walked in human form; in earlier days as clever as a devil, working his body like a galley-slave, alert as a thief, sly as a woman, but now fallen into the decadence of genius for want of practice since the new constitution of Parisian society, which has reformed even the valets of comedy. This Scapin emeritus was attached to his master as to a superior being; but the shrewd old vidame added a good round sum yearly to the wages of his former provost of gallantry, which strengthened the ties of natural affection by the bonds of self-interest, and obtained for the old gentleman as much care as the most loving mistress could bestow on a sick friend. It was this pearl of the old-fashioned comedy-valets, relic of the last century, auxiliary incorruptible from lack of passions to satisfy, on whom the old vidame and Monsieur de Maulincour now relied.

"Monsieur le baron will spoil all," said the great man in livery, when called into counsel. "Monsieur should eat, drink, and sleep in peace. I take the whole matter upon myself."

Accordingly, eight days after the conference, when Monsieur de

Maulincour, perfectly restored to health, was breakfasting with his grandmother and the vidame, Justin entered to make his report. As soon as the dowager had returned to her own apartments he said, with that mock modesty which men of talent are so apt to affect:—

“Ferragus is not the name of the enemy who is pursuing Monsieur le baron. This man—this devil, rather—is called Gratien, Henri, Victor, Jean-Joseph Bourignard. The Sieur Gratien Bourignard is a former ship-builder, once very rich, and, above all, one of the handsomest men of his day in Paris, —a Lovelace, capable of seducing Grandison. My information stops short there. He has been a simple workman; and the Companions of the Order of the Devorants did, at one time, elect him as their chief, under the title of Ferragus XXIII. The police ought to know that, if the police were instituted to know anything. The man has moved from the rue des Vieux-Augustins, and now roosts rue Joquelet, where Madame Jules Desmarets goes frequently to see him; sometimes her husband, on his way to the Bourse, drives her as far as the rue Vivienne, or she drives her husband to the Bourse. Monsieur le vidame knows about these things too well to want me to tell him if it is the husband who takes the wife, or the wife who takes the husband; but Madame Jules is so pretty, I’d bet on her. All that I have told you is positive. Bourignard often plays at number 129. Saving your presence, monsieur, he’s a rogue who loves women, and he has his little ways like a man of condition. As for the rest, he wins sometimes, disguises himself like an actor, paints his face to look like anything he chooses, and lives, I may say, the most original life in the world. I don’t doubt he has a good many lodgings, for most of the time he manages to evade what Monsieur le vidame calls ‘parliamentary investigations.’ If monsieur wishes, he could be disposed of honorably, seeing what his habits are. It is always easy to get rid of a man who loves women. However, this capitalist talks about moving again. Have Monsieur le vidame and Monsieur le baron any other commands to give me?”

“Justin, I am satisfied with you; don’t go any farther in the matter without my orders, but keep a close watch here, so that Monsieur le baron may have nothing to fear.”

“My dear boy,” continued the vidame, when they were alone, “go back to your old life, and forget Madame Jules.”

“No, no,” said Auguste; “I will never yield to Gratien Bourignard. I will have him bound hand and foot, and Madame Jules also.”

That evening the Baron Auguste de Maulincour, recently promoted to higher rank in the company of the Body-Guard of the king, went to a ball given by Madame la Duchesse de Berry at the Elysee-Bourbon. There, certainly, no danger could lurk for him; and yet, before he left the palace, he

had an affair of honor on his hands,—an affair it was impossible to settle except by a duel.

His adversary, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, considered that he had strong reasons to complain of Monsieur de Maulincour, who had given some ground for it during his former intimacy with Monsieur de Ronquerolles' sister, the Comtesse de Serizy. That lady, the one who detested German sentimentality, was all the more exacting in the matter of prudery. By one of those inexplicable fatalities, Auguste now uttered a harmless jest which Madame de Serizy took amiss, and her brother resented it. The discussion took place in the corner of a room, in a low voice. In good society, adversaries never raise their voices. The next day the faubourg Saint-Germain and the Chateau talked over the affair. Madame de Serizy was warmly defended, and all the blame was laid on Maulincour. Auguste's personages interfered. Seconds of the highest distinction were imposed on Messieurs de Maulincour and de Ronquerolles and every precaution was taken on the ground that no one should be killed.

When Auguste found himself face to face with his antagonist, a man of pleasure, to whom no one could possibly deny sentiments of the highest honor, he felt it was impossible to believe him the instrument of Ferragus, chief of the Devorants; and yet he was compelled, as it were, by an inexplicable presentiment, to question the marquis.

“Messieurs,” he said to the seconds, “I certainly do not refuse to meet the fire of Monsieur de Ronquerolles; but before doing so, I here declare that I was to blame, and I offer him whatever excuses he may desire, and publicly if he wishes it; because when the matter concerns a woman, nothing, I think, can degrade a man of honor. I therefore appeal to his generosity and good sense; is there not something rather silly in fighting without a cause?”

Monsieur de Ronquerolles would not allow of this way of ending the affair, and then the baron, his suspicions revived, walked up to him.

“Well, then! Monsieur le marquis,” he said, “pledge me, in presence of these gentlemen, your word as a gentleman that you have no other reason for vengeance than that you have chosen to put forward.”

“Monsieur, that is a question you have no right to ask.”

So saying, Monsieur de Ronquerolles took his place. It was agreed, in advance, that the adversaries were to be satisfied with one exchange of shots. Monsieur de Ronquerolles, in spite of the great distance determined by the seconds, which seemed to make the death of either party problematical, if not impossible, brought down the baron. The ball went through the latter's body just below the heart, but fortunately without doing vital injury.

“You aimed too well, monsieur,” said the baron, “to be avenging only a

paltry quarrel.”

And he fainted. Monsieur de Ronquerolles, who believed him to be a dead man, smiled sardonically as he heard those words.

After a fortnight, during which time the dowager and the vidame gave him those cares of old age the secret of which is in the hands of long experience only, the baron began to return to life. But one morning his grandmother dealt him a crushing blow, by revealing anxieties to which, in her last days, she was now subjected. She showed him a letter signed F, in which the history of her grandson’s secret espionage was recounted step by step. The letter accused Monsieur de Maulincour of actions that were unworthy of a man of honor. He had, it said, placed an old woman at the stand of hackney-coaches in the rue de Menars; an old spy, who pretended to sell water from her cask to the coachmen, but who was really there to watch the actions of Madame Jules Desmarets. He had spied upon the daily life of a most inoffensive man, in order to detect his secrets,—secrets on which depended the lives of three persons. He had brought upon himself a relentless struggle, in which, although he had escaped with life three times, he must inevitably succumb, because his death had been sworn and would be compassed if all human means were employed upon it. Monsieur de Maulincour could no longer escape his fate by even promising to respect the mysterious life of these three persons, because it was impossible to believe the word of a gentleman who had fallen to the level of a police-spy; and for what reason? Merely to trouble the respectable life of an innocent woman and a harmless old man.

The letter itself was nothing to Auguste in comparison to the tender reproaches of his grandmother. To lack respect to a woman! to spy upon her actions without a right to do so! Ought a man ever to spy upon a woman whom he loved?—in short, she poured out a torrent of those excellent reasons which prove nothing; and they put the young baron, for the first time in his life, into one of those great human furies in which are born, and from which issue the most vital actions of a man’s life.

“Since it is war to the knife,” he said in conclusion, “I shall kill my enemy by any means that I can lay hold of.”

The vidame went immediately, at Auguste’s request, to the chief of the private police of Paris, and without bringing Madame Jules’ name or person into the narrative, although they were really the gist of it, he made the official aware of the fears of the family of Maulincour about this mysterious person who was bold enough to swear the death of an officer of the Guards, in defiance of the law and the police. The chief pushed up his green spectacles in amazement, blew his nose several times, and offered snuff to the vidame, who, to save his dignity, pretended not to use tobacco, although his own nose was

discolored with it. Then the chief took notes and promised, Vidocq and his spies aiding, to send in a report within a few days to the Maulincour family, assuring them meantime that there were no secrets for the police of Paris.

A few days after this the police official called to see the vidame at the Hotel de Maulincour, where he found the young baron quite recovered from his last wound. He gave them in bureaucratic style his thanks for the indications they had afforded him, and told them that Bourignard was a convict, condemned to twenty years' hard labor, who had miraculously escaped from a gang which was being transported from Bicetre to Toulon. For thirteen years the police had been endeavoring to recapture him, knowing that he had boldly returned to Paris; but so far this convict had escaped the most active search, although he was known to be mixed up in many nefarious deeds. However, the man, whose life was full of very curious incidents, would certainly be captured now in one or other of his several domiciles and delivered up to justice. The bureaucrat ended his report by saying to Monsieur de Maulincour that if he attached enough importance to the matter to wish to witness the capture of Bourignard, he might come the next day at eight in the morning to a house in the rue Sainte-Foi, of which he gave him the number. Monsieur de Maulincour excused himself from going personally in search of certainty,—trusting, with the sacred respect inspired by the police of Paris, in the capability of the authorities.

Three days later, hearing nothing, and seeing nothing in the newspapers about the projected arrest, which was certainly of enough importance to have furnished an article, Monsieur de Maulincour was beginning to feel anxieties which were presently allayed by the following letter:—

Monsieur le Baron,—I have the honor to announce to you that you need have no further uneasiness touching the affair in question. The man named Gratien Bourignard, otherwise called Ferragus, died yesterday, at his lodgings, rue Joquelet No. 7. The suspicions we naturally conceived as to the identity of the dead body have been completely set at rest by the facts. The physician of the Prefecture of police was despatched by us to assist the physician of the arrondissement, and the chief of the detective police made all the necessary verifications to obtain absolute certainty. Moreover, the character of the persons who signed the certificate of death, and the affidavits of those who took care of the said Bourignard in his last illness, among others that of the worthy vicar of the church of the Bonne-Nouvelle (to whom he made his last confession, for he died a Christian), do not permit us to entertain any sort of doubt. Accept, Monsieur le baron, etc., etc.

Monsieur de Maulincour, the dowager, and the vidame breathed again with joy unspeakable. The good old woman kissed her grandson leaving a tear upon his cheek, and went away to thank God in prayer. The dear soul, who was

making a novena for Auguste's safety, believed her prayers were answered.

"Well," said the vidame, "now you had better show yourself at the ball you were speaking of. I oppose no further objections."

CHAPTER III. THE WIFE ACCUSED

Monsieur de Maulincour was all the more anxious to go to this ball because he knew that Madame Jules would be present. The fete was given by the Prefect of the Seine, in whose salons the two social worlds of Paris met as on neutral ground. Auguste passed through the rooms without finding the woman who now exercised so mighty an influence on his fate. He entered an empty boudoir where card-tables were placed awaiting players; and sitting down on a divan he gave himself up to the most contradictory thoughts about her. A man presently took the young officer by the arm, and looking up the baron was stupefied to behold the pauper of the rue Coquilliere, the Ferragus of Ida, the lodger in the rue Soly, the Bourignard of Justin, the convict of the police, and the dead man of the day before.

"Monsieur, not a sound, not a word," said Bourignard, whose voice he recognized. The man was elegantly dressed; he wore the order of the Golden-Fleece, and a medal on his coat. "Monsieur," he continued, and his voice was sibilant like that of a hyena, "you increase my efforts against you by having recourse to the police. You will perish, monsieur; it has now become necessary. Do you love Madame Jules? Are you beloved by her? By what right do you trouble her peaceful life, and blacken her virtue?"

Some one entered the card-room. Ferragus rose to go.

"Do you know this man?" asked Monsieur de Maulincour of the newcomer, seizing Ferragus by the collar. But Ferragus quickly disengaged himself, took Monsieur de Maulincour by the hair, and shook his head rapidly.

"Must you have lead in it to make it steady?" he said.

"I do not know him personally," replied Henri de Marsay, the spectator of this scene, "but I know that he is Monsieur de Funcal, a rich Portuguese."

Monsieur de Funcal had disappeared. The baron followed but without being able to overtake him until he reached the peristyle, where he saw Ferragus, who looked at him with a jeering laugh from a brilliant equipage which was driven away at high speed.

"Monsieur," said Auguste, re-entering the salon and addressing de Marsay, whom he knew, "I entreat you to tell me where Monsieur de Funcal lives."

“I do not know; but some one here can no doubt tell you.”

The baron, having questioned the prefect, ascertained that the Comte de Funcal lived at the Portuguese embassy. At this moment, while he still felt the icy fingers of that strange man in his hair, he saw Madame Jules in all her dazzling beauty, fresh, gracious, artless, resplendent with the sanctity of womanhood which had won his love. This creature, now infernal to him, excited no emotion in his soul but that of hatred; and this hatred shone in a savage, terrible look from his eyes. He watched for a moment when he could speak to her unheard, and then he said:—

“Madame, your bravi have missed me three times.”

“What do you mean, monsieur?” she said, flushing. “I know that you have had several unfortunate accidents lately, which I have greatly regretted; but how could I have had anything to do with them?”

“You knew that bravi were employed against me by that man of the rue Soly?”

“Monsieur!”

“Madame, I now call you to account, not for my happiness only, but for my blood—”

At this instant Jules Desmarets approached them.

“What are you saying to my wife, monsieur?”

“Make that inquiry at my own house, monsieur, if you are curious,” said Maulincour, moving away, and leaving Madame Jules in an almost fainting condition.

There are few women who have not found themselves, once at least in their lives, a propos of some undeniable fact, confronted with a direct, sharp, uncompromising question,—one of those questions pitilessly asked by husbands, the mere apprehension of which gives a chill, while the actual words enter the heart like the blade of a dagger. It is from such crises that the maxim has come, “All women lie.” Falsehood, kindly falsehood, venial falsehood, sublime falsehood, horrible falsehood,—but always the necessity to lie. This necessity admitted, ought they not to know how to lie well? French women do it admirably. Our manners and customs teach them deception! Besides, women are so naively saucy, so pretty, graceful, and withal so true in lying,—they recognize so fully the utility of doing so in order to avoid in social life the violent shocks which happiness might not resist,—that lying is seen to be as necessary to their lives as the cotton-wool in which they put away their jewels. Falsehood becomes to them the foundation of speech; truth is exceptional; they tell it, if they are virtuous, by caprice or by calculation.

According to individual character, some women laugh when they lie; others weep; others are grave; some grow angry. After beginning life by feigning indifference to the homage that deeply flatters them, they often end by lying to themselves. Who has not admired their apparent superiority to everything at the very moment when they are trembling for the secret treasures of their love? Who has never studied their ease, their readiness, their freedom of mind in the greatest embarrassments of life? In them, nothing is put on. Deception comes as the snow from heaven. And then, with what art they discover the truth in others! With what shrewdness they employ a direct logic in answer to some passionate question which has revealed to them the secret of the heart of a man who was guileless enough to proceed by questioning! To question a woman! why, that is delivering one's self up to her; does she not learn in that way all that we seek to hide from her? Does she not know also how to be dumb, through speaking? What men are daring enough to struggle with the Parisian woman?—a woman who knows how to hold herself above all dagger thrusts, saying: “You are very inquisitive; what is it to you? Why do you wish to know? Ah! you are jealous! And suppose I do not choose to answer you?”—in short, a woman who possesses the hundred and thirty-seven methods of saying No, and incommensurable variations of the word Yes. Is not a treatise on the words yes and no, a fine diplomatic, philosophic, logographic, and moral work, still waiting to be written? But to accomplish this work, which we may also call diabolic, isn't an androgynous genius necessary? For that reason, probably, it will never be attempted. And besides, of all unpublished works isn't it the best known and the best practised among women? Have you studied the behavior, the pose, the *disinvoltura* of a falsehood? Examine it.

Madame Desmarets was seated in the right-hand corner of her carriage, her husband in the left. Having forced herself to recover from her emotion in the ballroom, she now affected a calm demeanor. Her husband had then said nothing to her, and he still said nothing. Jules looked out of the carriage window at the black walls of the silent houses before which they passed; but suddenly, as if driven by a determining thought, when turning the corner of a street he examined his wife, who appeared to be cold in spite of the fur-lined pelisse in which she was wrapped. He thought she seemed pensive, and perhaps she really was so. Of all communicable things, reflection and gravity are the most contagious.

“What could Monsieur de Maulincour have said to affect you so keenly?” said Jules; “and why does he wish me to go to his house and find out?”

“He can tell you nothing in his house that I cannot tell you here,” she replied.

Then, with that feminine craft which always slightly degrades virtue,

Madame Jules waited for another question. Her husband turned his face back to the houses, and continued his study of their walls. Another question would imply suspicion, distrust. To suspect a woman is a crime in love. Jules had already killed a man for doubting his wife. Clemence did not know all there was of true passion, of loyal reflection, in her husband's silence; just as Jules was ignorant of the generous drama that was wringing the heart of his Clemence.

The carriage rolled on through a silent Paris, bearing the couple,—two lovers who adored each other, and who, gently leaning on the same silken cushion, were being parted by an abyss. In these elegant coupes returning from a ball between midnight and two in the morning, how many curious and singular scenes must pass,—meaning those coupes with lanterns, which light both the street and the carriage, those with their windows unshaded; in short, legitimate coupes, in which couples can quarrel without caring for the eyes of pedestrians, because the civil code gives a right to provoke, or beat, or kiss, a wife in a carriage or elsewhere, anywhere, everywhere! How many secrets must be revealed in this way to nocturnal pedestrians,—to those young fellows who have gone to a ball in a carriage, but are obliged, for whatever cause it may be, to return on foot. It was the first time that Jules and Clemence had been together thus,—each in a corner; usually the husband pressed close to his wife.

“It is very cold,” remarked Madame Jules.

But her husband did not hear her; he was studying the signs above the shop windows.

“Clemence,” he said at last, “forgive me the question I am about to ask you.”

He came closer, took her by the waist, and drew her to him.

“My God, it is coming!” thought the poor woman. “Well,” she said aloud, anticipating the question, “you want to know what Monsieur de Maulincour said to me. I will tell you, Jules; but not without fear. Good God! how is it possible that you and I should have secrets from one another? For the last few moments I have seen you struggling between a conviction of our love and vague fears. But that conviction is clear within us, is it not? And these doubts and fears, do they not seem to you dark and unnatural? Why not stay in that clear light of love you cannot doubt? When I have told you all, you will still desire to know more; and yet I myself do not know what the extraordinary words of that man meant. What I fear is that this may lead to some fatal affair between you. I would rather that we both forget this unpleasant moment. But, in any case, swear to me that you will let this singular adventure explain itself naturally. Here are the facts. Monsieur de Maulincour declared to me that the

three accidents you have heard mentioned—the falling of a stone on his servant, the breaking down of his cabriolet, and his duel about Madame de Serizy—were the result of some plot I had laid against him. He also threatened to reveal to you the cause of my desire to destroy him. Can you imagine what all this means? My emotion came from the sight of his face convulsed with madness, his haggard eyes, and also his words, broken by some violent inward emotion. I thought him mad. That is all that took place. Now, I should be less than a woman if I had not perceived that for over a year I have become, as they call it, the passion of Monsieur de Maulincour. He has never seen me except at a ball; and our intercourse has been most insignificant,—merely that which every one shares at a ball. Perhaps he wants to disunite us, so that he may find me at some future time alone and unprotected. There, see! already you are frowning! Oh, how cordially I hate society! We were so happy without him; why take any notice of him? Jules, I entreat you, forget all this! To-morrow we shall, no doubt, hear that Monsieur de Maulincour has gone mad.”

“What a singular affair!” thought Jules, as the carriage stopped under the peristyle of their house. He gave his arm to his wife and together they went up to their apartments.

To develop this history in all its truth of detail, and to follow its course through many windings, it is necessary here to divulge some of love’s secrets, to glide beneath the ceilings of a marriage chamber, not shamelessly, but like Trilby, frightening neither Dougal nor Jeannie, alarming no one,—being as chaste as our noble French language requires, and as bold as the pencil of Gerard in his picture of Daphnis and Chloe.

The bedroom of Madame Jules was a sacred plot. Herself, her husband, and her maid alone entered it. Opulence has glorious privileges, and the most enviable are those which enable the development of sentiments to their fullest extent,—fertilizing them by the accomplishment of even their caprices, and surrounding them with a brilliancy that enlarges them, with refinements that purify them, with a thousand delicacies that make them still more alluring. If you hate dinners on the grass, and meals ill-served, if you feel a pleasure in seeing a damask cloth that is dazzlingly white, a silver-gilt dinner service, and porcelain of exquisite purity, lighted by transparent candles, where miracles of cookery are served under silver covers bearing coats of arms, you must, to be consistent, leave the garrets at the tops of the houses, and the grisettes in the streets, abandon garrets, grisettes, umbrellas, and overshoes to men who pay for their dinners with tickets; and you must also comprehend Love to be a principle which develops in all its grace only on Savonnerie carpets, beneath the opal gleams of an alabaster lamp, between guarded walls silk-hung, before gilded hearths in chambers deadened to all outward sounds by shutters and billowy curtains. Mirrors must be there to show the play of form and repeat

the woman we would multiply as love itself multiplies and magnifies her; next low divans, and a bed which, like a secret, is divined, not shown. In this coquettish chamber are fur-lined slippers for pretty feet, wax-candles under glass with muslin draperies, by which to read at all hours of the night, and flowers, not those oppressive to the head, and linen, the fineness of which might have satisfied Anne of Austria.

Madame Jules had realized this charming programme, but that was nothing. All women of taste can do as much, though there is always in the arrangement of these details a stamp of personality which gives to this decoration or that detail a character that cannot be imitated. To-day, more than ever, reigns the fanaticism of individuality. The more our laws tend to an impossible equality, the more we shall get away from it in our manners and customs. Thus, rich people are beginning, in France, to become more exclusive in their tastes and their belongings, than they have been for the last thirty years. Madame Jules knew very well how to carry out this programme; and everything about her was arranged in harmony with a luxury that suits so well with love. Love in a cottage, or “Fifteen hundred francs and my Sophy,” is the dream of starvelings to whom black bread suffices in their present state; but when love really comes, they grow fastidious and end by craving the luxuries of gastronomy. Love holds toil and poverty in horror. It would rather die than merely live on from hand to mouth.

Many women, returning from a ball, impatient for their beds, throw off their gowns, their faded flowers, their bouquets, the fragrance of which has now departed. They leave their little shoes beneath a chair, the white strings trailing; they take out their combs and let their hair roll down as it will. Little they care if their husbands see the puffs, the hairpins, the artful props which supported the elegant edifices of the hair, and the garlands or the jewels that adorned it. No more mysteries! all is over for the husband; no more painting or decoration for him. The corset—half the time it is a corset of a reparative kind—lies where it is thrown, if the maid is too sleepy to take it away with her. The whalebone bustle, the oiled-silk protections round the sleeves, the pads, the hair bought from a coiffeur, all the false woman is there, scattered about in open sight. *Disjecta membra poetae*, the artificial poesy, so much admired by those for whom it is conceived and elaborated, the fragments of a pretty woman, litter every corner of the room. To the love of a yawning husband, the actual presents herself, also yawning, in a dishabille without elegance, and a tumbled night-cap, that of last night and that of to-morrow night also,—“For really, monsieur, if you want a pretty cap to rumple every night, increase my pin-money.”

There’s life as it is! A woman makes herself old and unpleasing to her husband; but dainty and elegant and adorned for others, for the rival of all

husbands,—for that world which calumniates and tears to shreds her sex.

Inspired by true love, for Love has, like other creations, its instinct of preservation, Madame Jules did very differently; she found in the constant blessing of her love the necessary impulse to fulfil all those minute personal cares which ought never to be relaxed, because they perpetuate love. Besides, such personal cares and duties proceed from a personal dignity which becomes all women, and are among the sweetest of flatteries, for is it not respecting in themselves the man they love?

So Madame Jules denied to her husband all access to her dressing-room, where she left the accessories of her toilet, and whence she issued mysteriously adorned for the mysterious fetes of her heart. Entering their chamber, which was always graceful and elegant, Jules found a woman coquettishly wrapped in a charming peignoir, her hair simply wound in heavy coils around her head; a woman always more simple, more beautiful there than she was before the world; a woman just refreshed in water, whose only artifice consisted in being whiter than her muslins, sweeter than all perfumes, more seductive than any siren, always loving and therefore always loved. This admirable understanding of a wife's business was the secret of Josephine's charm for Napoleon, as in former times it was that of Caesonia for Caius Caligula, of Diane de Poitiers for Henri II. If it was largely productive to women of seven or eight lustres what a weapon is it in the hands of young women! A husband gathers with delight the rewards of his fidelity.

Returning home after the conversation which had chilled her with fear, and still gave her the keenest anxiety, Madame Jules took particular pains with her toilet for the night. She wanted to make herself, and she did make herself enchanting. She belted the cambric of her dressing-gown round her waist, defining the lines of her bust; she allowed her hair to fall upon her beautifully modelled shoulders. A perfumed bath had given her a delightful fragrance, and her little bare feet were in velvet slippers. Strong in a sense of her advantages she came in stepping softly, and put her hands over her husband's eyes. She thought him pensive; he was standing in his dressing-gown before the fire, his elbow on the mantel and one foot on the fender. She said in his ear, warming it with her breath, and nibbling the tip of it with her teeth:—

“What are you thinking about, monsieur?”

Then she pressed him in her arms as if to tear him away from all evil thoughts. The woman who loves has a full knowledge of her power; the more virtuous she is, the more effectual her coquetry.

“About you,” he answered.

“Only about me?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! that’s a very doubtful ‘yes.’”

They went to bed. As she fell asleep, Madame Jules said to herself:—

“Monsieur de Maulincour will certainly cause some evil. Jules’ mind is preoccupied, disturbed; he is nursing thoughts he does not tell me.”

It was three in the morning when Madame Jules was awakened by a presentiment which struck her heart as she slept. She had a sense both physical and moral of her husband’s absence. She did not feel the arm Jules passed beneath her head,—that arm in which she had slept, peacefully and happy, for five years; an arm she had never wearied. A voice said to her, “Jules suffers, Jules is weeping.” She raised her head, and then sat up; felt that her husband’s place was cold, and saw him sitting before the fire, his feet on the fender, his head resting against the back of an arm-chair. Tears were on his cheeks. The poor woman threw herself hastily from her bed and sprang at a bound to her husband’s knees.

“Jules! what is it? Are you ill? Speak, tell me! Speak to me, if you love me!” and she poured out a hundred words expressing the deepest tenderness.

Jules knelt at her feet, kissed her hands and knees, and answered with fresh tears:—

“Dear Clemence, I am most unhappy! It is not loving to distrust the one we love. I adore you and suspect you. The words that man said to me to-night have struck to my heart; they stay there in spite of myself, and confound me. There is some mystery here. In short, and I blush to say it, your explanations do not satisfy me. My reason casts gleams into my soul which my love rejects. It is an awful combat. Could I stay there, holding your head, and suspecting thoughts within it to me unknown? Oh! I believe in you, I believe in you!” he cried, seeing her smile sadly and open her mouth as if to speak. “Say nothing; do not reproach me. Besides, could you say anything I have not said myself for the last three hours? Yes, for three hours, I have been here, watching you as you slept, so beautiful! admiring that pure, peaceful brow. Yes, yes! you have always told me your thoughts, have you not? I alone am in that soul. While I look at you, while my eyes can plunge into yours I see all plainly. Your life is as pure as your glance is clear. No, there is no secret behind those transparent eyes.” He rose and kissed their lids. “Let me avow to you, dearest soul,” he said, “that for the last five years each day has increased my happiness, through the knowledge that you are all mine, and that no natural affection even can take any of your love. Having no sister, no father, no mother, no companion, I am neither above nor below any living being in your heart; I am alone there. Clemence, repeat to me those sweet things of the spirit

you have so often said to me; do not blame me; comfort me, I am so unhappy. I have an odious suspicion on my conscience, and you have nothing in your heart to sear it. My beloved, tell me, could I stay there beside you? Could two heads united as ours have been lie on the same pillow when one was suffering and the other tranquil? What are you thinking of?" he cried abruptly, observing that Clemence was anxious, confused, and seemed unable to restrain her tears.

"I am thinking of my mother," she answered, in a grave voice. "You will never know, Jules, what I suffer in remembering my mother's dying farewell, said in a voice sweeter than all music, and in feeling the solemn touch of her icy hand at a moment when you overwhelm me with those assurances of your precious love."

She raised her husband, strained him to her with a nervous force greater than that of men, and kissed his hair, covering it with tears.

"Ah! I would be hacked in pieces for you! Tell me that I make you happy; that I am to you the most beautiful of women—a thousand women to you. Oh! you are loved as no other man ever was or will be. I don't know the meaning of those words 'duty,' 'virtue.' Jules, I love you for yourself; I am happy in loving you; I shall love you more and more to my dying day. I have pride in my love; I feel it is my destiny to have one sole emotion in my life. What I shall tell you now is dreadful, I know—but I am glad to have no child; I do not wish for any. I feel I am more wife than mother. Well, then, can you fear? Listen to me, my own beloved, promise to forget, not this hour of mingled tenderness and doubt, but the words of that madman. Jules, you must. Promise me not to see him, not to go to him. I have a deep conviction that if you set one foot in that maze we shall both roll down a precipice where I shall perish—but with your name upon my lips, your heart in my heart. Why hold me so high in that heart and yet so low in reality? What! you who give credit to so many as to money, can you not give me the charity of faith? And on the first occasion in our lives when you might prove to me your boundless trust, do you cast me from my throne in your heart? Between a madman and me, it is the madman whom you choose to believe? oh, Jules!" She stopped, threw back the hair that fell about her brow and neck, and then, in a heart-rending tone, she added: "I have said too much; one word should suffice. If your soul and your forehead still keep this cloud, however light it be, I tell you now that I shall die of it."

She could not repress a shudder, and turned pale.

"Oh! I will kill that man," thought Jules, as he lifted his wife in his arms and carried her to her bed.

"Let us sleep in peace, my angel," he said. "I have forgotten all, I swear

it!”

Clemence fell asleep to the music of those sweet words, softly repeated. Jules, as he watched her sleeping, said in his heart:—

“She is right; when love is so pure, suspicion blights it. To that young soul, that tender flower, a blight—yes, a blight means death.”

When a cloud comes between two beings filled with affection for each other and whose lives are in absolute unison, that cloud, though it may disperse, leaves in those souls a trace of its passage. Either love gains a stronger life, as the earth after rain, or the shock still echoes like distant thunder through a cloudless sky. It is impossible to recover absolutely the former life; love will either increase or diminish.

At breakfast, Monsieur and Madame Jules showed to each other those particular attentions in which there is always something of affectation. There were glances of forced gaiety, which seemed the efforts of persons endeavoring to deceive themselves. Jules had involuntary doubts, his wife had positive fears. Still, sure of each other, they had slept. Was this strained condition the effect of a want of faith, or was it only a memory of their nocturnal scene? They did not know themselves. But they loved each other so purely that the impression of that scene, both cruel and beneficent, could not fail to leave its traces in their souls; both were eager to make those traces disappear, each striving to be the first to return to the other, and thus they could not fail to think of the cause of their first variance. To loving souls, this is not grief; pain is still far-off; but it is a sort of mourning, which is difficult to depict. If there are, indeed, relations between colors and the emotions of the soul, if, as Locke’s blind man said, scarlet produces on the sight the effect produced upon the hearing by a blast of trumpets, it is permissible to compare this reaction of melancholy to mourning tones of gray.

But even so, love saddened, love in which remains a true sentiment of its happiness, momentarily troubled though it be, gives enjoyments derived from pain and pleasure both, which are all novel. Jules studied his wife’s voice; he watched her glances with the freshness of feeling that inspired him in the earliest days of his passion for her. The memory of five absolutely happy years, her beauty, the candor of her love, quickly effaced in her husband’s mind the last vestiges of an intolerable pain.

The day was Sunday,—a day on which there was no Bourse and no business to be done. The reunited pair passed the whole day together, getting farther into each other’s hearts than they ever yet had done, like two children who in a moment of fear, hold each other closely and cling together, united by an instinct. There are in this life of two-in-one completely happy days, the gift of chance, ephemeral flowers, born neither of yesterday nor belonging to the

morrow. Jules and Clemence now enjoyed this day as though they forboded it to be the last of their loving life. What name shall we give to that mysterious power which hastens the steps of travellers before the storm is visible; which makes the life and beauty of the dying so resplendent, and fills the parting soul with joyous projects for days before death comes; which tells the midnight student to fill his lamp when it shines brightest; and makes the mother fear the thoughtful look cast upon her infant by an observing man? We all are affected by this influence in the great catastrophes of life; but it has never yet been named or studied; it is something more than presentiment, but not as yet clear vision.

All went well till the following day. On Monday, Jules Desmarets, obliged to go to the Bourse on his usual business, asked his wife, as usual, if she would take advantage of his carriage and let him drive her anywhere.

“No,” she said, “the day is too unpleasant to go out.”

It was raining in torrents. At half-past two o’clock Monsieur Desmarets reached the Treasury. At four o’clock, as he left the Bourse, he came face to face with Monsieur de Maulincour, who was waiting for him with the nervous pertinacity of hatred and vengeance.

“Monsieur,” he said, taking Monsieur Desmarets by the arm, “I have important information to give you. Listen to me. I am too loyal a man to have recourse to anonymous letters with which to trouble your peace of mind; I prefer to speak to you in person. Believe me, if my very life were not concerned, I should not meddle with the private affairs of any household, even if I thought I had the right to do so.”

“If what you have to say to me concerns Madame Desmarets,” replied Jules, “I request you to be silent, monsieur.”

“If I am silent, monsieur, you may before long see Madame Jules on the prisoner’s bench at the court of assizes beside a convict. Now, do you wish me to be silent?”

Jules turned pale; but his noble face instantly resumed its calmness, though it was now a false calmness. Drawing the baron under one of the temporary sheds of the Bourse, near which they were standing, he said to him in a voice which concealed his intense inward emotion:—

“Monsieur, I will listen to you; but there will be a duel to the death between us if—”

“Oh, to that I consent!” cried Monsieur de Maulincour. “I have the greatest esteem for your character. You speak of death. You are unaware that your wife may have assisted in poisoning me last Saturday night. Yes, monsieur, since

then some extraordinary evil has developed in me. My hair appears to distil an inward fever and a deadly languor through my skull; I know who clutched my hair at that ball.”

Monsieur de Maulincour then related, without omitting a single fact, his platonic love for Madame Jules, and the details of the affair in the rue Soly which began this narrative. Any one would have listened to him with attention; but Madame Jules' husband had good reason to be more amazed than any other human being. Here his character displayed itself; he was more amazed than overcome. Made a judge, and the judge of an adored woman, he found in his soul the equity of a judge as well as the inflexibility. A lover still, he thought less of his own shattered life than of his wife's life; he listened, not to his own anguish, but to some far-off voice that cried to him, “Clemence cannot lie! Why should she betray you?”

“Monsieur,” said the baron, as he ended, “being absolutely certain of having recognized in Monsieur de Funcal the same Ferragus whom the police declared dead, I have put upon his traces an intelligent man. As I returned that night I remembered, by a fortunate chance, the name of Madame Meynardie, mentioned in that letter of Ida, the presumed mistress of my persecutor. Supplied with this clue, my emissary will soon get to the bottom of this horrible affair; for he is far more able to discover the truth than the police themselves.”

“Monsieur,” replied Desmarests, “I know not how to thank you for this confidence. You say that you can obtain proofs and witnesses; I shall await them. I shall seek the truth of this strange affair courageously; but you must permit me to doubt everything until the evidence of the facts you state is proved to me. In any case you shall have satisfaction, for, as you will certainly understand, we both require it.”

Jules returned home.

“What is the matter, Jules?” asked his wife, when she saw him. “You look so pale you frighten me!”

“The day is cold,” he answered, walking with slow steps across the room where all things spoke to him of love and happiness,—that room so calm and peaceful where a deadly storm was gathering.

“Did you go out to-day?” he asked, as though mechanically.

He was impelled to ask the question by the last of a myriad of thoughts which had gathered themselves together into a lucid meditation, though jealousy was actively prompting them.

“No,” she answered, in a tone that was falsely candid.

At that instant Jules saw through the open door of the dressing-room the velvet bonnet which his wife wore in the mornings; on it were drops of rain. Jules was a passionate man, but he was also full of delicacy. It was repugnant to him to bring his wife face to face with a lie. When such a situation occurs, all has come to an end forever between certain beings. And yet those drops of rain were like a flash tearing through his brain.

He left the room, went down to the porter's lodge, and said to the porter, after making sure that they were alone:—

“Fouguereau, a hundred crowns if you tell me the truth; dismissal if you deceive me; and nothing at all if you ever speak of my question and your answer.”

He stopped to examine the man's face, leading him under the window. Then he continued:—

“Did madame go out this morning?”

“Madame went out at a quarter to three, and I think I saw her come in about half an hour ago.”

“That is true, upon your honor?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“You will have the money; but if you speak of this, remember, you will lose all.”

Jules returned to his wife.

“Clemence,” he said, “I find I must put my accounts in order. Do not be offended at the inquiry I am going to make. Have I not given you forty thousand francs since the beginning of the year?”

“More,” she said,—“forty-seven.”

“Have you spent them?”

“Nearly,” she replied. “In the first place, I had to pay several of our last year's bills—”

“I shall never find out anything in this way,” thought Jules. “I am not taking the best course.”

At this moment Jules' own valet entered the room with a letter for his master, who opened it indifferently, but as soon as his eyes had lighted on the signature he read it eagerly. The letter was as follows:—

Monsieur,—For the sake of your peace of mind as well as ours, I take the course of writing you this letter without possessing the advantage of being

known to you; but my position, my age, and the fear of some misfortune compel me to entreat you to show indulgence in the trying circumstances under which our afflicted family is placed. Monsieur Auguste de Maulincour has for the last few days shown signs of mental derangement, and we fear that he may trouble your happiness by fancies which he confided to Monsieur le Vidame de Pamiers and myself during his first attack of frenzy. We think it right, therefore, to warn you of his malady, which is, we hope, curable; but it will have such serious and important effects on the honor of our family and the career of my grandson that we must rely, monsieur, on your entire discretion.

If Monsieur le Vidame or I could have gone to see you we would not have written. But I make no doubt that you will regard this prayer of a mother, who begs you to destroy this letter.

Accept the assurance of my perfect consideration.

Baronne de Maulincour, nee de Rieux.

“Oh! what torture!” cried Jules.

“What is it? what is in your mind?” asked his wife, exhibiting the deepest anxiety.

“I have come,” he answered, slowly, as he threw her the letter, “to ask myself whether it can be you who have sent me that to avert my suspicions. Judge, therefore, what I suffer.”

“Unhappy man!” said Madame Jules, letting fall the paper. “I pity him; though he has done me great harm.”

“Are you aware that he has spoken to me?”

“Oh! have you been to see him, in spite of your promise?” she cried in terror.

“Clemence, our love is in danger of perishing; we stand outside of the ordinary rules of life; let us lay aside all petty considerations in presence of this great peril. Explain to me why you went out this morning. Women think they have the right to tell us little falsehoods. Sometimes they like to hide a pleasure they are preparing for us. Just now you said a word to me, by mistake, no doubt, a no for a yes.”

He went into the dressing-room and brought out the bonnet.

“See,” he said, “your bonnet has betrayed you; these spots are raindrops. You must, therefore, have gone out in a street cab, and these drops fell upon it as you went to find one, or as you entered or left the house where you went. But a woman can leave her own home for many innocent purposes, even after she has told her husband that she did not mean to go out. There are so many

reasons for changing our plans! Caprices, whims, are they not your right? Women are not required to be consistent with themselves. You had forgotten something,—a service to render, a visit, some kind action. But nothing hinders a woman from telling her husband what she does. Can we ever blush on the breast of a friend? It is not a jealous husband who speaks to you, my Clemence; it is your lover, your friend, your brother.” He flung himself passionately at her feet. “Speak, not to justify yourself, but to calm my horrible sufferings. I know that you went out. Well—what did you do? where did you go?”

“Yes, I went out, Jules,” she answered in a strained voice, though her face was calm. “But ask me nothing more. Wait; have confidence; without which you will lay up for yourself terrible remorse. Jules, my Jules, trust is the virtue of love. I owe to you that I am at this moment too troubled to answer you: but I am not a false woman; I love you, and you know it.”

“In the midst of all that can shake the faith of man and rouse his jealousy, for I see I am not first in your heart, I am no longer thine own self—well, Clemence, even so, I prefer to believe you, to believe that voice, to believe those eyes. If you deceive me, you deserve—”

“Ten thousand deaths!” she cried, interrupting him.

“I have never hidden a thought from you, but you—”

“Hush!” she said, “our happiness depends upon our mutual silence.”

“Ha! I will know all!” he exclaimed, with sudden violence.

At that moment the cries of a woman were heard,—the yelping of a shrill little voice came from the antechamber.

“I tell you I will go in!” it cried. “Yes, I shall go in; I will see her! I shall see her!”

Jules and Clemence both ran to the salon as the door from the antechamber was violently burst open. A young woman entered hastily, followed by two servants, who said to their master:—

“Monsieur, this person would come in in spite of us. We told her that madame was not at home. She answered that she knew very well madame had been out, but she saw her come in. She threatened to stay at the door of the house till she could speak to madame.”

“You can go,” said Monsieur Desmarets to the two men. “What do you want, mademoiselle?” he added, turning to the strange woman.

This “demoiselle” was the type of a woman who is never to be met with except in Paris. She is made in Paris, like the mud, like the pavement, like the

water of the Seine, such as it becomes in Paris before human industry filters it ten times ere it enters the cut-glass decanters and sparkles pure and bright from the filth it has been. She is therefore a being who is truly original. Depicted scores of times by the painter's brush, the pencil of the caricaturist, the charcoal of the etcher, she still escapes analysis, because she cannot be caught and rendered in all her moods, like Nature, like this fantastic Paris itself. She holds to vice by one thread only, and she breaks away from it at a thousand other points of the social circumference. Besides, she lets only one trait of her character be known, and that the only one which renders her blamable; her noble virtues are hidden; she prefers to glory in her naive libertinism. Most incompletely rendered in dramas and tales where she is put upon the scene with all her poesy, she is nowhere really true but in her garret; elsewhere she is invariably calumniated or over-praised. Rich, she deteriorates; poor, she is misunderstood. She has too many vices, and too many good qualities; she is too near to pathetic asphyxiation or to a dissolute laugh; too beautiful and too hideous. She personifies Paris, to which, in the long run, she supplies the toothless portresses, washerwomen, street-sweepers, beggars, occasionally insolent countesses, admired actresses, applauded singers; she has even given, in the olden time, two quasi-queens to the monarchy. Who can grasp such a Proteus? She is all woman, less than woman, more than woman. From this vast portrait the painter of manners and morals can take but a feature here and there; the ensemble is infinite.

She was a grisette of Paris; a grisette in all her glory; a grisette in a hackney-coach,—happy, young, handsome, fresh, but a grisette; a grisette with claws, scissors, impudent as a Spanish woman, snarling as a prudish English woman proclaiming her conjugal rights, coquettish as a great lady, though more frank, and ready for everything; a perfect lionne in her way; issuing from the little apartment of which she had dreamed so often, with its red-calico curtains, its Utrecht velvet furniture, its tea-table, the cabinet of china with painted designs, the sofa, the little moquette carpet, the alabaster clock and candlesticks (under glass cases), the yellow bedroom, the eider-down quilt,—in short, all the domestic joys of a grisette's life; and in addition, the woman-of-all-work (a former grisette herself, now the owner of a moustache), theatre-parties, unlimited bonbons, silk dresses, bonnets to spoil,—in fact, all the felicities coveted by the grisette heart except a carriage, which only enters her imagination as a marshal's baton into the dreams of a soldier. Yes, this grisette had all these things in return for a true affection, or in spite of a true affection, as some others obtain it for an hour a day,—a sort of tax carelessly paid under the claws of an old man.

The young woman who now entered the presence of Monsieur and Madame Jules had a pair of feet so little covered by her shoes that only a slim black line was visible between the carpet and her white stockings. This

peculiar foot-gear, which Parisian caricaturists have well-rendered, is a special attribute of the grisette of Paris; but she is even more distinctive to the eyes of an observer by the care with which her garments are made to adhere to her form, which they clearly define. On this occasion she was trigly dressed in a green gown, with a white chemisette, which allowed the beauty of her bust to be seen; her shawl, of Ternaux cashmere, had fallen from her shoulders, and was held by its two corners, which were twisted round her wrists. She had a delicate face, rosy cheeks, a white skin, sparkling gray eyes, a round, very promising forehead, hair carefully smoothed beneath her little bonnet, and heavy curls upon her neck.

“My name is Ida,” she said, “and if that’s Madame Jules to whom I have the advantage of speaking, I’ve come to tell her all I have in my heart against her. It is very wrong, when a woman is set up and in her furniture, as you are here, to come and take from a poor girl a man with whom I’m as good as married, morally, and who did talk of making it right by marrying me before the municipality. There’s plenty of handsome young men in the world—ain’t there, monsieur?—to take your fancy, without going after a man of middle age, who makes my happiness. Yah! I haven’t got a fine hotel like this, but I’ve got my love, I have. I hate handsome men and money; I’m all heart, and —”

Madame Jules turned to her husband.

“You will allow me, monsieur, to hear no more of all this,” she said, retreating to her bedroom.

“If the lady lives with you, I’ve made a mess of it; but I can’t help that,” resumed Ida. “Why does she come after Monsieur Ferragus every day?”

“You are mistaken, mademoiselle,” said Jules, stupefied; “my wife is incapable—”

“Ha! so you’re married, you two,” said the grisette showing some surprise. “Then it’s very wrong, monsieur,—isn’t it?—for a woman who has the happiness of being married in legal marriage to have relations with a man like Henri—”

“Henri! who is Henri?” said Jules, taking Ida by the arm and pulling her into an adjoining room that his wife might hear no more.

“Why, Monsieur Ferragus.”

“But he is dead,” said Jules.

“Nonsense; I went to Franconi’s with him last night, and he brought me home—as he ought. Besides, your wife can tell you about him; didn’t she go there this very afternoon at three o’clock? I know she did, for I waited in the

street, and saw her,—all because that good-natured fellow, Monsieur Justin, whom you know perhaps,—a little old man with jewelry who wears corsets,—told me that Madame Jules was my rival. That name, monsieur, sounds mighty like a feigned one; but if it is yours, excuse me. But this I say, if Madame Jules was a court duchess, Henri is rich enough to satisfy all her fancies, and it is my business to protect my property; I've a right to, for I love him, that I do. He is my first inclination; my happiness and all my future fate depends on it. I fear nothing, monsieur; I am honest; I never lied, or stole the property of any living soul, no matter who. If an empress was my rival, I'd go straight to her, empress as she was; because all pretty women are equals, monsieur—”

“Enough! enough!” said Jules. “Where do you live?”

