The Human Comedy
Scenes from Parisian Life
Part V

By

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THE FIRM OF NUCINGEN

You know how slight the partitions are between the private rooms of fashionable restaurants in Paris; Very's largest room, for instance, is cut in two by a removable screen. This Scene is not laid at Very's, but in snug quarters, which for reasons of my own I forbear to specify. We were two, so I will say, like Henri Monnier's Prudhomme, "I should not like to compromise her!"

We had remarked the want of solidity in the wall-structure, so we talked with lowered voices as we sat together in the little private room, lingering over the dainty dishes of a dinner exquisite in more senses than one. We had come as far as the roast, however, and still we had no neighbors; no sound came from the next room save the crackling of the fire. But when the clock struck eight, we heard voices and noisy footsteps; the waiters brought candles. Evidently there was a party assembled in the next room, and at the first words I knew at once with whom we had to do—four bold cormorants as ever sprang from the foam on the crests of the ever-rising waves of this present generation—four pleasant young fellows whose existence was problematical, since they were not known to possess either stock or landed estates, yet they lived, and lived well. These ingenious condottieri of a modern industrialism, that has come to be the most ruthless of all warfares, leave anxieties to their creditors, and keep the pleasures for themselves. They are careful for nothing, save dress. Still with the courage of the Jean Bart order, that will smoke cigars on a barrel of powder (perhaps by way of keeping up their character), with a quizzing humor that outdoes the minor newspapers, sparing no one, not even themselves; clear-sighted, wary, keen after business, grasping yet open handed, envious yet self-complacent, profound politicians by fits and starts, analyzing everything, guessing everything—not one of these in question as yet had contrived to make his way in the world which they chose for their scene of operations. Only one of the four, indeed, had succeeded in coming as far as the foot of the ladder.

To have money is nothing; the self-made man only finds out all that he lacks after six months of flatteries. Andoche Finot, the self-made man in question, stiff, taciturn, cold, and dull-witted, possessed the sort of spirit which will not shrink from groveling before any creature that may be of use to him, and the cunning to be insolent when he needs a man no longer. Like one of the grotesque figures in the ballet in Gustave, he was a marquis behind, a boor in front. And this high-priest of commerce had a following.

Emile Blondet, Journalist, with abundance of intellectual power, reckless, brilliant, and indolent, could do anything that he chose, yet he submitted to be

exploited with his eyes open. Treacherous or kind upon impulse, a man to love, but not to respect; quick-witted as a soubrette, unable to refuse his pen to any one that asked, or his heart to the first that would borrow it, Emile was the most fascinating of those light-of-loves of whom a fantastic modern wit declared that “he liked them better in satin slippers than in boots.”

The third in the party, Couture by name, lived by speculation, grafting one affair upon another to make the gains pay for the losses. He was always between wind and water, keeping himself afloat by his bold, sudden strokes and the nervous energy of his play. Hither and thither he would swim over the vast sea of interests in Paris, in quest of some little isle that should be so far a debatable land that he might abide upon it. Clearly Couture was not in his proper place.

As for the fourth and most malicious personage, his name will be enough —it was Bixiou! Not (alas!) the Bixiou of 1825, but the Bixiou of 1836, a misanthropic buffoon, acknowledged supreme, by reason of his energetic and caustic wit; a very fiend let loose now that he saw how he had squandered his intellect in pure waste; a Bixiou vexed by the thought that he had not come by his share of the wreckage in the last Revolution; a Bixiou with a kick for every one, like Pierrot at the Funambules. Bixiou had the whole history of his own times at his finger-ends, more particularly its scandalous chronicle, embellished by added waggeries of his own. He sprang like a clown upon everybody’s back, only to do his utmost to leave the executioner’s brand upon every pair of shoulders.

The first cravings of gluttony satisfied, our neighbors reached the stage at which we also had arrived, to wit, the dessert; and, as we made no sign, they believed that they were alone. Thanks to the champagne, the talk grew confidential as they dallied with the dessert amid the cigar smoke. Yet through it all you felt the influence of the icy esprit that leaves the most spontaneous feeling frost-bound and stiff, that checks the most generous inspirations, and gives a sharp ring to the laughter. Their table-talk was full of bitter irony which turns a jest into a sneer; it told of the exhaustion of souls given over to themselves; of lives with no end in view but the satisfaction of self—of egoism induced by these times of peace in which we live. I can think of nothing like it save a pamphlet against mankind at large which Diderot was afraid to publish, a book that bares man’s breast simply to expose the plague-sores upon it. We listened to just such a pamphlet as Rameau’s Nephew, spoken aloud in all good faith, in the course of after-dinner talk in which nothing, not even the point which the speaker wished to carry, was sacred from epigram; nothing taken for granted, nothing built up except on ruins, nothing reverenced save the sceptic’s adopted article of belief—the omnipotence, omniscience, and universal applicability of money.

After some target practice at the outer circle of their acquaintances, they turned their ill-natured shafts at their intimate friends. With a sign I explained my wish to stay and listen as soon as Bixiou took up his parable, as will shortly be seen. And so we listened to one of those terrific improvisations which won that artist such a name among a certain set of seared and jaded spirits; and often interrupted and resumed though it was, memory serves me as a reporter of it. The opinions expressed and the form of expression lie alike outside the conditions of literature. It was, more properly speaking, a medley of sinister revelations that paint our age, to which indeed no other kind of story should be told; and, besides, I throw all the responsibility upon the principal speaker. The pantomime and the gestures that accompanied Bixiou's changes of voice, as he acted the parts of the various persons, must have been perfect, judging by the applause and admiring comments that broke from his audience of three.

"Then did Rastignac refuse?" asked Blondet, apparently addressing Finot.

"Point-blank."

"But did you threaten him with the newspapers?" asked Bixiou.

"He began to laugh," returned Finot.

"Rastignac is the late lamented de Marsay's direct heir; he will make his way politically as well as socially," commented Blondet.

"But how did he make his money?" asked Couture. "In 1819 both he and the illustrious Bianchon lived in a shabby boarding-house in the Latin Quarter; his people ate roast cockchafers and their own wine so as to send him a hundred francs every month. His father's property was not worth a thousand crowns; he had two sisters and a brother on his hands, and now——"

"Now he has an income of forty thousand livres," continued Finot; "his sisters had a handsome fortune apiece and married into noble families; he leaves his mother a life interest in the property——"

"Even in 1827 I have known him without a penny," said Blondet.

"Oh! in 1827," said Bixiou.

"Well," resumed Finot, "yet to-day, as we see, he is in a fair way to be a Minister, a peer of France—anything that he likes. He broke decently with Delphine three years ago; he will not marry except on good grounds; and he may marry a girl of noble family. The chap had the sense to take up with a wealthy woman."

"My friends, give him the benefit of extenuating circumstances," urged Blondet. "When he escaped the clutches of want, he dropped into the claws of a very clever man."

“You know what Nucingen is,” said Bixiou. “In the early days, Delphine and Rastignac thought him ‘good-natured’; he seemed to regard a wife as a plaything, an ornament in his house. And that very fact showed me that the man was square at the base as well as in height,” added Bixiou. “Nucingen makes no bones about admitting that his wife is his fortune; she is an indispensable chattel, but a wife takes a second place in the high-pressure life of a political leader and great capitalist. He once said in my hearing that Bonaparte had blundered like a bourgeois in his early relations with Josephine; and that after he had had the spirit to use her as a stepping-stone, he had made himself ridiculous by trying to make a companion of her.”

“Any man of unusual powers is bound to take Oriental views of women,” said Blondet.

“The Baron blended the opinions of East and West in a charming Parisian creed. He abhorred de Marsay; de Marsay was unmanageable, but with Rastignac he was much pleased; he exploited him, though Rastignac was not aware of it. All the burdens of married life were put on him. Rastignac bore the brunt of Delphine’s whims; he escorted her to the Bois de Boulogne; he went with her to the play; and the little politician and great man of to-day spent a good deal of his life at that time in writing dainty notes. Eugene was scolded for little nothings from the first; he was in good spirits when Delphine was cheerful, and drooped when she felt low; he bore the weight of her confidences and her ailments; he gave up his time, the hours of his precious youth, to fill the empty void of that fair Parisian’s idleness. Delphine and he held high councils on the toilettes which went best together; he stood the fire of bad temper and broadsides of pouting fits, while she, by way of trimming the balance, was very nice to the Baron. As for the Baron, he laughed in his sleeve; but whenever he saw that Rastignac was bending under the strain of the burden, he made ‘as if he suspected something,’ and reunited the lovers by a common dread.”

“I can imagine that a wealthy wife would have put Rastignac in the way of a living, and an honorable living, but where did he pick up his fortune?” asked Couture. “A fortune so considerable as his at the present day must come from somewhere; and nobody ever accused him of inventing a good stroke of business.”

“Somebody left it to him,” said Finot.

“Who?” asked Blondet.

“Some fool that he came across,” suggested Couture.

“He did not steal the whole of it, my little dears,” said Bixiou.

“Let not your terrors rise to fever-heat,

Our age is lenient with those who cheat.

Now, I will tell you about the beginnings of his fortune. In the first place, honor to talent! Our friend is not a ‘chap,’ as Finot describes him, but a gentleman in the English sense, who knows the cards and knows the game; whom, moreover, the gallery respects. Rastignac has quite as much intelligence as is needed at a given moment, as if a soldier should make his courage payable at ninety days’ sight, with three witnesses and guarantees. He may seem captious, wrong-headed, inconsequent, vacillating, and without any fixed opinions; but let something serious turn up, some combination to scheme out, he will not scatter himself like Blondet here, who chooses these occasions to look at things from his neighbor’s point of view. Rastignac concentrates himself, pulls himself together, looks for the point to carry by storm, and goes full tilt for it. He charges like a Murat, breaks squares, pounds away at shareholders, promoters, and the whole shop, and returns, when the breach is made, to his lazy, careless life. Once more he becomes the man of the South, the man of pleasure, the trifling, idle Rastignac. He has earned the right of lying in bed till noon because a crisis never finds him asleep.”

“So far so good, but just get to his fortune,” said Finot.

“Bixiou will lash that off at a stroke,” replied Blondet. “Rastignac’s fortune was Delphine de Nucingen, a remarkable woman; she combines boldness with foresight.”

“Did she ever lend you money?” inquired Bixiou. Everybody burst out laughing.

“You are mistaken in her,” said Couture, speaking to Blondet; “her cleverness simply consists in making more or less piquant remarks, in loving Rastignac with tedious fidelity, and obeying him blindly. She is a regular Italian.”

“Money apart,” Andoche Finot put in sourly.

“Oh, come, come,” said Bixiou coaxingly; “after what we have just been saying, will you venture to blame poor Rastignac for living at the expense of the firm of Nucingen, for being installed in furnished rooms precisely as La Torpille was once installed by our friend des Lupeaulx? You would sink to the vulgarity of the Rue Saint-Denis! First of all, ‘in the abstract,’ as Royer-Collard says, the question may abide the Kritik of Pure Reason; as for the impure reason——”

“There he goes!” said Finot, turning to Blondet.

“But there is reason in what he says,” exclaimed Blondet. “The problem is a very old one; it was the grand secret of the famous duel between La

Chataigneraie and Jarnac. It was cast up to Jarnac that he was on good terms with his mother-in-law, who, loving him only too well, equipped him sumptuously. When a thing is so true, it ought not to be said. Out of devotion to Henry II., who permitted himself this slander, La Chataigneraie took it upon himself, and there followed the duel which enriched the French language with the expression coup de Jarnac."

"Oh! does it go so far back? Then it is noble?" said Finot.

"As a proprietor of newspapers and reviews of old standing, you are not bound to know that," said Blondet.

"There are women," Bixiou gravely resumed, "and for that matter, men too, who can cut their lives in two and give away but one-half. (Remark how I word my phrase for you in humanitarian language.) For these, all material interests lie without the range of sentiment. They give their time, their life, their honor to a woman, and hold that between themselves it is not the thing to meddle with bits of tissue paper bearing the legend, 'Forgery is punishable with death.' And equally they will take nothing from a woman. Yes, the whole thing is debased if fusion of interests follows on fusion of souls. This is a doctrine much preached, and very seldom practised."

"Oh, what rubbish!" cried Blondet. "The Marechal de Richelieu understood something of gallantry, and he settled an allowance of a thousand louis d'or on Mme. de la Popeliniere after that affair of the hiding-place behind the hearth. Agnes Sorel, in all simplicity, took her fortune to Charles VII., and the King accepted it. Jacques Coeur kept the crown for France; he was allowed to do it, and woman-like, France was ungrateful."

"Gentlemen," said Bixiou, "a love that does not imply an indissoluble friendship, to my thinking, is momentary libertinage. What sort of entire surrender is it that keeps something back? Between these two diametrically opposed doctrines, the one as profoundly immoral as the other, there is no possible compromise. It seems to me that any shrinking from a complete union is surely due to a belief that the union cannot last, and if so, farewell to illusion. The passion that does not believe that it will last for ever is a hideous thing. (Here is pure unadulterated Fenelon for you!) At the same time, those who know the world, the observer, the man of the world, the wearers of irreproachable gloves and ties, the men who do not blush to marry a woman for her money, proclaim the necessity of a complete separation of sentiment and interest. The other sort are lunatics that love and imagine that they and the woman they love are the only two beings in the world; for them millions are dirt; the glove or the camellia flower that She wore is worth millions. If the squandered filthy lucre is never to be found again in their possession, you find the remains of floral relics hoarded in dainty cedar-wood boxes. They cannot

distinguish themselves one from the other; for them there is no ‘I’ left. Thou—that is their Word made flesh. What can you do? Can you stop the course of this ‘hidden disease of the heart’? There are fools that love without calculation and wise men that calculate while they love.”

“To my thinking Bixiou is sublime,” cried Blondet. “What does Finot say to it?”

“Anywhere else,” said Finot, drawing himself up in his cravat, “anywhere else, I should say, with the ‘gentlemen’; but here, I think——”

“With the scoundrelly scapegraces with whom you have the honor to associate?” said Bixiou.

“Upon my word, yes.”

“And you?” asked Bixiou, turning to Couture.

“Stuff and nonsense!” cried Couture. “The woman that will not make a stepping-stone of her body, that the man she singles out may reach his goal, is a woman that has no heart except for her own purposes.”

“And you, Blondet?”

“I do not preach, I practise.”

“Very good,” rejoined Bixiou in his most ironical tones. “Rastignac was not of your way of thinking. To take without repaying is detestable, and even rather bad form; but to take that you may render a hundred-fold, like the Lord, is a chivalrous deed. This was Rastignac’s view. He felt profoundly humiliated by his community of interests with Delphine de Nucingen; I can tell you that he regretted it; I have seen him deploring his position with tears in his eyes. Yes, he shed tears, he did indeed—after supper. Well, now to our way of thinking——”

“I say, you are laughing at us,” said Finot.

“Not the least in the world. We were talking of Rastignac. From your point of view his affliction would be a sign of his corruption; for by that time he was not nearly so much in love with Delphine. What would you have? he felt the prick in his heart, poor fellow. But he was a man of noble descent and profound depravity, whereas we are virtuous artists. So Rastignac meant to enrich Delphine; he was a poor man, she a rich woman. Would you believe it?—he succeeded. Rastignac, who might have fought at need, like Jarnac, went over to the opinion of Henri II. on the strength of his great maxim, ‘There is no such thing as absolute right; there are only circumstances.’ This brings us to the history of his fortune.”

“You might just as well make a start with your story instead of drawing us

on to traduce ourselves," said Blondet with urbane good humor.

"Aha! my boy," returned Bixiou, administering a little tap to the back of Blondet's head, "you are making up for lost time over the champagne!"

"Oh! by the sacred name of shareholder, get on with your story!" cried Couture.

"I was within an ace of it," retorted Bixiou, "but you with your profanity have brought me to the climax."

"Then, are there shareholders in the tale?" inquired Finot.

"Yes; rich as rich can be—like yours."

"It seems to me," Finot began stiffly, "that some consideration is owing to a good fellow to whom you look for a bill for five hundred francs upon occasion——"

"Waiter!" called Bixiou.

"What do you want with the waiter?" asked Blondet.

"I want five hundred francs to repay Finot, so that I can tear up my I. O. U. and set my tongue free."

"Get on with your story," said Finot, making believe to laugh.

"I take you all to witness that I am not the property of this insolent fellow, who fancies that my silence is worth no more than five hundred francs. You will never be a minister if you cannot gauge people's consciences. There, my good Finot," he added soothingly, "I will get on with my story without personalities, and we shall be quits."

"Now," said Couture with a smile, "he will begin to prove for our benefit that Nucingen made Rastignac's fortune."

"You are not so far out as you think," returned Bixiou. "You do not know what Nucingen is, financially speaking."

"Do you know so much as a word as to his beginnings?" asked Blondet.

"I have only known him in his own house," said Bixiou, "but we may have seen each other in the street in the old days."

"The prosperity of the firm of Nucingen is one of the most extraordinary things seen in our days," began Blondet. "In 1804 Nucingen's name was scarcely known. At that time bankers would have shuddered at the idea of three hundred thousand francs' worth of his acceptances in the market. The great capitalist felt his inferiority. How was he to get known? He suspended payment. Good! Every market rang with a name hitherto only known in

Strasbourg and the Quartier Poissonniere. He issued deposit certificates to his creditors, and resumed payment; forthwith people grew accustomed to his paper all over France. Then an unheard-of-thing happened—his paper revived, was in demand, and rose in value. Nucingen's paper was much inquired for. The year 1815 arrives, my banker calls in his capital, buys up Government stock before the battle of Waterloo, suspends payment again in the thick of the crisis, and meets his engagements with shares in the Wortschin mines, which he himself issued at twenty per cent more than he gave for them! Yes, gentlemen!—He took a hundred and fifty thousand bottles of champagne of Grandet to cover himself (forseeing the failure of the virtuous parent of the present Comte d'Aubrion), and as much Bordeaux wine of Duberghe at the same time. Those three hundred thousand bottles which he took over (and took at thirty sous apiece, my dear boy) he supplied at the price of six francs per bottle to the Allies in the Palais Royal during the foreign occupation, between 1817 and 1819. Nucingen's name and his paper acquired a European celebrity. The illustrious Baron, so far from being engulfed like others, rose the higher for calamities. Twice his arrangements had paid holders of his paper uncommonly well; he try to swindle them? Impossible. He is supposed to be as honest a man as you will find. When he suspends payment a third time, his paper will circulate in Asia, Mexico, and Australia, among the aborigines. No one but Ouvrard saw through this Alsacien banker, the son of some Jew or other converted by ambition; Ouvrard said, 'When Nucingen lets gold go, you may be sure that it is to catch diamonds.'"

"His crony, du Tillet, is just such another," said Finot. "And, mind you, that of birth du Tillet has just precisely as much as is necessary to exist; the chap had not a farthing in 1814, and you see what he is now; and he has done something that none of us has managed to do (I am not speaking of you, Couture), he has had friends instead of enemies. In fact, he has kept his past life so quiet, that unless you rake the sewers you are not likely to find out that he was an assistant in a perfumer's shop in the Rue Saint Honore, no further back than 1814."

"Tut, tut, tut!" said Bixiou, "do not think of comparing Nucingen with a little dabbler like du Tillet, a jackal that gets on in life through his sense of smell. He scents a carcass by instinct, and comes in time to get the best bone. Besides, just look at the two men. The one has a sharp-pointed face like a cat, he is thin and lanky; the other is cubical, fat, heavy as a sack, imperturbable as a diplomatist. Nucingen has a thick, heavy hand, and lynx eyes that never light up; his depths are not in front, but behind; he is inscrutable, you never see what he is making for. Whereas du Tillet's cunning, as Napoleon said to somebody (I have forgotten the name), is like cotton spun too fine, it breaks."

"I do not myself see that Nucingen has any advantage over du Tillet," said

Blondet, “unless it is that he has the sense to see that a capitalist ought not to rise higher than a baron’s rank, while du Tillet has a mind to be an Italian count.”

“Blondet—one word, my boy,” put in Couture. “In the first place, Nucingen dared to say that honesty is simply a question of appearances; and secondly, to know him well you must be in business yourself. With him banking is but a single department, and a very small one; he holds Government contracts for wines, wools, indigoes—anything, in short, on which any profit can be made. He has an all-round genius. The elephant of finance would contract to deliver votes on a division, or the Greeks to the Turks. For him business means the sum-total of varieties; as Cousin would say, the unity of specialties. Looked at in this way, banking becomes a kind of statecraft in itself, requiring a powerful head; and a man thoroughly tempered is drawn on to set himself above the laws of a morality that cramps him.”

“Right, my son,” said Blondet; “but we, and we alone, can comprehend that this means bringing war into the financial world. A banker is a conquering general making sacrifices on a tremendous scale to gain ends that no one perceives; his soldiers are private people’s interests. He has stratagems to plan out, partisans to bring into the field, ambushes to set, towns to take. Most men of this stamp are so close upon the borders of politics, that in the end they are drawn into public life, and thereby lose their fortunes. The firm of Necker, for instance, was ruined in this way; the famous Samuel Bernard was all but ruined. Some great capitalist in every age makes a colossal fortune, and leaves behind him neither fortune nor a family; there was the firm of Paris Brothers, for instance, that helped to pull down Law; there was Law himself (beside whom other promoters of companies are but pigmies); there was Bouret and Beaujon—none of them left any representative. Finance, like Time, devours its own children. If the banker is to perpetuate himself, he must found a noble house, a dynasty; like the Fuggers of Antwerp, that lent money to Charles V. and were created Princes of Babenhausen, a family that exists at this day—in the Almanach de Gotha. The instinct of self-preservation, working it may be unconsciously, leads the banker to seek a title. Jacques Coeur was the founder of the great noble house of Noirmoutier, extinct in the reign of Louis XIII. What power that man had! He was ruined for making a legitimate king; and he died, prince of an island in the Archipelago, where he built a magnificent cathedral.”

“Oh! you are giving us an historical lecture, we are wandering away from the present, the crown has no right of conferring nobility, and barons and counts are made with closed doors; more is the pity!” said Finot.

“You regret the times of the savonnette a vilain, when you could buy an office that ennobled?” asked Bixiou. “You are right. Je reviens a nos moutons.

—Do you know Beaudenord? No? no? no? Ah, well! See how all things pass away! Poor fellow, ten years ago he was the flower of dandyism; and now, so thoroughly absorbed that you no more know him than Finot just now knew the origin of the expression ‘coup de Jarnac’—I repeat that simply for the sake of illustration, and not to tease you, Finot. Well, it is a fact, he belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

“Beaudenord is the first pigeon that I will bring on the scene. And, in the first place, his name was Godefroid de Beaudenord; neither Finot, nor Blondet, nor Couture, nor I am likely to undervalue such an advantage as that! After a ball, when a score of pretty women stand behooded waiting for their carriages, with their husbands and adorers at their sides, Beaudenord could hear his people called without a pang of mortification. In the second place, he rejoiced in the full complement of limbs; he was whole and sound, had no mote in his eyes, no false hair, no artificial calves; he was neither knock-kneed nor bandy-legged, his dorsal column was straight, his waist slender, his hands white and shapely. His hair was black; he was of a complexion neither too pink, like a grocer’s assistant, nor yet too brown, like a Calabrese. Finally, and this is an essential point, Beaudenord was not too handsome, like some of our friends that look rather too much of professional beauties to be anything else; but no more of that; we have said it, it is shocking! Well, he was a crack shot, and sat a horse to admiration; he had fought a duel for a trifle, and had not killed his man.

“If you wish to know in what pure, complete, and unadulterated happiness consists in this Nineteenth Century in Paris—the happiness, that is to say, of a young man of twenty-six—do you realize that you must enter into the infinitely small details of existence? Beaudenord’s bootmaker had precisely hit off his style of foot; he was well shod; his tailor loved to clothe him. Godefroid neither rolled his r’s, nor lapsed into Normanisms nor Gascon; he spoke pure and correct French, and tied his cravat correctly (like Finot). He had neither father nor mother—such luck had he!—and his guardian was the Marquis d’Aiglemont, his cousin by marriage. He could go among city people as he chose, and the Faubourg Saint-Germain could make no objection; for, fortunately, a young bachelor is allowed to make his own pleasure his sole rule of life, he is at liberty to betake himself wherever amusement is to be found, and to shun the gloomy places where cares flourish and multiply. Finally, he had been vaccinated (you know what I mean, Blondet).

“And yet, in spite of all these virtues,” continued Bixiou, “he might very well have been a very unhappy young man. Eh! eh! that word happiness, unhappily, seems to us to mean something absolute, a delusion which sets so many wiseacres inquiring what happiness is. A very clever woman said that ‘Happiness was where you chose to put it.’”

“She formulated a dismal truth,” said Blondet.

“And a moral,” added Finot.

“Double distilled,” said Blondet. “Happiness, like Good, like Evil, is relative. Wherefore La Fontaine used to hope that in the course of time the damned would feel as much at home in hell as a fish in water.”

“La Fontaine’s sayings are known in Philistia!” put in Bixiou.

“Happiness at six-and-twenty in Paris is not the happiness of six-and-twenty at—say Blois,” continued Blondet, taking no notice of the interruption. “And those that proceed from this text to rail at the instability of opinion are either knaves or fools for their pains. Modern medicine, which passed (it is its fairest title to glory) from a hypothetical to a positive science, through the influence of the great analytical school of Paris, has proved beyond a doubt that a man is periodically renewed throughout——”

“New haft, new blade, like Jeannot’s knife, and yet you think that he is still the same man,” broke in Bixiou. “So there are several lozenges in the harlequin’s coat that we call happiness; and—well, there was neither hole nor stain in this Godefroid’s costume. A young man of six-and-twenty, who would be happy in love, who would be loved, that is to say, not for his blossoming youth, nor for his wit, nor for his figure, but spontaneously, and not even merely in return for his own love; a young man, I say, who has found love in the abstract, to quote Royer-Collard, might yet very possibly find never a farthing in the purse which She, loving and beloved, embroidered for him; he might owe rent to his landlord; he might be unable to pay the bootmaker before mentioned; his very tailor, like France herself, might at last show signs of disaffection. In short, he might have love and yet be poor. And poverty spoils a young man’s happiness, unless he holds our transcendental views of the fusion of interests. I know nothing more wearing than happiness within combined with adversity without. It is as if you had one leg freezing in the draught from the door, and the other half-roasted by a brazier—as I have at this moment. I hope to be understood. Comes there an echo from thy waistcoat-pocket, Blondet? Between ourselves, let the heart alone, it spoils the intellect.

“Let us resume. Godefroid de Beaudenord was respected by his tradespeople, for they were paid with tolerable regularity. The witty woman before quoted—I cannot give her name, for she is still living, thanks to her want of heart——”

“Who is this?”

“The Marquise d’Espard. She said that a young man ought to live on an entresol; there should be no sign of domesticity about the place; no cook, no

kitchen, an old manservant to wait upon him, and no pretence of permanence. In her opinion, any other sort of establishment is bad form. Godefroid de Beaudenord, faithful to this programme, lodged on an entresol on the Quai Malaquais; he had, however, been obliged to have this much in common with married couples, he had put a bedstead in his room, though for that matter it was so narrow that he seldom slept in it. An Englishwoman might have visited his rooms and found nothing ‘improper’ there. Finot, you have yet to learn the great law of the ‘Improper’ that rules Britain. But, for the sake of the bond between us—that bill for a thousand francs—I will just give you some idea of it. I have been in England myself.—I will give him wit enough for a couple of thousand,” he added in an aside to Blondet.

“In England, Finot, you grow extremely intimate with a woman in the course of an evening, at a ball or wherever it is; next day you meet her in the street and look as though you knew her again—‘improper.’—At dinner you discover a delightful man beneath your left-hand neighbor’s dresscoat; a clever man; no high mightiness, no constraint, nothing of an Englishman about him. In accordance with the tradition of French breeding, so urbane, so gracious as they are, you address your neighbor—‘improper.’—At a ball you walk up to a pretty woman to ask her to dance—‘improper.’ You wax enthusiastic, you argue, laugh, and give yourself out, you fling yourself heart and soul into the conversation, you give expression to your real feelings, you play when you are at the card-table, chat while you chat, eat while you eat —‘improper! improper! improper!’ Stendhal, one of the cleverest and profoundest minds of the age, hit off the ‘improper’ excellently well when he said that such-and-such a British peer did not dare to cross his legs when he sat alone before his own hearth for fear of being improper. An English gentlewoman, were she one of the rabid ‘Saints’—that most straitest sect of Protestants that would leave their whole family to starve if the said family did anything ‘improper’—may play the deuce’s own delight in her own bedroom, and need not be ‘improper,’ but she would look on herself as lost if she received a visit from a man of her acquaintance in the aforesaid room. Thanks to propriety, London and its inhabitants will be found petrified some of these days.”

“And to think that there are asses here in France that want to import the solemn tomfoolery that the English keep up among themselves with that admirable self-possession which you know!” added Blondet. “It is enough to make any man shudder if he has seen the English at home, and recollects the charming, gracious French manners. Sir Walter Scott was afraid to paint women as they are for fear of being ‘improper’; and at the close of his life repented of the creation of the great character of Effie in The Heart of Midlothian.”

“Do you wish not to be ‘improper’ in England?” asked Bixiou, addressing Finot.

“Well?”

“Go to the Tuileries and look at a figure there, something like a fireman carved in marble (‘Themistocles,’ the statuary calls it), try to walk like the Commandant’s statue, and you will never be ‘improper.’ It was through strict observance of the great law of the improper that Godefroid’s happiness became complete. There is the story:

“Beaudenord had a tiger, not a ‘groom,’ as they write that know nothing of society. The tiger, a diminutive Irish page called Paddy, Toby, Joby (which you please), was three feet in height by twenty inches in breadth, a weasel-faced infant, with nerves of steel tempered in fire-water, and agile as a squirrel. He drove a landau with a skill never yet at fault in London or Paris. He had a lizard’s eye, as sharp as my own, and he could mount a horse like the elder Franconi. With the rosy cheeks and yellow hair of one of Rubens’ Madonnas he was double-faced as a prince, and as knowing as an old attorney; in short, at the age of ten he was nothing more nor less than a blossom of depravity, gambling and swearing, partial to jam and punch, pert as a feuilleton, impudent and light-fingered as any Paris street-arab. He had been a source of honor and profit to a well-known English lord, for whom he had already won seven hundred thousand francs on the race-course. The aforesaid nobleman set no small store on Toby. His tiger was a curiosity, the very smallest tiger in town. Perched aloft on the back of a thoroughbred, Joby looked like a hawk. Yet—the great man dismissed him. Not for greediness, not for dishonesty, nor murder, nor rudeness to my lady, nor for cutting holes in my lady’s own woman’s pockets, nor because he had been ‘got at’ by some of his master’s rivals on the turf, nor for playing games of a Sunday, nor for bad behavior of any sort or description. Toby might have done all these things, he might even have spoken to milord before milord spoke to him, and his noble master might, perhaps, have pardoned that breach of the law domestic. Milord would have put up with a good deal from Toby; he was very fond of him. Toby could drive a tandem dog-cart, riding on the wheeler, postilion fashion; his legs did not reach the shafts, he looked in fact very much like one of the cherub heads circling about the Eternal Father in old Italian pictures. But an English journalist wrote a delicious description of the little angel, in the course of which he said that Paddy was quite too pretty for a tiger; in fact, he offered to bet that Paddy was a tame tigress. The description, on the heads of it, was calculated to poison minds and end in something ‘improper.’ And the superlative of ‘improper’ is the way to the gallows. Milord’s circumspection was highly approved by my lady.

“But poor Toby, now that his precise position in insular zoology had been

called in question, found himself hopelessly out of place. At that time Godefroid had blossomed out at the French Embassy in London, where he learned the adventures of Toby, Joby, Paddy. Godefroid found the infant weeping over a pot of jam (he had already lost the guineas with which milord gilded his misfortune). Godefroid took possession of him; and so it fell out that on his return among us he brought back with him the sweetest thing in tigers from England. He was known by his tiger—as Couture is known by his waistcoats—and found no difficulty in entering the fraternity of the club yclept to-day the Grammont. He had renounced the diplomatic career; he ceased accordingly to alarm the susceptibilites of the ambitious; and as he had no very dangerous amount of intellect, he was well looked upon everywhere.

"Some of us would feel mortified if we saw only smiling faces wherever we went; we enjoy the sour contortions of envy. Godefroid did not like to be disliked. Every one has his taste. Now for the solid, practical aspects of life!

"The distinguishing feature of his chambers, where I have licked my lips over breakfast more than once, was a mysterious dressing-closet, nicely decorated, and comfortably appointed, with a grate in it and a bath-tub. It gave upon a narrow staircase, the folding doors were noiseless, the locks well oiled, the hinges discreet, the window panes of frosted glass, the curtain impervious to light. While the bedroom was, as it ought to have been, in a fine disorder which would suit the most exacting painter in water-colors; while everything therein was redolent of the Bohemian life of a young man of fashion, the dressing-closet was like a shrine—white, spotless, neat, and warm. There were no draughts from door or window, the carpet had been made soft for bare feet hastily put to the floor in a sudden panic of alarm—which stamps him as your thoroughbred dandy that knows life; for here, in a few moments, he may show himself either a noodle or a master in those little details in which a man's character is revealed. The Marquise previously quoted—no, it was the Marquise de Rochefide—came out of that dressing-closet in a furious rage, and never went back again. She discovered nothing 'improper' in it. Godefroid used to keep a little cupboard full of——"

"Waistcoats?" suggested Finot.

"Come, now, just like you, great Turcaret that you are. (I shall never form that fellow.) Why, no. Full of cakes, and fruit, and dainty little flasks of Malaga and Lunel; an en cas de nuit in Louis Quatorze's style; anything that can tickle the delicate and well-bred appetite of sixteen quarterings. A knowing old man-servant, very strong in matters veterinary, waited on the horses and groomed Godefroid. He had been with the late M. de Beaudenord, Godefroid's father, and bore Godefroid an inveterate affection, a kind of heart complaint which has almost disappeared among domestic servants since savings banks were established.

“All material well-being is based upon arithmetic. You to whom Paris is known down to its very excrescences, will see that Beaudenord must have acquired about seventeen thousand livres per annum; for he paid some seventeen francs of taxes and spent a thousand crowns on his own whims. Well, dear boys, when Godefroid came of age, the Marquis d’Aiglemont submitted to him such an account of his trust as none of us would be likely to give a nephew; Godefroid’s name was inscribed as the owner of eighteen thousand livres of rentes, a remnant of his father’s wealth spared by the harrow of the great reduction under the Republic and the hailstorms of Imperial arrears. D’Aiglemont, that upright guardian, also put his ward in possession of some thirty thousand francs of savings invested with the firm of Nucingen; saying with all the charm of a grand seigneur and the indulgence of a soldier of the Empire, that he had contrived to put it aside for his ward’s young man’s follies. ‘If you will take my advice, Godefroid,’ added he, ‘instead of squandering the money like a fool, as so many young men do, let it go in follies that will be useful to you afterwards. Take an attache’s post at Turin, and then go to Naples, and from Naples to London, and you will be amused and learn something for your money. Afterwards, if you think of a career, the time and the money will not have been thrown away.’ The late lamented d’Aiglemont had more sense than people credited him with, which is more than can be said of some of us.”

“A young fellow that starts with an assured income of eighteen thousand livres at one-and-twenty is lost,” said Couture.

“Unless he is miserly, or very much above the ordinary level,” added Blondet.

“Well, Godefroid sojourned in the four capitals of Italy,” continued Bixiou. “He lived in England and Germany, he spent some little time at St. Petersburg, he ran over Holland but he parted company with the aforesaid thirty thousand francs by living as if he had thirty thousand a year. Everywhere he found the same supreme de volaille, the same aspics, and French wines; he heard French spoken wherever he went—in short, he never got away from Paris. He ought, of course, to have tried to deprave his disposition, to fence himself in triple brass, to get rid of his illusions, to learn to hear anything said without a blush, and to master the inmost secrets of the Powers.—Pooh! with a good deal of trouble he equipped himself with four languages—that is to say, he laid in a stock of four words for one idea. Then he came back, and certain tedious dowagers, styled ‘conquests’ abroad, were left disconsolate. Godefroid came back, shy, scarcely formed, a good fellow with a confiding disposition, incapable of saying ill of any one who honored him with an admittance to his house, too staunch to be a diplomatist, altogether he was what we call a thoroughly good fellow.”

“To cut it short, a brat with eighteen thousand livres per annum to drop over the first investment that turns up,” said Couture.

“That confounded Couture has such a habit of anticipating dividends, that he is anticipating the end of my tale. Where was I? Oh! Beaudenord came back. When he took up his abode on the Quai Malaquais, it came to pass that a thousand francs over and above his needs was altogether insufficient to keep up his share of a box at the Italiens and the Opera properly. When he lost twenty-five or thirty louis at play at one swoop, naturally he paid; when he won, he spent the money; so should we if we were fools enough to be drawn into a bet. Beaudenord, feeling pinched with his eighteen thousand francs, saw the necessity of creating what we to-day call a balance in hand. It was a great notion of his ‘not to get too deep.’ He took counsel of his sometime guardian. ‘The funds are now at par, my dear boy,’ quoth d’Aiglemont; ‘sell out. I have sold mine and my wife’s. Nucingen has all my capital, and is giving me six per cent; do likewise, you will have one per cent the more upon your capital, and with that you will be quite comfortable.’

“In three days’ time our Godefroid was comfortable. His increase of income exactly supplied his superfluities; his material happiness was complete.

“Suppose that it were possible to read the minds of all the young men in Paris at one glance (as, it appears, will be done at the Day of Judgment with all the millions upon millions that have groveled in all spheres, and worn all uniforms or the uniform of nature), and to ask them whether happiness at six-and-twenty is or is not made up of the following items—to wit, to own a saddle-horse and a tilbury, or a cab, with a fresh, rosy-faced Toby Joby Paddy no bigger than your fist, and to hire an unimpeachable brougham for twelve francs an evening; to appear elegantly arrayed, agreeably to the laws that regulate a man’s clothes, at eight o’clock, at noon, four o’clock in the afternoon, and in the evening; to be well received at every embassy, and to cull the short-lived flowers of superficial, cosmopolitan friendships; to be not insufferably handsome, to carry your head, your coat, and your name well; to inhabit a charming little entresol after the pattern of the rooms just described on the Quai Malaquais; to be able to ask a party of friends to dine at the Rocher de Cancale without a previous consultation with your trousers’ pocket; never to be pulled up in any rational project by the words, ‘And the money?’ and finally, to be able to renew at pleasure the pink rosettes that adorn the ears of three thoroughbreds and the lining of your hat?

“To such inquiry any ordinary young man (and we ourselves that are not ordinary men) would reply that the happiness is incomplete; that it is like the Madeleine without the altar; that a man must love and be loved, or love without return, or be loved without loving, or love at cross purposes. Now for

happiness as a mental condition.

“In January 1823, after Godefroid de Beaudenord had set foot in the various social circles which it pleased him to enter, and knew his way about in them, and felt himself secure amid these joys, he saw the necessity of a sunshade—the advantage of having a great lady to complain of, instead of chewing the stems of roses bought for fivepence apiece of Mme. Prevost, after the manner of the callow youngsters that chirp and cackle in the lobbies of the Opera, like chickens in a coop. In short, he resolved to centre his ideas, his sentiments, his affections upon a woman, one woman?—LA PHAMME! Ah!....

“At first he conceived the preposterous notion of an unhappy passion, and gyrated for a while about his fair cousin, Mme. d’Aiglemont, not perceiving that she had already danced the waltz in Faust with a diplomatist. The year ‘25 went by, spent in tentatives, in futile flirtations, and an unsuccessful quest. The loving object of which he was in search did not appear. Passion is extremely rare; and in our time as many barriers have been raised against passion in social life as barricades in the streets. In truth, my brothers, the ‘improper’ is gaining upon us, I tell you!

“As we may incur reproach for following on the heels of portrait painters, auctioneers, and fashionable dressmakers, I will not inflict any description upon you of her in whom Godefroid recognized the female of his species. Age, nineteen; height, four feet eleven inches; fair hair, eyebrows idem, blue eyes, forehead neither high nor low, curved nose, little mouth, short turned-up chin, oval face; distinguishing signs—none. Such was the description on the passport of the beloved object. You will not ask more than the police, or their worships the mayors, of all the towns and communes of France, the gendarmes and the rest of the powers that be? In other respects—I give you my word for it—she was a rough sketch of a Venus dei Medici.

“The first time that Godefroid went to one of the balls for which Mme. de Nucingen enjoyed a certain not undeserved reputation, he caught a glimpse of his future lady-love in a quadrille, and was set marveling by that height of four feet eleven inches. The fair hair rippled in a shower of curls about the little girlish head, she looked as fresh as a naiad peeping out through the crystal pane of her stream to take a look at the spring flowers. (This is quite in the modern style, strings of phrases as endless as the macaroni on the table a while ago.) On that ‘eyebrows idem’ (no offence to the prefect of police) Parny, that writer of light and playful verse, would have hung half-a-dozen couplets, comparing them very agreeably to Cupid’s bow, at the same time bidding us to observe that the dart was beneath; the said dart, however, was neither very potent nor very penetrating, for as yet it was controlled by the namby-pamby sweetness of a Mlle. de la Valliere as depicted on fire-screens, at the moment

when she solemnizes her betrothal in the sight of heaven, any solemnization before the registrar being quite out to the question.

“You know the effect of fair hair and blue eyes in the soft, voluptuous decorous dance? Such a girl does not knock audaciously at your heart, like the dark-haired damsels that seem to say after the fashion of Spanish beggars, ‘Your money or your life; give me five francs or take my contempt!’ These insolent and somewhat dangerous beauties may find favor in the sight of many men, but to my thinking the blonde that has the good fortune to look extremely tender and yielding, while foregoing none of her rights to scold, to tease, to use unmeasured language, to be jealous without grounds, to do anything, in short, that makes woman adorable,—the fair-haired girl, I say, will always be more sure to marry than the ardent brunette. Firewood is dear, you see.

“Isaure, white as an Alsacienne (she first saw the light at Strasbourg, and spoke German with a slight and very agreeable French accent), danced to admiration. Her feet, omitted on the passport, though they really might have found a place there under the heading Distinguishing Signs, were remarkable for their small size, and for that particular something which old-fashioned dancing masters used to call flic-flac, a something that put you in mind of Mlle. Mars’ agreeable delivery, for all the Muses are sisters, and the dancer and poet alike have their feet upon the earth. Isaure’s feet spoke lightly and swiftly with a clearness and precision which augured well for things of the heart. ‘Elle a duc flic-flac,’ was old Marcel’s highest word of praise, and old Marcel was the dancing master that deserved the epithet of ‘the Great.’ People used to say ‘the Great Marcel,’ as they said ‘Frederick the Great,’ and in Frederick’s time.”

“Did Marcel compose any ballets?” inquired Finot.

“Yes, something in the style of Les Quatre Elements and L’Europe galante.”

“What times they were, when great nobles dressed the dancers!” said Finot.

“Improper!” said Bixiou. “Isaure did not raise herself on the tips of her toes, she stayed on the ground, she swayed in the dance without jerks, and neither more nor less voluptuously than a young lady ought to do. There was a profound philosophy in Marcel’s remark that every age and condition had its dance; a married woman should not dance like a young girl, nor a little jackanapes like a capitalist, nor a soldier like a page; he even went so far as to say that the infantry ought not to dance like the cavalry, and from this point he proceeded to classify the world at large. All these fine distinctions seem very far away.”

“Ah!” said Blondet, “you have set your finger on a great calamity. If Marcel had been properly understood, there would have been no French Revolution.”

“It had been Godefroid’s privilege to run over Europe,” resumed Bixiou, “nor had he neglected his opportunities of making a thorough comparative study of European dancing. Perhaps but for profound diligence in the pursuit of what is usually held to be useless knowledge, he would never have fallen in love with this young lady; as it was, out of the three hundred guests that crowded the handsome rooms in the Rue Saint-Lazare, he alone comprehended the unpublished romance revealed by a garrulous quadrille. People certainly noticed Isaure d’Aldrigger’s dancing; but in this present century the cry is ‘Skim lightly over the surface, do not lean your weight on it;’ so one said (he was a notary’s clerk), ‘There is a girl that dances uncommonly well;’ another (a lady in a turban), ‘There is a young lady that dances enchantingly;’ and a third (a woman of thirty), ‘That little thing is not dancing badly.’—But to return to the great Marcel, let us parody his best known saying with, ‘How much there is in an avant-deux.’”

“And let us get on a little faster,” said Blondet; “you are maundering.”

“Isaure,” continued Bixiou, looking askance at Blondet, “wore a simple white crepe dress with green ribbons; she had a camellia in her hair, a camellia at her waist, another camellia at her skirt-hem, and a camellia——”

“Come, now! here comes Sancho’s three hundred goats.”

“Therein lies all literature, dear boy. Clarissa is a masterpiece, there are fourteen volumes of her, and the most wooden-headed playwright would give you the whole of Clarissa in a single act. So long as I amuse you, what have you to complain of? That costume was positively lovely. Don’t you like camillias? Would you rather have dahlias? No? Very good, chestnuts then, here’s for you.” (And probably Bixiou flung a chestnut across the table, for we heard something drop on a plate.)

“I was wrong, I acknowledge it. Go on,” said Blondet.

“I resume. ‘Pretty enough to marry, isn’t she?’ said Rastignac, coming up to Godefroid de Beaudenord, and indicating the little one with the spotless white camellias, every petal intact.

“Rastignac being an intimate friend, Godefroid answered in a low voice, ‘Well, so I was thinking. I was saying to myself that instead of enjoying my happiness with fear and trembling at every moment; instead of taking a world of trouble to whisper a word in an inattentive ear, of looking over the house at the Italiens to see if some one wears a red flower or a white in her hair, or watching along the Corso for a gloved hand on a carriage door, as we used to

do at Milan; instead of snatching a mouthful of baba like a lackey finishing off a bottle behind a door, or wearing out one's wits with giving and receiving letters like a postman—letters that consist not of a mere couple of tender lines, but expand to five folio volumes to-day and contract to a couple of sheets to-morrow (a tiresome practice); instead of dragging along over the ruts and dodging behind hedges—it would be better to give way to the adorable passion that Jean-Jacques Rousseau envied, to fall frankly in love with a girl like Isaure, with a view to making her my wife, if upon exchange of sentiments our hearts respond to each other; to be Werther, in short, with a happy ending.'

"'Which is a common weakness,' returned Rastignac without laughing. 'Possibly in your place I might plunge into the unspeakable delights of that ascetic course; it possesses the merits of novelty and originality, and it is not very expensive. Your Monna Lisa is sweet, but inane as music for the ballet; I give you warning.'

"Rastignac made this last remark in a way which set Beaudenord thinking that his friend had his own motives for disenchanting him; Beaudenord had not been a diplomatist for nothing; he fancied that Rastignac wanted to cut him out. If a man mistakes his vocation, the false start none the less influences him for the rest of his life. Godefroid was so evidently smitten with Mlle. Isaure d'Aldrigger, that Rastignac went off to a tall girl chatting in the card-room.—'Malvina,' he said, lowering his voice, 'your sister has just netted a fish worth eighteen thousand francs a year. He has a name, a manner, and a certain position in the world; keep an eye on them; be careful to gain Isaure's confidence; and if they philander, do not let her send word to him unless you have seen it first——'

"Towards two o'clock in the morning, Isaure was standing beside a diminutive Shepherdess of the Alps, a little woman of forty, coquettish as a Zerlina. A footman announced that 'Mme. la Baronne's carriage stops the way,' and Godefroid forthwith saw his beautiful maiden out of a German song draw her fantastical mother into the cloakroom, whither Malvina followed them; and (boy that he was) he must needs go to discover into what pot of preserves the infant Joby had fallen, and had the pleasure of watching Isaure and Malvina coaxing that sparkling person, their mamma, into her pelisse, with all the little tender precautions required for a night journey in Paris. Of course, the girls on their side watched Beaudenord out of the corners of their eyes, as well-taught kittens watch a mouse, without seeming to see it at all. With a certain satisfaction Beaudenord noted the bearing, manner, and appearance, of the tall well-gloved Alsacien servant in livery who brought three pairs of fur-lined overshoes for his mistresses.

"Never were two sisters more unlike than Isaure and Malvina. Malvina the

elder was tall and dark-haired, Isaure was short and fair, and her features were finely and delicately cut, while her sister's were vigorous and striking. Isaure was one of those women who reign like queens through their weakness, such a woman as a schoolboy would feel it incumbent upon him to protect; Malvina was the Andalouse of Musset's poem. As the sisters stood together, Isaure looked like a miniature beside a portrait in oils.

"'She is rich!' exclaimed Godefroid, going back to Rastignac in the ballroom.

"'Who?'

"'That young lady.'

"'Oh, Isaure d'Aldrigger? Why, yes. The mother is a widow; Nucingen was once a clerk in her husband's bank at Strasbourg. Do you want to see them again? Just turn off a compliment for Mme. de Restaud; she is giving a ball the day after to-morrow; the Baroness d'Aldrigger and her two daughters will be there. You will have an invitation.'

"For three days Godefroid beheld Isaure in the camera obscura of his brain —his Isaure with her white camellias and the little ways she had with her head —saw her as you see the bright thing on which you have been gazing after your eyes are shut, a picture grown somewhat smaller; a radiant, brightly-colored vision flashing out of a vortex of darkness."

"Bixiou, you are dropping into phenomena, block us out our pictures," put in Couture.

"Here you are, gentlemen! Here is the picture you ordered!" (from the tones of Bixiou's voice, he evidently was posing as a waiter.) "Finot, attention, one has to pull at your mouth as a jarvie pulls at his jade. In Madame Theodora Marguerite Wilhelmine Adolphus (of the firm of Adolphus and Company, Manheim), relict of the late Baron d'Aldrigger, you might expect to find a stout, comfortable German, compact and prudent, with a fair complexion mellowed to the tint of the foam on a pot of beer; and as to virtues, rich in all the patriarchal good qualities that Germany possesses—in romances, that is to say. Well there was not a gray hair in the frisky ringlets that she wore on either side of her face; she was still as fresh and as brightly colored on the cheek-bone as a Nuremberg doll; her eyes were lively and bright; a closely-fitting bodice set off the slenderness of her waist. Her brow and temples were furrowed by a few involuntary wrinkles which, like Ninon, she would fain have banished from her head to her heel, but they persisted in tracing their zigzags in the more conspicuous place. The outlines of the nose had somewhat fallen away, and the tip had reddened, and this was the more awkward because it matched the color on the cheek-bones.

“An only daughter and an heiress, spoilt by her father and mother, spoilt by her husband and the city of Strasbourg, spoilt still by two daughters who worshiped their mother, the Baroness d’Aldrigger indulged a taste for rose color, short petticoats, and a knot of ribbon at the point of the tightly-fitting corselet bodice. Any Parisian meeting the Baroness on the boulevard would smile and condemn her outright; he does not admit any plea of extenuating circumstances, like a modern jury on a case of fratricide. A scoffer is always superficial, and in consequence cruel; the rascal never thinks of throwing the proper share of ridicule on society that made the individual what he is; for Nature only makes dull animals of us, we owe the fool to artificial conditions.”

“The thing that I admire about Bixiou is his completeness,” said Blondet; “whenever he is not gibing at others, he is laughing at himself.”

“I will be even with you for that, Blondet,” returned Bixiou in a significant tone. “If the little Baroness was giddy, careless, selfish, and incapable in practical matters, she was not accountable for her sins; the responsibility is divided between the firm of Adolphus and Company of Manheim and Baron d’Aldrigger with his blind love for his wife. The Baroness was a gentle as a lamb; she had a soft heart that was very readily moved; unluckily, the emotion never lasted long, but it was all the more frequently renewed.

“When the Baron died, for instance, the Shepherdess all but followed him to the tomb, so violent and sincere was her grief, but—next morning there was green peas at lunch, she was fond of green peas, the delicious green peas calmed the crisis. Her daughters and her servants loved her so blindly that the whole household rejoiced over a circumstance that enabled them to hide the dolorous spectacle of the funeral from the sorrowing Baroness. Isaure and Malvina would not allow their idolized mother to see their tears.

“While the Requiem was chanted, they diverted her thoughts to the choice of mourning dresses. While the coffin was placed in the huge, black and white, wax-besprinkled catafalque that does duty for some three thousand dead in the course of its career—so I was informed by a philosophically-minded mute whom I once consulted on a point over a couple of glasses of petit blanc—while an indifferent priest mumbling the office for the dead, do you know what the friends of the departed were saying as, all dressed in black from head to foot, they sat or stood in the church? (Here is the picture you ordered.) Stay, do you see them?

“‘How much do you suppose old d’Aldrigger will leave?’ Desroches asked of Taillefer.—You remember Taillefer that gave us the finest orgy ever known not long before he died?”

“He was in treaty for practice in 1822,” said Couture. “It was a bold thing

to do, for he was the son of a poor clerk who never made more than eighteen hundred francs a year, and his mother sold stamped paper. But he worked very hard from 1818 to 1822. He was Derville's fourth clerk when he came; and in 1819 he was second!"

"Desroches?"

"Yes. Desroches, like the rest of us, once groveled in the poverty of Job. He grew so tired of wearing coats too tight and sleeves too short for him, that he swallowed down the law in desperation and had just bought a bare license. He was a licensed attorney, without a penny, or a client, or any friends beyond our set; and he was bound to pay interest on the purchase-money and the cautionary deposit besides."

"He used to make me feel as if I had met a tiger escaped from the Jardin des Plantes," said Couture. "He was lean and red-haired, his eyes were the color of Spanish snuff, and his complexion was harsh. He looked cold and phlegmatic. He was hard upon the widow, pitiless to the orphan, and a terror to his clerks; they were not allowed to waste a minute. Learned, crafty, double-faced, honey-tongued, never flying into a passion, rancorous in his judicial way."

"But there is goodness in him," cried Finot; "he is devoted to his friends. The first thing he did was to take Godeschal, Mariette's brother, as his head-clerk."

"At Paris," said Blondet, "there are attorneys of two shades. There is the honest man attorney; he abides within the province of the law, pushes on his cases, neglects no one, never runs after business, gives his clients his honest opinion, and makes them compromise on doubtful points—he is a Derville, in short. Then there is the starveling attorney, to whom anything seems good provided that he is sure of expenses; he will set, not mountains fighting, for he sells them, but planets; he will work to make the worse appear the better cause, and take advantage of a technical error to win the day for a rogue. If one of these fellows tries one of Maitre Gonin's tricks once too often, the guild forces him to sell his connection. Desroches, our friend Desroches, understood the full resources of a trade carried on in a beggarly way enough by poor devils; he would buy up causes of men who feared to lose the day; he plunged into chicanery with a fixed determination to make money by it. He was right; he did his business very honestly. He found influence among men in public life by getting them out of awkward complications; there was our dear les Lupeaulx, for instance, whose position was so deeply compromised. And Desroches stood in need of influence; for when he began, he was anything but well looked on at the court, and he who took so much trouble to rectify the errors of his clients was often in trouble himself. See now, Bixiou, to go back

to the subject—How came Desroches to be in the church?”

“‘D’Aldrigger is leaving seven or eight hundred thousand francs,’ Taillefer answered, addressing Desroches.

“‘Oh, pooh, there is only one man who knows how much they are worth,’ put in Werbrust, a friend of the deceased.

“‘Who?’

“‘That fat rogue Nucingen; he will go as far as the cemetery; d’Aldrigger was his master once, and out of gratitude he put the old man’s capital into his business.’

“‘The widow will soon feel a great difference.’

“‘What do you mean?’

“‘Well, d’Aldrigger was so fond of his wife. Now, don’t laugh, people are looking at us.’

“‘Look here comes du Tillet; he is very late. The epistle is just beginning.’

“‘He will marry the eldest girl in all probability.’

“‘Is it possible?’ asked Desroches; ‘why, he is tied more than ever to Mme. Roguin.’

“‘Tied—he?—You do not know him.’

“‘Do you know how Nucingen and du Tillet stand?’ asked Desroches.

“‘Like this,’ said Taillefer; ‘Nucingen is just the man to swallow down his old master’s capital, and then to disgorge it.’

“‘Ugh! ugh!’ coughed Werbrust, ‘these churches are confoundedly damp; ugh! ugh! What do you mean by “disgorge it"’?

“‘Well, Nucingen knows that du Tillet has a lot of money; he wants to marry him to Malvina; but du Tillet is shy of Nucingen. To a looker-on, the game is good fun.’

“‘What!’ exclaimed Werbrust, ‘is she old enough to marry? How quickly we grow old!’

“‘Malvina d’Aldrigger is quite twenty years old, my dear fellow. Old d’Aldrigger was married in 1800. He gave some rather fine entertainments in Strasbourg at the time of his wedding, and afterwards when Malvina was born. That was in 1801 at the peace of Amiens, and here are we in the year 1823, Daddy Werbrust! In those days everything was Ossianized; he called his daughter Malvina. Six years afterwards there was a rage for chivalry, Partant pour la Syrie—a pack of nonsense—and he christened his second daughter

Isaure. She is seventeen. So there are two daughters to marry.’

“‘The women will not have a penny left in ten years’ time,’ said Werbrust, speaking to Desroches in a confidential tone.

“‘There is d’Aldrigger’s man-servant, the old fellow bellowing away at the back of the church; he has been with them since the two young ladies were children, and he is capable of anything to keep enough together for them to live upon,’ said Taillefer.

“Dies iroe! (from the minor cannons). Dies illa! (from the choristers).

“‘Good-day, Werbrust (from Taillefer), the Dies iroe puts me too much in mind of my poor boy.’

“‘I shall go too; it is too damp in here,’ said Werbrust.

“In favilla.

“‘A few halfpence, kind gentlemen!’ (from the beggars at the door).

“‘For the expenses of the church!’ (from the beadle, with a rattling clatter of the money-box).

“‘Amen’ (from the choristers).

“‘What did he die of?’ (from a friend).

“‘He broke a blood-vessel in the heel’ (from an inquisitive wag).

“‘Who is dead?’ (from a passer-by).

“‘The President de Montesquieu!’ (from a relative).

“The sacristan to the poor, ‘Get away, all of you; the money for you has been given to us; don’t ask for any more.’”

“Done to the life!” cried Couture. And indeed it seemed to us that we heard all that went on in the church. Bixiou imitated everything, even the shuffling sound of the feet of the men that carried the coffin over the stone floor.

“There are poets and romancers and writers that say many fine things abut Parisian manners,” continued Bixiou, “but that is what really happens at a funeral. Ninety-nine out of a hundred that come to pay their respects to some poor devil departed, get together and talk business or pleasure in the middle of the church. To see some poor little touch of real sorrow, you need an impossible combination of circumstances. And, after all, is there such a thing as grief without a thought of self in it?”

“Ugh!” said Blondet. “Nothing is less respected than death; is it that there is nothing less respectable?”

“It is so common!” resumed Bixiou. “When the service was over Nucingen and du Tillet went to the graveside. The old man-servant walked; Nucingen and du Tillet were put at the head of the procession of mourning coaches. —‘Goot, mein goot friend,’ said Nucingen as they turned into the boulevard. ‘It ees a goot time to marry Malfina; you vill be der brodector off that boor family vat ess in tears; you vill haf ein family, a home off your own; you vill haf a house ready vurnished, und Malfina is truly ein dreashure.’”

“I seem to hear that old Robert Macaire of a Nucingen himself,” said Finot.

“‘A charming girl,’ said Ferdinand du Tillet in a cool, unenthusiastic tone,” Bixiou continued.

“Just du Tillet himself summed up in a word!” cried Couture.

“‘Those that do not know her may think her plain,’ pursued du Tillet, ‘but she has character, I admit.’

“‘Und ein herz, dot is the pest of die pizness, mein der poy; she vould make you an indelligent und defoted vife. In our beastly pizness, nopody cares to know who lifs or dies; it is a crate plessing gif a mann kann put drust in his vife’s heart. Mein Telvine prouht me more as a million, as you know, but I should gladly gif her for Malfina dot haf not so pig a dot.’

“‘But how much has she?’

“‘I do not know precisely; boot she haf somdings.’

“‘Yes, she has a mother with a great liking for rose-color.’ said du Tillet; and with that epigram he cut Nucingen’s diplomatic efforts short.

“After dinner the Baron de Nucingen informed Wilhelmine Adolphus that she had barely four hundred thousand francs deposited with him. The daughter of Adolphus of Manheim, thus reduced to an income of twenty-four thousand livres, lost herself in arithmetical exercises that muddled her wits.

“‘I have always had six thousand francs for our dress allowance,’ she said to Malvina. ‘Why, how did your father find money? We shall have nothing now with twenty-four thousand francs; it is destitution! Oh! if my father could see me so come down in the world, it would kill him if he were not dead already! Poor Wilhelmine!’ and she began to cry.

“Malvina, puzzled to know how to comfort her mother, represented to her that she was still young and pretty, that rose-color still became her, that she could continue to go to the Opera and the Bouffons, where Mme. de Nucingen had a box. And so with visions of gaieties, dances, music, pretty dresses, and social success, the Baroness was lulled to sleep and pleasant dreams in the blue, silk-curtained bed in the charming room next to the chamber in which Jean Baptiste, Baron d’Aldrigger, had breathed his last but two nights ago.

“Here in a few words is the Baron’s history. During his lifetime that worthy Alsacien accumulated about three millions of francs. In 1800, at the age of thirty-six, in the apogee of a fortune made during the Revolution, he made a marriage partly of ambition, partly of inclination, with the heiress of the family of Adolphus of Manheim. Wilhelmine, being the idol of her whole family, naturally inherited their wealth after some ten years. Next, d’Aldrigger’s fortune being doubled, he was transformed into a Baron by His Majesty, Emperor and King, and forthwith became a fanatical admirer of the great man to whom he owed his title. Wherefore, between 1814 and 1815 he ruined himself by a too serious belief in the sun of Austerlitz. Honest Alsacien as he was, he did not suspend payment, nor did he give his creditors shares in doubtful concerns by way of settlement. He paid everything over the counter, and retired from business, thoroughly deserving Nucingen’s comment on his behavior—‘Honest but stoobid.’

“All claims satisfied, there remained to him five hundred thousand francs and certain receipts for sums advanced to that Imperial Government, which had ceased to exist. ‘See vat komms of too much pelief in Nappolion,’ said he, when he had realized all his capital.

“When you have been one of the leading men in a place, how are you to remain in it when your estate has dwindled? D’Aldrigger, like all ruined provincials, removed to Paris, there intrepidly wore the tricolor braces embroidered with Imperial eagles, and lived entirely in Bonapartist circles. His capital he handed over to Nucingen, who gave him eight per cent upon it, and took over the loans to the Imperial Government at a mere sixty per cent of reduction; wherefore d’Aldrigger squeezed Nucingen’s hand and said, ‘I knew dot in you I should find de heart of ein Elzacien.’

“(Nucingen was paid in full through our friend des Lupeaulx.) Well fleeced as d’Aldrigger had been, he still possessed an income of forty-four thousand francs; but his mortification was further complicated by the spleen which lies in wait for the business man so soon as he retires from business. He set himself, noble heart, to sacrifice himself to his wife, now that her fortune was lost, that fortune of which she had allowed herself to be despoiled so easily, after the manner of a girl entirely ignorant of money matters. Mme. d’Aldrigger accordingly missed not a single pleasure to which she had been accustomed; any void caused by the loss of Strasbourg acquaintances were speedily filled, and more than filled, with Paris gaieties.

“Even then as now the Nucingens lived at the higher end of financial society, and the Baron de Nucingen made it a point of honor to treat the honest banker well. His disinterested virtue looked well in the Nucingen salon.

“Every winter dipped into d’Aldrigger’s principal, but he did not venture

to remonstrate with his pearl of a Wilhelmine. His was the most ingenious unintelligent tenderness in the world. A good man, but a stupid one! ‘What will become of them when I am gone?’ he said, as he lay dying; and when he was left alone for a moment with Wirth, his old man-servant, he struggled for breath to bid him take care of his mistress and her two daughters, as if the one reasonable being in the house was this Alsacien Caleb Balderstone.

“Three years afterwards, in 1826, Isaure was twenty years old, and Malvina still unmarried. Malvina had gone into society, and in course of time discovered for herself how superficial their friendships were, how accurately every one was weighed and appraised. Like most girls that have been ‘well brought up,’ as we say, Malvina had no idea of the mechanism of life, of the importance of money, of the difficulty of obtaining it, of the prices of things. And so, for six years, every lesson that she had learned had been a painful one for her.

“D’Aldrigger’s four hundred thousand francs were carried to the credit of the Baroness’ account with the firm of Nucingen (she was her husband’s creditor for twelve hundred thousand francs under her marriage settlement), and when in any difficulty the Shepherdess of the Alps dipped into her capital as though it were inexhaustible.

“When our pigeon first advanced towards his dove, Nucingen, knowing the Baroness’ character, must have spoken plainly to Malvina on the financial position. At that time three hundred thousand francs were left; the income of twenty-four thousand francs was reduced to eighteen thousand. Wirth had kept up this state of things for three years! After that confidential interview, Malvina put down the carriage, sold the horses, and dismissed the coachman, without her mother’s knowledge. The furniture, now ten years old, could not be renewed, but it all faded together, and for those that like harmony the effect was not half bad. The Baroness herself, that so well-preserved flower, began to look like the last solitary frost-touched rose on a November bush. I myself watched the slow decline of luxury by half-tones and semi-tones! Frightful, upon my honor! It was my last trouble of the kind; afterwards I said to myself, ‘It is silly to care so much about other people.’ But while I was in civil service, I was fool enough to take a personal interest in the houses where I dined; I used to stand up for them; I would say no ill of them myself; I—oh! I was a child.

“Well, when the ci-devant pearl’s daughter put the state of the case before her, ‘Oh my poor children,’ cried she, ‘who will make my dresses now? I cannot afford new bonnets; I cannot see visitors here nor go out.’—Now by what token do you know that a man is in love?” said Bixiou, interrupting himself. “The question is, whether Beaudenord was genuinely in love with the fair-haired girl.”

“He neglects his interests,” said Couture.

“He changes his shirt three times a day,” opined Blondet; “a man of more than ordinary ability, can he, and ought he, to fall in love?”

“My friends,” resumed Bixiou, with a sentimental air, “there is a kind of man who, when he feels that he is in peril of falling in love, will snap his fingers or fling away his cigar (as the case may be) with a ‘Pooh! there are other women in the world.’ Beware of that man for a dangerous reptile. Still, the Government may employ that citizen somewhere in the Foreign Office. Blondet, I call your attention to the fact that this Godefroid had thrown up diplomacy.”

“Well, he was absorbed,” said Blondet. “Love gives the fool his one chance of growing great.”

“Blondet, Blondet, how is it that we are so poor?” cried Bixiou.

“And why is Finot so rich?” returned Blondet. “I will tell you how it is; there, my son, we understand each other. Come, there is Finot filling up my glass as if I had carried in his firewood. At the end of dinner one ought to sip one’s wine slowly,—Well?”

“Thou has said. The absorbed Godefroid became fully acquainted with the family—the tall Malvina, the frivolous Baroness, and the little lady of the dance. He became a servant after the most conscientious and restricted fashion. He was not scared away by the cadaverous remains of opulence; not he! by degrees he became accustomed to the threadbare condition of things. It never struck the young man that the green silk damask and white ornaments in the drawing-room needed refurnishing. The curtains, the tea-table, the knick-knacks on the chimney-piece, the rococo chandelier, the Eastern carpet with the pile worn down to the thread, the pianoforte, the little flowered china cups, the fringed serviettes so full of holes that they looked like open work in the Spanish fashion, the green sitting-room with the Baroness’ blue bedroom beyond it,—it was all sacred, all dear to him. It is only your stupid woman with the brilliant beauty that throws heart, brain, and soul into the shade, who can inspire forgetfulness like this; a clever woman never abuses her advantages; she must be small-natured and silly to gain such a hold upon a man. Beaudenord actually loved the solemn old Wirth—he has told me so himself!

“That old rogue regarded his future master with the awe which a good Catholic feels for the Eucharist. Honest Wirth was a kind of Gaspard, a beer-drinking German sheathing his cunning in good-nature, much as a cardinal in the Middle Ages kept his dagger up his sleeve. Wirth saw a husband for Isaure, and accordingly proceeded to surround Godefroid with the mazy

circumlocutions of his Alsacien's geniality, that most adhesive of all known varieties of bird-lime.

"Mme. d'Aldrigger was radically 'improper.' She thought love the most natural thing imaginable. When Isaure and Malvina went out together to the Champs Elysees or the Tuileries, where they were sure to meet the young men of their set, she would simply say, 'A pleasant time to you, dear girls.' Their friends among men, the only persons who might have slandered the sisters, championed them; for the extraordinary liberty permitted in the d'Aldriggers' salon made it unique in Paris. Vast wealth could scarcely have procured such evenings, the talk was good on any subject; dress was not insisted upon; you felt so much at home there that you could ask for supper. The sisters corresponded as they pleased, and quietly read their letters by their mother's side; it never occurred to the Baroness to interfere in any way; the adorable woman gave the girls the full benefits of her selfishness, and in a certain sense selfish persons are the easiest to live with; they hate trouble, and therefore do not trouble other people; they never beset the lives of their fellow-creatures with thorny advice and captious fault-finding; nor do they torment you with the waspish solicitude of excessive affection that must know all things and rule all things——"

"This comes home," said Blondet, "but my dear fellow, this is not telling a story, this is blague——"

"Blondet, if you were not tipsy, I should really feel hurt! He is the one serious literary character among us; for his benefit, I honor you by treating you like men of taste, I am distilling my tale for you, and now he criticises me! There is no greater proof of intellectual sterility, my friends, than the piling up of facts. Le Misanthrope, that supreme comedy, shows us that art consists in the power of building a palace on a needle's point. The gist of my idea is in the fairy wand which can turn the Desert into an Interlaken in ten seconds (precisely the time required to empty this glass). Would you rather that I fired off at you like a cannon-ball, or a commander-in-chief's report? We chat and laugh; and this journalist, a bibliophobe when sober, expects me, forsooth, when he is drunk, to teach my tongue to move at the dull jogtrot of a printed book." (Here he affected to weep.) "Woe unto the French imagination when men fain would blunt the needle points of her pleasant humor! Dies iroe! Let us weep for Candide. Long live the Kritik of Pure Reason, La Symbolique, and the systems in five closely packed volumes, printed by Germans, who little suspect that the gist of the matter has been known in Paris since 1750, and crystallized in a few trenchant words—the diamonds of our national thought. Blondet is driving a hearse to his own suicide; Blondet, forsooth! who manufactures newspaper accounts of the last words of all the great men that die without saying anything!"

“Come, get on,” put in Finot.

“It was my intention to explain to you in what the happiness of a man consists when he is not a shareholder (out of compliment to Couture). Well, now, do you not see at what a price Godefroid secured the greatest happiness of a young man’s dreams? He was trying to understand Isaure, by way of making sure that she should understand him. Things which comprehend one another must needs be similar. Infinity and Nothingness, for instance, are like; everything that lies between the two is like neither. Nothingness is stupidity; genius, Infinity. The lovers wrote each other the stupidest letters imaginable, putting down various expressions then in fashion upon bits of scented paper: ‘Angel! Aeolian harp! with thee I shall be complete! There is a heart in my man’s breast! Weak woman, poor me!’ all the latest heart-frippery. It was Godefroid’s wont to stay in a drawing-room for a bare ten minutes; he talked without any pretension to the women in it, and at these times they thought him very clever. In short, judge of his absorption; Joby, his horses and carriages, became secondary interests in his life. He was never happy except in the depths of a snug settee opposite the Baroness, by the dark-green porphyry chimney-piece, watching Isaure, taking tea, and chatting with the little circle of friends that dropped in every evening between eleven and twelve in the Rue Joubert. You could play bouillotte there safely. (I always won.) Isaure sat with one little foot thrust out in its black satin shoe; Godefroid would gaze and gaze, and stay till every one else was gone, and say, ‘Give me your shoe!’ and Isaure would put her little foot on a chair and take it off and give it to him, with a glance, one of those glances that—in short, you understand.

