The Human Comedy
Scenes from Provincial Life
Part II

By

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EUGENIE GRANDET

I

There are houses in certain provincial towns whose aspect inspires melancholy, akin to that called forth by sombre cloisters, dreary moorlands, or the desolation of ruins. Within these houses there is, perhaps, the silence of the cloister, the barrenness of moors, the skeleton of ruins; life and movement are so stagnant there that a stranger might think them uninhabited, were it not that he encounters suddenly the pale, cold glance of a motionless person, whose half-monastic face peers beyond the window-casing at the sound of an unaccustomed step.

Such elements of sadness formed the physiognomy, as it were, of a dwelling-house in Saumur which stands at the end of the steep street leading to the chateau in the upper part of the town. This street—now little frequented, hot in summer, cold in winter, dark in certain sections—is remarkable for the resonance of its little pebbly pavement, always clean and dry, for the narrowness of its tortuous road-way, for the peaceful stillness of its houses, which belong to the Old town and are over-topped by the ramparts. Houses three centuries old are still solid, though built of wood, and their divers aspects add to the originality which commends this portion of Saumur to the attention of artists and antiquaries.

It is difficult to pass these houses without admiring the enormous oaken beams, their ends carved into fantastic figures, which crown with a black bas-relief the lower floor of most of them. In one place these transverse timbers are covered with slate and mark a bluish line along the frail wall of a dwelling covered by a roof en colombage which bends beneath the weight of years, and whose rotting shingles are twisted by the alternate action of sun and rain. In another place blackened, worn-out window-sills, with delicate sculptures now scarcely discernible, seem too weak to bear the brown clay pots from which springs the heart's-ease or the rose-bush of some poor working-woman. Farther on are doors studded with enormous nails, where the genius of our forefathers has traced domestic hieroglyphics, of which the meaning is now lost forever. Here a Protestant attested his belief; there a Leaguer cursed Henry IV.; elsewhere some bourgeois has carved the insignia of his noblesse de cloches, symbols of his long-forgotten magisterial glory. The whole history of France is there.

Next to a tottering house with roughly plastered walls, where an artisan enshrines his tools, rises the mansion of a country gentleman, on the stone

arch of which above the door vestiges of armorial bearings may still be seen, battered by the many revolutions that have shaken France since 1789. In this hilly street the ground-floors of the merchants are neither shops nor warehouses; lovers of the Middle Ages will here find the ouvrouere of our forefathers in all its naive simplicity. These low rooms, which have no shop-frontage, no show-windows, in fact no glass at all, are deep and dark and without interior or exterior decoration. Their doors open in two parts, each roughly iron-bound; the upper half is fastened back within the room, the lower half, fitted with a spring-bell, swings continually to and fro. Air and light reach the damp den within, either through the upper half of the door, or through an open space between the ceiling and a low front wall, breast-high, which is closed by solid shutters that are taken down every morning, put up every evening, and held in place by heavy iron bars.

This wall serves as a counter for the merchandise. No delusive display is there; only samples of the business, whatever it may chance to be,—such, for instance, as three or four tubs full of codfish and salt, a few bundles of sail-cloth, cordage, copper wire hanging from the joists above, iron hoops for casks ranged along the wall, or a few pieces of cloth upon the shelves. Enter. A neat girl, glowing with youth, wearing a white kerchief, her arms red and bare, drops her knitting and calls her father or her mother, one of whom comes forward and sells you what you want, phlegmatically, civilly, or arrogantly, according to his or her individual character, whether it be a matter of two sous' or twenty thousand francs' worth of merchandise. You may see a cooper, for instance, sitting in his doorway and twirling his thumbs as he talks with a neighbor. To all appearance he owns nothing more than a few miserable boat-ribs and two or three bundles of laths; but below in the port his teeming wood-yard supplies all the cooperage trade of Anjou. He knows to a plank how many casks are needed if the vintage is good. A hot season makes him rich, a rainy season ruins him; in a single morning puncheons worth eleven francs have been known to drop to six. In this country, as in Touraine, atmospheric vicissitudes control commercial life. Wine-growers, proprietors, wood-merchants, coopers, inn-keepers, mariners, all keep watch of the sun. They tremble when they go to bed lest they should hear in the morning of a frost in the night; they dread rain, wind, drought, and want water, heat, and clouds to suit their fancy. A perpetual duel goes on between the heavens and their terrestrial interests. The barometer smooths, saddens, or makes merry their countenances, turn and turn about. From end to end of this street, formerly the Grand'Rue de Saumur, the words: "Here's golden weather," are passed from door to door; or each man calls to his neighbor: "It rains louis," knowing well what a sunbeam or the opportune rainfall is bringing him.

On Saturdays after midday, in the fine season, not one sou's worth of merchandise can be bought from these worthy traders. Each has his vineyard,

his enclosure of fields, and all spend two days in the country. This being foreseen, and purchases, sales, and profits provided for, the merchants have ten or twelve hours to spend in parties of pleasure, in making observations, in criticisms, and in continual spying. A housewife cannot buy a partridge without the neighbors asking the husband if it were cooked to a turn. A young girl never puts her head near a window that she is not seen by idling groups in the street. Consciences are held in the light; and the houses, dark, silent, impenetrable as they seem, hide no mysteries. Life is almost wholly in the open air; every household sits at its own threshold, breakfasts, dines, and quarrels there. No one can pass along the street without being examined; in fact formerly, when a stranger entered a provincial town he was bantered and made game of from door to door. From this came many good stories, and the nickname copieux, which was applied to the inhabitants of Angers, who excelled in such urban sarcasms.

The ancient mansions of the old town of Saumur are at the top of this hilly street, and were formerly occupied by the nobility of the neighborhood. The melancholy dwelling where the events of the following history took place is one of these mansions,—venerable relics of a century in which men and things bore the characteristics of simplicity which French manners and customs are losing day by day. Follow the windings of the picturesque thoroughfare, whose irregularities awaken recollections that plunge the mind mechanically into reverie, and you will see a somewhat dark recess, in the centre of which is hidden the door of the house of Monsieur Grandet. It is impossible to understand the force of this provincial expression—the house of Monsieur Grandet—without giving the biography of Monsieur Grandet himself.

Monsieur Grandet enjoyed a reputation in Saumur whose causes and effects can never be fully understood by those who have not, at one time or another, lived in the provinces. In 1789 Monsieur Grandet—still called by certain persons le Pere Grandet, though the number of such old persons has perceptibly diminished—was a master-cooper, able to read, write, and cipher. At the period when the French Republic offered for sale the church property in the arrondissement of Saumur, the cooper, then forty years of age, had just married the daughter of a rich wood-merchant. Supplied with the ready money of his own fortune and his wife's dot, in all about two thousand louis-d'or, Grandet went to the newly established "district," where, with the help of two hundred double louis given by his father-in-law to the surly republican who presided over the sales of the national domain, he obtained for a song, legally if not legitimately, one of the finest vineyards in the arrondissement, an old abbey, and several farms. The inhabitants of Saumur were so little revolutionary that they thought Pere Grandet a bold man, a republican, and a patriot with a mind open to all the new ideas; though in point of fact it was open only to vineyards. He was appointed a member of the administration of

Saumur, and his pacific influence made itself felt politically and commercially. Politically, he protected the ci-devant nobles, and prevented, to the extent of his power, the sale of the lands and property of the emigres; commercially, he furnished the Republican armies with two or three thousand puncheons of white wine, and took his pay in splendid fields belonging to a community of women whose lands had been reserved for the last lot.

Under the Consulate Grandet became mayor, governed wisely, and harvested still better pickings. Under the Empire he was called Monsieur Grandet. Napoleon, however, did not like republicans, and superseded Monsieur Grandet (who was supposed to have worn the Phrygian cap) by a man of his own surroundings, a future baron of the Empire. Monsieur Grandet quitted office without regret. He had constructed in the interests of the town certain fine roads which led to his own property; his house and lands, very advantageously assessed, paid moderate taxes; and since the registration of his various estates, the vineyards, thanks to his constant care, had become the "head of the country,"—a local term used to denote those that produced the finest quality of wine. He might have asked for the cross of the Legion of honor.

This event occurred in 1806. Monsieur Grandet was then fifty-seven years of age, his wife thirty-six, and an only daughter, the fruit of their legitimate love, was ten years old. Monsieur Grandet, whom Providence no doubt desired to compensate for the loss of his municipal honors, inherited three fortunes in the course of this year,—that of Madame de la Gaudiniere, born de la Bertelliere, the mother of Madame Grandet; that of old Monsieur de la Bertelliere, her grandfather; and, lastly, that of Madame Gentillet, her grandmother on the mother's side: three inheritances, whose amount was not known to any one. The avarice of the deceased persons was so keen that for a long time they had hoarded their money for the pleasure of secretly looking at it. Old Monsieur de la Bertelliere called an investment an extravagance, and thought he got better interest from the sight of his gold than from the profits of usury. The inhabitants of Saumur consequently estimated his savings according to "the revenues of the sun's wealth," as they said.

Monsieur Grandet thus obtained that modern title of nobility which our mania for equality can never rub out. He became the most imposing personage in the arrondissement. He worked a hundred acres of vineyard, which in fruitful years yielded seven or eight hundred hogsheads of wine. He owned thirteen farms, an old abbey, whose windows and arches he had walled up for the sake of economy,—a measure which preserved them,—also a hundred and twenty-seven acres of meadow-land, where three thousand poplars, planted in 1793, grew and flourished; and finally, the house in which he lived. Such was his visible estate; as to his other property, only two persons could give even a

vague guess at its value: one was Monsieur Cruchot, a notary employed in the usurious investments of Monsieur Grandet; the other was Monsieur des Grassins, the richest banker in Saumur, in whose profits Grandet had a certain covenanted and secret share.

Although old Cruchot and Monsieur des Grassins were both gifted with the deep discretion which wealth and trust beget in the provinces, they publicly testified so much respect to Monsieur Grandet that observers estimated the amount of his property by the obsequious attention which they bestowed upon him. In all Saumur there was no one not persuaded that Monsieur Grandet had a private treasure, some hiding-place full of louis, where he nightly took ineffable delight in gazing upon great masses of gold. Avaricious people gathered proof of this when they looked at the eyes of the good man, to which the yellow metal seemed to have conveyed its tints. The glance of a man accustomed to draw enormous interest from his capital acquires, like that of the libertine, the gambler, or the sycophant, certain indefinable habits,—furtive, eager, mysterious movements, which never escape the notice of his co-religionists. This secret language is in a certain way the freemasonry of the passions. Monsieur Grandet inspired the respectful esteem due to one who owed no man anything, who, skilful cooper and experienced wine-grower that he was, guessed with the precision of an astronomer whether he ought to manufacture a thousand puncheons for his vintage, or only five hundred, who never failed in any speculation, and always had casks for sale when casks were worth more than the commodity that filled them, who could store his whole vintage in his cellars and bide his time to put the puncheons on the market at two hundred francs, when the little proprietors had been forced to sell theirs for five louis. His famous vintage of 1811, judiciously stored and slowly disposed of, brought him in more than two hundred and forty thousand francs.

Financially speaking, Monsieur Grandet was something between a tiger and a boa-constrictor. He could crouch and lie low, watch his prey a long while, spring upon it, open his jaws, swallow a mass of louis, and then rest tranquilly like a snake in process of digestion, impassible, methodical, and cold. No one saw him pass without a feeling of admiration mingled with respect and fear; had not every man in Saumur felt the rending of those polished steel claws? For this one, Maitre Cruchot had procured the money required for the purchase of a domain, but at eleven per cent. For that one, Monsieur des Grassins discounted bills of exchange, but at a frightful deduction of interest. Few days ever passed that Monsieur Grandet's name was not mentioned either in the markets or in social conversations at the evening gatherings. To some the fortune of the old wine-grower was an object of patriotic pride. More than one merchant, more than one innkeeper, said to strangers with a certain complacency: "Monsieur, we have two or three millionaire establishments; but as for Monsieur Grandet, he does not himself

know how much he is worth."

In 1816 the best reckoners in Saumur estimated the landed property of the worthy man at nearly four millions; but as, on an average, he had made yearly, from 1793 to 1817, a hundred thousand francs out of that property, it was fair to presume that he possessed in actual money a sum nearly equal to the value of his estate. So that when, after a game of boston or an evening discussion on the matter of vines, the talk fell upon Monsieur Grandet, knowing people said: "Le Pere Grandet? le Pere Grandet must have at least five or six millions."

"You are cleverer than I am; I have never been able to find out the amount," answered Monsieur Cruchot or Monsieur des Grassins, when either chanced to overhear the remark.

If some Parisian mentioned Rothschild or Monsieur Lafitte, the people of Saumur asked if he were as rich as Monsieur Grandet. When the Parisian, with a smile, tossed them a disdainful affirmative, they looked at each other and shook their heads with an incredulous air. So large a fortune covered with a golden mantle all the actions of this man. If in early days some peculiarities of his life gave occasion for laughter or ridicule, laughter and ridicule had long since died away. His least important actions had the authority of results repeatedly shown. His speech, his clothing, his gestures, the blinking of his eyes, were law to the country-side, where every one, after studying him as a naturalist studies the result of instinct in the lower animals, had come to understand the deep mute wisdom of his slightest actions.

"It will be a hard winter," said one; "Pere Grandet has put on his fur gloves."

"Pere Grandet is buying quantities of staves; there will be plenty of wine this year."

Monsieur Grandet never bought either bread or meat. His farmers supplied him weekly with a sufficiency of capons, chickens, eggs, butter, and his tithe of wheat. He owned a mill; and the tenant was bound, over and above his rent, to take a certain quantity of grain and return him the flour and bran. La Grande Nanon, his only servant, though she was no longer young, baked the bread of the household herself every Saturday. Monsieur Grandet arranged with kitchen-gardeners who were his tenants to supply him with vegetables. As to fruits, he gathered such quantities that he sold the greater part in the market. His fire-wood was cut from his own hedgerows or taken from the half-rotten old sheds which he built at the corners of his fields, and whose planks the farmers carted into town for him, all cut up, and obligingly stacked in his wood-house, receiving in return his thanks. His only known expenditures were for the consecrated bread, the clothing of his wife and daughter, the hire of their chairs in church, the wages of la Grand Nanon, the tinning of the

saucepans, lights, taxes, repairs on his buildings, and the costs of his various industries. He had six hundred acres of woodland, lately purchased, which he induced a neighbor's keeper to watch, under the promise of an indemnity. After the acquisition of this property he ate game for the first time.