“Rue de la Corderie-du-Temple, number 14, monsieur,—Ida Gruget, corset-maker, at your service,—for we make lots of corsets for men.”

“Where does the man whom you call Ferragus live?”

“Monsieur,” she said, pursing up her lips, “in the first place, he's not a man; he is a rich monsieur, much richer, perhaps, than you are. But why do you ask me his address when your wife knows it? He told me not to give it. Am I obliged to answer you? I'm not, thank God, in a confessional or a police-court; I'm responsible only to myself.”

“If I were to offer you ten thousand francs to tell me where Monsieur Ferragus lives, how then?”

“Ha! n, o, no, my little friend, and that ends the matter,” she said, emphasizing this singular reply with a popular gesture. “There's no sum in the world could make me tell you. I have the honor to bid you good-day. How do I get out of here?”

Jules, horror-struck, allowed her to go without further notice. The whole world seemed to crumble beneath his feet, and above him the heavens were falling with a crash.

“Monsieur is served,” said his valet.

The valet and the footman waited in the dining-room a quarter of an hour without seeing master or mistress.

“Madame will not dine to-day,” said the waiting-maid, coming in.

“What's the matter, Josephine?” asked the valet.

“I don't know,” she answered. “Madame is crying, and is going to bed. Monsieur has no doubt got some love-affair on hand, and it has been discovered at a very bad time. I wouldn't answer for madame's life. Men are so clumsy; they'll make you scenes without any precaution.”

“That’s not so,” said the valet, in a low voice. “On the contrary, madame is the one who—you understand? What times does monsieur have to go after pleasures, he, who hasn’t slept out of madame’s room for five years, who goes to his study at ten and never leaves it till breakfast, at twelve. His life is all known, it is regular; whereas madame goes out nearly every day at three o’clock, Heaven knows where.”

“And monsieur too,” said the maid, taking her mistress’s part.

“Yes, but he goes straight to the Bourse. I told him three times that dinner was ready,” continued the valet, after a pause. “You might as well talk to a post.”

Monsieur Jules entered the dining-room.

“Where is madame?” he said.

“Madame is going to bed; her head aches,” replied the maid, assuming an air of importance.

Monsieur Jules then said to the footmen composedly: “You can take away; I shall go and sit with madame.”

He went to his wife’s room and found her weeping, but endeavoring to smother her sobs with her handkerchief.

“Why do you weep?” said Jules; “you need expect no violence and no reproaches from me. Why should I avenge myself? If you have not been faithful to my love, it is that you were never worthy of it.”

“Not worthy?” The words were repeated amid her sobs and the accent in which they were said would have moved any other man than Jules.

“To kill you, I must love more than perhaps I do love you,” he continued. “But I should never have the courage; I would rather kill myself, leaving you to your—happiness, and with—whom!—”

He did not end his sentence.

“Kill yourself!” she cried, flinging herself at his feet and clasping them.

But he, wishing to escape the embrace, tried to shake her off, dragging her in so doing toward the bed.

“Let me alone,” he said.

“No, no, Jules!” she cried. “If you love me no longer I shall die. Do you wish to know all?”

“Yes.”

He took her, grasped her violently, and sat down on the edge of the bed,

holding her between his legs. Then, looking at that beautiful face now red as fire and furrowed with tears,—

“Speak,” he said.

Her sobs began again.

“No; it is a secret of life and death. If I tell it, I—No, I cannot. Have mercy, Jules!”

“You have betrayed me—”

“Ah! Jules, you think so now, but soon you will know all.”

“But this Ferragus, this convict whom you go to see, a man enriched by crime, if he does not belong to you, if you do not belong to him—”

“Oh, Jules!”

“Speak! Is he your mysterious benefactor?—the man to whom we owe our fortune, as persons have said already?”

“Who said that?”

“A man whom I killed in a duel.”

“Oh, God! one death already!”

“If he is not your protector, if he does not give you money, if it is you, on the contrary, who carry money to him, tell me, is he your brother?”

“What if he were?” she said.

Monsieur Desmarets crossed his arms.

“Why should that have been concealed from me?” he said. “Then you and your mother have both deceived me? Besides, does a woman go to see her brother every day, or nearly every day?”

His wife had fainted at his feet.

“Dead,” he said. “And suppose I am mistaken?”

He sprang to the bell-rope; called Josephine, and lifted Clemence to the bed.

“I shall die of this,” said Madame Jules, recovering consciousness.

“Josephine,” cried Monsieur Desmarets. “Send for Monsieur Desplein; send also to my brother and ask him to come here immediately.”

“Why your brother?” asked Clemence.

But Jules had already left the room.

CHAPTER IV. WHERE GO TO DIE?

For the first time in five years Madame Jules slept alone in her bed, and was compelled to admit a physician into that sacred chamber. These in themselves were two keen pangs. Desplein found Madame Jules very ill. Never was a violent emotion more untimely. He would say nothing definite, and postponed till the morrow giving any opinion, after leaving a few directions, which were not executed, the emotions of the heart causing all bodily cares to be forgotten.

When morning dawned, Clemence had not yet slept. Her mind was absorbed in the low murmur of a conversation which lasted several hours between the brothers; but the thickness of the walls allowed no word which could betray the object of this long conference to reach her ears. Monsieur Desmarets, the notary, went away at last. The stillness of the night, and the singular activity of the senses given by powerful emotion, enabled Clemence to distinguish the scratching of a pen and the involuntary movements of a person engaged in writing. Those who are habitually up at night, and who observe the different acoustic effects produced in absolute silence, know that a slight echo can be readily perceived in the very places where louder but more equable and continued murmurs are not distinct. At four o'clock the sound ceased. Clemence rose, anxious and trembling. Then, with bare feet and without a wrapper, forgetting her illness and her moist condition, the poor woman opened the door softly without noise and looked into the next room. She saw her husband sitting, with a pen in his hand, asleep in his arm-chair. The candles had burned to the sockets. She slowly advanced and read on an envelope, already sealed, the words, "This is my will."

She knelt down as if before an open grave and kissed her husband's hand. He woke instantly.

"Jules, my friend, they grant some days to criminals condemned to death," she said, looking at him with eyes that blazed with fever and with love. "Your innocent wife asks only two. Leave me free for two days, and—wait! After that, I shall die happy—at least, you will regret me."

"Clemence, I grant them."

Then, as she kissed her husband's hands in the tender transport of her heart, Jules, under the spell of that cry of innocence, took her in his arms and kissed her forehead, though ashamed to feel himself still under subjection to the power of that noble beauty.

On the morrow, after taking a few hours' rest, Jules entered his wife's

room, obeying mechanically his invariable custom of not leaving the house without a word to her. Clemence was sleeping. A ray of light passing through a chink in the upper blind of a window fell across the face of the dejected woman. Already suffering had impaired her forehead and the freshness of her lips. A lover's eye could not fail to notice the appearance of dark blotches, and a sickly pallor in place of the uniform tone of the cheeks and the pure ivory whiteness of the skin,—two points at which the sentiments of her noble soul were artlessly wont to show themselves.

“She suffers,” thought Jules. “Poor Clemence! May God protect us!”

He kissed her very softly on the forehead. She woke, saw her husband, and remembered all. Unable to speak, she took his hand, her eyes filling with tears.

“I am innocent,” she said, ending her dream.

“You will not go out to-day, will you?” asked Jules.

“No, I feel too weak to leave my bed.”

“If you should change your mind, wait till I return,” said Jules.

Then he went down to the porter's lodge.

“Fouguereau, you will watch the door yourself to-day. I wish to know exactly who comes to the house, and who leaves it.”

Then he threw himself into a hackney-coach, and was driven to the hotel de Maulincour, where he asked for the baron.

“Monsieur is ill,” they told him.

Jules insisted on entering, and gave his name. If he could not see the baron, he wished to see the vidame or the dowager. He waited some time in the salon, where Madame de Maulincour finally came to him and told him that her grandson was much too ill to receive him.

“I know, madame, the nature of his illness from the letter you did me the honor to write, and I beg you to believe—”

“A letter to you, monsieur, written by me!” cried the dowager, interrupting him. “I have written you no letter. What was I made to say in that letter, monsieur?”

“Madame,” replied Jules, “intending to see Monsieur de Maulincour to-day, I thought it best to preserve the letter in spite of its injunction to destroy it. There it is.”

Madame de Maulincour put on her spectacles, and the moment she cast her eyes on the paper she showed the utmost surprise.

“Monsieur,” she said, “my writing is so perfectly imitated that, if the matter were not so recent, I might be deceived myself. My grandson is ill, it is true; but his reason has never for a moment been affected. We are the puppets of some evil-minded person or persons; and yet I cannot imagine the object of a trick like this. You shall see my grandson, monsieur, and you will at once perceive that he is perfectly sound in mind.”

She rang the bell, and sent to ask if the baron felt able to receive Monsieur Desmarests. The servant returned with an affirmative answer. Jules went to the baron’s room, where he found him in an arm-chair near the fire. Too feeble to move, the unfortunate man merely bowed his head with a melancholy gesture. The Vidame de Pamiers was sitting with him.

“Monsieur le baron,” said Jules, “I have something to say which makes it desirable that I should see you alone.”

“Monsieur,” replied Auguste, “Monsieur le vidame knows about this affair; you can speak fearlessly before him.”

“Monsieur le baron,” said Jules, in a grave voice, “you have troubled and well-nigh destroyed my happiness without having any right to do so. Until the moment when we can see clearly which of us should demand, or grant, reparation to the other, you are bound to help me in following the dark and mysterious path into which you have flung me. I have now come to ascertain from you the present residence of the extraordinary being who exercises such a baneful effect on your life and mine. On my return home yesterday, after listening to your avowals, I received that letter.”

Jules gave him the forged letter.

“This Ferragus, this Bourignard, or this Monsieur de Funcal, is a demon!” cried Maulincour, after having read it. “Oh, what a frightful maze I put my foot into when I meddled in this matter! Where am I going? I did wrong, monsieur,” he continued, looking at Jules; “but death is the greatest of all expiations, and my death is now approaching. You can ask me whatever you like; I am at your orders.”

“Monsieur, you know, of course, where this man is living, and I must know it if it costs me all my fortune to penetrate this mystery. In presence of so cruel an enemy every moment is precious.”

“Justin shall tell you all,” replied the baron.

At these words the vidame fidgeted on his chair. Auguste rang the bell.

“Justin is not in the house!” cried the vidame, in a hasty manner that told much.

“Well, then,” said Auguste, excitedly, “the other servants must know where

he is; send a man on horseback to fetch him. Your valet is in Paris, isn't he? He can be found."

The vidame was visibly distressed.

"Justin can't come, my dear boy," said the old man; "he is dead. I wanted to conceal the accident from you, but—"

"Dead!" cried Monsieur de Maulincour,—“dead! When and how?”

"Last night. He had been supping with some old friends, and, I dare say, was drunk; his friends—no doubt they were drunk, too—left him lying in the street, and a heavy vehicle ran over him."

"The convict did not miss him; at the first stroke he killed," said Auguste. "He has had less luck with me; it has taken four blows to put me out of the way."

Jules was gloomy and thoughtful.

"Am I to know nothing, then?" he cried, after a long pause. "Your valet seems to have been justly punished. Did he not exceed your orders in calumniating Madame Desmarets to a person named Ida, whose jealousy he roused in order to turn her vindictiveness upon us?"

"Ah, monsieur! in my anger I informed him about Madame Jules," said Auguste.

"Monsieur!" cried the husband, keenly irritated.

"Oh, monsieur!" replied the baron, claiming silence by a gesture, "I am prepared for all. You cannot tell me anything my own conscience has not already told me. I am now expecting the most celebrated of all professors of toxicology, in order to learn my fate. If I am destined to intolerable suffering, my resolution is taken. I shall blow my brains out."

"You talk like a child!" cried the vidame, horrified by the coolness with which the baron said these words. "Your grandmother would die of grief."

"Then, monsieur," said Jules, "am I to understand that there exist no means of discovering in what part of Paris this extraordinary man resides?"

"I think, monsieur," said the old vidame, "from what I have heard poor Justin say, that Monsieur de Funcal lives at either the Portuguese or the Brazilian embassy. Monsieur de Funcal is a nobleman belonging to both those countries. As for the convict, he is dead and buried. Your persecutor, whoever he is, seems to me so powerful that it would be well to take no decisive measures until you are sure of some way of confounding and crushing him. Act prudently and with caution, my dear monsieur. Had Monsieur de Maulincour followed my advice, nothing of all this would have happened."

Jules coldly but politely withdrew. He was now at a total loss to know how to reach Ferragus. As he passed into his own house, the porter told him that Madame had just been out to throw a letter into the post box at the head of the rue de Menars. Jules felt humiliated by this proof of the insight with which the porter espoused his cause, and the cleverness by which he guessed the way to serve him. The eagerness of servants, and their shrewdness in compromising masters who compromised themselves, was known to him, and he fully appreciated the danger of having them as accomplices, no matter for what purpose. But he could not think of his personal dignity until the moment when he found himself thus suddenly degraded. What a triumph for the slave who could not raise himself to his master, to compel his master to come down to his level! Jules was harsh and hard to him. Another fault. But he suffered so deeply! His life till then so upright, so pure, was becoming crafty; he was to scheme and lie. Clemence was scheming and lying. This to him was a moment of horrible disgust. Lost in a flood of bitter feelings, Jules stood motionless at the door of his house. Yielding to despair, he thought of fleeing, of leaving France forever, carrying with him the illusions of uncertainty. Then, again, not doubting that the letter Clemence had just posted was addressed to Ferragus, his mind searched for a means of obtaining the answer that mysterious being was certain to send. Then his thoughts began to analyze the singular good fortune of his life since his marriage, and he asked himself whether the calumny for which he had taken such signal vengeance was not a truth. Finally, reverting to the coming answer, he said to himself:—

“But this man, so profoundly capable, so logical in his every act, who sees and foresees, who calculates, and even divines, our very thoughts, is he likely to make an answer? Will he not employ some other means more in keeping with his power? He may send his answer by some beggar; or in a carton brought by an honest man, who does not suspect what he brings; or in some parcel of shoes, which a shop-girl may innocently deliver to my wife. If Clemence and he have agreed upon such means—”

He distrusted all things; his mind ran over vast tracts and shoreless oceans of conjecture. Then, after floating for a time among a thousand contradictory ideas, he felt he was strongest in his own house, and he resolved to watch it as the ant-lion watches his sandy labyrinth.

“Fouguereau,” he said to the porter, “I am not at home to any one who comes to see me. If any one calls to see madame, or brings her anything, ring twice. Bring all letters addressed here to me, no matter for whom they are intended.”

“Thus,” thought he, as he entered his study, which was in the entresol, “I forestall the schemes of this Ferragus. If he sends some one to ask for me so as to find out if Clemence is alone, at least I shall not be tricked like a fool.”

He stood by the window of his study, which looked upon the street, and then a final scheme, inspired by jealousy, came into his mind. He resolved to send his head-clerk in his own carriage to the Bourse with a letter to another broker, explaining his sales and purchases and requesting him to do his business for that day. He postponed his more delicate transactions till the morrow, indifferent to the fall or rise of stocks or the debts of all Europe. High privilege of love!—it crushes all things, all interests fall before it: altar, throne, consols!

At half-past three, just the hour at which the Bourse is in full blast of reports, monthly settlements, premiums, etc., Fougereau entered the study, quite radiant with his news.

“Monsieur, an old woman has come, but very cautiously; I think she’s a sly one. She asked for monsieur, and seemed much annoyed when I told her he was out; then she gave me a letter for madame, and here it is.”

Fevered with anxiety, Jules opened the letter; then he dropped into a chair, exhausted. The letter was mere nonsense throughout, and needed a key. It was virtually in cipher.

“Go away, Fougereau.” The porter left him. “It is a mystery deeper than the sea below the plummet line! Ah! it must be love; love only is so sagacious, so inventive as this. Ah! I shall kill her.”

At this moment an idea flashed through his brain with such force that he felt almost physically illuminated by it. In the days of his toilsome poverty before his marriage, Jules had made for himself a true friend. The extreme delicacy with which he had managed the susceptibilities of a man both poor and modest; the respect with which he had surrounded him; the ingenious cleverness he had employed to nobly compel him to share his opulence without permitting it to make him blush, increased their friendship. Jacquet continued faithful to Desmarets in spite of his wealth.

Jacquet, a nobly upright man, a toiler, austere in his morals, had slowly made his way in that particular ministry which develops both honesty and knavery at the same time. A clerk in the ministry of Foreign Affairs, he had charge of the most delicate division of its archives. Jacquet in that office was like a glow-worm, casting his light upon those secret correspondences, deciphering and classifying despatches. Ranking higher than a mere bourgeois, his position at the ministry was superior to that of the other subalterns. He lived obscurely, glad to feel that such obscurity sheltered him from reverses and disappointments, and was satisfied to humbly pay in the lowest coin his debt to the country. Thanks to Jules, his position had been much ameliorated by a worthy marriage. An unrecognized patriot, a minister in actual fact, he contented himself with groaning in his chimney-corner at the

course of the government. In his own home, Jacquet was an easy-going king,—an umbrella-man, as they say, who hired a carriage for his wife which he never entered himself. In short, to end this sketch of a philosopher unknown to himself, he had never suspected and never in all his life would suspect the advantages he might have drawn from his position,—that of having for his intimate friend a broker, and of knowing every morning all the secrets of the State. This man, sublime after the manner of that nameless soldier who died in saving Napoleon by a “qui vive,” lived at the ministry.

In ten minutes Jules was in his friend’s office. Jacquet gave him a chair, laid aside methodically his green silk eye-shade, rubbed his hands, picked up his snuff-box, rose, stretched himself till his shoulder-blades cracked, swelled out his chest, and said:—

“What brings you here, Monsieur Desmarets? What do you want with me?”

“Jacquet, I want you to decipher a secret,—a secret of life and death.”

“It doesn’t concern politics?”

“If it did, I shouldn’t come to you for information,” said Jules. “No, it is a family matter, about which I require you to be absolutely silent.”

“Claude-Joseph Jacquet, dumb by profession. Don’t you know me by this time?” he said, laughing. “Discretion is my lot.”

Jules showed him the letter.

“You must read me this letter, addressed to my wife.”

“The deuce! the deuce! a bad business!” said Jacquet, examining the letter as a usurer examines a note to be negotiated. “Ha! that’s a gridiron letter! Wait a minute.”

He left Jules alone for a moment, but returned immediately.

“Easy enough to read, my friend! It is written on the gridiron plan, used by the Portuguese minister under Monsieur de Choiseul, at the time of the dismissal of the Jesuits. Here, see!”

Jacquet placed upon the writing a piece of paper cut out in regular squares, like the paper laces which confectioners wrap round their sugarplums; and Jules then read with perfect ease the words that were visible in the interstices. They were as follows:—

“Don’t be uneasy, my dear Clemence; our happiness cannot again be troubled; and your husband will soon lay aside his suspicions. However ill you may be, you must have the courage to come here to-morrow; find strength in your love for me. Mine for you has induced me to submit to a cruel operation,

and I cannot leave my bed. I have had the actual cautery applied to my back, and it was necessary to burn it in a long time; you understand me? But I thought of you, and I did not suffer. "To baffle Maulincour (who will not persecute us much longer), I have left the protecting roof of the embassy, and am now safe from all inquiry in the rue des Enfants-Rouges, number 12, with an old woman, Madame Etienne Gruget, mother of that Ida, who shall pay dear for her folly. Come to-morrow, at nine in the morning. I am in a room which is reached only by an interior staircase. Ask for Monsieur Camuset. Adieu; I kiss your forehead, my darling."

Jacquet looked at Jules with a sort of honest terror, the sign of a true compassion, as he made his favorite exclamation in two separate and distinct tones,—

"The deuce! the deuce!"

"That seems clear to you, doesn't it?" said Jules. "Well, in the depths of my heart there is a voice that pleads for my wife, and makes itself heard above the pangs of jealousy. I must endure the worst of all agony until to-morrow; but to-morrow, between nine and ten I shall know all; I shall be happy or wretched for all my life. Think of me then, Jacquet."

"I shall be at your house to-morrow at eight o'clock. We will go together; I'll wait for you, if you like, in the street. You may run some danger, and you ought to have near you some devoted person who'll understand a mere sign, and whom you can safely trust. Count on me."

"Even to help me in killing some one?"

"The deuce! the deuce!" said Jacquet, repeating, as it were, the same musical note. "I have two children and a wife."

Jules pressed his friend's hand and went away; but returned immediately.

"I forgot the letter," he said. "But that's not all, I must reseal it."

"The deuce! the deuce! you opened it without saving the seal; however, it is still possible to restore it. Leave it with me and I'll bring it to you *secundum scripturam*."

"At what time?"

"Half-past five."

"If I am not yet in, give it to the porter and tell him to send it up to madame."

"Do you want me to-morrow?"

"No. Adieu."

Jules drove at once to the place de la Rotonde du Temple, where he left his cabriolet and went on foot to the rue des Enfants-Rouges. He found the house of Madame Etienne Gruget and examined it. There, the mystery on which depended the fate of so many persons would be cleared up; there, at this moment, was Ferragus, and to Ferragus all the threads of this strange plot led. The Gordian knot of the drama, already so bloody, was surely in a meeting between Madame Jules, her husband, and that man; and a blade able to cut the closest of such knots would not be wanting.

The house was one of those which belong to the class called cabajoutis. This significant name is given by the populace of Paris to houses which are built, as it were, piecemeal. They are nearly always composed of buildings originally separate but afterwards united according to the fancy of the various proprietors who successively enlarge them; or else they are houses begun, left unfinished, again built upon, and completed,—unfortunate structures which have passed, like certain peoples, under many dynasties of capricious masters. Neither the floors nor the windows have an ensemble,—to borrow one of the most picturesque terms of the art of painting; all is discord, even the external decoration. The cabajoutis is to Parisian architecture what the capharnaum is to the apartment,—a poke-hole, where the most heterogeneous articles are flung pell-mell.

“Madame Etienne?” asked Jules of the portress.

This portress had her lodge under the main entrance, in a sort of chicken coop, or wooden house on rollers, not unlike those sentry-boxes which the police have lately set up by the stands of hackney-coaches.

“Hein?” said the portress, without laying down the stocking she was knitting.

In Paris the various component parts which make up the physiognomy of any given portion of the monstrous city, are admirably in keeping with its general character. Thus porter, concierge, or Suisse, whatever name may be given to that essential muscle of the Parisian monster, is always in conformity with the neighborhood of which he is a part; in fact, he is often an epitome of it. The lazy porter of the faubourg Saint-Germain, with lace on every seam of his coat, dabbles in stocks; he of the Chaussee d’Antin takes his ease, reads the money-articles in the newspapers, and has a business of his own in the faubourg Montmartre. The portress in the quarter of prostitution was formerly a prostitute; in the Marais, she has morals, is cross-grained, and full of crotchets.

On seeing Monsieur Jules this particular portress, holding her knitting in one hand, took a knife and stirred the half-extinguished peat in her foot-warmer; then she said:—

“You want Madame Etienne; do you mean Madame Etienne Gruget?”

“Yes,” said Jules, assuming a vexed air.

“Who makes trimmings?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, monsieur,” she said, issuing from her cage, and laying her hand on Jules’ arm and leading him to the end of a long passage-way, vaulted like a cellar, “go up the second staircase at the end of the court-yard—where you will see the windows with the pots of pinks; that’s where Madame Etienne lives.”

“Thank you, madame. Do you think she is alone?”

“Why shouldn’t she be alone? she’s a widow.”

Jules hastened up a dark stairway, the steps of which were knobby with hardened mud left by the feet of those who came and went. On the second floor he saw three doors but no signs of pinks. Fortunately, on one of the doors, the oiliest and darkest of the three, he read these words, chalked on a panel: “Ida will come to-night at nine o’clock.”

“This is the place,” thought Jules.

He pulled an old bellrope, black with age, and heard the smothered sound of a cracked bell and the barking of an asthmatic little dog. By the way the sounds echoed from the interior he knew that the rooms were encumbered with articles which left no space for reverberation,—a characteristic feature of the homes of workmen and humble households, where space and air are always lacking.

Jules looked out mechanically for the pinks, and found them on the outer sill of a sash window between two filthy drain-pipes. So here were flowers; here, a garden, two yards long and six inches wide; here, a wheat-ear; here, a whole life epitomized; but here, too, all the miseries of that life. A ray of light falling from heaven as if by special favor on those puny flowers and the vigorous wheat-ear brought out in full relief the dust, the grease, and that nameless color, peculiar to Parisian squalor, made of dirt, which crusted and spotted the damp walls, the worm-eaten balusters, the disjointed window-casings, and the door originally red. Presently the cough of an old woman, and a heavy female step, shuffling painfully in list slippers, announced the coming of the mother of Ida Gruget. The creature opened the door and came out upon the landing, looked up, and said:—

“Ah! is this Monsieur Bocquillon? Why, no? But perhaps you’re his brother. What can I do for you? Come in, monsieur.”

Jules followed her into the first room, where he saw, huddled together, cages, household utensils, ovens, furniture, little earthenware dishes full of food or water for the dog and the cats, a wooden clock, bed-quilts, engravings of Eisen, heaps of old iron, all these things mingled and massed together in a way that produced a most grotesque effect,—a true Parisian dusthole, in which were not lacking a few old numbers of the “Constitutionnel.”

Jules, impelled by a sense of prudence, paid no attention to the widow’s invitation when she said civilly, showing him an inner room:—

“Come in here, monsieur, and warm yourself.”

Fearing to be overheard by Ferragus, Jules asked himself whether it were not wisest to conclude the arrangement he had come to make with the old woman in the crowded antechamber. A hen, which descended cackling from a loft, roused him from this inward meditation. He came to a resolution, and followed Ida’s mother into the inner room, whither they were accompanied by the wheezy pug, a personage otherwise mute, who jumped upon a stool. Madame Gruget showed the assumption of semi-pauperism when she invited her visitor to warm himself. Her fire-pot contained, or rather concealed two bits of sticks, which lay apart: the grating was on the ground, its handle in the ashes. The mantel-shelf, adorned with a little wax Jesus under a shade of squares of glass held together with blue paper, was piled with wools, bobbins, and tools used in the making of gimps and trimmings. Jules examined everything in the room with a curiosity that was full of interest, and showed, in spite of himself, an inward satisfaction.

“Well, monsieur, tell me, do you want to buy any of my things?” said the old woman, seating herself in a cane arm-chair, which appeared to be her headquarters. In it she kept her handkerchief, snuffbox, knitting, half-peeled vegetables, spectacles, calendar, a bit of livery gold lace just begun, a greasy pack of cards, and two volumes of novels, all stuck into the hollow of the back. This article of furniture, in which the old creature was floating down the river of life, was not unlike the encyclopedic bag which a woman carries with her when she travels; in which may be found a compendium of her household belongings, from the portrait of her husband to eau de Melisse for faintness, sugarplums for the children, and English court-plaster in case of cuts.

Jules studied all. He looked attentively at Madame Gruget’s yellow visage, at her gray eyes without either brows or lashes, her toothless mouth, her wrinkles marked in black, her rusty cap, her still more rusty ruffles, her cotton petticoat full of holes, her worn-out slippers, her disabled fire-pot, her table heaped with dishes and silks and work begun or finished, in wool or cotton, in the midst of which stood a bottle of wine. Then he said to himself: “This old woman has some passion, some strong liking or vice; I can make her do my

will.”

“Madame,” he said aloud, with a private sign of intelligence, “I have come to order some livery trimmings.” Then he lowered his voice. “I know,” he continued, “that you have a lodger who has taken the name of Camuset.” The old woman looked at him suddenly, but without any sign of astonishment. “Now, tell me, can we come to an understanding? This is a question which means fortune for you.”

“Monsieur,” she replied, “speak out, and don’t be afraid. There’s no one here. But if I had any one above, it would be impossible for him to hear you.”

“Ha! the sly old creature, she answers like a Norman,” thought Jules, “We shall agree. Do not give yourself the trouble to tell falsehoods, madame,” he resumed, “In the first place, let me tell you that I mean no harm either to you or to your lodger who is suffering from cautery, or to your daughter Ida, a stay-maker, the friend of Ferragus. You see, I know all your affairs. Do not be uneasy; I am not a detective policeman, nor do I desire anything that can hurt your conscience. A young lady will come here to-morrow-morning at half-past nine o’clock, to talk with this lover of your daughter. I want to be where I can see all and hear all, without being seen or heard by them. If you will furnish me with the means of doing so, I will reward that service with the gift of two thousand francs and a yearly stipend of six hundred. My notary shall prepare a deed before you this evening, and I will give him the money to hold; he will pay the two thousand to you to-morrow after the conference at which I desire to be present, as you will then have given proofs of your good faith.”

“Will it injure my daughter, my good monsieur?” she asked, casting a cat-like glance of doubt and uneasiness upon him.

“In no way, madame. But, in any case, it seems to me that your daughter does not treat you well. A girl who is loved by so rich a man as Ferragus ought to make you more comfortable than you seem to be.”

“Ah, my dear monsieur, just think, not so much as one poor ticket to the Ambigu, or the Gaiete, where she can go as much as she likes. It’s shameful! A girl for whom I sold my silver forks and spoons! and now I eat, at my age, with German metal,—and all to pay for her apprenticeship, and give her a trade, where she could coin money if she chose. As for that, she’s like me, clever as a witch; I must do her that justice. But, I will say, she might give me her old silk gowns,—I, who am so fond of wearing silk. But no! Monsieur, she dines at the Cadran-Bleu at fifty francs a head, and rolls in her carriage as if she were a princess, and despises her mother for a Colin-Lampon. Heavens and earth! what heedless young ones we’ve brought into the world; we have nothing to boast of there. A mother, monsieur, can’t be anything else but a good mother; and I’ve concealed that girl’s ways, and kept her in my bosom,

to take the bread out of my mouth and cram everything into her own. Well, well! and now she comes and fondles one a little, and says, 'How d'ye do, mother?' And that's all the duty she thinks of paying. But she'll have children one of these days, and then she'll find out what it is to have such baggage,—which one can't help loving all the same."

"Do you mean that she does nothing for you?"

"Ah, nothing? No, monsieur, I didn't say that; if she did nothing, that would be a little too much. She gives me my rent and thirty-six francs a month. But, monsieur, at my age,—and I'm fifty-two years old, with eyes that feel the strain at night,—ought I to be working in this way? Besides, why won't she have me to live with her? I should shame her, should I? Then let her say so. Faith, one ought to be buried out of the way of such dogs of children, who forget you before they've even shut the door."

She pulled her handkerchief from her pocket, and with it a lottery ticket that dropped on the floor; but she hastily picked it up, saying, "Hi! that's the receipt for my taxes."

Jules at once perceived the reason of the sagacious parsimony of which the mother complained; and he was the more certain that the widow Gruget would agree to the proposed bargain.

"Well, then, madame," he said, "accept what I offer you."

"Did you say two thousand francs in ready money, and six hundred annuity, monsieur?"

"Madame, I've changed my mind; I will promise you only three hundred annuity. This way seems more to my own interests. But I will give you five thousand francs in ready money. Wouldn't you like that as well?"

"Bless me, yes, monsieur!"

"You'll get more comfort out of it; and you can go to the Ambigu and Franconi's at your ease in a coach."

"As for Franconi, I don't like that, for they don't talk there. Monsieur, if I accept, it is because it will be very advantageous for my child. I sha'n't be a drag on her any longer. Poor little thing! I'm glad she has her pleasures, after all. Ah, monsieur, youth must be amused! And so, if you assure me that no harm will come to anybody—"

"Not to anybody," replied Jules. "But now, how will you manage it?"

"Well, monsieur, if I give Monsieur Ferragus a little tea made of poppy-heads to-night, he'll sleep sound, the dear man; and he needs it, too, because of his sufferings, for he does suffer, I can tell you, and more's the pity. But I'd

like to know what a healthy man like him wants to burn his back for, just to get rid of a tic douloureux which troubles him once in two years. However, to come back to our business. I have my neighbor's key; her lodging is just above mine, and in it there's a room adjoining the one where Monsieur Ferragus is, with only a partition between them. My neighbor is away in the country for ten days. Therefore, if I make a hole to-night while Monsieur Ferragus is sound asleep, you can see and hear them to-morrow at your ease. I'm on good terms with a locksmith,—a very friendly man, who talks like an angel, and he'll do the work for me and say nothing about it.”

“Then here's a hundred francs for him. Come to-night to Monsieur Desmaret's office; he's a notary, and here's his address. At nine o'clock the deed will be ready, but—silence!”

“Enough, monsieur; as you say—silence! Au revoir, monsieur.”

Jules went home, almost calmed by the certainty that he should know the truth on the morrow. As he entered the house, the porter gave him the letter properly resealed.

“How do you feel now?” he said to his wife, in spite of the coldness that separated them.

“Pretty well, Jules,” she answered in a coaxing voice, “do come and dine beside me.”

“Very good,” he said, giving her the letter. “Here is something Fougereau gave me for you.”

Clemence, who was very pale, colored high when she saw the letter, and that sudden redness was a fresh blow to her husband.

“Is that joy,” he said, laughing, “or the effect of expectation?”

“Oh, of many things!” she said, examining the seal.

“I leave you now for a few moments.”

He went down to his study, and wrote to his brother, giving him directions about the payment to the widow Gruget. When he returned, he found his dinner served on a little table by his wife's bedside, and Josephine ready to wait on him.

“If I were up how I should like to serve you myself,” said Clemence, when Josephine had left them. “Oh, yes, on my knees!” she added, passing her white hands through her husband's hair. “Dear, noble heart, you were very kind and gracious to me just now. You did me more good by showing me such confidence than all the doctors on earth could do me with their prescriptions. That feminine delicacy of yours—for you do know how to love like a woman

—well, it has shed a balm into my heart which has almost cured me. There's truce between us, Jules; lower your head, that I may kiss it.”

Jules could not deny himself the pleasure of that embrace. But it was not without a feeling of remorse in his heart; he felt himself small before this woman whom he was still tempted to think innocent. A sort of melancholy joy possessed him. A tender hope shone on her features in spite of their grieved expression. They both were equally unhappy in deceiving each other; another caress, and, unable to resist their suffering, all would then have been avowed.

“To-morrow evening, Clemence.”

“No, no; to-morrow morning, by twelve o'clock, you will know all, and you'll kneel down before your wife—Oh, no! you shall not be humiliated; you are all forgiven now; you have done no wrong. Listen, Jules; yesterday you did crush me—harshly; but perhaps my life would not have been complete without that agony; it may be a shadow that will make our coming days celestial.”

“You lay a spell upon me,” cried Jules; “you fill me with remorse.”

“Poor love! destiny is stronger than we, and I am not the accomplice of mine. I shall go out to-morrow.”

“At what hour?” asked Jules.

“At half-past nine.”

“Clemence,” he said, “take every precaution; consult Doctor Desplein and old Haudry.”

“I shall consult nothing but my heart and my courage.”

“I shall leave you free; you will not see me till twelve o'clock.”

“Won't you keep me company this evening? I feel so much better.”

After attending to some business, Jules returned to his wife,—recalled by her invincible attraction. His passion was stronger than his anguish.

The next day, at nine o'clock Jules left home, hurried to the rue des Enfants-Rouges, went upstairs, and rang the bell of the widow Gruget's lodgings.

“Ah! you've kept your word, as true as the dawn. Come in, monsieur,” said the old woman when she saw him. “I've made you a cup of coffee with cream,” she added, when the door was closed. “Oh! real cream; I saw it milked myself at the dairy we have in this very street.”

“Thank you, no, madame, nothing. Take me at once—”

“Very good, monsieur. Follow me, this way.”

She led him up into the room above her own, where she showed him, triumphantly, an opening about the size of a two-franc piece, made during the night, in a place, which, in each room, was above a wardrobe. In order to look through it, Jules was forced to maintain himself in rather a fatiguing attitude, by standing on a step-ladder which the widow had been careful to place there.

“There’s a gentleman with him,” she whispered, as she retired.

Jules then beheld a man employed in dressing a number of wounds on the shoulders of Ferragus, whose head he recognized from the description given to him by Monsieur de Maulincour.

“When do you think those wounds will heal?” asked Ferragus.

“I don’t know,” said the other man. “The doctors say those wounds will require seven or eight more dressings.”

“Well, then, good-bye until to-night,” said Ferragus, holding out his hand to the man, who had just replaced the bandage.

“Yes, to-night,” said the other, pressing his hand cordially. “I wish I could see you past your sufferings.”

“To-morrow Monsieur de Funcal’s papers will be delivered to us, and Henri Bourignard will be dead forever,” said Ferragus. “Those fatal marks which have cost us so dear no longer exist. I shall become once more a social being, a man among men, and more of a man than the sailor whom the fishes are eating. God knows it is not for my own sake I have made myself a Portuguese count!”

“Poor Gratien!—you, the wisest of us all, our beloved brother, the Benjamin of the band; as you very well know.”

“Adieu; keep an eye on Maulincour.”

“You can rest easy on that score.”

“Ho! stay, marquis,” cried the convict.

“What is it?”

“Ida is capable of everything after the scene of last night. If she should throw herself into the river, I would not fish her out. She knows the secret of my name, and she’ll keep it better there. But still, look after her; for she is, in her way, a good girl.”

“Very well.”

The stranger departed. Ten minutes later Jules heard, with a feverish

shudder, the rustle of a silk gown, and almost recognized by their sound the steps of his wife.

“Well, father,” said Clemence, “my poor father, are you better? What courage you have shown!”

“Come here, my child,” replied Ferragus, holding out his hand to her.

Clemence held her forehead to him and he kissed it.

“Now tell me, what is the matter, my little girl? What are these new troubles?”

“Troubles, father! it concerns the life or death of the daughter you have loved so much. Indeed you must, as I wrote you yesterday, you must find a way to see my poor Jules to-day. If you knew how good he has been to me, in spite of all suspicions apparently so legitimate. Father, my love is my very life. Would you see me die? Ah! I have suffered so much that my life, I feel it! is in danger.”

“And all because of the curiosity of that miserable Parisian?” cried Ferragus. “I’d burn Paris down if I lost you, my daughter. Ha! you may know what a lover is, but you don’t yet know what a father can do.”

“Father, you frighten me when you look at me in that way. Don’t weigh such different feelings in the same scales. I had a husband before I knew that my father was living—”

“If your husband was the first to lay kisses on your forehead, I was the first to drop tears upon it,” replied Ferragus. “But don’t feel frightened, Clemence, speak to me frankly. I love you enough to rejoice in the knowledge that you are happy, though I, your father, may have little place in your heart, while you fill the whole of mine.”

“Ah! what good such words do me! You make me love you more and more, though I seem to rob something from my Jules. But, my kind father, think what his sufferings are. What may I tell him to-day?”

“My child, do you think I waited for your letter to save you from this threatened danger? Do you know what will become of those who venture to touch your happiness, or come between us? Have you never been aware that a second providence was guarding your life? Twelve men of power and intellect form a phalanx round your love and your existence,—ready to do all things to protect you. Think of your father, who has risked death to meet you in the public promenades, or see you asleep in your little bed in your mother’s home, during the night-time. Could such a father, to whom your innocent caresses give strength to live when a man of honor ought to have died to escape his infamy, could I, in short, I who breathe through your lips, and see with your

eyes, and feel with your heart, could I fail to defend with the claws of a lion and the soul of a father, my only blessing, my life, my daughter? Since the death of that angel, your mother, I have dreamed but of one thing,—the happiness of pressing you to my heart in the face of the whole earth, of burying the convict,—” He paused a moment, and then added: “—of giving you a father, a father who could press without shame your husband’s hand, who could live without fear in both your hearts, who could say to all the world, ‘This is my daughter,’—in short, to be a happy father.”

“Oh, father! father!”

“After infinite difficulty, after searching the whole globe,” continued Ferragus, “my friends have found me the skin of a dead man in which to take my place once more in social life. A few days hence, I shall be Monsieur de Funcal, a Portuguese count. Ah! my dear child, there are few men of my age who would have had the patience to learn Portuguese and English, which were spoken fluently by that devil of a sailor, who was drowned at sea.”

“But, my dear father—”

“All has been foreseen, and prepared. A few days hence, his Majesty John VI., King of Portugal will be my accomplice. My child, you must have a little patience where your father has had so much. But ah! what would I not do to reward your devotion for the last three years,—coming religiously to comfort your old father, at the risk of your own peace!”

“Father!” cried Clemence, taking his hands and kissing them.

“Come, my child, have courage still; keep my fatal secret a few days longer, till the end is reached. Jules is not an ordinary man, I know; but are we sure that his lofty character and his noble love may not impel him to dislike the daughter of a—”

“Oh!” cried Clemence, “you have read my heart; I have no other fear than that. The very thought turns me to ice,” she added, in a heart-rending tone. “But, father, think that I have promised him the truth in two hours.”

“If so, my daughter, tell him to go to the Portuguese embassy and see the Comte de Funcal, your father. I will be there.”

“But Monsieur de Maulincour has told him of Ferragus. Oh, father, what torture, to deceive, deceive, deceive!”

“Need you say that to me? But only a few days more, and no living man will be able to expose me. Besides, Monsieur de Maulincour is beyond the faculty of remembering. Come, dry your tears, my silly child, and think—”

At this instant a terrible cry rang from the room in which Jules Desmarets was stationed.

The clamor was heard by Madame Jules and Ferragus through the opening of the wall, and struck them with terror.

“Go and see what it means, Clemence,” said her father.

Clemence ran rapidly down the little staircase, found the door into Madame Gruget’s apartment wide open, heard the cries which echoed from the upper floor, went up the stairs, guided by the noise of sobs, and caught these words before she entered the fatal chamber:—

“You, monsieur, you, with your horrid inventions,—you are the cause of her death!”

“Hush, miserable woman!” replied Jules, putting his handkerchief on the mouth of the old woman, who began at once to cry out, “Murder! help!”

At this instant Clemence entered, saw her husband, uttered a cry, and fled away.

“Who will save my child?” cried the widow Gruget. “You have murdered her.”

“How?” asked Jules, mechanically, for he was horror-struck at being seen by his wife.

“Read that,” said the old woman, giving him a letter. “Can money or annuities console me for that?”

Farewell, mother! I bequeeth you what I have. I beg your pardon for my forlts, and the last greef to which I put you by ending my life in the river. Henry, who I love more than myself, says I have made his misfortune, and as he has drifen me away, and I have lost all my hops of merrying him, I am going to droun myself. I shall go abov Neuilly, so that they can’t put me in the Morg. If Henry does not hate me anny more after I am ded, ask him to berry a pore girl whose hart beet for him only, and to forgif me, for I did rong to meddle in what didn’t consern me. Tak care of his wounds. How much he sufered, pore fellow! I shall have as much corage to kill myself as he had to burn his bak. Carry home the corsets I have finished. And pray God for your daughter.

Ida.

“Take this letter to Monsieur de Funcal, who is upstairs,” said Jules. “He alone can save your daughter, if there is still time.”

So saying he disappeared, running like a man who has committed a crime. His legs trembled. The hot blood poured into his swelling heart in torrents greater than at any other moment of his life, and left it again with untold violence. Conflicting thoughts struggled in his mind, and yet one thought

predominated,—he had not been loyal to the being he loved most. It was impossible for him to argue with his conscience, whose voice, rising high with conviction, came like an echo of those inward cries of his love during the cruel hours of doubt he had lately lived through.

He spent the greater part of the day wandering about Paris, for he dared not go home. This man of integrity and honor feared to meet the spotless brow of the woman he had misjudged. We estimate wrongdoing in proportion to the purity of our conscience; the deed which is scarcely a fault in some hearts, takes the proportions of a crime in certain unsullied souls. The slightest stain on the white garment of a virgin makes it a thing ignoble as the rags of a mendicant. Between the two the difference lies in the misfortune of the one, the wrong-doing of the other. God never measures repentance; he never apportions it. As much is needed to efface a spot as to obliterate the crimes of a lifetime. These reflections fell with all their weight on Jules; passions, like human laws, will not pardon, and their reasoning is more just; for are they not based upon a conscience of their own as infallible as an instinct?

Jules finally came home pale, despondent, crushed beneath a sense of his wrong-doing, and yet expressing in spite of himself the joy his wife's innocence had given him. He entered her room all throbbing with emotion; she was in bed with a high fever. He took her hand, kissed it, and covered it with tears.

“Dear angel,” he said, when they were alone, “it is repentance.”

“And for what?” she answered.

As she made that reply, she laid her head back upon the pillow, closed her eyes, and remained motionless, keeping the secret of her sufferings that she might not frighten her husband,—the tenderness of a mother, the delicacy of an angel! All the woman was in her answer.

The silence lasted long. Jules, thinking her asleep, went to question Josephine as to her mistress's condition.

“Madame came home half-dead, monsieur. We sent at once for Monsieur Haudry.”

“Did he come? What did he say?”

“He said nothing, monsieur. He did not seem satisfied; gave orders that no one should go near madame except the nurse, and said he should come back this evening.”

Jules returned softly to his wife's room and sat down in a chair before the bed. There he remained, motionless, with his eyes fixed on those of Clemence. When she raised her eyelids she saw him, and through those lids passed a

tender glance, full of passionate love, free from reproach and bitterness,—a look which fell like a flame of fire upon the heart of that husband, nobly absolved and forever loved by the being whom he had killed. The presentiment of death struck both their minds with equal force. Their looks were blended in one anguish, as their hearts had long been blended in one love, felt equally by both, and shared equally. No questions were uttered; a horrible certainty was there,—in the wife an absolute generosity; in the husband an awful remorse; then, in both souls the same vision of the end, the same conviction of fatality.

There came a moment when, thinking his wife asleep, Jules kissed her softly on the forehead; then after long contemplation of that cherished face, he said:—

“Oh God! leave me this angel still a little while that I may blot out my wrong by love and adoration. As a daughter, she is sublime; as a wife, what word can express her?”

Clemence raised her eyes; they were full of tears.

“You pain me,” she said, in a feeble voice.

It was getting late; Doctor Haudry came, and requested the husband to withdraw during his visit. When the doctor left the sick-room Jules asked him no question; one gesture was enough.

“Call in consultation any physician in whom you place confidence; I may be wrong.”

“Doctor, tell me the truth. I am a man, and I can bear it. Besides, I have the deepest interest in knowing it; I have certain affairs to settle.”