“At length Godefroid discovered a great mystery in Malvina. Whenever du Tillet knocked at the door, the live red that colored Malvina’s face said ‘Ferdinand!’ When the poor girl’s eyes fell on that two-footed tiger, they lighted up like a brazier fanned by a current of air. When Ferdinand drew her away to the window or a side table, she betrayed her secret infinite joy. It is a rare and wonderful thing to see a woman so much in love that she loses her cunning to be strange, and you can read her heart; as rare (dear me!) in Paris as the Singing Flower in the Indies. But in spite of a friendship dating from the d’Aldriggers’ first appearance at the Nucingens’, Ferdinand did not marry Malvina. Our ferocious friend was not apparently jealous of Desroches, who paid assiduous court to the young lady; Desroches wanted to pay off the rest of the purchase-money due for his connection; Malvina could not well have less than fifty thousand crowns, he thought, and so the lawyer was fain to play the lover. Malvina, deeply humiliated as she was by du Tillet’s carelessness, loved him too well to shut the door upon him. With her, an enthusiastic, highly-wrought, sensitive girl, love sometimes got the better of pride, and pride again overcame wounded love. Our friend Ferdinand, cool and self-possessed, accepted her tenderness, and breathed the atmosphere with the quiet

enjoyment of a tiger licking the blood that dyes his throat. He would come to make sure of it with new proofs; he never allowed two days to pass without a visit to the Rue Joubert.

“At that time the rascal possessed something like eighteen hundred thousand francs; money must have weighted very little with him in the question of marriage; and he had not merely been proof against Malvina, he had resisted the Barons de Nucingen and de Rastignac; though both of them had set him galloping at the rate of seventy-five leagues a day, with outriders, regardless of expense, through mazes of their cunning devices—and with never a clue of thread.

“Godefroid could not refrain from saying a word to his future sister-in-law as to her ridiculous position between a banker and an attorney.

“‘You mean to read me a lecture on the subject of Ferdinand,’ she said frankly, ‘to know the secret between us. Dear Godefroid, never mention this again. Ferdinand’s birth, antecedents, and fortune count for nothing in this, so you may think it is something extraordinary.’ A few days afterwards, however, Malvina took Godefroid apart to say, ‘I do not think that Desroches is sincere’ (such is the instinct of love); ‘he would like to marry me, and he is paying court to some tradesman’s daughter as well. I should very much like to know whether I am a second shift, and whether marriage is a matter of money with him.’ The fact was that Desroches, deep as he was, could not make out du Tillet, and was afraid that he might marry Malvina. So the fellow had secured his retreat. His position was intolerable, he was scarcely paying his expenses and interest on the debt. Women understand nothing of these things; for them, love is always a millionaire.”

“But since neither du Tillet nor Desroches married her; just explain Ferdinand’s motive,” said Finot.

“Motive?” repeated Bixiou; “why, this. General Rule: A girl that has once given away her slipper, even if she refused it for ten years, is never married by the man who——”

“Bosh!” interrupted Blondet, “one reason for loving is the fact that one has loved. His motive? Here it is. General Rule: Do not marry as a sergeant when some day you may be Duke of Dantzig and Marshal of France. Now, see what a match du Tillet has made since then. He married one of the Comte de Granville’s daughters, into one of the oldest families in the French magistracy.”

“Desroches’ mother had a friend, a druggist’s wife,” continued Bixiou. “Said druggist had retired with a fat fortune. These druggist folk have absurdly crude notions; by way of giving his daughter a good education, he had sent her

to a boarding-school! Well, Matifat meant the girl to marry well, on the strength of two hundred thousand francs, good hard coin with no scent of drugs about it."

"Florine's Matifat?" asked Blondet.

"Well, yes. Lousteau's Matifat; ours, in fact. The Matifats, even then lost to us, had gone to live in the Rue du Cherche-Midi, as far as may be from the Rue des Lombards, where their money was made. For my own part, I had cultivated those Matifats. While I served my time in the galleys of the law, when I was cooped up for eight hours out of the twenty-four with nincompoops of the first water, I saw queer characters enough to convince myself that all is not dead-level even in obscure places, and that in the flattest inanity you may chance upon an angle. Yes, dear boy, such and such a philistine is to such another as Raphael is to Natoire.

"Mme. Desroches, the widowed mother, had long ago planned this marriage for her son, in spite of a tremendous obstacle which took the shape of one Cochin, Matifat's partner's son, a young clerk in the adult department. M. and Mme. Matifat were of the opinion that an attorney's position 'gave some guarantee for a wife's happiness,' to use their own expression; and as for Desroches, he was prepared to fall in with his mother's views in case he could do no better for himself. Wherefore, he kept up his acquaintance with the druggists in the Rue du Cherche-Midi.

"To put another kind of happiness before you, you should have a description of these shopkeepers, male and female. They rejoiced in the possession of a handsome ground floor and a strip of garden; for amusement, they watched a little squirt of water, no bigger than a cornstalk, perpetually rising and falling upon a small round freestone slab in the middle of a basin some six feet across; they would rise early of a morning to see if the plants in the garden had grown in the night; they had nothing to do, they were restless, they dressed for the sake of dressing, bored themselves at the theatre, and were for ever going to and fro between Paris and Luzarches, where they had a country house. I have dined there.

"Once they tried to quiz me, Blondet. I told them a long-winded story that lasted from nine o'clock till midnight, one tale inside another. I had just brought my twenty-ninth personage upon the scene (the newspapers have plagiarized with their 'continued in our next'), when old Matifat, who as host still held out, snored like the rest, after blinking for five minutes. Next day they all complimented me upon the ending of my tale!

"These tradespeople's society consisted of M. and Mme. Cochin, Mme. Desroches, and a young Popinot, still in the drug business, who used to bring them news of the Rue des Lombards. (You know him, Finot.) Mme. Matifat

loved the arts; she bought lithographs, chromo-lithographs, and colored prints,—all the cheapest things she could lay her hands on. The Sieur Matifat amused himself by looking into new business speculations, investing a little capital now and again for the sake of the excitement. Florine had cured him of his taste for the Regency style of thing. One saying of his will give you some idea of the depths in my Matifat. 'Art thou going to bed, my nieces?' he used to say when he wished them good-night, because (as he explained) he was afraid of hurting their feelings with the more formal 'you.'

"The daughter was a girl with no manner at all. She looked rather like a superior sort of housemaid. She could get through a sonata, she wrote a pretty English hand, knew French grammar and orthography—a complete commercial education, in short. She was impatient enough to be married and leave the paternal roof, finding it as dull at home as a lieutenant finds the nightwatch at sea; at the same time, it should be said that her watch lasted through the whole twenty-four hours. Desroches or Cochin junior, a notary or a lifeguardsman, or a sham English lord,—any husband would have suited her. As she so obviously knew nothing of life, I took pity upon her, I determined to reveal the great secret of it. But, pooh! the Matifats shut their doors on me. The bourgeois and I shall never understand each other."

"She married General Gouraud," said Finot.

"In forty-eight hours, Godefroid de Beaudenord, late of the diplomatic corps, saw through the Matifats and their nefarious designs," resumed Bixiou. "Rastignac happened to be chatting with the frivolous Baroness when Godefroid came in to give his report to Malvina. A word here and there reached his ear; he guessed the matter on foot, more particularly from Malvina's look of satisfaction that it was as she had suspected. Then Rastignac actually stopped on till two o'clock in the morning. And yet there are those that call him selfish! Beaudenord took his departure when the Baroness went to bed.

"As soon as Rastignac was left alone with Malvina, he spoke in a fatherly, good-humored fashion. 'Dear child, please to bear in mind that a poor fellow, heavy with sleep, has been drinking tea to keep himself awake till two o'clock in the morning, all for a chance of saying a solemn word of advice to you—Marry! Do not be too particular; do not brood over your feelings; never mind the sordid schemes of men that have one foot here and another in the Matifats' house; do not stop to think at all: Marry!—When a girl marries, it means that the man whom she marries undertakes to maintain her in a more or less good position in life, and at any rate her comfort is assured. I know the world. Girls, mammas, and grandmammas are all of them hypocrites when they fly off into sentiment over a question of marriage. Nobody really thinks of anything but a good position. If a mother marries her daughter well, she says that she has

made an excellent bargain.' Here Rastignac unfolded his theory of marriage, which to his way of thinking is a business arrangement, with a view to making life tolerable; and ended up with, 'I do not ask to know your secret, Malvina; I know it already. Men talk things over among themselves, just as you women talk after you leave the dinner-table. This is all I have to say: Marry. If you do not, remember that I begged you to marry, here, in this room, this evening!'

"There was a certain ring in Rastignac's voice which compelled, not attention, but reflection. There was something startling in his insistence; something that went, as Rastignac meant that it should, to the quick of Malvina's intelligence. She thought over the counsel again next day, and vainly asked herself why it had been given."

Couture broke in. "In all these tops that you have set spinning, I see nothing at all like the beginnings of Rastignac's fortune," said he. "You apparently take us for Matifats multiplied by half-a-dozen bottles of champagne."

"We are just coming to it," returned Bixiou. "You have followed the course of all the rivulets which make up that forty thousand livres a year which so many people envy. By this time Rastignac held the threads of all these lives in his hand."

"Desroches, the Matifats, Beaudenord, the d'Aldriggers, d'Aiglemont?"

"Yes, and a hundred others," assented Bixiou.

"Oh, come now, how?" cried Finot. "I know a few things, but I cannot see a glimpse of an answer to this riddle."

"Blondet has roughly given you the account of Nucingen's first two suspensions of payment; now for the third, with full details.—After the peace of 1815, Nucingen grasped an idea which some of us only fully understood later, to wit, that capital is a power only when you are very much richer than other people. In his own mind, he was jealous of the Rothschilds. He had five millions of francs, he wanted ten. He knew a way to make thirty millions with ten, while with five he could only make fifteen. So he made up his mind to operate a third suspension of payment. About that time, the great man hit on the idea of indemnifying his creditors with paper of purely fictitious value and keeping their coin. On the market, a great idea of this sort is not expressed in precisely this cut-and-dried way. Such an arrangement consists in giving a lot of grown-up children a small pie in exchange for a gold piece; and, like children of a smaller growth, they prefer the pie to the gold piece, not suspecting that they might have a couple of hundred pies for it."

"What is this all about, Bixiou?" cried Couture. "Nothing more bona fide. Not a week passes but pies are offered to the public for a louis. But who

compels the public to take them? Are they not perfectly free to make inquiries?”

“You would rather have it made compulsory to take up shares, would you?” asked Blondet.

“No,” said Finot. “Where would the talent come in?”

“Very good for Finot.”

“Who put him up to it?” asked Couture.

“The fact was,” continued Bixiou, “that Nucingen had twice had the luck to present the public (quite unintentionally) with a pie that turned out to be worth more than the money he received for it. That unlucky good luck gave him qualms of conscience. A course of such luck is fatal to a man in the long run. This time he meant to make no mistake of this sort; he waited ten years for an opportunity of issuing negotiable securities which should seem on the face of it to be worth something, while as a matter of fact——”

“But if you look at banking in that light,” broke in Couture, “no sort of business would be possible. More than one bona fide banker, backed up by a bona fide government, has induced the hardest-headed men on ‘Change to take up stock which is bound to fall within a given time. You have seen better than that. Have you not seen stock created with the concurrence of a government to pay the interest upon older stock, so as to keep things going and tide over the difficulty? These operations were more or less like Nucingen’s settlements.”

“The thing may look queer on a small scale,” said Blondet, “but on a large we call it finance. There are high-handed proceedings criminal between man and man that amount to nothing when spread out over any number of men, much as a drop of prussic acid becomes harmless in a pail of water. You take a man’s life, you are guillotined. But if, for any political conviction whatsoever, you take five hundred lives, political crimes are respected. You take five thousand francs out of my desk; to the hulks you go. But with a sop cleverly pushed into the jaws of a thousand speculators, you can cram the stock of any bankrupt republic or monarchy down their throats; even if the loan has been floated, as Couture says, to pay the interest on that very same national debt. Nobody can complain. These are the real principles of the present Golden Age.”

“When the stage machinery is so huge,” continued Bixiou, “a good many puppets are required. In the first place, Nucingen had purposely and with his eyes open invested his five millions in an American investment, foreseeing that the profits would not come in until it was too late. The firm of Nucingen deliberately emptied its coffers. Any liquidation ought to be brought about naturally. In deposits belonging to private individuals and other investments,

the firm possessed about six millions of capital altogether. Among those private individuals was the Baroness d'Aldrigger with her three hundred thousand francs, Beaudenord with four hundred thousand, d'Aiglemont with a million, Matifat with three hundred thousand, Charles Grandet (who married Mlle. d'Aubrion) with half a million, and so forth, and so forth.

"Now, if Nucingen had himself brought out a joint-stock company, with the shares of which he proposed to indemnify his creditors after more or less ingenious manoeuvring, he might perhaps have been suspected. He set about it more cunningly than that. He made some one else put up the machinery that was to play the part of the Mississippi scheme in Law's system. Nucingen can make the longest-headed men work out schemes for him without confiding a word to them; it is his peculiar talent. Nucingen just let fall a hint to du Tillet of the pyramidal, triumphant notion of bringing out a joint-stock enterprise with capital sufficient to pay very high dividends for a time. Tried for the first time, in days when noodles with capital were plentiful, the plan was pretty sure to end in a run upon the shares, and consequently in a profit for the banker that issued them. You must remember that this happened in 1826.

"Du Tillet, struck through he was by an idea both pregnant and ingenious, naturally bethought himself that if the enterprise failed, the blame must fall upon somebody. For which reason, it occurred to him to put forward a figurehead director in charge of his commercial machinery. At this day you know the secret of the firm of Claparon and Company, founded by du Tillet, one of the finest inventions——"

"Yes," said Blondet, "the responsible editor in business matters, the instigator, and scapegoat; but we know better than that nowadays. We put, 'Apply at the offices of the Company, such and such a number, such and such a street,' where the public find a staff of clerks in green caps, about as pleasing to behold as broker's men."

"Nucingen," pursued Bixiou, "had supported the firm of Charles Claparon and Company with all his credit. There were markets in which you might safely put a million francs' worth of Claparon's paper. So du Tillet proposed to bring his firm of Claparon to the fore. So said, so done. In 1825 the shareholder was still an unsophisticated being. There was no such thing as cash lying at call. Managing directors did not pledge themselves not to put their own shares upon the market; they kept no deposit with the Bank of France; they guaranteed nothing. They did not even condescend to explain to shareholders the exact limits of their liabilities when they informed them that the directors in their goodness, refrained from asking any more than a thousand, or five hundred, or even two hundred and fifty francs. It was not given out that the experiment in aere publico was not meant to last for more than seven, five, or even three years, so that shareholders would not have long

to wait for the catastrophe. It was in the childhood of the art. Promoters did not even publish the gigantic prospectuses with which they stimulate the imagination, and at the same time make demands for money of all and sundry."

"That only comes when nobody wishes to part with money," said Couture.

"In short, there was no competition in investments," continued Bixiou. "Paper-mache manufacturers, cotton printers, zinc-rollers, theatres, and newspapers as yet did not hurl themselves like hunting dogs upon their quarry —the expiring shareholder. 'Nice things in shares,' as Couture says, put thus artlessly before the public, and backed up by the opinions of experts ('the princes of science'), were negotiated shamefacedly in the silence and shadow of the Bourse. Lynx-eyed speculators used to execute (financially speaking) the air Calumny out of The Barber of Seville. They went about piano, piano, making known the merits of the concern through the medium of stock-exchange gossip. They could only exploit the victim in his own house, on the Bourse, or in company; so they reached him by means of the skilfully created rumor which grew till it reached a tutti of a quotation in four figures——"

"And as we can say anything among ourselves," said Couture, "I will go back to the last subject."

"Vous etes orfevre, Monsieur Josse!" cried Finot.

"Finot will always be classic, constitutional, and pedantic," commented Blondet.

"Yes," rejoined Couture, on whose account Cerizet had just been condemned on a criminal charge. "I maintain that the new way is infinitely less fraudulent, less ruinous, more straightforward than the old. Publicity means time for reflection and inquiry. If here and there a shareholder is taken in, he has himself to blame, nobody sells him a pig in a poke. The manufacturing industry——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Bixiou, "here comes industry——"

"—— is a gainer by it," continued Couture, taking no notice of the interruption. "Every government that meddles with commerce and cannot leave it free, sets about an expensive piece of folly; State interference ends in a maximum or a monopoly. To my thinking, few things can be more in conformity with the principles of free trade than joint-stock companies. State interference means that you try to regulate the relations of principal and interest, which is absurd. In business, generally speaking, the profits are in proportion to the risks. What does it matter to the State how money is set circulating, provided that it is always in circulation? What does it matter who is rich or who is poor, provided that there is a constant quantity of rich people

to be taxed? Joint-stock companies, limited liability companies, every sort of enterprise that pays a dividend, has been carried on for twenty years in England, commercially the first country in the world. Nothing passes unchallenged there; the Houses of Parliament hatch some twelve hundred laws every session, yet no member of Parliament has ever yet raised an objection to the system——”

“A cure for plethora of the strong box. Purely vegetable remedy,” put in Bixiou, “les carottes” (gambling speculation).

“Look here!” cried Couture, firing up at this. “You have ten thousand francs. You invest it in ten shares of a thousand francs each in ten different enterprises. You are swindled nine times out of the ten—as a matter of fact you are not, the public is a match for anybody, but say that you are swindled, and only one affair turns out well (by accident!—oh, granted!—it was not done on purpose—there, chaff away!). Very well, the punter that has the sense to divide up his stakes in this way hits on a splendid investment, like those who took shares in the Wortschin mines. Gentlemen, let us admit among ourselves that those who call out are hypocrites, desperately vexed because they have no good ideas of their own, and neither power to advertise nor skill to exploit a business. You will not have long to wait for proof. In a very short time you will see the aristocracy, the court, and public men descend into speculation in serried columns; you will see that their claws are longer, their morality more crooked than ours, while they have not our good points. What a head a man must have if he has to found a business in times when the shareholder is as covetous and keen as the inventor! What a great magnetizer must he be that can create a Claparon and hit upon expedients never tried before! Do you know the moral of it all? Our age is no better than we are; we live in an era of greed; no one troubles himself about the intrinsic value of a thing if he can only make a profit on it by selling it to somebody else; so he passes it on to his neighbor. The shareholder that thinks he sees a chance of making money is just as covetous as the founder that offers him the opportunity of making it.”

“Isn’t he fine, our Couture? Isn’t he fine?” exclaimed Bixiou, turning to Blondet. “He will ask us next to erect statues to him as a benefactor of the species.”

“It would lead people to conclude that the fool’s money is the wise man’s patrimony by divine right,” said Blondet.

“Gentlemen,” cried Couture, “let us have our laugh out here to make up for all the times when we must listen gravely to solemn nonsense justifying laws passed on the spur of the moment.”

“He is right,” said Blondet. “What times we live in, gentlemen! When the

fire of intelligence appears among us, it is promptly quenched by haphazard legislation. Almost all our lawgivers come up from little parishes where they studied human nature through the medium of the newspapers; forthwith they shut down the safety-valve, and when the machinery blows up there is weeping and gnashing of teeth! We do nothing nowadays but pass penal laws and levy taxes. Will you have the sum of it all!—There is no religion left in the State!"

"Oh, bravo, Blondet!" cried Bixiou, "thou hast set thy finger on the weak spot. Meddlesome taxation has lost us more victories here in France than the vexatious chances of war. I once spent seven years in the hulks of a government department, chained with bourgeois to my bench. There was a clerk in the office, a man with a head on his shoulders; he had set his mind upon making a sweeping reform of the whole fiscal system—ah, well, we took the conceit out of him nicely. France might have been too prosperous, you know she might have amused herself by conquering Europe again; we acted in the interests of the peace of nations. I slew Rabourdin with a caricature."

"By religion I do not mean cant; I use the word in its wide political sense," rejoined Blondet.

"Explain your meaning," said Finot.

"Here it is," returned Blondet. "There has been a good deal said about affairs at Lyons; about the Republic cannonaded in the streets; well, there was not a word of truth in it all. The Republic took up the riots, just as an insurgent snatches up a rifle. The truth is queer and profound, I can tell you. The Lyons trade is a soulless trade. They will not weave a yard of silk unless they have the order and are sure of payment. If orders fall off; the workmen may starve; they can scarcely earn a living, convicts are better off. After the Revolution of July, the distress reached such a pitch that the Lyons weavers—the canuts, as they call them—hoisted the flag, 'Bread or Death!' a proclamation of a kind which compels the attention of a government. It was really brought about by the cost of living at Lyons; Lyons must build theatres and become a metropolis, forsooth, and the octroi duties accordingly were insanely high. The Republicans got wind of this bread riot, they organized the canuts in two camps, and fought among themselves. Lyons had her Three Days, but order was restored, and the silk weavers went back to their dens. Hitherto the canut had been honest; the silk for his work was weighed out to him in hanks, and he brought back the same weight of woven tissue; now he made up his mind that the silk merchants were oppressing him; he put honesty out at the door and rubbed oil on his fingers. He still brought back weight for weight, but he sold the silk represented by the oil; and the French silk trade has suffered from a plague of 'greased silks,' which might have ruined Lyons and a whole branch of French commerce. The masters and the government, instead of removing

the causes of the evil, simply drove it in with a violent external application. They ought to have sent a clever man to Lyons, one of those men that are said to have no principle, an Abbe Terray; but they looked at the affair from a military point of view. The result of the troubles is a gros de Naples at forty sous per yard; the silk is sold at this day, I dare say, and the masters no doubt have hit upon some new check upon the men. This method of manufacturing without looking ahead ought never to have existed in the country where one of the greatest citizens that France has ever known ruined himself to keep six thousand weavers in work without orders. Richard Lenoir fed them, and the government was thickheaded enough to allow him to suffer from the fall of the prices of textile fabrics brought about by the Revolution of 1814. Richard Lenoir is the one case of a merchant that deserves a statue. And yet the subscription set on foot for him has no subscribers, while the fund for General Foy's children reached a million francs. Lyons has drawn her own conclusions; she knows France, she knows that there is no religion left. The story of Richard Lenoir is one of those blunders which Fouche condemned as worse than a crime."

"Suppose that there is a tinge of charlatanism in the way in which concerns are put before the public," began Couture, returning to the charge, "that word charlatanism has come to be a damaging expression, a middle term, as it were, between right and wrong; for where, I ask you, does charlatanism begin? where does it end? what is charlatanism? do me the kindness of telling me what it is not. Now for a little plain speaking, the rarest social ingredient. A business which should consist in going out at night to look for goods to sell in the day would obviously be impossible. You find the instinct of forestalling the market in the very match-seller. How to forestall the market—that is the one idea of the so-called honest tradesman of the Rue Saint-Denis, as of the most brazen-fronted speculator. If stocks are heavy, sell you must. If sales are slow, you must tickle your customer; hence the signs of the Middle Ages, hence the modern prospectus. I do not see a hair's-breadth of difference between attracting custom and forcing your goods upon the consumer. It may happen, it is sure to happen, it often happens, that a shopkeeper gets hold of damaged goods, for the seller always cheats the buyer. Go and ask the most upright folk in Paris—the best known men in business, that is—and they will all triumphantly tell you of dodges by which they passed off stock which they knew to be bad upon the public. The well-known firm of Minard began by sales of this kind. In the Rue Saint-Denis they sell nothing but 'greased silk'; it is all that they can do. The most honest merchants tell you in the most candid way that 'you must get out of a bad bargain as best you can'—a motto for the most unscrupulous rascality. Blondet has given you an account of the Lyons affair, its causes and effects, and I proceed in my turn to illustrate my theory with an anecdote:—There was once a woolen weaver, an ambitious man,

burdened with a large family of children by a wife too much beloved. He put too much faith in the Republic, laid in a stock of scarlet wool, and manufactured those red-knitted caps that you may have noticed on the heads of all the street urchins in Paris. How this came about I am just going to tell you. The Republic was beaten. After the Saint-Merri affair the caps were quite unsalable. Now, when a weaver finds that besides a wife and children he has some ten thousand red woolen caps in the house, and that no hatter will take a single one of them, notions begin to pass through his head as fast as if he were a banker racking his brains to get rid of ten million francs' worth of shares in some dubious investment. As for this Law of the Faubourg, this Nucingen of caps, do you know what he did? He went to find a pothouse dandy, one of those comic men that drive police sergeants to despair at open-air dancing saloons at the barriers; him he engaged to play the part of an American captain staying at Meurice's and buying for export trade. He was to go to some large hatter, who still had a cap in his shop window, and 'inquire for' ten thousand red woolen caps. The hatter, scenting business in the wind, hurried round to the woolen weaver and rushed upon the stock. After that, no more of the American captain, you understand, and great plenty of caps. If you interfere with the freedom of trade, because free trade has its drawbacks, you might as well tie the hands of justice because a crime sometimes goes unpunished, or blame the bad organization of society because civilization produces some evils. From the caps and the Rue Saint-Denis to joint-stock companies and the Bank——draw your own conclusions."

"A crown for Couture!" said Blondet, twisting a serviette into a wreath for his head. "I go further than that, gentlemen. If there is a defect in the working hypothesis, what is the cause? The law! the whole system of legislation. The blame rests with the legislature. The great men of their districts are sent up to us by the provinces, crammed with parochial notions of right and wrong; and ideas that are indispensable if you want to keep clear of collisions with justice, are stupid when they prevent a man from rising to the height at which a maker of the laws ought to abide. Legislation may prohibit such and such developments of human passions—gambling, lotteries, the Ninons of the pavement, anything you please—but you cannot extirpate the passions themselves by any amount of legislation. Abolish them, you would abolish the society which develops them, even if it does not produce them. The gambling passion lurks, for instance, at the bottom of every heart, be it a girl's heart, a provincial's, a diplomatist's; everybody longs to have money without working for it; you may hedge the desire about with restrictions, but the gambling mania immediately breaks out in another form. You stupidly suppress lotteries, but the cook-maid pilfers none the less, and puts her ill-gotten gains in the savings bank. She gambles with two hundred and fifty franc stakes instead of forty sous; joint-stock companies and speculation take the place of the lottery;

the gambling goes on without the green cloth, the croupier's rake is invisible, the cheating planned beforehand. The gambling houses are closed, the lottery has come to an end; 'and now,' cry idiots, 'morals have greatly improved in France,' as if, forsooth, they had suppressed the punters. The gambling still goes on, only the State makes nothing from it now; and for a tax paid with pleasure, it has substituted a burdensome duty. Nor is the number of suicides reduced, for the gambler never dies, though his victim does."

"I am not speaking now of foreign capital lost to France," continued Couture, "nor of the Frankfort lotteries. The Convention passed a decree of death against those who hawked foreign lottery-tickets, and procureur-syndics used to traffic in them. So much for the sense of our legislator and his driveling philanthropy. The encouragement given to savings banks is a piece of crass political folly. Suppose that things take a doubtful turn and people lose confidence, the Government will find that they have instituted a queue for money, like the queues outside the bakers' shops. So many savings banks, so many riots. Three street boys hoist a flag in some corner or other, and you have a revolution ready made.

"But this danger, however great it may be, seems to me less to be dreaded than the widespread demoralization. Savings banks are a means of inoculating the people, the classes least restrained by education or by reason from schemes that are tacitly criminal, with the vices bred of self-interest. See what comes of philanthropy!

"A great politician ought to be without a conscience in abstract questions, or he is a bad steersman for a nation. An honest politician is a steam-engine with feelings, a pilot that would make love at the helm and let the ship go down. A prime minister who helps himself to millions but makes France prosperous and great is preferable, is he not, to a public servant who ruins his country, even though he is buried at the public expense? Would you hesitate between a Richelieu, a Mazarin, or a Potemkin, each with his hundreds of millions of francs, and a conscientious Robert Lindet that could make nothing out of assignats and national property, or one of the virtuous imbeciles who ruined Louis XVI.? Go on, Bixiou."

"I will not go into the details of the speculation which we owe to Nucingen's financial genius. It would be the more inexpedient because the concern is still in existence and shares are quoted on the Bourse. The scheme was so convincing, there was such life in an enterprise sanctioned by royal letters patent, that though the shares issued at a thousand francs fell to three hundred, they rose to seven and will reach par yet, after weathering the stormy years '27, '30, and '32. The financial crisis of 1827 sent them down; after the Revolution of July they fell flat; but there really is something in the affair, Nucingen simply could not invent a bad speculation. In short, as several banks

of the highest standing have been mixed up in the affair, it would be unparliamentary to go further into detail. The nominal capital amounted to ten millions; the real capital to seven. Three millions were allotted to the founders and bankers that brought it out. Everything was done with a view to sending up the shares two hundred francs during the first six months by the payment of a sham dividend. Twenty per cent, on ten millions! Du Tillet's interest in the concern amounted to five hundred thousand francs. In the stock-exchange slang of the day, this share of the spoils was a 'sop in the pan.' Nucingen, with his millions made by the aid of a lithographer's stone and a handful of pink paper, proposed to himself to operate certain nice little shares carefully hoarded in his private office till the time came for putting them on the market. The shareholders' money floated the concern, and paid for splendid business premises, so they began operations. And Nucingen held in reserve founders' shares in Heaven knows what coal and argentiferous lead-mines, also in a couple of canals; the shares had been given to him for bringing out the concerns. All four were in working order, well got up and popular, for they paid good dividends.

"Nucingen might, of course, count on getting the differences if the shares went up, but this formed no part of the Baron's schemes; he left the shares at sea-level on the market to tempt the fishes.

"So he had massed his securities as Napoleon massed his troops, all with a view to suspending payment in the thick of the approaching crisis of 1826-27 which revolutionized European markets. If Nucingen had had his Prince of Wagram, he might have said, like Napoleon from the heights of Santon, 'Make a careful survey of the situation; on such and such a day, at such an hour funds will be poured in at such a spot.' But in whom could he confide? Du Tillet had no suspicion of his own complicity in Nucingen's plot; and the bold Baron had learned from his previous experiments in suspensions of payment that he must have some man whom he could trust to act at need as a lever upon the creditor. Nucingen had never a nephew, he dared not take a confidant; yet he must have a devoted and intelligent Claparon, a born diplomatist with a good manner, a man worthy of him, and fit to take office under government. Such connections are not made in a day nor yet in a year. By this time Rastignac had been so thoroughly entangled by Nucingen, that being, like the Prince de la Paix, equally beloved by the King and Queen of Spain, he fancied that he (Rastignac) had secured a very valuable dupe in Nucingen! For a long while he had laughed at a man whose capacities he was unable to estimate; he ended in a sober, serious, and devout admiration of Nucingen, owning that Nucingen really had the power which he thought he himself alone possessed.

"From Rastignac's introduction to society in Paris, he had been led to contemn it utterly. From the year 1820 he thought, like the Baron, that honesty

was a question of appearances; he looked upon the world as a mixture of corruption and rascality of every sort. If he admitted exceptions, he condemned the mass; he put no belief in any virtue—men did right or wrong, as circumstances decided. His worldly wisdom was the work of a moment; he learned his lesson at the summit of Pere Lachaise one day when he buried a poor, good man there; it was his Delphine's father, who died deserted by his daughters and their husbands, a dupe of our society and of the truest affection. Rastignac then and there resolved to exploit this world, to wear full dress of virtue, honesty, and fine manners. He was empanoplied in selfishness. When the young scion of nobility discovered that Nucingen wore the same armor, he respected him much as some knight mounted upon a barb and arrayed in damascened steel would have respected an adversary equally well horsed and equipped at a tournament in the Middle Ages. But for the time he had grown effeminate amid the delights of Capua. The friendship of such a woman as the Baronne de Nucingen is of a kind that sets a man abjuring egoism in all its forms.

"Delphine had been deceived once already; in her first venture of the affections she came across a piece of Birmingham manufacture, in the shape of the late lamented de Marsay; and therefore she could not but feel a limitless affection for a young provincial's articles of faith. Her tenderness reacted upon Rastignac. So by the time that Nucingen had put his wife's friend into the harness in which the exploiter always gets the exploited, he had reached the precise juncture when he (the Baron) meditated a third suspension of payment. To Rastignac he confided his position; he pointed out to Rastignac a means of making 'reparation.' As a consequence of his intimacy, he was expected to play the part of confederate. The Baron judged it unsafe to communicate the whole of his plot to his conjugal collaborator. Rastignac quite believed in impending disaster; and the Baron allowed him to believe further that he (Rastignac) saved the shop.

"But when there are so many threads in a skein, there are apt to be knots. Rastignac trembled for Delphine's money. He stipulated that Delphine must be independent and her estate separated from her husband's, swearing to himself that he would repay her by trebling her fortune. As, however, Rastignac said nothing of himself, Nucingen begged him to take, in the event of success, twenty-five shares of a thousand francs in the argentiferous lead-mines, and Eugene took them—not to offend him! Nucingen had put Rastignac up to this the day before that evening in the Rue Joubert when our friend counseled Malvina to marry. A cold shiver ran through Rastignac at the sight of so many happy folk in Paris going to and fro unconscious of the impending loss; even so a young commander might shiver at the first sight of an army drawn up before a battle. He saw the d'Aiglemonts, the d'Aldriggers, and Beaudenord. Poor little Isaure and Godefroid playing at love, what were they but Acis and

Galatea under the rock which a hulking Polyphemus was about to send down upon them?”

“That monkey of a Bixiou has something almost like talent,” said Blondet.

“Oh! so I am not maundering now?” asked Bixiou, enjoying his success as he looked round at his surprised auditors.—“For two months past,” he continued, “Godefroid had given himself up to all the little pleasures of preparation for the marriage. At such times men are like birds building nests in spring; they come and go, pick up their bits of straw, and fly off with them in their beaks to line the nest that is to hold a brood of young birds by and by. Isaure’s bridegroom had taken a house in the Rue de la Plancher at a thousand crowns, a comfortable little house neither too large nor too small, which suited them. Every morning he went round to take a look at the workmen and to superintend the painters. He had introduced ‘comfort’ (the only good thing in England)—heating apparatus to maintain an even temperature all over the house; fresh, soft colors, carefully chosen furniture, neither too showy nor too much in fashion; spring-blinds fitted to every window inside and out; silver plate and new carriages. He had seen to the stables, coach-house, and harness-room, where Toby Joby Paddy floundered and fidgeted about like a marmot let loose, apparently rejoiced to know that there would be women about the place and a ‘lady’! This fervent passion of a man that sets up housekeeping, choosing clocks, going to visit his betrothed with his pockets full of patterns of stuffs, consulting her as to the bedroom furniture, going, coming, and trotting about, for love’s sake,—all this, I say, is a spectacle in the highest degree calculated to rejoice the hearts of honest people, especially tradespeople. And as nothing pleases folk better than the marriage of a good-looking young fellow of seven-and-twenty and a charming girl of nineteen that dances admirably well, Godefroid in his perplexity over the corbeille asked Mme. de Nucingen and Rastignac to breakfast with him and advise him on this all-important point. He hit likewise on the happy idea of asking his cousin d’Aiglemont and his wife to meet them, as well as Mme. de Serizy. Women of the world are ready enough to join for once in an improvised breakfast-party at a bachelor’s rooms.”

“It is their way of playing truant,” put in Blondet.

“Of course they went over the new house,” resumed Bixiou. “Married women relish these little expeditions as ogres relish warm flesh; they feel young again with the young bliss, unspoiled as yet by fruition. Breakfast was served in Godefroid’s sitting-room, decked out like a troop horse for a farewell to bachelor life. There were dainty little dishes such as women love to devour, nibble at, and sip of a morning, when they are usually alarmingly hungry and horribly afraid to confess to it. It would seem that a woman compromises herself by admitting that she is hungry.—‘Why have you come alone?’

inquired Godefroid when Rastignac appeared.—‘Mme. de Nucingen is out of spirits; I will tell you all about it,’ answered Rastignac, with the air of a man whose temper has been tried.—‘A quarrel?’ hazarded Godefroid.—‘No.’—At four o’clock the women took flight for the Bois de Boulogne; Rastignac stayed in the room and looked out of the window, fixing his melancholy gaze upon Toby Joby Paddy, who stood, his arms crossed in Napoleonic fashion, audaciously posted in front of Beaudenord’s cab horse. The child could only control the animal with his shrill little voice, but the horse was afraid of Joby Toby.

“‘Well,’ began Godefroid, ‘what is the matter with you, my dear fellow? You look gloomy and anxious; your gaiety is forced. You are tormented by incomplete happiness. It is wretched, and that is a fact, when one cannot marry the woman one loves at the mayor’s office and the church.’

“‘Have you courage to hear what I have to say? I wonder whether you will see how much a man must be attached to a friend if he can be guilty of such a breach of confidence as this for his sake.’

“Something in Rastignac’s voice stung like a lash of a whip.

“‘What?’ asked Godefroid de Beaudenord, turning pale.

“‘I was unhappy over your joy; I had not the heart to keep such a secret to myself when I saw all these preparations, your happiness in bloom.’

“‘Just say it out in three words!’

“‘Swear to me on your honor that you will be as silent as the grave——’

“‘As the grave,’ repeated Beaudenord.

“‘That if one of your relatives were concerned in this secret, he should not know it.’

“‘No.’

“‘Very well. Nucingen started to-night for Brussels. He must file his schedule if he cannot arrange a settlement. This very morning Delphine petitioned for the separation of her estate. You may still save your fortune.’

“‘How?’ faltered Godefroid; the blood turned to ice in his veins.

“‘Simply write to the Baron de Nucingen, antedating your letter a fortnight, and instruct him to invest all your capital in shares.’—Rastignac suggested Claparon and Company, and continued—‘You have a fortnight, a month, possibly three months, in which to realize and make something; the shares are still going up——’

“‘But d’Aiglemont, who was here at breakfast with us, has a million in

Nucingen’s bank.’

“‘Look here; I do not know whether there will be enough of these shares to cover it; and besides, I am not his friend, I cannot betray Nucingen’s confidence. You must not speak to d’Aiglemont. If you say a word, you must answer to me for the consequences.’

“Godefroid stood stock still for ten minutes.

“‘Do you accept? Yes or no!’ said the inexorable Rastignac.

“Godefroid took up the pen, wrote at Rastignac’s dictation, and signed his name.

“‘My poor cousin!’ he cried.

“‘Each for himself,’ said Rastignac. ‘And there is one more settled!’ he added to himself as he left Beaudenord.

“While Rastignac was manoeuvring thus in Paris, imagine the state of things on the Bourse. A friend of mine, a provincial, a stupid creature, once asked me as we came past the Bourse between four and five in the afternoon what all that crowd of chatterers was doing, what they could possibly find to say to each other, and why they were wandering to and fro when business in public securities was over for the day. ‘My friend,’ said I, ‘they have made their meal, and now they are digesting it; while they digest it, they gossip about their neighbors, or there would be no commercial security in Paris. Concerns are floated here, such and such a man—Palma, for instance, who is something the same here as Sinard at the Academie Royale des Sciences—Palma says, “let the speculation be made!” and the speculation is made.’”

“What a man that Hebrew is,” put in Blondet; “he has not had a university education, but a universal education. And universal does not in his case mean superficial; whatever he knows, he knows to the bottom. He has a genius, an intuitive faculty for business. He is the oracle of all the lynxes that rule the Paris market; they will not touch an investment until Palma has looked into it. He looks solemn, he listens, ponders, and reflects; his interlocutor thinks that after this consideration he has come round his man, till Palma says, ‘This will not do for me.’—The most extraordinary thing about Palma, to my mind, is the fact that he and Werbrust were partners for ten years, and there was never the shadow of a disagreement between them.”

“That is the way with the very strong or the very weak; any two between the extremes fall out and lose no time in making enemies of each other,” said Couture.

“Nucingen, you see, had neatly and skilfully put a little bombshell under the colonnades of the Bourse, and towards four o’clock in the afternoon it

exploded.—‘Here is something serious; have you heard the news?’ asked du Tillet, drawing Werbrust into a corner. ‘Here is Nucingen gone off to Brussels, and his wife petitioning for a separation of her estate.’

“‘Are you and he in it together for a liquidation?’ asked Werbrust, smiling.

“‘No foolery, Werbrust,’ said du Tillet. ‘You know the holders of his paper. Now, look here. There is business in it. Shares in this new concern of ours have gone up twenty per cent already; they will go up to five-and-twenty by the end of the quarter; you know why. They are going to pay a splendid dividend.’

“‘Sly dog,’ said Werbrust. ‘Get along with you; you are a devil with long and sharp claws, and you have them deep in the butter.’

“‘Just let me speak, or we shall not have time to operate. I hit on the idea as soon as I heard the news. I positively saw Mme. de Nucingen crying; she is afraid for her fortune.’

“‘Poor little thing!’ said the old Alsacien Jew, with an ironical expression. ‘Well?’ he added, as du Tillet was silent.

“‘Well. At my place I have a thousand shares of a thousand francs in our concern; Nucingen handed them over to me to put on the market, do you understand? Good. Now let us buy up a million of Nucingen’s paper at a discount of ten or twenty per cent, and we shall make a handsome percentage out of it. We shall be debtors and creditors both; confusion will be worked! But we must set about it carefully, or the holders may imagine that we are operating in Nucingen’s interests.’

“Then Werbrust understood. He squeezed du Tillet’s hand with an expression such as a woman’s face wears when she is playing her neighbor a trick.

“Martin Falleix came up.—‘Well, have you heard the news?’ he asked. ‘Nucingen has stopped payment.’

“‘Pooh,’ said Werbrust, ‘pray don’t noise it about; give those that hold his paper a chance.’

“‘What is the cause of the smash; do you know?’ put in Claparon.

“‘You know nothing about it,’ said du Tillet. ‘There isn’t any smash. Payment will be made in full. Nucingen will start again; I shall find him all the money he wants. I know the causes of the suspension. He has put all his capital into Mexican securities, and they are sending him metal in return; old Spanish cannon cast in such an insane fashion that they melted down gold and bell-metal and church plate for it, and all the wreck of the Spanish dominion in the Indies. The specie is slow in coming, and the dear Baron is hard up. That is

all.’

“‘It is a fact,’ said Werbrust; ‘I am taking his paper myself at twenty per cent discount.’

“The news spread swift as fire in a straw rick. The most contradictory reports got about. But such confidence was felt in the firm after the two previous suspensions, that every one stuck to Nucingen’s paper. ‘Palma must lend us a hand,’ said Werbrust.

“Now Palma was the Keller’s oracle, and the Kellers were brimful of Nucingen’s paper. A hint from Palma would be enough. Werbrust arranged with Palma, and he rang the alarm bell. There was a panic next day on the Bourse. The Kellers, acting on Palma’s advice, let go Nucingen’s paper at ten per cent of loss; they set the example on ‘Change, for they were supposed to know very well what they were about. Taillefer followed up with three hundred thousand francs at a discount of twenty per cent, and Martin Falleix with two hundred thousand at fifteen. Gigonnet saw what was going on. He helped to spread the panic, with a view to buying up Nucingen’s paper himself and making a commission of two or three per cent out of Werbrust.

“In a corner of the Bourse he came upon poor Matifat, who had three hundred thousand francs in Nucingen’s bank. Matifat, ghastly and haggard, beheld the terrible Gigonnet, the bill-discounter of his old quarter, coming up to worry him. He shuddered in spite of himself.

“‘Things are looking bad. There is a crisis on hand. Nucingen is compounding with his creditors. But this does not interest you, Daddy Matifat; you are out of business.’

“‘Oh, well, you are mistaken, Gigonnet; I am in for three hundred thousand francs. I meant to speculate in Spanish bonds.’

“‘Then you have saved your money. Spanish bonds would have swept everything away; whereas I am prepared to offer you something like fifty per cent for your account with Nucingen.’

“‘You are very keen about it, it seems to me,’ said Matifat. ‘I never knew a banker yet that paid less than fifty per cent. Ah, if it were only a matter of ten per cent of loss—’ added the retired man of drugs.

“‘Well, will you take fifteen?’ asked Gigonnet.

“‘You are very keen about it, it seems to me,’ said Matifat.

“‘Good-night.’

“‘Will you take twelve?’

“‘Done,’ said Gigonnet.

“Before night two millions had been bought up in the names of the three chance-united confederates, and posted by du Tillet to the debit side of Nucingen’s account. Next day they drew their premium.

“The dainty little old Baroness d’Aldrigger was at breakfast with her two daughters and Godefroid, when Rastignac came in with a diplomatic air to steer the conversation on the financial crisis. The Baron de Nucingen felt a lively regard for the d’Aldrigger family; he was prepared, if things went amiss, to cover the Baroness’ account with his best securities, to wit, some shares in the argentiferous lead-mines, but the application must come from the lady.

“‘Poor Nucingen!’ said the Baroness. ‘What can have become of him?’

“‘He is in Belgium. His wife is petitioning for a separation of her property; but he had gone to see if he can arrange with some bankers to see him through.’

“‘Dear me! That reminds me of my poor husband! Dear M. de Rastignac, how you must feel this, so attached as you are to the house!’

“‘If all the indifferent are covered, his personal friends will be rewarded later on. He will pull through; he is a clever man.’

“‘An honest man, above all things,’ said the Baroness.

“A month later, Nucingen met all his liabilities, with no formalities beyond the letters by which creditors signified the investments which they preferred to take in exchange for their capital; and with no action on the part of other banks beyond registering the transfer of Nucingen’s paper for the investments in favor.

“While du Tillet, Werbrust, Claparon, Gigonnet, and others that thought themselves clever were fetching in Nucingen’s paper from abroad with a premium of one per cent—for it was still worth their while to exchange it for securities in a rising market—there was all the more talk on the Bourse, because there was nothing now to fear. They babbled over Nucingen; he was discussed and judged; they even slandered him. His luxurious life, his enterprises! When a man has so much on his hands, he overreaches himself, and so forth, and so forth.

“The talk was at its height, when several people were greatly astonished to receive letters from Geneva, Basel, Milan, Naples, Genoa, Marseilles, and London, in which their correspondents, previously advised of the failure, informed them that somebody was offering one per cent for Nucingen’s paper! ‘There is something up,’ said the lynxes of the Bourse.

“The Court meanwhile had granted the application for Mme. de Nucingen’s separation as to her estate, and the question became still more

complicated. The newspapers announced the return of M. le Baron de Nucingen from a journey to Belgium; he had been arranging, it was said, with a well-known Belgian firm to resume the working of some coal-pits in the Bois de Bossut. The Baron himself appeared on the Bourse, and never even took the trouble to contradict the slanders circulating against him. He scorned to reply through the press; he simply bought a splendid estate just outside Paris for two millions of francs. Six weeks afterwards, the Bordeaux shipping intelligence announced that two vessels with cargoes of bullion to the amount of seven millions, consigned to the firm of Nucingen, were lying in the river.

“Then it was plain to Palma, Werbrust, and du Tillet that the trick had been played. Nobody else was any the wiser. The three scholars studied the means by which the great bubble had been created, saw that it had been preparing for eleven months, and pronounced Nucingen the greatest financier in Europe.

“Rastignac understood nothing of all this, but he had the four hundred thousand francs which Nucingen had allowed him to shear from the Parisian sheep, and he portioned his sisters. D’Aiglemont, at a hint from his cousin Beaudenord, besought Rastignac to accept ten per cent upon his million if he would undertake to convert it into shares in a canal which is still to make, for Nucingen worked things with the Government to such purpose that the concessionaires find it to their interest not to finish their scheme. Charles Grandet implored Delphine’s lover to use his interest to secure shares for him in exchange for his cash. And altogether Rastignac played the part of Law for ten days; he had the prettiest duchesses in France praying to him to allot shares to them, and to-day the young man very likely has an income of forty thousand livres, derived in the first instance from the argentiferous lead-mines.”

“If every one was better off, who can have lost?” asked Finot.

“Hear the conclusion,” rejoined Bixiou. “The Marquis d’Aiglemont and Beaudenord (I put them forward as two examples out of many) kept their allotted shares, enticed by the so-called dividend that fell due a few months afterwards. They had another three per cent on their capital, they sang Nucingen’s praises, and took his part at a time when everybody suspected that he was going bankrupt. Godefroid married his beloved Isaure and took shares in the mines to the value of a hundred thousand francs. The Nucingens gave a ball even more splendid than people expected of them on the occasion of the wedding; Delphine’s present to the bride was a charming set of rubies. Isaure danced, a happy wife, a girl no longer. The little Baroness was more than ever a Shepherdess of the Alps. The ball was at its height when Malvina, the Andalouse of Musset’s poem, heard du Tillet’s voice drily advising her to take Desroches. Desroches, warmed to the right degree by Rastignac and Nucingen, tried to come to an understanding financially; but at the first hint of

shares in the mines for the bride's portion, he broke off and went back to the Matifat's in the Rue du Cherche-Midi, only to find the accursed canal shares which Gigonnet had foisted on Matifat in lieu of cash.

"They had not long to wait for the crash. The firm of Claparon did business on too large a scale, the capital was locked up, the concern ceased to serve its purposes, or to pay dividends, though the speculations were sound. These misfortunes coincided with the events of 1827. In 1829 it was too well known that Claparon was a man of straw set up by the two giants; he fell from his pedestal. Shares that had fetched twelve hundred and fifty francs fell to four hundred, though intrinsically they were worth six. Nucingen, knowing their value, bought them up at four.

"Meanwhile the little Baroness d'Aldrigger had sold out of the mines that paid no dividends, and Godefroid had reinvested the money belonging to his wife and her mother in Claparon's concern. Debts compelled them to realize when the shares were at their lowest, so that of seven hundred thousand francs only two hundred thousand remained. They made a clearance, and all that was left was prudently invested in the three per cents at seventy-five. Godefroid, the sometime gay and careless bachelor who had lived without taking thought all his life long, found himself saddled with a little goose of a wife totally unfitted to bear adversity (indeed, before six months were over, he had witnessed the anserine transformation of his beloved) to say nothing of a mother-in-law whose mind ran on pretty dresses while she had not bread to eat. The two families must live together to live at all. It was only by stirring up all his considerably chilled interest that Godefroid got a post in the audit department. His friends?—They were out of town. His relatives?—All astonishment and promises. 'What! my dear boy! Oh! count upon me! Poor fellow!' and Beaudenord was clean forgotten fifteen minutes afterwards. He owed his place to Nucingen and de Vandenesse.

"And to-day these so estimable and unfortunate people are living on a third floor (not counting the entresol) in the Rue du Mont Thabor. Malvina, the Adolphus' pearl of a granddaughter, has not a farthing. She gives music-lessons, not to be a burden upon her brother-in-law. You may see a tall, dark, thin, withered woman, like a mummy escaped from Passalacqua's about afoot through the streets of Paris. In 1830 Beaudenord lost his situation just as his wife presented him with a fourth child. A family of eight and two servants (Wirth and his wife) and an income of eight thousand livres. And at this moment the mines are paying so well, that an original share of a thousand francs brings in a dividend of cent per cent.

"Rastignac and Mme. de Nucingen bought the shares sold by the Baroness and Godefroid. The Revolution made a peer of France of Nucingen and a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor. He has not stopped payment since

1830, but still I hear that he has something like seventeen millions. He put faith in the Ordinances of July, sold out of all his investments, and boldly put his money into the funds when the three per cents stood at forty-five. He persuaded the Tuileries that this was done out of devotion, and about the same time he and du Tillet between them swallowed down three millions belonging to that great scamp Philippe Bridau.

“Quite lately our Baron was walking along the Rue de Rivoli on his way to the Bois when he met the Baroness d’Aldrigger under the colonnade. The little old lady wore a tiny green bonnet with a rose-colored lining, a flowered gown, and a mantilla; altogether, she was more than ever the Shepherdess of the Alps. She could no more be made to understand the causes of her poverty than the sources of her wealth. As she went along, leaning upon poor Malvina, that model of heroic devotion, she seemed to be the young girl and Malvina the old mother. Wirth followed them, carrying an umbrella.

“‘Dere are beoples whose vordune I vound it imbossible to make,’ said the Baron, addressing his companion (M. Cointet, a cabinet minister). ‘Now dot de baroxysm off brincibles haf bassed off, chust reinshtate dot boor Peautenord.’

“So Beaudenord went back to his desk, thanks to Nucingen’s good offices; and the d’Aldriggers extol Nucingen as a hero of friendship, for he always sends the little Shepherdess of the Alps and her daughters invitations to his balls. No creature whatsoever can be made to understand that the Baron yonder three times did his best to plunder the public without breaking the letter of the law, and enriched people in spite of himself. No one has a word to say against him. If anybody should suggest that a big capitalist often is another word for a cut-throat, it would be a most egregious calumny. If stocks rise and fall, if property improves and depreciates, the fluctuations of the market are caused by a common movement, a something in the air, a tide in the affairs of men subject like other tides to lunar influences. The great Arago is much to blame for giving us no scientific theory to account for this important phenomenon. The only outcome of all this is an axiom which I have never seen anywhere in print——”

“And that is?”

“The debtor is more than a match for the creditor.”

“Oh!” said Blondet. “For my own part, all that we have been saying seems to me to be a paraphrase of the epigram in which Montesquieu summed up l’Esprit des Lois.”

“What?” said Finot.

“Laws are like spiders’ webs; the big flies get through, while the little ones

are caught.”

“Then, what are you for?” asked Finot.

“For absolute government, the only kind of government under which enterprises against the spirit of the law can be put down. Yes. Arbitrary rule is the salvation of a country when it comes to the support of justice, for the right of mercy is strictly one-sided. The king can pardon a fraudulent bankrupt; he cannot do anything for the victims. The letter of the law is fatal to modern society.”

“Just get that into the electors’ heads!” said Bixiou.

“Some one has undertaken to do it.”

“Who?”

“Time. As the Bishop of Leon said, ‘Liberty is ancient, but kingship is eternal; any nation in its right mind returns to monarchical government in one form or another.’”

“I say, there was somebody next door,” said Finot, hearing us rise to go.

“There always is somebody next door,” retorted Bixiou. “But he must have been drunk.”

PARIS, November 1837.

THE SECRETS OF THE PRINCESSE DE CADIGNAN

CHAPTER I. THE LAST WORD OF TWO GREAT COQUETTES

After the disasters of the revolution of July, which destroyed so many aristocratic fortunes dependent on the court, Madame la Princesse de Cadignan was clever enough to attribute to political events the total ruin she had caused by her own extravagance. The prince left France with the royal family, and never returned to it, leaving the princess in Paris, protected by the fact of his absence; for their debts, which the sale of all their salable property had not been able to extinguish, could only be recovered through him. The revenues of the entailed estates had been seized. In short, the affairs of this great family were in as bad a state as those of the elder branch of the Bourbons.

This woman, so celebrated under her first name of Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, very wisely decided to live in retirement, and to make herself,

if possible, forgotten. Paris was then so carried away by the whirling current of events that the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, buried in the Princesse de Cadignan, a change of name unknown to most of the new actors brought upon the stage of society by the revolution of July, did really become a stranger in her own city.

In Paris the title of duke ranks all others, even that of prince; though, in heraldic theory, free of all sophism, titles signify nothing; there is absolute equality among gentlemen. This fine equality was formerly maintained by the House of France itself; and in our day it is so still, at least, nominally; witness the care with which the kings of France give to their sons the simple title of count. It was in virtue of this system that Francois I. crushed the splendid titles assumed by the pompous Charles the Fifth, by signing his answer: “Francois, seigneur de Vanves.” Louis XI. did better still by marrying his daughter to an untitled gentleman, Pierre de Beaujeu. The feudal system was so thoroughly broken up by Louis XIV. that the title of duke became, during his reign, the supreme honor of the aristocracy, and the most coveted.

Nevertheless there are two or three families in France in which the principality, richly endowed in former times, takes precedence of the duchy. The house of Cadignan, which possesses the title of Duc de Maufrigneuse for its eldest sons, is one of these exceptional families. Like the princes of the house of Rohan in earlier days, the princes of Cadignan had the right to a throne in their own domain; they could have pages and gentlemen in their service. This explanation is necessary, as much to escape foolish critics who know nothing, as to record the customs of a world which, we are told, is about to disappear, and which, evidently, so many persons are assisting to push away without knowing what it is.

The Cadignans bear: or, five lozenges sable appointed, placed fess-wise, with the word “Memini” for motto, a crown with a cap of maintenance, no supporters or mantle. In these days the great crowd of strangers flocking to Paris, and the almost universal ignorance of the science of heraldry, are beginning to bring the title of prince into fashion. There are no real princes but those possessed of principalities, to whom belongs the title of highness. The disdain shown by the French nobility for the title of prince, and the reasons which caused Louis XIV. to give supremacy to the title of duke, have prevented Frenchmen from claiming the appellation of “highness” for the few princes who exist in France, those of Napoleon excepted. This is why the princes of Cadignan hold an inferior position, nominally, to the princes of the continent.

The members of the society called the faubourg Saint-Germain protected the princess by a respectful silence due to her name, which is one of those that all men honor, to her misfortunes, which they ceased to discuss, and to her

beauty, the only thing she saved of her departed opulence. Society, of which she had once been the ornament, was thankful to her for having, as it were, taken the veil, and cloistered herself in her own home. This act of good taste was for her, more than for any other woman, an immense sacrifice. Great deeds are always so keenly felt in France that the princess gained, by her retreat, as much as she had lost in public opinion in the days of her splendor.

She now saw only one of her old friends, the Marquise d'Espard, and even to her she never went on festive occasions or to parties. The princess and the marquise visited each other in the forenoons, with a certain amount of secrecy. When the princess went to dine with her friend, the marquise closed her doors. Madame d'Espard treated the princess charmingly; she changed her box at the opera, leaving the first tier for a baignoire on the ground-floor, so that Madame de Cadignan could come to the theatre unseen, and depart incognito. Few women would have been capable of a delicacy which deprived them of the pleasure of bearing in their train a fallen rival, and of publicly being her benefactress. Thus relieved of the necessity for costly toilets, the princess could enjoy the theatre, whither she went in Madame d'Espard's carriage, which she would never have accepted openly in the daytime. No one has ever known Madame d'Espard's reasons for behaving thus to the Princesse de Cadignan; but her conduct was admirable, and for a long time included a number of little acts which, viewed single, seem mere trifles, but taken in the mass become gigantic.

In 1832, three years had thrown a mantle of snow over the follies and adventures of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and had whitened them so thoroughly that it now required a serious effort of memory to recall them. Of the queen once adored by so many courtiers, and whose follies might have given a theme to a variety of novels, there remained a woman still adorably beautiful, thirty-six years of age, but quite justified in calling herself thirty, although she was the mother of Duc Georges de Maufrigneuse, a young man of eighteen, handsome as Antinous, poor as Job, who was expected to obtain great successes, and for whom his mother desired, above all things, to find a rich wife. Perhaps this hope was the secret of the intimacy she still kept up with the marquise, in whose salon, which was one of the first in Paris, she might eventually be able to choose among many heiresses for Georges' wife. The princess saw five years between the present moment and her son's marriage,—five solitary and desolate years; for, in order to obtain such a marriage for her son, she knew that her own conduct must be marked in the corner with discretion.

The princess lived in the rue de Miromesnil, in a small house, of which she occupied the ground-floor at a moderate rent. There she made the most of the relics of her past magnificence. The elegance of the great lady was still

redolent about her. She was still surrounded by beautiful things which recalled her former existence. On her chimney-piece was a fine miniature portrait of Charles X., by Madame Mirbel, beneath which were engraved the words, “Given by the King”; and, as a pendant, the portrait of “Madame”, who was always her kind friend. On a table lay an album of costliest price, such as none of the bourgeoises who now lord it in our industrial and fault-finding society would have dared to exhibit. This album contained portraits, about thirty in number, of her intimate friends, whom the world, first and last, had given her as lovers. The number was a calumny; but had rumor said ten, it might have been, as her friend Madame d’Espard remarked, good, sound gossip. The portraits of Maxime de Trailles, de Marsay, Rastignac, the Marquis d’Esgrignon, General Montriveau, the Marquis de Ronquerolles and d’Ajuda-Pinto, Prince Galathionne, the young Ducs de Grandlieu and de Rhetore, the Vicomte de Serizy, and the handsome Lucien de Rubempre, had all been treated with the utmost coquetry of brush and pencil by celebrated artists. As the princess now received only two or three of these personages, she called the book, jokingly, the collection of her errors.

Misfortune had made this woman a good mother. During the fifteen years of the Restoration she had amused herself far too much to think of her son; but on taking refuge in obscurity, this illustrious egoist bethought her that the maternal sentiment, developed to its extreme, might be an absolution for her past follies in the eyes of sensible persons, who pardon everything to a good mother. She loved her son all the more because she had nothing else to love. Georges de Maufrigneuse was, moreover, one of those children who flatter the vanities of a mother; and the princess had, accordingly, made all sorts of sacrifices for him. She hired a stable and coach-house, above which he lived in a little entresol with three rooms looking on the street, and charmingly furnished; she had even borne several privations to keep a saddle-horse, a cab-horse, and a little groom for his use. For herself, she had only her own maid, and as cook, a former kitchen-maid. The duke’s groom had, therefore, rather a hard place. Toby, formerly tiger to the “late” Beaudenord (such was the jesting term applied by the gay world to that ruined gentleman),—Toby, who at twenty-five years of age was still considered only fourteen, was expected to groom the horses, clean the cabriolet, or the tilbury, and the harnesses, accompany his master, take care of the apartments, and be in the princess’s antechamber to announce a visitor, if, by chance, she happened to receive one.

When one thinks of what the beautiful Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had been under the Restoration,—one of the queens of Paris, a dazzling queen, whose luxurious existence equalled that of the richest women of fashion in London,—there was something touching in the sight of her in that humble little abode in the rue de Miromesnil, a few steps away from her splendid mansion, which no amount of fortune had enabled her to keep, and which the

hammer of speculators has since demolished. The woman who thought she was scarcely well served by thirty servants, who possessed the most beautiful reception-rooms in all Paris, and the loveliest little private apartments, and who made them the scene of such delightful fetes, now lived in a small apartment of five rooms,—an antechamber, dining-room, salon, one bed-chamber, and a dressing-room, with two women-servants only.

"Ah! she is devoted to her son," said that clever creature, Madame d'Espard, "and devoted without ostentation; she is happy. Who would ever have believed so frivolous a woman was capable of such persistent resolution! Our good archbishop has, consequently, greatly encouraged her; he is most kind to her, and has just induced the old Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne to pay her a visit."

Let us admit a truth! One must be a queen to know how to abdicate, and to descend with dignity from a lofty position which is never wholly lost. Those only who have an inner consciousness of being nothing in themselves, show regrets in falling, or struggle, murmuring, to return to a past which can never return,—a fact of which they themselves are well aware. Compelled to do without the choice exotics in the midst of which she had lived, and which set off so charmingly her whole being (for it is impossible not to compare her to a flower), the princess had wisely chosen a ground-floor apartment; there she enjoyed a pretty little garden which belonged to it,—a garden full of shrubs, and an always verdant turf, which brightened her peaceful retreat. She had about twelve thousand francs a year; but that modest income was partly made up of an annual stipend sent her by the old Duchesse de Navarreins, paternal aunt of the young duke, and another stipend given by her mother, the Duchesse d'Uxelles, who was living on her estate in the country, where she economized as old duchesses alone know how to economize; for Harpagon is a mere novice compared to them. The princess still retained some of her past relations with the exiled royal family; and it was in her house that the marshal to whom we owe the conquest of Africa had conferences, at the time of "Madame's" attempt in La Vendee, with the principal leaders of legitimist opinion,—so great was the obscurity in which the princess lived, and so little distrust did the government feel for her in her present distress.

Beholding the approach of that terrible fortieth year, the bankruptcy of love, beyond which there is so little for a woman as woman, the princess had flung herself into the kingdom of philosophy. She took to reading, she who for sixteen years had felt a cordial horror for serious things. Literature and politics are to-day what piety and devotion once were to her sex,—the last refuge of their feminine pretensions. In her late social circle it was said that Diane was writing a book. Since her transformation from a queen and beauty to a woman of intellect, the princess had contrived to make a reception in her little house a

great honor which distinguished the favored person. Sheltered by her supposed occupation, she was able to deceive one of her former adorers, de Marsay, the most influential personage of the political bourgeoisie brought to the fore in July 1830. She received him sometimes in the evenings, and, occupied his attention while the marshal and a few legitimists were talking, in a low voice, in her bedroom, about the recovery of power, which could be attained only by a general co-operation of ideas,—the one element of success which all conspirators overlook. It was the clever vengeance of the pretty woman, who thus inveigled the prime minister, and made him act as screen for a conspiracy against his own government.

This adventure, worthy of the finest days of the Fronde, was the text of a very witty letter, in which the princess rendered to “Madame” an account of the negotiations. The Duc de Maufrigneuse went to La Vendee, and was able to return secretly without being compromised, but not without taking part in “Madame’s” perils; the latter, however, sent him home the moment she saw that her cause was lost. Perhaps, had he remained, the eager vigilance of the young man might have foiled that treachery. However great the faults of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse may have seemed in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, the behavior of her son on this occasion certainly effaced them in the eyes of the aristocracy. There was great nobility and grandeur in thus risking her only son, and the heir of an historic name. Some persons are said to intentionally cover the faults of their private life by public services, and vice versa; but the Princesse de Cadignan made no such calculation. Possibly those who apparently so conduct themselves make none. Events count for much in such cases.

On one of the first fine days in the month of May, 1833, the Marquise d’Espard and the princess were turning about—one could hardly call it walking—in the single path which wound round the grass-plat in the garden, about half-past two in the afternoon, just as the sun was leaving it. The rays reflected on the walls gave a warm atmosphere to the little space, which was fragrant with flowers, the gift of the marquise.

“We shall soon lose de Marsay,” said the marquise; “and with him will disappear your last hope of fortune for your son. Ever since you played him that clever trick, he has returned to his affection for you.”

“My son will never capitulate to the younger branch,” returned the princess, “if he has to die of hunger, or I have to work with my hands to feed him. Besides, Berthe de Cinq-Cygne has no aversion to him.”

“Children don’t bind themselves to their parents’ principles,” said Madame d’Espard.

“Don’t let us talk about it,” said the princess. “If I can’t coax over the

Marquise de Cinq-Cygne, I shall marry Georges to the daughter of some iron-founderer, as that little d'Esgrignon did."

"Did you love Victurnien?" asked the marquise.

"No," replied the princess, gravely, "d'Esgrignon's simplicity was really only a sort of provincial silliness, which I perceived rather too late—or, if you choose, too soon."

"And de Marsay?"

"De Marsay played with me as if I were a doll. I was so young at the time! We never love men who pretend to teach us; they rub up all our little vanities."

"And that wretched boy who hanged himself?"

"Lucien? An Antinous and a great poet. I worshiped him in all conscience, and I might have been happy. But he was in love with a girl of the town; and I gave him up to Madame de Serizy.... If he had cared to love me, should I have given him up?"

"What an odd thing, that you should come into collision with an Esther!"

"She was handsomer than I," said the Princess.—"Very soon it shall be three years that I have lived in solitude," she resumed, after a pause, "and this tranquillity has nothing painful to me about it. To you alone can I dare to say that I feel I am happy. I was surfeited with adoration, weary of pleasure, emotional on the surface of things, but conscious that emotion itself never reached my heart. I have found all the men whom I have known petty, paltry, superficial; none of them ever caused me a surprise; they had no innocence, no grandeur, no delicacy. I wish I could have met with one man able to inspire me with respect."

"Then are you like me, my dear?" asked the marquise; "have you never felt the emotion of love while trying to love?"

"Never," replied the princess, laying her hand on the arm of her friend.

They turned and seated themselves on a rustic bench beneath a jasmine then coming into flower. Each had uttered one of those sayings that are solemn to women who have reached their age.

"Like you," resumed the princess, "I have received more love than most women; but through all my many adventures, I have never found happiness. I committed great follies, but they had an object, and that object retreated as fast as I approached it. I feel to-day in my heart, old as it is, an innocence which has never been touched. Yes, under all my experience, lies a first love intact,—just as I myself, in spite of all my losses and fatigues, feel young and beautiful. We may love and not be happy; we may be happy and never love; but to love

and be happy, to unite those two immense human experiences, is a miracle. That miracle has not taken place for me."

"Nor for me," said Madame d'Espard.

"I own I am pursued in this retreat by dreadful regret: I have amused myself all through life, but I have never loved."

"What an incredible secret!" cried the marquise.

"Ah! my dear," replied the princess, "such secrets we can tell to ourselves, you and I, but nobody in Paris would believe us."

"And," said the marquise, "if we were not both over thirty-six years of age, perhaps we would not tell them to each other."

"Yes; when women are young they have so many stupid conceits," replied the princess. "We are like those poor young men who play with a toothpick to pretend they have dined."

"Well, at any rate, here we are!" said Madame d'Espard, with coquettish grace, and a charming gesture of well-informed innocence; "and, it seems to me, sufficiently alive to think of taking our revenge."

"When you told me, the other day, that Beatrix had gone off with Conti, I thought of it all night long," said the princess, after a pause. "I suppose there was happiness in sacrificing her position, her future, and renouncing society forever."

"She was a little fool," said Madame d'Espard, gravely. "Mademoiselle des Touches was delighted to get rid of Conti. Beatrix never perceived how that surrender, made by a superior woman who never for a moment defended her claims, proved Conti's nothingness."

"Then you think she will be unhappy?"

"She is so now," replied Madame d'Espard. "Why did she leave her husband? What an acknowledgment of weakness!"

"Then you think that Madame de Rochefide was not influenced by the desire to enjoy a true love in peace?" asked the princess.

"No; she was simply imitating Madame de Beausant and Madame de Langeais, who, be it said, between you and me, would have been, in a less vulgar period than ours, the La Villiere, the Diane de Poitiers, the Gabrielle d'Estrees of history."

"Less the king, my dear. Ah! I wish I could evoke the shades of those women, and ask them—"

"But," said the marquise, interrupting the princess, "why ask the dead? We

know living women who have been happy. I have talked on this very subject a score of times with Madame de Montcornet since she married that little Emile Blondet, who makes her the happiest woman in the world; not an infidelity, not a thought that turns aside from her; they are as happy as they were the first day. These long attachments, like that of Rastignac and Madame de Nucingen, and your cousin, Madame de Camps, for her Octave, have a secret, and that secret you and I don't know, my dear. The world has paid us the extreme compliment of thinking we are two rakes worthy of the court of the regent; whereas we are, in truth, as innocent as a couple of school-girls."

"I should like that sort of innocence," cried the princess, laughing; "but ours is worse, and it is very humiliating. Well, it is a mortification we offer up in expiation of our fruitless search; yes, my dear, fruitless, for it isn't probable we shall find in our autumn season the fine flower we missed in the spring and summer."

"That's not the question," resumed the marquise, after a meditative pause. "We are both still beautiful enough to inspire love, but we could never convince any one of our innocence and virtue."

"If it were a lie, how easy to dress it up with commentaries, and serve it as some delicious fruit to be eagerly swallowed! But how is it possible to get a truth believed? Ah! the greatest of men have been mistaken there!" added the princess, with one of those meaning smiles which the pencil of Leonardo da Vinci alone has rendered.

"Fools love well, sometimes," returned the marquise.

"But in this case," said the princess, "fools wouldn't have enough credulity in their nature."