Monsieur Grandet's manners were very simple. He spoke little. He usually expressed his meaning by short sententious phrases uttered in a soft voice. After the Revolution, the epoch at which he first came into notice, the good man stuttered in a wearisome way as soon as he was required to speak at length or to maintain an argument. This stammering, the incoherence of his language, the flux of words in which he drowned his thought, his apparent lack of logic, attributed to defects of education, were in reality assumed, and will be sufficiently explained by certain events in the following history. Four sentences, precise as algebraic formulas, sufficed him usually to grasp and solve all difficulties of life and commerce: "I don't know; I cannot; I will not; I will see about it." He never said yes, or no, and never committed himself to writing. If people talked to him he listened coldly, holding his chin in his right hand and resting his right elbow in the back of his left hand, forming in his own mind opinions on all matters, from which he never receded. He reflected long before making any business agreement. When his opponent, after careful conversation, avowed the secret of his own purposes, confident that he had secured his listener's assent, Grandet answered: "I can decide nothing without consulting my wife." His wife, whom he had reduced to a state of helpless slavery, was a useful screen to him in business. He went nowhere among friends; he neither gave nor accepted dinners; he made no stir or noise, seeming to economize in everything, even movement. He never disturbed or disarranged the things of other people, out of respect for the rights of property. Nevertheless, in spite of his soft voice, in spite of his circumspect bearing, the language and habits of a coarse nature came to the surface, especially in his own home, where he controlled himself less than elsewhere.

Physically, Grandet was a man five feet high, thick-set, square-built, with calves twelve inches in circumference, knotted knee-joints, and broad shoulders; his face was round, tanned, and pitted by the small-pox; his chin was straight, his lips had no curves, his teeth were white; his eyes had that calm, devouring expression which people attribute to the basilisk; his forehead, full of transverse wrinkles, was not without certain significant protuberances; his yellow-grayish hair was said to be silver and gold by certain young people who did not realize the impropriety of making a jest about Monsieur Grandet. His nose, thick at the end, bore a veined wen, which the common people said, not without reason, was full of malice. The whole countenance showed a dangerous cunning, an integrity without warmth, the egotism of a man long used to concentrate every feeling upon the enjoyments of avarice and upon the only human being who was anything whatever to him,

—his daughter and sole heiress, Eugenie. Attitude, manners, bearing, everything about him, in short, testified to that belief in himself which the habit of succeeding in all enterprises never fails to give to a man.

Thus, though his manners were unctuous and soft outwardly, Monsieur Grandet's nature was of iron. His dress never varied; and those who saw him to-day saw him such as he had been since 1791. His stout shoes were tied with leathern thongs; he wore, in all weathers, thick woollen stockings, short breeches of coarse maroon cloth with silver buckles, a velvet waistcoat, in alternate stripes of yellow and puce, buttoned squarely, a large maroon coat with wide flaps, a black cravat, and a quaker's hat. His gloves, thick as those of a gendarme, lasted him twenty months; to preserve them, he always laid them methodically on the brim of his hat in one particular spot. Saumur knew nothing further about this personage.

Only six individuals had a right of entrance to Monsieur Grandet's house. The most important of the first three was a nephew of Monsieur Cruchot. Since his appointment as president of the Civil courts of Saumur this young man had added the name of Bonfons to that of Cruchot. He now signed himself C. de Bonfons. Any litigant so ill-advised as to call him Monsieur Cruchot would soon be made to feel his folly in court. The magistrate protected those who called him Monsieur le president, but he favored with gracious smiles those who addressed him as Monsieur de Bonfons. Monsieur le president was thirty-three years old, and possessed the estate of Bonfons (Boni Fontis), worth seven thousand francs a year; he expected to inherit the property of his uncle the notary and that of another uncle, the Abbe Cruchot, a dignitary of the chapter of Saint-Martin de Tours, both of whom were thought to be very rich. These three Cruchots, backed by a goodly number of cousins, and allied to twenty families in the town, formed a party, like the Medici in Florence; like the Medici, the Cruchots had their Pazzi.

Madame des Grassins, mother of a son twenty-three years of age, came assiduously to play cards with Madame Grandet, hoping to marry her dear Adolphe to Mademoiselle Eugenie. Monsieur des Grassins, the banker, vigorously promoted the schemes of his wife by means of secret services constantly rendered to the old miser, and always arrived in time upon the field of battle. The three des Grassins likewise had their adherents, their cousins, their faithful allies. On the Cruchot side the abbe, the Talleyrand of the family, well backed-up by his brother the notary, sharply contested every inch of ground with his female adversary, and tried to obtain the rich heiress for his nephew the president.

This secret warfare between the Cruchots and des Grassins, the prize thereof being the hand in marriage of Eugenie Grandet, kept the various social circles of Saumur in violent agitation. Would Mademoiselle Grandet marry

Monsieur le president or Monsieur Adolphe des Grassins? To this problem some replied that Monsieur Grandet would never give his daughter to the one or to the other. The old cooper, eaten up with ambition, was looking, they said, for a peer of France, to whom an income of three hundred thousand francs would make all the past, present, and future casks of the Grandets acceptable. Others replied that Monsieur and Madame des Grassins were nobles, and exceedingly rich; that Adolphe was a personable young fellow; and that unless the old man had a nephew of the pope at his beck and call, such a suitable alliance ought to satisfy a man who came from nothing,—a man whom Saumur remembered with an adze in his hand, and who had, moreover, worn the bonnet rouge. Certain wise heads called attention to the fact that Monsieur Cruchot de Bonfons had the right of entry to the house at all times, whereas his rival was received only on Sundays. Others, however, maintained that Madame des Grassins was more intimate with the women of the house of Grandet than the Cruchots were, and could put into their minds certain ideas which would lead, sooner or later, to success. To this the former retorted that the Abbe Cruchot was the most insinuating man in the world: pit a woman against a monk, and the struggle was even. "It is diamond cut diamond," said a Saumur wit.

The oldest inhabitants, wiser than their fellows, declared that the Grandets knew better than to let the property go out of the family, and that Mademoiselle Eugenie Grandet of Saumur would be married to the son of Monsieur Grandet of Paris, a wealthy wholesale wine-merchant. To this the Cruchotines and the Grassinists replied: "In the first place, the two brothers have seen each other only twice in thirty years; and next, Monsieur Grandet of Paris has ambitious designs for his son. He is mayor of an arrondissement, a deputy, colonel of the National Guard, judge in the commercial courts; he disowns the Grandets of Saumur, and means to ally himself with some ducal family,—ducal under favor of Napoleon." In short, was there anything not said of an heiress who was talked of through a circumference of fifty miles, and even in the public conveyances from Angers to Blois, inclusively!

At the beginning of 1811, the Cruchotines won a signal advantage over the Grassinists. The estate of Froidfond, remarkable for its park, its mansion, its farms, streams, ponds, forests, and worth about three millions, was put up for sale by the young Marquis de Froidfond, who was obliged to liquidate his possessions. Maitre Cruchot, the president, and the abbe, aided by their adherents, were able to prevent the sale of the estate in little lots. The notary concluded a bargain with the young man for the whole property, payable in gold, persuading him that suits without number would have to be brought against the purchasers of small lots before he could get the money for them; it was better, therefore, to sell the whole to Monsieur Grandet, who was solvent and able to pay for the estate in ready money. The fine marquisate of

Froidfond was accordingly conveyed down the gullet of Monsieur Grandet, who, to the great astonishment of Saumur, paid for it, under proper discount, with the usual formalities.

This affair echoed from Nantes to Orleans. Monsieur Grandet took advantage of a cart returning by way of Froidfond to go and see his chateau. Having cast a master's eye over the whole property, he returned to Saumur, satisfied that he had invested his money at five per cent, and seized by the stupendous thought of extending and increasing the marquisate of Froidfond by concentrating all his property there. Then, to fill up his coffers, now nearly empty, he resolved to thin out his woods and his forests, and to sell off the poplars in the meadows.

II

It is now easy to understand the full meaning of the term, "the house of Monsieur Grandet,"—that cold, silent, pallid dwelling, standing above the town and sheltered by the ruins of the ramparts. The two pillars and the arch, which made the porte-cochere on which the door opened, were built, like the house itself, of tufa,—a white stone peculiar to the shores of the Loire, and so soft that it lasts hardly more than two centuries. Numberless irregular holes, capriciously bored or eaten out by the inclemency of the weather, gave an appearance of the vermiculated stonework of French architecture to the arch and the side walls of this entrance, which bore some resemblance to the gateway of a jail. Above the arch was a long bas-relief, in hard stone, representing the four seasons, the faces already crumbling away and blackened. This bas-relief was surmounted by a projecting plinth, upon which a variety of chance growths had sprung up,—yellow pellitory, bindweed, convolvuli, nettles, plantain, and even a little cherry-tree, already grown to some height.

The door of the archway was made of solid oak, brown, shrunken, and split in many places; though frail in appearance, it was firmly held in place by a system of iron bolts arranged in symmetrical patterns. A small square grating, with close bars red with rust, filled up the middle panel and made, as it were, a motive for the knocker, fastened to it by a ring, which struck upon the grinning head of a huge nail. This knocker, of the oblong shape and kind which our ancestors called jaquemart, looked like a huge note of exclamation; an antiquary who examined it attentively might have found indications of the figure, essentially burlesque, which it once represented, and which long usage had now effaced. Through this little grating—intended in olden times for the

recognition of friends in times of civil war—inquisitive persons could perceive, at the farther end of the dark and slimy vault, a few broken steps which led to a garden, picturesquely shut in by walls that were thick and damp, and through which oozed a moisture that nourished tufts of sickly herbage. These walls were the ruins of the ramparts, under which ranged the gardens of several neighboring houses.

The most important room on the ground-floor of the house was a large hall, entered directly from beneath the vault of the porte-cochere. Few people know the importance of a hall in the little towns of Anjou, Touraine, and Berry. The hall is at one and the same time antechamber, salon, office, boudoir, and dining-room; it is the theatre of domestic life, the common living-room. There the barber of the neighborhood came, twice a year, to cut Monsieur Grandet's hair; there the farmers, the cure, the under-prefect, and the miller's boy came on business. This room, with two windows looking on the street, was entirely of wood. Gray panels with ancient mouldings covered the walls from top to bottom; the ceiling showed all its beams, which were likewise painted gray, while the space between them had been washed over in white, now yellow with age. An old brass clock, inlaid with arabesques, adorned the mantel of the ill-cut white stone chimney-piece, above which was a greenish mirror, whose edges, bevelled to show the thickness of the glass, reflected a thread of light the whole length of a gothic frame in damascened steel-work. The two copper-gilt candelabra which decorated the corners of the chimney-piece served a double purpose: by taking off the side-branches, each of which held a socket, the main stem—which was fastened to a pedestal of bluish marble tipped with copper—made a candlestick for one candle, which was sufficient for ordinary occasions. The chairs, antique in shape, were covered with tapestry representing the fables of La Fontaine; it was necessary, however, to know that writer well to guess at the subjects, for the faded colors and the figures, blurred by much darning, were difficult to distinguish.

At the four corners of the hall were closets, or rather buffets, surmounted by dirty shelves. An old card-table in marquetry, of which the upper part was a chess-board, stood in the space between the two windows. Above this table was an oval barometer with a black border enlivened with gilt bands, on which the flies had so licentiously disported themselves that the gilding had become problematical. On the panel opposite to the chimney-piece were two portraits in pastel, supposed to represent the grandfather of Madame Grandet, old Monsieur de la Bertelliere, as a lieutenant in the French guard, and the deceased Madame Gentillet in the guise of a shepherdess. The windows were draped with curtains of red gros de Tours held back by silken cords with ecclesiastical tassels. This luxurious decoration, little in keeping with the habits of Monsieur Grandet, had been, together with the steel pier-glass, the tapestries, and the buffets, which were of rose-wood, included in the purchase

of the house.

By the window nearest to the door stood a straw chair, whose legs were raised on castors to lift its occupant, Madame Grandet, to a height from which she could see the passers-by. A work-table of stained cherry-wood filled up the embrasure, and the little armchair of Eugenie Grandet stood beside it. In this spot the lives had flowed peacefully onward for fifteen years, in a round of constant work from the month of April to the month of November. On the first day of the latter month they took their winter station by the chimney. Not until that day did Grandet permit a fire to be lighted; and on the thirty-first of March it was extinguished, without regard either to the chills of the early spring or to those of a wintry autumn. A foot-warmer, filled with embers from the kitchen fire, which la Grande Nanon contrived to save for them, enabled Madame and Mademoiselle Grandet to bear the chilly mornings and evenings of April and October. Mother and daughter took charge of the family linen, and spent their days so conscientiously upon a labor properly that of working-women, that if Eugenie wished to embroider a collar for her mother she was forced to take the time from sleep, and deceive her father to obtain the necessary light. For a long time the miser had given out the tallow candle to his daughter and la Grande Nanon just as he gave out every morning the bread and other necessaries for the daily consumption.

La Grande Nanon was perhaps the only human being capable of accepting willingly the despotism of her master. The whole town envied Monsieur and Madame Grandet the possession of her. La Grande Nanon, so called on account of her height, which was five feet eight inches, had lived with Monsieur Grandet for thirty-five years. Though she received only sixty francs a year in wages, she was supposed to be one of the richest serving-women in Saumur. Those sixty francs, accumulating through thirty-five years, had recently enabled her to invest four thousand francs in an annuity with Maitre Cruchot. This result of her long and persistent economy seemed gigantic. Every servant in the town, seeing that the poor sexagenarian was sure of bread for her old age, was jealous of her, and never thought of the hard slavery through which it had been won.

At twenty-two years of age the poor girl had been unable to find a situation, so repulsive was her face to almost every one. Yet the feeling was certainly unjust: the face would have been much admired on the shoulders of a grenadier of the guard; but all things, so they say, should be in keeping. Forced to leave a farm where she kept the cows, because the dwelling-house was burned down, she came to Saumur to find a place, full of the robust courage that shrinks from no labor. Le Pere Grandet was at that time thinking of marriage and about to set up his household. He espied the girl, rejected as she was from door to door. A good judge of corporeal strength in his trade as a

cooper, he guessed the work that might be got out of a female creature shaped like a Hercules, as firm on her feet as an oak sixty years old on its roots, strong in the hips, square in the back, with the hands of a cartman and an honesty as sound as her unblemished virtue. Neither the warts which adorned her martial visage, nor the red-brick tints of her skin, nor the sinewy arms, nor the ragged garments of la Grande Nanon, dismayed the cooper, who was at that time still of an age when the heart shudders. He fed, shod, and clothed the poor girl, gave her wages, and put her to work without treating her too roughly. Seeing herself thus welcomed, la Grande Nanon wept secretly tears of joy, and attached herself in all sincerity to her master, who from that day ruled her and worked her with feudal authority. Nanon did everything. She cooked, she made the lye, she washed the linen in the Loire and brought it home on her shoulders; she got up early, she went to bed late; she prepared the food of the vine-dressers during the harvest, kept watch upon the market-people, protected the property of her master like a faithful dog, and even, full of blind confidence, obeyed without a murmur his most absurd exactions.