“Madame Jules is dying,” said the physician. “There is some moral malady which has made great progress, and it has complicated her physical condition, which was already dangerous, and made still more so by her great imprudence. To walk about barefooted at night! to go out when I forbade it! on foot yesterday in the rain, to-day in a carriage! She must have meant to kill herself. But still, my judgment is not final; she has youth, and a most amazing nervous strength. It may be best to risk all to win all by employing some violent reagent. But I will not take upon myself to order it; nor will I advise it; in consultation I shall oppose it.”

Jules returned to his wife. For eleven days and eleven nights he remained beside her bed, taking no sleep during the day when he laid his head upon the foot of the bed. No man ever pushed the jealousy of care and the craving for devotion to such an extreme as he. He could not endure that the slightest service should be done by others for his wife. There were days of uncertainty,

false hopes, now a little better, then a crisis,—in short, all the horrible mutations of death as it wavers, hesitates, and finally strikes. Madame Jules always found strength to smile at her husband. She pitied him, knowing that soon he would be alone. It was a double death,—that of life, that of love; but life grew feebler, and love grew mightier. One frightful night there was, when Clemence passed through that delirium which precedes the death of youth. She talked of her happy love, she talked of her father; she related her mother's revelations on her death-bed, and the obligations that mother had laid upon her. She struggled, not for life, but for her love which she could not leave.

“Grant, O God!” she said, “that he may not know I want him to die with me.”

Jules, unable to bear the scene, was at that moment in the adjoining room, and did not hear the prayer, which he would doubtless have fulfilled.

When this crisis was over, Madame Jules recovered some strength. The next day she was beautiful and tranquil; hope seemed to come to her; she adorned herself, as the dying often do. Then she asked to be alone all day, and sent away her husband with one of those entreaties made so earnestly that they are granted as we grant the prayer of a little child.

Jules, indeed, had need of this day. He went to Monsieur de Maulincour to demand the satisfaction agreed upon between them. It was not without great difficulty that he succeeded in reaching the presence of the author of these misfortunes; but the vidame, when he learned that the visit related to an affair of honor, obeyed the precepts of his whole life, and himself took Jules into the baron's chamber.

Monsieur Desmarets looked about him in search of his antagonist.

“Yes! that is really he,” said the vidame, motioning to a man who was sitting in an arm-chair beside the fire.

“Who is it? Jules?” said the dying man in a broken voice.

Auguste had lost the only faculty that makes us live—memory. Jules Desmarets recoiled with horror at this sight. He could not even recognize the elegant young man in that thing without—as Bossuet said—a name in any language. It was, in truth, a corpse with whitened hair, its bones scarce covered with a wrinkled, blighted, withered skin,—a corpse with white eyes motionless, mouth hideously gaping, like those of idiots or vicious men killed by excesses. No trace of intelligence remained upon that brow, nor in any feature; nor was there in that flabby flesh either color or the faintest appearance of circulating blood. Here was a shrunken, withered creature brought to the state of those monsters we see preserved in museums, floating in alcohol. Jules fancied that he saw above that face the terrible head of

Ferragus, and his own anger was silenced by such a vengeance. The husband found pity in his heart for the vacant wreck of what was once a man.

“The duel has taken place,” said the vidame.

“But he has killed many,” answered Jules, sorrowfully.

“And many dear ones,” added the old man. “His grandmother is dying; and I shall follow her soon into the grave.”

On the morrow of this day, Madame Jules grew worse from hour to hour. She used a moment’s strength to take a letter from beneath her pillow, and gave it eagerly to her husband with a sign that was easy to understand,—she wished to give him, in a kiss, her last breath. He took it, and she died. Jules fell half-dead himself and was taken to his brother’s house. There, as he deplored in tears his absence of the day before, his brother told him that this separation was eagerly desired by Clemence, who wished to spare him the sight of the religious paraphernalia, so terrible to tender imaginations, which the Church displays when conferring the last sacraments upon the dying.

“You could not have borne it,” said his brother. “I could hardly bear the sight myself, and all the servants wept. Clemence was like a saint. She gathered strength to bid us all good-bye, and that voice, heard for the last time, rent our hearts. When she asked pardon for the pain she might unwillingly have caused her servants, there were cries and sobs and—”

“Enough! enough!” said Jules.

He wanted to be alone, that he might read the last words of the woman whom all had loved, and who had passed away like a flower.

“My beloved, this is my last will. Why should we not make wills for the treasures of our hearts, as for our worldly property? Was not my love my property, my all? I mean here to dispose of my love: it was the only fortune of your Clemence, and it is all that she can leave you in dying. Jules, you love me still, and I die happy. The doctors may explain my death as they think best; I alone know the true cause. I shall tell it to you, whatever pain it may cause you. I cannot carry with me, in a heart all yours, a secret which you do not share, although I die the victim of an enforced silence.

“Jules, I was nurtured and brought up in the deepest solitude, far from the vices and the falsehoods of the world, by the loving woman whom you knew. Society did justice to her conventional charm, for that is what pleases society; but I knew secretly her precious soul, I could cherish the mother who made my childhood a joy without bitterness, and I knew why I cherished her. Was not that to love doubly? Yes, I loved her, I feared her, I respected her; yet nothing oppressed my heart, neither fear nor respect. I was all in all to her; she

was all in all to me. For nineteen happy years, without a care, my soul, solitary amid the world which muttered round me, reflected only her pure image; my heart beat for her and through her. I was scrupulously pious; I found pleasure in being innocent before God. My mother cultivated all noble and self-respecting sentiments in me. Ah! it gives me happiness to tell you, Jules, that I now know I was indeed a young girl, and that I came to you virgin in heart.

“When I left that absolute solitude, when, for the first time, I braided my hair and crowned it with almond blossoms, when I added, with delight, a few satin knots to my white dress, thinking of the world I was to see, and which I was curious to see—Jules, that innocent and modest coquetry was done for you! Yes, as I entered the world, I saw you first of all. Your face, I remarked it; it stood out from the rest; your person pleased me; your voice, your manners all inspired me with pleasant presentiments. When you came up, when you spoke to me, the color on your forehead, the tremble in your voice,—that moment gave me memories with which I throb as I now write to you, as I now, for the last time, think of them. Our love was at first the keenest of sympathies, but it was soon discovered by each of us and then, as speedily, shared; just as, in after times, we have both equally felt and shared innumerable happinesses. From that moment my mother was only second in my heart. Next, I was yours, all yours. There is my life, and all my life, dear husband.

“And here is what remains for me to tell you. One evening, a few days before my mother’s death, she revealed to me the secret of her life,—not without burning tears. I have loved you better since the day I learned from the priest as he absolved my mother that there are passions condemned by the world and by the Church. But surely God will not be severe when they are the sins of souls as tender as that of my mother; only, that dear woman could never bring herself to repent. She loved much, Jules; she was all love. So I have prayed daily for her, but never judged her.

“That night I learned the cause of her deep maternal tenderness; then I also learned that there was in Paris a man whose life and whose love centred on me; that your fortune was his doing, and that he loved you. I learned also that he was exiled from society and bore a tarnished name; but that he was more unhappy for me, for us, than for himself. My mother was all his comfort; she was dying, and I promised to take her place. With all the ardor of a soul whose feelings had never been perverted, I saw only the happiness of softening the bitterness of my mother’s last moments, and I pledged myself to continue her work of secret charity,—the charity of the heart. The first time that I saw my father was beside the bed where my mother had just expired. When he raised his tearful eyes, it was to see in me a revival of his dead hopes. I had sworn, not to tell a lie, but to keep silence; and that silence what woman could have

broken it?

“There is my fault, Jules,—a fault which I expiate by death. I doubted you. But fear is so natural to a woman; above all, a woman who knows what it is that she may lose. I trembled for our love. My father’s secret seemed to me the death of my happiness; and the more I loved, the more I feared. I dared not avow this feeling to my father; it would have wounded him, and in his situation a wound was agony. But, without a word from me, he shared my fears. That fatherly heart trembled for my happiness as much as I trembled for myself; but it dared not speak, obeying the same delicacy that kept me mute. Yes, Jules, I believed that you could not love the daughter of Gratien Bourignard as you loved your Clemence. Without that terror could I have kept back anything from you,—you who live in every fold of my heart?

“The day when that odious, unfortunate young officer spoke to you, I was forced to lie. That day, for the second time in my life, I knew what pain was; that pain has steadily increased until this moment, when I speak with you for the last time. What matters now my father’s position? You know all. I could, by the help of my love, have conquered my illness and borne its sufferings; but I cannot stifle the voice of doubt. Is it not probable that my origin would affect the purity of your love and weaken it, diminish it? That fear nothing has been able to quench in me. There, Jules, is the cause of my death. I cannot live fearing a word, a look,—a word you may never say, a look you may never give; but, I cannot help it, I fear them. I die beloved; there is my consolation.

“I have known, for the last three years, that my father and his friends have well-nigh moved the world to deceive the world. That I might have a station in life, they have bought a dead man, a reputation, a fortune, so that a living man might live again, restored; and all this for you, for us. We were never to have known of it. Well, my death will save my father from that falsehood, for he will not survive me.

“Farewell, Jules, my heart is all here. To show you my love in its agony of fear, is not that bequeathing my whole soul to you? I could never have the strength to speak to you; I have only enough to write. I have just confessed to God the sins of my life. I have promised to fill my mind with the King of Heaven only; but I must confess to him who is, for me, the whole of earth. Alas! shall I not be pardoned for this last sigh between the life that was and the life that shall be? Farewell, my Jules, my loved one! I go to God, with whom is Love without a cloud, to whom you will follow me. There, before his throne, united forever, we may love each other throughout the ages. This hope alone can comfort me. If I am worthy of being there at once, I will follow you through life. My soul shall bear your company; it will wrap you about, for you must stay here still,—ah! here below. Lead a holy life that you may the more surely come to me. You can do such good upon this earth! Is it not an angel’s

mission for the suffering soul to shed happiness about him,—to give to others that which he has not? I bequeath you to the Unhappy. Their smiles, their tears, are the only ones of which I cannot be jealous. We shall find a charm in sweet beneficence. Can we not live together still if you would join my name—your Clemence—in these good works?

“After loving as we have loved, there is naught but God, Jules. God does not lie; God never betrays. Adore him only, I charge you! Lead those who suffer up to him; comfort the sorrowing members of his Church. Farewell, dear soul that I have filled! I know you; you will never love again. I may die happy in the thought that makes all women happy. Yes, my grave will be your heart. After this childhood I have just related, has not my life flowed on within that heart? Dead, you will never drive me forth. I am proud of that rare life! You will know me only in the flower of my youth; I leave you regrets without disillusion. Jules, it is a happy death.

“You, who have so fully understood me, may I ask one thing more of you, —superfluous request, perhaps, the fulfilment of a woman’s fancy, the prayer of a jealousy we all must feel,—I pray you to burn all that especially belonged to us, destroy our chamber, annihilate all that is a memory of our happiness.

“Once more, farewell,—the last farewell! It is all love, and so will be my parting thought, my parting breath.”

When Jules had read that letter there came into his heart one of those wild frenzies of which it is impossible to describe the awful anguish. All sorrows are individual; their effects are not subjected to any fixed rule. Certain men will stop their ears to hear nothing; some women close their eyes hoping never to see again; great and splendid souls are met with who fling themselves into sorrow as into an abyss. In the matter of despair, all is true.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

Jules escaped from his brother’s house and returned home, wishing to pass the night beside his wife, and see till the last moment that celestial creature. As he walked along with an indifference to life known only to those who have reached the last degree of wretchedness, he thought of how, in India, the law ordained that widows should die; he longed to die. He was not yet crushed; the fever of his grief was still upon him. He reached his home and went up into the sacred chamber; he saw his Clemence on the bed of death, beautiful, like a saint, her hair smoothly laid upon her forehead, her hands joined, her body wrapped already in its shroud. Tapers were lighted, a priest was praying,

Josephine kneeling in a corner, wept, and, near the bed, were two men. One was Ferragus. He stood erect, motionless, gazing at his daughter with dry eyes; his head you might have taken for bronze: he did not see Jules.

The other man was Jacquet,—Jacquet, to whom Madame Jules had been ever kind. Jacquet felt for her one of those respectful friendships which rejoice the untroubled heart; a gentle passion; love without its desires and its storms. He had come to pay his debt of tears, to bid a long adieu to the wife of his friend, to kiss, for the first time, the icy brow of the woman he had tacitly made his sister.

All was silence. Here death was neither terrible as in the churches, nor pompous as it makes its way along the streets; no, it was death in the home, a tender death; here were pangs of the heart, tears drawn from the eyes of all. Jules sat down beside Jacquet and pressed his hand; then, without uttering a word, all these persons remained as they were till morning.

When daylight paled the tapers, Jacquet, foreseeing the painful scenes which would then take place, drew Jules away into another room. At this moment the husband looked at the father, and Ferragus looked at Jules. The two sorrows arraigned each other, measured each other, and comprehended each other in that look. A flash of fury shone for an instant in the eyes of Ferragus.

“You killed her,” thought he.

“Why was I distrusted?” seemed the answer of the husband.

The scene was one that might have passed between two tigers recognizing the futility of a struggle and, after a moment’s hesitation, turning away, without even a roar.

“Jacquet,” said Jules, “have you attended to everything?”

“Yes, to everything,” replied his friend, “but a man had forestalled me who had ordered and paid for all.”

“He tears his daughter from me!” cried the husband, with the violence of despair.

Jules rushed back to his wife’s room; but the father was there no longer. Clemence had now been placed in a leaden coffin, and workmen were employed in soldering the cover. Jules returned, horrified by the sight; the sound of the hammers the men were using made him mechanically burst into tears.

“Jacquet,” he said, “out of this dreadful night one idea has come to me, only one, but one I must make a reality at any price. I cannot let Clemence stay in any cemetery in Paris. I wish to burn her,—to gather her ashes and

keep her with me. Say nothing of this, but manage on my behalf to have it done. I am going to her chamber, where I shall stay until the time has come to go. You alone may come in there to tell me what you have done. Go, and spare nothing.”

During the morning, Madame Jules, after lying in a mortuary chapel at the door of her house, was taken to Saint-Roch. The church was hung with black throughout. The sort of luxury thus displayed had drawn a crowd; for in Paris all things are sights, even true grief. There are people who stand at their windows to see how a son deploras a mother as he follows her body; there are others who hire commodious seats to see how a head is made to fall. No people in the world have such insatiate eyes as the Parisians. On this occasion, inquisitive minds were particularly surprised to see the six lateral chapels at Saint-Roch also hung in black. Two men in mourning were listening to a mortuary mass said in each chapel. In the chancel no other persons but Monsieur Desmarets, the notary, and Jacquet were present; the servants of the household were outside the screen. To church loungers there was something inexplicable in so much pomp and so few mourners. But Jules had been determined that no indifferent persons should be present at the ceremony.

High mass was celebrated with the sombre magnificence of funeral services. Beside the ministers in ordinary of Saint-Roch, thirteen priests from other parishes were present. Perhaps never did the *Dies irae* produce upon Christians, assembled by chance, by curiosity, and thirsting for emotions, an effect so profound, so nervously glacial as that now caused by this hymn when the eight voices of the precentors, accompanied by the voices of the priests and the choir-boys, intoned it alternately. From the six lateral chapels twelve other childish voices rose shrilly in grief, mingling with the choir voices lamentably. From all parts of the church this mourning issued; cries of anguish responded to the cries of fear. That terrible music was the voice of sorrows hidden from the world, of secret friendships weeping for the dead. Never, in any human religion, have the terrors of the soul, violently torn from the body and stormily shaken in presence of the fulminating majesty of God, been rendered with such force. Before that clamor of clamors all artists and their most passionate compositions must bow humiliated. No, nothing can stand beside that hymn, which sums all human passions, gives them a galvanic life beyond the coffin, and leaves them, palpitating still, before the living and avenging God. These cries of childhood, mingling with the tones of older voices, including thus in the Song of Death all human life and its developments, recalling the sufferings of the cradle, swelling to the griefs of other ages in the stronger male voices and the quavering of the priests,—all this strident harmony, big with lightning and thunderbolts, does it not speak with equal force to the daring imagination, the coldest heart, nay, to philosophers themselves? As we hear it, we think God speaks; the vaulted

arches of no church are mere material; they have a voice, they tremble, they scatter fear by the might of their echoes. We think we see unnumbered dead arising and holding out their hands. It is no more a father, a wife, a child,—humanity itself is rising from its dust.

It is impossible to judge of the catholic, apostolic, and Roman faith, unless the soul has known that deepest grief of mourning for a loved one lying beneath the pall; unless it has felt the emotions that fill the heart, uttered by that Hymn of Despair, by those cries that crush the mind, by that sacred fear augmenting strophe by strophe, ascending heavenward, which terrifies, belittles, and elevates the soul, and leaves within our minds, as the last sound ceases, a consciousness of immortality. We have met and struggled with the vast idea of the Infinite. After that, all is silent in the church. No word is said; sceptics themselves know not what they are feeling. Spanish genius alone was able to bring this untold majesty to untold griefs.

When the solemn ceremony was over, twelve men came from the six chapels and stood around the coffin to hear the song of hope which the Church intones for the Christian soul before the human form is buried. Then, each man entered alone a mourning-coach; Jacquet and Monsieur Desmarets took the thirteenth; the servants followed on foot. An hour later, they were at the summit of that cemetery popularly called Pere-Lachaise. The unknown twelve men stood in a circle round the grave, where the coffin had been laid in presence of a crowd of loiterers gathered from all parts of this public garden. After a few short prayers the priest threw a handful of earth on the remains of this woman, and the grave-diggers, having asked for their fee, made haste to fill the grave in order to dig another.

Here this history seems to end; but perhaps it would be incomplete if, after giving a rapid sketch of Parisian life, and following certain of its capricious undulations, the effects of death were omitted. Death in Paris is unlike death in any other capital; few persons know the trials of true grief in its struggle with civilization, and the government of Paris. Perhaps, also, Monsieur Jules and Ferragus XXIII. may have proved sufficiently interesting to make a few words on their after life not entirely out of place. Besides, some persons like to be told all, and wish, as one of our cleverest critics has remarked, to know by what chemical process oil was made to burn in Aladdin's lamp.

Jacquet, being a government employee, naturally applied to the authorities for permission to exhume the body of Madame Jules and burn it. He went to see the prefect of police, under whose protection the dead sleep. That functionary demanded a petition. The blank was brought that gives to sorrow its proper administrative form; it was necessary to employ the bureaucratic jargon to express the wishes of a man so crushed that words, perhaps, were lacking to him, and it was also necessary to coldly and briefly repeat on the

margin the nature of the request, which was done in these words: “The petitioner respectfully asks for the incineration of his wife.”

When the official charged with making the report to the Councillor of State and prefect of police read that marginal note, explaining the object of the petition, and couched, as requested, in the plainest terms, he said:—

“This is a serious matter! my report cannot be ready under eight days.”

Jules, to whom Jacquet was obliged to speak of this delay, comprehended the words that Ferragus had said in his hearing, “I’ll burn Paris!” Nothing seemed to him now more natural than to annihilate that receptacle of monstrous things.

“But,” he said to Jacquet, “you must go to the minister of the Interior, and get your minister to speak to him.”

Jacquet went to the minister of the Interior, and asked an audience; it was granted, but the time appointed was two weeks later. Jacquet was a persistent man. He travelled from bureau to bureau, and finally reached the private secretary of the minister of the Interior, to whom he had made the private secretary of his own minister say a word. These high protectors aiding, he obtained for the morrow a second interview, in which, being armed with a line from the autocrat of Foreign affairs to the pacha of the Interior, Jacquet hoped to carry the matter by assault. He was ready with reasons, and answers to peremptory questions,—in short, he was armed at all points; but he failed.

“This matter does not concern me,” said the minister; “it belongs to the prefect of police. Besides, there is no law giving a husband any legal right to the body of his wife, nor to fathers those of their children. The matter is serious. There are questions of public utility involved which will have to be examined. The interests of the city of Paris might suffer. Therefore if the matter depended on me, which it does not, I could not decide *hic et nunc*; I should require a report.”

A report is to the present system of administration what limbo or hades is to Christianity. Jacquet knew very well the mania for “reports”; he had not waited until this occasion to groan at that bureaucratic absurdity. He knew that since the invasion into public business of the Report (an administrative revolution consummated in 1804) there was never known a single minister who would take upon himself to have an opinion or to decide the slightest matter, unless that opinion or matter had been winnowed, sifted, and plucked to bits by the paper-spoilers, quill-drivers, and splendid intellects of his particular bureau. Jacquet—he was one of those who are worthy of Plutarch as biographer—saw that he had made a mistake in his management of the affair, and had, in fact, rendered it impossible by trying to proceed legally. The thing

he should have done was to have taken Madame Jules to one of Desmaret's estates in the country; and there, under the good-natured authority of some village mayor to have gratified the sorrowful longing of his friend. Law, constitutional and administrative, begets nothing; it is a barren monster for peoples, for kings, and for private interests. But the peoples decipher no principles but those that are writ in blood, and the evils of legality will always be pacific; it flattens a nation down, that is all. Jacquet, a man of modern liberty, returned home reflecting on the benefits of arbitrary power.

When he went with his report to Jules, he found it necessary to deceive him, for the unhappy man was in a high fever, unable to leave his bed. The minister of the Interior mentioned, at a ministerial dinner that same evening, the singular fancy of a Parisian in wishing to burn his wife after the manner of the Romans. The clubs of Paris took up the subject, and talked for a while of the burials of antiquity. Ancient things were just then becoming a fashion, and some persons declared that it would be a fine thing to re-establish, for distinguished persons, the funeral pyre. This opinion had its defenders and its detractors. Some said that there were too many such personages, and the price of wood would be enormously increased by such a custom; moreover, it would be absurd to see our ancestors in their urns in the procession at Longchamps. And if the urns were valuable, they were likely some day to be sold at auction, full of respectable ashes, or seized by creditors,—a race of men who respected nothing. The other side made answer that our ancestors were much safer in urns than at Pere-Lachaise, for before very long the city of Paris would be compelled to order a Saint-Bartholomew against its dead, who were invading the neighboring country, and threatening to invade the territory of Brie. It was, in short, one of those futile but witty discussions which sometimes cause deep and painful wounds. Happily for Jules, he knew nothing of the conversations, the witty speeches, and arguments which his sorrow had furnished to the tongues of Paris.

The prefect of police was indignant that Monsieur Jacquet had appealed to a minister to avoid the wise delays of the commissioners of the public highways; for the exhumation of Madame Jules was a question belonging to that department. The police bureau was doing its best to reply promptly to the petition; one appeal was quite sufficient to set the office in motion, and once in motion matters would go far. But as for the administration, that might take the case before the Council of state,—a machine very difficult indeed to move.

After the second day Jacquet was obliged to tell his friend that he must renounce his desire, because, in a city where the number of tears shed on black draperies is tariffed, where the laws recognize seven classes of funerals, where the scrap of ground to hold the dead is sold at its weight in silver, where grief is worked for what it is worth, where the prayers of the Church are costly, and

the vestry claim payment for extra voices in the Dies irae,—all attempt to get out of the rut prescribed by the authorities for sorrow is useless and impossible.

“It would have been to me,” said Jules, “a comfort in my misery. I meant to have died away from here, and I hoped to hold her in my arms in a distant grave. I did not know that bureaucracy could send its claws into our very coffins.”

He now wished to see if room had been left for him beside his wife. The two friends went to the cemetery. When they reached it they found (as at the doors of museums, galleries, and coach-offices) ciceroni, who proposed to guide them through the labyrinth of Pere-Lachaise. Neither Jules nor Jacquet could have found the spot where Clemence lay. Ah, frightful anguish! They went to the lodge to consult the porter of the cemetery. The dead have a porter, and there are hours when the dead are “not receiving.” It is necessary to upset all the rules and regulations of the upper and lower police to obtain permission to weep at night, in silence and solitude, over the grave where a loved one lies. There’s a rule for summer and a rule for winter about this.

Certainly, of all the porters in Paris, the porter of Pere-Lachaise is the luckiest. In the first place, he has no gate-cord to pull; then, instead of a lodge, he has a house,—an establishment which is not quite ministerial, although a vast number of persons come under his administration, and a good many employees. And this governor of the dead has a salary, with emoluments, and acts under powers of which none complain; he plays despot at his ease. His lodge is not a place of business, though it has departments where the book-keeping of receipts, expenses, and profits, is carried on. The man is not a suisse, nor a concierge, nor actually a porter. The gate which admits the dead stands wide open; and though there are monuments and buildings to be cared for, he is not a care-taker. In short, he is an indefinable anomaly, an authority which participates in all, and yet is nothing,—an authority placed, like the dead on whom it is based, outside of all. Nevertheless, this exceptional man grows out of the city of Paris,—that chimerical creation like the ship which is its emblem, that creature of reason moving on a thousand paws which are seldom unanimous in motion.

This guardian of the cemetery may be called a concierge who has reached the condition of a functionary, not soluble by dissolution! His place is far from being a sinecure. He does not allow any one to be buried without a permit; he must count his dead. He points out to you in this vast field the six feet square of earth where you will one day put all you love, or all you hate, a mistress, or a cousin. Yes, remember this: all the feelings and emotions of Paris come to end here, at this porter’s lodge, where they are administrationized. This man has registers in which his dead are booked; they are in their graves, and also

on his records. He has under him keepers, gardeners, grave-diggers, and their assistants. He is a personage. Mourning hearts do not speak to him at first. He does not appear at all except in serious cases, such as one corpse mistaken for another, a murdered body, an exhumation, a dead man coming to life. The bust of the reigning king is in his hall; possibly he keeps the late royal, imperial, and quasi-royal busts in some cupboard,—a sort of little Pere-Lachaise all ready for revolutions. In short, he is a public man, an excellent man, good husband and good father,—epitaph apart. But so many diverse sentiments have passed before him on biers; he has seen so many tears, true and false; he has beheld sorrow under so many aspects and on so many faces; he has heard such endless thousands of eternal woes,—that to him sorrow has come to be nothing more than a stone an inch thick, four feet long, and twenty-four inches wide. As for regrets, they are the annoyances of his office; he neither breakfasts nor dines without first wiping off the rain of an inconsolable affliction. He is kind and tender to other feelings; he will weep over a stage-hero, over Monsieur Germeuil in the “Auberge des Adrets,” the man with the butter-colored breeches, murdered by Macaire; but his heart is ossified in the matter of real dead men. Dead men are ciphers, numbers, to him; it is his business to organize death. Yet he does meet, three times in a century, perhaps, with an occasion when his part becomes sublime, and then he is sublime through every hour of his day,—in times of pestilence.

When Jacquet approached him this absolute monarch was evidently out of temper.

“I told you,” he was saying, “to water the flowers from the rue Massena to the place Regnault de Saint-Jean-d’Angely. You paid no attention to me! Sac-a-papier! suppose the relations should take it into their heads to come here to-day because the weather is fine, what would they say to me? They’d shriek as if they were burned; they’d say horrid things of us, and calumniate us—”

“Monsieur,” said Jacquet, “we want to know where Madame Jules is buried.”

“Madame Jules who?” he asked. “We’ve had three Madame Jules within the last week. Ah,” he said, interrupting himself, “here comes the funeral of Monsieur le Baron de Maulincour! A fine procession, that! He has soon followed his grandmother. Some families, when they begin to go, rattle down like a wager. Lots of bad blood in Parisians.”

“Monsieur,” said Jacquet, touching him on the arm, “the person I spoke of is Madame Jules Desmarets, the wife of the broker of that name.”

“Ah, I know!” he replied, looking at Jacquet. “Wasn’t it a funeral with thirteen mourning coaches, and only one mourner in the twelve first? It was so droll we all noticed it—”

“Monsieur, take care, Monsieur Desmarets is with me; he might hear you, and what you say is not seemly.”

“I beg pardon, monsieur! you are quite right. Excuse me, I took you for heirs. Monsieur,” he continued, after consulting a plan of the cemetery, “Madame Jules is in the rue Marechal Lefebre, alley No. 4, between Mademoiselle Raucourt, of the Comedie-Francaise, and Monsieur Moreau-Malvin, a butcher, for whom a handsome tomb in white marble has been ordered, which will be one of the finest in the cemetery—”

“Monsieur,” said Jacquet, interrupting him, “that does not help us.”

“True,” said the official, looking round him. “Jean,” he cried, to a man whom he saw at a little distance, “conduct these gentlemen to the grave of Madame Jules Desmarets, the broker’s wife. You know where it is,—near to Mademoiselle Raucourt, the tomb where there’s a bust.”

The two friends followed the guide; but they did not reach the steep path which leads to the upper part of the cemetery without having to pass through a score of proposals and requests, made, with honied softness, by the touts of marble-workers, iron-founders, and monumental sculptors.

“If monsieur would like to order something, we would do it on the most reasonable terms.”

Jacquet was fortunate enough to be able to spare his friend the hearing of these proposals so agonizing to bleeding hearts; and presently they reached the resting-place. When Jules beheld the earth so recently dug, into which the masons had stuck stakes to mark the place for the stone posts required to support the iron railing, he turned, and leaned upon Jacquet’s shoulder, raising himself now and again to cast long glances at the clay mound where he was forced to leave the remains of the being in and by whom he still lived.

“How miserably she lies there!” he said.

“But she is not there,” said Jacquet, “she is in your memory. Come, let us go; let us leave this odious cemetery, where the dead are adorned like women for a ball.”

“Suppose we take her away?”

“Can it be done?”

“All things can be done!” cried Jules. “So, I shall lie there,” he added, after a pause. “There is room enough.”

Jacquet finally succeeded in getting him to leave the great enclosure, divided like a chessboard by iron railings and elegant compartments, in which were tombs decorated with palms, inscriptions, and tears as cold as the stones

on which sorrowing hearts had caused to be carved their regrets and coats of arms. Many good words are there engraved in black letters, epigrams reproving the curious, conceits, wittily turned farewells, rendezvous given at which only one side appears, pretentious biographies, glitter, rubbish and tinsel. Here the floriated thyrsus, there a lance-head, farther on Egyptian urns, now and then a few cannon; on all sides the emblems of professions, and every style of art,—Moorish, Greek, Gothic,—friezes, ovules, paintings, vases, guardian-angels, temples, together with innumerable immortelles, and dead rose-bushes. It is a forlorn comedy! It is another Paris, with its streets, its signs, its industries, and its lodgings; but a Paris seen through the diminishing end of an opera-glass, a microscopic Paris reduced to the littleness of shadows, spectres, dead men, a human race which no longer has anything great about it, except its vanity. There Jules saw at his feet, in the long valley of the Seine, between the slopes of Vaugirard and Meudon and those of Belleville and Montmartre, the real Paris, wrapped in a misty blue veil produced by smoke, which the sunlight tendered at that moment diaphanous. He glanced with a constrained eye at those forty thousand houses, and said, pointing to the space comprised between the column of the Place Vendome and the gilded cupola of the Invalides:—

“She was wrenched from me there by the fatal curiosity of that world which excites itself and meddles solely for excitement and occupation.”

Twelve miles from where they were, on the banks of the Seine, in a modest village lying on the slope of a hill of that long hilly basin the middle of which great Paris stirs like a child in its cradle, a death scene was taking place, far indeed removed from Parisian pomps, with no accompaniment of torches or tapers or mourning-coaches, without prayers of the Church, in short, a death in all simplicity. Here are the facts: The body of a young girl was found early in the morning, stranded on the river-bank in the slime and reeds of the Seine. Men employed in dredging sand saw it as they were getting into their frail boat on their way to their work.

“Tiens! fifty francs earned!” said one of them.

“True,” said the other.

They approached the body.

“A handsome girl! We had better go and make our statement.”

And the two dredgers, after covering the body with their jackets, went to the house of the village mayor, who was much embarrassed at having to make out the legal papers necessitated by this discovery.

The news of this event spread with the telegraphic rapidity peculiar to regions where social communications have no distractions, where gossip,

scandal, calumny, in short, the social tale which feasts the world has no break of continuity from one boundary to another. Before long, persons arriving at the mayor's office released him from all embarrassment. They were able to convert the proces-verbal into a mere certificate of death, by recognizing the body as that of the Demoiselle Ida Gruget, corset-maker, living rue de la Corderie-du-Temple, number 14. The judiciary police of Paris arrived, and the mother, bearing her daughter's last letter. Amid the mother's moans, a doctor certified to death by asphyxia, through the injection of black blood into the pulmonary system,—which settled the matter. The inquest over, and the certificates signed, by six o'clock the same evening authority was given to bury the grisette. The rector of the parish, however, refused to receive her into the church or to pray for her. Ida Gruget was therefore wrapped in a shroud by an old peasant-woman, put into a common pine-coffin, and carried to the village cemetery by four men, followed by a few inquisitive peasant-women, who talked about the death with wonder mingled with some pity.

The widow Gruget was charitably taken in by an old lady who prevented her from following the sad procession of her daughter's funeral. A man of triple functions, the bell-ringer, beadle, and grave-digger of the parish, had dug a grave in the half-acre cemetery behind the church,—a church well known, a classic church, with a square tower and pointed roof covered with slate, supported on the outside by strong corner buttresses. Behind the apse of the chancel, lay the cemetery, enclosed with a dilapidated wall,—a little field full of hillocks; no marble monuments, no visitors, but surely in every furrow, tears and true regrets, which were lacking to Ida Gruget. She was cast into a corner full of tall grass and brambles. After the coffin had been laid in this field, so poetic in its simplicity, the grave-digger found himself alone, for night was coming on. While filling the grave, he stopped now and then to gaze over the wall along the road. He was standing thus, resting on his spade, and looking at the Seine, which had brought him the body.

“Poor girl!” cried the voice of a man who suddenly appeared.

“How you made me jump, monsieur,” said the grave-digger.

“Was any service held over the body you are burying?”

“No, monsieur. Monsieur le cure wasn't willing. This is the first person buried here who didn't belong to the parish. Everybody knows everybody else in this place. Does monsieur—Why, he's gone!”

Some days had elapsed when a man dressed in black called at the house of Monsieur Jules Desmarets, and without asking to see him carried up to the chamber of his wife a large porphyry vase, on which were inscribed the words:

INVITA LEGE
CONJUGI MOERENTI
FILIOLAE CINERES
RESTITUIT
AMICIS XII. JUVANTIBUS
MORIBUNDUS PATER.

“What a man!” cried Jules, bursting into tears.

Eight days sufficed the husband to obey all the wishes of his wife, and to arrange his own affairs. He sold his practice to a brother of Martin Falleix, and left Paris while the authorities were still discussing whether it was lawful for a citizen to dispose of the body of his wife.

Who has not encountered on the boulevards of Paris, at the turn of a street, or beneath the arcades of the Palais-Royal, or in any part of the world where chance may offer him the sight, a being, man or woman, at whose aspect a thousand confused thoughts spring into his mind? At that sight we are suddenly interested, either by features of some fantastic conformation which reveal an agitated life, or by a singular effect of the whole person, produced by gestures, air, gait, clothes; or by some deep, intense look; or by other inexpressible signs which seize our minds suddenly and forcibly without our being able to explain even to ourselves the cause of our emotion. The next day other thoughts and other images have carried out of sight that passing dream. But if we meet the same personage again, either passing at some fixed hour, like the clerk of a mayor’s office, or wandering about the public promenades, like those individuals who seem to be a sort of furniture of the streets of Paris, and who are always to be found in public places, at first representations or noted restaurants,—then this being fastens himself or herself on our memory, and remains there like the first volume of a novel the end of which is lost. We are tempted to question this unknown person, and say, “Who are you?” “Why are you lounging here?” “By what right do you wear that pleated ruffle, that faded waistcoat, and carry that cane with an ivory top; why those blue spectacles; for what reason do you cling to that cravat of a dead and gone fashion?” Among these wandering creations some belong to the species of the Greek Hermae; they say nothing to the soul; they are there, and that is all. Why? is known to none. Such figure are a type of those used by sculptors for the four Seasons, for Commerce, for Plenty, etc. Some others—former lawyers, old merchants, elderly generals—move and walk, and yet seem stationary. Like old trees that are half uprooted by the current of a river, they seem never to take part in the torrent of Paris, with its youthful, active crowd. It is impossible to know if their friends have forgotten to bury them, or

whether they have escaped out of their coffins. At any rate, they have reached the condition of semi-fossils.

One of these Parisian Melmoths had come within a few days into a neighborhood of sober, quiet people, who, when the weather is fine, are invariably to be found in the space which lies between the south entrance of the Luxembourg and the north entrance of the Observatoire,—a space without a name, the neutral space of Paris. There, Paris is no longer; and there, Paris still lingers. The spot is a mingling of street, square, boulevard, fortification, garden, avenue, high-road, province, and metropolis; certainly, all of that is to be found there, and yet the place is nothing of all that,—it is a desert. Around this spot without a name stand the Foundling hospital, the Bourbe, the Cochin hospital, the Capucines, the hospital La Rochefoucauld, the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, the hospital of the Val-de-Grace; in short, all the vices and all the misfortunes of Paris find their asylum there. And (that nothing may lack in this philanthropic centre) Science there studies the tides and longitudes, Monsieur de Chateaubriand has erected the Marie-Therese Infirmary, and the Carmelites have founded a convent. The great events of life are represented by bells which ring incessantly through this desert,—for the mother giving birth, for the babe that is born, for the vice that succumbs, for the toiler who dies, for the virgin who prays, for the old man shaking with cold, for genius self-deluded. And a few steps off is the cemetery of Mont-Parnasse, where, hour after hour, the sorry funerals of the faubourg Saint-Marceau wend their way. This esplanade, which commands a view of Paris, has been taken possession of by bowl-players; it is, in fact, a sort of bowling green frequented by old gray faces, belonging to kindly, worthy men, who seem to continue the race of our ancestors, whose countenances must only be compared with those of their surroundings.

The man who had become, during the last few days, an inhabitant of this desert region, proved an assiduous attendant at these games of bowls; and must, undoubtedly, be considered the most striking creature of these various groups, who (if it is permissible to liken Parisians to the different orders of zoology) belonged to the genus mollusk. The new-comer kept sympathetic step with the cochonnet,—the little bowl which serves as a goal and on which the interest of the game must centre. He leaned against a tree when the cochonnet stopped; then, with the same attention that a dog gives to his master's gestures, he looked at the other bowls flying through the air, or rolling along the ground. You might have taken him for the weird and watchful genii of the cochonnet. He said nothing; and the bowl-players—the most fanatic men that can be encountered among the sectarians of any faith—had never asked the reason of his dogged silence; in fact, the most observing of them thought him deaf and dumb.

When it happened that the distances between the bowls and the cochonnet had to be measured, the cane of this silent being was used as a measure, the players coming up and taking it from the icy hands of the old man and returning it without a word or even a sign of friendliness. The loan of his cane seemed a servitude to which he had negatively consented. When a shower fell, he stayed near the cochonnet, the slave of the bowls, and the guardian of the unfinished game. Rain affected him no more than the fine weather did; he was, like the players themselves, an intermediary species between a Parisian who has the lowest intellect of his kind and an animal which has the highest.

In other respects, pallid and shrunken, indifferent to his own person, vacant in mind, he often came bareheaded, showing his sparse white hair, and his square, yellow, bald skull, like the knee of a beggar seen through his tattered trousers. His mouth was half-open, no ideas were in his glance, no precise object appeared in his movements; he never smiled; he never raised his eyes to heaven, but kept them habitually on the ground, where he seemed to be looking for something. At four o'clock an old woman arrived, to take him Heaven knows where; which she did by towing him along by the arm, as a young girl drags a wilful goat which still wants to browse by the wayside. This old man was a horrible thing to see.

In the afternoon of the day when Jules Desmarets left Paris, his travelling-carriage, in which he was alone, passed rapidly through the rue de l'Est, and came out upon the esplanade of the Observatoire at the moment when the old man, leaning against a tree, had allowed his cane to be taken from his hand amid the noisy vociferations of the players, pacifically irritated. Jules, thinking that he recognized that face, felt an impulse to stop, and at the same instant the carriage came to a standstill; for the postilion, hemmed in by some handcarts, had too much respect for the game to call upon the players to make way for him.

"It is he!" said Jules, beholding in that human wreck, Ferragus XXIII., chief of the Devorants. Then, after a pause, he added, "How he loved her!—Go on, postilion."

THE DUCHESS OF LANGEAIS

In a Spanish city on an island in the Mediterranean, there stands a convent of the Order of Barefoot Carmelites, where the rule instituted by St. Theresa is still preserved with all the first rigor of the reformation brought about by that

illustrious woman. Extraordinary as this may seem, it is none the less true. Almost every religious house in the Peninsula, or in Europe for that matter, was either destroyed or disorganized by the outbreak of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars; but as this island was protected through those times by the English fleet, its wealthy convent and peaceable inhabitants were secure from the general trouble and spoliation. The storms of many kinds which shook the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century spent their force before they reached those cliffs at so short a distance from the coast of Andalusia.

If the rumour of the Emperor's name so much as reached the shore of the island, it is doubtful whether the holy women kneeling in the cloisters grasped the reality of his dream-like progress of glory, or the majesty that blazed in flame across kingdom after kingdom during his meteor life.

In the minds of the Roman Catholic world, the convent stood out pre-eminent for a stern discipline which nothing had changed; the purity of its rule had attracted unhappy women from the furthest parts of Europe, women deprived of all human ties, sighing after the long suicide accomplished in the breast of God. No convent, indeed, was so well fitted for that complete detachment of the soul from all earthly things, which is demanded by the religious life, albeit on the continent of Europe there are many convents magnificently adapted to the purpose of their existence. Buried away in the loneliest valleys, hanging in mid-air on the steepest mountainsides, set down on the brink of precipices, in every place man has sought for the poetry of the Infinite, the solemn awe of Silence; in every place man has striven to draw closer to God, seeking Him on mountain peaks, in the depths below the crags, at the cliff's edge; and everywhere man has found God. But nowhere, save on this half-European, half-African ledge of rock could you find so many different harmonies, combining so to raise the soul, that the sharpest pain comes to be like other memories; the strongest impressions are dulled, till the sorrows of life are laid to rest in the depths.

The convent stands on the highest point of the crags at the uttermost end of the island. On the side towards the sea the rock was once rent sheer away in some globe-cataclysm; it rises up a straight wall from the base where the waves gnaw at the stone below high-water mark. Any assault is made impossible by the dangerous reefs that stretch far out to sea, with the sparkling waves of the Mediterranean playing over them. So, only from the sea can you discern the square mass of the convent built conformably to the minute rules laid down as to the shape, height, doors, and windows of monastic buildings. From the side of the town, the church completely hides the solid structure of the cloisters and their roofs, covered with broad slabs of stone impervious to sun or storm or gales of wind.

The church itself, built by the munificence of a Spanish family, is the

crowning edifice of the town. Its fine, bold front gives an imposing and picturesque look to the little city in the sea. The sight of such a city, with its close-huddled roofs, arranged for the most part amphitheatre-wise above a picturesque harbour, and crowned by a glorious cathedral front with triple-arched Gothic doorways, belfry towers, and filigree spires, is a spectacle surely in every way the sublimest on earth. Religion towering above daily life, to put men continually in mind of the End and the way, is in truth a thoroughly Spanish conception. But now surround this picture by the Mediterranean, and a burning sky, imagine a few palms here and there, a few stunted evergreen trees mingling their waving leaves with the motionless flowers and foliage of carved stone; look out over the reef with its white fringes of foam in contrast to the sapphire sea; and then turn to the city, with its galleries and terraces whither the townsfolk come to take the air among their flowers of an evening, above the houses and the tops of the trees in their little gardens; add a few sails down in the harbour; and lastly, in the stillness of falling night, listen to the organ music, the chanting of the services, the wonderful sound of bells pealing out over the open sea. There is sound and silence everywhere; oftener still there is silence over all.

The church is divided within into a sombre mysterious nave and narrow aisles. For some reason, probably because the winds are so high, the architect was unable to build the flying buttresses and intervening chapels which adorn almost all cathedrals, nor are there openings of any kind in the walls which support the weight of the roof. Outside there is simply the heavy wall structure, a solid mass of grey stone further strengthened by huge piers placed at intervals. Inside, the nave and its little side galleries are lighted entirely by the great stained-glass rose-window suspended by a miracle of art above the centre doorway; for upon that side the exposure permits of the display of lacework in stone and of other beauties peculiar to the style improperly called Gothic.

The larger part of the nave and aisles was left for the townsfolk, who came and went and heard mass there. The choir was shut off from the rest of the church by a grating and thick folds of brown curtain, left slightly apart in the middle in such a way that nothing of the choir could be seen from the church except the high altar and the officiating priest. The grating itself was divided up by the pillars which supported the organ loft; and this part of the structure, with its carved wooden columns, completed the line of the arcading in the gallery carried by the shafts in the nave. If any inquisitive person, therefore, had been bold enough to climb upon the narrow balustrade in the gallery to look down into the choir, he could have seen nothing but the tall eight-sided windows of stained glass beyond the high altar.

At the time of the French expedition into Spain to establish Ferdinand VII

once more on the throne, a French general came to the island after the taking of Cadiz, ostensibly to require the recognition of the King's Government, really to see the convent and to find some means of entering it. The undertaking was certainly a delicate one; but a man of passionate temper, whose life had been, as it were, but one series of poems in action, a man who all his life long had lived romances instead of writing them, a man pre-eminently a Doer, was sure to be tempted by a deed which seemed to be impossible.

To open the doors of a convent of nuns by lawful means! The metropolitan or the Pope would scarcely have permitted it! And as for force or stratagem—might not any indiscretion cost him his position, his whole career as a soldier, and the end in view to boot? The Duc d'Angouleme was still in Spain; and of all the crimes which a man in favour with the Commander-in-Chief might commit, this one alone was certain to find him inexorable. The General had asked for the mission to gratify private motives of curiosity, though never was curiosity more hopeless. This final attempt was a matter of conscience. The Carmelite convent on the island was the only nunnery in Spain which had baffled his search.

As he crossed from the mainland, scarcely an hour's distance, he felt a presentiment that his hopes were to be fulfilled; and afterwards, when as yet he had seen nothing of the convent but its walls, and of the nuns not so much as their robes; while he had merely heard the chanting of the service, there were dim auguries under the walls and in the sound of the voices to justify his frail hope. And, indeed, however faint those so unaccountable presentiments might be, never was human passion more vehemently excited than the General's curiosity at that moment. There are no small events for the heart; the heart exaggerates everything; the heart weighs the fall of a fourteen-year-old Empire and the dropping of a woman's glove in the same scales, and the glove is nearly always the heavier of the two. So here are the facts in all their prosaic simplicity. The facts first, the emotions will follow.

