The Human Comedy
Scenes from Private Life
Part V

By

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THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT

CHAPTER I. PRO AND CON

Monsieur de Manerville, the father, was a worthy Norman gentleman, well known to the Marechael de Richelieu, who married him to one of the richest heiresses of Bordeaux in the days when the old duke reigned in Guienne as governor. The Norman then sold the estate he owned in Bessin, and became a Gascon, allured by the beauty of the chateau de Lanstrac, a delightful residence owned by his wife. During the last days of the reign of Louis XV., he bought the post of major of the Gate Guards, and lived till 1813, having by great good luck escaped the dangers of the Revolution in the following manner.

Toward the close of the year, 1790, he went to Martinque, where his wife had interests, leaving the management of his property in Gascogne to an honest man, a notary's clerk, named Mathias, who was inclined to—or at any rate did—give into the new ideas. On his return the Comte de Manerville found his possessions intact and well-managed. This sound result was the fruit produced by grafting the Gascon on the Norman.

Madame de Manerville died in 1810. Having learned the importance of worldly goods through the dissipations of his youth, and, giving them, like many another old man, a higher place than they really hold in life, Monsieur de Manerville became increasingly economical, miserly, and sordid. Without reflecting that the avarice of parents prepares the way for the prodigalities of children, he allowed almost nothing to his son, although that son was an only child.

Paul de Manerville, coming home from the college of Vendome in 1810, lived under close paternal discipline for three years. The tyranny by which the old man of seventy oppressed his heir influenced, necessarily, a heart and a character which were not yet formed. Paul, the son, without lacking the physical courage which is vital in the air of Gascony, dared not struggle against his father, and consequently lost that faculty of resistance which begets moral courage. His thwarted feelings were driven to the depths of his heart, where they remained without expression; later, when he felt them to be out of harmony with the maxims of the world, he could only think rightly and act mistakenly. He was capable of fighting for a mere word or look, yet he trembled at the thought of dismissing a servant,—his timidity showing itself in those contests only which required a persistent will. Capable of doing great things to fly from persecution, he would never have prevented it by systematic

opposition, nor have faced it with the steady employment of force of will. Timid in thought, bold in actions, he long preserved that inward simplicity which makes a man the dupe and the voluntary victim of things against which certain souls hesitate to revolt, preferring to endure them rather than complain. He was, in point of fact, imprisoned by his father's old mansion, for he had not enough money to consort with young men; he envied their pleasures while unable to share them.

The old gentleman took him every evening, in an old carriage drawn by ill-harnessed old horses, attended by ill-dressed old servants, to royalist houses, where he met a society composed of the relics of the parliamentary nobility and the martial nobility. These two nobilities coalescing after the Revolution, had now transformed themselves into a landed aristocracy. Crushed by the vast and swelling fortunes of the maritime cities, this Faubourg Saint-Germain of Bordeaux responded by lofty disdain to the sumptuous displays of commerce, government administrations, and the military. Too young to understand social distinctions and the necessities underlying the apparent assumption which they create, Paul was bored to death among these ancients, unaware that the connections of his youth would eventually secure to him that aristocratic pre-eminence which Frenchmen will forever desire.

He found some slight compensations for the dulness of these evenings in certain manual exercises which always delight young men, and which his father enjoined upon him. The old gentleman considered that to know the art of fencing and the use of arms, to ride well on horseback, to play tennis, to acquire good manners,—in short, to possess all the frivolous accomplishments of the old nobility,—made a young man of the present day a finished gentleman. Accordingly, Paul took a fencing-lesson every morning, went to the riding-school, and practised in a pistol-gallery. The rest of his time was spent in reading novels, for his father would never have allowed the more abstruse studies now considered necessary to finish an education.

So monotonous a life would soon have killed the poor youth if the death of the old man had not delivered him from this tyranny at the moment when it was becoming intolerable. Paul found himself in possession of considerable capital, accumulated by his father's avarice, together with landed estates in the best possible condition. But he now held Bordeaux in horror; neither did he like Lanstrac, where his father had taken him to spend the summers, employing his whole time from morning till night in hunting.

As soon as the estate was fairly settled, the young heir, eager for enjoyment, bought consols with his capital, left the management of the landed property to old Mathias, his father's notary, and spent the next six years away from Bordeaux. At first he was attached to the French embassy at Naples; after that he was secretary of legation at Madrid, and then in London,—making in

this way the tour of Europe.

After seeing the world and life, after losing several illusions, after dissipating all the loose capital which his father had amassed, there came a time when, in order to continue his way of life, Paul was forced to draw upon the territorial revenues which his notary was laying by. At this critical moment, seized by one of the so-called virtuous impulses, he determined to leave Paris, return to Bordeaux, regulate his affairs, lead the life of a country gentleman at Lanstrac, improve his property, marry, and become, in the end, a deputy.

Paul was a count; nobility was once more of matrimonial value; he could, and he ought to make a good marriage. While many women desire a title, many others like to marry a man to whom a knowledge of life is familiar. Now Paul had acquired, in exchange for the sum of seven hundred thousand francs squandered in six years, that possession, which cannot be bought and is practically of more value than gold and silver; a knowledge which exacts long study, probation, examinations, friends, enemies, acquaintances, certain manners, elegance of form and demeanor, a graceful and euphonious name,—a knowledge, moreover, which means many love-affairs, duels, bets lost on a race-course, disillusions, deceptions, annoyances, toils, and a vast variety of undigested pleasures. In short, he had become what is called elegant. But in spite of his mad extravagance he had never made himself a mere fashionable man. In the burlesque army of men of the world, the man of fashion holds the place of a marshal of France, the man of elegance is the equivalent of a lieutenant-general. Paul enjoyed his lesser reputation, of elegance, and knew well how to sustain it. His servants were well-dressed, his equipages were cited, his suppers had a certain vogue; in short, his bachelor establishment was counted among the seven or eight whose splendor equalled that of the finest houses in Paris.

But—he had not caused the wretchedness of any woman; he gambled without losing; his luck was not notorious; he was far too upright to deceive or mislead any one, no matter who, even a wanton; never did he leave his billets-doux lying about, and he possessed no coffer or desk for love-letters which his friends were at liberty to read while he tied his cravat or trimmed his beard. Moreover, not willing to dip into his Guienne property, he had not that bold extravagance which leads to great strokes and calls attention at any cost to the proceedings of a young man. Neither did he borrow money, but he had the folly to lend to friends, who then deserted him and spoke of him no more either for good or evil. He seemed to have regulated his dissipations methodically. The secret of his character lay in his father's tyranny, which had made him, as it were, a social mongrel.

So, one morning, he said to a friend named de Marsay, who afterwards

became celebrated:—

"My dear fellow, life has a meaning."

"You must be twenty-seven years of age before you can find it out," replied de Marsay, laughing.

"Well, I am twenty-seven; and precisely because I am twenty-seven I mean to live the life of a country gentleman at Lanstrac. I'll transport my belongings to Bordeaux into my father's old mansion, and I'll spend three months of the year in Paris in this house, which I shall keep."

"Will you marry?"

"I will marry."

"I'm your friend, as you know, my old Paul," said de Marsay, after a moment's silence, "and I say to you: settle down into a worthy father and husband and you'll be ridiculous for the rest of your days. If you could be happy and ridiculous, the thing might be thought of; but you will not be happy. You haven't a strong enough wrist to drive a household. I'll do you justice and say you are a perfect horseman; no one knows as well as you how to pick up or thrown down the reins, and make a horse prance, and sit firm to the saddle. But, my dear fellow, marriage is another thing. I see you now, led along at a slapping pace by Madame la Comtesse de Manerville, going whither you would not, oftener at a gallop than a trot, and presently unhorsed!—yes, unhorsed into a ditch and your legs broken. Listen to me. You still have some forty-odd thousand francs a year from your property in the Gironde. Good. Take your horses and servants and furnish your house in Bordeaux; you can be king of Bordeaux, you can promulgate there the edicts that we put forth in Paris; you can be the correspondent of our stupidities. Very good. Play the rake in the provinces; better still, commit follies; follies may win you celebrity. But—don't marry. Who marries now-a-days? Only merchants, for the sake of their capital, or to be two to drag the cart; only peasants who want to produce children to work for them; only brokers and notaries who want a wife's 'dot' to pay for their practice; only miserable kings who are forced to continue their miserable dynasties. But we are exempt from the pack, and you want to shoulder it! And why DO you want to marry? You ought to give your best friend your reasons. In the first place, if you marry an heiress as rich as yourself, eighty thousand francs a year for two is not the same thing as forty thousand francs a year for one, because the two are soon three or four when the children come. You haven't surely any love for that silly race of Manerville which would only hamper you? Are you ignorant of what a father and mother have to be? Marriage, my old Paul, is the silliest of all the social immolations; our children alone profit by it, and don't know its price until their horses are nibbling the flowers on our grave. Do you regret your father, that old tyrant

who made your first years wretched? How can you be sure that your children will love you? The very care you take of their education, your precautions for their happiness, your necessary sternness will lessen their affection. Children love a weak or a prodigal father, whom they will despise in after years. You'll live betwixt fear and contempt. No man is a good head of a family merely because he wants to be. Look round on all our friends and name to me one whom you would like to have for a son. We have known a good many who dishonor their names. Children, my dear Paul, are the most difficult kind of merchandise to take care of. Yours, you think, will be angels; well, so be it! Have you ever sounded the gulf which lies between the lives of a bachelor and a married man? Listen. As a bachelor you can say to yourself: 'I shall never exhibit more than a certain amount of the ridiculous; the public will think of me what I choose it to think.' Married, you'll drop into the infinitude of the ridiculous! Bachelor, you can make your own happiness; you enjoy some to-day, you do without it to-morrow; married, you must take it as it comes; and the day you want it you will have to go without it. Marry, and you'll grow a blockhead; you'll calculate dowries; you'll talk morality, public and religious; you'll think young men immoral and dangerous; in short, you'll become a social academician. It's pitiable! The old bachelor whose property the heirs are waiting for, who fights to his last breath with his nurse for a spoonful of drink, is blest in comparison with a married man. I'm not speaking of all that will happen to annoy, bore, irritate, coerce, oppose, tyrannize, narcotize, paralyze, and idiotize a man in marriage, in that struggle of two beings always in one another's presence, bound forever, who have coupled each other under the strange impression that they were suited. No, to tell you those things would be merely a repetition of Boileau, and we know him by heart. Still, I'll forgive your absurd idea if you will promise me to marry "en grand seigneur"; to entail your property; to have two legitimate children, to give your wife a house and household absolutely distinct from yours; to meet her only in society, and never to return from a journey without sending her a courier to announce it. Two hundred thousand francs a year will suffice for such a life and your antecedents will enable you to marry some rich English woman hungry for a title. That's an aristocratic life which seems to me thoroughly French; the only life in which we can retain the respect and friendship of a woman; the only life which distinguishes a man from the present crowd,—in short, the only life for which a young man should even think of resigning his bachelor blessings. Thus established, the Comte de Manerville may advise his epoch, place himself above the world, and be nothing less than a minister or an ambassador. Ridicule can never touch him; he has gained the social advantages of marriage while keeping all the privileges of a bachelor."

"But, my good friend, I am not de Marsay; I am plainly, as you yourself do me the honor to say, Paul de Manerville, worthy father and husband, deputy of

the Centre, possibly peer of France,—a destiny extremely commonplace; but I am modest and I resign myself."

"Yes, but your wife," said the pitiless de Marsay, "will she resign herself?"

"My wife, my dear fellow, will do as I wish."

"Ah! my poor friend, is that where you are? Adieu, Paul. Henceforth, I refuse to respect you. One word more, however, for I cannot agree coldly to your abdication. Look and see in what the strength of our position lies. A bachelor with only six thousand francs a year remaining to him has at least his reputation for elegance and the memory of success. Well, even that fantastic shadow has enormous value in it. Life still offers many chances to the unmarried man. Yes, he can aim at anything. But marriage, Paul, is the social 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.' Once married you can never be anything but what you then are—unless your wife should deign to care for you."

"But," said Paul, "you are crushing me down with exceptional theories. I am tired of living for others; of having horses merely to exhibit them; of doing all things for the sake of what may be said of them; of wasting my substance to keep fools from crying out: 'Dear, dear! Paul is still driving the same carriage. What has he done with his fortune? Does he squander it? Does he gamble at the Bourse? No, he's a millionaire. Madame such a one is mad about him. He sent to England for a harness which is certainly the handsomest in all Paris. The four-horse equipages of Messieurs de Marsay and de Manerville were much noticed at Longchamps; the harness was perfect'—in short, the thousand silly things with which a crowd of idiots lead us by the nose. Believe me, my dear Henri, I admire your power, but I don't envy it. You know how to judge of life; you think and act as a statesman; you are able to place yourself above all ordinary laws, received ideas, adopted conventions, and acknowledged prejudices; in short, you can grasp the profits of a situation in which I should find nothing but ill-luck. Your cool, systematic, possibly true deductions are, to the eyes of the masses, shockingly immoral. I belong to the masses. I must play my game of life according to the rules of the society in which I am forced to live. While putting yourself above all human things on peaks of ice, you still have feelings; but as for me, I should freeze to death. The life of that great majority, to which I belong in my commonplace way, is made up of emotions of which I now have need. Often a man coquets with a dozen women and obtains none. Then, whatever be his strength, his cleverness, his knowledge of the world, he undergoes convulsions, in which he is crushed as between two gates. For my part, I like the peaceful chances and changes of life; I want that wholesome existence in which we find a woman always at our side."

"A trifle indecorous, your marriage!" exclaimed de Marsay.

Paul was not to be put out of countenance, and continued: "Laugh if you like; I shall feel myself a happy man when my valet enters my room in the morning and says: 'Madame is awaiting monsieur for breakfast'; happier still at night, when I return to find a heart—"

"Altogether indecorous, my dear Paul. You are not yet moral enough to marry."

"—a heart in which to confide my interests and my secrets. I wish to live in such close union with a woman that our affection shall not depend upon a yes or a no, or be open to the disillusions of love. In short, I have the necessary courage to become, as you say, a worthy husband and father. I feel myself fitted for family joys; I wish to put myself under the conditions prescribed by society; I desire to have a wife and children."

"You remind me of a hive of honey-bees! But go your way, you'll be a dupe all your life. Ha, ha! you wish to marry to have a wife! In other words, you wish to solve satisfactorily to your own profit the most difficult problem invented by those bourgeois morals which were created by the French Revolution; and, what is more, you mean to begin your attempt by a life of retirement. Do you think your wife won't crave the life you say you despise? Will she be disgusted with it, as you are? If you won't accept the noble conjugality just formulated for your benefit by your friend de Marsay, listen, at any rate, to his final advice. Remain a bachelor for the next thirteen years; amuse yourself like a lost soul; then, at forty, on your first attack of gout, marry a widow of thirty-six. Then you may possibly be happy. If you now take a young girl to wife, you'll die a madman."

"Ah ca! tell me why!" cried Paul, somewhat piqued.

"My dear fellow," replied de Marsay, "Boileau's satire against women is a tissue of poetical commonplaces. Why shouldn't women have defects? Why condemn them for having the most obvious thing in human nature? To my mind, the problem of marriage is not at all at the point where Boileau puts it. Do you suppose that marriage is the same thing as love, and that being a man suffices to make a wife love you? Have you gathered nothing in your boudoir experience but pleasant memories? I tell you that everything in our bachelor life leads to fatal errors in the married man unless he is a profound observer of the human heart. In the happy days of his youth a man, by the caprice of our customs, is always lucky; he triumphs over women who are all ready to be triumphed over and who obey their own desires. One thing after another—the obstacles created by the laws, the sentiments and natural defences of women—all engender a mutuality of sensations which deceives superficial persons as to their future relations in marriage, where obstacles no longer exist, where the

wife submits to love instead of permitting it, and frequently repulses pleasure instead of desiring it. Then, the whole aspect of a man's life changes. The bachelor, who is free and without a care, need never fear repulsion; in marriage, repulsion is almost certain and irreparable. It may be possible for a lover to make a woman reverse an unfavorable decision, but such a change, my dear Paul, is the Waterloo of husbands. Like Napoleon, the husband is thenceforth condemned to victories which, in spite of their number, do not prevent the first defeat from crushing him. The woman, so flattered by the perseverance, so delighted with the ardor of a lover, calls the same things brutality in a husband. You, who talk of marrying, and who will marry, have you ever meditated on the Civil Code? I myself have never muddied my feet in that hovel of commentators, that garret of gossip, called the Law-school. I have never so much as opened the Code; but I see its application on the vitals of society. The Code, my dear Paul, makes woman a ward; it considers her a child, a minor. Now how must we govern children? By fear. In that one word, Paul, is the curb of the beast. Now, feel your own pulse! Have you the strength to play the tyrant,—you, so gentle, so kind a friend, so confiding; you, at whom I have laughed, but whom I love, and love enough to reveal to you my science? For this is science. Yes, it proceeds from a science which the Germans are already calling Anthropology. Ah! if I had not already solved the mystery of life by pleasure, if I had not a profound antipathy for those who think instead of act, if I did not despise the ninnies who are silly enough to believe in the truth of a book, when the sands of the African deserts are made of the ashes of I know not how many unknown and pulverized Londons, Romes, Venices, and Parises, I would write a book on modern marriages made under the influence of the Christian system, and I'd stick a lantern on that heap of sharp stones among which lie the votaries of the social 'multiplicamini.' But the question is, Does humanity require even an hour of my time? And besides, isn't the more reasonable use of ink that of snaring hearts by writing love-letters?—Well, shall you bring the Comtesse de Manerville here, and let us see her?"

"Perhaps," said Paul.

"We shall still be friends," said de Marsay.

"If—" replied Paul.

"Don't be uneasy; we will treat you politely, as Maison-Rouge treated the English at Fontenoy."

CHAPTER II. THE PINK OF FASHION

Though the foregoing conversation affected the Comte de Manerville somewhat, he made it a point of duty to carry out his intentions, and he returned to Bordeaux during the winter of the year 1821.

The expenses he incurred in restoring and furnishing his family mansion sustained the reputation for elegance which had preceded him. Introduced through his former connections to the royalist society of Bordeaux, to which he belonged as much by his personal opinions as by his name and fortune, he soon obtained a fashionable pre-eminence. His knowledge of life, his manners, his Parisian acquirements enchanted the Faubourg Saint-Germain of Bordeaux. An old marquise made use of a term formerly in vogue at court to express the flowery beauty of the fops and beaux of the olden time, whose language and demeanor were social laws: she called him "the pink of fashion." The liberal clique caught up the word and used it satirically as a nickname, while the royalist party continued to employ it in good faith.

Paul de Manerville acquitted himself gloriously of the obligations imposed by his flowery title. It happened to him, as to many a mediocre actor, that the day when the public granted him their full attention he became, one may almost say, superior. Feeling at his ease, he displayed the fine qualities which accompanied his defects. His wit had nothing sharp or bitter in it; his manners were not supercilious; his intercourse with women expressed the respect they like,—it was neither too deferential, nor too familiar; his foppery went no farther than a care for his personal appearance which made him agreeable; he showed consideration for rank; he allowed young men a certain freedom, to which his Parisian experience assigned due limits; though skilful with sword and pistol, he was noted for a feminine gentleness for which others were grateful. His medium height and plumpness (which had not yet increased into obesity, an obstacle to personal elegance) did not prevent his outer man from playing the part of a Bordelais Brummell. A white skin tinged with the hues of health, handsome hands and feet, blue eyes with long lashes, black hair, graceful motions, a chest voice which kept to its middle tones and vibrated in the listener's heart, harmonized well with his sobriquet. Paul was indeed that delicate flower which needs such careful culture, the qualities of which display themselves only in a moist and suitable soil,—a flower which rough treatment dwarfs, which the hot sun burns, and a frost lays low. He was one of those men made to receive happiness, rather than to give it; who have something of the woman in their nature, wishing to be divined, understood, encouraged; in short, a man to whom conjugal love ought to come as a providence.

If such a character creates difficulties in private life, it is gracious and full of attraction for the world. Consequently, Paul had great success in the narrow social circle of the provinces, where his mind, always, so to speak, in half-tints, was better appreciated than in Paris.

The arrangement of his house and the restoration of the chateau de Lanstrac, where he introduced the comfort and luxury of an English country-house, absorbed the capital saved by the notary during the preceding six years. Reduced now to his strict income of forty-odd thousand a year, he thought himself wise and prudent in so regulating his household as not to exceed it.

After publicly exhibiting his equipages, entertaining the most distinguished young men of the place, and giving various hunting parties on the estate at Lanstrac, Paul saw very plainly that provincial life would never do without marriage. Too young to employ his time in miserly occupations, or in trying to interest himself in the speculative improvements in which provincials sooner or later engage (compelled thereto by the necessity of establishing their children), he soon felt the need of that variety of distractions a habit of which becomes at last the very life of a Parisian. A name to preserve, property to transmit to heirs, social relations to be created by a household where the principal families of the neighborhood could assemble, and a weariness of all irregular connections, were not, however, the determining reasons of his matrimonial desires. From the time he first returned to the provinces he had been secretly in love with the queen of Bordeaux, the great beauty, Mademoiselle Evangelista.

About the beginning of the century, a rich Spaniard, named Evangelista, established himself in Bordeaux, where his letters of recommendation, as well as his large fortune, gave him an entrance to the salons of the nobility. His wife contributed greatly to maintain him in the good graces of an aristocracy which may perhaps have adopted him in the first instance merely to pique the society of the class below them. Madame Evangelista, who belonged to the Casa-Reale, an illustrious family of Spain, was a Creole, and, like all women served by slaves, she lived as a great lady, knew nothing of the value of money, repressed no whims, even the most expensive, finding them ever satisfied by an adoring husband who generously concealed from her knowledge the running-gear of the financial machine. Happy in finding her pleased with Bordeaux, where his interests obliged him to live, the Spaniard bought a house, set up a household, received in much style, and gave many proofs of possessing a fine taste in all things. Thus, from 1800 to 1812, Monsieur and Madame Evangelista were objects of great interest to the community of Bordeaux.

The Spaniard died in 1813, leaving his wife a widow at thirty-two years of age, with an immense fortune and the prettiest little girl in the world, a child of eleven, who promised to be, and did actually become, a most accomplished young woman. Clever as Madame Evangelista was, the Restoration altered her position; the royalist party cleared its ranks and several of the old families left Bordeaux. Though the head and hand of her husband were lacking in the

direction of her affairs, for which she had hitherto shown the indifference of a Creole and the inaptitude of a lackadaisical woman, she was determined to make no change in her manner of living. At the period when Paul resolved to return to his native town, Mademoiselle Natalie Evangelista was a remarkably beautiful young girl, and, apparently, the richest match in Bordeaux, where the steady diminution of her mother's capital was unknown. In order to prolong her reign, Madame Evangelista had squandered enormous sums. Brilliant fetes and the continuation of an almost regal style of living kept the public in its past belief as to the wealth of the Spanish family.

Natalie was now in her nineteenth year, but no proposal of marriage had as yet reached her mother's ear. Accustomed to gratify her fancies, Mademoiselle Evangelista wore cashmeres and jewels, and lived in a style of luxury which alarmed all speculative suitors in a region and at a period when sons were as calculating as their parents. The fatal remark, "None but a prince can afford to marry Mademoiselle Evangelista," circulated among the salons and the cliques. Mothers of families, dowagers who had granddaughters to establish, young girls jealous of Natalie, whose elegance and tyrannical beauty annoyed them, took pains to envenom this opinion with treacherous remarks. When they heard a possible suitor say with ecstatic admiration, as Natalie entered a ball-room, "Heavens, how beautiful she is!" "Yes," the mammas would answer, "but expensive." If some new-comer thought Mademoiselle Evangelista bewitching and said to a marriageable man that he couldn't do it better, "Who would be bold enough," some woman would reply, "to marry a girl whose mother gives her a thousand francs a month for her toilet,—a girl who has horses and a maid of her own, and wears laces? Yes, her 'peignoirs' are trimmed with mechlin. The price of her washing would support the household of a clerk. She wears pelerines in the morning which actually cost six francs to get up."

These, and other speeches said occasionally in the form of praise extinguished the desires that some men might have had to marry the beautiful Spanish girl. Queen of every ball, accustomed to flattery, "blasee" with the smiles and the admiration which followed her every step, Natalie, nevertheless, knew nothing of life. She lived as the bird which flies, as the flower that blooms, finding every one about her eager to do her will. She was ignorant of the price of things; she knew neither the value of money, nor whence it came, how it should be managed, and how spent. Possibly she thought that every household had cooks and coachmen, lady's-maids and footmen, as the fields have hay and the trees their fruits. To her, beggars and paupers, fallen trees and waste lands seemed in the same category. Pampered and petted as her mother's hope, no fatigue was allowed to spoil her pleasure. Thus she bounded through life as a courser on his steppe, unbridled and unshod.

Six month's after Paul's arrival the Pink of Fashion and the Queen of Balls met in presence of the highest society of the town of Bordeaux. The two flowers looked at each other with apparent coldness, and mutually thought each other charming. Interested in watching the effects of the meeting, Madame Evangelista divined in the expression of Paul's eyes the feelings within him, and she muttered to herself, "He will be my son-in-law." Paul, on the other hand, said to himself, as he looked at Natalie, "She will be my wife."

The wealth of the Evangelistas, proverbial in Bordeaux, had remained in Paul's mind as a memory of his childhood. Thus the pecuniary conditions were known to him from the start, without necessitating those discussions and inquiries which are as repugnant to a timid mind as to a proud one. When some persons attempting to say to Paul a few flattering phrases as to Natalie's manner, language, and beauty, ending by remarks, cruelly calculated to deter him, on the lavish extravagance of the Evangelistas, the Pink of Fashion replied with a disdain that was well-deserved by such provincial pettiness. This method of receiving such speeches soon silenced them; for he now set the tone to the ideas and language as well as to the manners of those about him. He had imported from his travels a certain development of the Britannic personality with its icy barriers, also a tone of Byronic pessimism as to life, together with English plate, boot-polish, ponies, yellow gloves, cigars, and the habit of galloping.

It thus happened that Paul escaped the discouragements hitherto presented to marriageable men by dowagers and young girls. Madame Evangelista began by asking him to formal dinners on various occasions. The Pink of Fashion would not, of course, miss festivities to which none but the most distinguished young men of the town were bidden. In spite of the coldness that Paul assumed, which deceived neither mother nor daughter, he was drawn, step by step, into the path of marriage. Sometimes as he passed in his tilbury, or rode by on his fine English horse, he heard the young men of his acquaintance say to one another:—

"There's a lucky man. He is rich and handsome, and is to marry, so they say, Mademoiselle Evangelista. There are some men for whom the world seems made."

When he met the Evangelistas he felt proud of the particular distinction which mother and daughter imparted to their bows. If Paul had not secretly, within his heart, fallen in love with Mademoiselle Natalie, society would certainly have married him to her in spite of himself. Society, which never causes good, is the accomplice of much evil; then when it beholds the evil it has hatched maternally, it rejects and revenges it. Society in Bordeaux, attributing a "dot" of a million to Mademoiselle Evangelista, bestowed it upon Paul without awaiting the consent of either party. Their fortunes, so it was

said, agreed as well as their persons. Paul had the same habits of luxury and elegance in the midst of which Natalie had been brought up. He had just arranged for himself a house such as no other man in Bordeaux could have offered her. Accustomed to Parisian expenses and the caprices of Parisian women, he alone was fitted to meet the pecuniary difficulties which were likely to follow this marriage with a girl who was as much of a Creole and a great lady as her mother. Where they themselves, remarked the marriageable men, would have been ruined, the Comte de Manerville, rich as he was, could evade disaster. In short, the marriage was made. Persons in the highest royalist circles said a few engaging words to Paul which flattered his vanity:—

"Every one gives you Mademoiselle Evangelista. If you marry her you will do well. You could not find, even in Paris, a more delightful girl. She is beautiful, graceful, elegant, and takes after the Casa-Reales through her mother. You will make a charming couple; you have the same tastes, the same desires in life, and you will certainly have the most agreeable house in Bordeaux. Your wife need only bring her night-cap; all is ready for her. You are fortunate indeed in such a mother-in-law. A woman of intelligence, and very adroit, she will be a great help to you in public life, to which you ought to aspire. Besides, she has sacrificed everything to her daughter, whom she adores, and Natalie will, no doubt, prove a good wife, for she loves her mother. You must soon bring the matter to a conclusion."

"That is all very well," replied Paul, who, in spite of his love, was desirous of keeping his freedom of action, "but I must be sure that the conclusion shall be a happy one."

He now went frequently to Madame Evangelista's, partly to occupy his vacant hours, which were harder for him to employ than for most men. There alone he breathed the atmosphere of grandeur and luxury to which he was accustomed.

At forty years of age, Madame Evangelista was beautiful, with the beauty of those glorious summer sunsets which crown a cloudless day. Her spotless reputation had given an endless topic of conversation to the Bordeaux cliques; the curiosity of the women was all the more lively because the widow gave signs of the temperament which makes a Spanish woman and a Creole particularly noted. She had black eyes and hair, the feet and form of a Spanish woman,—that swaying form the movements of which have a name in Spain. Her face, still beautiful, was particularly seductive for its Creole complexion, the vividness of which can be described only by comparing it to muslin overlying crimson, so equally is the whiteness suffused with color. Her figure, which was full and rounded, attracted the eye by a grace which united nonchalance with vivacity, strength with ease. She attracted and she imposed, she seduced, but promised nothing. She was tall, which gave her at times the

air and carriage of a queen. Men were taken by her conversation like birds in a snare; for she had by nature that genius which necessity bestows on schemes; she advanced from concession to concession, strengthening herself with what she gained to ask for more, knowing well how to retreat with rapid steps when concessions were demanded in return. Though ignorant of facts, she had known the courts of Spain and Naples, the celebrated men of the two Americas, many illustrious families of England and the continent, all of which gave her so extensive an education superficially that it seemed immense. She received her society with the grace and dignity which are never learned, but which come to certain naturally fine spirits like a second nature; assimilating choice things wherever they are met. If her reputation for virtue was unexplained, it gave at any rate much authority to her actions, her conversation, and her character.

Mother and daughter had a true friendship for each other, beyond the filial and maternal sentiment. They suited one another, and their perpetual contact had never produced the slightest jar. Consequently many persons explained Madame Evangelista's actions by maternal love. But although Natalie consoled her mother's persistent widowhood, she may not have been the only motive for it. Madame Evangelista had been, it was said, in love with a man who recovered his titles and property under the Restoration. This man, desirous of marrying her in 1814 had discreetly severed the connection in 1816. Madame Evangelista, to all appearance the best-hearted woman in the world, had, in the depths of her nature, a fearful quality, explainable only by Catherine de Medici's device: "Odiate e aspettate"—"Hate and wait." Accustomed to rule, having always been obeyed, she was like other royalties, amiable, gentle, easy and pleasant in ordinary life, but terrible, implacable, if the pride of the woman, the Spaniard, and the Casa-Reale was touched. She never forgave. This woman believed in the power of her hatred; she made an evil fate of it and bade it hover above her enemy. This fatal power she employed against the man who had jilted her. Events which seemed to prove the influence of her "jettatura"—the casting of an evil eye—confirmed her superstitious faith in herself. Though a minister and peer of France, this man began to ruin himself, and soon came to total ruin. His property, his personal and public honor were doomed to perish. At this crisis Madame Evangelista in her brilliant equipage passed her faithless lover walking on foot in the Champes Elysees, and crushed him with a look which flamed with triumph. This misadventure, which occupied her mind for two years, was the original cause of her not remarrying. Later, her pride had drawn comparisons between the suitors who presented themselves and the husband who had loved her so sincerely and so well.

She had thus reached, through mistaken calculations and disappointed hopes, that period of life when women have no other part to take in life than

that of mother; a part which involves the sacrifice of themselves to their children, the placing of their interests outside of self upon another household, —the last refuge of human affections.

Madame Evangelista divined Paul's nature intuitively, and hid her own from his perception. Paul was the very man she desired for a son-in-law, for the responsible editor of her future power. He belonged, through his mother, to the family of Maulincour, and the old Baronne de Maulincour, the friend of the Vidame de Pamiers, was then living in the centre of the faubourg Saint-Germain. The grandson of the baroness, Auguste de Maulincour, held a fine position in the army. Paul would therefore be an excellent introducer for the Evangelistas into Parisian society. The widow had known something of the Paris of the Empire, she now desired to shine in the Paris of the Restoration. There alone were the elements of political fortune, the only business in which women of the world could decently co-operate. Madame Evangelista, compelled by her husband's affairs to reside in Bordeaux, disliked the place. She desired a wider field, as gamblers rush to higher stakes. For her own personal ends, therefore, she looked to Paul as a means of destiny, she proposed to employ the resources of her own talent and knowledge of life to advance her son-in-law, in order to enjoy through him the delights of power. Many men are thus made the screens of secret feminine ambitions. Madame Evangelista had, however, more than one interest, as we shall see, in laying hold of her daughter's husband.

Paul was naturally captivated by this woman, who charmed him all the more because she seemed to seek no influence over him. In reality she was using her ascendancy to magnify herself, her daughter, and all her surroundings in his eyes, for the purpose of ruling from the start the man in whom she saw a means of gratifying her social longings. Paul, on the other hand, began to value himself more highly when he felt himself appreciated by the mother and daughter. He thought himself much cleverer than he really was when he found his reflections and sayings accepted and understood by Mademoiselle Natalie—who raised her head and smiled in response to them—and by the mother, whose flattery always seemed involuntary. The two women were so kind and friendly to him, he was so sure of pleasing them, they ruled him so delightfully by holding the thread of his self-love, that he soon passed all his time at the hotel Evangelista.

A year after his return to Bordeaux, Comte Paul, without having declared himself, was so attentive to Natalie that the world considered him as courting her. Neither mother nor daughter appeared to be thinking of marriage. Mademoiselle Evangelista preserved towards Paul the reserve of a great lady who can make herself charming and converse agreeably without permitting a single step into intimacy. This reserve, so little customary among provincials,

pleased Paul immensely. Timid men are shy; sudden proposals alarm them. They retreat from happiness when it comes with a rush, and accept misfortune if it presents itself mildly with gentle shadows. Paul therefore committed himself in his own mind all the more because he saw no effort on Madame Evangelista's part to bind him. She fairly seduced him one evening by remarking that to superior women as well as men there came a period of life when ambition superseded all the earlier emotions of life.

"That woman is fitted," thought Paul, as he left her, "to advance me in diplomacy before I am even made a deputy."

If, in all the circumstances of life a man does not turn over and over both things and ideas in order to examine them thoroughly under their different aspects before taking action, that man is weak and incomplete and in danger of fatal failure. At this moment Paul was an optimist; he saw everything to advantage, and did not tell himself than an ambitious mother-in-law might prove a tyrant. So, every evening as he left the house, he fancied himself a married man, allured his mind with its own thought, and slipped on the slippers of wedlock cheerfully. In the first place, he had enjoyed his freedom too long to regret the loss of it; he was tired of a bachelor's life, which offered him nothing new; he now saw only its annoyances; whereas if he thought at times of the difficulties of marriage, its pleasures, in which lay novelty, came far more prominently before his mind.

"Marriage," he said to himself, "is disagreeable for people without means, but half its troubles disappear before wealth."

Every day some favorable consideration swelled the advantages which he now saw in this particular alliance.

"No matter to what position I attain, Natalie will always be on the level of her part," thought he, "and that is no small merit in a woman. How many of the Empire men I've seen who suffered horribly through their wives! It is a great condition of happiness not to feel one's pride or one's vanity wounded by the companion we have chosen. A man can never be really unhappy with a well-bred wife; she will never make him ridiculous; such a woman is certain to be useful to him. Natalie will receive in her own house admirably."

So thinking, he taxed his memory as to the most distinguished women of the faubourg Saint-Germain, in order to convince himself that Natalie could, if not eclipse them, at any rate stand among them on a footing of perfect equality. All comparisons were to her advantage, for they rested on his own imagination, which followed his desires. Paris would have shown him daily other natures, young girls of other styles of beauty and charm, and the multiplicity of impressions would have balanced his mind; whereas in Bordeaux Natalie had no rivals, she was the solitary flower; moreover, she

appeared to him at a moment when Paul was under the tyranny of an idea to which most men succumb at his age.

Thus these reasons of propinquity, joined to reasons of self-love and a real passion which had no means of satisfaction except by marriage, led Paul on to an irrational love, which he had, however, the good sense to keep to himself. He even endeavored to study Mademoiselle Evangelista as a man should who desires not to compromise his future life; for the words of his friend de Marsay did sometimes rumble in his ears like a warning. But, in the first place, persons accustomed to luxury have a certain indifference to it which misleads them. They despise it, they use it; it is an instrument, and not the object of their existence. Paul never imagined, as he observed the habits of life of the two ladies, that they covered a gulf of ruin. Then, though there may exist some general rules to soften the asperities of marriage, there are none by which they can be accurately foreseen and evaded. When trouble arises between two persons who have undertaken to render life agreeable and easy to each other, it comes from the contact of continual intimacy, which, of course, does not exist between young people before they marry, and will never exist so long as our present social laws and customs prevail in France. All is more or less deception between the two young persons about to take each other for life,—an innocent and involuntary deception, it is true. Each endeavors to appear in a favorable light; both take a tone and attitude conveying a more favorable idea of their nature than they are able to maintain in after years. Real life, like the weather, is made up of gray and cloudy days alternating with those when the sun shines and the fields are gay. Young people, however, exhibit fine weather and no clouds. Later they attribute to marriage the evils inherent in life itself; for there is in man a disposition to lay the blame of his own misery on the persons and things that surround him.

To discover in the demeanor, or the countenance, or the words, or the gestures of Mademoiselle Evangelista any indication that revealed the imperfections of her character, Paul must have possessed not only the knowledge of Lavater and Gall, but also a science in which there exists no formula of doctrine,—the individual and personal science of an observer, which, for its perfection, requires an almost universal knowledge. Natalie's face, like that of most young girls, was impenetrable. The deep, serene peace given by sculptors to the virgin faces of Justice and Innocence, divinities aloof from all earthly agitations, is the greatest charm of a young girl, the sign of her purity. Nothing, as yet, has stirred her; no shattered passion, no hope betrayed has clouded the placid expression of that pure face. Is that expression assumed? If so, there is no young girl behind it.

Natalie, closely held to the heart of her mother, had received, like other Spanish women, an education that was solely religious, together with a few

instructions from her mother as to the part in life she was called upon to play. Consequently, the calm, untroubled expression of her face was natural. And yet it formed a casing in which the woman was wrapped as the moth in its cocoon. Nevertheless, any man clever at handling the scalpel of analysis might have detected in Natalie certain indications of the difficulties her character would present when brought into contact with conjugal or social life. Her beauty, which was really marvellous, came from extreme regularity of feature harmonizing with the proportions of the head and the body. This species of perfection augurs ill for the mind; and there are few exceptions to the rule. All superior nature is found to have certain slight imperfections of form which become irresistible attractions, luminous points from which shine vivid sentiments, and on which the eye rests gladly. Perfect harmony expresses usually the coldness of a mixed organization.

Natalie's waist was round,—a sign of strength, but also the infallible indication of a will which becomes obstinacy in persons whose mind is neither keen nor broad. Her hands, like those of a Greek statue, confirmed the predictions of face and figure by revealing an inclination for illogical domination, of willing for will's sake only. Her eyebrows met,—a sign, according to some observers, which indicates jealousy. The jealousy of superior minds becomes emulation and leads to great things; that of small minds turns to hatred. The "hate and wait" of her mother was in her nature, without disguise. Her eyes were black apparently, though really brown with orange streaks, contrasting with her hair, of the ruddy tint so prized by the Romans, called auburn in England, a color which often appears in the offspring of persons of jet black hair, like that of Monsieur and Madame Evangelista. The whiteness and delicacy of Natalie's complexion gave to the contrast of color in her eyes and hair an inexpressible charm; and yet it was a charm that was purely external; for whenever the lines of a face are lacking in a certain soft roundness, whatever may be the finish and grace of the details, the beauty therein expressed is not of the soul. These roses of deceptive youth will drop their leaves, and you will be surprised in a few years to see hardness and dryness where you once admired what seemed to be the beauty of noble qualities.

Though the outlines of Natalie's face had something august about them, her chin was slightly "empate,"—a painter's expression which will serve to show the existence of sentiments the violence of which would only become manifest in after life. Her mouth, a trifle drawn in, expressed a haughty pride in keeping with her hand, her chin, her brows, and her beautiful figure. And—as a last diagnostic to guide the judgment of a connoisseur—Natalie's pure voice, a most seductive voice, had certain metallic tones. Softly as that brassy ring was managed, and in spite of the grace with which its sounds ran through the compass of the voice, that organ revealed the character of the Duke of Alba,

from whom the Casa-Reales were collaterally descended. These indications were those of violent passions without tenderness, sudden devotions, irreconcilable dislikes, a mind without intelligence, and the desire to rule natural to persons who feel themselves inferior to their pretensions.

These defects, born of temperament and constitution, were buried in Natalie like ore in a mine, and would only appear under the shocks and harsh treatment to which all characters are subjected in this world. Meantime the grace and freshness of her youth, the distinction of her manners, her sacred ignorance, and the sweetness of a young girl, gave a delicate glamour to her features which could not fail to mislead an unthinking or superficial mind. Her mother had early taught her the trick of agreeable talk which appears to imply superiority, replying to arguments by clever jests, and attracting by the graceful volubility beneath which a woman hides the subsoil of her mind, as Nature disguises her barren strata beneath a wealth of ephemeral vegetation. Natalie had the charm of children who have never known what it is to suffer. She charmed by her frankness, and had none of that solemn air which mothers impose on their daughters by laying down a programme of behavior and language until the time comes when they marry and are emancipated. She was gay and natural, like any young girl who knows nothing of marriage, expects only pleasure from it, replies to all objections with a jest, foresees no troubles, and thinks she is acquiring the right to have her own way.

How could Paul, who loved as men love when desire increases love, perceive in a girl of this nature whose beauty dazzled him, the woman, such as she would probably be at thirty, when observers themselves have been misled by these appearances? Besides, if happiness might prove difficult to find in a marriage with such a girl, it was not impossible. Through these embryo defects shone several fine qualities. There is no good quality which, if properly developed by the hand of an able master, will not stifle defects, especially in a young girl who loves him. But to render ductile so intractable a woman, the iron wrist, about which de Marsay had preached to Paul, was needful. The Parisian dandy was right. Fear, inspired by love is an infallible instrument by which to manage the minds of women. Whoso loves, fears; whoso fears is nearer to affection than to hatred.

Had Paul the coolness, firmness, and judgment required for this struggle, which an able husband ought not to let the wife suspect? Did Natalie love Paul? Like most young girls, Natalie mistook for love the first emotions of instinct and the pleasure she felt in Paul's external appearance; but she knew nothing of the things of marriage nor the demands of a home. To her, the Comte de Manerville, a rising diplomatist, to whom the courts of Europe were known, and one of the most elegant young men in Paris, could not seem, what perhaps he was, an ordinary man, without moral force, timid, though brave in

some ways, energetic perhaps in adversity, but helpless against the vexations and annoyances that hinder happiness. Would she, in after years, have sufficient tact and insight to distinguish Paul's noble qualities in the midst of his minor defects? Would she not magnify the latter and forget the former, after the manner of young wives who know nothing of life? There comes a time when wives will pardon defects in the husband who spares her annoyances, considering annoyances in the same category as misfortunes. What conciliating power, what wise experience would uphold and enlighten the home of this young pair? Paul and his wife would doubtless think they loved when they had really not advanced beyond the endearments and compliments of the honeymoon. Would Paul in that early period yield to the tyranny of his wife, instead of establishing his empire? Could Paul say, "No?" All was peril to a man so weak where even a strong man ran some risks.

The subject of this Study is not the transition of a bachelor into a married man,—a picture which, if broadly composed, would not lack the attraction which the inner struggles of our nature and feelings give to the commonest situations in life. The events and the ideas which led to the marriage of Paul with Natalie Evangelista are an introduction to our real subject, which is to sketch the great comedy that precedes, in France, all conjugal pairing. This Scene, until now singularly neglected by our dramatic authors, although it offers novel resources to their wit, controlled Paul's future life and was now awaited by Madame Evangelista with feelings of terror. We mean the discussion which takes place on the subject of the marriage contract in all families, whether noble or bourgeois, for human passions are as keenly excited by small interests as by large ones. These comedies, played before a notary, all resemble, more or less, the one we shall now relate, the interest of which will be far less in the pages of this book than in the memories of married persons.

CHAPTER III. THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT—FIRST DAY

At the beginning of the winter of 1822, Paul de Manerville made a formal request, through his great-aunt, the Baronne de Maulincour, for the hand of Mademoiselle Natalie Evangelista. Though the baroness never stayed more than two months in Medoc, she remained on this occasion till the last of October, in order to assist her nephew through the affair and play the part of a mother to him. After conveying the first suggestions to Madame Evangelista the experienced old woman returned to inform Paul of the results of the overture.

"My child," she said, "the affair is won. In talking of property, I found that

Madame Evangelista gives nothing of her own to her daughter. Mademoiselle Natalie's dowry is her patrimony. Marry her, my dear boy. Men who have a name and an estate to transmit, a family to continue, must, sooner or later, end in marriage. I wish I could see my dear Auguste taking that course. You can now carry on the marriage without me; I have nothing to give you but my blessing, and women as old as I are out of place at a wedding. I leave for Paris to-morrow. When you present your wife in society I shall be able to see her and assist her far more to the purpose than now. If you had had no house in Paris I would gladly have arranged the second floor of mine for you."

"Dear aunt," said Paul, "I thank you heartily. But what do you mean when you say that the mother gives nothing of her own, and that the daughter's dowry is her patrimony?"

"The mother, my dear boy, is a sly cat, who takes advantage of her daughter's beauty to impose conditions and allow you only that which she cannot prevent you from having; namely, the daughter's fortune from her father. We old people know the importance of inquiring closely, What has he? What has she? I advise you therefore to give particular instructions to your notary. The marriage contract, my dear child, is the most sacred of all duties. If your father and your mother had not made their bed properly you might now be sleeping without sheets. You will have children, they are the commonest result of marriage, and you must think of them. Consult Maitre Mathias our old notary."

Madame de Maulincour departed, having plunged Paul into a state of extreme perplexity. His mother-in-law a sly cat! Must he struggle for his interests in the marriage contract? Was it necessary to defend them? Who was likely to attack them?

He followed the advice of his aunt and confided the drawing-up of the marriage contract to Maitre Mathias. But these threatened discussions oppressed him, and he went to see Madame Evangelista and announce his intentions in a state of rather lively agitation. Like all timid men, he shrank from allowing the distrust his aunt had put into his mind to be seen; in fact, he considered it insulting. To avoid even a slight jar with a person so imposing to his mind as his future mother-in-law, he proceeded to state his intentions with the circumlocution natural to persons who dare not face a difficulty.

"Madame," he said, choosing a moment when Natalie was absent from the room, "you know, of course, what a family notary is. Mine is a worthy old man, to whom it would be a sincere grief if he were not entrusted with the drawing of my marriage contract."

"Why, of course!" said Madame Evangelista, interrupting him, "but are not marriage contracts always made by agreement of the notaries of both

families?"

The time that Paul took to reply to this question was occupied by Madame Evangelista in asking herself, "What is he thinking of?" for women possess in an eminent degree the art of reading thoughts from the play of countenance. She divined the instigations of the great-aunt in the embarrassed glance and the agitated tone of voice which betrayed an inward struggle in Paul's mind.

"At last," she thought to herself, "the fatal day has come; the crisis begins —how will it end? My notary is Monsieur Solonet," she said, after a pause. "Yours, I think you said, is Monsieur Mathias; I will invite them to dinner to-morrow, and they can come to an understanding then. It is their business to conciliate our interests without our interference; just as good cooks are expected to furnish good food without instructions."

"Yes, you are right," said Paul, letting a faint sigh of relief escape from him.

By a singular transposition of parts, Paul, innocent of all wrong-doing, trembled, while Madame Evangelista, though a prey to the utmost anxiety, was outwardly calm.

The widow owed her daughter one-third of the fortune left by Monsieur Evangelista,—namely, nearly twelve hundred thousand francs,—and she knew herself unable to pay it, even by taking the whole of her property to do so. She would therefore be placed at the mercy of a son-in-law. Though she might be able to control Paul if left to himself, would he, when enlightened by his notary, agree to release her from rendering her account as guardian of her daughter's patrimony? If Paul withdrew his proposals all Bordeaux would know the reason and Natalie's future marriage would be made impossible. This mother, who desired the happiness of her daughter, this woman, who from infancy had lived honorably, was aware that on the morrow she must become dishonest. Like those great warriors who fain would blot from their lives the moment when they had felt a secret cowardice, she ardently desired to cut this inevitable day from the record of hers. Most assuredly some hairs on her head must have whitened during the night, when, face to face with facts, she bitterly regretted her extravagance as she felt the hard necessities of the situation.

Among these necessities was that of confiding the truth to her notary, for whom she sent in the morning as soon as she rose. She was forced to reveal to him a secret defaulting she had never been willing to admit to herself, for she had steadily advanced to the abyss, relying on some chance accident, which never happened, to relieve her. There rose in her soul a feeling against Paul, that was neither dislike, nor aversion, nor anything, as yet, unkind; but HE was the cause of this crisis; the opposing party in this secret suit; he became,

without knowing it, an innocent enemy she was forced to conquer. What human being did ever yet love his or her dupe? Compelled to deceive and trick him if she could, the Spanish woman resolved, like other women, to put her whole force of character into the struggle, the dishonor of which could be absolved by victory only.

In the stillness of the night she excused her conduct to her own mind by a tissue of arguments in which her pride predominated. Natalie had shared the benefit of her extravagance. There was not a single base or ignoble motive in what she had done. She was no accountant, but was that a crime, a delinquency? A man was only too lucky to obtain a wife like Natalie without a penny. Such a treasure bestowed upon him might surely release her from a guardianship account. How many men had bought the women they loved by greater sacrifices? Why should a man do less for a wife than for a mistress? Besides, Paul was a nullity, a man of no force, incapable; she would spend the best resources of her mind upon him and open to him a fine career; he should owe his future power and position to her influence; in that way she could pay her debt. He would indeed be a fool to refuse such a future; and for what? a few paltry thousands, more or less. He would be infamous if he withdrew for such a reason.

"But," she added, to herself, "if the negotiation does not succeed at once, I shall leave Bordeaux. I can still find a good marriage for Natalie by investing the proceeds of what is left, house and diamonds and furniture,—keeping only a small income for myself."

When a strong soul constructs a way of ultimate escape,—as Richelieu did at Brouage,—and holds in reserve a vigorous end, the resolution becomes a lever which strengthens its immediate way. The thought of this finale in case of failure comforted Madame Evangelista, who fell asleep with all the more confidence as she remembered her assistance in the coming duel.

This was a young man named Solonet, considered the ablest notary in Bordeaux; now twenty-seven years of age and decorated with the Legion of honor for having actively contributed to the second return of the Bourbons. Proud and happy to be received in the home of Madame Evangelista, less as a notary than as belonging to the royalist society of Bordeaux, Solonet had conceived for that fine setting sun one of those passions which women like Madame Evangelista repulse, although flattered and graciously allowing them to exist upon the surface. Solonet remained therefore in a self-satisfied condition of hope and becoming respect. Being sent for, he arrived the next morning with the promptitude of a slave and was received by the coquettish widow in her bedroom, where she allowed him to find her in a very becoming dishabille.

"Can I," she said, "count upon your discretion and your entire devotion in a discussion which will take place in my house this evening? You will readily understand that it relates to the marriage of my daughter."

The young man expended himself in gallant protestations.

"Now to the point," she said.

"I am listening," he replied, checking his ardor.

Madame Evangelista then stated her position baldly.

"My dear lady, that is nothing to be troubled about," said Maitre Solonet, assuming a confident air as soon as his client had given him the exact figures. "The question is how have you conducted yourself toward Monsieur de Manerville? In this matter questions of manner and deportment are of greater importance than those of law and finance."

Madame Evangelista wrapped herself in dignity. The notary learned to his satisfaction that until the present moment his client's relations to Paul had been distant and reserved, and that partly from native pride and partly from involuntary shrewdness she had treated the Comte de Manerville as in some sense her inferior and as though it were an honor for him to be allowed to marry Mademoiselle Evangelista. She assured Solonet that neither she nor her daughter could be suspected of any mercenary interests in the marriage; that they had the right, should Paul make any financial difficulties, to retreat from the affair to an illimitable distance; and finally, that she had already acquired over her future son-in-law a very remarkable ascendancy.

"If that is so," said Solonet, "tell me what are the utmost concessions you are willing to make."

"I wish to make as few as possible," she answered, laughing.

"A woman's answer," cried Solonet. "Madame, are you anxious to marry Mademoiselle Natalie?"

"Yes."

"And you want a receipt for the eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs, for which you are responsible on the guardianship account which the law obliges you to render to your son-in-law?"

"Yes."

"How much do you want to keep back?"

"Thirty thousand a year, at least."

"It is a question of conquer or die, is it?"

"It is."

"Well, then, I must reflect on the necessary means to that end; it will need all our cleverness to manage our forces. I will give you some instructions on my arrival this evening; follow them carefully, and I think I may promise you a successful issue. Is the Comte de Manerville in love with Mademoiselle Natalie?" he asked as he rose to take leave.

"He adores her."

"That is not enough. Does he desire her to the point of disregarding all pecuniary difficulties?"

"Yes."

"That's what I call having a lien upon a daughter's property," cried the notary. "Make her look her best to-night," he added with a sly glance.

"She has a most charming dress for the occasion."

"The marriage-contract dress is, in my opinion, half the battle," said Solonet.

This last argument seemed so cogent to Madame Evangelista that she superintended Natalie's toilet herself, as much perhaps to watch her daughter as to make her the innocent accomplice of her financial conspiracy.

With her hair dressed a la Sevigne and wearing a gown of white tulle adorned with pink ribbons, Natalie seemed to her mother so beautiful as to guarantee victory. When the lady's-maid left the room and Madame Evangelista was certain that no one could overhear her, she arranged a few curls on her daughter's head by way of exordium.

"Dear child," she said, in a voice that was firm apparently, "do you sincerely love the Comte de Manerville?"

Mother and daughter cast strange looks at each other.

"Why do you ask that question, little mother? and to-day more than yesterday. Why have you thrown me with him?"

"If you and I had to part forever would you still persist in the marriage?"

"I should give it up—and I should not die of grief."

"You do not love him, my dear," said the mother, kissing her daughter's forehead.

"But why, my dear mother, are you playing the Grand Inquisitor?"

"I wished to know if you desired the marriage without being madly in love with the husband."

"I love him."

"And you are right. He is a count; we will make him a peer of France between us; nevertheless, there are certain difficulties."

"Difficulties between persons who love each other? Oh, no. The heart of the Pink of Fashion is too firmly planted here," she said, with a pretty gesture, "to make the very slightest objection. I am sure of that."

"But suppose it were otherwise?" persisted Madame Evangelista.

"He would be profoundly and forever forgotten," replied Natalie.

"Good! You are a Casa-Reale. But suppose, though he madly loves you, suppose certain discussions and difficulties should arise, not of his own making, but which he must decide in your interests as well as in mine—hey, Natalie, what then? Without lowering your dignity, perhaps a little softness in your manner might decide him—a word, a tone, a mere nothing. Men are so made; they resist a serious argument, but they yield to a tender look."

"I understand! a little touch to make my Favori leap the barrier," said Natalie, making the gesture of striking a horse with her whip.

"My darling! I ask nothing that resembles seduction. You and I have sentiments of the old Castilian honor which will never permit us to pass certain limits. Count Paul shall know our situation."

"What situation?"

"You would not understand it. But I tell you now that if after seeing you in all your glory his look betrays the slightest hesitation,—and I shall watch him,—on that instant I shall break off the marriage; I will liquidate my property, leave Bordeaux, and go to Douai, to be near the Claes. Madame Claes is our relation through the Temnincks. Then I'll marry you to a peer of France, and take refuge in a convent myself, that I may give up to you my whole fortune."

"Mother, what am I to do to prevent such misfortunes?" cried Natalie.

"I have never seen you so beautiful as you are now," replied her mother. "Be a little coquettish, and all is well."

Madame Evangelista left Natalie to her thoughts, and went to arrange her own toilet in such a way that would bear comparison with that of her daughter. If Natalie ought to make herself attractive to Paul she ought, none the less, to inflame the ardor of her champion Solonet. The mother and daughter were therefore under arms when Paul arrived, bearing the bouquet which for the last few months he had daily offered to his love. All three conversed pleasantly while awaiting the arrival of the notaries.

This day brought to Paul the first skirmish of that long and wearisome

warfare called marriage. It is therefore necessary to state the forces on both sides, the position of the belligerent bodies, and the ground on which they are about to manoeuvre.

To maintain a struggle, the importance of which had wholly escaped him, Paul's only auxiliary was the old notary, Mathias. Both were about to be confronted, unaware and defenceless, by a most unexpected circumstance; to be pressed by an enemy whose strategy was planned, and driven to decide on a course without having time to reflect upon it. Where is the man who would not have succumbed, even though assisted by Cujas and Barthole? How should he look for deceit and treachery where all seemed compliant and natural? What could old Mathias do alone against Madame Evangelista, against Solonet, against Natalie, especially when a client in love goes over to the enemy as soon as the rising conflict threatens his happiness? Already Paul was damaging his cause by making the customary lover's speeches, to which his passion gave excessive value in the ears of Madame Evangelista, whose object it was to drive him to commit himself.

The matrimonial condottieri now about to fight for their clients, whose personal powers were to be so vitally important in this solemn encounter, the two notaries, on short, represent individually the old and the new systems,—old fashioned notarial usage, and the new-fangled modern procedure.

Maitre Mathias was a worthy old gentleman sixty-nine years of age, who took great pride in his forty years' exercise of the profession. His huge gouty feet were encased in shoes with silver buckles, making a ridiculous termination to legs so spindling, with knees so bony, that when he crossed them they made you think of the emblems on a tombstone. His puny little thighs, lost in a pair of wide black breeches fastened with buckles, seemed to bend beneath the weight of a round stomach and a torso developed, like that of most sedentary persons, into a stout barrel, always buttoned into a green coat with square tails, which no man could remember to have ever seen new. His hair, well brushed and powdered, was tied in a rat's tail that lay between the collar of his coat and that of his waistcoat, which was white, with a pattern of flowers. With his round head, his face the color of a vine-leaf, his blue eyes, a trumpet nose, a thick-lipped mouth, and a double-chin, the dear old fellow excited, whenever he appeared among strangers who did not know him, that satirical laugh which Frenchmen so generously bestow on the ludicrous creations Dame Nature occasionally allows herself, which Art delights in exaggerating under the name of caricatures.

But in Maitre Mathias, mind had triumphed over form; the qualities of his soul had vanquished the oddities of his body. The inhabitants of Bordeaux, as a rule, testified a friendly respect and a deference that was full of esteem for him. The old man's voice went to their hearts and sounded there with the

eloquence of uprightness. His craft consisted in going straight to the fact, overturning all subterfuge and evil devices by plain questionings. His quick perception, his long training in his profession gave him that divining sense which goes to the depths of conscience and reads its secret thoughts. Though grave and deliberate in business, the patriarch could be gay with the gaiety of our ancestors. He could risk a song after dinner, enjoy all family festivities, celebrate the birthdays of grandmothers and children, and bury with due solemnity the Christmas log. He loved to send presents at New Year, and eggs at Easter; he believed in the duties of a godfather, and never deserted the customs which colored the life of the olden time. Maitre Mathias was a noble and venerable relic of the notaries, obscure great men, who gave no receipt for the millions entrusted to them, but returned those millions in the sacks they were delivered in, tied with the same twine; men who fulfilled their trusts to the letter, drew honest inventories, took fatherly interest in their clients, often barring the way to extravagance and dissipation,—men to whom families confided their secrets, and who felt so responsible for any error in their deeds that they meditated long and carefully over them. Never during his whole notarial life, had any client found reason to complain of a bad investment or an ill-placed mortgage. His own fortune, slowly but honorably acquired, had come to him as the result of a thirty years' practice and careful economy. He had established in life fourteen of his clerks. Religious, and generous in secret, Mathias was found whenever good was to be done without remuneration. An active member on hospital and other benevolent committees, he subscribed the largest sums to relieve all sudden misfortunes and emergencies, as well as to create certain useful permanent institutions; consequently, neither he nor his wife kept a carriage. Also his word was felt to be sacred, and his coffers held as much of the money of others as a bank; and also, we may add, he went by the name of "Our good Monsieur Mathias," and when he died, three thousand persons followed him to his grave.

Solonet was the style of young notary who comes in humming a tune, affects light-heartedness, declares that business is better done with a laugh than seriously. He is the notary captain of the national guard, who dislikes to be taken for a notary, solicits the cross of the Legion of honor, keeps his cabriolet, and leaves the verification of his deeds to his clerks; he is the notary who goes to balls and theatres, buys pictures and plays at ecarte; he has coffers in which gold is received on deposit and is later returned in bank-bills,—a notary who follows his epoch, risks capital in doubtful investments, speculates with all he can lay his hands on, and expects to retire with an income of thirty thousand francs after ten years' practice; in short, the notary whose cleverness comes of his duplicity, whom many men fear as an accomplice possessing their secrets, and who sees in his practice a means of ultimately marrying some blue-stockinged heiress.