In the famous year of 1811, when the grapes were gathered with unheard-of difficulty, Grandet resolved to give Nanon his old watch,—the first present he had made her during twenty years of service. Though he turned over to her his old shoes (which fitted her), it is impossible to consider that quarterly benefit as a gift, for the shoes were always thoroughly worn-out. Necessity had made the poor girl so niggardly that Grandet had grown to love her as we love a dog, and Nanon had let him fasten a spiked collar round her throat, whose spikes no longer pricked her. If Grandet cut the bread with rather too much parsimony, she made no complaint; she gaily shared the hygienic benefits derived from the severe regime of the household, in which no one was ever ill. Nanon was, in fact, one of the family; she laughed when Grandet laughed, felt gloomy or chilly, warmed herself, and toiled as he did. What pleasant compensations there were in such equality! Never did the master have occasion to find fault with the servant for pilfering the grapes, nor for the plums and nectarines eaten under the trees. "Come, fall-to, Nanon!" he would say in years when the branches bent under the fruit and the farmers were obliged to give it to the pigs.

To the poor peasant who in her youth had earned nothing but harsh treatment, to the pauper girl picked up by charity, Grandet's ambiguous laugh was like a sunbeam. Moreover, Nanon's simple heart and narrow head could hold only one feeling and one idea. For thirty-five years she had never ceased to see herself standing before the wood-yard of Monsieur Grandet, ragged and barefooted, and to hear him say: "What do you want, young one?" Her gratitude was ever new. Sometimes Grandet, reflecting that the poor creature had never heard a flattering word, that she was ignorant of all the tender sentiments inspired by women, that she might some day appear before the

throne of God even more chaste than the Virgin Mary herself,—Grandet, struck with pity, would say as he looked at her, "Poor Nanon!" The exclamation was always followed by an undefinable look cast upon him in return by the old servant. The words, uttered from time to time, formed a chain of friendship that nothing ever parted, and to which each exclamation added a link. Such compassion arising in the heart of the miser, and accepted gratefully by the old spinster, had something inconceivably horrible about it. This cruel pity, recalling, as it did, a thousand pleasures to the heart of the old cooper, was for Nanon the sum total of happiness. Who does not likewise say, "Poor Nanon!" God will recognize his angels by the inflexions of their voices and by their secret sighs.

There were very many households in Saumur where the servants were better treated, but where the masters received far less satisfaction in return. Thus it was often said: "What have the Grandets ever done to make their Grande Nanon so attached to them? She would go through fire and water for their sake!" Her kitchen, whose barred windows looked into the court, was always clean, neat, cold,—a true miser's kitchen, where nothing went to waste. When Nanon had washed her dishes, locked up the remains of the dinner, and put out her fire, she left the kitchen, which was separated by a passage from the living-room, and went to spin hemp beside her masters. One tallow candle sufficed the family for the evening. The servant slept at the end of the passage in a species of closet lighted only by a fan-light. Her robust health enabled her to live in this hole with impunity; there she could hear the slightest noise through the deep silence which reigned night and day in that dreary house. Like a watch-dog, she slept with one ear open, and took her rest with a mind alert.

A description of the other parts of the dwelling will be found connected with the events of this history, though the foregoing sketch of the hall, where the whole luxury of the household appears, may enable the reader to surmise the nakedness of the upper floors.

In 1819, at the beginning of an evening in the middle of November, la Grande Nanon lighted the fire for the first time. The autumn had been very fine. This particular day was a fete-day well known to the Cruchotines and the Grassinists. The six antagonists, armed at all points, were making ready to meet at the Grandets and surpass each other in testimonials of friendship. That morning all Saumur had seen Madame and Mademoiselle Grandet, accompanied by Nanon, on their way to hear Mass at the parish church, and every one remembered that the day was the anniversary of Mademoiselle Eugenie's birth. Calculating the hour at which the family dinner would be over, Maitre Cruchot, the Abbe Cruchot, and Monsieur C. de Bonfons hastened to arrive before the des Grassins, and be the first to pay their

compliments to Mademoiselle Eugenie. All three brought enormous bouquets, gathered in their little green-houses. The stalks of the flowers which the president intended to present were ingeniously wound round with a white satin ribbon adorned with gold fringe. In the morning Monsieur Grandet, following his usual custom on the days that commemorated the birth and the fete of Eugenie, went to her bedside and solemnly presented her with his paternal gift, —which for the last thirteen years had consisted regularly of a curious gold-piece. Madame Grandet gave her daughter a winter dress or a summer dress, as the case might be. These two dresses and the gold-pieces, of which she received two others on New Year's day and on her father's fete-day, gave Eugenie a little revenue of a hundred crowns or thereabouts, which Grandet loved to see her amass. Was it not putting his money from one strong-box to another, and, as it were, training the parsimony of his heiress? from whom he sometimes demanded an account of her treasure (formerly increased by the gifts of the Bertellieres), saying: "It is to be your marriage dozen."

The "marriage dozen" is an old custom sacredly preserved and still in force in many parts of central France. In Berry and in Anjou, when a young girl marries, her family, or that of the husband, must give her a purse, in which they place, according to their means, twelve pieces, or twelve dozen pieces, or twelve hundred pieces of gold. The poorest shepherd-girl never marries without her dozen, be it only a dozen coppers. They still tell in Issoudun of a certain "dozen" presented to a rich heiress, which contained a hundred and forty-four portugaises d'or. Pope Clement VII., uncle of Catherine de' Medici, gave her when he married her to Henri II. a dozen antique gold medals of priceless value.

During dinner the father, delighted to see his Eugenie looking well in a new gown, exclaimed: "As it is Eugenie's birthday let us have a fire; it will be a good omen."

"Mademoiselle will be married this year, that's certain," said la Grande Nanon, carrying away the remains of the goose,—the pheasant of tradesmen.

"I don't see any one suitable for her in Saumur," said Madame Grandet, glancing at her husband with a timid look which, considering her years, revealed the conjugal slavery under which the poor woman languished.

Grandet looked at his daughter and exclaimed gaily,—

"She is twenty-three years old to-day, the child; we must soon begin to think of it."

Eugenie and her mother silently exchanged a glance of intelligence.

Madame Grandet was a dry, thin woman, as yellow as a quince, awkward, slow, one of those women who are born to be down-trodden. She had big

bones, a big nose, a big forehead, big eyes, and presented at first sight a vague resemblance to those mealy fruits that have neither savor nor succulence. Her teeth were black and few in number, her mouth was wrinkled, her chin long and pointed. She was an excellent woman, a true la Bertelliere. L'abbe Cruchot found occasional opportunity to tell her that she had not done ill; and she believed him. Angelic sweetness, the resignation of an insect tortured by children, a rare piety, a good heart, an unalterable equanimity of soul, made her universally pitied and respected. Her husband never gave her more than six francs at a time for her personal expenses. Ridiculous as it may seem, this woman, who by her own fortune and her various inheritances brought Pere Grandet more than three hundred thousand francs, had always felt so profoundly humiliated by her dependence and the slavery in which she lived, against which the gentleness of her spirit prevented her from revolting, that she had never asked for one penny or made a single remark on the deeds which Maitre Cruchot brought for her signature. This foolish secret pride, this nobility of soul perpetually misunderstood and wounded by Grandet, ruled the whole conduct of the wife.

Madame Grandet was attired habitually in a gown of greenish levantine silk, endeavoring to make it last nearly a year; with it she wore a large kerchief of white cotton cloth, a bonnet made of plaited straws sewn together, and almost always a black-silk apron. As she seldom left the house she wore out very few shoes. She never asked anything for herself. Grandet, seized with occasional remorse when he remembered how long a time had elapsed since he gave her the last six francs, always stipulated for the "wife's pin-money" when he sold his yearly vintage. The four or five louis presented by the Belgian or the Dutchman who purchased the wine were the chief visible signs of Madame Grandet's annual revenues. But after she had received the five louis, her husband would often say to her, as though their purse were held in common: "Can you lend me a few sous?" and the poor woman, glad to be able to do something for a man whom her confessor held up to her as her lord and master, returned him in the course of the winter several crowns out of the "pin-money." When Grandet drew from his pocket the five-franc piece which he allowed monthly for the minor expenses,—thread, needles, and toilet,—of his daughter, he never failed to say as he buttoned his breeches' pocket: "And you, mother, do you want anything?"

"My friend," Madame Grandet would answer, moved by a sense of maternal dignity, "we will see about that later."

Wasted dignity! Grandet thought himself very generous to his wife. Philosophers who meet the like of Nanon, of Madame Grandet, of Eugenie, have surely a right to say that irony is at the bottom of the ways of Providence.

After the dinner at which for the first time allusion had been made to

Eugenie's marriage, Nanon went to fetch a bottle of black-currant ratafia from Monsieur Grandet's bed-chamber, and nearly fell as she came down the stairs.

"You great stupid!" said her master; "are you going to tumble about like other people, hey?"

"Monsieur, it was that step on your staircase which has given way."

"She is right," said Madame Grandet; "it ought to have been mended long ago. Yesterday Eugenie nearly twisted her ankle."

"Here," said Grandet to Nanon, seeing that she looked quite pale, "as it is Eugenie's birthday, and you came near falling, take a little glass of ratafia to set you right."

"Faith! I've earned it," said Nanon; "most people would have broken the bottle; but I'd sooner have broken my elbow holding it up high."

"Poor Nanon!" said Grandet, filling a glass.

"Did you hurt yourself?" asked Eugenie, looking kindly at her.

"No, I didn't fall; I threw myself back on my haunches."

"Well! as it is Eugenie's birthday," said Grandet, "I'll have the step mended. You people don't know how to set your foot in the corner where the wood is still firm."

Grandet took the candle, leaving his wife, daughter, and servant without any other light than that from the hearth, where the flames were lively, and went into the bakehouse to fetch planks, nails, and tools.

"Can I help you?" cried Nanon, hearing him hammer on the stairs.

"No, no! I'm an old hand at it," answered the former cooper.

At the moment when Grandet was mending his worm-eaten staircase and whistling with all his might, in remembrance of the days of his youth, the three Cruchots knocked at the door.

"Is it you, Monsieur Cruchot?" asked Nanon, peeping through the little grating.

"Yes," answered the president.

Nanon opened the door, and the light from the hearth, reflected on the ceiling, enabled the three Cruchots to find their way into the room.

"Ha! you've come a-greeting," said Nanon, smelling the flowers.

"Excuse me, messieurs," cried Grandet, recognizing their voices; "I'll be with you in a moment. I'm not proud; I am patching up a step on my

staircase."

"Go on, go on, Monsieur Grandet; a man's house is his castle," said the president sententiously.

Madame and Mademoiselle Grandet rose. The president, profiting by the darkness, said to Eugenie:

"Will you permit me, mademoiselle, to wish you, on this the day of your birth, a series of happy years and the continuance of the health which you now enjoy?"

He offered her a huge bouquet of choice flowers which were rare in Saumur; then, taking the heiress by the elbows, he kissed her on each side of her neck with a complacency that made her blush. The president, who looked like a rusty iron nail, felt that his courtship was progressing.

"Don't stand on ceremony," said Grandet, entering. "How well you do things on fete-days, Monsieur le president!"

"When it concerns mademoiselle," said the abbe, armed with his own bouquet, "every day is a fete-day for my nephew."

The abbe kissed Eugenie's hand. As for Maitre Cruchot, he boldly kissed her on both cheeks, remarking: "How we sprout up, to be sure! Every year is twelve months."

As he replaced the candlestick beside the clock, Grandet, who never forgot his own jokes, and repeated them to satiety when he thought them funny, said, —

"As this is Eugenie's birthday let us illuminate."

He carefully took off the branches of the candelabra, put a socket on each pedestal, took from Nanon a new tallow candle with paper twisted round the end of it, put it into the hollow, made it firm, lit it, and then sat down beside his wife, looking alternately at his friends, his daughter, and the two candles. The Abbe Cruchot, a plump, puffy little man, with a red wig plastered down and a face like an old female gambler, said as he stretched out his feet, well shod in stout shoes with silver buckles: "The des Grassins have not come?"

"Not yet," said Grandet.

"But are they coming?" asked the old notary, twisting his face, which had as many holes as a collander, into a queer grimace.

"I think so," answered Madame Grandet.

"Are your vintages all finished?" said Monsieur de Bonfons to Grandet.

"Yes, all of them," said the old man, rising to walk up and down the room,

his chest swelling with pride as he said the words, "all of them." Through the door of the passage which led to the kitchen he saw la Grande Nanon sitting beside her fire with a candle and preparing to spin there, so as not to intrude among the guests.

"Nanon," he said, going into the passage, "put out that fire and that candle, and come and sit with us. Pardieu! the hall is big enough for all."

"But monsieur, you are to have the great people."

"Are not you as good as they? They are descended from Adam, and so are you."

Grandet came back to the president and said,—

"Have you sold your vintage?"

"No, not I; I shall keep it. If the wine is good this year, it will be better two years hence. The proprietors, you know, have made an agreement to keep up the price; and this year the Belgians won't get the better of us. Suppose they are sent off empty-handed for once, faith! they'll come back."

"Yes, but let us mind what we are about," said Grandet in a tone which made the president tremble.

"Is he driving some bargain?" thought Cruchot.

At this moment the knocker announced the des Grassins family, and their arrival interrupted a conversation which had begun between Madame Grandet and the abbe.

Madame des Grassins was one of those lively, plump little women, with pink-and-white skins, who, thanks to the claustral calm of the provinces and the habits of a virtuous life, keep their youth until they are past forty. She was like the last rose of autumn,—pleasant to the eye, though the petals have a certain frostiness, and their perfume is slight. She dressed well, got her fashions from Paris, set the tone to Saumur, and gave parties. Her husband, formerly a quartermaster in the Imperial guard, who had been desperately wounded at Austerlitz, and had since retired, still retained, in spite of his respect for Grandet, the seeming frankness of an old soldier.