An hour after the General landed on the island, the royal authority was re-established there. Some few Constitutional Spaniards who had found their way thither after the fall of Cadiz were allowed to charter a vessel and sail for London. So there was neither resistance nor reaction. But the change of government could not be effected in the little town without a mass, at which the two divisions under the General's command were obliged to be present. Now, it was upon this mass that the General had built his hopes of gaining some information as to the sisters in the convent; he was quite unaware how absolutely the Carmelites were cut off from the world; but he knew that there might be among them one whom he held dearer than life, dearer than honour.

His hopes were cruelly dashed at once. Mass, it is true, was celebrated in

state. In honour of such a solemnity, the curtains which always hid the choir were drawn back to display its riches, its valuable paintings and shrines so bright with gems that they eclipsed the glories of the ex-votos of gold and silver hung up by sailors of the port on the columns in the nave. But all the nuns had taken refuge in the organ-loft. And yet, in spite of this first check, during this very mass of thanksgiving, the most intimately thrilling drama that ever set a man's heart beating opened out widely before him.

The sister who played the organ aroused such intense enthusiasm, that not a single man regretted that he had come to the service. Even the men in the ranks were delighted, and the officers were in ecstasy. As for the General, he was seemingly calm and indifferent. The sensations stirred in him as the sister played one piece after another belong to the small number of things which it is not lawful to utter; words are powerless to express them; like death, God, eternity, they can only be realised through their one point of contact with humanity. Strangely enough, the organ music seemed to belong to the school of Rossini, the musician who brings most human passion into his art.

Some day his works, by their number and extent, will receive the reverence due to the Homer of music. From among all the scores that we owe to his great genius, the nun seemed to have chosen Moses in Egypt for special study, doubtless because the spirit of sacred music finds therein its supreme expression. Perhaps the soul of the great musician, so gloriously known to Europe, and the soul of this unknown executant had met in the intuitive apprehension of the same poetry. So at least thought two dilettanti officers who must have missed the Theatre Favart in Spain.

At last in the Te Deum no one could fail to discern a French soul in the sudden change that came over the music. Joy for the victory of the Most Christian King evidently stirred this nun's heart to the depths. She was a Frenchwoman beyond mistake. Soon the love of country shone out, breaking forth like shafts of light from the fugue, as the sister introduced variations with all a Parisienne's fastidious taste, and blended vague suggestions of our grandest national airs with her music. A Spaniard's fingers would not have brought this warmth into a graceful tribute paid to the victorious arms of France. The musician's nationality was revealed.

"We find France everywhere, it seems," said one of the men.

The General had left the church during the Te Deum; he could not listen any longer. The nun's music had been a revelation of a woman loved to frenzy; a woman so carefully hidden from the world's eyes, so deeply buried in the bosom of the Church, that hitherto the most ingenious and persistent efforts made by men who brought great influence and unusual powers to bear upon the search had failed to find her. The suspicion aroused in the General's

heart became all but a certainty with the vague reminiscence of a sad, delicious melody, the air of *Fleuve du Tage*. The woman he loved had played the prelude to the ballad in a boudoir in Paris, how often! and now this nun had chosen the song to express an exile's longing, amid the joy of those that triumphed. Terrible sensation! To hope for the resurrection of a lost love, to find her only to know that she was lost, to catch a mysterious glimpse of her after five years—five years, in which the pent-up passion, chafing in an empty life, had grown the mightier for every fruitless effort to satisfy it!

Who has not known, at least once in his life, what it is to lose some precious thing; and after hunting through his papers, ransacking his memory, and turning his house upside down; after one or two days spent in vain search, and hope, and despair; after a prodigious expenditure of the liveliest irritation of soul, who has not known the ineffable pleasure of finding that all-important nothing which had come to be a king of monomania? Very good. Now, spread that fury of search over five years; put a woman, put a heart, put love in the place of the trifle; transpose the monomania into the key of high passion; and, furthermore, let the seeker be a man of ardent temper, with a lion's heart and a leonine head and mane, a man to inspire awe and fear in those who come in contact with him—realise this, and you may, perhaps, understand why the General walked abruptly out of the church when the first notes of a ballad, which he used to hear with a rapture of delight in a gilt-paneled boudoir, began to vibrate along the aisles of the church in the sea.

The General walked away down the steep street which led to the port, and only stopped when he could not hear the deep notes of the organ. Unable to think of anything but the love which broke out in volcanic eruption, filling his heart with fire, he only knew that the *Te Deum* was over when the Spanish congregation came pouring out of the church. Feeling that his behaviour and attitude might seem ridiculous, he went back to head the procession, telling the *alcalde* and the governor that, feeling suddenly faint, he had gone out into the air. Casting about for a plea for prolonging his stay, it at once occurred to him to make the most of this excuse, framed on the spur of the moment. He declined, on a plea of increasing indisposition, to preside at the banquet given by the town to the French officers, betook himself to his bed, and sent a message to the Major-General, to the effect that temporary illness obliged him to leave the Colonel in command of the troops for the time being. This commonplace but very plausible stratagem relieved him of all responsibility for the time necessary to carry out his plans. The General, nothing if not "catholic and monarchical," took occasion to inform himself of the hours of the services, and manifested the greatest zeal for the performance of his religious duties, piety which caused no remark in Spain.

The very next day, while the division was marching out of the town, the

General went to the convent to be present at vespers. He found an empty church. The townsfolk, devout though they were, had all gone down to the quay to watch the embarkation of the troops. He felt glad to be the only man there. He tramped noisily up the nave, clanking his spurs till the vaulted roof rang with the sound; he coughed, he talked aloud to himself to let the nuns know, and more particularly to let the organist know that if the troops were gone, one Frenchman was left behind. Was this singular warning heard and understood? He thought so. It seemed to him that in the Magnificat the organ made response which was borne to him on the vibrating air. The nun's spirit found wings in music and fled towards him, throbbing with the rhythmical pulse of the sounds. Then, in all its might, the music burst forth and filled the church with warmth. The Song of Joy set apart in the sublime liturgy of Latin Christianity to express the exaltation of the soul in the presence of the glory of the ever-living God, became the utterance of a heart almost terrified by its gladness in the presence of the glory of a mortal love; a love that yet lived, a love that had risen to trouble her even beyond the grave in which the nun is laid, that she may rise again as the bride of Christ.

The organ is in truth the grandest, the most daring, the most magnificent of all instruments invented by human genius. It is a whole orchestra in itself. It can express anything in response to a skilled touch. Surely it is in some sort a pedestal on which the soul poises for a flight forth into space, essaying on her course to draw picture after picture in an endless series, to paint human life, to cross the Infinite that separates heaven from earth? And the longer a dreamer listens to those giant harmonies, the better he realizes that nothing save this hundred-voiced choir on earth can fill all the space between kneeling men, and a God hidden by the blinding light of the Sanctuary. The music is the one interpreter strong enough to bear up the prayers of humanity to heaven, prayer in its omnipotent moods, prayer tinged by the melancholy of many different natures, coloured by meditative ecstasy, upspringing with the impulse of repentance—blended with the myriad fancies of every creed. Yes. In those long vaulted aisles the melodies inspired by the sense of things divine are blended with a grandeur unknown before, are decked with new glory and might. Out of the dim daylight, and the deep silence broken by the chanting of the choir in response to the thunder of the organ, a veil is woven for God, and the brightness of His attributes shines through it.

And this wealth of holy things seemed to be flung down like a grain of incense upon the fragile altar raised to Love beneath the eternal throne of a jealous and avenging God. Indeed, in the joy of the nun there was little of that awe and gravity which should harmonize with the solemnities of the Magnificat. She had enriched the music with graceful variations, earthly gladness throbbing through the rhythm of each. In such brilliant quivering notes some great singer might strive to find a voice for her love, her melodies

fluttered as a bird flutters about her mate. There were moments when she seemed to leap back into the past, to dally there now with laughter, now with tears. Her changing moods, as it were, ran riot. She was like a woman excited and happy over her lover's return.

But at length, after the swaying fugues of delirium, after the marvellous rendering of a vision of the past, a revulsion swept over the soul that thus found utterance for itself. With a swift transition from the major to the minor, the organist told her hearer of her present lot. She gave the story of long melancholy broodings, of the slow course of her moral malady. How day by day she deadened the senses, how every night cut off one more thought, how her heart was slowly reduced to ashes. The sadness deepened shade after shade through languid modulations, and in a little while the echoes were pouring out a torrent of grief. Then on a sudden, high notes rang out like the voices of angels singing together, as if to tell the lost but not forgotten lover that their spirits now could only meet in heaven. Pathetic hope! Then followed the Amen. No more joy, no more tears in the air, no sadness, no regrets. The Amen was the return to God. The final chord was deep, solemn, even terrible; for the last rumblings of the bass sent a shiver through the audience that raised the hair on their heads; the nun shook out her veiling of crepe, and seemed to sink again into the grave from which she had risen for a moment. Slowly the reverberations died away; it seemed as if the church, but now so full of light, had returned to thick darkness.

The General had been caught up and borne swiftly away by this strong-winged spirit; he had followed the course of its flight from beginning to end. He understood to the fullest extent the imagery of that burning symphony; for him the chords reached deep and far. For him, as for the sister, the poem meant future, present, and past. Is not music, and even opera music, a sort of text, which a susceptible or poetic temper, or a sore and stricken heart, may expand as memories shall determine? If a musician must needs have the heart of a poet, must not the listener too be in a manner a poet and a lover to hear all that lies in great music? Religion, love, and music—what are they but a threefold expression of the same fact, of that craving for expansion which stirs in every noble soul. And these three forms of poetry ascend to God, in whom all passion on earth finds its end. Wherefore the holy human trinity finds a place amid the infinite glories of God; of God, whom we always represent surrounded with the fires of love and seistrans of gold—music and light and harmony. Is not He the Cause and the End of all our strivings?

The French General guessed rightly that here in the desert, on this bare rock in the sea, the nun had seized upon music as an outpouring of the passion that still consumed her. Was this her manner of offering up her love as a sacrifice to God? Or was it Love exultant in triumph over God? The questions

were hard to answer. But one thing at least the General could not mistake—in this heart, dead to the world, the fire of passion burned as fiercely as in his own.

Vespers over, he went back to the alcalde with whom he was staying. In the all-absorbing joy which comes in such full measure when a satisfaction sought long and painfully is attained at last, he could see nothing beyond this—he was still loved! In her heart love had grown in loneliness, even as his love had grown stronger as he surmounted one barrier after another which this woman had set between them! The glow of soul came to its natural end. There followed a longing to see her again, to contend with God for her, to snatch her away—a rash scheme, which appealed to a daring nature. He went to bed, when the meal was over, to avoid questions; to be alone and think at his ease; and he lay absorbed by deep thought till day broke.

He rose only to go to mass. He went to the church and knelt close to the screen, with his forehead touching the curtain; he would have torn a hole in it if he had been alone, but his host had come with him out of politeness, and the least imprudence might compromise the whole future of his love, and ruin the new hopes.

The organ sounded, but it was another player, and not the nun of the last two days whose hands touched the keys. It was all colorless and cold for the General. Was the woman he loved prostrated by emotion which well-nigh overcame a strong man's heart? Had she so fully realised and shared an unchanged, longed-for love, that now she lay dying on her bed in her cell? While innumerable thoughts of this kind perplexed his mind, the voice of the woman he worshipped rang out close beside him; he knew its clear resonant soprano. It was her voice, with that faint tremor in it which gave it all the charm that shyness and diffidence gives to a young girl; her voice, distinct from the mass of singing as a prima donna's in the chorus of a finale. It was like a golden or silver thread in dark frieze.

It was she! There could be no mistake. Parisienne now as ever, she had not laid coquetry aside when she threw off worldly adornments for the veil and the Carmelite's coarse serge. She who had affirmed her love last evening in the praise sent up to God, seemed now to say to her lover, "Yes, it is I. I am here. My love is unchanged, but I am beyond the reach of love. You will hear my voice, my soul shall enfold you, and I shall abide here under the brown shroud in the choir from which no power on earth can tear me. You shall never see me more!"

"It is she indeed!" the General said to himself, raising his head. He had leant his face on his hands, unable at first to bear the intolerable emotion that surged like a whirlpool in his heart, when that well-known voice vibrated

under the arcading, with the sound of the sea for accompaniment.

Storm was without, and calm within the sanctuary. Still that rich voice poured out all its caressing notes; it fell like balm on the lover's burning heart; it blossomed upon the air—the air that a man would fain breathe more deeply to receive the effluence of a soul breathed forth with love in the words of the prayer. The alcalde coming to join his guest found him in tears during the elevation, while the nun was singing, and brought him back to his house. Surprised to find so much piety in a French military man, the worthy magistrate invited the confessor of the convent to meet his guest. Never had news given the General more pleasure; he paid the ecclesiastic a good deal of attention at supper, and confirmed his Spanish hosts in the high opinion they had formed of his piety by a not wholly disinterested respect.

He inquired with gravity how many sisters there were in the convent, and asked for particulars of its endowment and revenues, as if from courtesy he wished to hear the good priest discourse on the subject most interesting to him. He informed himself as to the manner of life led by the holy women. Were they allowed to go out of the convent, or to see visitors?

“Senor,” replied the venerable churchman, “the rule is strict. A woman cannot enter a monastery of the order of St. Bruno without a special permission from His Holiness, and the rule here is equally stringent. No man may enter a convent of Barefoot Carmelites unless he is a priest specially attached to the services of the house by the Archbishop. None of the nuns may leave the convent; though the great Saint, St. Theresa, often left her cell. The Visitor or the Mothers Superior can alone give permission, subject to an authorization from the Archbishop, for a nun to see a visitor, and then especially in a case of illness. Now we are one of the principal houses, and consequently we have a Mother Superior here. Among other foreign sisters there is one Frenchwoman, Sister Theresa; she it is who directs the music in the chapel.”

“Oh!” said the General, with feigned surprise. “She must have rejoiced over the victory of the House of Bourbon.”

“I told them the reason of the mass; they are always a little bit inquisitive.”

“But Sister Theresa may have interests in France. Perhaps she would like to send some message or to hear news.”

“I do not think so. She would have come to ask me.”

“As a fellow-countryman, I should be quite curious to see her,” said the General. “If it is possible, if the Lady Superior consents, if——”

“Even at the grating and in the Reverend Mother's presence, an interview

would be quite impossible for anybody whatsoever; but, strict as the Mother is, for a deliverer of our holy religion and the throne of his Catholic Majesty, the rule might be relaxed for a moment," said the confessor, blinking. "I will speak about it."

"How old is Sister Theresa?" inquired the lover. He dared not ask any questions of the priest as to the nun's beauty.

"She does not reckon years now," the good man answered, with a simplicity that made the General shudder.

Next day before siesta, the confessor came to inform the French General that Sister Theresa and the Mother consented to receive him at the grating in the parlour before vespers. The General spent the siesta in pacing to and fro along the quay in the noonday heat. Thither the priest came to find him, and brought him to the convent by way of the gallery round the cemetery. Fountains, green trees, and rows of arcading maintained a cool freshness in keeping with the place.

At the further end of the long gallery the priest led the way into a large room divided in two by a grating covered with a brown curtain. In the first, and in some sort of public half of the apartment, where the confessor left the newcomer, a wooden bench ran round the wall, and two or three chairs, also of wood, were placed near the grating. The ceiling consisted of bare unornamented joists and cross-beams of ilex wood. As the two windows were both on the inner side of the grating, and the dark surface of the wood was a bad reflector, the light in the place was so dim that you could scarcely see the great black crucifix, the portrait of Saint Theresa, and a picture of the Madonna which adorned the grey parlour walls. Tumultuous as the General's feelings were, they took something of the melancholy of the place. He grew calm in that homely quiet. A sense of something vast as the tomb took possession of him beneath the chill unceiled roof. Here, as in the grave, was there not eternal silence, deep peace—the sense of the Infinite? And besides this there was the quiet and the fixed thought of the cloister—a thought which you felt like a subtle presence in the air, and in the dim dusk of the room; an all-pervasive thought nowhere definitely expressed, and looming the larger in the imagination; for in the cloister the great saying, "Peace in the Lord," enters the least religious soul as a living force.

The monk's life is scarcely comprehensible. A man seems confessed a weakling in a monastery; he was born to act, to live out a life of work; he is evading a man's destiny in his cell. But what man's strength, blended with pathetic weakness, is implied by a woman's choice of the convent life! A man may have any number of motives for burying himself in a monastery; for him it is the leap over the precipice. A woman has but one motive—she is a woman

still; she betrothes herself to a Heavenly Bridegroom. Of the monk you may ask, "Why did you not fight your battle?" But if a woman immures herself in the cloister, is there not always a sublime battle fought first?

At length it seemed to the General that that still room, and the lonely convent in the sea, were full of thoughts of him. Love seldom attains to solemnity; yet surely a love still faithful in the breast of God was something solemn, something more than a man had a right to look for as things are in this nineteenth century? The infinite grandeur of the situation might well produce an effect upon the General's mind; he had precisely enough elevation of soul to forget politics, honours, Spain, and society in Paris, and to rise to the height of this lofty climax. And what in truth could be more tragic? How much must pass in the souls of these two lovers, brought together in a place of strangers, on a ledge of granite in the sea; yet held apart by an intangible, unsurmountable barrier! Try to imagine the man saying within himself, "Shall I triumph over God in her heart?" when a faint rustling sound made him quiver, and the curtain was drawn aside.

Between him and the light stood a woman. Her face was hidden by the veil that drooped from the folds upon her head; she was dressed according to the rule of the order in a gown of the colour become proverbial. Her bare feet were hidden; if the General could have seen them, he would have known how appallingly thin she had grown; and yet in spite of the thick folds of her coarse gown, a mere covering and no ornament, he could guess how tears, and prayer, and passion, and loneliness had wasted the woman before him.

An ice-cold hand, belonging, no doubt, to the Mother Superior, held back the curtain. The General gave the enforced witness of their interview a searching glance, and met the dark, inscrutable gaze of an aged recluse. The Mother might have been a century old, but the bright, youthful eyes belied the wrinkles that furrowed her pale face.

"Mme la Duchesse," he began, his voice shaken with emotion, "does your companion understand French?" The veiled figure bowed her head at the sound of his voice.

"There is no duchess here," she replied. "It is Sister Theresa whom you see before you. She whom you call my companion is my mother in God, my superior here on earth."

The words were so meekly spoken by the voice that sounded in other years amid harmonious surroundings of refined luxury, the voice of a queen of fashion in Paris. Such words from the lips that once spoke so lightly and flippantly struck the General dumb with amazement.

"The Holy Mother only speaks Latin and Spanish," she added.

“I understand neither. Dear Antoinette, make my excuses to her.”

The light fell full upon the nun’s figure; a thrill of deep emotion betrayed itself in a faint quiver of her veil as she heard her name softly spoken by the man who had been so hard in the past.

“My brother,” she said, drawing her sleeve under her veil, perhaps to brush tears away, “I am Sister Theresa.”

Then, turning to the Superior, she spoke in Spanish; the General knew enough of the language to understand what she said perfectly well; possibly he could have spoken it had he chosen to do so.

“Dear Mother, the gentleman presents his respects to you, and begs you to pardon him if he cannot pay them himself, but he knows neither of the languages which you speak——”

The aged nun bent her head slowly, with an expression of angelic sweetness, enhanced at the same time by the consciousness of her power and dignity.

“Do you know this gentleman?” she asked, with a keen glance.

“Yes, Mother.”

“Go back to your cell, my daughter!” said the Mother imperiously.

The General slipped aside behind the curtain lest the dreadful tumult within him should appear in his face; even in the shadow it seemed to him that he could still see the Superior’s piercing eyes. He was afraid of her; she held his little, frail, hardly-won happiness in her hands; and he, who had never quailed under a triple row of guns, now trembled before this nun. The Duchess went towards the door, but she turned back.

“Mother,” she said, with dreadful calmness, “the Frenchman is one of my brothers.”

“Then stay, my daughter,” said the Superior, after a pause.

The piece of admirable Jesuitry told of such love and regret, that a man less strongly constituted might have broken down under the keen delight in the midst of a great and, for him, an entirely novel peril. Oh! how precious words, looks, and gestures became when love must baffle lynx eyes and tiger’s claws! Sister Theresa came back.

“You see, my brother, what I have dared to do only to speak to you for a moment of your salvation and of the prayers that my soul puts up for your soul daily. I am committing mortal sin. I have told a lie. How many days of penance must expiate that lie! But I shall endure it for your sake. My brother, you do not know what happiness it is to love in heaven; to feel that you can

confess love purified by religion, love transported into the highest heights of all, so that we are permitted to lose sight of all but the soul. If the doctrine and the spirit of the Saint to whom we owe this refuge had not raised me above earth's anguish, and caught me up and set me, far indeed beneath the Sphere wherein she dwells, yet truly above this world, I should not have seen you again. But now I can see you, and hear your voice, and remain calm——”

The General broke in, “But, Antoinette, let me see you, you whom I love passionately, desperately, as you could have wished me to love you.”

“Do not call me Antoinette, I implore you. Memories of the past hurt me. You must see no one here but Sister Theresa, a creature who trusts in the Divine mercy.” She paused for a little, and then added, “You must control yourself, my brother. Our Mother would separate us without pity if there is any worldly passion in your face, or if you allow the tears to fall from your eyes.”

The General bowed his head to regain self-control; when he looked up again he saw her face beyond the grating—the thin, white, but still impassioned face of the nun. All the magic charm of youth that once bloomed there, all the fair contrast of velvet whiteness and the colour of the Bengal rose, had given place to a burning glow, as of a porcelain jar with a faint light shining through it. The wonderful hair in which she took such pride had been shaven; there was a bandage round her forehead and about her face. An ascetic life had left dark traces about the eyes, which still sometimes shot out fevered glances; their ordinary calm expression was but a veil. In a few words, she was but the ghost of her former self.

“Ah! you that have come to be my life, you must come out of this tomb! You were mine; you had no right to give yourself, even to God. Did you not promise me to give up all at the least command from me? You may perhaps think me worthy of that promise now when you hear what I have done for you. I have sought you all through the world. You have been in my thoughts at every moment for five years; my life has been given to you. My friends, very powerful friends, as you know, have helped with all their might to search every convent in France, Italy, Spain, Sicily, and America. Love burned more brightly for every vain search. Again and again I made long journeys with a false hope; I have wasted my life and the heaviest throbbings of my heart in vain under many a dark convent wall. I am not speaking of a faithfulness that knows no bounds, for what is it?—nothing compared with the infinite longings of my love. If your remorse long ago was sincere, you ought not to hesitate to follow me today.”

“You forget that I am not free.”

“The Duke is dead,” he answered quickly.

Sister Theresa flushed red.

“May heaven be open to him!” she cried with a quick rush of feeling. “He was generous to me.—But I did not mean such ties; it was one of my sins that I was ready to break them all without scruple—for you.”

“Are you speaking of your vows?” the General asked, frowning. “I did not think that anything weighed heavier with your heart than love. But do not think twice of it, Antoinette; the Holy Father himself shall absolve you of your oath. I will surely go to Rome, I will entreat all the powers of earth; if God could come down from heaven, I would——”

“Do not blaspheme.”

“So do not fear the anger of God. Ah! I would far rather hear that you would leave your prison for me; that this very night you would let yourself down into a boat at the foot of the cliffs. And we would go away to be happy somewhere at the world’s end, I know not where. And with me at your side, you should come back to life and health under the wings of love.”

“You must not talk like this,” said Sister Theresa; “you do not know what you are to me now. I love you far better than I ever loved you before. Every day I pray for you; I see you with other eyes. Armand, if you but knew the happiness of giving yourself up, without shame, to a pure friendship which God watches over! You do not know what joy it is to me to pray for heaven’s blessing on you. I never pray for myself: God will do with me according to His will; but, at the price of my soul, I wish I could be sure that you are happy here on earth, and that you will be happy hereafter throughout all ages. My eternal life is all that trouble has left me to offer up to you. I am old now with weeping; I am neither young nor fair; and in any case, you could not respect the nun who became a wife; no love, not even motherhood, could give me absolution.... What can you say to outweigh the uncounted thoughts that have gathered in my heart during the past five years, thoughts that have changed, and worn, and blighted it? I ought to have given a heart less sorrowful to God.”

“What can I say? Dear Antoinette, I will say this, that I love you; that affection, love, a great love, the joy of living in another heart that is ours, utterly and wholly ours, is so rare a thing and so hard to find, that I doubted you, and put you to sharp proof; but now, today, I love you, Antoinette, with all my soul’s strength.... If you will follow me into solitude, I will hear no voice but yours, I will see no other face.”

“Hush, Armand! You are shortening the little time that we may be together here on earth.”

“Antoinette, will you come with me?”

“I am never away from you. My life is in your heart, not through the selfish ties of earthly happiness, or vanity, or enjoyment; pale and withered as I am, I live here for you, in the breast of God. As God is just, you shall be happy——”

“Words, words all of it! Pale and withered? How if I want you? How if I cannot be happy without you? Do you still think of nothing but duty with your lover before you? Is he never to come first and above all things else in your heart? In time past you put social success, yourself, heaven knows what, before him; now it is God, it is the welfare of my soul! In Sister Theresa I find the Duchess over again, ignorant of the happiness of love, insensible as ever, beneath the semblance of sensibility. You do not love me; you have never loved me——”

“Oh, my brother——!”

“You do not wish to leave this tomb. You love my soul, do you say? Very well, through you it will be lost forever. I shall make away with myself——”

“Mother!” Sister Theresa called aloud in Spanish, “I have lied to you; this man is my lover!”

The curtain fell at once. The General, in his stupor, scarcely heard the doors within as they clanged.

“Ah! she loves me still!” he cried, understanding all the sublimity of that cry of hers. “She loves me still. She must be carried off....”

The General left the island, returned to headquarters, pleaded ill-health, asked for leave of absence, and forthwith took his departure for France.

And now for the incidents which brought the two personages in this Scene into their present relation to each other.

The thing known in France as the Faubourg Saint-Germain is neither a Quarter, nor a sect, nor an institution, nor anything else that admits of a precise definition. There are great houses in the Place Royale, the Faubourg Saint-Honore, and the Chaussee d’Antin, in any one of which you may breathe the same atmosphere of Faubourg Saint-Germain. So, to begin with, the whole Faubourg is not within the Faubourg. There are men and women born far enough away from its influences who respond to them and take their place in the circle; and again there are others, born within its limits, who may yet be driven forth forever. For the last forty years the manners, and customs, and speech, in a word, the tradition of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, has been to Paris what the Court used to be in other times; it is what the Hotel Saint-Paul was to the fourteenth century; the Louvre to the fifteenth; the Palais, the Hotel Rambouillet, and the Place Royale to the sixteenth; and lastly, as Versailles

was to the seventeenth and the eighteenth.

Just as the ordinary workaday Paris will always centre about some point; so, through all periods of history, the Paris of the nobles and the upper classes converges towards some particular spot. It is a periodically recurrent phenomenon which presents ample matter for reflection to those who are fain to observe or describe the various social zones; and possibly an enquiry into the causes that bring about this centralization may do more than merely justify the probability of this episode; it may be of service to serious interests which some day will be more deeply rooted in the commonwealth, unless, indeed, experience is as meaningless for political parties as it is for youth.

In every age the great nobles, and the rich who always ape the great nobles, build their houses as far as possible from crowded streets. When the Duc d'Uzes built his splendid hotel in the Rue Montmartre in the reign of Louis XIV, and set the fountain at his gates—for which beneficent action, to say nothing of his other virtues, he was held in such veneration that the whole quarter turned out in a body to follow his funeral—when the Duke, I say, chose this site for his house, he did so because that part of Paris was almost deserted in those days. But when the fortifications were pulled down, and the market gardens beyond the line of the boulevards began to fill with houses, then the d'Uzes family left their fine mansion, and in our time it was occupied by a banker. Later still, the noblesse began to find themselves out of their element among shopkeepers, left the Place Royale and the centre of Paris for good, and crossed the river to breathe freely in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where palaces were reared already about the great hotel built by Louis XIV for the Duc de Maine—the Benjamin among his legitimated offspring. And indeed, for people accustomed to a stately life, can there be more unseemly surroundings than the bustle, the mud, the street cries, the bad smells, and narrow thoroughfares of a populous quarter? The very habits of life in a mercantile or manufacturing district are completely at variance with the lives of nobles. The shopkeeper and artisan are just going to bed when the great world is thinking of dinner; and the noisy stir of life begins among the former when the latter have gone to rest. Their day's calculations never coincide; the one class represents the expenditure, the other the receipts. Consequently their manners and customs are diametrically opposed.

Nothing contemptuous is intended by this statement. An aristocracy is in a manner the intellect of the social system, as the middle classes and the proletariat may be said to be its organizing and working power. It naturally follows that these forces are differently situated; and of their antagonism there is bred a seeming antipathy produced by the performance of different functions, all of them, however, existing for one common end.

Such social dissonances are so inevitably the outcome of any charter of the

constitution, that however much a Liberal may be disposed to complain of them, as of treason against those sublime ideas with which the ambitious plebeian is apt to cover his designs, he would none the less think it a preposterous notion that M. le Prince de Montmorency, for instance, should continue to live in the Rue Saint-Martin at the corner of the street which bears that nobleman's name; or that M. le Duc de Fitz-James, descendant of the royal house of Scotland, should have his hotel at the angle of the Rue Marie Stuart and the Rue Montorgueil. *Sint ut sunt, aut non sint*, the grand words of the Jesuit, might be taken as a motto by the great in all countries. These social differences are patent in all ages; the fact is always accepted by the people; its "reasons of state" are self-evident; it is at once cause and effect, a principle and a law. The common sense of the masses never deserts them until demagogues stir them up to gain ends of their own; that common sense is based on the verities of social order; and the social order is the same everywhere, in Moscow as in London, in Geneva as in Calcutta. Given a certain number of families of unequal fortune in any given space, you will see an aristocracy forming under your eyes; there will be the patricians, the upper classes, and yet other ranks below them. Equality may be a right, but no power on earth can convert it into fact. It would be a good thing for France if this idea could be popularized. The benefits of political harmony are obvious to the least intelligent classes. Harmony is, as it were, the poetry of order, and order is a matter of vital importance to the working population. And what is order, reduced to its simplest expression, but the agreement of things among themselves—unity, in short? Architecture, music, and poetry, everything in France, and in France more than in any other country, is based upon this principle; it is written upon the very foundations of her clear accurate language, and a language must always be the most infallible index of national character. In the same way you may note that the French popular airs are those most calculated to strike the imagination, the best-modulated melodies are taken over by the people; clearness of thought, the intellectual simplicity of an idea attracts them; they like the incisive sayings that hold the greatest number of ideas. France is the one country in the world where a little phrase may bring about a great revolution. Whenever the masses have risen, it has been to bring men, affairs, and principles into agreement. No nation has a clearer conception of that idea of unity which should permeate the life of an aristocracy; possibly no other nation has so intelligent a comprehension of a political necessity; history will never find her behind the time. France has been led astray many a time, but she is deluded, woman-like, by generous ideas, by a glow of enthusiasm which at first outstrips sober reason.

So, to begin with, the most striking characteristic of the Faubourg is the splendour of its great mansions, its great gardens, and a surrounding quiet in keeping with princely revenues drawn from great estates. And what is this

distance set between a class and a whole metropolis but visible and outward expression of the widely different attitude of mind which must inevitably keep them apart? The position of the head is well defined in every organism. If by any chance a nation allows its head to fall at its feet, it is pretty sure sooner or later to discover that this is a suicidal measure; and since nations have no desire to perish, they set to work at once to grow a new head. If they lack the strength for this, they perish as Rome perished, and Venice, and so many other states.

This distinction between the upper and lower spheres of social activity, emphasized by differences in their manner of living, necessarily implies that in the highest aristocracy there is real worth and some distinguishing merit. In any state, no matter what form of "government" is affected, so soon as the patrician class fails to maintain that complete superiority which is the condition of its existence, it ceases to be a force, and is pulled down at once by the populace. The people always wish to see money, power, and initiative in their leaders, hands, hearts, and heads; they must be the spokesmen, they must represent the intelligence and the glory of the nation. Nations, like women, love strength in those who rule them; they cannot give love without respect; they refuse utterly to obey those of whom they do not stand in awe. An aristocracy fallen into contempt is a *roi faineant*, a husband in petticoats; first it ceases to be itself, and then it ceases to be.

And in this way the isolation of the great, the sharply marked distinction in their manner of life, or in a word, the general custom of the patrician caste is at once the sign of a real power, and their destruction so soon as that power is lost. The Faubourg Saint-Germain failed to recognise the conditions of its being, while it would still have been easy to perpetuate its existence, and therefore was brought low for a time. The Faubourg should have looked the facts fairly in the face, as the English aristocracy did before them; they should have seen that every institution has its climacteric periods, when words lose their old meanings, and ideas reappear in a new guise, and the whole conditions of politics wear a changed aspect, while the underlying realities undergo no essential alteration.

These ideas demand further development which form an essential part of this episode; they are given here both as a succinct statement of the causes, and an explanation of the things which happen in the course of the story.

The stateliness of the castles and palaces where nobles dwell; the luxury of the details; the constantly maintained sumptuousness of the furniture; the "atmosphere" in which the fortunate owner of landed estates (a rich man before he was born) lives and moves easily and without friction; the habit of mind which never descends to calculate the petty workaday gains of existence; the leisure; the higher education attainable at a much earlier age; and lastly, the

aristocratic tradition that makes of him a social force, for which his opponents, by dint of study and a strong will and tenacity of vocation, are scarcely a match—all these things should contribute to form a lofty spirit in a man, possessed of such privileges from his youth up; they should stamp his character with that high self-respect, of which the least consequence is a nobleness of heart in harmony with the noble name that he bears. And in some few families all this is realised. There are noble characters here and there in the Faubourg, but they are marked exceptions to a general rule of egoism which has been the ruin of this world within a world. The privileges above enumerated are the birthright of the French noblesse, as of every patrician efflorescence ever formed on the surface of a nation; and will continue to be theirs so long as their existence is based upon real estate, or money; *domaine-sol* and *domaine-argent* alike, the only solid bases of an organized society; but such privileges are held upon the understanding that the patricians must continue to justify their existence. There is a sort of moral fief held on a tenure of service rendered to the sovereign, and here in France the people are undoubtedly the sovereigns nowadays. The times are changed, and so are the weapons. The knight-banneret of old wore a coat of chain armor and a hauberk; he could handle a lance well and display his pennon, and no more was required of him; today he is bound to give proof of his intelligence. A stout heart was enough in the days of old; in our days he is required to have a capacious brain-pan. Skill and knowledge and capital—these three points mark out a social triangle on which the scutcheon of power is blazoned; our modern aristocracy must take its stand on these.

A fine theorem is as good as a great name. The Rothschilds, the Fuggers of the nineteenth century, are princes *de facto*. A great artist is in reality an oligarch; he represents a whole century, and almost always he is a law to others. And the art of words, the high pressure machinery of the writer, the poet's genius, the merchant's steady endurance, the strong will of the statesman who concentrates a thousand dazzling qualities in himself, the general's sword—all these victories, in short, which a single individual will win, that he may tower above the rest of the world, the patrician class is now bound to win and keep exclusively. They must head the new forces as they once headed the material forces; how should they keep the position unless they are worthy of it? How, unless they are the soul and brain of a nation, shall they set its hands moving? How lead a people without the power of command? And what is the marshal's baton without the innate power of the captain in the man who wields it? The Faubourg Saint-Germain took to playing with batons, and fancied that all the power was in its hands. It inverted the terms of the proposition which called it into existence. And instead of flinging away the insignia which offended the people, and quietly grasping the power, it allowed the bourgeoisie to seize the authority, clung with fatal obstinacy to its shadow,

and over and over again forgot the laws which a minority must observe if it would live. When an aristocracy is scarce a thousandth part of the body social, it is bound today, as of old, to multiply its points of action, so as to counterbalance the weight of the masses in a great crisis. And in our days those means of action must be living forces, and not historical memories.

In France, unluckily, the noblesse were still so puffed up with the notion of their vanished power, that it was difficult to contend against a kind of innate presumption in themselves. Perhaps this is a national defect. The Frenchman is less given than anyone else to undervalue himself; it comes natural to him to go from his degree to the one above it; and while it is a rare thing for him to pity the unfortunates over whose heads he rises, he always groans in spirit to see so many fortunate people above him. He is very far from heartless, but too often he prefers to listen to his intellect. The national instinct which brings the Frenchman to the front, the vanity that wastes his substance, is as much a dominant passion as thrift in the Dutch. For three centuries it swayed the noblesse, who, in this respect, were certainly pre-eminently French. The scion of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, beholding his material superiority, was fully persuaded of his intellectual superiority. And everything contributed to confirm him in his belief; for ever since the Faubourg Saint-Germain existed at all—which is to say, ever since Versailles ceased to be the royal residence—the Faubourg, with some few gaps in continuity, was always backed up by the central power, which in France seldom fails to support that side. Thence its downfall in 1830.

At that time the party of the Faubourg Saint-Germain was rather like an army without a base of operation. It had utterly failed to take advantage of the peace to plant itself in the heart of the nation. It sinned for want of learning its lesson, and through an utter incapability of regarding its interests as a whole. A future certainty was sacrificed to a doubtful present gain. This blunder in policy may perhaps be attributed to the following cause.

The class-isolation so strenuously kept up by the noblesse brought about fatal results during the last forty years; even caste-patriotism was extinguished by it, and rivalry fostered among themselves. When the French noblesse of other times were rich and powerful, the nobles (gentilhommes) could choose their chiefs and obey them in the hour of danger. As their power diminished, they grew less amenable to discipline; and as in the last days of the Byzantine Empire, everyone wished to be emperor. They mistook their uniform weakness for uniform strength.

Each family ruined by the Revolution and the abolition of the law of primogeniture thought only of itself, and not at all of the great family of the noblesse. It seemed to them that as each individual grew rich, the party as a whole would gain in strength. And herein lay their mistake. Money, likewise,

is only the outward and visible sign of power. All these families were made up of persons who preserved a high tradition of courtesy, of true graciousness of life, of refined speech, with a family pride, and a squeamish sense of noblesse oblige which suited well with the kind of life they led; a life wholly filled with occupations which become contemptible so soon as they cease to be accessories and take the chief place in existence. There was a certain intrinsic merit in all these people, but the merit was on the surface, and none of them were worth their face-value.

Not a single one among those families had courage to ask itself the question, "Are we strong enough for the responsibility of power?" They were cast on the top, like the lawyers of 1830; and instead of taking the patron's place, like a great man, the Faubourg Saint-Germain showed itself greedy as an upstart. The most intelligent nation in the world perceived clearly that the restored nobles were organizing everything for their own particular benefit. From that day the noblesse was doomed. The Faubourg Saint-Germain tried to be an aristocracy when it could only be an oligarchy—two very different systems, as any man may see for himself if he gives an intelligent perusal to the list of the patronymics of the House of Peers.

The King's Government certainly meant well; but the maxim that the people must be made to will everything, even their own welfare, was pretty constantly forgotten, nor did they bear in mind that La France is a woman and capricious, and must be happy or chastised at her own good pleasure. If there had been many dukes like the Duc de Laval, whose modesty made him worthy of the name he bore, the elder branch would have been as securely seated on the throne as the House of Hanover at this day.

In 1814 the noblesse of France were called upon to assert their superiority over the most aristocratic bourgeoisie in the most feminine of all countries, to take the lead in the most highly educated epoch the world had yet seen. And this was even more notably the case in 1820. The Faubourg Saint-Germain might very easily have led and amused the middle classes in days when people's heads were turned with distinctions, and art and science were all the rage. But the narrow-minded leaders of a time of great intellectual progress all of them detested art and science. They had not even the wit to present religion in attractive colours, though they needed its support. While Lamartine, Lamennais, Montalembert, and other writers were putting new life and elevation into men's ideas of religion, and gilding it with poetry, these bunglers in the Government chose to make the harshness of their creed felt all over the country. Never was nation in a more tractable humour; La France, like a tired woman, was ready to agree to anything; never was mismanagement so clumsy; and La France, like a woman, would have forgiven wrongs more easily than bungling.

If the noblesse meant to reinstate themselves, the better to found a strong oligarchy, they should have honestly and diligently searched their Houses for men of the stamp that Napoleon used; they should have turned themselves inside out to see if peradventure there was a Constitutionalist Richelieu lurking in the entrails of the Faubourg; and if that genius was not forthcoming from among them, they should have set out to find him, even in the fireless garret where he might happen to be perishing of cold; they should have assimilated him, as the English House of Lords continually assimilates aristocrats made by chance; and finally ordered him to be ruthless, to lop away the old wood, and cut the tree down to the living shoots. But, in the first place, the great system of English Toryism was far too large for narrow minds; the importation required time, and in France a tardy success is no better than a fiasco. So far, moreover, from adopting a policy of redemption, and looking for new forces where God puts them, these petty great folk took a dislike to any capacity that did not issue from their midst; and, lastly, instead of growing young again, the Faubourg Saint-Germain grew positively older.

Etiquette, not an institution of primary necessity, might have been maintained if it had appeared only on state occasions, but as it was, there was a daily wrangle over precedence; it ceased to be a matter of art or court ceremonial, it became a question of power. And if from the outset the Crown lacked an adviser equal to so great a crisis, the aristocracy was still more lacking in a sense of its wider interests, an instinct which might have supplied the deficiency. They stood nice about M. de Talleyrand's marriage, when M. de Talleyrand was the one man among them with the steel-encompassed brains that can forge a new political system and begin a new career of glory for a nation. The Faubourg scoffed at a minister if he was not gently born, and produced no one of gentle birth that was fit to be a minister. There were plenty of nobles fitted to serve their country by raising the dignity of justices of the peace, by improving the land, by opening out roads and canals, and taking an active and leading part as country gentlemen; but these had sold their estates to gamble on the Stock Exchange. Again the Faubourg might have absorbed the energetic men among the bourgeoisie, and opened their ranks to the ambition which was undermining authority; they preferred instead to fight, and to fight unarmed, for of all that they once possessed there was nothing left but tradition. For their misfortune there was just precisely enough of their former wealth left them as a class to keep up their bitter pride. They were content with their past. Not one of them seriously thought of bidding the son of the house take up arms from the pile of weapons which the nineteenth century flings down in the market-place. Young men, shut out from office, were dancing at Madame's balls, while they should have been doing the work done under the Republic and the Empire by young, conscientious, harmlessly employed energies. It was their place to carry out at Paris the programme

which their seniors should have been following in the country. The heads of houses might have won back recognition of their titles by unremitting attention to local interests, by falling in with the spirit of the age, by recasting their order to suit the taste of the times.

But, pent up together in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where the spirit of the ancient court and traditions of bygone feuds between the nobles and the Crown still lingered on, the aristocracy was not whole-hearted in its allegiance to the Tuileries, and so much the more easily defeated because it was concentrated in the Chamber of Peers, and badly organized even there. If the noblesse had woven themselves into a network over the country, they could have held their own; but cooped up in their Faubourg, with their backs against the Chateau, or spread at full length over the Budget, a single blow cut the thread of a fast-expiring life, and a petty, smug-faced lawyer came forward with the axe. In spite of M. Royer-Collard's admirable discourse, the hereditary peerage and law of entail fell before the lampoons of a man who made it a boast that he had adroitly argued some few heads out of the executioner's clutches, and now forsooth must clumsily proceed to the slaying of old institutions.

There are examples and lessons for the future in all this. For if there were not still a future before the French aristocracy, there would be no need to do more than find a suitable sarcophagus; it were something pitilessly cruel to burn the dead body of it with fire of Tophet. But though the surgeon's scalpel is ruthless, it sometimes gives back life to a dying man; and the Faubourg Saint-Germain may wax more powerful under persecution than in its day of triumph, if it but chooses to organize itself under a leader.

And now it is easy to give a summary of this semi-political survey. The wish to re-establish a large fortune was uppermost in everyone's mind; a lack of broad views, and a mass of small defects, a real need of religion as a political factor, combined with a thirst for pleasure which damaged the cause of religion and necessitated a good deal of hypocrisy; a certain attitude of protest on the part of loftier and clearer-sighted men who set their faces against Court jealousies; and the disaffection of the provincial families, who often came of purer descent than the nobles of the Court which alienated them from itself—all these things combined to bring about a most discordant state of things in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. It was neither compact in its organisation, nor consequent in its action; neither completely moral, nor frankly dissolute; it did not corrupt, nor was it corrupted; it would neither wholly abandon the disputed points which damaged its cause, nor yet adopt the policy that might have saved it. In short, however effete individuals might be, the party as a whole was none the less armed with all the great principles which lie at the roots of national existence. What was there in the Faubourg

that it should perish in its strength?

It was very hard to please in the choice of candidates; the Faubourg had good taste, it was scornfully fastidious, yet there was nothing very glorious nor chivalrous truly about its fall.

In the Emigration of 1789 there were some traces of a loftier feeling; but in the Emigration of 1830 from Paris into the country there was nothing discernible but self-interest. A few famous men of letters, a few oratorical triumphs in the Chambers, M. de Talleyrand's attitude in the Congress, the taking of Algiers, and not a few names that found their way from the battlefield into the pages of history—all these things were so many examples set before the French noblesse to show that it was still open to them to take their part in the national existence, and to win recognition of their claims, if, indeed, they could condescend thus far. In every living organism the work of bringing the whole into harmony within itself is always going on. If a man is indolent, the indolence shows itself in everything that he does; and, in the same manner, the general spirit of a class is pretty plainly manifested in the face it turns on the world, and the soul informs the body.

The women of the Restoration displayed neither the proud disregard of public opinion shown by the court ladies of olden time in their wantonness, nor yet the simple grandeur of the tardy virtues by which they expiated their sins and shed so bright a glory about their names. There was nothing either very frivolous or very serious about the woman of the Restoration. She was hypocritical as a rule in her passion, and compounded, so to speak, with its pleasures. Some few families led the domestic life of the Duchesse d'Orleans, whose connubial couch was exhibited so absurdly to visitors at the Palais Royal. Two or three kept up the traditions of the Regency, filling cleverer women with something like disgust. The great lady of the new school exercised no influence at all over the manners of the time; and yet she might have done much. She might, at worst, have presented as dignified a spectacle as English-women of the same rank. But she hesitated feebly among old precedents, became a bigot by force of circumstances, and allowed nothing of herself to appear, not even her better qualities.