"You are right," said the marquise. "But what we ought to look for is neither a fool nor even a man of talent. To solve our problem we need a man of genius. Genius alone has the faith of childhood, the religion of love, and willingly allows us to band its eyes. Look at Canalis and the Duchesse de Chaulieu! Though we have both encountered men of genius, they were either too far removed from us or too busy, and we too absorbed, too frivolous."

"Ah! how I wish I might not leave this world without knowing the happiness of true love," exclaimed the princess.

"It is nothing to inspire it," said Madame d'Espard; "the thing is to feel it. I see many women who are only the pretext for a passion without being both its cause and its effect."

"The last love I inspired was a beautiful and sacred thing," said the princess. "It had a future in it. Chance had brought me, for once in a way, the

man of genius who is due to us, and yet so difficult to obtain; there are more pretty women than men of genius. But the devil interfered with the affair."

"Tell me about it, my dear; this is all news to me."

"I first noticed this beautiful passion about the middle of the winter of 1829. Every Friday, at the opera, I observed a young man, about thirty years of age, in the orchestra stalls, who evidently came there for me. He was always in the same stall, gazing at me with eyes of fire, but, seemingly, saddened by the distance between us, perhaps by the hopelessness of reaching me."

"Poor fellow! When a man loves he becomes eminently stupid," said the marquise.

"Between every act he would slip into the corridor," continued the princess, smiling at her friend's epigrammatic remark. "Once or twice, either to see me or to make me see him, he looked through the glass sash of the box exactly opposite to mine. If I received a visit, I was certain to see him in the corridor close to my door, casting a furtive glance upon me. He had apparently learned to know the persons belonging to my circle; and he followed them when he saw them turning in the direction of my box, in order to obtain the benefit of the opening door. I also found my mysterious adorer at the Italian opera-house; there he had a stall directly opposite to my box, where he could gaze at me in naive ecstasy—oh! it was pretty! On leaving either house I always found him planted in the lobby, motionless; he was elbowed and jostled, but he never moved. His eyes grew less brilliant if he saw me on the arm of some favorite. But not a word, not a letter, no demonstration. You must acknowledge that was in good taste. Sometimes, on getting home late at night, I found him sitting upon one of the stone posts of the porte-cochere. This lover of mine had very handsome eyes, a long, thick, fan-shaped beard, with a moustache and side-whiskers; nothing could be seen of his skin but his white cheek-bones, and a noble forehead; it was truly an antique head. The prince, as you know, defended the Tuileries on the riverside, during the July days. He returned to Saint-Cloud that night, when all was lost, and said to me: 'I came near being killed at four o'clock. I was aimed at by one of the insurgents, when a young man, with a long beard, whom I have often seen at the opera, and who was leading the attack, threw up the man's gun, and saved me.' So my adorer was evidently a republican! In 1831, after I came to lodge in this house, I found him, one day, leaning with his back against the wall of it; he seemed pleased with my disasters; possibly he may have thought they drew us nearer together. But after the affair of Saint-Merri I saw him no more; he was killed there. The evening before the funeral of General Lamarque, I had gone out on foot with my son, and my republican accompanied us, sometimes behind, sometimes in front, from the Madeleine to the Passage des Panoramas, where I was going."

“Is that all?” asked the marquise.

“Yes, all,” replied the princess. “Except that on the morning Saint-Merri was taken, a gamin came here and insisted on seeing me. He gave me a letter, written on common paper, signed by my republican.”

“Show it to me,” said the marquise.

“No, my dear. Love was too great and too sacred in the heart of that man to let me violate its secrets. The letter, short and terrible, still stirs my soul when I think of it. That dead man gives me more emotions than all the living men I ever coquetted with; he constantly recurs to my mind.”

“What was his name?” asked the marquise.

“Oh! a very common one: Michel Chrestien.”

“You have done well to tell me,” said Madame d’Espard, eagerly. “I have often heard of him. This Michel Chrestien was the intimate friend of a remarkable man you have already expressed a wish to see,—Daniel d’Arthez, who comes to my house some two or three times a year. Chrestien, who was really killed at Saint-Merri, had no lack of friends. I have heard it said that he was one of those born statesmen to whom, like de Marsay, nothing is wanting but opportunity to become all they might be.”

“Then he had better be dead,” said the princess, with a melancholy air, under which she concealed her thoughts.

“Will you come to my house some evening and meet d’Arthez?” said the marquise. “You can talk of your ghost.”

“Yes, I will,” replied the princess.

CHAPTER II. DANIEL D’ARTHEZ

A few days after this conversation Blondet and Rastignac, who knew d’Arthez, promised Madame d’Espard that they would bring him to dine with her. This promise might have proved rash had it not been for the name of the princess, a meeting with whom was not a matter of indifference to the great writer.

Daniel d’Arthez, one of the rare men who, in our day, unite a noble character with great talent, had already obtained, not all the popularity his works deserve, but a respectful esteem to which souls of his own calibre could add nothing. His reputation will certainly increase; but in the eyes of connoisseurs it had already attained its full development. He is one of those

authors who, sooner or later, are put in their right place, and never lose it. A poor nobleman, he had understood his epoch well enough to seek personal distinction only. He had struggled long in the Parisian arena, against the wishes of a rich uncle who, by a contradiction which vanity must explain, after leaving his nephew a prey to the utmost penury, bequeathed to the man who had reached celebrity the fortune so pitilessly refused to the unknown writer. This sudden change in his position made no change in Daniel d'Arthez's habits; he continued to work with a simplicity worthy of the antique past, and even assumed new toils by accepting a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, where he took his seat on the Right.

Since his accession to fame he had sometimes gone into society. One of his old friends, the now-famous physician, Horace Bianchon, persuaded him to make the acquaintance of the Baron de Rastignac, under-secretary of State, and a friend of de Marsay, the prime minister. These two political officials acquiesced, rather nobly, in the strong wish of d'Arthez, Bianchon, and other friends of Michel Chrestien for the removal of the body of that republican to the church of Saint-Merri for the purpose of giving it funeral honors. Gratitude for a service which contrasted with the administrative rigor displayed at a time when political passions were so violent, had bound, so to speak, d'Arthez to Rastignac. The latter and de Marsay were much too clever not to profit by that circumstance; and thus they won over other friends of Michel Chrestien, who did not share his political opinions, and who now attached themselves to the new government. One of them, Leon Giraud, appointed in the first instance master of petitions, became eventually a Councillor of State.

The whole existence of Daniel d'Arthez is consecrated to work; he sees society only by snatches; it is to him a sort of dream. His house is a convent, where he leads the life of a Benedictine; the same sobriety of regimen, the same regularity of occupation. His friends knew that up to the present time woman had been to him no more than an always dreaded circumstance; he had observed her too much not to fear her; but by dint of studying her he had ceased to understand her,—like, in this, to those deep strategists who are always beaten on unexpected ground, where their scientific axioms are either modified or contradicted. In character he still remains a simple-hearted child, all the while proving himself an observer of the first rank. This contrast, apparently impossible, is explainable to those who know how to measure the depths which separate faculties from feelings; the former proceed from the head, the latter from the heart. A man can be a great man and a wicked one, just as he can be a fool and a devoted lover. D'Arthez is one of those privileged beings in whom shrewdness of mind and a broad expanse of the qualities of the brain do not exclude either the strength or the grandeur of sentiments. He is, by rare privilege, equally a man of action and a man of thought. His private life is noble and generous. If he carefully avoided love, it

was because he knew himself, and felt a premonition of the empire such a passion would exercise upon him.

For several years the crushing toil by which he prepared the solid ground of his subsequent works, and the chill of poverty, were marvellous preservatives. But when ease with his inherited fortune came to him, he formed a vulgar and most incomprehensible connection with a rather handsome woman, belonging to the lower classes, without education or manners, whom he carefully concealed from every eye. Michel Chrestien attributed to men of genius the power of transforming the most massive creatures into sylphs, fools into clever women, peasants into countesses; the more accomplished a woman was, the more she lost her value in their eyes, for, according to Michel, their imagination had the less to do. In his opinion love, a mere matter of the senses to inferior beings, was to great souls the most immense of all moral creations and the most binding. To justify d'Arthez, he instanced the example of Raffaele and the Fornarina. He might have offered himself as an instance for this theory, he who had seen an angel in the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse. This strange fancy of d'Arthez might, however, be explained in other ways; perhaps he had despaired of meeting here below with a woman who answered to that delightful vision which all men of intellect dream of and cherish; perhaps his heart was too sensitive, too delicate, to yield itself to a woman of society; perhaps he thought best to let nature have her way, and keep his illusions by cultivating his ideal; perhaps he had laid aside love as being incompatible with his work and the regularity of a monastic life which love would have wholly upset.

For several months past d'Arthez had been subjected to the jests and satire of Blondet and Rastignac, who reproached him with knowing neither the world nor women. According to them, his authorship was sufficiently advanced, and his works numerous enough, to allow him a few distractions; he had a fine fortune, and here he was living like a student; he enjoyed nothing,—neither his money nor his fame; he was ignorant of the exquisite enjoyments of the noble and delicate love which well-born and well-bred women could inspire and feel; he knew nothing of the charming refinements of language, nothing of the proofs of affection incessantly given by refined women to the commonest things. He might, perhaps, know woman; but he knew nothing of the divinity. Why not take his rightful place in the world, and taste the delights of Parisian society?

"Why doesn't a man who bears party per bend gules and or, a bezant and crab counterchanged," cried Rastignac, "display that ancient escutcheon of Picardy on the panels of a carriage? You have thirty thousand francs a year, and the proceeds of your pen; you have justified your motto: Ars thesaurusque virtus, that punning device our ancestors were always seeking, and yet you

never appear in the Bois de Boulogne! We live in times when virtue ought to show itself."

"If you read your works to that species of stout Laforet, whom you seem to fancy, I would forgive you," said Blondet. "But, my dear fellow, you are living on dry bread, materially speaking; in the matter of intellect you haven't even bread."

This friendly little warfare had been going on for several months between Daniel and his friends, when Madame d'Espard asked Rastignac and Blondet to induce d'Arthez to come and dine with her, telling them that the Princesse de Cadignan had a great desire to see that celebrated man. Such curiosities are to certain women what magic lanterns are to children,—a pleasure to the eyes, but rather shallow and full of disappointments. The more sentiments a man of talent excites at a distance, the less he responds to them on nearer view; the more brilliant fancy has pictured him, the duller he will seem in reality. Consequently, disenchanted curiosity is often unjust.

Neither Blondet nor Rastignac could deceive d'Arthez; but they told him, laughing, that they now offered him a most seductive opportunity to polish up his heart and know the supreme fascinations which love conferred on a Parisian great lady. The princess was evidently in love with him; he had nothing to fear but everything to gain by accepting the interview; it was quite impossible he could descend from the pedestal on which madame de Cadignan had placed him. Neither Blondet nor Rastignac saw any impropriety in attributing this love to the princess; she whose past had given rise to so many anecdotes could very well stand that lesser calumny. Together they began to relate to d'Arthez the adventures of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse: her first affair with de Marsay; her second with d'Ajuda, whom she had, they said, distracted from his wife, thus avenging Madame de Beausant; also her later connection with young d'Esgrignon, who had travelled with her in Italy, and had horribly compromised himself on her account; after that they told him how unhappy she had been with a certain celebrated ambassador, how happy with a Russian general, besides becoming the Egeria of two ministers of Foreign affairs, and various other anecdotes. D'Arthez replied that he knew a great deal more than they could tell him about her through their poor friend, Michel Chrestien, who adored her secretly for four years, and had well-nigh gone mad about her.

"I have often accompanied him," said Daniel, "to the opera. He would make me run through the streets as far as her horses that he might see the princess through the window of her coupe."

"Well, there you have a topic all ready for you," said Blondet, smiling. "This is the very woman you need; she'll initiate you most gracefully into the

mysteries of elegance; but take care! she has wasted many fortunes. The beautiful Diane is one of those spendthrifts who don't cost a penny, but for whom a man spends millions. Give yourself up to her, body and soul, if you choose; but keep your money in your hand, like the old fellow in Girodet's 'Deluge.'"

From the tenor of these remarks it was to be inferred that the princess had the depth of a precipice, the grace of a queen, the corruption of diplomatists, the mystery of a first initiation, and the dangerous qualities of a siren. The two clever men of the world, incapable of foreseeing the denouement of their joke, succeeded in presenting Diane d'Uxelles as a consummate specimen of the Parisian woman, the cleverest of coquettes, the most enchanting mistress in the world. Right or wrong, the woman whom they thus treated so lightly was sacred to d'Arthez; his desire to meet her needed no spur; he consented to do so at the first word, which was all the two friends wanted of him.

Madame d'Espard went to see the princess as soon as she had received this answer.

"My dear, do you feel yourself in full beauty and coquetry?" she said. "If so, come and dine with me a few days hence, and I'll serve up d'Arthez. Our man of genius is by nature, it seems, a savage; he fears women, and has never loved! Make your plans on that. He is all intellect, and so simple that he'll mislead you into feeling no distrust. But his penetration, which is wholly retrospective, acts later, and frustrates calculation. You may hoodwink him to-day, but to-morrow nothing can dupe him."

"Ah!" cried the princess, "if I were only thirty years old what amusement I might have with him! The one enjoyment I have lacked up to the present is a man of intellect to fool. I have had only partners, never adversaries. Love was a mere game instead of being a battle."

"Dear princess, admit that I am very generous; for, after all, you know!—charity begins at home."

The two women looked at each other, laughing, and clasped hands in a friendly way. Assuredly they both knew each other's secrets, and this was not the first man nor the first service that one had given to the other; for sincere and lasting friendships between women of the world need to be cemented by a few little crimes. When two friends are liable to kill each other reciprocally, and see a poisoned dagger in each other's hand, they present a touching spectacle of harmony, which is never troubled, unless, by chance, one of them is careless enough to drop her weapon.

So, eight days later, a little dinner such as are given to intimates by verbal invitation only, during which the doors are closed to all other visitors, took

place at Madame d'Espard's house. Five persons were invited,—Emile Blondet and Madame de Montcornet, Daniel d'Arthez, Rastignac, and the Princesse de Cadignan. Counting the mistress of the house, there were as many men as women.

Chance never exerted itself to make wiser preparations than those which opened the way to a meeting between d'Arthez and Madame de Cadignan. The princess is still considered one of the chief authorities on dress, which, to women, is the first of arts. On this occasion she wore a gown of blue velvet with flowing white sleeves, and a tulle guimpe, slightly frilled and edged with blue, covering the shoulders, and rising nearly to the throat, as we see in several of Raffaele's portraits. Her maid had dressed her hair with white heather, adroitly placed among its blond cascades, which were one of the great beauties to which she owed her celebrity.

Certainly Diane did not look to be more than twenty-five years old. Four years of solitude and repose had restored the freshness of her complexion. Besides, there are moments when the desire to please gives an increase of beauty to women. The will is not without influence on the variations of the face. If violent emotions have the power to yellow the white tones of persons of bilious and melancholy temperament, and to green lymphatic faces, shall we not grant to desire, hope, and joy, the faculty of clearing the skin, giving brilliancy to the eye, and brightening the glow of beauty with a light as jocund as that of a lovely morning? The celebrated faintness of the princess had taken on a ripeness which now made her seem more august. At this moment of her life, impressed by her many vicissitudes and by serious reflections, her noble, dreamy brow harmonized delightfully with the slow, majestic glance of her blue eyes. It was impossible for the ablest physiognomist to imagine calculation or self-will beneath that unspeakable delicacy of feature. There were faces of women which deceive knowledge, and mislead observation by their calmness and delicacy; it is necessary to examine such faces when passions speak, and that is difficult, or after they have spoken, which is no longer of any use, for then the woman is old and has ceased to dissimulate.

The princess is one of those impenetrable women; she can make herself what she pleases to be: playful, childlike, distractingly innocent; or reflective, serious, and profound enough to excite anxiety. She came to Madame d'Espard's dinner with the intention of being a gentle, simple woman, to whom life was known only through its deceptions: a woman full of soul, and calumniated, but resigned,—in short, a wounded angel.

She arrived early, so as to pose on a sofa near the fire beside Madame d'Espard, as she wished to be first seen: that is, in one of those attitudes in which science is concealed beneath an exquisite naturalness; a studied attitude, putting in relief the beautiful serpentine outline which, starting from the foot,

rises gracefully to the hip, and continues with adorable curves to the shoulder, presenting, in fact, a profile of the whole body. With a subtlety which few women would have dreamed of, Diane, to the great amazement of the marquise, had brought her son with her. After a moment's reflection, Madame d'Espard pressed the princess's hand, with a look of intelligence that seemed to say:—

"I understand you! By making d'Arthez accept all the difficulties at once you will not have to conquer them later."

Rastignac brought d'Arthez. The princess made none of those compliments to the celebrated author with which vulgar persons overwhelmed him; but she treated him with a kindness full of graceful respect, which, with her, was the utmost extent of her concessions. Her manner was doubtless the same with the King of France and the royal princes. She seemed happy to see this great man, and glad that she had sought him. Persons of taste, like the princess, are especially distinguished for their manner of listening, for an affability without superciliousness, which is to politeness what practice is to virtue. When the celebrated man spoke, she took an attentive attitude, a thousand times more flattering than the best-seasoned compliments. The mutual presentation was made quietly, without emphasis, and in perfectly good taste, by the marquise.

At dinner d'Arthez was placed beside the princess, who, far from imitating the eccentricities of diet which many affected women display, ate her dinner with a very good appetite, making it a point of honor to seem a natural woman, without strange ways or fancies. Between two courses she took advantage of the conversation becoming general to say to d'Arthez, in a sort of aside:—

"The secret of the pleasure I take in finding myself beside you, is the desire I feel to learn something of an unfortunate friend of yours, monsieur. He died for another cause greater than ours; but I was under the greatest obligations to him, although unable to acknowledge or thank him for them. I know that you were one of his best friends. Your mutual friendship, pure and unalterable, is a claim upon me. You will not, I am sure, think it extraordinary, that I have wished to know all you could tell me of a man so dear to you. Though I am attached to the exiled family, and bound, of course, to hold monarchical opinions, I am not among those who think it is impossible to be both republican and noble in heart. Monarchy and the republic are two forms of government which do not stifle noble sentiments."

"Michel Chrestien was an angel, madame," replied Daniel, in a voice of emotion. "I don't know among the heroes of antiquity a greater than he. Be careful not to think him one of those narrow-minded republicans who would like to restore the Convention and the amenities of the Committee of Public

Safety. No, Michel dreamed of the Swiss federation applied to all Europe. Let us own, between ourselves, that after the glorious government of one man only, which, as I think, is particularly suited to our nation, Michel's system would lead to the suppression of war in this old world, and its reconstruction on bases other than those of conquest, which formerly feudalized it. From this point of view the republicans came nearest to his idea. That is why he lent them his arm in July, and was killed at Saint-Merri. Though completely apart in opinion, he and I were closely bound together as friends."

"That is noble praise for both natures," said Madame de Cadignan, timidly.

"During the last four years of his life," continued Daniel, "he made to me alone a confidence of his love for you, and this confidence knitted closer than ever the already strong ties of brotherly affection. He alone, madame, can have loved you as you ought to be loved. Many a time I have been pelted with rain as we accompanied your carriage at the pace of the horses, to keep at a parallel distance, and see you—admire you."

"Ah! monsieur," said the princess, "how can I repay such feelings!"

"Why is Michel not here!" exclaimed Daniel, in melancholy accents.

"Perhaps he would not have loved me long," said the princess, shaking her head sadly. "Republicans are more absolute in their ideas than we absolutists, whose fault is indulgence. No doubt he imagined me perfect, and society would have cruelly undeceived him. We are pursued, we women, by as many calumnies as you authors are compelled to endure in your literary life; but we, alas! cannot defend ourselves either by our works or by our fame. The world will not believe us to be what we are, but what it thinks us to be. It would soon have hidden from his eyes the real but unknown woman that is in me, behind the false portrait of the imaginary woman which the world considers true. He would have come to think me unworthy of the noble feelings he had for me, and incapable of comprehending him."

Here the princess shook her head, swaying the beautiful blond curls, full of heather, with a touching gesture. This plaintive expression of grievous doubts and hidden sorrows is indescribable. Daniel understood them all; and he looked at the princess with keen emotion.

"And yet, the night on which I last saw him, after the revolution of July, I was on the point of giving way to the desire I felt to take his hand and press it before all the world, under the peristyle of the opera-house. But the thought came to me that such a proof of gratitude might be misinterpreted; like so many other little things done from noble motives which are called to-day the follies of Madame de Maufrigneuse—things which I can never explain, for none but my son and God have understood me."

These words, breathed into the ear of the listener, in tones inaudible to the other guests, and with accents worthy of the cleverest actress, were calculated to reach the heart; and they did reach that of d'Arthez. There was no question of himself in the matter; this woman was seeking to rehabilitate herself in favor of the dead. She had been calumniated; and she evidently wanted to know if anything had tarnished her in the eyes of him who had loved her; had he died with all his illusions?

"Michel," replied d'Arthez, "was one of those men who love absolutely, and who, if they choose ill, can suffer without renouncing the woman they have once elected."

"Was I loved thus?" she said, with an air of exalted beatitude.

"Yes, madame."

"I made his happiness?"

"For four years."

"A woman never hears of such a thing without a sentiment of proud satisfaction," she said, turning her sweet and noble face to d'Arthez with a movement full of modest confusion.

One of the most skilful manoeuvres of these actresses is to veil their manner when words are too expressive, and speak with their eyes when language is restrained. These clever discords, slipped into the music of their love, be it false or true, produce irresistible attractions.

"Is it not," she said, lowering her voice and her eyes, after feeling well assured they had produced her effect,—"is it not fulfilling one's destiny to have rendered a great man happy?"

"Did he not write that to you?"

"Yes; but I wanted to be sure, quite sure; for, believe me, monsieur, in putting me so high he was not mistaken."

Women know how to give a peculiar sacredness to their words; they communicate something vibrant to them, which extends the meaning of their ideas, and gives them depth; though later their fascinated listener may not remember precisely what they said, their end has been completely attained,—which is the object of all eloquence. The princess might at that moment have been wearing the diadem of France, and her brow could not have seemed more imposing than it was beneath that crown of golden hair, braided like a coronet, and adorned with heather. She was simple and calm; nothing betrayed a sense of any necessity to appear so, nor any desire to seem grand or loving. D'Arthez, the solitary toiler, to whom the ways of the world were unknown, whom study had wrapped in its protecting veils, was the dupe of her tones and

words. He was under the spell of those exquisite manners; he admired that perfect beauty, ripened by misfortune, placid in retirement; he adored the union of so rare a mind and so noble a soul; and he longed to become, himself, the heir of Michel Chrestien.

The beginning of this passion was, as in the case of almost all deep thinkers, an idea. Looking at the princess, studying the shape of her head, the arrangement of those sweet features, her figure, her hand, so finely modelled, closer than when he accompanied his friend in their wild rush through the streets, he was struck by the surprising phenomenon of the moral second-sight which a man exalted by love invariably finds within him. With what lucidity had Michel Chrestien read into that soul, that heart, illumined by the fires of love! Thus the princess acquired, in d'Arthez's eyes, another charm; a halo of poesy surrounded her.

As the dinner proceeded, Daniel called to mind the various confidences of his friend, his despair, his hopes, the noble poems of a true sentiment sung to his ear alone, in honor of this woman. It is rare that a man passes without remorse from the position of confidant to that of rival, and d'Arthez was free to do so without dishonor. He had suddenly, in a moment, perceived the enormous differences existing between a well-bred woman, that flower of the great world, and common women, though of the latter he did not know beyond one specimen. He was thus captured on the most accessible and sensitive sides of his soul and of his genius. Impelled by his simplicity, and by the impetuosity of his ideas, to lay immediate claim to this woman, he found himself restrained by society, also by the barrier which the manners and, let us say the word, the majesty of the princess placed between them. The conversation, which remained upon the topic of Michel Chrestien until the dessert, was an excellent pretext for both to speak in a low voice: love, sympathy, comprehension! she could pose as a maligned and misunderstood woman; he could slip his feet into the shoes of the dead republican. Perhaps his candid mind detected itself in regretting his dead friend less. The princess, at the moment when the dessert appeared upon the table, and the guests were separated by a brilliant hedge of fruits and sweetmeats, thought best to put an end to this flow of confidences by a charming little speech, in which she delicately expressed the idea that Daniel and Michel were twin souls.

After this d'Arthez threw himself into the general conversation with the gayety of a child, and a self-conceited air that was worthy of a schoolboy. When they left the dining-room, the princess took d'Arthez's arm, in the simplest manner, to return to Madame d'Espard's little salon. As they crossed the grand salon she walked slowly, and when sufficiently separated from the marquise, who was on Blondet's arm, she stopped.

"I do not wish to be inaccessible to the friend of that poor man," she said to

d’Arthez; “and though I have made it a rule to receive no visitors, you will always be welcome in my house. Do not think this a favor. A favor is only for strangers, and to my mind you and I seem old friends; I see in you the brother of Michel.”

D’Arthez could only press her arm, unable to make other reply.

After coffee was served, Diane de Cadignan wrapped herself, with coquettish motions, in a large shawl, and rose. Blondet and Rastignac were too much men of the world, and too polite to make the least remonstrance, or try to detain her; but Madame d’Espard compelled her friend to sit down again, whispering in her ear:—

“Wait till the servants have had their dinner; the carriage is not ready yet.”

So saying, the marquise made a sign to the footman, who was taking away the coffee-tray. Madame de Montcornet perceived that the princess and Madame d’Espard had a word to say to each other, and she drew around her d’Arthez, Rastignac, and Blondet, amusing them with one of those clever paradoxical attacks which Parisian women understand so thoroughly.

“Well,” said the marquise to Diane, “what do you think of him?”

“He is an adorable child, just out of swaddling-clothes! This time, like all other times, it will only be a triumph without a struggle.”

“Well, it is disappointing,” said Madame d’Espard. “But we might evade it.”

“How?”

“Let me be your rival.”

“Just as you please,” replied the princess. “I’ve decided on my course. Genius is a condition of the brain; I don’t know what the heart gets out of it; we’ll talk about that later.”

Hearing the last few words, which were wholly incomprehensible to her, Madame d’Espard returned to the general conversation, showing neither offence at that indifferent “As you please,” nor curiosity as to the outcome of the interview. The princess stayed an hour longer, seated on the sofa near the fire, in the careless, nonchalant attitude of Guerin’s Dido, listening with the attention of an absorbed mind, and looking at Daniel now and then, without disguising her admiration, which never went, however, beyond due limits. She slipped away when the carriage was announced, with a pressure of the hand to the marquise, and an inclination of the head to Madame de Montcornet.

The evening concluded without any allusion to the princess. The other guests profited by the sort of exaltation which d’Arthez had reached, for he put

forth the treasures of his mind. In Blondet and Rastignac he certainly had two acolytes of the first quality to bring forth the delicacy of his wit and the breadth of his intellect. As for the two women, they had long been counted among the cleverest in society. This evening was like a halt in the oasis of a desert,—a rare enjoyment, and well appreciated by these four persons, habitually victimized to the endless caution entailed by the world of salons and politics. There are beings who have the privilege of passing among men like beneficent stars, whose light illumines the mind, while its rays send a glow to the heart. D'Arthez was one of those beings. A writer who rises to his level, accustoms himself to free thought, and forgets that in society all things cannot be said; it is impossible for such a man to observe the restraint of persons who live in the world perpetually; but as his eccentricities of thought bore the mark of originality, no one felt inclined to complain. This zest, this piquancy, rare in mere talent, this youthfulness and simplicity of soul which made d'Arthez so nobly original, gave a delightful charm to this evening. He left the house with Rastignac, who, as they drove home, asked him how he liked the princess.

"Michel did well to love her," replied d'Arthez; "she is, indeed, an extraordinary woman."

"Very extraordinary," replied Rastignac, dryly. "By the tone of your voice I should judge you were in love with her already. You will be in her house within three days; and I am too old a denizen of Paris not to know what will be the upshot of that. Well, my dear Daniel, I do entreat you not to allow yourself to be drawn into any confusion of interests, so to speak. Love the princess if you feel any love for her in your heart, but keep an eye on your fortune. She has never taken or asked a penny from any man on earth, she is far too much of a d'Uxelles and a Cadignan for that; but, to my knowledge, she has not only spent her own fortune, which was very considerable, but she has made others waste millions. How? why? by what means? No one knows; she doesn't know herself. I myself saw her swallow up, some thirteen years ago, the entire fortune of a charming young fellow, and that of an old notary, in twenty months."

"Thirteen years ago!" exclaimed d'Arthez,—"why, how old is she now?"

"Didn't you see, at dinner," replied Rastignac, laughing, "her son, the Duc de Maufrigneuse. That young man is nineteen years old; nineteen and seventeen make—"

"Thirty-six!" cried the amazed author. "I gave her twenty."

"She'll accept them," said Rastignac; "but don't be uneasy, she will always be twenty to you. You are about to enter the most fantastic of worlds. Good-night, here you are at home," said the baron, as they entered the rue de Bellefond, where d'Arthez lived in a pretty little house of his own. "We shall

meet at Mademoiselle des Touches's in the course of the week."

CHAPTER III. THE PRINCESS GOES TO WORK

D'Arthez allowed love to enter his heart after the manner of my Uncle Toby, without making the slightest resistance; he proceeded by adoration without criticism, and by exclusive admiration. The princess, that noble creature, one of the most remarkable creations of our monstrous Paris, where all things are possible, good as well as evil, became—whatever vulgarity the course of time may have given to the expression—the angel of his dreams. To fully understand the sudden transformation of this illustrious author, it is necessary to realize the simplicity that constant work and solitude leave in the heart; all that love—reduced to a mere need, and now repugnant, beside an ignoble woman—excites of regret and longings for diviner sentiments in the higher regions of the soul. D'Arthez was, indeed, the child, the boy that Madame de Cadignan had recognized. An illumination something like his own had taken place in the beautiful Diane. At last she had met that superior man whom all women desire and seek, if only to make a plaything of him,—that power which they consent to obey, if only for the pleasure of subduing it; at last she had found the grandeurs of the intellect united with the simplicity of a heart all new to love; and she saw, with untold happiness, that these merits were contained in a form that pleased her. She thought d'Arthez handsome, and perhaps he was. Though he had reached the age of gravity (for he was now thirty-eight), he still preserved a flower of youth, due to the sober and ascetic life which he had led. Like all men of sedentary habits, and statesmen, he had acquired a certainly reasonable embonpoint. When very young, he bore some resemblance to Bonaparte; and the likeness still continued, as much as a man with black eyes and thick, dark hair could resemble a sovereign with blue eyes and scanty, chestnut hair. But whatever there once was of ardent and noble ambition in the great author's eyes had been somewhat quenched by successes. The thoughts with which that brow once teemed had flowered; the lines of the hollow face were filling out. Ease now spread its golden tints where, in youth, poverty had laid the yellow tones of the class of temperament whose forces band together to support a crushing and long-continued struggle. If you observe carefully the noble faces of ancient philosophers, you will always find those deviations from the type of a perfect human face which show the characteristic to which each countenance owes its originality, chastened by the habit of meditation, and by the calmness necessary for intellectual labor. The most irregular features, like those of Socrates, for instance, become, after a time, expressive of an almost divine serenity.

To the noble simplicity which characterized his head, d'Arthez added a naive expression, the naturalness of a child, and a touching kindliness. He did not have that politeness tinged with insincerity with which, in society, the best-bred persons and the most amiable assume qualities in which they are often lacking, leaving those they have thus duped wounded and distressed. He might, indeed, fail to observe certain rules of social life, owing to his isolated mode of living; but he never shocked the sensibilities, and therefore this perfume of savagery made the peculiar affability of a man of great talent the more agreeable; such men know how to leave their superiority in their studies, and come down to the social level, lending their backs, like Henry IV., to the children's leap-frog, and their minds to fools.

If d'Arthez did not brace himself against the spell which the princess had cast about him, neither did she herself argue the matter in her own mind, on returning home. It was settled for her. She loved with all her knowledge and all her ignorance. If she questioned herself at all, it was to ask whether she deserved so great a happiness, and what she had done that Heaven should send her such an angel. She wanted to be worthy of that love, to perpetuate it, to make it her own forever, and to gently end her career of frivolity in the paradise she now foresaw. As for coquetting, quibbling, resisting, she never once thought of it. She was thinking of something very different!—of the grandeur of men of genius, and the certainty which her heart divined that they would never subject the woman they chose to ordinary laws.

Here begins one of those unseen comedies, played in the secret regions of the consciousness between two beings of whom one will be the dupe of the other, though it keeps on this side of wickedness; one of those dark and comic dramas to which that of Tartuffe is mere child's play,—dramas that do not enter the scenic domain, although they are natural, conceivable, and even justifiable by necessity; dramas which may be characterized as not vice, only the other side of it.

The princess began by sending for d'Arthez's books, of which she had never, as yet, read a single word, although she had managed to maintain a twenty minutes' eulogism and discussion of them without a blunder. She now read them all. Then she wanted to compare these books with the best that contemporary literature had produced. By the time d'Arthez came to see her she was having an indigestion of mind. Expecting this visit, she had daily made a toilet of what may be called the superior order; that is, a toilet which expresses an idea, and makes it accepted by the eye without the owner of the eye knowing why or wherefore. She presented an harmonious combination of shades of gray, a sort of semi-mourning, full of graceful renunciation,—the garments of a woman who holds to life only through a few natural ties,—her child, for instance,—but who is weary of life. Those garments bore witness to

an elegant disgust, not reaching, however, as far as suicide; no, she would live out her days in these earthly galleys.

She received d'Arthez as a woman who expected him, and as if he had already been to see her a hundred times; she did him the honor to treat him like an old acquaintance, and she put him at his ease by pointing to a seat on a sofa, while she finished a note she was then writing. The conversation began in a commonplace manner: the weather, the ministry, de Marsay's illness, the hopes of the legitimists. D'Arthez was an absolutist; the princess could not be ignorant of the opinions of a man who sat in the Chamber among the fifteen or twenty persons who represented the legitimist party; she found means to tell him how she had fooled de Marsay to the top of his bent, then, by an easy transition to the royal family and to "Madame," and the devotion of the Prince de Cadignan to their service, she drew d'Arthez's attention to the prince:—

"There is this to be said for him: he loved his masters, and was faithful to them. His public character consoles me for the sufferings his private life has inflicted upon me—Have you never remarked," she went on, cleverly leaving the prince aside, "you who observe so much, that men have two natures: one of their homes, their wives, their private lives,—this is their true self; here no mask, no dissimulation; they do not give themselves the trouble to disguise a feeling; they are what they ARE, and it is often horrible! The other man is for others, for the world, for salons; the court, the sovereign, the public often see them grand, and noble, and generous, embroidered with virtues, adorned with fine language, full of admirable qualities. What a horrible jest it is!—and the world is surprised, sometimes, at the caustic smile of certain women, at their air of superiority to their husbands, and their indifference—"

She let her hand fall along the arm of her chair, without ending her sentence, but the gesture admirably completed the speech. She saw d'Arthez watching her flexible figure, gracefully bending in the depths of her easy-chair, noting the folds of her gown, and the pretty little ruffle which sported on her breast,—one of those audacities of the toilet that are suited only to slender waists,—and she resumed the thread of her thoughts as if she were speaking to herself:—

"But I will say no more. You writers have ended by making ridiculous all women who think they are misunderstood, or ill-mated, and who try to make themselves dramatically interesting,—attempts which seem to me, I must say, intolerably vulgar. There are but two things for women in that plight to do,—yield, and all is over; resist, and amuse themselves; in either case they should keep silence. It is true that I neither yielded wholly, nor resisted wholly; but, perhaps, that was only the more reason why I should be silent. What folly for women to complain! If they have not proved the stronger, they have failed in sense, in tact, in capacity, and they deserve their fate. Are they not queens in

France? They can play with you as they like, when they like, and as much as they like.” Here she danced her vinaigrette with an airy movement of feminine impertinence and mocking gayety. “I have often heard miserable little specimens of my sex regretting that they were women, wishing they were men; I have always regarded them with pity. If I had to choose, I should still elect to be a woman. A fine pleasure, indeed, to owe one’s triumph to force, and to all those powers which you give yourselves by the laws you make! But to see you at our feet, saying and doing foolish things,—ah! it is an intoxicating pleasure to feel within our souls that weakness triumphs! But when we triumph, we ought to keep silence, under pain of losing our empire. Beaten, a woman’s pride should gag her. The slave’s silence alarms the master.”

This chatter was uttered in a voice so softly sarcastic, so dainty, and with such coquettish motions of the head, that d’Arthez, to whom this style of woman was totally unknown, sat before her exactly like a partridge charmed by a setter.

“I entreat you, madame,” he said, at last, “to tell me how it was possible that a man could make you suffer? Be assured that where, as you say, other women are common and vulgar, you can only seem distinguished; your manner of saying things would make a cook-book interesting.”

“You go fast in friendship,” she said, in a grave voice which made d’Arthez extremely uneasy.

The conversation changed; the hour was late, and the poor man of genius went away contrite for having seemed curious, and for wounding the sensitive heart of that rare woman who had so strangely suffered. As for her, she had passed her life in amusing herself with men, and was another Don Juan in female attire, with this difference: she would certainly not have invited the Commander to supper, and would have got the better of any statue.

It is impossible to continue this tale without saying a word about the Prince de Cadignan, better known under the name of the Duc de Maufrigneuse, otherwise the spice of the princess’s confidences would be lost, and strangers would not understand the Parisian comedy she was about to play for her man of genius.

The Duc de Maufrigneuse, like a true son of the old Prince de Cadignan, is a tall, lean man, of elegant shape, very graceful, a sayer of witty things, colonel by the grace of God, and a good soldier by accident; brave as a Pole, which means without sense or discernment, and hiding the emptiness of his mind under the jargon of good society. After the age of thirty-six he was forced to be as absolutely indifferent to the fair sex as his master Charles X., punished, like that master, for having pleased it too well. For eighteen years

the idol of the faubourg Saint-Germain, he had, like other heirs of great families led a dissipated life, spent solely on pleasure. His father, ruined by the revolution, had somewhat recovered his position on the return of the Bourbons, as governor of a royal domain, with salary and perquisites; but this uncertain fortune the old prince spent, as it came, in keeping up the traditions of a great seigneur before the revolution; so that when the law of indemnity was passed, the sums he received were all swallowed up in the luxury he displayed in his vast hotel.

The old prince died some little time before the revolution of July aged eighty-seven. He had ruined his wife, and had long been on bad terms with the Duc de Navarreins, who had married his daughter for a first wife, and to whom he very reluctantly rendered his accounts. The Duc de Maufrigneuse, early in life, had had relations with the Duchesse d'Uxelles. About the year 1814, when Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was forty-six years of age, the duchess, pitying his poverty, and seeing that he stood very well at court, gave him her daughter Diane, then in her seventeenth year, and possessing, in her own right, some fifty or sixty thousand francs a year, not counting her future expectations. Mademoiselle d'Uxelles thus became a duchess, and, as her mother very well knew, she enjoyed the utmost liberty. The duke, after obtaining the unexpected happiness of an heir, left his wife entirely to her own devices, and went off to amuse himself in the various garrisons of France, returning occasionally to Paris, where he made debts which his father paid. He professed the most entire conjugal indulgence, always giving the duchess a week's warning of his return; he was adored by his regiment, beloved by the Dauphin, an adroit courtier, somewhat of a gambler, and totally devoid of affectation. Having succeeded to his father's office as governor of one of the royal domains, he managed to please the two kings, Louis XVIII. and Charles X., which proves he made the most of his nonentity; and even the liberals liked him; but his conduct and life were covered with the finest varnish; language, noble manners, and deportment were brought by him to a state of perfection. But, as the old prince said, it was impossible for him to continue the traditions of the Cadignans, who were all well known to have ruined their wives, for the duchess was running through her property on her own account.

These particulars were so well understood in the court circles and in the faubourg Saint-Germain, that during the last five years of the Restoration they were considered ancient history, and any one who mentioned them would have been laughed at. Women never spoke of the charming duke without praising him; he was excellent, they said, to his wife; could a man be better? He had left her the entire disposal of her own property, and had always defended her on every occasion. It is true that, whether from pride, kindliness, or chivalry, Monsieur de Maufrigneuse had saved the duchess under various circumstances which might have ruined other women, in spite of Diane's surroundings, and

the influence of her mother and that of the Duc de Navarreins, her father-in-law, and her husband's aunt.

For several ensuing days the princess revealed herself to d'Arthez as remarkable for her knowledge of literature. She discussed with perfect fearlessness the most difficult questions, thanks to her daily and nightly reading, pursued with an intrepidity worthy of the highest praise. D'Arthez, amazed, and incapable of suspecting that Diane d'Uxelles merely repeated at night that which she read in the morning (as some writers do), regarded her as a most superior woman. These conversations, however, led away from Diane's object, and she tried to get back to the region of confidences from which d'Arthez had prudently retired after her coquettish rebuff; but it was not as easy as she expected to bring back a man of his nature who had once been startled away.

However, after a month of literary campaigning and the finest platonic discourses, d'Arthez grew bolder, and arrived every day at three o'clock. He retired at six, and returned at nine, to remain until midnight, or one in the morning, with the regularity of an ardent and impatient lover. The princess was always dressed with more or less studied elegance at the hour when d'Arthez presented himself. This mutual fidelity, the care they each took of their appearance, in fact, all about them expressed sentiments that neither dared avow, for the princess discerned very plainly that the great child with whom she had to do shrank from the combat as much as she desired it. Nevertheless d'Arthez put into his mute declarations a respectful awe which was infinitely pleasing to her. Both felt, every day, all the more united because nothing acknowledged or definite checked the course of their ideas, as occurs between lovers when there are formal demands on one side, and sincere or coquettish refusals on the other.

Like all men younger than their actual age, d'Arthez was a prey to those agitating irresolutions which are caused by the force of desires and the terror of displeasing,—a situation which a young woman does not comprehend when she shares it, but which the princess had too often deliberately produced not to enjoy its pleasures. In fact, Diane enjoyed these delightful juvenilities all the more keenly because she knew that she could put an end to them at any moment. She was like a great artist delighting in the vague, undecided lines of his sketch, knowing well that in a moment of inspiration he can complete the masterpiece still waiting to come to birth. Many a time, seeing d'Arthez on the point of advancing, she enjoyed stopping him short, with an imposing air and manner. She drove back the hidden storms of that still young heart, raised them again, and stilled them with a look, holding out her hand to be kissed, or saying some trifling insignificant words in a tender voice.

These manoeuvres, planned in cold blood, but enchantingly executed,

carved her image deeper and deeper on the soul of that great writer and thinker whom she revelled in making childlike, confiding, simple, and almost silly beside her. And yet she had moments of repulsion against her own act, moments in which she could not help admiring the grandeur of such simplicity. This game of choicest coquetry attached her, insensibly, to her slave. At last, however, Diane grew impatient with an Epictetus of love; and when she thought she had trained him to the utmost credulity, she set to work to tie a thicker bandage still over his eyes.

CHAPTER IV. THE CONFESSION OF A PRETTY WOMAN

One evening Daniel found the princess thoughtful, one elbow resting on a little table, her beautiful blond head bathed in light from the lamp. She was toying with a letter which lay on the table-cloth. When d'Arthez had seen the paper distinctly, she folded it up, and stuck it in her belt.

"What is the matter?" asked d'Arthez; "you seem distressed."

"I have received a letter from Monsieur de Cadignan," she replied. "However great the wrongs he has done me, I cannot help thinking of his exile —without family, without son—from his native land."

These words, said in a soulful voice, betrayed angelic sensibility. D'Arthez was deeply moved. The curiosity of the lover became, so to speak, a psychological and literary curiosity. He wanted to know the height that woman had attained, and what were the injuries she thus forgave; he longed to know how these women of the world, taxed with frivolity, cold-heartedness, and egotism, could be such angels. Remembering how the princess had already repulsed him when he first tried to read that celestial heart, his voice, and he himself, trembled as he took the transparent, slender hand of the beautiful Diane with its curving finger-tips, and said,—

"Are we now such friends that you will tell me what you have suffered?"

"Yes," she said, breathing forth the syllable like the most mellifluous note that Tulou's flute had ever sighed.

Then she fell into a revery, and her eyes were veiled. Daniel remained in a state of anxious expectation, impressed with the solemnity of the occasion. His poetic imagination made him see, as it were, clouds slowly dispersing and disclosing to him the sanctuary where the wounded lamb was kneeling at the divine feet.

"Well?" he said, in a soft, still voice.

Diane looked at the tender petitioner; then she lowered her eyes slowly, dropping their lids with a movement of noble modesty. None but a monster would have been capable of imagining hypocrisy in the graceful undulation of the neck with which the princess again lifted her charming head, to look once more into the eager eyes of that great man.

“Can I? ought I?” she murmured, with a gesture of hesitation, gazing at d’Arthez with a sublime expression of dreamy tenderness. “Men have so little faith in things of this kind; they think themselves so little bound to be discreet!”

“Ah! if you distrust me, why am I here?” cried d’Arthez.

“Oh, friend!” she said, giving to the exclamation the grace of an involuntary avowal, “when a woman attaches herself for life, think you she calculates? It is not question of refusal (how could I refuse you anything?), but the idea of what you may think of me if I speak. I would willingly confide to you the strange position in which I am at my age; but what would you think of a woman who could reveal the secret wounds of her married life? Turenne kept his word to robbers; do I not owe to my torturers the honor of a Turenne?”

“Have you passed your word to say nothing?”

“Monsieur de Cadignan did not think it necessary to bind me to secrecy—You are asking more than my soul! Tyrant! you want me to bury my honor itself in your breast,” she said, casting upon d’Arthez a look, by which she gave more value to her coming confidence than to her personal self.

“You must think me a very ordinary man, if you fear any evil, no matter what, from me,” he said, with ill-concealed bitterness.

“Forgive me, friend,” she replied, taking his hand in hers caressingly, and letting her fingers wander gently over it. “I know your worth. You have related to me your whole life; it is noble, it is beautiful, it is sublime, and worthy of your name; perhaps, in return, I owe you mine. But I fear to lower myself in your eyes by relating secrets which are not wholly mine. How can you believe—you, a man of solitude and poesy—the horrors of social life? Ah! you little think when you invent your dramas that they are far surpassed by those that are played in families apparently united. You are wholly ignorant of certain gilded sorrows.”

“I know all!” he cried.

“No, you know nothing.”

D’Arthez felt like a man lost on the Alps of a dark night, who sees, at the first gleam of dawn, a precipice at his feet. He looked at the princess with a

bewildered air, and felt a cold chill running down his back. Diane thought for a moment that her man of genius was a weakling, but a flash from his eyes reassured her.

“You have become to me almost my judge,” she said, with a desperate air. “I must speak now, in virtue of the right that all calumniated beings have to show their innocence. I have been, I am still (if a poor recluse forced by the world to renounce the world is still remembered) accused of such light conduct, and so many evil things, that it may be allowed me to find in one strong heart a haven from which I cannot be driven. Hitherto I have always considered self-justification an insult to innocence; and that is why I have disdained to defend myself. Besides, to whom could I appeal? Such cruel things can be confided to none but God or to one who seems to us very near Him—a priest, or another self. Well! I do know this, if my secrets are not as safe there,” she said, laying her hand on d’Arthez’s heart, “as they are here” (pressing the upper end of her busk beneath her fingers), “then you are not the grand d’Arthez I think you—I shall have been deceived.”

A tear moistened d’Arthez’s eyes, and Diane drank it in with a side look, which, however, gave no motion either to the pupils or the lids of her eyes. It was quick and neat, like the action of a cat pouncing on a mouse.

D’Arthez, for the first time, after sixty days of protocols, ventured to take that warm and perfumed hand, and press it to his lips with a long-drawn kiss, extending from the wrist to the tip of the fingers, which made the princess augur well of literature. She thought to herself that men of genius must know how to love with more perfection than conceited fops, men of the world, diplomatists, and even soldiers, although such beings have nothing else to do. She was a connoisseur, and knew very well that the capacity for love reveals itself chiefly in mere nothings. A woman well informed in such matters can read her future in a simple gesture; just as Cuvier could say from the fragment of a bone: This belonged to an animal of such or such dimensions, with or without horns, carnivorous, herbivorous, amphibious, etc., age, so many thousand years. Sure now of finding in d’Arthez as much imagination in love as there was in his written style, she thought it wise to bring him up at once to the highest pitch of passion and belief.

She withdrew her hand hastily, with a magnificent movement full of varied emotions. If she had said in words: “Stop, or I shall die,” she could not have spoken more plainly. She remained for a moment with her eyes in d’Arthez’s eyes, expressing in that one glance happiness, prudery, fear, confidence, languor, a vague longing, and virgin modesty. She was twenty years old! but remember, she had prepared for this hour of comic falsehood by the choicest art of dress; she was there in her armchair like a flower, ready to blossom at the first kiss of sunshine. True or false, she intoxicated Daniel.

It if is permissible to risk a personal opinion we must avow that it would be delightful to be thus deceived for a good long time. Certainly Talma on the stage was often above and beyond nature, but the Princesse de Cadignan is the greatest true comedian of our day. Nothing was wanting to this woman but an attentive audience. Unfortunately, at epochs perturbed by political storms, women disappear like water-lilies which need a cloudless sky and balmy zephyrs to spread their bloom to our enraptured eyes.

The hour had come; Diane was now to entangle that great man in the inextricable meshes of a romance carefully prepared, to which he was fated to listen as the neophyte of early Christian times listened to the epistles of an apostle.

“My friend,” began Diane, “my mother, who still lives at Uxelles, married me in 1814, when I was seventeen years old (you see how old I am now!) to Monsieur de Maufrigneuse, not out of affection for me, but out of regard for him. She discharged her debt to the only man she had ever loved, for the happiness she had once received from him. Oh! you need not be astonished at so horrible a conspiracy; it frequently takes place. Many women are more lovers than mothers, though the majority are more mothers than wives. The two sentiments, love and motherhood, developed as they are by our manners and customs, often struggle together in the hearts of women; one or other must succumb when they are not of equal strength; when they are, they produce some exceptional women, the glory of our sex. A man of your genius must surely comprehend many things that bewilder fools but are none the less true; indeed I may go further and call them justifiable through difference of characters, temperaments, attachments, situations. I, for example, at this moment, after twenty years of misfortunes, of deceptions, of calumnies endured, and weary days and hollow pleasures, is it not natural that I should incline to fall at the feet of a man who would love me sincerely and forever? And yet, the world would condemn me. But twenty years of suffering might well excuse a few brief years which may still remain to me of youth given to a sacred and real love. This will not happen. I am not so rash as to sacrifice my hopes of heaven. I have borne the burden and heat of the day, I shall finish my course and win my recompense.”

“Angel!” thought d’Arthez.

“After all, I have never blamed my mother; she knew little of me. Mothers who lead a life like that of the Duchesse d’Uxelles keep their children at a distance. I saw and knew nothing of the world until my marriage. You can judge of my innocence! I knew nothing; I was incapable of understanding the causes of my marriage. I had a fine fortune; sixty thousand francs a year in forests, which the Revolution overlooked (or had not been able to sell) in the Nivernais, with the noble chateau of d’Anzy. Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was

steeped in debt. Later I learned what it was to have debts, but then I was too utterly ignorant of life to suspect my position; the money saved out of my fortune went to pacify my husband's creditors. Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was forty-eight years of age when I married him; but those years were like military campaigns, they ought to count for twice what they were. Ah! what a life I led for ten years! If any one had known the suffering of this poor, calumniated little woman! To be watched by a mother jealous of her daughter! Heavens! You who make dramas, you will never invent anything as direful as that. Ordinarily, according to the little that I know of literature, a drama is a suite of actions, speeches, movements which hurry to a catastrophe; but what I speak of was a catastrophe in action. It was an avalanche fallen in the morning and falling again at night only to fall again the next day. I am cold now as I speak to you of that cavern without an opening, cold, sombre, in which I lived. I, poor little thing that I was! brought up in a convent like a mystic rose, knowing nothing of marriage, developing late, I was happy at first; I enjoyed the goodwill and harmony of our family. The birth of my poor boy, who is all me—you must have been struck by the likeness? my hair, my eyes, the shape of my face, my mouth, my smile, my teeth!—well, his birth was a relief to me; my thoughts were diverted by the first joys of maternity from my husband, who gave me no pleasure and did nothing for me that was kind or amiable; those joys were all the keener because I knew no others. It had been so often rung into my ears that a mother should respect herself. Besides, a young girl loves to play the mother. I was so proud of my flower—for Georges was beautiful, a miracle, I thought! I saw and thought of nothing but my son, I lived with my son. I never let his nurse dress or undress him. Such cares, so wearing to mothers who have a regiment of children, were all my pleasure. But after three or four years, as I was not an actual fool, light came to my eyes in spite of the pains taken to blindfold me. Can you see me at that final awakening, in 1819? The drama of 'The Brothers at enmity' is a rose-water tragedy beside that of a mother and daughter placed as we then were. But I braved them all, my mother, my husband, the world, by public coquetries which society talked of,—and heaven knows how it talked! You can see, my friend, how the men with whom I was accused of folly were to me the dagger with which to stab my enemies. Thinking only of my vengeance, I did not see or feel the wounds I was inflicting on myself. Innocent as a child, I was thought a wicked woman, the worst of women, and I knew nothing of it! The world is very foolish, very blind, very ignorant; it can penetrate no secrets but those which amuse it and serve its malice: noble things, great things, it puts its hand before its eyes to avoid seeing. But, as I look back, it seems to me that I had an attitude and aspect of indignant innocence, with movements of pride, which a great painter would have recognized. I must have enlivened many a ball with my tempests of anger and disdain. Lost poesy! such sublime poems

are only made in the glowing indignation which seizes us at twenty. Later, we are wrathful no longer, we are too weary, vice no longer amazes us, we are cowards, we fear. But then—oh! I kept a great pace! For all that I played the silliest personage in the world; I was charged with crimes by which I never benefited. But I had such pleasure in compromising myself. That was my revenge! Ah! I have played many childish tricks! I went to Italy with a thoughtless youth, whom I crushed when he spoke to me of love, but later, when I herd that he was compromised on my account (he had committed a forgery to get money) I rushed to save him. My mother and husband kept me almost without means; but, this time, I went to the king. Louis XVIII., that man without a heart, was touched; he gave me a hundred thousand francs from his privy purse. The Marquis d'Esgrignon—you must have seen him in society for he ended by making a rich marriage—was saved from the abyss into which he had plunged for my sake. That adventure, caused by my own folly, led me to reflect. I saw that I myself was the first victim of my vengeance. My mother, who knew I was too proud, too d'Uxelles, to conduct myself really ill, began to see the harm that she had done me and was frightened by it. She was then fifty-two years of age; she left Paris and went to live at Uxelles. There she expiates her wrong-doing by a life of devotion and expresses the utmost affection for me. After her departure I was face to face, alone, with Monsieur de Maufrigneuse. Oh! my friend, you men can never know what an old man of gallantry can be. What a home is that of a man accustomed to the adulation of women of the world, when he finds neither incense nor censer in his own house! dead to all! and yet, perhaps for that very reason, jealous. I wished—when Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was wholly mine—I wished to be a good wife, but I found myself repulsed with the harshness of a soured spirit by a man who treated me like a child and took pleasure in humiliating my self-respect at every turn, in crushing me under the scorn of his experience, and in convicting me of total ignorance. He wounded me on all occasions. He did everything to make me detest him and to give me the right to betray him; but I was still the dupe of my own hope and of my desire to do right through several years. Shall I tell you the cruel saying that drove me to further follies? 'The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse has gone back to her husband,' said the world. 'Bah! it is always a triumph to bring the dead to life; it is all she can now do,' replied my best friend, a relation, she, at whose house I met you—"

"Madame d'Espard!" cried Daniel, with a gesture of horror.

"Oh! I have forgiven her. Besides, it was very witty; and I have myself made just as cruel epigrams on other poor women as innocent as myself."

D'Arthez again kissed the hand of that saintly woman who, having hacked her mother in pieces, and turned the Prince de Cadignan into an Othello, now proceeded to accuse herself in order to appear in the eyes of that innocent

great man as immaculate as the silliest or the wisest of women desire to seem at all costs to their lovers.

“You will readily understand, my friend, that I returned to society for the purpose of excitement and I may say of notoriety. I felt that I must conquer my independence. I led a life of dissipation. To divert my mind, to forget my real life in fictitious enjoyments I was gay, I shone, I gave fetes, I played the princess, and I ran in debt. At home I could forget myself in the sleep of weariness, able to rise the next day gay, and frivolous for the world; but in that sad struggle to escape my real life I wasted my fortune. The revolution of 1830 came; it came at the very moment when I had met, at the end of that Arabian Nights’’ life, a pure and sacred love which (I desire to be honest) I had longed to know. Was it not natural in a woman whose heart, repressed by many causes and accidents, was awakening at an age when a woman feels herself cheated if she has never known, like the women she sees about her, a happy love? Ah! why was Michel Chrestien so respectful? Why did he not seek to meet me? There again was another mockery! But what of that? in falling, I have lost everything; I have no illusions left; I had tasted of all things except the one fruit for which I have no longer teeth. Yes, I found myself disenchanted with the world at the very moment when I was forced to leave it. Providential, was it not? like all those strange insensibilities which prepare us for death” (she made a gesture full of pious unction). “All things served me then,” she continued; “the disasters of the monarchy and its ruin helped me to bury myself. My son consoles me for much. Maternal love takes the place of all frustrated feelings. The world is surprised at my retirement, but to me it has brought peace. Ah! if you knew how happy the poor creature before you is in this little place. In sacrificing all to my son I forget to think of joys of which I am and ever must be ignorant. Yes, hope has flown, I now fear everything; no doubt I should repulse the truest sentiment, the purest and most veritable love, in memory of the deceptions and the miseries of my life. It is all horrible, is it not? and yet, what I have told you is the history of many women.”

The last few words were said in a tone of easy pleasantry which recalled the presence of the woman of the world. D’Arthez was dumbfounded. In his eyes convicts sent to the galleys for murder, or aggravated robbery, or for putting a wrong name to checks, were saints compared to the men and women of society. This atrocious elegy, forged in the arsenal of lies, and steeped in the waters of the Parisian Styx, had been poured into his ears with the inimitable accent of truth. The grave author contemplated for a moment that adorable woman lying back in her easy-chair, her two hands pendant from its arms like dewdrops from a rose-leaf, overcome by her own revelation, living over again the sorrows of her life as she told them—in short an angel of melancholy.

“And judge,” she cried, suddenly lifting herself with a spring and raising

her hand, while lightning flashed from eyes where twenty chaste years shone —“judge of the impression the love of a man like Michel must have made upon me. But by some irony of fate—or was it the hand of God?—well, he died; died in saving the life of, whom do you suppose? of Monsieur de Cadignan. Are you now surprised to find me thoughtful?”

This was the last drop; poor d’Arthez could bear no more. He fell upon his knees, and laid his head on Diane’s hand, weeping soft tears such as the angels shed,—if angels weep. As Daniel was in that bent posture, Madame de Cadignan could safely let a malicious smile of triumph flicker on her lips, a smile such as the monkeys wear after playing a sly trick—if monkeys smile.

“Ah! I have him,” thought she; and, indeed, she had him fast.

“But you are—” he said, raising his fine head and looking at her with eyes of love.

“Virgin and martyr,” she replied, smiling at the commonness of that hackneyed expression, but giving it a freshness of meaning by her smile, so full of painful gayety. “If I laugh,” she continued, “it is that I am thinking of that princess whom the world thinks it knows, that Duchesse de Maufrigneuse to whom it gives as lovers de Marsay, that infamous de Trailles (a political cutthroat), and that little fool of a d’Esgrignon, and Rastignac, Rubempre, ambassadors, ministers, Russian generals, heaven knows who! all Europe! They have gossiped about that album which I ordered made, believing that those who admired me were my friends. Ah! it is frightful! I wonder that I allow a man at my feet! Despise them all, THAT should be my religion.”

She rose and went to the window with a gait and bearing magnificent in motifs.

D’Arthez remained on the low seat to which he had returned not daring to follow the princess; but he looked at her; he heard her blowing her nose. Was there ever a princess who blew her nose? but Diane attempted the impossible to convey an idea of her sensibility. D’Arthez believed his angel was in tears; he rushed to her side, took her round the waist, and pressed her to his heart.

“No, no, leave me!” she murmured in a feeble voice. “I have too many doubts to be good for anything. To reconcile me with life is a task beyond the powers of any man.”

“Diane! I will love you for your whole lost life.”

“No; don’t speak to me thus,” she answered. “At this moment I tremble, I am ashamed as though I had committed the greatest sins.”

She was now entirely restored to the innocence of little girls, and yet her bearing was august, grand, noble as that of a queen. It is impossible to

describe the effect of these manoeuvres, so clever that they acted like the purest truth on a soul as fresh and honest as that of d'Arthez. The great author remained dumb with admiration, passive beside her in the recess of that window awaiting a word, while the princess awaited a kiss; but she was far too sacred to him for that. Feeling cold, the princess returned to her easy-chair; her feet were frozen.

"It will take a long time," she said to herself, looking at Daniel's noble brow and head.

"Is this a woman?" thought that profound observer of human nature. "How ought I to treat her?"

Until two o'clock in the morning they spent their time in saying to each other the silly things that women of genius, like the princess, know how to make adorable. Diane pretended to be too worn, too old, too faded; D'Arthez proved to her (facts of which she was well convinced) that her skin was the most delicate, the softest to the touch, the whitest to the eye, the most fragrant; she was young and in her bloom, how could she think otherwise? Thus they disputed, beauty by beauty, detail by detail with many: "Oh! do you think so?"—"You are beside yourself!"—"It is hope, it is fancy!"—"You will soon see me as I am.—I am almost forty years of age. Can a man love so old a woman?"

D'Arthez responded with impetuous and school-boy eloquence, larded with exaggerated epithets. When the princess heard this wise and witty writer talking the nonsense of an amorous sub-lieutenant she listened with an absorbed air and much sensibility; but she laughed in her sleeve.

When d'Arthez was in the street, he asked himself whether he might not have been rather less respectful. He went over in memory those strange confidences—which have, naturally, been much abridged here, for they needed a volume to convey their mellifluous abundance and the graces which accompanied them. The retrospective perspicacity of this man, so natural, so profound, was baffled by the candor of that tale and its poignancy, and by the tones of the princess.

"It is true," he said to himself, being unable to sleep, "there are such dramas as that in society. Society covers great horrors with the flowers of its elegance, the embroidery of its gossip, the wit of its lies. We writers invent no more than the truth. Poor Diane! Michel had penetrated that enigma; he said that beneath her covering of ice there lay volcanoes! Bianchon and Rastignac were right; when a man can join the grandeurs of the ideal and the enjoyments of human passion in loving a woman of perfect manners, of intellect, of delicacy, it must be happiness beyond words."

So thinking, he sounded the love that was in him and found it infinite.

CHAPTER V. A TRIAL OF FAITH

The next day, about two in the afternoon, Madame d'Espard, who had seen and heard nothing of the princess for more than a month, went to see her under the impulse of extreme curiosity. Nothing was ever more amusing of its kind than the conversation of these two crafty adders during the first half-hour of this visit.

Diane d'Uxelles cautiously avoided, as she would the wearing of a yellow gown, all mention of d'Arthez. The marquise circled round and round that topic like a Bedouin round a caravan. Diane amused herself; the marquise fumed. Diane waited; she intended to utilize her friend and use her in the chase. Of these two women, both so celebrated in the social world, one was far stronger than the other. The princess rose by a head above the marquise, and the marquise was inwardly conscious of that superiority. In this, perhaps, lay the secret of their intimacy. The weaker of the two crouched low in her false attachment, watching for the hour, long awaited by feeble beings, of springing at the throat of the stronger and leaving the mark of a joyful bite. Diane saw clear; but the world was the dupe of the wile caresses of the two friends.

The instant that the princess perceived a direct question on the lips of her friend, she said:—

"Ah! dearest, I owe you a most complete, immense, infinite, celestial happiness."

"What can you mean?"

"Have you forgotten what we ruminated three months ago in the little garden, sitting on a bench in the sun, under the jasmine? Ah! there are none but men of genius who know how to love! I apply to my grand Daniel d'Arthez the Duke of Alba's saying to Catherine de' Medici: 'The head of a single salmon is worth all the frogs in the world.'"

"I am not surprised that I no longer see you," said Madame d'Espard.

"Promise me, if you meet him, not to say to him one word about me, my angel," said the princess, taking her friend's hand. "I am happy, oh! happy beyond all expression; but you know that in society a word, a mere jest can do much harm. One speech can kill, for they put such venom into a single sentence! Ah! if you knew how I long that you might meet with a love like this! Yes, it is a sweet, a precious triumph for women like ourselves to end our

woman’s life in this way; to rest in an ardent, pure, devoted, complete and absolute love; above all, when we have sought it long.”

“Why do you ask me to be faithful to my dearest friend?” said Madame d’Espard. “Do you think me capable of playing you some villainous trick?”

“When a woman possesses such a treasure the fear of losing it is so strong that it naturally inspires a feeling of terror. I am absurd, I know; forgive me, dear.”

A few moments later the marquise departed; as she watched her go the princess said to herself:—

“How she will pluck me! But to save her the trouble of trying to get Daniel away from here I’ll send him to her.”

At three o’clock, or a few moments after, d’Arthez arrived. In the midst of some interesting topic on which he was discoursing eloquently, the princess suddenly cut him short by laying her hand on his arm.

“Pardon me, my dear friend,” she said, interrupting him, “but I fear I may forget a thing which seems a mere trifle but may be of great importance. You have not set foot in Madame d’Espard’s salon since the ever-blessed day when I met you there. Pray go at once; not for your sake, nor by way of politeness, but for me. You may already have made her an enemy of mine, if by chance she has discovered that since her dinner you have scarcely left my house. Besides, my friend, I don’t like to see you dropping your connection with society, and neglecting your occupations and your work. I should again be strangely calumniated. What would the world say? That I held you in leading-strings, absorbed you, feared comparisons, and clung to my conquest knowing it to be my last! Who will know that you are my friend, my only friend? If you love me indeed, as you say you love me, you will make the world believe that we are purely and simply brother and sister—Go on with what you were saying.”

In his armor of tenderness, riveted by the knowledge of so many splendid virtues, d’Arthez obeyed this behest on the following day and went to see Madame d’Espard, who received him with charming coquetry. The marquise took very good care not to say a single word to him about the princess, but she asked him to dinner on a coming day.

On this occasion d’Arthez found a numerous company. The marquise had invited Rastignac, Blondet, the Marquis d’Ajuda-Pinto, Maxime de Trailles, the Marquis d’Esgrignon, the two brothers Vandenesse, du Tillet, one of the richest bankers in Paris, the Baron de Nucingen, Raoul Nathan, Lady Dudley, two very treacherous secretaries of embassies and the Chevalier d’Espard, the wiliest person in this assemblage and the chief instigator of his sister-in-law’s

policy.

When dinner was well under way, Maxime de Trailles turned to d’Arthez and said smiling:—

“You see a great deal, don’t you, of the Princesse de Cadignan?”

To this question d’Arthez responded by curtly nodding his head. Maxime de Trailles was a “bravo” of the social order, without faith or law, capable of everything, ruining the women who trusted him, compelling them to pawn their diamonds to give him money, but covering this conduct with a brilliant varnish; a man of charming manners and satanic mind. He inspired all who knew him with equal contempt and fear; but as no one was bold enough to show him any sentiments but those of the utmost courtesy he saw nothing of this public opinion, or else he accepted and shared the general dissimulation. He owed to the Comte de Marsay the greatest degree of elevation to which he could attain. De Marsay, whose knowledge of Maxime was of long-standing, judged him capable of fulfilling certain secret and diplomatic functions which he confided to him and of which de Trailles acquitted himself admirably. D’Arthez had for some time past mingled sufficiently in political matters to know the man for what he was, and he alone had sufficient strength and height of character to express aloud what others thought or said in a whisper.

“Is it for her that you neglect the Chamber?” asked Baron de Nucingen in his German accent.

“Ah! the princess is one of the most dangerous women a man can have anything to do with. I owe to her the miseries of my marriage,” exclaimed the Marquis d’Esgrignon.

“Dangerous?” said Madame d’Espard. “Don’t speak so of my nearest friend. I have never seen or known anything in the princess that did not seem to come from the noblest sentiments.”

“Let the marquis say what he thinks,” cried Rastignac. “When a man has been thrown by a fine horse he thinks it has vices and he sells it.”

Piqued by these words, the Marquis d’Esgrignon looked at d’Arthez and said:—

“Monsieur is not, I trust, on such terms with the princess that we cannot speak freely of her?”

D’Arthez kept silence. D’Esgrignon, who was not wanting in cleverness, replied to Rastignac’s speech with an apologetic portrait of the princess, which put the whole table in good humor. As the jest was extremely obscure to d’Arthez he leaned towards his neighbor, Madame de Montcornet, and asked her, in a whisper, what it meant.

“Excepting yourself—judging by the excellent opinion you seem to have of the princess—all the other guests are said to have been in her good graces.”

“I can assure you that such an accusation is absolutely false,” said Daniel.

“And yet, here is Monsieur d’Esgrignon of an old family of Alencon, who completely ruined himself for her some twelve years ago, and, if all is true, came very near going to the scaffold.”

“I know the particulars of that affair,” said d’Arthez. “Madame de Cadignan went to Alencon to save Monsieur d’Esgrignon from a trial before the court of assizes; and this is how he rewards her to-day!”

Madame de Montcornet looked at d’Arthez with a surprise and curiosity that were almost stupid, then she turned her eyes on Madame d’Espard with a look which seemed to say: “He is bewitched!”

During this short conversation Madame de Cadignan was protected by Madame d’Espard, whose protection was like that of the lightning-rod which draws the flash. When d’Arthez returned to the general conversation Maxime de Trailles was saying:—

“With Diane, depravity is not an effect but a cause; perhaps she owes that cause to her exquisite nature; she doesn’t invent, she makes no effort, she offers you the choicest refinements as the inspiration of a spontaneous and naive love; and it is absolutely impossible not to believe her.”

This speech, which seemed to have been prepared for a man of d’Arthez’s stamp, was so tremendous an arraignment that the company appeared to accept it as a conclusion. No one said more; the princess was crushed. D’Arthez looked straight at de Trailles and then at d’Esgrignon with a sarcastic air, and said:—

“The greatest fault of that woman is that she has followed in the wake of men. She squanders patrimonies as they do; she drives her lovers to usurers; she pockets ‘dots’; she ruins orphans; she inspires, possibly she commits, crimes, but—”

Never had the two men, whom d’Arthez was chiefly addressing, listened to such plain talk. At that BUT the whole table was startled, every one paused, fork in air, their eyes fixed alternately on the brave author and on the assailants of the princess, awaiting the conclusion of that horrible silence.

“But,” said d’Arthez, with sarcastic airiness, “Madame la Princesse de Cadignan has one advantage over men: when they have put themselves in danger for her sake, she saves them, and says no harm of any one. Among the multitude, why shouldn’t there be one woman who amuses herself with men as men amuse themselves with women? Why not allow the fair sex to take,

from time to time, its revenge?”

“Genius is stronger than wit,” said Blondet to Nathan.

This broadside of sarcasms was in fact the discharge of a battery of cannons against a platoon of musketry. When coffee was served, Blondet and Nathan went up to d’Arthez with an eagerness no one else dared to imitate, so unable were the rest of the company to show the admiration his conduct inspired from the fear of making two powerful enemies.

“This is not the first time we have seen that your character equals your talent in grandeur,” said Blondet. “You behaved just now more like a demi-god than a man. Not to have been carried away by your heart or your imagination, not to have taken up the defence of a beloved woman—a fault they were enticing you to commit, because it would have given those men of society eaten up with jealousy of your literary fame a triumph over you—ah! give me leave to say you have attained the height of private statesmanship.”