"Good evening, Grandet," he said, holding out his hand and affecting a sort of superiority, with which he always crushed the Cruchots. "Mademoiselle," he added, turning to Eugenie, after bowing to Madame Grandet, "you are always beautiful and good, and truly I do not know what to wish you." So saying, he offered her a little box which his servant had brought and which contained a Cape heather,—a flower lately imported into Europe and very rare.

Madame des Grassins kissed Eugenie very affectionately, pressed her hand, and said: "Adolphe wishes to make you my little offering."

A tall, blond young man, pale and slight, with tolerable manners and seemingly rather shy, although he had just spent eight or ten thousand francs over his allowance in Paris, where he had been sent to study law, now came forward and kissed Eugenie on both cheeks, offering her a workbox with utensils in silver-gilt,—mere show-case trumpery, in spite of the monogram E.G. in gothic letters rather well engraved, which belonged properly to something in better taste. As she opened it, Eugenie experienced one of those unexpected and perfect delights which make a young girl blush and quiver and tremble with pleasure. She turned her eyes to her father as if to ask permission to accept it, and Monsieur Grandet replied: "Take it, my daughter," in a tone which would have made an actor illustrious.

The three Cruchots felt crushed as they saw the joyous, animated look cast upon Adolphe des Grassins by the heiress, to whom such riches were unheard-of. Monsieur des Grassins offered Grandet a pinch of snuff, took one himself, shook off the grains as they fell on the ribbon of the Legion of honor which was attached to the button-hole of his blue surtout; then he looked at the Cruchots with an air that seemed to say, "Parry that thrust if you can!" Madame des Grassins cast her eyes on the blue vases which held the Cruchot bouquets, looking at the enemy's gifts with the pretended interest of a satirical woman. At this delicate juncture the Abbe Cruchot left the company seated in a circle round the fire and joined Grandet at the lower end of the hall. As the two men reached the embrasure of the farthest window the priest said in the miser's ear: "Those people throw money out of the windows."

"What does that matter if it gets into my cellar?" retorted the old wine-grower.

"If you want to give gilt scissors to your daughter, you have the means," said the abbe.

"I give her something better than scissors," answered Grandet.

"My nephew is a blockhead," thought the abbe as he looked at the president, whose rumpled hair added to the ill grace of his brown countenance. "Couldn't he have found some little trifle which cost money?"

"We will join you at cards, Madame Grandet," said Madame des Grassins.

"We might have two tables, as we are all here."

"As it is Eugenie's birthday you had better play loto all together," said Pere Grandet: "the two young ones can join"; and the old cooper, who never played any game, motioned to his daughter and Adolphe. "Come, Nanon, set the

tables."

"We will help you, Mademoiselle Nanon," said Madame des Grassins gaily, quite joyous at the joy she had given Eugenie.

"I have never in my life been so pleased," the heiress said to her; "I have never seen anything so pretty."

"Adolphe brought it from Paris, and he chose it," Madame des Grassins whispered in her ear.

"Go on! go on! damned intriguing thing!" thought the president. "If you ever have a suit in court, you or your husband, it shall go hard with you."

The notary, sitting in his corner, looked calmly at the abbe, saying to himself: "The des Grassins may do what they like; my property and my brother's and that of my nephew amount in all to eleven hundred thousand francs. The des Grassins, at the most, have not half that; besides, they have a daughter. They may give what presents they like; heiress and presents too will be ours one of these days."

At half-past eight in the evening the two card-tables were set out. Madame des Grassins succeeded in putting her son beside Eugenie. The actors in this scene, so full of interest, commonplace as it seems, were provided with bits of pasteboard striped in many colors and numbered, and with counters of blue glass, and they appeared to be listening to the jokes of the notary, who never drew a number without making a remark, while in fact they were all thinking of Monsieur Grandet's millions. The old cooper, with inward self-conceit, was contemplating the pink feathers and the fresh toilet of Madame des Grassins, the martial head of the banker, the faces of Adolphe, the president, the abbe, and the notary, saying to himself:—

"They are all after my money. Hey! neither the one nor the other shall have my daughter; but they are useful—useful as harpoons to fish with."

This family gaiety in the old gray room dimly lighted by two tallow candles; this laughter, accompanied by the whirr of Nanon's spinning-wheel, sincere only upon the lips of Eugenie or her mother; this triviality mingled with important interests; this young girl, who, like certain birds made victims of the price put upon them, was now lured and trapped by proofs of friendship of which she was the dupe,—all these things contributed to make the scene a melancholy comedy. Is it not, moreover, a drama of all times and all places, though here brought down to its simplest expression? The figure of Grandet, playing his own game with the false friendship of the two families and getting enormous profits from it, dominates the scene and throws light upon it. The modern god,—the only god in whom faith is preserved,—money, is here, in all its power, manifested in a single countenance. The tender sentiments of life

hold here but a secondary place; only the three pure, simple hearts of Nanon, of Eugenie, and of her mother were inspired by them. And how much of ignorance there was in the simplicity of these poor women! Eugenie and her mother knew nothing of Grandet's wealth; they could only estimate the things of life by the glimmer of their pale ideas, and they neither valued nor despised money, because they were accustomed to do without it. Their feelings, bruised, though they did not know it, but ever-living, were the secret spring of their existence, and made them curious exceptions in the midst of these other people whose lives were purely material. Frightful condition of the human race! there is no one of its joys that does not come from some species of ignorance.

At the moment when Madame Grandet had won a loto of sixteen sous,—the largest ever pooled in that house,—and while la Grande Nanon was laughing with delight as she watched madame pocketing her riches, the knocker resounded on the house-door with such a noise that the women all jumped in their chairs.

"There is no man in Saumur who would knock like that," said the notary.

"How can they bang in that way!" exclaimed Nanon; "do they want to break in the door?"

"Who the devil is it?" cried Grandet.

III

Nanon took one of the candles and went to open the door, followed by her master.

"Grandet! Grandet!" cried his wife, moved by a sudden impulse of fear, and running to the door of the room.

All the players looked at each other.

"Suppose we all go?" said Monsieur des Grassins; "that knock strikes me as evil-intentioned."

Hardly was Monsieur des Grassins allowed to see the figure of a young man, accompanied by a porter from the coach-office carrying two large trunks and dragging a carpet-bag after him, than Monsieur Grandet turned roughly on his wife and said,—

"Madame Grandet, go back to your loto; leave me to speak with monsieur."

Then he pulled the door quickly to, and the excited players returned to their seats, but did not continue the game.

"Is it any one belonging to Saumur, Monsieur des Grassins?" asked his wife.

"No, it is a traveller."

"He must have come from Paris."

"Just so," said the notary, pulling out his watch, which was two inches thick and looked like a Dutch man-of-war; "it's nine o'clock; the diligence of the Grand Bureau is never late."

"Is the gentleman young?" inquired the Abbe Cruchot.

"Yes," answered Monsieur des Grassins, "and he has brought luggage which must weigh nearly three tons."

"Nanon does not come back," said Eugenie.

"It must be one of your relations," remarked the president.

"Let us go on with our game," said Madame Grandet gently. "I know from Monsieur Grandet's tone of voice that he is annoyed; perhaps he would not like to find us talking of his affairs."

"Mademoiselle," said Adolphe to his neighbor, "it is no doubt your cousin Grandet,—a very good-looking young man; I met him at the ball of Monsieur de Nucingen." Adolphe did not go on, for his mother trod on his toes; and then, asking him aloud for two sous to put on her stake, she whispered: "Will you hold your tongue, you great goose!"

At this moment Grandet returned, without la Grande Nanon, whose steps, together with those of the porter, echoed up the staircase; and he was followed by the traveller who had excited such curiosity and so filled the lively imaginations of those present that his arrival at this dwelling, and his sudden fall into the midst of this assembly, can only be likened to that of a snail into a beehive, or the introduction of a peacock into some village poultry-yard.

"Sit down near the fire," said Grandet.

Before seating himself, the young stranger saluted the assembled company very gracefully. The men rose to answer by a courteous inclination, and the women made a ceremonious bow.

"You are cold, no doubt, monsieur," said Madame Grandet; "you have, perhaps, travelled from—"

"Just like all women!" said the old wine-grower, looking up from a letter he was reading. "Do let monsieur rest himself!"

"But, father, perhaps monsieur would like to take something," said Eugenie.

"He has got a tongue," said the old man sternly.

The stranger was the only person surprised by this scene; all the others were well-used to the despotic ways of the master. However, after the two questions and the two replies had been exchanged, the newcomer rose, turned his back towards the fire, lifted one foot so as to warm the sole of its boot, and said to Eugenie,—

"Thank you, my cousin, but I dined at Tours. And," he added, looking at Grandet, "I need nothing; I am not even tired."

"Monsieur has come from the capital?" asked Madame des Grassins.

Monsieur Charles,—such was the name of the son of Monsieur Grandet of Paris,—hearing himself addressed, took a little eye-glass, suspended by a chain from his neck, applied it to his right eye to examine what was on the table, and also the persons sitting round it. He ogled Madame des Grassins with much impertinence, and said to her, after he had observed all he wished, —

"Yes, madame. You are playing at loto, aunt," he added. "Do not let me interrupt you, I beg; go on with your game: it is too amusing to leave."

"I was certain it was the cousin," thought Madame des Grassins, casting repeated glances at him.

"Forty-seven!" cried the old abbe. "Mark it down, Madame des Grassins. Isn't that your number?"

Monsieur des Grassins put a counter on his wife's card, who sat watching first the cousin from Paris and then Eugenie, without thinking of her loto, a prey to mournful presentiments. From time to time the young heiress glanced furtively at her cousin, and the banker's wife easily detected a crescendo of surprise and curiosity in her mind.

Monsieur Charles Grandet, a handsome young man of twenty-two, presented at this moment a singular contrast to the worthy provincials, who, considerably disgusted by his aristocratic manners, were all studying him with sarcastic intent. This needs an explanation. At twenty-two, young people are still so near childhood that they often conduct themselves childishly. In all probability, out of every hundred of them fully ninety-nine would have behaved precisely as Monsieur Charles Grandet was now behaving.

Some days earlier than this his father had told him to go and spend several months with his uncle at Saumur. Perhaps Monsieur Grandet was thinking of Eugenie. Charles, sent for the first time in his life into the provinces, took a

fancy to make his appearance with the superiority of a man of fashion, to reduce the whole arrondissement to despair by his luxury, and to make his visit an epoch, importing into those country regions all the refinements of Parisian life. In short, to explain it in one word, he mean to pass more time at Saumur in brushing his nails than he ever thought of doing in Paris, and to assume the extra nicety and elegance of dress which a young man of fashion often lays aside for a certain negligence which in itself is not devoid of grace. Charles therefore brought with him a complete hunting-costume, the finest gun, the best hunting-knife in the prettiest sheath to be found in all Paris. He brought his whole collection of waistcoats. They were of all kinds,—gray, black, white, scarabaeus-colored: some were shot with gold, some spangled, some chined; some were double-breasted and crossed like a shawl, others were straight in the collar; some had turned-over collars, some buttoned up to the top with gilt buttons. He brought every variety of collar and cravat in fashion at that epoch. He brought two of Buisson's coats and all his finest linen He brought his pretty gold toilet-set,—a present from his mother. He brought all his dandy knick-knacks, not forgetting a ravishing little desk presented to him by the most amiable of women,—amiable for him, at least,—a fine lady whom he called Annette and who at this moment was travelling, matrimonially and wearily, in Scotland, a victim to certain suspicions which required a passing sacrifice of happiness; in the desk was much pretty note-paper on which to write to her once a fortnight.

In short, it was as complete a cargo of Parisian frivolities as it was possible for him to get together,—a collection of all the implements of husbandry with which the youth of leisure tills his life, from the little whip which helps to begin a duel, to the handsomely chased pistols which end it. His father having told him to travel alone and modestly, he had taken the coupe of the diligence all to himself, rather pleased at not having to damage a delightful travelling-carriage ordered for a journey on which he was to meet his Annette, the great lady who, etc.,—whom he intended to rejoin at Baden in the following June. Charles expected to meet scores of people at his uncle's house, to hunt in his uncle's forests,—to live, in short, the usual chateau life; he did not know that his uncle was in Saumur, and had only inquired about him incidentally when asking the way to Froidfond. Hearing that he was in town, he supposed that he should find him in a suitable mansion.

In order that he might make a becoming first appearance before his uncle either at Saumur or at Froidfond, he had put on his most elegant travelling attire, simple yet exquisite,—"adorable," to use the word which in those days summed up the special perfections of a man or a thing. At Tours a hairdresser had re-curled his beautiful chestnut locks; there he changed his linen and put on a black satin cravat, which, combined with a round shirt-collar, framed his fair and smiling countenance agreeably. A travelling great-coat, only half

buttoned up, nipped in his waist and disclosed a cashmere waistcoat crossed in front, beneath which was another waistcoat of white material. His watch, negligently slipped into a pocket, was fastened by a short gold chain to a buttonhole. His gray trousers, buttoned up at the sides, were set off at the seams with patterns of black silk embroidery. He gracefully twirled a cane, whose chased gold knob did not mar the freshness of his gray gloves. And to complete all, his cap was in excellent taste. None but a Parisian, and a Parisian of the upper spheres, could thus array himself without appearing ridiculous; none other could give the harmony of self-conceit to all these fopperies, which were carried off, however, with a dashing air,—the air of a young man who has fine pistols, a sure aim, and Annette.

Now if you wish to understand the mutual amazement of the provincial party and the young Parisian; if you would clearly see the brilliance which the traveller's elegance cast among the gray shadows of the room and upon the faces of this family group,—endeavor to picture to your minds the Cruchots. All three took snuff, and had long ceased to repress the habit of snivelling or to remove the brown blotches which strewed the frills of their dingy shirts and the yellowing creases of their crumpled collars. Their flabby cravats were twisted into ropes as soon as they wound them about their throats. The enormous quantity of linen which allowed these people to have their clothing washed only once in six months, and to keep it during that time in the depths of their closets, also enabled time to lay its grimy and decaying stains upon it. There was perfect unison of ill-grace and senility about them; their faces, as faded as their threadbare coats, as creased as their trousers, were worn-out, shrivelled-up, and puckered. As for the others, the general negligence of their dress, which was incomplete and wanting in freshness,—like the toilet of all country places, where insensibly people cease to dress for others and come to think seriously of the price of a pair of gloves,—was in keeping with the negligence of the Cruchots. A horror of fashion was the only point on which the Grassinists and the Cruchotines agreed.