When the slender, fair-haired Solonet, curled, perfumed, and booted like the leading gentleman at the Vaudeville, and dressed like a dandy whose most important business is a duel, entered Madame Evangelista's salon, preceding his brother notary, whose advance was delayed by a twinge of the gout, the two men presented to the life one of those famous caricatures entitled "Former Times and the Present Day," which had such eminent success under the Empire. If Madame and Mademoiselle Evangelista to whom the "good Monsieur Mathias," was personally unknown, felt, on first seeing him, a slight inclination to laugh, they were soon touched by the old-fashioned grace with which he greeted them. The words he used were full of that amenity which amiable old men convey as much by the ideas they suggest as by the manner in which they express them. The younger notary, with his flippant tone, seemed on a lower plane. Mathias showed his superior knowledge of life by the reserved manner with which he accosted Paul. Without compromising his white hairs, he showed that he respected the young man's nobility, while at the same time he claimed the honor due to old age, and made it felt that social rights are natural. Solonet's bow and greeting, on the contrary, expressed a sense of perfect equality, which would naturally affront the pretensions of a man of society and make the notary ridiculous in the eyes of a real noble. Solonet made a motion, somewhat too familiar, to Madame Evangelista, inviting her to a private conference in the recess of a window. For some minutes they talked to each other in a low voice, giving way now and then to laughter,—no doubt to lessen in the minds of others the importance of the conversation, in which Solonet was really communicating to his sovereign lady the plan of battle.

"But," he said, as he ended, "will you have the courage to sell your house?"

"Undoubtedly," she replied.

Madame Evangelista did not choose to tell her notary the motive of this heroism, which struck him greatly. Solonet's zeal might have cooled had he known that his client was really intending to leave Bordeaux. She had not as yet said anything about that intention to Paul, in order not to alarm him with the preliminary steps and circumlocutions which must be taken before he entered on the political life she planned for him.

After dinner the two plenipotentiaries left the loving pair with the mother, and betook themselves to an adjoining salon where their conference was arranged to take place. A dual scene then followed on this domestic stage: in the chimney-corner of the great salon a scene of love, in which to all appearances life was smiles and joy; in the other room, a scene of gravity and gloom, where selfish interests, baldly proclaimed, openly took the part they play in life under flowery disguises.

"My dear master," said Solonet, "the document can remain under your lock and key; I know very well what I owe to my old preceptor." Mathias bowed gravely. "But," continued Solonet, unfolding the rough copy of a deed he had made his clerk draw up, "as we are the oppressed party, I mean the daughter, I have written the contract—which will save you trouble. We marry with our rights under the rule of community of interests; with general donation of our property to each other in case of death without heirs; if not, donation of one-fourth as life interest, and one-fourth in fee; the sum placed in community of interests to be one-fourth of the respective property of each party; the survivor to possess the furniture without appraisal. It's all as simple as how d'ye do."

"Ta, ta, ta, ta," said Mathias, "I don't do business as one sings a tune. What are your claims?"

"What are yours?" said Solonet.

"Our property," replied Mathias, "is: the estate of Lanstrac, which brings in a rental of twenty-three thousand francs a year, not counting the natural products. Item: the farms of Grassol and Guadet, each worth three thousand six hundred francs a year. Item: the vineyard of Belle-Rose, yielding in ordinary years sixteen thousand francs; total, forty-six thousand two hundred francs a year. Item: the patrimonial mansion at Bordeaux taxed for nine hundred francs. Item: a handsome house, between court and garden in Paris, rue de la Pepiniere, taxed for fifteen hundred francs. These pieces of property, the title-deeds of which I hold, are derived from our father and mother, except the house in Paris, which we bought ourselves. We must also reckon in the furniture of the two houses, and that of the chateau of Lanstrac, estimated at four hundred and fifty thousand francs. There's the table, the cloth, and the first course. What do you bring for the second course and the dessert?"

"Our rights," replied Solonet.

"Specify them, my friend," said Mathias. "What do you bring us? Where is the inventory of the property left by Monsieur Evangelista? Show me the liquidation, the investment of the amount. Where is your capital?—if there is any capital. Where is your landed property?—if you have any. In short, let us see your guardianship account, and tell us what you bring and what your mother will secure to us."

"Does Monsieur le Comte de Manerville love Mademoiselle Evangelista?"

"He wishes to make her his wife if the marriage can be suitably arranged," said the old notary. "I am not a child; this matter concerns our business, and not our feelings."

"The marriage will be off unless you show generous feeling; and for this reason," continued Solonet. "No inventory was made at the death of our

husband; we are Spaniards, Creoles, and know nothing of French laws. Besides, we were too deeply grieved at our loss to think at such a time of the miserable formalities which occupy cold hearts. It is publicly well known that our late husband adored us, and that we mourned for him sincerely. If we did have a settlement of accounts with a short inventory attached, made, as one may say, by common report, you can thank our surrogate guardian, who obliged us to establish a status and assign to our daughter a fortune, such as it is, at a time when we were forced to withdraw from London our English securities, the capital of which was immense, and re-invest the proceeds in Paris, where interests were doubled."

"Don't talk nonsense to me. There are various ways of verifying the property. What was the amount of your legacy tax? Those figures will enable us to get at the total. Come to the point. Tell us frankly what you received from the father's estate and how much remains of it. If we are very much in love we'll see then what we can do."

"If you are marrying us for our money you can go about your business. We have claims to more than a million; but all that remains to our mother is this house and furniture and four hundred odd thousand francs invested about 1817 in the Five-per-cents, which yield about forty-thousand francs a year."

"Then why do you live in a style that requires one hundred thousand a year at the least?" cried Mathias, horror-stricken.

"Our daughter has cost us the eyes out of our head," replied Solonet. "Besides, we like to spend money. Your jeremiads, let me tell you, won't recover two farthings of the money."

"With the fifty thousand francs a year which belong to Mademoiselle Natalie you could have brought her up handsomely without coming to ruin. But if you have squandered everything while you were a girl what will it be when you are a married woman?"

"Then drop us altogether," said Solonet. "The handsomest girl in Bordeaux has a right to spend more than she has, if she likes."

"I'll talk to my client about that," said the old notary.

"Very good, old father Cassandra, go and tell your client that we haven't a penny," thought Solonet, who, in the solitude of his study, had strategically massed his forces, drawn up his propositions, manned the drawbridge of discussion, and prepared the point at which the opposing party, thinking the affair a failure, could suddenly be led into a compromise which would end in the triumph of his client.

The white dress with its rose-colored ribbons, the Sevigne curls, Natalie's

tiny foot, her winning glance, her pretty fingers constantly employed in adjusting curls that needed no adjustment, these girlish manoeuvres like those of a peacock spreading his tail, had brought Paul to the point at which his future mother-in-law desired to see him. He was intoxicated with love, and his eyes, the sure thermometer of the soul, indicated the degree of passion at which a man commits a thousand follies.

"Natalie is so beautiful," he whispered to the mother, "that I can conceive the frenzy which leads a man to pay for his happiness by death."

Madame Evangelista replied with a shake of her head:—

"Lover's talk, my dear count. My husband never said such charming things to me; but he married me without a fortune and for thirteen years he never caused me one moment's pain."

"Is that a lesson you are giving me?" said Paul, laughing.

"You know how I love you, my dear son," she answered, pressing his hand. "I must indeed love you well to give you my Natalie."

"Give me, give me?" said the young girl, waving a screen of Indian feathers, "what are you whispering about me?"

"I was telling her," replied Paul, "how much I love you, since etiquette forbids me to tell it to you."

"Why?"

"I fear to say too much."

"Ah! you know too well how to offer the jewels of flattery. Shall I tell you my private opinion about you? Well, I think you have more mind than a lover ought to have. To be the Pink of Fashion and a wit as well," she added, dropping her eyes, "is to have too many advantages: a man should choose between them. I fear too, myself."

"And why?"

"We must not talk in this way. Mamma, do you not think that this conversation is dangerous inasmuch as the contract is not yet signed?"

"It soon will be," said Paul.

"I should like to know what Achilles and Nestor are saying to each other in the next room," said Natalie, nodding toward the door of the little salon with a childlike expression of curiosity.

"They are talking of our children and our death and a lot of other such trifles; they are counting our gold to see if we can keep five horses in the stables. They are talking also of deeds of gift; but there, I have forestalled

them."

"How so?"

"Have I not given myself wholly to you?" he said, looking straight at the girl, whose beauty was enhanced by the blush which the pleasure of this answer brought to her face.

"Mamma, how can I acknowledge so much generosity."

"My dear child, you have a lifetime before you in which to return it. To make the daily happiness of a home, is to bring a treasure into it. I had no other fortune when I married."

"Do you like Lanstrac?" asked Paul, addressing Natalie.

"How could I fail to like the place where you were born?" she answered. "I wish I could see your house."

"Our house," said Paul. "Do you not want to know if I shall understand your tastes and arrange the house to suit you? Your mother had made a husband's task most difficult; you have always been so happy! But where love is infinite, nothing is impossible."

"My dear children," said Madame Evangelista, "do you feel willing to stay in Bordeaux after your marriage? If you have the courage to face the people here who know you and will watch and hamper you, so be it! But if you feel that desire for a solitude together which can hardly be expressed, let us go to Paris were the life of a young couple can pass unnoticed in the stream. There alone you can behave as lovers without fearing to seem ridiculous."

"You are quite right," said Paul, "but I shall hardly have time to get my house ready. However, I will write to-night to de Marsay, the friend on whom I can always count to get things done for me."

At the moment when Paul, like all young men accustomed to satisfy their desires without previous calculation, was inconsiderately binding himself to the expenses of a stay in Paris, Maitre Mathias entered the salon and made a sign to his client that he wished to speak to him.

"What is it, my friend?" asked Paul, following the old man to the recess of a window.

"Monsieur le comte," said the honest lawyer, "there is not a penny of dowry. My advice is: put off the conference to another day, so that you may gain time to consider your proper course."

"Monsieur Paul," said Natalie, "I have a word to say in private to you."

Though Madame Evangelista's face was calm, no Jew of the middle ages

ever suffered greater torture in his caldron of boiling oil than she was enduring in her violet velvet gown. Solonet had pledged the marriage to her, but she was ignorant of the means and conditions of success. The anguish of this uncertainty was intolerable. Possibly she owed her safety to her daughter's disobedience. Natalie had considered the advice of her mother and noted her anxiety. When she saw the success of her own coquetry she was struck to the heart with a variety of contradictory thoughts. Without blaming her mother, she was half-ashamed of manoeuvres the object of which was, undoubtedly, some personal game. She was also seized with a jealous curiosity which is easily conceived. She wanted to find out if Paul loved her well enough to rise above the obstacles that her mother foresaw and which she now saw clouding the face of the old lawyer. These ideas and sentiments prompted her to an action of loyalty which became her well. But, for all that, the blackest perfidy could not have been as dangerous as her present innocence.

"Paul," she said in a low voice, and she so called him for the first time, "if any difficulties as to property arise to separate us, remember that I free you from all engagements, and will allow you to let the blame of such a rupture rest on me."

She put such dignity into this expression of her generosity that Paul believed in her disinterestedness and in her ignorance of the strange fact that his notary had just told to him. He pressed the young girl's hand and kissed it like a man to whom love is more precious than wealth. Natalie left the room.

"Sac-a-papier! Monsieur le comte, you are committing a great folly," said the old notary, rejoining his client.

Paul grew thoughtful. He had expected to unite Natalie's fortune with his own and thus obtain for his married life an income of one hundred thousand francs a year; and however much a man may be in love he cannot pass without emotion and anxiety from the prospect of a hundred thousand to the certainty of forty-six thousand a year and the duty of providing for a woman accustomed to every luxury.

"My daughter is no longer here," said Madame Evangelista, advancing almost regally toward her son-in-law and his notary. "May I be told what is happening?"

"Madame," replied Mathias, alarmed at Paul's silence, "an obstacle which I fear will delay us has arisen—"

At these words, Maitre Solonet issued from the little salon and cut short the old man's speech by a remark which restored Paul's composure. Overcome by the remembrance of his gallant speeches and his lover-like behavior, he felt unable to disown them or to change his course. He longed, for the moment, to

fling himself into a gulf; Solonet's words relieved him.

"There is a way," said the younger notary, with an easy air, "by which madame can meet the payment which is due to her daughter. Madame Evangelista possesses forty thousand francs a year from an investment in the Five-per-cents, the capital of which will soon be at par, if not above it. We may therefore reckon it at eight hundred thousand francs. This house and garden are fully worth two hundred thousand. On that estimate, Madame can convey by the marriage contract the titles of that property to her daughter, reserving only a life interest in it—for I conclude that Monsieur le comte could hardly wish to leave his mother-in-law without means? Though Madame has certainly run through her fortune, she is still able to make good that of her daughter, or very nearly so."

"Women are most unfortunate in having no knowledge of business," said Madame Evangelista. "Have I titles to property? and what are life-interests?"

Paul was in a sort of ecstasy as he listened to this proposed arrangement. The old notary, seeing the trap, and his client with one foot caught in it, was petrified for a moment, as he said to himself:—

"I am certain they are tricking us."

"If madame will follow my advice," said Solonet, "she will secure her own tranquillity. By sacrificing herself in this way she may be sure that no minors will ultimately harass her—for we never know who may live and who may die! Monsieur le comte will then give due acknowledgment in the marriage contract of having received the sum total of Mademoiselle Evangelista's patrimonial inheritance."

Mathias could not restrain the indignation which shone in his eyes and flushed his face.

"And that sum," he said, shaking, "is—"

"One million, one hundred and fifty-six thousand francs according to the document—"

"Why don't you ask Monsieur le comte to make over 'hic et nunc' his whole fortune to his future wife?" said Mathias. "It would be more honest than what you now propose. I will not allow the ruin of the Comte de Manerville to take place under my very eyes—"

He made a step as if to address his client, who was silent throughout this scene as if dazed by it; but he turned and said, addressing Madame Evangelista:—

"Do not suppose, madame, that I think you a party to these ideas of my brother notary. I consider you an honest woman and a lady who knows nothing

of business."

"Thank you, brother notary," said Solonet.

"You know that there can be no offence between you and me," replied Mathias. "Madame," he added, "you ought to know the result of this proposed arrangement. You are still young and beautiful enough to marry again—Ah! madame," said the old man, noting her gesture, "who can answer for themselves on that point?"

"I did not suppose, monsieur," said Madame Evangelista, "that, after remaining a widow for the seven best years of my life, and refusing the most brilliant offers for my daughter's sake, I should be suspected of such a piece of folly as marrying again at thirty-nine years of age. If we were not talking business I should regard your suggestion as an impertinence."

"Would it not be more impertinent if I suggested that you could not marry again?"

"Can and will are separate terms," remarked Solonet, gallantly.

"Well," resumed Maitre Mathias, "we will say nothing of your marriage. You may, and we all desire it, live for forty-five years to come. Now, if you keep for yourself the life-interest in your daughter's patrimony, your children are laid on the shelf for the best years of their lives."

"What does that mean?" said the widow. "I don't understand being laid on a shelf."

Solonet, the man of elegance and good taste, began to laugh.

"I'll translate it for you," said Mathias. "If your children are wise they will think of the future. To think of the future means laying by half our income, provided we have only two children, to whom we are bound to give a fine education and a handsome dowry. Your daughter and son-in-law will, therefore, be reduced to live on twenty thousand francs a year, though each has spent fifty thousand while still unmarried. But that is nothing. The law obliges my client to account, hereafter, to his children for the eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs of their mother's patrimony; yet he may not have received them if his wife should die and madame should survive her, which may very well happen. To sign such a contract is to fling one's self into the river, bound hand and foot. You wish to make your daughter happy, do you not? If she loves her husband, a fact which notaries never doubt, she will share his troubles. Madame, I see enough in this scheme to make her die of grief and anxiety; you are consigning her to poverty. Yes, madame, poverty; to persons accustomed to the use of one hundred thousand francs a year, twenty thousand is poverty. Moreover, if Monsieur le comte, out of love for his wife, were

guilty of extravagance, she could ruin him by exercising her rights when misfortunes overtook him. I plead now for you, for them, for their children, for every one."

"The old fellow makes a lot of smoke with his cannon," thought Maitre Solonet, giving his client a look, which meant, "Keep on!"

"There is one way of combining all interests," replied Madame Evangelista, calmly. "I can reserve to myself only the necessary cost of living in a convent, and my children can have my property at once. I can renounce the world, if such anticipated death conduces to the welfare of my daughter."

"Madame," said the old notary, "let us take time to consider and weigh, deliberately, the course we had best pursue to conciliate all interests."

"Good heavens! monsieur," cried Madame Evangelista, who saw defeat in delay, "everything has already been considered and weighed. I was ignorant of what the process of marriage is in France; I am a Spaniard and a Creole. I did not know that in order to marry my daughter it was necessary to reckon up the days which God may still grant me; that my child would suffer because I live; that I do harm by living, and by having lived! When my husband married me I had nothing but my name and my person. My name alone was a fortune to him, which dwarfed his own. What wealth can equal that of a great name? My dowry was beauty, virtue, happiness, birth, education. Can money give those treasures? If Natalie's father could overhear this conversation, his generous soul would be wounded forever, and his happiness in paradise destroyed. I dissipated, foolishly, perhaps, a few of his millions without a quiver ever coming to his eyelids. Since his death, I have grown economical and orderly in comparison with the life he encouraged me to lead—Come, let us break this thing off! Monsieur de Manerville is so disappointed that I—"

No descriptive language can express the confusion and shock which the words, "break off," introduced into the conversation. It is enough to say that these four apparently well-bred persons all talked at once.

"In Spain people marry in the Spanish fashion, or as they please; but in France they marry according to French law, sensibly, and as best they can," said Mathias.

"Ah, madame," cried Paul, coming out of his stupefaction, "you mistake my feelings."

"This is not a matter of feeling," said the old notary, trying to stop his client from concessions. "We are concerned now with the interests and welfare of three generations. Have we wasted the missing millions? We are simply endeavoring to solve difficulties of which we are wholly guiltless."

"Marry us, and don't haggle," said Solonet.

"Haggle! do you call it haggling to defend the interests of father and mother and children?" said Mathias.

"Yes," said Paul, continuing his remarks to Madame Evangelista, "I deplore the extravagance of my youth, which does not permit me to stop this discussion, as you deplore your ignorance of business and your involuntary wastefulness. God is my witness that I am not thinking, at this moment, of myself. A simple life at Lanstrac does not alarm me; but how can I ask Mademoiselle Natalie to renounce her tastes, her habits? Her very existence would be changed."

"Where did Evangelista get his millions?" said the widow.

"Monsieur Evangelista was in business," replied the old notary; "he played in the great game of commerce; he despatched ships and made enormous sums; we are simply a landowner, whose capital is invested, whose income is fixed."

"There is still a way to harmonize all interests," said Solonet, uttering this sentence in a high falsetto tone, which silenced the other three and drew their eyes and their attention upon himself.

This young man was not unlike a skilful coachman who holds the reins of four horses, and amuses himself by first exciting his animals and then subduing them. He had let loose these passions, and then, in turn, he calmed them, making Paul, whose life and happiness were in the balance, sweat in his harness, as well as his own client, who could not clearly see her way through this involved discussion.

"Madame Evangelista," he continued, after a slight pause, "can resign her investment in the Five-per-cents at once, and she can sell this house. I can get three hundred thousand francs for it by cutting the land into small lots. Out of that sum she can give you one hundred and fifty thousand francs. In this way she pays down nine hundred thousand of her daughter's patrimony, immediately. That, to be sure, is not all that she owes her daughter, but where will you find, in France, a better dowry?"

"Very good," said Maitre Mathias; "but what, then, becomes of madame?"

At this question, which appeared to imply consent, Solonet said, softly, to himself, "Well done, old fox! I've caught you!"

"Madame," he replied, aloud, "will keep the hundred and fifty thousand francs remaining from the sale of the house. This sum, added to the value of her furniture, can be invested in an annuity which will give her twenty thousand francs a year. Monsieur le comte can arrange to provide a residence

for her under his roof. Lanstrac is a large house. You have also a house in Paris," he went on, addressing himself to Paul. "Madame can, therefore, live with you wherever you are. A widow with twenty thousand francs a year, and no household to maintain, is richer than madame was when she possessed her whole fortune. Madame Evangelista has only this one daughter; Monsieur le comte is without relations; it will be many years before your heirs attain their majority; no conflict of interests is, therefore, to be feared. A mother-in-law and a son-in-law placed in such relations will form a household of united interests. Madame Evangelista can make up for the remaining deficit by paying a certain sum for her support from her annuity, which will ease your way. We know that madame is too generous and too large-minded to be willing to be a burden on her children. In this way you can make one household, united and happy, and be able to spend, in your own right, one hundred thousand francs a year. Is not that sum sufficient, Monsieur le comte, to enjoy, in all countries, the luxuries of life, and to satisfy all your wants and caprices? Believe me, a young couple often feel the need of a third member of the household; and, I ask you, what third member could be so desirable as a good mother?"

"A little paradise!" exclaimed the old notary.

Shocked to see his client's joy at this proposal, Mathias sat down on an ottoman, his head in his hands, plunged in reflections that were evidently painful. He knew well the involved phraseology in which notaries and lawyers wrap up, intentionally, malicious schemes, and he was not the man to be taken in by it. He now began, furtively, to watch his brother notary and Madame Evangelista as they conversed with Paul, endeavoring to detect some clew to the deep-laid plot which was beginning to appear upon the surface.

"Monsieur," said Paul to Solonet, "I thank you for the pains you take to conciliate our interests. This arrangement will solve all difficulties far more happily than I expected—if," he added, turning to Madame Evangelista, "it is agreeable to you, madame; for I could not desire anything that did not equally please you."

"I?" she said; "all that makes the happiness of my children is joy to me. Do not consider me in any way."

"That would not be right," said Paul, eagerly. "If your future is not honorably provided for, Natalie and I would suffer more than you would suffer for yourself."

"Don't be uneasy, Monsieur le comte," interposed Solonet.

"Ah!" thought old Mathias, "they'll make him kiss the rod before they scourge him."

"You may feel quite satisfied," continued Solonet. "There are so many enterprises going on in Bordeaux at this moment that investments for annuities can be negotiated on very advantageous terms. After deducting from the proceeds of the house and furniture the hundred and fifty thousand francs we owe you, I think I can guarantee to madame that two hundred and fifty thousand will remain to her. I take upon myself to invest that sum in a first mortgage on property worth a million, and to obtain ten per cent for it,—twenty-five thousand francs a year. Consequently, we are marrying on nearly equal fortunes. In fact, against your forty-six thousand francs a year, Mademoiselle Natalie brings you forty thousand a year in the Five-per-cents, and one hundred and fifty thousand in a round sum, which gives, in all, forty-seven thousand francs a year."

"That is evident," said Paul.

As he ended his speech, Solonet had cast a sidelong glance at his client, intercepted by Mathias, which meant: "Bring up your reserves."

"But," exclaimed Madame Evangelista, in tones of joy that did not seem to be feigned, "I can give Natalie my diamonds; they are worth, at least, a hundred thousand francs."

"We can have them appraised," said the notary. "This will change the whole face of things. Madame can then keep the proceeds of her house, all but fifty thousand francs. Nothing will prevent Monsieur le comte from giving us a receipt in due form, as having received, in full, Mademoiselle Natalie's inheritance from her father; this will close, of course, the guardianship account. If madame, with Spanish generosity, robs herself in this way to fulfil her obligations, the least that her children can do is to give her a full receipt."

"Nothing could be more just than that," said Paul. "I am simply overwhelmed by these generous proposals."

"My daughter is another myself," said Madame Evangelista, softly.

Maitre Mathias detected a look of joy on her face when she saw that the difficulties were being removed: that joy, and the previous forgetfulness of the diamonds, which were now brought forward like fresh troops, confirmed his suspicions.

"The scene has been prepared between them as gamblers prepare the cards to ruin a pigeon," thought the old notary. "Is this poor boy, whom I saw born, doomed to be plucked alive by that woman, roasted by his very love, and devoured by his wife? I, who have nursed these fine estates for years with such care, am I to see them ruined in a single night? Three million and a half to be hypothecated for eleven hundred thousand francs these women will force him to squander!"

Discovering thus in the soul of the elder woman intentions which, without involving crime, theft, swindling, or any actually evil or blameworthy action, nevertheless belonged to all those criminalities in embryo, Maitre Mathias felt neither sorrow nor generous indignation. He was not the Misanthrope; he was an old notary, accustomed in his business to the shrewd calculations of worldly people, to those clever bits of treachery which do more fatal injury than open murder on the high-road committed by some poor devil, who is guillotined in consequence. To the upper classes of society these passages in life, these diplomatic meetings and discussions are like the necessary cesspools where the filth of life is thrown. Full of pity for his client, Mathias cast a foreseeing eye into the future and saw nothing good.

"We'll take the field with the same weapons," thought he, "and beat them."

At this moment, Paul, Solonet and Madame Evangelista, becoming embarrassed by the old man's silence, felt that the approval of that censor was necessary to carry out the transaction, and all three turned to him simultaneously.

"Well, my dear Monsieur Mathias, what do you think of it?" said Paul.

"This is what I think," said the conscientious and uncompromising notary. "You are not rich enough to commit such regal folly. The estate of Lanstrac, if estimated at three per cent on its rentals, represents, with its furniture, one million; the farms of Grassol and Guadet and your vineyard of Belle-Rose are worth another million; your two houses in Bordeaux and Paris, with their furniture, a third million. Against those three millions, yielding forty-seven thousand francs a year, Mademoiselle Natalie brings eight hundred thousand francs in the Five-per-cents, the diamonds (supposing them to be worth a hundred thousand francs, which is still problematical) and fifty thousand francs in money; in all, one million and fifty thousand francs. In presence of such facts my brother notary tells you boastfully that we are marrying equal fortunes! He expects us to encumber ourselves with a debt of eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs to our children by acknowledging the receipt of our wife's patrimony, when we have actually received but little more than a doubtful million. You are listening to such stuff with the rapture of a lover, and you think that old Mathias, who is not in love, can forget arithmetic, and will not point out the difference between landed estate, the actual value of which is enormous and constantly increasing, and the revenues of personal property, the capital of which is subject to fluctuations and diminishment of income. I am old enough to have learned that money dwindles and land augments. You have called me in, Monsieur le comte, to stipulate for your interests; either let me defend those interests, or dismiss me."

"If monsieur is seeking a fortune equal in capital to his own," said Solonet,

"we certainly cannot give it to him. We do not possess three millions and a half; nothing can be more evident. While you can boast of your three overwhelming millions, we can only produce our poor one million,—a mere nothing in your eyes, though three times the dowry of an archduchess of Austria. Bonaparte received only two hundred and fifty thousand francs with Maria-Louisa."

"Maria-Louisa was the ruin of Bonaparte," muttered Mathias.

Natalie's mother caught the words.

"If my sacrifices are worth nothing," she cried, "I do not choose to continue such a discussion; I trust to the discretion of Monsieur le comte, and I renounce the honor of his hand for my daughter."

According to the strategy marked out by the younger notary, this battle of contending interests had now reached the point where victory was certain for Madame Evangelista. The mother-in-law had opened her heart, delivered up her property, and was therefore practically released as her daughter's guardian. The future husband, under pain of ignoring the laws of generous propriety and being false to love, ought now to accept these conditions previously planned, and cleverly led up to by Solonet and Madame Evangelista. Like the hands of a clock turned by mechanism, Paul came faithfully up to time.

"Madame!" he exclaimed, "is it possible you can think of breaking off the marriage?"

"Monsieur," she replied, "to whom am I accountable? To my daughter. When she is twenty-one years of age she will receive my guardianship account and release me. She will then possess a million, and can, if she likes, choose her husband among the sons of the peers of France. She is a daughter of the Casa-Reale."

"Madame is right," remarked Solonet. "Why should she be more hardly pushed to-day than she will be fourteen months hence? You ought not to deprive her of the benefits of her maternity."

"Mathias," cried Paul, in deep distress, "there are two sorts of ruin, and you are bringing one upon me at this moment."

He made a step towards the old notary, no doubt intending to tell him that the contract must be drawn at once. But Mathias stopped that disaster with a glance which said, distinctly, "Wait!" He saw the tears in Paul's eyes,—tears drawn from an honorable man by the shame of this discussion as much as by the peremptory speech of Madame Evangelista, threatening rupture,—and the old man stanched them with a gesture like that of Archimedes when he cried, "Eureka!" The words "peer of France" had been to him like a torch in a dark

crypt.

Natalie appeared at this moment, dazzling as the dawn, saying, with infantine look and manner, "Am I in the way?"

"Singularly so, my child," answered her mother, in a bitter tone.

"Come in, dear Natalie," said Paul, taking her hand and leading her to a chair near the fireplace. "All is settled."

He felt it impossible to endure the overthrow of their mutual hopes.

"Yes, all can be settled," said Mathias, hastily interposing.

Like a general who, in a moment, upsets the plans skilfully laid and prepared by the enemy, the old notary, enlightened by that genius which presides over notaries, saw an idea, capable of saving the future of Paul and his children, unfolding itself in legal form before his eyes.

Maitre Solonet, who perceived no other way out of these irreconcilable difficulties than the resolution with which Paul's love inspired him, and to which this conflict of feelings and thwarted interests had brought him, was extremely surprised at the sudden exclamation of his brother notary. Curious to know the remedy that Mathias had found in a state of things which had seemed to him beyond all other relief, he said, addressing the old man:—

"What is it you propose?"

"Natalie, my dear child, leave us," said Madame Evangelista.

"Mademoiselle is not in the way," replied Mathias, smiling. "I am going to speak in her interests as well as in those of Monsieur le comte."

Silence reigned for a moment, during which time everybody present, oppressed with anxiety, awaited the allocution of the venerable notary with unspeakable curiosity.

"In these days," continued Maitre Mathias, after a pause, "the profession of notary has changed from what it was. Political revolutions now exert an influence over the prospects of families, which never happened in former times. In those days existences were clearly defined; so were rank and position —"

"We are not here for a lecture on political ceremony, but to draw up a marriage contract," said Solonet, interrupting the old man, impatiently.

"I beg you to allow me to speak in my turn as I see fit," replied the other.

Solonet turned away and sat down on the ottoman, saying, in a low voice, to Madame Evangelista:—

"You will now hear what we call in the profession 'balderdash.'"

"Notaries are therefore compelled to follow the course of political events, which are now intimately connected with private interests. Here is an example: formerly noble families owned fortunes that were never shaken, but which the laws, promulgated by the Revolution, destroyed, and the present system tends to reconstruct," resumed the old notary, yielding to the loquacity of the "tabellionaris boa-constrictor" (boa-notary). "Monsieur le comte by his name, his talents, and his fortune is called upon to sit some day in the elective Chamber. Perhaps his destiny will take him to the hereditary Chamber, for we know that he has talent and means enough to fulfil that expectation. Do you not agree with me, madame?" he added, turning to the widow.

"You anticipate my dearest hope," she replied. "Monsieur de Manerville must be a peer of France, or I shall die of mortification."

"Therefore all that leads to that end—" continued Mathias with a cordial gesture to the astute mother-in-law.

"—will promote my eager desire," she replied.

"Well, then," said Mathias, "is not this marriage the proper occasion on which to entail the estate and create the family? Such a course would, undoubtedly, militate in the mind of the present government in favor of the nomination of my client whenever a batch of appointments is sent in. Monsieur le comte can very well afford to devote the estate of Lanstrac (which is worth a million) to this purpose. I do not ask that mademoiselle should contribute an equal sum; that would not be just. But we can surely apply eight hundred thousand of her patrimony to this object. There are two domains adjoining Lanstrac now to be sold, which can be purchased for that sum, which will return in rentals four and a half per cent. The house in Paris should be included in the entail. The surplus of the two fortunes, if judiciously managed, will amply suffice for the fortunes of the younger children. If the contracting parties will agree to this arrangement, Monsieur ought certainly to accept your guardianship account with its deficiency. I consent to that."

"Questa coda non e di questo gatto (That tail doesn't belong to that cat)," murmured Madame Evangelista, appealing to Solonet.

"There's a snake in the grass somewhere," answered Solonet, in a low voice, replying to the Italian proverb with a French one.

"Why do you make this fuss?" asked Paul, leading Mathias into the adjoining salon.

"To save you from being ruined," replied the old notary, in a whisper. "You are determined to marry a girl and her mother who have already squandered

two millions in seven years; you are pledging yourself to a debt of eleven hundred thousand francs to your children, to whom you will have to account for the fortune you are acknowledging to have received with their mother. You risk having your own fortune squandered in five years, and to be left as naked as Saint-John himself, besides being a debtor to your wife and children for enormous sums. If you are determined to put your life in that boat, Monsieur le comte, of course you can do as you choose; but at least let me, your old friend, try to save the house of Manerville."

"How is this scheme going to save it?" asked Paul.

"Monsieur le comte, you are in love—"

"Yes."

"A lover is about as discreet as a cannon-ball; therefore, I shall not explain. If you repeated what I should say, your marriage would probably be broken off. I protect your love by my silence. Have you confidence in my devotion?"

"A fine question!"

"Well, then, believe me when I tell you that Madame Evangelista, her notary, and her daughter, are tricking us through thick and thin; they are more than clever. Tudieu! what a sly game!"

"Not Natalie," cried Paul.

"I sha'n't put my fingers between the bark and the tree," said the old man. "You want her, take her! But I wish you were well out of this marriage, if it could be done without the least wrong-doing on your part."

"Why do you wish it?"

"Because that girl will spend the mines of Peru. Besides, see how she rides a horse,—like the groom of a circus; she is half emancipated already. Such girls make bad wives."

Paul pressed the old man's hand, saying, with a confident air of self-conceit:—

"Don't be uneasy as to that! But now, at this moment, what am I to do?"

"Hold firm to my conditions. They will consent, for no one's apparent interest is injured. Madame Evangelista is very anxious to marry her daughter; I see that in her little game—Beware of her!"

Paul returned to the salon, where he found his future mother-in-law conversing in a low tone with Solonet. Natalie, kept outside of these mysterious conferences, was playing with a screen. Embarrassed by her position, she was thinking to herself: "How odd it is that they tell me nothing

of my own affairs."

The younger notary had seized, in the main, the future effect of the new proposal, based, as it was, on the self-love of both parties, into which his client had fallen headlong. Now, while Mathias was more than a mere notary, Solonet was still a young man, and brought into his business the vanity of youth. It often happens that personal conceit makes a man forgetful of the interests of his client. In this case, Maitre Solonet, who would not suffer the widow to think that Nestor had vanquished Achilles, advised her to conclude the marriage on the terms proposed. Little he cared for the future working of the marriage contract; to him, the conditions of victory were: Madame Evangelista released from her obligations as guardian, her future secured, and Natalie married.

"Bordeaux shall know that you have ceded eleven hundred thousand francs to your daughter, and that you still have twenty-five thousand francs a year left," whispered Solonet to his client. "For my part, I did not expect to obtain such a fine result."

"But," she said, "explain to me why the creation of this entail should have calmed the storm at once."

"It relieves their distrust of you and your daughter. An entail is unchangeable; neither husband nor wife can touch that capital."

"Then this arrangement is positively insulting!"

"No; we call it simply precaution. The old fellow has caught you in a net. If you refuse to consent to the entail, he can reply: 'Then your object is to squander the fortune of my client, who, by the creation of this entail, is protected from all such injury as securely as if the marriage took place under the "regime dotal."'"

Solonet quieted his own scruples by reflecting: "After all, these stipulations will take effect only in the future, by which time Madame Evangelista will be dead and buried."

Madame Evangelista contented herself, for the present, with these explanations, having full confidence in Solonet. She was wholly ignorant of law; considering her daughter as good as married, she thought she had gained her end, and was filled with the joy of success. Thus, as Mathias had shrewdly calculated, neither Solonet nor Madame Evangelista understood as yet, to its full extent, this scheme which he had based on reasons that were undeniable.

"Well, Monsieur Mathias," said the widow, "all is for the best, is it not?"

"Madame, if you and Monsieur le comte consent to this arrangement you ought to exchange pledges. It is fully understood, I suppose," he continued,

looking from one to the other, "that the marriage will only take place on condition of creating an entail upon the estate of Lanstrac and the house in the rue de la Pepiniere, together with eight hundred thousand francs in money brought by the future wife, the said sum to be invested in landed property? Pardon me the repetition, madame; but a positive and solemn engagement becomes absolutely necessary. The creation of an entail requires formalities, application to the chancellor, a royal ordinance, and we ought at once to conclude the purchase of the new estate in order that the property be included in the royal ordinance by virtue of which it becomes inalienable. In many families this would be reduced to writing, but on this occasion I think a simple consent would suffice. Do you consent?"

"Yes," replied Madame Evangelista.

"Yes," said Paul.

"And I?" asked Natalie, laughing.

"You are a minor, mademoiselle," replied Solonet; "don't complain of that."

It was then agreed that Maitre Mathias should draw up the contract, Maitre Solonet the guardianship account and release, and that both documents should be signed, as the law requires some days before the celebration of the marriage. After a few polite salutations the notaries withdrew.

"It rains, Mathias; shall I take you home?" said Solonet. "My cabriolet is here."

"My carriage is here too," said Paul, manifesting an intention to accompany the old man.

"I won't rob you of a moment's pleasure," said Mathias. "I accept my friend Solonet's offer."

"Well," said Achilles to Nestor, as the cabriolet rolled away, "you have been truly patriarchal to-night. The fact is, those young people would certainly have ruined themselves."

"I felt anxious about their future," replied Mathias, keeping silent as to the real motives of his proposition.

At this moment the two notaries were like a pair of actors arm in arm behind the stage on which they have played a scene of hatred and provocation.

"But," said Solonet, thinking of his rights as notary, "isn't it my place to buy that land you mentioned? The money is part of our dowry."

"How can you put property bought in the name of Mademoiselle Evangelista into the creation of an entail by the Comte de Manerville?" replied Mathias.

"We shall have to ask the chancellor about that," said Solonet.

"But I am the notary of the seller as well as of the buyer of that land," said Mathias. "Besides, Monsieur de Manerville can buy in his own name. At the time of payment we can make mention of the fact that the dowry funds are put into it."

"You've an answer for everything, old man," said Solonet, laughing. "You were really surpassing to-night; you beat us squarely."

"For an old fellow who didn't expect your batteries of grape-shot, I did pretty well, didn't I?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Solonet.

The odious struggle in which the material welfare of a family had been so perilously near destruction was to the two notaries nothing more than a matter of professional polemics.

"I haven't been forty years in harness for nothing," remarked Mathias. "Look here, Solonet," he added, "I'm a good fellow; you shall help in drawing the deeds for the sale of those lands."

"Thanks, my dear Mathias. I'll serve you in return on the very first occasion."

While the two notaries were peacefully returning homeward, with no other sensations than a little throaty warmth, Paul and Madame Evangelista were left a prey to the nervous trepidation, the quivering of the flesh and brain which excitable natures pass through after a scene in which their interests and their feelings have been violently shaken. In Madame Evangelista these last mutterings of the storm were overshadowed by a terrible reflection, a lurid gleam which she wanted, at any cost, to dispel.

"Has Maitre Mathias destroyed in a few minutes the work I have been doing for six months?" she asked herself. "Was he withdrawing Paul from my influence by filling his mind with suspicion during their secret conference in the next room?"

She was standing absorbed in these thoughts before the fireplace, her elbow resting on the marble mantel-shelf. When the porte-cochere closed behind the carriage of the two notaries, she turned to her future son-in-law, impatient to solve her doubts.

"This has been the most terrible day of my life," cried Paul, overjoyed to see all difficulties vanish. "I know no one so downright in speech as that old Mathias. May God hear him, and make me peer of France! Dear Natalie, I desire this for your sake more than for my own. You are my ambition; I live only in you."

Hearing this speech uttered in the accents of the heart, and noting, more especially, the limpid azure of Paul's eyes, whose glance betrayed no thought of double meaning, Madame Evangelista's satisfaction was complete. She regretted the sharp language with which she had spurred him, and in the joy of success she resolved to reassure him as to the future. Calming her countenance, and giving to her eyes that expression of tender friendship which made her so attractive, she smiled and answered:—

"I can say as much to you. Perhaps, dear Paul, my Spanish nature has led me farther than my heart desired. Be what you are,—kind as God himself,—and do not be angry with me for a few hasty words. Shake hands."

Paul was abashed; he fancied himself to blame, and he kissed Madame Evangelista.

"Dear Paul," she said with much emotion, "why could not those two sharks have settled this matter without dragging us into it, since it was so easy to settle?"

"In that case I should not have known how grand and generous you can be," replied Paul.

"Indeed she is, Paul," cried Natalie, pressing his hand.

"We have still a few little matters to settle, my dear son," said Madame Evangelista. "My daughter and I are above the foolish vanities to which so many persons cling. Natalie does not need my diamonds, but I am glad to give them to her."

"Ah! my dear mother, do you suppose that I will accept them?"

"Yes, my child; they are one of the conditions of the contract."

"I will not allow it; I will not marry at all," cried Natalie, vehemently. "Keep those jewels which my father took such pride in collecting for you. How could Monsieur Paul exact—"

"Hush, my dear," said her mother, whose eyes now filled with tears. "My ignorance of business compels me to a greater sacrifice than that."

"What sacrifice?"

"I must sell my house in order to pay the money that I owe to you."

"What money can you possibly owe to me?" she said; "to me, who owe you life! If my marriage costs you the slightest sacrifice, I will not marry."

"Child!"

"Dear Natalie, try to understand that neither I, nor your mother, nor you yourself, require these sacrifices, but our children."

"Suppose I do not marry at all?"

"Do you not love me?" said Paul, tenderly.

"Come, come, my silly child; do you imagine that a contract is like a house of cards which you can blow down at will? Dear little ignoramus, you don't know what trouble we have had to found an entail for the benefit of your eldest son. Don't cast us back into the discussions from which we have just escaped."

"Why do you wish to ruin my mother?" said Natalie, looking at Paul.

"Why are you so rich?" he replied, smiling.

"Don't quarrel, my children, you are not yet married," said Madame Evangelista. "Paul," she continued, "you are not to give either corbeille, or jewels, or trousseau. Natalie has everything in profusion. Lay by the money you would otherwise put into wedding presents. I know nothing more stupidly bourgeois and commonplace than to spend a hundred thousand francs on a corbeille, when five thousand a year given to a young woman saves her much anxiety and lasts her lifetime. Besides, the money for a corbeille is needed to decorate your house in Paris. We will return to Lanstrac in the spring; for Solonet is to settle my debts during the winter."

"All is for the best," cried Paul, at the summit of happiness.

"So I shall see Paris!" cried Natalie, in a tone that would justly have alarmed de Marsay.

"If we decide upon this plan," said Paul, "I'll write to de Marsay and get him to take a box for me at the Bouffons and also at the Italian opera."

"You are very kind; I should never have dared to ask for it," said Natalie. "Marriage is a very agreeable institution if it gives husbands a talent for divining the wishes of their wives."

"It is nothing else," replied Paul. "But see how late it is; I ought to go."

"Why leave so soon to-night?" said Madame Evangelista, employing those coaxing ways to which men are so sensitive.

Though all this passed on the best of terms, and according to the laws of the most exquisite politeness, the effect of the discussion of these contending interests had, nevertheless, cast between son and mother-in-law a seed of distrust and enmity which was liable to sprout under the first heat of anger, or the warmth of a feeling too harshly bruised. In most families the settlement of "dots" and the deeds of gift required by a marriage contract give rise to primitive emotions of hostility, caused by self-love, by the lesion of certain sentiments, by regret for the sacrifices made, and by the desire to diminish

them. When difficulties arise there is always a victorious side and a vanquished one. The parents of the future pair try to conclude the matter, which is purely commercial in their eyes, to their own advantage; and this leads to the trickery, shrewdness, and deception of such negotiations. Generally the husband alone is initiated into the secret of these discussions, and the wife is kept, like Natalie, in ignorance of the stipulations which make her rich or poor.

As he left the house, Paul reflected that, thanks to the cleverness of his notary, his fortune was almost entirely secured from injury. If Madame Evangelista did not live apart from her daughter their united household would have an income of more than a hundred thousand francs to spend. All his expectations of a happy and comfortable life would be realized.

"My mother-in-law seems to me an excellent woman," he thought, still under the influence of the cajoling manner by which she had endeavored to disperse the clouds raised by the discussion. "Mathias is mistaken. These notaries are strange fellows; they envenom everything. The harm started from that little cock-sparrow Solonet, who wanted to play a clever game."

While Paul went to bed recapitulating the advantages he had won during the evening, Madame Evangelista was congratulating herself equally on her victory.

"Well, darling mother, are you satisfied?" said Natalie, following Madame Evangelista into her bedroom.

"Yes, love," replied the mother, "everything went well, according to my wishes; I feel a weight lifted from my shoulders which was crushing me. Paul is a most easy-going man. Dear fellow! yes, certainly, we must make his life prosperous. You will make him happy, and I will be responsible for his political success. The Spanish ambassador used to be a friend of mine, and I'll renew the relation—as I will with the rest of my old acquaintance. Oh! you'll see! we shall soon be in the very heart of Parisian life; all will be enjoyment for us. You shall have the pleasures, my dearest, and I the last occupation of existence,—the game of ambition! Don't be alarmed when you see me selling this house. Do you suppose we shall ever come back to live in Bordeaux? no. Lanstrac? yes. But we shall spend all our winters in Paris, where our real interests lie. Well, Natalie, tell me, was it very difficult to do what I asked of you?"

"My little mamma! every now and then I felt ashamed."

"Solonet advises me to put the proceeds of this house into an annuity," said Madame Evangelista, "but I shall do otherwise; I won't take a penny of my fortune from you."

"I saw you were all very angry," said Natalie. "How did the tempest calm down?"

"By an offer of my diamonds," replied Madame Evangelista. "Solonet was right. How ably he conducted the whole affair. Get out my jewel-case, Natalie. I have never seriously considered what my diamonds are worth. When I said a hundred thousand francs I talked nonsense. Madame de Gyas always declared that the necklace and ear-rings your father gave me on our marriage day were worth at least that sum. My poor husband was so lavish! Then my family diamond, the one Philip the Second gave to the Duke of Alba, and which my aunt bequeathed to me, the 'Discreto,' was, I think, appraised in former times at four thousand quadruples,—one of our Spanish gold coins."

Natalie laid out upon her mother's toilet-table the pearl necklace, the sets of jewels, the gold bracelets and precious stones of all description, with that inexpressible sensation enjoyed by certain women at the sight of such treasures, by which—so commentators on the Talmud say—the fallen angels seduce the daughters of men, having sought these flowers of celestial fire in the bowels of the earth.

"Certainly," said Madame Evangelista, "though I know nothing about jewels except how to accept and wear them, I think there must be a great deal of money in these. Then, if we make but one household, I can sell my plate, the weight of which, as mere silver, would bring thirty thousand francs. I remember when we brought it from Lima, the custom-house officers weighed and appraised it. Solonet is right, I'll send to-morrow to Elie Magus. The Jew shall estimate the value of these things. Perhaps I can avoid sinking any of my fortune in an annuity."

"What a beautiful pearl necklace!" said Natalie.

"He ought to give it to you, if he loves you," replied her mother; "and I think he might have all my other jewels reset and let you keep them. The diamonds are a part of your property in the contract. And now, good-night, my darling. After the fatigues of this day we both need rest."

The woman of luxury, the Creole, the great lady, incapable of analyzing the results of a contract which was not yet in force, went to sleep in the joy of seeing her daughter married to a man who was easy to manage, who would let them both be mistresses of his home, and whose fortune, united to theirs, would require no change in their way of living. Thus having settled her account with her daughter, whose patrimony was acknowledged in the contract, Madame Evangelista could feel at her ease.

"How foolish of me to worry as I did," she thought. "But I wish the marriage were well over."

So Madame Evangelista, Paul, Natalie, and the two notaries were equally satisfied with the first day's result. The Te Deum was sung in both camps,—a dangerous situation; for there comes a moment when the vanquished side is aware of its mistake. To Madame Evangelista's mind, her son-in-law was the vanquished side.

CHAPTER IV. THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT—SECOND DAY

The next day Elie Magus (who happened at that time to be in Bordeaux) obeyed Madame Evangelista's summons, believing, from general rumor as to the marriage of Comte Paul with Mademoiselle Natalie, that it concerned a purchase of jewels for the bride. The Jew was, therefore, astonished when he learned that, on the contrary, he was sent for to estimate the value of the mother-in-law's property. The instinct of his race, as well as certain insidious questions, made him aware that the value of the diamonds was included in the marriage-contract. The stones were not to be sold, and yet he was to estimate them as if some private person were buying them from a dealer. Jewellers alone know how to distinguish between the diamonds of Asia and those of Brazil. The stones of Golconda and Visapur are known by a whiteness and glittering brilliancy which others have not,—the water of the Brazilian diamonds having a yellow tinge which reduces their selling value. Madame Evangelista's necklace and ear-rings, being composed entirely of Asiatic diamonds, were valued by Elie Magus at two hundred and fifty thousand francs. As for the "Discreto," he pronounced it one of the finest diamonds in the possession of private persons; it was known to the trade and valued at one hundred thousand francs. On hearing this estimate, which proved to her the lavishness of her husband, Madame Evangelista asked the old Jew whether she should be able to obtain that money immediately.

"Madame," replied the Jew, "if you wish to sell I can give you only seventy-five thousand for the brilliant, and one hundred and sixty thousand for the necklace and earrings."

"Why such reduction?"

"Madame," replied Magus, "the finer the diamond, the longer we keep it unsold. The rarity of such investments is one reason for the high value set upon precious stones. As the merchant cannot lose the interest of his money, this additional sum, joined to the rise and fall to which such merchandise is subject, explains the difference between the price of purchase and the price of sale. By owning these diamonds you have lost the interest on three hundred thousand francs for twenty years. If you wear your jewels ten times a year, it

costs you three thousand francs each evening to put them on. How many beautiful gowns you could buy with that sum. Those who own diamonds are, therefore, very foolish; but, luckily for us, women are never willing to understand the calculation."

"I thank you for explaining it to me, and I shall profit by it."

"Do you wish to sell?" asked Magus, eagerly.

"What are the other jewels worth?"

The Jew examined the gold of the settings, held the pearls to the light, scrutinized the rubies, the diadems, clasps, bracelets, and chains, and said, in a mumbling tone:—

"A good many Portuguese diamonds from Brazil are among them. They are not worth more than a hundred thousand to me. But," he added, "a dealer would sell them to a customer for one hundred and fifty thousand, at least."

"I shall keep them," said Madame Evangelista.

"You are wrong," replied Elie Magus. "With the income from the sum they represent you could buy just as fine diamonds in five years, and have the capital to boot."

This singular conference became known, and corroborated certain rumors excited by the discussion of the contract. The servants of the house, overhearing high voices, supposed the difficulties greater than they really were. Their gossip with other valets spread the information, which from the lower regions rose to the ears of the masters. The attention of society, and of the town in general, became so fixed on the marriage of two persons equally rich and well-born, that every one, great and small, busied themselves about the matter, and in less than a week the strangest rumors were bruited about.

"Madame Evangelista sells her house; she must be ruined. She offered her diamonds to Elie Magus. Nothing is really settled between herself and the Comte de Manerville. Is it probable that the marriage will ever take place?"

To this question some answered yes, and others said no. The two notaries, when questioned, denied these calumnies, and declared that the difficulties arose only from the official delay in constituting the entail. But when public opinion has taken a trend in one direction it is very difficult to turn it back. Though Paul went every day to Madame Evangelista's house, and though the notaries denied these assertions continually, the whispered calumny went on. Young girls, and their mothers and aunts, vexed at a marriage they had dreamed of for themselves or for their families, could not forgive the Spanish ladies for their happiness, as authors cannot forgive each other for their success. A few persons revenged themselves for the twenty-years luxury and

grandeur of the family of Evangelista, which had lain heavily on their self-love. A leading personage at the prefecture declared that the notaries could have chosen no other language and followed no other conduct in the case of a rupture. The time actually required for the establishment of the entail confirmed the suspicions of the Bordeaux provincials.

"They will keep the ball going through the winter; then, in the spring, they will go to some watering-place, and we shall learn before the year is out that the marriage is off."

"And, of course, we shall be given to understand," said others, "for the sake of the honor of the two families, that the difficulties did not come from either side, but the chancellor refused to consent; you may be sure it will be some quibble about that entail which will cause the rupture."

"Madame Evangelista," some said, "lived in a style that the mines of Valencia couldn't meet. When the time came to melt the bell, and pay the daughter's patrimony, nothing would be found to pay it with."

The occasion was excellent to add up the spendings of the handsome widow and prove, categorically, her ruin. Rumors were so rife that bets were made for and against the marriage. By the laws of worldly jurisprudence this gossip was not allowed to reach the ears of the parties concerned. No one was enemy or friend enough to Paul or to Madame Evangelista to inform either of what was being said. Paul had some business at Lanstrac, and used the occasion to make a hunting-party for several of the young men of Bordeaux,—a sort of farewell, as it were, to his bachelor life. This hunting party was accepted by society as a signal confirmation of public suspicion.

When this event occurred, Madame de Gyas, who had a daughter to marry, thought it high time to sound the matter, and to condole, with joyful heart, the blow received by the Evangelistas. Natalie and her mother were somewhat surprised to see the lengthened face of the marquise, and they asked at once if anything distressing had happened to her.

"Can it be," she replied, "that you are ignorant of the rumors that are circulating? Though I think them false myself, I have come to learn the truth in order to stop this gossip, at any rate among the circle of my own friends. To be the dupes or the accomplices of such an error is too false a position for true friends to occupy."

"But what is it? what has happened?" asked mother and daughter.

Madame de Gyas thereupon allowed herself the happiness of repeating all the current gossip, not sparing her two friends a single stab. Natalie and Madame Evangelista looked at each other and laughed, but they fully understood the meaning of the tale and the motives of their friend. The

Spanish lady took her revenge very much as Celimene took hers on Arsinoe.

"My dear, are you ignorant—you who know the provinces so well—can you be ignorant of what a mother is capable when she has on her hands a daughter whom she cannot marry for want of 'dot' and lovers, want of beauty, want of mind, and, sometimes, want of everything? Why, a mother in that position would rob a diligence or commit a murder, or wait for a man at the corner of a street—she would sacrifice herself twenty times over, if she was a mother at all. Now, as you and I both know, there are many such in that situation in Bordeaux, and no doubt they attribute to us their own thoughts and actions. Naturalists have depicted the habits and customs of many ferocious animals, but they have forgotten the mother and daughter in quest of a husband. Such women are hyenas, going about, as the Psalmist says, seeking whom they may devour, and adding to the instinct of the brute the intellect of man, and the genius of woman. I can understand that those little spiders, Mademoiselle de Belor, Mademoiselle de Trans, and others, after working so long at their webs without catching a fly, without so much as hearing a buzz, should be furious; I can even forgive their spiteful speeches. But that you, who can marry your daughter when you please, you, who are rich and titled, you who have nothing of the provincial about you, whose daughter is clever and possesses fine qualities, with beauty and the power to choose—that you, so distinguished from the rest by your Parisian grace, should have paid the least heed to this talk does really surprise me. Am I bound to account to the public for the marriage stipulations which our notaries think necessary under the political circumstances of my son-in-law's future life? Has the mania for public discussion made its way into families? Ought I to convoke in writing the fathers and mothers of the province to come here and give their vote on the clauses of our marriage contract?"

A torrent of epigram flowed over Bordeaux. Madame Evangelista was about to leave the city, and could safely scan her friends and enemies, caricature them and lash them as she pleased, with nothing to fear in return. Accordingly, she now gave vent to her secret observations and her latent dislikes as she sought for the reason why this or that person denied the shining of the sun at mid-day.

"But, my dear," said the Marquise de Gyas, "this stay of the count at Lanstrac, these parties given to young men under such circumstances—"

"Ah! my dear," said the great lady, interrupting the marquise, "do you suppose that we adopt the pettiness of bourgeois customs? Is Count Paul held in bonds like a man who might seek to get away? Think you we ought to watch him with a squad of gendarmes lest some provincial conspiracy should get him away from us?"

"Be assured, my dearest friend, that it gives me the greatest pleasure to—"

Here her words were interrupted by a footman who entered the room to announce Paul. Like many lovers, Paul thought it charming to ride twelve miles to spend an hour with Natalie. He had left his friends while hunting, and came in booted and spurred, and whip in hand.

"Dear Paul," said Natalie, "you don't know what an answer you are giving to madame."

When Paul heard of the gossip that was current in Bordeaux, he laughed instead of being angry.

"These worthy people have found out, perhaps, that there will be no wedding festivities, according to provincial usages, no marriage at mid-day in the church, and they are furious. Well, my dear mother," he added, kissing her hand, "let us pacify them with a ball on the day when we sign the contract, just as the government flings a fete to the people in the great square of the Champs-Elysees, and we will give our dear friends the dolorous pleasure of signing a marriage-contract such as they have seldom heard of in the provinces."

This little incident proved of great importance. Madame Evangelista invited all Bordeaux to witness the signature of the contract, and showed her intention of displaying in this last fete a luxury which should refute the foolish lies of the community.

The preparations for this event required over a month, and it was called the fete of the camellias. Immense quantities of that beautiful flower were massed on the staircase, and in the antechamber and supper-room. During this month the formalities for constituting the entail were concluded in Paris; the estates adjoining Lanstrac were purchased, the banns were published, and all doubts finally dissipated. Friends and enemies thought only of preparing their toilets for the coming fete.

The time occupied by these events obscured the difficulties raised by the first discussion, and swept into oblivion the words and arguments of that stormy conference. Neither Paul nor his mother-in-law continued to think of them. Were they not, after all, as Madame Evangelista had said, the affair of the two notaries?

But—to whom has it never happened, when life is in its fullest flow, to be suddenly changed by the voice of memory, raised, perhaps, too late, reminding us of some important new fact, some threatened danger? On the morning of the day when the contract was to be signed and the fete given, one of these flashes of the soul illuminated the mind of Madame Evangelista during the semi-somnolence of her waking hour. The words that she herself had uttered at

the moment when Mathias acceded to Solonet's conditions, "Questa coda non e di questo gatto," were cried aloud in her mind by that voice of memory. In spite of her incapacity for business, Madame Evangelista's shrewdness told her:—

"If so clever a notary as Mathias was pacified, it must have been that he saw compensation at the cost of some one."

That some one could not be Paul, as she had blindly hoped. Could it be that her daughter's fortune was to pay the costs of war? She resolved to demand explanations on the tenor of the contract, not reflecting on the course she would have to take in case she found her interests seriously compromised. This day had so powerful an influence on Paul de Manerville's conjugal life that it is necessary to explain certain of the external circumstances which accompanied it.

Madame Evangelista had shrunk from no expense for this dazzling fete. The court-yard was gravelled and converted into a tent, and filled with shrubs, although it was winter. The camellias, of which so much had been said from Angouleme to Dax, were banked on the staircase and in the vestibules. Wall partitions had disappeared to enlarge the supper-room and the ball-room where the dancing was to be. Bordeaux, a city famous for the luxury of colonial fortunes, was on a tiptoe of expectation for this scene of fairyland. About eight o'clock, as the last discussion of the contract was taking place within the house, the inquisitive populace, anxious to see the ladies in full dress getting out of their carriages, formed in two hedges on either side of the porte-cochere. Thus the sumptuous atmosphere of a fete acted upon all minds at the moment when the contract was being signed, illuminating colored lamps lighted up the shrubs, and the wheels of the arriving guests echoed from the court-yard. The two notaries had dined with the bridal pair and their mother. Mathias's head-clerk, whose business it was to receive the signatures of the guests during the evening (taking due care that the contract was not surreptitiously read by the signers), was also present at the dinner.

No bridal toilet was ever comparable with that of Natalie, whose beauty, decked with laces and satin, her hair coquettishly falling in a myriad of curls about her throat, resembled that of a flower encased in its foliage. Madame Evangelista, robed in a gown of cherry velvet, a color judiciously chosen to heighten the brilliancy of her skin and her black hair and eyes, glowed with the beauty of a woman at forty, and wore her pearl necklace, clasped with the "Discreto," a visible contradiction to the late calumnies.

To fully explain this scene, it is necessary to say that Paul and Natalie sat together on a sofa beside the fireplace and paid no attention to the reading of the documents. Equally childish and equally happy, regarding life as a

cloudless sky, rich, young, and loving, they chattered to each other in a low voice, sinking into whispers. Arming his love with the presence of legality, Paul took delight in kissing the tips of Natalie's fingers, in lightly touching her snowy shoulders and the waving curls of her hair, hiding from the eyes of others these joys of illegal emancipation. Natalie played with a screen of peacock's feathers given to her by Paul,—a gift which is to love, according to superstitious belief in certain countries, as dangerous an omen as the gift of scissors or other cutting instruments, which recall, no doubt, the Parces of antiquity.

Seated beside the two notaries, Madame Evangelista gave her closest attention to the reading of the documents. After listening to the guardianship account, most ably written out by Solonet, in which Natalie's share of the three million and more francs left by Monsieur Evangelista was shown to be the much-debated eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand, Madame Evangelista said to the heedless young couple:—

"Come, listen, listen, my children; this is your marriage contract."