“Yes, you are a statesman,” said Nathan. “It is as clever as it is difficult to avenge a woman without defending her.”

“The princess is one of those heroines of the legitimist party, and it is the duty of all men of honor to protect her quand meme,” replied d’Arthez, coldly. “What she has done for the cause of her masters would excuse all follies.”

“He keeps his own counsel!” said Nathan to Blondet.

“Precisely as if the princess were worth it,” said Rastignac, joining the other two.

D’Arthez went to the princess, who was awaiting him with the keenest anxiety. The result of this experiment, which Diane had herself brought about, might be fatal to her. For the first time in her life this woman suffered in her heart. She knew not what she should do in case d’Arthez believed the world which spoke the truth, instead of believing her who lied; for never had so noble a nature, so complete a man, a soul so pure, a conscience so ingenuous come beneath her hand. Though she had told him cruel lies she was driven to do so by the desire of knowing a true love. That love—she felt it dawning in her heart; yes, she loved d’Arthez; and now she was condemned forever to deceive him! She must henceforth remain to him the actress who had played that comedy to blind his eyes.

When she heard Daniel’s step in the dining-room a violent commotion, a shudder which reached to her very vitals came over her. That convulsion, never felt during all the years of her adventurous existence, told her that she had staked her happiness on this issue. Her eyes, gazing into space, took in the whole of d’Arthez’s person; their light poured through his flesh, she read his

soul; suspicion had not so much as touched him with its bat's-wing. The terrible emotion of that fear then came to its reaction; joy almost stifled her; for there is no human being who is not more able to endure grief than to bear extreme felicity.

"Daniel, they have calumniated me, and you have avenged me!" she cried, rising, and opening her arms to him.

In the profound amazement caused by these words, the roots of which were utterly unknown to him, Daniel allowed his hand to be taken between her beautiful hands, as the princess kissed him sacredly on the forehead.

"But," he said, "how could you know—"

"Oh! illustrious ninny! do you not see that I love you fondly?"

Since that day nothing has been said of the Princess de Cadignan, nor of d'Arthez. The princess has inherited some fortune from her mother and she spends all her summers in a villa on the lake of Geneva, where the great writer joins her. She returns to Paris for a few months in winter. D'Arthez is never seen except in the Chamber. His writings are becoming exceedingly rare. Is this a conclusion? Yes, for people of sense; no, for persons who want to know everything.

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BUREAUCRACY

CHAPTER I. THE RABOURDIN HOUSEHOLD

In Paris, where men of thought and study bear a certain likeness to one another, living as they do in a common centre, you must have met with several resembling Monsieur Rabourdin, whose acquaintance we are about to make at a moment when he is head of a bureau in one of our most important ministries. At this period he was forty years old, with gray hair of so pleasing a shade that women might at a pinch fall in love with it for it softened a somewhat melancholy countenance, blue eyes full of fire, a skin that was still fair, though rather ruddy and touched here and there with strong red marks; a forehead and nose a la Louis XV., a serious mouth, a tall figure, thin, or perhaps wasted, like that of a man just recovering from illness, and finally, a bearing that was midway between the indolence of a mere idler and the thoughtfulness of a busy man. If this portrait serves to depict his character, a sketch of this man's dress will bring it still further into relief. Rabourdin wore habitually a blue

surcoat, a white cravat, a waistcoat crossed a la Robespierre, black trousers without straps, gray silk stockings and low shoes. Well-shaved, and with his stomach warmed by a cup of coffee, he left home at eight in the morning with the regularity of clock-work, always passing along the same streets on his way to the ministry: so neat was he, so formal, so starched that he might have been taken for an Englishman on the road to his embassy.

From these general signs you will readily discern a family man, harassed by vexations in his own household, worried by annoyances at the ministry, yet philosopher enough to take life as he found it; an honest man, loving his country and serving it, not concealing from himself the obstacles in the way of those who seek to do right; prudent, because he knew men; exquisitely courteous with women, of whom he asked nothing,—a man full of acquirements, affable with his inferiors, holding his equals at great distance, and dignified towards his superiors. At the epoch of which we write, you would have noticed in him the coldly resigned air of one who has buried the illusions of his youth and renounced every secret ambition; you would have recognized a discouraged, but not disgusted man, one who still clings to his first projects,—more perhaps to employ his faculties than in the hope of a doubtful success. He was not decorated with any order, and always accused himself of weakness for having worn that of the Fleur-de-lis in the early days of the Restoration.

The life of this man was marked by certain mysterious peculiarities. He had never known his father; his mother, a woman to whom luxury was everything, always elegantly dressed, always on pleasure bent, whose beauty seemed to him miraculous and whom he very seldom saw, left him little at her death; but she had given him that too common and incomplete education which produces so much ambition and so little ability. A few days before his mother’s death, when he was just sixteen, he left the Lycee Napoleon to enter as supernumerary a government office, where an unknown protector had provided him with a place. At twenty-two years of age Rabourdin became under-head-clerk; at twenty-five, head-clerk, or, as it was termed, head of the bureau. From that day the hand that assisted the young man to start in life was never felt again in his career, except as to a single circumstance; it led him, poor and friendless, to the house of a Monsieur Leprince, formerly an auctioneer, a widower said to be extremely rich, and father of an only daughter. Xavier Rabourdin fell desperately in love with Mademoiselle Celestine Leprince, then seventeen years of age, who had all the matrimonial claims of a dowry of two hundred thousand francs. Carefully educated by an artistic mother, who transmitted her own talents to her daughter, this young lady was fitted to attract distinguished men. Tall, handsome, and finely-formed, she was a good musician, drew and painted, spoke several languages, and even knew something of science,—a dangerous advantage, which requires

a woman to avoid carefully all appearance of pedantry. Blinded by mistaken tenderness, the mother gave the daughter false ideas as to her probable future; to the maternal eyes a duke or an ambassador, a marshal of France or a minister of State, could alone give her Celestine her due place in society. The young lady had, moreover, the manners, language, and habits of the great world. Her dress was richer and more elegant than was suitable for an unmarried girl; a husband could give her nothing more than she now had, except happiness. Besides all such indulgences, the foolish spoiling of the mother, who died a year after the girl's marriage, made a husband's task all the more difficult. What coolness and composure of mind were needed to rule such a woman! Commonplace suitors held back in fear. Xavier Rabourdin, without parents and without fortune other than his situation under government, was proposed to Celestine by her father. She resisted for a long time; not that she had any personal objection to her suitor, who was young, handsome, and much in love, but she shrank from the plain name of Madame Rabourdin. Monsieur Leprince assured his daughter that Xavier was of the stock that statesmen came of. Celestine answered that a man named Rabourdin would never be anything under the government of the Bourbons, etc. Forced back to his intrenchments, the father made the serious mistake of telling his daughter that her future husband was certain of becoming Rabourdin "de something or other" before he reached the age of admission to the Chamber. Xavier was soon to be appointed Master of petitions, and general-secretary at his ministry. From these lower steps of the ladder the young man would certainly rise to the higher ranks of the administration, possessed of a fortune and a name bequeathed to him in a certain will of which he, Monsieur Leprince, was cognizant. On this the marriage took place.

Rabourdin and his wife believed in the mysterious protector to whom the auctioneer alluded. Led away by such hopes and by the natural extravagance of happy love, Monsieur and Madame Rabourdin spent nearly one hundred thousand francs of their capital in the first five years of married life. By the end of this time Celestine, alarmed at the non-advancement of her husband, insisted on investing the remaining hundred thousand francs of her dowry in landed property, which returned only a slender income; but her future inheritance from her father would amply repay all present privations with perfect comfort and ease of life. When the worthy auctioneer saw his son-in-law disappointed of the hopes they had placed on the nameless protector, he tried, for the sake of his daughter, to repair the secret loss by risking part of his fortune in a speculation which had favourable chances of success. But the poor man became involved in one of the liquidations of the house of Nucingen, and died of grief, leaving nothing behind him but a dozen fine pictures which adorned his daughter's salon, and a few old-fashioned pieces of furniture, which she put in the garret.

Eight years of fruitless expectation made Madame Rabourdin at last understand that the paternal protector of her husband must have died, and that his will, if it ever existed, was lost or destroyed. Two years before her father's death the place of chief of division, which became vacant, was given, over her husband's head, to a certain Monsieur de la Billardiere, related to a deputy of the Right who was made minister in 1823. It was enough to drive Rabourdin out of the service; but how could he give up his salary of eight thousand francs and perquisites, when they constituted three fourths of his income and his household was accustomed to spend them? Besides, if he had patience for a few more years he would then be entitled to a pension. What a fall was this for a woman whose high expectations at the opening of her life were more or less warranted, and one who was admitted on all sides to be a superior woman.

Madame Rabourdin had justified the expectations formed of Mademoiselle Leprince; she possessed the elements of that apparent superiority which pleases the world; her liberal education enabled her to speak to every one in his or her own language; her talents were real; she showed an independent and elevated mind; her conversation charmed as much by its variety and ease as by the oddness and originality of her ideas. Such qualities, useful and appropriate in a sovereign or an ambassadress, were of little service to a household compelled to jog in the common round. Those who have the gift of speaking well desire an audience; they like to talk, even if they sometimes weary others. To satisfy the requirements of her mind Madame Rabourdin took a weekly reception-day and went a great deal into society to obtain the consideration her self-love was accustomed to enjoy. Those who know Parisian life will readily understand how a woman of her temperament suffered, and was martyrized at heart by the scantiness of her pecuniary means. No matter what foolish declarations people make about money, they one and all, if they live in Paris, must grovel before accounts, do homage to figures, and kiss the forked hoof of the golden calf. What a problem was hers! twelve thousand francs a year to defray the costs of a household consisting of father, mother, two children, a chambermaid and cook, living on the second floor of a house in the rue Duphot, in an apartment costing two thousand francs a year. Deduct the dress and the carriage of Madame before you estimate the gross expenses of the family, for dress precedes everything; then see what remains for the education of the children (a girl of eight and a boy of nine, whose maintenance must cost at least two thousand francs besides) and you will find that Madame Rabourdin could barely afford to give her husband thirty francs a month. That is the position of half the husbands in Paris, under penalty of being thought monsters.

Thus it was that this woman who believed herself destined to shine in the world was condemned to use her mind and her faculties in a sordid struggle, fighting hand to hand with an account-book. Already, terrible sacrifice of

pride! she had dismissed her man-servant, not long after the death of her father. Most women grow weary of this daily struggle; they complain but they usually end by giving up to fate and taking what comes to them; Celestine's ambition, far from lessening, only increased through difficulties, and led her, when she found she could not conquer them, to sweep them aside. To her mind this complicated tangle of the affairs of life was a Gordian knot impossible to untie and which genius ought to cut. Far from accepting the pettiness of middle-class existence, she was angry at the delay which kept the great things of life from her grasp,—blaming fate as deceptive. Celestine sincerely believed herself a superior woman. Perhaps she was right; perhaps she would have been great under great circumstances; perhaps she was not in her right place. Let us remember there are as many varieties of woman as there are of man, all of which society fashions to meet its needs. Now in the social order, as in Nature's order, there are more young shoots than there are trees, more spawn than full-grown fish, and many great capacities (Athanase Granson, for instance) which die withered for want of moisture, like seeds on stony ground. There are, unquestionably, household women, accomplished women, ornamental women, women who are exclusively wives, or mothers, or sweethearts, women purely spiritual or purely material; just as there are soldiers, artists, artisans, mathematicians, poets, merchants, men who understand money, or agriculture, or government, and nothing else. Besides all this, the eccentricity of events leads to endless cross-purposes; many are called and few are chosen is the law of earth as of heaven. Madame Rabourdin conceived herself fully capable of directing a statesman, inspiring an artist, helping an inventor and pushing his interests, or of devoting her powers to the financial politics of a Nucingen, and playing a brilliant part in the great world. Perhaps she was only endeavouring to excuse to her own mind a hatred for the laundry lists and the duty of overlooking the housekeeping bills, together with the petty economies and cares of a small establishment. She was superior only in those things where it gave her pleasure to be so. Feeling as keenly as she did the thorns of a position which can only be likened to that of Saint-Laurence on his grid-iron, is it any wonder that she sometimes cried out? So, in her paroxysms of thwarted ambition, in the moments when her wounded vanity gave her terrible shooting pains, Celestine turned upon Xavier Rabourdin. Was it not her husband's duty to give her a suitable position in the world? If she were a man she would have had the energy to make a rapid fortune for the sake of rendering an adored wife happy! She reproached him for being too honest a man. In the mouth of some women this accusation is a charge of imbecility. She sketched out for him certain brilliant plans in which she took no account of the hindrances imposed by men and things; then, like all women under the influence of vehement feeling, she became in thought as Machiavellian as Gondreville, and more unprincipled than Maxime de

Trailles. At such times Celestine's mind took a wide range, and she imagined herself at the summit of her ideas.

When these fine visions first began Rabourdin, who saw the practical side, was cool. Celestine, much grieved, thought her husband narrow-minded, timid, unsympathetic; and she acquired, insensibly, a wholly false opinion of the companion of her life. In the first place, she often extinguished him by the brilliancy of her arguments. Her ideas came to her in flashes, and she sometimes stopped him short when he began an explanation, because she did not choose to lose the slightest sparkle of her own mind. From the earliest days of their marriage Celestine, feeling herself beloved and admired by her husband, treated him without ceremony; she put herself above conjugal laws and the rules of private courtesy by expecting love to pardon all her little wrong-doings; and, as she never in any way corrected herself, she was always in the ascendant. In such a situation the man holds to the wife very much the position of a child to a teacher when the latter cannot or will not recognize that the mind he has ruled in childhood is becoming mature. Like Madame de Stael, who exclaimed in a room full of people, addressing, as we may say, a greater man than herself, "Do you know you have really said something very profound!" Madame Rabourdin said of her husband: "He certainly has a good deal of sense at times." Her disparaging opinion of him gradually appeared in her behavior through almost imperceptible motions. Her attitude and manners expressed a want of respect. Without being aware of it she injured her husband in the eyes of others; for in all countries society, before making up its mind about a man, listens for what his wife thinks of him, and obtains from her what the Genevese term "pre-advice."

When Rabourdin became aware of the mistakes which love had led him to commit it was too late,—the groove had been cut; he suffered and was silent. Like other men in whom sentiments and ideas are of equal strength, whose souls are noble and their brains well balanced, he was the defender of his wife before the tribunal of his own judgment; he told himself that nature doomed her to a disappointed life through his fault; HIS; she was like a thoroughbred English horse, a racer harnessed to a cart full of stones; she it was who suffered; and he blamed himself. His wife, by dint of constant repetition, had inoculated him with her own belief in herself. Ideas are contagious in a household; the ninth thermidor, like so many other portentous events, was the result of female influence. Thus, goaded by Celestine's ambition, Rabourdin had long considered the means of satisfying it, though he hid his hopes, so as to spare her the tortures of uncertainty. The man was firmly resolved to make his way in the administration by bringing a strong light to bear upon it. He intended to bring about one of those revolutions which send a man to the head of either one party or another in society; but being incapable of so doing in his own interests, he merely pondered useful thoughts and dreamed of triumphs

won for his country by noble means. His ideas were both generous and ambitious; few officials have not conceived the like; but among officials as among artists there are more miscarriages than births; which is tantamount to Buffon's saying that "Genius is patience."

Placed in a position where he could study French administration and observe its mechanism, Rabourdin worked in the circle where his thought revolved, which, we may remark parenthetically, is the secret of much human accomplishment; and his labor culminated finally in the invention of a new system for the Civil Service of government. Knowing the people with whom he had to do, he maintained the machine as it then worked, so it still works and will continue to work; for everybody fears to remodel it, though no one, according to Rabourdin, ought to be unwilling to simplify it. In his opinion, the problem to be resolved lay in a better use of the same forces. His plan, in its simplest form, was to revise taxation and lower it in a way that should not diminish the revenues of the State, and to obtain, from a budget equal to the budgets which now excite such rabid discussion, results that should be two-fold greater than the present results. Long practical experience had taught Rabourdin that perfection is brought about in all things by changes in the direction of simplicity. To economize is to simplify. To simplify means to suppress unnecessary machinery; removals naturally follow. His system, therefore, depended on the weeding out of officials and the establishment of a new order of administrative offices. No doubt the hatred which all reformers incur takes its rise here. Removals required by this perfecting process, always ill-understood, threaten the well-being of those on whom a change in their condition is thus forced. What rendered Rabourdin really great was that he was able to restrain the enthusiasm that possesses all reformers, and to patiently seek out a slow evolving medium for all changes so as to avoid shocks, leaving time and experience to prove the excellence of each reform. The grandeur of the result anticipated might make us doubt its possibility if we lose sight of this essential point in our rapid analysis of his system. It is, therefore, not unimportant to show through his self-communings, however incomplete they might be, the point of view from which he looked at the administrative horizon. This tale, which is evolved from the very heart of the Civil Service, may also serve to show some of the evils of our present social customs.

Xavier Rabourdin, deeply impressed by the trials and poverty which he witnessed in the lives of the government clerks, endeavored to ascertain the cause of their growing deterioration. He found it in those petty partial revolutions, the eddies, as it were, of the storm of 1789, which the historians of great social movements neglect to inquire into, although as a matter of fact it is they which have made our manners and customs what they are now.

Formerly, under the monarchy, the bureaucratic armies did not exist. The clerks, few in number, were under the orders of a prime minister who communicated with the sovereign; thus they directly served the king. The superiors of these zealous servants were simply called head-clerks. In those branches of administration which the king did not himself direct, such for instance as the “fermes” (the public domains throughout the country on which a revenue was levied), the clerks were to their superior what the clerks of a business-house are to their employer; they learned a science which would one day advance them to prosperity. Thus, all points of the circumference were fastened to the centre and derived their life from it. The result was devotion and confidence. Since 1789 the State, call it the Nation if you like, has replaced the sovereign. Instead of looking directly to the chief magistrate of this nation, the clerks have become, in spite of our fine patriotic ideas, the subsidiaries of the government; their superiors are blown about by the winds of a power called “the administration,” and do not know from day to day where they may be on the morrow. As the routine of public business must go on, a certain number of indispensable clerks are kept in their places, though they hold these places on sufferance, anxious as they are to retain them. Bureaucracy, a gigantic power set in motion by dwarfs, was generated in this way. Though Napoleon, by subordinating all things and all men to his will, retarded for a time the influence of bureaucracy (that ponderous curtain hung between the service to be done and the man who orders it), it was permanently organized under the constitutional government, which was, inevitably, the friend of all mediocrities, the lover of authentic documents and accounts, and as meddlesome as an old tradeswoman. Delighted to see the various ministers constantly struggling against the four hundred petty minds of the Elected of the Chamber, with their ten or a dozen ambitious and dishonest leaders, the Civil Service officials hastened to make themselves essential to the warfare by adding their quota of assistance under the form of written action; they created a power of inertia and named it “Report.” Let us explain the Report.

When the kings of France took to themselves ministers, which first happened under Louis XV., they made them render reports on all important questions, instead of holding, as formerly, grand councils of state with the nobles. Under the constitutional government, the ministers of the various departments were insensibly led by their bureaus to imitate this practice of kings. Their time being taken up in defending themselves before the two Chambers and the court, they let themselves be guided by the leading-strings of the Report. Nothing important was ever brought before the government that a minister did not say, even when the case was urgent, “I have called for a report.” The Report thus became, both as to the matter concerned and for the minister himself, the same as a report to the Chamber of Deputies on a question of laws,—namely, a disquisition in which the reasons for and against

are stated with more or less partiality. No real result is attained; the minister, like the Chamber, is fully as well prepared before as after the report is rendered. A determination, in whatever matter, is reached in an instant. Do what we will, the moment comes when the decision must be made. The greater the array of reasons for and against, the less sound will be the judgment. The finest things of which France can boast have been accomplished without reports and where decisions were prompt and spontaneous. The dominant law of a statesman is to apply precise formula to all cases, after the manner of judges and physicians.

Rabourdin, who said to himself: “A minister should have decision, should know public affairs, and direct their course,” saw “Report” rampant throughout France, from the colonel to the marshal, from the commissary of police to the king, from the prefects to the ministers of state, from the Chamber to the courts. After 1818 everything was discussed, compared, and weighed, either in speech or writing; public business took a literary form. France went to ruin in spite of this array of documents; dissertations stood in place of action; a million of reports were written every year; bureaucracy was enthroned! Records, statistics, documents, failing which France would have been ruined, circumlocution, without which there could be no advance, increased, multiplied, and grew majestic. From that day forth bureaucracy used to its own profit the mistrust that stands between receipts and expenditures; it degraded the administration for the benefit of the administrators; in short, it spun those lilliputian threads which have chained France to Parisian centralization,—as if from 1500 to 1800 France had undertaken nothing for want of thirty thousand government clerks! In fastening upon public offices, like a mistletoe on a pear-tree, these officials indemnified themselves amply, and in the following manner.

The ministers, compelled to obey the princes or the Chambers who impose upon them the distribution of the public moneys, and forced to retain the workers in office, proceeded to diminish salaries and increase the number of those workers, thinking that if more persons were employed by government the stronger the government would be. And yet the contrary law is an axiom written on the universe; there is no vigor except where there are few active principles. Events proved in July, 1830, the error of the materialism of the Restoration. To plant a government in the hearts of a nation it is necessary to bind INTERESTS to it, not MEN. The government-clerks being led to detest the administrations which lessened both their salaries and their importance, treated them as a courtesan treats an aged lover, and gave them mere work for money; a state of things which would have seemed as intolerable to the administration as to the clerks, had the two parties dared to feel each other’s pulse, or had the higher salaries not succeeded in stifling the voices of the lower. Thus wholly and solely occupied in retaining his place, drawing his

pay, and securing his pension, the government official thought everything permissible that conduced to these results. This state of things led to servility on the part of the clerks and to endless intrigues within the various departments, where the humbler clerks struggled vainly against degenerate members of the aristocracy, who sought positions in the government bureaus for their ruined sons.

Superior men could scarcely bring themselves to tread these tortuous ways, to stoop, to cringe, and creep through the mire of these cloacas, where the presence of a fine mind only alarmed the other denizens. The ambitious man of genius grows old in obtaining his triple crown; he does not follow in the steps of Sixtus the Fifth merely to become head of a bureau. No one comes or stays in the government offices but idlers, incapables, or fools. Thus the mediocrity of French administration has slowly come about. Bureaucracy, made up entirely of petty minds, stands as an obstacle to the prosperity of the nation; delays for seven years, by its machinery, the project of a canal which would have stimulated the production of a province; is afraid of everything, prolongs procrastination, and perpetuates the abuses which in turn perpetuate and consolidate itself. Bureaucracy holds all things and the administration itself in leading strings; it stifles men of talent who are bold enough to be independent of it or to enlighten it on its own follies. About the time of which we write the pension list had just been issued, and on it Rabourdin saw the name of an underling in office rated for a larger sum than the old colonels, maimed and wounded for their country. In that fact lies the whole history of bureaucracy.

Another evil, brought about by modern customs, which Rabourdin counted among the causes of this secret demoralization, was the fact that there is no real subordination in the administration in Paris; complete equality reigns between the head of an important division and the humblest copying-clerk; one is as powerful as the other in an arena outside of which each lords it in his own way. Education, equally distributed through the masses, brings the son of a porter into a government office to decide the fate of some man of merit or some landed proprietor whose door-bell his father may have answered. The last comer is therefore on equal terms with the oldest veteran in the service. A wealthy supernumerary splashes his superior as he drives his tilbury to Longchamps and points with his whip to the poor father of a family, remarking to the pretty woman at his side, “That’s my chief.” The Liberals call this state of things Progress; Rabourdin thought it Anarchy at the heart of power. He saw how it resulted in restless intrigues, like those of a harem between eunuchs and women and imbecile sultans, or the petty troubles of nuns full of underhand vexations, or college tyrannies, or diplomatic manoeuvrings fit to terrify an ambassador, all put in motion to obtain a fee or an increase in salary; it was like the hopping of fleas harnessed to pasteboard cars, the spitefulness

of slaves, often visited on the minister himself. With all this were the really useful men, the workers, victims of such parasites; men sincerely devoted to their country, who stood vigorously out from the background of the other incapables, yet who were often forced to succumb through unworthy trickery.

All the higher offices were gained through parliamentary influence, royalty had nothing to do now with them, and the subordinate clerks became, after a time, merely the running-gear of the machine; the most important considerations with them being to keep the wheels well greased. This fatal conviction entering some of the best minds smothered many statements conscientiously written on the secret evils of the national government; lowered the courage of many hearts, and corrupted sterling honesty, weary of injustice and won to indifference by deteriorating annoyances. A clerk in the employ of the Rothchilds corresponds with all England; another, in a government office, may communicate with all the prefects; but where the one learns the way to make his fortune, the other loses time and health and life to no avail. An undermining evil lies here. Certainly a nation does not seem threatened with immediate dissolution because an able clerk is sent away and a middling sort of man replaces him. Unfortunately for the welfare of nations individual men never seem essential to their existence. But in the long run when the belittling process is fully carried out nations will disappear. Every one who seeks instruction on this point can look at Venice, Madrid, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Rome; all places which were formerly resplendent with mighty powers and are now destroyed by the infiltrating littleness which gradually attained the highest eminence. When the day of struggle came, all was found rotten, the State succumbed to a weak attack. To worship the fool who succeeds, and not to grieve over the fall of an able man is the result of our melancholy education, of our manners and customs which drive men of intellect into disgust, and genius to despair.

What a difficult undertaking is the rehabilitation of the Civil Service while the liberal cries aloud in his newspapers that the salaries of clerks are a standing theft, calls the items of the budget a cluster of leeches, and every year demands why the nation should be saddled with a thousand millions of taxes. In Monsieur Rabourdin’s eyes the clerk in relation to the budget was very much what the gambler is to the game; that which he wins he puts back again. All remuneration implies something furnished. To pay a man a thousand francs a year and demand his whole time was surely to organize theft and poverty. A galley-slave costs nearly as much, and does less. But to expect a man whom the State remunerated with twelve thousand francs a year to devote himself to his country was a profitable contract for both sides, fit to allure all capacities.

These reflections had led Rabourdin to desire the recasting of the clerical

official staff. To employ fewer man, to double or treble salaries, and do away with pensions, to choose only young clerks (as did Napoleon, Louis XIV., Richelieu, and Ximenes), but to keep them long and train them for the higher offices and greatest honors, these were the chief features of a reform which if carried out would be as beneficial to the State as to the clerks themselves. It is difficult to recount in detail, chapter by chapter, a plan which embraced the whole budget and continued down through the minutest details of administration in order to keep the whole synthetical; but perhaps a slight sketch of the principal reforms will suffice for those who understand such matters, as well as for those who are wholly ignorant of the administrative system. Though the historian's position is rather hazardous in reproducing a plan which may be thought the politics of a chimney-corner, it is, nevertheless, necessary to sketch it so as to explain the author of it by his own work. Were the recital of his efforts to be omitted, the reader would not believe the narrator's word if he merely declared the talent and the courage of this official.

Rabourdin's plan divided the government into three ministries, or departments. He thought that if the France of former days possessed brains strong enough to comprehend in one system both foreign and domestic affairs, the France of to-day was not likely to be without its Mazarin, its Suger, its Sully, its de Choiseul, or its Colbert to direct even vast administrative departments. Besides, constitutionally speaking, three ministries will agree better than seven; and, in the restricted number there is less chance for mistaken choice; moreover, it might be that the kingdom would some day escape from those perpetual ministerial oscillations which interfered with all plans of foreign policy and prevented all ameliorations of home rule. In Austria, where many diverse united nations present so many conflicting interests to be conciliated and carried forward under one crown, two statesmen alone bear the burden of public affairs and are not overwhelmed by it. Was France less prolific of political capacities than Germany? The rather silly game of what are called "constitutional institutions" carried beyond bounds has ended, as everybody knows, in requiring a great many offices to satisfy the multifarious ambition of the middle classes. It seemed to Rabourdin, in the first place, natural to unite the ministry of war with the ministry of the navy. To his thinking the navy was one of the current expenses of the war department, like the artillery, cavalry, infantry, and commissariat. Surely it was an absurdity to give separate administrations to admirals and marshals when both were employed to one end, namely, the defense of the nation, the overthrow of an enemy, and the security of the national possessions. The ministry of the interior ought in like manner to combine the departments of commerce, police, and finances, or it belied its own name. To the ministry of foreign affairs belonged the administration of justice, the household of the king, and all that concerned arts, sciences, and belles lettres. All patronage

ought to flow directly from the sovereign. Such ministries necessitated the supremacy of a council. Each required the work of two hundred officials, and no more, in its central administration offices, where Rabourdin proposed that they should live, as in former days under the monarchy. Taking the sum of twelve thousand francs a year for each official as an average, he estimated seven millions as the cost of the whole body of such officials, which actually stood at twenty in the budget.

By thus reducing the ministers to three heads he suppressed departments which had come to be useless, together with the enormous costs of their maintenance in Paris. He proved that an arrondissement could be managed by ten men; a prefecture by a dozen at the most; which reduced the entire civil service force throughout France to five thousand men, exclusive of the departments of war and justice. Under this plan the clerks of the court were charged with the system of loans, and the ministry of the interior with that of registration and the management of domains. Thus Rabourdin united in one centre all divisions that were allied in nature. The mortgage system, inheritance, and registration did not pass outside of their own sphere of action and only required three additional clerks in the justice courts and three in the royal courts. The steady application of this principle brought Rabourdin to reforms in the finance system. He merged the collection of revenue into one channel, taxing consumption in bulk instead of taxing property. According to his ideas, consumption was the sole thing properly taxable in times of peace. Land-taxes should always be held in reserve in case of war; for then only could the State justly demand sacrifices from the soil, which was in danger; but in times of peace it was a serious political fault to burden it beyond a certain limit; otherwise it could never be depended on in great emergencies. Thus a loan should be put on the market when the country was tranquil, for at such times it could be placed at par, instead of at fifty per cent loss as in bad times; in war times resort should be had to a land-tax.

“The invasion of 1814 and 1815,” Rabourdin would say to his friends, “founded in France and practically explained an institution which neither Law nor Napoleon had been able to establish,—I mean Credit.”

Unfortunately, Xavier considered the true principles of this admirable machine of civil service very little understood at the period when he began his labor of reform in 1820. His scheme levied a toll on the consumption by means of direct taxation and suppressed the whole machinery of indirect taxation. The levying of the taxes was simplified by a single classification of a great number of articles. This did away with the more harassing customs at the gates of the cities, and obtained the largest revenues from the remainder, by lessening the enormous expense of collecting them. To lighten the burden of taxation is not, in matters of finance, to diminish the taxes, but to assess them

better; if lightened, you increase the volume of business by giving it freer play; the individual pays less and the State receives more. This reform, which may seem immense, rests on very simple machinery. Rabourdin regarded the tax on personal property as the most trustworthy representative of general consumption. Individual fortunes are usually revealed in France by rentals, by the number of servants, horses, carriages, and luxuries, the costs of which are all to the interest of the public treasury. Houses and what they contain vary comparatively but little, and are not liable to disappear. After pointing out the means of making a tax-list on personal property which should be more impartial than the existing list, Rabourdin assessed the sums to be brought into the treasury by indirect taxation as so much per cent on each individual share. A tax is a levy of money on things or persons under disguises that are more or less specious. These disguises, excellent when the object is to extort money, become ridiculous in the present day, when the class on which the taxes weigh the heaviest knows why the State imposes them and by what machinery they are given back. In fact the budget is not a strong-box to hold what is put into it, but a watering-pot; the more it takes in and the more it pours out the better for the prosperity of the country. Therefore, supposing there are six millions of tax-payers in easy circumstances (Rabourdin proved their existence, including the rich) is it not better to make them pay a duty on the consumption of wine, which would not be more offensive than that on doors and windows and would return a hundred millions, rather than harass them by taxing the thing itself. By this system of taxation, each individual tax-payer pays less in reality, while the State receives more, and consumers profit by a vast reduction in the price of things which the State releases from its perpetual and harassing interference. Rabourdin’s scheme retained a tax on the cultivation of vineyards, so as to protect that industry from the too great abundance of its own products. Then, to reach the consumption of the poorer tax-payers, the licences of retail dealers were taxed according to the population of the neighborhoods in which they lived.

In this way, the State would receive without cost or vexatious hindrances an enormous revenue under three forms; namely, a duty on wine, on the cultivation of vineyards, and on licenses, where now an irritating array of taxes existed as a burden on itself and its officials. Taxation was thus imposed upon the rich without overburdening the poor. To give another example. Suppose a share assessed to each person of one or two francs for the consumption of salt and you obtain ten or a dozen millions; the modern “gabelle” disappears, the poor breathe freer, agriculture is relieved, the State receives as much, and no tax-payer complains. All persons, whether they belong to the industrial classes or to the capitalists, will see at once the benefits of a tax so assessed when they discover how commerce increases, and life is ameliorated in the country districts. In short, the State will see from year

to year the number of her well-to-do tax-payers increasing. By doing away with the machinery of indirect taxation, which is very costly (a State, as it were, within a State), both the public finances and the individual tax-payer are greatly benefited, not to speak of the saving in costs of collecting.

The whole subject is indeed less a question of finance than a question of government. The State should possess nothing of its own, neither forests, nor mines, nor public works. That it should be the owner of domains was, in Rabourdin's opinion, an administrative contradiction. The State cannot turn its possessions to profit and it deprives itself of taxes; it thus loses two forms of production. As to the manufactories of the government, they are just as unreasonable in the sphere of industry. The State obtains products at a higher cost than those of commerce, produces them more slowly, and loses its tax upon the industry, the maintenance of which it, in turn, reduces. Can it be thought a proper method of governing a country to manufacture instead of promoting manufactures? to possess property instead of creating more possessions and more diverse ones? In Rabourdin's system the State exacted no money security; he allowed only mortgage securities; and for this reason: Either the State holds the security in specie, and that embarrasses business and the movement of money; or it invests it at a higher rate than the State itself pays, and that is a contemptible robbery; or else it loses on the transaction, and that is folly; moreover, if it is obliged at any time to dispose of a mass of these securities it gives rises in certain cases to terrible bankruptcy.

The territorial tax did not entirely disappear in Rabourdin's plan,—he kept a minute portion of it as a point of departure in case of war; but the productions of the soil were freed, and industry, finding raw material at a low price, could compete with foreign nations without the deceptive help of customs. The rich carried on the administration of the provinces without compensation except that of receiving a peerage under certain conditions. Magistrates, learned bodies, officers of the lower grades found their services honorably rewarded; no man employed by the government failed to obtain great consideration through the value and extent of his labors and the excellence of his salary; every one was able to provide for his own future and France was delivered from the cancer of pensions. As a result Rabourdin's scheme exhibited only seven hundred millions of expenditures and twelve hundred millions of receipts. A saving of five hundred millions annually had far more virtue than the accumulation of a sinking fund whose dangers were plainly to be seen. In that fund the State, according to Rabourdin, became a stockholder, just as it persisted in being a land-holder and a manufacturer. To bring about these reforms without too roughly jarring the existing state of things or incurring a Saint-Bartholomew of clerks, Rabourdin considered that an evolution of twenty years would be required.

Such were the thoughts maturing in Rabourdin's mind ever since his promised place had been given to Monsieur de la Billardiere, a man of sheer incapacity. This plan, so vast apparently yet so simple in point of fact, which did away with so many large staffs and so many little offices all equally useless, required for its presentation to the public mind close calculations, precise statistics, and self-evident proof. Rabourdin had long studied the budget under its double-aspect of ways and means and of expenditure. Many a night he had lain awake unknown to his wife. But so far he had only dared to conceive the plan and fit it prospectively to the administrative skeleton; all of which counted for nothing,—he must gain the ear of a minister capable of appreciating his ideas. Rabourdin's success depended on the tranquil condition of political affairs, which up to this time were still unsettled. He had not considered the government as permanently secure until three hundred deputies at least had the courage to form a compact majority systematically ministerial. An administration founded on that basis had come into power since Rabourdin had finished his elaborate plan. At this time the luxury of peace under the Bourbons had eclipsed the warlike luxury of the days when France shone like a vast encampment, prodigal and magnificent because it was victorious. After the Spanish campaign, the administration seemed to enter upon an era of tranquillity in which some good might be accomplished; and three months before the opening of our story a new reign had begun without any apparent opposition; for the liberalism of the Left had welcomed Charles X. with as much enthusiasm as the Right. Even clear-sighted and suspicious persons were misled. The moment seemed propitious for Rabourdin. What could better conduce to the stability of the government than to propose and carry through a reform whose beneficial results were to be so vast?

Never had Rabourdin seemed so anxious and preoccupied as he now did in the mornings as he walked from his house to the ministry, or at half-past four in the afternoon, when he returned. Madame Rabourdin, on her part, disconsolate over her wasted life, weary of secretly working to obtain a few luxuries of dress, never appeared so bitterly discontented as now; but, like any wife who is really attached to her husband, she considered it unworthy of a superior woman to condescend to the shameful devices by which the wives of some officials eke out the insufficiency of their husband's salary. This feeling made her refuse all intercourse with Madame Colleville, then very intimate with Francois Keller, whose parties eclipsed those of the rue Duphot. Nevertheless, she mistook the quietude of the political thinker and the preoccupation of the intrepid worker for the apathetic torpor of an official broken down by the dulness of routine, vanquished by that most hateful of all miseries, the mediocrity that simply earns a living; and she groaned at being married to a man without energy.

Thus it was that about this period in their lives she resolved to take the

making of her husband's fortune on herself; to thrust him at any cost into a higher sphere, and to hide from him the secret springs of her machinations. She carried into all her plans the independence of ideas which characterized her, and was proud to think that she could rise above other women by sharing none of their petty prejudices and by keeping herself untrammelled by the restraints which society imposes. In her anger she resolved to fight fools with their own weapons, and to make herself a fool if need be. She saw things coming to a crisis. The time was favorable. Monsieur de la Billardiere, attacked by a dangerous illness, was likely to die in a few days. If Rabourdin succeeded him, his talents (for Celestine did vouchsafe him an administrative gift) would be so thoroughly appreciated that the office of Master of petitions, formerly promised, would now be given to him; she fancied she saw him the king's commissioner, presenting bills to the Chambers and defending them; then indeed she could help him; she would even be, if needful, his secretary; she would sit up all night to do the work! All this to drive in the Bois in a pretty carriage, to equal Madame Delphine de Nucingen, to raise her salon to the level of Madame Colleville's, to be invited to the great ministerial solemnities, to win listeners and make them talk of her as "Madame Rabourdin DE something or other" (she had not yet determined on the estate), just as they did of Madame Firmiani, Madame d'Espard, Madame d'Aiglemont, Madame de Carigliano, and thus efface forever the odious name of Rabourdin.

These secret schemes brought some changes into the household. Madame Rabourdin began to walk with a firm step in the path of /debt/. She set up a man-servant, and put him in livery of brown cloth with red pipins, she renewed parts of her furniture, hung new papers on the walls, adorned her salon with plants and flowers, always fresh, and crowded it with knick-knacks that were then in vogue; then she, who had always shown scruples as to her personal expenses, did not hesitate to put her dress in keeping with the rank to which she aspired, the profits of which were discounted in several of the shops where she equipped herself for war. To make her "Wednesdays" fashionable she gave a dinner on Fridays, the guests being expected to pay their return visit and take a cup of tea on the following Wednesday. She chose her guests cleverly among influential deputies or other persons of note who, sooner or later, might advance her interests. In short, she gathered an agreeable and befitting circle about her. People amused themselves at her house; they said so at least, which is quite enough to attract society in Paris. Rabourdin was so absorbed in completing his great and serious work that he took no notice of the sudden reappearance of luxury in the bosom of his family.

Thus the wife and the husband were besieging the same fortress, working on parallel lines, but without each other's knowledge.

CHAPTER II. MONSIEUR DES LUPEAULX

At the ministry to which Rabourdin belonged there flourished, as general-secretary, a certain Monsieur Clement Chardin des Lupeaulx, one of those men whom the tide of political events sends to the surface for a few years, then engulfs on a stormy night, but whom we find again on a distant shore, tossed up like the carcass of a wrecked ship which still seems to have life in her. We ask ourselves if that derelict could ever have held goodly merchandise or served a high emprise, co-operated in some defence, held up the trappings of a throne, or borne away the corpse of a monarchy. At this particular time Clement des Lupeaulx (the “Lupeaulx” absorbed the “Chardin”) had reached his culminating period. In the most illustrious lives as in the most obscure, in animals as in secretary-generals, there is a zenith and there is a nadir, a period when the fur is magnificent, the fortune dazzling. In the nomenclature which we derive from fabulists, des Lupeaulx belonged to the species Bertrand, and was always in search of Ratons. As he is one of the principal actors in this drama he deserves a description, all the more precise because the revolution of July has suppressed his office, eminently useful as it was, to a constitutional ministry.

Moralists usually employ their weapons against obstructive administrations. In their eyes, crime belongs to the assizes or the police-courts; but the socially refined evils escape their ken; the adroitness that triumphs under shield of the Code is above them or beneath them; they have neither eye-glass nor telescope; they want good stout horrors easily visible. With their eyes fixed on the carnivora, they pay no attention to the reptiles; happily, they abandon to the writers of comedy the shading and colorings of a Chardin des Lupeaulx. Vain and egotistical, supple and proud, libertine and gourmand, grasping from the pressure of debt, discreet as a tomb out of which nought issues to contradict the epitaph intended for the passer’s eye, bold and fearless when soliciting, good-natured and witty in all acceptations of the word, a timely jester, full of tact, knowing how to compromise others by a glance or a nudge, shrinking from no mudhole, but gracefully leaping it, intrepid Voltairean, yet punctual at mass if a fashionable company could be met in Saint Thomas Aquinas,—such a man as this secretary-general resembled, in one way or another, all the mediocrities who form the kernel of the political world. Knowing in the science of human nature, he assumed the character of a listener, and none was ever more attentive. Not to awaken suspicion he was flattering ad nauseum, insinuating as a perfume, and cajoling as a woman.

Des Lupeaulx was just forty years old. His youth had long been a vexation

to him, for he felt that the making of his career depended on his becoming a deputy. How had he reached his present position? may be asked. By very simple means. He began by taking charge of certain delicate missions which can be given neither to a man who respects himself nor to a man who does not respect himself, but are confided to grave and enigmatic individuals who can be acknowledged or disavowed at will. His business was that of being always compromised; but his fortunes were pushed as much by defeat as by success. He well understood that under the Restoration, a period of continual compromises between men, between things, between accomplished facts and other facts looking on the horizon, it was all-important for the ruling powers to have a household drudge. Observe in a family some old charwoman who can make beds, sweep the floors, carry away the dirty linen, who knows where the silver is kept, how the creditors should be pacified, what persons should be let in and who must be kept out of the house, and such a creature, even if she has all the vices, and is dirty, decrepit, and toothless, or puts into the lottery and steals thirty sous a day for her stake, and you will find the masters like her from habit, talk and consult in her hearing upon even critical matters; she comes and goes, suggests resources, gets on the scent of secrets, brings the rouge or the shawl at the right moment, lets herself be scolded and pushed downstairs, and the next morning reappears smiling with an excellent bouillon. No matter how high a statesman may stand, he is certain to have some household drudge, before whom he is weak, undecided, disputations with fate, self-questioning, self-answering, and buckling for the fight. Such a familiar is like the soft wood of savages, which, when rubbed against the hard wood, strikes fire. Sometimes great geniuses illumine themselves in this way. Napoleon lived with Berthier, Richelieu with Pere Joseph; des Lupeaulx was the familiar of everybody. He continued friends with fallen ministers and made himself their intermediary with their successors, diffusing thus the perfume of the last flattery and the first compliment. He well understood how to arrange all the little matters which a statesman has no leisure to attend to. He saw necessities as they arose; he obeyed well; he could gloss a base act with a jest and get the whole value of it; and he chose for the services he thus rendered those that the recipients were not likely to forget.

Thus, when it was necessary to cross the ditch between the Empire and the Restoration, at a time when every one was looking about for planks, and the curs of the Empire were howling their devotion right and left, des Lupeaulx borrowed large sums from the usurers and crossed the frontier. Risking all to win all, he bought up Louis XVIII.‘s most pressing debts, and was the first to settle nearly three million of them at twenty per cent—for he was lucky enough to be backed by Gobseck in 1814 and 1815. It is true that Messrs. Gobseck, Werdet, and Gigonnet swallowed the profits, but des Lupeaulx had agreed that they should have them; he was not playing for a stake; he

challenged the bank, as it were, knowing very well that the king was not a man to forget this debt of honor. Des Lupeaulx was not mistaken; he was appointed Master of petitions, Knight of the order of Saint Louis, and officer of the Legion of honor. Once on the ladder of political success, his clever mind looked about for the means to maintain his foothold; for in the fortified city into which he had wormed himself, generals do not long keep useless mouths. So to his general trade of household drudge and go-between he added that of gratuitous consultation on the secret maladies of power.

After discovering in the so-called superior men of the Restoration their utter inferiority in comparison with the events which had brought them to the front, he overcame their political mediocrity by putting into their mouths, at a crisis, the word of command for which men of real talent were listening. It must not be thought that this word was the outcome of his own mind. Were it so, des Lupeaulx would have been a man of genius, whereas he was only a man of talent. He went everywhere, collected opinions, sounded consciences, and caught all the tones they gave out. He gathered knowledge like a true and indefatigable political bee. This walking Bayle dictionary did not act, however, like that famous lexicon; he did not report all opinions without drawing his own conclusions; he had the talent of a fly which drops plumb upon the best bit of meat in the middle of a kitchen. In this way he came to be regarded as an indispensable helper to statesmen. A belief in his capacity had taken such deep root in all minds that the more ambitious public men felt it was necessary to compromise des Lupeaulx in some way to prevent his rising higher; they made up to him for his subordinate public position by their secret confidence.

Nevertheless, feeling that such men were dependent on him, this gleaner of ideas exacted certain dues. He received a salary on the staff of the National Guard, where he held a sinecure which was paid for by the city of Paris; he was government commissioner to a secret society; and filled a position of superintendence in the royal household. His two official posts which appeared on the budget were those of secretary-general to his ministry and Master of petitions. What he now wanted was to be made commander of the Legion of honor, gentleman of the bed-chamber, count, and deputy. To be elected deputy it was necessary to pay taxes to the amount of a thousand francs; and the miserable homestead of the des Lupeaulx was rated at only five hundred. Where could he get money to build a mansion and surround it with sufficient domain to throw dust in the eyes of a constituency? Though he dined out every day, and was lodged for the last nine years at the cost of the State, and driven about in the minister’s equipage, des Lupeaulx possessed absolutely nothing, at the time when our tale opens, but thirty thousand francs of debt—undisputed property. A marriage might float him and pump the waters of debt out of his bark; but a good marriage depended on his advancement, and his

advancement required that he should be a deputy. Searching about him for the means of breaking through this vicious circle, he could think of nothing better than some immense service to render or some delicate intrigue to carry through for persons in power. Alas! conspiracies were out of date; the Bourbons were apparently on good terms with all parties; and, unfortunately, for the last few years the government had been so thoroughly held up to the light of day by the silly discussions of the Left, whose aim seemed to be to make government of any kind impossible in France, that no good strokes of business could be made. The last were tried in Spain, and what an outcry that excited!

In addition to all this, des Lupeaulx complicated matters by believing in the friendship of his minister, to whom he had the imprudence to express the wish to sit on the ministerial benches. The minister guessed at the real meaning of the desire, which simply was that des Lupeaulx wanted to strengthen a precarious position, so that he might throw off all dependence on his chief. The harrier turned against the huntsman; the minister gave him cuts with the whip and caresses, alternately, and set up rivals to him. But des Lupeaulx behaved like an adroit courtier with all competitors; he laid traps into which they fell, and then he did prompt justice upon them. The more he felt himself in danger the more anxious he became for an irremovable position; yet he was compelled to play low; one moment's indiscretion, and he might lose everything. A pen-stroke might demolish his civilian epaulets, his place at court, his sinecure, his two offices and their advantages; in all, six salaries retained under fire of the law against pluralists. Sometimes he threatened his minister as a mistress threatens her lover; telling him he was about to marry a rich widow. At such times the minister petted and cajoled des Lupeaulx. After one of these reconciliations he received the formal promise of a place in the Academy of Belles-lettres on the first vacancy. "It would pay," he said, "the keep of a horse." His position, so far as it went, was a good one, and Clement Chardin des Lupeaulx flourished in it like a tree planted in good soil. He could satisfy his vices, his caprices, his virtues and his defects.

The following were the toils of his life. He was obliged to choose, among five or six daily invitations, the house where he could be sure of the best dinner. Every morning he went to his minister's morning reception to amuse that official and his wife, and to pet their children. Then he worked an hour or two; that is to say, he lay back in a comfortable chair and read the newspapers, dictated the meaning of a letter, received visitors when the minister was not present, explained the work in a general way, caught or shed a few drops of the holy-water of the court, looked over the petitions with an eyeglass, or wrote his name on the margin,—a signature which meant "I think it absurd; do what you like about it." Every body knew that when des Lupeaulx was interested in any person or in any thing he attended to the matter personally.

He allowed the head-clerks to converse privately about affairs of delicacy, but he listened to their gossip. From time to time he went to the Tuileries to get his cue. And he always waited for the minister's return from the Chamber, if in session, to hear from him what intrigue or manoeuvre he was to set about. This official sybarite dressed, dined, and visited a dozen or fifteen salons between eight at night and three in the morning. At the opera he talked with journalists, for he stood high in their favor; a perpetual exchange of little services went on between them; he poured into their ears his misleading news and swallowed theirs; he prevented them from attacking this or that minister on such or such a matter, on the plea that it would cause real pain to their wives or their mistresses.

"Say that his bill is worth nothing, and prove it if you can, but do not say that Mariette danced badly. The devil! haven't we all played our little plays; and which of us knows what will become of him in times like these? You may be minister yourself to-morrow, you who are spicing the cakes of the 'Constitutionel' to-day."

Sometimes, in return, he helped editors, or got rid of obstacles to the performances of some play; gave gratuities and good dinners at the right moment, or promised his services to bring some affair to a happy conclusion. Moreover, he really liked literature and the arts; he collected autographs, obtained splendid albums gratis, and possessed sketches, engravings, and pictures. He did a great deal of good to artists by simply not injuring them and by furthering their wishes on certain occasions when their self-love wanted some rather costly gratification. Consequently, he was much liked in the world of actors and actresses, journalists and artists. For one thing, they had the same vices and the same indolence as himself. Men who could all say such witty things in their cups or in company with a danseuse, how could they help being friends? If des Lupeaulx had not been a general-secretary he would certainly have been a journalist. Thus, in that fifteen years' struggle in which the harlequin sabre of epigram opened a breach by which insurrection entered the citadel, des Lupeaulx never received so much as a scratch.

As the young fry of clerks looked at this man playing bowls in the gardens of the ministry with the minister's children, they cracked their brains to guess the secret of his influence and the nature of his services; while, on the other hand, the aristocrats in all the various ministries looked upon him as a dangerous Mephistopheles, courted him, and gave him back with usury the flatteries he bestowed in the higher sphere. As difficult to decipher as a hieroglyphic inscription to the clerks, the vocation of the secretary and his usefulness were as plain as the rule of three to the self-interested. This lesser Prince de Wagram of the administration, to whom the duty of gathering opinions and ideas and making verbal reports thereon was entrusted, knew all

the secrets of parliamentary politics; dragged in the lukewarm, fetched, carried, and buried propositions, said the Yes and the No that the ministers dared not say for themselves. Compelled to receive the first fire and the first blows of despair and wrath, he laughed or bemoaned himself with the minister, as the case might be. Mysterious link by which many interests were in some way connected with the Tuileries, and safe as a confessor, he sometimes knew everything and sometimes nothing; and, in addition to all these functions came that of saying for the minister those things that a minister cannot say for himself. In short, with his political Hephaestion the minister might dare to be himself; to take off his wig and his false teeth, lay aside his scruples, put on his slippers, unbutton his conscience, and give way to his trickery. However, it was not all a bed of roses for des Lupeaulx; he flattered and advised his master, forced to flatter in order to advise, to advise while flattering, and disguise the advice under the flattery. All politicians who follow this trade have bilious faces; and their constant habit of giving affirmative nods acquiescing in what is said to them, or seeming to do so, gives a certain peculiar turn to their heads. They agree indifferently with whatever is said before them. Their talk is full of “buts,” “notwithstandings,” “for myself I should,” “were I in your place” (they often say “in your place”),—phrases, however, which pave the way to opposition.

In person, Clement des Lupeaulx had the remains of a handsome man; five feet six inches tall, tolerably stout, complexion flushed with good living, powdered head, delicate spectacles, and a worn-out air; the natural skin blond, as shown by the hand, puffy like that of an old woman, rather too square, and with short nails—the hand of a satrap. His foot was elegant. After five o’clock in the afternoon des Lupeaulx was always to be seen in open-worked silk stockings, low shoes, black trousers, cashmere waistcoat, cambric handkerchief (without perfume), gold chain, blue coat of the shade called “king’s blue,” with brass buttons and a string of orders. In the morning he wore creaking boots and gray trousers, and the short close surtout coat of the politician. His general appearance early in the day was that of a sharp lawyer rather than that of a ministerial officer. Eyes glazed by the constant use of spectacles made him plainer than he really was, if by chance he took those appendages off. To real judges of character, as well as to upright men who are at ease only with honest natures, des Lupeaulx was intolerable. To them, his gracious manners only draped his lies; his amiable protestations and hackneyed courtesies, new to the foolish and ignorant, too plainly showed their texture to an observing mind. Such minds considered him a rotten plank, on which no foot should trust itself.

No sooner had the beautiful Madame Rabourdin decided to interfere in her husband’s administrative advancement than she fathomed Clement des Lupeaulx’s true character, and studied him thoughtfully to discover whether in

this thin strip of deal there were ligneous fibres strong enough to let her lightly trip across it from the bureau to the department, from a salary of eight thousand a year to twelve thousand. The clever woman believed she could play her own game with this political roue; and Monsieur des Lupeaulx was partly the cause of the unusual expenditures which now began and were continued in the Rabourdin household.

The rue Duphot, built up under the Empire, is remarkable for several houses with handsome exteriors, the apartments of which are skilfully laid out. That of the Rabourdins was particularly well arranged,—a domestic advantage which has much to do with the nobleness of private lives. A pretty and rather wide antechamber, lighted from the courtyard, led to the grand salon, the windows of which looked on the street. To the right of the salon were Rabourdin's study and bedroom, and behind them the dining-room, which was entered from the antechamber; to the left was Madame's bedroom and dressing-room, and behind them her daughter's little bedroom. On reception days the door of Rabourdin's study and that of his wife's bedroom were thrown open. The rooms were thus spacious enough to contain a select company, without the absurdity which attends many middle-class entertainments, where unusual preparations are made at the expense of the daily comfort, and consequently give the effect of exceptional effort. The salon had lately been rehung in gold-colored silk with carmelite touches. Madame's bedroom was draped in a fabric of true blue and furnished in a rococo manner. Rabourdin's study had inherited the late hangings of the salon, carefully cleaned, and was adorned by the fine pictures once belonging to Monsieur Leprince. The daughter of the late auctioneer had utilized in her dining-room certain exquisite Turkish rugs which her father had bought at a bargain; panelling them on the walls in ebony, the cost of which has since become exorbitant. Elegant buffets made by Boulle, also purchased by the auctioneer, furnished the sides of the room, at the end of which sparkled the brass arabesques inlaid in tortoise-shell of the first tall clock that reappeared in the nineteenth century to claim honor for the masterpieces of the seventeenth. Flowers perfumed these rooms so full of good taste and of exquisite things, where each detail was a work of art well placed and well surrounded, and where Madame Rabourdin, dressed with that natural simplicity which artists alone attain, gave the impression of a woman accustomed to such elegancies, though she never spoke of them, but allowed the charms of her mind to complete the effect produced upon her guests by these delightful surroundings. Thanks to her father, Celestine was able to make society talk of her as soon as the rococo became fashionable.

Accustomed as des Lupeaulx was to false as well as real magnificence in all their stages, he was, nevertheless, surprised at Madame Rabourdin's home. The charm it exercised over this Parisian Asmodeus can be explained by a

comparison. A traveller wearied with the rich aspects of Italy, Brazil, or India, returns to his own land and finds on his way a delightful little lake, like the Lac d'Orta at the foot of Monte Rosa, with an island resting on the calm waters, bewitchingly simple; a scene of nature and yet adorned; solitary, but well surrounded with choice plantations and foliage and statues of fine effect. Beyond lies a vista of shores both wild and cultivated; tumultuous grandeur towers above, but in itself all proportions are human. The world that the traveller has lately viewed is here in miniature, modest and pure; his soul, refreshed, bids him remain where a charm of melody and poesy surrounds him with harmony and awakens ideas within his mind. Such a scene represents both life and a monastery.

A few days earlier the beautiful Madame Firmiani, one of the charming women of the faubourg Saint-Germain who visited and liked Madame Rabourdin, had said to des Lupeaulx (invited expressly to hear this remark), "Why do you not call on Madame ——?" with a motion towards Celestine; "she gives delightful parties, and her dinners, above all, are—better than mine."

Des Lupeaulx allowed himself to be drawn into an engagement by the handsome Madame Rabourdin, who, for the first time, turned her eyes on him as she spoke. He had, accordingly, gone to the rue Duphot, and that tells the tale. Woman has but one trick, cries Figaro, but that's infallible. After dining once at the house of this unimportant official, des Lupeaulx made up his mind to dine there often. Thanks to the perfectly proper and becoming advances of the beautiful woman, whom her rival, Madame Colleville, called the Celimene of the rue Duphot, he had dined there every Friday for the last month, and returned of his own accord for a cup of tea on Wednesdays.

Within a few days Madame Rabourdin, having watched him narrowly and knowingly, believed she had found on the secretarial plank a spot where she might safely set her foot. She was no longer doubtful of success. Her inward joy can be realized only in the families of government officials where for three or four years prosperity has been counted on through some appointment, long expected and long sought. How many troubles are to be allayed! how many entreaties and pledges given to the ministerial divinities! how many visits of self-interest paid! At last, thanks to her boldness, Madame Rabourdin heard the hour strike when she was to have twenty thousand francs a year instead of eight thousand.

"And I shall have managed well," she said to herself. "I have had to make a little outlay; but these are times when hidden merit is overlooked, whereas if a man keeps himself well in sight before the world, cultivates social relations and extends them, he succeeds. After all, ministers and their friends interest themselves only in the people they see; but Rabourdin knows nothing of the

world! If I had not cajoled those three deputies they might have wanted La Billardiere's place themselves; whereas, now that I have invited them here, they will be ashamed to do so and will become our supporters instead of rivals. I have rather played the coquette, but—it is delightful that the first nonsense with which one fools a man sufficed."

The day on which a serious and unlooked-for struggle about this appointment began, after a ministerial dinner which preceded one of those receptions which ministers regard as public, des Lupeaulx was standing beside the fireplace near the minister's wife. While taking his coffee he once more included Madame Rabourdin among the seven or eight really superior women in Paris. Several times already he had staked Madame Rabourdin very much as Corporal Trim staked his cap.

"Don't say that too often, my dear friend, or you will injure her," said the minister's wife, half-laughing.

Women never like to hear the praise of other women; they keep silence themselves to lessen its effect.

"Poor La Billardiere is dying," remarked his Excellency the minister; "that place falls to Rabourdin, one of our most able men, and to whom our predecessors did not behave well, though one of them actually owed his position in the prefecture of police under the Empire to a certain great personage who was interested in Rabourdin. But, my dear friend, you are still young enough to be loved by a pretty woman for yourself—"

"If La Billardiere's place is given to Rabourdin I may be believed when I praise the superiority of his wife," replied des Lupeaulx, piqued by the minister's sarcasm; "but if Madame la Comtesse would be willing to judge for herself—"

"You want me to invite her to my next ball, don't you? Your clever woman will meet a knot of other women who only come here to laugh at us, and when they hear 'Madame Rabourdin' announced—"

"But Madame Firmiani is announced at the Foreign Office parties?"

"Ah, but she was born a Cadignan!" said the newly created count, with a savage look at his general-secretary, for neither he nor his wife were noble.

The persons present thought important matters were being talked over, and the solicitors for favors and appointments kept at a little distance. When des Lupeaulx left the room the countess said to her husband, "I think des Lupeaulx is in love."

"For the first time in his life, then," he replied, shrugging his shoulders, as much as to inform his wife that des Lupeaulx did not concern himself with

such nonsense.

Just then the minister saw a deputy of the Right Centre enter the room, and he left his wife abruptly to cajole an undecided vote. But the deputy, under the blow of a sudden and unexpected disaster, wanted to make sure of a protector and he had come to announce privately that in a few days he should be compelled to resign. Thus forewarned, the minister would be able to open his batteries for the new election before those of the opposition.

The minister, or to speak correctly, des Lupeaulx had invited to dinner on this occasion one of those irremovable officials who, as we have said, are to be found in every ministry; an individual much embarrassed by his own person, who, in his desire to maintain a dignified appearance, was standing erect and rigid on his two legs, held well together like the Greek hermae. This functionary waited near the fireplace to thank the secretary, whose abrupt and unexpected departure from the room disconcerted him at the moment when he was about to turn a compliment. This official was the cashier of the ministry, the only clerk who did not tremble when the government changed hands.

At the time of which we write, the Chamber did not meddle shabbily with the budget, as it does in the deplorable days in which we now live; it did not contemptibly reduce ministerial emoluments, nor save, as they say in the kitchen, the candle-ends; on the contrary, it granted to each minister taking charge of a public department an indemnity, called an “outfit.” It costs, alas, as much to enter on the duties of a minister as to retire from them; indeed, the entrance involves expenses of all kinds which it is quite impossible to inventory. This indemnity amounted to the pretty little sum of twenty-five thousand francs. When the appointment of a new minister was gazetted in the “Moniteur,” and the greater or lesser officials, clustering round the stoves or before the fireplaces and shaking in their shoes, asked themselves: “What will he do? will he increase the number of clerks? will he dismiss two to make room for three?” the cashier tranquilly took out twenty-five clean bank-bills and pinned them together with a satisfied expression on his beadle face. The next day he mounted the private staircase and had himself ushered into the minister’s presence by the lackeys, who considered the money and the keeper of money, the contents and the container, the idea and the form, as one and the same power. The cashier caught the ministerial pair at the dawn of official delight, when the newly appointed statesman is benign and affable. To the minister’s inquiry as to what brings him there, he replies with the bank-notes, —informing his Excellency that he hastens to pay him the customary indemnity. Moreover, he explains the matter to the minister’s wife, who never fails to draw freely upon the fund, and sometimes takes all, for the “outfit” is looked upon as a household affair. The cashier then proceeds to turn a compliment, and to slip in a few politic phrases: “If his Excellency would

deign to retain him; if, satisfied with his purely mechanical services, he would," etc. As a man who brings twenty-five thousand francs is always a worthy official, the cashier is sure not to leave without his confirmation to the post from which he has seen a succession of ministers come and go during a period of, perhaps, twenty-five years. His next step is to place himself at the orders of Madame; he brings the monthly thirteen thousand francs whenever wanted; he advances or delays the payment as requested, and thus manages to obtain, as they said in the monasteries, a voice in the chapter.

Formerly book-keeper at the Treasury, when that establishment kept its books by double entry, the Sieur Saillard was compensated for the loss of that position by his appointment as cashier of a ministry. He was a bulky, fat man, very strong in the matter of book-keeping, and very weak in everything else; round as a round O, simple as how-do-you-do,—a man who came to his office with measured steps, like those of an elephant, and returned with the same measured tread to the place Royale, where he lived on the ground-floor of an old mansion belonging to him. He usually had a companion on the way in the person of Monsieur Isidore Baudoyer, head of a bureau in Monsieur de la Billardiere's division, consequently one of Rabourdin's colleagues. Baudoyer was married to Elisabeth Saillard, the cashier's only daughter, and had hired, very naturally, the apartments above those of his father-in-law. No one at the ministry had the slightest doubt that Saillard was a blockhead, but neither had any one ever found out how far his stupidity could go; it was too compact to be examined; it did not ring hollow; it absorbed everything and gave nothing out. Bixiou (a clerk of whom more anon) caricatured the cashier by drawing a head in a wig at the top of an egg, and two little legs at the other end, with this inscription: "Born to pay out and take in without blundering. A little less luck, and he might have been lackey to the bank of France; a little more ambition, and he could have been honorably discharged."

At the moment of which we are now writing, the minister was looking at his cashier very much as we gaze at a window or a cornice, without supposing that either can hear us, or fathom our secret thoughts.

"I am all the more anxious that we should settle everything with the prefect in the quietest way, because des Lupeaulx has designs upon the place for himself," said the minister, continuing his talk with the deputy; "his paltry little estate is in your arrondissement; we won't want him as deputy."

"He has neither years nor rentals enough to be eligible," said the deputy.

"That may be; but you know how it was decided for Casimir Perier as to age; and as to worldly possessions, des Lupeaulx does possess something,—not much, it is true, but the law does not take into account increase, which he may very well obtain; commissions have wide margins for the deputies of the

Centre, you know, and we cannot openly oppose the good-will that is shown to this dear friend."

"But where would he get the money?"

"How did Manuel manage to become the owner of a house in Paris?" cried the minister.

The cashier listened and heard, but reluctantly and against his will. These rapid remarks, murmured as they were, struck his ear by one of those acoustic rebounds which are very little studied. As he heard these political confidences, however, a keen alarm took possession of his soul. He was one of those simple-minded beings, who are shocked at listening to anything they are not intended to hear, or entering where they are not invited, and seeming bold when they are really timid, inquisitive where they are truly discreet. The cashier accordingly began to glide along the carpet and edge himself away, so that the minister saw him at a distance when he first took notice of him. Saillard was a ministerial henchman absolutely incapable of indiscretion; even if the minister had known that he had overheard a secret he had only to whisper "motus" in his ear to be sure it was perfectly safe. The cashier, however, took advantage of an influx of office-seekers, to slip out and get into his hackney-coach (hired by the hour for these costly entertainments), and to return to his home in the place Royale.

CHAPTER III. THE TEREDOS NAVALIS, OTHERWISE CALLED SHIP-WORM

While old Saillard was driving across Paris his son-in-law, Isidore Baudoyer, and his daughter, Elisabeth, Baudoyer's wife, were playing a virtuous game of boston with their confessor, the Abbe Gaudron, in company with a few neighbors and a certain Martin Falleix, a brass-founder in the fauborg Saint-Antoine, to whom Saillard had loaned the necessary money to establish a business. This Falleix, a respectable Auvergnat who had come to seek his fortune in Paris with his smelting-pot on his back, had found immediate employment with the firm of Brezac, collectors of metals and other relics from all chateaux in the provinces. About twenty-seven years of age, and spoiled, like others, by success, Martin Falleix had had the luck to become the active agent of Monsieur Saillard, the sleeping-partner in the working out of a discovery made by Falleix in smelting (patent of invention and gold medal granted at the exposition of 1825). Madame Baudoyer, whose only daughter was treading—to use an expression of old Saillard's—on the tail of her twelve years, laid claim to Falleix, a thickset, swarthy, active young fellow,

of shrewd principles, whose education she was superintending. The said education, according to her ideas, consisted in teaching him to play boston, to hold his cards properly, and not to let others see his game; to shave himself regularly before he came to the house, and to wash his hands with good cleansing soap; not to swear, to speak her kind of French, to wear boots instead of shoes, cotton shirts instead of sacking, and to brush up his hair instead of plastering it flat. During the preceding week Elisabeth had finally succeeded in persuading Falleix to give up wearing a pair of enormous flat earrings resembling hoops.

“You go too far, Madame Baudoyer,” he said, seeing her satisfaction at the final sacrifice; “you order me about too much. You make me clean my teeth, which loosens them; presently you will want me to brush my nails and curl my hair, which won’t do at all in our business; we don’t like dandies.”

Elisabeth Baudoyer, nee Saillard, is one of those persons who escape portraiture through their utter commonness; yet who ought to be sketched, because they are specimens of that second-rate Parisian bourgeoisie which occupies a place above the well-to-do artisan and below the upper middle classes,—a tribe whose virtues are well-nigh vices, whose defects are never kindly, but whose habits and manners, dull and insipid though they be, are not without a certain originality. Something pinched and puny about Elisabeth Saillard was painful to the eye. Her figure, scarcely over four feet in height, was so thin that the waist measured less than twenty inches. Her small features, which clustered close about the nose, gave her face a vague resemblance to a weasel’s snout. Though she was past thirty years old she looked scarcely more than sixteen. Her eyes, of porcelain blue, overweighted by heavy eyelids which fell nearly straight from the arch of the eyebrows, had little light in them. Everything about her appearance was commonplace: witness her flaxen hair, tending to whiteness; her flat forehead, from which the light did not reflect; and her dull complexion, with gray, almost leaden, tones. The lower part of the face, more triangular than oval, ended irregularly the otherwise irregular outline of her face. Her voice had a rather pretty range of intonation, from sharp to sweet. Elisabeth was a perfect specimen of the second-rate little bourgeoisie who lectures her husband behind the curtains; obtains no credit for her virtues; is ambitious without intelligent object, and solely through the development of her domestic selfishness. Had she lived in the country she would have bought up adjacent land; being, as she was, connected with the administration, she was determined to push her way. If we relate the life of her father and mother, we shall show the sort of woman she was by a picture of her childhood and youth.

Monsieur Saillard married the daughter of an upholsterer keeping shop under the arcades of the Market. Limited means compelled Monsieur and

Madame Saillard at their start in life to bear constant privation. After thirty-three years of married life, and twenty-nine years of toil in a government office, the property of “the Saillards”—their circle of acquaintance called them so—consisted of sixty thousand francs entrusted to Falleix, the house in the place Royale, bought for forty thousand in 1804, and thirty-six thousand francs given in dowry to their daughter Elisabeth. Out of this capital about fifty thousand came to them by the will of the widow Bidault, Madame Saillard’s mother. Saillard’s salary from the government had always been four thousand five hundred francs a year, and no more; his situation was a blind alley that led nowhere, and had tempted no one to supersede him. Those ninety thousand francs, put together sou by sou, were the fruit therefore of a sordid economy unintelligently employed. In fact, the Saillards did not know how better to manage their savings than to carry them, five thousand francs at a time, to their notary, Monsieur Sorbier, Cardot’s predecessor, and let him invest them at five per cent in first mortgages, with the wife’s rights reserved in case the borrower was married! In 1804 Madame Saillard obtained a government office for the sale of stamped papers, a circumstance which brought a servant into the household for the first time. At the time of which we write, the house, which was worth a hundred thousand francs, brought in a rental of eight thousand. Falleix paid seven per cent for the sixty thousand invested in the foundry, besides an equal division of profits. The Saillards were therefore enjoying an income of not less than seventeen thousand francs a year. The whole ambition of the good man now centred on obtaining the cross of the Legion and his retiring pension.

Elisabeth, the only child, had toiled steadily from infancy in a home where the customs of life were rigid and the ideas simple. A new hat for Saillard was a matter of deliberation; the time a coat could last was estimated and discussed; umbrellas were carefully hung up by means of a brass buckle. Since 1804 no repairs of any kind had been done to the house. The Saillards kept the ground-floor in precisely the state in which their predecessor left it. The gilding of the pier-glasses was rubbed off; the paint on the cornices was hardly visible through the layers of dust that time had collected. The fine large rooms still retained certain sculptured marble mantel-pieces and ceilings, worthy of Versailles, together with the old furniture of the widow Bidault. The latter consisted of a curious mixture of walnut armchairs, disjointed, and covered with tapestry; rosewood bureaus; round tables on single pedestals, with brass railings and cracked marble tops; one superb Boulle secretary, the value of which style had not yet been recognized; in short, a chaos of bargains picked up by the worthy widow,—pictures bought for the sake of the frames, china services of a composite order; to wit, a magnificent Japanese dessert set, and all the rest porcelains of various makes, unmatched silver plate, old glass, fine damask, and a four-post bedstead, hung with curtains and garnished with

plumes.