Not one among the Frenchwomen of that day had the ability to create a salon whither leaders of fashion might come to take lessons in taste and elegance. Their voices, which once laid down the law to literature, that living expression of a time, now counted absolutely for nought. Now when a literature lacks a general system, it fails to shape a body for itself, and dies out with its period.

When in a nation at any time there is a people apart thus constituted, the historian is pretty certain to find some representative figure, some central

personage who embodies the qualities and the defects of the whole party to which he belongs; there is Coligny, for instance, among the Huguenots, the Coadjuteur in the time of the Fronde, the Marechal de Richelieu under Louis XV, Danton during the Terror. It is in the nature of things that the man should be identified with the company in which history finds him. How is it possible to lead a party without conforming to its ideas? or to shine in any epoch unless a man represents the ideas of his time? The wise and prudent head of a party is continually obliged to bow to the prejudices and follies of its rear; and this is the cause of actions for which he is afterwards criticised by this or that historian sitting at a safer distance from terrific popular explosions, coolly judging the passion and ferment without which the great struggles of the world could not be carried on at all. And if this is true of the Historical Comedy of the Centuries, it is equally true in a more restricted sphere in the detached scenes of the national drama known as the Manners of the Age.

At the beginning of that ephemeral life led by the Faubourg Saint-Germain under the Restoration, to which, if there is any truth in the above reflections, they failed to give stability, the most perfect type of the aristocratic caste in its weakness and strength, its greatness and littleness, might have been found for a brief space in a young married woman who belonged to it. This was a woman artificially educated, but in reality ignorant; a woman whose instincts and feelings were lofty while the thought which should have controlled them was wanting. She squandered the wealth of her nature in obedience to social conventions; she was ready to brave society, yet she hesitated till her scruples degenerated into artifice. With more wilfulness than real force of character, impressionable rather than enthusiastic, gifted with more brain than heart; she was supremely a woman, supremely a coquette, and above all things a Parisienne, loving a brilliant life and gaiety, reflecting never, or too late; imprudent to the verge of poetry, and humble in the depths of her heart, in spite of her charming insolence. Like some straight-growing reed, she made a show of independence; yet, like the reed, she was ready to bend to a strong hand. She talked much of religion, and had it not at heart, though she was prepared to find in it a solution of her life. How explain a creature so complex? Capable of heroism, yet sinking unconsciously from heroic heights to utter a spiteful word; young and sweet-natured, not so much old at heart as aged by the maxims of those about her; versed in a selfish philosophy in which she was all unpractised, she had all the vices of a courtier, all the nobleness of developing womanhood. She trusted nothing and no one, yet there were times when she quitted her sceptical attitude for a submissive credulity.

How should any portrait be anything but incomplete of her, in whom the play of swiftly-changing colour made discord only to produce a poetic confusion? For in her there shone a divine brightness, a radiance of youth that blended all her bewildering characteristics in a certain completeness and unity

informed by her charm. Nothing was feigned. The passion or semi-passion, the ineffectual high aspirations, the actual pettiness, the coolness of sentiment and warmth of impulse, were all spontaneous and unaffected, and as much the outcome of her own position as of the position of the aristocracy to which she belonged. She was wholly self-contained; she put herself proudly above the world and beneath the shelter of her name. There was something of the egoism of Medea in her life, as in the life of the aristocracy that lay a-dying, and would not so much as raise itself or stretch out a hand to any political physician; so well aware of its feebleness, or so conscious that it was already dust, that it refused to touch or be touched.

The Duchesse de Langeais (for that was her name) had been married for about four years when the Restoration was finally consummated, which is to say, in 1816. By that time the revolution of the Hundred Days had let in the light on the mind of Louis XVIII. In spite of his surroundings, he comprehended the situation and the age in which he was living; and it was only later, when this Louis XI, without the axe, lay stricken down by disease, that those about him got the upper hand. The Duchesse de Langeais, a Navarreins by birth, came of a ducal house which had made a point of never marrying below its rank since the reign of Louis XIV. Every daughter of the house must sooner or later take a tabouret at Court. So, Antoinette de Navarreins, at the age of eighteen, came out of the profound solitude in which her girlhood had been spent to marry the Duc de Langeais' eldest son. The two families at that time were living quite out of the world; but after the invasion of France, the return of the Bourbons seemed to every Royalist mind the only possible way of putting an end to the miseries of the war.

The Ducs de Navarreins and de Langeais had been faithful throughout to the exiled Princes, nobly resisting all the temptations of glory under the Empire. Under the circumstances they naturally followed out the old family policy; and Mlle Antoinette, a beautiful and portionless girl, was married to M. le Marquis de Langeais only a few months before the death of the Duke his father.

After the return of the Bourbons, the families resumed their rank, offices, and dignity at Court; once more they entered public life, from which hitherto they held aloof, and took their place high on the sunlit summits of the new political world. In that time of general baseness and sham political conversions, the public conscience was glad to recognise the unstained loyalty of the two houses, and a consistency in political and private life for which all parties involuntarily respected them. But, unfortunately, as so often happens in a time of transition, the most disinterested persons, the men whose loftiness of view and wise principles would have gained the confidence of the French nation and led them to believe in the generosity of a novel and spirited policy

—these men, to repeat, were taken out of affairs, and public business was allowed to fall into the hands of others, who found it to their interest to push principles to their extreme consequences by way of proving their devotion.

The families of Langeais and Navarreins remained about the Court, condemned to perform the duties required by Court ceremonial amid the reproaches and sneers of the Liberal party. They were accused of gorging themselves with riches and honours, and all the while their family estates were no larger than before, and liberal allowances from the civil list were wholly expended in keeping up the state necessary for any European government, even if it be a Republic.

In 1818, M. le Duc de Langeais commanded a division of the army, and the Duchess held a post about one of the Princesses, in virtue of which she was free to live in Paris and apart from her husband without scandal. The Duke, moreover, besides his military duties, had a place at Court, to which he came during his term of waiting, leaving his major-general in command. The Duke and Duchess were leading lives entirely apart, the world none the wiser. Their marriage of convention shared the fate of nearly all family arrangements of the kind. Two more antipathetic dispositions could not well have been found; they were brought together; they jarred upon each other; there was soreness on either side; then they were divided once for all. Then they went their separate ways, with a due regard for appearances. The Duc de Langeais, by nature as methodical as the Chevalier de Folard himself, gave himself up methodically to his own tastes and amusements, and left his wife at liberty to do as she pleased so soon as he felt sure of her character. He recognised in her a spirit pre-eminently proud, a cold heart, a profound submissiveness to the usages of the world, and a youthful loyalty. Under the eyes of great relations, with the light of a prudish and bigoted Court turned full upon the Duchess, his honour was safe.

So the Duke calmly did as the grands seigneurs of the eighteenth century did before him, and left a young wife of two-and-twenty to her own devices. He had deeply offended that wife, and in her nature there was one appalling characteristic—she would never forgive an offence when woman's vanity and self-love, with all that was best in her nature perhaps, had been slighted, wounded in secret. Insult and injury in the face of the world a woman loves to forget; there is a way open to her of showing herself great; she is a woman in her forgiveness; but a secret offence women never pardon; for secret baseness, as for hidden virtues and hidden love, they have no kindness.

This was Mme la Duchesse de Langeais' real position, unknown to the world. She herself did not reflect upon it. It was the time of the rejoicings over the Duc de Berri's marriage. The Court and the Faubourg roused itself from its listlessness and reserve. This was the real beginning of that unheard-of

splendour which the Government of the Restoration carried too far. At that time the Duchess, whether for reasons of her own, or from vanity, never appeared in public without a following of women equally distinguished by name and fortune. As queen of fashion she had her dames d'atours, her ladies, who modeled their manner and their wit on hers. They had been cleverly chosen. None of her satellites belonged to the inmost Court circle, nor to the highest level of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; but they had set their minds upon admission to those inner sanctuaries. Being as yet simple denominations, they wished to rise to the neighbourhood of the throne, and mingle with the seraphic powers in the high sphere known as *le petit chateau*. Thus surrounded, the Duchess's position was stronger and more commanding and secure. Her "ladies" defended her character and helped her to play her detestable part of a woman of fashion. She could laugh at men at her ease, play with fire, receive the homage on which the feminine nature is nourished, and remain mistress of herself.

At Paris, in the highest society of all, a woman is a woman still; she lives on incense, adulation, and honours. No beauty, however undoubted, no face, however fair, is anything without admiration. Flattery and a lover are proofs of power. And what is power without recognition? Nothing. If the prettiest of women were left alone in a corner of a drawing-room, she would droop. Put her in the very centre and summit of social grandeur, she will at once aspire to reign over all hearts—often because it is out of her power to be the happy queen of one. Dress and manner and coquetry are all meant to please one of the poorest creatures extant—the brainless coxcomb, whose handsome face is his sole merit; it was for such as these that women threw themselves away. The gilded wooden idols of the Restoration, for they were neither more nor less, had neither the antecedents of the *petits maitres* of the time of the Fronde, nor the rough sterling worth of Napoleon's heroes, not the wit and fine manners of their grandsires; but something of all three they meant to be without any trouble to themselves. Brave they were, like all young Frenchmen; ability they possessed, no doubt, if they had had a chance of proving it, but their places were filled up by the old worn-out men, who kept them in leading strings. It was a day of small things, a cold prosaic era. Perhaps it takes a long time for a Restoration to become a Monarchy.

For the past eighteen months the Duchesse de Langeais had been leading this empty life, filled with balls and subsequent visits, objectless triumphs, and the transient loves that spring up and die in an evening's space. All eyes were turned on her when she entered a room; she reaped her harvest of flatteries and some few words of warmer admiration, which she encouraged by a gesture or a glance, but never suffered to penetrate deeper than the skin. Her tone and bearing and everything else about her imposed her will upon others. Her life was a sort of fever of vanity and perpetual enjoyment, which turned her head.

She was daring enough in conversation; she would listen to anything, corrupting the surface, as it were, of her heart. Yet when she returned home, she often blushed at the story that had made her laugh; at the scandalous tale that supplied the details, on the strength of which she analyzed the love that she had never known, and marked the subtle distinctions of modern passion, not with comment on the part of complacent hypocrites. For women know how to say everything among themselves, and more of them are ruined by each other than corrupted by men.

There came a moment when she discerned that not until a woman is loved will the world fully recognise her beauty and her wit. What does a husband prove? Simply that a girl or woman was endowed with wealth, or well brought up; that her mother managed cleverly that in some way she satisfied a man's ambitions. A lover constantly bears witness to her personal perfections. Then followed the discovery still in Mme de Langeais' early womanhood, that it was possible to be loved without committing herself, without permission, without vouchsafing any satisfaction beyond the most meagre dues. There was more than one demure feminine hypocrite to instruct her in the art of playing such dangerous comedies.

So the Duchess had her court, and the number of her adorers and courtiers guaranteed her virtue. She was amiable and fascinating; she flirted till the ball or the evening's gaiety was at an end. Then the curtain dropped. She was cold, indifferent, self-contained again till the next day brought its renewed sensations, superficial as before. Two or three men were completely deceived, and fell in love in earnest. She laughed at them, she was utterly insensible. "I am loved!" she told herself. "He loves me!" The certainty sufficed her. It is enough for the miser to know that his every whim might be fulfilled if he chose; so it was with the Duchess, and perhaps she did not even go so far as to form a wish.

One evening she chanced to be at the house of an intimate friend Mme la Vicomtesse de Fontaine, one of the humble rivals who cordially detested her, and went with her everywhere. In a "friendship" of this sort both sides are on their guard, and never lay their armor aside; confidences are ingeniously indiscreet, and not unfrequently treacherous. Mme de Langeais had distributed her little patronizing, friendly, or freezing bows, with the air natural to a woman who knows the worth of her smiles, when her eyes fell upon a total stranger. Something in the man's large gravity of aspect startled her, and, with a feeling almost like dread, she turned to Mme de Maufrigneuse with, "Who is the newcomer, dear?"

"Someone that you have heard of, no doubt. The Marquis de Montriveau."

"Oh! is it he?"

She took up her eyeglass and submitted him to a very insolent scrutiny, as if he had been a picture meant to receive glances, not to return them.

“Do introduce him; he ought to be interesting.”

“Nobody more tiresome and dull, dear. But he is the fashion.”

M. Armand de Montriveau, at that moment all unwittingly the object of general curiosity, better deserved attention than any of the idols that Paris needs must set up to worship for a brief space, for the city is vexed by periodical fits of craving, a passion for engouement and sham enthusiasm, which must be satisfied. The Marquis was the only son of General de Montriveau, one of the *ci-devants* who served the Republic nobly, and fell by Joubert's side at Novi. Bonaparte had placed his son at the school at Chalons, with the orphans of other generals who fell on the battlefield, leaving their children under the protection of the Republic. Armand de Montriveau left school with his way to make, entered the artillery, and had only reached a major's rank at the time of the Fontainebleau disaster. In his section of the service the chances of advancement were not many. There are fewer officers, in the first place, among the gunners than in any other corps; and in the second place, the feeling in the artillery was decidedly Liberal, not to say Republican; and the Emperor, feeling little confidence in a body of highly educated men who were apt to think for themselves, gave promotion grudgingly in the service. In the artillery, accordingly, the general rule of the army did not apply; the commanding officers were not invariably the most remarkable men in their department, because there was less to be feared from mediocrities. The artillery was a separate corps in those days, and only came under Napoleon in action.

Besides these general causes, other reasons, inherent in Armand de Montriveau's character, were sufficient in themselves to account for his tardy promotion. He was alone in the world. He had been thrown at the age of twenty into the whirlwind of men directed by Napoleon; his interests were bounded by himself, any day he might lose his life; it became a habit of mind with him to live by his own self-respect and the consciousness that he had done his duty. Like all shy men, he was habitually silent; but his shyness sprang by no means from timidity; it was a kind of modesty in him; he found any demonstration of vanity intolerable. There was no sort of swagger about his fearlessness in action; nothing escaped his eyes; he could give sensible advice to his chums with unshaken coolness; he could go under fire, and duck upon occasion to avoid bullets. He was kindly; but his expression was haughty and stern, and his face gained him this character. In everything he was rigorous as arithmetic; he never permitted the slightest deviation from duty on any plausible pretext, nor blinked the consequences of a fact. He would lend himself to nothing of which he was ashamed; he never asked anything for

himself; in short, Armand de Montriveau was one of many great men unknown to fame, and philosophical enough to despise it; living without attaching themselves to life, because they have not found their opportunity of developing to the full their power to do and feel.

People were afraid of Montriveau; they respected him, but he was not very popular. Men may indeed allow you to rise above them, but to decline to descend as low as they can do is the one unpardonable sin. In their feeling towards loftier natures, there is a trace of hate and fear. Too much honour with them implies censure of themselves, a thing forgiven neither to the living nor to the dead.

After the Emperor's farewells at Fontainebleau, Montriveau, noble though he was, was put on half-pay. Perhaps the heads of the War Office took fright at uncompromising uprightness worthy of antiquity, or perhaps it was known that he felt bound by his oath to the Imperial Eagle. During the Hundred Days he was made a Colonel of the Guard, and left on the field of Waterloo. His wounds kept him in Belgium he was not present at the disbanding of the Army of the Loire, but the King's government declined to recognise promotion made during the Hundred Days, and Armand de Montriveau left France.

An adventurous spirit, a loftiness of thought hitherto satisfied by the hazards of war, drove him on an exploring expedition through Upper Egypt; his sanity or impulse directed his enthusiasm to a project of great importance, he turned his attention to that unexplored Central Africa which occupies the learned of today. The scientific expedition was long and unfortunate. He had made a valuable collection of notes bearing on various geographical and commercial problems, of which solutions are still eagerly sought; and succeeded, after surmounting many obstacles, in reaching the heart of the continent, when he was betrayed into the hands of a hostile native tribe. Then, stripped of all that he had, for two years he led a wandering life in the desert, the slave of savages, threatened with death at every moment, and more cruelly treated than a dumb animal in the power of pitiless children. Physical strength, and a mind braced to endurance, enabled him to survive the horrors of that captivity; but his miraculous escape well-nigh exhausted his energies. When he reached the French colony at Senegal, a half-dead fugitive covered with rags, his memories of his former life were dim and shapeless. The great sacrifices made in his travels were all forgotten like his studies of African dialects, his discoveries, and observations. One story will give an idea of all that he passed through. Once for several days the children of the sheikh of the tribe amused themselves by putting him up for a mark and flinging horses' knuckle-bones at his head.

Montriveau came back to Paris in 1818 a ruined man. He had no interest, and wished for none. He would have died twenty times over sooner than ask a

favour of anyone; he would not even press the recognition of his claims. Adversity and hardship had developed his energy even in trifles, while the habit of preserving his self-respect before that spiritual self which we call conscience led him to attach consequence to the most apparently trivial actions. His merits and adventures became known, however, through his acquaintances, among the principal men of science in Paris, and some few well-read military men. The incidents of his slavery and subsequent escape bore witness to a courage, intelligence, and coolness which won him celebrity without his knowledge, and that transient fame of which Paris salons are lavish, though the artist that fain would keep it must make untold efforts.

Montriveau's position suddenly changed towards the end of that year. He had been a poor man, he was now rich; or, externally at any rate, he had all the advantages of wealth. The King's government, trying to attach capable men to itself and to strengthen the army, made concessions about that time to Napoleon's old officers if their known loyalty and character offered guarantees of fidelity. M. de Montriveau's name once more appeared in the army list with the rank of colonel; he received his arrears of pay and passed into the Guards. All these favours, one after another, came to seek the Marquis de Montriveau; he had asked for nothing however small. Friends had taken the steps for him which he would have refused to take for himself.

After this, his habits were modified all at once; contrary to his custom, he went into society. He was well received, everywhere he met with great deference and respect. He seemed to have found some end in life; but everything passed within the man, there were no external signs; in society he was silent and cold, and wore a grave, reserved face. His social success was great, precisely because he stood out in such strong contrast to the conventional faces which line the walls of Paris salons. He was, indeed, something quite new there. Terse of speech, like a hermit or a savage, his shyness was thought to be haughtiness, and people were greatly taken with it. He was something strange and great. Women generally were so much the more smitten with this original person because he was not to be caught by their flatteries, however adroit, nor by the wiles with which they circumvent the strongest men and corrode the steel temper. Their Parisian's grimaces were lost upon M. de Montriveau; his nature only responded to the sonorous vibration of lofty thought and feeling. And he would very promptly have been dropped but for the romance that hung about his adventures and his life; but for the men who cried him up behind his back; but for a woman who looked for a triumph for her vanity, the woman who was to fill his thoughts.

For these reasons the Duchesse de Langeais' curiosity was no less lively than natural. Chance had so ordered it that her interest in the man before her had been aroused only the day before, when she heard the story of one of M.

de Montriveau's adventures, a story calculated to make the strongest impression upon a woman's ever-changing fancy.

During M. de Montriveau's voyage of discovery to the sources of the Nile, he had had an argument with one of his guides, surely the most extraordinary debate in the annals of travel. The district that he wished to explore could only be reached on foot across a tract of desert. Only one of his guides knew the way; no traveller had penetrated before into that part of the country, where the undaunted officer hoped to find a solution of several scientific problems. In spite of the representations made to him by the guide and the older men of the place, he started upon the formidable journey. Summoning up courage, already highly strung by the prospect of dreadful difficulties, he set out in the morning.

The loose sand shifted under his feet at every step; and when, at the end of a long day's march, he lay down to sleep on the ground, he had never been so tired in his life. He knew, however, that he must be up and on his way before dawn next day, and his guide assured him that they should reach the end of their journey towards noon. That promise kept up his courage and gave him new strength. In spite of his sufferings, he continued his march, with some blasphemings against science; he was ashamed to complain to his guide, and kept his pain to himself. After marching for a third of the day, he felt his strength failing, his feet were bleeding, he asked if they should reach the place soon. "In an hour's time," said the guide. Armand braced himself for another hour's march, and they went on.

The hour slipped by; he could not so much as see against the sky the palm-trees and crests of hill that should tell of the end of the journey near at hand; the horizon line of sand was vast as the circle of the open sea.

He came to a stand, refused to go farther, and threatened the guide—he had deceived him, murdered him; tears of rage and weariness flowed over his fevered cheeks; he was bowed down with fatigue upon fatigue, his throat seemed to be glued by the desert thirst. The guide meanwhile stood motionless, listening to these complaints with an ironical expression, studying the while, with the apparent indifference of an Oriental, the scarcely perceptible indications in the lie of the sands, which looked almost black, like burnished gold.

"I have made a mistake," he remarked coolly. "I could not make out the track, it is so long since I came this way; we are surely on it now, but we must push on for two hours."

"The man is right," thought M. de Montriveau.

So he went on again, struggling to follow the pitiless native. It seemed as if

he were bound to his guide by some thread like the invisible tie between the condemned man and the headsman. But the two hours went by, Montriveau had spent his last drops of energy, and the skyline was a blank, there were no palm-trees, no hills. He could neither cry out nor groan, he lay down on the sand to die, but his eyes would have frightened the boldest; something in his face seemed to say that he would not die alone. His guide, like a very fiend, gave him back a cool glance like a man that knows his power, left him to lie there, and kept at a safe distance out of reach of his desperate victim. At last M. Montriveau recovered strength enough for a last curse. The guide came nearer, silenced him with a steady look, and said, "Was it not your own will to go where I am taking you, in spite of us all? You say that I have lied to you. If I had not, you would not be even here. Do you want the truth? Here it is. We have still another five hours' march before us, and we cannot go back. Sound yourself; if you have not courage enough, here is my dagger."

Startled by this dreadful knowledge of pain and human strength, M. de Montriveau would not be behind a savage; he drew a fresh stock of courage from his pride as a European, rose to his feet, and followed his guide. The five hours were at an end, and still M. de Montriveau saw nothing, he turned his failing eyes upon his guide; but the Nubian hoisted him on his shoulders, and showed him a wide pool of water with greenness all about it, and a noble forest lighted up by the sunset. It lay only a hundred paces away; a vast ledge of granite hid the glorious landscape. It seemed to Armand that he had taken a new lease of life. His guide, that giant in courage and intelligence, finished his work of devotion by carrying him across the hot, slippery, scarcely discernible track on the granite. Behind him lay the hell of burning sand, before him the earthly paradise of the most beautiful oasis in the desert.

The Duchess, struck from the first by the appearance of this romantic figure, was even more impressed when she learned that this was that Marquis de Montriveau of whom she had dreamed during the night. She had been with him among the hot desert sands, he had been the companion of her nightmare wanderings; for such a woman was not this a delightful presage of a new interest in her life? And never was a man's exterior a better exponent of his character; never were curious glances so well justified. The principal characteristic of his great, square-hewn head was the thick, luxuriant black hair which framed his face, and gave him a strikingly close resemblance to General Kleber; and the likeness still held good in the vigorous forehead, in the outlines of his face, the quiet fearlessness of his eyes, and a kind of fiery vehemence expressed by strongly marked features. He was short, deep-chested, and muscular as a lion. There was something of the despot about him, and an indescribable suggestion of the security of strength in his gait, bearing, and slightest movements. He seemed to know that his will was irresistible, perhaps because he wished for nothing unjust. And yet, like all really strong

men, he was mild of speech, simple in his manners, and kindly natured; although it seemed as if, in the stress of a great crisis, all these finer qualities must disappear, and the man would show himself implacable, unshaken in his resolve, terrific in action. There was a certain drawing in of the inner line of the lips which, to a close observer, indicated an ironical bent.

The Duchesse de Langeais, realising that a fleeting glory was to be won by such a conquest, made up her mind to gain a lover in Armand de Montriveau during the brief interval before the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse brought him to be introduced. She would prefer him above the others; she would attach him to herself, display all her powers of coquetry for him. It was a fancy, such a merest Duchess's whim as furnished a Lope or a Calderon with the plot of the Dog in the Manger. She would not suffer another woman to engross him; but she had not the remotest intention of being his.

Nature had given the Duchess every qualification for the part of coquette, and education had perfected her. Women envied her, and men fell in love with her, not without reason. Nothing that can inspire love, justify it, and give it lasting empire was wanting in her. Her style of beauty, her manner, her voice, her bearing, all combined to give her that instinctive coquetry which seems to be the consciousness of power. Her shape was graceful; perhaps there was a trace of self-consciousness in her changes of movement, the one affectation that could be laid to her charge; but everything about her was a part of her personality, from her least little gesture to the peculiar turn of her phrases, the demure glance of her eyes. Her great lady's grace, her most striking characteristic, had not destroyed the very French quick mobility of her person. There was an extraordinary fascination in her swift, incessant changes of attitude. She seemed as if she surely would be a most delicious mistress when her corset and the encumbering costume of her part were laid aside. All the rapture of love surely was latent in the freedom of her expressive glances, in her caressing tones, in the charm of her words. She gave glimpses of the high-born courtesan within her, vainly protesting against the creeds of the duchess.

You might sit near her through an evening, she would be gay and melancholy in turn, and her gaiety, like her sadness, seemed spontaneous. She could be gracious, disdainful, insolent, or confiding at will. Her apparent good nature was real; she had no temptation to descend to malignity. But at each moment her mood changed; she was full of confidence or craft; her moving tenderness would give place to a heart-breaking hardness and insensibility. Yet how paint her as she was, without bringing together all the extremes of feminine nature? In a word, the Duchess was anything that she wished to be or to seem. Her face was slightly too long. There was a grace in it, and a certain thinness and fineness that recalled the portraits of the Middle Ages. Her skin was white, with a faint rose tint. Everything about her erred, as it were, by an

excess of delicacy.

M. de Montriveau willingly consented to be introduced to the Duchesse de Langeais; and she, after the manner of persons whose sensitive taste leads them to avoid banalities, refrained from overwhelming him with questions and compliments. She received him with a gracious deference which could not fail to flatter a man of more than ordinary powers, for the fact that a man rises above the ordinary level implies that he possesses something of that tact which makes women quick to read feeling. If the Duchess showed any curiosity, it was by her glances; her compliments were conveyed in her manner; there was a winning grace displayed in her words, a subtle suggestion of a desire to please which she of all women knew the art of manifesting. Yet her whole conversation was but, in a manner, the body of the letter; the postscript with the principal thought in it was still to come. After half an hour spent in ordinary talk, in which the words gained all their value from her tone and smiles, M. de Montriveau was about to retire discreetly, when the Duchess stopped him with an expressive gesture.

“I do not know, monsieur, whether these few minutes during which I have had the pleasure of talking to you proved so sufficiently attractive, that I may venture to ask you to call upon me; I am afraid that it may be very selfish of me to wish to have you all to myself. If I should be so fortunate as to find that my house is agreeable to you, you will always find me at home in the evening until ten o’clock.”

The invitation was given with such irresistible grace, that M. de Montriveau could not refuse to accept it. When he fell back again among the groups of men gathered at a distance from the women, his friends congratulated him, half laughingly, half in earnest, on the extraordinary reception vouchsafed him by the Duchesse de Langeais. The difficult and brilliant conquest had been made beyond a doubt, and the glory of it was reserved for the Artillery of the Guard. It is easy to imagine the jests, good and bad, when this topic had once been started; the world of Paris salons is so eager for amusement, and a joke lasts for such a short time, that everyone is eager to make the most of it while it is fresh.

All unconsciously, the General felt flattered by this nonsense. From his place where he had taken his stand, his eyes were drawn again and again to the Duchess by countless wavering reflections. He could not help admitting to himself that of all the women whose beauty had captivated his eyes, not one had seemed to be a more exquisite embodiment of faults and fair qualities blended in a completeness that might realise the dreams of earliest manhood. Is there a man in any rank of life that has not felt indefinable rapture in his secret soul over the woman singled out (if only in his dreams) to be his own; when she, in body, soul, and social aspects, satisfies his every requirement, a

thrice perfect woman? And if this threefold perfection that flatters his pride is no argument for loving her, it is beyond cavil one of the great inducements to the sentiment. Love would soon be convalescent, as the eighteenth century moralist remarked, were it not for vanity. And it is certainly true that for everyone, man or woman, there is a wealth of pleasure in the superiority of the beloved. Is she set so high by birth that a contemptuous glance can never wound her? is she wealthy enough to surround herself with state which falls nothing short of royalty, of kings, of finance during their short reign of splendour? is she so ready-witted that a keen-edged jest never brings her into confusion? beautiful enough to rival any woman?—Is it such a small thing to know that your self-love will never suffer through her? A man makes these reflections in the twinkling of an eye. And how if, in the future opened out by early ripened passion, he catches glimpses of the changeful delight of her charm, the frank innocence of a maiden soul, the perils of love's voyage, the thousand folds of the veil of coquetry? Is not this enough to move the coldest man's heart?

This, therefore, was M. de Montriveau's position with regard to woman; his past life in some measure explaining the extraordinary fact. He had been thrown, when little more than a boy, into the hurricane of Napoleon's wars; his life had been spent on fields of battle. Of women he knew just so much as a traveller knows of a country when he travels across it in haste from one inn to another. The verdict which Voltaire passed upon his eighty years of life might, perhaps, have been applied by Montriveau to his own thirty-seven years of existence; had he not thirty-seven follies with which to reproach himself? At his age he was as much a novice in love as the lad that has just been furtively reading Faublas. Of women he had nothing to learn; of love he knew nothing; and thus, desires, quite unknown before, sprang from this virginity of feeling.

There are men here and there as much engrossed in the work demanded of them by poverty or ambition, art or science, as M. de Montriveau by war and a life of adventure—these know what it is to be in this unusual position if they very seldom confess to it. Every man in Paris is supposed to have been in love. No woman in Paris cares to take what other women have passed over. The dread of being taken for a fool is the source of the coxcomb's bragging so common in France; for in France to have the reputation of a fool is to be a foreigner in one's own country. Vehement desire seized on M. de Montriveau, desire that had gathered strength from the heat of the desert and the first stirrings of a heart unknown as yet in its suppressed turbulence.

A strong man, and violent as he was strong, he could keep mastery over himself; but as he talked of indifferent things, he retired within himself, and swore to possess this woman, for through that thought lay the only way to love for him. Desire became a solemn compact made with himself, an oath after the

manner of the Arabs among whom he had lived; for among them a vow is a kind of contract made with Destiny a man's whole future is solemnly pledged to fulfil it, and everything even his own death, is regarded simply as a means to the one end.

A younger man would have said to himself, "I should very much like to have the Duchess for my mistress!" or, "If the Duchesse de Langeais cared for a man, he would be a very lucky rascal!" But the General said, "I will have Mme de Langeais for my mistress." And if a man takes such an idea into his head when his heart has never been touched before, and love begins to be a kind of religion with him, he little knows in what a hell he has set his foot.

Armand de Montriveau suddenly took flight and went home in the first hot fever-fit of the first love that he had known. When a man has kept all his boyish beliefs, illusions, frankness, and impetuosity into middle age, his first impulse is, as it were, to stretch out a hand to take the thing that he desires; a little later he realizes that there is a gulf set between them, and that it is all but impossible to cross it. A sort of childish impatience seizes him, he wants the thing the more, and trembles or cries. Wherefore, the next day, after the stormiest reflections that had yet perturbed his mind, Armand de Montriveau discovered that he was under the yoke of the senses, and his bondage made the heavier by his love.

The woman so cavalierly treated in his thoughts of yesterday had become a most sacred and dreadful power. She was to be his world, his life, from this time forth. The greatest joy, the keenest anguish, that he had yet known grew colorless before the bare recollection of the least sensation stirred in him by her. The swiftest revolutions in a man's outward life only touch his interests, while passion brings a complete revulsion of feeling. And so in those who live by feeling, rather than by self-interest, the doers rather than the reasoners, the sanguine rather than the lymphatic temperaments, love works a complete revolution. In a flash, with one single reflection, Armand de Montriveau wiped out his whole past life.

A score of times he asked himself, like a boy, "Shall I go, or shall I not?" and then at last he dressed, came to the Hotel de Langeais towards eight o'clock that evening, and was admitted. He was to see the woman—ah! not the woman—the idol that he had seen yesterday, among lights, a fresh innocent girl in gauze and silken lace and veiling. He burst in upon her to declare his love, as if it were a question of firing the first shot on a field of battle.

Poor novice! He found his ethereal sylphide shrouded in a brown cashmere dressing-gown ingeniously befrilled, lying languidly stretched out upon a sofa in a dimly lighted boudoir. Mme de Langeais did not so much as rise, nothing

was visible of her but her face, her hair was loose but confined by a scarf. A hand indicated a seat, a hand that seemed white as marble to Montriveau by the flickering light of a single candle at the further side of the room, and a voice as soft as the light said:

“If it had been anyone else, M. le Marquis, a friend with whom I could dispense with ceremony, or a mere acquaintance in whom I felt but slight interest, I should have closed my door. I am exceedingly unwell.”

“I will go,” Armand said to himself.

“But I do not know how it is,” she continued (and the simple warrior attributed the shining of her eyes to fever), “perhaps it was a presentiment of your kind visit (and no one can be more sensible of the prompt attention than I), but the vapors have left my head.”

“Then may I stay?”

“Oh, I should be very sorry to allow you to go. I told myself this morning that it was impossible that I should have made the slightest impression on your mind, and that in all probability you took my request for one of the commonplaces of which Parisians are lavish on every occasion. And I forgave your ingratitude in advance. An explorer from the deserts is not supposed to know how exclusive we are in our friendships in the Faubourg.”

The gracious, half-murmured words dropped one by one, as if they had been weighted with the gladness that apparently brought them to her lips. The Duchess meant to have the full benefit of her headache, and her speculation was fully successful. The General, poor man, was really distressed by the lady’s simulated distress. Like Crillon listening to the story of the Crucifixion, he was ready to draw his sword against the vapors. How could a man dare to speak just then to this suffering woman of the love that she inspired? Armand had already felt that it would be absurd to fire off a declaration of love point-blank at one so far above other women. With a single thought came understanding of the delicacies of feeling, of the soul’s requirements. To love: what was that but to know how to plead, to beg for alms, to wait? And as for the love that he felt, must he not prove it? His tongue was mute, it was frozen by the conventions of the noble Faubourg, the majesty of a sick headache, the bashfulness of love. But no power on earth could veil his glances; the heat and the Infinite of the desert blazed in eyes calm as a panther’s, beneath the lids that fell so seldom. The Duchess enjoyed the steady gaze that enveloped her in light and warmth.

“Mme la Duchesse,” he answered, “I am afraid I express my gratitude for your goodness very badly. At this moment I have but one desire—I wish it were in my power to cure the pain.”

“Permit me to throw this off, I feel too warm now,” she said, gracefully tossing aside a cushion that covered her feet.

“Madame, in Asia your feet would be worth some ten thousand sequins.

“A traveler’s compliment!” smiled she.

It pleased the sprightly lady to involve a rough soldier in a labyrinth of nonsense, commonplaces, and meaningless talk, in which he manoeuvred, in military language, as Prince Charles might have done at close quarters with Napoleon. She took a mischievous amusement in reconnoitring the extent of his infatuation by the number of foolish speeches extracted from a novice whom she led step by step into a hopeless maze, meaning to leave him there in confusion. She began by laughing at him, but nevertheless it pleased her to make him forget how time went.

The length of a first visit is frequently a compliment, but Armand was innocent of any such intent. The famous explorer spent an hour in chat on all sorts of subjects, said nothing that he meant to say, and was feeling that he was only an instrument on whom this woman played, when she rose, sat upright, drew the scarf from her hair, and wrapped it about her throat, leant her elbow on the cushions, did him the honour of a complete cure, and rang for lights. The most graceful movement succeeded to complete repose. She turned to M. de Montriveau, from whom she had just extracted a confidence which seemed to interest her deeply, and said:

“You wish to make game of me by trying to make me believe that you have never loved. It is a man’s great pretension with us. And we always believe it! Out of pure politeness. Do we not know what to expect from it for ourselves? Where is the man that has found but a single opportunity of losing his heart? But you love to deceive us, and we submit to be deceived, poor foolish creatures that we are; for your hypocrisy is, after all, a homage paid to the superiority of our sentiments, which are all purity.”

The last words were spoken with a disdainful pride that made the novice in love feel like a worthless bale flung into the deep, while the Duchess was an angel soaring back to her particular heaven.

“Confound it!” thought Armand de Montriveau, “how am I to tell this wild thing that I love her?”

He had told her already a score of times; or rather, the Duchess had a score of times read his secret in his eyes; and the passion in this unmistakably great man promised her amusement, and an interest in her empty life. So she prepared with no little dexterity to raise a certain number of redoubts for him to carry by storm before he should gain an entrance into her heart. Montriveau should overleap one difficulty after another; he should be a plaything for her

caprice, just as an insect teased by children is made to jump from one finger to another, and in spite of all its pains is kept in the same place by its mischievous tormentor. And yet it gave the Duchess inexpressible happiness to see that this strong man had told her the truth. Armand had never loved, as he had said. He was about to go, in a bad humour with himself, and still more out of humour with her; but it delighted her to see a sullenness that she could conjure away with a word, a glance, or a gesture.

“Will you come tomorrow evening?” she asked. “I am going to a ball, but I shall stay at home for you until ten o’clock.”

Montriveau spent most of the next day in smoking an indeterminate quantity of cigars in his study window, and so got through the hours till he could dress and go to the Hotel de Langeais. To anyone who had known the magnificent worth of the man, it would have been grievous to see him grown so small, so distrustful of himself; the mind that might have shed light over undiscovered worlds shrunk to the proportions of a she-coxcomb’s boudoir. Even he himself felt that he had fallen so low already in his happiness that to save his life he could not have told his love to one of his closest friends. Is there not always a trace of shame in the lover’s bashfulness, and perhaps in woman a certain exultation over diminished masculine stature? Indeed, but for a host of motives of this kind, how explain why women are nearly always the first to betray the secret?—a secret of which, perhaps, they soon weary.

“Mme la Duchesse cannot see visitors, monsieur,” said the man; “she is dressing, she begs you to wait for her here.”

Armand walked up and down the drawing-room, studying her taste in the least details. He admired Mme de Langeais herself in the objects of her choosing; they revealed her life before he could grasp her personality and ideas. About an hour later the Duchess came noiselessly out of her chamber. Montriveau turned, saw her flit like a shadow across the room, and trembled. She came up to him, not with a bourgeoisie’s enquiry, “How do I look?” She was sure of herself; her steady eyes said plainly, “I am adorned to please you.”

No one surely, save the old fairy godmother of some princess in disguise, could have wound a cloud of gauze about the dainty throat, so that the dazzling satin skin beneath should gleam through the gleaming folds. The Duchess was dazzling. The pale blue colour of her gown, repeated in the flowers in her hair, appeared by the richness of its hue to lend substance to a fragile form grown too wholly ethereal; for as she glided towards Armand, the loose ends of her scarf floated about her, putting that valiant warrior in mind of the bright damosel flies that hover now over water, now over the flowers with which they seem to mingle and blend.

“I have kept you waiting,” she said, with the tone that a woman can always

bring into her voice for the man whom she wishes to please.

“I would wait patiently through an eternity,” said he, “if I were sure of finding a divinity so fair; but it is no compliment to speak of your beauty to you; nothing save worship could touch you. Suffer me only to kiss your scarf.”

“Oh, fie!” she said, with a commanding gesture, “I esteem you enough to give you my hand.”

She held it out for his kiss. A woman’s hand, still moist from the scented bath, has a soft freshness, a velvet smoothness that sends a tingling thrill from the lips to the soul. And if a man is attracted to a woman, and his senses are as quick to feel pleasure as his heart is full of love, such a kiss, though chaste in appearance, may conjure up a terrific storm.

“Will you always give it me like this?” the General asked humbly when he had pressed that dangerous hand respectfully to his lips.

“Yes, but there we must stop,” she said, smiling. She sat down, and seemed very slow over putting on her gloves, trying to slip the unstretched kid over all her fingers at once, while she watched M. de Montriveau; and he was lost in admiration of the Duchess and those repeated graceful movements of hers.

“Ah! you were punctual,” she said; “that is right. I like punctuality. It is the courtesy of kings, His Majesty says; but to my thinking, from you men it is the most respectful flattery of all. Now, is it not? Just tell me.”

Again she gave him a side glance to express her insidious friendship, for he was dumb with happiness sheer happiness through such nothings as these! Oh, the Duchess understood *son metier de femme*—the art and mystery of being a woman—most marvelously well; she knew, to admiration, how to raise a man in his own esteem as he humbled himself to her; how to reward every step of the descent to sentimental folly with hollow flatteries.

“You will never forget to come at nine o’clock.”

“No; but are you going to a ball every night?”

“Do I know?” she answered, with a little childlike shrug of the shoulders; the gesture was meant to say that she was nothing if not capricious, and that a lover must take her as she was.—“Besides,” she added, “what is that to you? You shall be my escort.”

“That would be difficult tonight,” he objected; “I am not properly dressed.”

“It seems to me,” she returned loftily, “that if anyone has a right to complain of your costume, it is I. Know, therefore, *monsieur le voyageur*, that if I accept a man’s arm, he is forthwith above the laws of fashion, nobody would venture to criticise him. You do not know the world, I see; I like you

the better for it.”

And even as she spoke she swept him into the pettiness of that world by the attempt to initiate him into the vanities of a woman of fashion.

“If she chooses to do a foolish thing for me, I should be a simpleton to prevent her,” said Armand to himself. “She has a liking for me beyond a doubt; and as for the world, she cannot despise it more than I do. So, now for the ball if she likes.”

The Duchess probably thought that if the General came with her and appeared in a ballroom in boots and a black tie, nobody would hesitate to believe that he was violently in love with her. And the General was well pleased that the queen of fashion should think of compromising herself for him; hope gave him wit. He had gained confidence, he brought out his thoughts and views; he felt nothing of the restraint that weighed on his spirits yesterday. His talk was interesting and animated, and full of those first confidences so sweet to make and to receive.

Was Mme de Langeais really carried away by his talk, or had she devised this charming piece of coquetry? At any rate, she looked up mischievously as the clock struck twelve.

“Ah! you have made me too late for the ball!” she exclaimed, surprised and vexed that she had forgotten how time was going.

The next moment she approved the exchange of pleasures with a smile that made Armand’s heart give a sudden leap.

“I certainly promised Mme de Beauseant,” she added. “They are all expecting me.”

“Very well—go.”

“No—go on. I will stay. Your Eastern adventures fascinate me. Tell me the whole story of your life. I love to share in a brave man’s hardships, and I feel them all, indeed I do!”

She was playing with her scarf, twisting it and pulling it to pieces, with jerky, impatient movements that seemed to tell of inward dissatisfaction and deep reflection.

“We are fit for nothing,” she went on. “Ah! we are contemptible, selfish, frivolous creatures. We can bore ourselves with amusements, and that is all we can do. Not one of us that understands that she has a part to play in life. In old days in France, women were beneficent lights; they lived to comfort those that mourned, to encourage high virtues, to reward artists and stir new life with noble thoughts. If the world has grown so petty, ours is the fault. You make me loathe the ball and this world in which I live. No, I am not giving up much for

you.”

She had plucked her scarf to pieces, as a child plays with a flower, pulling away all the petals one by one; and now she crushed it into a ball, and flung it away. She could show her swan’s neck.

She rang the bell. “I shall not go out tonight,” she told the footman. Her long, blue eyes turned timidly to Armand; and by the look of misgiving in them, he knew that he was meant to take the order for a confession, for a first and great favour. There was a pause, filled with many thoughts, before she spoke with that tenderness which is often in women’s voices, and not so often in their hearts. “You have had a hard life,” she said.

“No,” returned Armand. “Until today I did not know what happiness was.”

“Then you know it now?” she asked, looking at him with a demure, keen glance.

“What is happiness for me henceforth but this—to see you, to hear you?... Until now I have only known privation; now I know that I can be unhappy _____”

“That will do, that will do,” she said. “You must go; it is past midnight. Let us regard appearances. People must not talk about us. I do not know quite what I shall say; but the headache is a good-natured friend, and tells no tales.”

“Is there to be a ball tomorrow night?”

“You would grow accustomed to the life, I think. Very well. Yes, we will go again tomorrow night.”

There was not a happier man in the world than Armand when he went out from her. Every evening he came to Mme de Langeais’ at the hour kept for him by a tacit understanding.

It would be tedious, and, for the many young men who carry a redundancy of such sweet memories in their hearts, it were superfluous to follow the story step by step—the progress of a romance growing in those hours spent together, a romance controlled entirely by a woman’s will. If sentiment went too fast, she would raise a quarrel over a word, or when words flagged behind her thoughts, she appealed to the feelings. Perhaps the only way of following such Penelope’s progress is by marking its outward and visible signs.

As, for instance, within a few days of their first meeting, the assiduous General had won and kept the right to kiss his lady’s insatiable hands. Wherever Mme de Langeais went, M. de Montriveau was certain to be seen, till people jokingly called him “Her Grace’s orderly.” And already he had made enemies; others were jealous, and envied him his position. Mme de Langeais had attained her end. The Marquis de Montriveau was among her

numerous train of adorers, and a means of humiliating those who boasted of their progress in her good graces, for she publicly gave him preference over them all.

“Decidedly, M. de Montriveau is the man for whom the Duchess shows a preference,” pronounced Mme de Serizy.

And who in Paris does not know what it means when a woman “shows a preference?” All went on therefore according to prescribed rule. The anecdotes which people were pleased to circulate concerning the General put that warrior in so formidable a light, that the more adroit quietly dropped their pretensions to the Duchess, and remained in her train merely to turn the position to account, and to use her name and personality to make better terms for themselves with certain stars of the second magnitude. And those lesser powers were delighted to take a lover away from Mme de Langeais. The Duchess was keen-sighted enough to see these desertions and treaties with the enemy; and her pride would not suffer her to be the dupe of them. As M. de Talleyrand, one of her great admirers, said, she knew how to take a second edition of revenge, laying the two-edged blade of a sarcasm between the pairs in these “morganatic” unions. Her mocking disdain contributed not a little to increase her reputation as an extremely clever woman and a person to be feared. Her character for virtue was consolidated while she amused herself with other people’s secrets, and kept her own to herself. Yet, after two months of assiduities, she saw with a vague dread in the depths of her soul that M. de Montriveau understood nothing of the subtleties of flirtation after the manner of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; he was taking a Parisienne’s coquetry in earnest.

“You will not tame him, dear Duchess,” the old Vidame de Pamiers had said. “‘Tis a first cousin to the eagle; he will carry you off to his eyrie if you do not take care.”

Then Mme de Langeais felt afraid. The shrewd old noble’s words sounded like a prophecy. The next day she tried to turn love to hate. She was harsh, exacting, irritable, unbearable; Montriveau disarmed her with angelic sweetness. She so little knew the great generosity of a large nature, that the kindly jests with which her first complaints were met went to her heart. She sought a quarrel, and found proofs of affection. She persisted.