The clerk drank a glass of iced-water, Solonet and Mathias blew their noses, Paul and Natalie looked at the four personages before them, listened to the preamble, and returned to their chatter. The statement of the property brought by each party; the general deed of gift in the event of death without issue; the deed of gift of one-fourth in life-interest and one-fourth in capital without interest, allowed by the Code, whatever be the number of the children; the constitution of a common fund for husband and wife; the settlement of the diamonds on the wife, the library and horses on the husband, were duly read and passed without observations. Then followed the constitution of the entail. When all was read and nothing remained but to sign the contract, Madame Evangelista demanded to know what would be the ultimate effect of the entail.

"An entail, madam," replied Solonet, "means an inalienable right to the inheritance of certain property belonging to both husband and wife, which is settled from generation to generation on the eldest son of the house, without, however, depriving him of his right to share in the division of the rest of the property."

"What will be the effect of this on my daughter's rights?"

Maitre Mathias, incapable of disguising the truth, replied:—

"Madame, an entail being an appanage, or portion of property set aside for this purpose from the fortunes of husband and wife, it follows that if the wife dies first, leaving several children, one of them a son, Monsieur de Manerville will owe those children three hundred and sixty thousand francs only, from which he will deduct his fourth in life-interest and his fourth in capital. Thus

his debt to those children will be reduced to one hundred and sixty thousand francs, or thereabouts, exclusive of his savings and profits from the common fund constituted for husband and wife. If, on the contrary, he dies first, leaving a male heir, Madame de Manerville has a right to three hundred and sixty thousand francs only, and to her deeds of gift of such of her husband's property as is not included in the entail, to the diamonds now settled upon her, and to her profits and savings from the common fund."

The effect of Maitre Mathias's astute and far-sighted policy were now plainly seen.

"My daughter is ruined," said Madame Evangelista in a low voice.

The old and the young notary both overheard the words.

"Is it ruin," replied Mathias, speaking gently, "to constitute for her family an indestructible fortune?"

The younger notary, seeing the expression of his client's face, thought it judicious in him to state the disaster in plain terms.

"We tried to trick them out of three hundred thousand francs," he whispered to the angry woman. "They have actually laid hold of eight hundred thousand; it is a loss of four hundred thousand from our interests for the benefit of the children. You must now either break the marriage off at once, or carry it through," concluded Solonet.

It is impossible to describe the moment of silence that followed. Maitre Mathias waited in triumph the signature of the two persons who had expected to rob his client. Natalie, not competent to understand that she had lost half her fortune, and Paul, ignorant that the house of Manerville had gained it, were laughing and chattering still. Solonet and Madame Evangelista gazed at each other; the one endeavoring to conceal his indifference, the other repressing the rush of a crowd of bitter feelings.

After suffering in her own mind the struggles of remorse, after blaming Paul as the cause of her dishonesty, Madame Evangelista had decided to employ those shameful manoeuvres to cast on him the burden of her own unfaithful guardianship, considering him her victim. But now, in a moment, she perceived that where she thought she triumphed she was about to perish, and her victim was her own daughter. Guilty without profit, she saw herself the dupe of an honorable old man, whose respect she had doubtless lost. Her secret conduct must have inspired the stipulation of old Mathias; and Mathias must have enlightened Paul. Horrible reflection! Even if he had not yet done so, as soon as that contract was signed the old wolf would surely warn his client of the dangers he had run and had now escaped, were it only to receive the praise of his sagacity. He would put him on his guard against the wily

woman who had lowered herself to this conspiracy; he would destroy the empire she had conquered over her son-in-law! Feeble natures, once warned, turn obstinate, and are never won again. At the first discussion of the contract she had reckoned on Paul's weakness, and on the impossibility he would feel of breaking off a marriage so far advanced. But now, she herself was far more tightly bound. Three months earlier Paul had no real obstacles to prevent the rupture; now, all Bordeaux knew that the notaries had smoothed the difficulties; the banns were published; the wedding was to take place immediately; the friends of both families were at that moment arriving for the fete, and to witness the contract. How could she postpone the marriage at this late hour? The cause of the rupture would surely be made known; Maitre Mathias's stern honor was too well known in Bordeaux; his word would be believed in preference to hers. The scoffers would turn against her and against her daughter. No, she could not break it off; she must yield!

These reflections, so cruelly sound, fell upon Madame Evangelista's brain like a water-spout and split it. Though she still maintained the dignity and reserve of a diplomatist, her chin was shaken by that apoplectic movement which showed the anger of Catherine the Second on the famous day when, seated on her throne and in presence of her court (very much in the present circumstances of Madame Evangelista), she was braved by the King of Sweden. Solonet observed that play of the muscles, which revealed the birth of a mortal hatred, a lurid storm to which there was no lightning. At this moment Madame Evangelista vowed to her son-in-law one of those unquenchable hatreds the seeds of which were left by the Moors in the atmosphere of Spain.

"Monsieur," she said, bending to the ear of her notary, "you called that stipulation balderdash; it seems to me that nothing could have been more clear."

"Madame, allow me—"

"Monsieur," she continued, paying no heed to his interruption, "if you did not perceive the effect of that entail at the time of our first conference, it is very extraordinary that it did not occur to you in the silence of your study. This can hardly be incapacity."

The young notary drew his client into the next room, saying to himself, as he did so:—

"I get a three-thousand franc fee for the guardianship account, three thousand for the contract, six thousand on the sale of the house, fifteen thousand in all—better not be angry."

He closed the door, cast on Madame Evangelista the cool look of a business man, and said:—

"Madame, having, for your sake, passed—as I did—the proper limits of legal craft, do you seriously intend to reward my devotion by such language?"

"But, monsieur—"

"Madame, I did not, it is true, calculate the effect of the deeds of gift. But if you do not wish Comte Paul for your son-in-law you are not obliged to accept him. The contract is not signed. Give your fete, and postpone the signing. It is far better to brave Bordeaux than sacrifice yourself."

"How can I justify such a course to society, which is already prejudiced against us by the slow conclusion of the marriage?"

"By some error committed in Paris; some missing document not sent with the rest," replied Solonet.

"But those purchases of land near Lanstrac?"

"Monsieur de Manerville will be at no loss to find another bride and another dowry."

"Yes, he'll lose nothing; but we lose all, all!"

"You?" replied Solonet; "why, you can easily find another count who will cost you less money, if a title is the chief object of this marriage."

"No, no! we can't stake our honor in that way. I am caught in a trap, monsieur. All Bordeaux will ring with this to-morrow. Our solemn words are pledged—"

"You wish the happiness of Mademoiselle Natalie."

"Above all things."

"To be happy in France," said the notary, "means being mistress of the home. She can lead that fool of a Manerville by the nose if she chooses; he is so dull he has actually seen nothing of all this. Even if he now distrusts you, he will always trust his wife; and his wife is YOU, is she not? The count's fate is still within your power if you choose to play the cards in your hand."

"If that were true, monsieur, I know not what I would not do to show my gratitude," she said, in a transport of feeling that colored her cheeks.

"Let us now return to the others, madame," said Solonet. "Listen carefully to what I shall say; and then—you shall think me incapable if you choose."

"My dear friend," said the young notary to Maitre Mathias, "in spite of your great ability, you have not foreseen either the case of Monsieur de Manerville dying without children, nor that in which he leaves only female issue. In either of those cases the entail would pass to the Manervilles, or, at any rate, give rise to suits on their part. I think, therefore, it is necessary to

stipulate that in the first case the entailed property shall pass under the general deed of gift between husband and wife; and in the second case that the entail shall be declared void. This agreement concerns the wife's interest."

"Both clauses seem to me perfectly just," said Maitre Mathias. "As to their ratification, Monsieur le comte can, doubtless, come to an understanding with the chancellor, if necessary."

Solonet took a pen and added this momentous clause on the margin of the contract. Paul and Natalie paid no attention to the matter; but Madame Evangelista dropped her eyes while Maitre Mathias read the added sentence aloud.

"We will now sign," said the mother.

The volume of voice which Madame Evangelista repressed as she uttered those words betrayed her violent emotion. She was thinking to herself: "No, my daughter shall not be ruined—but he! My daughter shall have the name, the title, and the fortune. If she should some day discover that she does not love him, that she loves another, irresistibly, Paul shall be driven out of France! My daughter shall be free, and happy, and rich."

If Maitre Mathias understood how to analyze business interests, he knew little of the analysis of human passions. He accepted Madame Evangelista's words as an honorable "amende," instead of judging them for what they were, a declaration of war. While Solonet and his clerk superintended Natalie as she signed the documents,—an operation which took time,—Mathias took Paul aside and told him the meaning of the stipulation by which he had saved him from ultimate pain.

"The whole affair is now 'en regle.' I hold the documents. But the contract contains a rescript for the diamonds; you must ask for them. Business is business. Diamonds are going up just now, but may go down. The purchase of those new domains justifies you in turning everything into money that you can. Therefore, Monsieur le comte, have no false modesty in this matter. The first payment is due after the formalities are over. The sum is two hundred thousand francs; put the diamonds into that. You have the lien on this house, which will be sold at once, and will pay the rest. If you have the courage to spend only fifty thousand francs for the next three years, you can save the two hundred thousand francs you are now obliged to pay. If you plant vineyards on your new estates, you can get an income of over twenty-five thousand francs upon them. You may be said, in short, to have made a good marriage."

Paul pressed the hand of his old friend very affectionately, a gesture which did not escape Madame Evangelista, who now came forward to offer him the pen. Suspicion became certainty to her mind. She was confident that Paul and

Mathias had come to an understanding about her. Rage and hatred sent the blood surging through her veins to her heart. The worst had come.

After verifying that all the documents were duly signed and the initials of the parties affixed to the bottom of the leaves, Maitre Mathias looked from Paul to his mother-in-law, and seeing that his client did not intend to speak of the diamonds, he said:—

"I do not suppose there can be any doubt about the transfer of the diamonds, as you are now one family."

"It would be more regular if Madame Evangelista made them over now, as Monsieur de Manerville has become responsible for the guardianship funds, and we never know who may live or die," said Solonet, who thought he saw in this circumstance fresh cause of anger in the mother-in-law against the son-in-law.

"Ah! mother," cried Paul, "it would be insulting to us all to do that, —'Summum jus, summum injuria,' monsieur," he said to Solonet.

"And I," said Madame Evangelista, led by the hatred now surging in her heart to see a direct insult to her in the indirect appeal of Maitre Mathias, "I will tear that contract up if you do not take them."

She left the room in one of those furious passions which long for the power to destroy everything, and which the sense of impotence drives almost to madness.

"For Heaven's sake, take them, Paul," whispered Natalie in his ear. "My mother is angry; I shall know why to-night, and I will tell you. We must pacify her."

Calmed by this first outburst, madame kept the necklace and ear-rings, which she was wearing, and brought the other jewels, valued at one hundred and fifty thousand francs by Elie Magus. Accustomed to the sight of family diamonds in all valuations of inheritance, Maitre Mathias and Solonet examined these jewels in their cases and exclaimed upon their duty.

"You will lose nothing, after all, upon the 'dot,' Monsieur le comte," said Solonet, bringing the color to Paul's face.

"Yes," said Mathias, "these jewels will meet the first payment on the purchase of the new estate."

"And the costs of the contract," added Solonet.

Hatred feeds, like love, on little things; the least thing strengthens it; as one beloved can do no evil, so the person hated can do no good. Madame Evangelista assigned to hypocrisy the natural embarrassment of Paul, who was

unwilling to take the jewels, and not knowing where to put the cases, longed to fling them from the window. Madame Evangelista spurred him with a glance which seemed to say, "Take your property from here."

"Dear Natalie," said Paul, "put away these jewels; they are yours; I give them to you."

Natalie locked them into the drawer of a console. At this instant the noise of the carriages in the court-yard and the murmur of voices in the receptions-rooms became so loud that Natalie and her mother were forced to appear. The salons were filled in a few moments, and the fete began.

"Profit by the honeymoon to sell those diamonds," said the old notary to Paul as he went away.

While waiting for the dancing to begin, whispers went round about the marriage, and doubts were expressed as to the future of the promised couple.

"Is it finally arranged?" said one of the leading personages of the town to Madame Evangelista.

"We had so many documents to read and sign that I fear we are rather late," she replied; "but perhaps we are excusable."

"As for me, I heard nothing," said Natalie, giving her hand to her lover to open the ball.

"Both of those young persons are extravagant, and the mother is not of a kind to check them," said a dowager.

"But they have founded an entail, I am told, worth fifty thousand francs a year."

"Pooh!"

"In that I see the hand of our worthy Monsieur Mathias," said a magistrate. "If it is really true, he has done it to save the future of the family."

"Natalie is too handsome not to be horribly coquettish. After a couple of years of marriage," said one young woman, "I wouldn't answer for Monsieur de Manerville's happiness in his home."

"The Pink of Fashion will then need staking," said Solonet, laughing.

"Don't you think Madame Evangelista looks annoyed?" asked another.

"But, my dear, I have just been told that all she is able to keep is twenty-five thousand francs a year, and what is that to her?"

"Penury!"

"Yes, she has robbed herself for Natalie. Monsieur de Manerville has been

so exacting—"

"Extremely exacting," put in Maitre Solonet. "But before long he will be peer of France. The Maulincours and the Vidame de Pamiers will use their influence. He belongs to the faubourg Saint-Germain."

"Oh! he is received there, and that is all," said a lady, who had tried to obtain him as a son-in-law. "Mademoiselle Evangelista, as the daughter of a merchant, will certainly not open the doors of the chapter-house of Cologne to him!"

"She is grand-niece to the Duke of Casa-Reale."

"Through the female line!"

The topic was presently exhausted. The card-players went to the tables, the young people danced, the supper was served, and the ball was not over till morning, when the first gleams of the coming day whitened the windows.

Having said adieu to Paul, who was the last to go away, Madame Evangelista went to her daughter's room; for her own had been taken by the architect to enlarge the scene of the fete. Though Natalie and her mother were overcome with sleep, they said a few words to each other as soon as they were alone.

"Tell me, mother dear, what was the matter with you?"

"My darling, I learned this evening to what lengths a mother's tenderness can go. You know nothing of business, and you are ignorant of the suspicions to which my integrity has been exposed. I have trampled my pride under foot, for your happiness and my reputation were at stake."

"Are you talking of the diamonds? Poor boy, he wept; he did not want them; I have them."

"Sleep now, my child. We will talk business when we wake—for," she added, sighing, "you and I have business now; another person has come between us."

"Ah! my dear mother, Paul will never be an obstacle to our happiness, yours and mine," murmured Natalie, as she went to sleep.

"Poor darling! she little knows that the man has ruined her."

Madame Evangelista's soul was seized at that moment with the first idea of avarice, a vice to which many become a prey as they grow aged. It came into her mind to recover in her daughter's interest the whole of the property left by her husband. She told herself that her honor demanded it. Her devotion to Natalie made her, in a moment, as shrewd and calculating as she had hitherto been careless and wasteful. She resolved to turn her capital to account, after

investing a part of it in the Funds, which were then selling at eighty francs. A passion often changes the whole character in a moment; an indiscreet person becomes a diplomatist, a coward is suddenly brave. Hate made this prodigal woman a miser. Chance and luck might serve the project of vengeance, still undefined and confused, which she would now mature in her mind. She fell asleep, muttering to herself, "To-morrow!" By an unexplained phenomenon, the effects of which are familiar to all thinkers, her mind, during sleep, marshalled its ideas, enlightened them, classed them, prepared a means by which she was to rule Paul's life, and showed her a plan which she began to carry out on that very to-morrow.

CHAPTER V. THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT—THIRD DAY

Though the excitement of the fete had driven from Paul's mind the anxious thoughts that now and then assailed it, when he was alone with himself and in his bed they returned to torment him.

"It seems to me," he said to himself, "that without that good Mathias my mother-in-law would have tricked me. And yet, is that believable? What interest could lead her to deceive me? Are we not to join fortunes and live together? Well, well, why should I worry about it? In two days Natalie will be my wife, our money relations are plainly defined, nothing can come between us. Vogue la galere—Nevertheless, I'll be upon my guard. Suppose Mathias was right? Well, if he was, I'm not obliged to marry my mother-in-law."

In this second battle of the contract Paul's future had completely changed in aspect, though he was not aware of it. Of the two persons whom he was marrying, one, the cleverest, was now his mortal enemy, and meditated already withdrawing her interests from the common fund. Incapable of observing the difference that a Creole nature placed between his mother-in-law and other women, Paul was far from suspecting her craftiness. The Creole nature is apart from all others; it derives from Europe by its intellect, from the tropics by the illogical violence of its passions, from the East by the apathetic indifference with which it does, or suffers, either good or evil, equally,—a graceful nature withal, but dangerous, as a child is dangerous if not watched. Like a child, the Creole woman must have her way immediately; like a child, she would burn a house to boil an egg. In her soft and easy life she takes no care upon her mind; but when impassioned, she thinks of all things. She has something of the perfidy of the Negroes by whom she has been surrounded from her cradle, but she is also as naive and even, at times, as artless as they. Like them and like the children, she wishes doggedly for one thing with a

growing intensity of desire, and will brood upon that idea until she hatches it. A strange assemblage of virtues and defects! which her Spanish nature had strengthened in Madame Evangelista, and over which her French experience had cast the glaze of its politeness.

This character, slumbering in married happiness for sixteen years, occupied since then with the trivialities of social life, this nature to which a first hatred had revealed its strength, awoke now like a conflagration; at the moment of the woman's life when she was losing the dearest object of her affections and needed another element for the energy that possessed her, this flame burst forth. Natalie could be but three days more beneath her influence! Madame Evangelista, vanquished at other points, had one clear day before her, the last of those that a daughter spends beside her mother. A few words, and the Creole nature could influence the lives of the two beings about to walk together through the brambled paths and the dusty high-roads of Parisian society, for Natalie believed in her mother blindly. What far-reaching power would the counsel of that Creole nature have on a mind so subservient! The whole future of these lives might be determined by one single speech. No code, no human institution can prevent the crime that kills by words. There lies the weakness of social law; in that is the difference between the morals of the great world and the morals of the people: one is frank, the other hypocritical; one employs the knife, the other the venom of ideas and language; to one death, to the other impunity.

The next morning, about mid-day, Madame Evangelista was half seated, half lying on the edge of her daughter's bed. During that waking hour they caressed and played together in happy memory of their loving life; a life in which no discord had ever troubled either the harmony of their feelings, the agreement of their ideas, or the mutual choice and enjoyment of their pleasures.

"Poor little darling!" said the mother, shedding true tears, "how can I help being sorrowful when I think that after I have fulfilled your every wish during your whole life you will belong, to-morrow night, to a man you must obey?"

"Oh, my dear mother, as for obeying!—" and Natalie made a little motion of her head which expressed a graceful rebellion. "You are joking," she continued. "My father always gratified your caprices; and why not? he loved you. And I am loved, too."

"Yes, Paul has a certain love for you. But if a married woman is not careful nothing more rapidly evaporates than conjugal love. The influence a wife ought to have over her husband depends entirely on how she begins with him. You need the best advice."

"But you will be with us."

"Possibly, my child. Last night, while the ball was going on, I reflected on the dangers of our being together. If my presence were to do you harm, if the little acts by which you ought slowly, but surely, to establish your authority as a wife should be attributed to my influence, your home would become a hell. At the first frown I saw upon your husband's brow I, proud as I am, should instantly leave his house. If I were driven to leave it, better, I think, not to enter it. I should never forgive your husband if he caused trouble between us. Whereas, when you have once become the mistress, when your husband is to you what your father was to me, that danger is no longer to be feared. Though this wise policy will cost your young and tender heart a pang, your happiness demands that you become the absolute sovereign of your home."

"Then why, mamma, did you say just now I must obey him?"

"My dear little daughter, in order that a wife may rule, she must always seem to do what her husband wishes. If you were not told this you might by some impulsive opposition destroy your future. Paul is a weak young man; he might allow a friend to rule him; he might even fall under the dominion of some woman who would make you feel her influence. Prevent such disasters by making yourself from the very start his ruler. Is it not better that he be governed by you than by others?"

"Yes, certainly," said Natalie. "I should think only of his happiness."

"And it is my privilege, darling, to think only of yours, and to wish not to leave you at so crucial a moment without a compass in the midst of the reefs through which you must steer."

"But, dearest mother, are we not strong enough, you and I, to stay together beside him, without having to fear those frowns you seem to dread. Paul loves you, mamma."

"Oh! oh! He fears me more than he loves me. Observe him carefully to-day when I tell him that I shall let you go to Paris without me, and you will see on his face, no matter what pains he takes to conceal it, his inward joy."

"Why should he feel so?"

"Why? Dear child! I am like Saint-Jean Bouche-d'Or. I will tell that to himself, and before you."

"But suppose I marry on condition that you do not leave me?" urged Natalie.

"Our separation is necessary," replied her mother. "Several considerations have greatly changed my future. I am now poor. You will lead a brilliant life in Paris, and I could not live with you suitably without spending the little that remains to me. Whereas, if I go to Lanstrac, I can take care of your property

there and restore my fortune by economy."

"You, mamma! You practise economy!" cried Natalie, laughing. "Don't begin to be a grandmother yet. What! do you mean to leave me for such reasons as those? Dear mother, Paul may seem to you a trifle stupid, but he is not one atom selfish or grasping."

"Ah!" replied Madame Evangelista, in a tone of voice big with suggestions which made the girl's heart throb, "those discussions about the contract have made me distrustful. I have my doubts about him—But don't be troubled, dear child," she added, taking her daughter by the neck and kissing her. "I will not leave you long alone. Whenever my return can take place without making difficulty between you, whenever Paul can rightly judge me, we will begin once more our happy little life, our evening confidences—"

"Oh! mother, how can you think of living without your Natalie?"

"Because, dear angel, I shall live for her. My mother's heart will be satisfied in the thought that I contribute, as I ought, to your future happiness."

"But, my dear, adorable mother, must I be alone with Paul, here, now, all at once? What will become of me? what will happen? what must I do? what must I not do?"

"Poor child! do you think that I would utterly abandon you to your first battle? We will write to each other three times a week like lovers. We shall thus be close to each other's hearts incessantly. Nothing can happen to you that I shall not know, and I can save you from all misfortune. Besides, it would be too ridiculous if I never went to see you; it would seem to show dislike or disrespect to your husband; I will always spend a month or two every year with you in Paris."

"Alone, already alone, and with him!" cried Natalie in terror, interrupting her mother.

"But you wish to be his wife?"

"Yes, I wish it. But tell me how I should behave,—you, who did what you pleased with my father. You know the way; I'll obey you blindly."

Madame Evangelista kissed her daughter's forehead. She had willed and awaited this request.

"Child, my counsels must adept themselves to circumstances. All men are not alike. The lion and the frog are not more unlike than one man compared with another,—morally, I mean. Do I know to-day what will happen to you to-morrow? No; therefore I can only give you general advice upon the whole tenor of your conduct."

"Dear mother, tell me, quick, all that you know yourself."

"In the first place, my dear child, the cause of the failure of married women who desire to keep their husbands' hearts—and," she said, making a parenthesis, "to keep their hearts and rule them is one and the same thing—Well, the principle cause of conjugal disunion is to be found in perpetual intercourse, which never existed in the olden time, but which has been introduced into this country of late years with the mania for family. Since the Revolution the manners and customs of the bourgeois have invaded the homes of the aristocracy. This misfortune is due to one of their writers, Rousseau, an infamous heretic, whose ideas were all anti-social and who pretended, I don't know how, to justify the most senseless things. He declared that all women had the same rights and the same faculties; that living in a state of society we ought, nevertheless, to obey nature—as if the wife of a Spanish grandee, as if you or I had anything in common with the women of the people! Since then, well-bred women have suckled their children, have educated their daughters, and stayed in their own homes. Life has become so involved that happiness is almost impossible,—for a perfect harmony between natures such as that which has made you and me live as two friends is an exception. Perpetual contact is as dangerous for parents and children as it is for husband and wife. There are few souls in which love survives this fatal omnipresence. Therefore, I say, erect between yourself and Paul the barriers of society; go to balls and operas; go out in the morning, dine out in the evenings, pay visits constantly, and grant but little of your time to your husband. By this means you will always keep your value to him. When two beings bound together for life have nothing to live upon but sentiment, its resources are soon exhausted, indifference, satiety, and disgust succeed. When sentiment has withered what will become of you? Remember, affection once extinguished can lead to nothing but indifference or contempt. Be ever young and ever new to him. He may weary you,—that often happens,—but you must never weary him. The faculty of being bored without showing it is a condition of all species of power. You cannot diversify happiness by the cares of property or the occupations of a family. If you do not make your husband share your social interests, if you do not keep him amused you will fall into a dismal apathy. Then begins the SPLEEN of love. But a man will always love the woman who amuses him and keeps him happy. To give happiness and to receive it are two lines of feminine conduct which are separated by a gulf."

"Dear mother, I am listening to you, but I don't understand one word you say."

"If you love Paul to the extent of doing all he asks of you, if you make your happiness depend on him, all is over with your future life; you will never be mistress of your home, and the best precepts in the world will do you no

good."

"That is plainer; but I see the rule without knowing how to apply it," said Natalie, laughing. "I have the theory; the practice will come."

"My poor Ninie," replied the mother, who dropped an honest tear at the thought of her daughter's marriage, "things will happen to teach it to you—And," she continued, after a pause, during which the mother and daughter held each other closely embraced in the truest sympathy, "remember this, my Natalie: we all have our destiny as women, just as men have their vocation as men. A woman is born to be a woman of the world and a charming hostess, as a man is born to be a general or a poet. Your vocation is to please. Your education has formed you for society. In these days women should be educated for the salon as they once were for the gynoecium. You were not born to be the mother of a family or the steward of a household. If you have children, I hope they will not come to spoil your figure on the morrow of your marriage; nothing is so bourgeois as to have a child at once. If you have them two or three years after your marriage, well and good; governesses and tutors will bring them up. YOU are to be the lady, the great lady, who represents the luxury and the pleasure of the house. But remember one thing—let your superiority be visible in those things only which flatter a man's self-love; hide the superiority you must also acquire over him in great things."

"But you frighten me, mamma," cried Natalie. "How can I remember all these precepts? How shall I ever manage, I, such a child, and so heedless, to reflect and calculate before I act?"

"But, my dear little girl, I am telling you to-day that which you must surely learn later, buying your experience by fatal faults and errors of conduct which will cause you bitter regrets and embarrass your whole life."

"But how must I begin?" asked Natalie, artlessly.

"Instinct will guide you," replied her mother. "At this moment Paul desires you more than he loves you; for love born of desires is a hope; the love that succeeds their satisfaction is the reality. There, my dear, is the question; there lies your power. What woman is not loved before marriage? Be so on the morrow and you shall remain so always. Paul is a weak man who is easily trained to habit. If he yields to you once he will yield always. A woman ardently desired can ask all things; do not commit the folly of many women who do not see the importance of the first hours of their sway,—that of wasting your power on trifles, on silly things with no result. Use the empire your husband's first emotions give you to accustom him to obedience. And when you make him yield, choose that it be on some unreasonable point, so as to test the measure of your power by the measure of his concession. What victory would there be in making him agree to a reasonable thing? Would that

be obeying you? We must always, as the Castilian proverb says, take the bull by the horns; when a bull has once seen the inutility of his defence and of his strength he is beaten. When your husband does a foolish thing for you, you can govern him."

"Why so?"

"Because, my child, marriage lasts a lifetime, and a husband is not a man like other men. Therefore, never commit the folly of giving yourself into his power in everything. Keep up a constant reserve in your speech and in your actions. You may even be cold to him without danger, for you can modify coldness at will. Besides, nothing is more easy to maintain than our dignity. The words, 'It is not becoming in your wife to do thus and so,' is a great talisman. The life of a woman lies in the words, 'I will not.' They are the final argument. Feminine power is in them, and therefore they should only be used on real occasions. But they constitute a means of governing far beyond that of argument or discussion. I, my dear child, reigned over your father by his faith in me. If your husband believes in you, you can do all things with him. To inspire that belief you must make him think that you understand him. Do not suppose that that is an easy thing to do. A woman can always make a man think that he is loved, but to make him admit that he is understood is far more difficult. I am bound to tell you all now, my child, for to-morrow life with its complications, life with two wills which must be made one, begins for you. Bear in mind, at all moments, that difficulty. The only means of harmonizing your two wills is to arrange from the first that there shall be but one; and that will must be yours. Many persons declare that a wife creates her own unhappiness by changing sides in this way; but, my dear, she can only become the mistress by controlling events instead of bearing them; and that advantage compensates for any difficulty."

Natalie kissed her mother's hands with tears of gratitude. Like all women in whom mental emotion is never warmed by physical emotion, she suddenly comprehended the bearings of this feminine policy; but, like a spoiled child that never admits the force of reason and returns obstinately to its one desire, she came back to the charge with one of those personal arguments which the logic of a child suggests:—

"Dear mamma," she said, "it is only a few days since you were talking of Paul's advancement, and saying that you alone could promote it; why, then, do you suddenly turn round and abandon us to ourselves?"

"I did not then know the extent of my obligations nor the amount of my debts," replied the mother, who would not suffer her real motive to be seen. "Besides, a year or two hence I can take up that matter again. Come, let us dress; Paul will be here soon. Be as sweet and caressing as you were,—you

know?—that night when we first discussed this fatal contract; for to-day we must save the last fragments of our fortune, and I must win for you a thing to which I am superstitiously attached."

"What is it?"

"The 'Discreto.'"

Paul arrived about four o'clock. Though he endeavored to meet his mother-in-law with a gracious look upon his face, Madame Evangelista saw traces of the clouds which the counsels of the night and the reflections of the morning had brought there.

"Mathias has told him!" she thought, resolving to defeat the old notary's action. "My dear son," she said, "you left your diamonds in the drawer of the console, and I frankly confess that I would rather not see again the things that threatened to bring a cloud between us. Besides, as Monsieur Mathias said, they ought to be sold at once to meet the first payment on the estates you have purchased."

"They are not mine," he said. "I have given them to Natalie, and when you see them upon her you will forget the pain they caused you."

Madame Evangelista took his hand and pressed it cordially, with a tear of emotion.

"Listen to me, my dear children," she said, looking from Paul to Natalie; "since you really feel thus, I have a proposition to make to both of you. I find myself obliged to sell my pearl necklace and my earrings. Yes, Paul, it is necessary; I do not choose to put a penny of my fortune into an annuity; I know what I owe to you. Well, I admit a weakness; to sell the 'Discreto' seems to me a disaster. To sell a diamond which bears the name of Philip the Second and once adorned his royal hand, an historic stone which the Duke of Alba touched for ten years in the hilt of his sword—no, no, I cannot! Elie Magus estimates my necklace and ear-rings at a hundred and some odd thousand francs without the clasps. Will you exchange the other jewels I made over to you for these? you will gain by the transaction, but what of that? I am not selfish. Instead of those mere fancy jewels, Paul, your wife will have fine diamonds which she can really enjoy. Isn't it better that I should sell those ornaments which will surely go out of fashion, and that you should keep in the family these priceless stones?"

"But, my dear mother, consider yourself," said Paul.

"I," replied Madame Evangelista, "I want such things no longer. Yes, Paul, I am going to be your bailiff at Lanstrac. It would be folly in me to go to Paris at the moment when I ought to be here to liquidate my property and settle my

affairs. I shall grow miserly for my grandchildren."

"Dear mother," said Paul, much moved, "ought I to accept this exchange without paying you the difference?"

"Good heavens! are you not, both of you, my dearest interests? Do you suppose I shall not find happiness in thinking, as I sit in my chimney-corner, 'Natalie is dazzling to-night at the Duchesse de Berry's ball'? When she sees my diamond at her throat and my ear-rings in her ears she will have one of those little enjoyments of vanity which contribute so much to a woman's happiness and make her so gay and fascinating. Nothing saddens a woman more than to have her vanity repressed; I have never seen an ill-dressed woman who was amiable or good-humored."

"Heavens! what was Mathias thinking about?" thought Paul. "Well, then, mamma," he said, in a low voice, "I accept."

"But I am confounded!" said Natalie.

At this moment Solonet arrived to announce the good news that he had found among the speculators of Bordeaux two contractors who were much attracted by the house, the gardens of which could be covered with dwellings.

"They offer two hundred and fifty thousand francs," he said; "but if you consent to the sale, I can make them give you three hundred thousand. There are three acres of land in the garden."

"My husband paid two hundred thousand for the place, therefore I consent," she replied. "But you must reserve the furniture and the mirrors."

"Ah!" said Solonet, "you are beginning to understand business."

"Alas! I must," she said, sighing.

"I am told that a great many persons are coming to your midnight service," said Solonet, perceiving that his presence was inopportune, and preparing to go.

Madame Evangelista accompanied him to the door of the last salon, and there she said, in a low voice:—

"I now have personal property to the amount of two hundred and fifty thousand francs; if I can get two hundred thousand for my share of the house it will make a handsome capital, which I shall want to invest to the very best advantage. I count on you for that. I shall probably live at Lanstrac."

The young notary kissed his client's hand with a gesture of gratitude; for the widow's tone of voice made Solonet fancy that this alliance, really made from self-interest only, might extend a little farther.

"You can count on me," he replied. "I can find you investments in merchandise on which you will risk nothing and make very considerable profits."

"Adieu until to-morrow," she said; "you are to be our witness, you know, with Monsieur le Marquis de Gyas."

"My dear mother," said Paul, when she returned to them, "why do you refuse to come to Paris? Natalie is provoked with me, as if I were the cause of your decision."

"I have thought it all over, my children, and I am sure that I should hamper you. You would feel obliged to make me a third in all you did, and young people have ideas of their own which I might, unintentionally, thwart. Go to Paris. I do not wish to exercise over the Comtesse de Manerville the gentle authority I have held over Natalie. I desire to leave her wholly to you. Don't you see, Paul, that there are habits and ways between us which must be broken up? My influence ought to yield to yours. I want you to love me, and to believe that I have your interests more at heart than you think for. Young husbands are, sooner or later, jealous for the love of a wife for her mother. Perhaps they are right. When you are thoroughly united, when love has blended your two souls into one, then, my dear son, you will not fear an opposing influence if I live in your house. I know the world, and men, and things; I have seen the peace of many a home destroyed by the blind love of mothers who made themselves in the end as intolerable to their daughters as to their sons-in-law. The affection of old people is often exacting and querulous. Perhaps I could not efface myself as I should. I have the weakness to think myself still handsome; I have flatterers who declare that I am still agreeable; I should have, I fear, certain pretensions which might interfere with your lives. Let me, therefore, make one more sacrifice for your happiness. I have given you my fortune, and now I desire to resign to you my last vanities as a woman. Your notary Mathias is getting old. He cannot look after your estates as I will. I will be your bailiff; I will create for myself those natural occupations which are the pleasures of old age. Later, if necessary, I will come to you in Paris, and second you in your projects of ambition. Come, Paul, be frank; my proposal suits you, does it not?"

Paul would not admit it, but he was at heart delighted to get his liberty. The suspicions which Mathias had put into his mind respecting his mother-in-law were, however, dissipated by this conversation, which Madame Evangelista carried on still longer in the same tone.

"My mother was right," thought Natalie, who had watched Paul's countenance. "He is glad to know that I am separated from her—why?"

That "why" was the first note of a rising distrust; did it prove the power of

those maternal instructions?

There are certain characters which on the faith of a single proof believe in friendship. To persons thus constituted the north wind drives away the clouds as rapidly as the south wind brings them; they stop at effects and never hark back to causes. Paul had one of those essentially confiding natures, without ill-feelings, but also without foresight. His weakness proceeded far more from his kindness, his belief in goodness, than from actual debility of soul.

Natalie was sad and thoughtful, for she knew not what to do without her mother. Paul, with that self-confident conceit which comes of love, smiled to himself at her sadness, thinking how soon the pleasures of marriage and the excitements of Paris would drive it away. Madame Evangelista saw this confidence with much satisfaction. She had already taken two great steps. Her daughter possessed the diamonds which had cost Paul two hundred thousand francs; and she had gained her point of leaving these two children to themselves with no other guide than their illogical love. Her revenge was thus preparing, unknown to her daughter, who would, sooner or later, become its accomplice. Did Natalie love Paul? That was a question still undecided, the answer to which might modify her projects, for she loved her daughter too sincerely not to respect her happiness. Paul's future, therefore, still depended on himself. If he could make his wife love him, he was saved.

The next day, at midnight, after an evening spent together, with the addition of the four witnesses, to whom Madame Evangelista gave the formal dinner which follows the legal marriage, the bridal pair, accompanied by their friends, heard mass by torchlight, in presence of a crowd of inquisitive persons. A marriage celebrated at night always suggests to the mind an unpleasant omen. Light is the symbol of life and pleasure, the forecasts of which are lacking to a midnight wedding. Ask the intrepid soul why it shivers; why the chill of those black arches enervates it; why the sound of steps startles it; why it notices the cry of bats and the hoot of owls. Though there is absolutely no reason to tremble, all present do tremble, and the darkness, emblem of death, saddens them. Natalie, parted from her mother, wept. The girl was now a prey to those doubts which grasp the heart as it enters a new career in which, despite all assurances of happiness, a thousand pitfalls await the steps of a young wife. She was cold and wanted a mantle. The air and manner of Madame Evangelista and that of the bridal pair excited some comment among the elegant crowd which surrounded the altar.

"Solonet tells me that the bride and bridegroom leave for Paris to-morrow morning, all alone."

"Madame Evangelista was to live with them, I thought."

"Count Paul has got rid of her already."

"What a mistake!" said the Marquise de Gyas. "To shut the door on the mother of his wife is to open it to a lover. Doesn't he know what a mother is?"

"He has been very hard on Madame Evangelista; the poor woman has had to sell her house and her diamonds, and is going to live at Lanstrac."

"Natalie looks very sad."

"Would you like to be made to take a journey the day after your marriage?"

"It is very awkward."

"I am glad I came here to-night," said a lady. "I am now convinced of the necessity of the pomps of marriage and of wedding fetes; a scene like this is very bare and sad. If I may say what I think," she added, in a whisper to her neighbor, "this marriage seems to me indecent."

Madame Evangelista took Natalie in her carriage and accompanied her, alone, to Paul's house.

"Well, mother, it is done!"

"Remember, my dear child, my last advice, and you will be a happy woman. Be his wife, and not his mistress."

When Natalie had retired, the mother played the little comedy of flinging herself with tears into the arms of her son-in-law. It was the only provincial thing that Madame Evangelista allowed herself, but she had her reasons for it. Amid tears and speeches, apparently half wild and despairing, she obtained of Paul those concessions which all husbands make.

The next day she put the married pair into their carriage, and accompanied them to the ferry, by which the road to Paris crosses the Gironde. With a look and a word Natalie enabled her mother to see that if Paul had won the trick in the game of the contract, her revenge was beginning. Natalie was already reducing her husband to perfect obedience.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

Five years later, on an afternoon in the month of November, Comte Paul de Manerville, wrapped in a cloak, was entering, with a bowed head and a mysterious manner, the house of his old friend Monsieur Mathias at Bordeaux.

Too old to continue in business, the worthy notary had sold his practice and was ending his days peacefully in a quiet house to which he had retired. An urgent affair had obliged him to be absent at the moment of his guest's

arrival, but his housekeeper, warned of Paul's coming, took him to the room of the late Madame Mathias, who had been dead a year. Fatigued by a rapid journey, Paul slept till evening. When the old man reached home he went up to his client's room, and watched him sleeping, as a mother watches her child. Josette, the old housekeeper, followed her master and stood before the bed, her hands on her hips.

"It is a year to-day, Josette, since I received my dear wife's last sigh; I little knew then that I should stand here again to see the count half dead."

"Poor man! he moans in his sleep," said Josette.

"Sac a papier!" cried the old notary, an innocent oath which was a sign with him of the despair on a man of business before insurmountable difficulties. "At any rate," he thought, "I have saved the title to the Lanstrac estate for him, and that of Ausac, Saint-Froult, and his house, though the usufruct has gone." Mathias counted his fingers. "Five years! Just five years this month, since his old aunt, now dead, that excellent Madame de Maulincour, asked for the hand of that little crocodile of a woman, who has finally ruined him—as I expected."

And the gouty old gentleman, leaning on his cane, went to walk in the little garden till his guest should awake. At nine o'clock supper was served, for Mathias took supper. The old man was not a little astonished, when Paul joined him, to see that his old client's brow was calm and his face serene, though noticeably changed. If at the age of thirty-three the Comte de Manerville seemed to be a man of forty, that change in his appearance was due solely to mental shocks; physically, he was well. He clasped the old man's hand affectionately, and forced him not to rise, saying:—

"Dear, kind Maitre Mathias, you, too, have had your troubles."

"Mine were natural troubles, Monsieur le comte; but yours—"

"We will talk of that presently, while we sup."

"If I had not a son in the magistracy, and a daughter married," said the good old man, "you would have found in old Mathias, believe me, Monsieur le comte, something better than mere hospitality. Why have you come to Bordeaux at the very moment when posters are on all the walls of the seizure of your farms at Grassol and Guadet, the vineyard of Belle-Rose and the family mansion? I cannot tell you the grief I feel at the sight of those placards, —I, who for forty years nursed that property as if it belonged to me; I, who bought it for your mother when I was only third clerk to Monsieur Chesnau, my predecessor, and wrote the deeds myself in my best round hand; I, who have those titles now in my successor's office; I, who have known you since you were so high"; and the old man stopped to put his hand near the ground.

"Ah! a man must have been a notary for forty-one years and a half to know the sort of grief I feel to see my name exposed before the face of Israel in those announcements of the seizure and sale of the property. When I pass through the streets and see men reading these horrible yellow posters, I am ashamed, as if my own honor and ruin were concerned. Some fools will stand there and read them aloud expressly to draw other fools about them—and what imbecile remarks they make! As if a man were not master of his own property! Your father ran through two fortunes before he made the one he left you; and you wouldn't be a Manerville if you didn't do likewise. Besides, seizures of real estate have a whole section of the Code to themselves; they are expected and provided for; you are in a position recognized by the law.—If I were not an old man with white hair, I would thrash those fools I hear reading aloud in the streets such an abomination as this," added the worthy notary, taking up a paper; "'At the request of Dame Natalie Evangelista, wife of Paul-Francois-Joseph, Comte de Manerville, separated from him as to worldly goods and chattels by the Lower court of the department of the Seine—'"

"Yes, and now separated in body," said Paul.

"Ah!" exclaimed the old man.

"Oh! against my wife's will," added the count, hastily. "I was forced to deceive her; she did not know that I was leaving her."

"You have left her?"

"My passage is taken; I sail for Calcutta on the 'Belle-Amelie.'"

"Two day's hence!" cried the notary. "Then, Monsieur le comte, we shall never meet again."

"You are only seventy-three, my dear Mathias, and you have the gout, the brevet of old age. When I return I shall find you still afoot. Your good head and heart will be as sound as ever, and you will help me to reconstruct what is now a shaken edifice. I intend to make a noble fortune in seven years. I shall be only forty on my return. All is still possible at that age."

"You?" said Mathias, with a gesture of amazement,—you, Monsieur le comte, to undertake commerce! How can you even think of it?"

"I am no longer Monsieur le comte, dear Mathias. My passage is taken under the name of Camille, one of my mother's baptismal names. I have acquirements which will enable me to make my fortune otherwise than in business. Commerce, at any rate, will be only my final chance. I start with a sum in hand sufficient for the redemption of my future on a large scale."

"Where is that money?"

"A friend is to send it to me."

The old man dropped his fork as he heard the word "friend," not in surprise, not scoffingly, but in grief; his look and manner expressed the pain he felt in finding Paul under the influence of a deceitful illusion; his practised eye fathomed a gulf where the count saw nothing but solid ground.

"I have been fifty years in the notariat," he said, "and I never yet knew a ruined man whose friend would lend him money."

"You don't know de Marsay. I am certain that he has sold out some of his investments already, and to-morrow you will receive from him a bill of exchange for one hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"I hope I may. If that be so, cannot your friend settle your difficulties here? You could live quietly at Lanstrac for five or six years on your wife's income, and so recover yourself."

"No assignment or economy on my part could pay off fifteen hundred thousand francs of debt, in which my wife is involved to the amount of five hundred and fifty thousand."

"You cannot mean to say that in four years you have incurred a million and a half of debt?"

"Nothing is more certain, Mathias. Did I not give those diamonds to my wife? Did I not spend the hundred and fifty thousand I received from the sale of Madame Evangelista's house, in the arrangement of my house in Paris? Was I not forced to use other money for the first payments on that property demanded by the marriage contract? I was even forced to sell out Natalie's forty thousand a year in the Funds to complete the purchase of Auzac and Saint-Froult. We sold at eighty-seven, therefore I became in debt for over two hundred thousand francs within a month after my marriage. That left us only sixty-seven thousand francs a year; but we spent fully three times as much every year. Add all that up, together with rates of interest to usurers, and you will soon find a million."

"Br-r-r!" exclaimed the old notary. "Go on. What next?"

"Well, I wanted, in the first place, to complete for my wife that set of jewels of which she had the pearl necklace clasped by the family diamond, the 'Discreto,' and her mother's ear-rings. I paid a hundred thousand francs for a coronet of diamond wheat-ears. There's eleven hundred thousand. And now I find I owe the fortune of my wife, which amounts to three hundred and sixty-six thousand francs of her 'dot.'"

"But," said Mathias, "if Madame la comtesse had given up her diamonds and you had pledged your income you could have pacified your creditors and have paid them off in time."

"When a man is down, Mathias, when his property is covered with mortgages, when his wife's claims take precedence of his creditors', and when that man has notes out for a hundred thousand francs which he must pay (and I hope I can do so out of the increased value of my property here), what you propose is not possible."

"This is dreadful!" cried Mathias; "would you sell Belle-Rose with the vintage of 1825 still in the cellars?"

"I cannot help myself."

"Belle-Rose is worth six hundred thousand francs."

"Natalie will buy it in; I have advised her to do so."

"I might push the price to seven hundred thousand, and the farms are worth a hundred thousand each."

"Then if the house in Bordeaux can be sold for two hundred thousand—"

"Solonet will give more than that; he wants it. He is retiring with a handsome property made by gambling on the Funds. He has sold his practice for three hundred thousand francs, and marries a mulatto woman. God knows how she got her money, but they say it amounts to millions. A notary gambling in stocks! a notary marrying a black woman! What an age! It is said that he speculates for your mother-in-law with her funds."

"She has greatly improved Lanstrac and taken great pains with its cultivation. She has amply repaid me for the use of it."

"I shouldn't have thought her capable of that."

"She is so kind and so devoted; she has always paid Natalie's debts during the three months she spent with us every year in Paris."

"She could well afford to do so, for she gets her living out of Lanstrac," said Mathias. "She! grown economical! what a miracle! I am told she has just bought the domain of Grainrouge between Lanstrac and Grassol; so that if the Lanstrac avenue were extended to the high-road, you would drive four and a half miles through your own property to reach the house. She paid one hundred thousand francs down for Grainrouge."

"She is as handsome as ever," said Paul; "country life preserves her freshness; I don't mean to go to Lanstrac and bid her good-bye; her heart would bleed for me too much."

"You would go in vain; she is now in Paris. She probably arrived there as you left."

"No doubt she had heard of the sale of my property and came to help me. I

have no complaint to make of life, Mathias. I am truly loved,—as much as any man ever could be here below; beloved by two women who outdo each other in devotion; they are even jealous of each other; the daughter blames the mother for loving me too much, and the mother reproaches the daughter for what she calls her dissipations. I may say that this great affection has been my ruin. How could I fail to satisfy even the slightest caprice of a loving wife? Impossible to restrain myself! Neither could I accept any sacrifice on her part. We might certainly, as you say, live at Lanstrac, save my income, and part with her diamonds, but I would rather go to India and work for a fortune than tear my Natalie from the life she enjoys. So it was I who proposed the separation as to property. Women are angels who ought not to be mixed up in the sordid interests of life."

Old Mathias listened in doubt and amazement.

"You have no children, I think," he said.

"Fortunately, none," replied Paul.

"That is not my idea of marriage," remarked the old notary, naively. "A wife ought, in my opinion, to share the good and evil fortunes of her husband. I have heard that young married people who love like lovers, do not want children? Is pleasure the only object of marriage? I say that object should be the joys of family. Moreover, in this case—I am afraid you will think me too much of notary—your marriage contract made it incumbent upon you to have a son. Yes, monsieur le comte, you ought to have had at once a male heir to consolidate that entail. Why not? Madame Evangelista was strong and healthy; she had nothing to fear in maternity. You will tell me, perhaps, that these are the old-fashioned notions of our ancestors. But in those noble families, Monsieur le comte, the legitimate wife thought it her duty to bear children and bring them up nobly; as the Duchesse de Sully, the wife of the great Sully, said, a wife is not an instrument of pleasure, but the honor and virtue of her household."

"You don't know women, my good Mathias," said Paul. "In order to be happy we must love them as they want to be loved. Isn't there something brutal in at once depriving a wife of her charms, and spoiling her beauty before she has begun to enjoy it?"

"If you had had children your wife would not have dissipated your fortune; she would have stayed at home and looked after them."

"If you were right, dear friend," said Paul, frowning, "I should be still more unhappy than I am. Do not aggravate my sufferings by preaching to me after my fall. Let me go, without the pang of looking backward to my mistakes."

The next day Mathias received a bill of exchange for one hundred and fifty

thousand francs from de Marsay.

"You see," said Paul, "he does not write a word to me. He begins by obliging me. Henri's nature is the most imperfectly perfect, the most illegally beautiful that I know. If you knew with what superiority that man, still young, can rise above sentiments, above self-interests, and judge them, you would be astonished, as I am, to find how much heart he has."

Mathias tried to battle with Paul's determination, but he found it irrevocable, and it was justified by so many cogent reasons that the old man finally ceased his endeavors to retain his client.

It is seldom that vessels sail promptly at the time appointed, but on this occasion, by a fateful circumstance for Paul, the wind was fair and the "Belle-Amelie" sailed on the morrow, as expected. The quay was lined with relations, and friends, and idle persons. Among them were several who had formerly known Manerville. His disaster, posted on the walls of the town, made him as celebrated as he was in the days of his wealth and fashion. Curiosity was aroused; every one had their word to say about him. Old Mathias accompanied his client to the quay, and his sufferings were sore as he caught a few words of those remarks:—

"Who could recognize in that man you see over there, near old Mathias, the dandy who was called the Pink of Fashion five years ago, and made, as they say, 'fair weather and foul' in Bordeaux."

"What! that stout, short man in the alpaca overcoat, who looks like a groom,—is that Comte Paul de Manerville?"

"Yes, my dear, the same who married Mademoiselle Evangelista. Here he is, ruined, without a penny to his name, going out to India to look for luck."

"But how did he ruin himself? he was very rich."

"Oh! Paris, women, play, luxury, gambling at the Bourse—"

"Besides," said another, "Manerville always was a poor creature; no mind, soft as papier-mache, he'd let anybody shear the wool from his back; incapable of anything, no matter what. He was born to be ruined."

Paul wrung the hand of the old man and went on board. Mathias stood upon the pier, looking at his client, who leaned against the shrouds, defying the crowed before him with a glance of contempt. At the moment when the sailors began to weigh anchor, Paul noticed that Mathias was making signals to him with his handkerchief. The old housekeeper had hurried to her master, who seemed to be excited by some sudden event. Paul asked the captain to wait a moment, and send a boat to the pier, which was done. Too feeble himself to go aboard, Mathias gave two letters to a sailor in the boat.

"My friend," he said, "this packet" (showing one of the two letters) "is important; it has just arrived by a courier from Paris in thirty-five hours. State this to Monsieur le comte; don't neglect to do so; it may change his plans."

"Would he come ashore?"

"Possibly, my friend," said the notary, imprudently.

The sailor is, in all lands, a being of a race apart, holding all land-folk in contempt. This one happened to be a bas-Breton, who saw but one thing in Maitre Mathias's request.

"Come ashore, indeed!" he thought, as he rowed. "Make the captain lose a passenger! If one listened to those walruses we'd have nothing to do but embark and disembark 'em. He's afraid that son of his will catch cold."

The sailor gave Paul the letter and said not a word of the message. Recognizing the handwriting of his wife and de Marsay, Paul supposed that he knew what they both would urge upon him. Anxious not to be influenced by offers which he believed their devotion to his welfare would inspire, he put the letters in his pocket unread, with apparent indifference.

Absorbed in the sad thoughts which assail the strongest man under such circumstances, Paul gave way to his grief as he waved his hand to his old friend, and bade farewell to France, watching the steeples of Bordeaux as they fled out of sight. He seated himself on a coil of rope. Night overtook him still lost in thought. With the semi-darkness of the dying day came doubts; he cast an anxious eye into the future. Sounding it, and finding there uncertainty and danger, he asked his soul if courage would fail him. A vague dread seized his mind as he thought of Natalie left wholly to herself; he repented the step he had taken; he regretted Paris and his life there. Suddenly sea-sickness overcame him. Every one knows the effect of that disorder. The most horrible of its sufferings devoid of danger is a complete dissolution of the will. An inexplicable distress relaxes to their very centre the cords of vitality; the soul no longer performs its functions; the sufferer becomes indifferent to everything; the mother forgets her child, the lover his mistress, the strongest man lies prone, like an inert mass. Paul was carried to his cabin, where he stayed three days, lying on his back, gorged with grog by the sailors, or vomiting; thinking of nothing, and sleeping much. Then he revived into a species of convalescence, and returned by degrees to his ordinary condition. The first morning after he felt better he went on deck and passed the poop, breathing in the salt breezes of another atmosphere. Putting his hands into his pockets he felt the letters. At once he opened them, beginning with that of his wife.

In order that the letter of the Comtesse de Manerville be fully understood,

it is necessary to give the one which Paul had written to her on the day that he left Paris.

From Paul de Manerville to his wife:

My beloved,—When you read this letter I shall be far away from you; perhaps already on the vessel which is to take me to India, where I am going to repair my shattered fortune. I have not found courage to tell you of my departure. I have deceived you; but it was best to do so. You would only have been uselessly distressed; you would have wished to sacrifice your fortune, and that I could not have suffered. Dear Natalie, feel no remorse; I have no regrets. When I return with millions I shall imitate your father and lay them at your feet, as he laid his at the feet of your mother, saying to you: "All I have is yours." I love you madly, Natalie; I say this without fear that the avowal will lead you to strain a power which none but weak men fear; yours has been boundless from the day I knew you first. My love is the only accomplice in my disaster. I have felt, as my ruin progressed, the delirious joys of a gambler; as the money diminished, so my enjoyment grew. Each fragment of my fortune turned into some little pleasure for you gave me untold happiness. I could have wished that you had more caprices that I might gratify them all. I knew I was marching to a precipice, but I went on crowned with joys of which a common heart knows nothing. I have acted like those lovers who take refuge in a cottage on the shores of some lake for a year or two, resolved to kill themselves at last; dying thus in all the glory of their illusions and their love. I have always thought such persons infinitely sensible. You have known nothing of my pleasures or my sacrifices. The greatest joy of all was to hide from the one beloved the cost of her desires. I can reveal these secrets to you now, for when you hold this paper, heavy with love, I shall be far away. Though I lose the treasures of your gratitude, I do not suffer that contraction of the heart which would disable me if I spoke to you of these matters. Besides, my own beloved, is there not a tender calculation in thus revealing to you the history of the past? Does it not extend our love into the future?—But we need no such supports! We love each other with a love to which proof is needless,—a love which takes no note of time or distance, but lives of itself alone. Ah! Natalie, I have just looked at you asleep, trustful, restful as a little child, your hand stretched toward me. I left a tear upon the pillow which has known our precious joys. I leave you without fear, on the faith of that attitude; I go to win the future of our love by bringing home to you a fortune large enough to gratify your every taste, and let no shadow of anxiety disturb our joys. Neither you nor I can do without enjoyments in the life we live. To me belongs the task of providing the necessary fortune. I am a man; and I have courage. Perhaps you might seek to follow me. For that reason I conceal from you the name of the vessel, the port from which I sail, and the day of sailing. After I am gone, when too late to follow me, a friend will tell you all. Natalie! my

affection is boundless. I love you as a mother loves her child, as a lover loves his mistress, with absolute unselfishness. To me the toil, to you the pleasures; to me all sufferings, to you all happiness. Amuse yourself; continue your habits of luxury; go to theatres and operas, enjoy society and balls; I leave you free for all things. Dear angel, when you return to this nest where for five years we have tasted the fruits which love has ripened think of your friend; think for a moment of me, and rest upon my heart. That is all I ask of you. For myself, dear eternal thought of mine! whether under burning skies, toiling for both of us, I face obstacles to vanquish, or whether, weary with the struggle, I rest my mind on hopes of a return, I shall think of you alone; of you who are my life,—my blessed life! Yes, I shall live in you. I shall tell myself daily that you have no troubles, no cares; that you are happy. As in our natural lives of day and night, of sleeping and waking, I shall have sunny days in Paris, and nights of toil in India,—a painful dream, a joyful reality; and I shall live so utterly in that reality that my actual life will pass as a dream. I shall have memories! I shall recall, line by line, strophe by strophe, our glorious five years' poem. I shall remember the days of your pleasure in some new dress or some adornment which made you to my eyes a fresh delight. Yes, dear angel, I go like a man vowed to some great emprize, the guerdon of which, if success attend him, is the recovery of his beautiful mistress. Oh! my precious love, my Natalie, keep me as a religion in your heart. Be the child that I have just seen asleep! If you betray my confidence, my blind confidence, you need not fear my anger—be sure of that; I should die silently. But a wife does not deceive the man who leaves her free—for woman is never base. She tricks a tyrant; but an easy treachery, which would kill its victim, she will not commit—No, no! I will not think of it. Forgive this cry, this single cry, so natural to the heart of man! Dear love, you will see de Marsay; he is now the lessee of our house, and he will leave you in possession of it. This nominal lease was necessary to avoid a useless loss. Our creditors, ignorant that their payment is a question of time only, would otherwise have seized the furniture and the temporary possession of the house. Be kind to de Marsay; I have the most entire confidence in his capacity and his loyalty. Take him as your defender and adviser, make him your slave. However occupied, he will always find time to be devoted to you. I have placed the liquidation of my affairs and the payment of the debts in his hands. If he should advance some sum of which he should later feel in need I rely on you to pay it back. Remember, however, that I do not leave you to de Marsay, but to yourself; I do not seek to impose him upon you. Alas! I have but an hour more to stay beside you; I cannot spend that hour in writing business—I count your breaths; I try to guess your thoughts in the slight motions of your sleep. I would I could infuse my blood into your veins that you might be a part of me, my thought your thought, and your heart mine—A murmur has just escaped your lips as though it were a soft reply. Be

calm and beautiful forever as you are now! Ah! would that I possessed that fabulous fairy power which, with a wand, could make you sleep while I am absent, until, returning, I should wake you with a kiss. How much I must love you, how much energy of soul I must possess, to leave you as I see you now! Adieu, my cherished one. Your poor Pink of Fashion is blown away by stormy winds, but—the wings of his good luck shall waft him back to you. No, my Ninie, I am not bidding you farewell, for I shall never leave you. Are you not the soul of my actions? Is not the hope of returning with happiness indestructible for YOU the end and aim of my endeavor? Does it not lead my every step? You will be with me everywhere. Ah! it will not be the sun of India, but the fire of your eyes that lights my way. Therefore be happy—as happy as a woman can be without her lover. I would the last kiss that I take from those dear lips were not a passive one; but, my Ninie, my adored one, I will not wake you. When you wake, you will find a tear upon your forehead—make it a talisman! Think, think of him who may, perhaps, die for you, far from you; think less of the husband than of the lover who confides you to God.