When the Parisian took up his eye-glass to examine the strange accessories of this dwelling,—the joists of the ceiling, the color of the woodwork, and the specks which the flies had left there in sufficient number to punctuate the "Moniteur" and the "Encyclopaedia of Sciences,"—the loto-players lifted their noses and looked at him with as much curiosity as they might have felt about a giraffe. Monsieur des Grassins and his son, to whom the appearance of a man of fashion was not wholly unknown, were nevertheless as much astonished as their neighbors, whether it was that they fell under the indefinable influence of the general feeling, or that they really shared it as with satirical glances they seemed to say to their compatriots,—

"That is what you see in Paris!"

They were able to examine Charles at their leisure without fearing to displease the master of the house. Grandet was absorbed in the long letter which he held in his hand; and to read it he had taken the only candle upon the card-table, paying no heed to his guests or their pleasure. Eugenie, to whom such a type of perfection, whether of dress or of person, was absolutely unknown, thought she beheld in her cousin a being descended from seraphic spheres. She inhaled with delight the fragrance wafted from the graceful curls of that brilliant head. She would have liked to touch the soft kid of the delicate gloves. She envied Charles his small hands, his complexion, the freshness and refinement of his features. In short,—if it is possible to sum up the effect this elegant being produced upon an ignorant young girl perpetually employed in darning stockings or in mending her father's clothes, and whose life flowed on beneath these unclean rafters, seeing none but occasional passers along the silent street,—this vision of her cousin roused in her soul an emotion of delicate desire like that inspired in a young man by the fanciful pictures of women drawn by Westall for the English "Keepsakes," and that engraved by the Findens with so clever a tool that we fear, as we breathe upon the paper, that the celestial apparitions may be wafted away. Charles drew from his pocket a handkerchief embroidered by the great lady now travelling in Scotland. As Eugenie saw this pretty piece of work, done in the vacant hours which were lost to love, she looked at her cousin to see if it were possible that he meant to make use of it. The manners of the young man, his gestures, the way in which he took up his eye-glass, his affected superciliousness, his contemptuous glance at the coffer which had just given so much pleasure to the rich heiress, and which he evidently regarded as without value, or even as ridiculous,—all these things, which shocked the Cruchots and the des Grassins, pleased Eugenie so deeply that before she slept she dreamed long dreams of her phoenix cousin.

The loto-numbers were drawn very slowly, and presently the game came suddenly to an end. La Grand Nanon entered and said aloud: "Madame, I want the sheets for monsieur's bed."

Madame Grandet followed her out. Madame des Grassins said in a low voice: "Let us keep our sous and stop playing." Each took his or her two sous from the chipped saucer in which they had been put; then the party moved in a body toward the fire.

"Have you finished your game?" said Grandet, without looking up from his letter.

"Yes, yes!" replied Madame des Grassins, taking a seat near Charles.

Eugenie, prompted by a thought often born in the heart of a young girl when sentiment enters it for the first time, left the room to go and help her

mother and Nanon. Had an able confessor then questioned her she would, no doubt, have avowed to him that she thought neither of her mother nor of Nanon, but was pricked by a poignant desire to look after her cousin's room and concern herself with her cousin; to supply what might be needed, to remedy any forgetfulness, to see that all was done to make it, as far as possible, suitable and elegant; and, in fact, she arrived in time to prove to her mother and Nanon that everything still remained to be done. She put into Nanon's head the notion of passing a warming-pan between the sheets. She herself covered the old table with a cloth and requested Nanon to change it every morning; she convinced her mother that it was necessary to light a good fire, and persuaded Nanon to bring up a great pile of wood into the corridor without saying anything to her father. She ran to get, from one of the corner-shelves of the hall, a tray of old lacquer which was part of the inheritance of the late Monsieur de la Bertelliere, catching up at the same time a six-sided crystal goblet, a little tarnished gilt spoon, an antique flask engraved with cupids, all of which she put triumphantly on the corner of her cousin's chimney-piece. More ideas surged through her head in one quarter of an hour than she had ever had since she came into the world.

"Mamma," she said, "my cousin will never bear the smell of a tallow candle; suppose we buy a wax one?" And she darted, swift as a bird, to get the five-franc piece which she had just received for her monthly expenses. "Here, Nanon," she cried, "quick!"

"What will your father say?" This terrible remonstrance was uttered by Madame Grandet as she beheld her daughter armed with an old Sevres sugar-basin which Grandet had brought home from the chateau of Froidfond. "And where will you get the sugar? Are you crazy?"

"Mamma, Nanon can buy some sugar as well as the candle."

"But your father?"

"Surely his nephew ought not to go without a glass of eau sucree? Besides, he will not notice it."

"Your father sees everything," said Madame Grandet, shaking her head.

Nanon hesitated; she knew her master.

"Come, Nanon, go,—because it is my birthday."

Nanon gave a loud laugh as she heard the first little jest her young mistress had ever made, and then obeyed her.

While Eugenie and her mother were trying to embellish the bedroom assigned by Monsieur Grandet for his nephew, Charles himself was the object of Madame des Grassins' attentions; to all appearances she was setting her cap

at him.

"You are very courageous, monsieur," she said to the young dandy, "to leave the pleasures of the capital at this season and take up your abode in Saumur. But if we do not frighten you away, you will find there are some amusements even here."

She threw him the ogling glance of the provinces, where women put so much prudence and reserve into their eyes that they impart to them the prudish concupiscence peculiar to certain ecclesiastics to whom all pleasure is either a theft or an error. Charles was so completely out of his element in this abode, and so far from the vast chateau and the sumptuous life with which his fancy had endowed his uncle, that as he looked at Madame des Grassins he perceived a dim likeness to Parisian faces. He gracefully responded to the species of invitation addressed to him, and began very naturally a conversation, in which Madame des Grassins gradually lowered her voice so as to bring it into harmony with the nature of the confidences she was making. With her, as with Charles, there was the need of conference; so after a few moments spent in coquettish phrases and a little serious jesting, the clever provincial said, thinking herself unheard by the others, who were discussing the sale of wines which at that season filled the heads of every one in Saumur, —

"Monsieur if you will do us the honor to come and see us, you will give as much pleasure to my husband as to myself. Our salon is the only one in Saumur where you will find the higher business circles mingling with the nobility. We belong to both societies, who meet at our house simply because they find it amusing. My husband—I say it with pride—is as much valued by the one class as by the other. We will try to relieve the monotony of your visit here. If you stay all the time with Monsieur Grandet, good heavens! what will become of you? Your uncle is a sordid miser who thinks of nothing but his vines; your aunt is a pious soul who can't put two ideas together; and your cousin is a little fool, without education, perfectly common, no fortune, who will spend her life in darning towels."

"She is really very nice, this woman," thought Charles Grandet as he duly responded to Madame des Grassins' coquetries.

"It seems to me, wife, that you are taking possession of monsieur," said the stout banker, laughing.

On this remark the notary and the president said a few words that were more or less significant; but the abbe, looking at them slyly, brought their thoughts to a focus by taking a pinch of snuff and saying as he handed round his snuff-box: "Who can do the honors of Saumur for monsieur so well as madame?"

"Ah! what do you mean by that, monsieur l'abbe?" demanded Monsieur des Grassins.

"I mean it in the best possible sense for you, for madame, for the town of Saumur, and for monsieur," said the wily old man, turning to Charles.

The Abbe Cruchot had guessed the conversation between Charles and Madame des Grassins without seeming to pay attention to it.

"Monsieur," said Adolphe to Charles with an air which he tried to make free and easy, "I don't know whether you remember me, but I had the honor of dancing as your vis-a-vis at a ball given by the Baron de Nucingen, and—"

"Perfectly; I remember perfectly, monsieur," answered Charles, pleased to find himself the object of general attention.

"Monsieur is your son?" he said to Madame des Grassins.

The abbe looked at her maliciously.

"Yes, monsieur," she answered.

"Then you were very young when you were in Paris?" said Charles, addressing Adolphe.

"You must know, monsieur," said the abbe, "that we send them to Babylon as soon as they are weaned."

Madame des Grassins examined the abbe with a glance of extreme penetration.

"It is only in the provinces," he continued, "that you will find women of thirty and more years as fresh as madame, here, with a son about to take his degree. I almost fancy myself back in the days when the young men stood on chairs in the ball-room to see you dance, madame," said the abbe, turning to his female adversary. "To me, your triumphs are but of yesterday—"

"The old rogue!" thought Madame Grassins; "can he have guessed my intentions?"

"It seems that I shall have a good deal of success in Saumur," thought Charles as he unbuttoned his great-coat, put a hand into his waistcoat, and cast a glance into the far distance, to imitate the attitude which Chantrey has given to Lord Byron.

The inattention of Pere Grandet, or, to speak more truly, the preoccupation of mind into which the reading of the letter had plunged him, did not escape the vigilance of the notary and the president, who tried to guess the contents of the letter by the almost imperceptible motions of the miser's face, which was then under the full light of the candle. He maintained the habitual calm of his

features with evident difficulty; we may, in fact, picture to ourselves the countenance such a man endeavored to preserve as he read the fatal letter which here follows:—

My Brother,—It is almost twenty-three years since we have seen each other. My marriage was the occasion of our last interview, after which we parted, and both of us were happy. Assuredly I could not then foresee that you would one day be the prop of the family whose prosperity you then predicted.

When you hold this letter within your hands I shall be no longer living. In the position I now hold I cannot survive the disgrace of bankruptcy. I have waited on the edge of the gulf until the last moment, hoping to save myself. The end has come, I must sink into it. The double bankruptcies of my broker and of Roguin, my notary, have carried off my last resources and left me nothing. I have the bitterness of owing nearly four millions, with assets not more than twenty-five per cent in value to pay them. The wines in my warehouses suffer from the fall in prices caused by the abundance and quality of your vintage. In three days Paris will cry out: "Monsieur Grandet was a knave!" and I, an honest man, shall be lying in my winding-sheet of infamy. I deprive my son of a good name, which I have stained, and the fortune of his mother, which I have lost. He knows nothing of all this,—my unfortunate child whom I idolize! We parted tenderly. He was ignorant, happily, that the last beatings of my heart were spent in that farewell. Will he not some day curse me? My brother, my brother! the curses of our children are horrible; they can appeal against ours, but theirs are irrevocable. Grandet, you are my elder brother, you owe me your protection; act for me so that Charles may cast no bitter words upon my grave! My brother, if I were writing with my blood, with my tears, no greater anguish could I put into this letter,—nor as great, for then I should weep, I should bleed, I should die, I should suffer no more, but now I suffer and look at death with dry eyes.

From henceforth you are my son's father; he has no relations, as you well know, on his mother's side. Why did I not consider social prejudices? Why did I yield to love? Why did I marry the natural daughter of a great lord? Charles has no family. Oh, my unhappy son! my son! Listen, Grandet! I implore nothing for myself, —besides, your property may not be large enough to carry a mortgage of three millions,—but for my son! Brother, my suppliant hands are clasped as I think of you; behold them! Grandet, I confide my son to you in dying, and I look at the means of death with less pain as I think that you will be to him a father. He loved me well, my Charles; I was good to him, I never thwarted him; he will not curse me. Ah, you see! he is gentle, he is like his mother, he will cause you no grief. Poor boy! accustomed to all the enjoyments of luxury, he knows nothing of the privations to which you and I were condemned by the poverty of our youth. And I leave him ruined! alone!

Yes, all my friends will avoid him, and it is I who have brought this humiliation upon him! Would that I had the force to send him with one thrust into the heavens to his mother's side! Madness! I come back to my disaster—to his. I send him to you that you may tell him in some fitting way of my death, of his future fate. Be a father to him, but a good father. Do not tear him all at once from his idle life, it would kill him. I beg him on my knees to renounce all rights that, as his mother's heir, he may have on my estate. But the prayer is superfluous; he is honorable, and he will feel that he must not appear among my creditors. Bring him to see this at the right time; reveal to him the hard conditions of the life I have made for him: and if he still has tender thoughts of me, tell him in my name that all is lost for him. Yes, work, labor, which saved us both, may give him back the fortune of which I have deprived him; and if he listens to his father's voice as it reaches him from the grave, he will go the Indies. My brother, Charles is an upright and courageous young man; give him the wherewithal to make his venture; he will die sooner than not repay you the funds which you may lend him. Grandet! if you will not do this, you will lay up for yourself remorse. Ah, should my child find neither tenderness nor succor in you, I would call down the vengeance of God upon your cruelty!

If I had been able to save something from the wreck, I might have had the right to leave him at least a portion of his mother's property; but my last monthly payments have absorbed everything. I did not wish to die uncertain of my child's fate; I hoped to feel a sacred promise in a clasp of your hand which might have warmed my heart: but time fails me. While Charles is journeying to you I shall be preparing my assignment. I shall endeavor to show by the order and good faith of my accounts that my disaster comes neither from a faulty life nor from dishonesty. It is for my son's sake that I strive to do this.

Farewell, my brother! May the blessing of God be yours for the generous guardianship I lay upon you, and which, I doubt not, you will accept. A voice will henceforth and forever pray for you in that world where we must all go, and where I am now as you read these lines.

Victor-Ange-Guillaume Grandet.

"So you are talking?" said Pere Grandet as he carefully folded the letter in its original creases and put it into his waistcoat-pocket. He looked at his nephew with a humble, timid air, beneath which he hid his feelings and his calculations. "Have you warmed yourself?" he said to him.

"Thoroughly, my dear uncle."

"Well, where are the women?" said his uncle, already forgetting that his nephew was to sleep at the house. At this moment Eugenie and Madame Grandet returned.

"Is the room all ready?" said Grandet, recovering his composure.

"Yes, father."

"Well then, my nephew, if you are tired, Nanon shall show you your room. It isn't a dandy's room; but you will excuse a poor wine-grower who never has a penny to spare. Taxes swallow up everything."

"We do not wish to intrude, Grandet," said the banker; "you may want to talk to your nephew, and therefore we will bid you good-night."

At these words the assembly rose, and each made a parting bow in keeping with his or her own character. The old notary went to the door to fetch his lantern and came back to light it, offering to accompany the des Grassins on their way. Madame des Grassins had not foreseen the incident which brought the evening prematurely to an end, her servant therefore had not arrived.

"Will you do me the honor to take my arm, madame?" said the abbe.

"Thank you, monsieur l'abbe, but I have my son," she answered dryly.