Amid these curious relics, Madame Saillard always sat on a sofa of modern mahogany, near a fireplace full of ashes and without fire, on the mantel-shelf of which stood a clock, some antique bronzes, candelabra with paper flowers but no candles, for the careful housewife lighted the room with a tall tallow candle always guttering down into the flat brass candlestick which held it. Madame Saillard's face, despite its wrinkles, was expressive of obstinacy and severity, narrowness of ideas, an uprightness that might be called quadrangular, a religion without piety, straightforward, candid avarice, and the peace of a quiet conscience. You may see in certain Flemish pictures the wives of burgomasters cut out by nature on the same pattern and wonderfully reproduced on canvas; but these dames wear fine robes of velvet and precious stuffs, whereas Madame Saillard possessed no robes, only that venerable garment called in Touraine and Picardy "cottes," elsewhere petticoats, or skirts pleated behind and on each side, with other skirts hanging over them. Her bust was inclosed in what was called a "casaquin," another obsolete name for a short gown or jacket. She continued to wear a cap with starched wings, and shoes with high heels. Though she was now fifty-seven years old, and her lifetime of vigorous household work ought now to be rewarded with well-earned repose, she was incessantly employed in knitting her husband's stockings and her own, and those of an uncle, just as her countrywomen knit them, moving about the room, talking, pacing up and down the garden, or looking round the kitchen to watch what was going on.

The Saillard's avarice, which was really imposed on them in the first instance by dire necessity, was now a second nature. When the cashier got back from the office, he laid aside his coat, and went to work in the large garden, shut off from the courtyard by an iron railing, and which the family reserved to itself. For years Elisabeth, the daughter, went to market every morning with her mother, and the two did all the work of the house. The mother cooked well, especially a duck with turnips; but, according to Saillard, no one could equal Elisabeth in hashing the remains of a leg of mutton with onions. "You might eat your boots with those onions and not know it," he remarked. As soon as Elisabeth knew how to hold a needle, her mother had her mend the household linen and her father's coats. Always at work, like a servant, she never went out alone. Though living close by the boulevard du Temple, where Franconi, La Gaite, and l'Ambigu-Comique were within a stone's throw, and, further on, the Porte-Saint-Martin, Elisabeth had never seen a comedy. When she asked to "see what it was like" (with the Abbe Gaudron's permission, be it understood), Monsieur Baudoyer took her—for the glory of the thing, and to show her the finest that was to be seen—to the Opera, where they were playing "The Chinese Laborer." Elisabeth thought "the comedy" as wearisome as the plague of flies, and never wished to see

another. On Sundays, after walking four times to and fro between the place Royale and Saint-Paul's church (for her mother made her practise the precepts and the duties of religion), her parents took her to the pavement in front of the Cafe Ture, where they sat on chairs placed between a railing and the wall. The Saillards always made haste to reach the place early so as to choose the best seats, and found much entertainment in watching the passers-by. In those days the Cafe Ture was the rendezvous of the fashionable society of the Marais, the faubourg Saint-Antoine, and the circumjacent regions.

Elisabeth never wore anything but cotton gowns in summer and merino in the winter, which she made herself. Her mother gave her twenty francs a month for her expenses, but her father, who was very fond of her, mitigated this rigorous treatment with a few presents. She never read what the Abbe Gaudron, vicar of Saint-Paul's and the family director, called profane books. This discipline had borne fruit. Forced to employ her feelings on some passion or other, Elisabeth became eager after gain. Though she was not lacking in sense or perspicacity, religious theories, and her complete ignorance of higher emotions had encircled all her faculties with an iron hand; they were exercised solely on the commonest things of life; spent in a few directions they were able to concentrate themselves on a matter in hand. Repressed by religious devotion, her natural intelligence exercised itself within the limits marked out by cases of conscience, which form a mine of subtleties among which self-interest selects its subterfuges. Like those saintly personages in whom religion does not stifle ambition, Elisabeth was capable of requiring others to do a blamable action that she might reap the fruits; and she would have been, like them again, implacable as to her dues and dissembling in her actions. Once offended, she watched her adversaries with the perfidious patience of a cat, and was capable of bringing about some cold and complete vengeance, and then laying it to the account of God. Until her marriage the Saillards lived without other society than that of the Abbe Gaudron, a priest from Auvergne appointed vicar of Saint-Paul's after the restoration of Catholic worship. Besides this ecclesiastic, who was a friend of the late Madame Bidault, a paternal uncle of Madame Saillard, an old paper-dealer retired from business ever since the year II. of the Republic, and now sixty-nine years old, came to see them on Sundays only, because on that day no government business went on.

This little old man, with a livid face blazoned by the red nose of a tippler and lighted by two gleaming vulture eyes, allowed his gray hair to hang loose under a three-cornered hat, wore breeches with straps that extended beyond the buckles, cotton stockings of mottled thread knitted by his niece, whom he always called "the little Saillard," stout shoes with silver buckles, and a surtout coat of mixed colors. He looked very much like those verger-beadle-bell-ringing-grave-digging-parish-clerks who are taken to be caricatures until we

see them performing their various functions. On the present occasion he had come on foot to dine with the Saillards, intending to return in the same way to the rue Greneta, where he lived on the third floor of an old house. His business was that of discounting commercial paper in the quartier Saint-Martin, where he was known by the nickname of “Gigonnet,” from the nervous convulsive movement with which he lifted his legs in walking, like a cat. Monsieur Bidault began this business in the year II. in partnership with a dutchman named Werbrust, a friend of Gobseck.

Some time later Saillard made the acquaintance of Monsieur and Madame Transon, wholesale dealers in pottery, with an establishment in the rue de Lesdiguieres, who took an interest in Elisabeth and introduced young Isadore Baudoyer to the family with the intention of marrying her. Gigonnet approved of the match, for he had long employed a certain Mitral, uncle of the young man, as clerk. Monsieur and Madame Baudoyer, father and mother of Isidore, highly respected leather-dressers in the rue Censier, had slowly made a moderate fortune out of a small trade. After marrying their only son, on whom they settled fifty thousand francs, they determined to live in the country, and had lately removed to the neighborhood of Ile-d’Adam, where after a time they were joined by Mitral. They frequently came to Paris, however, where they kept a corner in the house in the rue Censier which they gave to Isidore on his marriage. The elder Baudoyers had an income of about three thousand francs left to live upon after establishing their son.

Mitral was a being with a sinister wig, a face the color of Seine water, lighted by a pair of Spanish-tobacco-colored eyes, cold as a well-rope, always smelling a rat, and close-mouthed about his property. He probably made his fortune in his own hole and corner, just as Werbrust and Gigonnet made theirs in the quartier Saint-Martin.

Though the Saillards’ circle of acquaintance increased, neither their ideas nor their manners and customs changed. The saint’s-days of father, mother, daughter, son-in-law, and grandchild were carefully observed, also the anniversaries of birth and marriage, Easter, Christmas, New Year’s day, and Epiphany. These festivals were preceded by great domestic sweepings and a universal clearing up of the house, which added an element of usefulness to the ceremonies. When the festival day came, the presents were offered with much pomp and an accompaniment of flowers,—silk stockings or a fur cap for old Saillard; gold earrings and articles of plate for Elisabeth or her husband, for whom, little by little, the parents were accumulating a whole silver service; silk petticoats for Madame Saillard, who laid the stuff by and never made it up. The recipient of these gifts was placed in an armchair and asked by those present for a certain length of time, “Guess what we have for you!” Then came a splendid dinner, lasting at least five hours, to which were invited the Abbe

Gaudron, Falleix, Rabourdin, Monsieur Godard, under-head-clerk to Monsieur Baudoyer, Monsieur Bataille, captain of the company of the National Guard to which Saillard and his son-in-law belonged. Monsieur Cardot, who was invariably asked, did as Rabourdin did, namely, accepted one invitation out of six. The company sang at dessert, shook hands and embraced with enthusiasm, wishing each other all manner of happiness; the presents were exhibited and the opinion of the guests asked about them. The day Saillard received his fur cap he wore it during the dessert, to the satisfaction of all present. At night, mere ordinary acquaintances were bidden, and dancing went on till very late, formerly to the music of one violin, but for the last six years Monsieur Godard, who was a great flute player, contributed the piercing tones of a flageolet to the festivity. The cook, Madame Baudoyer's nurse, and old Catherine, Madame Saillard's woman-servant, together with the porter or his wife, stood looking on at the door of the salon. The servants always received three francs on these occasions to buy themselves wine or coffee.

This little circle looked upon Saillard and Baudoyer as transcendent beings; they were government officers; they had risen by their own merits; they worked, it was said, with the minister himself; they owed their fortune to their talents; they were politicians. Baudoyer was considered the more able of the two; his position as head of a bureau presupposed labor that was more intricate and arduous than that of a cashier. Moreover, Isidore, though the son of a leather-dresser, had had the genius to study and to cast aside his father's business and find a career in politics, which had led him to a post of eminence. In short, silent and uncommunicative as he was, he was looked upon as a deep thinker, and perhaps, said the admiring circle, he would some day become deputy of the eighth arrondissement. As Gigonnet listened to such remarks as these, he pressed his already pinched lips closer together, and threw a glance at his great-niece, Elisabeth.

In person, Isidore was a tall, stout man of thirty-seven, who perspired freely, and whose head looked as if he had water on the brain. This enormous head, covered with chestnut hair cropped close, was joined to the neck by rolls of flesh which overhung the collar of his coat. He had the arms of Hercules, hands worthy of Domitian, a stomach which sobriety held within the limits of the majestic, to use a saying of Brillaet-Savarin. His face was a good deal like that of the Emperor Alexander. The Tartar type was in the little eyes and the flattened nose turned slightly up, in the frigid lips and the short chin. The forehead was low and narrow. Though his temperament was lymphatic, the devout Isidore was under the influence of a conjugal passion which time did not lessen.

In spite, however, of his resemblance to the handsome Russian Emperor and the terrible Domitian, Isidore Baudoyer was nothing more than a political

office-holder, of little ability as head of his department, a cut-and-dried routine man, who concealed the fact that he was a flabby cipher by so ponderous a personality that no scalpel could cut deep enough to let the operator see into him. His severe studies, in which he had shown the patience and sagacity of an ox, and his square head, deceived his parents, who firmly believed him an extraordinary man. Pedantic and hypercritical, meddlesome and fault-finding, he was a terror to the clerks under him, whom he worried in their work, enforcing the rules rigorously, and arriving himself with such terrible punctuality that not one of them dared to be a moment late. Baudoyer wore a blue coat with gilt buttons, a chamois waistcoat, gray trousers and cravats of various colors. His feet were large and ill-shod. From the chain of his watch depended an enormous bunch of old trinkets, among which in 1824 he still wore “American beads,” which were very much the fashion in the year VII.

In the bosom of this family, bound together by the force of religious ties, by the inflexibility of its customs, by one solitary emotion, that of avarice, a passion which was now as it were its compass, Elisabeth was forced to commune with herself, instead of imparting her ideas to those around her, for she felt herself without equals in mind who could comprehend her. Though facts compelled her to judge her husband, her religious duty led her to keep up as best she could a favorable opinion of him; she showed him marked respect; honored him as the father of her child, her husband, the temporal power, as the vicar of Saint-Paul’s told her. She would have thought it a mortal sin to make a single gesture, or give a single glance, or say a single word which would reveal to others her real opinion of the imbecile Baudoyer. She even professed to obey passively all his wishes. But her ears were receptive of many things; she thought them over, weighed and compared them in the solitude of her mind, and judged so soberly of men and events that at the time when our history begins she was the hidden oracle of the two functionaries, her husband and father, who had, unconsciously, come to do nothing whatever without consulting her. Old Saillard would say, innocently, “Isn’t she clever, that Elisabeth of mine?” But Baudoyer, too great a fool not to be puffed up by the false reputation the quartier Saint-Antoine bestowed upon him, denied his wife’s cleverness all the while that he was making use of it.

Elisabeth had long felt sure that her uncle Bidault, otherwise called Gigonnet, was rich and handled vast sums of money. Enlightened by self-interest, she had come to understand Monsieur des Lupeaulx far better than the minister understood him. Finding herself married to a fool, she never allowed herself to think that life might have gone better with her, she only imagined the possibility of better things without expecting or wishing to attain them. All her best affections found their vocation in her love for her daughter, to whom she spared the pains and privations she had borne in her own childhood; she believed that in this affection she had her full share in the world of feeling.

Solely for her daughter's sake she had persuaded her father to take the important step of going into partnership with Falleix. Falleix had been brought to the Saillard's house by old Bidault, who lent him money on his merchandise. Falleix thought his old countryman extortionate, and complained to the Saillards that Gigonnet demanded eighteen per cent from an Auvergnat. Madame Saillard ventured to remonstrate with her uncle.

"It is just because he is an Auvergnat that I take only eighteen per cent," said Gigonnet, when she spoke of him.

Falleix, who had made a discovery at the age of twenty-eight, and communicated it to Saillard, seemed to carry his heart in his hand (an expression of old Saillard's), and also seemed likely to make a great fortune. Elisabeth determined to husband him for her daughter and train him herself, having, as she calculated, seven years to do it in. Martin Falleix felt and showed the deepest respect for Madame Baudoyer, whose superior qualities he was able to recognize. If he were fated to make millions he would always belong to her family, where he had found a home. The little Baudoyer girl was already trained to bring him his tea and to take his hat.

On the evening of which we write, Monsieur Saillard, returning from the ministry, found a game of boston in full blast; Elisabeth was advising Falleix how to play; Madame Saillard was knitting in the chimney-corner and overlooking the cards of the vicar; Monsieur Baudoyer, motionless as a mile-stone, was employing his mental capacity in calculating how the cards were placed, and sat opposite to Mitral, who had come up from Ile-d'Adam for the Christmas holidays. No one moved as the cashier entered, and for some minutes he walked up and down the room, his fat face contracted with unaccustomed thought.

"He is always so when he dines at the ministry," remarked Madame Saillard; "happily, it is only twice a year, or he'd die of it. Saillard was never made to be in the government—Well, now, I do hope, Saillard," she continued in a loud tone, "that you are not going to keep on those silk breeches and that handsome coat. Go and take them off; don't wear them at home, my man."

"Your father has something on his mind," said Baudoyer to his wife, when the cashier was in his bedroom, undressing without any fire.

"Perhaps Monsieur de la Billardiere is dead," said Elisabeth, simply; "and as he is anxious you should have the place, it worries him."

"Can I be useful in any way?" said the vicar of Saint-Paul's; "if so, pray use my services. I have the honor to be known to Madame la Dauphine. These are days when public offices should be given only to faithful men, whose religious principles are not to be shaken."

“Dear me!” said Falleix, “do men of merit need protectors and influence to get places in the government service? I am glad I am an iron-master; my customers know where to find a good article—”

“Monsieur,” interrupted Baudoyer, “the government is the government; never attack it in this house.”

“You speak like the ‘Constitutionel,’” said the vicar.

“The ‘Constitutionel’ never says anything different from that,” replied Baudoyer, who never read it.

The cashier believed his son-in-law to be as superior in talent to Rabourdin as God was greater than Saint-Crepin, to use his own expression; but the good man coveted this appointment in a straightforward, honest way. Influenced by the feeling which leads all officials to seek promotion,—a violent, unreflecting, almost brutal passion,—he desired success, just as he desired the cross of the Legion of honor, without doing anything against his conscience to obtain it, and solely, as he believed, on the strength of his son-in-law’s merits. To his thinking, a man who had patiently spent twenty-five years in a government office behind an iron railing had sacrificed himself to his country and deserved the cross. But all that he dreamed of doing to promote his son-in-law’s appointment in La Billardiere’s place was to say a word to his Excellency’s wife when he took her the month’s salary.

“Well, Saillard, you look as if you had lost all your friends! Do speak; do, pray, tell us something,” cried his wife when he came back into the room.

Saillard, after making a little sign to his daughter, turned on his heel to keep himself from talking politics before strangers. When Monsieur Mitral and the vicar had departed, Saillard rolled back the card-table and sat down in an armchair in the attitude he always assumed when about to tell some office-gossip,—a series of movements which answered the purpose of the three knocks given at the Theatre-Francais. After binding his wife, daughter, and son-in-law to the deepest secrecy,—for, however petty the gossip, their places, as he thought, depended on their discretion,—he related the incomprehensible enigma of the resignation of a deputy, the very legitimate desire of the general-secretary to get elected to the place, and the secret opposition of the minister to this wish of a man who was one of his firmest supporters and most zealous workers. This, of course, brought down an avalanche of suppositions, flooded with the sapient arguments of the two officials, who sent back and forth to each other a wearisome flood of nonsense. Elisabeth quietly asked three questions:—

“If Monsieur des Lupeaulx is on our side, will Monsieur Baudoyer be appointed in Monsieur de la Billardiere’s place?”

“Heavens! I should think so,” cried the cashier.

“My uncle Bidault and Monsieur Gobseck helped in him 1814,” thought she. “Is he in debt?” she asked, aloud.

“Yes,” cried the cashier with a hissing and prolonged sound on the last letter; “his salary was attached, but some of the higher powers released it by a bill at sight.”

“Where is the des Lupeaulx estate?”

“Why, don’t you know? in the part of the country where your grandfather and your great-uncle Bidault belong, in the arrondissement of the deputy who wants to resign.”

When her colossus of a husband had gone to bed, Elisabeth leaned over him, and though he always treated her remarks as women’s nonsense, she said, “Perhaps you will really get Monsieur de la Billardiere’s place.”

“There you go with your imaginations!” said Baudoyer; “leave Monsieur Gaudron to speak to the Dauphine and don’t meddle with politics.”

At eleven o’clock, when all were asleep in the place Royale, Monsieur des Lupeaulx was leaving the Opera for the rue Duphot. This particular Wednesday was one of Madame Rabourdin’s most brilliant evenings. Many of her customary guests came in from the theatres and swelled the company already assembled, among whom were several celebrities, such as: Canalis the poet, Schinner the painter, Dr. Bianchon, Lucien de Rubempre, Octave de Camps, the Comte de Granville, the Vicomte de Fontaine, du Bruel the vaudevillist, Andoche Finot the journalist, Derville, one of the best heads in the law courts, the Comte du Chatelet, deputy, du Tillet, banker, and several elegant young men, such as Paul de Manerville and the Vicomte de Portenduere. Celestine was pouring out tea when the general-secretary entered. Her dress that evening was very becoming; she wore a black velvet robe without ornament of any kind, a black gauze scarf, her hair smoothly bound about her head and raised in a heavy braided mass, with long curls a l’Anglaise falling on either side of her face. The charms which particularly distinguished this woman were the Italian ease of her artistic nature, her ready comprehension, and the grace with which she welcomed and promoted the least appearance of a wish on the part of others. Nature had given her an elegant, slender figure, which could sway lightly at a word, black eyes of oriental shape, able, like those of the Chinese women, to see out of their corners. She well knew how to manage a soft, insinuating voice, which threw a tender charm into every word, even such as she merely chanced to utter; her feet were like those we see in portraits where the painter boldly lies and flatters his sitter in the only way which does not compromise anatomy. Her

complexion, a little yellow by day, like that of most brunettes, was dazzling at night under the wax candles, which brought out the brilliancy of her black hair and eyes. Her slender and well-defined outlines reminded an artist of the Venus of the Middle Ages rendered by Jean Goujon, the illustrious sculptor of Diane de Poitiers.

Des Lupeaulx stopped in the doorway, and leaned against the woodwork. This ferret of ideas did not deny himself the pleasure of spying upon sentiment, and this woman interested him more than any of the others to whom he had attached himself. Des Lupeaulx had reached an age when men assert pretensions in regard to women. The first white hairs lead to the latest passions, all the more violent because they are astride of vanishing powers and dawning weakness. The age of forty is the age of folly,—an age when man wants to be loved for himself; whereas at twenty-five life is so full that he has no wants. At twenty-five he overflows with vigor and wastes it with impunity, but at forty he learns that to use it in that way is to abuse it. The thoughts that came into des Lupeaulx's mind at this moment were melancholy ones. The nerves of the old beau relaxed; the agreeable smile, which served as a mask and made the character of his countenance, faded; the real man appeared, and he was horrible. Rabourdin caught sight of him and thought, "What has happened to him? can he be disgraced in any way?" The general-secretary was, however, only thinking how the pretty Madame Colleville, whose intentions were exactly those of Madame Rabourdin, had summarily abandoned him when it suited her to do so. Rabourdin caught the sham statesman's eyes fixed on his wife, and he recorded the look in his memory. He was too keen an observer not to understand des Lupeaulx to the bottom, and he deeply despised him; but, as with most busy men, his feelings and sentiments seldom came to the surface. Absorption in a beloved work is practically equivalent to the cleverest dissimulation, and thus it was that the opinions and ideas of Rabourdin were a sealed book to des Lupeaulx. The former was sorry to see the man in his house, but he was never willing to oppose his wife's wishes. At this particular moment, while he talked confidentially with a supernumerary of his office who was destined, later, to play an unconscious part in a political intrigue resulting from the death of La Billardiere, he watched, though half-abstractedly, his wife and des Lupeaulx.

Here we must explain, as much for foreigners as for our own grandchildren, what a supernumerary in a government office in Paris means.

The supernumerary is to the administration what a choir-boy is to a church, what the company's child is to the regiment, what the figurante is to a theatre; something artless, naive, innocent, a being blinded by illusions. Without illusions what would become of any of us? They give strength to bear the res angusta domi of arts and the beginnings of all science by inspiring us with

faith. Illusion is illimitable faith. Now the supernumerary has faith in the administration; he never thinks it cold, cruel, and hard, as it really is. There are two kinds of supernumeraries, or hangers-on,—one poor, the other rich. The poor one is rich in hope and wants a place, the rich one is poor in spirit and wants nothing. A wealthy family is not so foolish as to put its able men into the administration. It confides an unfledged scion to some head-clerk, or gives him in charge of a directory who initiates him into what Bilboquet, that profound philosopher, called the high comedy of government; he is spared all the horrors of drudgery and is finally appointed to some important office. The rich supernumerary never alarms the other clerks; they know he does not endanger their interests, for he seeks only the highest posts in the administration. About the period of which we write many families were saying to themselves: “What can we do with our sons?” The army no longer offered a chance for fortune. Special careers, such as civil and military engineering, the navy, mining, and the professorial chair were all fenced about by strict regulations or to be obtained only by competition; whereas in the civil service the revolving wheel which turned clerks into prefects, sub-prefects, assessors, and collectors, like the figures in a magic lantern, was subjected to no such rules and entailed no drudgery. Through this easy gap emerged into life the rich supernumeraries who drove their tilburys, dressed well, and wore moustachios, all of them as impudent as parvenus. Journalists were apt to persecute the tribe, who were cousins, nephews, brothers, or other relatives of some minister, some deputy, or an influential peer. The humbler clerks regarded them as a means of influence.

The poor supernumerary, on the other hand, who is the only real worker, is almost always the son of some former clerk’s widow, who lives on a meagre pension and sacrifices herself to support her son until he can get a place as copying-clerk, and then dies leaving him no nearer the head of his department than writer of deeds, order-clerks, or, possibly, under-head-clerk. Living always in some locality where rents are low, this humble supernumerary starts early from home. For him the Eastern question relates only to the morning skies. To go on foot and not get muddied, to save his clothes, and allow for the time he may lose in standing under shelter during a shower, are the preoccupations of his mind. The street pavements, the flaggings of the quays and the boulevards, when first laid down, were a boon to him. If, for some extraordinary reason, you happen to be in the streets of Paris at half-past seven or eight o’clock of a winter’s morning, and see through piercing cold or fog or rain a timid, pale young man loom up, cigarless, take notice of his pockets. You will be sure to see the outline of a roll which his mother has given him to stay his stomach between breakfast and dinner. The guilelessness of the supernumerary does not last long. A youth enlightened by gleams by Parisian life soon measures the frightful distance that separates him from the head-

clerkship, a distance which no mathematician, neither Archimedes, nor Leibnitz, nor Laplace has ever reckoned, the distance that exists between 0 and the figure 1. He begins to perceive the impossibilities of his career; he hears talk of favoritism; he discovers the intrigues of officials: he sees the questionable means by which his superiors have pushed their way,—one has married a young woman who made a false step; another, the natural daughter of a minister; this one shouldered the responsibility of another's fault; that one, full of talent, risks his health in doing, with the perseverance of a mole, prodigies of work which the man of influence feels incapable of doing for himself, though he takes the credit. Everything is known in a government office. The incapable man has a wife with a clear head, who has pushed him along and got him nominated for deputy; if he has not talent enough for an office, he cabals in the Chamber. The wife of another has a statesman at her feet. A third is the hidden informant of a powerful journalist. Often the disgusted and hopeless supernumerary sends in his resignation. About three fourths of his class leave the government employ without ever obtaining an appointment, and their number is winnowed down to either those young men who are foolish or obstinate enough to say to themselves, "I have been here three years, and I must end sooner or later by getting a place," or to those who are conscious of a vocation for the work. Undoubtedly the position of supernumerary in a government office is precisely what the novitiate is in a religious order,—a trial. It is a rough trial. The State discovers how many of them can bear hunger, thirst, and penury without breaking down, how many can toil without revolting against it; it learns which temperaments can bear up under the horrible experience—or if you like, the disease—of government official life. From this point of view the apprenticeship of the supernumerary, instead of being an infamous device of the government to obtain labor gratis, becomes a useful institution.

The young man with whom Rabourdin was talking was a poor supernumerary named Sebastien de la Roche, who had picked his way on the points of his toes, without incurring the least splash upon his boots, from the rue du Roi-Dore in the Marais. He talked of his mamma, and dared not raise his eyes to Madame Rabourdin, whose house appeared to him as gorgeous as the Louvre. He was careful to show his gloves, well cleaned with india-rubber, as little as he could. His poor mother had put five francs in his pocket in case it became absolutely necessary that he should play cards; but she enjoined him to take nothing, to remain standing, and to be very careful not to knock over a lamp or the bric-a-brac from an etagere. His dress was all of the strictest black. His fair face, his eyes, of a fine shade of green with golden reflections, were in keeping with a handsome head of auburn hair. The poor lad looked furtively at Madame Rabourdin, whispering to himself, "How beautiful!" and was likely to dream of that fairy when he went to bed.

Rabourdin had noted a vocation for his work in the lad, and as he himself took the whole service seriously, he felt a lively interest in him. He guessed the poverty of his mother's home, kept together on a widow's pension of seven hundred francs a year—for the education of the son, who was just out of college, had absorbed all her savings. He therefore treated the youth almost paternally; often endeavoured to get him some fee from the Council, or paid it from his own pocket. He overwhelmed Sebastien with work, trained him, and allowed him to do the work of du Bruel's place, for which that vaudevillist, otherwise known as Cursy, paid him three hundred francs out of his salary. In the minds of Madame de la Roche and her son, Rabourdin was at once a great man, a tyrant, and an angel. On him all the poor fellow's hopes of getting an appointment depended, and the lad's devotion to his chief was boundless. He dined once a fortnight in the rue Duphot; but always at a family dinner, invited by Rabourdin himself; Madame asked him to evening parties only when she wanted partners.

At that moment Rabourdin was scolding poor Sebastien, the only human being who was in the secret of his immense labors. The youth copied and recopied the famous "statement," written on a hundred and fifty folio sheets, besides the corroborative documents, and the summing up (contained in one page), with the estimates bracketed, the captions in a running hand, and the sub-titles in a round one. Full of enthusiasm, in spite of his merely mechanical participation in the great idea, the lad of twenty would rewrite whole pages for a single blot, and made it his glory to touch up the writing, regarding it as the element of a noble undertaking. Sebastien had that afternoon committed the great imprudence of carrying into the general office, for the purpose of copying, a paper which contained the most dangerous facts to make known prematurely, namely, a memorandum relating to the officials in the central offices of all ministries, with facts concerning their fortunes, actual and prospective, together with the individual enterprises of each outside of his government employment.

All government clerks in Paris who are not endowed, like Rabourdin, with patriotic ambition or other marked capacity, usually add the profits of some industry to the salary of their office, in order to eke out a living. A number do as Monsieur Saillard did,—put their money into a business carried on by others, and spend their evenings in keeping the books of their associates. Many clerks are married to milliners, licensed tobacco dealers, women who have charge of the public lotteries or reading-rooms. Some, like the husband of Madame Colleville, Celestine's rival, play in the orchestra of a theatre; others like du Bruel, write vaudeville, comic operas, melodramas, or act as prompters behind the scenes. We may mention among them Messrs. Planard, Sewrin, etc. Pigault-Lebrun, Piis, Duvicquet, in their day, were in government employ. Monsieur Scribe's head-librarian was a clerk in the Treasury.

Besides such information as this, Rabourdin's memorandum contained an inquiry into the moral and physical capacities and faculties necessary in those who were to examine the intelligence, aptitude for labor, and sound health of the applicants for government service,—three indispensable qualities in men who are to bear the burden of public affairs and should do their business well and quickly. But this careful study, the result of ten years' observation and experience, and of a long acquaintance with men and things obtained by intercourse with the various functionaries in the different ministries, would assuredly have, to those who did not see its purport and connection, an air of treachery and police espial. If a single page of these papers were to fall under the eye of those concerned, Monsieur Rabourdin was lost. Sebastien, who admired his chief without reservation, and who was, as yet, wholly ignorant of the evils of bureaucracy, had the follies of guilelessness as well as its grace. Blamed on a former occasion for carrying away these papers, he now bravely acknowledged his fault to its fullest extent; he related how he had put away both the memorandum and the copy carefully in a box in the office where no one would ever find them. Tears rolled from his eyes as he realized the greatness of his offence.

"Come, come!" said Rabourdin, kindly. "Don't be so imprudent again, but never mind now. Go to the office very early tomorrow morning; here is the key of a small safe which is in my roller secretary; it shuts with a combination lock. You can open it with the word 'sky'; put the memorandum and your copy into it and shut it carefully."

This proof of confidence dried the poor fellow's tears. Rabourdin advised him to take a cup of tea and some cakes.

"Mamma forbids me to drink tea, on account of my chest," said Sebastien.

"Well, then, my dear child," said the imposing Madame Rabourdin, who wished to appear gracious, "here are some sandwiches and cream; come and sit by me."

She made Sebastien sit down beside her, and the lad's heart rose in his throat as he felt the robe of this divinity brush the sleeve of his coat. Just then the beautiful woman caught sight of Monsieur des Lupeaulx standing in the doorway. She smiled, and not waiting till he came to her, she went to him.

"Why do you stay there as if you were sulking?" she asked.

"I am not sulking," he returned; "I came to announce some good news, but the thought has overtaken me that it will only add to your severity towards me. I fancy myself six months hence almost a stranger to you. Yes, you are too clever, and I too experienced,—too blase, if you like,—for either of us to deceive the other. Your end is attained without its costing you more than a few

smiles and gracious words.”

“Deceive each other! what can you mean?” she cried, in a hurt tone.

“Yes; Monsieur de la Billardiere is dying, and from what the minister told me this evening I judge that your husband will be appointed in his place.”

He thereupon related what he called his scene at the ministry and the jealousy of the countess, repeating her remarks about the invitation he had asked her to send to Madame Rabourdin.

“Monsieur des Lupeaulx,” said Madame Rabourdin, with dignity, “permit me to tell you that my husband is the oldest head-clerk as well as the most capable man in the division; also that the appointment of La Billardiere over his head made much talk in the service, and that my husband has stayed on for the last year expecting this promotion, for which he has really no competitor and no rival.”

“That is true.”

“Well, then,” she resumed, smiling and showing her handsome teeth, “how can you suppose that the friendship I feel for you is marred by a thought of self-interest? Why should you think me capable of that?”

Des Lupeaulx made a gesture of admiring denial.

“Ah!” she continued, “the heart of woman will always remain a secret for even the cleverest of men. Yes, I welcomed you to my house with the greatest pleasure; and there was, I admit, a motive of self-interest behind my pleasure —”

“Ah!”

“You have a career before you,” she whispered in his ear, “a future without limit; you will be deputy, minister!” (What happiness for an ambitious man when such things as these are warbled in his ear by the sweet voice of a pretty woman!) “Oh, yes! I know you better than you know yourself. Rabourdin is a man who could be of immense service to you in such a career; he could do the steady work while you were in the Chamber. Just as you dream of the ministry, so I dream of seeing Rabourdin in the Council of State, and general director. It is therefore my object to draw together two men who can never injure, but, on the contrary, must greatly help each other. Isn’t that a woman’s mission? If you are friends, you will both rise the faster, and it is surely high time that each of you made hay. I have burned my ships,” she added, smiling. “But you are not as frank with me as I have been with you.”

“You would not listen to me if I were,” he replied, with a melancholy air, in spite of the deep inward satisfaction her remarks gave him. “What would such future promotions avail me, if you dismiss me now?”

“Before I listen to you,” she replied, with naive Parisian liveliness, “we must be able to understand each other.”

And she left the old fop to go and speak with Madame de Chessel, a countess from the provinces, who seemed about to take leave.

“That is a very extraordinary woman,” said des Lupeaulx to himself. “I don’t know my own self when I am with her.”

Accordingly, this man of no principle, who six years earlier had kept a ballet-girl, and who now, thanks to his position, made himself a seraglio with the pretty wives of the under-clerks, and lived in the world of journalists and actresses, became devotedly attentive all the evening to Celestine, and was the last to leave the house.

“At last!” thought Madame Rabourdin, as she undressed that night, “we have the place! Twelve thousand francs a year and perquisites, beside the rents of our farms at Grajeux,—nearly twenty thousand francs a year. It is not affluence, but at least it isn’t poverty.”

CHAPTER IV. THREE-QUARTER LENGTH PORTRAITS OF CERTAIN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

If it were possible for literature to use the microscope of the Leuwenhoeks, the Malpighis, and the Raspails (an attempt once made by Hoffman, of Berlin), and if we could magnify and then picture the teredos navalis, in other words, those ship-worms which brought Holland within an inch of collapsing by honey-combing her dykes, we might have been able to give a more distinct idea of Messieurs Gigonnet, Baudoyer, Saillard, Gaudron, Falleix, Transon, Godard and company, borers and burrowers, who proved their undermining power in the thirtieth year of this century.

But now it is time to show another set of teredos, who burrowed and swarmed in the government offices where the principal scenes of our present study took place.

In Paris nearly all these government bureaus resemble each other. Into whatever ministry you penetrate to ask some slight favor, or to get redress for a trifling wrong, you will find the same dark corridors, ill-lighted stairways, doors with oval panes of glass like eyes, as at the theatre. In the first room as you enter you will find the office servant; in the second, the under-clerks; the private office of the second head-clerk is to the right or left, and further on is that of the head of the bureau. As to the important personage called, under the Empire, head of division, then, under the Restoration, director, and now by the

former name, head or chief of division, he lives either above or below the offices of his three or four different bureaus.

Speaking in the administrative sense, a bureau consists of a man-servant, several supernumeraries (who do the work gratis for a certain number of years), various copying clerks, writers of bills and deeds, order clerks, principal clerks, second or under head-clerk, and head-clerk, otherwise called head or chief of the bureau. These denominational titles vary under some administrations; for instance, the order-clerks are sometimes called auditors, or again, book-keepers.

Paved like the corridor, and hung with a shabby paper, the first room, where the servant is stationed, is furnished with a stove, a large black table with inkstand, pens, and paper, and benches, but no mats on which to wipe the public feet. The clerk's office beyond is a large room, tolerably well lighted, but seldom floored with wood. Wooden floors and fireplaces are commonly kept sacred to heads of bureaus and divisions; and so are closets, wardrobes, mahogany tables, sofas and armchairs covered with red or green morocco, silk curtains, and other articles of administrative luxury. The clerk's office contents itself with a stove, the pipe of which goes into the chimney, if there be a chimney. The wall paper is plain and all of one color, usually green or brown. The tables are of black wood. The private characteristics of the several clerks often crop out in their method of settling themselves at their desks,—the chilly one has a wooden footstool under his feet; the man with a bilious temperament has a metal mat; the lymphatic being who dreads draughts constructs a fortification of boxes on a screen. The door of the under-head-clerk's office always stands open so that he may keep an eye to some extent on his subordinates.

Perhaps an exact description of Monsieur de la Billardiere's division will suffice to give foreigners and provincials an idea of the internal manners and customs of a government office; the chief features of which are probably much the same in the civil service of all European governments.

In the first place, picture to yourself the man who is thus described in the Yearly Register:—

"Chief of Division.—Monsieur la baron Flamet de la Billardiere (Athanase-Jean-Francois-Michel) formerly provost-marshal of the department of the Correze, gentleman in ordinary of the bed-chamber, president of the college of the department of the Dordogne, officer of the Legion of honor, knight of Saint Louis and of the foreign orders of Christ, Isabella, Saint Wladimir, etc., member of the Academy of Gers, and other learned bodies, vice-president of the Society of Belles-lettres, member of the Association of Saint-Joseph and of the Society of Prisons, one of the mayors of Paris, etc."

The person who requires so much typographic space was at this time occupying an area five feet six in length by thirty-six inches in width in a bed, his head adorned with a cotton night-cap tied on by flame-colored ribbons; attended by Despleins, the King's surgeon, and young doctor Bianchon, flanked by two old female relatives, surrounded by phials of all kinds, bandages, appliances, and various mortuary instruments, and watched over by the curate of Saint-Roch, who was advising him to think of his salvation.

La Billardiere's division occupied the upper floor of a magnificent mansion, in which the vast official ocean of a ministry was contained. A wide landing separated its two bureaus, the doors of which were duly labelled. The private offices and antechambers of the heads of the two bureaus, Monsieur Rabourdin and Monsieur Baudoyer, were below on the second floor, and beyond that of Monsieur Rabourdin were the antechamber, salon, and two offices of Monsieur de la Billardiere.

On the first floor, divided in two by an entresol, were the living rooms and office of Monsieur Ernest de la Briere, an occult and powerful personage who must be described in a few words, for he well deserves the parenthesis. This young man held, during the whole time that this particular administration lasted, the position of private secretary to the minister. His apartment was connected by a secret door with the private office of his Excellency. A private secretary is to the minister himself what des Lupeaulx was to the ministry at large. The same difference existed between young La Briere and des Lupeaulx that there is between an aide-de-camp and a chief of staff. This ministerial apprentice decamps when his protector leaves office, returning sometimes when he returns. If the minister enjoys the royal favor when he falls, or still has parliamentary hopes, he takes his secretary with him into retirement only to bring him back on his return; otherwise he puts him to grass in some of the various administrative pastures,—for instance, in the Court of Exchequer, that wayside refuge where private secretaries wait for the storm to blow over. The young man is not precisely a government official; he is a political character, however; and sometimes his politics are limited to those of one man. When we think of the number of letters it is the private secretary's fate to open and read, besides all his other avocations, it is very evident that under a monarchical government his services would be well paid for. A drudge of this kind costs ten or twenty thousand francs a year; and he enjoys, moreover, the opera-boxes, the social invitations, and the carriages of the minister. The Emperor of Russia would be thankful to be able to pay fifty thousand a year to one of these amiable constitutional poodles, so gentle, so nicely curled, so caressing, so docile, always spick and span,—careful watch-dogs besides, and faithful to a degree! But the private secretary is a product of the representative government hot-house; he is propagated and developed there, and there only. Under a monarchy you will find none but courtiers and vassals, whereas under

a constitutional government you may be flattered, served, and adulated by free men. In France ministers are better off than kings or women; they have some one who thoroughly understands them. Perhaps, indeed, the private secretary is to be pitied as much as women and white paper. They are nonentities who are made to bear all things. They are allowed no talents except hidden ones, which must be employed in the service of their ministers. A public show of talent would ruin them. The private secretary is therefore an intimate friend in the gift of government—However, let us return to the bureaus.

Three men-servants lived in peace in the Billardiere division, to wit: a footman for the two bureaus, another for the service of the two chiefs, and a third for the director of the division himself. All three were lodged, warmed, and clothed by the State, and wore the well-known livery of the State, blue coat with red pipings for undress, and broad red, white, and blue braid for great occasions. La Billardiere's man had the air of a gentleman-usher, an innovation which gave an aspect of dignity to the division.

Pillars of the ministry, experts in all manners and customs bureaucratic, well-warmed and clothed at the State's expense, growing rich by reason of their few wants, these lackeys saw completely through the government officials, collectively and individually. They had no better way of amusing their idle hours than by observing these personages and studying their peculiarities. They knew how far to trust the clerks with loans of money, doing their various commissions with absolute discretion; they pawned and took out of pawn, bought up bills when due, and lent money without interest, albeit no clerk ever borrowed of them without returning a "gratification." These servants without a master received a salary of nine hundred francs a year; new years' gifts and "gratifications" brought their emoluments to twelve hundred francs, and they made almost as much money by serving breakfasts to the clerks at the office.

The elder of these men, who was also the richest, waited upon the main body of the clerks. He was sixty years of age, with white hair cropped short like a brush; stout, thickset, and apoplectic about the neck, with a vulgar pimpled face, gray eyes, and a mouth like a furnace door; such was the profile portrait of Antoine, the oldest attendant in the ministry. He had brought his two nephews, Laurent and Gabriel, from Echelles in Savoie,—one to serve the heads of the bureaus, the other the director himself. All three came to open the offices and clean them, between seven and eight o'clock in the morning; at which time they read the newspapers and talked civil service politics from their point of view with the servants of other divisions, exchanging the bureaucratic gossip. In common with servants of modern houses who know their masters' private affairs thoroughly, they lived at the ministry like spiders at the centre of a web, where they felt the slightest jar of the fabric.

On a Thursday evening, the day after the ministerial reception and Madame Rabourdin's evening party, just as Antoine was trimming his beard and his nephews were assisting him in the antechamber of the division on the upper floor, they were surprised by the unexpected arrival of one of the clerks.

"That's Monsieur Dutocq," said Antoine. "I know him by that pickpocket step of his. He is always moving round on the sly, that man. He is on your back before you know it. Yesterday, contrary to his usual ways, he outstayed the last man in the office; such a thing hasn't happened three times since he has been at the ministry."

Here follows the portrait of Monsieur Dutocq, order-clerk in the Rabourdin bureau: Thirty-eight years old, oblong face and bilious skin, grizzled hair always cut close, low forehead, heavy eyebrows meeting together, a crooked nose and pinched lips; tall, the right shoulder slightly higher than the left; brown coat, black waistcoat, silk cravat, yellowish trousers, black woollen stockings, and shoes with flapping bows; thus you behold him. Idle and incapable, he hated Rabourdin,—naturally enough, for Rabourdin had no vice to flatter, and no bad or weak side on which Dutocq could make himself useful. Far too noble to injure a clerk, the chief was also too clear-sighted to be deceived by any make-believe. Dutocq kept his place therefore solely through Rabourdin's generosity, and was very certain that he could never be promoted if the latter succeeded La Billardiere. Though he knew himself incapable of important work, Dutocq was well aware that in a government office incapacity was no hindrance to advancement; La Billardiere's own appointment over the head of so capable a man as Rabourdin had been a striking and fatal example of this. Wickedness combined with self-interest works with a power equivalent to that of intellect; evilly disposed and wholly self-interested, Dutocq had endeavoured to strengthen his position by becoming a spy in all the offices. After 1816 he assumed a marked religious tone, foreseeing the favor which the fools of those days would bestow on those they indiscriminately called Jesuits. Belonging to that fraternity in spirit, though not admitted to its rites, Dutocq went from bureau to bureau, sounded consciences by recounting immoral jests, and then reported and paraphrased results to des Lupeaulx; the latter thus learned all the trivial events of the ministry, and often surprised the minister by his consummate knowledge of what was going on. He tolerated Dutocq under the idea that circumstances might some day make him useful, were it only to get him or some distinguished friend of his out of a scrape by a disgraceful marriage. The two understood each other well. Dutocq had succeeded Monsieur Poiret the elder, who had retired in 1814, and now lived in the pension Vanquer in the Latin quarter. Dutocq himself lived in a pension in the rue de Beaune, and spent his evenings in the Palais-Royal, sometimes going to the theatre, thanks to du Bruel, who gave him an author's ticket about once a week. And now, a word on du Bruel.

Though Sebastien did his work at the office for the small compensation we have mentioned, du Bruel was in the habit of coming there to advertise the fact that he was the under-head-clerk and to draw his salary. His real work was that of dramatic critic to a leading ministerial journal, in which he also wrote articles inspired by the ministers,—a very well understood, clearly defined, and quite unassailable position. Du Bruel was not lacking in those diplomatic little tricks which go so far to conciliate general good-will. He sent Madame Rabourdin an opera-box for a first representation, took her there in a carriage and brought her back,—an attention which evidently pleased her. Rabourdin, who was never exacting with his subordinates allowed du Bruel to go off to rehearsals, come to the office at his own hours, and work at his vaudevilles when there. Monsieur le Duc de Chaulieu, the minister, knew that du Bruel was writing a novel which was to be dedicated to himself. Dressed with the careless ease of a theatre man, du Bruel wore, in the morning, trousers strapped under his feet, shoes with gaiters, a waistcoat evidently vamped over, an olive surtout, and a black cravat. At night he played the gentleman in elegant clothes. He lived, for good reasons, in the same house as Florine, an actress for whom he wrote plays. Du Bruel, or to give him his pen name, Cursy, was working just now at a piece in five acts for the Francais. Sebastien was devoted to the author,—who occasionally gave him tickets to the pit,—and applauded his pieces at the parts which du Bruel told him were of doubtful interest, with all the faith and enthusiasm of his years. In fact, the youth looked upon the playwright as a great author, and it was to Sebastien that du Bruel said, the day after a first representation of a vaudeville produced, like all vaudevilles, by three collaborators, “The audience preferred the scenes written by two.”

“Why don’t you write alone?” asked Sebastien naively.

There were good reasons why du Bruel did not write alone. He was the third of an author. A dramatic writer, as few people know, is made up of three individuals; first, the man with brains who invents the subject and maps out the structure, or scenario, of the vaudeville; second, the plodder, who works the piece into shape; and third, the toucher-up, who sets the songs to music, arranges the chorus and concerted pieces and fits them into their right place, and finally writes the puffs and advertisements. Du Bruel was a plodder; at the office he read the newest books, extracted their wit, and laid it by for use in his dialogues. He was liked by his collaborators on account of his carefulness; the man with brains, sure of being understood, could cross his arms and feel that his ideas would be well rendered. The clerks in the office liked their companion well enough to attend a first performance of his plays in a body and applaud them, for he really deserved the title of a good fellow. His hand went readily to his pocket; ices and punch were bestowed without prodding, and he loaned fifty francs without asking them back. He owned a country-

house at Aulnay, laid by his money, and had, besides the four thousand five hundred francs of his salary under government, twelve hundred francs pension from the civil list, and eight hundred from the three hundred thousand francs fund voted by the Chambers for encouragement of the Arts. Add to these diverse emoluments nine thousand francs earned by his quarters, thirds, and halves of plays in three different theatres, and you will readily understand that such a man must be physically round, fat, and comfortable, with the face of a worthy capitalist. As to morals, he was the lover and the beloved of Tullia and felt himself preferred in heart to the brilliant Duc de Rhetore, the lover in chief.

Dutocq had seen with great uneasiness what he called the liaison of des Lupeaulx with Madame Rabourdin, and his silent wrath on the subject was accumulating. He had too prying an eye not to have guessed that Rabourdin was engaged in some great work outside of his official labors, and he was provoked to feel that he knew nothing about it, whereas that little Sebastien was, wholly or in part, in the secret. Dutocq was intimate with Godard, under-head-clerk to Baudoyer, and the high esteem in which Dutocq held Baudoyer was the original cause of his acquaintance with Godard; not that Dutocq was sincere even in this; but by praising Baudoyer and saying nothing of Rabourdin he satisfied his hatred after the fashion of little minds.

Joseph Godard, a cousin of Mitral on the mother’s side, made pretension to the hand of Mademoiselle Baudoyer, not perceiving that her mother was laying siege to Falliex as a son-in-law. He brought little gifts to the young lady, artificial flowers, bonbons on New-Year’s day and pretty boxes for her birthday. Twenty-six years of age, a worker working without purpose, steady as a girl, monotonous and apathetic, holding cafes, cigars, and horsemanship in detestation, going to bed regularly at ten o’clock and rising at seven, gifted with some social talents, such as playing quadrille music on the flute, which first brought him into favor with the Saillards and the Baudoyers. He was moreover a fifer in the National Guard,—to escape his turn of sitting up all night in a barrack-room. Godard was devoted more especially to natural history. He made collections of shells and minerals, knew how to stuff birds, kept a mass of curiosities bought for nothing in his bedroom; took possession of phials and empty perfume bottles for his specimens; pinned butterflies and beetles under glass, hung Chinese parasols on the walls, together with dried fishskins. He lived with his sister, an artificial-flower maker, in the due de Richelieu. Though much admired by mammas this model young man was looked down upon by his sister’s shop-girls, who had tried to inveigle him. Slim and lean, of medium height, with dark circles round his eyes, Joseph Godard took little care of his person; his clothes were ill-cut, his trousers bagged, he wore white stockings at all seasons of the year, a hat with a narrow brim and laced shoes. He was always complaining of his digestion. His

principal vice was a mania for proposing rural parties during the summer season, excursions to Montmorency, picnics on the grass, and visits to creameries on the boulevard du Mont-Parnasse. For the last six months Dutocq had taken to visiting Mademoiselle Godard from time to time, with certain views of his own, hoping to discover in her establishment some female treasure.

Thus Baudoyer had a pair of henchmen in Dutocq and Godard. Monsieur Saillard, too innocent to judge rightly of Dutocq, was in the habit of paying him frequent little visits at the office. Young La Billardiere, the director's son, placed as supernumerary with Baudoyer, made another member of the clique. The clever heads in the offices laughed much at this alliance of incapables. Bixiou named Baudoyer, Godard, and Dutocq a "Trinity without the Spirit," and little La Billardiere the "Pascal Lamb."

"You are early this morning," said Antoine to Dutocq, laughing.

"So are you, Antoine," answered Dutocq; "you see, the newspapers do come earlier than you let us have them at the office."

"They did to-day, by chance," replied Antoine, not disconcerted; "they never come two days together at the same hour."

The two nephews looked at each other as if to say, in admiration of their uncle, "What cheek he has!"

"Though I make two sous by all his breakfasts," muttered Antoine, as he heard Monsieur Dutocq close the office door, "I'd give them up to get that man out of our division."

"Ah, Monsieur Sebastien, you are not the first here to-day," said Antoine, a quarter of an hour later, to the supernumerary.

"Who is here?" asked the poor lad, turning pale.

"Monsieur Dutocq," answered Laurent.

Virgin natures have, beyond all others, the inexplicable gift of second-sight, the reason of which lies perhaps in the purity of their nervous systems, which are, as it were, brand-new. Sebastien had long guessed Dutocq's hatred to his revered Rabourdin. So that when Laurent uttered his name a dreadful presentiment took possession of the lad's mind, and crying out, "I feared it!" he flew like an arrow into the corridor.

"There is going to be a row in the division," said Antoine, shaking his white head as he put on his livery. "It is very certain that Monsieur le baron is off to his account. Yes, Madame Gruget, the nurse, told me he couldn't live through the day. What a stir there'll be! oh! won't there! Go along, you fellows, and see if the stoves are drawing properly. Heavens and earth! our

world is coming down about our ears."

"That poor young one," said Laurent, "had a sort of sunstroke when he heard that Jesuit of a Dutocq had got here before him."

"I have told him a dozen times,—for after all one ought to tell the truth to an honest clerk, and what I call an honest clerk is one like that little fellow who gives us 'recta' his ten francs on New-Year's day,—I have said to him again and again: The more you work the more they'll make you work, and they won't promote you. He doesn't listen to me; he tires himself out staying here till five o'clock, an hour after all the others have gone. Folly! he'll never get on that way! The proof is that not a word has been said about giving him an appointment, though he has been here two years. It's a shame! it makes my blood boil."

"Monsieur Rabourdin is very fond of Monsieur Sebastien," said Laurent.

"But Monsieur Rabourdin isn't a minister," retorted Antoine; "it will be a hot day when that happens, and the hens will have teeth; he is too—but mum! When I think that I carry salaries to those humbugs who stay away and do as they please, while that poor little La Roche works himself to death, I ask myself if God ever thinks of the civil service. And what do they give you, these pets of Monsieur le marechal and Monsieur le duc? 'Thank you, my dear Antoine, thank you,' with a gracious nod! Pack of sluggards! go to work, or you'll bring another revolution about your ears. Didn't see such goings-on under Monsieur Robert Lindet. I know, for I served my apprenticeship under Robert Lindet. The clerks had to work in his day! You ought to have seen how they scratched paper here till midnight; why, the stoves went out and nobody noticed it. It was all because the guillotine was there! now-a-days they only mark 'em when they come in late!"

"Uncle Antoine," said Gabriel, "as you are so talkative this morning, just tell us what you think a clerk really ought to be."

"A government clerk," replied Antoine, gravely, "is a man who sits in a government office and writes. But there, there, what am I talking about? Without the clerks, where should we be, I'd like to know? Go along and look after your stoves and mind you never say harm of a government clerk, you fellows. Gabriel, the stove in the large office draws like the devil; you must turn the damper."

Antoine stationed himself at a corner of the landing whence he could see all the officials as they entered the porte-cochere; he knew every one at the ministry, and watched their behavior, observing narrowly the contrasts in their dress and appearance.

The first to arrive after Sebastien was a clerk of deeds in Rabourdin's

office named Phellion, a respectable family-man. To the influence of his chief he owed a half-scholarship for each of his two sons in the College Henri IV.; while his daughter was being educated gratis at a boarding school where his wife gave music lessons and he himself a course of history and one of geography in the evenings. He was about forty-five years of age, sergeant-major of his company in the National Guard, very compassionate in feeling and words, but wholly unable to give away a penny. Proud of his post, however, and satisfied with his lot, he applied himself faithfully to serve the government, believed he was useful to his country, and boasted of his indifference to politics, knowing none but those of the men in power. Monsieur Rabourdin pleased him highly whenever he asked him to stay half an hour longer to finish a piece of work. On such occasions he would say, when he reached home, “Public affairs detained me; when a man belongs to the government he is no longer master of himself.” He compiled books of questions and answers on various studies for the use of young ladies in boarding-schools. These little “solid treatises,” as he called them, were sold at the University library under the name of “Historical and Geographic Catechisms.” Feeling himself in duty bound to offer a copy of each volume, bound in red morocco, to Monsieur Rabourdin, he always came in full dress to present them,—breeches and silk stockings, and shoes with gold buckles. Monsieur Phellion received his friends on Thursday evenings, on which occasions the company played bouillote, at five sous a game, and were regaled with cakes and beer. He had never yet dared to invite Monsieur Rabourdin to honor him with his presence, though he would have regarded such an event as the most distinguished of his life. He said if he could leave one of his sons following in the steps of Monsieur Rabourdin he should die the happiest father in the world.

One of his greatest pleasures was to explore the environs of Paris, which he did with a map. He knew every inch of Arcueil, Bievre, Fontenay-aux-Roses, and Aulnay, so famous as the resort of great writers, and hoped in time to know the whole western side of the country around Paris. He intended to put his eldest son into a government office and his second into the Ecole Polytechnique. He often said to the elder, “When you have the honor to be a government clerk”; though he suspected him of a preference for the exact sciences and did his best to repress it, mentally resolved to abandon the lad to his own devices if he persisted. When Rabourdin sent for him to come down and receive instructions about some particular piece of work, Phellion gave all his mind to it,—listening to every word the chief said, as a dilettante listens to an air at the Opera. Silent in the office, with his feet in the air resting on a wooden desk, and never moving them, he studied his task conscientiously. His official letters were written with the utmost gravity, and transmitted the commands of the minister in solemn phrases. Monsieur Phellion’s face was

that of a pensive ram, with little color and pitted by the small-pox; the lips were thick and the lower one pendent; the eyes light-blue, and his figure above the common height. Neat and clean as a master of history and geography in a young ladies' school ought to be, he wore fine linen, a pleated shirt-frill, a black cashmere waistcoat, left open and showing a pair of braces embroidered by his daughter, a diamond in the bosom of his shirt, a black coat, and blue trousers. In winter he added a nut-colored box-coat with three capes, and carried a loaded stick, necessitated, he said, by the profound solitude of the quarter in which he lived. He had given up taking snuff, and referred to this reform as a striking example of the empire a man could exercise over himself. Monsieur Phellion came slowly up the stairs, for he was afraid of asthma, having what he called an "adipose chest." He saluted Antoine with dignity.

The next to follow was a copying-clerk, who presented a strange contrast to the virtuous Phellion. Vimeux was a young man of twenty-five, with a salary of fifteen hundred francs, well-made and graceful, with a romantic face, and eyes, hair, beard, and eyebrows as black as jet, fine teeth, charming hands, and wearing a moustache so carefully trimmed that he seemed to have made it the business and occupation of his life. Vimeux had such aptitude for work that he despatched it much quicker than any of the other clerks. "He has a gift, that young man!" Phellion said of him when he saw him cross his legs and have nothing to do for the rest of the day, having got through his appointed task; "and see what a little dandy he is!" Vimeux breakfasted on a roll and a glass of water, dined for twenty sous at Katcomb's, and lodged in a furnished room, for which he paid twelve francs a month. His happiness, his sole pleasure in life, was dress. He ruined himself in miraculous waistcoats, in trousers that were tight, half-tight, pleated, or embroidered; in superfine boots, well-made coats which outlined his elegant figure; in bewitching collars, spotless gloves, and immaculate hats. A ring with a coat of arms adorned his hand, outside his glove, from which dangled a handsome cane; with these accessories he endeavoured to assume the air and manner of a wealthy young man. After the office closed he appeared in the great walk of the Tuileries, with a tooth-pick in his mouth, as though he were a millionaire who had just dined. Always on the lookout for a woman,—an Englishwoman, a foreigner of some kind, or a widow,—who might fall in love with him, he practised the art of twirling his cane and of flinging the sort of glance which Bixiou told him was American. He smiled to show his fine teeth; he wore no socks under his boots, but he had his hair curled every day. Vimeux was prepared, in accordance with fixed principles, to marry a hunch-back with six thousand a year, or a woman of forty-five at eight thousand, or an Englishwoman for half that sum. Phellion, who delighted in his neat hand-writing, and was full of compassion for the fellow, read him lectures on the duty of giving lessons in penmanship,—an honorable career, he said, which would ameliorate existence

and even render it agreeable; he promised him a situation in a young ladies' boarding-school. But Vimeux's head was so full of his own idea that no human being could prevent him from having faith in his star. He continued to lay himself out, like a salmon at a fishmonger's, in spite of his empty stomach and the fact that he had fruitlessly exhibited his enormous moustache and his fine clothes for over three years. As he owed Antoine more than thirty francs for his breakfasts, he lowered his eyes every time he passed him; and yet he never failed at midday to ask the man to buy him a roll.

After trying to get a few reasonable ideas into this foolish head, Rabourdin had finally given up the attempt as hopeless. Adolphe (his family name was Adolphe) had lately economized on dinners and lived entirely on bread and water, to buy a pair of spurs and a riding-whip. Jokes at the expense of this starving Amadis were made only in the spirit of mischievous fun which creates vaudevilles, for he was really a kind-hearted fellow and a good comrade, who harmed no one but himself. A standing joke in the two bureaus was the question whether he wore corsets, and bets depended on it. Vimeux was originally appointed to Baudoyer's bureau, but he manoeuvred to get himself transferred to Rabourdin's, on account of Baudoyer's extreme severity in relation to what were called "the English,"—a name given by the government clerks to their creditors. "English day" means the day on which the government offices are thrown open to the public. Certain then of finding their delinquent debtors, the creditors swarm in and torment them, asking when they intend to pay, and threatening to attach their salaries. The implacable Baudoyer compelled the clerks to remain at their desks and endure this torture. "It was their place not to make debts," he said; and he considered his severity as a duty which he owed to the public weal. Rabourdin, on the contrary, protected the clerks against their creditors, and turned the latter away, saying that the government bureaus were open for public business, not private. Much ridicule pursued Vimeux in both bureaus when the clank of his spurs resounded in the corridors and on the staircases. The wag of the ministry, Bixiou, sent round a paper, headed by a caricature of his victim on a pasteboard horse, asking for subscriptions to buy him a live charger. Monsieur Baudoyer was down for a bale of hay taken from his own forage allowance, and each of the clerks wrote his little epigram; Vimeux himself, good-natured fellow that he was, subscribed under the name of "Miss Fairfax."

Handsome clerks of the Vimeux style have their salaries on which to live, and their good looks by which to make their fortune. Devoted to masked balls during the carnival, they seek their luck there, though it often escapes them. Many end the weary round by marrying milliners, or old women,—sometimes, however, young ones who are charmed with their handsome persons, and with whom they set up a romance illustrated with stupid love letters, which, nevertheless, seem to answer their purpose.

Bixiou (pronounce it Bisiou) was a draughtsman, who ridiculed Dutocq as readily as he did Rabourdin, whom he nicknamed “the virtuous woman.” Without doubt the cleverest man in the division or even in the ministry (but clever after the fashion of a monkey, without aim or sequence), Bixiou was so essentially useful to Baudoyer and Godard that they upheld and protected him in spite of his misconduct; for he did their work when they were incapable of doing it for themselves. Bixiou wanted either Godard’s or du Bruel’s place as under-head-clerk, but his conduct interfered with his promotion. Sometimes he sneered at the public service; this was usually after he had made some happy hit, such as the publication of portraits in the famous Fualdes case (for which he drew faces hap-hazard), or his sketch of the debate on the Castaing affair. At other times, when possessed with a desire to get on, he really applied himself to work, though he would soon leave off to write a vaudeville, which was never finished. A thorough egoist, a spendthrift and a miser in one,—that is to say, spending his money solely on himself,—sharp, aggressive, and indiscreet, he did mischief for mischief’s sake; above all, he attacked the weak, respected nothing and believed in nothing, neither in France, nor in God, nor in art, nor in the Greeks, nor in the Turks, nor in the monarchy,—insulting and disparaging everything that he could not comprehend. He was the first to paint a black cap on Charles X.‘s head on the five-franc coins. He mimicked Dr. Gall when lecturing, till he made the most starched of diplomatists burst their buttons. Famous for his practical jokes, he varied them with such elaborate care that he always obtained a victim. His great secret in this was the power of guessing the inmost wishes of others; he knew the way to many a castle in the air, to the dreams about which a man may be fooled because he wants to be; and he made such men sit to him for hours.

Thus it happened that this close observer, who could display unrivalled tact in developing a joke or driving home a sarcasm, was unable to use the same power to make men further his fortunes and promote him. The person he most liked to annoy was young La Billardiere, his nightmare, his detestation, whom he was nevertheless constantly wheedling so as the better to torment him on his weakest side. He wrote him love letters signed “Comtesse de M——” or “Marquise de B—“; took him to the Opera on gala days and presented him to some grisette under the clock, after calling everybody’s attention to the young fool. He allied himself with Dutocq (whom he regarded as a solemn juggler) in his hatred to Rabourdin and his praise of Baudoyer, and did his best to support him. Jean-Jaques Bixiou was the grandson of a Parisian grocer. His father, who died a colonel, left him to the care of his grandmother, who married her head-clerk, named Descoings, after the death of her first husband, and died in 1822. Finding himself without prospects on leaving college, he attempted painting, but in spite of his intimacy with Joseph Bridau, his life-long friend, he abandoned art to take up caricature, vignette designing, and drawing for

books, which twenty years later went by the name of “illustration.” The influence of the Ducs de Maufrigneuse and de Rhetore, whom he knew in the society of actresses, procured him his employment under government in 1819. On good terms with des Lupeaulx, with whom in society he stood on an equality, and intimate with du Bruel, he was a living proof of Rabourdin’s theory as to the steady deterioration of the administrative hierarchy in Paris through the personal importance which a government official may acquire outside of a government office. Short in stature but well-formed, with a delicate face remarkable for its vague likeness to Napoleon’s, thin lips, a straight chin, chestnut whiskers, twenty-seven years old, fair-skinned, with a piercing voice and sparkling eye,—such was Bixiou; a man, all sense and all wit, who abandoned himself to a mad pursuit of pleasure of every description, which threw him into a constant round of dissipation. Hunter of grisettes, smoker, jester, diner-out and frequenter of supper-parties, always tuned to the highest pitch, shining equally in the greenroom and at the balls given among the grisettes of the Allee des Veuves, he was just as surprisingly entertaining at table as at a picnic, as gay and lively at midnight on the streets as in the morning when he jumped out of bed, and yet at heart gloomy and melancholy, like most of the great comic players.

Launched into the world of actors and actresses, writers, artists, and certain women of uncertain means, he lived well, went to the theatre without paying, gambled at Frascati, and often won. Artist by nature and really profound, though by flashes only, he swayed to and fro in life like a swing, without thinking or caring of a time when the cord would break. The liveliness of his wit and the prodigal flow of his ideas made him acceptable to all persons who took pleasure in the lights of intellect; but none of his friends liked him. Incapable of checking a witty saying, he would scarify his two neighbors before a dinner was half over. In spite of his skin-deep gayety, a secret dissatisfaction with his social position could be detected in his speech; he aspired to something better, but the fatal demon hiding in his wit hindered him from acquiring the gravity which imposes on fools. He lived on the second floor of a house in the rue de Ponthieu, where he had three rooms delivered over to the untidiness of a bachelor’s establishment, in fact, a regular bivouac. He often talked of leaving France and seeking his fortune in America. No wizard could foretell the future of this young man in whom all talents were incomplete; who was incapable of perseverance, intoxicated with pleasure, and who acted on the belief that the world ended on the morrow.

In the matter of dress Bixiou had the merit of never being ridiculous; he was perhaps the only official of the ministry whose dress did not lead outsiders to say, “That man is a government clerk!” He wore elegant boots with black trousers strapped under them, a fancy waistcoat, a becoming blue coat, collars that were the never-ending gift of grisettes, one of Bandoni’s hats,

and a pair of dark-colored kid gloves. His walk and bearing, cavalier and simple both, were not without grace. He knew all this, and when des Lupeaulx summoned him for a piece of impertinence said and done about Monsieur de la Billardiere and threatened him with dismissal, Bixiou replied, “You will take me back because my clothes do credit to the ministry”; and des Lupeaulx, unable to keep from laughing, let the matter pass. The most harmless of Bixiou’s jokes perpetrated among the clerks was the one he played off upon Godard, presenting him with a butterfly just brought from China, which the worthy man keeps in his collection and exhibits to this day, blissfully unconscious that it is only painted paper. Bixiou had the patience to work up the little masterpiece for the sole purpose of hoaxing his superior.

The devil always puts a martyr near a Bixiou. Baudoyer’s bureau held the martyr, a poor copying-clerk twenty-two years of age, with a salary of fifteen hundred francs, named Auguste-Jean-Francois Minard. Minard had married for love the daughter of a porter, an artificial-flower maker employed by Mademoiselle Godard. Zelie Lorrain, a pupil, in the first place, of the Conservatoire, then by turns a danseuse, a singer, and an actress, had thought of doing as so many of the working-women do; but the fear of consequences kept her from vice. She was floating undecidedly along, when Minard appeared upon the scene with a definite proposal of marriage. Zelie earned five hundred francs a year, Minard had fifteen hundred. Believing that they could live on two thousand, they married without settlements, and started with the utmost economy. They went to live, like dove-turtles, near the barriere de Courcelles, in a little apartment at three hundred francs a year, with white cotton curtains to the windows, a Scotch paper costing fifteen sous a roll on the walls, brick floors well polished, walnut furniture in the parlor, and a tiny kitchen that was very clean. Zelie nursed her children herself when they came, cooked, made her flowers, and kept the house. There was something very touching in this happy and laborious mediocrity. Feeling that Minard truly loved her, Zelie loved him. Love begets love,—it is the abyssus abyssum of the Bible. The poor man left his bed in the morning before his wife was up, that he might fetch provisions. He carried the flowers she had finished, on his way to the bureau, and bought her materials on his way back; then, while waiting for dinner, he stamped out her leaves, trimmed the twigs, or rubbed her colors. Small, slim, and wiry, with crisp red hair, eyes of a light yellow, a skin of dazzling fairness, though blotched with red, the man had a sturdy courage that made no show. He knew the science of writing quite as well as Vimeux. At the office he kept in the background, doing his allotted task with the collected air of a man who thinks and suffers. His white eyelashes and lack of eyebrows induced the relentless Bixiou to name him “the white rabbit.” Minard—the Rabourdin of a lower sphere—was filled with the desire of placing his Zelie in better circumstances, and his mind searched the ocean of

the wants of luxury in hopes of finding an idea, of making some discovery or some improvement which would bring him a rapid fortune. His apparent dulness was really caused by the continual tension of his mind; he went over the history of Cephalic Oils and the Paste of Sultans, lucifer matches and portable gas, jointed sockets for hydrostatic lamps,—in short, all the infinitely little inventions of material civilization which pay so well. He bore Bixiou's jests as a busy man bears the buzzing of an insect; he was not even annoyed by them. In spite of his cleverness, Bixiou never perceived the profound contempt which Minard felt for him. Minard never dreamed of quarrelling, however,—regarding it as a loss of time. After a while his composure tired out his tormentor. He always breakfasted with his wife, and ate nothing at the office. Once a month he took Zelie to the theatre, with tickets bestowed by du Bruel or Bixiou; for Bixiou was capable of anything, even of doing a kindness. Monsieur and Madame Minard paid their visits in person on New-Year's day. Those who saw them often asked how it was that a woman could keep her husband in good clothes, wear a Leghorn bonnet with flowers, embroidered muslin dresses, silk mantles, prunella boots, handsome fichus, a Chinese parasol, and drive home in a hackney-coach, and yet be virtuous; while Madame Colleville and other "ladies" of her kind could scarcely make ends meet, though they had double Madame Minard's means.

In the two bureaus were two clerks so devoted to each other that their friendship became the butt of all the rest. He of the bureau Baudoyer, named Colleville, was chief-clerk, and would have been head of the bureau long before if the Restoration had never happened. His wife was as clever in her way as Madame Rabourdin in hers. Colleville, who was son of a first violin at the opera, fell in love with the daughter of a celebrated danseuse. Flavie Minoret, one of those capable and charming Parisian women who know how to make their husbands happy and yet preserve their own liberty, made the Colleville home a rendezvous for all our best artists and orators. Colleville's humble position under government was forgotten there. Flavie's conduct gave such food for gossip, however, that Madame Rabourdin had declined all her invitations. The friend in Rabourdin's bureau to whom Colleville was so attached was named Thuillier. All who knew one knew the other. Thuillier, called "the handsome Thuillier," an ex-Lothario, led as idle a life as Colleville led a busy one. Colleville, government official in the mornings and first clarionet at the Opera-Comique at night, worked hard to maintain his family, though he was not without influential friends. He was looked upon as a very shrewd man,—all the more, perhaps, because he hid his ambitions under a show of indifference. Apparently content with his lot and liking work, he found every one, even the chiefs, ready to protect his brave career. During the last few weeks Madame Colleville had made an evident change in the household, and seemed to be taking to piety. This gave rise to a vague report

in the bureaus that she thought of securing some more powerful influence than that of Francois Keller, the famous orator, who had been one of her chief adorers, but who, so far, had failed to obtain a better place for her husband. Flavie had, about this time—and it was one of her mistakes—turned for help to des Lupeaulx.