From the Comtesse de Manerville to her husband:

Dear, beloved one,—Your letter has plunged me into affliction. Had you the right to take this course, which must affect us equally, without consulting me? Are you free? Do you not belong to me? If you must go, why should I not follow you? You show me, Paul, that I am not indispensable to you. What have I done, to be deprived of my rights? Surely I count for something in this ruin. My luxuries have weighed somewhat in the scale. You make me curse the happy, careless life we have led for the last five years. To know that you are banished from France for years is enough to kill me. How soon can a fortune be made in India? Will you ever return? I was right when I refused, with instinctive obstinacy, that separation as to property which my mother and you were so determined to carry out. What did I tell you then? Did I not warn you that it was casting a reflection upon you, and would ruin your credit? It was not until you were really angry that I gave way. My dear Paul, never have you been so noble in my eyes as you are at this moment. To despair of nothing, to start courageously to seek a fortune! Only your character, your strength of mind could do it. I sit at your feet. A man who avows his weakness with your good faith, who rebuilds his fortune from the same motive that made him wreck it, for love's sake, for the sake of an irresistible passion, oh, Paul, that man is sublime! Therefore, fear nothing; go on, through all obstacles, not doubting your Natalie—for that would be doubting yourself. Poor darling, you mean to live in me? And I shall ever be in you. I shall not be here; I shall be wherever you are, wherever you go. Though your letter has caused me the keenest pain, it has also filled me with joy—you have made me know those two extremes! Seeing how you love me, I have been proud to learn that my love is truly felt. Sometimes I have thought that I loved you more than you

loved me. Now, I admit myself vanquished, you have added the delightful superiority—of loving—to all the others with which you are blest. That precious letter in which your soul reveals itself will lie upon my heart during all your absence; for my soul, too, is in it; that letter is my glory. I shall go to live at Lanstrac with my mother. I die to the world; I will economize my income and pay your debts to their last farthing. From this day forth, Paul, I am another woman. I bid farewell forever to society; I will have no pleasures that you cannot share. Besides, Paul, I ought to leave Paris and live in retirement. Dear friend, you will soon have a noble reason to make your fortune. If your courage needed a spur you would find it in this. Cannot you guess? We shall have a child. Your cherished desires are granted. I feared to give you one of those false hopes which hurt so much—have we not had grief enough already on that score? I was determined not to be mistaken in this good news. To-day I feel certain, and it makes me happy to shed this joy upon your sorrows. This morning, fearing nothing and thinking you still at home, I went to the Assumption; all things smiled upon me; how could I foresee misfortune? As I left the church I met my mother; she had heard of your distress, and came, by post, with all her savings, thirty thousand francs, hoping to help you. Ah! what a heart is hers, Paul! I felt joyful, and hurried home to tell you this good news, and to breakfast with you in the greenhouse, where I ordered just the dainties that you like. Well, Augustine brought me your letter, —a letter from you, when we had slept together! A cold fear seized me; it was like a dream! I read your letter! I read it weeping, and my mother shared my tears. I was half-dead. Such love, such courage, such happiness, such misery! The richest fortunes of the heart, and the momentary ruin of all interests! To lose you at a moment when my admiration of your greatness thrilled me! what woman could have resisted such a tempest of emotion? To know you far away when your hand upon my heart would have stilled its throbbings; to feel that YOU were not here to give me that look so precious to me, to rejoice in our new hopes; that I was not with you to soften your sorrows by those caresses which made your Natalie so dear to you! I wished to start, to follow you, to fly to you. But my mother told me you had taken passage in a ship which leaves Bordeaux to-morrow, that I could not reach you except by post, and, moreover, that it was madness in my present state to risk our future by attempting to follow you. I could not bear such violent emotions; I was taken ill, and am writing to you now in bed. My mother is doing all she can to stop certain calumnies which seem to have got about on your disaster. The Vandenesses, Charles and Felix, have earnestly defended you; but your friend de Marsay treats the affair satirically. He laughs at your accusers instead of replying to them. I do not like his way of lightly brushing aside such serious attacks. Are you not deceived in him? However, I will obey you; I will make him my friend. Do not be anxious, my adored one, on the points that concern your

honor; is it not mine as well? My diamonds shall be pledged; we intend, mamma and I, to employ our utmost resources in the payment of your debts; and we shall try to buy back your vineyard at Belle-Rose. My mother, who understands business like a lawyer, blames you very much for not having told her of your embarrassments. She would not have bought —thinking to please you—the Grainrouge domain, and then she could have lent you that money as well as the thirty thousand francs she brought with her. She is in despair at your decision; she fears the climate of India for your health. She entreats you to be sober, and not to let yourself be trapped by women—That made me laugh; I am as sure of you as I am of myself. You will return to me rich and faithful. I alone know your feminine delicacy, and the secret sentiments which make you a human flower worthy of the gardens of heaven. The Bordeaux people were right when they gave you your floral nickname. But alas! who will take care of my delicate flower? My heart is rent with dreadful ideas. I, his wife, Natalie, I am here, and perhaps he suffers far away from me! And not to share your pains, your vexations, your dangers! In whom will you confide? how will you live without that ear into which you have hitherto poured all? Dear, sensitive plant, swept away by this storm, will you be able to survive in another soil than your native land? It seems to me that I have been alone for centuries. I have wept sorely. To be the cause of your ruin! What a text for the thoughts of a loving woman! You treated me like a child to whom we give all it asks, or like a courtesan, allowed by some thoughtless youth to squander his fortune. Ah! such indulgence was, in truth, an insult. Did you think I could not live without fine dresses, balls and operas and social triumphs? Am I so frivolous a woman? Do you think me incapable of serious thought, of ministering to your fortune as I have to your pleasures? If you were not so far away, and so unhappy, I would blame you for that impertinence. Why lower your wife in that way? Good heavens! what induced me to go into society at all?—to flatter your vanity; I adorned myself for you, as you well know. If I did wrong, I am punished, cruelly; your absence is a harsh expiation of our mutual life. Perhaps my happiness was too complete; it had to be paid by some great trial—and here it is. There is nothing now for me but solitude. Yes, I shall live at Lanstrac, the place your father laid out, the house you yourself refurnished so luxuriously. There I shall live, with my mother and my child, and await you,—sending you daily, night and morning, the prayers of all. Remember that our love is a talisman against all evil. I have no more doubt of you than you can have of me. What comfort can I put into this letter,—I so desolate, so broken, with the lonely years before me, like a desert to cross. But no! I am not utterly unhappy; the desert will be brightened by our son,—yes, it must be a son, must it not? And now, adieu, my own beloved; our love and prayers will follow you. The tears you see upon this paper will tell you much that I cannot write. I kiss you on this little square of paper, see! below. Take

those kisses from

Your Natalie.

This letter threw Paul into a reverie caused as much by memories of the past as by these fresh assurances of love. The happier a man is, the more he trembles. In souls which are exclusively tender—and exclusive tenderness carries with it a certain amount of weakness—jealousy and uneasiness exist in direct proportion to the amount of the happiness and its extent. Strong souls are neither jealous nor fearful; jealousy is doubt, fear is meanness. Unlimited belief is the principal attribute of a great man. If he is deceived (for strength as well as weakness may make a man a dupe) his contempt will serve him as an axe with which to cut through all. This greatness, however, is the exception. Which of us has not known what it is to be abandoned by the spirit which sustains our frail machine, and to hearken to that mysterious Voice denying all? Paul, his mind going over the past, and caught here and there by irrefutable facts, believed and doubted all. Lost in thought, a prey to an awful and involuntary incredulity, which was combated by the instincts of his own pure love and his faith in Natalie, he read and re-read that wordy letter, unable to decide the question which it raised either for or against his wife. Love is sometimes as great and true when smothered in words as it is in brief, strong sentences.

To understand the situation into which Paul de Manerville was about to enter we must think of him as he was at this moment, floating upon the ocean as he floated upon his past, looking back upon the years of his life as he looked at the limitless water and cloudless sky about him, and ending his reverie by returning, through tumults of doubt, to faith, the pure, unalloyed and perfect faith of the Christian and the lover, which enforced the voice of his faithful heart.

It is necessary to give here his own letter to de Marsay written on leaving Paris, to which his friend replied in the letter he received through old Mathias from the dock:—

From Comte Paul de Manerville to Monsieur le Marquis Henri de Marsay:

Henri,—I have to say to you one of the most vital words a man can say to his friend:—I am ruined. When you read this I shall be on the point of sailing from Bordeaux to Calcutta on the brig "Belle-Amelie." You will find in the hands of your notary a deed which only needs your signature to be legal. In it, I lease my house to you for six years at a nominal rent. Send a duplicate of that deed to my wife. I am forced to take this precaution that Natalie may continue to live in her own home without fear of being driven out by creditors. I also convey to you by deed the income of my share of the entailed property for

four years; the whole amounting to one hundred and fifty thousand francs, which sum I beg you to lend me and to send in a bill of exchange on some house in Bordeaux to my notary, Maitre Mathias. My wife will give you her signature to this paper as an endorsement of your claim to my income. If the revenues of the entail do not pay this loan as quickly as I now expect, you and I will settle on my return. The sum I ask for is absolutely necessary to enable me to seek my fortune in India; and if I know you, I shall receive it in Bordeaux the night before I sail. I have acted as you would have acted in my place. I held firm to the last moment, letting no one suspect my ruin. Before the news of the seizure of my property at Bordeaux reached Paris, I had attempted, with one hundred thousand francs which I obtained on notes, to recover myself by play. Some lucky stroke might still have saved me. I lost. How have I ruined myself? By my own will, Henri. From the first month of my married life I saw that I could not keep up the style in which I started. I knew the result; but I chose to shut my eyes; I could not say to my wife, "We must leave Paris and live at Lanstrac." I have ruined myself for her as men ruin themselves for a mistress, but I knew it all along. Between ourselves, I am neither a fool nor a weak man. A fool does not let himself be ruled with his eyes open by a passion; and a man who starts for India to reconstruct his fortune, instead of blowing out his brains, is not weak. I shall return rich, or I shall never return at all. Only, my dear friend, as I want wealth solely for her, as I must be absent six years at least, and as I will not risk being duped in any way, I confide to you my wife. I know no better guardian. Being childless, a lover might be dangerous to her. Henri! I love her madly, basely, without proper pride. I would forgive her, I think, an infidelity, not because I am certain of avenging it, but because I would kill myself to leave her free and happy—since I could not make her happiness myself. But what have I to fear? Natalie feels for me that friendship which is independent of love, but which preserves love. I have treated her like a petted child. I took such delight in my sacrifices, one led so naturally to another, that she can never be false; she would be a monster if she were. Love begets love. Alas! shall I tell you all, my dear Henri? I have just written her a letter in which I let her think that I go with heart of hope and brow serene; that neither jealousy, nor doubt, nor fear is in my soul,—a letter, in short, such as a son might write to his mother, aware that he is going to his death. Good God! de Marsay, as I wrote it hell was in my soul! I am the most wretched man on earth. Yes, yes, to you the cries, to you the grinding of my teeth! I avow myself to you a despairing lover; I would rather live these six years sweeping the streets beneath her windows than return a millionaire at the end of them—if I could choose. I suffer agony; I shall pass from pain to pain until I hear from you that you will take the trust which you alone can fulfil or accomplish. Oh! my dear de Marsay, this woman is indispensable to my life; she is my sun, my atmosphere. Take her under

your shield and buckler, keep her faithful to me, even if she wills it not. Yes, I could be satisfied with a half-happiness. Be her guardian, her chaperon, for I could have no distrust of you. Prove to her that in betraying me she would do a low and vulgar thing, and be no better than the common run of women; tell her that faithfulness will prove her lofty spirit. She probably has fortune enough to continue her life of luxury and ease. But if she lacks a pleasure, if she has caprices which she cannot satisfy, be her banker, and do not fear, I will return with wealth. But, after all, these fears are in vain! Natalie is an angel of purity and virtue. When Felix de Vandenesse fell deeply in love with her and began to show her certain attentions, I had only to let her see the danger, and she instantly thanked me so affectionately that I was moved to tears. She said that her dignity and reputation demanded that she should not close her doors abruptly to any man, but that she knew well how to dismiss him. She did, in fact, receive him so coldly that the affair all ended for the best. We have never had any other subject of dispute —if, indeed, a friendly talk could be called a dispute—in all our married life. And now, my dear Henri, I bid you farewell in the spirit of a man. Misfortune has come. No matter what the cause, it is here. I strip to meet it. Poverty and Natalie are two irreconcilable terms. The balance may be close between my assets and my liabilities, but no one shall have cause to complain of me. But, should any unforeseen event occur to imperil my honor, I count on you. Send letters under cover to the Governor of India at Calcutta. I have friendly relations with his family, and someone there will care for all letters that come to me from Europe. Dear friend, I hope to find you the same de Marsay on my return,—the man who scoffs at everything and yet is receptive of the feelings of others when they accord with the grandeur he is conscious of in himself. You stay in Paris, friend; but when you read these words, I shall be crying out, "To Carthage!"

The Marquis Henri de Marsay to Comte Paul de Manerville:

So, so, Monsieur le comte, you have made a wreck of it! Monsieur l'ambassadeur has gone to the bottom! Are these the fine things that you were doing? Why, Paul, why have you kept away from me? If you had said a single word, my poor old fellow, I would have made your position plain to you. Your wife has refused me her endorsement. May that one word unseal your eyes! But, if that does not suffice, learn that your notes have been protested at the instigation of a Sieur Lecuyer, formerly head-clerk to Maitre Solonet, a notary in Bordeaux. That usurer in embryo (who came from Gascony for jobbery) is the proxy of your very honorable mother-in-law, who is the actual holder of your notes for one hundred thousand francs, on which I am told that worthy woman doled out to you only seventy thousand. Compared with Madame Evangelista, papa Gobseck is flannel, velvet, vanilla cream, a sleeping draught. Your vineyard of Belle-Rose is to fall into the clutches of your wife, to whom her mother pays the difference between the price it goes for at the

auction sale and the amount of her dower claim upon it. Madame Evangelista will also have the farms at Guadet and Grassol, and the mortgages on your house in Bordeaux already belong to her, in the names of straw men provided by Solonet. Thus these two excellent women will make for themselves a united income of one hundred and twenty thousand francs a year out of your misfortunes and forced sale of property, added to the revenue of some thirty-odd thousand on the Grand-livre which these cats already possess. The endorsement of your wife was not needed; for this morning the said Sieur Lecuyer came to offer me a return of the sum I had lent you in exchange for a legal transfer of my rights. The vintage of 1825 which your mother-in-law keeps in the cellars at Lanstrac will suffice to pay me. These two women have calculated, evidently, that you are now upon the ocean; but I send this letter by courier, so that you may have time to follow the advice I now give you. I made Lecuyer talk. I disentangled from his lies, his language, and his reticence, the threads I lacked to bring to light the whole plot of the domestic conspiracy hatched against you. This evening, at the Spanish embassy, I shall offer my admiring compliments to your mother-in-law and your wife. I shall pay court to Madame Evangelista; I intend to desert you basely, and say sly things to your discredit,—nothing openly, or that Mascarille in petticoats would detect my purpose. How did you make her such an enemy? That is what I want to know. If you had had the wit to be in love with that woman before you married her daughter, you would to-day be peer of France, Duc de Manerville, and, possibly, ambassador to Madrid. If you had come to me at the time of your marriage, I would have helped you to analyze and know the women to whom you were binding yourself; out of our mutual observations safety might have been yours. But, instead of that, these women judged me, became afraid of me, and separated us. If you had not stupidly given in to them and turned me the cold shoulder, they would never have been able to ruin you. Your wife brought on the coldness between us, instigated by her mother, to whom she wrote two letters a week,—a fact to which you paid no attention. I recognized my Paul when I heard that detail. Within a month I shall be so intimate with your mother-in-law that I shall hear from her the reasons of the hispano-italiano hatred which she feels for you,—for you, one of the best and kindest men on earth! Did she hate you before her daughter fell in love with Felix de Vandenesse; that's a question in my mind. If I had not taken a fancy to go to the East with Montriveau, Ronquerolles, and a few other good fellows of your acquaintance, I should have been in a position to tell you something about that affair, which was beginning just as I left Paris. I saw the first gleams even then of your misfortune. But what gentleman is base enough to open such a subject unless appealed to? Who shall dare to injure a woman, or break that illusive mirror in which his friend delights in gazing at the fairy scenes of a happy marriage? Illusions are the riches of the heart. Your wife, dear friend, is, I

believe I may say, in the fullest application of the word, a fashionable woman. She thinks of nothing but her social success, her dress, her pleasures; she goes to opera and theatre and balls; she rises late and drives to the Bois, dines out, or gives a dinner-party. Such a life seems to me for women very much what war is for men; the public sees only the victors; it forgets the dead. Many delicate women perish in this conflict; those who come out of it have iron constitutions, consequently no heart, but good stomachs. There lies the reason of the cold insensibility of social life. Fine souls keep themselves reserved, weak and tender natures succumb; the rest are cobblestones which hold the social organ in its place, water-worn and rounded by the tide, but never worn-out. Your wife has maintained that life with ease; she looks made for it; she is always fresh and beautiful. To my mind the deduction is plain, —she has never loved you; and you have loved her like a madman. To strike out love from that siliceous nature a man of iron was needed. After standing, but without enduring, the shock of Lady Dudley, Felix was the fitting mate to Natalie. There is no great merit in divining that to you she was indifferent. In love with her yourself, you have been incapable of perceiving the cold nature of a young woman whom you have fashioned and trained for a man like Vandenesse. The coldness of your wife, if you perceived it, you set down, with the stupid jurisprudence of married people, to the honor of her reserve and her innocence. Like all husbands, you thought you could keep her virtuous in a society where women whisper from ear to ear that which men are afraid to say. No, your wife has liked the social benefits she derived from marriage, but the private burdens of it she found rather heavy. Those burdens, that tax was—you! Seeing nothing of all this, you have gone on digging your abysses (to use the hackneyed words of rhetoric) and covering them with flowers. You have mildly obeyed the law which rules the ruck of men; from which I desired to protect you. Dear fellow! only one thing was wanting to make you as dull as the bourgeois deceived by his wife, who is all astonishment or wrath, and that is that you should talk to me of your sacrifices, your love for Natalie, and chant that psalm: "Ungrateful would she be if she betrayed me; I have done this, I have done that, and more will I do; I will go to the ends of the earth, to the Indies for her sake. I—I—" etc. My dear Paul, have you never lived in Paris, have you never had the honor of belonging by ties of friendship to Henri de Marsay, that you should be so ignorant of the commonest things, the primitive principles that move the feminine mechanism, the a-b-c of their hearts? Then hear me:—

Suppose you exterminate yourself, suppose you go to Saint-Pelagie for a woman's debts, suppose you kill a score of men, desert a dozen women, serve like Laban, cross the deserts, skirt the galleys, cover yourself with glory, cover yourself with shame, refuse, like Nelson, to fight a battle until you have kissed the shoulder of Lady Hamilton, dash yourself, like Bonaparte, upon the bridge

at Arcola, go mad like Roland, risk your life to dance five minutes with a woman—my dear fellow, what have all those things to do with love? If love were won by samples such as those mankind would be too happy. A spurt of prowess at the moment of desire would give a man the woman that he wanted. But love, love, my good Paul, is a faith like that in the Immaculate conception of the Holy Virgin; it comes, or it does not come. Will the mines of Potosi, or the shedding of our blood, or the making of our fame serve to waken an involuntary, an inexplicable sentiment? Young men like you, who expect to be loved as the balance of your account, are nothing else than usurers. Our legitimate wives owe us virtue and children, but they don't owe us love. Love, my dear Paul, is the sense of pleasure given and received, and the certainty of giving and receiving it; love is a desire incessantly moving and growing, incessantly satisfied and insatiable. The day when Vandenesse stirred the cord of a desire in your wife's heart which you had left untouched, all your self-satisfied affection, your gifts, your deeds, your money, ceased to be even memories; one emotion of love in your wife's heart has cast out the treasures of your own passion, which are now nothing better than old iron. Felix has the virtues and the beauties in her eyes, and the simple moral is that blinded by your own love you never made her love you. Your mother-in-law is on the side of the lover against the husband,—secretly or not; she may have closed her eyes, or she may have opened them; I know not what she has done—but one thing is certain, she is for her daughter, and against you. During the fifteen years that I have observed society, I have never yet seen a mother who, under such circumstances, abandons her daughter. This indulgence seems to be an inheritance transmitted in the female line. What man can blame it? Some copyist of the Civil code, perhaps, who sees formulas only in the place of feelings. As for your present position, the dissipation into which the life of a fashionable woman cast you, and your own easy nature, possibly your vanity, have opened the way for your wife and her mother to get rid of you by this ruin so skilfully contrived. From all of which you will conclude, my good friend, that the mission you entrusted to me, and which I would all the more faithfully fulfil because it amused me, is, necessarily, null and void. The evil you wish me to prevent is accomplished,—"consummatum est." Forgive me, dear friend, if I write to you, as you say, a la de Marsay on subjects which must seem to you very serious. Far be it from me to dance upon the grave of a friend, like heirs upon that of a progenitor. But you have written to me that you mean to act the part of a man, and I believe you; I therefore treat you as a man of the world, and not as a lover. For you, this blow ought to be like the brand on the shoulder of a galley-slave, which flings him forever into a life of systematic opposition to society. You are now freed of one evil; marriage possessed you; it now behooves you to turn round and possess marriage. Paul, I am your friend in the fullest acceptation of the word. If you had a brain in an

iron skull, if you had the energy which has come to you too late, I would have proved my friendship by telling you things that would have made you walk upon humanity as upon a carpet. But when I did talk to you guardedly of Parisian civilization, when I told you in the disguise of fiction some of the actual adventures of my youth, you regarded them as mere romance and would not see their bearing. When I told you that history of a lawyer at the galleys branded for forgery, who committed the crime to give his wife, adored like yours, an income of thirty thousand francs, and whom his wife denounced that she might be rid of him and free to love another man, you exclaimed, and other fools who were supping with us exclaimed against me. Well, my dear Paul, you were that lawyer, less the galleys. Your friends here are not sparing you. The sister of the two Vandenesses, the Marquise de Listomere and all her set, in which, by the bye, that little Rastignac has enrolled himself,—the scamp will make his way!—Madame d'Aiglemont and her salon, the Lenoncourts, the Comtesse Ferraud, Madame d'Espard, the Nucingens, the Spanish ambassador, in short, all the cliques in society are flinging mud upon you. You are a bad man, a gambler, a dissipated fellow who has squandered his property. After paying your debts a great many times, your wife, an angel of virtue, has just redeemed your notes for one hundred thousand francs, although her property was separate from yours. Luckily, you had done the best you could do by disappearing. If you had stayed here you would have made her bed in the straw; the poor woman would have been the victim of her conjugal devotion! When a man attains to power, my dear Paul, he has all the virtues of an epitaph; let him fall into poverty, and he has more sins than the Prodigal Son; society at the present moment gives you the vices of a Don Juan. You gambled at the Bourse, you had licentious tastes which cost you fabulous sums of money to gratify; you paid enormous interests to money-lenders. The two Vandenesses have told everywhere how Gigonnet gave you for six thousand francs an ivory frigate, and made your valet buy it back for three hundred in order to sell it to you again. The incident did really happen to Maxime de Trailles about nine years ago; but it fits your present circumstances so well that Maxime has forever lost the command of his frigate.

In short, I can't tell you one-half that is said; you have supplied a whole encyclopaedia of gossip which the women have an interest in swelling. Your wife is having an immense success. Last evening at the opera Madame Firmiani began to repeat to me some of the things that are being said. "Don't talk of that," I replied. "You know nothing of the real truth, you people. Paul has robbed the Bank, cheated the Treasury, murdered Ezzelin and three Medoras in the rue Saint-Denis, and I think, between ourselves, that he is a member of the Dix-Mille. His associate is the famous Jacques Collin, on whom the police have been unable to lay a hand since he escaped from the galleys. Paul gave him a room in his house; you see he is capable of anything;

in fact, the two have gone off to India together to rob the Great Mogul." Madame Firmiani, like the distinguished woman that she is, saw that she ought not to convert her beautiful lips into a mouthpiece for false denunciation. Many persons, when they hear of these tragi-comedies of life, refuse to believe them. They take the side of human nature and fine sentiments; they declare that these things do not exist. But Talleyrand said a fine thing, my dear fellow: "All things happen." Truly, things happen under our very noses which are more amazing than this domestic plot of yours; but society has an interest in denying them, and in declaring itself calumniated. Often these dramas are played so naturally and with such a varnish of good taste that even I have to rub the lens of my opera-glass to see to the bottom of them. But, I repeat to you, when a man is a friend of mine, when we have received together the baptism of champagne and have knelt together before the altar of the Venus Commodus, when the crooked fingers of play have given us their benediction, if that man finds himself in a false position I'd ruin a score of families to do him justice.You must be aware from all this that I love you. Have I ever in my life written a letter as long as this? No. Therefore, read with attention what I still have to say.

Alas! Paul, I shall be forced to take to writing, for I am taking to politics. I am going into public life. I intend to have, within five years, the portfolio of a ministry or some embassy. There comes an age when the only mistress a man can serve is his country. I enter the ranks of those who intend to upset not only the ministry, but the whole present system of government. In short, I swim in the waters of a certain prince who is lame of the foot only,—a man whom I regard as a statesman of genius whose name will go down to posterity; a prince as complete in his way as a great artist may be in his. Several of us, Ronquerolles, Montriveau, the Grandlieus, La Roche-Hugon, Serisy, Feraud, and Granville, have allied ourselves against the "parti-pretre," as the party-ninny represented by the "Constitutionnel" has ingeniously said. We intend to overturn the Navarreins, Lenoncourts, Vandenesses, and the Grand Almonry. In order to succeed we shall even ally ourselves with Lafayette, the Orleanists, and the Left,—people whom we can throttle on the morrow of victory, for no government in the world is possible with their principles. We are capable of anything for the good of the country—and our own. Personal questions as to the King's person are mere sentimental folly in these days; they must be cleared away. From that point of view, the English with their sort of Doge, are more advanced than we are. Politics have nothing to do with that, my dear fellow. Politics consist in giving the nation an impetus by creating an oligarchy embodying a fixed theory of government, and able to direct public affairs along a straight path, instead of allowing the country to be pulled in a thousand different directions, which is what has been happening for the last forty years in our beautiful France—at once so intelligent and so sottish, so

wise and so foolish; it needs a system, indeed, much more than men. What are individuals in this great question? If the end is a great one, if the country may live happy and free from trouble, what do the masses care for the profits of our stewardship, our fortune, privileges, and pleasures?

I am now standing firm on my feet. I have at the present moment a hundred and fifty thousand francs a year in the Three per Cents, and a reserve of two hundred thousand francs to repair damages. Even this does not seem to me very much ballast in the pocket of a man starting left foot foremost to scale the heights of power. A fortunate accident settled the question of my setting out on this career, which did not particularly smile on me, for you know my predilection for the life of the East. After thirty-five years of slumber, my highly-respected mother woke up to the recollection that she had a son who might do her honor. Often when a vine-stock is eradicated, some years after shoots come up to the surface of the ground; well, my dear boy, my mother had almost torn me up by the roots from her heart, and I sprouted again in her head. At the age of fifty-eight, she thinks herself old enough to think no more of any men but her son. At this juncture she has met in some hot-water cauldron, at I know not what baths, a delightful old maid —English, with two hundred and forty thousand francs a year; and, like a good mother, she has inspired her with an audacious ambition to become my wife. A maid of six-and-thirty, my word! Brought up in the strictest puritanical principles, a steady sitting hen, who maintains that unfaithful wives should be publicly burnt. 'Where will you find wood enough?' I asked her. I could have sent her to the devil, for two hundred and forty thousand francs a year are no equivalent for liberty, nor a fair price for my physical and moral worth and my prospects. But she is the sole heiress of a gouty old fellow, some London brewer, who within a calculable time will leave her a fortune equal at least to what the sweet creature has already. Added to these advantages, she has a red nose, the eyes of a dead goat, a waist that makes one fear lest she should break into three pieces if she falls down, and the coloring of a badly painted doll. But—she is delightfully economical; but—she will adore her husband, do what he will; but —she has the English gift; she will manage my house, my stables, my servants, my estates better than any steward. She has all the dignity of virtue; she holds herself as erect as a confidante on the stage of the Francais; nothing will persuade me that she has not been impaled and the shaft broken off in her body. Miss Stevens is, however, fair enough to be not too unpleasing if I must positively marry her. But—and this to me is truly pathetic—she has the hands of a woman as immaculate as the sacred ark; they are so red that I have not yet hit on any way to whiten them that will not be too costly, and I have no idea how to fine down her fingers, which are like sausages. Yes; she evidently belongs to the brew-house by her hands, and to the aristocracy by her money; but she is apt to affect the great lady a little too much, as rich English women

do who want to be mistaken for them, and she displays her lobster's claws too freely. She has, however, as little intelligence as I could wish in a woman. If there were a stupider one to be found, I would set out to seek her. This girl, whose name is Dinah, will never criticise me; she will never contradict me; I shall be her Upper Chamber, her Lords and Commons. In short, Paul, she is indefeasible evidence of the English genius; she is a product of English mechanics brought to their highest pitch of perfection; she was undoubtedly made at Manchester, between the manufactory of Perry's pens and the workshops for steam-engines. It eats, it drinks, it walks, it may have children, take good care of them, and bring them up admirably, and it apes a woman so well that you would believe it real. When my mother introduced us, she had set up the machine so cleverly, had so carefully fitted the pegs, and oiled the wheels so thoroughly, that nothing jarred; then, when she saw I did not make a very wry face, she set the springs in motion, and the woman spoke. Finally, my mother uttered the decisive words, "Miss Dinah Stevens spends no more than thirty thousand francs a year, and has been traveling for seven years in order to economize."—So there is another image, and that one is silver.

Matters are so far advanced that the banns are to be published. We have got as far as "My dear love." Miss makes eyes at me that might floor a porter. The settlements are prepared. My fortune is not inquired into; Miss Stevens devotes a portion of hers to creating an entail in landed estate, bearing an income of two hundred and forty thousand francs, and to the purchase of a house, likewise entailed. The settlement credited to me is of a million francs. She has nothing to complain of. I leave her uncle's money untouched.

The worthy brewer, who has helped to found the entail, was near bursting with joy when he heard that his niece was to be a marquise. He would be capable of doing something handsome for my eldest boy.

I shall sell out of the funds as soon as they are up to eighty, and invest in land. Thus, in two years I may look to get six hundred thousand francs a year out of real estate. So, you see, Paul, I do not give my friends advice that I am not ready to act upon.

If you had but listened to me, you would have an English wife, some Nabob's daughter, who would leave you the freedom of a bachelor and the independence necessary for playing the whist of ambition. I would concede my future wife to you if you were not married already. But that cannot be helped, and I am not the man to bid you chew the cud of the past.

All this preamble was needful to explain to you that for the future my position in life will be such as a man needs if he wants to play the great game of pitch-and-toss. I cannot do without you, my friend. Now, then, my dear Paul, instead of setting sail for India you would do a much wiser thing to

navigate with me the waters of the Seine. Believe me, Paris is still the place where fortune, abundant fortune, can be won. Potosi is in the rue Vivienne, the rue de la Paix, the Place Vendome, the rue de Rivoli. In all other places and countries material works and labors, marches and counter-marches, and sweatings of the brow are necessary to the building up of fortune; but in Paris thought suffices. Here, every man even mentally mediocre, can see a mine of wealth as he puts on his slippers, or picks his teeth after dinner, in his down-sitting and his up-rising. Find me another place on the globe where a good round stupid idea brings in more money, or is sooner understood than it is here. If I reach the top of the ladder, as I shall, am I the man to refuse you a helping hand, an influence, a signature? We shall want, we young roues, a faithful friend on whom to count, if only to compromise him and make him a scape-goat, or send him to die like a common soldier to save his general. Government is impossible without a man of honor at one's side, in whom to confide and with whom we can do and say everything. Here is what I propose. Let the "Belle-Amelie" sail without you; come back here like a thunderbolt; I'll arrange a duel for you with Vandenesse in which you shall have the first shot, and you can wing him like a pigeon. In France the husband who shoots his rival becomes at once respectable and respected. No one ever cavils at him again. Fear, my dear fellow, is a valuable social element, a means of success for those who lower their eyes before the gaze of no man living. I who care as little to live as to drink a glass of milk, and who have never felt the emotion of fear, I have remarked the strange effects produced by that sentiment upon our modern manners. Some men tremble to lose the enjoyments to which they are attached, others dread to leave a woman. The old adventurous habits of other days when life was flung away like a garment exist no longer. The bravery of a great many men is nothing more than a clever calculation on the fear of their adversary. The Poles are the only men in Europe who fight for the pleasure of fighting; they cultivate the art for the art's sake, and not for speculation.

Now hear me: kill Vandenesse, and your wife trembles, your mother-in-law trembles, the public trembles, and you recover your position, you prove your grand passion for your wife, you subdue society, you subdue your wife, you become a hero. Such is France. As for your embarrassments, I hold a hundred thousand francs for you; you can pay your principal debts, and sell what property you have left with a power of redemption, for you will soon obtain an office which will enable you by degrees to pay off your creditors. Then, as for your wife, once enlightened as to her character you can rule her. When you loved her you had no power to manage her; not loving her, you will have an unconquerable force. I will undertake, myself, to make your mother-in-law as supple as a glove; for you must recover the use of the hundred and fifty thousand francs a year those two women have squeezed out of you. Therefore, I say, renounce this expatriation which seems to me no better than a

pan of charcoal or a pistol to your head. To go away is to justify all calumnies. The gambler who leaves the table to get his money loses it when he returns; we must have our gold in our pockets. Let us now, you and I, be two gamblers on the green baize of politics; between us loans are in order. Therefore take post-horses, come back instantly, and renew the game. You'll win it with Henri de Marsay for your partner, for Henri de Marsay knows how to will, and how to strike.

See how we stand politically. My father is in the British ministry; we shall have close relations with Spain through the Evangelistas, for, as soon as your mother-in-law and I have measured claws she will find there is nothing to gain by fighting the devil. Montriveau is our lieutenant-general; he will certainly be minister of war before long, and his eloquence will give him great ascendancy in the Chamber. Ronquerolles will be minister of State and privy-councillor; Martial de la Roche-Hugon is minister to Germany and peer of France; Serisy leads the Council of State, to which he is indispensable; Granville holds the magistracy, to which his sons belong; the Grandlieus stand well at court; Ferraud is the soul of the Gondreville coterie,—low intriguers who are always on the surface of things, I'm sure I don't know why. Thus supported, what have we to fear? The money question is a mere nothing when this great wheel of fortune rolls for us. What is a woman?—you are not a schoolboy. What is life, my dear fellow, if you let a woman be the whole of it? A boat you can't command, without a rudder, but not without a magnet, and tossed by every wind that blows. Pah! The great secret of social alchemy, my dear Paul, is to get the most we can out of each age of life through which we pass; to have and to hold the buds of our spring, the flowers of our summer, the fruits of our autumn. We amused ourselves once, a few good fellows and I, for a dozen or more years, like mousquetaires, black, red, and gray; we denied ourselves nothing, not even an occasional filibustering here and there. Now we are going to shake down the plums which age and experience have ripened. Be one of us; you shall have your share in the pudding we are going to cook.

Come; you will find a friend all yours in the skin of

H. de Marsay.

As Paul de Manerville ended the reading of this letter, which fell like the blows of a pickaxe on the edifice of his hopes, his illusions, and his love, the vessel which bore him from France was beyond the Azores. In the midst of this utter devastation a cold and impotent anger laid hold of him.

"What had I done to them?" he said to himself.

That is the question of fools, of feeble beings, who, seeing nothing, can nothing foresee. Then he cried aloud: "Henri! Henri!" to his loyal friend. Many a man would have gone mad; Paul went to bed and slept that heavy

sleep which follows immense disasters,—the sleep that seized Napoleon after Waterloo.

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A START IN LIFE

CHAPTER I. THAT WHICH WAS LACKING TO PIERROTIN'S HAPPINESS

Railroads, in a future not far distant, must force certain industries to disappear forever, and modify several others, more especially those relating to the different modes of transportation in use around Paris. Therefore the persons and things which are the elements of this Scene will soon give to it the character of an archaeological work. Our nephews ought to be enchanted to learn the social material of an epoch which they will call the "olden time." The picturesque "coucous" which stood on the Place de la Concorde, encumbering the Cours-la-Reine,—coucous which had flourished for a century, and were still numerous in 1830, scarcely exist in 1842, unless on the occasion of some attractive suburban solemnity, like that of the Grandes Eaux of Versailles. In 1820, the various celebrated places called the "Environs of Paris" did not all possess a regular stage-coach service.

Nevertheless, the Touchards, father and son, had acquired a monopoly of travel and transportation to all the populous towns within a radius of forty-five miles; and their enterprise constituted a fine establishment in the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis. In spite of their long-standing rights, in spite, too, of their efforts, their capital, and all the advantages of a powerful centralization, the Touchard coaches ("messageries") found terrible competition in the coucous for all points with a circumference of fifteen or twenty miles. The passion of the Parisian for the country is such that local enterprise could successfully compete with the Lesser Stage company,—Petites Messageries, the name given to the Touchard enterprise to distinguish it from that of the Grandes Messageries of the rue Montmartre. At the time of which we write, the Touchard success was stimulating speculators. For every small locality in the neighborhood of Paris there sprang up schemes of beautiful, rapid, and commodious vehicles, departing and arriving in Paris at fixed hours, which produced, naturally, a fierce competition. Beaten on the long distances of twelve to eighteen miles, the coucou came down to shorter trips, and so lived on for several years. At last, however, it succumbed to omnibuses, which demonstrated the possibility of carrying eighteen persons in a vehicle drawn

by two horses. To-day the coucous—if by chance any of those birds of ponderous flight still linger in the second-hand carriage-shops—might be made, as to its structure and arrangement, the subject of learned researches comparable to those of Cuvier on the animals discovered in the chalk pits of Montmartre.

These petty enterprises, which had struggled since 1822 against the Touchards, usually found a strong foothold in the good-will and sympathy of the inhabitants of the districts which they served. The person undertaking the business as proprietor and conductor was nearly always an inn-keeper along the route, to whom the beings, things, and interests with which he had to do were all familiar. He could execute commissions intelligently; he never asked as much for his little stages, and therefore obtained more custom than the Touchard coaches. He managed to elude the necessity of a custom-house permit. If need were, he was willing to infringe the law as to the number of passengers he might carry. In short, he possessed the affection of the masses; and thus it happened that whenever a rival came upon the same route, if his days for running were not the same as those of the coucou, travellers would put off their journey to make it with their long-tried coachman, although his vehicle and his horses might be in a far from reassuring condition.

One of the lines which the Touchards, father and son, endeavored to monopolize, and the one most stoutly disputed (as indeed it still is), is that of Paris to Beaumont-sur-Oise,—a line extremely profitable, for three rival enterprises worked it in 1822. In vain the Touchards lowered their price; in vain they constructed better coaches and started oftener. Competition still continued, so productive is a line on which are little towns like Saint-Denis and Saint-Brice, and villages like Pierrefitte, Groslay, Ecouen, Poncelles, Moisselles, Monsoult, Maffliers, Franconville, Presles, Nointel, Nerville, etc. The Touchard coaches finally extended their route to Chambly; but competition followed. To-day the Toulouse, a rival enterprise, goes as far as Beauvais.

Along this route, which is that toward England, there lies a road which turns off at a place well-named, in view of its topography, The Cave, and leads through a most delightful valley in the basin of the Oise to the little town of Isle-Adam, doubly celebrated as the cradle of the family, now extinct, of Isle-Adam, and also as the former residence of the Bourbon-Contis. Isle-Adam is a little town flanked by two large villages, Nogent and Parmain, both remarkable for splendid quarries, which have furnished material for many of the finest buildings in modern Paris and in foreign lands,—for the base and capital of the columns of the Brussels theatre are of Nogent stone. Though remarkable for its beautiful sites, for the famous chateaux which princes, monks, and designers have built, such as Cassan, Stors, Le Val, Nointel,

Persan, etc., this region had escaped competition in 1822, and was reached by two coaches only, working more or less in harmony.

This exception to the rule of rivalry was founded on reasons that are easy to understand. From the Cave, the point on the route to England where a paved road (due to the luxury of the Princes of Conti) turned off to Isle-Adam, the distance is six miles. No speculating enterprise would make such a detour, for Isle-Adam was the terminus of the road, which did not go beyond it. Of late years, another road has been made between the valley of Montmorency and the valley of the Oise; but in 1822 the only road which led to Isle-Adam was the paved highway of the Princes of Conti. Pierrotin and his colleague reigned, therefore, from Paris to Isle-Adam, beloved by every one along the way. Pierrotin's vehicle, together with that of his comrade, and Pierrotin himself, were so well known that even the inhabitants on the main road as far as the Cave were in the habit of using them; for there was always better chance of a seat to be had than in the Beaumont coaches, which were almost always full. Pierrotin and his competitor were on the best of terms. When the former started from Isle-Adam, the latter was returning from Paris, and vice versa.

It is unnecessary to speak of the rival. Pierrotin possessed the sympathies of his region; besides, he is the only one of the two who appears in this veracious narrative. Let it suffice you to know that the two coach proprietors lived under a good understanding, rivalled each other loyally, and obtained customers by honorable proceedings. In Paris they used, for economy's sake, the same yard, hotel, and stable, the same coach-house, office, and clerk. This detail is alone sufficient to show that Pierrotin and his competitor were, as the popular saying is, "good dough." The hotel at which they put up in Paris, at the corner of the rue d'Enghien, is still there, and is called the "Lion d'Argent." The proprietor of the establishment, which from time immemorial had lodged coachmen and coaches, drove himself for the great company of Daumartin, which was so firmly established that its neighbors, the Touchards, whose place of business was directly opposite, never dreamed of starting a rival coach on the Daumartin line.

Though the departures for Isle-Adam professed to take place at a fixed hour, Pierrotin and his co-rival practised an indulgence in that respect which won for them the grateful affection of the country-people, and also violent remonstrances on the part of strangers accustomed to the regularity of the great lines of public conveyances. But the two conductors of these vehicles, which were half diligence, half coucou, were invariably defended by their regular customers. The afternoon departure at four o'clock usually lagged on till half-past, while that of the morning, fixed for eight o'clock, was seldom known to take place before nine. In this respect, however, the system was elastic. In summer, that golden period for the coaching business, the rule of

departure, rigorous toward strangers, was often relaxed for country customers. This method not infrequently enabled Pierrotin to pocket two fares for one place, if a countryman came early and wanted a seat already booked and paid for by some "bird of passage" who was, unluckily for himself, a little late. Such elasticity will certainly not commend itself to purists in morality; but Pierrotin and his colleague justified it on the varied grounds of "hard times," of their losses during the winter months, of the necessity of soon getting better coaches, and of the duty of keeping exactly to the rules written on the tariff, copies of which were, however, never shown, unless some chance traveller was obstinate enough to demand it.

Pierrotin, a man about forty years of age, was already the father of a family. Released from the cavalry on the great disbandment of 1815, the worthy fellow had succeeded his father, who for many years had driven a coucou of capricious flight between Paris and Isle-Adam. Having married the daughter of a small inn-keeper, he enlarged his business, made it a regular service, and became noted for his intelligence and a certain military precision. Active and decided in his ways, Pierrotin (the name seems to have been a sobriquet) contrived to give, by the vivacity of his countenance, an expression of sly shrewdness to his ruddy and weather-stained visage which suggested wit. He was not without that facility of speech which is acquired chiefly through "seeing life" and other countries. His voice, by dint of talking to his horses and shouting "Gare!" was rough; but he managed to tone it down with the bourgeois. His clothing, like that of all coachmen of the second class, consisted of stout boots, heavy with nails, made at Isle-Adam, trousers of bottle-green velveteen, waistcoat of the same, over which he wore, while exercising his functions, a blue blouse, ornamented on the collar, shoulder-straps and cuffs, with many-colored embroidery. A cap with a visor covered his head. His military career had left in Pierrotin's manners and customs a great respect for all social superiority, and a habit of obedience to persons of the upper classes; and though he never willingly mingled with the lesser bourgeoisie, he always respected women in whatever station of life they belonged. Nevertheless, by dint of "trundling the world,"—one of his own expressions,—he had come to look upon those he conveyed as so many walking parcels, who required less care than the inanimate ones,—the essential object of a coaching business.

Warned by the general movement which, since the Peace, was revolutionizing his calling, Pierrotin would not allow himself to be outdone by the progress of new lights. Since the beginning of the summer season he had talked much of a certain large coach, ordered from Farry, Breilmann, and Company, the best makers of diligences,—a purchase necessitated by an increasing influx of travellers. Pierrotin's present establishment consisted of two vehicles. One, which served in winter, and the only one he reported to the

tax-gatherer, was the coucou which he inherited from his father. The rounded flanks of this vehicle allowed him to put six travellers on two seats, of metallic hardness in spite of the yellow Utrecht velvet with which they were covered. These seats were separated by a wooden bar inserted in the sides of the carriage at the height of the travellers' shoulders, which could be placed or removed at will. This bar, specially covered with velvet (Pierrotin called it "a back"), was the despair of the passengers, from the great difficulty they found in placing and removing it. If the "back" was difficult and even painful to handle, that was nothing to the suffering caused to the omoplates when the bar was in place. But when it was left to lie loose across the coach, it made both ingress and egress extremely perilous, especially to women.

Though each seat of this vehicle, with rounded sides like those of a pregnant woman, could rightfully carry only three passengers, it was not uncommon to see eight persons on the two seats jammed together like herrings in a barrel. Pierrotin declared that the travellers were far more comfortable in a solid, immovable mass; whereas when only three were on a seat they banged each other perpetually, and ran much risk of injuring their hats against the roof by the violent jolting of the roads. In front of the vehicle was a wooden bench where Pierrotin sat, on which three travellers could perch; when there, they went, as everybody knows, by the name of "rabbits." On certain trips Pierrotin placed four rabbits on the bench, and sat himself at the side, on a sort of box placed below the body of the coach as a foot-rest for the rabbits, which was always full of straw, or of packages that feared no damage. The body of this particular coucou was painted yellow, embellished along the top with a band of barber's blue, on which could be read, on the sides, in silvery white letters, "Isle-Adam, Paris," and across the back, "Line to Isle-Adam."

Our descendants will be mightily mistaken if they fancy that thirteen persons including Pierrotin were all that this vehicle could carry. On great occasions it could take three more in a square compartment covered with an awning, where the trunks, cases, and packages were piled; but the prudent Pierrotin only allowed his regular customers to sit there, and even they were not allowed to get in until at some distance beyond the "barriere." The occupants of the "hen-roost" (the name given by conductors to this section of their vehicles) were made to get down outside of every village or town where there was a post of gendarmerie; the overloading forbidden by law, "for the safety of passengers," being too obvious to allow the gendarme on duty—always a friend to Pierrotin—to avoid the necessity of reporting this flagrant violation of the ordinances. Thus on certain Saturday nights and Monday mornings, Pierrotin's coucou "trundled" fifteen travellers; but on such occasions, in order to drag it along, he gave his stout old horse, called Rougeot, a mate in the person of a little beast no bigger than a pony, about whose merits he had much to say. This little horse was a mare named Bichette;

she ate little, she was spirited, she was indefatigable, she was worth her weight in gold.

"My wife wouldn't give her for that fat lazybones of a Rougeot!" cried Pierrotin, when some traveller would joke him about his epitome of a horse.

The difference between this vehicle and the other consisted chiefly in the fact that the other was on four wheels. This coach, of comical construction, called the "four-wheel-coach," held seventeen travellers, though it was bound not to carry more than fourteen. It rumbled so noisily that the inhabitants of Isle-Adam frequently said, "Here comes Pierrotin!" when he was scarcely out of the forest which crowns the slope of the valley. It was divided into two lobes, so to speak: one, called the "interior," contained six passengers on two seats; the other, a sort of cabriolet constructed in front, was called the "coupe." This coupe was closed in with very inconvenient and fantastic glass sashes, a description of which would take too much space to allow of its being given here. The four-wheeled coach was surmounted by a hooded "imperial," into which Pierrotin managed to poke six passengers; this space was inclosed by leather curtains. Pierrotin himself sat on an almost invisible seat perched just below the sashes of the coupe.

The master of the establishment paid the tax which was levied upon all public conveyances on his coucou only, which was rated to carry six persons; and he took out a special permit each time that he drove the four-wheeler. This may seem extraordinary in these days, but when the tax on vehicles was first imposed, it was done very timidly, and such deceptions were easily practised by the coach proprietors, always pleased to "faire la queue" (cheat of their dues) the government officials, to use the argot of their vocabulary. Gradually the greedy Treasury became severe; it forced all public conveyances not to roll unless they carried two certificates,—one showing that they had been weighed, the other that their taxes were duly paid. All things have their salad days, even the Treasury; and in 1822 those days still lasted. Often in summer, the "four-wheel-coach," and the coucou journeyed together, carrying between them thirty-two passengers, though Pierrotin was only paying a tax on six. On these specially lucky days the convoy started from the faubourg Saint-Denis at half-past four o'clock in the afternoon, and arrived gallantly at Isle-Adam by ten at night. Proud of this service, which necessitated the hire of an extra horse, Pierrotin was wont to say:—

"We went at a fine pace!"

But in order to do the twenty-seven miles in five hours with his caravan, he was forced to omit certain stoppages along the road,—at Saint-Brice, Moisselles, and La Cave.

The hotel du Lion d'Argent occupies a piece of land which is very deep for

its width. Though its frontage has only three or four windows on the faubourg Saint-Denis, the building extends back through a long court-yard, at the end of which are the stables, forming a large house standing close against the division wall of the adjoining property. The entrance is through a sort of passage-way beneath the floor of the second story, in which two or three coaches had room to stand. In 1822 the offices of all the lines of coaches which started from the Lion d'Argent were kept by the wife of the inn-keeper, who had as many books as there were lines. She received the fares, booked the passengers, and stowed away, good-naturedly, in her vast kitchen the various packages and parcels to be transported. Travellers were satisfied with this easy-going, patriarchal system. If they arrived too soon, they seated themselves beneath the hood of the huge kitchen chimney, or stood within the passage-way, or crossed to the Cafe de l'Echiquier, which forms the corner of the street so named.

In the early days of the autumn of 1822, on a Saturday morning, Pierrotin was standing, with his hands thrust into his pockets through the apertures of his blouse, beneath the porte-cochere of the Lion d'Argent, whence he could see, diagonally, the kitchen of the inn, and through the long court-yard to the stables, which were defined in black at the end of it. Daumartin's diligence had just started, plunging heavily after those of the Touchards. It was past eight o'clock. Under the enormous porch or passage, above which could be read on a long sign, "Hotel du Lion d'Argent," stood the stablemen and porters of the coaching-lines watching the lively start of the vehicles which deceives so many travellers, making them believe that the horses will be kept to that vigorous gait.

"Shall I harness up, master?" asked Pierrotin's hostler, when there was nothing more to be seen along the road.

"It is a quarter-past eight, and I don't see any travellers," replied Pierrotin. "Where have they poked themselves? Yes, harness up all the same. And there are no parcels either! Twenty good Gods! a fine day like this, and I've only four booked! A pretty state of things for a Saturday! It is always the same when you want money! A dog's life, and a dog's business!"

"If you had more, where would you put them? There's nothing left but the cabriolet," said the hostler, intending to soothe Pierrotin.

"You forget the new coach!" cried Pierrotin.

"Have you really got it?" asked the man, laughing, and showing a set of teeth as white and broad as almonds.

"You old good-for-nothing! It starts to-morrow, I tell you; and I want at least eighteen passengers for it."

"Ha, ha! a fine affair; it'll warm up the road," said the hostler.

"A coach like that which runs to Beaumont, hey? Flaming! painted red and gold to make Touchard burst with envy! It takes three horses! I have bought a mate for Rougeot, and Bichette will go finely in unicorn. Come, harness up!" added Pierrotin, glancing out towards the street, and stuffing the tobacco into his clay pipe. "I see a lady and lad over there with packages under their arms; they are coming to the Lion d'Argent, for they've turned a deaf ear to the coucous. Tiens, tiens! seems to me I know that lady for an old customer."

"You've often started empty, and arrived full," said his porter, still by way of consolation.

"But no parcels! Twenty good Gods! What a fate!"

And Pierrotin sat down on one of the huge stone posts which protected the walls of the building from the wheels of the coaches; but he did so with an anxious, reflective air that was not habitual with him.

This conversation, apparently insignificant, had stirred up cruel anxieties which were slumbering in his breast. What could there be to trouble the heart of Pierrotin in a fine new coach? To shine upon "the road," to rival the Touchards, to magnify his own line, to carry passengers who would compliment him on the conveniences due to the progress of coach-building, instead of having to listen to perpetual complaints of his "sabots" (tires of enormous width),—such was Pierrotin's laudable ambition; but, carried away with the desire to outstrip his comrade on the line, hoping that the latter might some day retire and leave to him alone the transportation to Isle-Adam, he had gone too far. The coach was indeed ordered from Barry, Breilmann, and Company, coach-builders, who had just substituted square English springs for those called "swan-necks," and other old-fashioned French contrivances. But these hard and distrustful manufacturers would only deliver over the diligence in return for coin. Not particularly pleased to build a vehicle which would be difficult to sell if it remained upon their hands, these long-headed dealers declined to undertake it at all until Pierrotin had made a preliminary payment of two thousand francs. To satisfy this precautionary demand, Pierrotin had exhausted all his resources and all his credit. His wife, his father-in-law, and his friends had bled. This superb diligence he had been to see the evening before at the painter's; all it needed now was to be set a-rolling, but to make it roll, payment in full must, alas! be made.

Now, a thousand francs were lacking to Pierrotin, and where to get them he did not know. He was in debt to the master of the Lion d'Argent; he was in danger of his losing his two thousand francs already paid to the coach-builder, not counting five hundred for the mate to Rougeot, and three hundred for new harnesses, on which he had a three-months' credit. Driven by the fury of

despair and the madness of vanity, he had just openly declared that the new coach was to start on the morrow. By offering fifteen hundred francs, instead of the two thousand five hundred still due, he was in hopes that the softened carriage-builders would give him his coach. But after a few moments' meditation, his feelings led him to cry out aloud:—

"No! they're dogs! harpies! Suppose I appeal to Monsieur Moreau, the steward at Presles? he is such a kind man," thought Pierrotin, struck with a new idea. "Perhaps he would take my note for six months."

At this moment a footman in livery, carrying a leather portmanteau and coming from the Touchard establishment, where he had gone too late to secure places as far as Chambly, came up and said:—

"Are you Pierrotin?"

"Say on," replied Pierrotin.

"If you would wait a quarter of an hour, you could take my master. If not, I'll carry back the portmanteau and try to find some other conveyance."

"I'll wait two, three quarters, and throw a little in besides, my lad," said Pierrotin, eyeing the pretty leather trunk, well buckled, and bearing a brass plate with a coat of arms.

"Very good; then take this," said the valet, ridding his shoulder of the trunk, which Pierrotin lifted, weighed, and examined.

"Here," he said to his porter, "wrap it up carefully in soft hay and put it in the boot. There's no name upon it," he added.

"Monseigneur's arms are there," replied the valet.

"Monseigneur! Come and take a glass," said Pierrotin, nodding toward the Cafe de l'Echiquier, whither he conducted the valet. "Waiter, two absinthes!" he said, as he entered. "Who is your master? and where is he going? I have never seen you before," said Pierrotin to the valet as they touched glasses.

"There's a good reason for that," said the footman. "My master only goes into your parts about once a year, and then in his own carriage. He prefers the valley d'Orge, where he has the most beautiful park in the neighborhood of Paris, a perfect Versailles, a family estate of which he bears the name. Don't you know Monsieur Moreau?"

"The steward of Presles?"

"Yes. Monsieur le Comte is going down to spend a couple of days with him."

"Ha! then I'm to carry Monsieur le Comte de Serizy!" cried the coach-

proprietor.

"Yes, my land, neither more nor less. But listen! here's a special order. If you have any of the country neighbors in your coach you are not to call him Monsieur le comte; he wants to travel 'en cognito,' and told me to be sure to say he would pay a handsome pourboire if he was not recognized."

"So! Has this secret journey anything to do with the affair which Pere Leger, the farmer at the Moulineaux, came to Paris the other day to settle?"

"I don't know," replied the valet, "but the fat's in the fire. Last night I was sent to the stable to order the Daumont carriage to be ready to go to Presles at seven this morning. But when seven o'clock came, Monsieur le comte countermanded it. Augustin, his valet de chambre, attributes the change to the visit of a lady who called last night, and again this morning,—he thought she came from the country."

"Could she have told him anything against Monsieur Moreau?—the best of men, the most honest of men, a king of men, hey! He might have made a deal more than he has out of his position, if he'd chosen; I can tell you that."

"Then he was foolish," answered the valet, sententiously.

"Is Monsieur le Serizy going to live at Presles at last?" asked Pierrotin; "for you know they have just repaired and refurnished the chateau. Do you think it is true he has already spent two hundred thousand francs upon it?"

"If you or I had half what he has spent upon it, you and I would be rich bourgeois. If Madame la comtesse goes there—ha! I tell you what! no more ease and comfort for the Moreaus," said the valet, with an air of mystery.

"He's a worthy man, Monsieur Moreau," remarked Pierrotin, thinking of the thousand francs he wanted to get from the steward. "He is a man who makes others work, but he doesn't cheapen what they do; and he gets all he can out of the land—for his master. Honest man! He often comes to Paris and gives me a good fee: he has lots of errands for me to do in Paris; sometimes three or four packages a day,—either from monsieur or madame. My bill for cartage alone comes to fifty francs a month, more or less. If madame does set up to be somebody, she's fond of her children; and it is I who fetch them from school and take them back; and each time she gives me five francs,—a real great lady couldn't do better than that. And every time I have any one in the coach belonging to them or going to see them, I'm allowed to drive up to the chateau,—that's all right, isn't it?"

"They say Monsieur Moreau wasn't worth three thousand francs when Monsieur le comte made him steward of Presles," said the valet.

"Well, since 1806, there's seventeen years, and the man ought to have

made something at any rate."

"True," said the valet, nodding. "Anyway, masters are very annoying; and I hope, for Moreau's sake, that he has made butter for his bread."

"I have often been to your house in the rue de la Chaussee d'Antin to carry baskets of game," said Pierrotin, "but I've never had the advantage, so far of seeing either monsieur or madame."

"Monsieur le comte is a good man," said the footman, confidentially. "But if he insists on your helping to keep up his cognito there's something in the wind. At any rate, so we think at the house; or else, why should he countermand the Daumont,—why travel in a coucou? A peer of France might afford to hire a cabriolet to himself, one would think."

"A cabriolet would cost him forty francs to go there and back; for let me tell you, if you don't know it, that road was only made for squirrels,—up-hill and down, down-hill and up!" said Pierrotin. "Peer of France or bourgeois, they are all looking after the main chance, and saving their money. If this journey concerns Monsieur Moreau, faith, I'd be sorry any harm should come to him! Twenty good Gods! hadn't I better find some way of warning him?—for he's a truly good man, a kind man, a king of men, hey!"

"Pooh! Monsieur le comte thinks everything of Monsieur Moreau," replied the valet. "But let me give you a bit of good advice. Every man for himself in this world. We have enough to do to take care of ourselves. Do what Monsieur le comte asks you to do, and all the more because there's no trifling with him. Besides, to tell the truth, the count is generous. If you oblige him so far," said the valet, pointing half-way down his little finger, "he'll send you on as far as that," stretching out his arm to its full length.

This wise reflection, and the action that enforced it, had the effect, coming from a man who stood as high as second valet to the Comte de Serizy, of cooling the ardor of Pierrotin for the steward of Presles.

"Well, adieu, Monsieur Pierrotin," said the valet.

A glance rapidly cast on the life of the Comte de Serizy, and on that of his steward, is here necessary in order to fully understand the little drama now about to take place in Pierrotin's vehicle.

CHAPTER II. THE STEWARD IN DANGER

Monsieur Huguet de Serisy descends in a direct line from the famous president Huguet, ennobled under Francois I.

This family bears: party per pale or and sable, an orle counterchanged and two lozenges counterchanged, with: "i, semper melius eris,"—a motto which, together with the two distaffs taken as supporters, proves the modesty of the burgher families in the days when the Orders held their allotted places in the State; and the naivete of our ancient customs by the pun on "eris," which word, combined with the "i" at the beginning and the final "s" in "melius," forms the name (Serisy) of the estate from which the family take their title.

The father of the present count was president of a parliament before the Revolution. He himself a councillor of State at the Grand Council of 1787, when he was only twenty-two years of age, was even then distinguished for his admirable memoranda on delicate diplomatic matters. He did not emigrate during the Revolution, and spent that period on his estate of Serizy near Arpajon, where the respect in which his father was held protected him from all danger. After spending several years in taking care of the old president, who died in 1794, he was elected about that time to the Council of the Five Hundred, and accepted those legislative functions to divert his mind from his grief. After the 18th Brumaire, Monsieur de Serizy became, like so many other of the old parliamentary families, an object of the First Consul's blandishment. He was appointed to the Council of State, and received one of the most disorganized departments of the government to reconstruct. This scion of an old historical family proved to be a very active wheel in the grand and magnificent organization which we owe to Napoleon.

The councillor of State was soon called from his particular administration to a ministry. Created count and senator by the Emperor, he was made proconsul to two kingdoms in succession. In 1806, when forty years of age, he married the sister of the ci-devant Marquis de Ronquerolles, the widow at twenty of Gaubert, one of the most illustrious of the Republican generals, who left her his whole property. This marriage, a suitable one in point of rank, doubled the already considerable fortune of the Comte de Serizy, who became through his wife the brother-in-law of the ci-devant Marquis de Rouvre, made count and chamberlain by the Emperor.

In 1814, weary with constant toil, the Comte de Serizy, whose shattered health required rest, resigned all his posts, left the department at the head of which the Emperor had placed him, and came to Paris, where Napoleon was compelled by the evidence of his eyes to admit that the count's illness was a valid excuse, though at first that unfatiguable master, who gave no heed to the fatigue of others, was disposed to consider Monsieur de Serizy's action as a defection. Though the senator was never in disgrace, he was supposed to have reason to complain of Napoleon. Consequently, when the Bourbons returned, Louis XVIII., whom Monsieur de Serizy held to be his legitimate sovereign, treated the senator, now a peer of France, with the utmost confidence, placed

him in charge of his private affairs, and appointed him one of his cabinet ministers. On the 20th of March, Monsieur de Serizy did not go to Ghent. He informed Napoleon that he remained faithful to the house of Bourbon; would not accept his peerage during the Hundred Days, and passed that period on his estate at Serizy.