"Ladies cannot compromise themselves with me," said the abbe.

"Take Monsieur Cruchot's arm," said her husband.

The abbe walked off with the pretty lady so quickly that they were soon some distance in advance of the caravan.

"That is a good-looking young man, madame," he said, pressing her arm. "Good-by to the grapes, the vintage is done. It is all over with us. We may as well say adieu to Mademoiselle Grandet. Eugenie will belong to the dandy. Unless this cousin is enamoured of some Parisian woman, your son Adolphe will find another rival in—"

"Not at all, monsieur l'abbe. This young man cannot fail to see that Eugenie is a little fool,—a girl without the least freshness. Did you notice her to-night? She was as yellow as a quince."

"Perhaps you made the cousin notice it?"

"I did not take the trouble—"

"Place yourself always beside Eugenie, madame, and you need never take the trouble to say anything to the young man against his cousin; he will make his own comparisons, which—"

"Well, he has promised to dine with me the day after to-morrow."

"Ah! if you only would, madame—" said the abbe.

"What is it that you wish me to do, monsieur l'abbe? Do you mean to offer me bad advice? I have not reached the age of thirty-nine, without a stain upon

my reputation, thank God! to compromise myself now, even for the empire of the Great Mogul. You and I are of an age when we both know the meaning of words. For an ecclesiastic, you certainly have ideas that are very incongruous. Fie! it is worthy of Faublas!"

"You have read Faublas?"

"No, monsieur l'abbe; I meant to say the Liaisons dangereuses."

"Ah! that book is infinitely more moral," said the abbe, laughing. "But you make me out as wicked as a young man of the present day; I only meant—"

"Do you dare to tell me you were not thinking of putting wicked things into my head? Isn't it perfectly clear? If this young man—who I admit is very good-looking—were to make love to me, he would not think of his cousin. In Paris, I know, good mothers do devote themselves in this way to the happiness and welfare of their children; but we live in the provinces, monsieur l'abbe."

"Yes, madame."

"And," she continued, "I do not want, and Adolphe himself would not want, a hundred millions brought at such a price."

"Madame, I said nothing about a hundred millions; that temptation might be too great for either of us to withstand. Only, I do think that an honest woman may permit herself, in all honor, certain harmless little coquetries, which are, in fact, part of her social duty and which—"

"Do you think so?"

"Are we not bound, madame, to make ourselves agreeable to each other?—Permit me to blow my nose.—I assure you, madame," he resumed, "that the young gentleman ogled you through his glass in a more flattering manner than he put on when he looked at me; but I forgive him for doing homage to beauty in preference to old age—"

"It is quite apparent," said the president in his loud voice, "that Monsieur Grandet of Paris has sent his son to Saumur with extremely matrimonial intentions."

"But in that case the cousin wouldn't have fallen among us like a cannon-ball," answered the notary.

"That doesn't prove anything," said Monsieur des Grassins; "the old miser is always making mysteries."

"Des Grassins, my friend, I have invited the young man to dinner. You must go and ask Monsieur and Madame de Larsonniere and the du Hautoys, with the beautiful demoiselle du Hautoy, of course. I hope she will be properly dressed; that jealous mother of hers does make such a fright of her!

Gentlemen, I trust that you will all do us the honor to come," she added, stopping the procession to address the two Cruchots.

"Here you are at home, madame," said the notary.

After bowing to the three des Grassins, the three Cruchots returned home, applying their provincial genius for analysis to studying, under all its aspects, the great event of the evening, which undoubtedly changed the respective positions of Grassinists and Cruchotines. The admirable common-sense which guided all the actions of these great machinators made each side feel the necessity of a momentary alliance against a common enemy. Must they not mutually hinder Eugenie from loving her cousin, and the cousin from thinking of Eugenie? Could the Parisian resist the influence of treacherous insinuations, soft-spoken calumnies, slanders full of faint praise and artless denials, which should be made to circle incessantly about him and deceive him?

IV

When the four relations were left alone, Monsieur Grandet said to his nephew,—

"We must go to bed. It is too late to talk about the matters which have brought you here; to-morrow we will take a suitable moment. We breakfast at eight o'clock; at midday we eat a little fruit or a bit of bread, and drink a glass of white wine; and we dine, like the Parisians, at five o'clock. That's the order of the day. If you like to go and see the town and the environs you are free to do so. You will excuse me if my occupations do not permit me to accompany you. You may perhaps hear people say that I am rich,—Monsieur Grandet this, Monsieur Grandet that. I let them talk; their gossip does not hurt my credit. But I have not a penny; I work in my old age like an apprentice whose worldly goods are a bad plane and two good arms. Perhaps you'll soon know yourself what a franc costs when you have got to sweat for it. Nanon, where are the candles?"

"I trust, my nephew, that you will find all you want," said Madame Grandet; "but if you should need anything else, you can call Nanon."

"My dear aunt, I shall need nothing; I have, I believe, brought everything with me. Permit me to bid you good-night, and my young cousin also."

Charles took a lighted wax candle from Nanon's hand,—an Anjou candle, very yellow in color, and so shopworn that it looked like tallow and deceived Monsieur Grandet, who, incapable of suspecting its presence under his roof, did not perceive this magnificence.

"I will show you the way," he said.

Instead of leaving the hall by the door which opened under the archway, Grandet ceremoniously went through the passage which divided the hall from the kitchen. A swing-door, furnished with a large oval pane of glass, shut this passage from the staircase, so as to fend off the cold air which rushed through it. But the north wind whistled none the less keenly in winter, and, in spite of the sand-bags at the bottom of the doors of the living-room, the temperature within could scarcely be kept at a proper height. Nanon went to bolt the outer door; then she closed the hall and let loose a wolf-dog, whose bark was so strangled that he seemed to have laryngitis. This animal, noted for his ferocity, recognized no one but Nanon; the two untutored children of the fields understood each other.

When Charles saw the yellow, smoke-stained walls of the well of the staircase, where each worm-eaten step shook under the heavy foot-fall of his uncle, his expectations began to sober more and more. He fancied himself in a hen-roost. His aunt and cousin, to whom he turned an inquiring look, were so used to the staircase that they did not guess the cause of his amazement, and took the glance for an expression of friendliness, which they answered by a smile that made him desperate.

"Why the devil did my father send me to such a place?" he said to himself.

When they reached the first landing he saw three doors painted in Etruscan red and without casings,—doors sunk in the dusty walls and provided with iron bars, which in fact were bolts, each ending with the pattern of a flame, as did both ends of the long sheath of the lock. The first door at the top of the staircase, which opened into a room directly above the kitchen, was evidently walled up. In fact, the only entrance to that room was through Grandet's bedchamber; the room itself was his office. The single window which lighted it, on the side of the court, was protected by a lattice of strong iron bars. No one, not even Madame Grandet, had permission to enter it. The old man chose to be alone, like an alchemist in his laboratory. There, no doubt, some hiding-place had been ingeniously constructed; there the title-deeds of property were stored; there hung the scales on which to weigh the louis; there were devised, by night and secretly, the estimates, the profits, the receipts, so that business men, finding Grandet prepared at all points, imagined that he got his cue from fairies or demons; there, no doubt, while Nanon's loud snoring shook the rafters, while the wolf-dog watched and yawned in the courtyard, while Madame and Mademoiselle Grandet were quietly sleeping, came the old cooper to cuddle, to con over, to caress and clutch and clasp his gold. The walls were thick, the screens sure. He alone had the key of this laboratory, where—so people declared—he studied the maps on which his fruit-trees were marked, and calculated his profits to a vine, and almost to a twig.

The door of Eugenie's chamber was opposite to the walled-up entrance to this room. At the other end of the landing were the appartements of the married pair, which occupied the whole front of the house. Madame Grandet had a room next to that of Eugenie, which was entered through a glass door. The master's chamber was separated from that of his wife by a partition, and from the mysterious strong-room by a thick wall. Pere Grandet lodged his nephew on the second floor, in the high mansarde attic which was above his own bedroom, so that he might hear him if the young man took it into his head to go and come. When Eugenie and her mother reached the middle of the landing they kissed each other for good-night; then with a few words of adieu to Charles, cold upon the lips, but certainly very warm in the heart of the young girl, they withdrew into their own chambers.

"Here you are in your room, my nephew," said Pere Grandet as he opened the door. "If you need to go out, call Nanon; without her, beware! the dog would eat you up without a word. Sleep well. Good-night. Ha! why, they have made you a fire!" he cried.

At this moment Nanon appeared with the warming pan.

"Here's something more!" said Monsieur Grandet. "Do you take my nephew for a lying-in woman? Carry off your brazier, Nanon!"

"But, monsieur, the sheets are damp, and this gentleman is as delicate as a woman."

"Well, go on, as you've taken it into your head," said Grandet, pushing her by the shoulders; "but don't set things on fire." So saying, the miser went down-stairs, grumbling indistinct sentences.

Charles stood aghast in the midst of his trunks. After casting his eyes on the attic-walls covered with that yellow paper sprinkled with bouquets so well known in dance-houses, on the fireplace of ribbed stone whose very look was chilling, on the chairs of yellow wood with varnished cane seats that seemed to have more than the usual four angles, on the open night-table capacious enough to hold a small sergeant-at-arms, on the meagre bit of rag-carpet beside the bed, on the tester whose cloth valance shook as if, devoured by moths, it was about to fall, he turned gravely to la Grande Nanon and said,—

"Look here! my dear woman, just tell me, am I in the house of Monsieur Grandet, formerly mayor of Saumur, and brother to Monsieur Grandet of Paris?"

"Yes, monsieur; and a very good, a very kind, a very perfect gentleman. Shall I help you to unpack your trunks?"

"Faith! yes, if you will, my old trooper. Didn't you serve in the marines of

the Imperial Guard?"

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Nanon. "What's that,—the marines of the guard? Is it salt? Does it go in the water?"

"Here, get me my dressing-gown out of that valise; there's the key."

Nanon was wonder-struck by the sight of a dressing-gown made of green silk, brocaded with gold flowers of an antique design.

"Are you going to put that on to go to bed with?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Holy Virgin! what a beautiful altar-cloth it would make for the parish church! My dear darling monsieur, give it to the church, and you'll save your soul; if you don't, you'll lose it. Oh, how nice you look in it! I must call mademoiselle to see you."

"Come, Nanon, if Nanon you are, hold your tongue; let me go to bed. I'll arrange my things to-morrow. If my dressing-gown pleases you so much, you shall save your soul. I'm too good a Christian not to give it to you when I go away, and you can do what you like with it."

Nanon stood rooted to the ground, gazing at Charles and unable to put faith into his words.

"Good night, Nanon."

"What in the world have I come here for?" thought Charles as he went to sleep. "My father is not a fool; my journey must have some object. Pshaw! put off serious thought till the morrow, as some Greek idiot said."

"Blessed Virgin! how charming he is, my cousin!" Eugenie was saying, interrupting her prayers, which that night at least were never finished.

Madame Grandet had no thoughts at all as she went to bed. She heard the miser walking up and down his room through the door of communication which was in the middle of the partition. Like all timid women, she had studied the character of her lord. Just as the petrel foresees the storm, she knew by imperceptible signs when an inward tempest shook her husband; and at such times, to use an expression of her own, she "feigned dead."

Grandet gazed at the door lined with sheet-iron which he lately put to his sanctum, and said to himself,—

"What a crazy idea of my brother to bequeath his son to me! A fine legacy! I have not fifty francs to give him. What are fifty francs to a dandy who looked at my barometer as if he meant to make firewood of it!"

In thinking over the consequences of that legacy of anguish Grandet was

perhaps more agitated than his brother had been at the moment of writing it.

"I shall have that golden robe," thought Nanon, who went to sleep tricked out in her altar-cloth, dreaming for the first time in her life of flowers, embroidery, and damask, just as Eugenie was dreaming of love.

In the pure and monotonous life of young girls there comes a delicious hour when the sun sheds its rays into their soul, when the flowers express their thoughts, when the throbbings of the heart send upward to the brain their fertilizing warmth and melt all thoughts into a vague desire,—day of innocent melancholy and of dulcet joys! When babes begin to see, they smile; when a young girl first perceives the sentiment of nature, she smiles as she smiled when an infant. If light is the first love of life, is not love a light to the heart? The moment to see within the veil of earthly things had come for Eugenie.

An early riser, like all provincial girls, she was up betimes and said her prayers, and then began the business of dressing,—a business which henceforth was to have a meaning. First she brushed and smoothed her chestnut hair and twisted its heavy masses to the top of her head with the utmost care, preventing the loose tresses from straying, and giving to her head a symmetry which heightened the timid candor of her face; for the simplicity of these accessories accorded well with the innocent sincerity of its lines. As she washed her hands again and again in the cold water which hardened and reddened the skin, she looked at her handsome round arms and asked herself what her cousin did to make his hands so softly white, his nails so delicately curved. She put on new stockings and her prettiest shoes. She laced her corset straight, without skipping a single eyelet. And then, wishing for the first time in her life to appear to advantage, she felt the joy of having a new gown, well made, which rendered her attractive.

As she finished her toilet the clock of the parish church struck the hour; to her astonishment, it was only seven. The desire of having plenty of time for dressing carefully had led her to get up too early. Ignorant of the art of retouching every curl and studying every effect, Eugenie simply crossed her arms, sat down by the window, and looked at the court-yard, the narrow garden, and the high terraced walls that over-topped it: a dismal, hedged-in prospect, yet not wholly devoid of those mysterious beauties which belong to solitary or uncultivated nature. Near the kitchen was a well surrounded by a curb, with a pulley fastened to a bent iron rod clasped by a vine whose leaves were withered, reddened, and shrivelled by the season. From thence the tortuous shoots straggled to the wall, clutched it, and ran the whole length of the house, ending near the wood-pile, where the logs were ranged with as much precision as the books in a library. The pavement of the court-yard showed the black stains produced in time by lichens, herbage, and the absence of all movement or friction. The thick walls wore a coating of green moss

streaked with waving brown lines, and the eight stone steps at the bottom of the court-yard which led up to the gate of the garden were disjointed and hidden beneath tall plants, like the tomb of a knight buried by his widow in the days of the Crusades. Above a foundation of moss-grown, crumbling stones was a trellis of rotten wood, half fallen from decay; over them clambered and intertwined at will a mass of clustering creepers. On each side of the latticed gate stretched the crooked arms of two stunted apple-trees. Three parallel walks, gravelled and separated from each other by square beds, where the earth was held in by box-borders, made the garden, which terminated, beneath a terrace of the old walls, in a group of lindens. At the farther end were raspberry-bushes; at the other, near the house, an immense walnut-tree drooped its branches almost into the window of the miser's sanctum.