Colleville had a passion for reading the horoscopes of famous men in the anagram of their names. He passed whole months in decomposing and recomposing words and fitting them to new meanings. “Un Corse la finira,” found within the words, “Revolution Francaise”; “Eh, c’est large nez,” in “Charles Genest,” an abbe at the court of Louis XIV., whose huge nose is recorded by Saint-Simon as the delight of the Duc de Bourgogne (the exigencies of this last anagram required the substitution of a z for an s),—were a never-ending marvel to Colleville. Raising the anagram to the height of a science, he declared that the destiny of every man was written in the words or phrase given by the transposition of the letters of his names and titles; and his patriotism struggled hard to suppress the fact—signal evidence for his theory—that in Horatio Nelson, “honor est a Nilo.” Ever since the accession of Charles X., he had bestowed much thought on the king’s anagram. Thuillier, who was fond of making puns, declared that an anagram was nothing more than a pun on letters. The sight of Colleville, a man of real feeling, bound almost indissolubly to Thuillier, the model of an egoist, presented a difficult problem to the mind of an observer. The clerks in the offices explained it by saying, “Thuillier is rich, and the Colleville household costly.” This friendship, however, consolidated by time, was based on feelings and on facts which naturally explained it; an account of which may be found elsewhere (see “Les Petits Bourgeois”). We may remark in passing that though Madame Colleville was well known in the bureaus, the existence of Madame Thuillier was almost unknown there. Colleville, an active man, burdened with a family of children, was fat, round, and jolly, whereas Thuillier, “the beau of the Empire” without apparent anxieties and always at leisure, was slender and thin, with a livid face and a melancholy air. “We never know,” said Rabourdin, speaking of the two men, “whether our friendships are born of likeness or of contrast.”

Unlike these Siamese twins, two other clerks, Chazelle and Paulmier, were forever squabbling. One smoked, the other took snuff, and the merits of their respective use of tobacco were the origin of ceaseless disputes. Chazelle’s home, which was tyrannized over by a wife, furnished a subject of endless ridicule to Paulmier; whereas Paulmier, a bachelor, often half-starved like Vimeux, with ragged clothes and half-concealed penury was a fruitful source of ridicule to Chazelle. Both were beginning to show a protuberant stomach; Chazelle’s, which was round and projecting, had the impertinence, so Bixiou said, to enter the room first; Paulmier’s corporation spread to right and left. A favorite amusement with Bixiou was to measure them quarterly. The two

clerks, by dint of quarrelling over the details of their lives, and washing much of their dirty linen at the office, had obtained the disrepute which they merited. “Do you take me for a Chazelle?” was a frequent saying that served to end many an annoying discussion.

Monsieur Poiret junior, called “junior” to distinguish him from his brother Monsieur Poiret senior (now living in the Maison Vanquer, where Poiret junior sometimes dined, intending to end his days in the same retreat), had spent thirty years in the Civil Service. Nature herself is not so fixed and unvarying in her evolutions as was Poiret junior in all the acts of his daily life; he always laid his things in precisely the same place, put his pen in the same rack, sat down in his seat at the same hour, warmed himself at the stove at the same moment of the day. His sole vanity consisted in wearing an infallible watch, timed daily at the Hotel de Ville as he passed it on his way to the office. From six to eight o’clock in the morning he kept the books of a large shop in the rue Saint-Antoine, and from six to eight o’clock in the evening those of the Maison Camusot, in the rue des Bourdonnais. He thus earned three thousand francs a year, counting his salary from the government. In a few months his term of service would be up, when he would retire on a pension; he therefore showed the utmost indifference to the political intrigues of the bureaus. Like his elder brother, to whom retirement from active service had proved a fatal blow, he would probably grow an old man when he could no longer come from his home to the ministry, sit in the same chair and copy a certain number of pages. Poiret’s eyes were dim, his glance weak and lifeless, his skin discolored and wrinkled, gray in tone and speckled with bluish dots; his nose flat, his lips drawn inward to the mouth, where a few defective teeth still lingered. His gray hair, flattened to the head by the pressure of his hat, gave him the look of an ecclesiastic,—a resemblance he would scarcely have liked, for he hated priests and clergy, though he could give no reasons for his anti-religious views. This antipathy, however, did not prevent him from being extremely attached to whatever administration happened to be in power. He never buttoned his old green coat, even on the coldest days, and he always wore shoes with ties, and black trousers.

No human life was ever lived so thoroughly by rule. Poiret kept all his receipted bills, even the most trifling, and all his account-books, wrapped in old shirts and put away according to their respective years from the time of his entrance at the ministry. Rough copies of his letters were dated and put away in a box, ticketed “My Correspondence.” He dined at the same restaurant (the Sucking Calf in the place du Chatelet), and sat in the same place, which the waiters kept for him. He never gave five minutes more time to the shop in the rue Saint Antoine than justly belonged to it, and at half-past eight precisely he reached the Cafe David, where he breakfasted and remained till eleven. There he listened to political discussions, his arms crossed on his cane, his chin in his

right hand, never saying a word. The dame du comptoir, the only woman to whom he ever spoke with pleasure, was the sole confidant of the little events of his life, for his seat was close to her counter. He played dominoes, the only game he was capable of understanding. When his partners did not happen to be present, he usually went to sleep with his back against the wainscot, holding a newspaper in his hand, the wooden file resting on the marble of his table. He was interested in the buildings going up in Paris, and spent his Sundays in walking about to examine them. He was often heard to say, “I saw the Louvre emerge from its rubbish; I saw the birth of the place du Chatelet, the quai aux Fleurs and the Markets.” He and his brother, both born at Troyes, were sent in youth to serve their apprenticeship in a government office. Their mother made herself notorious by misconduct, and the two brothers had the grief of hearing of her death in the hospital at Troyes, although they had frequently sent money for her support. This event led them both not only to abjure marriage, but to feel a horror of children; ill at ease with them, they feared them as others fear madmen, and watched them with haggard eyes.

Since the day when he first came to Paris Poiret junior had never gone outside the city. He began at that time to keep a journal of his life, in which he noted down all the striking events of his day. Du Bruel told him that Lord Byron did the same thing. This likeness filled Poiret junior with delight, and led him to buy the works of Lord Byron, translated by Chastopalli, of which he did not understand a word. At the office he was often seen in a melancholy attitude, as though absorbed in thought, when in fact he was thinking of nothing at all. He did not know a single person in the house where he lived, and always carried the keys of his apartment about with him. On New-Year’s day he went round and left his own cards on all the clerks of the division. Bixiou took it into his head on one of the hottest of dog-days to put a layer of lard under the lining of a certain old hat which Poiret junior (he was, by the bye, fifty-two years old) had worn for the last nine years. Bixiou, who had never seen any other hat on Poiret’s head, dreamed of it and declared he tasted it in his food; he therefore resolved, in the interests of his digestion, to relieve the bureau of the sight of that amorphous old hat. Poiret junior left the office regularly at four o’clock. As he walked along, the sun’s rays reflected from the pavements and walls produced a tropical heat; he felt that his head was inundated,—he, who never perspired! Feeling that he was ill, or on the point of being so, instead of going as usual to the Sucking Calf he went home, drew out from his desk the journal of his life, and recorded the fact in the following manner:—

“To-day, July 3, 1823, overtaken by extraordinary perspiration, a sign, perhaps, of the sweating-sickness, a malady which prevails in Champagne. I am about to consult Doctor Haudry. The disease first appeared as I reached the highest part of the quai des Ecoles.”

Suddenly, having taken off his hat, he became aware that the mysterious sweat had some cause independent of his own person. He wiped his face, examined the hat, and could find nothing, for he did not venture to take out the lining. All this he noted in his journal:—

“Carried my hat to the Sieur Tournan, hat-maker in the rue Saint-Martin, for the reason that I suspect some unknown cause for this perspiration, which, in that case, might not be perspiration, but, possibly, the effect of something lately added, or formerly done, to my hat.”

Monsieur Tournan at once informed his customer of the presence of a greasy substance, obtained by the trying-out of the fat of a pig or sow. The next day Poiret appeared at the office with another hat, lent by Monsieur Tournan while a new one was making; but he did not sleep that night until he had added the following sentence to the preceding entries in his journal: “It is asserted that my hat contained lard, the fat of a pig.”

This inexplicable fact occupied the intellect of Poiret junior for the space of two weeks; and he never knew how the phenomenon was produced. The clerks told him tales of showers of frogs, and other dog-day wonders, also the startling fact that an imprint of the head of Napoleon had been found in the root of a young elm, with other eccentricities of natural history. Vimeux informed him that one day his hat—his, Vimeux’s—had stained his forehead black, and that hat-makers were in the habit of using drugs. After that Poiret paid many visits to Monsieur Tournan to inquire into his methods of manufacture.

In the Rabourdin bureau was a clerk who played the man of courage and audacity, professed the opinions of the Left centre, and rebelled against the tyrannies of Baudoyer as exercised upon what he called the unhappy slaves of that office. His name was Fleury. He boldly subscribed to an opposition newspaper, wore a gray hat with a broad brim, red bands on his blue trousers, a blue waistcoat with gilt buttons, and a surtout coat crossed over the breast like that of a quartermaster of gendarmerie. Though unyielding in his opinions, he continued to be employed in the service, all the while predicting a fatal end to a government which persisted in upholding religion. He openly avowed his sympathy for Napoleon, now that the death of that great man put an end to the laws enacted against “the partisans of the usurper.” Fleury, ex-captain of a regiment of the line under the Emperor, a tall, dark, handsome fellow, was now, in addition to his civil-service post, box-keeper at the Cirque-Olympique. Bixiou never ventured on tormenting Fleury, for the rough trooper, who was a good shot and clever at fencing, seemed quite capable of extreme brutality if provoked. An ardent subscriber to “Victoires et Conquetes,” Fleury nevertheless refused to pay his subscription, though he kept and read the copies, alleging that they exceeded the number proposed in

the prospectus. He adored Monsieur Rabourdin, who had saved him from dismissal, and was even heard to say that if any misfortune happened to the chief through anybody's fault he would kill that person. Dutocq meanly courted Fleury because he feared him. Fleury, crippled with debt, played many a trick on his creditors. Expert in legal matters, he never signed a promissory note; and had prudently attached his own salary under the names of fictitious creditors, so that he was able to draw nearly the whole of it himself. He played ecarte, was the life of evening parties, tossed off glasses of champagne without wetting his lips, and knew all the songs of Beranger by heart. He was proud of his full, sonorous voice. His three great admirations were Napoleon, Bolivar, and Beranger. Foy, Lafitte, and Casimir Delavigne he only esteemed. Fleury, as you will have guessed already, was a Southerner, destined, no doubt, to become the responsible editor of a liberal journal.

Desroys, the mysterious clerk of the division, consorted with no one, talked little, and hid his private life so carefully that no one knew where he lived, nor who were his protectors, nor what were his means of subsistence. Looking about them for the causes of this reserve, some of his colleagues thought him a "carbonaro," others an Orleanist; there were others again who doubted whether to call him a spy or a man of solid merit. Desroys was, however, simple and solely the son of a "Conventionel," who did not vote the king's death. Cold and prudent by temperament, he had judged the world and ended by relying on no one but himself. Republican in secret, an admirer of Paul-Louis Courier and a friend of Michael Chrestien, he looked to time and public intelligence to bring about the triumph of his opinions from end to end of Europe. He dreamed of a new Germany and a new Italy. His heart swelled with that dull, collective love which we must call humanitarianism, the eldest son of deceased philanthropy, and which is to the divine catholic charity what system is to art, or reasoning to deed. This conscientious puritan of freedom, this apostle of an impossible equality, regretted keenly that his poverty forced him to serve the government, and he made various efforts to find a place elsewhere. Tall, lean, lanky, and solemn in appearance, like a man who expects to be called some day to lay down his life for a cause, he lived on a page of Volney, studied Saint-Just, and employed himself on a vindication of Robespierre, whom he regarded as the successor of Jesus Christ.

The last of the individuals belonging to these bureaus who merits a sketch here is the little La Billardiere. Having, to his great misfortune, lost his mother, and being under the protection of the minister, safe therefore from the tyrannies of Baudoyer, and received in all the ministerial salons, he was nevertheless detested by every one because of his impertinence and conceit. The two chiefs were polite to him, but the clerks held him at arm's length and prevented all companionship by means of the extreme and grotesque politeness which they bestowed upon him. A pretty youth of twenty-two, tall

and slender, with the manners of an Englishman, a dandy in dress, curled and perfumed, gloved and booted in the latest fashion, and twirling an eyeglass, Benjamin de la Billardiere thought himself a charming fellow and possessed all the vices of the world with none of its graces. He was now looking forward impatiently to the death of his father, that he might succeed to the title of baron. His cards were printed “le Chevalier de la Billardiere” and on the wall of his office hung, in a frame, his coat of arms (sable, two swords in saltire, on a chief azure three mullets argent; with the motto; “Toujours fidele”). Possessed with a mania for talking heraldry, he once asked the young Vicomte de Portenduere why his arms were charged in a certain way, and drew down upon himself the happy answer, “I did not make them.” He talked of his devotion to the monarchy and the attentions the Dauphine paid him. He stood very well with des Lupeaulx, whom he thought his friend, and they often breakfasted together. Bixiou posed as his mentor, and hoped to rid the division and France of the young fool by tempting him to excesses, and openly avowed that intention.

Such were the principal figures of La Billardiere’s division of the ministry, where also were other clerks of less account, who resembled more or less those that are represented here. It is difficult even for an observer to decide from the aspect of these strange personalities whether the goose-quill tribe were becoming idiots from the effects of their employment or whether they entered the service because they were natural born fools. Possibly the making of them lies at the door of Nature and of the government both. Nature, to a civil-service clerk is, in fact, the sphere of the office; his horizon is bounded on all sides by green boxes; to him, atmospheric changes are the air of the corridors, the masculine exhalations contained in rooms without ventilators, the odor of paper, pens, and ink; the soil he treads is a tiled pavement or a wooden floor, strewn with a curious litter and moistened by the attendant’s watering-pot; his sky is the ceiling toward which he yawns; his element is dust. Several distinguished doctors have remonstrated against the influence of this second nature, both savage and civilized, on the moral being vegetating in those dreadful pens called bureaus, where the sun seldom penetrates, where thoughts are tied down to occupations like that of horses who turn a crank and who, poor beasts, yawn distressingly and die quickly. Rabourdin was, therefore, fully justified in seeking to reform their present condition, by lessening their numbers and giving to each a larger salary and far heavier work. Men are neither wearied nor bored when doing great things. Under the present system government loses fully four hours out of the nine which the clerks owe to the service,—hours wasted, as we shall see, in conversations, in gossip, in disputes, and, above all, in underhand intriguing. The reader must have haunted the bureaus of the ministerial departments before he can realize how much their petty and belittling life resembles that of seminaries.

Wherever men live collectively this likeness is obvious; in regiments, in law-courts, you will find the elements of the school on a smaller or larger scale. The government clerks, forced to be together for nine hours of the day, looked upon their office as a sort of class-room where they had tasks to perform, where the head of the bureau was no other than a schoolmaster, and where the gratuities bestowed took the place of prizes given out to proteges,—a place, moreover, where they teased and hated each other, and yet felt a certain comradeship, colder than that of a regiment, which itself is less hearty than that of seminaries. As a man advances in life he grows more selfish; egoism develops, and relaxes all the secondary bonds of affection. A government office is, in short, a microcosm of society, with its oddities and hatreds, its envy and its cupidity, its determination to push on, no matter who goes under, its frivolous gossip which gives so many wounds, and its perpetual spying.

CHAPTER V. THE MACHINE IN MOTION

At this moment the division of Monsieur de la Billardiere was in a state of unusual excitement, resulting very naturally from the event which was about to happen; for heads of divisions do not die every day, and there is no insurance office where the chances of life and death are calculated with more sagacity than in a government bureau. Self-interest stifles all compassion, as it does in children, but the government service adds hypocrisy to boot.

The clerks of the bureau Baudoyer arrived at eight o’clock in the morning, whereas those of the bureau Rabourdin seldom appeared till nine,—a circumstance which did not prevent the work in the latter office from being more rapidly dispatched than that of the former. Dutocq had important reasons for coming early on this particular morning. The previous evening he had furtively entered the study where Sebastien was at work, and had seen him copying some papers for Rabourdin; he concealed himself until he saw Sebastien leave the premises without taking any papers away with him. Certain, therefore, of finding the rather voluminous memorandum which he had seen, together with its copy, in some corner of the study, he searched through the boxes one after another until he finally came upon the fatal list. He carried it in hot haste to an autograph-printing house, where he obtained two pressed copies of the memorandum, showing, of course, Rabourdin’s own writing. Anxious not to arouse suspicion, he had gone very early to the office and replaced both the memorandum and Sebastien’s copy in the box from which he had taken them. Sebastien, who was kept up till after midnight at Madame Rabourdin’s party, was, in spite of his desire to get to the office early, preceded by the spirit of hatred. Hatred lived in the rue Saint-Louis-Saint-

Honore, whereas love and devotion lived far-off in the rue du Roi-Dore in the Marais. This slight delay was destined to affect Rabourdin's whole career.

Sebastien opened his box eagerly, found the memorandum and his own unfinished copy all in order, and locked them at once into the desk as Rabourdin had directed. The mornings are dark in these offices towards the end of December, sometimes indeed the lamps are lit till after ten o'clock; consequently Sebastien did not happen to notice the pressure of the copying-machine upon the paper. But when, about half-past nine o'clock, Rabourdin looked at his memorandum he saw at once the effects of the copying process, and all the more readily because he was then considering whether these autographic presses could not be made to do the work of copying clerks.

"Did any one get to the office before you?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Sebastien,—"Monsieur Dutocq."

"Ah! well, he was punctual. Send Antoine to me."

Too noble to distress Sebastien uselessly by blaming him for a misfortune now beyond remedy, Rabourdin said no more. Antoine came. Rabourdin asked if any clerk had remained at the office after four o'clock the previous evening. The man replied that Monsieur Dutocq had worked there later than Monsieur de la Roche, who was usually the last to leave. Rabourdin dismissed him with a nod, and resumed the thread of his reflections.

"Twice I have prevented his dismissal," he said to himself, "and this is my reward."

This morning was to Rabourdin like the solemn hour in which great commanders decide upon a battle and weigh all chances. Knowing the spirit of official life better than any one, he well knew that it would never pardon, any more than a school or the galleys or the army pardon, what looked like espionage or tale-bearing. A man capable of informing against his comrades is disgraced, dishonored, despised; the ministers in such a case would disavow their own agents. Nothing was left to an official so placed but to send in his resignation and leave Paris; his honor is permanently stained; explanations are of no avail; no one will either ask for them or listen to them. A minister may well do the same thing and be thought a great man, able to choose the right instruments; but a mere subordinate will be judged as a spy, no matter what may be his motives. While justly measuring the folly of such judgment, Rabourdin knew that it was all-powerful; and he knew, too, that he was crushed. More surprised than overwhelmed, he now sought for the best course to follow under the circumstances; and with such thoughts in his mind he was necessarily aloof from the excitement caused in the division by the death of Monsieur de la Billardiere; in fact he did not hear of it until young La Briere,

who was able to appreciate his sterling value, came to tell him. About ten o'clock, in the bureau Baudoyer, Bixiou was relating the last moments of the life of the director to Minard, Desroys, Monsieur Godard, whom he had called from his private office, and Dutocq, who had rushed in with private motives of his own. Colleville and Chazelle were absent.

Bixiou [standing with his back to the stove and holding up the sole of each boot alternately to dry at the open door]. "This morning, at half-past seven, I went to inquire after our most worthy and respectable director, knight of the order of Christ, et caetera, et caetera. Yes, gentlemen, last night he was a being with twenty et caeteras, to-day he is nothing, not even a government clerk. I asked all particulars of his nurse. She told me that this morning at five o'clock he became uneasy about the royal family. He asked for the names of all the clerks who had called to inquire after him; and then he said: 'Fill my snuff-box, give me the newspaper, bring my spectacles, and change my ribbon of the Legion of honor,—it is very dirty.' I suppose you know he always wore his orders in bed. He was fully conscious, retained his senses and all his usual ideas. But, presto! ten minutes later the water rose, rose, rose and flooded his chest; he knew he was dying for he felt the cysts break. At that fatal moment he gave evident proof of his powerful mind and vast intellect. Ah, we never rightly appreciated him! We used to laugh at him and call him a booby—didn't you, Monsieur Godard?"

Godard. "I? I always rated Monsieur de la Billardiere's talents higher than the rest of you."

Bixiou. "You and he could understand each other!"

Godard. "He wasn't a bad man; he never harmed any one."

Bixiou. "To do harm you must do something, and he never did anything. If it wasn't you who said he was a dolt, it must have been Minard."

Minard [shrugging his shoulders]. "I!"

Bixiou. "Well, then it was you, Dutocq!" [Dutocq made a vehement gesture of denial.] "Oh! very good, then it was nobody. Every one in this office knew his intellect was herculean. Well, you were right. He ended, as I have said, like the great man that he was."

Desroys [impatiently]. "Pray what did he do that was so great? he had the weakness to confess himself."

Bixiou. "Yes, monsieur, he received the holy sacraments. But do you know what he did in order to receive them? He put on his uniform as gentleman-in-ordinary of the Bedchamber, with all his orders, and had himself powdered; they tied his queue (that poor queue!) with a fresh ribbon. Now I say that none

but a man of remarkable character would have his queue tied with a fresh ribbon just as he was dying. There are eight of us here, and I don’t believe one among us is capable of such an act. But that’s not all; he said,—for you know all celebrated men make a dying speech; he said,—stop now, what did he say? Ah! he said, ‘I must attire myself to meet the King of Heaven,—I, who have so often dressed in my best for audience with the kings of earth.’ That’s how Monsieur de la Billardiere departed this life. He took upon himself to justify the saying of Pythagoras, ‘No man is known until he dies.’”

Colleville [rushing in]. “Gentlemen, great news!”

All. “We know it.”

Colleville. “I defy you to know it! I have been hunting for it ever since the accession of His Majesty to the thrones of France and of Navarre. Last night I succeeded! but with what labor! Madame Colleville asked me what was the matter.”

Dutocq. “Do you think we have time to bother ourselves with your intolerable anagrams when the worthy Monsieur de la Billardiere has just expired?”

Colleville. “That’s Bixiou’s nonsense! I have just come from Monsieur de la Billardiere’s; he is still living, though they expect him to die soon.” [Godard, indignant at the hoax, goes off grumbling.] “Gentlemen! you would never guess what extraordinary events are revealed by the anagram of this sacramental sentence” [he pulls out a piece of paper and reads], “Charles dix, par la grace de Dieu, roi de France et de Navarre.”

Godard [re-entering]. “Tell what it is at once, and don’t keep people waiting.”

Colleville [triumphantly unfolding the rest of the paper]. “Listen!

“A H. V. il cedera;

De S. C. l. d. partira;

Eh nauf errera,

Decide a Gorix.

“Every letter is there!” [He repeats it.] “A Henry cinq cedera (his crown of course); de Saint-Cloud partira; en nauf (that’s an old French word for skiff, vessel, felucca, corvette, anything you like) errera—”

Dutocq. “What a tissue of absurdities! How can the King cede his crown to Henry V., who, according to your nonsense, must be his grandson, when Monseigneur le Dauphin is living. Are you prophesying the Dauphin’s death?”

Bixiou. “What’s Gorix, pray?—the name of a cat?”

Colleville [provoked]. “It is the archaeological and lapidarial abbreviation of the name of a town, my good friend; I looked it out in Malte-Brun: Goritz, in Latin Gorixia, situated in Bohemia or Hungary, or it may be Austria—”

Bixiou. “Tyrol, the Basque provinces, or South America. Why don’t you set it all to music and play it on the clarionet?”

Godard [shrugging his shoulders and departing]. “What utter nonsense!”

Colleville. “Nonsense! nonsense indeed! It is a pity you don’t take the trouble to study fatalism, the religion of the Emperor Napoleon.”

Godard [irritated at Colleville’s tone]. “Monsieur Colleville, let me tell you that Bonaparte may perhaps be styled Emperor by historians, but it is extremely out of place to refer to him as such in a government office.”

Bixiou [laughing]. “Get an anagram out of that, my dear fellow.”

Colleville [angrily]. “Let me tell you that if Napoleon Bonaparte had studied the letters of his name on the 14th of April, 1814, he might perhaps be Emperor still.”

Bixiou. “How do you make that out?”

Colleville [solemnly]. “Napoleon Bonaparte.—No, appear not at Elba!”

Dutocq. “You’ll lose your place for talking such nonsense.”

Colleville. “If my place is taken from me, Francois Keller will make it hot for your minister.” [Dead silence.] “I’d have you to know, Master Dutocq, that all known anagrams have actually come to pass. Look here,—you, yourself,—don’t you marry, for there’s ‘coqu’ in your name.”

Bixiou [interrupting]. “And d, t, for de-testable.”

Dutocq [without seeming angry]. “I don’t care, as long as it is only in my name. Why don’t you anagrammatize, or whatever you call it, ‘Xavier Rabourdin, chef du bureau’?”

Colleville. “Bless you, so I have!”

Bixiou [mending his pen]. “And what did you make of it?”

Colleville. “It comes out as follows: D’abord reva bureaux, E-u,—(you catch the meaning? et eut—and had) E-u fin riche; which signifies that after first belonging to the administration, he gave it up and got rich elsewhere.” [Repeats.] “D’abord reva bureaux, E-u fin riche.”

Dutocq. “That IS queer!”

Bixiou. “Try Isidore Baudoyer.”

Colleville [mysteriously]. “I sha’n’t tell the other anagrams to any one but Thuillier.”

Bixiou. “I’ll bet you a breakfast that I can tell that one myself.”

Colleville. “And I’ll pay if you find it out.”

Bixiou. “Then I shall breakfast at your expense; but you won’t be angry, will you? Two such geniuses as you and I need never conflict. ‘Isidore Baudoyer’ anagrams into ‘Ris d’aboyeur d’oie.’”

Colleville [petrified with amazement]. “You stole it from me!”

Bixiou [with dignity]. “Monsieur Colleville, do me the honor to believe that I am rich enough in absurdity not to steal my neighbor’s nonsense.”

Baudoyer [entering with a bundle of papers in his hand]. “Gentlemen, I request you to shout a little louder; you bring this office into such high repute with the administration. My worthy coadjutor, Monsieur Clergeot, did me the honor just now to come and ask a question, and he heard the noise you are making” [passes into Monsieur Godard’s room].

Bixiou [in a low voice]. “The watch-dog is very tame this morning; there’ll be a change of weather before night.”

Dutocq [whispering to Bixiou]. “I have something I want to say to you.”

Bixiou [fingering Dutocq’s waistcoat]. “You’ve a pretty waistcoat, that cost you nothing; is that what you want to say?”

Dutocq. “Nothing, indeed! I never paid so dear for anything in my life. That stuff cost six francs a yard in the best shop in the rue de la Paix,—a fine dead stuff, the very thing for deep mourning.”

Bixiou. “You know about engravings and such things, my dear fellow, but you are totally ignorant of the laws of etiquette. Well, no man can be a universal genius! Silk is positively not admissible in deep mourning. Don’t you see I am wearing woollen? Monsieur Rabourdin, Monsieur Baudoyer, and the minister are all in woollen; so is the faubourg Saint-Germain. There’s no one here but Minard who doesn’t wear woollen; he’s afraid of being taken for a sheep. That’s the reason why he didn’t put on mourning for Louis XVIII.”

[During this conversation Baudoyer is sitting by the fire in Godard’s room, and the two are conversing in a low voice.]

Baudoyer. “Yes, the worthy man is dying. The two ministers are both with him. My father-in-law has been notified of the event. If you want to do me a signal service you will take a cab and go and let Madame Baudoyer know

what is happening; for Monsieur Saillard can't leave his desk, nor I my office. Put yourself at my wife's orders; do whatever she wishes. She has, I believe, some ideas of her own, and wants to take certain steps simultaneously." [The two functionaries go out together.]

Godard. "Monsieur Bixiou, I am obliged to leave the office for the rest of the day. You will take my place."

Baudoyer [to Bixiou, benignly]. "Consult me, if there is any necessity."

Bixiou. "This time, La Billardiere is really dead."

Dutocq [in Bixiou's ear]. "Come outside a minute." [The two go into the corridor and gaze at each other like birds of ill-omen.]

Dutocq [whispering]. "Listen. Now is the time for us to understand each other and push our way. What would you say to your being made head of the bureau, and I under you?"

Bixiou [shrugging his shoulders]. "Come, come, don't talk nonsense!"

Dutocq. "If Baudoyer gets La Billardiere's place Rabourdin won't stay on where he is. Between ourselves, Baudoyer is so incapable that if du Bruel and you don't help him he will certainly be dismissed in a couple of months. If I know arithmetic that will give three empty places for us to fill—"

Bixiou. "Three places right under our noses, which will certainly be given to some bloated favorite, some spy, some pious fraud,—to Colleville perhaps, whose wife has ended where all pretty women end—in piety."

Dutocq. "No, to /you/, my dear fellow, if you will only, for once in your life, use your wits logically." [He stopped as if to study the effect of his adverb in Bixiou's face.] "Come, let us play fair."

Bixiou [stolidly]. "Let me see your game."

Dutocq. "I don't wish to be anything more than under-head-clerk. I know myself perfectly well, and I know I haven't the ability, like you, to be head of a bureau. Du Bruel can be director, and you the head of this bureau; he will leave you his place as soon as he has made his pile; and as for me, I shall swim with the tide comfortably, under your protection, till I can retire on a pension."

Bixiou. "Sly dog! but how to you expect to carry out a plan which means forcing the minister's hand and ejecting a man of talent? Between ourselves, Rabourdin is the only man capable of taking charge of the division, and I might say of the ministry. Do you know that they talk of putting in over his head that solid lump of foolishness, that cube of idiocy, Baudoyer?"

Dutocq [consequentially]. "My dear fellow, I am in a position to rouse the

whole division against Rabourdin. You know how devoted Fleury is to him? Well, I can make Fleury despise him."

Bixiou. "Despised by Fleury!"

Dutocq. "Not a soul will stand by Rabourdin; the clerks will go in a body and complain of him to the minister,—not only in our division, but in all the divisions—"

Bixiou. "Forward, march! infantry, cavalry, artillery, and marines of the guard! You rave, my good fellow! And I, what part am I to take in the business?"

Dutocq. "You are to make a cutting caricature,—sharp enough to kill a man."

Bixiou. "How much will you pay for it?"

Dutocq. "A hundred francs."

Bixiou [to himself]. "Then there is something in it."

Dutocq [continuing]. "You must represent Rabourdin dressed as a butcher (make it a good likeness), find analogies between a kitchen and a bureau, put a skewer in his hand, draw portraits of the principal clerks and stick their heads on fowls, put them in a monstrous coop labelled 'Civil Service executions'; make him cutting the throat of one, and supposed to take the others in turn. You can have geese and ducks with heads like ours,—you understand! Baudoyer, for instance, he'll make an excellent turkey-buzzard."

Bixiou. "Ris d'aboyeur d'oie!" [He has watched Dutocq carefully for some time.] "Did you think of that yourself?"

Dutocq. "Yes, I myself."

Bixiou [to himself]. "Do evil feelings bring men to the same result as talents?" [Aloud] "Well, I'll do it" [Dutocq makes a motion of delight] "—when" [full stop] "—I know where I am and what I can rely on. If you don't succeed I shall lose my place, and I must make a living. You are a curious kind of innocent still, my dear colleague."

Dutocq. "Well, you needn't make the lithograph till success is proved."

Bixiou. "Why don't you come out and tell me the whole truth?"

Dutocq. "I must first see how the land lays in the bureau; we will talk about it later" [goes off].

Bixiou [alone in the corridor]. "That fish, for he's more a fish than a bird, that Dutocq has a good idea in his head—I'm sure I don't know where he stole it. If Baudoyer should succeed La Billardiere it would be fun, more than fun—

profit!” [Returns to the office.] “Gentlemen, I announce glorious changes; papa La Billardiere is dead, really dead,—no nonsense, word of honor! Godard is off on business for our excellent chief Baudoyer, successor presumptive to the deceased.” [Minard, Desroys, and Colleville raise their heads in amazement; they all lay down their pens, and Colleville blows his nose.] “Every one of us is to be promoted! Colleville will be under-head-clerk at the very least. Minard may have my place as chief clerk—why not? he is quite as dull as I am. Hey, Minard, if you should get twenty-five hundred francs a-year your little wife would be uncommonly pleased, and you could buy yourself a pair of boots now and then.”

Colleville. “But you don’t get twenty-five hundred francs.”

Bixiou. “Monsieur Dutocq gets that in Rabourdin’s office; why shouldn’t I get it this year? Monsieur Baudoyer gets it.”

Colleville. “Only through the influence of Monsieur Saillard. No other chief clerk gets that in any of the divisions.”

Paulmier. “Bah! Hasn’t Monsieur Cochin three thousand? He succeeded Monsieur Vavasseur, who served ten years under the Empire at four thousand. His salary was dropped to three when the King first returned; then to two thousand five hundred before Vavasseur died. But Monsieur Cochin, who succeeded him, had influence enough to get the salary put back to three thousand.”

Colleville. “Monsieur Cochin signs E. A. L. Cochin (he is named Emile-Adolphe-Lucian), which, when anagrammed, gives Cochineal. Now observe, he’s a partner in a druggist’s business in the rue des Lombards, the Maison Matifat, which made its fortune by that identical colonial product.”

Baudoyer [entering]. “Monsieur Chazelle, I see, is not here; you will be good enough to say I asked for him, gentlemen.”

Bixiou [who had hastily stuck a hat on Chazelle’s chair when he heard Baudoyer’s step]. “Excuse me, Monsieur, but Chazelle has gone to the Rabourdins’ to make an inquiry.”

Chazelle [entering with his hat on his head, and not seeing Baudoyer]. “La Billardiere is done for, gentlemen! Rabourdin is head of the division and Master of petitions; he hasn’t stolen /his/ promotion, that’s very certain.”

Baudoyer [to Chazelle]. “You found that appointment in your second hat, I presume” [points to the hat on the chair]. “This is the third time within a month that you have come after nine o’clock. If you continue the practice you will get on—elsewhere.” [To Bixiou, who is reading the newspaper.] “My dear Monsieur Bixiou, do pray leave the newspapers to these gentlemen who are

going to breakfast, and come into my office for your orders for the day. I don't know what Monsieur Rabourdin wants with Gabriel; he keeps him to do his private errands, I believe. I've rung three times and can't get him." [Baudoyer and Bixiou retire into the private office.]

Chazelle. "Damned unlucky!"

Paulmier [delighted to annoy Chazelle]. "Why didn't you look about when you came into the room? You might have seen the elephant, and the hat too; they are big enough to be visible."

Chazelle [dismally]. "Disgusting business! I don't see why we should be treated like slaves because the government gives us four francs and sixty-five centimes a day."

Fleury [entering]. "Down with Baudoyer! hurrah for Rabourdin!—that's the cry in the division."

Chazelle [getting more and more angry]. "Baudoyer can turn off me if he likes, I sha'n't care. In Paris there are a thousand ways of earning five francs a day; why, I could earn that at the Palais de Justice, copying briefs for the lawyers."

Paulmier [still prodding him]. "It is very easy to say that; but a government place is a government place, and that plucky Colleville, who works like a galley-slave outside of this office, and who could earn, if he lost his appointment, more than his salary, prefers to keep his place. Who the devil is fool enough to give up his expectations?"

Chazelle [continuing his philippic]. "You may not be, but I am! We have no chances at all. Time was when nothing was more encouraging than a civil-service career. So many men were in the army that there were not enough for the government work; the maimed and the halt and the sick ones, like Paulmier, and the near-sighted ones, all had their chance of a rapid promotion. But now, ever since the Chamber invented what they called special training, and the rules and regulations for civil-service examiners, we are worse off than common soldiers. The poorest places are at the mercy of a thousand mischances because we are now ruled by a thousand sovereigns."

Bixiou [returning]. "Are you crazy, Chazelle? Where do you find a thousand sovereigns?—not in your pocket, are they?"

Chazelle. "Count them up. There are four hundred over there at the end of the pont de la Concorde (so called because it leads to the scene of perpetual discord between the Right and Left of the Chamber); three hundred more at the end of the rue de Tournon. The court, which ought to count for the other three hundred, has seven hundred parts less power to get a man appointed to a

place under government than the Emperor Napoleon had."

Fleury. "All of which signifies that in a country where there are three powers you may bet a thousand to one that a government clerk who has no influence but his own merits to advance him will remain in obscurity."

Bixiou [looking alternately at Chazelle and Fleury]. "My sons, you have yet to learn that in these days the worst state of life is the state of belonging to the State."

Fleury. "Because it has a constitutional government."

Colleville. "Gentlemen, gentlemen! no politics!"

Bixiou. "Fleury is right. Serving the State in these days is no longer serving a prince who knew how to punish and reward. The State now is /everybody/. Everybody of course cares for nobody. Serve everybody, and you serve nobody. Nobody is interested in nobody; the government clerk lives between two negations. The world has neither pity nor respect, neither heart nor head; everybody forgets to-morrow the service of yesterday. Now each one of you may be, like Monsieur Baudoyer, an administrative genius, a Chateaubriand of reports, a Bossouet of circulars, the Canalis of memorials, the gifted son of diplomatic despatches; but I tell you there is a fatal law which interferes with all administrative genius,—I mean the law of promotion by average. This average is based on the statistics of promotion and the statistics of mortality combined. It is very certain that on entering whichever section of the Civil Service you please at the age of eighteen, you can't get eighteen hundred francs a year till you reach the age of thirty. Now there's no free and independent career in which, in the course of twelve years, a young man who has gone through the grammar-school, been vaccinated, is exempt from military service, and possesses all his faculties (I don't mean transcendent ones) can't amass a capital of forty-five thousand francs in centimes, which represents a permanent income equal to our salaries, which are, after all, precarious. In twelve years a grocer can earn enough to give him ten thousand francs a year; a painter can daub a mile of canvas and be decorated with the Legion of honor, or pose as a neglected genius. A literary man becomes professor of something or other, or a journalist at a hundred francs for a thousand lines; he writes 'feuilletons,' or he gets into Saint-Pelagie for a brilliant article that offends the Jesuits,—which of course is an immense benefit to him and makes him a politician at once. Even a lazy man, who does nothing but make debts, has time to marry a widow who pays them; a priest finds time to become a bishop 'in partibus.' A sober, intelligent young fellow, who begins with a small capital as a money-changer, soon buys a share in a broker's business; and, to go even lower, a petty clerk becomes a notary, a rag-picker lays by two or three thousand francs a year, and the poorest workmen

often become manufacturers; whereas, in the rotatory movement of this present civilization, which mistakes perpetual division and redivision for progress, an unhappy civil service clerk, like Chazelle for instance, is forced to dine for twenty-two sous a meal, struggles with his tailor and bootmaker, gets into debt, and is an absolute nothing; worse than that, he becomes an idiot! Come, gentlemen, now's the time to make a stand! Let us all give in our resignations! Fleury, Chazelle, fling yourselves into other employments and become the great men you really are."

Chazelle [calmed down by Bixiou's allocution]. "No, I thank you" [general laughter].

Bixiou. "You are wrong; in your situation I should try to get ahead of the general-secretary."

Chazelle [uneasily]. "What has he to do with me?"

Bixiou. "You'll find out; do you suppose Baudoyer will overlook what happened just now?"

Fleury. "Another piece of Bixiou's spite! You've a queer fellow to deal with in there. Now, Monsieur Rabourdin,—there's a man for you! He put work on my table to-day that you couldn't get through within this office in three days; well, he expects me to have it done by four o'clock to-day. But he is not always at my heels to hinder me from talking to my friends."

Baudoyer [appearing at the door]. "Gentlemen, you will admit that if you have the legal right to find fault with the chamber and the administration you must at least do so elsewhere than in this office." [To Fleury.] "What are you doing here, monsieur?"

Fleury [insolently]. "I came to tell these gentlemen that there was to be a general turn-out. Du Bruel is sent for to the ministry, and Dutocq also. Everybody is asking who will be appointed."

Baudoyer [retiring]. "It is not your affair, sir; go back to your own office, and do not disturb mine."

Fleury [in the doorway]. "It would be a shameful injustice if Rabourdin lost the place; I swear I'd leave the service. Did you find that anagram, papa Colleville?"

Colleville. "Yes, here it is."

Fleury [leaning over Colleville's desk]. "Capital! famous! This is just what will happen if the administration continues to play the hypocrite." [He makes a sign to the clerks that Baudoyer is listening.] "If the government would frankly state its intentions without concealments of any kind, the liberals would know what they had to deal with. An administration which sets its best

friends against itself, such men as those of the ‘Debats,’ Chateaubriand, and Royer-Collard, is only to be pitied!”

Colleville [after consulting his colleagues]. “Come, Fleury, you’re a good fellow, but don’t talk politics here; you don’t know what harm you may do us.”

Fleury [dryly]. “Well, adieu, gentlemen; I have my work to do by four o’clock.”

While this idle talk had been going on, des Lupeaulx was closeted in his office with du Bruel, where, a little later, Dutocq joined them. Des Lupeaulx had heard from his valet of La Billardiere’s death, and wishing to please the two ministers, he wanted an obituary article to appear in the evening papers.

“Good morning, my dear du Bruel,” said the semi-minister to the head-clerk as he entered, and not inviting him to sit down. “You have heard the news? La Billardiere is dead. The ministers were both present when he received the last sacraments. The worthy man strongly recommended Rabourdin, saying he should die with less regret if he could know that his successor were the man who had so constantly done his work. Death is a torture which makes a man confess everything. The minister agreed the more readily because his intention and that of the Council was to reward Monsieur Rabourdin’s numerous services. In fact, the Council of State needs his experience. They say that young La Billardiere is to leave the division of his father and go to the Commission of Seals; that’s just the same as if the King had made him a present of a hundred thousand francs,—the place can always be sold. But I know the news will delight your division, which will thus get rid of him. Du Bruel, we must get ten or a dozen lines about the worthy late director into the papers; his Excellency will glance them over,—he reads the papers. Do you know the particulars of old La Billardiere’s life?”

Du Bruel made a sign in the negative.

“No?” continued des Lupeaulx. “Well then; he was mixed up in the affairs of La Vendee, and he was one of the confidants of the late King. Like Monsieur le Comte de Fontaine he always refused to hold communication with the First Consul. He was a bit of a ‘chouan’; born in Brittany of a parliamentary family, and ennobled by Louis XVIII. How old was he? never mind about that; just say his loyalty was untarnished, his religion enlightened, —the poor old fellow hated churches and never set foot in one, but you had better make him out a ‘pious vassal.’ Bring in, gracefully, that he sang the song of Simeon at the accession of Charles X. The Comte d’Artois thought very highly of La Billardiere, for he co-operated in the unfortunate affair of Quiberon and took the whole responsibility on himself. You know about that, don’t you? La Billardiere defended the King in a printed pamphlet in reply to

an impudent history of the Revolution written by a journalist; you can allude to his loyalty and devotion. But be very careful what you say; weigh your words, so that the other newspapers can't laugh at us; and bring me the article when you've written it. Were you at Rabourdin's yesterday?"

"Yes, monseigneur," said du Bruel, "Ah! beg pardon."

"No harm done," answered des Lupeaulx, laughing.

"Madame Rabourdin looked delightfully handsome," added du Bruel. "There are not two women like her in Paris. Some are as clever as she, but there's not one so gracefully witty. Many women may even be handsomer, but it would be hard to find one with such variety of beauty. Madame Rabourdin is far superior to Madame Colleville," said the vaudevillist, remembering des Lupeaulx's former affair. "Flavie owes what she is to the men about her, whereas Madame Rabourdin is all things in herself. It is wonderful too what she knows; you can't tell secrets in Latin before /her/. If I had such a wife, I know I should succeed in everything."

"You have more mind than an author ought to have," returned des Lupeaulx, with a conceited air. Then he turned round and perceived Dutocq. "Ah, good-morning, Dutocq," he said. "I sent for you to lend me your Charlet —if you have the whole complete. Madame la comtesse knows nothing of Charlet."

Du Bruel retired.

"Why do you come in without being summoned?" said des Lupeaulx, harshly, when he and Dutocq were left alone. "Is the State in danger that you must come here at ten o'clock in the morning, just as I am going to breakfast with his Excellency?"

"Perhaps it is, monsieur," said Dutocq, dryly. "If I had had the honor to see you earlier, you would probably have not been so willing to support Monsieur Rabourdin, after reading his opinion of you."

Dutocq opened his coat, took a paper from the left-hand breast-pocket and laid it on des Lupeaulx's desk, pointing to a marked passage. Then he went to the door and slipped the bolt, fearing interruption. While he was thus employed, the secretary-general read the opening sentence of the article, which was as follows:

"Monsieur des Lupeaulx. A government degrades itself by openly employing such a man, whose real vocation is for police diplomacy.

He is fitted to deal with the political filibusters of other cabinets, and it would be a pity therefore to employ him on our internal detective police. He is above a common spy, for he is able to understand a plan; he could skilfully

carry through a dark piece of work and cover his retreat safely."

Des Lupeaulx was succinctly analyzed in five or six such paragraphs,—the essence, in fact, of the biographical portrait which we gave at the beginning of this history. As he read the words the secretary felt that a man stronger than himself sat in judgment on him; and he at once resolved to examine the memorandum, which evidently reached far and high, without allowing Dutocq to know his secret thoughts. He therefore showed a calm, grave face when the spy returned to him. Des Lupeaulx, like lawyers, magistrates, diplomatists, and all whose work obliges them to pry into the human heart, was past being surprised at anything. Hardened in treachery and in all the tricks and wiles of hatred, he could take a stab in the back and not let his face tell of it.

"How did you get hold of this paper?"

Dutocq related his good luck; des Lupeaulx's face as he listened expressed no approbation; and the spy ended in terror an account which began triumphantly.

"Dutocq, you have put your finger between the bark and the tree," said the secretary, coldly. "If you don't want to make powerful enemies I advise you to keep this paper a profound secret; it is a work of the utmost importance and already well known to me."

So saying, des Lupeaulx dismissed Dutocq by one of those glances that are more expressive than words.

"Ha! that scoundrel of a Rabourdin has put his finger in this!" thought Dutocq, alarmed on finding himself anticipated; "he has reached the ear of the administration, while I am left out in the cold. I shouldn't have thought it!"

To all his other motives of aversion to Rabourdin he now added the jealousy of one man to another man of the same calling,—a most powerful ingredient in hatred.

When des Lupeaulx was left alone, he dropped into a strange meditation. What power was it of which Rabourdin was the instrument? Should he, des Lupeaulx, use this singular document to destroy him, or should he keep it as a weapon to succeed with the wife? The mystery that lay behind this paper was all darkness to des Lupeaulx, who read with something akin to terror page after page, in which the men of his acquaintance were judged with unerring wisdom. He admired Rabourdin, though stabbed to his vitals by what he said of him. The breakfast-hour suddenly cut short his meditation.

"His Excellency is waiting for you to come down," announced the minister's footman.

The minister always breakfasted with his wife and children and des

Lupeaulx, without the presence of servants. The morning meal affords the only moment of privacy which public men can snatch from the current of overwhelming business. Yet in spite of the precautions they take to keep this hour for private intimacies and affections, a good many great and little people manage to infringe upon it. Business itself will, as at this moment, thrust itself in the way of their scanty comfort.

“I thought Rabourdin was a man above all ordinary petty manoeuvres,” began the minister; “and yet here, not ten minutes after La Billardiere’s death, he sends me this note by La Briere,—it is like a stage missive. Look,” said his Excellency, giving des Lupeaulx a paper which he was twirling in his fingers.

Too noble in mind to think for a moment of the shameful meaning La Billardiere’s death might lend to his letter, Rabourdin had not withdrawn it from La Briere’s hands after the news reached him. Des Lupeaulx read as follows:—

“Monseigneur,—If twenty-three years of irreproachable services may claim a favor, I entreat your Excellency to grant me an audience this very day. My honor is involved in the matter of which I desire to speak.”

“Poor man!” said des Lupeaulx, in a tone of compassion which confirmed the minister in his error. “We are alone; I advise you to see him now. You have a meeting of the Council when the Chamber rises; moreover, your Excellency has to reply to-day to the opposition; this is really the only hour when you can receive him.”

Des Lupeaulx rose, called the servant, said a few words, and returned to his seat. “I have told them to bring him in at dessert,” he said.

Like all other ministers under the Restoration, this particular minister was a man without youth. The charter granted by Louis XVIII. had the defect of tying the hands of the kings by compelling them to deliver the destinies of the nation into the control of the middle-aged men of the Chamber and the septuagenarians of the peerage; it robbed them of the right to lay hands on a man of statesmanlike talent wherever they could find him, no matter how young he was or how poverty-stricken his condition might be. Napoleon alone was able to employ young men as he chose, without being restrained by any consideration. After the overthrow of that mighty will, vigor deserted power. Now the period when effeminacy succeeds to vigor presents a contrast that is far more dangerous in France than in other countries. As a general thing, ministers who were old before they entered office have proved second or third rate, while those who were taken young have been an honor to European monarchies and to the republics whose affairs they have directed. The world still rings with the struggle between Pitt and Napoleon, two men who conducted the politics of their respective countries at an age when Henri de

Navarre, Richelieu, Mazarin, Colbert, Louvois, the Prince of Orange, the Guises, Machiavelli, in short, all the best known of our great men, coming from the ranks or born to a throne, began to rule the State. The Convention—that model of energy—was made up in a great measure of young heads; no sovereign can ever forget that it was able to put fourteen armies into the field against Europe. Its policy, fatal in the eyes of those who cling to what is called absolute power, was nevertheless dictated by strictly monarchical principles, and it behaved itself like any of the great kings.

After ten or a dozen years of parliamentary struggle, having studied the science of politics until he was worn down by it, this particular minister had come to be enthroned by his party, who considered him in the light of their business man. Happily for him he was now nearer sixty than fifty years of age; had he retained even a vestige of juvenile vigor he would quickly have quenched it. But, accustomed to back and fill, retreat and return to the charge, he was able to endure being struck at, turn and turn about, by his own party, by the opposition, by the court, by the clergy, because to all such attacks he opposed the inert force of a substance which was equally soft and consistent; thus he reaped the benefits of what was really his misfortune. Harassed by a thousand questions of government, his mind, like that of an old lawyer who has tried every species of case, no longer possessed the spring which solitary minds are able to retain, nor that power of prompt decision which distinguishes men who are early accustomed to action, and young soldiers. How could it be otherwise? He had practised sophistries and quibbled instead of judging; he had criticised effects and done nothing for causes; his head was full of plans such as a political party lays upon the shoulders of a leader,—matters of private interest brought to an orator supposed to have a future, a jumble of schemes and impractical requests. Far from coming fresh to his work, he was wearied out with marching and counter-marching, and when he finally reached the much desired height of his present position, he found himself in a thicket of thorny bushes with a thousand conflicting wills to conciliate. If the statesmen of the Restoration had been allowed to follow out their own ideas, their capacity would doubtless have been criticised; but though their wills were often forced, their age saved them from attempting the resistance which youth opposes to intrigues, both high and low,—intrigues which vanquished Richelieu, and to which, in a lower sphere, Rabourdin was to succumb.

After the rough and tumble of their first struggles in political life these men, less old than aged, have to endure the additional wear and tear of a ministry. Thus it is that their eyes begin to weaken just as they need to have the clear-sightedness of eagles; their mind is weary when its youth and fire need to be redoubled. The minister in whom Rabourdin sought to confide was in the habit of listening to men of undoubted superiority as they explained

ingenious theories of government, applicable or inapplicable to the affairs of France. Such men, by whom the difficulties of national policy were never apprehended, were in the habit of attacking this minister personally whenever a parliamentary battle or a contest with the secret follies of the court took place,—on the eve of a struggle with the popular mind, or on the morrow of a diplomatic discussion which divided the Council into three separate parties. Caught in such a predicament, a statesman naturally keeps a yawn ready for the first sentence designed to show him how the public service could be better managed. At such periods not a dinner took place among bold schemers or financial and political lobbyists where the opinions of the Bourse and the Bank, the secrets of diplomacy, and the policy necessitated by the state of affairs in Europe were not canvassed and discussed. The minister has his own private councillors in des Lupeaulx and his secretary, who collected and pondered all opinions and discussions for the purpose of analyzing and controlling the various interests proclaimed and supported by so many clever men. In fact, his misfortune was that of most other ministers who have passed the prime of life; he trimmed and shuffled under all his difficulties,—with journalism, which at this period it was thought advisable to repress in an underhand way rather than fight openly; with financial as well as labor questions; with the clergy as well as with that other question of the public lands; with liberalism as with the Chamber. After manoeuvering his way to power in the course of seven years, the minister believed that he could manage all questions of administration in the same way. It is so natural to think we can maintain a position by the same methods which served us to reach it that no one ventured to blame a system invented by mediocrity to please minds of its own calibre. The Restoration, like the Polish revolution, proved to nations as to princes the true value of a Man, and what will happen if that necessary man is wanting. The last and the greatest weakness of the public men of the Restoration was their honesty, in a struggle in which their adversaries employed the resources of political dishonesty, lies, and calumnies, and let loose upon them, by all subversive means, the clamor of the unintelligent masses, able only to understand revolt.

Rabourdin told himself all these things. But he had made up his mind to win or lose, like a man weary of gambling who allows himself a last stake; ill-luck had given him as adversary in the game a sharper like des Lupeaulx. With all his sagacity, Rabourdin was better versed in matters of administration than in parliamentary optics, and he was far indeed from imagining how his confidence would be received; he little thought that the great work that filled his mind would seem to the minister nothing more than a theory, and that a man who held the position of a statesman would confound his reform with the schemes of political and self-interested talkers.

As the minister rose from table, thinking of Francois Keller, his wife

detained him with the offer of a bunch of grapes, and at that moment Rabourdin was announced. Des Lupeaulx had counted on the minister's preoccupation and his desire to get away; seeing him for the moment occupied with his wife, the general-secretary went forward to meet Rabourdin; whom he petrified with his first words, said in a low tone of voice:—

"His Excellency and I know what the subject is that occupies your mind; you have nothing to fear"; then, raising his voice, he added, "neither from Dutocq nor from any one else."

"Don't feel uneasy, Rabourdin," said his Excellency, kindly, but making a movement to get away.

Rabourdin came forward respectfully, and the minister could not evade him.

"Will your Excellency permit me to see you for a moment in private?" he said, with a mysterious glance.

The minister looked at the clock and went towards the window, whither the poor man followed him.

"When may I have the honor of submitting the matter of which I spoke to your Excellency? I desire to fully explain the plan of administration to which the paper that was taken belongs—"

"Plan of administration!" exclaimed the minister, frowning, and hurriedly interrupting him. "If you have anything of that kind to communicate you must wait for the regular day when we do business together. I ought to be at the Council now; and I have an answer to make to the Chamber on that point which the opposition raised before the session ended yesterday. Your day is Wednesday next; I could not work yesterday, for I had other things to attend to; political matters are apt to interfere with purely administrative ones."

"I place my honor with all confidence in your Excellency's hands," said Rabourdin gravely, "and I entreat you to remember that you have not allowed me time to give you an immediate explanation of the stolen paper—"

"Don't be uneasy," said des Lupeaulx, interposing between the minister and Rabourdin, whom he thus interrupted; "in another week you will probably be appointed—"

The minister smiled as he thought of des Lupeaulx's enthusiasm for Madame Rabourdin, and he glanced knowingly at his wife. Rabourdin saw the look, and tried to imagine its meaning; his attention was diverted for a moment, and his Excellency took advantage of the fact to make his escape.

"We will talk of all this, you and I," said des Lupeaulx, with whom Rabourdin, much to his surprise, now found himself alone. "Don't be angry

with Dutocq; I'll answer for his discretion."

"Madame Rabourdin is charming," said the minister's wife, wishing to say the civil thing to the head of a bureau.

The children all gazed at Rabourdin with curiosity. The poor man had come there expecting some serious, even solemn, result, and he was like a great fish caught in the threads of a flimsy net; he struggled with himself.

"Madame la comtesse is very good," he said.

"Shall I not have the pleasure of seeing Madame here some Wednesday?" said the countess. "Pray bring her; it will give me pleasure."

"Madame Rabourdin herself receives on Wednesdays," interrupted des Lupeaulx, who knew the empty civility of an invitation to the official Wednesdays; "but since you are so kind as to wish for her, you will soon give one of your private parties, and—"

The countess rose with some irritation.

"You are the master of my ceremonies," she said to des Lupeaulx,—ambiguous words, by which she expressed the annoyance she felt with the secretary for presuming to interfere with her private parties, to which she admitted only a select few. She left the room without bowing to Rabourdin, who remained alone with des Lupeaulx; the latter was twisting in his fingers the confidential letter to the minister which Rabourdin had intrusted to La Briere. Rabourdin recognized it.

"You have never really known me," said des Lupeaulx. "Friday evening we will come to a full understanding. Just now I must go and receive callers; his Excellency saddles me with that burden when he has other matters to attend to. But I repeat, Rabourdin, don't worry yourself; you have nothing to fear."

Rabourdin walked slowly through the corridors, amazed and confounded by this singular turn of events. He had expected Dutocq to denounce him, and found he had not been mistaken; des Lupeaulx had certainly seen the document which judged him so severely, and yet des Lupeaulx was fawning on his judge! It was all incomprehensible. Men of upright minds are often at a loss to understand complicated intrigues, and Rabourdin was lost in a maze of conjecture without being able to discover the object of the game which the secretary was playing.

"Either he has not read the part about himself, or he loves my wife."

Such were the two thoughts to which his mind arrived as he crossed the courtyard; for the glance he had intercepted the night before between des Lupeaulx and Celestine came back to his memory like a flash of lightning.

CHAPTER VI. THE WORMS AT WORK

Rabourdin’s bureau was during his absence a prey to the keenest excitement; for the relation between the head officials and the clerks in a government office is so regulated that, when a minister’s messenger summons the head of a bureau to his Excellency’s presence (above all at the latter’s breakfast hour), there is no end to the comments that are made. The fact that the present unusual summons followed so closely on the death of Monsieur de la Billardiere seemed to give special importance to the circumstance, which was made known to Monsieur Saillard, who came at once to confer with Baudoyer. Bixiou, who happened at the moment to be at work with the latter, left him to converse with his father-in-law and betook himself to the bureau Rabourdin, where the usual routine was of course interrupted.

Bixiou [entering]. “I thought I should find you at a white heat! Don’t you know what’s going on down below? The virtuous woman is done for! yes, done for, crushed! Terrible scene at the ministry!”

Dutocq [looking fixedly at him]. “Are you telling the truth?”

Bixiou. “Pray, who would regret it? Not you, certainly, for you will be made under-head-clerk and du Bruel head of the bureau. Monsieur Baudoyer gets the division.”

Fleury. “I’ll bet a hundred francs that Baudoyer will never be head of the division.”

Vimeux. “I’ll join in the bet; will you, Monsieur Poiret?”

Poiret. “I retire in January.”

Bixiou. “Is it possible? are we to lose the sight of those shoe-ties? What will the ministry be without you? Will nobody take up the bet on my side?”

Dutocq. “I can’t, for I know the facts. Monsieur Rabourdin is appointed. Monsieur de la Billardiere requested it of the two ministers on his death-bed, blaming himself for having taken the emoluments of an office of which Rabourdin did all the work; he felt remorse of conscience, and the ministers, to quiet him, promised to appoint Rabourdin unless higher powers intervened.”

Bixiou. “Gentlemen, are you all against me? seven to one,—for I know which side you’ll take, Monsieur Phellion. Well, I’ll bet a dinner costing five hundred francs at the Rocher de Cancale that Rabourdin does not get La Billardiere’s place. That will cost you only a hundred francs each, and I’m

risking five hundred,—five to one against me! Do you take it up?" [Shouting into the next room.] "Du Bruel, what say you?"

Phellion [laying down his pen]. "Monsieur, may I ask on what you base that contingent proposal?—for contingent it is. But stay, I am wrong to call it a proposal; I should say contract. A wager constitutes a contract."

Fleury. "No, no; you can only apply the word 'contract' to agreements that are recognized in the Code. Now the Code allows of no action for the recovery of a bet."

Dutocq. "Proscribe a thing and you recognize it."

Bixiou. "Good! my little man."

Poiret. "Dear me!"

Fleury. "True! when one refuses to pay one's debts, that's recognizing them."

Thuillier. "You would make famous lawyers."

Poiret. "I am as curious as Monsieur Phellion to know what grounds Monsieur Bixiou has for—"

Bixiou [shouting across the office]. "Du Bruel! Will you bet?"

Du Bruel [appearing at the door]. "Heavens and earth, gentlemen, I'm very busy; I have something very difficult to do; I've got to write an obituary notice of Monsieur de la Billardiere. I do beg you to be quiet; you can laugh and bet afterwards."

Bixiou. "That's true, du Bruel; the praise of an honest man is a very difficult thing to write. I'd rather any day draw a caricature of him."

Du Bruel. "Do come and help me, Bixiou."

Bixiou [following him]. "I'm willing; though I can do such things much better when eating."

Du Bruel. "Well, we will go and dine together afterwards. But listen, this is what I have written" [reads] "'The Church and the Monarchy are daily losing many of those who fought for them in Revolutionary times.'"

Bixiou. "Bad, very bad; why don't you say, 'Death carries on its ravages amongst the few surviving defenders of the monarchy and the old and faithful servants of the King, whose heart bleeds under these reiterated blows?'" [Du Bruel writes rapidly.] "'Monsieur le Baron Flamet de la Billardiere died this morning of dropsy, caused by heart disease.' You see, it is just as well to show there are hearts in government offices; and you ought to slip in a little flummery about the emotions of the Royalists during the Terror,—might be

useful, hey! But stay,—no! the petty papers would be sure to say the emotions came more from the stomach than the heart. Better leave that out. What are you writing now?”

Du Bruel [reading]. “‘Issuing from an old parliamentary stock in which devotion to the throne was hereditary, as was also attachment to the faith of our fathers, Monsieur de la Billardiere—‘”

Bixiou. “Better say Monsieur le Baron de la Billardiere.”

Du Bruel. “But he wasn’t baron in 1793.”

Bixiou. “No matter. Don’t you remember that under the Empire Fouche was telling an anecdote about the Convention, in which he had to quote Robespierre, and he said, ‘Robespierre called out to me, “Duc d’Otrante, go to the Hotel de Ville.”’ There’s a precedent for you!”

Du Bruel. “Let me just write that down; I can use it in a vaudeville.—But to go back to what we were saying. I don’t want to put ‘Monsieur le baron,’ because I am reserving his honors till the last, when they rained upon him.”

Bixiou. “Oh! very good; that’s theatrical,—the finale of the article.”

Du Bruel [continuing]. “‘In appointing Monsieur de la Billardiere gentleman-in-ordinary—‘”

Bixiou. “Very ordinary!”

Du Bruel. “‘—of the Bedchamber, the King rewarded not only the services rendered by the Provost, who knew how to harmonize the severity of his functions with the customary urbanity of the Bourbons, but the bravery of the Vendean hero, who never bent the knee to the imperial idol. He leaves a son, who inherits his loyalty and his talents.’”

Bixiou. “Don’t you think all that is a little too florid? I should tone down the poetry. ‘Imperial idol!’ ‘bent the knee!’ damn it, my dear fellow, writing vaudevilles has ruined your style; you can’t come down to pedestrial prose. I should say, ‘He belonged to the small number of those who.’ Simplify, simplify! the man himself was a simpleton.”

Du Bruel. “That’s vaudeville, if you like! You would make your fortune at the theatre, Bixiou.”

Bixiou. “What have you said about Quiberon?” [Reads over du Bruel’s shoulder.] “Oh, that won’t do! Here, this is what you must say: ‘He took upon himself, in a book recently published, the responsibility for all the blunders of the expedition to Quiberon,—thus proving the nature of his loyalty, which did not shrink from any sacrifice.’ That’s clever and witty, and exalts La Billardiere.”

Du Bruel. “At whose expense?”

Bixiou [solemn as a priest in a pulpit]. “Why, Hoche and Tallien, of course; don’t you read history?”

Du Bruel. “No. I subscribed to the Baudouin series, but I’ve never had time to open a volume; one can’t find matter for vaudevilles there.”

Phellion [at the door]. “We all want to know, Monsieur Bixiou, what made you think that the worthy and honorable Monsieur Rabourdin, who has so long done the work of this division for Monsieur de la Billardiere,—he, who is the senior head of all the bureaus, and whom, moreover, the minister summoned as soon as he heard of the departure of the late Monsieur de la Billardiere,—will not be appointed head of the division.”

Bixiou. “Papa Phellion, you know geography?”

Phellion [bridling up]. “I should say so!”

Bixiou. “And history?”

Phellion [affecting modesty]. “Possibly.”

Bixiou [looking fixedly at him]. “Your diamond pin is loose, it is coming out. Well, you may know all that, but you don’t know the human heart; you have gone no further in the geography and history of that organ than you have in the environs of the city of Paris.”

Poiret [to Vimeux]. “Environs of Paris? I thought they were talking of Monsieur Rabourdin.”

Bixiou. “About that bet? Does the entire bureau Rabourdin bet against me?”

All. “Yes.”

Bixiou. “Du Bruel, do you count in?”

Du Bruel. “Of course I do. We want Rabourdin to go up a step and make room for others.”

Bixiou. “Well, I accept the bet,—for this reason; you can hardly understand it, but I’ll tell it to you all the same. It would be right and just to appoint Monsieur Rabourdin” [looking full at Dutocq], “because, in that case, long and faithful service, honor, and talent would be recognized, appreciated, and properly rewarded. Such an appointment is in the best interests of the administration.” [Phellion, Poiret, and Thuillier listen stupidly, with the look of those who try to peer before them in the darkness.] “Well, it is just because the promotion would be so fitting, and because the man has such merit, and because the measure is so eminently wise and equitable that I bet Rabourdin

will not be appointed. Yes, you'll see, that appointment will slip up, just like the invasion from Boulogne, and the march to Russia, for the success of which a great genius has gathered together all the chances. It will fail as all good and just things do fail in this low world. I am only backing the devil's game."

Du Bruel. "Who do you think will be appointed?"

Bixiou. "The more I think about Baudoyer, the more sure I feel that he unites all the opposite qualities; therefore I think he will be the next head of this division."

Dutocq. "But Monsieur des Lupeaulx, who sent for me to borrow my Charlet, told me positively that Monsieur Rabourdin was appointed, and that the little La Billardiere would be made Clerk of the Seals."

Bixiou. "Appointed, indeed! The appointment can't be made and signed under ten days. It will certainly not be known before New-Year's day. There he goes now across the courtyard; look at him, and say if the virtuous Rabourdin looks like a man in the sunshine of favor. I should say he knows he's dismissed." [Fleury rushes to the window.] "Gentlemen, adieu; I'll go and tell Monsieur Baudoyer that I hear from you that Rabourdin is appointed; it will make him furious, the pious creature! Then I'll tell him of our wager, to cool him down,—a process we call at the theatre turning the Wheel of Fortune, don't we, du Bruel? Why do I care who gets the place? simply because if Baudoyer does he will make me under-head-clerk" [goes out].

Poiret. "Everybody says that man is clever, but as for me, I can never understand a word he says" [goes on copying]. "I listen and listen; I hear words, but I never get at any meaning; he talks about the environs of Paris when he discusses the human heart and" [lays down his pen and goes to the stove] "declares he backs the devil's game when it is a question of Russia and Boulogne; now what is there so clever in that, I'd like to know? We must first admit that the devil plays any game at all, and then find out what game; possibly dominoes" [blows his nose].

Fleury [interrupting]. "Pere Poiret is blowing his nose; it must be eleven o'clock."

Du Bruel. "So it is! Goodness! I'm off to the secretary; he wants to read the obituary."

Poiret. "What was I saying?"

Thuillier. "Dominoes,—perhaps the devil plays dominoes." [Sebastien enters to gather up the different papers and circulars for signature.]

Vimeux. "Ah! there you are, my fine young man. Your days of hardship are nearly over; you'll get a post. Monsieur Rabourdin will be appointed.

Weren’t you at Madame Rabourdin’s last night? Lucky fellow! they say that really superb women go there.”

Sebastien. “Do they? I didn’t know.”

Fleury. “Are you blind?”

Sebastien. “I don’t like to look at what I ought not to see.”

Phellion [delighted]. “Well said, young man!”

Vimeux. “The devil! well, you looked at Madame Rabourdin enough, any how; a charming woman.”

Fleury. “Pooh! thin as a rail. I saw her in the Tuileries, and I much prefer Percilliee, the ballet-mistress, Castaing’s victim.”

Phellion. “What has an actress to do with the wife of a government official?”

Dutocq. “They both play comedy.”

Fleury [looking askance at Dutocq]. “The physical has nothing to do with the moral, and if you mean—”

Dutocq. “I mean nothing.”

Fleury. “Do you all want to know which of us will really be made head of this bureau?”

All. “Yes, tell us.”

Fleury. “Colleville.”

Thuillier. “Why?”

Fleury. “Because Madame Colleville has taken the shortest way to it—through the sacristy.”

Thuillier. “I am too much Colleville’s friend not to beg you, Monsieur Fleury, to speak respectfully of his wife.”

Phellion. “A defenceless woman should never be made the subject of conversation here—”

Vimeux. “All the more because the charming Madame Colleville won’t invite Fleury to her house. He backbites her in revenge.”

Fleury. “She may not receive me on the same footing that she does Thuillier, but I go there—”

Thuillier. “When? how?—under her windows?”

Though Fleury was dreaded as a bully in all the offices, he received

Thuillier's speech in silence. This meekness, which surprised the other clerks, was owing to a certain note for two hundred francs, of doubtful value, which Thuillier agreed to pass over to his sister. After this skirmish dead silence prevailed. They all wrote steadily from one to three o'clock. Du Bruel did not return.

About half-past three the usual preparations for departure, the brushing of hats, the changing of coats, went on in all the ministerial offices. That precious thirty minutes thus employed served to shorten by just so much the day's labor. At this hour the over-heated rooms cool off; the peculiar odor that hangs about the bureaus evaporates; silence is restored. By four o'clock none but a few clerks who do their duty conscientiously remain. A minister may know who are the real workers under him if he will take the trouble to walk through the divisions after four o'clock,—a species of prying, however, that no one of his dignity would condescend to.

The various heads of divisions and bureaus usually encountered each other in the courtyards at this hour and exchanged opinions on the events of the day. On this occasion they departed by twos and threes, most of them agreeing in favor of Rabourdin; while the old stagers, like Monsieur Clergeot, shook their heads and said, "Habent sua sidera lites." Saillard and Baudoyer were politely avoided, for nobody knew what to say to them about La Billardiere's death, it being fully understood that Baudoyer wanted the place, though it was certainly not due to him.

When Saillard and his son-in-law had gone a certain distance from the ministry the former broke silence and said: "Things look badly for you, my poor Baudoyer."

"I can't understand," replied the other, "what Elisabeth was dreaming of when she sent Godard in such a hurry to get a passport for Falleix; Godard tells me she hired a post-chaise by the advice of my uncle Mitral, and that Falleix has already started for his own part of the country."

"Some matter connected with our business," suggested Saillard.

"Our most pressing business just now is to look after Monsieur La Billardiere's place," returned Baudoyer, crossly.

They were just then near the entrance of the Palais-Royal on the rue Saint-Honore. Dutocq came up, bowing, and joined them.

"Monsieur," he said to Baudoyer, "if I can be useful to you in any way under the circumstances in which you find yourself, pray command me, for I am not less devoted to your interests than Monsieur Godard."