After the second fall of the Emperor, he became once more a privy-councillor, was appointed vice-president of the Council of State, and liquidator, on behalf of France, of claims and indemnities demanded by foreign powers. Without personal assumption, without ambition even, he possessed great influence in public affairs. Nothing of importance was done without consulting him; but he never went to court, and was seldom seen in his own salons. This noble life, devoting itself from its very beginning to work, had ended by becoming a life of incessant toil. The count rose at all seasons by four o'clock in the morning, and worked till mid-day, attended to his functions as peer of France and vice-president of the Council of State in the afternoons, and went to bed at nine o'clock. In recognition of such labor, the King had made him a knight of his various Orders. Monsieur de Serizy had long worn the grand cross of the Legion of honor; he also had the orders of the Golden Fleece, of Saint-Andrew of Russia, that of the Prussian Eagle, and nearly all the lesser Orders of the courts of Europe. No man was less obvious, or more useful in the political world than he. It is easy to understand that the world's honor, the fuss and feathers of public favor, the glories of success were indifferent to a man of this stamp; but no one, unless a priest, ever comes to life of this kind without some serious underlying reason. His conduct had its cause, and a cruel one.

In love with his wife before he married her, this passion had lasted through all the secret unhappiness of his marriage with a widow,—a woman mistress of herself before as well as after her second marriage, and who used her liberty all the more freely because her husband treated her with the indulgence of a mother for a spoilt child. His constant toil served him as shield and buckler against pangs of heart which he silenced with the care that diplomatists give to the keeping of secrets. He knew, moreover, how ridiculous was jealousy in the eyes of a society that would never have believed in the conjugal passion of an old statesman. How happened it that from the earliest days of his marriage his wife so fascinated him? Why did he suffer without resistance? How was it that he dared not resist? Why did he let the years go by and still hope on? By what means did this young and pretty and clever woman hold him in bondage?

The answer to all these questions would require a long history, which would injure our present tale. Let us only remark here that the constant toil and grief of the count had unfortunately contributed not a little to deprive him of personal advantages very necessary to a man who attempts to struggle

against dangerous comparisons. In fact, the most cruel of the count's secret sorrows was that of causing repugnance to his wife by a malady of the skin resulting solely from excessive labor. Kind, and always considerate of the countess, he allowed her to be mistress of herself and her home. She received all Paris; she went into the country; she returned from it precisely as though she were still a widow. He took care of her fortune and supplied her luxury as a steward might have done. The countess had the utmost respect for her husband. She even admired his turn of mind; she knew how to make him happy by approbation; she could do what she pleased with him by simply going to his study and talking for an hour with him. Like the great seigneurs of the olden time, the count protected his wife so loyally that a single word of disrespect said of her would have been to him an unpardonable injury. The world admired him for this; and Madame de Serizy owed much to it. Any other woman, even though she came of a family as distinguished as the Ronquerolles, might have found herself degraded in public opinion. The countess was ungrateful, but she mingled a charm with her ingratitude. From time to time she shed a balm upon the wounds of her husband's heart.

Let us now explain the meaning of this sudden journey, and the incognito maintained by a minister of State.

A rich farmer of Beaumont-sur-Oise, named Leger, leased and cultivated a farm, the fields of which projected into and greatly injured the magnificent estate of the Comte de Serizy, called Presles. This farm belonged to a burgher of Beaumont-sur-Oise, named Margueron. The lease made to Leger in 1799, at a time when the great advance of agriculture was not foreseen, was about to expire, and the owner of the farm refused all offers from Leger to renew the lease. For some time past, Monsieur de Serizy, wishing to rid himself of the annoyances and petty disputes caused by the inclosure of these fields within his land, had desired to buy the farm, having heard that Monsieur Margueron's chief ambition was to have his only son, then a mere tax-gatherer, made special collector of finances at Beaumont. The farmer, who knew he could sell the fields piecemeal to the count at a high price, was ready to pay Margueron even more than he expected from the count.

Thus matters stood when, two days earlier than that of which we write, Monsieur de Serizy, anxious to end the matter, sent for his notary, Alexandre Crottat, and his lawyer, Derville, to examine into all the circumstances of the affair. Though Derville and Crottat threw some doubt on the zeal of the count's steward (a disturbing letter from whom had led to the consultation), Monsieur de Serizy defended Moreau, who, he said, had served him faithfully for seventeen years.

"Very well!" said Derville, "then I advise your Excellency to go to Presles yourself, and invite this Margueron to dinner. Crottat will send his head-clerk

with a deed of sale drawn up, leaving only the necessary lines for description of property and titles in blank. Your Excellency should take with you part of the purchase money in a check on the Bank of France, not forgetting the appointment of the son to the collectorship. If you don't settle the thing at once that farm will slip through your fingers. You don't know, Monsieur le comte, the trickery of these peasants. Peasants against diplomat, and the diplomat succumbs."

Crottat agreed in this advice, which the count, if we may judge by the valet's statements to Pierrotin, had adopted. The preceding evening he had sent Moreau a line by the diligence to Beaumont, telling him to invite Margueron to dinner in order that they might then and there close the purchase of the farm of Moulineaux.

Before this matter came up, the count had already ordered the chateau of Presles to be restored and refurnished, and for the last year, Grindot, an architect then in fashion, was in the habit of making a weekly visit. So, while concluding his purchase of the farm, Monsieur de Serizy also intended to examine the work of restoration and the effect of the new furniture. He intended all this to be a surprise to his wife when he brought her to Presles, and with this idea in his mind, he had put some personal pride and self-love into the work. How came it therefore that the count, who intended in the evening to drive to Presles openly in his own carriage, should be starting early the next morning incognito in Pierrotin's coucou?

Here a few words on the life of the steward Moreau become indispensable.

Moreau, steward of the state of Presles, was the son of a provincial attorney who became during the Revolution syndic-attorney at Versailles. In that position, Moreau the father had been the means of almost saving both the lives and property of the Serizys, father and son. Citizen Moreau belonged to the Danton party; Robespierre, implacable in his hatreds, pursued him, discovered him, and finally had him executed at Versailles. Moreau the son, heir to the doctrines and friendships of his father, was concerned in one of the conspiracies which assailed the First Consul on his accession to power. At this crisis, Monsieur de Serizy, anxious to pay his debt of gratitude, enabled Moreau, lying under sentence of death, to make his escape; in 1804 he asked for his pardon, obtained it, offered him first a place in his government office, and finally took him as private secretary for his own affairs.

Some time after the marriage of his patron Moreau fell in love with the countess's waiting-woman and married her. To avoid the annoyances of the false position in which this marriage placed him (more than one example of which could be seen at the imperial court), Moreau asked the count to give him the management of the Presles estate, where his wife could play the lady

in a country region, and neither of them would be made to suffer from wounded self-love. The count wanted a trustworthy man at Presles, for his wife preferred Serizy, an estate only fifteen miles from Paris. For three or four years Moreau had held the key of the count's affairs; he was intelligent, and before the Revolution he had studied law in his father's office; so Monsieur de Serizy granted his request.

"You can never advance in life," he said to Moreau, "for you have broken your neck; but you can be happy, and I will take care that you are so."

He gave Moreau a salary of three thousand francs and his residence in a charming lodge near the chateau, all the wood he needed from the timber that was cut on the estate, oats, hay, and straw for two horses, and a right to whatever he wanted of the produce of the gardens. A sub-prefect is not as well provided for.

During the first eight years of his stewardship, Moreau managed the estate conscientiously; he took an interest in it. The count, coming down now and then to examine the property, pass judgment on what had been done, and decide on new purchases, was struck with Moreau's evident loyalty, and showed his satisfaction by liberal gifts.

But after the birth of Moreau's third child, a daughter, he felt himself so securely settled in all his comforts at Presles that he ceased to attribute to Monsieur de Serizy those enormous advantages. About the year 1816, the steward, who until then had only taken what he needed for his own use from the estate, accepted a sum of twenty-five thousand francs from a wood-merchant as an inducement to lease to the latter, for twelve years, the cutting of all the timber. Moreau argued this: he could have no pension; he was the father of a family; the count really owed him that sum as a gift after ten years' management; already the legitimate possessor of sixty thousand francs in savings, if he added this sum to that, he could buy a farm worth a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs in Champagne, a township just above Isle-Adam, on the right bank of the Oise. Political events prevented both the count and the neighboring country-people from becoming aware of this investment, which was made in the name of Madame Moreau, who was understood to have inherited property from an aunt of her father.

As soon as the steward had tasted the delightful fruit of the possession of the property, he began, all the while maintaining toward the world an appearance of the utmost integrity, to lose no occasion of increasing his fortune clandestinely; the interests of his three children served as a poultice to the wounds of his honor. Nevertheless, we ought in justice to say that while he accepted casks of wine, and took care of himself in all the purchases that he made for the count, yet according to the terms of the Code he remained an

honest man, and no proof could have been found to justify an accusation against him. According to the jurisprudence of the least thieving cook in Paris, he shared with the count in the profits due to his own capable management. This manner of swelling his fortune was simply a case of conscience, that was all. Alert, and thoroughly understanding the count's interests, Moreau watched for opportunities to make good purchases all the more eagerly, because he gained a larger percentage on them. Presles returned a revenue of seventy thousand francs net. It was a saying of the country-side for a circuit of thirty miles:—

"Monsieur de Serizy has a second self in Moreau."

Being a prudent man, Moreau invested yearly, after 1817, both his profits and his salary on the Grand Livre, piling up his heap with the utmost secrecy. He often refused proposals on the plea of want of money; and he played the poor man so successfully with the count that the latter gave him the means to send both his sons to the school Henri IV. At the present moment Moreau was worth one hundred and twenty thousand francs of capital invested in the Consolidated thirds, now paying five per cent, and quoted at eighty francs. These carefully hidden one hundred and twenty thousand francs, and his farm at Champagne, enlarged by subsequent purchases, amounted to a fortune of about two hundred and eighty thousand francs, giving him an income of some sixteen thousand.

Such was the position of the steward at the time when the Comte de Serizy desired to purchase the farm of Moulineaux,—the ownership of which was indispensable to his comfort. This farm consisted of ninety-six parcels of land bordering the estate of Presles, and frequently running into it, producing the most annoying discussions as to the trimming of hedges and ditches and the cutting of trees. Any other than a cabinet minister would probably have had scores of lawsuits on his hands. Pere Leger only wished to buy the property in order to sell to the count at a handsome advance. In order to secure the exorbitant sum on which his mind was set, the farmer had long endeavored to come to an understanding with Moreau. Impelled by circumstances, he had, only three days before this critical Sunday, had a talk with the steward in the open field, and proved to him clearly that he (Moreau) could make the count invest his money at two and a half per cent, and thus appear to serve his patron's interests, while he himself pocketed forty thousand francs which Leger offered him to bring about the transaction.

"I tell you what," said the steward to his wife, as he went to bed that night, "if I make fifty thousand francs out of the Moulineaux affair,—and I certainly shall, for the count will give me ten thousand as a fee,—we'll retire to Isle-Adam and live in the Pavillon de Nogent."

This "pavillon" was a charming place, originally built by the Prince de Conti for a mistress, and in it every convenience and luxury had been placed.

"That will suit me," said his wife. "The Dutchman who lives there has put it in good order, and now that he is obliged to return to India, he would probably let us have it for thirty thousand francs."

"We shall be close to Champagne," said Moreau. "I am in hopes of buying the farm and mill of Mours for a hundred thousand francs. That would give us ten thousand a year in rentals. Nogent is one of the most delightful residences in the valley; and we should still have an income of ten thousand from the Grand-Livre."

"But why don't you ask for the post of juge-de-paix at Isle-Adam? That would give us influence, and fifteen hundred a year salary."

"Well, I did think of it."

With these plans in mind, Moreau, as soon as he heard from the count that he was coming to Presles, and wished him to invite Margueron to dinner on Saturday, sent off an express to the count's head-valet, inclosing a letter to his master, which the messenger failed to deliver before Monsieur de Serizy retired at his usually early hour. Augustin, however, placed it, according to custom in such cases, on his master's desk. In this letter Moreau begged the count not to trouble himself to come down, but to trust entirely to him. He added that Margueron was no longer willing to sell the whole in one block, and talked of cutting the farm up into a number of smaller lots. It was necessary to circumvent this plan, and perhaps, added Moreau, it might be best to employ a third party to make the purchase.

Everybody has enemies in this life. Now the steward and his wife had wounded the feelings of a retired army officer, Monsieur de Reybert, and his wife, who were living near Presles. From speeches like pin-pricks, matters had advanced to dagger-thrusts. Monsieur de Reybert breathed vengeance. He was determined to make Moreau lose his situation and gain it himself. The two ideas were twins. Thus the proceedings of the steward, spied upon for two years, were no secret to Reybert. The same conveyance that took Moreau's letter to the count conveyed Madame de Reybert, whom her husband despatched to Paris. There she asked with such earnestness to see the count that although she was sent away at nine o'clock, he having then gone to bed, she was ushered into his study the next morning at seven.

"Monsieur," she said to the cabinet-minister, "we are incapable, my husband and I, of writing anonymous letters, therefore I have come to see you in person. I am Madame de Reybert, nee de Corroy. My husband is a retired officer, with a pension of six hundred francs, and we live at Presles, where

your steward has offered us insult after insult, although we are persons of good station. Monsieur de Reybert, who is not an intriguing man, far from it, is a captain of artillery, retired in 1816, having served twenty years,—always at a distance from the Emperor, Monsieur le comte. You know of course how difficult it is for soldiers who are not under the eye of their master to obtain promotion,—not counting that the integrity and frankness of Monsieur de Reybert were displeasing to his superiors. My husband has watched your steward for the last three years, being aware of his dishonesty and intending to have him lose his place. We are, as you see, quite frank with you. Moreau has made us his enemies, and we have watched him. I have come to tell you that you are being tricked in the purchase of the Moulineaux farm. They mean to get an extra hundred thousand francs out of you, which are to be divided between the notary, the farmer Leger, and Moreau. You have written Moreau to invite Margueron, and you are going to Presles to-day; but Margueron will be ill, and Leger is so certain of buying the farm that he is now in Paris to draw the money. If we have enlightened you as to what is going on, and if you want an upright steward you will take my husband; though noble, he will serve you as he has served the State. Your steward has made a fortune of two hundred and fifty thousand francs out of his place; he is not to be pitied therefore."

The count thanked Madame de Reybert coldly, bestowing upon her the holy-water of courts, for he despised backbiting; but for all that, he remembered Derville's doubts, and felt inwardly shaken. Just then he saw his steward's letter and read it. In its assurances of devotion and its respectful reproaches for the distrust implied in wishing to negotiate the purchase for himself, he read the truth.

"Corruption has come to him with fortune,—as it always does!" he said to himself.

The count then made several inquiries of Madame de Reybert, less to obtain information than to gain time to observe her; and he wrote a short note to his notary telling him not to send his head-clerk to Presles as requested, but to come there himself in time for dinner.

"Though Monsieur le comte," said Madame de Reybert in conclusion, "may have judged me unfavorably for the step I have taken unknown to my husband, he ought to be convinced that we have obtained this information about his steward in a natural and honorable manner; the most sensitive conscience cannot take exception to it."

So saying, Madame de Reybert, nee de Corroy, stood erect as a pike-staff. She presented to the rapid investigation of the count a face seamed with the small-pox like a colander with holes, a flat, spare figure, two light and eager

eyes, fair hair plastered down upon an anxious forehead, a small drawn-bonnet of faded green taffetas lined with pink, a white gown with violet spots, and leather shoes. The count recognized the wife of some poor, half-pay captain, a puritan, subscribing no doubt to the "Courrier Francais," earnest in virtue, but aware of the comfort of a good situation and eagerly coveting it.

"You say your husband has a pension of six hundred francs," he said, replying to his own thoughts, and not to the remark Madame de Reybert had just made.

"Yes, monsieur."

"You were born a Corroy?"

"Yes, monsieur,—a noble family of Metz, where my husband belongs."

"In what regiment did Monsieur de Reybert serve?"

"The 7th artillery."

"Good!" said the count, writing down the number.

He had thought at one time of giving the management of the estate to some retired army officer, about whom he could obtain exact information from the minister of war.

"Madame," he resumed, ringing for his valet, "return to Presles, this afternoon with my notary, who is going down there for dinner, and to whom I have recommended you. Here is his address. I am going myself secretly to Presles, and will send for Monsieur de Reybert to come and speak to me."

It will thus be seen that Monsieur de Serizy's journey by a public conveyance, and the injunction conveyed by the valet to conceal his name and rank had not unnecessarily alarmed Pierrotin. That worthy had just forebodings of a danger which was about to swoop down upon one of his best customers.

CHAPTER III. THE TRAVELLERS

As Pierrotin issued from the Cafe de l'Echiquier, after treating the valet, he saw in the gate-way of the Lion d'Argent the lady and the young man in whom his perspicacity at once detected customers, for the lady with outstretched neck and anxious face was evidently looking for him. She was dressed in a black-silk gown that was dyed, a brown bonnet, an old French cashmere shawl, raw-silk stockings, and low shoes; and in her hand she carried a straw bag and a blue umbrella. This woman, who had once been beautiful, seemed to

be about forty years of age; but her blue eyes, deprived of the fire which happiness puts there, told plainly that she had long renounced the world. Her dress, as well as her whole air and demeanor, indicated a mother wholly devoted to her household and her son. If the strings of her bonnet were faded, the shape betrayed that it was several years old. The shawl was fastened by a broken needle converted into a pin by a bead of sealing-wax. She was waiting impatiently for Pierrotin, wishing to recommend to his special care her son, who was doubtless travelling for the first time, and with whom she had come to the coach-office as much from doubt of his ability as from maternal affection.

This mother was in every way completed by the son, so that the son would not be understood without the mother. If the mother condemned herself to mended gloves, the son wore an olive-green coat with sleeves too short for him, proving that he had grown, and might grow still more, like other adults of eighteen or nineteen years of age. The blue trousers, mended by his mother, presented to the eye a brighter patch of color when the coat-tails maliciously parted behind him.

"Don't rub your gloves that way, you'll spoil them," she was saying as Pierrotin appeared. "Is this the conductor? Ah! Pierrotin, is it you?" she exclaimed, leaving her son and taking the coachman apart a few steps.

"I hope you're well, Madame Clapart," he replied, with an air that expressed both respect and familiarity.

"Yes, Pierrotin, very well. Please take good care of my Oscar; he is travelling alone for the first time."

"Oh! so he is going alone to Monsieur Moreau!" cried Pierrotin, for the purpose of finding out whether he were really going there.

"Yes," said the mother.

"Then Madame Moreau is willing?" returned Pierrotin, with a sly look.

"Ah!" said the mother, "it will not be all roses for him, poor child! But his future absolutely requires that I should send him."

This answer struck Pierrotin, who hesitated to confide his fears for the steward to Madame Clapart, while she, on her part, was afraid of injuring her boy if she asked Pierrotin for a care which might have transformed him into a mentor. During this short deliberation, which was ostensibly covered by a few phrases as to the weather, the journey, and the stopping-places along the road, we will ourselves explain what were the ties that united Madame Clapart with Pierrotin, and authorized the two confidential remarks which they have just exchanged.

Often—that is to say, three or four times a month—Pierrotin, on his way to Paris, would find the steward on the road near La Cave. As soon as the vehicle came up, Moreau would sign to a gardener, who, with Pierrotin's help, would put upon the coach either one or two baskets containing the fruits and vegetables of the season, chickens, eggs, butter, and game. The steward always paid the carriage and Pierrotin's fee, adding the money necessary to pay the toll at the barriere, if the baskets contained anything dutiable. These baskets, hampers, or packages, were never directed to any one. On the first occasion, which served for all others, the steward had given Madame Clapart's address by word of mouth to the discreet Pierrotin, requesting him never to deliver to others the precious packages. Pierrotin, impressed with the idea of an intrigue between the steward and some pretty girl, had gone as directed to number 7 rue de la Cerisaie, in the Arsenal quarter, and had there found the Madame Clapart just portrayed, instead of the young and beautiful creature he expected to find.

The drivers of public conveyances and carriers are called by their business to enter many homes, and to be cognizant of many secrets; but social accident, that sub-providence, having willed that they be without education and devoid of the talent of observation, it follows that they are not dangerous. Nevertheless, at the end of a few months, Pierrotin was puzzled to explain the exact relations of Monsieur Moreau and Madame Clapart from what he saw of the household in the rue de la Cerisaie. Though lodgings were not dear at that time in the Arsenal quarter, Madame Clapart lived on a third floor at the end of a court-yard, in a house which was formerly that of a great family, in the days when the higher nobility of the kingdom lived on the ancient site of the Palais des Tournelles and the hotel Saint-Paul. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the great seigneurs divided among themselves these vast spaces, once occupied by the gardens of the kings of France, as indicated by the present names of the streets,—Cerisaie, Beautreillis, des Lions, etc. Madame Clapart's apartment, which was panelled throughout with ancient carvings, consisted of three connecting rooms, a dining-room, salon, and bedroom. Above it was the kitchen, and a bedroom for Oscar. Opposite to the entrance, on what is called in Paris "le carre,"—that is, the square landing,—was the door of a back room, opening, on every floor, into a sort of tower built of rough stone, in which was also the well for the staircase. This was the room in which Moreau slept whenever he went to Paris.

Pierrotin had seen in the first room, where he deposited the hampers, six wooden chairs with straw seats, a table, and a sideboard; at the windows, discolored curtains. Later, when he entered the salon, he noticed some old Empire furniture, now shabby; but only as much as all proprietors exact to secure their rent. Pierrotin judged of the bedroom by the salon and dining-room. The wood-work, painted coarsely of a reddish white, which thickened

and blurred the mouldings and figurines, far from being ornamental, was distressing to the eye. The floors, never waxed, were of that gray tone we see in boarding-schools. When Pierrotin came upon Monsieur and Madame Clapart at their meals he saw that their china, glass, and all other little articles betrayed the utmost poverty; and yet, though the chipped and mended dishes and tureens were those of the poorest families and provoked pity, the forks and spoons were of silver.

Monsieur Clapart, clothed in a shabby surtout, his feet in broken slippers, always wore green spectacles, and exhibited, whenever he removed his shabby cap of a bygone period, a pointed skull, from the top of which trailed a few dirty filaments which even a poet could scarcely call hair. This man, of wan complexion, seemed timorous, but withal tyrannical.

In this dreary apartment, which faced the north and had no other outlook than to a vine on the opposite wall and a well in the corner of the yard, Madame Clapart bore herself with the airs of a queen, and moved like a woman unaccustomed to go anywhere on foot. Often, while thanking Pierrotin, she gave him glances which would have touched to pity an intelligent observer; from time to time she would slip a twelve-sous piece into his hand, and then her voice was charming. Pierrotin had never seen Oscar, for the reason that the boy was always in school at the time his business took him to the house.

Here is the sad story which Pierrotin could never have discovered, even by asking for information, as he sometimes did, from the portress of the house; for that individual knew nothing beyond the fact that the Claparts paid a rent of two hundred and fifty francs a year, had no servant but a charwoman who came daily for a few hours in the morning, that Madame Clapart did some of her smaller washing herself, and paid the postage on her letters daily, being apparently unable to let the sum accumulate.

There does not exist, or rather, there seldom exists, a criminal who is wholly criminal. Neither do we ever meet with a dishonest nature which is completely dishonest. It is possible for a man to cheat his master to his own advantage, or rake in for himself alone all the hay in the manger, but, even while laying up capital by actions more or less illicit, there are few men who never do good ones. If only from self-love, curiosity, or by way of variety, or by chance, every man has his moment of beneficence; he may call it his error, he may never do it again, but he sacrifices to Goodness, as the most surly man sacrifices to the Graces once or twice in his life. If Moreau's faults can ever be excused, it might be on the score of his persistent kindness in succoring a woman of whose favors he had once been proud, and in whose house he was hidden when in peril of his life.

This woman, celebrated under the Directory for her liaison with one of the five kings of that reign, married, through that all-powerful protection, a purveyor who was making his millions out of the government, and whom Napoleon ruined in 1802. This man, named Husson, became insane through his sudden fall from opulence to poverty; he flung himself into the Seine, leaving the beautiful Madame Husson pregnant. Moreau, very intimately allied with Madame Husson, was at that time condemned to death; he was unable therefore to marry the widow, being forced to leave France. Madame Husson, then twenty-two years old, married in her deep distress a government clerk named Clapart, aged twenty-seven, who was said to be a rising man. At that period of our history, government clerks were apt to become persons of importance; for Napoleon was ever on the lookout for capacity. But Clapart, though endowed by nature with a certain coarse beauty, proved to have no intelligence. Thinking Madame Husson very rich, he feigned a great passion for her, and was simply saddled with the impossibility of satisfying either then or in the future the wants she had acquired in a life of opulence. He filled, very poorly, a place in the Treasury that gave him a salary of eighteen hundred francs; which was all the new household had to live on. When Moreau returned to France as the secretary of the Comte de Serizy he heard of Madame Husson's pitiable condition, and he was able, before his own marriage, to get her an appointment as head-waiting-woman to Madame Mere, the Emperor's mother. But in spite of that powerful protection Clapart was never promoted; his incapacity was too apparent.

Ruined in 1815 by the fall of the Empire, the brilliant Aspasia of the Directory had no other resources than Clapart's salary of twelve hundred francs from a clerkship obtained for him through the Comte de Serizy. Moreau, the only protector of a woman whom he had known in possession of millions, obtained a half-scholarship for her son, Oscar Husson, at the school of Henri IV.; and he sent her regularly, by Pierrotin, such supplies from the estate at Presles as he could decently offer to a household in distress.

Oscar was the whole life and all the future of his mother. The poor woman could now be reproached with no other fault than her exaggerated tenderness for her boy,—the bete-noire of his step-father. Oscar was, unfortunately, endowed by nature with a foolishness his mother did not perceive, in spite of the step-father's sarcasms. This foolishness—or, to speak more specifically, this overweening conceit—so troubled Monsieur Moreau that he begged Madame Clapart to send the boy down to him for a month that he might study his character, and find out what career he was fit for. Moreau was really thinking of some day proposing Oscar to the count as his successor.

But to give to the devil and to God what respectively belongs to them, perhaps it would be well to show the causes of Oscar Husson's silly self-

conceit, premising that he was born in the household of Madame Mere. During his early childhood his eyes were dazzled by imperial splendors. His pliant imagination retained the impression of those gorgeous scenes, and nursed the images of a golden time of pleasure in hopes of recovering them. The natural boastfulness of school-boys (possessed of a desire to outshine their mates) resting on these memories of his childhood was developed in him beyond all measure. It may also have been that his mother at home dwelt too fondly on the days when she herself was a queen in Directorial Paris. At any rate, Oscar, who was now leaving school, had been made to bear many humiliations which the paying pupils put upon those who hold scholarships, unless the scholars are able to impose respect by superior physical ability.

This mixture of former splendor now departed, of beauty gone, of blind maternal love, of sufferings heroically borne, made the mother one of those pathetic figures which catch the eye of many an observer in Paris.

Incapable, naturally, of understanding the real attachment of Moreau to this woman, or that of the woman for the man she had saved in 1797, now her only friend, Pierrotin did not think it best to communicate the suspicion that had entered his head as to some danger which was threatening Moreau. The valet's speech, "We have enough to do in this world to look after ourselves," returned to his mind, and with it came that sentiment of obedience to what he called the "chefs de file,"—the front-rank men in war, and men of rank in peace. Besides, just now Pierrotin's head was as full of his own stings as there are five-franc pieces in a thousand francs. So that the "Very good, madame," "Certainly, madame," with which he replied to the poor mother, to whom a trip of twenty miles appeared a journey, showed plainly that he desired to get away from her useless and prolix instructions.

"You will be sure to place the packages so that they cannot get wet if the weather should happen to change."

"I've a hood," replied Pierrotin. "Besides, see, madame, with what care they are being placed."

"Oscar, don't stay more than two weeks, no matter how much they may ask you," continued Madame Clapart, returning to her son. "You can't please Madame Moreau, whatever you do; besides, you must be home by the end of September. We are to go to Belleville, you know, to your uncle Cardot."

"Yes, mamma."

"Above all," she said, in a low voice, "be sure never to speak about servants; keep thinking all the time that Madame Moreau was once a waiting-maid."

"Yes, mamma."

Oscar, like all youths whose vanity is excessively ticklish, seemed annoyed at being lectured on the threshold of the Lion d'Argent.

"Well, now good-bye, mamma. We shall start soon; there's the horse all harnessed."

The mother, forgetting that she was in the open street, embraced her Oscar, and said, smiling, as she took a little roll from her basket:—

"Tiens! you were forgetting your roll and the chocolate! My child, once more, I repeat, don't take anything at the inns; they'd make you pay for the slightest thing ten times what it is worth."

Oscar would fain have seen his mother farther off as she stuffed the bread and chocolate into his pocket. The scene had two witnesses,—two young men a few years older than Oscar, better dressed than he, without a mother hanging on to them, whose actions, dress, and ways all betokened that complete independence which is the one desire of a lad still tied to his mother's apron-strings.

"He said mamma!" cried one of the new-comers, laughing.

The words reached Oscar's ears and drove him to say, "Good-bye, mother!" in a tone of terrible impatience.

Let us admit that Madame Clapart spoke too loudly, and seemed to wish to show to those around them her tenderness for the boy.

"What is the matter with you, Oscar?" asked the poor hurt woman. "I don't know what to make of you," she added in a severe tone, fancying herself able to inspire him with respect,—a great mistake made by those who spoil their children. "Listen, my Oscar," she said, resuming at once her tender voice, "you have a propensity to talk, and to tell all you know, and all that you don't know; and you do it to show off, with the foolish vanity of a mere lad. Now, I repeat, endeavor to keep your tongue in check. You are not sufficiently advanced in life, my treasure, to be able to judge of the persons with whom you may be thrown; and there is nothing more dangerous than to talk in public conveyances. Besides, in a diligence well-bred persons always keep silence."

The two young men, who seemed to have walked to the farther end of the establishment, here returned, making their boot-heels tap upon the paved passage of the porte-cochere. They might have heard the whole of this maternal homily. So, in order to rid himself of his mother, Oscar had recourse to an heroic measure, which proved how vanity stimulates the intellect.

"Mamma," he said, "you are standing in a draught, and you may take cold. Besides, I am going to get into the coach."

The lad must have touched some tender spot, for his mother caught him to

her bosom, kissed him as if he were starting upon a long journey, and went with him to the vehicle with tears in her eyes.

"Don't forget to give five francs to the servants when you come away," she said; "write me three times at least during the fifteen days; behave properly, and remember all that I have told you. You have linen enough; don't send any to the wash. And above all, remember Monsieur Moreau's kindness; mind him as you would a father, and follow his advice."

As he got into the coach, Oscar's blue woollen stockings became visible, through the action of his trousers which drew up suddenly, also the new patch in the said trousers was seen, through the parting of his coat-tails. The smiles of the two young men, on whom these signs of an honorable indigence were not lost, were so many fresh wounds to the lad's vanity.

"The first place was engaged for Oscar," said the mother to Pierrotin. "Take the back seat," she said to the boy, looking fondly at him with a loving smile.

Oh! how Oscar regretted that trouble and sorrow had destroyed his mother's beauty, and that poverty and self-sacrifice prevented her from being better dressed! One of the young men, the one who wore top-boots and spurs, nudged the other to make him take notice of Oscar's mother, and the other twirled his moustache with a gesture which signified,—

"Rather pretty figure!"

"How shall I ever get rid of mamma?" thought Oscar.

"What's the matter?" asked Madame Clapart.

Oscar pretended not to hear, the monster! Perhaps Madame Clapart was lacking in tact under the circumstances; but all absorbing sentiments have so much egotism!

"Georges, do you like children when travelling?" asked one young man of the other.

"Yes, my good Amaury, if they are weaned, and are named Oscar, and have chocolate."

These speeches were uttered in half-tones to allow Oscar to hear them or not hear them as he chose; his countenance was to be the weather-gauge by which the other young traveller could judge how much fun he might be able to get out of the lad during the journey. Oscar chose not to hear. He looked to see if his mother, who weighed upon him like a nightmare, was still there, for he felt that she loved him too well to leave him so quickly. Not only did he involuntarily compare the dress of his travelling companion with his own, but he felt that his mother's toilet counted for much in the smiles of the two young

men.

"If they would only take themselves off!" he said to himself.

Instead of that, Amaury remarked to Georges, giving a tap with his cane to the heavy wheel of the coucou:

"And so, my friend, you are really going to trust your future to this fragile bark?"

"I must," replied Georges, in a tone of fatalism.

Oscar gave a sigh as he remarked the jaunty manner in which his companion's hat was stuck on one ear for the purpose of showing a magnificent head of blond hair beautifully brushed and curled; while he, by order of his step-father, had his black hair cut like a clothes-brush across the forehead, and clipped, like a soldier's, close to the head. The face of the vain lad was round and chubby and bright with the hues of health, while that of his fellow-traveller was long, and delicate, and pale. The forehead of the latter was broad, and his chest filled out a waistcoat of cashmere pattern. As Oscar admired the tight-fitting iron-gray trousers and the overcoat with its frogs and olives clasping the waist, it seemed to him that this romantic-looking stranger, gifted with such advantages, insulted him by his superiority, just as an ugly woman feels injured by the mere sight of a pretty one. The click of the stranger's boot-heels offended his taste and echoed in his heart. He felt as hampered by his own clothes (made no doubt at home out of those of his step-father) as that envied young man seemed at ease in his.

"That fellow must have heaps of francs in his trousers pocket," thought Oscar.

The young man turned round. What were Oscar's feelings on beholding a gold chain round his neck, at the end of which no doubt was a gold watch! From that moment the young man assumed, in Oscar's eyes, the proportions of a personage.

Living in the rue de la Cerisaie since 1815, taken to and from school by his step-father, Oscar had no other points of comparison since his adolescence than the poverty-stricken household of his mother. Brought up strictly, by Moreau's advice, he seldom went to the theatre, and then to nothing better than the Ambigu-Comique, where his eyes could see little elegance, if indeed the eyes of a child riveted on a melodrama were likely to examine the audience. His step-father still wore, after the fashion of the Empire, his watch in the fob of his trousers, from which there depended over his abdomen a heavy gold chain, ending in a bunch of heterogeneous ornaments, seals, and a watch-key with a round top and flat sides, on which was a landscape in mosaic. Oscar, who considered that old-fashioned finery as the "ne plus ultra" of adornment,

was bewildered by the present revelation of superior and negligent elegance. The young man exhibited, offensively, a pair of spotless gloves, and seemed to wish to dazzle Oscar by twirling with much grace a gold-headed switch cane.

Oscar had reached that last quarter of adolescence when little things cause immense joys and immense miseries,—a period when youth prefers misfortune to a ridiculous suit of clothes, and caring nothing for the real interests of life, torments itself about frivolities, about neckcloths, and the passionate desire to appear a man. Then the young fellow swells himself out; his swagger is all the more portentous because it is exercised on nothings. Yet if he envies a fool who is elegantly dressed, he is also capable of enthusiasm over talent, and of genuine admiration for genius. Such defects as these, when they have no root in the heart, prove only the exuberance of sap,—the richness of the youthful imagination. That a lad of nineteen, an only child, kept severely at home by poverty, adored by a mother who put upon herself all privations for his sake, should be moved to envy by a young man of twenty-two in a frogged surtout-coat silk-lined, a waist-coat of fancy cashmere, and a cravat slipped through a ring of the worse taste, is nothing more than a peccadillo committed in all ranks of social life by inferiors who envy those that seem beyond them. Men of genius themselves succumb to this primitive passion. Did not Rousseau admire Ventura and Bacle?

But Oscar passed from peccadillo to evil feelings. He felt humiliated; he was angry with the youth he envied, and there rose in his heart a secret desire to show openly that he himself was as good as the object of his envy.

The two young fellows continued to walk up and own from the gate to the stables, and from the stables to the gate. Each time they turned they looked at Oscar curled up in his corner of the coucou. Oscar, persuaded that their jokes and laughter concerned himself, affected the utmost indifference. He began to hum the chorus of a song lately brought into vogue by the liberals, which ended with the words, "'Tis Voltaire's fault, 'tis Rousseau's fault."

"Tiens! perhaps he is one of the chorus at the Opera," said Amaury.

This exasperated Oscar, who bounded up, pulled out the wooden "back," and called to Pierrotin:—

"When do we start?"

"Presently," said that functionary, who was standing, whip in hand, and gazing toward the rue d'Enghien.

At this moment the scene was enlivened by the arrival of a young man accompanied by a true "gamin," who was followed by a porter dragging a hand-cart. The young man came up to Pierrotin and spoke to him confidentially, on which the latter nodded his head, and called to his own

porter. The man ran out and helped to unload the little hand-cart, which contained, besides two trunks, buckets, brushes, boxes of singular shape, and an infinity of packages and utensils which the youngest of the new-comers, who had climbed into the imperial, stowed away with such celerity that Oscar, who happened to be smiling at his mother, now standing on the other side of the street, saw none of the paraphernalia which might have revealed to him the profession of his new travelling companion.

The gamin, who must have been sixteen years of age, wore a gray blouse buckled round his waist by a polished leather belt. His cap, jauntily perched on the side of his head, seemed the sign of a merry nature, and so did the picturesque disorder of the curly brown hair which fell upon his shoulders. A black-silk cravat drew a line round his very white neck, and added to the vivacity of his bright gray eyes. The animation of his brown and rosy face, the moulding of his rather large lips, the ears detached from his head, his slightly turned-up nose,—in fact, all the details of his face proclaimed the lively spirit of a Figaro, and the careless gayety of youth, while the vivacity of his gesture and his mocking eye revealed an intellect already developed by the practice of a profession adopted very early in life. As he had already some claims to personal value, this child, made man by Art or by vocation, seemed indifferent to the question of costume; for he looked at his boots, which had not been polished, with a quizzical air, and searched for the spots on his brown Holland trousers less to remove them than to see their effect.

"I'm in style," he said, giving himself a shake and addressing his companion.

The glance of the latter, showed authority over his adept, in whom a practised eye would at once have recognized the joyous pupil of a painter, called in the argot of the studios a "rapin."

"Behave yourself, Mistigris," said his master, giving him the nickname which the studio had no doubt bestowed upon him.

The master was a slight and pale young man, with extremely thick black hair, worn in a disorder that was actually fantastic. But this abundant mass of hair seemed necessary to an enormous head, whose vast forehead proclaimed a precocious intellect. A strained and harassed face, too original to be ugly, was hollowed as if this noticeable young man suffered from some chronic malady, or from privations caused by poverty (the most terrible of all chronic maladies), or from griefs too recent to be forgotten. His clothing, analogous, with due allowance, to that of Mistigris, consisted of a shabby surtout coat, American-green in color, much worn, but clean and well-brushed; a black waistcoat buttoned to the throat, which almost concealed a scarlet neckerchief; and trousers, also black and even more worn than the coat, flapping his thin

legs. In addition, a pair of very muddy boots indicated that he had come on foot and from some distance to the coach office. With a rapid look this artist seized the whole scene of the Lion d'Argent, the stables, the courtyard, the various lights and shades, and the details; then he looked at Mistigris, whose satirical glance had followed his own.

"Charming!" said Mistigris.

"Yes, very," replied the other.

"We seem to have got here too early," pursued Mistigris. "Couldn't we get a mouthful somewhere? My stomach, like Nature, abhors a vacuum."

"Have we time to get a cup of coffee?" said the artist, in a gentle voice, to Pierrotin.

"Yes, but don't be long," answered the latter.

"Good; that means we have a quarter of an hour," remarked Mistigris, with the innate genius for observation of the Paris rapin.

The pair disappeared. Nine o'clock was striking in the hotel kitchen. Georges thought it just and reasonable to remonstrate with Pierrotin.

"Hey! my friend; when a man is blessed with such wheels as these (striking the clumsy tires with his cane) he ought at least to have the merit of punctuality. The deuce! one doesn't get into that thing for pleasure; I have business that is devilishly pressing or I wouldn't trust my bones to it. And that horse, which you call Rougeot, he doesn't look likely to make up for lost time."

"We are going to harness Bichette while those gentlemen take their coffee," replied Pierrotin. "Go and ask, you," he said to his porter, "if Pere Leger is coming with us—"

"Where is your Pere Leger?" asked Georges.

"Over the way, at number 50. He couldn't get a place in the Beaumont diligence," said Pierrotin, still speaking to his porter and apparently making no answer to his customer; then he disappeared himself in search of Bichette.

Georges, after shaking hands with his friend, got into the coach, handling with an air of great importance a portfolio which he placed beneath the cushion of the seat. He took the opposite corner to that of Oscar, on the same seat.

"This Pere Leger troubles me," he said.

"They can't take away our places," replied Oscar. "I have number one."

"And I number two," said Georges.

Just as Pierrotin reappeared, having harnessed Bichette, the porter returned with a stout man in tow, whose weight could not have been less than two hundred and fifty pounds at the very least. Pere Leger belonged to the species of farmer which has a square back, a protuberant stomach, a powdered pigtail, and wears a little coat of blue linen. His white gaiters, coming above the knee, were fastened round the ends of his velveteen breeches and secured by silver buckles. His hob-nailed shoes weighed two pounds each. In his hand, he held a small reddish stick, much polished, with a large knob, which was fastened round his wrist by a thong of leather.

"And you are called Pere Leger?" asked Georges, very seriously, as the farmer attempted to put a foot on the step.

"At your service," replied the farmer, looking in and showing a face like that of Louis XVIII., with fat, rubicund cheeks, from between which issued a nose that in any other face would have seemed enormous. His smiling eyes were sunken in rolls of fat. "Come, a helping hand, my lad!" he said to Pierrotin.

The farmer was hoisted in by the united efforts of Pierrotin and the porter, to cries of "Houp la! hi! ha! hoist!" uttered by Georges.

"Oh! I'm not going far; only to La Cave," said the farmer, good-humoredly.

In France everybody takes a joke.

"Take the back seat," said Pierrotin, "there'll be six of you."

"Where's your other horse?" demanded Georges. "Is it as mythical as the third post-horse."

"There she is," said Pierrotin, pointing to the little mare, who was coming along alone.

"He calls that insect a horse!" exclaimed Georges.

"Oh! she's good, that little mare," said the farmer, who by this time was seated. "Your servant, gentlemen. Well, Pierrotin, how soon do you start?"

"I have two travellers in there after a cup of coffee," replied Pierrotin.

The hollow-cheeked young man and his page reappeared.

"Come, let's start!" was the general cry.

"We are going to start," replied Pierrotin. "Now, then, make ready," he said to the porter, who began thereupon to take away the stones which stopped the wheels.

Pierrotin took Rougeot by the bridle and gave that guttural cry, "Ket, ket!" to tell the two animals to collect their energy; on which, though evidently stiff,

they pulled the coach to the door of the Lion d'Argent. After which manoeuvre, which was purely preparatory, Pierrotin gazed up the rue d'Enghien and then disappeared, leaving the coach in charge of the porter.

"Ah ca! is he subject to such attacks,—that master of yours?" said Mistigris, addressing the porter.

"He has gone to fetch his feed from the stable," replied the porter, well versed in all the usual tricks to keep passengers quiet.

"Well, after all," said Mistigris, "'art is long, but life is short'—to Bichette."

At this particular epoch, a fancy for mutilating or transposing proverbs reigned in the studios. It was thought a triumph to find changes of letters, and sometimes of words, which still kept the semblance of the proverb while giving it a fantastic or ridiculous meaning.[*]

[*] It is plainly impossible to translate many of these proverbs

and put any fun or meaning into them.—Tr.

"Patience, Mistigris!" said his master; "'come wheel, come whoa.'"

Pierrotin here returned, bringing with him the Comte de Serizy, who had come through the rue de l'Echiquier, and with whom he had doubtless had a short conversation.

"Pere Leger," said Pierrotin, looking into the coach, "will you give your place to Monsieur le comte? That will balance the carriage better."

"We sha'n't be off for an hour if you go on this way," cried Georges. "We shall have to take down this infernal bar, which cost such trouble to put up. Why should everybody be made to move for the man who comes last? We all have a right to the places we took. What place has monsieur engaged? Come, find that out! Haven't you a way-book, a register, or something? What place has Monsieur Lecomte engaged?—count of what, I'd like to know."

"Monsieur le comte," said Pierrotin, visibly troubled, "I am afraid you will be uncomfortable."

"Why didn't you keep better count of us?" said Mistigris. "'Short counts make good ends.'"

"Mistigris, behave yourself," said his master.

Monsieur de Serizy was evidently taken by all the persons in the coach for a bourgeois of the name of Lecomte.

"Don't disturb any one," he said to Pierrotin. "I will sit with you in front."

"Come, Mistigris," said the master to his rapin, "remember the respect you

owe to age; you don't know how shockingly old you may be yourself some day. 'Travel deforms youth.' Give your place to monsieur."

Mistigris opened the leathern curtain and jumped out with the agility of a frog leaping into the water.

"You mustn't be a rabbit, august old man," he said to the count.

"Mistigris, 'ars est celare bonum,'" said his master.

"I thank you very much, monsieur," said the count to Mistigris's master, next to whom he now sat.

The minister of State cast a sagacious glance round the interior of the coach, which greatly affronted both Oscar and Georges.

"When persons want to be master of a coach, they should engage all the places," remarked Georges.

Certain now of his incognito, the Comte de Serizy made no reply to this observation, but assumed the air of a good-natured bourgeois.

"Suppose you were late, wouldn't you be glad that the coach waited for you?" said the farmer to the two young men.

Pierrotin still looked up and down the street, whip in hand, apparently reluctant to mount to the hard seat where Mistigris was fidgeting.

"If you expect some one else, I am not the last," said the count.

"I agree to that reasoning," said Mistigris.

Georges and Oscar began to laugh impertinently.

"The old fellow doesn't know much," whispered Georges to Oscar, who was delighted at this apparent union between himself and the object of his envy.

"Parbleu!" cried Pierrotin, "I shouldn't be sorry for two more passengers."

"I haven't paid; I'll get out," said Georges, alarmed.

"What are you waiting for, Pierrotin?" asked Pere Leger.

Whereupon Pierrotin shouted a certain "Hi!" in which Bichette and Rougeot recognized a definitive resolution, and they both sprang toward the rise of the faubourg at a pace which was soon to slacken.

The count had a red face, of a burning red all over, on which were certain inflamed portions which his snow-white hair brought out into full relief. To any but heedless youths, this complexion would have revealed a constant inflammation of the blood, produced by incessant labor. These blotches and

pimples so injured the naturally noble air of the count that careful examination was needed to find in his green-gray eyes the shrewdness of the magistrate, the wisdom of a statesman, and the knowledge of a legislator. His face was flat, and the nose seemed to have been depressed into it. The hat hid the grace and beauty of his forehead. In short, there was enough to amuse those thoughtless youths in the odd contrasts of the silvery hair, the burning face, and the thick, tufted eye-brows which were still jet-black.

The count wore a long blue overcoat, buttoned in military fashion to the throat, a white cravat around his neck, cotton wool in his ears, and a shirt-collar high enough to make a large square patch of white on each cheek. His black trousers covered his boots, the toes of which were barely seen. He wore no decoration in his button-hole, and doeskin gloves concealed his hands. Nothing about him betrayed to the eyes of youth a peer of France, and one of the most useful statesmen in the kingdom.

Pere Leger had never seen the count, who, on his side, knew the former only by name. When the count, as he got into the carriage, cast the glance about him which affronted Georges and Oscar, he was, in reality, looking for the head-clerk of his notary (in case he had been forced, like himself, to take Pierrotin's vehicle), intending to caution him instantly about his own incognito. But feeling reassured by the appearance of Oscar, and that of Pere Leger, and, above all, by the quasi-military air, the waxed moustaches, and the general look of an adventurer that distinguished Georges, he concluded that his note had reached his notary, Alexandre Crottat, in time to prevent the departure of the clerk.

"Pere Leger," said Pierrotin, when they reached the steep hill of the faubourg Saint-Denis by the rue de la Fidelite, "suppose we get out, hey?"

"I'll get out, too," said the count, hearing Leger's name.

"Goodness! if this is how we are going, we shall do fourteen miles in fifteen days!" cried Georges.

"It isn't my fault," said Pierrotin, "if a passenger wishes to get out."

"Ten louis for you if you keep the secret of my being here as I told you before," said the count in a low voice, taking Pierrotin by the arm.

"Oh, my thousand francs!" thought Pierrotin as he winked an eye at Monsieur de Serizy, which meant, "Rely on me."

Oscar and Georges stayed in the coach.

"Look here, Pierrotin, since Pierrotin you are," cried Georges, when the passengers were once more stowed away in the vehicle, "if you don't mean to go faster than this, say so! I'll pay my fare and take a post-horse at Saint-

Denis, for I have important business on hand which can't be delayed."

"Oh! he'll go well enough," said Pere Leger. "Besides, the distance isn't great."

"I am never more than half an hour late," asserted Pierrotin.

"Well, you are not wheeling the Pope in this old barrow of yours," said Georges, "so, get on."

"Perhaps he's afraid of shaking monsieur," said Mistigris looking round at the count. "But you shouldn't have preferences, Pierrotin, it isn't right."

"Coucous and the Charter make all Frenchmen equals," said Georges.

"Oh! be easy," said Pere Leger; "we are sure to get to La Chapelle by mid-day,"—La Chapelle being the village next beyond the Barriere of Saint-Denis.

CHAPTER IV. THE GRANDSON OF THE FAMOUS CZERNI-GEORGES

Those who travel in public conveyances know that the persons thus united by chance do not immediately have anything to say to one another; unless under special circumstances, conversation rarely begins until they have gone some distance. This period of silence is employed as much in mutual examination as in settling into their places. Minds need to get their equilibrium as much as bodies. When each person thinks he has discovered the age, profession, and character of his companions, the most talkative member of the company begins, and the conversation gets under way with all the more vivacity because those present feel a need of enlivening the journey and forgetting its tedium.

That is how things happen in French stage-coaches. In other countries customs are very different. Englishmen pique themselves on never opening their lips; Germans are melancholy in a vehicle; Italians too wary to talk; Spaniards have no public conveyances; and Russians no roads. There is no amusement except in the lumbering diligences of France, that gabbling and indiscreet country, where every one is in a hurry to laugh and show his wit, and where jest and epigram enliven all things, even the poverty of the lower classes and the weightier cares of the solid bourgeois. In a coach there is no police to check tongues, and legislative assemblies have set the fashion of public discussion. When a young man of twenty-two, like the one named Georges, is clever and lively, he is much tempted, especially under circumstances like the present, to abuse those qualities.

In the first place, Georges had soon decided that he was the superior human being of the party there assembled. He saw in the count a manufacturer of the second-class, whom he took, for some unknown reason, to be a chandler; in the shabby young man accompanied by Mistigris, a fellow of no account; in Oscar a ninny, and in Pere Leger, the fat farmer, an excellent subject to hoax. Having thus looked over the ground, he resolved to amuse himself at the expense of such companions.

"Let me see," he thought to himself, as the coucou went down the hill from La Chapelle to the plain of Saint-Denis, "shall I pass myself off for Etienne or Beranger? No, these idiots don't know who they are. Carbonaro? the deuce! I might get myself arrested. Suppose I say I'm the son of Marshal Ney? Pooh! what could I tell them?—about the execution of my father? It wouldn't be funny. Better be a disguised Russian prince and make them swallow a lot of stuff about the Emperor Alexander. Or I might be Cousin, and talk philosophy; oh, couldn't I perplex 'em! But no, that shabby fellow with the tousled head looks to me as if he had jogged his way through the Sorbonne. What a pity! I can mimic an Englishman so perfectly I might have pretended to be Lord Byron, travelling incognito. Sapristi! I'll command the troops of Ali, pacha of Janina!"

During this mental monologue, the coucou rolled through clouds of dust rising on either side of it from that much travelled road.

"What dust!" cried Mistigris.

"Henry IV. is dead!" retorted his master. "If you'd say it was scented with vanilla that would be emitting a new opinion."

"You think you're witty," replied Mistigris. "Well, it is like vanilla at times."

"In the Levant—" said Georges, with the air of beginning a story.

"'Ex Oriente flux,'" remarked Mistigris's master, interrupting the speaker.

"I said in the Levant, from which I have just returned," continued Georges, "the dust smells very good; but here it smells of nothing, except in some old dust-barrel like this."

"Has monsieur lately returned from the Levant?" said Mistigris, maliciously. "He isn't much tanned by the sun."

"Oh! I've just left my bed after an illness of three months, from the germ, so the doctors said, of suppressed plague."

"Have you had the plague?" cried the count, with a gesture of alarm. "Pierrotin, stop!"

"Go on, Pierrotin," said Mistigris. "Didn't you hear him say it was inward, his plague?" added the rapin, talking back to Monsieur de Serizy. "It isn't catching; it only comes out in conversation."

"Mistigris! if you interfere again I'll have you put off into the road," said his master. "And so," he added, turning to Georges, "monsieur has been to the East?"

"Yes, monsieur; first to Egypt, then to Greece, where I served under Ali, pacha of Janina, with whom I had a terrible quarrel. There's no enduring those climates long; besides, the emotions of all kinds in Oriental life have disorganized my liver."

"What, have you served as a soldier?" asked the fat farmer. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-nine," replied Georges, whereupon all the passengers looked at him. "At eighteen I enlisted as a private for the famous campaign of 1813; but I was present at only one battle, that of Hanau, where I was promoted sergeant-major. In France, at Montereau, I won the rank of sub-lieutenant, and was decorated by,—there are no informers here, I'm sure,—by the Emperor."

"What! are you decorated?" cried Oscar. "Why don't you wear your cross?"

"The cross of 'ceux-ci'? No, thank you! Besides, what man of any breeding would wear his decorations in travelling? There's monsieur," he said, motioning to the Comte de Serizy. "I'll bet whatever you like—"

"Betting whatever you like means, in France, betting nothing at all," said Mistigris's master.

"I'll bet whatever you like," repeated Georges, incisively, "that monsieur here is covered with stars."

"Well," said the count, laughing, "I have the grand cross of the Legion of honor, that of Saint Andrew of Russia, that of the Prussian Eagle, that of the Annunciation of Sardinia, and the Golden Fleece."

"Beg pardon," said Mistigris, "are they all in the coucou?"

"Hey! that brick-colored old fellow goes it strong!" whispered Georges to Oscar. "What was I saying?—oh! I know. I don't deny that I adore the Emperor—"

"I served under him," said the count.

"What a man he was, wasn't he?" cried Georges.

"A man to whom I owe many obligations," replied the count, with a silly expression that was admirably assumed.

"For all those crosses?" inquired Mistigris.

"And what quantities of snuff he took!" continued Monsieur de Serizy.

"He carried it loose in his pockets," said Georges.

"So I've been told," remarked Pere Leger with an incredulous look.

"Worse than that; he chewed and smoked," continued Georges. "I saw him smoking, in a queer way, too, at Waterloo, when Marshal Soult took him round the waist and flung him into his carriage, just as he had seized a musket and was going to charge the English—"

"You were at Waterloo!" cried Oscar, his eyes stretching wide open.

"Yes, young man, I did the campaign of 1815. I was a captain at Mont-Saint-Jean, and I retired to the Loire, after we were all disbanded. Faith! I was disgusted with France; I couldn't stand it. In fact, I should certainly have got myself arrested; so off I went, with two or three dashing fellows,—Selves, Besson, and others, who are now in Egypt,—and we entered the service of pacha Mohammed; a queer sort of fellow he was, too! Once a tobacco merchant in the bazaars, he is now on the high-road to be a sovereign prince. You've all seen him in that picture by Horace Vernet,—'The Massacre of the Mameluks.' What a handsome fellow he was! But I wouldn't give up the religion of my fathers and embrace Islamism; all the more because the abjuration required a surgical operation which I hadn't any fancy for. Besides, nobody respects a renegade. Now if they had offered me a hundred thousand francs a year, perhaps—and yet, no! The pacha did give me a thousand talari as a present."

"How much is that?" asked Oscar, who was listening to Georges with all his ears.

"Oh! not much. A talaro is, as you might say, a five-franc piece. But faith! I got no compensation for the vices I contracted in that God-forsaken country, if country it is. I can't live now without smoking a narghile twice a-day, and that's very costly."

"How did you find Egypt?" asked the count.

"Egypt? Oh! Egypt is all sand," replied Georges, by no means taken aback. "There's nothing green but the valley of the Nile. Draw a green line down a sheet of yellow paper, and you have Egypt. But those Egyptians—fellahs they are called—have an immense advantage over us. There are no gendarmes in that country. You may go from end to end of Egypt, and you won't see one."

"But I suppose there are a good many Egyptians," said Mistigris.

"Not as many as you think for," replied Georges. "There are many more

Abyssinians, and Giaours, and Vechabites, Bedouins, and Cophs. But all that kind of animal is very uninteresting, and I was glad enough to embark on a Genoese polacca which was loading for the Ionian Islands with gunpowder and munitions for Ali de Tebelen. You know, don't you, that the British sell powder and munitions of war to all the world,—Turks, Greeks, and the devil, too, if the devil has money? From Zante we were to skirt the coasts of Greece and tack about, on and off. Now it happens that my name of Georges is famous in that country. I am, such as you see me, the grandson of the famous Czerni-Georges who made war upon the Porte, and, instead of crushing it, as he meant to do, got crushed himself. His son took refuge in the house of the French consul at Smyrna, and he afterwards died in Paris, leaving my mother pregnant with me, his seventh child. Our property was all stolen by friends of my grandfather; in fact, we were ruined. My mother, who lived on her diamonds, which she sold one by one, married, in 1799, my step-father, Monsieur Yung, a purveyor. But my mother is dead, and I have quarrelled with my step-father, who, between ourselves, is a blackguard; he is still alive, but I never see him. That's why, in despair, left all to myself, I went off to the wars as a private in 1813. Well, to go back to the time I returned to Greece; you wouldn't believe with what joy old Ali Tebelen received the grandson of Czerni-Georges. Here, of course, I call myself simply Georges. The pacha gave me a harem—"

"You have had a harem?" said Oscar.

"Were you a pacha with many tails?" asked Mistigris.

"How is it that you don't know," replied Georges, "that only the Sultan makes pachas, and that my friend Tebelen (for we were as friendly as Bourbons) was in rebellion against the Padishah! You know, or you don't know, that the true title of the Grand Seignior is Padishah, and not Sultan or Grand Turk. You needn't think that a harem is much of a thing; you might as well have a herd of goats. The women are horribly stupid down there; I much prefer the grisettes of the Chaumieres at Mont-Parnasse."

"They are nearer, at any rate," said the count.

"The women of the harem couldn't speak a word of French, and that language is indispensable for talking. Ali gave me five legitimate wives and ten slaves; that's equivalent to having none at all at Janina. In the East, you must know, it is thought very bad style to have wives and women. They have them, just as we have Voltaire and Rousseau; but who ever opens his Voltaire or his Rousseau? Nobody. But, for all that, the highest style is to be jealous. They sew a woman up in a sack and fling her into the water on the slightest suspicion,—that's according to their Code."

"Did you fling any in?" asked the farmer.

"I, a Frenchman! for shame! I loved them."

Whereupon Georges twirled and twisted his moustache with a dreamy air.

They were now entering Saint-Denis, and Pierrotin presently drew up before the door of a tavern where were sold the famous cheese-cakes of that place. All the travellers got out. Puzzled by the apparent truth mingled with Georges' inventions, the count returned to the coucou when the others had entered the house, and looked beneath the cushion for the portfolio which Pierrotin told him that enigmatical youth had placed there. On it he read the words in gilt letters: "Maitre Crottat, notary." The count at once opened it, and fearing, with some reason, that Pere Leger might be seized with the same curiosity, he took out the deed of sale for the farm at Moulineaux, put it into his coat pocket, and entered the inn to keep an eye on the travellers.

"This Georges is neither more nor less than Crottat's second clerk," thought he. "I shall pay my compliments to his master, whose business it was to send me his head-clerk."

From the respectful glances of Pere Leger and Oscar, Georges perceived that he had made for himself two fervent admirers. Accordingly, he now posed as a great personage; paid for their cheese-cakes, and ordered for each a glass of Alicante. He offered the same to Mistigris and his master, who refused with smiles; but the friend of Ali Tebelen profited by the occasion to ask the pair their names.

"Oh! monsieur," said Mistigris' master, "I am not blessed, like you, with an illustrious name; and I have not returned from Asia—"

At this moment the count, hastening into the huge inn-kitchen lest his absence should excite inquiry, entered the place in time to hear the conclusion of the young man's speech.

"—I am only a poor painter lately returned from Rome, where I went at the cost of the government, after winning the 'grand prix' five years ago. My name is Schinner."

"Hey! bourgeois, may I offer you a glass of Alicante and some cheese-cakes?" said Georges to the count.

"Thank you," replied the latter. "I never leave home without taking my cup of coffee and cream."

"Don't you eat anything between meals? How bourgeois, Marais, Place Royale, that is!" cried Georges. "When he 'blagued' just now about his crosses, I thought there was something in him," whispered the Eastern hero to the painter. "However, we'll set him going on his decorations, the old tallow-chandler! Come, my lad," he added, calling to Oscar, "drink me down the

glass poured out for the chandler; that will start your moustache."

Oscar, anxious to play the man, swallowed the second glass of wine, and ate three more cheese-cakes.

"Good wine, that!" said Pere Leger, smacking his lips.

"It is all the better," said Georges, "because it comes from Bercy. I've been to Alicante myself, and I know that this wine no more resembles what is made there than my arm is like a windmill. Our made-up wines are a great deal better than the natural ones in their own country. Come, Pierrotin, take a glass! It is a great pity your horses can't take one, too; we might go faster."

"Forward, march!" cried Pierrotin, amid a mighty cracking of whips, after the travellers were again boxed up.