A clear day and the beautiful autumnal sun common to the banks of the Loire was beginning to melt the hoar-frost which the night had laid on these picturesque objects, on the walls, and on the plants which swathed the court-yard. Eugenie found a novel charm in the aspect of things lately so insignificant to her. A thousand confused thoughts came to birth in her mind and grew there, as the sunbeams grew without along the wall. She felt that impulse of delight, vague, inexplicable, which wraps the moral being as a cloud wraps the physical body. Her thoughts were all in keeping with the details of this strange landscape, and the harmonies of her heart blended with the harmonies of nature. When the sun reached an angle of the wall where the "Venus-hair" of southern climes drooped its thick leaves, lit with the changing colors of a pigeon's breast, celestial rays of hope illumined the future to her eyes, and thenceforth she loved to gaze upon that piece of wall, on its pale flowers, its blue harebells, its wilting herbage, with which she mingled memories as tender as those of childhood. The noise made by each leaf as it fell from its twig in the void of that echoing court gave answer to the secret questionings of the young girl, who could have stayed there the livelong day without perceiving the flight of time. Then came tumultuous heavings of the soul. She rose often, went to her glass, and looked at herself, as an author in good faith looks at his work to criticise it and blame it in his own mind.

"I am not beautiful enough for him!" Such was Eugenie's thought,—a humble thought, fertile in suffering. The poor girl did not do herself justice; but modesty, or rather fear, is among the first of love's virtues. Eugenie belonged to the type of children with sturdy constitutions, such as we see among the lesser bourgeoisie, whose beauties always seem a little vulgar; and yet, though she resembled the Venus of Milo, the lines of her figure were ennobled by the softer Christian sentiment which purifies womanhood and gives it a distinction unknown to the sculptors of antiquity. She had an enormous head, with the masculine yet delicate forehead of the Jupiter of Phidias, and gray eyes, to which her chaste life, penetrating fully into them,

carried a flood of light. The features of her round face, formerly fresh and rosy, were at one time swollen by the small-pox, which destroyed the velvet texture of the skin, though it kindly left no other traces, and her cheek was still so soft and delicate that her mother's kiss made a momentary red mark upon it. Her nose was somewhat too thick, but it harmonized well with the vermilion mouth, whose lips, creased in many lines, were full of love and kindness. The throat was exquisitely round. The bust, well curved and carefully covered, attracted the eye and inspired reverie. It lacked, no doubt, the grace which a fitting dress can bestow; but to a connoisseur the non-flexibility of her figure had its own charm. Eugenie, tall and strongly made, had none of the prettiness which pleases the masses; but she was beautiful with a beauty which the spirit recognizes, and none but artists truly love. A painter seeking here below for a type of Mary's celestial purity, searching womankind for those proud modest eyes which Raphael divined, for those virgin lines, often due to chances of conception, which the modesty of Christian life alone can bestow or keep unchanged,—such a painter, in love with his ideal, would have found in the face of Eugenie the innate nobleness that is ignorant of itself; he would have seen beneath the calmness of that brow a world of love; he would have felt, in the shape of the eyes, in the fall of the eyelids, the presence of the nameless something that we call divine. Her features, the contour of her head, which no expression of pleasure had ever altered or wearied, were like the lines of the horizon softly traced in the far distance across the tranquil lakes. That calm and rosy countenance, margined with light like a lovely full-blown flower, rested the mind, held the eye, and imparted the charm of the conscience that was there reflected. Eugenie was standing on the shore of life where young illusions flower, where daisies are gathered with delights ere long to be unknown; and thus she said, looking at her image in the glass, unconscious as yet of love: "I am too ugly; he will not notice me."

Then she opened the door of her chamber which led to the staircase, and stretched out her neck to listen for the household noises. "He is not up," she thought, hearing Nanon's morning cough as the good soul went and came, sweeping out the halls, lighting her fire, chaining the dog, and speaking to the beasts in the stable. Eugenie at once went down and ran to Nanon, who was milking the cow.

"Nanon, my good Nanon, make a little cream for my cousin's breakfast."

"Why, mademoiselle, you should have thought of that yesterday," said Nanon, bursting into a loud peal of laughter. "I can't make cream. Your cousin is a darling, a darling! oh, that he is! You should have seen him in his dressing-gown, all silk and gold! I saw him, I did! He wears linen as fine as the surplice of monsieur le cure."

"Nanon, please make us a galette."

"And who'll give me wood for the oven, and flour and butter for the cakes?" said Nanon, who in her function of prime-minister to Grandet assumed at times enormous importance in the eyes of Eugenie and her mother. "Mustn't rob the master to feast the cousin. You ask him for butter and flour and wood: he's your father, perhaps he'll give you some. See! there he is now, coming to give out the provisions."

Eugenie escaped into the garden, quite frightened as she heard the staircase shaking under her father's step. Already she felt the effects of that virgin modesty and that special consciousness of happiness which lead us to fancy, not perhaps without reason, that our thoughts are graven on our foreheads and are open to the eyes of all. Perceiving for the first time the cold nakedness of her father's house, the poor girl felt a sort of rage that she could not put it in harmony with her cousin's elegance. She felt the need of doing something for him,—what, she did not know. Ingenuous and truthful, she followed her angelic nature without mistrusting her impressions or her feelings. The mere sight of her cousin had wakened within her the natural yearnings of a woman, —yearnings that were the more likely to develop ardently because, having reached her twenty-third year, she was in the plenitude of her intelligence and her desires. For the first time in her life her heart was full of terror at the sight of her father; in him she saw the master of the fate, and she fancied herself guilty of wrong-doing in hiding from his knowledge certain thoughts. She walked with hasty steps, surprised to breathe a purer air, to feel the sun's rays quickening her pulses, to absorb from their heat a moral warmth and a new life. As she turned over in her mind some stratagem by which to get the cake, a quarrel—an event as rare as the sight of swallows in winter—broke out between la Grande Nanon and Grandet. Armed with his keys, the master had come to dole out provisions for the day's consumption.

"Is there any bread left from yesterday?" he said to Nanon.

"Not a crumb, monsieur."

Grandet took a large round loaf, well floured and moulded in one of the flat baskets which they use for baking in Anjou, and was about to cut it, when Nanon said to him,—

"We are five, to-day, monsieur."

"That's true," said Grandet, "but your loaves weigh six pounds; there'll be some left. Besides, these young fellows from Paris don't eat bread, you'll see."

"Then they must eat frippe?" said Nanon.

Frippe is a word of the local lexicon of Anjou, and means any accompaniment of bread, from butter which is spread upon it, the commonest kind of frippe, to peach preserve, the most distinguished of all the frippes;

those who in their childhood have licked the frippe and left the bread, will comprehend the meaning of Nanon's speech.

"No," answered Grandet, "they eat neither bread nor frippe; they are something like marriageable girls."

After ordering the meals for the day with his usual parsimony, the goodman, having locked the closets containing the supplies, was about to go towards the fruit-garden, when Nanon stopped him to say,—

"Monsieur, give me a little flour and some butter, and I'll make a galette for the young ones."

"Are you going to pillage the house on account of my nephew?"

"I wasn't thinking any more of your nephew than I was of your dog,—not more than you think yourself; for, look here, you've only forked out six bits of sugar. I want eight."

"What's all this, Nanon? I have never seen you like this before. What have you got in your head? Are you the mistress here? You sha'n't have more than six pieces of sugar."

"Well, then, how is your nephew to sweeten his coffee?"

"With two pieces; I'll go without myself."

"Go without sugar at your age! I'd rather buy you some out of my own pocket."

"Mind your own business."

In spite of the recent fall in prices, sugar was still in Grandet's eyes the most valuable of all the colonial products; to him it was always six francs a pound. The necessity of economizing it, acquired under the Empire, had grown to be the most inveterate of his habits. All women, even the greatest ninnies, know how to dodge and dodge to get their ends; Nanon abandoned the sugar for the sake of getting the galette.

"Mademoiselle!" she called through the window, "do you want some galette?"

"No, no," answered Eugenie.

"Come, Nanon," said Grandet, hearing his daughter's voice. "See here." He opened the cupboard where the flour was kept, gave her a cupful, and added a few ounces of butter to the piece he had already cut off.

"I shall want wood for the oven," said the implacable Nanon.

"Well, take what you want," he answered sadly; "but in that case you must

make us a fruit-tart, and you'll cook the whole dinner in the oven. In that way you won't need two fires."

"Goodness!" cried Nanon, "you needn't tell me that."

Grandet cast a look that was well-nigh paternal upon his faithful deputy.

"Mademoiselle," she cried, when his back was turned, "we shall have the galette."

Pere Grandet returned from the garden with the fruit and arranged a plateful on the kitchen-table.

"Just see, monsieur," said Nanon, "what pretty boots your nephew has. What leather! why it smells good! What does he clean it with, I wonder? Am I to put your egg-polish on it?"

"Nanon, I think eggs would injure that kind of leather. Tell him you don't know how to black morocco; yes, that's morocco. He will get you something himself in Saumur to polish those boots with. I have heard that they put sugar into the blacking to make it shine."

"They look good to eat," said the cook, putting the boots to her nose. "Bless me! if they don't smell like madame's eau-de-cologne. Ah! how funny!"

"Funny!" said her master. "Do you call it funny to put more money into boots than the man who stands in them is worth?"

"Monsieur," she said, when Grandet returned the second time, after locking the fruit-garden, "won't you have the pot-au-feu put on once or twice a week on account of your nephew?"

"Yes."

"Am I to go to the butcher's?"

"Certainly not. We will make the broth of fowls; the farmers will bring them. I shall tell Cornoiller to shoot some crows; they make the best soup in the world."

"Isn't it true, monsieur, that crows eat the dead?"

"You are a fool, Nanon. They eat what they can get, like the rest of the world. Don't we all live on the dead? What are legacies?"

Monsieur Grandet, having no further orders to give, drew out his watch, and seeing that he had half an hour to dispose of before breakfast, he took his hat, went and kissed his daughter, and said to her:

"Do you want to come for a walk in the fields, down by the Loire? I have something to do there."

Eugenie fetched her straw bonnet, lined with pink taffeta; then the father and daughter went down the winding street to the shore.

"Where are you going at this early hour?" said Cruchot, the notary, meeting them.

"To see something," answered Grandet, not duped by the matutinal appearance of his friend.

When Pere Grandet went to "see something," the notary knew by experience there was something to be got by going with him; so he went.

"Come, Cruchot," said Grandet, "you are one of my friends. I'll show you what folly it is to plant poplar-trees on good ground."

"Do you call the sixty thousand francs that you pocketed for those that were in your fields down by the Loire, folly?" said Maitre Cruchot, opening his eyes with amazement. "What luck you have had! To cut down your trees at the very time they ran short of white-wood at Nantes, and to sell them at thirty francs!"

Eugenie listened, without knowing that she approached the most solemn moment of her whole life, and that the notary was about to bring down upon her head a paternal and supreme sentence. Grandet had now reached the magnificent fields which he owned on the banks of the Loire, where thirty workmen were employed in clearing away, filling up, and levelling the spots formerly occupied by the poplars.

"Maitre Cruchot, see how much ground this tree once took up! Jean," he cried to a laborer, "m-m-measure with your r-r-rule, b-both ways."

"Four times eight feet," said the man.

"Thirty-two feet lost," said Grandet to Cruchot. "I had three hundred poplars in this one line, isn't that so? Well, then, three h-h-hundred times thir-thirty-two lost m-m-me five hundred in h-h-hay; add twice as much for the side rows,—fifteen hundred; the middle rows as much more. So we may c-c-call it a th-thousand b-b-bales of h-h-hay—"

"Very good," said Cruchot, to help out his friend; "a thousand bales are worth about six hundred francs."

"Say t-t-twelve hundred, be-c-cause there's three or four hundred francs on the second crop. Well, then, c-c-calculate that t-twelve thousand francs a year for f-f-forty years with interest c-c-comes to—"

"Say sixty thousand francs," said the notary.

"I am willing; c-c-comes t-t-to sixty th-th-thousand. Very good," continued Grandet, without stuttering: "two thousand poplars forty years old will only

yield me fifty thousand francs. There's a loss. I have found that myself," said Grandet, getting on his high horse. "Jean, fill up all the holes except those at the bank of the river; there you are to plant the poplars I have bought. Plant 'em there, and they'll get nourishment from the government," he said, turning to Cruchot, and giving a slight motion to the wen on his nose, which expressed more than the most ironical of smiles.

"True enough; poplars should only be planted on poor soil," said Cruchot, amazed at Grandet's calculations.

"Y-y-yes, monsieur," answered the old man satirically.

Eugenie, who was gazing at the sublime scenery of the Loire, and paying no attention to her father's reckonings, presently turned an ear to the remarks of Cruchot when she heard him say,—

"So you have brought a son-in-law from Paris. All Saumur is talking about your nephew. I shall soon have the marriage-contract to draw up, hey! Pere Grandet?"

"You g-g-got up very early to t-t-tell me that," said Grandet, accompanying the remark with a motion of his wen. "Well, old c-c-comrade, I'll be frank, and t-t-tell you what you want t-t-to know. I would rather, do you see, f-f-fling my daughter into the Loire than g-g-give her to her c-c-cousin. You may t-t-tell that everywhere,—no, never mind; let the world t-t-talk."

This answer dazzled and blinded the young girl with sudden light. The distant hopes upspringing in her heart bloomed suddenly, became real, tangible, like a cluster of flowers, and she saw them cut down and wilting on the earth. Since the previous evening she had attached herself to Charles by those links of happiness which bind soul to soul; from henceforth suffering was to rivet them. Is it not the noble destiny of women to be more moved by the dark solemnities of grief than by the splendors of fortune? How was it that fatherly feeling had died out of her father's heart? Of what crime had Charles been guilty? Mysterious questions! Already her dawning love, a mystery so profound, was wrapping itself in mystery. She walked back trembling in all her limbs; and when she reached the gloomy street, lately so joyous to her, she felt its sadness, she breathed the melancholy which time and events had printed there. None of love's lessons lacked. A few steps from their own door she went on before her father and waited at the threshold. But Grandet, who saw a newspaper in the notary's hand, stopped short and asked,—

"How are the Funds?"

"You never listen to my advice, Grandet," answered Cruchot. "Buy soon; you will still make twenty per cent in two years, besides getting an excellent rate of interest,—five thousand a year for eighty thousand francs fifty

centimes."