“When a man idolizes you, how can he have vexed you?” asked Armand.

“You do not vex me,” she answered, suddenly grown gentle and submissive. “But why do you wish to compromise me? For me you ought to be nothing but a friend. Do you not know it? I wish I could see that you had the instincts, the delicacy of real friendship, so that I might lose neither your respect nor the pleasure that your presence gives me.”

“Nothing but your friend!” he cried out. The terrible word sent an electric shock through his brain. “On the faith of these happy hours that you grant me, I sleep and wake in your heart. And now today, for no reason, you are pleased to destroy all the secret hopes by which I live. You have required promises of such constancy in me, you have said so much of your horror of women made up of nothing but caprice; and now do you wish me to understand that, like other women here in Paris, you have passions, and know nothing of love? If so, why did you ask my life of me? why did you accept it?”

“I was wrong, my friend. Oh, it is wrong of a woman to yield to such intoxication when she must not and cannot make any return.”

“I understand. You have merely been coquetting with me, and——”

“Coquetting?” she repeated. “I detest coquetry. A coquette Armand, makes promises to many, and gives herself to none; and a woman who keeps such promises is a libertine. This much I believed I had grasped of our code. But to be melancholy with humorists, gay with the frivolous, and politic with ambitious souls; to listen to a babbler with every appearance of admiration, to talk of war with a soldier, wax enthusiastic with philanthropists over the good of the nation, and to give to each one his little dole of flattery—it seems to me that this is as much a matter of necessity as dress, diamonds, and gloves, or flowers in one’s hair. Such talk is the moral counterpart of the toilette. You take it up and lay it aside with the plumed head-dress. Do you call this coquetry? Why, I have never treated you as I treat everyone else. With you, my friend, I am sincere. Have I not always shared your views, and when you convinced me after a discussion, was I not always perfectly glad? In short, I love you, but only as a devout and pure woman may love. I have thought it over. I am a married woman, Armand. My way of life with M. de Langeais gives me liberty to bestow my heart; but law and custom leave me no right to dispose of my person. If a woman loses her honour, she is an outcast in any rank of life; and I have yet to meet with a single example of a man that realizes all that our sacrifices demand of him in such a case. Quite otherwise. Anyone can foresee the rupture between Mme de Beauseant and M. d’Ajuda (for he is going to marry Mlle de Rochefide, it seems), that affair made it clear to my mind that these very sacrifices on the woman’s part are almost always the cause of the man’s desertion. If you had loved me sincerely, you would have kept away for a time.—Now, I will lay aside all vanity for you; is not that something? What will not people say of a woman to whom no man attaches himself? Oh, she is heartless, brainless, soulless; and what is more, devoid of charm! Coquettes will not spare me. They will rob me of the very qualities that mortify them. So long as my reputation is safe, what do I care if my rivals deny my merits? They certainly will not inherit them. Come, my friend; give up something for her who sacrifices so much for you. Do not come quite so

often; I shall love you none the less.”

“Ah!” said Armand, with the profound irony of a wounded heart in his words and tone. “Love, so the scribblers say, only feeds on illusions. Nothing could be truer, I see; I am expected to imagine that I am loved. But, there!—there are some thoughts like wounds, from which there is no recovery. My belief in you was one of the last left to me, and now I see that there is nothing left to believe in this earth.”

She began to smile.

“Yes,” Montriveau went on in an unsteady voice, “this Catholic faith to which you wish to convert me is a lie that men make for themselves; hope is a lie at the expense of the future; pride, a lie between us and our fellows; and pity, and prudence, and terror are cunning lies. And now my happiness is to be one more lying delusion; I am expected to delude myself, to be willing to give gold coin for silver to the end. If you can so easily dispense with my visits; if you can confess me neither as your friend nor your lover, you do not care for me! And I, poor fool that I am, tell myself this, and know it, and love you!”

“But, dear me, poor Armand, you are flying into a passion!”

“I flying into a passion?”

“Yes. You think that the whole question is opened because I ask you to be careful.”

In her heart of hearts she was delighted with the anger that leapt out in her lover’s eyes. Even as she tortured him, she was criticising him, watching every slightest change that passed over his face. If the General had been so unluckily inspired as to show himself generous without discussion (as happens occasionally with some artless souls), he would have been a banished man forever, accused and convicted of not knowing how to love. Most women are not displeased to have their code of right and wrong broken through. Do they not flatter themselves that they never yield except to force? But Armand was not learned enough in this kind of lore to see the snare ingeniously spread for him by the Duchess. So much of the child was there in the strong man in love.

“If all you want is to preserve appearances,” he began in his simplicity, “I am willing to——”

“Simply to preserve appearances!” the lady broke in; “why, what idea can you have of me? Have I given you the slightest reason to suppose that I can be yours?”

“Why, what else are we talking about?” demanded Montriveau.

“Monsieur, you frighten me!... No, pardon me. Thank you,” she added, coldly; “thank you, Armand. You have given me timely warning of

imprudence; committed quite unconsciously, believe it, my friend. You know how to endure, you say. I also know how to endure. We will not see each other for a time; and then, when both of us have contrived to recover calmness to some extent, we will think about arrangements for a happiness sanctioned by the world. I am young, Armand; a man with no delicacy might tempt a woman of four-and-twenty to do many foolish, wild things for his sake. But you! You will be my friend, promise me that you will?"

"The woman of four-and-twenty," returned he, "knows what she is about."

He sat down on the sofa in the boudoir, and leant his head on his hands.

"Do you love me, madame?" he asked at length, raising his head, and turning a face full of resolution upon her. "Say it straight out; Yes or No!"

His direct question dismayed the Duchess more than a threat of suicide could have done; indeed, the woman of the nineteenth century is not to be frightened by that stale stratagem, the sword has ceased to be part of the masculine costume. But in the effect of eyelids and lashes, in the contraction of the gaze, in the twitching of the lips, is there not some influence that communicates the terror which they express with such vivid magnetic power?

"Ah, if I were free, if——"

"Oh! is it only your husband that stands in the way?" the General exclaimed joyfully, as he strode to and fro in the boudoir. "Dear Antoinette, I wield a more absolute power than the Autocrat of all the Russias. I have a compact with Fate; I can advance or retard destiny, so far as men are concerned, at my fancy, as you alter the hands of a watch. If you can direct the course of fate in our political machinery, it simply means (does it not?) that you understand the ins and outs of it. You shall be free before very long, and then you must remember your promise."

"Armand!" she cried. "What do you mean? Great heavens! Can you imagine that I am to be the prize of a crime? Do you want to kill me? Why! you cannot have any religion in you! For my own part, I fear God. M. de Langeais may have given me reason to hate him, but I wish him no manner of harm."

M. de Montriveau beat a tattoo on the marble chimney-piece, and only looked composedly at the lady.

"Dear," continued she, "respect him. He does not love me, he is not kind to me, but I have duties to fulfil with regard to him. What would I not do to avert the calamities with which you threaten him?—Listen," she continued after a pause, "I will not say another word about separation; you shall come here as in the past, and I will still give you my forehead to kiss. If I refused once or

twice, it was pure coquetry, indeed it was. But let us understand each other," she added as he came closer. "You will permit me to add to the number of my satellites; to receive even more visitors in the morning than heretofore; I mean to be twice as frivolous; I mean to use you to all appearance very badly; to feign a rupture; you must come not quite so often, and then, afterwards——"

While she spoke, she had allowed him to put an arm about her waist, Montriveau was holding her tightly to him, and she seemed to feel the exceeding pleasure that women usually feel in that close contact, an earnest of the bliss of a closer union. And then, doubtless she meant to elicit some confidence, for she raised herself on tiptoe, and laid her forehead against Armand's burning lips.

"And then," Montriveau finished her sentence for her, "you shall not speak to me of your husband. You ought not to think of him again."

Mme de Langeais was silent awhile.

"At least," she said, after a significant pause, "at least you will do all that I wish without grumbling, you will not be naughty; tell me so, my friend? You wanted to frighten me, did you not? Come, now, confess it?... You are too good ever to think of crimes. But is it possible that you can have secrets that I do not know? How can you control Fate?"

"Now, when you confirm the gift of the heart that you have already given me, I am far too happy to know exactly how to answer you. I can trust you, Antoinette; I shall have no suspicion, no unfounded jealousy of you. But if accident should set you free, we shall be one——"

"Accident, Armand?" (With that little dainty turn of the head that seems to say so many things, a gesture that such women as the Duchess can use on light occasions, as a great singer can act with her voice.) "Pure accident," she repeated. "Mind that. If anything should happen to M. de Langeais by your fault, I should never be yours."

And so they parted, mutually content. The Duchess had made a pact that left her free to prove to the world by words and deeds that M. de Montriveau was no lover of hers. And as for him, the wily Duchess vowed to tire him out. He should have nothing of her beyond the little concessions snatched in the course of contests that she could stop at her pleasure. She had so pretty an art of revoking the grant of yesterday, she was so much in earnest in her purpose to remain technically virtuous, that she felt that there was not the slightest danger for her in preliminaries fraught with peril for a woman less sure of her self-command. After all, the Duchess was practically separated from her husband; a marriage long since annulled was no great sacrifice to make to her love.

Montriveau on his side was quite happy to win the vaguest promise, glad once for all to sweep aside, with all scruples of conjugal fidelity, her stock of excuses for refusing herself to his love. He had gained ground a little, and congratulated himself. And so for a time he took unfair advantage of the rights so hardly won. More a boy than he had ever been in his life, he gave himself up to all the childishness that makes first love the flower of life. He was a child again as he poured out all his soul, all the thwarted forces that passion had given him, upon her hands, upon the dazzling forehead that looked so pure to his eyes; upon her fair hair; on the tufted curls where his lips were pressed. And the Duchess, on whom his love was poured like a flood, was vanquished by the magnetic influence of her lover's warmth; she hesitated to begin the quarrel that must part them forever. She was more a woman than she thought, this slight creature, in her effort to reconcile the demands of religion with the ever-new sensations of vanity, the semblance of pleasure which turns a Parisienne's head. Every Sunday she went to Mass; she never missed a service; then, when evening came, she was steeped in the intoxicating bliss of repressed desire. Armand and Mme de Langeais, like Hindoo fakirs, found the reward of their continence in the temptations to which it gave rise. Possibly, the Duchess had ended by resolving love into fraternal caresses, harmless enough, as it might have seemed to the rest of the world, while they borrowed extremes of degradation from the license of her thoughts. How else explain the incomprehensible mystery of her continual fluctuations? Every morning she proposed to herself to shut her door on the Marquis de Montriveau; every evening, at the appointed hour, she fell under the charm of his presence. There was a languid defence; then she grew less unkind. Her words were sweet and soothing. They were lovers—lovers only could have been thus. For him the Duchess would display her most sparkling wit, her most captivating wiles; and when at last she had wrought upon his senses and his soul, she might submit herself passively to his fierce caresses, but she had her *nec plus ultra* of passion; and when once it was reached, she grew angry if he lost the mastery of himself and made as though he would pass beyond. No woman on earth can brave the consequences of refusal without some motive; nothing is more natural than to yield to love; wherefore Mme de Langeais promptly raised a second line of fortification, a stronghold less easy to carry than the first. She evoked the terrors of religion. Never did Father of the Church, however eloquent, plead the cause of God better than the Duchess. Never was the wrath of the Most High better justified than by her voice. She used no preacher's commonplaces, no rhetorical amplifications. No. She had a "pulpit-tremor" of her own. To Armand's most passionate entreaty, she replied with a tearful gaze, and a gesture in which a terrible plenitude of emotion found expression. She stopped his mouth with an appeal for mercy. She would not hear another word; if she did, she must succumb; and better death than criminal happiness.

“Is it nothing to disobey God?” she asked him, recovering a voice grown faint in the crises of inward struggles, through which the fair actress appeared to find it hard to preserve her self-control. “I would sacrifice society, I would give up the whole world for you, gladly; but it is very selfish of you to ask my whole after-life of me for a moment of pleasure. Come, now! are you not happy?” she added, holding out her hand; and certainly in her careless toilette the sight of her afforded consolations to her lover, who made the most of them.

Sometimes from policy, to keep her hold on a man whose ardent passion gave her emotions unknown before, sometimes in weakness, she suffered him to snatch a swift kiss; and immediately, in feigned terror, she flushed red and exiled Armand from the sofa so soon as the sofa became dangerous ground.

“Your joys are sins for me to expiate, Armand; they are paid for by penitence and remorse,” she cried.

And Montriveau, now at two chairs’ distance from that aristocratic petticoat, betook himself to blasphemy and railed against Providence. The Duchess grew angry at such times.

“My friend,” she said drily, “I do not understand why you decline to believe in God, for it is impossible to believe in man. Hush, do not talk like that. You have too great a nature to take up their Liberal nonsense with its pretension to abolish God.”

Theological and political disputes acted like a cold douche on Montriveau; he calmed down; he could not return to love when the Duchess stirred up his wrath by suddenly setting him down a thousand miles away from the boudoir, discussing theories of absolute monarchy, which she defended to admiration. Few women venture to be democrats; the attitude of democratic champion is scarcely compatible with tyrannous feminine sway. But often, on the other hand, the General shook out his mane, dropped politics with a leonine growling and lashing of the flanks, and sprang upon his prey; he was no longer capable of carrying a heart and brain at such variance for very far; he came back, terrible with love, to his mistress. And she, if she felt the prick of fancy stimulated to a dangerous point, knew that it was time to leave her boudoir; she came out of the atmosphere surcharged with desires that she drew in with her breath, sat down to the piano, and sang the most exquisite songs of modern music, and so baffled the physical attraction which at times showed her no mercy, though she was strong enough to fight it down.

At such times she was something sublime in Armand’s eyes; she was not acting, she was genuine; the unhappy lover was convinced that she loved him. Her egoistic resistance deluded him into a belief that she was a pure and sainted woman; he resigned himself; he talked of Platonic love, did this artillery officer!

When Mme de Langeais had played with religion sufficiently to suit her own purposes, she played with it again for Armand's benefit. She wanted to bring him back to a Christian frame of mind; she brought out her edition of *Le Genie du Christianisme*, adapted for the use of military men. Montriveau chafed; his yoke was heavy. Oh! at that, possessed by the spirit of contradiction, she dinned religion into his ears, to see whether God might not rid her of this suitor, for the man's persistence was beginning to frighten her. And in any case she was glad to prolong any quarrel, if it bade fair to keep the dispute on moral grounds for an indefinite period; the material struggle which followed it was more dangerous.

But if the time of her opposition on the ground of the marriage law might be said to be the *epoque civile* of this sentimental warfare, the ensuing phase which might be taken to constitute the *epoque religieuse* had also its crisis and consequent decline of severity.

Armand happening to come in very early one evening, found M. l'Abbe Gondrand, the Duchess's spiritual director, established in an armchair by the fireside, looking as a spiritual director might be expected to look while digesting his dinner and the charming sins of his penitent. In the ecclesiastic's bearing there was a stateliness befitting a dignitary of the Church; and the episcopal violet hue already appeared in his dress. At sight of his fresh, well-preserved complexion, smooth forehead, and ascetic's mouth, Montriveau's countenance grew uncommonly dark; he said not a word under the malicious scrutiny of the other's gaze, and greeted neither the lady nor the priest. The lover apart, Montriveau was not wanting in tact; so a few glances exchanged with the bishop-designate told him that here was the real forger of the Duchess's armory of scruples.

That an ambitious abbe should control the happiness of a man of Montriveau's temper, and by underhand ways! The thought burst in a furious tide over his face, clenched his fists, and set him chafing and pacing to and fro; but when he came back to his place intending to make a scene, a single look from the Duchess was enough. He was quiet.

Any other woman would have been put out by her lover's gloomy silence; it was quite otherwise with Mme de Langeais. She continued her conversation with M. de Gondrand on the necessity of re-establishing the Church in its ancient splendour. And she talked brilliantly.

The Church, she maintained, ought to be a temporal as well as a spiritual power, stating her case better than the Abbe had done, and regretting that the Chamber of Peers, unlike the English House of Lords, had no bench of bishops. Nevertheless, the Abbe rose, yielded his place to the General, and took his leave, knowing that in Lent he could play a return game. As for the

Duchess, Montriveau's behaviour had excited her curiosity to such a pitch that she scarcely rose to return her director's low bow.

"What is the matter with you, my friend?"

"Why, I cannot stomach that Abbe of yours."

"Why did you not take a book?" she asked, careless whether the Abbe, then closing the door, heard her or no.

The General paused, for the gesture which accompanied the Duchess's speech further increased the exceeding insolence of her words.

"My dear Antoinette, thank you for giving love precedence of the Church; but, for pity's sake, allow me to ask one question."

"Oh! you are questioning me! I am quite willing. You are my friend, are you not? I certainly can open the bottom of my heart to you; you will see only one image there."

"Do you talk about our love to that man?"

"He is my confessor."

"Does he know that I love you?"

"M. de Montriveau, you cannot claim, I think, to penetrate the secrets of the confessional?"

"Does that man know all about our quarrels and my love for you?"

"That man, monsieur; say God!"

"God again! I ought to be alone in your heart. But leave God alone where He is, for the love of God and me. Madame, you shall not go to confession again, or——"

"Or?" she repeated sweetly.

"Or I will never come back here."

"Then go, Armand. Good-bye, good-bye forever."

She rose and went to her boudoir without so much as a glance at Armand, as he stood with his hand on the back of a chair. How long he stood there motionless he himself never knew. The soul within has the mysterious power of expanding as of contracting space.

He opened the door of the boudoir. It was dark within. A faint voice was raised to say sharply:

"I did not ring. What made you come in without orders? Go away, Suzette."

“Then you are ill,” exclaimed Montriveau.

“Stand up, monsieur, and go out of the room for a minute at any rate,” she said, ringing the bell.

“Mme la Duchesse rang for lights?” said the footman, coming in with the candles. When the lovers were alone together, Mme de Langeais still lay on her couch; she was just as silent and motionless as if Montriveau had not been there.

“Dear, I was wrong,” he began, a note of pain and a sublime kindness in his voice. “Indeed, I would not have you without religion——”

“It is fortunate that you can recognise the necessity of a conscience,” she said in a hard voice, without looking at him. “I thank you in God’s name.”

The General was broken down by her harshness; this woman seemed as if she could be at will a sister or a stranger to him. He made one despairing stride towards the door. He would leave her forever without another word. He was wretched; and the Duchess was laughing within herself over mental anguish far more cruel than the old judicial torture. But as for going away, it was not in his power to do it. In any sort of crisis, a woman is, as it were, bursting with a certain quantity of things to say; so long as she has not delivered herself of them, she experiences the sensation which we are apt to feel at the sight of something incomplete. Mme de Langeais had not said all that was in her mind. She took up her parable and said:

“We have not the same convictions, General, I am pained to think. It would be dreadful if a woman could not believe in a religion which permits us to love beyond the grave. I set Christian sentiments aside; you cannot understand them. Let me simply speak to you of expediency. Would you forbid a woman at court the table of the Lord when it is customary to take the sacrament at Easter? People must certainly do something for their party. The Liberals, whatever they may wish to do, will never destroy the religious instinct. Religion will always be a political necessity. Would you undertake to govern a nation of logic-choppers? Napoleon was afraid to try; he persecuted ideologists. If you want to keep people from reasoning, you must give them something to feel. So let us accept the Roman Catholic Church with all its consequences. And if we would have France go to mass, ought we not to begin by going ourselves? Religion, you see, Armand, is a bond uniting all the conservative principles which enable the rich to live in tranquillity. Religion and the rights of property are intimately connected. It is certainly a finer thing to lead a nation by ideas of morality than by fear of the scaffold, as in the time of the Terror—the one method by which your odious Revolution could enforce obedience. The priest and the king—that means you, and me, and the Princess my neighbour; and, in a word, the interests of all honest people personified.

There, my friend, just be so good as to belong to your party, you that might be its Scylla if you had the slightest ambition that way. I know nothing about politics myself; I argue from my own feelings; but still I know enough to guess that society would be overturned if people were always calling its foundations in question——”

“If that is how your Court and your Government think, I am sorry for you,” broke in Montriveau. “The Restoration, madam, ought to say, like Catherine de Medici, when she heard that the battle of Dreux was lost, ‘Very well; now we will go to the meeting-house.’ Now 1815 was your battle of Dreux. Like the royal power of those days, you won in fact, while you lost in right. Political Protestantism has gained an ascendancy over people’s minds. If you have no mind to issue your Edict of Nantes; or if, when it is issued, you publish a Revocation; if you should one day be accused and convicted of repudiating the Charter, which is simply a pledge given to maintain the interests established under the Republic, then the Revolution will rise again, terrible in her strength, and strike but a single blow. It will not be the Revolution that will go into exile; she is the very soil of France. Men die, but people’s interests do not die. ... Eh, great Heavens! what are France and the crown and rightful sovereigns, and the whole world besides, to us? Idle words compared with my happiness. Let them reign or be hurled from the throne, little do I care. Where am I now?”

“In the Duchesse de Langeais’ boudoir, my friend.”

“No, no. No more of the Duchess, no more of Langeais; I am with my dear Antoinette.”

“Will you do me the pleasure to stay where you are,” she said, laughing and pushing him back, gently however.

“So you have never loved me,” he retorted, and anger flashed in lightning from his eyes.

“No, dear”; but the “No” was equivalent to “Yes.”

“I am a great ass,” he said, kissing her hands. The terrible queen was a woman once more.—“Antoinette,” he went on, laying his head on her feet, “you are too chastely tender to speak of our happiness to anyone in this world.”

“Oh!” she cried, rising to her feet with a swift, graceful spring, “you are a great simpleton.” And without another word she fled into the drawing-room.

“What is it now?” wondered the General, little knowing that the touch of his burning forehead had sent a swift electric thrill through her from foot to head.

In hot wrath he followed her to the drawing-room, only to hear divinely sweet chords. The Duchess was at the piano. If the man of science or the poet can at once enjoy and comprehend, bringing his intelligence to bear upon his enjoyment without loss of delight, he is conscious that the alphabet and phraseology of music are but cunning instruments for the composer, like the wood and copper wire under the hands of the executant. For the poet and the man of science there is a music existing apart, underlying the double expression of this language of the spirit and senses. *Andiamo mio ben* can draw tears of joy or pitying laughter at the will of the singer; and not unfrequently one here and there in the world, some girl unable to live and bear the heavy burden of an unguessed pain, some man whose soul vibrates with the throb of passion, may take up a musical theme, and lo! heaven is opened for them, or they find a language for themselves in some sublime melody, some song lost to the world.

The General was listening now to such a song; a mysterious music unknown to all other ears, as the solitary plaint of some mateless bird dying alone in a virgin forest.

“Great Heavens! what are you playing there?” he asked in an unsteady voice.

“The prelude of a ballad, called, I believe, *Fleuve du Tage*.”

“I did not know that there was such music in a piano,” he returned.

“Ah!” she said, and for the first time she looked at him as a woman looks at the man she loves, “nor do you know, my friend, that I love you, and that you cause me horrible suffering; and that I feel that I must utter my cry of pain without putting it too plainly into words. If I did not, I should yield——But you see nothing.”

“And you will not make me happy!”

“Armand, I should die of sorrow the next day.”

The General turned abruptly from her and went. But out in the street he brushed away the tears that he would not let fall.

The religious phase lasted for three months. At the end of that time the Duchess grew weary of vain repetitions; the Deity, bound hand and foot, was delivered up to her lover. Possibly she may have feared that by sheer dint of talking of eternity she might perpetuate his love in this world and the next. For her own sake, it must be believed that no man had touched her heart, or her conduct would be inexcusable. She was young; the time when men and women feel that they cannot afford to lose time or to quibble over their joys was still far off. She, no doubt, was on the verge not of first love, but of her

first experience of the bliss of love. And from inexperience, for want of the painful lessons which would have taught her to value the treasure poured out at her feet, she was playing with it. Knowing nothing of the glory and rapture of the light, she was fain to stay in the shadow.

Armand was just beginning to understand this strange situation; he put his hope in the first word spoken by nature. Every evening, as he came away from Mme de Langeais', he told himself that no woman would accept the tenderest, most delicate proofs of a man's love during seven months, nor yield passively to the slighter demands of passion, only to cheat love at the last. He was waiting patiently for the sun to gain power, not doubting but that he should receive the earliest fruits. The married woman's hesitations and the religious scruples he could quite well understand. He even rejoiced over those battles. He mistook the Duchess's heartless coquetry for modesty; and he would not have had her otherwise. So he had loved to see her devising obstacles; was he not gradually triumphing over them? Did not every victory won swell the meagre sum of lovers' intimacies long denied, and at last conceded with every sign of love? Still, he had had such leisure to taste the full sweetness of every small successive conquest on which a lover feeds his love, that these had come to be matters of use and wont. So far as obstacles went, there were none now save his own awe of her; nothing else left between him and his desire save the whims of her who allowed him to call her Antoinette. So he made up his mind to demand more, to demand all. Embarrassed like a young lover who cannot dare to believe that his idol can stoop so low, he hesitated for a long time. He passed through the experience of terrible reactions within himself. A set purpose was annihilated by a word, and definite resolves died within him on the threshold. He despised himself for his weakness, and still his desire remained unuttered. Nevertheless, one evening, after sitting in gloomy melancholy, he brought out a fierce demand for his illegally legitimate rights. The Duchess had not to wait for her bond-slave's request to guess his desire. When was a man's desire a secret? And have not women an intuitive knowledge of the meaning of certain changes of countenance?

"What! you wish to be my friend no longer?" she broke in at the first words, and a divine red surging like new blood under the transparent skin, lent brightness to her eyes. "As a reward for my generosity, you would dishonor me? Just reflect a little. I myself have thought much over this; and I think always for us both. There is such a thing as a woman's loyalty, and we can no more fail in it than you can fail in honour. I cannot blind myself. If I am yours, how, in any sense, can I be M. de Langeais' wife? Can you require the sacrifice of my position, my rank, my whole life in return for a doubtful love that could not wait patiently for seven months? What! already you would rob me of my right to dispose of myself? No, no; you must not talk like this again. No, not another word. I will not, I cannot listen to you."

Mme de Langeais raised both hands to her head to push back the tufted curls from her hot forehead; she seemed very much excited.

“You come to a weak woman with your purpose definitely planned out. You say—‘For a certain length of time she will talk to me of her husband, then of God, and then of the inevitable consequences. But I will use and abuse the ascendancy I shall gain over her; I will make myself indispensable; all the bonds of habit, all the misconstructions of outsiders, will make for me; and at length, when our liaison is taken for granted by all the world, I shall be this woman’s master.’—Now, be frank; these are your thoughts! Oh! you calculate, and you say that you love. Shame on you! You are enamoured? Ah! that I well believe! You wish to possess me, to have me for your mistress, that is all! Very well then, No! The Duchesse de Langeais will not descend so far. Simple bourgeois may be the victims of your treachery—I, never! Nothing gives me assurance of your love. You speak of my beauty; I may lose every trace of it in six months, like the dear Princess, my neighbour. You are captivated by my wit, my grace. Great Heavens! you would soon grow used to them and to the pleasures of possession. Have not the little concessions that I was weak enough to make come to be a matter of course in the last few months? Some day, when ruin comes, you will give me no reason for the change in you beyond a curt, ‘I have ceased to care for you.’—Then, rank and fortune and honour and all that was the Duchesse de Langeais will be swallowed up in one disappointed hope. I shall have children to bear witness to my shame, and ——” With an involuntary gesture she interrupted herself, and continued: “But I am too good-natured to explain all this to you when you know it better than I. Come! let us stay as we are. I am only too fortunate in that I can still break these bonds which you think so strong. Is there anything so very heroic in coming to the Hotel de Langeais to spend an evening with a woman whose prattle amuses you?—a woman whom you take for a plaything? Why, half a dozen young coxcombs come here just as regularly every afternoon between three and five. They, too, are very generous, I am to suppose? I make fun of them; they stand my petulance and insolence pretty quietly, and make me laugh; but as for you, I give all the treasures of my soul to you, and you wish to ruin me, you try my patience in endless ways. Hush, that will do, that will do,” she continued, seeing that he was about to speak, “you have no heart, no soul, no delicacy. I know what you want to tell me. Very well, then—yes. I would rather you should take me for a cold, insensible woman, with no devotion in her composition, no heart even, than be taken by everybody else for a vulgar person, and be condemned to your so-called pleasures, of which you would most certainly tire, and to everlasting punishment for it afterwards. Your selfish love is not worth so many sacrifices....”

The words give but a very inadequate idea of the discourse which the Duchess trilled out with the quick volubility of a bird-organ. Nor, truly, was

there anything to prevent her from talking on for some time to come, for poor Armand's only reply to the torrent of flute notes was a silence filled with cruelly painful thoughts. He was just beginning to see that this woman was playing with him; he divined instinctively that a devoted love, a responsive love, does not reason and count the consequences in this way. Then, as he heard her reproach him with detestable motives, he felt something like shame as he remembered that unconsciously he had made those very calculations. With angelic honesty of purpose, he looked within, and self-examination found nothing but selfishness in all his thoughts and motives, in the answers which he framed and could not utter. He was self-convicted. In his despair he longed to fling himself from the window. The egoism of it was intolerable.

What indeed can a man say when a woman will not believe in love?—Let me prove how much I love you.—The I is always there.

The heroes of the boudoir, in such circumstances, can follow the example of the primitive logician who preceded the Pyrrhonists and denied movement. Montriveau was not equal to this feat. With all his audacity, he lacked this precise kind which never deserts an adept in the formulas of feminine algebra. If so many women, and even the best of women, fall a prey to a kind of expert to whom the vulgar give a grosser name, it is perhaps because the said experts are great provers, and love, in spite of its delicious poetry of sentiment, requires a little more geometry than people are wont to think.

Now the Duchess and Montriveau were alike in this—they were both equally unversed in love lore. The lady's knowledge of theory was but scanty; in practice she knew nothing whatever; she felt nothing, and reflected over everything. Montriveau had had but little experience, was absolutely ignorant of theory, and felt too much to reflect at all. Both therefore were enduring the consequences of the singular situation. At that supreme moment the myriad thoughts in his mind might have been reduced to the formula—"Submit to be mine——" words which seem horribly selfish to a woman for whom they awaken no memories, recall no ideas. Something nevertheless he must say. And what was more, though her barbed shafts had set his blood tingling, though the short phrases that she discharged at him one by one were very keen and sharp and cold, he must control himself lest he should lose all by an outbreak of anger.

"Mme la Duchesse, I am in despair that God should have invented no way for a woman to confirm the gift of her heart save by adding the gift of her person. The high value which you yourself put upon the gift teaches me that I cannot attach less importance to it. If you have given me your inmost self and your whole heart, as you tell me, what can the rest matter? And besides, if my happiness means so painful a sacrifice, let us say no more about it. But you must pardon a man of spirit if he feels humiliated at being taken for a spaniel."

The tone in which the last remark was uttered might perhaps have frightened another woman; but when the wearer of a petticoat has allowed herself to be addressed as a Divinity, and thereby set herself above all other mortals, no power on earth can be so haughty.

“M. le Marquis, I am in despair that God should not have invented some nobler way for a man to confirm the gift of his heart than by the manifestation of prodigiously vulgar desires. We become bond-slaves when we give ourselves body and soul, but a man is bound to nothing by accepting the gift. Who will assure me that love will last? The very love that I might show for you at every moment, the better to keep your love, might serve you as a reason for deserting me. I have no wish to be a second edition of Mme de Beauseant. Who can ever know what it is that keeps you beside us? Our persistent coldness of heart is the cause of an unfailing passion in some of you; other men ask for an untiring devotion, to be idolized at every moment; some for gentleness, others for tyranny. No woman in this world as yet has really read the riddle of man’s heart.”

There was a pause. When she spoke again it was in a different tone.

“After all, my friend, you cannot prevent a woman from trembling at the question, ‘Will this love last always?’ Hard though my words may be, the dread of losing you puts them into my mouth. Oh, me! it is not I who speaks, dear, it is reason; and how should anyone so mad as I be reasonable? In truth, I am nothing of the sort.”

The poignant irony of her answer had changed before the end into the most musical accents in which a woman could find utterance for ingenuous love. To listen to her words was to pass in a moment from martyrdom to heaven. Montriveau grew pale; and for the first time in his life, he fell on his knees before a woman. He kissed the Duchess’s skirt hem, her knees, her feet; but for the credit of the Faubourg Saint-Germain it is necessary to respect the mysteries of its boudoirs, where many are fain to take the utmost that Love can give without giving proof of love in return.

The Duchess thought herself generous when she suffered herself to be adored. But Montriveau was in a wild frenzy of joy over her complete surrender of the position.

“Dear Antoinette,” he cried. “Yes, you are right; I will not have you doubt any longer. I too am trembling at this moment—lest the angel of my life should leave me; I wish I could invent some tie that might bind us to each other irrevocably.”

“Ah!” she said, under her breath, “so I was right, you see.”

“Let me say all that I have to say; I will scatter all your fears with a word.

Listen! if I deserted you, I should deserve to die a thousand deaths. Be wholly mine, and I will give you the right to kill me if I am false. I myself will write a letter explaining certain reasons for taking my own life; I will make my final arrangements, in short. You shall have the letter in your keeping; in the eye of the law it will be a sufficient explanation of my death. You can avenge yourself, and fear nothing from God or men.”

“What good would the letter be to me? What would life be if I had lost your love? If I wished to kill you, should I not be ready to follow? No; thank you for the thought, but I do not want the letter. Should I not begin to dread that you were faithful to me through fear? And if a man knows that he must risk his life for a stolen pleasure, might it not seem more tempting? Armand, the thing I ask of you is the one hard thing to do.”

“Then what is it that you wish?”

“Your obedience and my liberty.”

“Ah, God!” cried he, “I am a child.”

“A wayward, much spoilt child,” she said, stroking the thick hair, for his head still lay on her knee. “Ah! and loved far more than he believes, and yet he is very disobedient. Why not stay as we are? Why not sacrifice to me the desires that hurt me? Why not take what I can give, when it is all that I can honestly grant? Are you not happy?”

“Oh yes, I am happy when I have not a doubt left. Antoinette, doubt in love is a kind of death, is it not?”

In a moment he showed himself as he was, as all men are under the influence of that hot fever; he grew eloquent, insinuating. And the Duchess tasted the pleasures which she reconciled with her conscience by some private, Jesuitical ukase of her own; Armand’s love gave her a thrill of cerebral excitement which custom made as necessary to her as society, or the Opera. To feel that she was adored by this man, who rose above other men, whose character frightened her; to treat him like a child; to play with him as Poppaea played with Nero—many women, like the wives of King Henry VIII, have paid for such a perilous delight with all the blood in their veins. Grim presentiment! Even as she surrendered the delicate, pale, gold curls to his touch, and felt the close pressure of his hand, the little hand of a man whose greatness she could not mistake; even as she herself played with his dark, thick locks, in that boudoir where she reigned a queen, the Duchess would say to herself:

“This man is capable of killing me if he once finds out that I am playing with him.”

Armand de Montriveau stayed with her till two o'clock in the morning. From that moment this woman, whom he loved, was neither a duchess nor a Navarreins; Antoinette, in her disguises, had gone so far as to appear to be a woman. On that most blissful evening, the sweetest prelude ever played by a Parisienne to what the world calls "a slip"; in spite of all her affectations of a coyness which she did not feel, the General saw all maidenly beauty in her. He had some excuse for believing that so many storms of caprice had been but clouds covering a heavenly soul; that these must be lifted one by one like the veils that hid her divine loveliness. The Duchess became, for him, the most simple and girlish mistress; she was the one woman in the world for him; and he went away quite happy in that at last he had brought her to give him such pledges of love, that it seemed to him impossible but that he should be but her husband henceforth in secret, her choice sanctioned by Heaven.

Armand went slowly home, turning this thought in his mind with the impartiality of a man who is conscious of all the responsibilities that love lays on him while he tastes the sweetness of its joys. He went along the Quais to see the widest possible space of sky; his heart had grown in him; he would fain have had the bounds of the firmament and of earth enlarged. It seemed to him that his lungs drew an ampler breath. In the course of his self-examination, as he walked, he vowed to love this woman so devoutly, that every day of her life she should find absolution for her sins against society in unflinching happiness. Sweet stirrings of life when life is at the full! The man that is strong enough to steep his soul in the colour of one emotion, feels infinite joy as glimpses open out for him of an ardent lifetime that knows no diminution of passion to the end; even so it is permitted to certain mystics, in ecstasy, to behold the Light of God. Love would be naught without the belief that it would last forever; love grows great through constancy. It was thus that, wholly absorbed by his happiness, Montriveau understood passion.

"We belong to each other forever!"

The thought was like a talisman fulfilling the wishes of his life. He did not ask whether the Duchess might not change, whether her love might not last. No, for he had faith. Without that virtue there is no future for Christianity, and perhaps it is even more necessary to society. A conception of life as feeling occurred to him for the first time; hitherto he had lived by action, the most strenuous exertion of human energies, the physical devotion, as it may be called, of the soldier.

Next day M. de Montriveau went early in the direction of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. He had made an appointment at a house not far from the Hotel de Langeais; and the business over, he went thither as if to his own home. The General's companion chanced to be a man for whom he felt a kind of repulsion whenever he met him in other houses. This was the Marquis de

Ronquerolles, whose reputation had grown so great in Paris boudoirs. He was witty, clever, and what was more—courageous; he set the fashion to all the young men in Paris. As a man of gallantry, his success and experience were equally matters of envy; and neither fortune nor birth was wanting in his case, qualifications which add such lustre in Paris to a reputation as a leader of fashion.

“Where are you going?” asked M. de Ronquerolles.

“To Mme de Langeais’.”

“Ah, true. I forgot that you had allowed her to lime(sp) you. You are wasting your affections on her when they might be much better employed elsewhere. I could have told you of half a score of women in the financial world, any one of them a thousand times better worth your while than that titled courtesan, who does with her brains what less artificial women do with _____”

“What is this, my dear fellow?” Armand broke in. “The Duchess is an angel of innocence.”

Ronquerolles began to laugh.

“Things being thus, dear boy,” said he, “it is my duty to enlighten you. Just a word; there is no harm in it between ourselves. Has the Duchess surrendered? If so, I have nothing more to say. Come, give me your confidence. There is no occasion to waste your time in grafting your great nature on that unthankful stock, when all your hopes and cultivation will come to nothing.”

Armand ingenuously made a kind of general report of his position, enumerating with much minuteness the slender rights so hardly won. Ronquerolles burst into a peal of laughter so heartless, that it would have cost any other man his life. But from their manner of speaking and looking at each other during that colloquy beneath the wall, in a corner almost as remote from intrusion as the desert itself, it was easy to imagine the friendship between the two men knew no bounds, and that no power on earth could estrange them.

“My dear Armand, why did you not tell me that the Duchess was a puzzle to you? I would have given you a little advice which might have brought your flirtation properly through. You must know, to begin with, that the women of our Faubourg, like any other women, love to steep themselves in love; but they have a mind to possess and not to be possessed. They have made a sort of compromise with human nature. The code of their parish gives them a pretty wide latitude short of the last transgression. The sweets enjoyed by this fair Duchess of yours are so many venial sins to be washed away in the waters of penitence. But if you had the impertinence to ask in earnest for the moral sin

to which naturally you are sure to attach the highest importance, you would see the deep disdain with which the door of the boudoir and the house would be incontinently shut upon you. The tender Antoinette would dismiss everything from her memory; you would be less than a cipher for her. She would wipe away your kisses, my dear friend, as indifferently as she would perform her ablutions. She would sponge love from her cheeks as she washes off rouge. We know women of that sort—the thorough-bred Parisienne. Have you ever noticed a grisette tripping along the street? Her face is as good as a picture. A pretty cap, fresh cheeks, trim hair, a guileful smile, and the rest of her almost neglected. Is not this true to the life? Well, that is the Parisienne. She knows that her face is all that will be seen, so she devotes all her care, finery, and vanity to her head. The Duchess is the same; the head is everything with her. She can only feel through her intellect, her heart lies in her brain, she is a sort of intellectual epicure, she has a head-voice. We call that kind of poor creature a Lais of the intellect. You have been taken in like a boy. If you doubt it, you can have proof of it tonight, this morning, this instant. Go up to her, try the demand as an experiment, insist peremptorily if it is refused. You might set about it like the late Marechal de Richelieu, and get nothing for your pains.”

Armand was dumb with amazement.

“Has your desire reached the point of infatuation?”

“I want her at any cost!” Montriveau cried out despairingly.

“Very well. Now, look here. Be as inexorable as she is herself. Try to humiliate her, to sting her vanity. Do not try to move her heart, nor her soul, but the woman’s nerves and temperament, for she is both nervous and lymphatic. If you can once awaken desire in her, you are safe. But you must drop these romantic boyish notions of yours. If when once you have her in your eagle’s talons you yield a point or draw back, if you so much as stir an eyelid, if she thinks that she can regain her ascendancy over you, she will slip out of your clutches like a fish, and you will never catch her again. Be as inflexible as law. Show no more charity than the headsman. Hit hard, and then hit again. Strike and keep on striking as if you were giving her the knout. Duchesses are made of hard stuff, my dear Armand; there is a sort of feminine nature that is only softened by repeated blows; and as suffering develops a heart in women of that sort, so it is a work of charity not to spare the rod. Do you persevere. Ah! when pain has thoroughly relaxed those nerves and softened the fibres that you take to be so pliant and yielding; when a shriveled heart has learned to expand and contract and to beat under this discipline; when the brain has capitulated—then, perhaps, passion may enter among the steel springs of this machinery that turns out tears and affectations and languors and melting phrases; then you shall see a most magnificent conflagration (always supposing that the chimney takes fire). The steel

feminine system will glow red-hot like iron in the forge; that kind of heat lasts longer than any other, and the glow of it may possibly turn to love.

“Still,” he continued, “I have my doubts. And, after all, is it worth while to take so much trouble with the Duchess? Between ourselves a man of my stamp ought first to take her in hand and break her in; I would make a charming woman of her; she is a thoroughbred; whereas, you two left to yourselves will never get beyond the A B C. But you are in love with her, and just now you might not perhaps share my views on this subject——. A pleasant time to you, my children,” added Ronquerolles, after a pause. Then with a laugh: “I have decided myself for facile beauties; they are tender, at any rate, the natural woman appears in their love without any of your social seasonings. A woman that haggles over herself, my poor boy, and only means to inspire love! Well, have her like an extra horse—for show. The match between the sofa and confessional, black and white, queen and knight, conscientious scruples and pleasure, is an uncommonly amusing game of chess. And if a man knows the game, let him be never so little of a rake, he wins in three moves. Now, if I undertook a woman of that sort, I should start with the deliberate purpose of——” His voice sank to a whisper over the last words in Armand’s ear, and he went before there was time to reply.

As for Montriveau, he sprang at a bound across the courtyard of the Hotel de Langeais, went unannounced up the stairs straight to the Duchess’s bedroom.

“This is an unheard-of thing,” she said, hastily wrapping her dressing-gown about her. “Armand! this is abominable of you! Come, leave the room, I beg. Just go out of the room, and go at once. Wait for me in the drawing-room.—Come now!”

“Dear angel, has a plighted lover no privilege whatsoever?”

“But, monsieur, it is in the worst possible taste of a plighted lover or a wedded husband to break in like this upon his wife.”

He came up to the Duchess, took her in his arms, and held her tightly to him.

“Forgive, dear Antoinette; but a host of horrid doubts are fermenting in my heart.”

“Doubts? Fie!—Oh, fie on you!”

“Doubts all but justified. If you loved me, would you make this quarrel? Would you not be glad to see me? Would you not have felt a something stir in your heart? For I, that am not a woman, feel a thrill in my inmost self at the mere sound of your voice. Often in a ballroom a longing has come upon me to

spring to your side and put my arms about your neck.”

“Oh! if you have doubts of me so long as I am not ready to spring to your arms before all the world, I shall be doubted all my life long, I suppose. Why, Othello was a mere child compared with you!”

“Ah!” he cried despairingly, “you have no love for me——”

“Admit, at any rate, that at this moment you are not lovable.”

“Then I have still to find favour in your sight?”

“Oh, I should think so. Come,” added she, “with a little imperious air, go out of the room, leave me. I am not like you; I wish always to find favour in your eyes.”

Never woman better understood the art of putting charm into insolence, and does not the charm double the effect? is it not enough to infuriate the coolest of men? There was a sort of untrammelled freedom about Mme de Langeais; a something in her eyes, her voice, her attitude, which is never seen in a woman who loves when she stands face to face with him at the mere sight of whom her heart must needs begin to beat. The Marquis de Ronquerolles’ counsels had cured Armand of sheepishness; and further, there came to his aid that rapid power of intuition which passion will develop at moments in the least wise among mortals, while a great man at such a time possesses it to the full. He guessed the terrible truth revealed by the Duchess’s nonchalance, and his heart swelled with the storm like a lake rising in flood.

“If you told me the truth yesterday, be mine, dear Antoinette,” he cried; “you shall——”

“In the first place,” said she composedly, thrusting him back as he came nearer—“in the first place, you are not to compromise me. My woman might overhear you. Respect me, I beg of you. Your familiarity is all very well in my boudoir in an evening; here it is quite different. Besides, what may your ‘you shall’ mean? ‘You shall.’ No one as yet has ever used that word to me. It is quite ridiculous, it seems to me, absolutely ridiculous.

“Will you surrender nothing to me on this point?”

“Oh! do you call a woman’s right to dispose of herself a ‘point?’ A capital point indeed; you will permit me to be entirely my own mistress on that ‘point.’”

“And how if, believing in your promises to me, I should absolutely require it?”

“Oh! then you would prove that I made the greatest possible mistake when I made you a promise of any kind; and I should beg you to leave me in peace.”

The General's face grew white; he was about to spring to her side, when Mme de Langeais rang the bell, the maid appeared, and, smiling with a mocking grace, the Duchess added, "Be so good as to return when I am visible."

Then Montriveau felt the hardness of a woman as cold and keen as a steel blade; she was crushing in her scorn. In one moment she had snapped the bonds which held firm only for her lover. She had read Armand's intention in his face, and held that the moment had come for teaching the Imperial soldier his lesson. He was to be made to feel that though duchesses may lend themselves to love, they do not give themselves, and that the conquest of one of them would prove a harder matter than the conquest of Europe.

"Madame," returned Armand, "I have not time to wait. I am a spoilt child, as you told me yourself. When I seriously resolve to have that of which we have been speaking, I shall have it."

"You will have it?" queried she, and there was a trace of surprise in her loftiness.