It was now eleven o'clock. The weather, which had been cloudy, cleared; the breeze swept off the mists, and the blue of the sky appeared in spots; so that when the coucou trundled along the narrow strip of road from Saint-Denis to Pierrefitte, the sun had fairly drunk up the last floating vapors of the diaphanous veil which swathed the scenery of that famous region.

"Well, now, tell us why you left your friend the pacha," said Pere Leger, addressing Georges.

"He was a very singular scamp," replied Georges, with an air that hid a multitude of mysteries. "He put me in command of his cavalry,—so far, so good—"

"Ah! that's why he wears spurs," thought poor Oscar.

"At that time Ali Tebelen wanted to rid himself of Chosrew pacha, another queer chap! You call him, here, Chaureff; but the name is pronounced, in Turkish, Cosserew. You must have read in the newspapers how old Ali drubbed Chosrew, and soundly, too, faith! Well, if it hadn't been for me, Ali Tebelen himself would have bit the dust two days earlier. I was at the right wing, and I saw Chosrew, an old sly-boots, thinking to force our centre,—ranks closed, stiff, swift, fine movement a la Murat. Good! I take my time; then I charge, double-quick, and cut his line in two,—you understand? Ha! ha! after the affair was over, Ali kissed me—"

"Do they do that in the East?" asked the count, in a joking way.

"Yes, monsieur," said the painter, "that's done all the world over."

"After that," continued Georges, "Ali gave me yataghans, and carbines, and scimetars, and what-not. But when we got back to his capital he made me propositions, wanted me to drown a wife, and make a slave of myself,—Orientals are so queer! But I thought I'd had enough of it; for, after all, you

know, Ali was a rebel against the Porte. So I concluded I had better get off while I could. But I'll do Monsieur Tebelen the justice to say that he loaded me with presents,—diamonds, ten thousand talari, one thousand gold coins, a beautiful Greek girl for groom, a little Circassian for a mistress, and an Arab horse! Yes, Ali Tebelen, pacha of Janina, is too little known; he needs an historian. It is only in the East one meets with such iron souls, who can nurse a vengeance twenty years and accomplish it some fine morning. He had the most magnificent white beard that was ever seen, and a hard, stern face—"

"But what did you do with your treasures?" asked farmer Leger.

"Ha! that's it! you may well ask that! Those fellows down there haven't any Grand Livre nor any Bank of France. So I was forced to carry off my windfalls in a felucca, which was captured by the Turkish High-Admiral himself. Such as you see me here to-day, I came very near being impaled at Smyrna. Indeed, if it hadn't been for Monsieur de Riviere, our ambassador, who was there, they'd have taken me for an accomplice of Ali pacha. I saved my head, but, to tell the honest truth, all the rest, the ten thousand talari, the thousand gold pieces, and the fine weapons, were all, yes all, drunk up by the thirsty treasury of the Turkish admiral. My position was the more perilous because that very admiral happened to be Chosrew pacha. After I routed him, the fellow had managed to obtain a position which is equal to that of our Admiral of the Fleet —"

"But I thought he was in the cavalry?" said Pere Leger, who had followed the narrative with the deepest attention.

"Dear me! how little the East is understood in the French provinces!" cried Georges. "Monsieur, I'll explain the Turks to you. You are a farmer; the Padishah (that's the Sultan) makes you a marshal; if you don't fulfil your functions to his satisfaction, so much the worse for you, he cuts your head off; that's his way of dismissing his functionaries. A gardener is made a prefect; and the prime minister comes down to be a foot-boy. The Ottomans have no system of promotion and no hierarchy. From a cavalry officer Chosrew simply became a naval officer. Sultan Mahmoud ordered him to capture Ali by sea; and he did get hold of him, assisted by those beggarly English—who put their paw on most of the treasure. This Chosrew, who had not forgotten the riding-lesson I gave him, recognized me. You understand, my goose was cooked, oh, brown! when it suddenly came into my head to claim protection as a Frenchman and a troubadour from Monsieur de Riviere. The ambassador, enchanted to find something to show him off, demanded that I should be set at liberty. The Turks have one good trait in their nature; they are as willing to let you go as they are to cut your head off; they are indifferent to everything. The French consul, charming fellow, friend of Chosrew, made him give back two thousand of the talari, and, consequently, his name is, as I may say, graven on

my heart—"

"What was his name?" asked Monsieur de Serizy; and a look of some surprise passed over his face as Georges named, correctly, one of our most distinguished consul-generals who happened at that time to be stationed at Smyrna.

"I assisted," added Georges, "at the execution of the Governor of Smyrna, whom the Sultan had ordered Chosrew to put to death. It was one of the most curious things I ever saw, though I've seen many,—I'll tell you about it when we stop for breakfast. From Smyrna I crossed to Spain, hearing there was a revolution there. I went straight to Mina, who appointed me as his aide-de-camp with the rank of colonel. I fought for the constitutional cause, which will certainly be defeated when we enter Spain—as we undoubtedly shall, some of these days—"

"You, a French soldier!" said the count, sternly. "You show extraordinary confidence in the discretion of those who are listening to you."

"But there are no spies here," said Georges.

"Are you aware, Colonel Georges," continued the count, "that the Court of Peers is at this very time inquiring into a conspiracy which has made the government extremely severe in its treatment of French soldiers who bear arms against France, and who deal in foreign intrigues for the purpose of overthrowing our legitimate sovereigns."

On hearing this stern admonition the painter turned red to his ears and looked at Mistigris, who seemed dumfounded.

"Well," said Pere Leger, "what next?"

"If," continued the count, "I were a magistrate, it would be my duty to order the gendarmes at Pierrefitte to arrest the aide-de-camp of Mina, and to summon all present in this vehicle to testify to his words."

This speech stopped Georges' narrative all the more surely, because at this moment the coucou reached the guard-house of a brigade of gendarmerie,—the white flag floating, as the orthodox saying is, upon the breeze.

"You have too many decorations to do such a dastardly thing," said Oscar.

"Never mind; we'll catch up with him soon," whispered Georges in the lad's ear.

"Colonel," cried Leger, who was a good deal disturbed by the count's outburst, and wanted to change the conversation, "in all these countries where you have been, what sort of farming do they do? How do they vary the crops?"

"Well, in the first place, my good fellow, you must understand, they are too

busy cropping off each others' heads to think much of cropping the ground."

The count couldn't help smiling; and that smile reassured the narrator.

"They have a way of cultivating which you will think very queer. They don't cultivate at all; that's their style of farming. The Turks and the Greeks, they eat onions or rise. They get opium from poppies, and it gives them a fine revenue. Then they have tobacco, which grows of itself, famous latakiah! and dates! and all kinds of sweet things that don't need cultivation. It is a country full of resources and commerce. They make fine rugs at Smyrna, and not dear."

"But," persisted Leger, "if the rugs are made of wool they must come from sheep; and to have sheep you must have fields, farms, culture—"

"Well, there may be something of that sort," replied Georges. "But their chief crop, rice, grows in the water. As for me, I have only been along the coasts and seen the parts that are devastated by war. Besides, I have the deepest aversion to statistics."

"How about the taxes?" asked the farmer.

"Oh! the taxes are heavy; they take all a man has, and leave him the rest. The pacha of Egypt was so struck with the advantages of that system, that, when I came away he was on the point of organizing his own administration on that footing—"

"But," said Leger, who no longer understood a single word, "how?"

"How?" said Georges. "Why, agents go round and take all the harvests, and leave the fellahs just enough to live on. That's a system that does away with stamped papers and bureaucracy, the curse of France, hein?"

"By virtue of what right?" said Leger.

"Right? why it is a land of despotism. They haven't any rights. Don't you know the fine definition Montesquieu gives of despotism. 'Like the savage, it cuts down the tree to gather the fruits.' They don't tax, they take everything."

"And that's what our rulers are trying to bring us to. 'Tax vobiscum,'—no, thank you!" said Mistigris.

"But that is what we are coming to," said the count. "Therefore, those who own land will do well to sell it. Monsieur Schinner must have seen how things are tending in Italy, where the taxes are enormous."

"Corpo di Bacco! the Pope is laying it on heavily," replied Schinner. "But the people are used to it. Besides, Italians are so good-natured that if you let 'em murder a few travellers along the highways they're contented."

"I see, Monsieur Schinner," said the count, "that you are not wearing the decoration you obtained in 1819; it seems the fashion nowadays not to wear orders."

Mistigris and the pretended Schinner blushed to their ears.

"Well, with me," said the artist, "the case is different. It isn't on account of fashion; but I don't want to be recognized. Have the goodness not to betray me, monsieur; I am supposed to be a little painter of no consequence,—a mere decorator. I'm on may way to a chateau where I mustn't rouse the slightest suspicion."

"Ah! I see," said the count, "some intrigue,—a love affair! Youth is happy!"

Oscar, who was writhing in his skin at being a nobody and having nothing to say, gazed at Colonel Czerni-Georges and at the famous painter Schinner, and wondered how he could transform himself into somebody. But a youth of nineteen, kept at home all his life, and going for two weeks only into the country, what could he be, or do, or say? However, the Alicante had got into his head, and his vanity was boiling in his veins; so when the famous Schinner allowed a romantic adventure to be guessed at in which the danger seemed as great as the pleasure, he fastened his eyes, sparkling with wrath and envy, upon that hero.

"Yes," said the count, with a credulous air, "a man must love a woman well to make such sacrifices."

"What sacrifices?" demanded Mistigris.

"Don't you know, my little friend, that a ceiling painted by so great a master as yours is worth its weight in gold?" replied the count. "If the civil list paid you, as it did, thirty thousand francs for each of those rooms in the Louvre," he continued, addressing Schinner, "a bourgeois,—as you call us in the studios—ought certainly to pay you twenty thousand. Whereas, if you go to this chateau as a humble decorator, you will not get two thousand."

"The money is not the greatest loss," said Mistigris. "The work is sure to be a masterpiece, but he can't sign it, you know, for fear of compromising her."

"Ah! I'd return all my crosses to the sovereigns who gave them to me for the devotion that youth can win," said the count.

"That's just it!" said Mistigris, "when one's young, one's loved; plenty of love, plenty of women; but they do say: 'Where there's wife, there's mope.'"

"What does Madame Schinner say to all this?" pursued the count; "for I believe you married, out of love, the beautiful Adelaide de Rouville, the protegee of old Admiral de Kergarouet; who, by the bye, obtained for you the

order for the Louvre ceilings through his nephew, the Comte de Fontaine."

"A great painter is never married when he travels," said Mistigris.

"So that's the morality of studios, is it?" cried the count, with an air of great simplicity.

"Is the morality of courts where you got those decorations of yours any better?" said Schinner, recovering his self-possession, upset for the moment by finding out how much the count knew of Schinner's life as an artist.

"I never asked for any of my orders," said the count. "I believe I have loyally earned them."

"'A fair yield and no flavor,'" said Mistigris.

The count was resolved not to betray himself; he assumed an air of good-humored interest in the country, and looked up the valley of Groslay as the coucou took the road to Saint-Brice, leaving that to Chantilly on the right.

"Is Rome as fine as they say it is?" said Georges, addressing the great painter.

"Rome is fine only to those who love it; a man must have a passion for it to enjoy it. As a city, I prefer Venice,—though I just missed being murdered there."

"Faith, yes!" cried Mistigris; "if it hadn't been for me you'd have been gobbled up. It was that mischief-making tom-fool, Lord Byron, who got you into the scrape. Oh! wasn't he raging, that buffoon of an Englishman?"

"Hush!" said Schinner. "I don't want my affair with Lord Byron talked about."

"But you must own, all the same, that you were glad enough I knew how to box," said Mistigris.

From time to time, Pierrotin exchanged sly glances with the count, which might have made less inexperienced persons than the five other travellers uneasy.

"Lords, pachas, and thirty-thousand-franc ceilings!" he cried. "I seem to be driving sovereigns. What pourboires I'll get!"

"And all the places paid for!" said Mistigris, slyly.

"It is a lucky day for me," continued Pierrotin; "for you know, Pere Leger, about my beautiful new coach on which I have paid an advance of two thousand francs? Well, those dogs of carriage-builders, to whom I have to pay two thousand five hundred francs more, won't take fifteen hundred down, and my note for a thousand for two months! Those vultures want it all. Who ever

heard of being so stiff with a man in business these eight years, and the father of a family?—making me run the risk of losing everything, carriage and money too, if I can't find before to-morrow night that miserable last thousand! Hue, Bichette! They won't play that trick on the great coach offices, I'll warrant you."

"Yes, that's it," said the rapin; "'your money or your strife.'"

"Well, you have only eight hundred now to get," remarked the count, who considered this moan, addressed to Pere Leger, a sort of letter of credit drawn upon himself.

"True," said Pierrotin. "Xi! xi! Rougeot!"

"You must have seen many fine ceilings in Venice," resumed the count, addressing Schinner.

"I was too much in love to take any notice of what seemed to me then mere trifles," replied Schinner. "But I was soon cured of that folly, for it was in the Venetian states—in Dalmatia—that I received a cruel lesson."

"Can it be told?" asked Georges. "I know Dalmatia very well."

"Well, if you have been there, you know that all the people at that end of the Adriatic are pirates, rovers, corsairs retired from business, as they haven't been hanged—"

"Uscoques," said Georges.

Hearing the right name given, the count, who had been sent by Napoleon on one occasion to the Illyrian provinces, turned his head and looked at Georges, so surprised was he.

"The affair happened in that town where they make maraschino," continued Schinner, seeming to search for a name.

"Zara," said Georges. "I've been there; it is on the coast."

"You are right," said the painter. "I had gone there to look at the country, for I adore scenery. I've longed a score of times to paint landscape, which no one, as I think, understands but Mistigris, who will some day reproduce Hobbema, Ruysdael, Claude Lorrain, Poussin, and others."

"But," exclaimed the count, "if he reproduces one of them won't that be enough?"

"If you persist in interrupting, monsieur," said Oscar, "we shall never get on."

"And Monsieur Schinner was not addressing himself to you in particular," added Georges.

"'Tisn't polite to interrupt," said Mistigris, sententiously, "but we all do it, and conversation would lose a great deal if we didn't scatter little condiments while exchanging our reflections. Therefore, continue, agreeable old gentleman, to lecture us, if you like. It is done in the best society, and you know the proverb: 'we must 'owl with the wolves.'"

"I had heard marvellous things of Dalmatia," resumed Schinner, "so I went there, leaving Mistigris in Venice at an inn—"

"'Locanda,'" interposed Mistigris; "keep to the local color."

"Zara is what is called a country town—"

"Yes," said Georges; "but it is fortified."

"Parbleu!" said Schinner; "the fortifications count for much in my adventure. At Zara there are a great many apothecaries. I lodged with one. In foreign countries everybody makes a principal business of letting lodgings; all other trades are accessory. In the evening, linen changed, I sat in my balcony. In the opposite balcony I saw a woman; oh! such a woman! Greek,—that tells all! The most beautiful creature in the town; almond eyes, lids that dropped like curtains, lashes like a paint-brush, a face with an oval to drive Raffaelle mad, a skin of the most delicious coloring, tints well-blended, velvety! and hands, oh!—"

"They weren't made of butter like those of the David school," put in Mistigris.

"You are always lugging in your painting," cried Georges.

"La, la!" retorted Mistigris; "'an ounce o' paint is worth a pound of swagger.'"

"And such a costume! pure Greek!" continued Schinner. "Conflagration of soul! you understand? Well, I questioned my Diafoirus; and he told me that my neighbor was named Zena. Changed my linen. The husband, an old villain, in order to marry Zena, paid three hundred thousand francs to her father and mother, so celebrated was the beauty of that beautiful creature, who was truly the most beautiful girl in all Dalmatia, Illyria, Adriatica, and other places. In those parts they buy their wives without seeing them—"

"I shall not go there," said Pere Leger.

"There are nights when my sleep is still illuminated by the eyes of Zena," continued Schinner. "The husband was sixty-nine years of age, and jealous! not as a tiger, for they say of a tiger, 'jealous as a Dalmatian'; and my man was worse than A Dalmatian, one Dalmatian,—he was three and a half Dalmatians at the very least; he was an Uscoque, tricoque, archicoque in a bicoque of a paltry little place like Zara—"

"Horrid fellow, and 'horrider bellow,'" put in Mistigris.

"Ha! good," said Georges, laughing.

"After being a corsair, and probably a pirate, he thought no more of spitting a Christian on his dagger than I did of spitting on the ground," continued Schinner. "So that was how the land lay. The old wretch had millions, and was hideous with the loss of an ear some pacha had cut off, and the want of an eye left I don't know where. 'Never,' said the little Diafoirus, 'never does he leave his wife, never for a second.' 'Perhaps she'll want your services, and I could go in your clothes; that's a trick that has great success in our theatres,' I told him. Well, it would take too long to tell you all the delicious moments of that lifetime—to wit, three days—which I passed exchanging looks with Zena, and changing linen every day. It was all the more violently titillating because the slightest motion was significant and dangerous. At last it must have dawned upon Zena's mind that none but a Frenchman and an artist was daring enough to make eyes at her in the midst of the perils by which she was surrounded; and as she hated her hideous pirate, she answered my glances with delightful ogles fit to raise a man to the summit of Paradise without pulleys. I attained to the height of Don Quixote; I rose to exaltation! and I cried: 'The monster may kill me, but I'll go, I'll go!' I gave up landscape and studied the ignoble dwelling of the Uscoque. That night, changed linen, and put on the most perfumed shirt I had; then I crossed the street, and entered —"

"The house?" cried Oscar.

"The house?" echoed Georges.

"The house," said Schinner.

"Well, you're a bold dog," cried farmer Leger. "I should have kept out of it myself."

"Especially as you could never have got through the doorway," replied Schinner. "So in I went," he resumed, "and I found two hands stretched out to meet mine. I said nothing, for those hands, soft as the peel of an onion, enjoined me to silence. A whisper breathed into my ear, 'He sleeps!' Then, as we were sure that nobody would see us, we went to walk, Zena and I, upon the ramparts, but accompanied, if you please, by a duenna, as hideous as an old portress, who didn't leave us any more than our shadow; and I couldn't persuade Madame Pirate to send her away. The next night we did the same thing, and again I wanted to get rid of the old woman, but Zena resisted. As my sweet love spoke only Greek, and I Venetian, we couldn't understand each other, and so we quarrelled. I said to myself, in changing linen, 'As sure as fate, the next time there'll be no old woman, and we can make it all up with the

language of love.' Instead of which, fate willed that that old woman should save my life! You'll hear how. The weather was fine, and, not to create suspicion, I took a turn at landscape,—this was after our quarrel was made up, you understand. After walking along the ramparts for some time, I was coming tranquilly home with my hands in my pockets, when I saw the street crowded with people. Such a crowd! like that for an execution. It fell upon me; I was seized, garroted, gagged, and guarded by the police. Ah! you don't know—and I hope you never may know—what it is to be taken for a murderer by a maddened populace which stones you and howls after you from end to end of the principal street of a town, shouting for your death! Ah! those eyes were so many flames, all mouths were a single curse, while from the volume of that burning hatred rose the fearful cry: 'To death! to death! down with the murderer!'"

"So those Dalmatians spoke our language, did they?" said the count. "I observe you relate the scene as if it happened yesterday."

Schinner was nonplussed.

"Riot has but one language," said the astute statesman Mistigris.

"Well," continued Schinner, "when I was brought into court in presence of the magistrates, I learned that the cursed corsair was dead, poisoned by Zena. I'd liked to have changed linen then. Give you my word, I knew nothing of that melodrama. It seems the Greek girl put opium (a great many poppies, as monsieur told us, grow about there) in the pirate's grog, just to make him sleep soundly and leave her free for a little walk with me, and the old duenna, unfortunate creature, made a mistake and trebled the dose. The immense fortune of that cursed pirate was really the cause of all my Zena's troubles. But she explained matters so ingenuously that I, for one, was released with an injunction from the mayor and the Austrian commissary of police to go back to Rome. Zena, who let the heirs of the Uscoque and the judges get most of the old villain's wealth, was let off with two years' seclusion in a convent, where she still is. I am going back there some day to paint her portrait; for in a few years, you know, all this will be forgotten. Such are the follies one commits at eighteen!"

"And you left me without a sou in the locanda at Venice," said Mistigris. "And I had to get from Venice to Rome by painting portraits for five francs apiece, which they didn't pay me. However, that was my halcyon time. I don't regret it."

"You can imagine the reflections that came to me in that Dalmatian prison, thrown there without protection, having to answer to Austrians and Dalmatians, and in danger of losing my head because I went twice to walk with a woman. There's ill-luck, with a vengeance!"

"Did all that really happen to you?" said Oscar, naively.

"Why shouldn't it happen to him, inasmuch as it had already happened during the French occupation of Illyria to one of our most gallant officers of artillery?" said the count, slyly.

"And you believed that artillery officer?" said Mistigris, as slyly to the count.

"Is that all?" asked Oscar.

"Of course he can't tell you that they cut his head off,—how could he?" said Mistigris. "'Dead schinners tell no tales.'"

"Monsieur, are there farms in that country?" asked Pere Leger. "What do they cultivate?"

"Maraschino," replied Mistigris,—"a plant that grows to the height of the lips, and produces a liqueur which goes by that name."

"Ah!" said Pere Leger.

"I only stayed three days in the town and fifteen in prison," said Schinner, "so I saw nothing; not even the fields where they grow the maraschino."

"They are fooling you," said Georges to the farmer. "Maraschino comes in cases."

"'Romances alter cases,'" remarked Mistigris.

CHAPTER V. THE DRAMA BEGINS

Pierrotin's vehicle was now going down the steep incline of the valley of Saint-Brice to the inn which stands in the middle of the large village of that name, where Pierrotin was in the habit of stopping an hour to breathe his horses, give them their oats, and water them. It was now about half-past one o'clock.

"Ha! here's Pere Leger," cried the inn-keeper, when the coach pulled up before the door. "Do you breakfast?"

"Always once a day," said the fat farmer; "and I'll break a crust here and now."

"Give us a good breakfast," cried Georges, twirling his cane in a cavalier manner which excited the admiration of poor Oscar.

But that admiration was turned to jealousy when he saw the gay adventurer

pull out from a side-pocket a small straw case, from which he selected a light-colored cigar, which he proceeded to smoke on the threshold of the inn door while waiting for breakfast.

"Do you smoke?" he asked of Oscar.

"Sometimes," replied the ex-schoolboy, swelling out his little chest and assuming a jaunty air.

Georges presented the open case to Oscar and Schinner.

"Phew!" said the great painter; "ten-sous cigars!"

"The remains of those I brought back from Spain," said the adventurer. "Do you breakfast here?"

"No," said the artist. "I am expected at the chateau. Besides, I took something at the Lion d'Argent just before starting."

"And you?" said Georges to Oscar.

"I have breakfasted," replied Oscar.

Oscar would have given ten years of his life for boots and straps to his trousers. He sneezed, he coughed, he spat, and swallowed the smoke with ill-disguised grimaces.

"You don't know how to smoke," said Schinner; "look at me!"

With a motionless face Schinner breathed in the smoke of his cigar and let it out through his nose without the slightest contraction of feature. Then he took another whiff, kept the smoke in his throat, removed the cigar from his lips, and allowed the smoke slowly and gracefully to escape them.

"There, young man," said the great painter.

"Here, young man, here's another way; watch this," said Georges, imitating Schinner, but swallowing the smoke and exhaling none.

"And my parents believed they had educated me!" thought Oscar, endeavoring to smoke with better grace.

But his nausea was so strong that he was thankful when Mistigris filched his cigar, remarking, as he smoked it with evident satisfaction, "You haven't any contagious diseases, I hope."

Oscar in reply would fain have punched his head.

"How he does spend money!" he said, looking at Colonel Georges. "Eight francs for Alicante and the cheese-cakes; forty sous for cigars; and his breakfast will cost him—"

"Ten francs at least," replied Mistigris; "but that's how things are. 'Sharp stomachs make short purses.'"

"Come, Pere Leger, let us drink a bottle of Bordeaux together," said Georges to the farmer.

"Twenty francs for his breakfast!" cried Oscar; "in all, more than thirty-odd francs since we started!"

Killed by a sense of his inferiority, Oscar sat down on a stone post, lost in a revery which did not allow him to perceive that his trousers, drawn up by the effect of his position, showed the point of junction between the old top of his stocking and the new "footing,"—his mother's handiwork.

"We are brothers in socks," said Mistigris, pulling up his own trousers sufficiently to show an effect of the same kind,—"'By the footing, Hercules.'"

The count, who overheard this, laughed as he stood with folded arms under the porte-cochere, a little behind the other travellers. However nonsensical these lads might be, the grave statesman envied their very follies; he liked their bragging and enjoyed the fun of their lively chatter.

"Well, are you to have Les Moulineaux? for I know you went to Paris to get the money for the purchase," said the inn-keeper to Pere Leger, whom he had just taken to the stables to see a horse he wanted to sell to him. "It will be queer if you manage to fleece a peer of France and a minister of State like the Comte de Serizy."

The person thus alluded to showed no sign upon his face as he turned to look at the farmer.

"I've done for him," replied Pere Leger, in a low voice.

"Good! I like to see those nobles fooled. If you should want twenty thousand francs or so, I'll lend them to you—But Francois, the conductor of Touchard's six o'clock coach, told me that Monsieur Margueron was invited by the Comte de Serizy to dine with him to-day at Presles."

"That was the plan of his Excellency, but we had our own little ways of thwarting it," said the farmer, laughing.

"The count could appoint Monsieur Margueron's son, and you haven't any place to give,—remember that," said the inn-keeper.

"Of course I do; but if the count has the ministry on his side, I have King Louis XVIII.," said Pere Leger, in a low voice. "Forty thousand of his pictures on coin of the realm given to Moreau will enable me to buy Les Moulineaux for two hundred and sixty thousand, money down, before Monsieur de Serizy can do so. When he finds the sale is made, he'll be glad enough to buy the

farm for three hundred and sixty thousand, instead of letting me cut it up in small lots right in the heart of his property."

"Well done, bourgeois!" cried the inn-keeper.

"Don't you think that's good play?" said Leger.

"Besides," said the inn-keeper, "the farm is really worth that to him."

"Yes; Les Moulineaux brings in to-day six thousand francs in rental. I'll take another lease of it at seven thousand five hundred for eighteen years. Therefore it is really an investment at more than two and a half per cent. The count can't complain of that. In order not to involve Moreau, he is himself to propose me as tenant and farmer; it gives him a look of acting for his master's interests by finding him nearly three per cent for his money, and a tenant who will pay well."

"How much will Moreau make, in all?"

"Well, if the count gives him ten thousand francs for the transaction the matter will bring him fifty thousand,—and well-earned, too."

"After all, the count, so they tell me, doesn't like Presles. And then he is so rich, what does it matter what it costs him?" said the inn-keeper. "I have never seen him, myself."

"Nor I," said Pere Leger. "But he must be intending to live there, or why should he spend two hundred thousand francs in restoring the chateau? It is as fine now as the King's own palace."

"Well, well," said the inn-keeper, "it was high time for Moreau to feather his nest."

"Yes, for if the masters come there," replied Leger, "they won't keep their eyes in their pockets."

The count lost not a word of this conversation, which was held in a low voice, but not in a whisper.

"Here I have actually found the proofs I was going down there to seek," he thought, looking at the fat farmer as he entered the kitchen. "But perhaps," he added, "it is only a scheme; Moreau may not have listened to it."

So unwilling was he to believe that his steward could lend himself to such a conspiracy.

Pierrotin here came out to water his horses. The count, thinking that the driver would probably breakfast with the farmer and the inn-keeper, feared some thoughtless indiscretion.

"All these people combine against us," he thought; "it is allowable to baffle

them—Pierrotin," he said in a low voice as the man passed him, "I promised you ten louis to keep my secret; but if you continue to conceal my name (and remember, I shall know if you pronounce it, or make the slightest sign that reveals it to any one, no matter who, here or at Isle-Adam, before to-night), I will give you to-morrow morning, on your return trip, the thousand francs you need to pay for your new coach. Therefore, by way of precaution," added the count, striking Pierrotin, who was pale with happiness, on the shoulder, "don't go in there to breakfast; stay with your horses."

"Monsieur le comte, I understand you; don't be afraid! it relates to Pere Leger, of course."

"It relates to every one," replied the count.

"Make yourself easy.—Come, hurry," said Pierrotin, a few moments later, putting his head into the kitchen. "We are late. Pere Leger, you know there's a hill to climb; I'm not hungry, and I'll drive on slowly; you can soon overtake me,—it will do you good to walk a bit."

"What a hurry you are in, Pierrotin!" said the inn-keeper. "Can't you stay and breakfast? The colonel here pays for the wine at fifty sous, and has ordered a bottle of champagne."

"I can't. I've got a fish I must deliver by three o'clock for a great dinner at Stors; there's no fooling with customers, or fishes, either."

"Very good," said Pere Leger to the inn-keeper. "You can harness that horse you want to sell me into the cabriolet; we'll breakfast in peace and overtake Pierrotin, and I can judge of the beast as we go along. We can go three in your jolter."

To the count's surprise, Pierrotin himself rebridled the horses. Schinner and Mistigris had walked on. Scarcely had Pierrotin overtaken the two artists and was mounting the hill from which Ecouen, the steeple of Mesnil, and the forests that surround that most beautiful region, came in sight, when the gallop of a horse and the jingling of a vehicle announced the coming of Pere Leger and the grandson of Czerni-Georges, who were soon restored to their places in the coucou.

As Pierrotin drove down the narrow road to Moisselles, Georges, who had so far not ceased to talk with the farmer of the beauty of the hostess at Saint-Brice, suddenly exclaimed: "Upon my word, this landscape is not so bad, great painter, is it?"

"Pooh! you who have seen the East and Spain can't really admire it."

"I've two cigars left! If no one objects, will you help me finish them, Schinner? the little young man there seems to have found a whiff or two

enough for him."

Pere Leger and the count kept silence, which passed for consent.

Oscar, furious at being called a "little young man," remarked, as the other two were lighting their cigars:

"I am not the aide-de-camp of Mina, monsieur, and I have not yet been to the East, but I shall probably go there. The career to which my family destine me will spare me, I trust, the annoyances of travelling in a coucou before I reach your present age. When I once become a personage I shall know how to maintain my station."

"'Et caetera punctum!'" crowed Mistigris, imitating the hoarse voice of a young cock; which made Oscar's deliverance all the more absurd, because he had just reached the age when the beard sprouts and the voice breaks. "'What a chit for chat!'" added the rapin.

"Your family, young man, destine you to some career, do they?" said Georges. "Might I ask what it is?"

"Diplomacy," replied Oscar.

Three bursts of laughter came from Mistigris, the great painter, and the farmer. The count himself could not help smiling. Georges was perfectly grave.

"By Allah!" he exclaimed, "I see nothing to laugh at in that. Though it seems to me, young man, that your respectable mother is, at the present moment, not exactly in the social sphere of an ambassadress. She carried a handbag worthy of the utmost respect, and wore shoe-strings which—"

"My mother, monsieur!" exclaimed Oscar, in a tone of indignation. "That was the person in charge of our household."

"'Our household' is a very aristocratic term," remarked the count.

"Kings have households," replied Oscar, proudly.

A look from Georges repressed the desire to laugh which took possession of everybody; he contrived to make Mistigris and the painter understand that it was necessary to manage Oscar cleverly in order to work this new mine of amusement.

"Monsieur is right," said the great Schinner to the count, motioning towards Oscar. "Well-bred people always talk of their 'households'; it is only common persons like ourselves who say 'home.' For a man so covered with decorations—"

"'Nunc my eye, nunc alii,'" whispered Mistigris.

"—you seem to know little of the language of the courts. I ask your future protection, Excellency," added Schinner, turning to Oscar.

"I congratulate myself on having travelled with three such distinguished men," said the count,—"a painter already famous, a future general, and a young diplomatist who may some day recover Belgium for France."

Having committed the odious crime of repudiating his mother, Oscar, furious from a sense that his companions were laughing at him, now resolved, at any cost, to make them pay attention to him.

"'All is not gold that glitters,'" he began, his eyes flaming.

"That's not it," said Mistigris. "'All is not old that titters.' You'll never get on in diplomacy if you don't know your proverbs better than that."

"I may not know proverbs, but I know my way—"

"It must be far," said Georges, "for I saw that person in charge of your household give you provisions enough for an ocean voyage: rolls, chocolate —"

"A special kind of bread and chocolate, yes, monsieur," returned Oscar; "my stomach is much too delicate to digest the victuals of a tavern."

"'Victuals' is a word as delicate and refined as your stomach," said Georges.

"Ah! I like that word 'victuals,'" cried the great painter.

"The word is all the fashion in the best society," said Mistigris. "I use it myself at the cafe of the Black Hen."

"Your tutor is, doubtless, some celebrated professor, isn't he?—Monsieur Andrieux of the Academie Francaise, or Monsieur Royer-Collard?" asked Schinner.

"My tutor is or was the Abbe Loraux, now vicar of Saint-Sulpice," replied Oscar, recollecting the name of the confessor at his school.

"Well, you were right to take a private tutor," said Mistigris. "'Tuto, tutor, celeritus, and jocund.' Of course, you will reward him well, your abbe?"

"Undoubtedly he will be made a bishop some day," said Oscar.

"By your family influence?" inquired Georges gravely.

"We shall probably contribute to his rise, for the Abbe Frayssinous is constantly at our house."

"Ah! you know the Abbe Frayssinous?" asked the count.

"He is under obligations to my father," answered Oscar.

"Are you on your way to your estate?" asked Georges.

"No, monsieur; but I am able to say where I am going, if others are not. I am going to the Chateau de Presles, to the Comte de Serizy."

"The devil! are you going to Presles?" cried Schinner, turning as red as a cherry.

"So you know his Excellency the Comte de Serizy?" said Georges.

Pere Leger turned round to look at Oscar with a stupefied air.

"Is Monsieur de Serizy at Presles?" he said.

"Apparently, as I am going there," replied Oscar.

"Do you often see the count," asked Monsieur de Serizy.

"Often," replied Oscar. "I am a comrade of his son, who is about my age, nineteen; we ride together on horseback nearly every day."

"'Aut Caesar, aut Serizy,'" said Mistigris, sententiously.

Pierrotin and Pere Leger exchanged winks on hearing this statement.

"Really," said the count to Oscar, "I am delighted to meet with a young man who can tell me about that personage. I want his influence on a rather serious matter, although it would cost him nothing to oblige me. It concerns a claim I wish to press on the American government. I should be glad to obtain information about Monsieur de Serizy."

"Oh! if you want to succeed," replied Oscar, with a knowing look, "don't go to him, but go to his wife; he is madly in love with her; no one knows more than I do about that; but she can't endure him."

"Why not?" said Georges.

"The count has a skin disease which makes him hideous. Doctor Albert has tried in vain to cure it. The count would give half his fortune if he had a chest like mine," said Oscar, swelling himself out. "He lives a lonely life in his own house; gets up very early in the morning and works from three to eight o'clock; after eight he takes his remedies,—sulphur-baths, steam-baths, and such things. His valet bakes him in a sort of iron box—for he is always in hopes of getting cured."

"If he is such a friend of the King as they say he is, why doesn't he get his Majesty to touch him?" asked Georges.

"The count has lately promised thirty thousand francs to a celebrated Scotch doctor who is coming over to treat him," continued Oscar.

"Then his wife can't be blamed if she finds better—" said Schinner, but he did not finish his sentence.

"I should say so!" resumed Oscar. "The poor man is so shrivelled and old you would take him for eighty! He's as dry as parchment, and, unluckily for him, he feels his position."

"Most men would," said Pere Leger.

"He adores his wife and dares not find fault with her," pursued Oscar, rejoicing to have found a topic to which they listened. "He plays scenes with her which would make you die of laughing,—exactly like Arnolphe in Moliere's comedy."

The count, horror-stricken, looked at Pierrotin, who, finding that the count said nothing, concluded that Madame Clapart's son was telling falsehoods.

"So, monsieur," continued Oscar, "if you want the count's influence, I advise you to apply to the Marquis d'Aiglemont. If you get that former adorer of Madame de Serizy on your side, you will win husband and wife at one stroke."

"Look here!" said the painter, "you seem to have seen the count without his clothes; are you his valet?"

"His valet!" cried Oscar.

"Hang it! people don't tell such things about their friends in public conveyances," exclaimed Mistigris. "As for me, I'm not listening to you; I'm deaf: 'discretion plays the better part of adder.'"

"'A poet is nasty and not fit,' and so is a tale-bearer," cried Schinner.

"Great painter," said Georges, sententiously, "learn this: you can't say harm of people you don't know. Now the little one here has proved, indubitably, that he knows his Serizy by heart. If he had told us about the countess, perhaps —?"

"Stop! not a word about the Comtesse de Serizy, young men," cried the count. "I am a friend of her brother, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, and whoever attempts to speak disparagingly of the countess must answer to me."

"Monsieur is right," cried the painter; "no man should blaguer women."

"God, Honor, and the Ladies! I believe in that melodrama," said Mistigris.

"I don't know the guerrilla chieftain, Mina, but I know the Keeper of the Seals," continued the count, looking at Georges; "and though I don't wear my decorations," he added, looking at the painter, "I prevent those who do not deserve them from obtaining any. And finally, let me say that I know so many

persons that I even know Monsieur Grindot, the architect of Presles. Pierrotin, stop at the next inn; I want to get out a moment."

Pierrotin hurried his horses through the village street of Moisselles, at the end of which was the inn where all travellers stopped. This short distance was done in silence.

"Where is that young fool going?" asked the count, drawing Pierrotin into the inn-yard.

"To your steward. He is the son of a poor lady who lives in the rue de la Cerisaie, to whom I often carry fruit, and game, and poultry from Presles. She is a Madame Husson."

"Who is that man?" inquired Pere Leger of Pierrotin when the count had left him.

"Faith, I don't know," replied Pierrotin; "this is the first time I have driven him. I shouldn't be surprised if he was that prince who owns Maffliers. He has just told me to leave him on the road near there; he doesn't want to go on to Isle-Adam."

"Pierrotin thinks he is the master of Maffliers," said Pere Leger, addressing Georges when he got back into the coach.

The three young fellows were now as dull as thieves caught in the act; they dared not look at each other, and were evidently considering the consequences of their fibs.

"This is what is called 'suffering for license sake,'" said Mistigris.

"You see I did know the count," said Oscar.

"Possibly. But you'll never be an ambassador," replied Georges. "When people want to talk in public conveyances, they ought to be careful, like me, to talk without saying anything."

"That's what speech is for," remarked Mistigris, by way of conclusion.

The count returned to his seat and the coucou rolled on amid the deepest silence.

"Well, my friends," said the count, when they reached the Carreau woods, "here we all are, as silent as if we were going to the scaffold."

"'Silence gives content,'" muttered Mistigris.

"The weather is fine," said Georges.

"What place is that?" said Oscar, pointing to the chateau de Franconville, which produces a fine effect at that particular spot, backed, as it is, by the

noble forest of Saint-Martin.

"How is it," cried the count, "that you, who say you go so often to Presles, do not know Franconville?"

"Monsieur knows men, not castles," said Mistigris.

"Budding diplomatists have so much else to take their minds," remarked Georges.

"Be so good as to remember my name," replied Oscar, furious. "I am Oscar Husson, and ten years hence I shall be famous."

After that speech, uttered with bombastic assumption, Oscar flung himself back in his corner.

"Husson of what, of where?" asked Mistigris.

"It is a great family," replied the count. "Husson de la Cerisaie; monsieur was born beneath the steps of the Imperial throne."

Oscar colored crimson to the roots of his hair, and was penetrated through and through with a dreadful foreboding.

They were now about to descend the steep hill of La Cave, at the foot of which, in a narrow valley, flanked by the forest of Saint-Martin, stands the magnificent chateau of Presles.

"Messieurs," said the count, "I wish you every good fortune in your various careers. Monsieur le colonel, make your peace with the King of France; the Czerni-Georges ought not to snub the Bourbons. I have nothing to wish for you, my dear Monsieur Schinner; your fame is already won, and nobly won by splendid work. But you are much to be feared in domestic life, and I, being a married man, dare not invite you to my house. As for Monsieur Husson, he needs no protection; he possesses the secrets of statesmen and can make them tremble. Monsieur Leger is about to pluck the Comte de Serizy, and I can only exhort him to do it with a firm hand. Pierrotin, put me out here, and pick me up at the same place to-morrow," added the count, who then left the coach and took a path through the woods, leaving his late companions confused and bewildered.

"He must be that count who has hired Franconville; that's the path to it," said Leger.

"If ever again," said the false Schinner, "I am caught blague-ing in a public coach, I'll fight a duel with myself. It was your fault, Mistigris," giving his rapin a tap on the head.

"All I did was to help you out, and follow you to Venice," said Mistigris; "but that's always the way, 'Fortune belabors the slave.'"

"Let me tell you," said Georges to his neighbor Oscar, "that if, by chance, that was the Comte de Serizy, I wouldn't be in your skin for a good deal, healthy as you think it."

Oscar, remembering his mother's injunctions, which these words recalled to his mind, turned pale and came to his senses.

"Here you are, messieurs!" cried Pierrotin, pulling up at a fine iron gate.

"Here we are—where?" said the painter, and Georges, and Oscar all at once.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Pierrotin, "if that doesn't beat all! Ah ca, monsieurs, have none of you been here before? Why, this is the chateau de Presles."

"Oh, yes; all right, friend," said Georges, recovering his audacity. "But I happen to be going on to Les Moulineaux," he added, not wishing his companions to know that he was really going to the chateau.

"You don't say so? Then you are coming to me," said Pere Leger.

"How so?"

"Why, I'm the farmer at Moulineaux. Hey, colonel, what brings you there?"

"To taste your butter," said Georges, pulling out his portfolio.

"Pierrotin," said Oscar, "leave my things at the steward's. I am going straight to the chateau."

Whereupon Oscar plunged into a narrow path, not knowing, in the least, where he was going.

"Hi! Monsieur l'ambassadeur," cried Pere Leger, "that's the way to the forest; if you really want to get to the chateau, go through the little gate."

Thus compelled to enter, Oscar disappeared into the grand court-yard. While Pere Leger stood watching Oscar, Georges, utterly confounded by the discovery that the farmer was the present occupant of Les Moulineaux, has slipped away so adroitly that when the fat countryman looked round for his colonel there was no sign of him.

The iron gates opened at Pierrotin's demand, and he proudly drove in to deposit with the concierge the thousand and one utensils belonging to the great Schinner. Oscar was thunderstruck when he became aware that Mistigris and his master, the witnesses of his bravado, were to be installed in the chateau itself. In ten minutes Pierrotin had discharged the various packages of the painter, the bundles of Oscar Husson, and the pretty little leather portmanteau, which he took from its nest of hay and confided mysteriously to the wife of

the concierge. Then he drove out of the courtyard, cracking his whip, and took the road that led through the forest to Isle-Adam, his face beaming with the sly expression of a peasant who calculates his profits. Nothing was lacking now to his happiness; on the morrow he would have his thousand francs, and, as a consequence, his magnificent new coach.

CHAPTER VI. THE MOREAU INTERIOR

Oscar, somewhat abashed, was skulking behind a clump of trees in the centre of the court-yard, and watching to see what became of his two road-companions, when Monsieur Moreau suddenly came out upon the portico from what was called the guard-room. He was dressed in a long blue overcoat which came to his heels, breeches of yellowish leather and top-boots, and in his hand he carried a riding-whip.

"Ah! my boy, so here you are? How is the dear mamma?" he said, taking Oscar by the hand. "Good-day, messieurs," he added to Mistigris and his master, who then came forward. "You are, no doubt, the two painters whom Monsieur Grindot, the architect, told me to expect."

He whistled twice at the end of his whip; the concierge came.

"Take these gentlemen to rooms 14 and 15. Madame Moreau will give you the keys. Go with them to show the way; make fires there, if necessary, and take up all their things. I have orders from Monsieur le comte," he added, addressing the two young men, "to invite you to my table, messieurs; we dine at five, as in Paris. If you like hunting, you will find plenty to amuse you; I have a license from the Eaux et Forets; and we hunt over twelve thousand acres of forest, not counting our own domain."

Oscar, the painter, and Mistigris, all more or less subdued, exchanged glances, but Mistigris, faithful to himself, remarked in a low tone, "'Veni, vidi, cecidi,—I came, I saw, I slaughtered.'"

Oscar followed the steward, who led him along at a rapid pace through the park.

"Jacques," said Moreau to one of his children whom they met, "run in and tell your mother that little Husson has come, and say to her that I am obliged to go to Les Moulineaux for a moment."

The steward, then about fifty years old, was a dark man of medium height, and seemed stern. His bilious complexion, to which country habits had added a certain violent coloring, conveyed, at first sight, the impression of a nature

which was other than his own. His blue eyes and a large crow-beaked nose gave him an air that was the more threatening because his eyes were placed too close together. But his large lips, the outline of his face, and the easy good-humor of his manner soon showed that his nature was a kindly one. Abrupt in speech and decided in tone, he impressed Oscar immensely by the force of his penetration, inspired, no doubt, by the affection which he felt for the boy. Trained by his mother to magnify the steward, Oscar had always felt himself very small in Moreau's presence; but on reaching Presles a new sensation came over him, as if he expected some harm from this fatherly figure, his only protector.

"Well, my Oscar, you don't look pleased at getting here," said the steward. "And yet you'll find plenty of amusement; you shall learn to ride on horseback, and shoot, and hunt."

"I don't know any of those things," said Oscar, stupidly.

"But I brought you here to learn them."

"Mamma told me only to stay two weeks because of Madame Moreau."

"Oh! we'll see about that," replied Moreau, rather wounded that his conjugal authority was doubted.

Moreau's youngest son, an active, strapping lad of twelve, here ran up.

"Come," said his father, "take Oscar to your mother."

He himself went rapidly along the shortest path to the gamekeeper's house, which was situated between the park and the forest.

The pavilion, or lodge, in which the count had established his steward, was built a few years before the Revolution. It stood in the centre of a large garden, one wall of which adjoined the court-yard of the stables and offices of the chateau itself. Formerly its chief entrance was on the main road to the village. But after the count's father bought the building, he closed that entrance and united the place with his own property.

The house, built of freestone, in the style of the period of Louis XV. (it is enough to say that its exterior decoration consisted of a stone drapery beneath the windows, as in the colonnades of the Place Louis XV., the flutings of which were stiff and ungainly), had on the ground-floor a fine salon opening into a bedroom, and a dining-room connected with a billiard-room. These rooms, lying parallel to one another, were separated by a staircase, in front of which was a sort of peristyle which formed an entrance-hall, on which the two suits of rooms on either side opened. The kitchen was beneath the dining-room, for the whole building was raised ten steps from the ground level.

By placing her own bedroom on the first floor above the ground-floor,

Madame Moreau was able to transform the chamber adjoining the salon into a boudoir. These two rooms were richly furnished with beautiful pieces culled from the rare old furniture of the chateau. The salon, hung with blue and white damask, formerly the curtains of the state-bed, was draped with ample portieres and window curtains lined with white silk. Pictures, evidently from old panels, plant-stands, various pretty articles of modern upholstery, handsome lamps, and a rare old cut-glass chandelier, gave a grandiose appearance to the room. The carpet was a Persian rug. The boudoir, wholly modern, and furnished entirely after Madame Moreau's own taste, was arranged in imitation of a tent, with ropes of blue silk on a gray background. The classic divan was there, of course, with its pillows and footstools. The plant-stands, taken care of by the head-gardener of Presles, rejoiced the eye with their pyramids of bloom. The dining-room and billiard-room were furnished in mahogany.

Around the house the steward's wife had laid out a beautiful garden, carefully cultivated, which opened into the great park. Groups of choice parks hid the offices and stables. To improve the entrance by which visitors came to see her, she had substituted a handsome iron gateway for the shabby railing, which she discarded.

The dependence in which the situation of their dwelling placed the Moreaus, was thus adroitly concealed, and they seemed all the more like rich and independent persons taking care of the property of a friend, because neither the count nor the countess ever came to Presles to take down their pretensions. Moreover, the perquisites granted by Monsieur de Serizy allowed them to live in the midst of that abundance which is the luxury of country life. Milk, eggs, poultry, game, fruits, flowers, forage, vegetables, wood, the steward and his wife used in profusion, buying absolutely nothing but butcher's-meat, wines, and the colonial supplies required by their life of luxury. The poultry-maid baked their bread; and of late years Moreau had paid his butcher with pigs from the farm, after reserving those he needed for his own use.

On one occasion, the countess, always kind and good to her former maid, gave her, as a souvenir perhaps, a little travelling-carriage, the fashion of which was out of date. Moreau had it repainted, and now drove his wife about the country with two good horses which belonged to the farm. Besides these horses, Moreau had his own saddle-horse. He did enough farming on the count's property to keep the horses and maintain his servants. He stacked three hundred tons of excellent hay, but accounted for only one hundred, making use of a vague permission once granted by the count. He kept his poultry-yard, pigeon-cotes, and cattle at the cost of the estate, but the manure of the stables was used by the count's gardeners. All these little stealings had some

ostensible excuse.

Madame Moreau had taken into her service a daughter of one of the gardeners, who was first her maid and afterwards her cook. The poultry-game, also the dairy-maid, assisted in the work of the household; and the steward had hired a discharged soldier to groom the horses and do the heavy labor.

At Nerville, Chaumont, Maffliers, Nointel, and other places of the neighborhood, the handsome wife of the steward was received by persons who either did not know, or pretended not to know her previous condition. Moreau did services to many persons. He induced his master to agree to certain things which seem trifles in Paris, but are really of immense importance in the country. After bringing about the appointment of a certain "juge de paix" at Beaumont and also at Isle-Adam, he had, in the same year, prevented the dismissal of a keeper-general of the Forests, and obtained the cross of the Legion of honor for the first cavalry-sergeant at Beaumont. Consequently, no festivity was ever given among the bourgeoisie to which Monsieur and Madame Moreau were not invited. The rector of Presles and the mayor of Presles came every evening to play cards with them. It is difficult for a man not to be kind and hospitable after feathering his nest so comfortably.

A pretty woman, and an affected one, as all retired waiting-maids of great ladies are, for after they are married they imitate their mistresses, Madame Moreau imported from Paris all the new fashions. She wore expensive boots, and never was seen on foot, except, occasionally, in the finest weather. Though her husband allowed but five hundred francs a year for her toilet, that sum is immense in the provinces, especially if well laid out. So that Madame Moreau, fair, rosy, and fresh, about thirty-six years of age, still slender and delicate in shape in spite of her three children, played the young girl and gave herself the airs of a princess. If, when she drove by in her caleche, some stranger had asked, "Who is she?" Madame Moreau would have been furious had she heard the reply: "The wife of the steward at Presles." She wished to be taken for the mistress of the chateau. In the villages, she patronized the people in the tone of a great lady. The influence of her husband over the count, proved in so many years, prevented the small bourgeoisie from laughing at Madame Moreau, who, in the eyes of the peasants, was really a personage.

Estelle (her name was Estelle) took no more part in the affairs of the stewardship then the wife of a broker does in her husband's affairs at the Bourse. She even depended on Moreau for the care of the household and their own fortune. Confident of his means, she was a thousand leagues from dreaming that this comfortable existence, which had lasted for seventeen years, could ever be endangered. And yet, when she heard of the count's determination to restore the magnificent chateau, she felt that her enjoyments were threatened, and she urged her husband to come to the arrangement with

Leger about Les Moulineaux, so that they might retire from Presles and live at Isle-Adam. She had no intention of returning to a position that was more or less that of a servant in presence of her former mistress, who, indeed, would have laughed to see her established in the lodge with all the airs and graces of a woman of the world.

The rancorous enmity which existed between the Reyberts and the Moreaus came from a wound inflicted by Madame de Reybert upon Madame Moreau on the first occasion when the latter assumed precedence over the former on her first arrival at Presles, the wife of the steward being determined not to allow her supremacy to be undermined by a woman nee de Corroy. Madame de Reybert thereupon reminded, or, perhaps, informed the whole country-side of Madame Moreau's former station. The words "waiting-maid" flew from lip to lip. The envious acquaintances of the Moreaus throughout the neighborhood from Beaumont to Moisselles, began to carp and criticize with such eagerness that a few sparks of the conflagration fell into the Moreau household. For four years the Reyberts, cut dead by the handsome Estelle, found themselves the objects of so much animadversion on the part of the adherents of the Moreaus that their position at Presles would not have been endurable without the thought of vengeance which had, so far, supported them.

The Moreaus, who were very friendly with Grindot the architect, had received notice from him of the early arrival of the two painters sent down to finish the decorations of the chateau, the principal paintings for which were just completed by Schinner. The great painter had recommended for this work the artist who was accompanied by Mistigris. For two days past Madame Moreau had been on the tiptoe of expectation, and had put herself under arms to receive him. An artist, who was to be her guest and companion for weeks, demanded some effort. Schinner and his wife had their own apartment at the chateau, where, by the count's express orders, they were treated with all the consideration due to himself. Grindot, who stayed at the steward's house, showed such respect for the great artist that neither the steward nor his wife had attempted to put themselves on familiar terms with him. Moreover, the noblest and richest people in the surrounding country had vied with each other in paying attention to Schinner and his wife. So, very well pleased to have, as it were, a little revenge of her own, Madame Moreau was determined to cry up the artist she was now expecting, and to present him to her social circle as equal in talent to the great Schinner.

Though for two days past Moreau's pretty wife had arrayed herself coquettishly, the prettiest of her toilets had been reserved for this very Saturday, when, as she felt no doubt, the artist would arrive for dinner. A pink gown in very narrow stripes, a pink belt with a richly chased gold buckle, a

velvet ribbon and cross at her throat, and velvet bracelets on her bare arms (Madame de Serizy had handsome arms and showed them much), together with bronze kid shoes and thread stockings, gave Madame Moreau all the appearance of an elegant Parisian. She wore, also, a superb bonnet of Leghorn straw, trimmed with a bunch of moss roses from Nattier's, beneath the spreading sides of which rippled the curls of her beautiful blond hair.

After ordering a very choice dinner and reviewing the condition of her rooms, she walked about the grounds, so as to be seen standing near a flower-bed in the court-yard of the chateau, like the mistress of the house, on the arrival of the coach from Paris. She held above her head a charming rose-colored parasol lined with white silk and fringed. Seeing that Pierrotin merely left Mistigris's queer packages with the concierge, having, apparently, brought no passengers, Estelle retired disappointed and regretting the trouble of making her useless toilet. Like many persons who are dressed in their best, she felt incapable of any other occupation than that of sitting idly in her salon awaiting the coach from Beaumont, which usually passed about an hour after that of Pierrotin, though it did not leave Paris till mid-day. She was, therefore, in her own apartment when the two artists walked up to the chateau, and were sent by Moreau himself to their rooms where they made their regulation toilet for dinner. The pair had asked questions of their guide, the gardener, who told them so much of Moreau's beauty that they felt the necessity of "rigging themselves up" (studio slang). They, therefore, put on their most superlative suits and then walked over to the steward's lodge, piloted by Jacques Moreau, the eldest son, a hardy youth, dressed like an English boy in a handsome jacket with a turned-over collar, who was spending his vacation like a fish in water on the estate where his father and mother reigned as aristocrats.

"Mamma," he said, "here are the two artists sent down by Monsieur Schinner."

Madame Moreau, agreeably surprised, rose, told her son to place chairs, and began to display her graces.

"Mamma, the Husson boy is with papa," added the lad; "shall I fetch him?"

"You need not hurry; go and play with him," said his mother.

The remark "you need not hurry" proved to the two artists the unimportance of their late travelling companion in the eyes of their hostess; but it also showed, what they did not know, the feeling of a step-mother against a step-son. Madame Moreau, after seventeen years of married life, could not be ignorant of the steward's attachment to Madame Clapart and the little Husson, and she hated both mother and child so vehemently that it is not surprising that Moreau had never before risked bringing Oscar to Presles.

"We are requested, my husband and myself," she said to the two artists, "to do you the honors of the chateau. We both love art, and, above all, artists," she added in a mincing tone; "and I beg you to make yourselves at home here. In the country, you know, every one should be at their ease; one must feel wholly at liberty, or life is too insipid. We have already had Monsieur Schinner with us."

Mistigris gave a sly glance at his companion.

"You know him, of course?" continued Estelle, after a slight pause.

"Who does not know him, madame?" said the painter.

"Knows him like his double," remarked Mistigris.

"Monsieur Grindot told me your name," said Madame Moreau to the painter. "But—"

"Joseph Bridau," he replied, wondering with what sort of woman he had to do.

Mistigris began to rebel internally against the patronizing manner of the steward's wife; but he waited, like Bridau, for some word which might give him his cue; one of those words "de singe a dauphin" which artists, cruel, born-observers of the ridiculous—the pabulum of their pencils—seize with such avidity. Meantime Estelle's clumsy hands and feet struck their eyes, and presently a word, or phrase or two, betrayed her past, and quite out of keeping with the elegance of her dress, made the two young fellows aware of their prey. A single glance at each other was enough to arrange a scheme that they should take Estelle seriously on her own ground, and thus find amusement enough during the time of their stay.

"You say you love art, madame; perhaps you cultivate it successfully," said Joseph Bridau.

"No. Without being neglected, my education was purely commercial; but I have so profound and delicate a sense of art that Monsieur Schinner always asked me, when he had finished a piece of work, to give him my opinion on it."

"Just as Moliere consulted La Foret," said Mistigris.

Not knowing that La Foret was Moliere's servant-woman, Madame Moreau inclined her head graciously, showing that in her ignorance she accepted the speech as a compliment.

"Didn't he propose to 'croquer' you?" asked Bridau. "Painters are eager enough after handsome women."

"What may you mean by such language?"

"In the studios we say croquer, craunch, nibble, for sketching," interposed Mistigris, with an insinuating air, "and we are always wanting to croquer beautiful heads. That's the origin of the expression, 'She is pretty enough to eat.'"

"I was not aware of the origin of the term," she replied, with the sweetest glance at Mistigris.

"My pupil here," said Bridau, "Monsieur Leon de Lora, shows a remarkable talent for portraiture. He would be too happy, I know, to leave you a souvenir of our stay by painting your charming head, madame."

Joseph Bridau made a sign to Mistigris which meant: "Come, sail in, and push the matter; she is not so bad in looks, this woman."

Accepting the glance, Leon de Lora slid down upon the sofa beside Estelle and took her hand, which she permitted.

"Oh! madame, if you would like to offer a surprise to your husband, and will give me a few secret sittings I would endeavor to surpass myself. You are so beautiful, so fresh, so charming! A man without any talent might become a genius in painting you. He would draw from your eyes—"

"We must paint your dear children in the arabesques," said Bridau, interrupting Mistigris.

"I would rather have them in the salon; but perhaps I am indiscreet in asking it," she replied, looking at Bridau coquettishly.

"Beauty, madame, is a sovereign whom all painters worship; it has unlimited claims upon them."

"They are both charming," thought Madame Moreau. "Do you enjoy driving? Shall I take you through the woods, after dinner, in my carriage?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Mistigris, in three ecstatic tones. "Why, Presles will prove our terrestrial paradise."

"With an Eve, a fair, young, fascinating woman," added Bridau.

Just as Madame Moreau was bridling, and soaring to the seventh heaven, she was recalled like a kite by a twitch at its line.

"Madame!" cried her maid-servant, bursting into the room.

"Rosalie," said her mistress, "who allowed you to come here without being sent for?"

Rosalie paid no heed to the rebuke, but whispered in her mistress's ear:—

"The count is at the chateau."

"Has he asked for me?" said the steward's wife.

"No, madame; but he wants his trunk and the key of his apartment."

"Then give them to him," she replied, making an impatient gesture to hide her real trouble.

"Mamma! here's Oscar Husson," said her youngest son, bringing in Oscar, who turned as red as a poppy on seeing the two artists in evening dress.

"Oh! so you have come, my little Oscar," said Estelle, stiffly. "I hope you will now go and dress," she added, after looking at him contemptuously from head to foot. "Your mother, I presume, has not accustomed you to dine in such clothes as those."

"Oh!" cried the cruel Mistigris, "a future diplomatist knows the saying that 'two coats are better than none.'"

"How do you mean, a future diplomatist?" exclaimed Madame Moreau.

Poor Oscar had tears in his eyes as he looked in turn from Joseph to Leon.

"Merely a joke made in travelling," replied Joseph, who wanted to save Oscar's feelings out of pity.

"The boy just wanted to be funny like the rest of us, and he blagued, that's all," said Mistigris.

"Madame," said Rosalie, returning to the door of the salon, "his Excellency has ordered dinner for eight, and wants it served at six o'clock. What are we to do?"

During Estelle's conference with her head-woman the two artists and Oscar looked at each other in consternation; their glances were expressive of terrible apprehension.

"His Excellency! who is he?" said Joseph Bridau.

"Why, Monsieur le Comte de Serizy, of course," replied little Moreau.

"Could it have been the count in the coucou?" said Leon de Lora.

"Oh!" exclaimed Oscar, "the Comte de Serizy always travels in his own carriage with four horses."

"How did the Comte de Serizy get here?" said the painter to Madame Moreau, when she returned, much discomfited, to the salon.

"I am sure I do not know," she said. "I cannot explain to myself this sudden arrival; nor do I know what has brought him—And Moreau not here!"

"His Excellency wishes Monsieur Schinner to come over to the chateau,"

said the gardener, coming to the door of the salon. "And he begs Monsieur Schinner to give him the pleasure to dine with him; also Monsieur Mistigris."