"Such an assurance is at least consoling," replied Baudoyer; "it makes me

aware that I have the confidence of honest men."

"If you would kindly employ your influence to get me placed in your division, taking Bixiou as head of the bureau and me as under-head-clerk, you will secure the future of two men who are ready to do anything for your advancement."

"Are you making fun of us, monsieur?" asked Saillard, staring at him stupidly.

"Far be it from me to do that," said Dutocq. "I have just come from the printing-office of the ministerial journal (where I carried from the general-secretary an obituary notice of Monsieur de la Billardiere), and I there read an article which will appear to-night about you, which has given me the highest opinion of your character and talents. If it is necessary to crush Rabourdin, I'm in a position to give him the final blow; please to remember that."

Dutocq disappeared.

"May I be shot if I understand a single word of it," said Saillard, looking at Baudoyer, whose little eyes were expressive of stupid bewilderment. "I must buy the newspaper to-night."

When the two reached home and entered the salon on the ground-floor, they found a large fire lighted, and Madame Saillard, Elisabeth, Monsieur Gaudron and the curate of Saint-Paul's sitting by it. The curate turned at once to Monsieur Baudoyer, to whom Elisabeth made a sign which he failed to understand.

"Monsieur," said the curate, "I have lost no time in coming in person to thank you for the magnificent gift with which you have adorned my poor church. I dared not run in debt to buy that beautiful monstrance, worthy of a cathedral. You, who are one of our most pious and faithful parishioners, must have keenly felt the bareness of the high altar. I am on my way to see Monseigneur the coadjutor, and he will, I am sure, send you his own thanks later."

"I have done nothing as yet—" began Baudoyer.

"Monsieur le cure," interposed his wife, cutting him short. "I see I am forced to betray the whole secret. Monsieur Baudoyer hopes to complete the gift by sending you a dais for the coming Fete-Dieu. But the purchase must depend on the state of our finances, and our finances depend on my husband's promotion."

"God will reward those who honor him," said Monsieur Gaudron, preparing, with the curate, to take leave.

"But will you not," said Saillard to the two ecclesiastics, "do us the honor

to take pot luck with us?”

“You can stay, my dear vicar,” said the curate to Gaudron; “you know I am engaged to dine with the curate of Saint-Roch, who, by the bye, is to bury Monsieur de la Billardiere to-morrow.”

“Monsieur le cure de Saint-Roch might say a word for us,” began Baudoyer. His wife pulled the skirt of his coat violently.

“Do hold your tongue, Baudoyer,” she said, leading him aside and whispering in his ear. “You have given a monstrance to the church, that cost five thousand francs. I’ll explain it all later.”

The miserly Baudoyer make a sulky grimace, and continued gloomy and cross for the rest of the day.

“What did you busy yourself about Falleix’s passport for? Why do you meddle in other people’s affairs?” he presently asked her.

“I must say, I think Falleix’s affairs are as much ours as his,” returned Elisabeth, dryly, glancing at her husband to make him notice Monsieur Gaudron, before whom he ought to be silent.

“Certainly, certainly,” said old Saillard, thinking of his co-partnership.

“I hope you reached the newspaper office in time?” remarked Elisabeth to Monsieur Gaudron, as she helped him to soup.

“Yes, my dear lady,” answered the vicar; “when the editor read the little article I gave him, written by the secretary of the Grand Almoner, he made no difficulty. He took pains to insert it in a conspicuous place. I should never have thought of that; but this young journalist has a wide-awake mind. The defenders of religion can enter the lists against impiety without disadvantage at the present moment, for there is a great deal of talent in the royalist press. I have every reason to believe that success will crown your hopes. But you must remember, my dear Baudoyer, to promote Monsieur Colleville; he is an object of great interest to his Eminence; in fact, I am desired to mention him to you.”

“If I am head of the division, I will make him head of one of my bureaus, if you want me to,” said Baudoyer.

The matter thus referred to was explained after dinner, when the ministerial organ (bought and sent up by the porter) proved to contain among its Paris news the following articles, called items:—

“Monsieur le Baron de la Billardiere died this morning, after a long and painful illness. The king loses a devoted servant, the Church a most pious son. Monsieur de la Billardiere’s end has fitly crowned a noble life, consecrated in dark and troublesome times to perilous missions, and of late years to arduous

civic duties. Monsieur de la Billardiere was provost of a department, where his force of character triumphed over all the obstacles that rebellion arrayed against him. He subsequently accepted the difficult post of director of a division (in which his great acquirements were not less useful than the truly French affability of his manners) for the express purpose of conciliating the serious interests that arise under its administration. No rewards have ever been more truly deserved than those by which the King, Louis XVIII., and his present Majesty took pleasure in crowning a loyalty which never faltered under the usurper. This old family still survives in the person of a single heir to the excellent man whose death now afflicts so many warm friends. His Majesty has already graciously made known that Monsieur Benjamin de la Billardiere will be included among the gentlemen-in-ordinary of the Bedchamber.

"The numerous friends who have not already received their notification of this sad event are hereby informed that the funeral will take place to-morrow at four o'clock, in the church of Saint-Roch. The memorial address will be delivered by Monsieur l'Abbe Fontanon."——

"Monsieur Isidore-Charles-Thomas Baudoyer, representing one of the oldest bourgeois families of Paris, and head of a bureau in the late Monsieur de la Billardiere's division, has lately recalled the old traditions of piety and devotion which formerly distinguished these great families, so jealous for the honor and glory of religion, and so faithful in preserving its monuments. The church of Saint-Paul has long needed a monstrance in keeping with the magnificence of that basilica, itself due to the Company of Jesus. Neither the vestry nor the curate were rich enough to decorate the altar. Monsieur Baudoyer has bestowed upon the parish a monstrance that many persons have seen and admired at Monsieur Gohier's, the king's jeweller. Thanks to the piety of this gentleman, who did not shrink from the immensity of the price, the church of Saint-Paul possesses to-day a masterpiece of the jeweller's art designed by Monsieur de Sommervieux. It gives us pleasure to make known this fact, which proves how powerless the declamations of liberals have been on the mind of the Parisian bourgeoisie. The upper ranks of that body have at all times been royalist and they prove it when occasion offers."

"The price was five thousand francs," said the Abbe Gaudron; "but as the payment was in cash, the court jeweller reduced the amount."

"Representing one of the oldest bourgeois families in Paris!" Saillard was saying to himself; "there it is printed,—in the official paper, too!"

"Dear Monsieur Gaudron," said Madame Baudoyer, "please help my father to compose a little speech that he could slip into the countess's ear when he takes her the monthly stipend,—a single sentence that would cover all! I must

leave you. I am obliged to go out with my uncle Mitral. Would you believe it? I was unable to find my uncle Bidault at home this afternoon. Oh, what a dog-kennel he lives in! But Monsieur Mitral, who knows his ways, says he does all his business between eight o'clock in the morning and midday, and that after that hour he can be found only at a certain cafe called the Cafe Themis,—a singular name."

"Is justice done there?" said the abbe, laughing.

"Do you ask why he goes to a cafe at the corner of the rue Dauphine and the quai des Augustins? They say he plays dominoes there every night with his friend Monsieur Gobseck. I don't wish to go to such a place alone; my uncle Mitral will take me there and bring me back."

At this instant Mitral showed his yellow face, surmounted by a wig which looked as though it might be made of hay, and made a sign to his niece to come at once, and not keep a carriage waiting at two francs an hour. Madame Baudoyer rose and went away without giving any explanation to her husband or father.

"Heaven has given you in that woman," said Monsieur Gaudron to Baudoyer when Elisabeth had disappeared, "a perfect treasure of prudence and virtue, a model of wisdom, a Christian who gives sure signs of possessing the Divine spirit. Religion alone is able to form such perfect characters. To-morrow I shall say a mass for the success of your good cause. It is all-important, for the sake of the monarchy and of religion itself that you should receive this appointment. Monsieur Rabourdin is a liberal; he subscribes to the 'Journal des Debats,' a dangerous newspaper, which made war on Monsieur le Comte de Villele to please the wounded vanity of Monsieur de Chateaubriand. His Eminence will read the newspaper to-night, if only to see what is said of his poor friend Monsieur de la Billardiere; and Monseigneur the coadjutor will speak of you to the King. When I think of what you have now done for his dear church, I feel sure he will not forget you in his prayers; more than that, he is dining at this moment with the coadjutor at the house of the curate of Saint-Roch."

These words made Saillard and Baudoyer begin to perceive that Elisabeth had not been idle ever since Godard had informed her of Monsieur de la Billardiere's decease.

"Isn't she clever, that Elisabeth of mine?" cried Saillard, comprehending more clearly than Monsieur l'abbe the rapid undermining, like the path of a mole, which his daughter had undertaken.

"She sent Godard to Rabourdin's door to find out what newspaper he takes," said Gaudron; "and I mentioned the name to the secretary of his

Eminence,—for we live at a crisis when the Church and Throne must keep themselves informed as to who are their friends and who their enemies."

"For the last five days I have been trying to find the right thing to say to his Excellency's wife," said Saillard.

"All Paris will read that," cried Baudoyer, whose eyes were still riveted on the paper.

"Your eulogy costs us four thousand eight hundred francs, son-in-law!" exclaimed Madame Saillard.

"You have adorned the house of God," said the Abbe Gaudron.

"We might have got salvation without doing that," she returned. "But if Baudoyer gets the place, which is worth eight thousand more, the sacrifice is not so great. If he doesn't get it! hey, papa," she added, looking at her husband, "how we shall have bled!—"

"Well, never mind," said Saillard, enthusiastically, "we can always make it up through Falleix, who is going to extend his business and use his brother, whom he has made a stockbroker on purpose. Elisabeth might have told us, I think, why Falleix went off in such a hurry. But let's invent my little speech. This is what I thought of: 'Madame, if you would say a word to his Excellency —'"

"'If you would deign,'" said Gaudron; "add the word 'deign,' it is more respectful. But you ought to know, first of all, whether Madame la Dauphine will grant you her protection, and then you could suggest to Madame la comtesse the idea of co-operating with the wishes of her Royal Highness."

"You ought to designate the vacant post," said Baudoyer.

"'Madame la comtesse,'" began Saillard, rising, and bowing to his wife, with an agreeable smile.

"Goodness! Saillard; how ridiculous you look. Take care, my man, you'll make the woman laugh."

"'Madame la comtesse,'" resumed Saillard. "Is that better, wife?"

"Yes, my duck."

"'The place of the worthy Monsieur de la Billardiere is vacant; my son-in-law, Monsieur Baudoyer—'"

"'Man of talent and extreme piety,'" prompted Gaudron.

"Write it down, Baudoyer," cried old Saillard, "write that sentence down."

Baudoyer proceeded to take a pen and wrote, without a blush, his own

praises, precisely as Nathan or Canalis might have reviewed one of their own books.

"'Madame la comtesse'—Don't you see, mother?" said Saillard to his wife; "I am supposing you to be the minister's wife."

"Do you take me for a fool?" she answered sharply. "I know that."

"'The place of the late worthy de la Billardiere is vacant; my son-in-law, Monsieur Baudoyer, a man of consummate talent and extreme piety—'" After looking at Monsieur Gaudron, who was reflecting, he added, "'will be very glad if he gets it.' That's not bad; it's brief and it says the whole thing."

"But do wait, Saillard; don't you see that Monsieur l'abbe is turning it over in his mind?" said Madame Saillard; "don't disturb him."

"'Will be very thankful if you would deign to interest yourself in his behalf,'" resumed Gaudron. "'And in saying a word to his Excellency you will particularly please Madame la Dauphine, by whom he has the honor and the happiness to be protected.'"

"Ah! Monsieur Gaudron, that sentence is worth more than the monstrance; I don't regret the four thousand eight hundred—Besides, Baudoyer, my lad, you'll pay them, won't you? Have you written it all down?"

"I shall make you repeat it, father, morning and evening," said Madame Saillard. "Yes, that's a good speech. How lucky you are, Monsieur Gaudron, to know so much. That's what it is to be brought up in a seminary; they learn there how to speak to God and his saints."

"He is as good as he is learned," said Baudoyer, pressing the priest's hand. "Did you write that article?" he added, pointing to the newspaper.

"No, it was written by the secretary of his Eminence, a young abbe who is under obligations to me, and who takes an interest in Monsieur Colleville; he was educated at my expense."

"A good deed is always rewarded," said Baudoyer.

While these four personages were sitting down to their game of boston, Elisabeth and her uncle Mitral reached the cafe Themis, with much discourse as they drove along about a matter which Elisabeth's keen perceptions told her was the most powerful lever that could be used to force the minister's hand in the affair of her husband's appointment. Uncle Mitral, a former sheriff's officer, crafty, clever at sharp practice, and full of expedients and judicial precautions, believed the honor of his family to be involved in the appointment of his nephew. His avarice had long led him to estimate the contents of old Gigonnet's strong-box, for he knew very well they would go in the end to benefit his nephew Baudoyer; and it was therefore important that

the latter should obtain a position which would be in keeping with the combined fortunes of the Saillards and the old Gigonnet, which would finally devolve on the Baudoyer's little daughter; and what an heiress she would be with an income of a hundred thousand francs! to what social position might she not aspire with that fortune? He adopted all the ideas of his niece Elisabeth and thoroughly understood them. He had helped in sending off Falleix expeditiously, explaining to him the advantage of taking post horses. After which, while eating his dinner, he reflected that it be as well to give a twist of his own to the clever plan invented by Elisabeth.

When they reached the Cafe Themis he told his niece that he alone could manage Gigonnet in the matter they both had in view, and he made her wait in the hackney-coach and bide her time to come forward at the right moment. Elisabeth saw through the window-panes the two faces of Gobseck and Gigonnet (her uncle Bidault), which stood out in relief against the yellow wood-work of the old cafe, like two cameo heads, cold and impassible, in the rigid attitude that their gravity gave them. The two Parisian misers were surrounded by a number of other old faces, on which "thirty per cent discount" was written in circular wrinkles that started from the nose and turned round the glacial cheek-bones. These remarkable physiognomies brightened up on seeing Mitral, and their eyes gleamed with tigerish curiosity.

"Hey, hey! it is papa Mitral!" cried one of them, named Chaboisseau, a little old man who discounted for a publisher.

"Bless me, so it is!" said another, a broker named Metivier, "ha, that's an old monkey well up in his tricks."

"And you," retorted Mitral, "you are an old crow who knows all about carcasses."

"True," said the stern Gobseck.

"What are you here for? Have you come to seize friend Metivier?" asked Gigonnet, pointing to the broker, who had the bluff face of a porter.

"Your great-niece Elisabeth is out there, papa Gigonnet," whispered Mitral.

"What! some misfortune?" said Bidault. The old man drew his eyebrows together and assumed a tender look like that of an executioner when about to go to work officially. In spite of his Roman virtue he must have been touched, for his red nose lost somewhat of its color.

"Well, suppose it is misfortune, won't you help Saillard's daughter?—a girl who has knitted your stockings for the last thirty years!" cried Mitral.

"If there's good security I don't say I won't," replied Gigonnet. "Falleix is in with them. Falleix has just set up his brother as a broker, and he is doing as

much business as the Brezacs; and what with? his mind, perhaps! Saillard is no simpleton."

"He knows the value of money," put in Chaboisseau.

That remark, uttered among those old men, would have made an artist and thinker shudder as they all nodded their heads.

"But it is none of my business," resumed Bidault-Gigonnet. "I'm not bound to care for my neighbors' misfortunes. My principle is never to be off my guard with friends or relatives; you can't perish except through weakness. Apply to Gobseck; he is softer."

The usurers all applauded these doctrines with a shake of their metallic heads. An onlooker would have fancied he heard the creaking of ill-oiled machinery.

"Come, Gigonnet, show a little feeling," said Chaboisseau, "they've knit your stockings for thirty years."

"That counts for something," remarked Gobseck.

"Are you all alone? Is it safe to speak?" said Mitral, looking carefully about him. "I come about a good piece of business."

"If it is good, why do you come to us?" said Gigonnet, sharply, interrupting Mitral.

"A fellow who was a gentleman of the Bedchamber," went on Mitral, "a former 'chouan,'—what's his name?—La Billardiere is dead."

"True," said Gobseck.

"And our nephew is giving monstrances to the church," snarled Gigonnet.

"He is not such a fool as to give them, he sells them, old man," said Mitral, proudly. "He wants La Billardiere's place, and in order to get it, we must seize —"

"Seize! You'll never be anything but a sheriff's officer," put in Metivier, striking Mitral amicably on the shoulder; "I like that, I do!"

"Seize Monsieur Clement des Lupeaulx in our clutches," continued Mitral; "Elisabeth has discovered how to do it, and he is—"

"Elisabeth"; cried Gigonnet, interrupting again; "dear little creature! she takes after her grandfather, my poor brother! he never had his equal! Ah, you should have seen him buying up old furniture; what tact! what shrewdness! What does Elisabeth want?"

"Hey! hey!" cried Mitral, "you've got back your bowels of compassion,

papa Gigonnet! That phenomenon has a cause."

"Always a child," said Gobseck to Gigonnet, "you are too quick on the trigger."

"Come, Gobseck and Gigonnet, listen to me; you want to keep well with des Lupeaulx, don't you? You've not forgotten how you plucked him in that affair about the king's debts, and you are afraid he'll ask you to return some of his feathers," said Mitral.

"Shall we tell him the whole thing?" asked Gobseck, whispering to Gigonnet.

"Mitral is one of us; he wouldn't play a shabby trick on his former customers," replied Gigonnet. "You see, Mitral," he went on, speaking to the ex-sheriff in a low voice, "we three have just bought up all those debts, the payment of which depends on the decision of the liquidation committee."

"How much will you lose?" asked Mitral.

"Nothing," said Gobseck.

"Nobody knows we are in it," added Gigonnet; "Samanon screens us."

"Come, listen to me, Gigonnet; it is cold, and your niece is waiting outside. You'll understand what I want in two words. You must at once, between you, send two hundred and fifty thousand francs (without interest) into the country after Falleix, who has gone post-haste, with a courier in advance of him."

"Is it possible!" said Gobseck.

"What for?" cried Gigonnet, "and where to?"

"To des Lupeaulx's magnificent country-seat," replied Mitral. "Falleix knows the country, for he was born there; and he is going to buy up land all round the secretary's miserable hovel, with the two hundred and fifty thousand francs I speak of,—good land, well worth the price. There are only nine days before us for drawing up and recording the notarial deeds (bear that in mind). With the addition of this land, des Lupeaulx's present miserable property would pay taxes to the amount of one thousand francs, the sum necessary to make a man eligible to the Chamber. Ergo, with it des Lupeaulx goes into the electoral college, becomes eligible, count, and whatever he pleases. You know the deputy who has slipped out and left a vacancy, don't you?"

The two misers nodded.

"Des Lupeaulx would cut off a leg to get elected in his place," continued Mitral; "but he must have the title-deeds of the property in his own name, and then mortgage them back to us for the amount of the purchase-money. Ah! now you begin to see what I am after! First of all, we must make sure of

Baudoyer’s appointment, and des Lupeaulx will get it for us on these terms; after that is settled we will hand him back to you. Falleix is now canvassing the electoral vote. Don’t you perceive that you have Lupeaulx completely in your power until after the election?—for Falleix’s friends are a large majority. Now do you see what I mean, papa Gigonnet?”

“It’s a clever game,” said Metivier.

“We’ll do it,” said Gigonnet; “you agree, don’t you, Gobseck? Falleix can give us security and put mortgages on the property in my name; we’ll go and see des Lupeaulx when all is ready.”

“We’re robbed,” said Gobseck.

“Ha, ha!” laughed Mitral, “I’d like to know the robber!”

“Nobody can rob us but ourselves,” answered Gigonnet. “I told you we were doing a good thing in buying up all des Lupeaulx’s paper from his creditors at sixty per cent discount.”

“Take this mortgage on his estate and you’ll hold him tighter still through the interest,” answered Mitral.

“Possibly,” said Gobseck.

After exchanging a shrewd look with Gobseck, Gigonnet went to the door of the cafe.

“Elisabeth! follow it up, my dear,” he said to his niece. “We hold your man securely; but don’t neglect accessories. You have begun well, clever woman! go on as you began and you’ll have your uncle’s esteem,” and he grasped her hand, gayly.

“But,” said Mitral, “Metivier and Chaboisseau heard it all, and they may play us a trick and tell the matter to some opposition journal which would catch the ball on its way and counteract the effect of the ministerial article. You must go alone, my dear; I dare not let those two cormorants out of my sight.” So saying he re-entered the cafe.

The next day the numerous subscribers to a certain liberal journal read, among the Paris items, the following article, inserted authoritatively by Chaboisseau and Metivier, share-holders in the said journal, brokers for publishers, printers, and paper-makers, whose behests no editor dared refuse: —

“Yesterday a ministerial journal plainly indicated as the probable successor of Monsieur le Baron de la Billardiere, Monsieur Baudoyer, one of the worthiest citizens of a populous quarter, where his benevolence is scarcely less known than the piety on which the ministerial organ laid so much stress. Why

was that sheet silent as to his talents? Did it reflect that in boasting of the bourgeoise nobility of Monsieur Baudoyer—which, certainly, is a nobility as good as any other—it was pointing out a reason for the exclusion of the candidate? A gratuitous piece of perfidy! an attempt to kill with a caress! To appoint Monsieur Baudoyer is to do honor to the virtues, the talents of the middle classes, of whom we shall ever be the supporters, though their cause seems at times a lost one. This appointment, we repeat, will be an act of justice and good policy; consequently we may be sure it will not be made."

On the morrow, Friday, the usual day for the dinner given by Madame Rabourdin, whom des Lupeaulx had left at midnight, radiant in beauty, on the staircase of the Bouffons, arm in arm with Madame de Camps (Madame Firmiani had lately married), the old roue awoke with his thoughts of vengeance calmed, or rather refreshed, and his mind full of a last glance exchanged with Celestine.

"I'll make sure of Rabourdin's support by forgiving him now,—I'll get even with him later. If he hasn't this place for the time being I should have to give up a woman who is capable of becoming a most precious instrument in the pursuit of high political fortune. She understands everything; shrinks from nothing, from no idea whatever!—and besides, I can't know before his Excellency what new scheme of administration Rabourdin has invented. No, my dear des Lupeaulx, the thing in hand is to win all now for your Celestine. You may make as many faces as you please, Madame la comtesse, but you will invite Madame Rabourdin to your next select party."

Des Lupeaulx was one of those men who to satisfy a passion are quite able to put away revenge in some dark corner of their minds. His course was taken; he was resolved to get Rabourdin appointed.

"I will prove to you, my dear fellow, that I deserve a good place in your galley," thought he as he seated himself in his study and began to unfold a newspaper.

He knew so well what the ministerial organ would contain that he rarely took the trouble to read it, but on this occasion he did open it to look at the article on La Billardiere, recollecting with amusement the dilemma in which du Bruel had put him by bringing him the night before Bixiou's amendments to the obituary. He was laughing to himself as he reread the biography of the late Comte da Fontaine, dead a few months earlier, which he had hastily substituted for that of La Billardiere, when his eyes were dazzled by the name of Baudoyer. He read with fury the article which pledged the minister, and then he rang violently for Dutocq, to send him at once to the editor. But what was his astonishment on reading the reply of the opposition paper! The situation was evidently serious. He knew the game, and he saw that the man

who was shuffling his cards for him was a Greek of the first order. To dictate in this way through two opposing newspapers in one evening, and to begin the fight by forestalling the intentions of the minister was a daring game! He recognized the pen of a liberal editor, and resolved to question him that night at the opera. Dutocq appeared.

“Read that,” said des Lupeaulx, handing him over the two journals, and continuing to run his eye over others to see if Baudoyer had pulled any further wires. “Go to the office and ask who has dared to thus compromise the minister.”

“It was not Monsieur Baudoyer himself,” answered Dutocq, “for he never left the ministry yesterday. I need not go and inquire; for when I took your article to the newspaper office I met a young abbe who brought in a letter from the Grand Almoner, before which you yourself would have had to bow.”

“Dutocq, you have a grudge against Monsieur Rabourdin, and it isn’t right; for he has twice saved you from being turned out. However, we are not masters of our own feelings; we sometimes hate our benefactors. Only, remember this; if you show the slightest treachery to Rabourdin, without my permission, it will be your ruin. As to that newspaper, let the Grand Almoner subscribe as largely as we do, if he wants its services. Here we are at the end of the year; the matter of subscriptions will come up for discussion, and I shall have something to say on that head. As to La Billardiere’s place, there is only one way to settle the matter; and that is to appoint Rabourdin this very day.”

“Gentlemen,” said Dutocq, returning to the clerks’ office and addressing his colleagues. “I don’t know if Bixiou has the art of looking into futurity, but if you have not read the ministerial journal I advise you to study the article about Baudoyer; then, as Monsieur Fleury takes the opposition sheet, you can see the reply. Monsieur Rabourdin certainly has talent, but a man who in these days gives a six-thousand-franc monstrance to the Church has a devilish deal more talent than he.”

Bixiou [entering]. “What say you, gentlemen, to the First Epistle to the Corinthians in our pious ministerial journal, and the reply Epistle to the Ministers in the opposition sheet? How does Monsieur Rabourdin feel now, du Bruel?”

Du Bruel [rushing in]. “I don’t know.” [He drags Bixiou back into his cabinet, and says in a low voice] “My good fellow, your way of helping people is like that of the hangman who jumps upon a victim’s shoulders to break his neck. You got me into a scrape with des Lupeaulx, which my folly in ever trusting you richly deserved. A fine thing indeed, that article on La Billardiere. I sha’n’t forget the trick! Why, the very first sentence was as good as telling the King he was superannuated and it was time for him to die. And as to that

Quiberon bit, it said plainly that the King was a—What a fool I was!”

Bixiou [laughing]. “Bless my heart! are you getting angry? Can’t a fellow joke any more?”

Du Bruel. “Joke! joke indeed. When you want to be made head-clerk somebody shall joke with you, my dear fellow.”

Bixiou [in a bullying tone]. “Angry, are we?”

Du Bruel. “Yes!”

Bixiou [dryly]. “So much the worse for you.”

Du Bruel [uneasy]. “You wouldn’t pardon such a thing yourself, I know.”

Bixiou [in a wheedling tone]. “To a friend? indeed I would.” [They hear Fleury’s voice.] “There’s Fleury cursing Baudoyer. Hey, how well the thing has been managed! Baudoyer will get the appointment.” [Confidentially] “After all, so much the better. Du Bruel, just keep your eye on the consequences. Rabourdin would be a mean-spirited creature to stay under Baudoyer; he will send in his registration, and that will give us two places. You can be head of the bureau and take me for under-head-clerk. We will make vaudevilles together, and I’ll fag at your work in the office.”

Du Bruel [smiling]. “Dear me, I never thought of that. Poor Rabourdin! I shall be sorry for him, though.”

Bixiou. “That shows how much you love him!” [Changing his tone] “Ah, well, I don’t pity him any longer. He’s rich; his wife gives parties and doesn’t ask me,—me, who go everywhere! Well, good-bye, my dear fellow, good-bye, and don’t owe me a grudge!” [He goes out through the clerks’ office.] “Adieu, gentlemen; didn’t I tell you yesterday that a man who has nothing but virtues and talents will always be poor, even though he has a pretty wife?”

Henry. “You are so rich, you!”

Bixiou. “Not bad, my Cincinnatus! But you’ll give me that dinner at the Rocher de Cancale.”

Poiret. “It is absolutely impossible for me to understand Monsieur Bixiou.”

Phellion [with an elegaic air]. “Monsieur Rabourdin so seldom reads the newspapers that it might perhaps be serviceable to deprive ourselves momentarily by taking them in to him.” [Fleury hands over his paper, Vimeux the office sheet, and Phellion departs with them.]

At that moment des Lupeaulx, coming leisurely downstairs to breakfast with the minister, was asking himself whether, before playing a trump card for the husband, it might not be prudent to probe the wife’s heart and make sure of

a reward for his devotion. He was feeling about for the small amount of heart that he possessed, when, at a turn of the staircase, he encountered his lawyer, who said to him, smiling, “Just a word, Monseigneur,” in the tone of familiarity assumed by men who know they are indispensable.

“What is it, my dear Desroches?” exclaimed the politician. “Has anything happened?”

“I have come to tell you that all your notes and debts have been brought up by Gobseck and Gigonnet, under the name of a certain Samanon.”

“Men whom I helped to make their millions!”

“Listen,” whispered the lawyer. “Gigonnet (really named Bidault) is the uncle of Saillard, your cashier; and Saillard is father-in-law to a certain Baudoyer, who thinks he has a right to the vacant place in your ministry. Don’t you think I have done right to come and tell you?”

“Thank you,” said des Lupeaulx, nodding to the lawyer with a shrewd look.

“One stroke of your pen will buy them off,” said Desroches, leaving him.

“What an immense sacrifice!” muttered des Lupeaulx. “It would be impossible to explain it to a woman,” thought he. “Is Celestine worth more than the clearing off of my debts?—that is the question. I’ll go and see her this morning.”

So the beautiful Madame Rabourdin was to be, within an hour, the arbiter of her husband’s fate, and no power on earth could warn her of the importance of her replies, or give her the least hint to guard her conduct and compose her voice. Moreover, in addition to her mischances, she believed herself certain of success, never dreaming that Rabourdin was undermined in all directions by the secret sapping of the mollusks.

“Well, Monseigneur,” said des Lupeaulx, entering the little salon where they breakfasted, “have you seen the articles on Baudoyer?”

“For God’s sake, my dear friend,” replied the minister, “don’t talk of those appointments just now; let me have an hour’s peace! They cracked my ears last night with that monstrance. The only way to save Rabourdin is to bring his appointment before the Council, unless I submit to having my hand forced. It is enough to disgust a man with the public service. I must purchase the right to keep that excellent Rabourdin by promoting a certain Colleville!”

“Why not make over the management of this pretty little comedy to me, and rid yourself of the worry of it? I’ll amuse you every morning with an account of the game of chess I should play with the Grand Almoner,” said des Lupeaulx.

“Very good,” said the minister, “settle it with the head examiner. But you know perfectly well that nothing is more likely to strike the king’s mind than just those reasons the opposition journal has chosen to put forth. Good heavens! fancy managing a ministry with such men as Baudoyer under me!”

“An imbecile bigot,” said des Lupeaulx, “and as utterly incapable as—”

“—as La Billardiere,” added the minister.

“But La Billardiere had the manners of a gentleman-in-ordinary,” replied des Lupeaulx. “Madame,” he continued, addressing the countess, “it is now an absolute necessity to invite Madame Rabourdin to your next private party. I must assure you she is the intimate friend of Madame de Camps; they were at the Opera together last night. I first met her at the hotel Firmiani. Besides, you will see that she is not of a kind to compromise a salon.”

“Invite Madame Rabourdin, my dear,” said the minister, “and pray let us talk of something else.”

CHAPTER VII. SCENES FROM DOMESTIC LIFE

Parisian households are literally eaten up with the desire to be in keeping with the luxury that surrounds them on all sides, and few there are who have the wisdom to let their external situation conform to their internal revenue. But this vice may perhaps denote a truly French patriotism, which seeks to maintain the supremacy of the nation in the matter of dress. France reigns through clothes over the whole of Europe; and every one must feel the importance of retaining a commercial sceptre that makes fashion in France what the navy is to England. This patriotic ardor which leads a nation to sacrifice everything to appearances—to the “paroistre,” as d’Aubigne said in the days of Henri IV.—is the cause of those vast secret labors which employ the whole of a Parisian woman’s morning, when she wishes, as Madame Rabourdin wished, to keep up on twelve thousand francs a year the style that many a family with thirty thousand does not indulge in. Consequently, every Friday,—the day of her dinner parties,—Madame Rabourdin helped the chambermaid to do the rooms; for the cook went early to market, and the man-servant was cleaning the silver, folding the napkins, and polishing the glasses. The ill-advised individual who might happen, through an oversight of the porter, to enter Madame Rabourdin’s establishment about eleven o’clock in the morning would have found her in the midst of a disorder the reverse of picturesque, wrapped in a dressing-gown, her hair ill-dressed, and her feet in old slippers, attending to the lamps, arranging the flowers, or cooking in haste

an extremely unpoetic breakfast. The visitor to whom the mysteries of Parisian life were unknown would certainly have learned for the rest of his life not to set foot in these greenrooms at the wrong moment; a woman caught in her matin mysteries would ever after point him out as a man capable of the blackest crimes; or she would talk of his stupidity and indiscretion in a manner to ruin him. The true Parisian woman, indulgent to all curiosity that she can put to profit, is implacable to that which makes her lose her prestige. Such a domiciliary invasion may be called, not only (as they say in police reports) an attack on privacy, but a burglary, a robbery of all that is most precious, namely, CREDIT. A woman is quite willing to let herself be surprised half-dressed, with her hair about her shoulders. If her hair is all her own she scores one; but she will never allow herself to be seen “doing” her own rooms, or she loses her pariostre,—that precious /seeming-to-be/!

Madame Rabourdin was in full tide of preparation for her Friday dinner, standing in the midst of provisions the cook had just fished from the vast ocean of the markets, when Monsieur des Lupeaulx made his way stealthily in. The general-secretary was certainly the last man Madame Rabourdin expected to see, and so, when she heard his boots creaking in the ante-chamber, she exclaimed, impatiently, “The hair-dresser already!”—an exclamation as little agreeable to des Lupeaulx as the sight of des Lupeaulx was agreeable to her. She immediately escaped into her bedroom, where chaos reigned; a jumble of furniture to be put out of sight, with other heterogeneous articles of more or rather less elegance,—a domestic carnival, in short. The bold des Lupeaulx followed the handsome figure, so piquant did she seem to him in her dishabille. There is something indescribably alluring to the eye in a portion of flesh seen through an hiatus in the undergarment, more attractive far than when it rises gracefully above the circular curve of the velvet bodice, to the vanishing line of the prettiest swan’s-neck that ever lover kissed before a ball. When the eye dwells on a woman in full dress making exhibition of her magnificent white shoulders, do we not fancy that we see the elegant dessert of a grand dinner? But the glance that glides through the disarray of muslins rumpled in sleep enjoys, as it were, a feast of stolen fruit glowing between the leaves on a garden wall.

“Stop! wait!” cried the pretty Parisian, bolting the door of the disordered room.

She rang for Therese, called for her daughter, the cook, and the man-servant, wishing she possessed the whistle of the machinist at the Opera. Her call, however, answered the same purpose. In a moment, another phenomenon! the salon assumed a piquant morning look, quite in keeping with the becoming toilet hastily got together by the fugitive; we say it to her glory, for she was evidently a clever woman, in this at least.

“You!” she said, coming forward, “at this hour? What has happened?”

“Very serious things,” answered des Lupeaulx. “You and I must understand each other now.”

Celestine looked at the man behind his glasses, and understood the matter.

“My principle vice,” she said, “is oddity. For instance, I do not mix up affections with politics; let us talk politics,—business, if you will,—the rest can come later. However, it is not really oddity nor a whim that forbids me to mingle ill-assorted colors and put together things that have no affinity, and compels me to avoid discords; it is my natural instinct as an artist. We women have politics of our own.”

Already the tones of her voice and the charm of her manners were producing their effect on the secretary and metamorphosing his roughness into sentimental courtesy; she had recalled him to his obligations as a lover. A clever pretty woman makes an atmosphere about her in which the nerves relax and the feelings soften.

“You are ignorant of what is happening,” said des Lupeaulx, harshly, for he still thought it best to make a show of harshness. “Read that.”

He gave the two newspapers to the graceful woman, having drawn a line in red ink round each of the famous articles.

“Good heavens!” she exclaimed, “but this is dreadful! Who is this Baudoyer?”

“A donkey,” answered des Lupeaulx; “but, as you see, he uses means,—he gives monstrances; he succeeds, thanks to some clever hand that pulls the wires.”

The thought of her debts crossed Madame Rabourdin’s mind and blurred her sight, as if two lightning flashes had blinded her eyes at the same moment; her ears hummed under the pressure of the blood that began to beat in her arteries; she remained for a moment quite bewildered, gazing at a window which she did not see.

“But are you faithful to us?” she said at last, with a winning glance at des Lupeaulx, as if to attach him to her.

“That is as it may be,” he replied, answering her glance with an interrogative look which made the poor woman blush.

“If you demand caution-money you may lose all,” she said, laughing; “I thought you more magnanimous than you are. And you, you thought me less a person than I am,—a sort of school-girl.”

“You have misunderstood me,” he said, with a covert smile; “I meant that I

could not assist a man who plays against me just as l'Etourdi played against Mascarille."

"What can you mean?"

"This will prove to you whether I am magnanimous or not."

He gave Madame Rabourdin the memorandum stolen by Dutocq, pointing out to her the passage in which her husband had so ably analyzed him.

"Read that."

Celestine recognized the handwriting, read the paper, and turned pale under the blow.

"All the ministries, the whole service is treated in the same way," said des Lupeaulx.

"Happily," she said, "you alone possess this document. I cannot explain it, even to myself."

"The man who stole it is not such a fool as to let me have it without keeping a copy for himself; he is too great a liar to admit it, and too clever in his business to give it up. I did not even ask him for it."

"Who is he?"

"Your chief clerk."

"Dutocq! People are always punished through their kindnesses! But," she added, "he is only a dog who wants a bone."

"Do you know what the other side offer me, poor devil of a general-secretary?"

"What?"

"I owe thirty-thousand and odd miserable francs,—you will despise me because it isn't more, but here, I grant you, I am significant. Well, Baudoyer's uncle has bought up my debts, and is, doubtless, ready to give me a receipt for them if Baudoyer is appointed."

"But all that is monstrous."

"Not at all; it is monarchical and religious, for the Grand Almoner is concerned in it. Baudoyer himself must appoint Colleville in return for ecclesiastical assistance."

"What shall you do?"

"What will you bid me do?" he said, with charming grace, holding out his hand.

Celestine no longer thought him ugly, nor old, nor white and chilling as a hoar-frost, nor indeed anything that was odious and offensive, but she did not give him her hand. At night, in her salon, she would have let him take it a hundred times, but here, alone and in the morning, the action seemed too like a promise that might lead her far.

“And they say that statesmen have no hearts!” she cried enthusiastically, trying to hide the harshness of her refusal under the grace of her words. “The thought used to terrify me,” she added, assuming an innocent, ingenuous air.

“What a calumny!” cried des Lupeaulx. “Only this week one of the stiffest of diplomatists, a man who has been in the service ever since he came to manhood, has married the daughter of an actress, and has introduced her at the most iron-bound court in Europe as to quarterings of nobility.”

“You will continue to support us?”

“I am to draw up your husband’s appointment—But no cheating, remember.”

She gave him her hand to kiss, and tapped him on the cheek as she did so. “You are mine!” she said.

Des Lupeaulx admired the expression.

[That night, at the Opera, the old coxcomb related the incident as follows: “A woman who did not want to tell a man she would be his,—an acknowledgment a well-bred woman never allows herself to make,—changed the words into ‘You are mine.’ Don’t you think the evasion charming?”]

“But you must be my ally,” he answered. “Now listen, your husband has spoken to the minister of a plan for the reform of the administration; the paper I have shown you is a part of that plan. I want to know what it is. Find out, and tell me to-night.”

“I will,” she answered, wholly unaware of the important nature of the errand which brought des Lupeaulx to the house that morning.

“Madame, the hair-dresser.”

“At last!” thought Celestine. “I don’t see how I should have got out of it if he had delayed much longer.”

“You do not know to what lengths my devotion can go,” said des Lupeaulx, rising. “You shall be invited to the first select party given by his Excellency’s wife.”

“Ah, you are an angel!” she cried. “And I see now how much you love me; you love me intelligently.”

“To-night, dear child,” he said, “I shall find out at the Opera what journalists are conspiring for Baudoyer, and we will measure swords together.”

“Yes, but you must dine with us, will you not? I have taken pains to get the things you like best—”

“All that is so like love,” said des Lupeaulx to himself as he went downstairs, “that I am willing to be deceived in that way for a long time. Well, if she IS tricking me I shall know it. I’ll set the cleverest of all traps before the appointment is fairly signed, and I’ll read her heart. Ah! my little cats, I know you! for, after all, women are just what we men are. Twenty-eight years old, virtuous, and living here in the rue Duphot!—a rare piece of luck and worth cultivating,” thought the elderly butterfly as he fluttered down the staircase.

“Good heavens! that man, without his glasses, must look funny enough in a dressing-gown!” thought Celestine, “but the harpoon is in his back and he’ll tow me where I want to go; I am sure now of that invitation. He has played his part in my comedy.”

When, at five o’clock in the afternoon, Rabourdin came home to dress for dinner, his wife presided at his toilet and presently laid before him the fatal memorandum which, like the slipper in the Arabian Nights, the luckless man was fated to meet at every turn.

“Who gave you that?” he asked, thunderstruck.

“Monsieur des Lupeaulx.”

“So he has been here!” cried Rabourdin, with a look which would certainly have made a guilty woman turn pale, but which Celestine received with unruffled brow and a laughing eye.

“And he is coming back to dinner,” she said. “Why that startled air?”

“My dear,” replied Rabourdin, “I have mortally offended des Lupeaulx; such men never forgive, and yet he fawns upon me! Do you think I don’t see why?”

“The man seems to me,” she said, “to have good taste; you can’t expect me to blame him. I really don’t know anything more flattering to a woman than to please a worn-out palate. After—”

“A truce to nonsense, Celestine. Spare a much-tried man. I cannot get an audience of the minister, and my honor is at stake.”

“Good heavens, no! Dutocq can have the promise of a good place as soon as you are named head of the division.”

“Ah! I see what you are about, dear child,” said Rabourdin; “but the game

you are playing is just as dishonorable as the real thing that is going on around us. A lie is a lie, and an honest woman—”

“Let me use the weapons employed against us.”

“Celestine, the more that man des Lupeaulx feels he is foolishly caught in a trap, the more bitter he will be against me.”

“What if I get him dismissed altogether?”

Rabourdin looked at his wife in amazement.

“I am thinking only of your advancement; it was high time, my poor husband,” continued Celestine. “But you are mistaking the dog for the game,” she added, after a pause. “In a few days des Lupeaulx will have accomplished all that I want of him. While you are trying to speak to the minister, and before you can even see him on business, I shall have seen him and spoken with him. You are worn out in trying to bring that plan of your brain to birth,—a plan which you have been hiding from me; but you will find that in three months your wife has accomplished more than you have done in six years. Come, tell me this fine scheme of yours.”

Rabourdin, continuing to shave, cautioned his wife not to say a word about his work, and after assuring her that to confide a single idea to des Lupeaulx would be to put the cat near the milk-jug, he began an explanation of his labors.

“Why didn’t you tell me this before, Rabourdin?” said Celestine, cutting her husband short at his fifth sentence. “You might have saved yourself a world of trouble. I can understand that a man should be blinded by an idea for a moment, but to nurse it up for six or seven years, that’s a thing I cannot comprehend! You want to reduce the budget,—a vulgar and commonplace idea! The budget ought, on the contrary, to reach two hundred millions. Then, indeed, France would be great. If you want a new system let it be one of loans, as Monsieur de Nucingen keeps saying. The poorest of all treasuries is the one with a surplus that it never uses; the mission of a minister of finance is to fling gold out of the windows. It will come back to him through the cellars; and you, you want to hoard it! The thing to do is to increase the offices and all government employments, instead of reducing them! So far from lessening the public debt, you ought to increase the creditors. If the Bourbons want to reign in peace, let them seek creditors in the towns and villages, and place their loans there; above all, they ought not to let foreigners draw interest away from France; some day an alien nation might ask us for the capital. Whereas if capital and interest are held only in France, neither France nor credit can perish. That’s what saved England. Your plan is the tradesman’s plan. An ambitious public man should produce some bold scheme,—he should make

himself another Law, without Law's fatal ill-luck; he ought to exhibit the power of credit, and show that we should reduce, not principal, but interest, as they do in England."

"Come, come, Celestine," said Rabourdin; "mix up ideas as much as you please, and make fun of them,—I'm accustomed to that; but don't criticise a work of which you know nothing as yet."

"Do I need," she asked, "to know a scheme the essence of which is to govern France with a civil service of six thousand men instead of twenty thousand? My dear friend, even allowing it were the plan of a man of genius, a king of France who attempted to carry it out would get himself dethroned. You can keep down a feudal aristocracy by levelling a few heads, but you can't subdue a hydra with thousands. And is it with the present ministers—between ourselves, a wretched crew—that you expect to carry out your reform? No, no; change the monetary system if you will, but do not meddle with men, with little men; they cry out too much, whereas gold is dumb."

"But, Celestine, if you will talk, and put wit before argument, we shall never understand each other."

"Understand! I understand what that paper, in which you have analyzed the capacities of the men in office, will lead to," she replied, paying no attention to what her husband said. "Good heavens! you have sharpened the axe to cut off your own head. Holy Virgin! why didn't you consult me? I could have at least prevented you from committing anything to writing, or, at any rate, if you insisted on putting it to paper, I would have written it down myself, and it should never have left this house. Good God! to think that he never told me! That's what men are! capable of sleeping with the wife of their bosom for seven years, and keeping a secret from her! Hiding their thoughts from a poor woman for seven years!—doubting her devotion!"

"But," cried Rabourdin, provoked, "for eleven years and more I have been unable to discuss anything with you because you insist on cutting me short and substituting your ideas for mine. You know nothing at all about my scheme."

"Nothing! I know all."

"Then tell it to me!" cried Rabourdin, angry for the first time since his marriage.

"There! it is half-past six o'clock; finish shaving and dress at once," she cried hastily, after the fashion of women when pressed on a point they are not ready to talk of. "I must go; we'll adjourn the discussion, for I don't want to be nervous on a reception-day. Good heavens! the poor soul!" she thought, as she left the room, "it /is/ hard to be in labor for seven years and bring forth a dead child! And not trust his wife!"

She went back into the room.

“If you had listened to me you would never had interceded to keep your chief clerk; he stole that abominable paper, and has, no doubt, kept a fac-simile of it. Adieu, man of genius!”

Then she noticed the almost tragic expression of her husband’s grief; she felt she had gone too far, and ran to him, seized him just as he was, all lathered with soap-suds, and kissed him tenderly.

“Dear Xavier, don’t be vexed,” she said. “To-night, after the people are gone, we will study your plan; you shall speak at your ease,—I will listen just as long as you wish me to. Isn’t that nice of me? What do I want better than to be the wife of Mohammed?”

She began to laugh; and Rabourdin laughed too, for the soapsuds were clinging to Celestine’s lips, and her voice had the tones of the purest and most steadfast affection.

“Go and dress, dear child; and above all, don’t say a word of this to des Lupeaulx. Swear you will not. That is the only punishment that I impose—”

“/Impose/!” she cried. “Then I won’t swear anything.”

“Come, come, Celestine, I said in jest a really serious thing.”

“To-night,” she said, “I mean your general-secretary to know whom I am really intending to attack; he has given me the means.”

“Attack whom?”

“The minister,” she answered, drawing himself up. “We are to be invited to his wife’s private parties.”

In spite of his Celestine’s loving caresses, Rabourdin, as he finished dressing, could not prevent certain painful thoughts from clouding his brow.

“Will she ever appreciate me?” he said to himself. “She does not even understand that she is the sole incentive of my whole work. How wrong-headed, and yet how excellent a mind!—If I had not married I might now have been high in office and rich. I could have saved half my salary; my savings well-invested would have given me to-day ten thousand francs a year outside of my office, and I might then have become, through a good marriage—Yes, that is all true,” he exclaimed, interrupting himself, “but I have Celestine and my two children.” The man flung himself back on his happiness. To the best of married lives there come moments of regret. He entered the salon and looked around him. “There are not two women in Paris who understand making life pleasant as she does. To keep such a home as this on twelve thousand francs a year!” he thought, looking at the flower-stands bright with bloom, and

thinking of the social enjoyments that were about to gratify his vanity. “She was made to be the wife of a minister. When I think of his Excellency’s wife, and how little she helps him! the good woman is a comfortable middle-class dowdy, and when she goes to the palace or into society—” He pinched his lips together. Very busy men are apt to have very ignorant notions about household matters, and you can make them believe that a hundred thousand francs afford little or that twelve thousand afford all.

Though impatiently expected, and in spite of the flattering dishes prepared for the palate of the gourmet-emeritus, des Lupeaulx did not come to dinner; in fact he came in very late, about midnight, an hour when company dwindles and conversations become intimate and confidential. Andoche Finot, the journalist, was one of the few remaining guests.

“I now know all,” said des Lupeaulx, when he was comfortably seated on a sofa at the corner of the fireplace, a cup of tea in his hand and Madame Rabourdin standing before him with a plate of sandwiches and some slices of cake very appropriately called “leaden cake.” “Finot, my dear and witty friend, you can render a great service to our gracious queen by letting loose a few dogs upon the men we were talking of. You have against you,” he said to Rabourdin, lowering his voice so as to be heard only by the three persons whom he addressed, “a set of usurers and priests—money and the church. The article in the liberal journal was instituted by an old money-lender to whom the paper was under obligations; but the young fellow who wrote it cares nothing about it. The paper is about to change hands, and in three days more will be on our side. The royalist opposition,—for we have, thanks to Monsieur de Chateaubriand, a royalist opposition, that is to say, royalists who have gone over to the liberals,—however, there’s no need to discuss political matters now,—these assassins of Charles X. have promised me to support your appointment at the price of our acquiescence in one of their amendments. All my batteries are manned. If they threaten us with Baudoyer we shall say to the clerical phalanx, ‘Such and such a paper and such and such men will attack your measures and the whole press will be against you’ (for even the ministerial journals which I influence will be deaf and dumb, won’t they, Finot?). ‘Appoint Rabourdin, a faithful servant, and public opinion is with you __‘”

“Hi, hi!” laughed Finot.

“So, there’s no need to be uneasy,” said des Lupeaulx. “I have arranged it all to-night; the Grand Almoner must yield.”

“I would rather have had less hope, and you to dinner,” whispered Celestine, looking at him with a vexed air which might very well pass for an expression of wounded love.

“This must win my pardon,” he returned, giving her an invitation to the ministry for the following Tuesday.

Celestine opened the letter, and a flush of pleasure came into her face. No enjoyment can be compared to that of gratified vanity.

“You know what the countess’s Tuesdays are,” said des Lupeaulx, with a confidential air. “To the usual ministerial parties they are what the ‘Petit-Chateau’ is to a court ball. You will be at the heart of power! You will see there the Comtesse Feraud, who is still in favor notwithstanding Louis XVIII.‘s death, Delphine de Nucingen, Madame de Listomere, the Marquise d’Espard, and your dear Firmiani; I have had her invited to give you her support in case the other women attempt to black-ball you. I long to see you in the midst of them.”

Celestine threw up her head like a thoroughbred before the race, and re-read the invitation just as Baudoyer and Saillard had re-read the articles about themselves in the newspapers, without being able to quaff enough of it.

“/There/ first, and /next/ at the Tuileries,” she said to des Lupeaulx, who was startled by the words and by the attitude of the speaker, so expressive were they of ambition and security.

“Can it be that I am only a stepping-stone?” he asked himself. He rose, and went into Madame Rabourdin’s bedroom, where she followed him, understanding from a motion of his head that he wished to speak to her privately.

“Well, your husband’s plan,” he said; “what of it?”

“Bah! the useless nonsense of an honest man!” she replied. “He wants to suppress fifteen thousand offices and do the work with five or six thousand. You never heard of such nonsense; I will let you read the whole document when copied; it is written in perfect good faith. His analysis of the officials was prompted only by his honesty and rectitude,—poor dear man!”

Des Lupeaulx was all the more reassured by the genuine laugh which accompanied these jesting and contemptuous words, because he was a judge of lying and knew that Celestine spoke in good faith.

“But still, what is at the bottom of it all?” he asked.

“Well, he wants to do away with the land-tax and substitute taxes on consumption.”

“Why it is over a year since Francois Keller and Nucingen proposed some such plan, and the minister himself is thinking of a reduction of the land-tax.”

“There!” exclaimed Celestine, “I told him there was nothing new in his

scheme.”

“No; but he is on the same ground with the best financier of the epoch,—the Napoleon of finance. Something may come of it. Your husband must surely have some special ideas in his method of putting the scheme into practice.”

“No, it is all commonplace,” she said, with a disdainful curl of her lip. “Just think of governing France with five or six thousand offices, when what is really needed is that everybody in France should be personally enlisted in the support of the government.”

Des Lupeaulx seemed satisfied that Rabourdin, to whom in his own mind he had granted remarkable talents, was really a man of mediocrity.

“Are you quite sure of the appointment? You don’t want a bit of feminine advice?” she said.

“You women are greater adepts than we in refined treachery,” he said, nodding.

“Well, then, say /Baudoyer/ to the court and clergy, to divert suspicion and put them to sleep, and then, at the last moment, write /Rabourdin/.”

“There are some women who say /yes/ as long as they need a man, and /no/ when he has played his part,” returned des Lupeaulx, significantly.

“I know they do,” she answered, laughing; “but they are very foolish, for in politics everything recommences. Such proceedings may do with fools, but you are a man of sense. In my opinion the greatest folly any one can commit is to quarrel with a clever man.”

“You are mistaken,” said des Lupeaulx, “for such a man pardons. The real danger is with the petty spiteful natures who have nothing to do but study revenge,—I spend my life among them.”

When all the guests were gone, Rabourdin came into his wife’s room, and after asking for her strict attention, he explained his plan and made her see that it did not cut down the revenue but on the contrary increased it; he showed her in what ways the public funds were employed, and how the State could increase tenfold the circulation of money by putting its own, in the proportion of a third, or a quarter, into the expenditures which would be sustained by private or local interests. He finally proved to her plainly that his plan was not mere theory, but a system teeming with methods of execution. Celestine, brightly enthusiastic, sprang into her husband’s arms and sat upon his knee in the chimney-corner.

“At last I find the husband of my dreams!” she cried. “My ignorance of your real merit has saved you from des Lupeaulx’s claws. I calumniated you to

him gloriously and in good faith.”

The man wept with joy. His day of triumph had come at last. Having labored for many years to satisfy his wife, he found himself a great man in the eyes of his sole public.

“To one who knows how good you are, how tender, how equable in anger, how loving, you are tenfold greater still. But,” she added, “a man of genius is always more or less a child; and you are a child, a dearly beloved child,” she said, caressing him. Then she drew that invitation from that particular spot where women put what they sacredly hide, and showed it to him.

“Here is what I wanted,” she said; “Des Lupeaulx has put me face to face with the minister, and were he a man of iron, his Excellency shall be made for a time to bend the knee to me.”

The next day Celestine began her preparations for entrance into the inner circle of the ministry. It was her day of triumph, her own! Never courtesan took such pains with herself as this honest woman bestowed upon her person. No dressmaker was ever so tormented as hers. Madame Rabourdin forgot nothing. She went herself to the stable where she hired carriages, and chose a coupe that was neither old, nor bourgeois, nor showy. Her footman, like the footmen of great houses, had the dress and appearance of a master. About ten on the evening of the eventful Tuesday, she left home in a charming full mourning attire. Her hair was dressed with jet grapes of exquisite workmanship,—an ornament costing three thousand francs, made by Fossin for an Englishwoman who had left Paris before it was finished. The leaves were of stamped iron-work, as light as the vine-leaves themselves, and the artist had not forgotten the graceful tendrils, which twined in the wearer’s curls just as, in nature, they catch upon the branches. The bracelets, necklace, and earrings were all what is called Berlin iron-work; but these delicate arabesques were made in Vienna, and seemed to have been fashioned by the fairies who, the stories tell us, are condemned by a jealous Carabosse to collect the eyes of ants, or weave a fabric so diaphanous that a nutshell can contain it. Madame Rabourdin’s graceful figure, made more slender still by the black draperies, was shown to advantage by a carefully cut dress, the two sides of which met at the shoulders in a single strap without sleeves. At every motion she seemed, like a butterfly, to be about to leave her covering; but the gown held firmly on by some contrivance of the wonderful dressmaker. The robe was of mousseline de laine—a material which the manufacturers had not yet sent to the Paris markets; a delightful stuff which some months later was to have a wild success, a success which went further and lasted longer than most French fashions. The actual economy of mousseline de laine, which needs no washing, has since injured the sale of cotton fabrics enough to revolutionize the Rouen manufactories. Celestine’s little feet, covered with fine silk

stockings and turk-satin shoes (for silk-satin is inadmissible in deep mourning) were of elegant proportions. Thus dressed, she was very handsome. Her complexion, beautified by a bran-bath, was softly radiant. Her eyes, suffused with the light of hope, and sparkling with intelligence, justified her claims to the superiority which des Lupeaulx, proud and happy on this occasion, asserted for her.

She entered the room well (women will understand the meaning of that expression), bowed gracefully to the minister's wife, with a happy mixture of deference and of self-respect, and gave no offence by a certain reliance on her own dignity; for every beautiful woman has the right to seem a queen. With the minister himself she took the pretty air of sauciness which women may properly allow themselves with men, even when they are grand dukes. She reconnoitred the field, as it were, while taking her seat, and saw that she was in the midst of one of those select parties of few persons, where the women eye and appraise each other, and every word said echoes in all ears; where every glance is a stab, and conversation a duel with witnesses; where all that is commonplace seems commoner still, and where every form of merit or distinction is silently accepted as though it were the natural level of all present. Rabourdin betook himself to the adjoining salon in which a few persons were playing cards; and there he planted himself on exhibition, as it were, which proved that he was not without social intelligence.

"My dear," said the Marquise d'Espard to the Comtesse Feraud, Louis XVIII.'s last mistress, "Paris is certainly unique. It produces—whence and how, who knows?—women like this person, who seems ready to will and to do anything."

"She really does will, and does do everything," put in des Lupeaulx, puffed up with satisfaction.

At this moment the wily Madame Rabourdin was courting the minister's wife. Carefully coached the evening before by des Lupeaulx, who knew all the countess's weak spots, she was flattering her without seeming to do so. Every now and then she kept silence; for des Lupeaulx, in love as he was, knew her defects, and said to her the night before, "Be careful not to talk too much,"—words which were really an immense proof of attachment. Bertrand Barrere left behind him this sublime axiom: "Never interrupt a woman when dancing to give her advice," to which we may add (to make this chapter of the female code complete), "Never blame a woman for scattering her pearls."

The conversation became general. From time to time Madame Rabourdin joined in, just as a well-trained cat puts a velvet paw on her mistress's laces with the claws carefully drawn in. The minister, in matters of the heart, had few emotions. There was not another statesman under the Restoration who had

so completely done with gallantry as he; even the opposition papers, the “Miroir,” “Pandora,” and “Figaro,” could not find a single throbbing artery with which to reproach him. Madame Rabourdin knew this, but she knew also that ghosts return to old castles, and she had taken it into her head to make the minister jealous of the happiness which des Lupeaulx was appearing to enjoy. The latter’s throat literally gurgled with the name of his divinity. To launch his supposed mistress successfully, he was endeavoring to persuade the Marquise d’Espard, Madame de Nucingen, and the countess, in an eight-ear conversation, that they had better admit Madame Rabourdin to their coalition; and Madame de Camps was supporting him. At the end of the hour the minister’s vanity was greatly tickled; Madame Rabourdin’s cleverness pleased him, and she had won his wife, who, delighted with the siren, invited her to come to all her receptions whenever she pleased.

“For your husband, my dear,” she said, “will soon be director; the minister intends to unite the two divisions and place them under one director; you will then be one of us, you know.”

His Excellency carried off Madame Rabourdin on his arm to show her a certain room, which was then quite celebrated because the opposition journals blamed him for decorating it extravagantly; and together they laughed over the absurdities of journalism.

“Madame, you really must give the countess and myself the pleasure of seeing you here often.”

And he went on with a round of ministerial compliments.

“But, Monseigneur,” she replied, with one of those glances which women hold in reserve, “it seems to me that that depends on you.”

“How so?”

“You alone can give me the right to come here.”

“Pray explain.”

“No; I said to myself before I came that I would certainly not have the bad taste to seem a petitioner.”

“No, no, speak freely. Places asked in this way are never out of place,” said the minister, laughing; for there is no jest too silly to amuse a solemn man.

“Well, then, I must tell you plainly that the wife of the head of a bureau is out of place here; a director’s wife is not.”

“That point need not be considered,” said the minister, “your husband is indispensable to the administration; he is already appointed.”

“Is that a veritable fact?”

“Would you like to see the papers in my study? They are already drawn up.”

“Then,” she said, pausing in a corner where she was alone with the minister, whose eager attentions were now very marked, “let me tell you that I can make you a return.”

She was on the point of revealing her husband’s plan, when des Lupeaulx, who had glided noiselessly up to them, uttered an angry sound, which meant that he did not wish to appear to have overheard what, in fact, he had been listening to. The minister gave an ill-tempered look at the old beau, who, impatient to win his reward, had hurried, beyond all precedent, the preliminary work of the appointment. He had carried the papers to his Excellency that evening, and desired to take himself, on the morrow, the news of the appointment to her whom he was now endeavoring to exhibit as his mistress. Just then the minister’s valet approached des Lupeaulx in a mysterious manner, and told him that his own servant wished him to deliver to him at once a letter of the utmost importance.

The general-secretary went up to a lamp and read a note thus worded:—

Contrary to my custom, I am waiting in your ante-chamber to see you; you have not a moment to lose if you wish to come to terms with

Your obedient servant, Gobseck.

The secretary shuddered when he saw the signature, which we regret we cannot give in fac-simile, for it would be valuable to those who like to guess character from what may be called the physiognomy of signature. If ever a hieroglyphic sign expressed an animal, it was assuredly this written name, in which the first and the final letter approached each other like the voracious jaws of a shark,—insatiable, always open, seeking whom to devour, both strong and weak. As for the wording of the note, the spirit of usury alone could have inspired a sentence so imperative, so insolently curt and cruel, which said all and revealed nothing. Those who had never heard of Gobseck would have felt, on reading words which compelled him to whom they were addressed to obey, yet gave no order, the presence of the implacable money-lender of the rue des Gres. Like a dog called to heel by the huntsman, des Lupeaulx left his present quest and went immediately to his own rooms, thinking of his hazardous position. Imagine a general to whom an aide-de-camp rides up and says: “The enemy with thirty thousand fresh troops is attacking on our right flank.”

A very few words will serve to explain this sudden arrival of Gigonnet and Gobseck on the field of battle,—for des Lupeaulx found them both waiting. At eight o’clock that evening, Martin Falleix, returning on the wings of the wind,

—thanks to three francs to the postboys and a courier in advance,—had brought back with him the deeds of the property signed the night before. Taken at once to the Cafe Themis by Mitral, these securities passed into the hands of the two usurers, who hastened (though on foot) to the ministry. It was past eleven o'clock. Des Lupeaulx trembled when he saw those sinister faces, emitting a simultaneous look as direct as a pistol shot and as brilliant as the flash itself.

"What is it, my masters?" he said.

The two extortioners continued cold and motionless. Gigonnet silently pointed to the documents in his hand, and then at the servant.

"Come into my study," said des Lupeaulx, dismissing his valet by a sign.

"You understand French very well," remarked Gigonnet, approvingly.

"Have you come here to torment a man who enabled each of you to make a couple of hundred thousand francs?"

"And who will help us to make more, I hope," said Gigonnet.

"Some new affair?" asked des Lupeaulx. "If you want me to help you, consider that I recollect the past."

"So do we," answered Gigonnet.

"My debts must be paid," said des Lupeaulx, disdainfully, so as not to seem worsted at the outset.

"True," said Gobseck.

"Let us come to the point, my son," said Gigonnet. "Don't stiffen your chin in your cravat; with us all that is useless. Take these deeds and read them."

The two usurers took a mental inventory of des Lupeaulx's study while he read with amazement and stupefaction a deed of purchase which seemed wafted to him from the clouds by angels.

"Don't you think you have a pair of intelligent business agents in Gobseck and me?" asked Gigonnet.

"But tell me, to what do I owe such able co-operation?" said des Lupeaulx, suspicious and uneasy.

"We knew eight days ago a fact that without us you would not have known till to-morrow morning. The president of the chamber of commerce, a deputy, as you know, feels himself obliged to resign."

Des Lupeaulx's eyes dilated, and were as big as daisies.

"Your minister has been tricking you about this event," said the concise

Gobseck.

“You master me,” said the general-secretary, bowing with an air of profound respect, bordering however, on sarcasm.

“True,” said Gobseck.

“Can you mean to strangle me?”

“Possibly.”

“Well, then, begin your work, executioners,” said the secretary, smiling.

“You will see,” resumed Gigonnet, “that the sum total of your debts is added to the sum loaned by us for the purchase of the property; we have bought them up.”

“Here are the deeds,” said Gobseck, taking from the pocket of his greenish overcoat a number of legal papers.

“You have three years in which to pay off the whole sum,” said Gigonnet.

“But,” said des Lupeaulx, frightened at such kindness, and also by so apparently fantastic an arrangement. “What do you want of me?”

“La Billardiere’s place for Baudoyer,” said Gigonnet, quickly.

“That’s a small matter, though it will be next to impossible for me to do it,” said des Lupeaulx. “I have just tied my hands.”

“Bite the cords with your teeth,” said Gigonnet.

“They are sharp,” added Gobseck.

“Is that all?” asked des Lupeaulx.

“We keep the title-deeds of the property till the debts are paid,” said Gigonnet, putting one of the papers before des Lupeaulx; “and if the matter of the appointment is not satisfactorily arranged within six days our names will be substituted in place of yours.”

“You are deep,” cried the secretary.

“Exactly,” said Gobseck.

“And this is all?” exclaimed des Lupeaulx.

“All,” said Gobseck.

“You agree?” asked Gigonnet.

Des Lupeaulx nodded his head.

“Well, then, sign this power of attorney. Within two days Baudoyer is to be nominated; within six your debts will be cleared off, and—”

“And what?” asked des Lupeaulx.

“We guarantee—”

“Guarantee!—what?” said the secretary, more and more astonished.

“Your election to the Chamber,” said Gigonnet, rising on his heels. “We have secured a majority of fifty-two farmers’ and mechanics’ votes, which will be thrown precisely as those who lend you this money dictate.”

Des Lupeaulx wrung Gigonnet’s hand.

“It is only such as we who never misunderstand each other,” he said; “this is what I call doing business. I’ll make you a return gift.”

“Right,” said Gobseck.

“What is it?” asked Gigonnet.

“The cross of the Legion of honor for your imbecile of a nephew.”

“Good,” said Gigonnet, “I see you know him well.”

The pair took leave of des Lupeaulx, who conducted them to the staircase.

“They must be secret envoys from foreign powers,” whispered the footmen to each other.

Once in the street, the two usurers looked at each other under a street lamp and laughed.

“He will owe us nine thousand francs interest a year,” said Gigonnet; “that property doesn’t bring him in five.”

“He is under our thumb for a long time,” said Gobseck.

“He’ll build; he’ll commit extravagancies,” continued Gigonnet; “Falleix will get his land.”

“His interest is only to be made deputy; the old fox laughs at the rest,” said Gobseck.

“Hey! hey!”

“Hi! hi!”

These dry little exclamations served as a laugh to the two old men, who took their way back (always on foot) to the Cafe Themis.

Des Lupeaulx returned to the salon and found Madame Rabourdin sailing with the wind of success, and very charming; while his Excellency, usually so gloomy, showed a smooth and gracious countenance.

“She performs miracles,” thought des Lupeaulx. “What a wonderfully

clever woman! I must get to the bottom of her heart."

"Your little lady is decidedly handsome," said the Marquise to the secretary; "now if she only had your name."

"Yes, her defect is that she is the daughter of an auctioneer. She will fail for want of birth," replied des Lupeaulx, with a cold manner that contrasted strangely with the ardor of his remarks about Madame Rabourdin not half an hour earlier.

The marquise looked at him fixedly.

"The glance you gave them did not escape me," she said, motioning towards the minister and Madame Rabourdin; "it pierced the mask of your spectacles. How amusing you both are, to quarrel over that bone!"

As the marquise turned to leave the room the minister joined her and escorted her to the door.

"Well," said des Lupeaulx to Madame Rabourdin, "what do you think of his Excellency?"

"He is charming. We must know these poor ministers to appreciate them," she added, slightly raising her voice so as to be heard by his Excellency's wife. "The newspapers and the opposition calumnies are so misleading about men in politics that we are all more or less influenced by them; but such prejudices turn to the advantage of statesmen when we come to know them personally."

"He is very good-looking," said des Lupeaulx.

"Yes, and I assure you he is quite lovable," she said, heartily.

"Dear child," said des Lupeaulx, with a genial, caressing manner; "you have actually done the impossible."

"What is that?"

"Resuscitated the dead. I did not think that man had a heart; ask his wife. But he may have just enough for a passing fancy. Therefore profit by it. Come this way, and don't be surprised." He led Madame Rabourdin into the boudoir, placed her on a sofa, and sat down beside her. "You are very sly," he said, "and I like you the better for it. Between ourselves, you are a clever woman. Des Lupeaulx served to bring you into this house, and that is all you wanted of him, isn't it? Now when a woman decides to love a man for what she can get out of him it is better to take a sexagenarian Excellency than a quadragenarian secretary; there's more profit and less annoyance. I'm a man with spectacles, grizzled hair, worn out with dissipation,—a fine lover, truly! I tell myself all this again and again. It must be admitted, of course, that I can sometimes be useful, but never agreeable. Isn't that so? A man must be a fool if he cannot

reason about himself. You can safely admit the truth and let me see to the depths of your heart; we are partners, not lovers. If I show some tenderness at times, you are too superior a woman to pay any attention to such follies; you will forgive me,—you are not a school-girl, or a bourgeoise of the rue Saint-Denis. Bah! you and I are too well brought up for that. There's the Marquise d'Espard who has just left the room; this is precisely what she thinks and does. She and I came to an understanding two years ago [the coxcomb!], and now she has only to write me a line and say, 'My dear des Lupeaulx, you will oblige me by doing such and such a thing,' and it is done at once. We are engaged at this very moment in getting a commission of lunacy on her husband. Ah! you women, you can get what you want by the bestowal of a few favors. Well, then, my dear child, bewitch the minister. I'll help you; it is my interest to do so. Yes, I wish he had a woman who could influence him; he wouldn't escape me,—for he does escape me quite often, and the reason is that I hold him only through his intellect. Now if I were one with a pretty woman who was also intimate with him, I should hold him by his weaknesses, and that is much the firmest grip. Therefore, let us be friends, you and I, and share the advantages of the conquest you are making."

Madame Rabourdin listened in amazement to this singular profession of rascality. The apparent artlessness of this political swindler prevented her from suspecting a trick.

"Do you believe he really thinks of me?" she asked, falling into the trap.

"I know it; I am certain of it."

"Is it true that Rabourdin's appointment is signed?"

"I gave him the papers this morning. But it is not enough that your husband should be made director; he must be Master of petitions."

"Yes," she said.

"Well, then, go back to the salon and coquette a little more with his Excellency."

"It is true," she said, "that I never fully understood you till to-night. There is nothing commonplace about /you/."

"We will be two old friends," said des Lupeaulx, "and suppress all tender nonsense and tormenting love; we will take things as they did under the Regency. Ah! they had plenty of wit and wisdom in those days!"

"You are really strong; you deserve my admiration," she said, smiling, and holding out her hand to him, "one does more for one's friend, you know, than for one's—"

She left him without finishing her sentence.

“Dear creature!” thought des Lupeaulx, as he saw her approach the minister, “des Lupeaulx has no longer the slightest remorse in turning against you. To-morrow evening when you offer me a cup of tea, you will be offering me a thing I no longer care for. All is over. Ah! when a man is forty years of age women may take pains to catch him, but they won’t love him.”