"I shall have it."

"Oh! you would do me a great pleasure by 'resolving' to have it. For curiosity's sake, I should be delighted to know how you would set about it _____"

"I am delighted to put a new interest into your life," interrupted Montriveau, breaking into a laugh which dismayed the Duchess. "Will you permit me to take you to the ball tonight?"

"A thousand thanks. M. de Marsay has been beforehand with you. I gave him my promise."

Montriveau bowed gravely and went.

"So Ronquerolles was right," thought he, "and now for a game of chess."

Thenceforward he hid his agitation by complete composure. No man is strong enough to bear such sudden alternations from the height of happiness to the depths of wretchedness. So he had caught a glimpse of happy life the better to feel the emptiness of his previous existence? There was a terrible storm within him; but he had learned to endure, and bore the shock of tumultuous thoughts as a granite cliff stands out against the surge of an angry sea.

"I could say nothing. When I am with her my wits desert me. She does not know how vile and contemptible she is. Nobody has ventured to bring her face to face with herself. She has played with many a man, no doubt; I will avenge them all."

For the first time, it may be, in a man's heart, revenge and love were blended so equally that Montriveau himself could not know whether love or revenge would carry all before it. That very evening he went to the ball at which he was sure of seeing the Duchesse de Langeais, and almost despaired of reaching her heart. He inclined to think that there was something diabolical about this woman, who was gracious to him and radiant with charming smiles; probably because she had no wish to allow the world to think that she had compromised herself with M. de Montriveau. Coolness on both sides is a sign of love; but so long as the Duchess was the same as ever, while the Marquis looked sullen and morose, was it not plain that she had conceded nothing? Onlookers know the rejected lover by various signs and tokens; they never mistake the genuine symptoms for a coolness such as some women command their adorers to feign, in the hope of concealing their love. Everyone laughed at Montriveau; and he, having omitted to consult his cornac, was abstracted and ill at ease. M. de Ronquerolles would very likely have bidden him compromise the Duchess by responding to her show of friendliness by passionate demonstrations; but as it was, Armand de Montriveau came away from the ball, loathing human nature, and even then scarcely ready to believe in such complete depravity.

"If there is no executioner for such crimes," he said, as he looked up at the lighted windows of the ballroom where the most enchanting women in Paris were dancing, laughing, and chatting, "I will take you by the nape of the neck, Mme la Duchesse, and make you feel something that bites more deeply than the knife in the Place de la Greve. Steel against steel; we shall see which heart will leave the deeper mark."

For a week or so Mme de Langeais hoped to see the Marquis de Montriveau again; but he contented himself with sending his card every morning to the Hotel de Langeais. The Duchess could not help shuddering each time that the card was brought in, and a dim foreboding crossed her mind, but the thought was vague as a presentiment of disaster. When her eyes fell on the name, it seemed to her that she felt the touch of the implacable man's strong hand in her hair; sometimes the words seemed like a prognostication of a vengeance which her lively intellect invented in the most shocking forms. She had studied him too well not to dread him. Would he murder her, she wondered? Would that bull-necked man dash out her vitals by flinging her over his head? Would he trample her body under his feet? When, where, and how would he get her into his power? Would he make her suffer very much, and what kind of pain would he inflict? She repented of her conduct. There were hours when, if he had come, she would have gone to his arms in complete self-surrender.

Every night before she slept she saw Montriveau's face; every night it

wore a different aspect. Sometimes she saw his bitter smile, sometimes the Jovelike knitting of the brows; or his leonine look, or some disdainful movement of the shoulders made him terrible for her. Next day the card seemed stained with blood. The name of Montriveau stirred her now as the presence of the fiery, stubborn, exacting lover had never done. Her apprehensions gathered strength in the silence. She was forced, without aid from without, to face the thought of a hideous duel of which she could not speak. Her proud hard nature was more responsive to thrills of hate than it had ever been to the caresses of love. Ah! if the General could but have seen her, as she sat with her forehead drawn into folds between her brows; immersed in bitter thoughts in that boudoir where he had enjoyed such happy moments, he might perhaps have conceived high hopes. Of all human passions, is not pride alone incapable of engendering anything base? Mme de Langeais kept her thoughts to herself, but is it not permissible to suppose that M. de Montriveau was no longer indifferent to her? And has not a man gained ground immensely when a woman thinks about him? He is bound to make progress with her either one way or the other afterwards.

Put any feminine creature under the feet of a furious horse or other fearsome beast; she will certainly drop on her knees and look for death; but if the brute shows a milder mood and does not utterly slay her, she will love the horse, lion, bull, or what not, and will speak of him quite at her ease. The Duchess felt that she was under the lion's paws; she quaked, but she did not hate him.

The man and woman thus singularly placed with regard to each other met three times in society during the course of that week. Each time, in reply to coquettish questioning glances, the Duchess received a respectful bow, and smiles tinged with such savage irony, that all her apprehensions over the card in the morning were revived at night. Our lives are simply such as our feelings shape them for us; and the feelings of these two had hollowed out a great gulf between them.

The Comtesse de Serizy, the Marquis de Ronquerolles' sister, gave a great ball at the beginning of the following week, and Mme de Langeais was sure to go to it. Armand was the first person whom the Duchess saw when she came into the room, and this time Armand was looking out for her, or so she thought at least. The two exchanged a look, and suddenly the woman felt a cold perspiration break from every pore. She had thought all along that Montriveau was capable of taking reprisals in some unheard-of way proportioned to their condition, and now the revenge had been discovered, it was ready, heated, and boiling. Lightnings flashed from the foiled lover's eyes, his face was radiant with exultant vengeance. And the Duchess? Her eyes were haggard in spite of her resolution to be cool and insolent. She went to take her place beside the

Comtesse de Serizy, who could not help exclaiming, "Dear Antoinette! what is the matter with you? You are enough to frighten one."

"I shall be all right after a quadrille," she answered, giving a hand to a young man who came up at that moment.

Mme de Langeais waltzed that evening with a sort of excitement and transport which redoubled Montriveau's lowering looks. He stood in front of the line of spectators, who were amusing themselves by looking on. Every time that she came past him, his eyes darted down upon her eddying face; he might have been a tiger with the prey in his grasp. The waltz came to an end, Mme de Langeais went back to her place beside the Countess, and Montriveau never took his eyes off her, talking all the while with a stranger.

"One of the things that struck me most on the journey," he was saying (and the Duchess listened with all her ears), "was the remark which the man makes at Westminster when you are shown the axe with which a man in a mask cut off Charles the First's head, so they tell you. The King made it first of all to some inquisitive person, and they repeat it still in memory of him."

"What does the man say?" asked Mme de Serizy.

"Do not touch the axe!" replied Montriveau, and there was menace in the sound of his voice.

"Really, my Lord Marquis," said Mme de Langeais, "you tell this old story that everybody knows if they have been to London, and look at my neck in such a melodramatic way that you seem to me to have an axe in your hand."

The Duchess was in a cold sweat, but nevertheless she laughed as she spoke the last words.

"But circumstances give the story a quite new application," returned he.

"How so; pray tell me, for pity's sake?"

"In this way, madame—you have touched the axe," said Montriveau, lowering his voice.

"What an enchanting prophecy!" returned she, smiling with assumed grace. "And when is my head to fall?"

"I have no wish to see that pretty head of yours cut off. I only fear some great misfortune for you. If your head were clipped close, would you feel no regrets for the dainty golden hair that you turn to such good account?"

"There are those for whom a woman would love to make such a sacrifice; even if, as often happens, it is for the sake of a man who cannot make allowances for an outbreak of temper."

“Quite so. Well, and if some wag were to spoil your beauty on a sudden by some chemical process, and you, who are but eighteen for us, were to be a hundred years old?”

“Why, the smallpox is our Battle of Waterloo, monsieur,” she interrupted. “After it is over we find out those who love us sincerely.”

“Would you not regret the lovely face that?”

“Oh! indeed I should, but less for my own sake than for the sake of someone else whose delight it might have been. And, after all, if I were loved, always loved, and truly loved, what would my beauty matter to me?—What do you say, Clara?”

“It is a dangerous speculation,” replied Mme de Serizy.

“Is it permissible to ask His Majesty the King of Sorcerers when I made the mistake of touching the axe, since I have not been to London as yet?—”

“Not so,” he answered in English, with a burst of ironical laughter.

“And when will the punishment begin?”

At this Montriveau coolly took out his watch, and ascertained the hour with a truly appalling air of conviction.

“A dreadful misfortune will befall you before this day is out.”

“I am not a child to be easily frightened, or rather, I am a child ignorant of danger,” said the Duchess. “I shall dance now without fear on the edge of the precipice.”

“I am delighted to know that you have so much strength of character,” he answered, as he watched her go to take her place in a square dance.

But the Duchess, in spite of her apparent contempt for Armand’s dark prophecies, was really frightened. Her late lover’s presence weighed upon her morally and physically with a sense of oppression that scarcely ceased when he left the ballroom. And yet when she had drawn freer breath, and enjoyed the relief for a moment, she found herself regretting the sensation of dread, so greedy of extreme sensations is the feminine nature. The regret was not love, but it was certainly akin to other feelings which prepare the way for love. And then—as if the impression which Montriveau had made upon her were suddenly revived—she recollected his air of conviction as he took out his watch, and in a sudden spasm of dread she went out.

By this time it was about midnight. One of her servants, waiting with her pelisse, went down to order her carriage. On her way home she fell naturally enough to musing over M. de Montriveau’s prediction. Arrived in her own courtyard, as she supposed, she entered a vestibule almost like that of her own

hotel, and suddenly saw that the staircase was different. She was in a strange house. Turning to call her servants, she was attacked by several men, who rapidly flung a handkerchief over her mouth, bound her hand and foot, and carried her off. She shrieked aloud.

“Madame, our orders are to kill you if you scream,” a voice said in her ear.

So great was the Duchess’s terror, that she could never recollect how nor by whom she was transported. When she came to herself, she was lying on a couch in a bachelor’s lodging, her hands and feet tied with silken cords. In spite of herself, she shrieked aloud as she looked round and met Armand de Montriveau’s eyes. He was sitting in his dressing-gown, quietly smoking a cigar in his armchair.

“Do not cry out, Mme la Duchesse,” he said, coolly taking the cigar out of his mouth; “I have a headache. Besides, I will untie you. But listen attentively to what I have the honour to say to you.”

Very carefully he untied the knots that bound her feet.

“What would be the use of calling out? Nobody can hear your cries. You are too well bred to make any unnecessary fuss. If you do not stay quietly, if you insist upon a struggle with me, I shall tie your hands and feet again. All things considered, I think that you have self-respect enough to stay on this sofa as if you were lying on your own at home; cold as ever, if you will. You have made me shed many tears on this couch, tears that I hid from all other eyes.”

While Montriveau was speaking, the Duchess glanced about her; it was a woman’s glance, a stolen look that saw all things and seemed to see nothing. She was much pleased with the room. It was rather like a monk’s cell. The man’s character and thoughts seemed to pervade it. No decoration of any kind broke the grey painted surface of the walls. A green carpet covered the floor. A black sofa, a table littered with papers, two big easy-chairs, a chest of drawers with an alarum clock by way of ornament, a very low bedstead with a coverlet flung over it—a red cloth with a black key border—all these things made part of a whole that told of a life reduced to its simplest terms. A triple candle-sconce of Egyptian design on the chimney-piece recalled the vast spaces of the desert and Montriveau’s long wanderings; a huge sphinx-claw stood out beneath the folds of stuff at the bed-foot; and just beyond, a green curtain with a black and scarlet border was suspended by large rings from a spear handle above a door near one corner of the room. The other door by which the band had entered was likewise curtained, but the drapery hung from an ordinary curtain-rod. As the Duchess finally noted that the pattern was the same on both, she saw that the door at the bed-foot stood open; gleams of ruddy light from the room beyond flickered below the fringed border. Naturally, the ominous light roused her curiosity; she fancied she could distinguish strange

shapes in the shadows; but as it did not occur to her at the time that danger could come from that quarter, she tried to gratify a more ardent curiosity.

“Monsieur, if it is not indiscreet, may I ask what you mean to do with me?” The insolence and irony of the tone stung through the words. The Duchess quite believed that she read extravagant love in Montriveau’s speech. He had carried her off; was not that in itself an acknowledgment of her power?

“Nothing whatever, madame,” he returned, gracefully puffing the last whiff of cigar smoke. “You will remain here for a short time. First of all, I should like to explain to you what you are, and what I am. I cannot put my thoughts into words whilst you are twisting on the sofa in your boudoir; and besides, in your own house you take offence at the slightest hint, you ring the bell, make an outcry, and turn your lover out at the door as if he were the basest of wretches. Here my mind is unfettered. Here nobody can turn me out. Here you shall be my victim for a few seconds, and you are going to be so exceedingly kind as to listen to me. You need fear nothing. I did not carry you off to insult you, nor yet to take by force what you refused to grant of your own will to my unworthiness. I could not stoop so low. You possibly think of outrage; for myself, I have no such thoughts.”

He flung his cigar coolly into the fire.

“The smoke is unpleasant to you, no doubt, madame?” he said, and rising at once, he took a chafing-dish from the hearth, burnt perfumes, and purified the air. The Duchess’s astonishment was only equaled by her humiliation. She was in this man’s power; and he would not abuse his power. The eyes in which love had once blazed like flame were now quiet and steady as stars. She trembled. Her dread of Armand was increased by a nightmare sensation of restlessness and utter inability to move; she felt as if she were turned to stone. She lay passive in the grip of fear. She thought she saw the light behind the curtains grow to a blaze, as if blown up by a pair of bellows; in another moment the gleams of flame grew brighter, and she fancied that three masked figures suddenly flashed out; but the terrible vision disappeared so swiftly that she took it for an optical delusion.

“Madame,” Armand continued with cold contempt, “one minute, just one minute is enough for me, and you shall feel it afterwards at every moment throughout your lifetime, the one eternity over which I have power. I am not God. Listen carefully to me,” he continued, pausing to add solemnity to his words. “Love will always come at your call. You have boundless power over men: but remember that once you called love, and love came to you; love as pure and true-hearted as may be on earth, and as reverent as it was passionate; fond as a devoted woman’s, as a mother’s love; a love so great indeed, that it was past the bounds of reason. You played with it, and you committed a crime.

Every woman has a right to refuse herself to love which she feels she cannot share; and if a man loves and cannot win love in return, he is not to be pitied, he has no right to complain. But with a semblance of love to attract an unfortunate creature cut off from all affection; to teach him to understand happiness to the full, only to snatch it from him; to rob him of his future of felicity; to slay his happiness not merely today, but as long as his life lasts, by poisoning every hour of it and every thought—this I call a fearful crime!”

“Monsieur——”

“I cannot allow you to answer me yet. So listen to me still. In any case I have rights over you; but I only choose to exercise one—the right of the judge over the criminal, so that I may arouse your conscience. If you had no conscience left, I should not reproach you at all; but you are so young! You must feel some life still in your heart; or so I like to believe. While I think of you as depraved enough to do a wrong which the law does not punish, I do not think you so degraded that you cannot comprehend the full meaning of my words. I resume.”

As he spoke the Duchess heard the smothered sound of a pair of bellows. Those mysterious figures which she had just seen were blowing up the fire, no doubt; the glow shone through the curtain. But Montriveau’s lurid face was turned upon her; she could not choose but wait with a fast-beating heart and eyes fixed in a stare. However curious she felt, the heat in Armand’s words interested her even more than the crackling of the mysterious flames.

“Madame,” he went on after a pause, “if some poor wretch commits a murder in Paris, it is the executioner’s duty, you know, to lay hands on him and stretch him on the plank, where murderers pay for their crimes with their heads. Then the newspapers inform everyone, rich and poor, so that the former are assured that they may sleep in peace, and the latter are warned that they must be on the watch if they would live. Well, you that are religious, and even a little of a bigot, may have masses said for such a man’s soul. You both belong to the same family, but yours is the elder branch; and the elder branch may occupy high places in peace and live happily and without cares. Want or anger may drive your brother the convict to take a man’s life; you have taken more, you have taken the joy out of a man’s life, you have killed all that was best in his life—his dearest beliefs. The murderer simply lay in wait for his victim, and killed him reluctantly, and in fear of the scaffold; but you ...! You heaped up every sin that weakness can commit against strength that suspected no evil; you tamed a passive victim, the better to gnaw his heart out; you lured him with caresses; you left nothing undone that could set him dreaming, imagining, longing for the bliss of love. You asked innumerable sacrifices of him, only to refuse to make any in return. He should see the light indeed before you put out his eyes! It is wonderful how you found the heart to do it!

Such villainies demand a display of resource quite above the comprehension of those bourgeois whom you laugh at and despise. They can give and forgive; they know how to love and suffer. The grandeur of their devotion dwarfs us. Rising higher in the social scale, one finds just as much mud as at the lower end; but with this difference, at the upper end it is hard and gilded over.

“Yes, to find baseness in perfection, you must look for a noble bringing up, a great name, a fair woman, a duchess. You cannot fall lower than the lowest unless you are set high above the rest of the world.—I express my thoughts badly; the wounds you dealt me are too painful as yet, but do not think that I complain. My words are not the expression of any hope for myself; there is no trace of bitterness in them. Know this, madame, for a certainty—I forgive you. My forgiveness is so complete that you need not feel in the least sorry that you came hither to find it against your will.... But you might take advantage of other hearts as child-like as my own, and it is my duty to spare them anguish. So you have inspired the thought of justice. Expiate your sin here on earth; God may perhaps forgive you; I wish that He may, but He is inexorable, and will strike.”

The broken-spirited, broken-hearted woman looked up, her eyes filled with tears.

“Why do you cry? Be true to your nature. You could look on indifferently at the torture of a heart as you broke it. That will do, madame, do not cry. I cannot bear it any longer. Other men will tell you that you have given them life; as for myself, I tell you, with rapture, that you have given me blank extinction. Perhaps you guess that I am not my own, that I am bound to live for my friends, that from this time forth I must endure the cold chill of death, as well as the burden of life? Is it possible that there can be so much kindness in you? Are you like the desert tigress that licks the wounds she has inflicted?”

The Duchess burst out sobbing.

“Pray spare your tears, madame. If I believed in them at all, it would merely set me on my guard. Is this another of your artifices? or is it not? You have used so many with me; how can one think that there is any truth in you? Nothing that you do or say has any power now to move me. That is all I have to say.”

Mme de Langeais rose to her feet, with a great dignity and humility in her bearing.

“You are right to treat me very hardly,” she said, holding out a hand to the man who did not take it; “you have not spoken hardly enough; and I deserve this punishment.”

“I punish you, madame! A man must love still, to punish, must he not? From me you must expect no feeling, nothing resembling it. If I chose, I might be accuser and judge in my cause, and pronounce and carry out the sentence. But I am about to fulfil a duty, not a desire of vengeance of any kind. The cruelest revenge of all, I think, is scorn of revenge when it is in our power to take it. Perhaps I shall be the minister of your pleasures; who knows? Perhaps from this time forth, as you gracefully wear the tokens of disgrace by which society marks out the criminal, you may perforce learn something of the convict’s sense of honour. And then, you will love!”

The Duchess sat listening; her meekness was unfeigned; it was no coquettish device. When she spoke at last, it was after a silence.

“Armand,” she began, “it seems to me that when I resisted love, I was obeying all the instincts of woman’s modesty; I should not have looked for such reproaches from you. I was weak; you have turned all my weaknesses against me, and made so many crimes of them. How could you fail to understand that the curiosity of love might have carried me further than I ought to go; and that next morning I might be angry with myself, and wretched because I had gone too far? Alas! I sinned in ignorance. I was as sincere in my wrongdoing, I swear to you, as in my remorse. There was far more love for you in my severity than in my concessions. And besides, of what do you complain? I gave you my heart; that was not enough; you demanded, brutally, that I should give my person——”

“Brutally?” repeated Montriveau. But to himself he said, “If I once allow her to dispute over words, I am lost.”

“Yes. You came to me as if I were one of those women. You showed none of the respect, none of the attentions of love. Had I not reason to reflect? Very well, I reflected. The unseemliness of your conduct is not inexcusable; love lay at the source of it; let me think so, and justify you to myself.—Well, Armand, this evening, even while you were prophesying evil, I felt convinced that there was happiness in store for us both. Yes, I put my faith in the noble, proud nature so often tested and proved.” She bent lower. “And I was yours wholly,” she murmured in his ear. “I felt a longing that I cannot express to give happiness to a man so violently tried by adversity. If I must have a master, my master should be a great man. As I felt conscious of my height, the less I cared to descend. I felt I could trust you, I saw a whole lifetime of love, while you were pointing to death.... Strength and kindness always go together. My friend, you are so strong, you will not be unkind to a helpless woman who loves you. If I was wrong, is there no way of obtaining forgiveness? No way of making reparation? Repentance is the charm of love; I should like to be very charming for you. How could I, alone among women, fail to know a woman’s doubts and fears, the timidity that it is so natural to feel when you

bind yourself for life, and know how easily a man snaps such ties? The bourgeois, with whom you compared me just now, give themselves, but they struggle first. Very well—I struggled; but here I am!—Ah! God, he does not hear me!” she broke off, and wringing her hands, she cried out “But I love you! I am yours!” and fell at Armand’s feet.

“Yours! yours! my one and only master!”

Armand tried to raise her.

“Madame, it is too late! Antoinette cannot save the Duchesse de Langeais. I cannot believe in either. Today you may give yourself; tomorrow, you may refuse. No power in earth or heaven can insure me the sweet constancy of love. All love’s pledges lay in the past; and now nothing of that past exists.”

The light behind the curtain blazed up so brightly, that the Duchess could not help turning her head; this time she distinctly saw the three masked figures.

“Armand,” she said, “I would not wish to think ill of you. Why are those men there? What are you going to do to me?”

“Those men will be as silent as I myself with regard to the thing which is about to be done. Think of them simply as my hands and my heart. One of them is a surgeon——”

“A surgeon! Armand, my friend, of all things, suspense is the hardest to bear. Just speak; tell me if you wish for my life; I will give it to you, you shall not take it——”

“Then you did not understand me? Did I not speak just now of justice? To put an end to your misapprehensions,” continued he, taking up a small steel object from the table, “I will now explain what I have decided with regard to you.”

He held out a Lorraine cross, fastened to the tip of a steel rod.

“Two of my friends at this very moment are heating another cross, made on this pattern, red-hot. We are going to stamp it upon your forehead, here between the eyes, so that there will be no possibility of hiding the mark with diamonds, and so avoiding people’s questions. In short, you shall bear on your forehead the brand of infamy which your brothers the convicts wear on their shoulders. The pain is a mere trifle, but I feared a nervous crisis of some kind, of resistance——”

“Resistance?” she cried, clapping her hands for joy. “Oh no, no! I would have the whole world here to see. Ah, my Armand, brand her quickly, this creature of yours; brand her with your mark as a poor little trifle belonging to you. You asked for pledges of my love; here they are all in one. Ah! for me

there is nothing but mercy and forgiveness and eternal happiness in this revenge of yours. When you have marked this woman with your mark, when you set your crimson brand on her, your slave in soul, you can never afterwards abandon her, you will be mine for evermore? When you cut me off from my kind, you make yourself responsible for my happiness, or you prove yourself base; and I know that you are noble and great! Why, when a woman loves, the brand of love is burnt into her soul by her own will.—Come in, gentlemen! come in and brand her, this Duchesse de Langeais. She is M. de Montriveau's forever! Ah! come quickly, all of you, my forehead burns hotter than your fire!”

Armand turned his head sharply away lest he should see the Duchess kneeling, quivering with the throbbings of her heart. He said some word, and his three friends vanished.

The women of Paris salons know how one mirror reflects another. The Duchess, with every motive for reading the depths of Armand's heart, was all eyes; and Armand, all unsuspecting of the mirror, brushed away two tears as they fell. Her whole future lay in those two tears. When he turned round again to help her to rise, she was standing before him, sure of love. Her pulses must have throbbed fast when he spoke with the firmness she had known so well how to use of old while she played with him.

“I spare you, madame. All that has taken place shall be as if it had never been, you may believe me. But now, let us bid each other good-bye. I like to think that you were sincere in your coquetries on your sofa, sincere again in this outpouring of your heart. Good-bye. I feel that there is no faith in you left in me. You would torment me again; you would always be the Duchess, and——But there, good-bye, we shall never understand each other.

“Now, what do you wish?” he continued, taking the tone of a master of the ceremonies—“to return home, or to go back to Mme de Serizy's ball? I have done all in my power to prevent any scandal. Neither your servants nor anyone else can possibly know what has passed between us in the last quarter of an hour. Your servants have no idea that you have left the ballroom; your carriage never left Mme de Serizy's courtyard; your brougham may likewise be found in the court of your own hotel. Where do you wish to be?”

“What do you counsel, Armand?”

“There is no Armand now, Mme la Duchesse. We are strangers to each other.”

“Then take me to the ball,” she said, still curious to put Armand's power to the test. “Thrust a soul that suffered in the world, and must always suffer there, if there is no happiness for her now, down into hell again. And yet, oh my

friend, I love you as your bourgeois love; I love you so that I could come to you and fling my arms about your neck before all the world if you asked it off me. The hateful world has not corrupted me. I am young at least, and I have grown younger still. I am a child, yes, your child, your new creature. Ah! do not drive me forth out of my Eden!”

Armand shook his head.

“Ah! let me take something with me, if I go, some little thing to wear tonight on my heart,” she said, taking possession of Armand’s glove, which she twisted into her handkerchief.

“No, I am not like all those depraved women. You do not know the world, and so you cannot know my worth. You shall know it now! There are women who sell themselves for money; there are others to be gained by gifts, it is a vile world! Oh, I wish I were a simple bourgeoisie, a working girl, if you would rather have a woman beneath you than a woman whose devotion is accompanied by high rank, as men count it. Oh, my Armand, there are noble, high, and chaste and pure natures among us; and then they are lovely indeed. I would have all nobleness that I might offer it all up to you. Misfortune willed that I should be a duchess; I would I were a royal princess, that my offering might be complete. I would be a grisette for you, and a queen for everyone besides.”

He listened, damping his cigars with his lips.

“You will let me know when you wish to go,” he said.

“But I should like to stay——”

“That is another matter!”

“Stay, that was badly rolled,” she cried, seizing on a cigar and devouring all that Armand’s lips had touched.

“Do you smoke?”

“Oh, what would I not do to please you?”

“Very well. Go, madame.”

“I will obey you,” she answered, with tears in her eyes.

“You must be blindfolded; you must not see a glimpse of the way.”

“I am ready, Armand,” she said, bandaging her eyes.

“Can you see?”

“No.”

Noiselessly he knelt before her.

“Ah! I can hear you!” she cried, with a little fond gesture, thinking that the pretence of harshness was over.

He made as if he would kiss her lips; she held up her face.

“You can see, madame.”

“I am just a little bit curious.”

“So you always deceive me?”

“Ah! take off this handkerchief, sir,” she cried out, with the passion of a great generosity repelled with scorn, “lead me; I will not open my eyes.”

Armand felt sure of her after that cry. He led the way; the Duchess nobly true to her word, was blind. But while Montriveau held her hand as a father might, and led her up and down flights of stairs, he was studying the throbbing pulses of this woman’s heart so suddenly invaded by Love. Mme de Langeais, rejoicing in this power of speech, was glad to let him know all; but he was inflexible; his hand was passive in reply to the questionings of her hand.

At length, after some journey made together, Armand bade her go forward; the opening was doubtless narrow, for as she went she felt that his hand protected her dress. His care touched her; it was a revelation surely that there was a little love still left; yet it was in some sort a farewell, for Montriveau left her without a word. The air was warm; the Duchess, feeling the heat, opened her eyes, and found herself standing by the fire in the Comtesse de Serizy’s boudoir.

She was alone. Her first thought was for her disordered toilette; in a moment she had adjusted her dress and restored her picturesque coiffure.

“Well, dear Antoinette, we have been looking for you everywhere.” It was the Comtesse de Serizy who spoke as she opened the door.

“I came here to breathe,” said the Duchess; “it is unbearably hot in the rooms.”

“People thought that you had gone; but my brother Ronquerolles told me that your servants were waiting for you.”

“I am tired out, dear, let me stay and rest here for a minute,” and the Duchess sat down on the sofa.

“Why, what is the matter with you? You are shaking from head to foot!”

The Marquis de Ronquerolles came in.

“Mme la Duchesse, I was afraid that something might have happened. I have just come across your coachman, the man is as tipsy as all the Swiss in Switzerland.”

The Duchess made no answer; she was looking round the room, at the chimney-piece and the tall mirrors, seeking the trace of an opening. Then with an extraordinary sensation she recollected that she was again in the midst of the gaiety of the ballroom after that terrific scene which had changed the whole course of her life. She began to shiver violently.

“M. de Montriveau’s prophecy has shaken my nerves,” she said. “It was a joke, but still I will see whether his axe from London will haunt me even in my sleep. So good-bye, dear.—Good-bye, M. le Marquis.”

As she went through the rooms she was beset with inquiries and regrets. Her world seemed to have dwindled now that she, its queen, had fallen so low, was so diminished. And what, moreover, were these men compared with him whom she loved with all her heart; with the man grown great by all that she had lost in stature? The giant had regained the height that he had lost for a while, and she exaggerated it perhaps beyond measure. She looked, in spite of herself, at the servant who had attended her to the ball. He was fast asleep.

“Have you been here all the time?” she asked.

“Yes, madame.”

As she took her seat in her carriage she saw, in fact, that her coachman was drunk—so drunk, that at any other time she would have been afraid; but after a great crisis in life, fear loses its appetite for common food. She reached home, at any rate, without accident; but even there she felt a change in herself, a new feeling that she could not shake off. For her, there was now but one man in the world; which is to say that henceforth she cared to shine for his sake alone.

While the physiologist can define love promptly by following out natural laws, the moralist finds a far more perplexing problem before him if he attempts to consider love in all its developments due to social conditions. Still, in spite of the heresies of the endless sects that divide the church of Love, there is one broad and trenchant line of difference in doctrine, a line that all the discussion in the world can never deflect. A rigid application of this line explains the nature of the crisis through which the Duchess, like most women, was to pass. Passion she knew, but she did not love as yet.

Love and passion are two different conditions which poets and men of the world, philosophers and fools, alike continually confound. Love implies a give and take, a certainty of bliss that nothing can change; it means so close a clinging of the heart, and an exchange of happiness so constant, that there is no room left for jealousy. Then possession is a means and not an end; unfaithfulness may give pain, but the bond is not less close; the soul is neither more nor less ardent or troubled, but happy at every moment; in short, the divine breath of desire spreading from end to end of the immensity of Time

steeps it all for us in the selfsame hue; life takes the tint of the unclouded heaven. But Passion is the foreshadowing of Love, and of that Infinite to which all suffering souls aspire. Passion is a hope that may be cheated. Passion means both suffering and transition. Passion dies out when hope is dead. Men and women may pass through this experience many times without dishonor, for it is so natural to spring towards happiness; but there is only one love in a lifetime. All discussions of sentiment ever conducted on paper or by word of mouth may therefore be resumed by two questions—"Is it passion? Is it love?" So, since love comes into existence only through the intimate experience of the bliss which gives it lasting life, the Duchess was beneath the yoke of passion as yet; and as she knew the fierce tumult, the unconscious calculations, the fevered cravings, and all that is meant by that word passion—she suffered. Through all the trouble of her soul there rose eddying gusts of tempest, raised by vanity or self-love, or pride or a high spirit; for all these forms of egoism make common cause together.

She had said to this man, "I love you; I am yours!" Was it possible that the Duchesse de Langeais should have uttered those words—in vain? She must either be loved now or play her part of queen no longer. And then she felt the loneliness of the luxurious couch where pleasure had never yet set his glowing feet; and over and over again, while she tossed and writhed there, she said, "I want to be loved."

But the belief that she still had in herself gave her hope of success. The Duchess might be piqued, the vain Parisienne might be humiliated; but the woman saw glimpses of wedded happiness, and imagination, avenging the time lost for nature, took a delight in kindling the inextinguishable fire in her veins. She all but attained to the sensations of love; for amid her poignant doubt whether she was loved in return, she felt glad at heart to say to herself, "I love him!" As for her scruples, religion, and the world she could trample them under foot! Montriveau was her religion now. She spent the next day in a state of moral torpor, troubled by a physical unrest, which no words could express. She wrote letters and tore them all up, and invented a thousand impossible fancies.

When M. de Montriveau's usual hour arrived, she tried to think that he would come, and enjoyed the feeling of expectation. Her whole life was concentrated in the single sense of hearing. Sometimes she shut her eyes, straining her ears to listen through space, wishing that she could annihilate everything that lay between her and her lover, and so establish that perfect silence which sounds may traverse from afar. In her tense self-concentration, the ticking of the clock grew hateful to her; she stopped its ill-omened garrulity. The twelve strokes of midnight sounded from the drawing-room.

"Ah, God!" she cried, "to see him here would be happiness. And yet, it is

not so very long since he came here, brought by desire, and the tones of his voice filled this boudoir. And now there is nothing.”

She remembered the times that she had played the coquette with him, and how that her coquetry had cost her her lover, and the despairing tears flowed for long.

Her woman came at length with, “Mme la Duchesse does not know, perhaps, that it is two o’clock in the morning; I thought that madame was not feeling well.”

“Yes, I am going to bed,” said the Duchess, drying her eyes. “But remember, Suzanne, never to come in again without orders; I tell you this for the last time.”

For a week, Mme de Langeais went to every house where there was a hope of meeting M. de Montriveau. Contrary to her usual habits, she came early and went late; gave up dancing, and went to the card-tables. Her experiments were fruitless. She did not succeed in getting a glimpse of Armand. She did not dare to utter his name now. One evening, however, in a fit of despair, she spoke to Mme de Serizy, and asked as carelessly as she could, “You must have quarreled with M. de Montriveau? He is not to be seen at your house now.”

The Countess laughed. “So he does not come here either?” she returned. “He is not to be seen anywhere, for that matter. He is interested in some woman, no doubt.”

“I used to think that the Marquis de Ronquerolles was one of his friends ——” the Duchess began sweetly.

“I have never heard my brother say that he was acquainted with him.”

Mme de Langeais did not reply. Mme de Serizy concluded from the Duchess’s silence that she might apply the scourge with impunity to a discreet friendship which she had seen, with bitterness of soul, for a long time past.

“So you miss that melancholy personage, do you? I have heard most extraordinary things of him. Wound his feelings, he never comes back, he forgives nothing; and, if you love him, he keeps you in chains. To everything that I said of him, one of those that praise him sky-high would always answer, ‘He knows how to love!’ People are always telling me that Montriveau would give up all for his friend; that his is a great nature. Pooh! society does not want such tremendous natures. Men of that stamp are all very well at home; let them stay there and leave us to our pleasant littlenesses. What do you say, Antoinette?”

Woman of the world though she was, the Duchess seemed agitated, yet she replied in a natural voice that deceived her fair friend:

“I am sorry to miss him. I took a great interest in him, and promised to myself to be his sincere friend. I like great natures, dear friend, ridiculous though you may think it. To give oneself to a fool is a clear confession, is it not, that one is governed wholly by one’s senses?”

Mme de Serizy’s “preferences” had always been for commonplace men; her lover at the moment, the Marquis d’Aiglemont, was a fine, tall man.

After this, the Countess soon took her departure, you may be sure Mme de Langeais saw hope in Armand’s withdrawal from the world; she wrote to him at once; it was a humble, gentle letter, surely it would bring him if he loved her still. She sent her footman with it next day. On the servant’s return, she asked whether he had given the letter to M. de Montriveau himself, and could not restrain the movement of joy at the affirmative answer. Armand was in Paris! He stayed alone in his house; he did not go out into society! So she was loved! All day long she waited for an answer that never came. Again and again, when impatience grew unbearable, Antoinette found reasons for his delay. Armand felt embarrassed; the reply would come by post; but night came, and she could not deceive herself any longer. It was a dreadful day, a day of pain grown sweet, of intolerable heart-throbs, a day when the heart squanders the very forces of life in riot.

Next day she sent for an answer.

“M. le Marquis sent word that he would call on Mme la Duchesse,” reported Julien.

She fled lest her happiness should be seen in her face, and flung herself on her couch to devour her first sensations.

“He is coming!”

The thought rent her soul. And, in truth, woe unto those for whom suspense is not the most horrible time of tempest, while it increases and multiplies the sweetest joys; for they have nothing in them of that flame which quickens the images of things, giving to them a second existence, so that we cling as closely to the pure essence as to its outward and visible manifestation. What is suspense in love but a constant drawing upon an unfailing hope?—a submission to the terrible scourging of passion, while passion is yet happy, and the disenchantment of reality has not set in. The constant putting forth of strength and longing, called suspense, is surely, to the human soul, as fragrance to the flower that breathes it forth. We soon leave the brilliant, unsatisfying colours of tulips and coreopsis, but we turn again and again to drink in the sweetness of orange-blossoms or volkameria-flowers compared separately, each in its own land, to a betrothed bride, full of love, made fair by the past and future.

The Duchess learned the joys of this new life of hers through the rapture with which she received the scourgings of love. As this change wrought in her, she saw other destinies before her, and a better meaning in the things of life. As she hurried to her dressing-room, she understood what studied adornment and the most minute attention to her toilet mean when these are undertaken for love's sake and not for vanity. Even now this making ready helped her to bear the long time of waiting. A relapse of intense agitation set in when she was dressed; she passed through nervous paroxysms brought on by the dreadful power which sets the whole mind in ferment. Perhaps that power is only a disease, though the pain of it is sweet. The Duchess was dressed and waiting at two o'clock in the afternoon. At half-past eleven that night M. de Montriveau had not arrived. To try to give an idea of the anguish endured by a woman who might be said to be the spoilt child of civilization, would be to attempt to say how many imaginings the heart can condense into one thought. As well endeavour to measure the forces expended by the soul in a sigh whenever the bell rang; to estimate the drain of life when a carriage rolled past without stopping, and left her prostrate.

"Can he be playing with me?" she said, as the clocks struck midnight.

She grew white; her teeth chattered; she struck her hands together and leapt up and crossed the boudoir, recollecting as she did so how often he had come thither without a summons. But she resigned herself. Had she not seen him grow pale, and start up under the stinging barbs of irony? Then Mme de Langeais felt the horror of the woman's appointed lot; a man's is the active part, a woman must wait passively when she loves. If a woman goes beyond her beloved, she makes a mistake which few men can forgive; almost every man would feel that a woman lowers herself by this piece of angelic flattery. But Armand's was a great nature; he surely must be one of the very few who can repay such exceeding love by love that lasts forever.

"Well, I will make the advance," she told herself, as she tossed on her bed and found no sleep there; "I will go to him. I will not weary myself with holding out a hand to him, but I will hold it out. A man of a thousand will see a promise of love and constancy in every step that a woman takes towards him. Yes, the angels must come down from heaven to reach men; and I wish to be an angel for him."

Next day she wrote. It was a billet of the kind in which the intellects of the ten thousand Sevignes that Paris now can number particularly excel. And yet only a Duchesse de Langeais, brought up by Mme la Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, could have written that delicious note; no other woman could complain without lowering herself; could spread wings in such a flight without dragging her pinions in humiliation; rise gracefully in revolt; scold without giving offence; and pardon without compromising her personal dignity.

Julien went with the note. Julien, like his kind, was the victim of love's marches and countermarches.

"What did M. de Montriveau reply?" she asked, as indifferently as she could, when the man came back to report himself.

"M. le Marquis requested me to tell Mme la Duchesse that it was all right."

Oh the dreadful reaction of the soul upon herself! To have her heart stretched on the rack before curious witnesses; yet not to utter a sound, to be forced to keep silence! One of the countless miseries of the rich!

More than three weeks went by. Mme de Langeais wrote again and again, and no answer came from Montriveau. At last she gave out that she was ill, to gain a dispensation from attendance on the Princess and from social duties. She was only at home to her father the Duc de Navarreins, her aunt the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, the old Vidame de Pamiers (her maternal great-uncle), and to her husband's uncle, the Duc de Grandlieu. These persons found no difficulty in believing that the Duchess was ill, seeing that she grew thinner and paler and more dejected every day. The vague ardour of love, the smart of wounded pride, the continual prick of the only scorn that could touch her, the yearnings towards joys that she craved with a vain continual longing—all these things told upon her, mind and body; all the forces of her nature were stimulated to no purpose. She was paying the arrears of her life of make-believe.

She went out at last to a review. M. de Montriveau was to be there. For the Duchess, on the balcony of the Tuileries with the Royal Family, it was one of those festival days that are long remembered. She looked supremely beautiful in her languor; she was greeted with admiration in all eyes. It was Montriveau's presence that made her so fair.

Once or twice they exchanged glances. The General came almost to her feet in all the glory of that soldier's uniform, which produces an effect upon the feminine imagination to which the most prudish will confess. When a woman is very much in love, and has not seen her lover for two months, such a swift moment must be something like the phase of a dream when the eyes embrace a world that stretches away forever. Only women or young men can imagine the dull, frenzied hunger in the Duchess's eyes. As for older men, if during the paroxysms of early passion in youth they had experience of such phenomena of nervous power; at a later day it is so completely forgotten that they deny the very existence of the luxuriant ecstasy—the only name that can be given to these wonderful intuitions. Religious ecstasy is the aberration of a soul that has shaken off its bonds of flesh; whereas in amorous ecstasy all the forces of soul and body are embraced and blended in one. If a woman falls a victim to the tyrannous frenzy before which Mme de Langeais was forced to

bend, she will take one decisive resolution after another so swiftly that it is impossible to give account of them. Thought after thought rises and flits across her brain, as clouds are whirled by the wind across the grey veil of mist that shuts out the sun. Thenceforth the facts reveal all. And the facts are these.

The day after the review, Mme de Langeais sent her carriage and liveried servants to wait at the Marquis de Montriveau's door from eight o'clock in the morning till three in the afternoon. Armand lived in the Rue de Tournon, a few steps away from the Chamber of Peers, and that very day the House was sitting; but long before the peers returned to their palaces, several people had recognised the Duchess's carriage and liveries. The first of these was the Baron de Maulincour. That young officer had met with disdain from Mme de Langeais and a better reception from Mme de Serizy; he betook himself at once therefore to his mistress, and under seal of secrecy told her of this strange freak.

In a moment the news was spread with telegraphic speed through all the coteries in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; it reached the Tuileries and the Elysee-Bourbon; it was the sensation of the day, the matter of all the talk from noon till night. Almost everywhere the women denied the facts, but in such a manner that the report was confirmed; the men one and all believed it, and manifested a most indulgent interest in Mme de Langeais. Some among them threw the blame on Armand.

"That savage of a Montriveau is a man of bronze," said they; "he insisted on making this scandal, no doubt."

"Very well, then," others replied, "Mme de Langeais has been guilty of a most generous piece of imprudence. To renounce the world and rank, and fortune, and consideration for her lover's sake, and that in the face of all Paris, is as fine a coup d'etat for a woman as that barber's knife-thrust, which so affected Canning in a court of assize. Not one of the women who blame the Duchess would make a declaration worthy of ancient times. It is heroic of Mme de Langeais to proclaim herself so frankly. Now there is nothing left to her but to love Montriveau. There must be something great about a woman if she says, 'I will have but one passion.'"

"But what is to become of society, monsieur, if you honour vice in this way without respect for virtue?" asked the Comtesse de Granville, the attorney-general's wife.

While the Chateau, the Faubourg, and the Chaussee d'Antin were discussing the shipwreck of aristocratic virtue; while excited young men rushed about on horseback to make sure that the carriage was standing in the Rue de Tournon, and the Duchess in consequence was beyond a doubt in M. de Montriveau's rooms, Mme de Langeais, with heavy throbbing pulses, was

lying hidden away in her boudoir. And Armand?—he had been out all night, and at that moment was walking with M. de Marsay in the Gardens of the Tuileries. The elder members, of Mme de Langeais' family were engaged in calling upon one another, arranging to read her a homily and to hold a consultation as to the best way of putting a stop to the scandal.

At three o'clock, therefore, M. le Duc de Navarreins, the Vidame de Pamiers, the old Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, and the Duc de Grandlieu were assembled in Mme la Duchesse de Langeais' drawing-room. To them, as to all curious inquirers, the servants said that their mistress was not at home; the Duchess had made no exceptions to her orders. But these four personages shone conspicuous in that lofty sphere, of which the revolutions and hereditary pretensions are solemnly recorded year by year in the Almanach de Gotha, wherefore without some slight sketch of each of them this picture of society were incomplete.

The Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, in the feminine world, was a most poetic wreck of the reign of Louis Quinze. In her beautiful prime, so it was said, she had done her part to win for that monarch his appellation of le Bien-aime. Of her past charms of feature, little remained save a remarkably prominent slender nose, curved like a Turkish scimitar, now the principal ornament of a countenance that put you in mind of an old white glove. Add a few powdered curls, high-heeled pantoufles, a cap with upstanding loops of lace, black mittens, and a decided taste for ombre. But to do full justice to the lady, it must be said that she appeared in low-necked gowns of an evening (so high an opinion of her ruins had she), wore long gloves, and raddled her cheeks with Martin's classic rouge. An appalling amiability in her wrinkles, a prodigious brightness in the old lady's eyes, a profound dignity in her whole person, together with the triple barbed wit of her tongue, and an infallible memory in her head, made of her a real power in the land. The whole Cabinet des Chartes was entered in duplicate on the parchment of her brain. She knew all the genealogies of every noble house in Europe—princes, dukes, and counts—and could put her hand on the last descendants of Charlemagne in the direct line. No usurpation of title could escape the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry.

Young men who wished to stand well at Court, ambitious men, and young married women paid her assiduous homage. Her salon set the tone of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The words of this Talleyrand in petticoats were taken as final decrees. People came to consult her on questions of etiquette or usages, or to take lessons in good taste. And, in truth, no other old woman could put back her snuff-box in her pocket as the Princess could; while there was a precision and a grace about the movements of her skirts, when she sat down or crossed her feet, which drove the finest ladies of the young generation

to despair. Her voice had remained in her head during one-third of her lifetime; but she could not prevent a descent into the membranes of the nose, which lent to it a peculiar expressiveness. She still retained a hundred and fifty thousand livres of her great fortune, for Napoleon had generously returned her woods to her; so that personally and in the matter of possessions she was a woman of no little consequence.