"Done for!" cried the rapin, laughing. "He whom we took for a bourgeois in the coucou was the count. You may well say: 'Sour are the curses of perversity.'"

Oscar was very nearly changed to a pillar of salt; for, at this revelation, his throat felt saltier than the sea.

"And you, who talked to him about his wife's lovers and his skin diseases!" said Mistigris, turning on Oscar.

"What does he mean?" exclaimed the steward's wife, gazing after the two artists, who went away laughing at the expression of Oscar's face.

Oscar remained dumb, confounded, stupefied, hearing nothing, though Madame Moreau questioned him and shook him violently by his arm, which she caught and squeezed. She gained nothing, however, and was forced to leave him in the salon without an answer, for Rosalie appeared again, to ask for linen and silver, and to beg she would go herself and see that the multiplied orders of the count were executed. All the household, together with the gardeners and the concierge and his wife, were going and coming in a confusion that may readily be imagined. The master had fallen upon his own house like a bombshell.

From the top of the hill near La Cave, where he left the coach, the count had gone, by the path through the woods well-known to him, to the house of his gamekeeper. The keeper was amazed when he saw his real master.

"Is Moreau here?" said the count. "I see his horse."

"No, monseigneur; he means to go to Moulineaux before dinner, and he has left his horse here while he went to the chateau to give a few orders."

"If you value your place," said the count, "you will take that horse and ride at once to Beaumont, where you will deliver to Monsieur Margueron the note that I shall now write."

So saying the count entered the keeper's lodge and wrote a line, folding it in a way impossible to open without detection, and gave it to the man as soon as he saw him in the saddle.

"Not a word to any one," he said, "and as for you, madame," he added to the gamekeeper's wife, "if Moreau comes back for his horse, tell him merely that I have taken it."

The count then crossed the park and entered the court-yard of the chateau through the iron gates. However worn-out a man may be by the wear and tear

of public life, by his own emotions, by his own mistakes and disappointments, the soul of any man able to love deeply at the count's age is still young and sensitive to treachery. Monsieur de Serizy had felt such pain at the thought that Moreau had deceived him, that even after hearing the conversation at Saint-Brice he thought him less an accomplice of Leger and the notary than their tool. On the threshold of the inn, and while that conversation was still going on, he thought of pardoning his steward after giving him a good reproof. Strange to say, the dishonesty of his confidential agent occupied his mind as a mere episode from the moment when Oscar revealed his infirmities. Secrets so carefully guarded could only have been revealed by Moreau, who had, no doubt, laughed over the hidden troubles of his benefactor with either Madame de Serizy's former maid or with the Aspasia of the Directory.

As he walked along the wood-path, this peer of France, this statesman, wept as young men weep; he wept his last tears. All human feelings were so cruelly hurt by one stroke that the usually calm man staggered through his park like a wounded deer.

When Moreau arrived at the gamekeeper's lodge and asked for his horse, the keeper's wife replied:—

"Monsieur le comte has just taken it."

"Monsieur le comte!" cried Moreau. "Whom do you mean?"

"Why, the Comte de Serizy, our master," she replied. "He is probably at the chateau by this time," she added, anxious to be rid of the steward, who, unable to understand the meaning of her words, turned back towards the chateau.

But he presently turned again and came back to the lodge, intending to question the woman more closely; for he began to see something serious in this secret arrival, and the apparently strange method of his master's return. But the wife of the gamekeeper, alarmed to find herself caught in a vise between the count and his steward, had locked herself into the house, resolved not to open to any but her husband. Moreau, more and more uneasy, ran rapidly, in spite of his boots and spurs, to the chateau, where he was told that the count was dressing.

"Seven persons invited to dinner!" cried Rosalie as soon as she saw him.

Moreau then went through the offices to his own house. On his way he met the poultry-girl, who was having an altercation with a handsome young man.

"Monsieur le comte particularly told me a colonel, an aide-de-camp of Mina," insisted the girl.

"I am not a colonel," replied Georges.

"But isn't your name Georges?"

"What's all this?" said the steward, intervening.

"Monsieur, my name is Georges Marest; I am the son of a rich wholesale ironmonger in the rue Saint-Martin; I come on business to Monsieur le Comte de Serizy from Maitre Crottat, a notary, whose second clerk I am."

"And I," said the girl, "am telling him that monseigneur said to me: 'There'll come a colonel named Czerni-Georges, aide-de-camp to Mina; he'll come by Pierrotin's coach; if he asks for me show him into the waiting-room.'"

"Evidently," said the clerk, "the count is a traveller who came down with us in Pierrotin's coucou; if it hadn't been for the politeness of a young man he'd have come as a rabbit."

"A rabbit! in Pierrotin's coucou!" exclaimed Moreau and the poultry-girl together.

"I am sure of it, from what this girl is now saying," said Georges.

"How so?" asked the steward.

"Ah! that's the point," cried the clerk. "To hoax the travellers and have a bit of fun I told them a lot of stuff about Egypt and Greece and Spain. As I happened to be wearing spurs I have myself out for a colonel of cavalry: pure nonsense!"

"Tell me," said Moreau, "what did this traveller you take to be Monsieur le comte look like?"

"Face like a brick," said Georges, "hair snow-white, and black eyebrows."

"That is he!"

"Then I'm lost!" exclaimed Georges.

"Why?"

"Oh, I chaffed him about his decorations."

"Pooh! he's a good fellow; you probably amused him. Come at once to the chateau. I'll go in and see his Excellency. Where did you say he left the coach?"

"At the top of the mountain."

"I don't know what to make of it!"

"After all," thought Georges, "though I did blague him, I didn't say anything insulting."

"Why have you come here?" asked the steward.

"I have brought the deed of sale for the farm at Moulineaux, all ready for

signature."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the steward, "I don't understand one word of all this!"

Moreau felt his heart beat painfully when, after giving two raps on his master's door, he heard the words:—

"Is that you, Monsieur Moreau?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Come in."

The count was now wearing a pair of white trousers and thin boots, a white waistcoat and a black coat on which shone the grand cross of the Legion upon the right breast, and fastened to a buttonhole on the left was the order of the Golden Fleece hanging by a short gold chain. He had arranged his hair himself, and had, no doubt, put himself in full dress to do the honors of Presles to Monsieur Margueron; and, possibly, to impress the good man's mind with a prestige of grandeur.

"Well, monsieur," said the count, who remained seated, leaving Moreau to stand before him. "We have not concluded that purchase from Margueron."

"He asks too much for the farm at the present moment."

"But why is he not coming to dinner as I requested?"

"Monseigneur, he is ill."

"Are you sure?"

"I have just come from there."

"Monsieur," said the count, with a stern air which was really terrible, "what would you do with a man whom you trusted, if, after seeing you dress wounds which you desired to keep secret from all the world, he should reveal your misfortunes and laugh at your malady with a strumpet?"

"I would thrash him for it."

"And if you discovered that he was also betraying your confidence and robbing you?"

"I should endeavor to detect him, and send him to the galleys."

"Monsieur Moreau, listen to me. You have undoubtedly spoken of my infirmities to Madame Clapart; you have laughed at her house, and with her, over my attachment to the Comtesse de Serizy; for her son, little Husson, told a number of circumstances relating to my medical treatment, to travellers by a public conveyance in my presence, and Heaven knows in what language! He

dared to calumniate my wife. Besides this, I learned from the lips of Pere Leger himself, who was in the coach, of the plan laid by the notary at Beaumont and by you and by himself in relation to Les Moulineaux. If you have been, as you say, to Monsieur Margueron, it was to tell him to feign illness. He is so little ill that he is coming here to dinner this evening. Now, monsieur, I could pardon you having made two hundred and fifty thousand francs out of your situation in seventeen years,—I can understand that. You might each time have asked me for what you took, and I would have given it to you; but let that pass. You have been, notwithstanding this disloyalty, better than others, as I believe. But that you, who knew my toil for our country, for France, you have seen me giving night after night to the Emperor's service, and working eighteen hours of each twenty-four for months together, you who knew my love for Madame de Serizy,—that you should have gossiped about me before a boy! holding up my secrets and my affections to the ridicule of a Madame Husson!—"

"Monseigneur!"

"It is unpardonable. To injure a man's interest, why, that is nothing; but to stab his heart!—Oh! you do not know what you have done!"

The count put his head in his hands and was silent for some moments.

"I leave you what you have gained," he said after a time, "and I shall forget you. For my sake, for my dignity, and for your honor, we will part decently; for I cannot but remember even now what your father did for mine. You will explain the duties of the stewardship in a proper manner to Monsieur de Reybert, who succeeds you. Be calm, as I am. Give no opportunity for fools to talk. Above all, let there be no recrimination or petty meanness. Though you no longer possess my confidence, endeavor to behave with the decorum of well-bred persons. As for that miserable boy who has wounded me to death, I will not have him sleep at Presles; send him to the inn; I will not answer for my own temper if I see him."

"I do not deserve such gentleness, monseigneur," said Moreau, with tears in his eyes. "Yes, you are right; if I had been utterly dishonest I should now be worth five hundred thousand francs instead of half that sum. I offer to give you an account of my fortune, with all its details. But let me tell you, monseigneur, that in talking of you with Madame Clapart, it was never in derision; but, on the contrary, to deplore your state, and to ask her for certain remedies, not used by physicians, but known to the common people. I spoke of your feelings before the boy, who was in his bed and, as I supposed, asleep (it seems he must have been awake and listening to us), with the utmost affection and respect. Alas! fate wills that indiscretions be punished like crimes. But while accepting the results of your just anger, I wish you to know what

actually took place. It was, indeed, from heart to heart that I spoke of you to Madame Clapart. As for my wife, I have never said one word of these things —"

"Enough," said the count, whose conviction was now complete; "we are not children. All is now irrevocable. Put your affairs and mine in order. You can stay in the pavilion until October. Monsieur and Madame de Reybert will lodge for the present in the chateau; endeavor to keep on terms with them, like well-bred persons who hate each other, but still keep up appearances."

The count and Moreau went downstairs; Moreau white as the count's hair, the count himself calm and dignified.

During the time this interview lasted the Beaumont coach, which left Paris at one o'clock, had stopped before the gates of the chateau, and deposited Maitre Crottat, the notary, who was shown, according to the count's orders, into the salon, where he found his clerk, extremely subdued in manner, and the two painters, all three of them painfully self-conscious and embarrassed. Monsieur de Reybert, a man of fifty, with a crabbed expression of face, was also there, accompanied by old Margueron and the notary of Beaumont, who held in his hand a bundle of deeds and other papers.

When these various personages saw the count in evening dress, and wearing his orders, Georges Marest had a slight sensation of colic, Joseph Bridau quivered, but Mistigris, who was conscious of being in his Sunday clothes, and had, moreover, nothing on his conscience, remarked, in a sufficiently loud tone:—

"Well, he looks a great deal better like that."

"Little scamp," said the count, catching him by the ear, "we are both in the decoration business. I hope you recognize your own work, my dear Schinner," he added, pointing to the ceiling of the salon.

"Monseigneur," replied the artist, "I did wrong to take such a celebrated name out of mere bravado; but this day will oblige me to do fine things for you, and so bring credit on my own name of Joseph Bridau."

"You took up my defence," said the count, hastily; "and I hope you will give me the pleasure of dining with me, as well as my lively friend Mistigris."

"Your Excellency doesn't know to what you expose yourself," said the saucy rapin; "'facilis descensus victuali,' as we say at the Black Hen."

"Bridau!" exclaimed the minister, struck by a sudden thought. "Are you any relation to one of the most devoted toilers under the Empire, the head of a bureau, who fell a victim to his zeal?"

"His son, monseigneur," replied Joseph, bowing.

"Then you are most welcome here," said the count, taking Bridau's hand in both of his. "I knew your father, and you can count on me as on—on an uncle in America," added the count, laughing. "But you are too young to have pupils of your own; to whom does Mistigris really belong?"

"To my friend Schinner, who lent him to me," said Joseph. "Mistigris' name is Leon de Lora. Monseigneur, if you knew my father, will you deign to think of his other son, who is now accused of plotting against the State, and is soon to be tried before the Court of Peers?"

"Ah! that's true," said the count. "Yes, I will think about it, be sure of that. As for Colonel Czerni-Georges, the friend of Ali Pacha, and Mina's aide-de-camp—" he continued, walking up to Georges.

"He! why that's my second clerk!" cried Crottat.

"You are quite mistaken, Maitre Crottat," said the count, assuming a stern air. "A clerk who intends to be a notary does not leave important deeds in a diligence at the mercy of other travellers; neither does he spend twenty francs between Paris and Moisselles; or expose himself to be arrested as a deserter —"

"Monseigneur," said Georges Marest, "I may have amused myself with the bourgeois in the diligence, but—"

"Let his Excellency finish what he was saying," said the notary, digging his elbow into his clerk's ribs.

"A notary," continued the count, "ought to practise discretion, shrewdness, caution from the start; he should be incapable of such a blunder as taking a peer of France for a tallow-chandler—"

"I am willing to be blamed for my faults," said Georges; "but I never left my deeds at the mercy of—"

"Now you are committing the fault of contradicting the word of a minister of State, a gentleman, an old man, and a client," said the count. "Give me that deed of sale."

Georges turned over and over the papers in his portfolio.

"That will do; don't disarrange those papers," said the count, taking the deed from his pocket. "Here is what you are looking for."

Crottat turned the paper back and forth, so astonished was he at receiving it from the hands of his client.

"What does this mean, monsieur?" he said, finally, to Georges.

"If I had not taken it," said the count, "Pere Leger,—who is by no means

such a ninny as you thought him from his questions about agriculture, by which he showed that he attended to his own business,—Pere Leger might have seized that paper and guessed my purpose. You must give me the pleasure of dining with me, but one on condition,—that of describing, as you promised, the execution of the Muslim of Smyrna, and you must also finish the memoirs of some client which you have certainly read to be so well informed."

"Schlague for blague!" said Leon de Lora, in a whisper, to Joseph Bridau.

"Gentlemen," said the count to the two notaries and Messieurs Margueron and de Reybert, "let us go into the next room and conclude this business before dinner, because, as my friend Mistigris would say: 'Qui esurit constentit.'"

"Well, he is very good-natured," said Leon de Lora to Georges Marest, when the count had left the room.

"Yes, HE may be, but my master isn't," said Georges, "and he will request me to go and blaguer somewhere else."

"Never mind, you like travel," said Bridau.

"What a dressing that boy will get from Monsieur and Madame Moreau!" cried Mistigris.

"Little idiot!" said Georges. "If it hadn't been for him the count would have been amused. Well, anyhow, the lesson is a good one; and if ever again I am caught bragging in a public coach—"

"It is a stupid thing to do," said Joseph Bridau.

"And common," added Mistigris. "'Vulgarity is the brother of pretension.'"

While the matter of the sale was being settled between Monsieur Margueron and the Comte de Serizy, assisted by their respective notaries in presence of Monsieur de Reybert, the ex-steward walked with slow steps to his own house. There he entered the salon and sat down without noticing anything. Little Husson, who was present, slipped into a corner, out of sight, so much did the livid face of his mother's friend alarm him.

"Eh! my friend!" said Estelle, coming into the room, somewhat tired with what she had been doing. "What is the matter?"

"My dear, we are lost,—lost beyond recovery. I am no longer steward of Presles, no longer in the count's confidence."

"Why not?"

"Pere Leger, who was in Pierrotin's coach, told the count all about the

affair of Les Moulineaux. But that is not the thing that has cost me his favor."

"What then?"

"Oscar spoke ill of the countess, and he told about the count's diseases."

"Oscar!" cried Madame Moreau. "Ah! my dear, your sin has found you out. It was well worth while to warm that young serpent in your bosom. How often I have told you—"

"Enough!" said Moreau, in a strained voice.

At this moment Estelle and her husband discovered Oscar cowering in his corner. Moreau swooped down on the luckless lad like a hawk on its prey, took him by the collar of the coat and dragged him to the light of a window. "Speak! what did you say to monseigneur in that coach? What demon let loose your tongue, you who keep a doltish silence whenever I speak to you? What did you do it for?" cried the steward, with frightful violence.

Too bewildered to weep, Oscar was dumb and motionless as a statue.

"Come with me and beg his Excellency's pardon," said Moreau.

"As if his Excellency cares for a little toad like that!" cried the furious Estelle.

"Come, I say, to the chateau," repeated Moreau.

Oscar dropped like an inert mass to the ground.

"Come!" cried Moreau, his anger increasing at every instant.

"No! no! mercy!" cried Oscar, who could not bring himself to submit to a torture that seemed to him worse than death.

Moreau then took the lad by his coat, and dragged him, as he might a dead body, through the yards, which rang with the boy's outcries and sobs. He pulled him up the portico, and, with an arm that fury made powerful, he flung him, bellowing, and rigid as a pole, into the salon, at the very feet of the count, who, having completed the purchase of Les Moulineaux, was about to leave the salon for the dining-room with his guests.

"On your knees, wretched boy! and ask pardon of him who gave food to your mind by obtaining your scholarship."

Oscar, his face to the ground, was foaming with rage, and did not say a word. The spectators of the scene were shocked. Moreau seemed no longer in his senses; his face was crimson with injected blood.

"This young man is a mere lump of vanity," said the count, after waiting a moment for Oscar's excuses. "A proud man humiliates himself because he sees

there is grandeur in a certain self-abasement. I am afraid that you will never make much of that lad."

So saying, his Excellency passed on. Moreau took Oscar home with him; and on the way gave orders that the horses should immediately be put to Madame Moreau's caleche.

CHAPTER VII. A MOTHER'S TRIALS

While the horses were being harnessed, Moreau wrote the following letter to Madame Clapart:—

My dear,—Oscar has ruined me. During his journey in Pierrotin's coach, he spoke of Madame de Serizy's behavior to his Excellency, who was travelling incognito, and actually told, to himself, the secret of his terrible malady. After dismissing me from my stewardship, the count told me not to let Oscar sleep at Presles, but to send him away immediately. Therefore, to obey his orders, the horses are being harnessed at this moment to my wife's carriage, and Brochon, my stable-man, will take the miserable child to you to-night.

We are, my wife and I, in a distress of mind which you may perhaps imagine, though I cannot describe it to you. I will see you in a few days, for I must take another course. I have three children, and I ought to consider their future. At present I do not know what to do; but I shall certainly endeavor to make the count aware of what seventeen years of the life of a man like myself is worth. Owning at the present moment about two hundred and fifty thousand francs, I want to raise myself to a fortune which may some day make me the equal of his Excellency. At this moment I feel within me the power to move mountains and vanquish insurmountable difficulties. What a lever is such a scene of bitter humiliation as I have just passed through! Whose blood has Oscar in his veins?

His conduct has been that of a blockhead; up to this moment when I write to you, he has not said a word nor answered, even by a sign, the questions my wife and I have put to him. Will he become an idiot? or is he one already? Dear friend, why did you not instruct him as to his behavior before you sent him to me? How many misfortunes you would have spared me, had you brought him here yourself as I begged you to do. If Estelle alarmed you, you might have stayed at Moisselles. However, the thing is done, and there is no use talking about it.

Adieu; I shall see you soon.

Your devoted servant and friend,

At eight o'clock that evening, Madame Clapart, just returned from a walk she had taken with her husband, was knitting winter socks for Oscar, by the light of a single candle. Monsieur Clapart was expecting a friend named Poiret, who often came in to play dominoes, for never did he allow himself to spend an evening at a cafe. In spite of the prudent economy to which his small means forced him, Clapart would not have answered for his temperance amid a luxury of food and in presence of the usual guests of a cafe whose inquisitive observation would have piqued him.

"I'm afraid Poiret came while we were out," said Clapart to his wife.

"Why, no, my friend; the portress would have told us so when we came in," replied Madame Clapart.

"She may have forgotten it."

"What makes you think so?"

"It wouldn't be the first time she has forgotten things for us,—for God knows how people without means are treated."

"Well," said the poor woman, to change the conversation and escape Clapart's cavilling, "Oscar must be at Presles by this time. How he will enjoy that fine house and the beautiful park."

"Oh! yes," snarled Clapart, "you expect fine things of him; but, mark my words, there'll be squabbles wherever he goes."

"Will you never cease to find fault with that poor child?" said the mother. "What has he done to you? If some day we should live at our ease, we may owe it all to him; he has such a good heart—"

"Our bones will be jelly long before that fellow makes his way in the world," cried Clapart. "You don't know your own child; he is conceited, boastful, deceitful, lazy, incapable of—"

"Why don't you go to meet Poiret?" said the poor mother, struck to the heart by the diatribe she had brought upon herself.

"A boy who has never won a prize at school!" continued Clapart.

To bourgeois eyes, the obtaining of school prizes means the certainty of a fine future for the fortunate child.

"Did you win any?" asked his wife. "Oscar stood second in philosophy."

This remark imposed silence for a moment on Clapart; but presently he began again.

"Besides, Madame Moreau hates him like poison, you know why. She'll try to set her husband against him. Oscar to step into his shoes as steward of Presles! Why he'd have to learn agriculture, and know how to survey."

"He can learn."

"He—that pussy cat! I'll bet that if he does get a place down there, it won't be a week before he does some doltish thing which will make the count dismiss him."

"Good God! how can you be so bitter against a poor child who is full of good qualities, sweet-tempered as an angel, incapable of doing harm to any one, no matter who."

Just then the cracking of a postilion's whip and the noise of a carriage stopping before the house was heard, this arrival having apparently put the whole street into a commotion. Clapart, who heard the opening of many windows, looked out himself to see what was happening.

"They have sent Oscar back to you in a post-chaise," he cried, in a tone of satisfaction, though in truth he felt inwardly uneasy.

"Good heavens! what can have happened to him?" cried the poor mother, trembling like a leaf shaken by the autumn wind.

Brochon here came up, followed by Oscar and Poiret.

"What has happened?" repeated the mother, addressing the stable-man.

"I don't know, but Monsieur Moreau is no longer steward of Presles, and they say your son has caused it. His Excellency ordered that he should be sent home to you. Here's a letter from poor Monsieur Moreau, madame, which will tell you all. You never saw a man so changed in a single day."

"Clapart, two glasses of wine for the postilion and for monsieur!" cried the mother, flinging herself into a chair that she might read the fatal letter. "Oscar," she said, staggering towards her bed, "do you want to kill your mother? After all the cautions I gave you this morning—"

She did not end her sentence, for she fainted from distress of mind. When she came to herself she heard her husband saying to Oscar, as he shook him by the arm:—

"Will you answer me?"

"Go to bed, monsieur," she said to her son. "Let him alone, Monsieur Clapart. Don't drive him out of his senses; he is frightfully changed."

Oscar did not hear his mother's last words; he had slipped away to bed the instant that he got the order.

Those who remember their youth will not be surprised to learn that after a day so filled with events and emotions, Oscar, in spite of the enormity of his offences, slept the sleep of the just. The next day he did not find the world so changed as he thought it; he was surprised to be very hungry,—he who the night before had regarded himself as unworthy to live. He had only suffered mentally. At his age mental impressions succeed each other so rapidly that the last weakens its predecessor, however deeply the first may have been cut in. For this reason corporal punishment, though philanthropists are deeply opposed to it in these days, becomes necessary in certain cases for certain children. It is, moreover, the most natural form of retribution, for Nature herself employs it; she uses pain to impress a lasting memory of her precepts. If to the shame of the preceding evening, unhappily too transient, the steward had joined some personal chastisement, perhaps the lesson might have been complete. The discernment with which such punishment needs to be administered is the greatest argument against it. Nature is never mistaken; but the teacher is, and frequently.

Madame Clapart took pains to send her husband out, so that she might be alone with her son the next morning. She was in a state to excite pity. Her eyes, worn with tears; her face, weary with the fatigue of a sleepless night; her feeble voice,—in short, everything about her proved an excess of suffering she could not have borne a second time, and appealed to sympathy.

When Oscar entered the room she signed to him to sit down beside her, and reminded him in a gentle but grieved voice of the benefits they had so constantly received from the steward of Presles. She told him that they had lived, especially for the last six years, on the delicate charity of Monsieur Moreau; and that Monsieur Clapart's salary, also the "demi-bourse," or scholarship, by which he (Oscar) had obtained an education, was due to the Comte de Serizy. Most of this would now cease. Monsieur Clapart, she said, had no claim to a pension,—his period of service not being long enough to obtain one. On the day when he was no longer able to keep his place, what would become of them?

"For myself," she said, "by nursing the sick, or living as a housekeeper in some great family, I could support myself and Monsieur Clapart; but you, Oscar, what could you do? You have no means, and you must earn some, for you must live. There are but four careers for a young man like you,—commerce, government employment, the licensed professions, or military service. All forms of commerce need capital, and we have none to give you. In place of capital, a young man can only give devotion and his capacity. But commerce also demands the utmost discretion, and your conduct yesterday proves that you lack it. To enter a government office, you must go through a long probation by the help of influence, and you have just alienated the only

protector that we had,—a most powerful one. Besides, suppose you were to meet with some extraordinary help, by which a young man makes his way promptly either in business or in the public employ, where could you find the money to live and clothe yourself during the time that you are learning your employment?"

Here the mother wandered, like other women, into wordy lamentation: What should she do now to feed the family, deprived of the benefits Moreau's stewardship had enabled him to send her from Presles? Oscar had overthrown his benefactor's prosperity! As commerce and a government clerkship were now impossible, there remained only the professions of notary and lawyer, either barristers or solicitors, and sheriffs. But for those he must study at least three years, and pay considerable sums for entrance fees, examinations, certificates, and diplomas; and here again the question of maintenance presented itself.

"Oscar," she said, in conclusion, "in you I had put all my pride, all my life. In accepting for myself an unhappy old age, I fastened my eyes on you; I saw you with the prospect of a fine career, and I imagined you succeeding in it. That thought, that hope, gave me courage to face the privations I have endured for six years in order to carry you through school, where you have cost me, in spite of the scholarship, between seven and eight hundred francs a year. Now that my hope is vanishing, your future terrifies me. I cannot take one penny from Monsieur Clapart's salary for my son. What can you do? You are not strong enough to mathematics to enter any of the technical schools; and, besides, where could I get the three thousand francs board-money which they extract? This is life as it is, my child. You are eighteen, you are strong. Enlist in the army; it is your only means, that I can see, to earn your bread."

Oscar knew as yet nothing whatever of life. Like all children who have been kept from a knowledge of the trials and poverty of the home, he was ignorant of the necessity of earning his living. The word "commerce" presented no idea whatever to his mind; "public employment" said almost as little, for he saw no results of it. He listened, therefore, with a submissive air, which he tried to make humble, to his mother's exhortations, but they were lost in the void, and did not reach his mind. Nevertheless, the word "army," the thought of being a soldier, and the sight of his mother's tears did at last make him cry. No sooner did Madame Clapart see the drops coursing down his cheeks than she felt herself helpless, and, like most mothers in such cases, she began the peroration which terminates these scenes,—scenes in which they suffer their own anguish and that of their children also.

"Well, Oscar, promise me that you will be more discreet in future,—that you will not talk heedlessly any more, but will strive to repress your silly vanity," et cetera, et cetera.

Oscar of course promised all his mother asked him to promise, and then, after gently drawing him to her, Madame Clapart ended by kissing him to console him for being scolded.

"In future," she said, "you will listen to your mother, and will follow her advice; for a mother can give nothing but good counsel to her child. We will go and see your uncle Cardot; that is our last hope. Cardot owed a great deal to your father, who gave him his sister, Mademoiselle Husson, with an enormous dowry for those days, which enabled him to make a large fortune in the silk trade. I think he might, perhaps, place you with Monsieur Camusot, his successor and son-in-law, in the rue des Bourdonnais. But, you see, your uncle Cardot has four children. He gave his establishment, the Cocon d'Or, to his eldest daughter, Madame Camusot; and though Camusot has millions, he has also four children by two wives; and, besides, he scarcely knows of our existence. Cardot has married his second daughter, Mariane, to Monsieur Protez, of the firm of Protez and Chiffreville. The practice of his eldest son, the notary, cost him four hundred thousand francs; and he has just put his second son, Joseph, into the drug business of Matifat. So you see, your uncle Cardot has many reasons not to take an interest in you, whom he sees only four times a year. He has never come to call upon me here, though he was ready enough to visit me at Madame Mere's when he wanted to sell his silks to the Emperor, the imperial highnesses, and all the great people at court. But now the Camusots have turned ultras. The eldest son of Camusot's first wife married a daughter of one of the king's ushers. The world is mighty hump-backed when it stoops! However, it was a clever thing to do, for the Cocon d'Or has the custom of the present court as it had that of the Emperor. But to-morrow we will go and see your uncle Cardot, and I hope that you will endeavor to behave properly; for, as I said before, and I repeat it, that is our last hope."

Monsieur Jean-Jerome-Severin Cardot had been a widower six years. As head-clerk of the Cocon d'Or, one of the oldest firms in Paris, he had bought the establishment in 1793, at a time when the heads of the house were ruined by the maximum; and the money of Mademoiselle Husson's dowry had enabled him to do this, and so make a fortune that was almost colossal in ten years. To establish his children richly during his lifetime, he had conceived the idea of buying an annuity for himself and his wife with three hundred thousand francs, which gave him an income of thirty thousand francs a year. He then divided his capital into three shares of four hundred thousand francs each, which he gave to three of his children,—the Cocon d'Or, given to his eldest daughter on her marriage, being the equivalent of a fourth share. Thus the worthy man, who was now nearly seventy years old, could spend his thirty thousand a year as he pleased, without feeling that he injured the prospects of his children, all finely provided for, whose attentions and proofs of affection

were, moreover, not prompted by self-interest.

Uncle Cardot lived at Belleville, in one of the first houses above the Courtille. He there occupied, on the first floor, an apartment overlooking the valley of the Seine, with a southern exposure, and the exclusive enjoyment of a large garden, for the sum of a thousand francs a year. He troubled himself not at all about the three or four other tenants of the same vast country-house. Certain, through a long lease, of ending his days there, he lived rather plainly, served by an old cook and the former maid of the late Madame Cardot,—both of whom expected to reap an annuity of some six hundred francs apiece on the old man's death. These two women took the utmost care of him, and were all the more interested in doing so because no one was ever less fussy or less fault-finding than he. The apartment, furnished by the late Madame Cardot, had remained in the same condition for the last six years,—the old man being perfectly contented with it. He spent in all not more than three thousand francs a year there; for he dined in Paris five days in the week, and returned home at midnight in a hackney-coach, which belonged to an establishment at Courtille. The cook had only her master's breakfast to provide on those days. This was served at eleven o'clock; after that he dressed and perfumed himself, and departed for Paris. Usually, a bourgeois gives notice in the household if he dines out; old Cardot, on the contrary, gave notice when he dined at home.

This little old man—fat, rosy, squat, and strong—always looked, in popular speech, as if he had stepped from a bandbox. He appeared in black silk stockings, breeches of "pou-de-soie" (paduasoy), a white pique waistcoat, dazzling shirt-front, a blue-bottle coat, violet silk gloves, gold buckles to his shoes and his breeches, and, lastly, a touch of powder and a little queue tied with black ribbon. His face was remarkable for a pair of eyebrows as thick as bushes, beneath which sparkled his gray eyes; and for a square nose, thick and long, which gave him somewhat the air of the abbes of former times. His countenance did not belie him. Pere Cardot belonged to that race of lively Gerontes which is now disappearing rapidly, though it once served as Turcarets to the comedies and tales of the eighteenth century. Uncle Cardot always said "Fair lady," and he placed in their carriages, and otherwise paid attention to those women whom he saw without protectors; he "placed himself at their disposition," as he said, in his chivalrous way.

But beneath his calm air and his snowy poll he concealed an old age almost wholly given up to mere pleasure. Among men he openly professed epicureanism, and gave himself the license of free talk. He had seen no harm in the devotion of his son-in-law, Camusot, to Mademoiselle Coralie, for he himself was secretly the Mecaenas of Mademoiselle Florentine, the first danseuse at the Gaiete. But this life and these opinions never appeared in his own home, nor in his external conduct before the world. Uncle Cardot, grave

and polite, was thought to be somewhat cold, so much did he affect decorum; a "devote" would have called him a hypocrite.

The worthy old gentleman hated priests; he belonged to that great flock of ninnies who subscribed to the "Constitutionnel," and was much concerned about "refusals to bury." He adored Voltaire, though his preferences were really for Piron, Vade, and Colle. Naturally, he admired Beranger, whom he wittily called the "grandfather of the religion of Lisette." His daughters, Madame Camusot and Madame Protez, and his two sons would, to use a popular expression, have been flabbergasted if any one had explained to them what their father meant by "singing la Mere Godichon."

This long-headed parent had never mentioned his income to his children, who, seeing that he lived in a cheap way, reflected that he had deprived himself of his property for their sakes, and, therefore, redoubled their attentions and tenderness. In fact, he would sometimes say to his sons:—

"Don't lose your property; remember, I have none to leave you."

Camusot, in whom he recognized a certain likeness to his own nature, and whom he liked enough to make a sharer in his secret pleasures, alone knew of the thirty thousand a year annuity. But Camusot approved of the old man's ethics, and thought that, having made the happiness of his children and nobly fulfilled his duty by them, he now had a right to end his life jovially.

"Don't you see, my friend," said the former master of the Cocon d'Or, "I might re-marry. A young woman would give me more children. Well, Florentine doesn't cost me what a wife would; neither does she bore me; and she won't give me children to lessen your property."

Camusot considered that Pere Cardot gave expression to a high sense of family duty in these words; he regarded him as an admirable father-in-law.

"He knows," thought he, "how to unite the interests of his children with the pleasures which old age naturally desires after the worries of business life."

Neither the Cardots, nor the Camusots, nor the Protez knew anything of the ways of life of their aunt Clapart. The family intercourse was restricted to the sending of notes of "faire part" on the occasion of deaths and marriages, and cards at the New Year. The proud Madame Clapart would never have brought herself to seek them were it not for Oscar's interests, and because of her friendship for Moreau, the only person who had been faithful to her in misfortune. She had never annoyed old Cardot by her visits, or her importunities, but she held to him as to a hope, and always went to see him once every three months and talked to him of Oscar, the nephew of the late respectable Madame Cardot; and she took the boy to call upon him three times during each vacation. At each of these visits the old gentleman had given

Oscar a dinner at the Cadran-Bleu, taking him, afterwards, to the Gaiete, and returning him safely to the rue de la Cerisaie. On one occasion, having given the boy an entirely new suit of clothes, he added the silver cup and fork and spoon required for his school outfit.

Oscar's mother endeavored to impress the old gentleman with the idea that his nephew cherished him, and she constantly referred to the cup and the fork and spoon and to the beautiful suit of clothes, though nothing was then left of the latter but the waistcoat. But such little arts did Oscar more harm than good when practised on so sly an old fox as uncle Cardot. The latter had never much liked his departed wife, a tall, spare, red-haired woman; he was also aware of the circumstances of the late Husson's marriage with Oscar's mother, and without in the least condemning her, he knew very well that Oscar was a posthumous child. His nephew, therefore, seemed to him to have no claims on the Cardot family. But Madame Clapart, like all women who concentrate their whole being into the sentiment of motherhood, did not put herself in Cardot's place and see the matter from his point of view; she thought he must certainly be interested in so sweet a child, who bore the maiden name of his late wife.

"Monsieur," said old Cardot's maid-servant, coming out to him as he walked about the garden while awaiting his breakfast, after his hairdresser had duly shaved him and powdered his queue, "the mother of your nephew, Oscar, is here."

"Good-day, fair lady," said the old man, bowing to Madame Clapart, and wrapping his white pique dressing-gown about him. "Hey, hey! how this little fellow grows," he added, taking Oscar by the ear.

"He has finished school, and he regretted so much that his dear uncle was not present at the distribution of the Henri IV. prizes, at which he was named. The name of Husson, which, let us hope, he will bear worthily, was proclaimed—"

"The deuce it was!" exclaimed the little old man, stopping short. Madame Clapart, Oscar, and he were walking along a terrace flanked by oranges, myrtles, and pomegranates. "And what did he get?"

"The fourth rank in philosophy," replied the mother proudly.

"Oh! oh!" cried uncle Cardot, "the rascal has a good deal to do to make up for lost time; for the fourth rank in philosophy, well, it isn't Peru, you know! You will stay and breakfast with me?" he added.

"We are at your orders," replied Madame Clapart. "Ah! my dear Monsieur Cardot, what happiness it is for fathers and mothers when their children make a good start in life! In this respect—indeed, in all others," she added, catching herself up, "you are one of the most fortunate fathers I have ever known.

Under your virtuous son-in-law and your amiable daughter, the Cocon d'Or continues to be the greatest establishment of its kind in Paris. And here's your eldest son, for the last ten years at the head of a fine practice and married to wealth. And you have such charming little granddaughters! You are, as it were, the head of four great families. Leave us, Oscar; go and look at the garden, but don't touch the flowers."

"Why, he's eighteen years old!" said uncle Cardot, smiling at this injunction, which made an infant of Oscar.

"Alas, yes, he is eighteen, my good Monsieur Cardot; and after bringing him so far, sound and healthy in mind and body, neither bow-legged nor crooked, after sacrificing everything to give him an education, it would be hard if I could not see him on the road to fortune."

"That Monsieur Moreau who got him the scholarship will be sure to look after his career," said uncle Cardot, concealing his hypocrisy under an air of friendly good-humor.

"Monsieur Moreau may die," she said. "And besides, he has quarrelled irrevocably with the Comte de Serizy, his patron."

"The deuce he has! Listen, madame; I see you are about to—"

"No, monsieur," said Oscar's mother, interrupting the old man, who, out of courtesy to the "fair lady," repressed his annoyance at being interrupted. "Alas, you do not know the miseries of a mother who, for seven years past, has been forced to take a sum of six hundred francs a year for her son's education from the miserable eighteen hundred francs of her husband's salary. Yes, monsieur, that is all we have had to live upon. Therefore, what more can I do for my poor Oscar? Monsieur Clapart so hates the child that it is impossible for me to keep him in the house. A poor woman, alone in the world, am I not right to come and consult the only relation my Oscar has under heaven?"

"Yes, you are right," said uncle Cardot. "You never told me of all this before."

"Ah, monsieur!" replied Madame Clapart, proudly, "you were the last to whom I would have told my wretchedness. It is all my own fault; I married a man whose incapacity is almost beyond belief. Yes, I am, indeed, most unhappy."

"Listen to me, madame," said the little old man, "and don't weep; it is most painful to me to see a fair lady cry. After all, your son bears the name of Husson, and if my dear deceased wife were living she would wish to do something for the name of her father and of her brother—"

"She loved her brother," said Oscar's mother.

"But all my fortune is given to my children, who expect nothing from me at my death," continued the old man. "I have divided among them the millions that I had, because I wanted to see them happy and enjoying their wealth during my lifetime. I have nothing now except an annuity; and at my age one clings to old habits. Do you know the path on which you ought to start this young fellow?" he went on, after calling to Oscar and taking him by the arm. "Let him study law; I'll pay the costs. Put him in a lawyer's office and let him learn the business of pettifogging; if he does well, if he distinguishes himself, if he likes his profession and I am still alive, each of my children shall, when the proper time comes, lend him a quarter of the cost of a practice; and I will be security for him. You will only have to feed and clothe him. Of course he'll sow a few wild oats, but he'll learn life. Look at me: I left Lyon with two double louis which my grandmother gave me, and walked to Paris; and what am I now? Fasting is good for the health. Discretion, honesty, and work, young man, and you'll succeed. There's a great deal of pleasure in earning one's fortune; and if a man keeps his teeth he eats what he likes in his old age, and sings, as I do, 'La Mere Godichon.' Remember my words: Honesty, work, discretion."

"Do you hear that, Oscar?" said his mother. "Your uncle sums up in three words all that I have been saying to you. You ought to carve the last word in letters of fire on your memory."

"Oh, I have," said Oscar.

"Very good,—then thank your uncle; didn't you hear him say he would take charge of your future? You will be a lawyer in Paris."

"He doesn't see the grandeur of his destiny," said the little old man, observing Oscar's apathetic air. "Well, he's just out of school. Listen, I'm no talker," he continued; "but I have this to say: Remember that at your age honesty and uprightness are maintained only by resisting temptations; of which, in a great city like Paris, there are many at every step. Live in your mother's home, in the garret; go straight to the law-school; from there to your lawyer's office; drudge night and day, and study at home. Become, by the time you are twenty-two, a second clerk; by the time you are twenty-four, head-clerk; be steady, and you will win all. If, moreover, you shouldn't like the profession, you might enter the office of my son the notary, and eventually succeed him. Therefore, work, patience, discretion, honesty,—those are your landmarks."

"God grant that you may live thirty years longer to see your fifth child realizing all we expect from him," cried Madame Clapart, seizing uncle Cardot's hand and pressing it with a gesture that recalled her youth.

"Now come to breakfast," replied the kind old man, leading Oscar by the

ear.

During the meal uncle Cardot observed his nephew without appearing to do so, and soon saw that the lad knew nothing of life.

"Send him here to me now and then," he said to Madame Clapart, as he bade her good-bye, "and I'll form him for you."

This visit calmed the anxieties of the poor mother, who had not hoped for such brilliant success. For the next fortnight she took Oscar to walk daily, and watched him tyrannically. This brought matters to the end of October. One morning as the poor household was breakfasting on a salad of herring and lettuce, with milk for a dessert, Oscar beheld with terror the formidable ex-steward, who entered the room and surprised this scene of poverty.

"We are now living in Paris—but not as we lived at Presles," said Moreau, wishing to make known to Madame Clapart the change in their relations caused by Oscar's folly. "I shall seldom be here myself; for I have gone into partnership with Pere Leger and Pere Margueron of Beaumont. We are speculating in land, and we have begun by purchasing the estate of Persan. I am the head of the concern, which has a capital of a million; part of which I have borrowed on my own securities. When I find a good thing, Pere Leger and I examine it; my partners have each a quarter and I a half in the profits; but I do nearly all the work, and for that reason I shall be constantly on the road. My wife lives here, in the faubourg du Roule, very plainly. When we see how the business turns out, if we risk only the profits, and if Oscar behaves himself, we may, perhaps, employ him."

"Ah! my friend, the catastrophe caused by my poor boy's heedlessness may prove to be the cause of your making a brilliant fortune; for, really and truly, you were burying your energy and your capacity at Presles."

Madame Clapart then went on to relate her visit to uncle Cardot, in order to show Moreau that neither she nor her son need any longer be a burden on him.

"He is right, that old fellow," said the ex-steward. "We must hold Oscar in that path with an iron hand, and he will end as a barrister or a notary. But he mustn't leave the track; he must go straight through with it. Ha! I know how to help you. The legal business of land-agents is quite important, and I have heard of a lawyer who has just bought what is called a "titre nu"; that means a practice without clients. He is a young man, hard as an iron bar, eager for work, ferociously active. His name is Desroches. I'll offer him our business on condition that he takes Oscar as a pupil; and I'll ask him to let the boy live with him at nine hundred francs a year, of which I will pay three, so that your son will cost you only six hundred francs, without his living, in future. If the boy ever means to become a man it can only be under a discipline like that.

He'll come out of that office, notary, solicitor, or barrister, as he may elect."

"Come, Oscar; thank our kind Monsieur Moreau, and don't stand there like a stone post. All young men who commit follies have not the good fortune to meet with friends who still take an interest in their career, even after they have been injured by them."

"The best way to make your peace with me," said Moreau, pressing Oscar's hand, "is to work now with steady application, and to conduct yourself in future properly."

CHAPTER VIII. TRICKS AND FARCES OF THE EMBRYO LONG ROBE

Ten days later, Oscar was taken by Monsieur Moreau to Maitre Desroches, solicitor, recently established in the rue de Bethisy, in a vast apartment at the end of a narrow court-yard, for which he was paying a relatively low price.

Desroches, a young man twenty-six years of age, born of poor parents, and brought up with extreme severity by a stern father, had himself known the condition in which Oscar now was. Accordingly, he felt an interest in him, but the sort of interest which alone he could take, checked by the apparent harshness that characterized him. The aspect of this gaunt young man, with a muddy skin and hair cropped like a clothes-brush, who was curt of speech and possessed a piercing eye and a gloomy vivaciousness, terrified the unhappy Oscar.

"We work here day and night," said the lawyer, from the depths of his armchair, and behind a table on which were papers, piled up like Alps. "Monsieur Moreau, we won't kill him; but he'll have to go at our pace. Monsieur Godeschal!" he called out.

Though the day was Sunday, the head-clerk appeared, pen in hand.

"Monsieur Godeschal, here's the pupil of whom I spoke to you. Monsieur Moreau takes the liveliest interest in him. He will dine with us and sleep in the small attic next to your chamber. You will allot the exact time it takes to go to the law-school and back, so that he does not lose five minutes on the way. You will see that he learns the Code and is proficient in his classes; that is to say, after he has done his work here, you will give him authors to read. In short, he is to be under your immediate direction, and I shall keep an eye on it. They want to make him what you have made yourself, a capable head-clerk, against the time when he can take such a place himself. Go with Monsieur Godeschal, my young friend; he'll show you your lodging, and you can settle down in it.

Did you notice Godeschal?" continued Desroches, speaking to Moreau. "There's a fellow who, like me, has nothing. His sister Mariette, the famous danseuse, is laying up her money to buy him a practice in ten years. My clerks are young blades who have nothing but their ten fingers to rely upon. So we all, my five clerks and I, work as hard as a dozen ordinary fellows. But in ten years I'll have the finest practice in Paris. In my office, business and clients are a passion, and that's beginning to make itself felt. I took Godeschal from Derville, where he was only just made second clerk. He gets a thousand francs a year from me, and food and lodging. But he's worth it; he is indefatigable. I love him, that fellow! He has managed to live, as I did when a clerk, on six hundred francs a year. What I care for above all is honesty, spotless integrity; and when it is practised in such poverty as that, a man's a man. For the slightest fault of that kind a clerk leaves my office."

"The lad is in a good school," thought Moreau.

For two whole years Oscar lived in the rue de Bethisy, a den of pettifogging; for if ever that superannuated expression was applicable to a lawyer's office, it was so in this case. Under this supervision, both petty and able, he was kept to his regular hours and to his work with such rigidity that his life in the midst of Paris was that of a monk.

At five in the morning, in all weathers, Godeschal woke up. He went down with Oscar to the office, where they always found their master up and working. Oscar then did the errands of the office and prepared his lessons for the law-school,—and prepared them elaborately; for Godeschal, and frequently Desroches himself, pointed out to their pupil authors to be looked through and difficulties to overcome. He was not allowed to leave a single section of the Code until he had thoroughly mastered it to the satisfaction of his chief and Godeschal, who put him through preliminary examinations more searching and longer than those of the law-school. On his return from his classes, where he was kept but a short time, he went to his work in the office; occasionally he was sent to the Palais, but always under the thumb of the rigid Godeschal, till dinner. The dinner was that of his master,—one dish of meat, one of vegetables, and a salad. The dessert consisted of a piece of Gruyere cheese. After dinner, Godeschal and Oscar returned to the office and worked till night. Once a month Oscar went to breakfast with his uncle Cardot, and he spent the Sundays with his mother. From time to time Moreau, when he came to the office about his own affairs, would take Oscar to dine in the Palais-Royal, and to some theatre in the evening. Oscar had been so snubbed by Godeschal and by Desroches for his attempts at elegance that he no longer gave a thought to his clothes.

"A good clerk," Godeschal told him, "should have two black coats, one new, one old, a pair of black trousers, black stockings, and shoes. Boots cost

too much. You can't have boots till you are called to the bar. A clerk should never spend more than seven hundred francs a year. Good stout shirts of strong linen are what you want. Ha! when a man starts from nothing to reach fortune, he has to keep down to bare necessities. Look at Monsieur Desroches; he did what we are doing, and see where he is now."

Godeschal preached by example. If he professed the strictest principles of honor, discretion, and honesty, he practised them without assumption, as he walked, as he breathed; such action was the natural play of his soul, as walking and breathing were the natural play of his organs. Eighteen months after Oscar's installation into the office, the second clerk was, for the second time, slightly wrong in his accounts, which were comparatively unimportant. Godeschal said to him in presence of all the other clerks:

"My dear Gaudet, go away from here of your own free will, that it may not be said that Monsieur Desroches has dismissed you. You have been careless or absent-minded, and neither of those defects can pass here. The master shall know nothing about the matter; that is all that I can do for a comrade."

At twenty years of age, Oscar became third clerk in the office. Though he earned no salary, he was lodged and fed, for he did the work of the second clerk. Desroches employed two chief clerks, and the work of the second was unremitting toil. By the end of his second year in the law-school Oscar knew more than most licensed graduates; he did the work at the Palais intelligently, and argued some cases in chambers. Godeschal and Desroches were satisfied with him. And yet, though he now seemed a sensible man, he showed, from time to time, a hankering after pleasure and a desire to shine, repressed, though it was, by the stern discipline and continual toil of his life.

Moreau, satisfied with Oscar's progress, relaxed, in some degree, his watchfulness; and when, in July, 1825, Oscar passed his examinations with a spotless record, the land-agent gave him the money to dress himself elegantly. Madame Clapart, proud and happy in her son, prepared the outfit splendidly for the rising lawyer.

In the month of November, when the courts reopened, Oscar Husson occupied the chamber of the second clerk, whose work he now did wholly. He had a salary of eight hundred francs with board and lodging. Consequently, uncle Cardot, who went privately to Desroches and made inquiries about his nephew, promised Madame Clapart to be on the lookout for a practice for Oscar, if he continued to do as well in the future.

In spite of these virtuous appearances, Oscar Husson was undergoing a great strife in his inmost being. At times he thought of quitting a life so directly against his tastes and his nature. He felt that galley-slaves were happier than he. Galled by the collar of this iron system, wild desires seized

him to fly when he compared himself in the street with the well-dressed young men whom he met. Sometimes he was driven by a sort of madness towards women; then, again, he resigned himself, but only to fall into a deeper disgust for life. Impelled by the example of Godeschal, he was forced, rather than led of himself, to remain in that rugged way.

Godeschal, who watched and took note of Oscar, made it a matter of principle not to allow his pupil to be exposed to temptation. Generally the young clerk was without money, or had so little that he could not, if he would, give way to excess. During the last year, the worthy Godeschal had made five or six parties of pleasure with Oscar, defraying the expenses, for he felt that the rope by which he tethered the young kid must be slackened. These "pranks," as he called them, helped Oscar to endure existence, for there was little amusement in breakfasting with his uncle Cardot, and still less in going to see his mother, who lived even more penuriously than Desroches. Moreau could not make himself familiar with Oscar as Godeschal could; and perhaps that sincere friend to young Husson was behind Godeschal in these efforts to initiate the poor youth safely into the mysteries of life. Oscar, grown prudent, had come, through contact with others, to see the extent and the character of the fault he had committed on that luckless journey; but the volume of his repressed fancies and the follies of youth might still get the better of him. Nevertheless, the more knowledge he could get of the world and its laws, the better his mind would form itself, and, provided Godeschal never lost sight of him, Moreau flattered himself that between them they could bring the son of Madame Clapart through in safety.

"How is he getting on?" asked the land-agent of Godeschal on his return from one of his journeys which had kept him some months out of Paris.

"Always too much vanity," replied Godeschal. "You give him fine clothes and fine linen, he wears the shirt-fronts of a stockbroker, and so my dainty coxcomb spends his Sundays in the Tuileries, looking out for adventures. What else can you expect? That's youth. He torments me to present him to my sister, where he would see a pretty sort of society!—actresses, ballet-dancers, elegant young fops, spendthrifts who are wasting their fortunes! His mind, I'm afraid, is not fitted for law. He can talk well, though; and if we could make him a barrister he might plead cases that were carefully prepared for him."

In the month of November, 1825, soon after Oscar Husson had taken possession of his new clerkship, and at the moment when he was about to pass his examination for the licentiate's degree, a new clerk arrived to take the place made vacant by Oscar's promotion.

This fourth clerk, named Frederic Marest, intended to enter the magistracy, and was now in his third year at the law school. He was a fine young man of

twenty-three, enriched to the amount of some twelve thousand francs a year by the death of a bachelor uncle, and the son of Madame Marest, widow of the wealthy wood-merchant. This future magistrate, actuated by a laudable desire to understand his vocation in its smallest details, had put himself in Desroches' office for the purpose of studying legal procedure, and of training himself to take a place as head-clerk in two years. He hoped to do his "stage" (the period between the admission as licentiate and the call to the bar) in Paris, in order to be fully prepared for the functions of a post which would surely not be refused to a rich young man. To see himself, by the time he was thirty, "procureur du roi" in any court, no matter where, was his sole ambition. Though Frederic Marest was cousin-german to Georges Marest, the latter not having told his surname in Pierrotin's coucou, Oscar Husson did not connect the present Marest with the grandson of Czerni-Georges.

"Messieurs," said Godeschal at breakfast time, addressing all the clerks, "I announce to you the arrival of a new jurisconsult; and as he is rich, rishissime, we will make him, I hope, pay a glorious entrance-fee."

"Forward, the book!" cried Oscar, nodding to the youngest clerk, "and pray let us be serious."

The youngest clerk climbed like a squirrel along the shelves which lined the room, until he could reach a register placed on the top shelf, where a thick layer of dust had settled on it.

"It is getting colored," said the little clerk, exhibiting the volume.

We must explain the perennial joke of this book, then much in vogue in legal offices. In a clerical life where work is the rule, amusement is all the more treasured because it is rare; but, above all, a hoax or a practical joke is enjoyed with delight. This fancy or custom does, to a certain extent, explain Georges Marest's behavior in the coucou. The gravest and most gloomy clerk is possessed, at times, with a craving for fun and quizzing. The instinct with which a set of young clerks will seize and develop a hoax or a practical joke is really marvellous. The denizens of a studio and of a lawyer's office are, in this line, superior to comedians.

In buying a practice without clients, Desroches began, as it were, a new dynasty. This circumstance made a break in the usages relative to the reception of new-comers. Moreover, Desroches having taken an office where legal documents had never yet been scribbled, had bought new tables, and white boxes edged with blue, also new. His staff was made up of clerks coming from other officers, without mutual ties, and surprised, as one may say, to find themselves together. Godeschal, who had served his apprenticeship under Maitre Derville, was not the sort of clerk to allow the precious tradition of the "welcome" to be lost. This "welcome" is a breakfast which every neophyte

must give to the "ancients" of the office into which he enters.

Now, about the time when Oscar came to the office, during the first six months of Desroches' installation, on a winter evening when the work had been got through more quickly than usual, and the clerks were warming themselves before the fire preparatory to departure, it came into Godeschal's head to construct and compose a Register "architriclino-basochien," of the utmost antiquity, saved from the fires of the Revolution, and derived through the procureur of the Chatelet-Bordin, the immediate predecessor of Sauvaguest, the attorney, from whom Desroches had bought his practice. The work, which was highly approved by the other clerks, was begun by a search through all the dealers in old paper for a register, made of paper with the mark of the eighteenth century, duly bound in parchment, on which should be the stamp of an order in council. Having found such a volume it was left about in the dust, on the stove, on the ground, in the kitchen, and even in what the clerks called the "chamber of deliberations"; and thus it obtained a mouldiness to delight an antiquary, cracks of aged dilapidation, and broken corners that looked as though the rats had gnawed them; also, the gilt edges were tarnished with surprising perfection. As soon as the book was duly prepared, the entries were made. The following extracts will show to the most obtuse mind the purpose to which the office of Maitre Desroches devoted this register, the first sixty pages of which were filled with reports of fictitious cases. On the first page appeared as follows, in the legal spelling of the eighteenth century:—

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so be it. This day, the feast of our lady Saincte-Geneviesve, patron saint of Paris, under whose protection have existed, since the year 1525 the clerks of this Practice, we the under-signed, clerks and sub-clerks of Maistre Jerosme-Sebastien Bordin, successor to the late Guerbet, in his lifetime procureur at the Chastelet, do hereby recognize the obligation under which we lie to renew and continue the register and the archives of installation of the clerks of this noble Practice, a glorious member of the Kingdom of Basoche, the which register, being now full in consequence of the many acts and deeds of our well-beloved predecessors, we have consigned to the Keeper of the Archives of the Palais for safe-keeping, with the registers of other ancient Practices; and we have ourselves gone, each and all, to hear mass at the parish church of Saint-Severin to solemnize the inauguration of this our new register.

In witness whereof we have hereunto signed our names: Malin, head-clerk; Grevin, second-clerk; Athanase Feret, clerk; Jacques Heret, clerk; Regnault de Saint-Jean-d'Angely, clerk; Bedeau, youngest clerk and gutter-jumper.

In the year of our Lord 1787.

After the mass aforesaid was heard, we conveyed ourselves to Courtille,

where, at the common charge, we ordered a fine breakfast; which did not end till seven o'clock the next morning.

This was marvellously well engrossed. An expert would have said that it was written in the eighteenth century. Twenty-seven reports of receptions of neophytes followed, the last in the fatal year of 1792. Then came a blank of fourteen years; after which the register began again, in 1806, with the appointment of Bordin as attorney before the first Court of the Seine. And here follows the deed which proclaimed the reconstitution of the kingdom of Basoche:—

God in his mercy willed that, in spite of the fearful storms which have cruelly ravaged the land of France, now become a great Empire, the archives of the very celebrated Practice of Maitre Bordin should be preserved; and we, the undersigned, clerks of the very virtuous and very worthy Maitre Bordin, do not hesitate to attribute this unheard-of preservation, when all titles, privileges, and charters were lost, to the protection of Sainte-Genevieve, patron Saint of this office, and also to the reverence which the last of the procureurs of noble race had for all that belonged to ancient usages and customs. In the uncertainty of knowing the exact part of Sainte-Genevieve and Maitre Bordin in this miracle, we have resolved, each of us, to go to Saint-Etienne du Mont and there hear mass, which will be said before the altar of that Holy-Shepherdess who sends us sheep to shear, and also to offer a breakfast to our master Bordin, hoping that he will pay the costs.

Signed: Oignard, first clerk; Poidevin, second clerk; Proust, clerk; Augustin Coret, sub-clerk.

At the office.

November, 1806.

At three in the afternoon, the above-named clerks hereby return their grateful thanks to their excellent master, who regaled them at the establishment of the Sieur Rolland restaurateur, rue du Hasard, with exquisite wines of three regions, to wit: Bordeaux, Champagne, and Burgundy, also with dishes most carefully chosen, between the hours of four in the afternoon to half-past seven in the evening. Coffee, ices, and liqueurs were in abundance. But the presence of the master himself forbade the chanting of hymns of praise in clerical stanzas. No clerk exceeded the bounds of amiable gayety, for the worthy, respectable, and generous patron had promised to take his clerks to see Talma in "Brittanicus," at the Theatre-Francais. Long life to Maitre Bordin! May God shed favors on his venerable pow! May he sell dear so glorious a practice! May the rich clients for whom he prays arrive! May his bills of costs and charges be paid in a trice! May our masters to come be like him! May he ever be loved by clerks in other worlds than this!

Here followed thirty-three reports of various receptions of new clerks, distinguished from one another by different writing and different inks, also by quotations, signatures, and praises of good cheer and wines, which seemed to show that each report was written and signed on the spot, "inter pocula."

Finally, under date of the month of June, 1822, the period when Desroches took the oath, appears this constitutional declaration:—

I, the undersigned, Francois-Claude-Marie Godeschal, called by Maitre Desroches to perform the difficult functions of head-clerk in a Practice where the clients have to be created, having learned through Maitre Derville, from whose office I come, of the existence of the famous archives architriclino-basochien, so celebrated at the Palais, have implored our gracious master to obtain them from his predecessor; for it has become of the highest importance to recover a document bearing date of the year 1786, which is connected with other documents deposited for safe-keeping at the Palais, the existence of which has been certified to by Messrs. Terrasse and Duclos, keepers of records, by the help of which we may go back to the year 1525, and find historical indications of the utmost value on the manners, customs, and cookery of the clerical race.

Having received a favorable answer to this request, the present office has this day been put in possession of these proofs of the worship in which our predecessors held the Goddess Bottle and good living.

In consequence thereof, for the edification of our successors, and to renew the chain of years and goblets, I, the said Godeschal, have invited Messieurs Doublet, second clerk; Vassal, third clerk; Herisson and Grandemain, clerks; and Dumets, sub-clerk, to breakfast, Sunday next, at the "Cheval Rouge," on the Quai Saint-Bernard, where we will celebrate the victory of obtaining this volume which contains the Charter of our gullets.

This day, Sunday, June 27th, were imbibed twelve bottles of twelve different wines, regarded as exquisite; also were devoured melons, "pates au jus romanum," and a fillet of beef with mushroom sauce. Mademoiselle Mariette, the illustrious sister of our head-clerk and leading lady of the Royal Academy of music and dancing, having obligingly put at the disposition of this Practice orchestra seats for the performance of this evening, it is proper to make this record of her generosity. Moreover, it is hereby decreed that the aforesaid clerks shall convey themselves in a body to that noble demoiselle to thank her in person, and declare to her that on the occasion of her first lawsuit, if the devil sends her one, she shall pay the money laid out upon it, and no more.

And our head-clerk Godeschal has been and is hereby proclaimed a flower of Basoche, and, more especially, a good fellow. May a man who treats so well

be soon in treaty for a Practice of his own!