He looked himself over in a mirror, admitting honestly that though he did very well as a politician he was a wreck on the shores of Cythera. At the same moment Madame Rabourdin was gathering herself together for a becoming exit. She wished to make a last graceful impression on the minds of all, and she succeeded. Contrary to the usual custom in society, every one cried out as soon as she was gone, “What a charming woman!” and the minister himself took her to the outer door.

“I am quite sure you will think of me to-morrow,” he said, alluding to the appointment.

“There are so few high functionaries who have agreeable wives,” remarked his Excellency on re-entering the room, “that I am very well satisfied with our new acquisition.”

“Don’t you think her a little overpowering?” said des Lupeaulx with a piqued air.

The women present all exchanged expressive glances; the rivalry between the minister and his secretary amused them and instigated one of those pretty little comedies which Parisian women play so well. They excited and led on his Excellency and des Lupeaulx by a series of comments on Madame Rabourdin: one thought her too studied in manner, too eager to appear clever; another compared the graces of the middle classes with the manners of high life, while des Lupeaulx defended his pretended mistress as we all defend an enemy in society.

“Do her justice, ladies,” he said; “is it not extraordinary that the daughter of an auctioneer should appear as well as she does? See where she came from, and what she is. She will end in the Tuileries; that is what she intends,—she told me so.”

“Suppose she is the daughter of an auctioneer,” said the Comtesse Feraud, smiling, “that will not hinder her husband’s rise to power.”

“Not in these days, you mean,” said the minister’s wife, tightening her lips.

“Madame,” said his Excellency to the countess, sternly, “such sentiments and such speeches lead to revolutions; unhappily, the court and the great world do not restrain them. You would hardly believe, however, how the injudicious conduct of the aristocracy in this respect displeases certain clear-sighted

personages at the palace. If I were a great lord, instead of being, as I am, a mere country gentleman who seems to be placed where he is to transact your business for you, the monarchy would not be as insecure as I now think it is. What becomes of a throne which does not bestow dignity on those who administer its government? We are far indeed from the days when a king could make men great at will,—such men as Louvois, Colbert, Richelieu, Jeannin, Villeroy, Sully,—Sully, in his origin, was no greater than I. I speak to you thus because we are here in private among ourselves. I should be very paltry indeed if I were personally offended by such speeches. After all, it is for us and not for others to make us great."

"You are appointed, dear," cried Celestine, pressing her husband's hand as they drove away. "If it had not been for des Lupeaulx I should have explained your scheme to his Excellency. But I will do it next Tuesday, and it will help the further matter of making you Master of petitions."

In the life of every woman there comes a day when she shines in all her glory; a day which gives her an unfading recollection to which she recurs with happiness all her life. As Madame Rabourdin took off one by one the ornaments of her apparel, she thought over the events of this evening, and marked the day among the triumphs and glories of her life,—all her beauties had been seen and envied, she had been praised and flattered by the minister's wife, delighted thus to make the other women jealous of her; but, above all, her grace and vanities had shone to the profit of conjugal love. Her husband was appointed.

"Did you think I looked well to-night?" she said to him, joyously.

At the same instant Mitral, waiting at the Cafe Themis, saw the two usurers returning, but was unable to perceive the slightest indications of the result on their impassible faces.

"What of it?" he said, when they were all seated at table.

"Same as ever," replied Gigonnet, rubbing his hands, "victory with gold."

"True," said Gobseck.

Mitral took a cabriolet and went straight to the Saillards and Baudoyers, who were still playing boston at a late hour. No one was present but the Abbe Gaudron. Falleix, half-dead with the fatigue of his journey, had gone to bed.

"You will be appointed, nephew," said Mitral; "and there's a surprise in store for you."

"What is it?" asked Saillard.

"The cross of the Legion of honor?" cried Mitral.

“God protects those who guard his altars,” said Gaudron.

Thus the Te Deum was sung with equal joy and confidence in both camps.

CHAPTER VIII. FORWARD, MOLLUSKS!

The next day, Wednesday, Monsieur Rabourdin was to transact business with the minister, for he had filled the late La Billardiere’s place since the beginning of the latter’s illness. On such days the clerks came punctually, the servants were specially attentive, there was always a certain excitement in the offices on these signing-days,—and why, nobody ever knew. On this occasion the three servants were at their post, flattering themselves they should get a few fees; for a rumor of Rabourdin’s nomination had spread through the ministry the night before, thanks to Dutocq. Uncle Antoine and Laurent had donned their full uniform, when, at a quarter to eight, des Lupeaulx’s servant came in with a letter, which he begged Antoine to give secretly to Dutocq, saying that the general-secretary had ordered him to deliver it without fail at Monsieur Dutocq’s house by seven o’clock.

“I’m sure I don’t know how it happened,” he said, “but I overslept myself. I’ve only just waked up, and he’d play the devil’s tattoo on me if he knew the letter hadn’t gone. I know a famous secret, Antoine; but don’t say anything about it to the clerks if I tell you; promise? He would send me off if he knew I had said a single word; he told me so.”

“What’s inside the letter?” asked Antoine, eying it.

“Nothing; I looked this way—see.”

He made the letter gape open, and showed Antoine that there was nothing but blank paper to be seen.

“This is going to be a great day for you, Laurent,” went on the secretary’s man. “You are to have a new director. Economy must be the order of the day, for they are going to unite the two divisions under one director—you fellows will have to look out!”

“Yes, nine clerks are put on the retired list,” said Dutocq, who came in at the moment; “how did you hear that?”

Antoine gave him the letter, and he had no sooner opened it than he rushed headlong downstairs in the direction of the secretary’s office.

The bureaus Rabourdin and Baudoyer, after idling and gossiping since the death of Monsieur de la Billardiere, were now recovering their usual official

look and the dolce far niente habits of a government office. Nevertheless, the approaching end of the year did cause rather more application among the clerks, just as porters and servants become at that season more unctuously civil. They all came punctually, for one thing; more remained after four o'clock than was usual at other times. It was not forgotten that fees and gratuities depend on the last impressions made upon the minds of masters. The news of the union of the two divisions, that of La Billardiere and that of Clergeot, under one director, had spread through the various offices. The number of the clerks to be retired was known, but all were in ignorance of the names. It was taken for granted that Poiret would not be replaced, and that would be a retrenchment. Little La Billardiere had already departed. Two new supernumeraries had made their appearance, and, alarming circumstance! they were both sons of deputies. The news told about in the offices the night before, just as the clerks were dispersing, agitated all minds, and for the first half-hour after arrival in the morning they stood around the stoves and talked it over. But earlier than that, Dutocq, as we have seen, had rushed to des Lupeaulx on receiving his note, and found him dressing. Without laying down his razor, the general-secretary cast upon his subordinate the glance of a general issuing an order.

"Are we alone?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Very good. March on Rabourdin; forward! steady! Of course you kept a copy of that paper?"

"Yes."

"You understand me? Inde iroe! There must be a general hue and cry raised against him. Find some way to start a clamor—"

"I could get a man to make a caricature, but I haven't five hundred francs to pay for it."

"Who would make it?"

"Bixou."

"He shall have a thousand and be under-head-clerk to Colleville, who will arrange with them; tell him so."

"But he wouldn't believe it on nothing more than my word."

"Are you trying to make me compromise myself? Either do the thing or let it alone; do you hear me?"

"If Monsieur Baudoyer were director—"

"Well, he will be. Go now, and make haste; you have no time to lose. Go

down the back-stairs; I don’t want people to know you have just seen me.”

While Dutocq was returning to the clerks’ office and asking himself how he could best incite a clamor against his chief without compromising himself, Bixiou rushed to the Rabourdin office for a word of greeting. Believing that he had lost his bet the incorrigible joker thought it amusing to pretend that he had won it.

Bixiou [mimicking Phellion’s voice]. “Gentlemen, I salute you with a collective how d’ye do, and I appoint Sunday next for the dinner at the Rocher de Cancale. But a serious question presents itself. Is that dinner to include the clerks who are dismissed?”

Poiret. “And those who retire?”

Bixiou. “Not that I care, for it isn’t I who pay.” [General stupefaction.] “Baudoyer is appointed. I think I already hear him calling Laurent” [mimicking Baudoyer], “Laurent! lock up my hair-shirt, and my scourge.” [They all roar with laughter.] “Yes, yes, he laughs well who laughs last. Gentlemen, there’s a great deal in that anagram of Colleville’s. ‘Xavier Rabourdin, chef de bureau—D’abord reva bureaux, e-u fin riche.’ If I were named ‘Charles X., par la grace de Dieu roi de France et de Navarre,’ I should tremble in my shoes at the fate those letters anagrammatize.”

Thuillier. “Look here! are you making fun?”

Bixiou. “No, I am not. Rabourdin resigns in a rage at finding Baudoyer appointed director.”

Vimeux [entering.] “Nonsense, no such thing! Antoine (to whom I have just been paying forty francs that I owed him) tells me that Monsieur and Madame Rabourdin were at the minister’s private party last night and stayed till midnight. His Excellency escorted Madame Rabourdin to the staircase. It seems she was divinely dressed. In short, it is quite certain that Rabourdin is to be director. Riffe, the secretary’s copying clerk, told me he sat up all the night before to draw the papers; it is no longer a secret. Monsieur Clergeot is retired. After thirty years’ service that’s no misfortune. Monsieur Cochlin, who is rich —”

Bixiou. “By cochineal.”

Vimeux. “Yes, cochineal; he’s a partner in the house of Matifat, rue des Lombards. Well, he is retired; so is Poiret. Neither is to be replaced. So much is certain; the rest is all conjecture. The appointment of Monsieur Rabourdin is to be announced this morning; they are afraid of intrigues.”

Bixiou. “What intrigues?”

Fleury. “Baudoyer’s, confound him! The priests uphold him; here’s another

article in the liberal journal,—only half a dozen lines, but they are queer" [reads]:

"Certain persons spoke last night in the lobby of the Opera-house of the return of Monsieur de Chateaubriand to the ministry, basing their opinion on the choice made of Monsieur Rabourdin (the protege of friends of the noble viscount) to fill the office for which Monsieur Baudoyer was first selected. The clerical party is not likely to withdraw unless in deference to the great writer.

"Blackguards!"

Dutocq [entering, having heard the whole discussion]. "Blackguards! Who? Rabourdin? Then you know the news?"

Fleury [rolling his eyes savagely]. "Rabourdin a blackguard! Are you mad, Dutocq? do you want a ball in your brains to give them weight?"

Dutocq. "I said nothing against Monsieur Rabourdin; only it has just been told to me in confidence that he has written a paper denouncing all the clerks and officials, and full of facts about their lives; in short, the reason why his friends support him is because he has written this paper against the administration, in which we are all exposed—"

Phellion [in a loud voice]. "Monsieur Rabourdin is incapable of—"

Bixiou. "Very proper in you to say so. Tell me, Dutocq" [they whisper together and then go into the corridor].

Bixiou. "What has happened?"

Dutocq. "Do you remember what I said to you about that caricature?"

Bixiou. "Yes, what then?"

Dutocq. "Make it, and you shall be under-head-clerk with a famous fee. The fact is, my dear fellow, there's dissension among the powers that be. The minister is pledged to Rabourdin, but if he doesn't appoint Baudoyer he offends the priests and their party. You see, the King, the Dauphin and the Dauphine, the clergy, and lastly the court, all want Baudoyer; the minister wants Rabourdin."

Bixiou. "Good!"

Dutocq. "To ease the matter off, the minister, who sees he must give way, wants to strangle the difficulty. We must find some good reason for getting rid of Rabourdin. Now somebody has lately unearthed a paper of his, exposing the present system of administration and wanting to reform it; and that paper is going the rounds,—at least, this is how I understand the matter. Make the drawing we talked of; in so doing you'll play the game of all the big people,

and help the minister, the court, the clergy,—in short, everybody; and you'll get your appointment. Now do you understand me?"

Bixiou. "I don't understand how you came to know all that; perhaps you are inventing it."

Dutocq. "Do you want me to let you see what Rabourdin wrote about you?"

Bixiou. "Yes."

Dutocq. "Then come home with me; for I must put the document into safe keeping."

Bixiou. "You go first alone." [Re-enters the bureau Rabourdin.] "What Dutocq told you is really all true, word of honor! It seems that Monsieur Rabourdin has written and sent in very unflattering descriptions of the clerks whom he wants to 'reform.' That's the real reason why his secret friends wish him appointed. Well, well; we live in days when nothing astonishes me" [flings his cloak about him like Talma, and declaims]:—

"Thou who has seen the fall of grand, illustrious heads,

Why thus amazed, insensate that thou art,

to find a man like Rabourdin employing such means? Baudoyer is too much of a fool to know how to use them. Accept my congratulations, gentlemen; either way you are under a most illustrious chief" [goes off].

Poiret. "I shall leave this ministry without ever comprehending a single word that gentleman utters. What does he mean with his 'heads that fall'?"

Fleury. "'Heads that fell?' why, think of the four sergeants of Rochelle, Ney, Berton, Caron, the brothers Faucher, and the massacres."

Phellion. "He asserts very flippantly things that he only guesses at."

Fleury. "Say at once that he lies; in his mouth truth itself turns to corrosion."

Phellion. "Your language is unparliamentary and lacks the courtesy and consideration which are due to a colleague."

Vimeux. "It seems to me that if what he says is false, the proper name for it is calumny, defamation of character; and such a slanderer deserves the thrashing."

Fleury [getting hot]. "If the government offices are public places, the matter ought to be taken into the police-courts."

Phellion [wishing to avert a quarrel, tries to turn the conversation].

“Gentleman, might I ask you to keep quiet? I am writing a little treatise on moral philosophy, and I am just at the heart of it.”

Fleury [interrupting]. “What are you saying about it, Monsieur Phellion?”

Phellion [reading]. “Question.—What is the soul of man?

“Answer.—A spiritual substance which thinks and reasons.”

Thuillier. “Spiritual substance! you might as well talk about immaterial stone.”

Poiret. “Don’t interrupt; let him go on.”

Phellion [continuing]. “Quest.—Whence comes the soul?

“Ans.—From God, who created it of a nature one and indivisible; the destructibility thereof is, consequently, not conceivable, and he hath said—”

Poiret [amazed]. “God said?”

Phellion. “Yes, monsieur; tradition authorizes the statement.”

Fleury [to Poiret]. “Come, don’t interrupt, yourself.”

Phellion [resuming]. “—and he hath said that he created it immortal; in other words, the soul can never die.

“Quest.—What are the uses of the soul?

“Ans.—To comprehend, to will, to remember; these constitute understanding, volition, memory.

“Quest.—What are the uses of the understanding?

“Ans.—To know. It is the eye of the soul.”

Fleury. “And the soul is the eye of what?”

Phellion [continuing]. “Quest.—What ought the understanding to know?

“Ans.—Truth.

“Quest.—Why does man possess volition?

“Ans.—To love good and hate evil.

“Quest.—What is good?

“Ans.—That which makes us happy.”

Vimeux. “Heavens! do you teach that to young ladies?”

Phellion. “Yes” [continuing]. “Quest.—How many kinds of good are there?”

Fleury. “Amazingly indecorous, to say the least.”

Phellion [aggrieved]. “Oh, monsieur!” [Controlling himself.] “But here’s the answer,—that’s as far as I have got” [reads]:—

“Ans.—There are two kinds of good,—eternal good and temporal good.”

Poiret [with a look of contempt]. “And does that sell for anything?”

Phellion. “I hope it will. It requires great application of mind to carry on a system of questions and answers; that is why I ask you to be quiet and let me think, for the answers—”

Thuillier [interrupting]. “The answers might be sold separately.”

Poiret. “Is that a pun?”

Thuillier. “No; a riddle.”

Phellion. “I am sorry I interrupted you” [he dives into his office desk]. “But” [to himself] “at any rate, I have stopped their talking about Monsieur Rabourdin.”

At this moment a scene was taking place between the minister and des Lupeaulx which decided Rabourdin’s fate. The general-secretary had gone to see the minister in his private study before the breakfast-hour, to make sure that La Briere was not within hearing.

“Your Excellency is not treating me frankly—”

“He means a quarrel,” thought the minister; “and all because his mistress coquetted with me last night. I did not think you so juvenile, my dear friend,” he said aloud.

“Friend?” said the general-secretary, “that is what I want to find out.”

The minister looked haughtily at des Lupeaulx.

“We are alone,” continued the secretary, “and we can come to an understanding. The deputy of the arrondissement in which my estate is situated—”

“So it is really an estate!” said the minister, laughing, to hide his surprise.

“Increased by a recent purchase of two hundred thousand francs’ worth of adjacent property,” replied des Lupeaulx, carelessly. “You knew of the deputy’s approaching resignation at least ten days ago, and you did not tell me of it. You were perhaps not bound to do so, but you knew very well that I am most anxious to take my seat in the centre. Has it occurred to you that I might fling myself back on the ‘Doctrine’?—which, let me tell you, will destroy the administration and the monarchy both if you continue to allow the party of

representative government to be recruited from men of talent whom you ignore. Don’t you know that in every nation there are fifty to sixty, not more, dangerous heads, whose schemes are in proportion to their ambition? The secret of knowing how to govern is to know those heads well, and either to chop them off or buy them. I don’t know how much talent I have, but I know that I have ambition; and you are committing a serious blunder when you set aside a man who wishes you well. The anointed head dazzles for the time being, but what next?—Why, a war of words; discussions will spring up once more and grow embittered, envenomed. Then, for your own sake, I advise you not to find me at the Left Centre. In spite of your prefect’s manoeuvres (instructions for which no doubt went from here confidentially) I am secure of a majority. The time has come for you and me to understand each other. After a breeze like this people sometimes become closer friends than ever. I must be made count and receive the grand cordon of the Legion of honor as a reward for my public services. However, I care less for those things just now than I do for something else in which you are more personally concerned. You have not yet appointed Rabourdin, and I have news this morning which tends to show that most persons will be better satisfied if you appoint Baudoyer.”

“Appoint Baudoyer!” echoed the minister. “Do you know him?”

“Yes,” said des Lupeaulx; “but suppose he proves incapable, as he will, you can then get rid of him by asking those who protect him to employ him elsewhere. You will thus get back an important office to give to friends; it may come in at the right moment to facilitate some compromise.”

“But I have pledged it to Rabourdin.”

“That may be; and I don’t ask you to make the change this very day. I know the danger of saying yes and no within twenty-four hours. But postpone the appointment, and don’t sign the papers till the day after to-morrow; by that time you may find it impossible to retain Rabourdin,—in fact, in all probability, he will send you his resignation—”

“His resignation?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“He is the tool of a secret power in whose interests he has carried on a system of espionage in all the ministries, and the thing has been discovered by mere accident. He has written a paper of some kind, giving short histories of all the officials. Everybody is talking of it; the clerks are furious. For heaven’s sake, don’t transact business with him to-day; let me find some means for you to avoid it. Ask an audience of the King; I am sure you will find great satisfaction there if you concede the point about Baudoyer; and you can obtain

something as an equivalent. Your position will be better than ever if you are forced later to dismiss a fool whom the court party impose upon you."

"What has made you turn against Rabourdin?"

"Would you forgive Monsieur de Chateaubriand for writing an article against the ministry? Well, read that, and see how Rabourdin has treated me in his secret document," said des Lupeaulx, giving the paper to the minister. "He pretends to reorganize the government from beginning to end,—no doubt in the interests of some secret society of which, as yet, we know nothing. I shall continue to be his friend for the sake of watching him; by that means I may render the government such signal service that they will have to make me count; for the peerage is the only thing I really care for. I want you fully to understand that I am not seeking office or anything else that would cause me to stand in your way; I am simply aiming for the peerage, which will enable me to marry a banker's daughter with an income of a couple of hundred thousand francs. And so, allow me to render you a few signal services which will make the King feel that I have saved the throne. I have long said that Liberalism would never offer us a pitched battle. It has given up conspiracies, Carbonaroism, and revolts with weapons; it is now sapping and mining, and the day is coming when it will be able to say, 'Out of that and let me in!' Do you think I have been courting Rabourdin's wife for my own pleasure? No, but I got much information from her. So now, let us agree on two things; first, the postponement of the appointment; second, your /sincere/ support of my election. You shall find at the end of the session that I have amply repaid you."

For all answer, the minister took the appointment papers and placed them in des Lupeaulx's hand.

"I will go and tell Rabourdin," added des Lupeaulx, "that you cannot transact business with him till Saturday."

The minister replied with an assenting gesture. The secretary despatched his man with a message to Rabourdin that the minister could not work with him until Saturday, on which day the Chamber was occupied with private bills, and his Excellency had more time at his disposal.

Just at this moment Saillard, having brought the monthly stipend, was slipping his little speech into the ear of the minister's wife, who drew herself up and answered with dignity that she did not meddle in political matters, and besides, she had heard that Monsieur Rabourdin was already appointed. Saillard, terrified, rushed up to Baudoyer's office, where he found Dutocq, Godard, and Bixiou in a state of exasperation difficult to describe; for they were reading the terrible paper on the administration in which they were all discussed.

Bixiou [with his finger on a paragraph]. “Here /you/ are, pere Saillard. Listen” [reads]:—

“Saillard.—The office of cashier to be suppressed in all the ministries; their accounts to be kept in future at the Treasury. Saillard is rich and does not need a pension.

“Do you want to hear about your son-in-law?” [Turns over the leaves.] “Here he is” [reads]:—

“Baudoyer.—Utterly incapable. To be thanked and dismissed. Rich; does not need a pension.

“And here’s for Godard” [reads]:—

“Godard.—Should be dismissed; pension one-third of his present salary.

“In short, here we all are. Listen to what I am” [reads]: “An artist who might be employed by the civil list, at the Opera, or the Menus-Plaisirs, or the Museum. Great deal of capacity, little self-respect, no application,—a restless spirit. Ha! I’ll give you a touch of the artist, Monsieur Rabourdin!”

Saillard. “Suppress cashiers! Why, the man’s a monster?”

Bixiou. “Let us see what he says of our mysterious Desroys.” [Turns over the pages; reads.]

“Desroys.—Dangerous; because he cannot be shaken in principles that are subversive of monarchial power. He is the son of the Conventionel, and he admires the Convention. He may become a very mischievous journalist.”

Baudoyer. “The police are not worse spies!”

Godard. “I shall go the general-secretary and lay a complaint in form; we must all resign in a body if such a man as that is put over us.”

Dutocq. “Gentlemen, listen to me; let us be prudent. If you rise at once in a body, we may all be accused of rancor and revenge. No, let the thing work, let the rumor spread quietly. When the whole ministry is aroused your remonstrances will meet with general approval.”

Bixiou. “Dutocq believes in the principles of the grand air composed by the sublime Rossini for Basilio,—which goes to show, by the bye, that the great composer was also a great politician. I shall leave my card on Monsieur Rabourdin to-morrow morning, inscribed thus: ‘Bixiou; no self-respect, no application, restless mind.’”

Godard. “A good idea, gentlemen. Let us all leave our cards to-morrow on Rabourdin inscribed in the same way.”

Dutocq [leading Bixiou apart]. “Come, you’ll agree to make that caricature

now, won’t you?”

Bixiou. “I see plainly, my dear fellow, that you knew all about this affair ten days ago” [looks him in the eye]. “Am I to be under-head-clerk?”

Dutocq. “On my word of honor, yes, and a thousand-franc fee beside, just as I told you. You don’t know what a service you’ll be rendering to powerful personages.”

Bixiou. “You know them?”

Dutocq. “Yes.”

Bixiou. “Well, then I want to speak with them.”

Dutocq [dryly]. “You can make the caricature or not, and you can be under-head-clerk or not,—as you please.”

Bixiou. “At any rate, let me see that thousand francs.”

Dutocq. “You shall have them when you bring the drawing.”

Bixiou. “Forward, march! that lampoon shall go from end to end of the bureaus to-morrow morning. Let us go and torment the Rabourdins.” [Then speaking to Saillard, Godard, and Baudoyer, who were talking together in a low voice.] “We are going to stir up the neighbors.” [Goes with Dutocq into the Rabourdin bureau. Fleury, Thuillier, and Vimeux are there, talking excitedly.] “What’s the matter, gentlemen? All that I told you turns out to be true; you can go and see for yourselves the work of this infamous informer; for it is in the hands of the virtuous, honest, estimable, upright, and pious Baudoyer, who is indeed utterly incapable of doing any such thing. Your chief has got every one of you under the guillotine. Go and see; follow the crowd; money returned if you are not satisfied; execution /gratis/! The appointments are postponed. All the bureaus are in arms; Rabourdin has been informed that the minister will not work with him. Come, be off; go and see for yourselves.”

They all depart except Phellion and Poiret, who are left alone. The former loved Rabourdin too well to look for proof that might injure a man he was determined not to judge; the other had only five days more to remain in the office, and cared nothing either way. Just then Sebastien came down to collect the papers for signature. He was a good deal surprised, though he did not show it, to find the office deserted.

Phellion. “My young friend” [he rose, a rare thing], “do you know what is going on? what scandals are rife about Monsieur Rabourdin whom you love, and” [bending to whisper in Sebastien’s ear] “whom I love as much as I respect him. They say he has committed the imprudence to leave a paper containing comments on the officials lying about in the office—” [Phellion stopped short, caught the young man in his strong arms, seeing that he turned

pale and was near fainting, and placed him on a chair.] “A key, Monsieur Poiret, to put down his back; have you a key?”

Poiret. “I have the key of my domicile.”

[Old Poiret junior promptly inserted the said key between Sebastien’s shoulders, while Phellion gave him some water to drink. The poor lad no sooner opened his eyes than he began to weep. He laid his head on Phellion’s desk, and all his limbs were limp as if struck by lightning; while his sobs were so heartrending, so genuine, that for the first time in his life Poiret’s feelings were stirred by the sufferings of another.]

Phellion [speaking firmly]. “Come, come, my young friend; courage! In times of trial we must show courage. You are a man. What is the matter? What has happened to distress you so terribly?”

Sebastien [sobbing]. “It is I who have ruined Monsieur Rabourdin. I left that paper lying about when I copied it. I have killed my benefactor; I shall die myself. Such a noble man!—a man who ought to be minister!”

Poiret [blowing his nose]. “Then it is true he wrote the report.”

Sebastien [still sobbing]. “But it was to—there, I was going to tell his secrets! Ah! that wretch of a Dutocq; it was he who stole the paper.”

His tears and sobs recommenced and made so much noise that Rabourdin came up to see what was the matter. He found the young fellow almost fainting in the arms of Poiret and Phellion.

Rabourdin. “What is the matter, gentlemen?”

Sebastien [struggling to his feet, and then falling on his knees before Rabourdin]. “I have ruined you, monsieur. That memorandum,—Dutocq, the monster, he must have taken it.”

Rabourdin [calmly]. “I knew that already” [he lifts Sebastien]. “You are a child, my young friend.” [Speaks to Phellion.] “Where are the other gentlemen?”

Phellion. “They have gone into Monsieur Baudoyer’s office to see a paper which it is said—”

Rabourdin [interrupting him]. “Enough.” [Goes out, taking Sebastien with him. Poiret and Phellion look at each other in amazement, and do not know what to say.]

Poiret [to Phellion]. “Monsieur Rabourdin—”

Phellion [to Poiret]. “Monsieur Rabourdin—”

Poiret. “Well, I never! Monsieur Rabourdin!”

Phellion. “But did you notice how calm and dignified he was?”

Poiret [with a sly look that was more like a grimace]. “I shouldn’t be surprised if there were something under it all.”

Phellion. “A man of honor; pure and spotless.”

Poiret. “Who is?”

Phellion. “Monsieur Poiret, you think as I think about Dutocq; surely you understand me?”

Poiret [nodding his head three times and answering with a shrewd look]. “Yes.” [The other clerks return.]

Fleury. “A great shock; I still don’t believe the thing. Monsieur Rabourdin, a king among men! If such men are spies, it is enough to disgust one with virtue. I have always put Rabourdin among Plutarch’s heroes.”

Vimeux. “It is all true.”

Poiret [reflecting that he had only five days more to stay in the office]. “But, gentlemen, what do you say about the man who stole that paper, who spied upon Rabourdin?” [Dutocq left the room.]

Fleury. “I say he is a Judas Iscariot. Who is he?”

Phellion [significantly]. “He is not here at /this moment/.”

Vimeux [enlightened]. “It is Dutocq!”

Phellion. “I have no proof of it, gentlemen. While you were gone, that young man, Monsieur de la Roche, nearly fainted here. See his tears on my desk!”

Poiret. “We held him fainting in our arms.—My key, the key of my domicile!—dear, dear! it is down his back.” [Poiret goes hastily out.]

Vimeux. “The minister refused to transact business with Rabourdin to-day; and Monsieur Saillard, to whom the secretary said a few words, came to tell Monsieur Baudoyer to apply for the cross of the Legion of honor,—there is one to be granted, you know, on New-Year’s day, to all the heads of divisions. It is quite clear what it all means. Monsieur Rabourdin is sacrificed by the very persons who employed him. Bixiou says so. We were all to be turned out, except Sebastien and Phellion.”

Du Bruel [entering]. “Well, gentlemen, is it true?”

Thuillier. “To the last word.”

Du Bruel [putting his hat on again]. “Good-bye.” [Hurries out.]

Thuillier. “He may rush as much as he pleases to his Duc de Rhetore and Duc de Maufrigneuse, but Colleville is to be our under-head-clerk, that’s certain.”

Phellion. “Du Bruel always seemed to be attached to Monsieur Rabourdin.”

Poiret [returning]. “I have had a world of trouble to get back my key. That boy is crying still, and Monsieur Rabourdin has disappeared.” [Dutocq and Bixiou enter.]

Bixiou. “Ha, gentlemen! strange things are going on in your bureau. Du Bruel! I want you.” [Looks into the adjoining room.] “Gone?”

Thuillier. “Full speed.”

Bixiou. “What about Rabourdin?”

Fleury. “Distilled, evaporated, melted! Such a man, the king of men, that he—”

Poiret [to Dutocq]. “That little Sebastien, in his trouble, said that you, Monsieur Dutocq, had taken the paper from him ten days ago.”

Bixiou [looking at Dutocq]. “You must clear yourself of /that/, my good friend.” [All the clerks look fixedly at Dutocq.]

Dutocq. “Where’s the little viper who copied it?”

Bixiou. “Copied it? How did you know he copied it? Ha! ha! it is only the diamond that cuts the diamond.” [Dutocq leaves the room.]

Poiret. “Would you listen to me, Monsieur Bixiou? I have only five days and a half to stay in this office, and I do wish that once, only once, I might have the pleasure of understanding what you mean. Do me the honor to explain what diamonds have to do with these present circumstances.”

Bixiou. “I meant papa,—for I’m willing for once to bring my intellect down to the level of yours,—that just as the diamond alone can cut the diamond, so it is only one inquisitive man who can defeat another inquisitive man.”

Fleury. “‘Inquisitive man’ stands for ‘spy.’”

Poiret. “I don’t understand.”

Bixiou. “Very well; try again some other time.”

Monsieur Rabourdin, after taking Sebastien to his room, had gone straight to the minister; but the minister was at the Chamber of Deputies. Rabourdin went at once to the Chamber, where he wrote a note to his Excellency, who

was at that moment in the tribune engaged in a hot discussion. Rabourdin waited, not in the conference hall, but in the courtyard, where, in spite of the cold, he resolved to remain and intercept his Excellency as he got into his carriage. The usher of the Chamber had told him that the minister was in the thick of a controversy raised by the nineteen members of the extreme Left, and that the session was likely to be stormy. Rabourdin walked to and for in the courtyard of the palace for five mortal hours, a prey to feverish agitation. At half-past six o'clock the session broke up, and the members filed out. The minister's chasseur came up to find the coachman.

"Hi, Jean!" he called out to him; "Monseigneur has gone with the minister of war; they are going to see the King, and after that they dine together, and we are to fetch him at ten o'clock. There's a Council this evening."

Rabourdin walked slowly home, in a state of despondency not difficult to imagine. It was seven o'clock, and he had barely time to dress.

"Well, you are appointed?" cried his wife, joyously, as he entered the salon.

Rabourdin raised his head with a grievous motion of distress and answered, "I fear I shall never again set foot in the ministry."

"What?" said his wife, quivering with sudden anxiety.

"My memorandum on the officials is known in all the offices; and I have not been able to see the minister."

Celestine's eyes were opened to a sudden vision in which the devil, in one of his infernal flashes, showed her the meaning of her last conversation with des Lupeaulx.

"If I had behaved like a low woman," she thought, "we should have had the place."

She looked at Rabourdin with grief in her heart. A sad silence fell between them, and dinner was eaten in the midst of gloomy meditations.

"And it is my Wednesday," she said at last.

"All is not lost, dear Celestine," said Rabourdin, laying a kiss on his wife's forehead; "perhaps to-morrow I shall be able to see the minister and explain everything. Sebastien sat up all last night to finish the writing; the papers are copied and collated; I shall place them on the minister's desk and beg him to read them through. La Briere will help me. A man is never condemned without a hearing."

"I am curious to see if Monsieur des Lupeaulx will come here to-night."

"He? Of course he will come," said Rabourdin; "there's something of the

tiger in him; he likes to lick the blood of the wounds he has given."

"My poor husband," said his wife, taking his hand, "I don't see how it is that a man who could conceive so noble a reform did not also see that it ought not to be communicated to a single person. It is one of those ideas that a man should keep in his own mind, for he alone can apply them. A statesman must do in our political sphere as Napoleon did in his; he stooped, twisted, crawled. Yes, Bonaparte crawled! To be made commander-in-chief of the Army of Italy he married Barrere's mistress. You should have waited, got yourself elected deputy, followed the politics of a party, sometimes down in the depths, at other times on the crest of the wave, and you should have taken, like Monsieur de Villele, the Italian motto 'Col tempo,' in other words, 'All things are given to him who knows how to wait.' That great orator worked for seven years to get into power; he began in 1814 by protesting against the Charter when he was the same age that you are now. Here's your fault; you have allowed yourself to be kept subordinate, when you were born to rule."

The entrance of the painter Schinner imposed silence on the wife and husband, but these words made the latter thoughtful.

"Dear friend," said the painter, grasping Rabourdin's hand, "the support of artists is a useless thing enough, but let me say under these circumstances that we are all faithful to you. I have just read the evening papers. Baudoyer is appointed director and receives the cross of the Legion of honor—"

"I have been longer in the department, I have served twenty-four hours," said Rabourdin with a smile.

"I know Monsieur le Comte de Serizy, the minister of State, pretty well, and if he can help you, I will go and see him," said Schinner.

The salon soon filled with persons who knew nothing of the government proceedings. Du Bruel did not appear. Madame Rabourdin was gayer and more graceful than ever, like the charger wounded in battle, that still finds strength to carry his master from the field.

"She is very courageous," said a few women who knew the truth, and who were charmingly attentive to her, understanding her misfortunes.

"But she certainly did a great deal to attract des Lupeaulx," said the Baronne du Chatelet to the Vicomtesse de Fontaine.

"Do you think—" began the vicomtesse.

"If so," interrupted Madame de Camps, in defence of her friend, "Monsieur Rabourdin would at least have had the cross."

About eleven o'clock des Lupeaulx appeared; and we can only describe him by saying that his spectacles were sad and his eyes joyous; the glasses,

however, obscured the glances so successfully that only a physiognomist would have seen the diabolical expression which they wore. He went up to Rabourdin and pressed the hand which the latter could not avoid giving him.

Then he approached Madame Rabourdin.

“We have much to say to each other,” he remarked as he seated himself beside the beautiful woman, who received him admirably.

“Ah!” he continued, giving her a side glance, “you are grand indeed; I find you just what I expected, glorious under defeat. Do you know that it is a very rare thing to find a superior woman who answers to the expectations formed of her. So defeat doesn’t dishearten you? You are right; we shall triumph in the end,” he whispered in her ear. “Your fate is always in your own hands,—so long, I mean, as your ally is a man who adores you. We will hold counsel together.”

“But is Baudoyer appointed?” she asked.

“Yes,” said the secretary.

“Does he get the cross?”

“Not yet; but he will have it later.”

“Amazing!”

“Ah! you don’t understand political exigencies.”

During this evening, which seemed interminable to Madame Rabourdin, another scene was occurring in the place Royale,—one of those comedies which are played in seven Parisian salons whenever there is a change of ministry. The Saillards’ salon was crowded. Monsieur and Madame Transon arrived at eight o’clock; Madame Transon kissed Madame Baudoyer, nee Saillard. Monsieur Bataille, captain of the National Guard, came with his wife and the curate of Saint Paul’s.

“Monsieur Baudoyer,” said Madame Transon. “I wish to be the first to congratulate you; they have done justice to your talents. You have indeed earned your promotion.”

“Here you are, director,” said Monsieur Transon, rubbing his hands, “and the appointment is very flattering to this neighborhood.”

“And we can truly say it came to pass without any intriguing,” said the worthy Saillard. “We are none of us political intriguers; /we/ don’t go to select parties at the ministry.”

Uncle Mitral rubbed his nose and grinned as he glanced at his niece Elisabeth, the woman whose hand had pulled the wires, who was talking with

Gigonnet. Falleix, honest fellow, did not know what to make of the stupid blindness of Saillard and Baudoyer. Messieurs Dutocq, Bixiou, du Bruel, Godard, and Colleville (the latter appointed head of the bureau) entered.

“What a crew!” whispered Bixiou to du Bruel. “I could make a fine caricature of them in the shapes of fishes,—dorys, flounders, sharks, and snappers, all dancing a saraband!”

“Monsieur,” said Colleville, “I come to offer you my congratulations; or rather we congratulate ourselves in having such a man placed over us; and we desire to assure you of the zeal with which we shall co-operate in your labors. Allow me to say that this event affords a signal proof to the truth of my axiom that a man’s destiny lies in the letters of his name. I may say that I knew of this appointment and of your other honors before I heard of them, for I spend the night in anagrammatizing your name as follows:” [proudly] “Isidore C. T. Baudoyer,—Director, decorated by us (his Majesty the King, of course).”

Baudoyer bowed and remarked piously that names were given in baptism.

Monsieur and Madame Baudoyer, senior, father and mother of the new director, were there to enjoy the glory of their son and daughter-in-law. Uncle Gigonnet-Bidault, who had dined at the house, had a restless, fidgety look in his eye which frightened Bixiou.

“There’s a queer one,” said the latter to du Bruel, calling his attention to Gigonnet, “who would do in a vaudeville. I wonder if he could be bought. Such an old scarecrow is just the thing for a sign over the Two Baboons. And what a coat! I did think there was nobody but Poiret who could show the like after that after ten years’ public exposure to the inclemencies of Parisian weather.”

“Baudoyer is magnificent,” said du Bruel.

“Dazzling,” answered Bixiou.

“Gentlemen,” said Baudoyer, “let me present you to my own uncle, Monsieur Mitral, and to my great-uncle through my wife, Monsieur Bidault.”

Gigonnet and Mitral gave a glance at the three clerks so penetrating, so glittering with gleams of gold, that the two scoffers were sobered at once.

“Hein?” said Bixiou, when they were safely under the arcades in the place Royale; “did you examine those uncles?—two copies of Shylock. I’ll bet their money is lent in the market at a hundred per cent per week. They lend on pawn; and sell most that they lay hold of, coats, gold lace, cheese, men, women, and children; they are a conglomeration of Arabs, Jews, Genoese, Genevese, Greeks, Lombards, and Parisians, suckled by a wolf and born of a Turkish woman.”

“I believe you,” said Godard. “Uncle Mitral used to be a sheriff’s officer.”

“That settles it,” said du Bruel.

“I’m off to see the proof of my caricature,” said Bixiou; “but I should like to study the state of things in Rabourdin’s salon to-night. You are lucky to be able to go there, du Bruel.”

“I!” said the vaudevillist, “what should I do there? My face doesn’t lend itself to condolences. And it is very vulgar in these days to go and see people who are down.”

CHAPTER IX. THE RESIGNATION

By midnight Madame Rabourdin’s salon was deserted; only two or three guests remained with des Lupeaulx and the master and mistress of the house. When Schinner and Monsieur and Madame de Camps had likewise departed, des Lupeaulx rose with a mysterious air, stood with his back to the fireplace and looked alternately at the husband and wife.

“My friends,” he said, “nothing is really lost, for the minister and I are faithful to you. Dutocq simply chose between two powers the one he thought strongest. He has served the court and the Grand Almoner; he has betrayed me. But that is in the order of things; a politician never complains of treachery. Nevertheless, Baudoyer will be dismissed as incapable in a few months; no doubt his protectors will find him a place,—in the prefecture of police, perhaps,—for the clergy will not desert him.”

From this point des Lupeaulx went on with a long tirade about the Grand Almoner and the dangers the government ran in relying upon the church and upon the Jesuits. We need not, we think, point out to the intelligent reader that the court and the Grand Almoner, to whom the liberal journals attributed an enormous influence under the administration, had little really to do with Monsieur Baudoyer’s appointment. Such petty intrigues die in the upper sphere of great self-interests. If a few words in favor of Baudoyer were obtained by the importunity of the curate of Saint-Paul’s and the Abbe Gaudron, they would have been withdrawn immediately at a suggestion from the minister. The occult power of the Congregation of Jesus (admissible certainly as confronting the bold society of the “Doctrine,” entitled “Help yourself and heaven will help you,”) was formidable only through the imaginary force conferred on it by subordinate powers who perpetually threatened each other with its evils. The liberal scandal-mongers delighted in representing the Grand Almoner and the whole Jesuitical Chapter as political,

administrative, civil, and military giants. Fear creates bugbears. At this crisis Baudoyer firmly believed in the said Chapter, little aware that the only Jesuits who had put him where he now was sat by his own fireside, and in the Cafe Themis playing dominoes.

At certain epochs in history certain powers appear, to whom all evils are attributed, though at the same time their genius is denied; they form an efficient argument in the mouth of fools. Just as Monsieur de Talleyrand was supposed to hail all events of whatever kind with a bon mot, so in these days of the Restoration the clerical party had the credit of doing and undoing everything. Unfortunately, it did and undid nothing. Its influence was not wielded by a Cardinal Richelieu or a Cardinal Mazarin; it was in the hands of a species of Cardinal de Fleury, who, timid for over five years, turned bold for one day, injudiciously bold. Later on, the “Doctrine” did more, with impunity, at Saint-Merri, than Charles X. pretended to do in July, 1830. If the section on the censorship so foolishly introduced into the new charter had been omitted, journalism also would have had its Saint-Merri. The younger Branch could have legally carried out Charles X.‘s plan.

“Remain where you are, head of a bureau under Baudoyer,” went on des Lupeaulx. “Have the nerve to do this; make yourself a true politician; put ideas and generous impulses aside; attend only to your functions; don’t say a word to your new director; don’t help him with a suggestion; and do nothing yourself without his order. In three months Baudoyer will be out of the ministry, either dismissed, or stranded on some other administrative shore. They may attach him to the king’s household. Twice in my life I have been set aside as you are, and overwhelmed by an avalanche of folly; I have quietly waited and let it pass.”

“Yes,” said Rabourdin, “but you were not calumniated; your honor was not assailed, compromised—”

“Ha, ha, ha!” cried des Lupeaulx, interrupting him with a burst of Homeric laughter. “Why, that’s the daily bread of every remarkable man in this glorious kingdom of France! And there are but two ways to meet such calumny,—either yield to it, pack up, and go plant cabbages in the country; or else rise above it, march on, fearless, and don’t turn your head.”

“For me, there is but one way of untying the noose which treachery and the work of spies have fastened round my throat,” replied Rabourdin. “I must explain the matter at once to his Excellency, and if you are as sincerely attached to me as you say you are, you will put me face to face with him to-morrow.”

“You mean that you wish to explain to him your plan for the reform of the service?”

Rabourdin bowed.

“Well, then, trust the papers with me,—your memoranda, all the documents. I promise you that he shall sit up all night and examine them.”

“Let us go to him, then!” cried Rabourdin, eagerly; “six years’ toil certainly deserves two or three hours attention from the king’s minister, who will be forced to recognize, if he does not applaud, such perseverance.”

Compelled by Rabourdin’s tenacity to take a straightforward path, without ambush or angle where his treachery could hide itself, des Lupeaulx hesitated for a single instant, and looked at Madame Rabourdin, while he inwardly asked himself, “Which shall I permit to triumph, my hatred for him, or my fancy for her?”

“You have no confidence in my honor,” he said, after a pause. “I see that you will always be to me the author of your /secret analysis/. Adieu, madame.”

Madame Rabourdin bowed coldly. Celestine and Xavier returned at once to their own rooms without a word; both were overcome by their misfortune. The wife thought of the dreadful situation in which she stood toward her husband. The husband, resolving slowly not to remain at the ministry but to send in his resignation at once, was lost in a sea of reflections; the crisis for him meant a total change of life and the necessity of starting on a new career. All night he sat before his fire, taking no notice of Celestine, who came in several times on tiptoe, in her night-dress.

“I must go once more to the ministry, to bring away my papers, and show Baudoyer the routine of the business,” he said to himself at last. “I had better write my resignation now.”

He turned to his table and began to write, thinking over each clause of the letter, which was as follows:—

Monseigneur,—I have the honor to inclose to your Excellency my resignation. I venture to hope that you still remember hearing me say that I left my honor in your hands, and that everything, for me, depended on my being able to give you an immediate explanation.

This explanation I have vainly sought to give. To-day it would, perhaps, be useless; for a fragment of my work relating to the administration, stolen and misused, has gone the rounds of the offices and is misinterpreted by hatred; in consequence, I find myself compelled to resign, under the tacit condemnation of my superiors.

Your Excellency may have thought, on the morning when I first sought to speak with you, that my purpose was to ask for my promotion, when, in fact, I was thinking only of the glory and usefulness of your ministry and of the

public good. It is all-important, I think, to correct that impression.

Then followed the usual epistolary formulas.

It was half-past seven in the morning when the man consummated the sacrifice of his ideas; he burned everything, the toil of years. Fatigued by the pressure of thought, overcome by mental suffering, he fell asleep with his head on the back of his armchair. He was wakened by a curious sensation, and found his hands covered with his wife's tears and saw her kneeling before him. Celestine had read the resignation. She could measure the depth of his fall. They were now to be reduced to live on four thousand francs a year; and that day she had counted up her debts,—they amounted to something like thirty-two thousand francs! The most ignoble of all wretchedness had come upon them. And that noble man who had trusted her was ignorant that she had abused the fortune he had confided to her care. She was sobbing at his feet, beautiful as the Magdalen.

"My cup is full," cried Xavier, in terror. "I am dishonored at the ministry, and dishonored—"

The light of her pure honor flashed from Celestine's eyes; she sprang up like a startled horse and cast a fulminating glance at Rabourdin.

"I! I!" she said, on two sublime tones. "Am I a base wife? If I were, you would have been appointed. But," she added mournfully, "it is easier to believe that than to believe what is the truth."

"Then what is it?" said Rabourdin.

"All in three words," she said; "I owe thirty thousand francs."

Rabourdin caught his wife to his heart with a gesture of almost frantic joy, and seated her on his knee.

"Take comfort, dear," he said, in a tone of voice so adorably kind that the bitterness of her grief was changed to something inexpressibly tender. "I too have made mistakes; I have worked uselessly for my country when I thought I was being useful to her. But now I mean to take another path. If I had sold groceries we should now be millionaires. Well, let us be grocers. You are only twenty-eight, dear angel; in ten years you shall recover the luxury that you love, which we must needs renounce for a short time. I, too, dear heart, am not a base or common husband. We will sell our farm; its value has increased of late. That and the sale of our furniture will pay my debts."

My debts! Celestine embraced her husband a thousand times in the single kiss with which she thanked him for that generous word.

"We shall still have a hundred thousand francs to put into business. Before the month is out I shall find some favorable opening. If luck gave a Martin

Falleix to a Saillard, why should we despair? Wait breakfast for me. I am going now to the ministry, but I shall come back with my neck free of the yoke."

Celestine clasped her husband in her arms with a force men do not possess, even in their passionate moments; for women are stronger through emotion than men through power. She wept and laughed and sobbed in turns.

When Rabourdin left the house at eight o'clock, the porter gave him the satirical cards suggested by Bixiou. Nevertheless, he went to the ministry, where he found Sebastien waiting near the door to entreat him not to enter any of the bureaus, because an infamous caricature of him was making the round of the offices.

"If you wish to soften the pain of my downfall," he said to the lad, "bring me that drawing; I am now taking my resignation to Ernest de la Briere myself, that it may not be altered or distorted while passing through the routine channels. I have my own reasons for wishing to see that caricature."

When Rabourdin came back to the courtyard, after making sure that his letter would go straight into the minister's hands, he found Sebastien in tears, with a copy of the lithograph, which the lad reluctantly handed over to him.

"It is very clever," said Rabourdin, showing a serene brow to his companion, though the crown of thorns was on it all the same.

He entered the bureaus with a calm air, and went at once into Baudoyer's section to ask him to come to the office of the head of the division and receive instructions as to the business which that incapable being was henceforth to direct.

"Tell Monsieur Baudoyer that there must be no delay," he added, in the hearing of all the clerks; "my resignation is already in the minister's hands, and I do not wish to stay here longer than is necessary."

Seeing Bixiou, Rabourdin went straight up to him, showed him the lithograph, and said, to the great astonishment of all present,—

"Was I not right in saying you were an artist? Still, it is a pity you directed the point of your pencil against a man who cannot be judged in this way, nor indeed by the bureaus at all;—but everything is laughed at in France, even God."

Then he took Baudoyer into the office of the late La Billardiere. At the door he found Phellion and Sebastien, the only two who, under his great disaster, dared to remain openly faithful to the fallen man. Rabourdin noticed that Phellion's eyes were moist, and he could not refrain from wringing his hand.

“Monsieur,” said the good man, “if we can serve you in any way, make use of us.”

Monsieur Rabourdin shut himself up in the late chief’s office with Monsieur Baudoyer, and Phellion helped him to show the new incumbent all the administrative difficulties of his new position. At each separate affair which Rabourdin carefully explained, Baudoyer’s little eyes grew big as saucers.

“Farewell, monsieur,” said Rabourdin at last, with a manner that was half-solemn, half-satirical.

Sebastien meanwhile had made up a package of papers and letters belonging to his chief and had carried them away in a hackney coach. Rabourdin passed through the grand courtyard, while all the clerks were watching from the windows, and waited there a moment to see if the minister would send him any message. His Excellency was dumb. Phellion courageously escorted the fallen man to his home, expressing his feelings of respectful admiration; then he returned to the office, and took up his work, satisfied with his own conduct in rendering these funeral honors to the neglected and misjudged administrative talent.

Bixiou [seeing Phellion re-enter]. “Victrix cause diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.”

Phellion. “Yes, monsieur.”

Poiret. “What does that mean?”

Fleury. “That priests rejoice, and Monsieur Rabourdin has the respect of men of honor.”

Dutocq [annoyed]. “You didn’t say that yesterday.”

Fleury. “If you address me you’ll have my hand in your face. It is known for certain that you filched those papers from Monsieur Rabourdin.” [Dutocq leaves the office.] “Oh, yes, go and complain to your Monsieur des Lupeaulx, spy!”

Bixiou [laughing and grimacing like a monkey]. “I am curious to know how the division will get along. Monsieur Rabourdin is so remarkable a man that he must have had some special views in that work of his. Well, the minister loses a fine mind.” [Rubs his hands.]

Laurent [entering]. “Monsieur Fleury is requested to go to the secretary’s office.”

All the clerks. “Done for!”

Fleury [leaving the room]. “I don’t care; I am offered a place as

responsible editor. I shall have all my time to myself to lounge the streets or do amusing work in a newspaper office."

Bixiou. "Dutocq has already made them cut off the head of that poor Desroys."

Colleville [entering joyously]. "Gentlemen, I am appointed head of this bureau."

Thuillier. "Ah, my friend, if it were I myself, I couldn't be better pleased."

Bixiou. "His wife has managed it." [Laughter.]

Poiret. "Will any one tell me the meaning of all that is happening here to-day?"

Bixiou. "Do you really want to know? Then listen. The antechamber of the administration is henceforth a chamber, the court is a boudoir, the best way to get in is through the cellar, and the bed is more than ever a cross-cut."

Poiret. "Monsieur Bixiou, may I entreat you, explain?"

Bixiou. "I'll paraphrase my opinion. To be anything at all you must begin by being everything. It is quite certain that a reform of this service is needed; for on my word of honor, the State robs the poor officials as much as the officials rob the State in the matter of hours. But why is it that we idle as we do? because they pay us too little; and the reason of that is we are too many for the work, and your late chief, the virtuous Rabourdin, saw all this plainly. That great administrator,—for he was that, gentlemen,—saw what the thing is coming to, the thing that these idiots call the 'working of our admirable institutions.' The chamber will want before long to administrate, and the administrators will want to legislate. The government will try to administrate and the administrators will want to govern, and so it will go on. Laws will come to be mere regulations, and ordinances will be thought laws. God made this epoch of the world for those who like to laugh. I live in a state of jovial admiration of the spectacle which the greatest joker of modern times, Louis XVIII., bequeathed to us" [general stupefaction]. "Gentlemen, if France, the country with the best civil service in Europe, is managed thus, what do you suppose the other nations are like? Poor unhappy nations! I ask myself how they can possibly get along without two Chambers, without the liberty of the press, without reports, without circulars even, without an army of clerks? Dear, dear, how do you suppose they have armies and navies? how can they exist at all without political discussions? Can they even be called nations, or governments? It is said (mere traveller's tales) that these strange peoples claim to have a policy, to wield a certain influence; but that's absurd! how can they when they haven't 'progress' or 'new lights'? They can't stir up ideas, they haven't an independent forum; they are still in the twilight of barbarism. There

are no people in the world but the French people who have ideas. Can you understand, Monsieur Poiret," [Poiret jumped as if he had been shot] "how a nation can do without heads of divisions, general-secretaries and directors, and all this splendid array of officials, the glory of France and of the Emperor Napoleon,—who had his own good reasons for creating a myriad of offices? I don't see how those nations have the audacity to live at all. There's Austria, which has less than a hundred clerks in her war ministry, while the salaries and pensions of ours amount to a third of our whole budget, a thing that was unheard of before the Revolution. I sum up all I've been saying in one single remark, namely, that the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-lettres, which seems to have very little to do, had better offer a prize for the ablest answer to the following question: Which is the best organized State; the one that does many things with few officials, or the one that does next to nothing with an army of them?"

Poiret. "Is that your last word?"

Bixiou. "Yes, sir! whether English, French, German or Italian,—I let you off the other languages."

Poiret [lifting his hands to heaven]. "Gracious goodness! and they call you a witty man!"

Bixiou. "Haven't you understood me yet?"

Phellion. "Your last observation was full of excellent sense."

Bixiou. "Just as full as the budget itself, and like the budget again, as complicated as it looks simple; and I set it as a warning, a beacon, at the edge of this hole, this gulf, this volcano, called, in the language of the 'Constitutionel,' 'the political horizon.'"

Poiret. "I should much prefer a comprehensible explanation."

Bixiou. "Hurrah for Rabourdin! there's my explanation; that's my opinion. Are you satisfied?"

Colleville [gravely]. "Monsieur Rabourdin had but one defect."

Poiret. "What was it?"

Colleville. "That of being a statesman instead of a subordinate official."

Phellion [standing before Bixiou]. "Monsieur! why did you, who understand Monsieur Rabourdin so well, why did you make that inf—that odi—that hideous caricature?"

Bixiou. "Do you forget our bet? don't you know I was backing the devil's game, and that your bureau owes me a dinner at the Rocher de Cancale?"

Poiret [much put-out]. “Then it is a settled thing that I am to leave this government office without ever understanding a sentence, or a single word uttered by Monsieur Bixiou.”

Bixiou. “It is your own fault; ask these gentlemen. Gentlemen, have you understood the meaning of my observations? and were those observations just, and brilliant?”

All. “Alas, yes!”

Minard. “And the proof is that I shall send in my resignation. I shall plunge into industrial avocations.”

Bixiou. “What! have you managed to invent a mechanical corset, or a baby’s bottle, or a fire engine, or chimneys that consume no fuel, or ovens which cook cutlets with three sheets of paper?”

Minard [departing.] “Adieu, I shall keep my secret.”

Bixiou. “Well, young Poiret junior, you see,—all these gentlemen understand me.”

Poiret [crest-fallen]. “Monsieur Bixiou, would you do me the honor to come down for once to my level and speak in a language I can understand?”

Bixiou [winking at the rest]. “Willingly.” [Takes Poiret by the button of his frock-coat.] “Before you leave this office forever perhaps you would be glad to know what you are—”

Poiret [quickly]. “An honest man, monsieur.”

Bixiou [shrugging his shoulders]. “—to be able to define, explain, and analyze precisely what a government clerk is? Do you know what he is?”

Poiret. “I think I do.”

Bixiou [twisting the button]. “I doubt it.”

Poiret. “He is a man paid by government to do work.”

Bixiou. “Oh! then a soldier is a government clerk?”

Poiret [puzzled]. “Why, no.”

Bixiou. “But he is paid by the government to do work, to mount guard and show off at reviews. You may perhaps tell me that he longs to get out of his place,—that he works too hard and fingers too little metal, except that of his musket.”

Poiret [his eyes wide open]. “Monsieur, a government clerk is, logically speaking, a man who needs the salary to maintain himself, and is not free to get out of his place; for he doesn’t know how to do anything but copy papers.”

Bixiou. “Ah! now we are coming to a conclusion. So the bureau is the clerk’s shell, husk, pod. No clerk without a bureau, no bureau without a clerk. But what do you make, then, of a customs officer?” [Poiret shuffles his feet and tries to edge away; Bixiou twists off one button and catches him by another.] “He is, from the bureaucratic point of view, a neutral being. The excise-man is only half a clerk; he is on the confines between civil and military service; neither altogether soldier nor altogether clerk—Here, here, where are you going?” [Twists the button.] “Where does the government clerk proper end? That’s a serious question. Is a prefect a clerk?”

Poiret [hesitating]. “He is a functionary.”

Bixiou. “But you don’t mean that a functionary is not a clerk? that’s an absurdity.”

Poiret [weary and looking round for escape]. “I think Monsieur Godard wants to say something.”

Godard. “The clerk is the order, the functionary the species.”

Bixiou [laughing]. “I shouldn’t have thought you capable of that distinction, my brave subordinate.”

Poiret [trying to get away]. “Incomprehensible!”

Bixiou. “La, la, papa, don’t step on your tether. If you stand still and listen, we shall come to an understanding before long. Now, here’s an axiom which I bequeath to this bureau and to all bureaus: Where the clerk ends, the functionary begins; where the functionary ends, the statesman rises. There are very few statesmen among the prefects. The prefect is therefore a neutral being among the higher species. He comes between the statesman and the clerk, just as the custom-house officer stands between the civil and the military. Let us continue to clear up these important points.” [Poiret turns crimson with distress.] “Suppose we formulate the whole matter in a maxim worthy of Larochefoucault: Officials with salaries of twenty thousand francs are not clerks. From which we may deduce mathematically this corollary: The statesman first looms up in the sphere of higher salaries; and also this second and not less logical and important corollary: Directors-general may be statesmen. Perhaps it is in that sense that more than one deputy says in his heart, ‘It is a fine thing to be a director-general.’ But in the interests of our noble French language and of the Academy—”

Poiret [magnetized by the fixity of Bixiou’s eye]. “The French language! the Academy!”

Bixiou [twisting off the second button and seizing another]. “Yes, in the interests of our noble tongue, it is proper to observe that although the head of a

bureau, strictly speaking, may be called a clerk, the head of a division must be called a bureaucrat. These gentlemen" [turning to the clerks and privately showing them the third button off Poiret's coat] "will appreciate this delicate shade of meaning. And so, papa Poiret, don't you see it is clear that the government clerk comes to a final end at the head of a division? Now that question once settled, there is no longer any uncertainty; the government clerk who has hitherto seemed undefinable is defined."

Poiret. "Yes, that appears to me beyond a doubt."

Bixiou. "Nevertheless, do me the kindness to answer the following question: A judge being irremovable, and consequently debarred from being, according to your subtle distinction, a functionary, and receiving a salary which is not the equivalent of the work he does, is he to be included in the class of clerks?"

Poiret [gazing at the cornice]. "Monsieur, I don't follow you."

Bixiou [getting off the fourth button]. "I wanted to prove to you, monsieur, that nothing is simple; but above all—and what I am going to say is intended for philosophers—I wish (if you'll allow me to misquote a saying of Louis XVIII.),—I wish to make you see that definitions lead to muddles."

Poiret [wiping his forehead]. "Excuse me, I am sick at my stomach" [tries to button his coat]. "Ah! you have cut off all my buttons!"

Bixiou. "But the point is, /do you understand me/?"

Poiret [angrily]. "Yes, monsieur, I do; I understand that you have been playing me a shameful trick and twisting off my buttons while I have been standing here unconscious of it."

Bixiou [solemnly]. "Old man, you are mistaken! I wished to stamp upon your brain the clearest possible image of constitutional government" [all the clerks look at Bixiou; Poiret, stupefied, gazes at him uneasily], "and also to keep my word to you. In so doing I employed the parabolical method of savages. Listen and comprehend: While the ministers start discussions in the Chambers that are just about as useful and as conclusive as the one we are engaged in, the administration cuts the buttons off the tax-payers."

All. "Bravo, Bixiou!"

Poiret [who comprehends]. "I don't regret my buttons."

Bixiou. "I shall follow Minard's example; I won't pocket such a paltry salary as mine any longer; I shall deprive the government of my co-operation." [Departs amid general laughter.]

Another scene was taking place in the minister's reception-room, more

instructive than the one we have just related, because it shows how great ideas are allowed to perish in the higher regions of State affairs, and in what way statesmen console themselves.

Des Lupeaulx was presenting the new director, Monsieur Baudoyer, to the minister. A number of persons were assembled in the salon,—two or three ministerial deputies, a few men of influence, and Monsieur Clergeot (whose division was now merged with La Billardiere's under Baudoyer's direction), to whom the minister was promising an honorable pension. After a few general remarks, the great event of the day was brought up.

A deputy. "So you lose Rabourdin?"

Des Lupeaulx. "He has resigned."

Clergeot. "They say he wanted to reform the administration."

The Minister [looking at the deputies]. "Salaries are not really in proportion to the exigencies of the civil service."

De la Briere. "According to Monsieur Rabourdin, one hundred clerks with a salary of twelve thousand francs would do better and quicker work than a thousand clerks at twelve hundred."

Clergeot. "Perhaps he is right."

The Minister. "But what is to be done? The machine is built in that way. Must we take it to pieces and remake it? No one would have the courage to attempt that in face of the Chamber, and the foolish outcries of the Opposition, and the fierce denunciations of the press. It follows that there will happen, one of these days, some damaging 'solution of continuity' between the government and the administration."

A deputy. "In what way?"

The Minister. "In many ways. A minister will want to serve the public good, and will not be allowed to do so. You will create interminable delays between things and their results. You may perhaps render the theft of a penny actually impossible, but you cannot prevent the buying and selling of influence, the collusions of self-interest. The day will come when nothing will be conceded without secret stipulations, which may never see the light. Moreover, the clerks, one and all, from the least to the greatest, are acquiring opinions of their own; they will soon be no longer the hands of a brain, the scribes of governmental thought; the Opposition even now tends towards giving them a right to judge the government and to talk and vote against it."

Baudoyer [in a low voice, but meaning to be heard]. "Monseigneur is really fine."

Des Lupeaulx. “Of course bureaucracy has its defects. I myself think it slow and insolent; it hampers ministerial action, stifles projects, and arrests progress. But, after all, French administration is amazingly useful.”

Baudoyer. “Certainly!”

Des Lupeaulx. “If only to maintain the paper and stamp industries! Suppose it is rather fussy and provoking, like all good housekeepers,—it can at any moment render an account of its disbursements. Where is the merchant who would not gladly give five per cent of his entire capital if he could insure himself against /leakage/?”

The Deputy [a manufacturer]. “The manufacturing interests of all nations would joyfully unite against that evil genius of theirs called leakage.”

Des Lupeaulx. “After all, though statistics are the childish foible of modern statesmen, who think that figures are estimates, we must cipher to estimate. Figures are, moreover, the convincing argument of societies based on self-interest and money, and that is the sort of society the Charter has given us,—in my opinion, at any rate. Nothing convinces the ‘intelligent masses’ as much as a row of figures. All things in the long run, say the statesmen of the Left, resolve themselves into figures. Well then, let us figure” [the minister here goes off into a corner with a deputy, to whom he talks in a low voice]. “There are forty thousand government clerks in France. The average of their salaries is fifteen hundred francs. Multiply forty thousand by fifteen hundred and you have sixty millions. Now, in the first place, a publicist would call the attention of Russia and China (where all government officials steal), also that of Austria, the American republics, and indeed that of the whole world, to the fact that for this price France possesses the most inquisitorial, fussy, ferreting, scribbling, paper-blotting, fault-finding old housekeeper of a civil service on God’s earth. Not a copper farthing of the nation’s money is spent or hoarded that is not ordered by a note, proved by vouchers, produced and re-produced on balance-sheets, and receipted for when paid; orders and receipts are registered on the rolls, and checked and verified by an army of men in spectacles. If there is the slightest mistake in the form of these precious documents, the clerk is terrified, for he lives on such minutiae. Some nations would be satisfied to get as far as this; but Napoleon went further. That great organizer appointed supreme magistrates of a court which is absolutely unique in the world. These officials pass their days in verifying money-orders, documents, roles, registers, lists, permits, custom-house receipts, payments, taxes received, taxes spent, etc.; all of which the clerks write or copy. These stern judges push the gift of exactitude, the genius of inquisition, the sharp-sightedness of lynxes, the perspicacity of account-books to the point of going over all the additions in search of subtractions. These sublime martyrs to figures have been known to return to an army commissary, after a delay of two

years, some account in which there was an error of two farthings. This is how and why it is that the French system of administration, the purest and best on the globe has rendered robbery, as his Excellency has just told you, next to impossible, and as for peculation, it is a myth. France at this present time possesses a revenue of twelve hundred millions, and she spends it. That sum enters her treasury, and that sum goes out of it. She handles, therefore, two thousand four hundred millions, and all she pays for the labor of those who do the work is sixty millions,—two and a half per cent; and for that she obtains the certainty that there is no leakage. Our political and administrative kitchen costs us sixty millions, but the gendarmerie, the courts of law, the galleys and the police cost just as much, and give no return. Moreover, we employ a body of men who could do no other work. Waste and disorder, if such there be, can only be legislative; the Chambers lead to them and render them legal. Leakage follows in the form of public works which are neither urgent nor necessary; troops re-uniformed and gold-laced over and over again; vessels sent on useless cruises; preparations for war without ever making it; paying the debts of a State, and not requiring reimbursement or insisting on security."

Baudoyer. "But such leakage has nothing to do with the subordinate officials; this bad management of national affairs concerns the statesmen who guide the ship."

The Minister [who has finished his conversation]. "There is a great deal of truth in what des Lupeaulx has just said; but let me tell you" [to Baudoyer], "Monsieur le directeur, that few men see from the standpoint of a statesman. To order expenditure of all kinds, even useless ones, does not constitute bad management. Such acts contribute to the movement of money, the stagnation of which becomes, especially in France, dangerous to the public welfare, by reason of the miserly and profoundly illogical habits of the provinces which hoard their gold."

The Deputy [who listened to des Lupeaulx]. "But it seems to me that if your Excellency was right just now, and if our clever friend here" [takes Lupeaulx by the arm] "was not wrong, it will be difficult to come to any conclusion on the subject."

Des Lupeaulx [after looking at the minister]. "No doubt something ought to be done."

De la Briere [timidly]. "Monsieur Rabourdin seems to have judged rightly."

The Minister. "I will see Rabourdin."

Des Lupeaulx. "The poor man made the blunder of constituting himself supreme judge of the administration and of all the officials who compose it; he

wants to do away with the present state of things, and he demands that there be only three ministries."

The Minister. "He must be crazy."

The Deputy. "How do you represent in three ministries the heads of all the parties in the Chamber?"

Baudoyer [with an air that he imagined to be shrewd]. "Perhaps Monsieur Rabourdin desired to change the Constitution, which we owe to our legislative sovereign."

The Minister [thoughtful, takes La Briere's arm and leads him into the study]. "I want to see that work of Rabourdin's, and as you know about it—"

De la Briere. "He has burned it. You allowed him to be dishonored and he has resigned from the ministry. Do not think for a moment, Monseigneur, that Rabourdin ever had the absurd thought (as des Lupeaulx tries to make it believed) to change the admirable centralization of power."

The Minister [to himself]. "I have made a mistake" [is silent a moment]. "No matter; we shall never be lacking in plans for reform."

De la Briere. "It is not ideas, but men capable of executing them that we lack."

Des Lupeaulx, that adroit advocate of abuses came into the minister's study at this moment.

"Monseigneur, I start at once for my election."

"Wait a moment," said his Excellency, leaving the private secretary and taking des Lupeaulx by the arm into the recess of a window. "My dear friend, let me have that arrondissement,—if you will, you shall be made count and I will pay your debts. Later, if I remain in the ministry after the new Chamber is elected, I will find a way to send in your name in a batch for the peerage."

"You are a man of honor, and I accept."

This is how it came to pass that Clement Chardin des Lupeaulx, whose father was ennobled under Louis XV., and who beareth quarterly, first, argent, a wolf ravisant carrying a lamb gules; second, purpure, three mascles argent, two and one; third, paly of twelve, gules and argent; fourth, or, on a pale endorsed, three batons fleurdelises gules; supported by four griffon's-claws jessant from the sides of the escutcheon, with the motto "En Lupus in Historia," was able to surmount these rather satirical arms with a count's coronet.

Towards the close of the year 1830 Monsieur Rabourdin did some business on hand which required him to visit the old ministry, where the bureaus had all

been in great commotion, owing to a general removal of officials, from the highest to the lowest. This revolution bore heaviest, in point of fact, upon the lackeys, who are not fond of seeing new faces. Rabourdin had come early, knowing all the ways of the place, and he thus chanced to overhear a dialogue between the two nephews of old Antoine, who had recently retired on a pension.

“Well, Laurent, how is your chief of division going on?”

“Oh, don’t talk to me about him; I can’t do anything with him. He rings me up to ask if I have seen his handkerchief or his snuff-box. He receives people without making them wait; in short, he hasn’t a bit of dignity. I’m often obliged to say to him: But, monsieur, monsieur le comte your predecessor, for the credit of the thing, used to punch holes with his penknife in the arms of his chair to make believe he was working. And he makes such a mess of his room. I find everything topsy-turvy. He has a very small mind. How about your man?”

“Mine? Oh, I have succeeded in training him. He knows exactly where his letter-paper and envelopes, his wood, and his boxes and all the rest of his things are. The other man used to swear at me, but this one is as meek as a lamb,—still, he hasn’t the grand style! Moreover, he isn’t decorated, and I don’t like to serve a chief who isn’t; he might be taken for one of us, and that’s humiliating. He carries the office letter-paper home, and asked me if I couldn’t go there and wait at table when there was company.”

“Hey! what a government, my dear fellow!”

“Yes, indeed; everybody plays low in these days.”

“I hope they won’t cut down our poor wages.”

“I’m afraid they will. The Chambers are prying into everything. Why, they even count the sticks of wood.”

“Well, it can’t last long if they go on that way.”

“Hush, we’re caught! somebody is listening.”

“Hey! it is the late Monsieur Rabourdin. Ah, monsieur, I knew your step. If you have business to transact here I am afraid you will not find any one who is aware of the respect that ought to be paid to you; Laurent and I are the only persons remaining about the place who were here in your day. Messieurs Colleville and Baudoyer didn’t wear out the morocco of the chairs after you left. Heavens, no! six months later they were made Collectors of Paris.”