This curious antique, seated in a low chair by the fireside, was chatting with the Vidame de Pamiers, a contemporary ruin. The Vidame was a big, tall, and spare man, a seigneur of the old school, and had been a Commander of the Order of Malta. His neck had always been so tightly compressed by a strangulation stock, that his cheeks pouched over it a little, and he held his head high; to many people this would have given an air of self-sufficiency, but in the Vidame it was justified by a Voltairean wit. His wide prominent eyes seemed to see everything, and as a matter of fact there was not much that they had not seen. Altogether, his person was a perfect model of aristocratic outline, slim and slender, supple and agreeable. He seemed as if he could be pliant or rigid at will, and twist and bend, or rear his head like a snake.

The Duc de Navarreins was pacing up and down the room with the Duc de Grandlieu. Both were men of fifty-six or thereabouts, and still hale; both were short, corpulent, flourishing, somewhat florid-complexioned men with jaded eyes, and lower lips that had begun to hang already. But for an exquisite refinement of accent, an urbane courtesy, and an ease of manner that could change in a moment to insolence, a superficial observer might have taken them for a couple of bankers. Any such mistake would have been impossible, however, if the listener could have heard them converse, and seen them on their guard with men whom they feared, vapid and commonplace with their equals, slippery with the inferiors whom courtiers and statesmen know how to tame by a tactful word, or to humiliate with an unexpected phrase.

Such were the representatives of the great noblesse that determined to perish rather than submit to any change. It was a noblesse that deserved praise and blame in equal measure; a noblesse that will never be judged impartially until some poet shall arise to tell how joyfully the nobles obeyed the King though their heads fell under a Richelieu's axe, and how deeply they scorned the guillotine of '89 as a foul revenge.

Another noticeable trait in all the four was a thin voice that agreed peculiarly well with their ideas and bearing. Among themselves, at any rate, they were on terms of perfect equality. None of them betrayed any sign of annoyance over the Duchess's escapade, but all of them had learned at Court to hide their feelings.

And here, lest critics should condemn the puerility of the opening of the

forthcoming scene, it is perhaps as well to remind the reader that Locke, once happening to be in the company of several great lords, renowned no less for their wit than for their breeding and political consistency, wickedly amused himself by taking down their conversation by some shorthand process of his own; and afterwards, when he read it over to them to see what they could make of it, they all burst out laughing. And, in truth, the tinsel jargon which circulates among the upper ranks in every country yields mighty little gold to the crucible when washed in the ashes of literature or philosophy. In every rank of society (some few Parisian salons excepted) the curious observer finds folly a constant quantity beneath a more or less transparent varnish. Conversation with any substance in it is a rare exception, and boeotianism is current coin in every zone. In the higher regions they must perforce talk more, but to make up for it they think the less. Thinking is a tiring exercise, and the rich like their lives to flow by easily and without effort. It is by comparing the fundamental matter of jests, as you rise in the social scale from the street-boy to the peer of France, that the observer arrives at a true comprehension of M. de Talleyrand's maxim, "The manner is everything"; an elegant rendering of the legal axiom, "The form is of more consequence than the matter." In the eyes of the poet the advantage rests with the lower classes, for they seldom fail to give a certain character of rude poetry to their thoughts. Perhaps also this same observation may explain the sterility of the salons, their emptiness, their shallowness, and the repugnance felt by men of ability for bartering their ideas for such pitiful small change.

The Duke suddenly stopped as if some bright idea occurred to him, and remarked to his neighbour:

"So you have sold Tornthon?"

"No, he is ill. I am very much afraid I shall lose him, and I should be uncommonly sorry. He is a very good hunter. Do you know how the Duchesse de Marigny is?"

"No. I did not go this morning. I was just going out to call when you came in to speak about Antoinette. But yesterday she was very ill indeed; they had given her up, she took the sacrament."

"Her death will make a change in your cousin's position."

"Not at all. She gave away her property in her lifetime, only keeping an annuity. She made over the Guebriant estate to her niece, Mme de Soulanges, subject to a yearly charge."

"It will be a great loss for society. She was a kind woman. Her family will miss her; her experience and advice carried weight. Her son Marigny is an amiable man; he has a sharp wit, he can talk. He is pleasant, very pleasant."

Pleasant? oh, that no one can deny, but—ill regulated to the last degree. Well, and yet it is an extraordinary thing, he is very acute. He was dining at the club the other day with that moneyed Chaussee-d'Antin set. Your uncle (he always goes there for his game of cards) found him there to his astonishment, and asked if he was a member. 'Yes,' said he, 'I don't go into society now; I am living among the bankers.'—You know why?" added the Marquis, with a meaning smile.

"No," said the Duke.

"He is smitten with that little Mme Keller, Gondreville's daughter; she is only lately married, and has a great vogue, they say, in that set."

"Well, Antoinette does not find time heavy on her hands, it seems," remarked the Vidame.

"My affection for that little woman has driven me to find a singular pastime," replied the Princess, as she returned her snuff-box to her pocket.

"Dear aunt, I am extremely vexed," said the Duke, stopping short in his walk. "Nobody but one of Bonaparte's men could ask such an indecorous thing of a woman of fashion. Between ourselves, Antoinette might have made a better choice."

"The Montriveaus are a very old family and very well connected, my dear," replied the Princess; "they are related to all the noblest houses of Burgundy. If the Dulmen branch of the Arschoot Rivaudoults should come to an end in Galicia, the Montriveaus would succeed to the Arschoot title and estates. They inherit through their great-grandfather.

"Are you sure?"

"I know it better than this Montriveau's father did. I told him about it, I used to see a good deal of him; and, Chevalier of several orders though he was, he only laughed; he was an encyclopaedist. But his brother turned the relationship to good account during the emigration. I have heard it said that his northern kinsfolk were most kind in every way——"

"Yes, to be sure. The Comte de Montriveau died at St. Petersburg," said the Vidame. "I met him there. He was a big man with an incredible passion for oysters."

"However many did he eat?" asked the Duc de Grandlieu.

"Ten dozen every day."

"And did they not disagree with him?"

"Not the least bit in the world."

“Why, that is extraordinary! Had he neither the stone nor gout, nor any other complaint, in consequence?”

“No; his health was perfectly good, and he died through an accident.”

“By accident! Nature prompted him to eat oysters, so probably he required them; for up to a certain point our predominant tastes are conditions of our existence.”

“I am of your opinion,” said the Princess, with a smile.

“Madame, you always put a malicious construction on things,” returned the Marquis.

“I only want you to understand that these remarks might leave a wrong impression on a young woman’s mind,” said she, and interrupted herself to exclaim, “But this niece, this niece of mine!”

“Dear aunt, I still refuse to believe that she can have gone to M. de Montriveau,” said the Duc de Navarreins.

“Bah!” returned the Princess.

“What do you think, Vidame?” asked the Marquis.

“If the Duchess were an artless simpleton, I should think that——”

“But when a woman is in love she becomes an artless simpleton,” retorted the Princess. “Really, my poor Vidame, you must be getting older.”

“After all, what is to be done?” asked the Duke.

“If my dear niece is wise,” said the Princess, “she will go to Court this evening—fortunately, today is Monday, and reception day—and you must see that we all rally round her and give the lie to this absurd rumour. There are hundreds of ways of explaining things; and if the Marquis de Montriveau is a gentleman, he will come to our assistance. We will bring these children to listen to reason——”

“But, dear aunt, it is not easy to tell M. de Montriveau the truth to his face. He is one of Bonaparte’s pupils, and he has a position. Why, he is one of the great men of the day; he is high up in the Guards, and very useful there. He has not a spark of ambition. He is just the man to say, ‘Here is my commission, leave me in peace,’ if the King should say a word that he did not like.”

“Then, pray, what are his opinions?”

“Very unsound.”

“Really,” sighed the Princess, “the King is, as he always has been, a

Jacobin under the Lilies of France.”

“Oh! not quite so bad,” said the Vidame.

“Yes; I have known him for a long while. The man that pointed out the Court to his wife on the occasion of her first state dinner in public with, ‘These are our people,’ could only be a black-hearted scoundrel. I can see Monsieur exactly the same as ever in the King. The bad brother who voted so wrongly in his department of the Constituent Assembly was sure to compound with the Liberals and allow them to argue and talk. This philosophical cant will be just as dangerous now for the younger brother as it used to be for the elder; this fat man with the little mind is amusing himself by creating difficulties, and how his successor is to get out of them I do not know; he holds his younger brother in abhorrence; he would be glad to think as he lay dying, ‘He will not reign very long——’”

“Aunt, he is the King, and I have the honour to be in his service——”

“But does your post take away your right of free speech, my dear? You come of quite as good a house as the Bourbons. If the Guises had shown a little more resolution, His Majesty would be a nobody at this day. It is time I went out of this world, the noblesse is dead. Yes, it is all over with you, my children,” she continued, looking as she spoke at the Vidame. “What has my niece done that the whole town should be talking about her? She is in the wrong; I disapprove of her conduct, a useless scandal is a blunder; that is why I still have my doubts about this want of regard for appearances; I brought her up, and I know that——”

Just at that moment the Duchess came out of her boudoir. She had recognised her aunt’s voice and heard the name of Montriveau. She was still in her loose morning-gown; and even as she came in, M. de Grandlieu, looking carelessly out of the window, saw his niece’s carriage driving back along the street. The Duke took his daughter’s face in both hands and kissed her on the forehead.

“So, dear girl,” he said, “you do not know what is going on?”

“Has anything extraordinary happened, father dear?”

“Why, all Paris believes that you are with M. de Montriveau.”

“My dear Antoinette, you were at home all the time, were you not?” said the Princess, holding out a hand, which the Duchess kissed with affectionate respect.

“Yes, dear mother; I was at home all the time. And,” she added, as she turned to greet the Vidame and the Marquis, “I wished that all Paris should think that I was with M. de Montriveau.”

The Duke flung up his hands, struck them together in despair, and folded his arms.

“Then, cannot you see what will come of this mad freak?” he asked at last.

But the aged Princess had suddenly risen, and stood looking steadily at the Duchess, the younger woman flushed, and her eyes fell. Mme de Chauvry gently drew her closer, and said, “My little angel, let me kiss you!”

She kissed her niece very affectionately on the forehead, and continued smiling, while she held her hand in a tight clasp.

“We are not under the Valois now, dear child. You have compromised your husband and your position. Still, we will arrange to make everything right.”

“But, dear aunt, I do not wish to make it right at all. It is my wish that all Paris should say that I was with M. de Montriveau this morning. If you destroy that belief, however ill grounded it may be, you will do me a singular disservice.”

“Do you really wish to ruin yourself, child, and to grieve your family?”

“My family, father, unintentionally condemned me to irreparable misfortune when they sacrificed me to family considerations. You may, perhaps, blame me for seeking alleviations, but you will certainly feel for me.”

“After all the endless pains you take to settle your daughters suitably!” muttered M. de Navarreins, addressing the Vidame.

The Princess shook a stray grain of snuff from her skirts. “My dear little girl,” she said, “be happy, if you can. We are not talking of troubling your felicity, but of reconciling it with social usages. We all of us here assembled know that marriage is a defective institution tempered by love. But when you take a lover, is there any need to make your bed in the Place du Carrousel? See now, just be a bit reasonable, and hear what we have to say.”

“I am listening.”

“Mme la Duchesse,” began the Duc de Grandlieu, “if it were any part of an uncle’s duty to look after his nieces, he ought to have a position; society would owe him honours and rewards and a salary, exactly as if he were in the King’s service. So I am not here to talk about my nephew, but of your own interests. Let us look ahead a little. If you persist in making a scandal—I have seen the animal before, and I own that I have no great liking for him—Langeais is stingy enough, and he does not care a rap for anyone but himself; he will have a separation; he will stick to your money, and leave you poor, and consequently you will be a nobody. The income of a hundred thousand livres that you have just inherited from your maternal great-aunt will go to pay for his mistresses’ amusements. You will be bound and gagged by the law; you

will have to say Amen to all these arrangements. Suppose M. de Montriveau leaves you—dear me! do not let us put ourselves in a passion, my dear niece; a man does not leave a woman while she is young and pretty; still, we have seen so many pretty women left disconsolate, even among princesses, that you will permit the supposition, an all but impossible supposition I quite wish to believe.—Well, suppose that he goes, what will become of you without a husband? Keep well with your husband as you take care of your beauty; for beauty, after all, is a woman's parachute, and a husband also stands between you and worse. I am supposing that you are happy and loved to the end, and I am leaving unpleasant or unfortunate events altogether out of the reckoning. This being so, fortunately or unfortunately, you may have children. What are they to be? Montriveaus? Very well; they certainly will not succeed to their father's whole fortune. You will want to give them all that you have; he will wish to do the same. Nothing more natural, dear me! And you will find the law against you. How many times have we seen heirs-at-law bringing a law-suit to recover the property from illegitimate children? Every court of law rings with such actions all over the world. You will create a *fidei commissum* perhaps; and if the trustee betrays your confidence, your children have no remedy against him; and they are ruined. So choose carefully. You see the perplexities of the position. In every possible way your children will be sacrificed of necessity to the fancies of your heart; they will have no recognised status. While they are little they will be charming; but, Lord! some day they will reproach you for thinking of no one but your two selves. We old gentlemen know all about it. Little boys grow up into men, and men are ungrateful beings. When I was in Germany, did I not hear young de Horn say, after supper, 'If my mother had been an honest woman, I should be prince-regnant!' If?' We have spent our lives in hearing plebeians say if. If brought about the Revolution. When a man cannot lay the blame on his father or mother, he holds God responsible for his hard lot. In short, dear child, we are here to open your eyes. I will say all I have to say in a few words, on which you had better meditate: A woman ought never to put her husband in the right."

"Uncle, so long as I cared for nobody, I could calculate; I looked at interests then, as you do; now, I can only feel."

"But, my dear little girl," remonstrated the Vidame, "life is simply a complication of interests and feelings; to be happy, more particularly in your position, one must try to reconcile one's feelings with one's interests. A grisette may love according to her fancy, that is intelligible enough, but you have a pretty fortune, a family, a name and a place at Court, and you ought not to fling them out of the window. And what have we been asking you to do to keep them all?—To manoeuvre carefully instead of falling foul of social conventions. Lord! I shall very soon be eighty years old, and I cannot

recollect, under any regime, a love worth the price that you are willing to pay for the love of this lucky young man.”

The Duchess silenced the Vidame with a look; if Montriveau could have seen that glance, he would have forgiven all.

“It would be very effective on the stage,” remarked the Duc de Grandlieu, “but it all amounts to nothing when your jointure and position and independence is concerned. You are not grateful, my dear niece. You will not find many families where the relatives have courage enough to teach the wisdom gained by experience, and to make rash young heads listen to reason. Renounce your salvation in two minutes, if it pleases you to damn yourself; well and good; but reflect well beforehand when it comes to renouncing your income. I know of no confessor who remits the pains of poverty. I have a right, I think, to speak in this way to you; for if you are ruined, I am the one person who can offer you a refuge. I am almost an uncle to Langeais, and I alone have a right to put him in the wrong.”

The Duc de Navarreins roused himself from painful reflections.

“Since you speak of feeling, my child,” he said, “let me remind you that a woman who bears your name ought to be moved by sentiments which do not touch ordinary people. Can you wish to give an advantage to the Liberals, to those Jesuits of Robespierre’s that are doing all they can to vilify the noblesse? Some things a Navarreins cannot do without failing in duty to his house. You would not be alone in your dishonor——”

“Come, come!” said the Princess. “Dishonor? Do not make such a fuss about the journey of an empty carriage, children, and leave me alone with Antoinette. All three of you come and dine with me. I will undertake to arrange matters suitably. You men understand nothing; you are beginning to talk sourly already, and I have no wish to see a quarrel between you and my dear child. Do me the pleasure to go.”

The three gentlemen probably guessed the Princess’s intentions; they took their leave. M. de Navarreins kissed his daughter on the forehead with, “Come, be good, dear child. It is not too late yet if you choose.”

“Couldn’t we find some good fellow in the family to pick a quarrel with this Montriveau?” said the Vidame, as they went downstairs.

When the two women were alone, the Princess beckoned her niece to a little low chair by her side.

“My pearl,” said she, “in this world below, I know nothing worse calumniated than God and the eighteenth century; for as I look back over my own young days, I do not recollect that a single duchess trampled the

proprieties underfoot as you have just done. Novelists and scribblers brought the reign of Louis XV into disrepute. Do not believe them. The du Barry, my dear, was quite as good as the Widow Scarron, and the more agreeable woman of the two. In my time a woman could keep her dignity among her gallantries. Indiscretion was the ruin of us, and the beginning of all the mischief. The philosophists—the nobodies whom we admitted into our salons—had no more gratitude or sense of decency than to make an inventory of our hearts, to traduce us one and all, and to rail against the age by way of a return for our kindness. The people are not in a position to judge of anything whatsoever; they looked at the facts, not at the form. But the men and women of those times, my heart, were quite as remarkable as at any other period of the Monarchy. Not one of your Werthers, none of your notabilities, as they are called, never a one of your men in yellow kid gloves and trousers that disguise the poverty of their legs, would cross Europe in the dress of a travelling hawker to brave the daggers of a Duke of Modena, and to shut himself up in the dressing-room of the Regent's daughter at the risk of his life. Not one of your little consumptive patients with their tortoiseshell eyeglasses would hide himself in a closet for six weeks, like Lauzun, to keep up his mistress's courage while she was lying in of her child. There was more passion in M. de Jaucourt's little finger than in your whole race of higglers that leave a woman to better themselves elsewhere! Just tell me where to find the page that would be cut in pieces and buried under the floorboards for one kiss on the Konigsmark's gloved finger!

“Really, it would seem today that the roles are exchanged, and women are expected to show their devotion for men. These modern gentlemen are worth less, and think more of themselves. Believe me, my dear, all these adventures that have been made public, and now are turned against our good Louis XV, were kept quite secret at first. If it had not been for a pack of poetasters, scribblers, and moralists, who hung about our waiting-women, and took down their slanders, our epoch would have appeared in literature as a well-conducted age. I am justifying the century and not its fringe. Perhaps a hundred women of quality were lost; but for every one, the rogues set down ten, like the gazettes after a battle when they count up the losses of the beaten side. And in any case I do not know that the Revolution and the Empire can reproach us; they were coarse, dull, licentious times. Faugh! it is revolting. Those are the brothels of French history.

“This preamble, my dear child,” she continued after a pause, “brings me to the thing that I have to say. If you care for Montriveau, you are quite at liberty to love him at your ease, and as much as you can. I know by experience that, unless you are locked up (but locking people up is out of fashion now), you will do as you please; I should have done the same at your age. Only, sweetheart, I should not have given up my right to be the mother of future

Ducs de Langeais. So mind appearances. The Vidame is right. No man is worth a single one of the sacrifices which we are foolish enough to make for their love. Put yourself in such a position that you may still be M. de Langeais' wife, in case you should have the misfortune to repent. When you are an old woman, you will be very glad to hear mass said at Court, and not in some provincial convent. Therein lies the whole question. A single imprudence means an allowance and a wandering life; it means that you are at the mercy of your lover; it means that you must put up with insolence from women that are not so honest, precisely because they have been very vulgarly sharp-witted. It would be a hundred times better to go to Montriveau's at night in a cab, and disguised, instead of sending your carriage in broad daylight. You are a little fool, my dear child! Your carriage flattered his vanity; your person would have ensnared his heart. All this that I have said is just and true; but, for my own part, I do not blame you. You are two centuries behind the times with your false ideas of greatness. There, leave us to arrange your affairs, and say that Montriveau made your servants drunk to gratify his vanity and to compromise you——”

The Duchess rose to her feet with a spring. “In Heaven's name, aunt, do not slander him!”

The old Princess's eyes flashed.

“Dear child,” she said, “I should have liked to spare such of your illusions as were not fatal. But there must be an end of all illusions now. You would soften me if I were not so old. Come, now, do not vex him, or us, or anyone else. I will undertake to satisfy everybody; but promise me not to permit yourself a single step henceforth until you have consulted me. Tell me all, and perhaps I may bring it all right again.”

“Aunt, I promise——”

“To tell me everything?”

“Yes, everything. Everything that can be told.”

“But, my sweetheart, it is precisely what cannot be told that I want to know. Let us understand each other thoroughly. Come, let me put my withered old lips on your beautiful forehead. No; let me do as I wish. I forbid you to kiss my bones. Old people have a courtesy of their own.... There, take me down to my carriage,” she added, when she had kissed her niece.

“Then may I go to him in disguise, dear aunt?”

“Why—yes. The story can always be denied,” said the old Princess.

This was the one idea which the Duchess had clearly grasped in the sermon. When Mme de Chauvry was seated in the corner of her carriage,

Mme de Langeais bade her a graceful adieu and went up to her room. She was quite happy again.

“My person would have snared his heart; my aunt is right; a man cannot surely refuse a pretty woman when she understands how to offer herself.”

That evening, at the Elysee-Bourbon, the Duc de Navarreins, M. de Pamiers, M. de Marsay, M. de Grandlieu, and the Duc de Maufrigneuse triumphantly refuted the scandals that were circulating with regard to the Duchesse de Langeais. So many officers and other persons had seen Montriveau walking in the Tuileries that morning, that the silly story was set down to chance, which takes all that is offered. And so, in spite of the fact that the Duchess’s carriage had waited before Montriveau’s door, her character became as clear and as spotless as Membrino’s sword after Sancho had polished it up.

But, at two o’clock, M. de Ronquerolles passed Montriveau in a deserted alley, and said with a smile, “She is coming on, is your Duchess. Go on, keep it up!” he added, and gave a significant cut of the riding whip to his mare, who sped off like a bullet down the avenue.

Two days after the fruitless scandal, Mme de Langeais wrote to M. de Montriveau. That letter, like the preceding ones, remained unanswered. This time she took her own measures, and bribed M. de Montriveau’s man, Auguste. And so at eight o’clock that evening she was introduced into Armand’s apartment. It was not the room in which that secret scene had passed; it was entirely different. The Duchess was told that the General would not be at home that night. Had he two houses? The man would give no answer. Mme de Langeais had bought the key of the room, but not the man’s whole loyalty.

When she was left alone she saw her fourteen letters lying on an old-fashioned stand, all of them uncreased and unopened. He had not read them. She sank into an easy-chair, and for a while she lost consciousness. When she came to herself, Auguste was holding vinegar for her to inhale.

“A carriage; quick!” she ordered.

The carriage came. She hastened downstairs with convulsive speed, and left orders that no one was to be admitted. For twenty-four hours she lay in bed, and would have no one near her but her woman, who brought her a cup of orange-flower water from time to time. Suzette heard her mistress moan once or twice, and caught a glimpse of tears in the brilliant eyes, now circled with dark shadows.

The next day, amid despairing tears, Mme de Langeais took her resolution. Her man of business came for an interview, and no doubt received instructions

of some kind. Afterwards she sent for the Vidame de Pamiers; and while she waited, she wrote a letter to M. de Montriveau. The Vidame punctually came towards two o'clock that afternoon, to find his young cousin looking white and worn, but resigned; never had her divine loveliness been more poetic than now in the languor of her agony.

"You owe this assignation to your eighty-four years, dear cousin," she said. "Ah! do not smile, I beg of you, when an unhappy woman has reached the lowest depths of wretchedness. You are a gentleman, and after the adventures of your youth you must feel some indulgence for women."

"None whatever," said he.

"Indeed!"

"Everything is in their favour."

"Ah! Well, you are one of the inner family circle; possibly you will be the last relative, the last friend whose hand I shall press, so I can ask your good offices. Will you, dear Vidame, do me a service which I could not ask of my own father, nor of my uncle Grandlieu, nor of any woman? You cannot fail to understand. I beg of you to do my bidding, and then to forget what you have done, whatever may come of it. It is this: Will you take this letter and go to M. de Montriveau? will you see him yourself, give it into his hands, and ask him, as you men can ask things between yourselves—for you have a code of honour between man and man which you do not use with us, and a different way of regarding things between yourselves—ask him if he will read this letter? Not in your presence. Certain feelings men hide from each other. I give you authority to say, if you think it necessary to bring him, that it is a question of life or death for me. If he deigns——"

"Deigns!" repeated the Vidame.

"If he deigns to read it," the Duchess continued with dignity, "say one thing more. You will go to see him about five o'clock, for I know that he will dine at home today at that time. Very good. By way of answer he must come to see me. If, three hours afterwards, by eight o'clock, he does not leave his house, all will be over. The Duchesse de Langeais will have vanished from the world. I shall not be dead, dear friend, no, but no human power will ever find me again on this earth. Come and dine with me; I shall at least have one friend with me in the last agony. Yes, dear cousin, tonight will decide my fate; and whatever happens to me, I pass through an ordeal by fire. There! not a word. I will hear nothing of the nature of comment or advice——Let us chat and laugh together," she added, holding out a hand, which he kissed. "We will be like two grey-headed philosophers who have learned how to enjoy life to the last moment. I will look my best; I will be very enchanting for you. You

perhaps will be the last man to set eyes on the Duchesse de Langeais.”

The Vicomte bowed, took the letter, and went without a word. At five o'clock he returned. His cousin had studied to please him, and she looked lovely indeed. The room was gay with flowers as if for a festivity; the dinner was exquisite. For the grey-headed Vidame the Duchess displayed all the brilliancy of her wit; she was more charming than she had ever been before. At first the Vidame tried to look on all these preparations as a young woman's jest; but now and again the attempted illusion faded, the spell of his fair cousin's charm was broken. He detected a shudder caused by some kind of sudden dread, and once she seemed to listen during a pause.

“What is the matter?” he asked.

“Hush!” she said.

At seven o'clock the Duchess left him for a few minutes. When she came back again she was dressed as her maid might have dressed for a journey. She asked her guest to be her escort, took his arm, sprang into a hackney coach, and by a quarter to eight they stood outside M. de Montriveau's door.

Armand meantime had been reading the following letter:—

“MY FRIEND,—I went to your rooms for a few minutes without your knowledge; I found my letters there, and took them away. This cannot be indifference, Armand, between us; and hatred would show itself quite differently. If you love me, make an end of this cruel play, or you will kill me, and afterwards, learning how much you were loved, you might be in despair. If I have not rightly understood you, if you have no feeling towards me but aversion, which implies both contempt and disgust, then I give up all hope. A man never recovers from those feelings. You will have no regrets. Dreadful though that thought may be, it will comfort me in my long sorrow. Regrets? Oh, my Armand, may I never know of them; if I thought that I had caused you a single regret—But, no, I will not tell you what desolation I should feel. I should be living still, and I could not be your wife; it would be too late!

“Now that I have given myself wholly to you in thought, to whom else should I give myself?—to God. The eyes that you loved for a little while shall never look on another man's face; and may the glory of God blind them to all besides. I shall never hear human voices more since I heard yours—so gentle at the first, so terrible yesterday; for it seems to me that I am still only on the morrow of your vengeance. And now may the will of God consume me. Between His wrath and yours, my friend, there will be nothing left for me but a little space for tears and prayers.

“Perhaps you wonder why I write to you? Ah! do not think ill of me if I keep a gleam of hope, and give one last sigh to happy life before I take leave

of it forever. I am in a hideous position. I feel all the inward serenity that comes when a great resolution has been taken, even while I hear the last growlings of the storm. When you went out on that terrible adventure which so drew me to you, Armand, you went from the desert to the oasis with a good guide to show you the way. Well, I am going out of the oasis into the desert, and you are a pitiless guide to me. And yet you only, my friend, can understand how melancholy it is to look back for the last time on happiness—to you, and you only, I can make moan without a blush. If you grant my entreaty, I shall be happy; if you are inexorable, I shall expiate the wrong that I have done. After all, it is natural, is it not, that a woman should wish to live, invested with all noble feelings, in her friend's memory? Oh! my one and only love, let her to whom you gave life go down into the tomb in the belief that she is great in your eyes. Your harshness led me to reflect; and now that I love you so, it seems to me that I am less guilty than you think. Listen to my justification, I owe it to you; and you that are all the world to me, owe me at least a moment's justice.

“I have learned by my own anguish all that I made you suffer by my coquetry; but in those days I was utterly ignorant of love. You know what the torture is, and you mete it out to me! During those first eight months that you gave me you never roused any feeling of love in me. Do you ask why this was so, my friend? I can no more explain it than I can tell you why I love you now. Oh! certainly it flattered my vanity that I should be the subject of your passionate talk, and receive those burning glances of yours; but you left me cold. No, I was not a woman; I had no conception of womanly devotion and happiness. Who was to blame? You would have despised me, would you not, if I had given myself without the impulse of passion? Perhaps it is the highest height to which we can rise—to give all and receive no joy; perhaps there is no merit in yielding oneself to bliss that is foreseen and ardently desired. Alas, my friend, I can say this now; these thoughts came to me when I played with you; and you seemed to me so great even then that I would not have you owe the gift to pity——What is this that I have written?

“I have taken back all my letters; I am flinging them one by one on the fire; they are burning. You will never know what they confessed—all the love and the passion and the madness——

“I will say no more, Armand; I will stop. I will not say another word of my feelings. If my prayers have not echoed from my soul through yours, I also, woman that I am, decline to owe your love to your pity. It is my wish to be loved, because you cannot choose but love me, or else to be left without mercy. If you refuse to read this letter, it shall be burnt. If, after you have read it, you do not come to me within three hours, to be henceforth forever my husband, the one man in the world for me; then I shall never blush to know

that this letter is in your hands, the pride of my despair will protect my memory from all insult, and my end shall be worthy of my love. When you see me no more on earth, albeit I shall still be alive, you yourself will not think without a shudder of the woman who, in three hours' time, will live only to overwhelm you with her tenderness; a woman consumed by a hopeless love, and faithful—not to memories of past joys—but to a love that was slighted.

“The Duchesse de la Valliere wept for lost happiness and vanished power; but the Duchesse de Langeais will be happy that she may weep and be a power for you still. Yes, you will regret me. I see clearly that I was not of this world, and I thank you for making it clear to me.

“Farewell; you will never touch my axe. Yours was the executioner's axe, mine is God's; yours kills, mine saves. Your love was but mortal, it could not endure disdain or ridicule; mine can endure all things without growing weaker, it will last eternally. Ah! I feel a sombre joy in crushing you that believe yourself so great; in humbling you with the calm, indulgent smile of one of the least among the angels that lie at the feet of God, for to them is given the right and the power to protect and watch over men in His name. You have but felt fleeting desires, while the poor nun will shed the light of her ceaseless and ardent prayer about you, she will shelter you all your life long beneath the wings of a love that has nothing of earth in it.

“I have a presentiment of your answer; our trysting place shall be—in heaven. Strength and weakness can both enter there, dear Armand; the strong and the weak are bound to suffer. This thought soothes the anguish of my final ordeal. So calm am I that I should fear that I had ceased to love you if I were not about to leave the world for your sake.

“ANTOINETTE.”

“Dear Vidame,” said the Duchess as they reached Montriveau's house, “do me the kindness to ask at the door whether he is at home.” The Vidame, obedient after the manner of the eighteenth century to a woman's wish, got out, and came back to bring his cousin an affirmative answer that sent a shudder through her. She grasped his hand tightly in hers, suffered him to kiss her on either cheek, and begged him to go at once. He must not watch her movements nor try to protect her. “But the people passing in the street,” he objected.

“No one can fail in respect to me,” she said. It was the last word spoken by the Duchess and the woman of fashion.

The Vidame went. Mme de Langeais wrapped herself about in her cloak, and stood on the doorstep until the clocks struck eight. The last stroke died away. The unhappy woman waited ten, fifteen minutes; to the last she tried to

see a fresh humiliation in the delay, then her faith ebbed. She turned to leave the fatal threshold.

“Oh, God!” the cry broke from her in spite of herself; it was the first word spoken by the Carmelite.

Montriveau and some of his friends were talking together. He tried to hasten them to a conclusion, but his clock was slow, and by the time he started out for the Hotel de Langeais the Duchess was hurrying on foot through the streets of Paris, goaded by the dull rage in her heart. She reached the Boulevard d’Enfer, and looked out for the last time through falling tears on the noisy, smoky city that lay below in a red mist, lighted up by its own lamps. Then she hailed a cab, and drove away, never to return. When the Marquis de Montriveau reached the Hotel de Langeais, and found no trace of his mistress, he thought that he had been duped. He hurried away at once to the Vidame, and found that worthy gentleman in the act of slipping on his flowered dressing-gown, thinking the while of his fair cousin’s happiness.

Montriveau gave him one of the terrific glances that produced the effect of an electric shock on men and women alike.

“Is it possible that you have lent yourself to some cruel hoax, monsieur?” Montriveau exclaimed. “I have just come from Mme de Langeais’ house; the servants say that she is out.”

“Then a great misfortune has happened, no doubt,” returned the Vidame, “and through your fault. I left the Duchess at your door——”

“When?”

“At a quarter to eight.”

“Good evening,” returned Montriveau, and he hurried home to ask the porter whether he had seen a lady standing on the doorstep that evening.

“Yes, my Lord Marquis, a handsome woman, who seemed very much put out. She was crying like a Magdalen, but she never made a sound, and stood as upright as a post. Then at last she went, and my wife and I that were watching her while she could not see us, heard her say, ‘Oh, God!’ so that it went to our hearts, asking your pardon, to hear her say it.”

Montriveau, in spite of all his firmness, turned pale at those few words. He wrote a few lines to Ronquerolles, sent off the message at once, and went up to his rooms. Ronquerolles came just about midnight.

Armand gave him the Duchess’s letter to read.

“Well?” asked Ronquerolles.

“She was here at my door at eight o’clock; at a quarter-past eight she had

gone. I have lost her, and I love her. Oh! if my life were my own, I could blow my brains out.”

“Pooh, pooh! Keep cool,” said Ronquerolles. “Duchesses do not fly off like wagtails. She cannot travel faster than three leagues an hour, and tomorrow we will ride six.—Confound it! Mme de Langeais is no ordinary woman,” he continued. “Tomorrow we will all of us mount and ride. The police will put us on her track during the day. She must have a carriage; angels of that sort have no wings. We shall find her whether she is on the road or hidden in Paris. There is the semaphore. We can stop her. You shall be happy. But, my dear fellow, you have made a blunder, of which men of your energy are very often guilty. They judge others by themselves, and do not know the point when human nature gives way if you strain the cords too tightly. Why did you not say a word to me sooner? I would have told you to be punctual. Good-bye till tomorrow,” he added, as Montriveau said nothing. “Sleep if you can,” he added, with a grasp of the hand.

But the greatest resources which society has ever placed at the disposal of statesmen, kings, ministers, bankers, or any human power, in fact, were all exhausted in vain. Neither Montriveau nor his friends could find any trace of the Duchess. It was clear that she had entered a convent. Montriveau determined to search, or to institute a search, for her through every convent in the world. He must have her, even at the cost of all the lives in a town. And in justice to this extraordinary man, it must be said that his frenzied passion awoke to the same ardour daily and lasted through five years. Only in 1829 did the Duc de Navarreins hear by chance that his daughter had travelled to Spain as Lady Julia Hopwood’s maid, that she had left her service at Cadiz, and that Lady Julia never discovered that Mlle Caroline was the illustrious duchess whose sudden disappearance filled the minds of the highest society of Paris.

The feelings of the two lovers when they met again on either side of the grating in the Carmelite convent should now be comprehended to the full, and the violence of the passion awakened in either soul will doubtless explain the catastrophe of the story.

In 1823 the Duc de Langeais was dead, and his wife was free. Antoinette de Navarreins was living, consumed by love, on a ledge of rock in the Mediterranean; but it was in the Pope’s power to dissolve Sister Theresa’s vows. The happiness bought by so much love might yet bloom for the two lovers. These thoughts sent Montriveau flying from Cadiz to Marseilles, and from Marseilles to Paris.

A few months after his return to France, a merchant brig, fitted out and munitioned for active service, set sail from the port of Marseilles for Spain.

The vessel had been chartered by several distinguished men, most of them Frenchmen, who, smitten with a romantic passion for the East, wished to make a journey to those lands. Montriveau's familiar knowledge of Eastern customs made him an invaluable travelling companion, and at the entreaty of the rest he had joined the expedition; the Minister of War appointed him lieutenant-general, and put him on the Artillery Commission to facilitate his departure.

Twenty-four hours later the brig lay to off the north-west shore of an island within sight of the Spanish coast. She had been specially chosen for her shallow keel and light mastage, so that she might lie at anchor in safety half a league away from the reefs that secure the island from approach in this direction. If fishing vessels or the people on the island caught sight of the brig, they were scarcely likely to feel suspicious of her at once; and besides, it was easy to give a reason for her presence without delay. Montriveau hoisted the flag of the United States before they came in sight of the island, and the crew of the vessel were all American sailors, who spoke nothing but English. One of M. de Montriveau's companions took the men ashore in the ship's longboat, and made them so drunk at an inn in the little town that they could not talk. Then he gave out that the brig was manned by treasure-seekers, a gang of men whose hobby was well known in the United States; indeed, some Spanish writer had written a history of them. The presence of the brig among the reefs was now sufficiently explained. The owners of the vessel, according to the self-styled boatswain's mate, were looking for the wreck of a galleon which foundered thereabouts in 1778 with a cargo of treasure from Mexico. The people at the inn and the authorities asked no more questions.

Armand, and the devoted friends who were helping him in his difficult enterprise, were all from the first of the opinion that there was no hope of rescuing or carrying off Sister Theresa by force or stratagem from the side of the little town. Wherefore these bold spirits, with one accord, determined to take the bull by the horns. They would make a way to the convent at the most seemingly inaccessible point; like General Lamarque, at the storming of Capri, they would conquer Nature. The cliff at the end of the island, a sheer block of granite, afforded even less hold than the rock of Capri. So it seemed at least to Montriveau, who had taken part in that incredible exploit, while the nuns in his eyes were much more redoubtable than Sir Hudson Lowe. To raise a hubbub over carrying off the Duchess would cover them with confusion. They might as well set siege to the town and convent, like pirates, and leave not a single soul to tell of their victory. So for them their expedition wore but two aspects. There should be a conflagration and a feat of arms that should dismay all Europe, while the motives of the crime remained unknown; or, on the other hand, a mysterious, aerial descent which should persuade the nuns that the Devil himself had paid them a visit. They had decided upon the latter course in the secret council held before they left Paris, and subsequently everything had

been done to insure the success of an expedition which promised some real excitement to jaded spirits weary of Paris and its pleasures.

An extremely light pirogue, made at Marseilles on a Malayan model, enabled them to cross the reef, until the rocks rose from out of the water. Then two cables of iron wire were fastened several feet apart between one rock and another. These wire ropes slanted upwards and downwards in opposite directions, so that baskets of iron wire could travel to and fro along them; and in this manner the rocks were covered with a system of baskets and wire-cables, not unlike the filaments which a certain species of spider weaves about a tree. The Chinese, an essentially imitative people, were the first to take a lesson from the work of instinct. Fragile as these bridges were, they were always ready for use; high waves and the caprices of the sea could not throw them out of working order; the ropes hung just sufficiently slack, so as to present to the breakers that particular curve discovered by Cachin, the immortal creator of the harbour at Cherbourg. Against this cunningly devised line the angry surge is powerless; the law of that curve was a secret wrested from Nature by that faculty of observation in which nearly all human genius consists.

M. de Montriveau's companions were alone on board the vessel, and out of sight of every human eye. No one from the deck of a passing vessel could have discovered either the brig hidden among the reefs, or the men at work among the rocks; they lay below the ordinary range of the most powerful telescope. Eleven days were spent in preparation, before the Thirteen, with all their infernal power, could reach the foot of the cliffs. The body of the rock rose up straight from the sea to a height of thirty fathoms. Any attempt to climb the sheer wall of granite seemed impossible; a mouse might as well try to creep up the slippery sides of a plain china vase. Still there was a cleft, a straight line of fissure so fortunately placed that large blocks of wood could be wedged firmly into it at a distance of about a foot apart. Into these blocks the daring workers drove iron cramps, specially made for the purpose, with a broad iron bracket at the outer end, through which a hole had been drilled. Each bracket carried a light deal board which corresponded with a notch made in a pole that reached to the top of the cliffs, and was firmly planted in the beach at their feet. With ingenuity worthy of these men who found nothing impossible, one of their number, a skilled mathematician, had calculated the angle from which the steps must start; so that from the middle they rose gradually, like the sticks of a fan, to the top of the cliff, and descended in the same fashion to its base. That miraculously light, yet perfectly firm, staircase cost them twenty-two days of toil. A little tinder and the surf of the sea would destroy all trace of it forever in a single night. A betrayal of the secret was impossible; and all search for the violators of the convent was doomed to failure.

At the top of the rock there was a platform with sheer precipice on all sides. The Thirteen, reconnoitring the ground with their glasses from the masthead, made certain that though the ascent was steep and rough, there would be no difficulty in gaining the convent garden, where the trees were thick enough for a hiding-place. After such great efforts they would not risk the success of their enterprise, and were compelled to wait till the moon passed out of her last quarter.

For two nights Montriveau, wrapped in his cloak, lay out on the rock platform. The singing at vespers and matins filled him with unutterable joy. He stood under the wall to hear the music of the organ, listening intently for one voice among the rest. But in spite of the silence, the confused effect of music was all that reached his ears. In those sweet harmonies defects of execution are lost; the pure spirit of art comes into direct communication with the spirit of the hearer, making no demand on the attention, no strain on the power of listening. Intolerable memories awoke. All the love within him seemed to break into blossom again at the breath of that music; he tried to find auguries of happiness in the air. During the last night he sat with his eyes fixed upon an ungrated window, for bars were not needed on the side of the precipice. A light shone there all through the hours; and that instinct of the heart, which is sometimes true, and as often false, cried within him, "She is there!"

"She is certainly there! Tomorrow she will be mine," he said to himself, and joy blended with the slow tinkling of a bell that began to ring.

Strange unaccountable workings of the heart! The nun, wasted by yearning love, worn out with tears and fasting, prayer and vigils; the woman of nine-and-twenty, who had passed through heavy trials, was loved more passionately than the lighthearted girl, the woman of four-and-twenty, the sylphide, had ever been. But is there not, for men of vigorous character, something attractive in the sublime expression engraven on women's faces by the impetuous stirrings of thought and misfortunes of no ignoble kind? Is there not a beauty of suffering which is the most interesting of all beauty to those men who feel that within them there is an inexhaustible wealth of tenderness and consoling pity for a creature so gracious in weakness, so strong with love? It is the ordinary nature that is attracted by young, smooth, pink-and-white beauty, or, in one word, by prettiness. In some faces love awakens amid the wrinkles carved by sorrow and the ruin made by melancholy; Montriveau could not but feel drawn to these. For cannot a lover, with the voice of a great longing, call forth a wholly new creature? a creature athrob with the life but just begun breaks forth for him alone, from the outward form that is fair for him, and faded for all the world besides. Does he not love two women?—One of them, as others see her, is pale and wan and sad; but the other, the unseen love that his heart knows, is an angel who understands life through feeling, and is

adorned in all her glory only for love's high festivals.

The General left his post before sunrise, but not before he had heard voices singing together, sweet voices full of tenderness sounding faintly from the cell. When he came down to the foot of the cliffs where his friends were waiting, he told them that never in his life had he felt such enthralling bliss, and in the few words there was that unmistakable thrill of repressed strong feeling, that magnificent utterance which all men respect.

That night eleven of his devoted comrades made the ascent in the darkness. Each man carried a poniard, a provision of chocolate, and a set of house-breaking tools. They climbed the outer walls with scaling-ladders, and crossed the cemetery of the convent. Montriveau recognised the long, vaulted gallery through which he went to the parlour, and remembered the windows of the room. His plans were made and adopted in a moment. They would effect an entrance through one of the windows in the Carmelite's half of the parlour, find their way along the corridors, ascertain whether the sister's names were written on the doors, find Sister Theresa's cell, surprise her as she slept, and carry her off, bound and gagged. The programme presented no difficulties to men who combined boldness and a convict's dexterity with the knowledge peculiar to men of the world, especially as they would not scruple to give a stab to ensure silence.

In two hours the bars were sawn through. Three men stood on guard outside, and two inside the parlour. The rest, barefooted, took up their posts along the corridor. Young Henri de Marsay, the most dexterous man among them, disguised by way of precaution in a Carmelite's robe, exactly like the costume of the convent, led the way, and Montriveau came immediately behind him. The clock struck three just as the two men reached the dormitory cells. They soon saw the position. Everything was perfectly quiet. With the help of a dark lantern they read the names luckily written on every door, together with the picture of a saint or saints and the mystical words which every nun takes as a kind of motto for the beginning of her new life and the revelation of her last thought. Montriveau reached Sister Theresa's door and read the inscription, *Sub invocatione sanctae matris Theresae*, and her motto, *Adoremus in aeternum*. Suddenly his companion laid a hand on his shoulder. A bright light was streaming through the chinks of the door. M. de Ronquerolles came up at that moment.

"All the nuns are in the church," he said; "they are beginning the Office for the Dead."

"I will stay here," said Montriveau. "Go back into the parlour, and shut the door at the end of the passage."

He threw open the door and rushed in, preceded by his disguised

companion, who let down the veil over his face.

There before them lay the dead Duchess; her plank bed had been laid on the floor of the outer room of her cell, between two lighted candles. Neither Montriveau nor de Marsay spoke a word or uttered a cry; but they looked into each other's faces. The General's dumb gesture tried to say, "Let us carry her away!"

"Quickly" shouted Ronquerolles, "the procession of nuns is leaving the church. You will be caught!"

With magical swiftness of movement, prompted by an intense desire, the dead woman was carried into the convent parlour, passed through the window, and lowered from the walls before the Abbess, followed by the nuns, returned to take up Sister Theresa's body. The sister left in charge had imprudently left her post; there were secrets that she longed to know; and so busy was she ransacking the inner room, that she heard nothing, and was horrified when she came back to find that the body was gone. Before the women, in their blank amazement, could think of making a search, the Duchess had been lowered by a cord to the foot of the crags, and Montriveau's companions had destroyed all traces of their work. By nine o'clock that morning there was not a sign to show that either staircase or wire-cables had ever existed, and Sister Theresa's body had been taken on board. The brig came into the port to ship her crew, and sailed that day.

Montriveau, down in the cabin, was left alone with Antoinette de Navarreins. For some hours it seemed as if her dead face was transfigured for him by that unearthly beauty which the calm of death gives to the body before it perishes.

"Look here," said Ronquerolles when Montriveau reappeared on deck, "that was a woman once, now it is nothing. Let us tie a cannon ball to both feet and throw the body overboard; and if ever you think of her again, think of her as of some book that you read as a boy."

"Yes," assented Montriveau, "it is nothing now but a dream."

"That is sensible of you. Now, after this, have passions; but as for love, a man ought to know how to place it wisely; it is only a woman's last love that can satisfy a man's first love."

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