On this record were stains of wine, pates, and candle-grease. To exhibit the stamp of truth that the writers had managed to put upon these records, we may here give the report of Oscar's own pretended reception:—

This day, Monday, November 25th, 1822, after a session held yesterday at the rue de la Cerisaie, Arsenal quarter, at the house of Madame Clapart, mother of the candidate-basochien Oscar Husson, we, the undersigned, declare that the repast of admission surpassed our expectations. It was composed of radishes, pink and black, gherkins, anchovies, butter and olives for hors-d'oeuvre; a succulent soup of rice, bearing testimony to maternal solicitude, for we recognized therein a delicious taste of poultry; indeed, by acknowledgment of the new member, we learned that the gibbets of a fine stew prepared by the hands of Madame Clapart herself had been judiciously inserted into the family soup-pot with a care that is never taken except in such households.

Item: the said gibbets inclosed in a sea of jelly.

Item: a tongue of beef with tomatoes, which rendered us all tongue-tied automatoes.

Item: a compote of pigeons with caused us to think the angels had had a finger in it.

Item: a timbale of macaroni surrounded by chocolate custards.

Item: a dessert composed of eleven delicate dishes, among which we remarked (in spite of the tipsiness caused by sixteen bottles of the choicest wines) a compote of peaches of august and mirobolant delicacy.

The wines of Roussillon and those of the banks of the Rhone completely effaced those of Champagne and Burgundy. A bottle of maraschino and another of kirsch did, in spite of the exquisite coffee, plunge us into so marked an oenological ecstasy that we found ourselves at a late hour in the Bois de Boulogne instead of our domicile, where we thought we were.

In the statutes of our Order there is one rule which is rigidly enforced; namely, to allow all candidates for the privilege of Basoche to limit the magnificence of their feast of welcome to the length of their purse; for it is publicly notorious that no one delivers himself up to Themis if he has a fortune, and every clerk is, alas, sternly curtailed by his parents. Consequently, we hereby record with the highest praise the liberal conduct of Madame Clapart, widow, by her first marriage, of Monsieur Husson, father of the candidate, who is worthy of the hurrahs which we gave for her at dessert.

To all of which we hereby set our hands.

[Signed by all the clerks.]

Three clerks had already been deceived by the Book, and three real "receptions of welcome," were recorded on this imposing register.

The day after the arrival of each neophyte, the little sub-clerk (the errand-boy and "gutter-jumper") laid upon the new-comer's desk the "Archives Architriclino-Basochiennes," and the clerks enjoyed the sight of his countenance as he studied its facetious pages. Inter pocula each candidate had learned the secret of the farce, and the revelation inspired him with the desire to hoax his successor.

We see now why Oscar, become in his turn participator in the hoax, called out to the little clerk, "Forward, the book!"

Ten minutes later a handsome young man, with a fine figure and pleasant face, presented himself, asked for Monsieur Desroches, and gave his name without hesitation to Godeschal.

"I am Frederic Marest," he said, "and I come to take the place of third clerk."

"Monsieur Husson," said Godeschal to Oscar, "show monsieur his seat and tell him about the customs of the office."

The next day the new clerk found the register lying on his desk. He took it up, but after reading a few pages he began to laugh, said nothing to the assembled clerks, and laid the book down again.

"Messieurs," he said, when the hour of departure came at five o'clock, "I have a cousin who is head clerk of the notary Maitre Leopold Hannequin; I will ask his advice as to what I ought to do for my welcome."

"That looks ill," cried Godeschal, when Frederic had gone, "he hasn't the cut of a novice, that fellow!"

"We'll get some fun out of him yet," said Oscar.

CHAPTER IX, LA MARQUISE DE LAS FLORENTINAS Y CABIROLOS

The following day, at two o'clock, a young man entered the office, whom Oscar recognized as Georges Marest, now head-clerk of the notary Hannequin.

"Ha! here's the friend of Ali pacha!" he exclaimed in a flippant way.

"Hey! you here, Monsieur l'ambassadeur!" returned Georges, recollecting

Oscar.

"So you know each other?" said Godeschal, addressing Georges.

"I should think so! We got into a scrape together," replied Georges, "about two years ago. Yes, I had to leave Crottat and go to Hannequin in consequence of that affair."

"What was it?" asked Godeschal.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Georges, at a sign from Oscar. "We tried to hoax a peer of France, and he bowled us over. Ah ca! so you want to jockey my cousin, do you?"

"We jockey no one," replied Oscar, with dignity; "there's our charter."

And he presented the famous register, pointing to a place where sentence of banishment was passed on a refractory who was stated to have been forced, for acts of dishonesty, to leave the office in 1788.

Georges laughed as he looked through the archives.

"Well, well," he said, "my cousin and I are rich, and we'll give you a fete such as you never had before,—something to stimulate your imaginations for that register. To-morrow (Sunday) you are bidden to the Rocher de Cancale at two o'clock. Afterwards, I'll take you to spend the evening with Madame la Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos, where we shall play cards, and you'll see the elite of the women of fashion. Therefore, gentleman of the lower courts," he added, with notarial assumption, "you will have to behave yourselves, and carry your wine like the seigneurs of the Regency."

"Hurrah!" cried the office like one man. "Bravo! very well! vivat! Long live the Marests!"

"What's all this about?" asked Desroches, coming out from his private office. "Ah! is that you, Georges? I know what you are after; you want to demoralize my clerks."

So saying, he withdrew into his own room, calling Oscar after him.

"Here," he said, opening his cash-box, "are five hundred francs. Go to the Palais, and get from the registrar a copy of the decision in Vandernesse against Vandernesse; it must be served to-night if possible. I have promised a PROD of twenty francs to Simon. Wait for the copy if it is not ready. Above all, don't let yourself be fooled; for Derville is capable, in the interest of his clients, to stick a spoke in our wheel. Count Felix de Vandernesse is more powerful than his brother, our client, the ambassador. Therefore keep your eyes open, and if there's the slightest hitch come back to me at once."

Oscar departed with the full intention of distinguishing himself in this little

skirmish,—the first affair entrusted to him since his installation as second clerk.

After the departure of Georges and Oscar, Godeschal sounded the new clerk to discover the joke which, as he thought, lay behind this Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos. But Frederic, with the coolness and gravity of a king's attorney, continued his cousin's hoax, and by his way of answering, and his manner generally, he succeeded in making the office believe that the marquise might really be the widow of a Spanish grandee, to whom his cousin Georges was paying his addresses. Born in Mexico, and the daughter of Creole parents, this young and wealthy widow was noted for the easy manners and habits of the women of those climates.

"She loves to laugh, she loves to sing, she loves to drink like me!" he said in a low voice, quoting the well-known song of Beranger. "Georges," he added, "is very rich; he has inherited from his father (who was a widower) eighteen thousand francs a year, and with the twelve thousand which an uncle has just left to each of us, he has an income of thirty thousand. So he pays his debts, and gives up the law. He hopes to be Marquis de las Florentinas, for the young widow is marquise in her own right, and has the privilege of giving her titles to her husband."

Though the clerks were still a good deal undecided in mind as to the marquise, the double perspective of a breakfast at the Rocher de Cancale and a fashionable festivity put them into a state of joyous expectation. They reserved all points as to the Spanish lady, intending to judge her without appeal after the meeting.

The Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos was neither more nor less than Mademoiselle Agathe-Florentine Cabirolle, first danseuse at the Gaiete, with whom uncle Cardot was in the habit of singing "Mere Godichon." A year after the very reparable loss of Madame Cardot, the successful merchant encountered Florentine as she was leaving Coulon's dancing-class. Attracted by the beauty of that choregraphic flower (Florentine was then about thirteen years of age), he followed her to the rue Pastourel, where he found that the future star of the ballet was the daughter of a portress. Two weeks later, the mother and daughter, established in the rue de Crussol, were enjoying a modest competence. It was to this protector of the arts—to use the consecrated phrase—that the theatre owed the brilliant danseuse. The generous Maecenas made two beings almost beside themselves with joy in the possession of mahogany furniture, hangings, carpets, and a regular kitchen; he allowed them a woman-of-all-work, and gave them two hundred and fifty francs a month for their living. Pere Cardot, with his hair in "pigeon-wings," seemed like an angel, and was treated with the attention due to a benefactor. To him this was the age of gold.

For three years the warbler of "Mere Godichon" had the wise policy to keep Mademoiselle Cabirolle and her mother in this little apartment, which was only ten steps from the theatre; but he gave the girl, out of love for the choregraphic art, the great Vestris for a master. In 1820 he had the pleasure of seeing Florentine dance her first "pas" in the ballet of a melodrama entitled "The Ruins of Babylon." Florentine was then about sixteen. Shortly after this debut Pere Cardot became an "old screw" in the eyes of his protegee; but as he had the sense to see that a danseuse at the Gaiete had a certain rank to maintain, he raised the monthly stipend to five hundred francs, for which, although he did not again become an angel, he was, at least, a "friend for life," a second father. This was his silver age.

From 1820 to 1823, Florentine had the experience of every danseuse of nineteen to twenty years of age. Her friends were the illustrious Mariette and Tullia, leading ladies of the Opera, Florine, and also poor Coralie, torn too early from the arts, and love, and Camusot. As old Cardot had by this time acquired five additional years, he had fallen into the indulgence of a semi-paternity, which is the way with old men towards the young talents they have trained, and which owe their success to them. Besides, where could he have found another Florentine who knew all his habits and likings, and with whom he and his friends could sing "Mere Godichon"? So the little old man remained under a yoke that was semi-conjugal and also irresistibly strong. This was the brass age for the old fellow.

During the five years of silver and gold Pere Cardot had laid by eighty thousand francs. The old gentleman, wise from experience, foresaw that by the time he was seventy Florentine would be of age, probably engaged at the Opera, and, consequently, wanting all the luxury of a theatrical star. Some days before the party mentioned by Georges, Pere Cardot had spent the sum of forty-five thousand francs in fitting up for his Florentine the former apartment of the late Coralie. In Paris there are suites of rooms as well as houses and streets that have their predestinations. Enriched with a magnificent service of plate, the "prima danseuse" of the Gaiete began to give dinners, spent three hundred francs a month on her dress, never went out except in a hired carriage, and had a maid for herself, a cook, and a little footman.

In fact, an engagement at the Opera was already in the wind. The Cocon d'Or did homage to its first master by sending its most splendid products for the gratification of Mademoiselle Cabirolle, now called Florentine. The magnificence which suddenly burst upon her apartment in the rue de Vendome would have satisfied the most ambitious supernumerary. After being the master of the ship for seven years, Cardot now found himself towed along by a force of unlimited caprice. But the luckless old gentleman was fond of his tyrant. Florentine was to close his eyes; he meant to leave her a hundred

thousand francs. The iron age had now begun.

Georges Marest, with thirty thousand francs a year, and a handsome face, courted Florentine. Every danseuse makes a point of having some young man who will take her to drive, and arrange the gay excursions into the country which all such women delight in. However disinterested she may be, the courtship of such a star is a passion which costs some trifles to the favored mortal. There are dinners at restaurants, boxes at the theatres, carriages to go to the environs and return, choice wines consumed in profusion,—for an opera danseuse eats and drinks like an athlete. Georges amused himself like other young men who pass at a jump from paternal discipline to a rich independence, and the death of his uncle, nearly doubling his means, had still further enlarged his ideas. As long as he had only his patrimony of eighteen thousand francs a year, his intention was to become a notary, but (as his cousin remarked to the clerks of Desroches) a man must be stupid who begins a profession with the fortune most men hope to acquire in order to leave it. Wiser then Georges, Frederic persisted in following the career of public office, and of putting himself, as we have seen, in training for it.

A young man as handsome and attractive as Georges might very well aspire to the hand of a rich creole; and the clerks in Desroches' office, all of them the sons of poor parents, having never frequented the great world, or, indeed, known anything about it, put themselves into their best clothes on the following day, impatient enough to behold, and be presented to the Mexican Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos.

"What luck," said Oscar to Godeschal, as they were getting up in the morning, "that I had just ordered a new coat and trousers and waistcoat, and that my dear mother had made me that fine outfit! I have six frilled shirts of fine linen in the dozen she made for me. We shall make an appearance! Ha! ha! suppose one of us were to carry off the Creole marchioness from that Georges Marest!"

"Fine occupation that, for a clerk in our office!" cried Godeschal. "Will you never control your vanity, popinjay?"

"Ah! monsieur," said Madame Clapart, who entered the room at that moment to bring her son some cravats, and overhead the last words of the head-clerk, "would to God that my Oscar might always follow your advice. It is what I tell him all the time: 'Imitate Monsieur Godeschal; listen to what he tells you.'"

"He'll go all right, madame," interposed Godeschal, "but he mustn't commit any more blunders like one he was guilty of last night, or he'll lose the confidence of the master. Monsieur Desroches won't stand any one not succeeding in what he tells them to do. He ordered your son, for a first

employment in his new clerkship, to get a copy of a judgment which ought to have been served last evening, and Oscar, instead of doing so, allowed himself to be fooled. The master was furious. It's a chance if I have been able to repair the mischief by going this morning, at six o'clock, to see the head-clerk at the Palais, who has promised me to have a copy ready by seven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Ah, Godeschal!" cried Oscar, going up to him and pressing his hand. "You are, indeed, a true friend."

"Ah, monsieur!" said Madame Clapart, "a mother is happy, indeed, in knowing that her son has a friend like you; you may rely upon a gratitude which can end only with my life. Oscar, one thing I want to say to you now. Distrust that Georges Marest. I wish you had never met him again, for he was the cause of your first great misfortune in life."

"Was he? How so?" asked Godeschal.

The too devoted mother explained succinctly the adventure of her poor Oscar in Pierrotin's coucou.

"I am certain," said Godeschal, "that that blagueur is preparing some trick against us for this evening. As for me, I can't go to the Marquise de las Florentinas' party, for my sister wants me to draw up the terms of her new engagement; I shall have to leave after the dessert. But, Oscar, be on your guard. They will ask you to play, and, of course, the Desroches office mustn't draw back; but be careful. You shall play for both of us; here's a hundred francs," said the good fellow, knowing that Oscar's purse was dry from the demands of his tailor and bootmaker. "Be prudent; remember not to play beyond that sum; and don't let yourself get tipsy, either with play or libations. Saperlotte! a second clerk is already a man of weight, and shouldn't gamble on notes, or go beyond a certain limit in anything. His business is to get himself admitted to the bar. Therefore don't drink too much, don't play too long, and maintain a proper dignity,—that's your rule of conduct. Above all, get home by midnight; for, remember, you must be at the Palais to-morrow morning by seven to get that judgment. A man is not forbidden to amuse himself, but business first, my boy."

"Do you hear that, Oscar?" said Madame Clapart. "Monsieur Godeschal is indulgent; see how well he knows how to combine the pleasures of youth and the duties of his calling."

Madame Clapart, on the arrival of the tailor and the bootmaker with Oscar's new clothes, remained alone with Godeschal, in order to return him the hundred francs he had just given her son.

"Ah, monsieur!" she said, "the blessings of a mother will follow you

wherever you go, and in all your enterprises."

Poor woman! she now had the supreme delight of seeing her son well-dressed, and she gave him a gold watch, the price of which she had saved by economy, as the reward of his good conduct.

"You draw for the conscription next week," she said, "and to prepare, in case you get a bad number, I have been to see your uncle Cardot. He is very much pleased with you; and so delighted to know you are a second clerk at twenty, and to hear of your successful examination at the law-school, that he promised me the money for a substitute. Are not you glad to think that your own good conduct has brought such reward? Though you have some privations to bear, remember the happiness of being able, five years from now, to buy a practice. And think, too, my dear little kitten, how happy you make your mother."

Oscar's face, somewhat thinned by study, had acquired, through habits of business, a serious expression. He had reached his full growth, his beard was thriving; adolescence had given place to virility. The mother could not refrain from admiring her son and kissing him, as she said:—

"Amuse yourself, my dear boy, but remember the advice of our good Monsieur Godeschal. Ah! by the bye, I was nearly forgetting! Here's a present our friend Moreau sends you. See! what a pretty pocket-book."

"And I want it, too; for the master gave me five hundred francs to get that cursed judgment of Vandernesse versus Vandernesse, and I don't want to leave that sum of money in my room."

"But, surely, you are not going to carry it with you!" exclaimed his mother, in alarm. "Suppose you should lose a sum like that! Hadn't you better give it to Monsieur Godeschal for safe keeping?"

"Godeschal!" cried Oscar, who thought his mother's suggestion excellent.

But Godeschal, who, like all clerks, has his time to himself on Sundays, from ten to two o'clock, had already departed.

When his mother left him, Oscar went to lounge upon the boulevards until it was time to go to Georges Marest's breakfast. Why not display those beautiful clothes which he wore with a pride and joy which all young fellows who have been pinched for means in their youth will remember. A pretty waistcoat with a blue ground and a palm-leaf pattern, a pair of black cashmere trousers pleated, a black coat very well fitting, and a cane with a gilt top, the cost of which he had saved himself, caused a natural joy to the poor lad, who thought of his manner of dress on the day of that journey to Presles, as the effect that Georges had then produced upon him came back to his mind.

Oscar had before him the perspective of a day of happiness; he was to see the gay world at last! Let us admit that a clerk deprived of enjoyments, though longing for dissipation, was likely to let his unchained senses drive the wise counsels of his mother and Godeschal completely out of his mind. To the shame of youth let it be added that good advice is never lacking to it. In the matter of Georges, Oscar himself had a feeling of aversion for him; he felt humiliated before a witness of that scene in the salon at Presles when Moreau had flung him at the count's feet. The moral senses have their laws, which are implacable, and we are always punished for disregarding them. There is one in particular, which the animals themselves obey without discussion, and invariably; it is that which tells us to avoid those who have once injured us, with or without intention, voluntarily or involuntarily. The creature from whom we receive either damage or annoyance will always be displeasing to us. Whatever may be his rank or the degree of affection in which he stands to us, it is best to break away from him; for our evil genius has sent him to us. Though the Christian sentiment is opposed to it, obedience to this terrible law is essentially social and conservative. The daughter of James II., who seated herself upon her father's throne, must have caused him many a wound before that usurpation. Judas had certainly given some murderous blow to Jesus before he betrayed him. We have within us an inward power of sight, an eye of the soul which foresees catastrophes; and the repugnance that comes over us against the fateful being is the result of that foresight. Though religion orders us to conquer it, distrust remains, and its voice is forever heard. Would Oscar, at twenty years of age, have the wisdom to listen to it?

Alas! when, at half-past two o'clock, Oscar entered the salon of the Rocher de Cancale,—where were three invited persons besides the clerks, to wit: an old captain of dragoons, named Giroudeau; Finot, a journalist who might procure an engagement for Florentine at the Opera, and du Bruel, an author, the friend of Tullia, one of Mariette's rivals,—the second clerk felt his secret hostility vanish at the first handshaking, the first dashes of conversation as they sat around a table luxuriously served. Georges, moreover, made himself charming to Oscar.

"You've taken to private diplomacy," he said; "for what difference is there between a lawyer and an ambassador? only that between a nation and an individual. Ambassadors are the attorneys of Peoples. If I can ever be useful to you, let me know."

"Well," said Oscar, "I'll admit to you now that you once did me a very great harm."

"Pooh!" said Georges, after listening to the explanation for which he asked; "it was Monsieur de Serizy who behaved badly. His wife! I wouldn't have her at any price; neither would I like to be in the count's red skin, minister of State

and peer of France as he is. He has a small mind, and I don't care a fig for him now."

Oscar listened with true pleasure to these slurs on the count, for they diminished, in a way, the importance of his fault; and he echoed the spiteful language of the ex-notary, who amused himself by predicting the blows to the nobility of which the bourgeoisie were already dreaming,—blows which were destined to become a reality in 1830.

At half-past three the solid eating of the feast began; the dessert did not appear till eight o'clock,—each course having taken two hours to serve. None but clerks can eat like that! The stomachs of eighteen and twenty are inexplicable to the medical art. The wines were worthy of Borrel, who in those days had superseded the illustrious Balaine, the creator of the first restaurant for delicate and perfectly prepared food in Paris,—that is to say, the whole world.

The report of this Belshazzar's feast for the architriclino-basochien register was duly drawn up, beginning, "Inter pocula aurea restauranti, qui vulgo dicitur Rupes Cancali." Every one can imagine the fine page now added to the Golden Book of jurisprudential festivals.

Godeschal disappeared after signing the report, leaving the eleven guests, stimulated by the old captain of the Imperial Guard, to the wines, toasts, and liqueurs of a dessert composed of choice and early fruits, in pyramids that rivalled the obelisk of Thebes. By half-past ten the little sub-clerk was in such a state that Georges packed him into a coach, paid his fare, and gave the address of his mother to the driver. The remaining ten, all as drunk as Pitt and Dundas, talked of going on foot along the boulevards, considering the fine evening, to the house of the Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos, where, about midnight, they might expect to find the most brilliant society of Paris. They felt the need of breathing the pure air into their lungs; but, with the exception of Georges, Giroudeau, du Bruel, and Finot, all four accustomed to Parisian orgies, not one of the party could walk. Consequently, Georges sent to a livery-stable for three open carriages, in which he drove his company for an hour round the exterior boulevards from Monmartre to the Barriere du Trone. They returned by Bercy, the quays, and the boulevards to the rue de Vendome.

The clerks were fluttering still in the skies of fancy to which youth is lifted by intoxication, when their amphitryon introduced them into Florentine's salon. There sparkled a bevy of stage princesses, who, having been informed, no doubt, of Frederic's joke, were amusing themselves by imitating the women of good society. They were then engaged in eating ices. The wax-candles flamed in the candelabra. Tullia's footmen and those of Madame du Val-Noble and Florine, all in full livery, where serving the dainties on silver salvers. The

hangings, a marvel of Lyonnaise workmanship, fastened by gold cords, dazzled all eyes. The flowers of the carpet were like a garden. The richest "bibelots" and curiosities danced before the eyes of the new-comers.

At first, and in the state to which Georges had brought them, the clerks, and more particularly Oscar, believed in the Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos. Gold glittered on four card-tables in the bed-chamber. In the salon, the women were playing at vingt-et-un, kept by Nathan, the celebrated author.

After wandering, tipsy and half asleep, through the dark exterior boulevards, the clerks now felt that they had wakened in the palace of Armida. Oscar, presented to the marquise by Georges, was quite stupefied, and did not recognize the danseuse he had seen at the Gaiete, in this lady, aristocratically decolletee and swathed in laces, till she looked like the vignette of a keepsake, who received him with manners and graces the like of which was neither in the memory nor the imagination of a young clerk rigidly brought up. After admiring the splendors of the apartment and the beautiful women there displayed, who had all outdone each other in their dress for this occasion, Oscar was taken by the hand and led by Florentine to a vingt-et-un table.

"Let me present you," she said, "to the beautiful Marquise d'Anglade, one of my nearest friends."

And she took Oscar to the pretty Fanny Beaupre, who had just made herself a reputation at the Porte-Saint-Martin, in a melodrama entitled "La Famille d'Anglade."

"My dear," said Florentine, "allow me to present to you a charming youth, whom you can take as a partner in the game."

"Ah! that will be delightful," replied the actress, smiling, as she looked at Oscar. "I am losing. Shall we go shares, monsieur?"

"Madame la marquise, I am at your orders," said Oscar, sitting down beside her.

"Put down the money; I'll play; you shall being me luck! See, here are my last hundred francs."

And the "marquise" took out from her purse, the rings of which were adorned with diamonds, five gold pieces. Oscar pulled out his hundred in silver five-franc pieces, much ashamed at having to mingle such ignoble coins with gold. In ten throws the actress lost the two hundred francs.

"Oh! how stupid!" she cried. "I'm banker now. But we'll play together still, won't we?"

Fanny Beaupre rose to take her place as banker, and Oscar, finding himself observed by the whole table, dared not retire on the ground that he had no

money. Speech failed him, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Lend me five hundred francs," said the actress to the danseuse.

Florentine brought the money, which she obtained from Georges, who had just passed eight times at ecarte.

"Nathan has won twelve hundred francs," said the actress to Oscar. "Bankers always win; we won't let them fool us, will we?" she whispered in his ear.

Persons of nerve, imagination, and dash will understand how it was that poor Oscar opened his pocket-book and took out the note of five hundred francs which Desroches had given him. He looked at Nathan, the distinguished author, who now began, with Florine, to play a heavy game against the bank.

"Come, my little man, take 'em up," cried Fanny Beaupre, signing to Oscar to rake in the two hundred francs which Nathan and Florine had punted.

The actress did not spare taunts or jests on those who lost. She enlivened the game with jokes which Oscar thought singular; but reflection was stifled by joy; for the first two throws produced a gain of two thousand francs. Oscar then thought of feigning illness and making his escape, leaving his partner behind him; but "honor" kept him there. Three more turns and the gains were lost. Oscar felt a cold sweat running down his back, and he was sobered completely.

The next two throws carried off the thousand francs of their mutual stake. Oscar was consumed with thirst, and drank three glasses of iced punch one after the other. The actress now led him into the bed-chamber, where the rest of the company were playing, talking frivolities with an easy air. But by this time the sense of his wrong-doing overcame him; the figure of Desroches appeared to him like a vision. He turned aside to a dark corner and sat down, putting his handkerchief to his eyes, and wept. Florentine noticed the attitude of true grief, which, because it is sincere, is certain to strike the eye of one who acts. She ran to him, took the handkerchief from his hand, and saw his tears; then she led him into a boudoir alone.

"What is it, my child?" she said.

At the tone and accent of that voice Oscar recognized a motherly kindness which is often found in women of her kind, and he answered openly:—

"I have lost five hundred francs which my employer gave me to obtain a document to-morrow morning; there's nothing for me but to fling myself into the river; I am dishonored."

"How silly you are!" she said. "Stay where you are; I'll get you a thousand francs and you can win back what you've lost; but don't risk more than five

hundred, so that you may be sure of your master's money. Georges plays a fine game at ecarte; bet on him."

Oscar, frightened by his position, accepted the offer of the mistress of the house.

"Ah!" he thought, "it is only women of rank who are capable of such kindness. Beautiful, noble, rich! how lucky Georges is!"

He received the thousand francs from Florentine and returned to bet on his hoaxer. Georges had just passed for the fourth time when Oscar sat down beside him. The other players saw with satisfaction the arrival of a new better; for all, with the instinct of gamblers, took the side of Giroudeau, the old officer of the Empire.

"Messieurs," said Georges, "you'll be punished for deserting me; I feel in the vein. Come, Oscar, we'll make an end of them!"

Georges and his partner lost five games running. After losing the thousand francs Oscar was seized with the fury of play and insisted on taking the cards himself. By the result of a chance not at all uncommon with those who play for the first time, he won. But Georges bewildered him with advice; told him when to throw the cards, and even snatched them from his hand; so that this conflict of wills and intuitions injured his vein. By three o'clock in the morning, after various changes of fortune, and still drinking punch, Oscar came down to his last hundred francs. He rose with a heavy head, completely stupefied, took a few steps forward, and fell upon a sofa in the boudoir, his eyes closing in a leaden sleep.

"Mariette," said Fanny Beaupre to Godeschal's sister, who had come in about two o'clock, "do you dine here to-morrow? Camusot and Pere Cardot are coming, and we'll have some fun."

"What!" cried Florentine, "and my old fellow never told me!"

"He said he'd tell you to-morrow morning," remarked Fanny Beaupre.

"The devil take him and his orgies!" exclaimed Florentine. "He and Camusot are worse than magistrates or stage-managers. But we have very good dinners here, Mariette," she continued. "Cardot always orders them from Chevet's; bring your Duc de Maufrigneuse and we'll make them dance like Tritons."

Hearing the names of Cardot and Camusot, Oscar made an effort to throw off his sleep; but he could only mutter a few words which were not understood, and then he fell back upon the silken cushions.

"You'll have to keep him here all night," said Fanny Beaupre, laughing, to Florentine.

"Oh! poor boy! he is drunk with punch and despair both. It is the second clerk in your brother's office," she said to Mariette. "He has lost the money his master gave him for some legal affair. He wanted to drown himself; so I lent him a thousand francs, but those brigands Finot and Giroudeau won them from him. Poor innocent!"

"But we ought to wake him," said Mariette. "My brother won't make light of it, nor his master either."

"Oh, wake him if you can, and carry him off with you!" said Florentine, returning to the salon to receive the adieux of some departing guests.

Presently those who remained began what was called "character dancing," and by the time it was broad daylight, Florentine, tired out, went to bed, oblivious to Oscar, who was still in the boudoir sound asleep.

CHAPTER X. ANOTHER CATASTROPHE

About eleven the next morning, a terrible sound awoke the unfortunate clerk. Recognizing the voice of his uncle Cardot, he thought it wise to feign sleep, and so turned his face into the yellow velvet cushions on which he had passed the night.

"Really, my little Florentine," said the old gentleman, "this is neither right nor sensible; you danced last evening in 'Les Ruines,' and you have spent the night in an orgy. That's deliberately going to work to lose your freshness. Besides which, it was ungrateful to inaugurate this beautiful apartment without even letting me know. Who knows what has been going on here?"

"Old monster!" cried Florentine, "haven't you a key that lets you in at all hours? My ball lasted till five in the morning, and you have the cruelty to come and wake me up at eleven!"

"Half-past eleven, Titine," observed Cardot, humbly. "I came out early to order a dinner fit for an archbishop at Chevet's. Just see how the carpets are stained! What sort of people did you have here?"

"You needn't complain, for Fanny Beaupre told me you were coming to dinner with Camusot, and to please you I've invited Tullia, du Bruel, Mariette, the Duc de Maufrigneuse, Florine, and Nathan. So you'll have the four loveliest creatures ever seen behind the foot-lights; we'll dance you a 'pas de Zephire.'"

"It is enough to kill you to lead such a life!" cried old Cardot; "and look at the broken glasses! What pillage! The antechamber actually makes me

shudder—"

At this instant the wrathful old gentleman stopped short as if magnetized, like a bird which a snake is charming. He saw the outline of a form in a black coat through the door of the boudoir.

"Ah, Mademoiselle Cabirolle!" he said at last.

"Well, what?" she asked.

The eyes of the danseuse followed those of the little old man; and when she recognized the presence of the clerk she went off into such fits of laughter that not only was the old gentleman nonplussed, but Oscar was compelled to appear; for Florentine took him by the arm, still pealing with laughter at the conscience-stricken faces of the uncle and nephew.

"You here, nephew?"

"Nephew! so he's your nephew?" cried Florentine, with another burst of laughter. "You never told me about him. Why didn't Mariette carry you off?" she said to Oscar, who stood there petrified. "What can he do now, poor boy?"

"Whatever he pleases!" said Cardot, sharply, marching to the door as if to go away.

"One moment, papa Cardot. You will be so good as to get your nephew out of a scrape into which I led him; for he played the money of his master and lost it, and I lend him a thousand francs to win it back, and he lost that too."

"Miserable boy! you lost fifteen hundred francs at play at your age?"

"Oh, uncle, uncle!" cried poor Oscar, plunged by these words into all the horrors of his position, and falling on his knees before his uncle, with clasped hands, "It is twelve o'clock! I am lost, dishonored! Monsieur Desroches will have no pity! He gave me the money for an important affair, in which his pride was concerned. I was to get a paper at the Palais in the case of Vandernesse versus Vandernesse! What will become of me? Oh, save me for the sake of my father and aunt! Come with me to Monsieur Desroches, and explain it to him; make some excuse,—anything!"

These sentences were jerked out through sobs and tears that might have moved the sphinx of Luxor.

"Old skinflint!" said the danseuse, who was crying, "will you let your own nephew be dishonored,—the son of the man to whom you owe your fortune? —for his name is Oscar Husson. Save him, or Titine will deny you forever!"

"But how did he come here?" asked Cardot.

"Don't you see that the reason he forgot to go for those papers was because

he was drunk and overslept himself. Georges and his cousin Frederic took all the clerks in his office to a feast at the Rocher de Cancale."

Pere Cardot looked at Florentine and hesitated.

"Come, come," she said, "you old monkey, shouldn't I have hid him better if there had been anything else in it?"

"There, take your five hundred francs, you scamp!" said Cardot to his nephew, "and remember, that's the last penny you'll ever get from me. Go and make it up with your master if you can. I'll return the thousand francs which you borrowed of mademoiselle; but I'll never hear another word about you."

Oscar disappeared, not wishing to hear more. Once in the street, however, he knew not where to go.

Chance which destroys men and chance which saves them were both making equal efforts for and against Oscar during that fateful morning. But he was doomed to fall before a master who forgave no failure in any affair he had once undertaken. When Mariette reached home that night, she felt alarmed at what might happen to the youth in whom her brother took interest and she wrote a hasty note to Godeschal, telling him what had happened to Oscar and inclosing a bank bill for five hundred francs to repair his loss. The kind-hearted creature went to sleep after charging her maid to carry the little note to Desroches' office before seven o'clock in the morning. Godeschal, on his side, getting up at six and finding that Oscar had not returned, guessed what had happened. He took the five hundred francs from his own little hoard and rushed to the Palais, where he obtained a copy of the judgment and returned in time to lay it before Desroches by eight o'clock.

Meantime Desroches, who always rose at four, was in his office by seven. Mariette's maid, not finding the brother of her mistress in his bedroom, came down to the office and there met Desroches, to whom she very naturally offered the note.

"Is it about business?" he said; "I am Monsieur Desroches."

"You can see, monsieur," replied the maid.

Desroches opened the letter and read it. Finding the five-hundred-franc note, he went into his private office furiously angry with his second clerk. About half-past seven he heard Godeschal dictating to the second head-clerk a copy of the document in question, and a few moments later the good fellow entered his master's office with an air of triumph in his heart.

"Did Oscar Husson fetch the paper this morning from Simon?" inquired Desroches.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Who gave him the money?"

"Why, you did, Saturday," replied Godeschal.

"Then it rains five-hundred-franc notes," cried Desroches. "Look here, Godeschal, you are a fine fellow, but that little Husson does not deserve such generosity. I hate idiots, but I hate still more the men who will go wrong in spite of the fatherly care which watches over them." He gave Godeschal Mariette's letter and the five-hundred-franc note which she had sent. "You must excuse my having opened it," he said, "but your sister's maid told me it was on business. Dismiss Husson."

"Poor unhappy boy! what grief he has caused me!" said Godeschal, "that tall ne'er-do-well of a Georges Marest is his evil genius; he ought to flee him like the plague; if not, he'll bring him to some third disgrace."

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

Godeschal then related briefly the affair of the journey to Presles.

"Ah! yes," said the lawyer, "I remember Joseph Bridau told me that story about the time it happened. It is to that meeting that we owe the favor Monsieur de Serizy has since shown in the matter of Joseph's brother, Philippe Bridau."

At this moment Moreau, to whom the case of the Vandernesse estate was of much importance, entered the office. The marquis wished to sell the land in parcels and the count was opposed to such a sale. The land-agent received therefore the first fire of Desroches' wrath against his ex-second clerk and all the threatening prophecies which he fulminated against him. The result was that this most sincere friend and protector of the unhappy youth came to the conclusion that his vanity was incorrigible.

"Make him a barrister," said Desroches. "He has only his last examination to pass. In that line, his defects might prove virtues, for self-love and vanity give tongues to half the attorneys."

At this time Clapart, who was ill, was being nursed by his wife,—a painful task, a duty without reward. The sick man tormented the poor creature, who was now doomed to learn what venomous and spiteful teasing a half-imbecile man, whom poverty had rendered craftily savage, could be capable of in the weary tete-a-tete of each endless day. Delighted to turn a sharpened arrow in the sensitive heart of the mother, he had, in a measure, studied the fears that Oscar's behavior and defects inspired in the poor woman. When a mother receives from her child a shock like that of the affair at Presles, she continues in a state of constant fear, and, by the manner in which his wife boasted of Oscar every time he obtained the slightest success, Clapart knew the extent of

her secret uneasiness, and he took pains to rouse it on every occasion.

"Well, Madame," Clapart would say, "Oscar is doing better than I even hoped. That journey to Presles was only a heedlessness of youth. Where can you find young lads who do not commit just such faults? Poor child! he bears his privations heroically! If his father had lived, he would never have had any. God grant he may know how to control his passions!" etc., etc.

While all these catastrophes were happening in the rue de Vendome and the rue de Bethisy, Clapart, sitting in the chimney corner, wrapped in an old dressing-gown, watched his wife, who was engaged over the fire in their bedroom in simultaneously making the family broth, Clapart's "tisane," and her own breakfast.

"Mon Dieu! I wish I knew how the affair of yesterday ended. Oscar was to breakfast at the Rocher de Cancale and spend the evening with a marquise—"

"Don't trouble yourself! Sooner or later you'll find out about your swan," said her husband. "Do you really believe in that marquise? Pooh! A young man who has senses and a taste for extravagance like Oscar can find such ladies as that on every bush—if he pays for them. Some fine morning you'll find yourself with a load of debt on your back."

"You are always trying to put me in despair!" cried Madame Clapart. "You complained that my son lived on your salary, and never has he cost you a penny. For two years you haven't had the slightest cause of complaint against him; here he is second clerk, his uncle and Monsieur Moreau pay all expenses, and he earns, himself, a salary of eight hundred francs. If we have bread to eat in our old age we may owe it all to that dear boy. You are really too unjust—"

"You call my foresight unjust, do you?" replied the invalid, crossly.

Just then the bell rang loudly. Madame Clapart ran to open the door, and remained in the outer room with Moreau, who had come to soften the blow which Oscar's new folly would deal to the heart of his poor mother.

"What! he gambled with the money of the office?" she cried, bursting into tears.

"Didn't I tell you so, hey?" said Clapart, appearing like a spectre at the door of the salon whither his curiosity had brought him.

"Oh! what shall we do with him?" said Madame Clapart, whose grief made her impervious to Clapart's taunt.

"If he bore my name," replied Moreau, "I should wait composedly till he draws for the conscription, and if he gets a fatal number I should not provide him with a substitute. This is the second time your son has committed a folly out of sheer vanity. Well, vanity may inspire fine deeds in war and may

advance him in the career of a soldier. Besides, six years of military service will put some lead into his head; and as he has only his last legal examination to pass, it won't be much ill-luck for him if he doesn't become a lawyer till he is twenty-six; that is, if he wants to continue in the law after paying, as they say, his tax of blood. By that time, at any rate, he will have been severely punished, he will have learned experience, and contracted habits of subordination. Before making his probation at the bar he will have gone through his probations in life."

"If that is your decision for a son," said Madame Clapart, "I see that the heart of a father is not like that of a mother. My poor Oscar a common soldier! —"

"Would you rather he flung himself headforemost into the Seine after committing a dishonorable action? He cannot now become a solicitor; do you think him steady and wise enough to be a barrister? No. While his reason is maturing, what will he become? A dissipated fellow. The discipline of the army will, at least, preserve him from that."

"Could he not go into some other office? His uncle Cardot has promised to pay for his substitute; Oscar is to dedicate his graduating thesis to him."

At this moment carriage-wheels were heard, and a hackney-coach containing Oscar and all his worldly belongings stopped before the door. The luckless young man came up at once.

"Ah! here you are, Monsieur Joli-Coeur!" cried Clapart.

Oscar kissed his mother, and held out to Moreau a hand which the latter refused to take. To this rebuff Oscar replied by a reproachful look, the boldness of which he had never shown before. Then he turned on Clapart.

"Listen to me, monsieur," said the youth, transformed into a man. "You worry my poor mother devilishly, and that's your right, for she is, unfortunately, your wife. But as for me, it is another thing. I shall be of age in a few months; and you have no rights over me even as a minor. I have never asked anything of you. Thanks to Monsieur Moreau, I have never cost you one penny, and I owe you no gratitude. Therefore, I say, let me alone!"

Clapart, hearing this apostrophe, slunk back to his sofa in the chimney corner. The reasoning and the inward fury of the young man, who had just received a lecture from his friend Godeschal, silenced the imbecile mind of the sick man.

"A momentary temptation, such as you yourself would have yielded to at my age," said Oscar to Moreau, "has made me commit a fault which Desroches thinks serious, though it is only a peccadillo. I am more provoked

with myself for taking Florentine of the Gaiete for a marquise than I am for losing fifteen hundred francs after a little debauch in which everybody, even Godeschal, was half-seas over. This time, at any rate, I've hurt no one by myself. I'm cured of such things forever. If you are willing to help me, Monsieur Moreau, I swear to you that the six years I must still stay a clerk before I can get a practice shall be spent without—"

"Stop there!" said Moreau. "I have three children, and I can make no promises."

"Never mind, never mind," said Madame Clapart to her son, casting a reproachful glance at Moreau. "Your uncle Cardot—"

"I have no longer an uncle Cardot," replied Oscar, who related the scene at the rue de Vendome.

Madame Clapart, feeling her legs give way under the weight of her body, staggered to a chair in the dining-room, where she fell as if struck by lightning.

"All the miseries together!" she said, as she fainted.

Moreau took the poor mother in his arms, and carried her to the bed in her chamber. Oscar remained motionless, as if crushed.

"There is nothing left for you," said Moreau, coming back to him, "but to make yourself a soldier. That idiot of a Clapart looks to me as though he couldn't live three months, and then your mother will be without a penny. Ought I not, therefore, to reserve for her the little money I am able to give? It was impossible to tell you this before her. As a soldier, you'll eat plain bread and reflect on life such as it is to those who are born into it without fortune."

"I may get a lucky number," said Oscar.

"Suppose you do, what then? Your mother has well fulfilled her duty towards you. She gave you an education; she placed you on the right road, and secured you a career. You have left it. Now, what can you do? Without money, nothing; as you know by this time. You are not a man who can begin a new career by taking off your coat and going to work in your shirt-sleeves with the tools of an artisan. Besides, your mother loves you, and she would die to see you come to that."

Oscar sat down and no longer restrained his tears, which flowed copiously. At last he understood this language, so completely unintelligible to him ever since his first fault.

"Men without means ought to be perfect," added Moreau, not suspecting the profundity of that cruel sentence.

"My fate will soon be decided," said Oscar. "I draw my number the day after to-morrow. Between now and then I will decide upon my future."

Moreau, deeply distressed in spite of his stern bearing, left the household in the rue de la Cerisaie to its despair.

Three days later Oscar drew the number twenty-seven. In the interests of the poor lad the former steward of Presles had the courage to go to the Comte de Serizy and ask for his influence to get Oscar into the cavalry. It happened that the count's son, having left the Ecole Polytechnique rather low in his class, was appointed, as a favor, sub-lieutenant in a regiment of cavalry commanded by the Duc de Maufrigneuse. Oscar had, therefore, in his great misfortune, the small luck of being, at the Comte de Serizy's instigation, drafted into that noble regiment, with the promise of promotion to quartermaster within a year. Chance had thus placed the ex-clerk under the command of the son of the Comte de Serizy.

Madame Clapart, after languishing for some days, so keenly was she affected by these catastrophes, became a victim to the remorse which seizes upon many a mother whose conduct has been frail in her youth, and who, in her old age, turns to repentance. She now considered herself under a curse. She attributed the sorrows of her second marriage and the misfortunes of her son to a just retribution by which God was compelling her to expiate the errors and pleasures of her youth. This opinion soon became a certainty in her mind. The poor woman went, for the first time in forty years, to confess herself to the Abbe Gaudron, vicar of Saint-Paul's, who led her into the practice of devotion. But so ill-used and loving a soul as that of Madame Clapart's could never be anything but simply pious. The Aspasia of the Directory wanted to expiate her sins in order to draw down the blessing of God on the head of her poor Oscar, and she henceforth vowed herself to works and deeds of the purest piety. She believed she had won the attention of heaven when she saved the life of Monsieur Clapart, who, thanks to her devotion, lived on to torture her; but she chose to see, in the tyranny of that imbecile mind, a trial inflicted by the hand of one who loveth while he chasteneth.

Oscar, meantime, behaved so well that in 1830 he was first sergeant of the company of the Vicomte de Serizy, which gave him the rank of sub-lieutenant of the line. Oscar Husson was by that time twenty-five years old. As the Royal Guard, to which his regiment was attached, was always in garrison in Paris, or within a circumference of thirty miles around the capital, he came to see his mother from time to time, and tell her his griefs; for he had the sense to see that he could never become an officer as matters then were. At that time the cavalry grades were all being taken up by the younger sons of noble families, and men without the article to their names found promotion difficult. Oscar's sole ambition was to leave the Guards and be appointed sub-lieutenant in a

regiment of the cavalry of the line. In the month of February, 1830, Madame Clapart obtained this promotion for her son through the influence of Madame la Dauphine, granted to the Abbe Gaudron, now rector of Saint-Pauls.

Although Oscar outwardly professed to be devoted to the Bourbons, in the depths of his heart he was a liberal. Therefore, in the struggle of 1830, he went over to the side of the people. This desertion, which had an importance due to the crisis in which it took place, brought him before the eyes of the public. During the excitement of triumph in the month of August he was promoted lieutenant, received the cross of the Legion of honor, and was attached as aide-de-camp to La Fayette, who gave him the rank of captain in 1832. When the amateur of the best of all possible republics was removed from the command of the National guard, Oscar Husson, whose devotion to the new dynasty amounted to fanaticism, was appointed major of a regiment sent to Africa at the time of the first expedition undertaken by the Prince-royal. The Vicomte de Serizy chanced to be the lieutenant-colonel of this regiment. At the affair of the Makta, where the field had to be abandoned to the Arabs, Monsieur de Serizy was left wounded under a dead horse. Oscar, discovering this, called out to the squadron:

"Messieurs, it is going to death, but we cannot abandon our colonel."

He dashed upon the enemy, and his electrified soldiers followed him. The Arabs, in their first astonishment at this furious and unlooked-for return, allowed Oscar to seize the viscount, whom he flung across his horse, and carried off at full gallop,—receiving, as he did so, two slashes from yataghans on his left arm.

Oscar's conduct on this occasion was rewarded with the officer's cross of the Legion of honor, and by his promotion to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He took the most affectionate care of the Vicomte de Serizy, whose mother came to meet him on the arrival of the regiment at Toulon, where, as we know, the young man died of his wounds.

The Comtesse de Serizy had not separated her son from the man who had shown him such devotion. Oscar himself was so seriously wounded that the surgeons whom the countess had brought with her from Paris thought best to amputate his left arm.

Thus the Comte de Serizy was led not only to forgive Oscar for his painful remarks on the journey to Presles, but to feel himself his debtor on behalf of his son, now buried in the chapel of the chateau de Serizy.

CHAPTER XI. OSCAR'S LAST BLUNDER

Some years after the affair at Makta, an old lady, dressed in black, leaning on the arm of a man about thirty-four years of age, in whom observers would recognize a retired officer, from the loss of an arm and the rosette of the Legion of honor in his button-hole, was standing, at eight o'clock, one morning in the month of May, under the porte-cochere of the Lion d'Argent, rue de Faubourg Saint-Denis, waiting, apparently, for the departure of a diligence. Undoubtedly Pierrotin, the master of the line of coaches running through the valley of the Oise (despatching one through Saint-Leu-Taverny and Isle-Adam to Beaumont), would scarcely have recognized in this bronzed and maimed officer the little Oscar Husson he had formerly taken to Presles. Madame Husson, at last a widow, was as little recognizable as her son. Clapart, a victim of Fieschi's machine, had served his wife better by death than by all his previous life. The idle lounger was hanging about, as usual, on the boulevard du Temple, gazing at the show, when the explosion came. The poor widow was put upon the pension list, made expressly for the families of the victim, at fifteen hundred francs a year.

The coach, to which were harnessed four iron-gray horses that would have done honor to the Messageries-royales, was divided into three compartments, coupe, interieur, and rotonde, with an imperiale above. It resembled those diligences called "Gondoles," which now ply, in rivalry with the railroad, between Paris and Versailles. Both solid and light, well-painted and well-kept, lined with fine blue cloth, and furnished with blinds of a Moorish pattern and cushions of red morocco, the "Swallow of the Oise" could carry, comfortably, nineteen passengers. Pierrotin, now about fifty-six years old, was little changed. Still dressed in a blue blouse, beneath which he wore a black suit, he smoked his pipe, and superintended the two porters in livery, who were stowing away the luggage in the great imperiale.

"Are your places taken?" he said to Madame Clapart and Oscar, eyeing them like a man who is trying to recall a likeness to his memory.

"Yes, two places for the interieur in the name of my servant, Bellejambe," replied Oscar; "he must have taken them last evening."

"Ah! monsieur is the new collector of Beaumont," said Pierrotin. "You take the place of Monsieur Margueron's nephew?"

"Yes," replied Oscar, pressing the arm of his mother, who was about to speak.

The officer wished to remain unknown for a time.

Just then Oscar thrilled at hearing the well-remembered voice of Georges Marest calling out from the street: "Pierrotin, have you one seat left?"

"It seems to me you could say 'monsieur' without cracking your throat," replied the master of the line of coaches of the Valley of the Oise, sharply.

Unless by the sound of the voice, Oscar could never have recognized the individual whose jokes had been so fatal to him. Georges, almost bald, retained only three or four tufts of hair above his ears; but these were elaborately frizzed out to conceal, as best they could, the nakedness of the skull. A fleshiness ill-placed, in other words, a pear-shaped stomach, altered the once elegant proportions of the ex-young man. Now almost ignoble in appearance and bearing, Georges exhibited the traces of disasters in love and a life of debauchery in his blotched skin and bloated, vinous features. The eyes had lost the brilliancy, the vivacity of youth which chaste or studious habits have the virtue to retain. Dressed like a man who is careless of his clothes, Georges wore a pair of shabby trousers, with straps intended for varnished boots; but his were of leather, thick-soled, ill-blacked, and of many months' wear. A faded waistcoat, a cravat, pretentiously tied, although the material was a worn-out foulard, bespoke the secret distress to which a former dandy sometimes falls a prey. Moreover, Georges appeared at this hour of the morning in an evening coat, instead of a surtout; a sure diagnostic of actual poverty. This coat, which had seen long service at balls, had now, like its master, passed from the opulent ease of former times to daily work. The seams of the black cloth showed whitening lines; the collar was greasy; long usage had frayed the edges of the sleeves into fringes.

And yet, Georges ventured to attract attention by yellow kid gloves, rather dirty, it is true, on the outside of which a signet ring defined a large dark spot. Round his cravat, which was slipped into a pretentious gold ring, was a chain of silk, representing hair, which, no doubt, held a watch. His hat, though worn rather jauntily, revealed, more than any of the above symptoms, the poverty of a man who was totally unable to pay sixteen francs to a hat-maker, being forced to live from hand to mouth. The former admirer of Florentine twirled a cane with a chased gold knob, which was horribly battered. The blue trousers, the waistcoat of a material called "Scotch stuff," a sky-blue cravat and a pink-striped cotton shirt, expressed, in the midst of all this ruin, such a latent desire to SHOW-OFF that the contrast was not only a sight to see, but a lesson to be learned.

"And that is Georges!" said Oscar, in his own mind,—"a man I left in possession of thirty thousand francs a year!"

"Has Monsieur de Pierrotin a place in the coupe?" asked Georges, ironically replying to Pierrotin's rebuff.

"No; my coupe is taken by a peer of France, the son-in-law of Monsieur Moreau, Monsieur le Baron de Canalis, his wife, and his mother-in-law. I have

nothing left but one place in the interieur."

"The devil! so peers of France still travel in your coach, do they?" said Georges, remembering his adventure with the Comte de Serizy. "Well, I'll take that place in the interieur."

He cast a glance of examination on Oscar and his mother, but did not recognize them.

Oscar's skin was now bronzed by the sun of Africa; his moustache was very thick and his whiskers ample; the hollows in his cheeks and his strongly marked features were in keeping with his military bearing. The rosette of an officer of the Legion of honor, his missing arm, the strict propriety of his dress, would all have diverted Georges recollections of his former victim if he had had any. As for Madame Clapart, whom Georges had scarcely seen, ten years devoted to the exercise of the most severe piety had transformed her. No one would ever have imagined that that gray sister concealed the Aspasia of 1797.

An enormous old man, very simply dressed, though his clothes were good and substantial, in whom Oscar recognized Pere Leger, here came slowly and heavily along. He nodded familiarly to Pierrotin, who appeared by his manner to pay him the respect due in all lands to millionaires.

"Ha! ha! why, here's Pere Leger! more and more preponderant!" cried Georges.

"To whom have I the honor of speaking?" asked old Leger, curtly.

"What! you don't recognize Colonel Georges, the friend of Ali pacha? We travelled together once upon a time, in company with the Comte de Serizy."

One of the habitual follies of those who have fallen in the world is to recognize and desire the recognition of others.

"You are much changed," said the ex-farmer, now twice a millionaire.

"All things change," said Georges. "Look at the Lion d'Argent and Pierrotin's coach; they are not a bit like what they were fourteen years ago."

"Pierrotin now controls the whole service of the Valley of the Oise," replied Monsieur Leger, "and sends out five coaches. He is the bourgeois of Beaumont, where he keeps a hotel, at which all the diligences stop, and he has a wife and daughter who are not a bad help to him."

An old man of seventy here came out of the hotel and joined the group of travellers who were waiting to get into the coach.

"Come along, Papa Reybert," said Leger, "we are only waiting now for your great man."

"Here he comes," said the steward of Presles, pointing to Joseph Bridau.

Neither Georges nor Oscar recognized the illustrious artist, for his face had the worn and haggard lines that were now famous, and his bearing was that which is given by success. The ribbon of the Legion of honor adorned his black coat, and the rest of his dress, which was extremely elegant, seemed to denote an expedition to some rural fete.

At this moment a clerk, with a paper in his hand, came out of the office (which was now in the former kitchen of the Lion d'Argent), and stood before the empty coupe.

"Monsieur and Madame de Canalis, three places," he said. Then, moving to the door of the interieur, he named, consecutively, "Monsieur Bellejambe, two places; Monsieur de Reybert, three places; Monsieur—your name, if you please?" he said to Georges.

"Georges Marest," said the fallen man, in a low voice.

The clerk then moved to the rotunde, before which were grouped a number of nurses, country-people, and petty shopkeepers, who were bidding each other adieu. Then, after bundling in the six passengers, he called to four young men who mounted to the imperial; after which he cried: "Start!" Pierrotin got up beside his driver, a young man in a blouse, who called out: "Pull!" to his animals, and the vehicle, drawn by four horses brought at Roye, mounted the rise of the faubourg Saint-Denis at a slow trot.

But no sooner had it got above Saint-Laurent than it raced like a mail-cart to Saint-Denis, which it reached in forty minutes. No stop was made at the cheese-cake inn, and the coach took the road through the valley of Montmorency.

It was at the turn into this road that Georges broke the silence which the travellers had so far maintained while observing each other.

"We go a little faster than we did fifteen years ago, hey, Pere Leger?" he said, pulling out a silver watch.

"Persons are usually good enough to call me Monsieur Leger," said the millionaire.

"Why, here's our blagueur of the famous journey to Presles," cried Joseph Bridau. "Have you made any new campaigns in Asia, Africa, or America?"

"Sacrebleu! I've made the revolution of July, and that's enough for me, for it ruined me."

"Ah! you made the revolution of July!" cried the painter, laughing. "Well, I always said it never made itself."

"How people meet again!" said Monsieur Leger, turning to Monsieur de Reybert. "This, papa Reybert, is the clerk of the notary to whom you undoubtedly owe the stewardship of Presles."

"We lack Mistigris, now famous under his own name of Leon de Lora," said Joseph Bridau, "and the little young man who was stupid enough to talk to the count about those skin diseases which are now cured, and about his wife, whom he has recently left that he may die in peace."

"And the count himself, you lack him," said old Reybert.

"I'm afraid," said Joseph Bridau, sadly, "that the last journey the count will ever take will be from Presles to Isle-Adam, to be present at my marriage."

"He still drives about the park," said Reybert.

"Does his wife come to see him?" asked Leger.

"Once a month," replied Reybert. "She is never happy out of Paris. Last September she married her niece, Mademoiselle du Rouvre, on whom, since the death of her son, she spends all her affection, to a very rich young Pole, the Comte Laginski."

"To whom," asked Madame Clapart, "will Monsieur de Serizy's property go?"

"To his wife, who will bury him," replied Georges. "The countess is still fine-looking for a woman of fifty-four years of age. She is very elegant, and, at a little distance, gives one the illusion—"

"She will always be an illusion to you," said Leger, who seemed inclined to revenge himself on his former hoaxer.

"I respect her," said Georges. "But, by the bye, what became of that steward whom the count turned off?"

"Moreau?" said Leger; "why, he's the deputy from the Oise."

"Ha! the famous Centre man; Moreau de l'Oise?" cried Georges.

"Yes," returned Leger, "Moreau de l'Oise. He did more than you for the revolution of July, and he has since then bought the beautiful estate of Pointel, between Presles and Beaumont."

"Next to the count's," said Georges. "I call that very bad taste."

"Don't speak so loud," said Monsieur de Reybert, "for Madame Moreau and her daughter, the Baronne de Canalis, and the Baron himself, the former minister, are in the coupe."

"What 'dot' could he have given his daughter to induce our great orator to

marry her?" said Georges.

"Something like two millions," replied old Leger.

"He always had a taste for millions," remarked Georges. "He began his pile surreptitiously at Presles—"

"Say nothing against Monsieur Moreau," cried Oscar, hastily. "You ought to have learned before now to hold your tongue in public conveyances."

Joseph Bridau looked at the one-armed officer for several seconds; then he said, smiling:—

"Monsieur is not an ambassador, but his rosette tells us he has made his way nobly; my brother and General Giroudeau have repeatedly named him in their reports."

"Oscar Husson!" cried Georges. "Faith! if it hadn't been for your voice I should never have known you."

"Ah! it was monsieur who so bravely rescued the Vicomte Jules de Serizy from the Arabs?" said Reybert, "and for whom the count has obtained the collectorship of Beaumont while awaiting that of Pontoise?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Oscar.

"I hope you will give me the pleasure, monsieur," said the great painter, "of being present at my marriage at Isle-Adam."

"Whom do you marry?" asked Oscar, after accepting the invitation.

"Mademoiselle Leger," replied Joseph Bridau, "the granddaughter of Monsieur de Reybert. Monsieur le comte was kind enough to arrange the marriage for me. As an artist I owe him a great deal, and he wished, before his death, to secure my future, about which I did not think, myself."

"Whom did Pere Leger marry?" asked Georges.

"My daughter," replied Monsieur de Reybert, "and without a 'dot.'"

"Ah!" said Georges, assuming a more respectful manner toward Monsieur Leger, "I am fortunate in having chosen this particular day to do the valley of the Oise. You can all be useful to me, gentlemen."

"How so?" asked Monsieur Leger.

"In this way," replied Georges. "I am employed by the 'Esperance,' a company just formed, the statutes of which have been approved by an ordinance of the King. This institution gives, at the end of ten years, dowries to young girls, annuities to old men; it pays the education of children, and takes charge, in short, of the fortunes of everybody."

"I can well believe it," said Pere Leger, smiling. "In a word, you are a runner for an insurance company."

"No, monsieur. I am the inspector-general; charged with the duty of establishing correspondents and appointing the agents of the company throughout France. I am only operating until the agents are selected; for it is a matter as delicate as it is difficult to find honest agents."

"But how did you lose your thirty thousand a year?" asked Oscar.

"As you lost your arm," replied the son of Czerni-Georges, curtly.

"Then you must have shared in some brilliant action," remarked Oscar, with a sarcasm not unmixed with bitterness.

"Parbleu! I've too many—shares! that's just what I wanted to sell."

By this time they had arrived at Saint-Leu-Taverny, where all the passengers got out while the coach changed horses. Oscar admired the liveliness which Pierrotin displayed in unhooking the traces from the whiffle-trees, while his driver cleared the reins from the leaders.

"Poor Pierrotin," thought he; "he has stuck like me,—not far advanced in the world. Georges has fallen low. All the others, thanks to speculation and to talent, have made their fortune. Do we breakfast here, Pierrotin?" he said, aloud, slapping that worthy on the shoulder.

"I am not the driver," said Pierrotin.

"What are you, then?" asked Colonel Husson.

"The proprietor," replied Pierrotin.

"Come, don't be vexed with an old acquaintance," said Oscar, motioning to his mother, but still retaining his patronizing manner. "Don't you recognize Madame Clapart?"

It was all the nobler of Oscar to present his mother to Pierrotin, because, at that moment, Madame Moreau de l'Oise, getting out of the coupe, overheard the name, and stared disdainfully at Oscar and his mother.

"My faith! madame," said Pierrotin, "I should never have known you; nor you, either, monsieur; the sun burns black in Africa, doesn't it?"

The species of pity which Oscar thus felt for Pierrotin was the last blunder that vanity ever led our hero to commit, and, like his other faults, it was punished, but very gently, thus:—

Two months after his official installation at Beaumont-sur-Oise, Oscar was paying his addresses to Mademoiselle Georgette Pierrotin, whose 'dot' amounted to one hundred and fifty thousand francs, and he married the pretty

daughter of the proprietor of the stage-coaches of the Oise, toward the close of the winter of 1838.

The adventure of the journey to Presles was a lesson to Oscar Husson in discretion; his disaster at Florentine's card-party strengthened him in honesty and uprightness; the hardships of his military career taught him to understand the social hierarchy and to yield obedience to his lot. Becoming wise and capable, he was happy. The Comte de Serizy, before his death, obtained for him the collectorship at Pontoise. The influence of Monsieur Moreau de l'Oise and that of the Comtesse de Serizy and the Baron de Canalis secured, in after years, a receiver-generalship for Monsieur Husson, in whom the Camusot family now recognize a relation.

Oscar is a commonplace man, gentle, without assumption, modest, and always keeping, like his government, to a middle course. He excites neither envy nor contempt. In short, he is the modern bourgeois.