"We'll see about that," answered Grandet, rubbing his chin.

"Good God!" exclaimed the notary.

"Well, what?" cried Grandet; and at the same moment Cruchot put the newspaper under his eyes and said:

"Read that!"

"Monsieur Grandet, one of the most respected merchants in Paris, blew his brains out yesterday, after making his usual appearance at the Bourse. He had sent his resignation to the president of the Chamber of Deputies, and had also resigned his functions as a judge of the commercial courts. The failures of Monsieur Roguin and Monsieur Souchet, his broker and his notary, had ruined him. The esteem felt for Monsieur Grandet and the credit he enjoyed were nevertheless such that he might have obtained the necessary assistance from other business houses. It is much to be regretted that so honorable a man should have yielded to momentary despair," etc.

"I knew it," said the old wine-grower to the notary.

The words sent a chill of horror through Maitre Cruchot, who, notwithstanding his impassibility as a notary, felt the cold running down his spine as he thought that Grandet of Paris had possibly implored in vain the millions of Grandet of Saumur.

"And his son, so joyous yesterday—"

"He knows nothing as yet," answered Grandet, with the same composure.

"Adieu! Monsieur Grandet," said Cruchot, who now understood the state of the case, and went off to reassure Monsieur de Bonfons.

On entering, Grandet found breakfast ready. Madame Grandet, round whose neck Eugenie had flung her arms, kissing her with the quick effusion of feeling often caused by secret grief, was already seated in her chair on castors, knitting sleeves for the coming winter.

"You can begin to eat," said Nanon, coming downstairs four steps at a time; "the young one is sleeping like a cherub. Isn't he a darling with his eyes shut? I went in and I called him: no answer."

"Let him sleep," said Grandet; "he'll wake soon enough to hear ill-tidings."

"What is it?" asked Eugenie, putting into her coffee the two little bits of sugar weighing less than half an ounce which the old miser amused himself by cutting up in his leisure hours. Madame Grandet, who did not dare to put the question, gazed at her husband.

"His father has blown his brains out."

"My uncle?" said Eugenie.

"Poor young man!" exclaimed Madame Grandet.

"Poor indeed!" said Grandet; "he isn't worth a sou!"

"Eh! poor boy, and he's sleeping like the king of the world!" said Nanon in a gentle voice.

Eugenie stopped eating. Her heart was wrung, as the young heart is wrung when pity for the suffering of one she loves overflows, for the first time, the whole being of a woman. The poor girl wept.

"What are you crying about? You didn't know your uncle," said her father, giving her one of those hungry tigerish looks he doubtless threw upon his piles of gold.

"But, monsieur," said Nanon, "who wouldn't feel pity for the poor young man, sleeping there like a wooden shoe, without knowing what's coming?"

"I didn't speak to you, Nanon. Hold your tongue!"

Eugenie learned at that moment that the woman who loves must be able to hide her feelings. She did not answer.

"You will say nothing to him about it, Ma'ame Grandet, till I return," said the old man. "I have to go and straighten the line of my hedge along the high-road. I shall be back at noon, in time for the second breakfast, and then I will talk with my nephew about his affairs. As for you, Mademoiselle Eugenie, if it is for that dandy you are crying, that's enough, child. He's going off like a shot to the Indies. You will never see him again."

The father took his gloves from the brim of his hat, put them on with his usual composure, pushed them in place by shoving the fingers of both hands together, and went out.

"Mamma, I am suffocating!" cried Eugenie when she was alone with her mother; "I have never suffered like this."

Madame Grandet, seeing that she turned pale, opened the window and let her breathe fresh air.

"I feel better!" said Eugenie after a moment.

This nervous excitement in a nature hitherto, to all appearance, calm and cold, reacted on Madame Grandet; she looked at her daughter with the sympathetic intuition with which mothers are gifted for the objects of their tenderness, and guessed all. In truth the life of the Hungarian sisters, bound together by a freak of nature, could scarcely have been more intimate than that

of Eugenie and her mother,—always together in the embrasure of that window, and sleeping together in the same atmosphere.

"My poor child!" said Madame Grandet, taking Eugenie's head and laying it upon her bosom.

At these words the young girl raised her head, questioned her mother by a look, and seemed to search out her inmost thought.

"Why send him to the Indies?" she said. "If he is unhappy, ought he not to stay with us? Is he not our nearest relation?"

"Yes, my child, it seems natural; but your father has his reasons: we must respect them."

The mother and daughter sat down in silence, the former upon her raised seat, the latter in her little armchair, and both took up their work. Swelling with gratitude for the full heart-understanding her mother had given her, Eugenie kissed the dear hand, saying,—

"How good you are, my kind mamma!"

The words sent a glow of light into the motherly face, worn and blighted as it was by many sorrows.

"You like him?" asked Eugenie.

Madame Grandet only smiled in reply. Then, after a moment's silence, she said in a low voice: "Do you love him already? That is wrong."

"Wrong?" said Eugenie. "Why is it wrong? You are pleased with him, Nanon is pleased with him; why should he not please me? Come, mamma, let us set the table for his breakfast."

She threw down her work, and her mother did the same, saying, "Foolish child!" But she sanctioned the child's folly by sharing it. Eugenie called Nanon.

"What do you want now, mademoiselle?"

"Nanon, can we have cream by midday?"

"Ah! midday, to be sure you can," answered the old servant.

"Well, let him have his coffee very strong; I heard Monsieur des Grassins say that they make the coffee very strong in Paris. Put in a great deal."

"Where am I to get it?"

"Buy some."

"Suppose monsieur meets me?"

"He has gone to his fields."

"I'll run, then. But Monsieur Fessard asked me yesterday if the Magi had come to stay with us when I bought the wax candle. All the town will know our goings-on."

"If your father finds it out," said Madame Grandet, "he is capable of beating us."

"Well, let him beat us; we will take his blows on our knees."

Madame Grandet for all answer raised her eyes to heaven. Nanon put on her hood and went off. Eugenie got out some clean table-linen, and went to fetch a few bunches of grapes which she had amused herself by hanging on a string across the attic; she walked softly along the corridor, so as not to waken her cousin, and she could not help listening at the door to his quiet breathing.

"Sorrow is watching while he sleeps," she thought.

She took the freshest vine-leaves and arranged her dish of grapes as coquettishly as a practised house-keeper might have done, and placed it triumphantly on the table. She laid hands on the pears counted out by her father, and piled them in a pyramid mixed with leaves. She went and came, and skipped and ran. She would have liked to lay under contribution everything in her father's house; but the keys were in his pocket. Nanon came back with two fresh eggs. At sight of them Eugenie almost hugged her round the neck.

"The farmer from Lande had them in his basket. I asked him for them, and he gave them to me, the darling, for nothing, as an attention!"

V

After two hours' thought and care, during which Eugenie jumped up twenty times from her work to see if the coffee were boiling, or to go and listen to the noise her cousin made in dressing, she succeeded in preparing a simple little breakfast, very inexpensive, but which, nevertheless, departed alarmingly from the inveterate customs of the house. The midday breakfast was always taken standing. Each took a slice of bread, a little fruit or some butter, and a glass of wine. As Eugenie looked at the table drawn up near the fire with an arm-chair placed before her cousin's plate, at the two dishes of fruit, the egg-cup, the bottle of white wine, the bread, and the sugar heaped up in a saucer, she trembled in all her limbs at the mere thought of the look her father would give her if he should come in at that moment. She glanced often

at the clock to see if her cousin could breakfast before the master's return.

"Don't be troubled, Eugenie; if your father comes in, I will take it all upon myself," said Madame Grandet.

Eugenie could not repress a tear.

"Oh, my good mother!" she cried, "I have never loved you enough."

Charles, who had been tramping about his room for some time, singing to himself, now came down. Happily, it was only eleven o'clock. The true Parisian! he had put as much dandyism into his dress as if he were in the chateau of the noble lady then travelling in Scotland. He came into the room with the smiling, courteous manner so becoming to youth, which made Eugenie's heart beat with mournful joy. He had taken the destruction of his castles in Anjou as a joke, and came up to his aunt gaily.

"Have you slept well, dear aunt? and you, too, my cousin?"

"Very well, monsieur; did you?" said Madame Grandet.

"I? perfectly."

"You must be hungry, cousin," said Eugenie; "will you take your seat?"

"I never breakfast before midday; I never get up till then. However, I fared so badly on the journey that I am glad to eat something at once. Besides—" here he pulled out the prettiest watch Breguet ever made. "Dear me! I am early, it is only eleven o'clock!"

"Early?" said Madame Grandet.

"Yes; but I wanted to put my things in order. Well, I shall be glad to have anything to eat,—anything, it doesn't matter what, a chicken, a partridge."

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Nanon, overhearing the words.

"A partridge!" whispered Eugenie to herself; she would gladly have given the whole of her little hoard for a partridge.

"Come and sit down," said his aunt.

The young dandy let himself drop into an easy-chair, just as a pretty woman falls gracefully upon a sofa. Eugenie and her mother took ordinary chairs and sat beside him, near the fire.

"Do you always live here?" said Charles, thinking the room uglier by daylight than it had seemed the night before.

"Always," answered Eugenie, looking at him, "except during the vintage. Then we go and help Nanon, and live at the Abbaye des Noyers."

"Don't you ever take walks?"

"Sometimes on Sunday after vespers, when the weather is fine," said Madame Grandet, "we walk on the bridge, or we go and watch the haymakers."

"Have you a theatre?"

"Go to the theatre!" exclaimed Madame Grandet, "see a play! Why, monsieur, don't you know it is a mortal sin?"

"See here, monsieur," said Nanon, bringing in the eggs, "here are your chickens,—in the shell."

"Oh! fresh eggs," said Charles, who, like all people accustomed to luxury, had already forgotten about his partridge, "that is delicious: now, if you will give me the butter, my good girl."

"Butter! then you can't have the galette."

"Nanon, bring the butter," cried Eugenie.

The young girl watched her cousin as he cut his sippets, with as much pleasure as a grisette takes in a melodrama where innocence and virtue triumph. Charles, brought up by a charming mother, improved, and trained by a woman of fashion, had the elegant, dainty, foppish movements of a coxcomb. The compassionate sympathy and tenderness of a young girl possess a power that is actually magnetic; so that Charles, finding himself the object of the attentions of his aunt and cousin, could not escape the influence of feelings which flowed towards him, as it were, and inundated him. He gave Eugenie a bright, caressing look full of kindness,—a look which seemed itself a smile. He perceived, as his eyes lingered upon her, the exquisite harmony of features in the pure face, the grace of her innocent attitude, the magic clearness of the eyes, where young love sparkled and desire shone unconsciously.

"Ah! my dear cousin, if you were in full dress at the Opera, I assure you my aunt's words would come true,—you would make the men commit the mortal sin of envy, and the women the sin of jealousy."

The compliment went to Eugenie's heart and set it beating, though she did not understand its meaning.

"Oh! cousin," she said, "you are laughing at a poor little country girl."

"If you knew me, my cousin, you would know that I abhor ridicule; it withers the heart and jars upon all my feelings." Here he swallowed his buttered sippet very gracefully. "No, I really have not enough mind to make fun of others; and doubtless it is a great defect. In Paris, when they want to disparage a man, they say: 'He has a good heart.' The phrase means: 'The poor

fellow is as stupid as a rhinoceros.' But as I am rich, and known to hit the bull's-eye at thirty paces with any kind of pistol, and even in the open fields, ridicule respects me."

"My dear nephew, that bespeaks a good heart."

"You have a very pretty ring," said Eugenie; "is there any harm in asking to see it?"

Charles held out his hand after loosening the ring, and Eugenie blushed as she touched the pink nails of her cousin with the tips of her fingers.

"See, mamma, what beautiful workmanship."

"My! there's a lot of gold!" said Nanon, bringing in the coffee.

"What is that?" exclaimed Charles, laughing, as he pointed to an oblong pot of brown earthenware, glazed on the inside, and edged with a fringe of ashes, from the bottom of which the coffee-grounds were bubbling up and falling in the boiling liquid.

"It is boiled coffee," said Nanon.

"Ah! my dear aunt, I shall at least leave one beneficent trace of my visit here. You are indeed behind the age! I must teach you to make good coffee in a Chaptal coffee-pot."

He tried to explain the process of a Chaptal coffee-pot.

"Gracious! if there are so many things as all that to do," said Nanon, "we may as well give up our lives to it. I shall never make coffee that way; I know that! Pray, who is to get the fodder for the cow while I make the coffee?"

"I will make it," said Eugenie.

"Child!" said Madame Grandet, looking at her daughter.

The word recalled to their minds the sorrow that was about to fall upon the unfortunate young man; the three women were silent, and looked at him with an air of commiseration that caught his attention.

"Is anything the matter, my cousin?" he said.

"Hush!" said Madame Grandet to Eugenie, who was about to answer; "you know, my daughter, that your father charged us not to speak to monsieur—"

"Say Charles," said young Grandet.

"Ah! you are called Charles? What a beautiful name!" cried Eugenie.

Presentiments of evil are almost always justified. At this moment Nanon, Madame Grandet, and Eugenie, who had all three been thinking with a

shudder of the old man's return, heard the knock whose echoes they knew but too well.

"There's papa!" said Eugenie.

She removed the saucer filled with sugar, leaving a few pieces on the table-cloth; Nanon carried off the egg-cup; Madame Grandet sat up like a frightened hare. It was evidently a panic, which amazed Charles, who was wholly unable to understand it.

"Why! what is the matter?" he asked.

"My father has come," answered Eugenie.

"Well, what of that?"

Monsieur Grandet entered the room, threw his keen eye upon the table, upon Charles, and saw the whole thing.

"Ha! ha! so you have been making a feast for your nephew; very good, very good, very good indeed!" he said, without stuttering. "When the cat's away, the mice will play."

"Feast!" thought Charles, incapable of suspecting or imagining the rules and customs of the household.

"Give me my glass, Nanon," said the master

Eugenie brought the glass. Grandet drew a horn-handled knife with a big blade from his breeches' pocket, cut a slice of bread, took a small bit of butter, spread it carefully on the bread, and ate it standing. At this moment Charlie was sweetening his coffee. Pere Grandet saw the bits of sugar, looked at his wife, who turned pale, and made three steps forward; he leaned down to the poor woman's ear and said,—

"Where did you get all that sugar?"

"Nanon fetched it from Fessard's; there was none."

It is impossible to picture the profound interest the three women took in this mute scene. Nanon had left her kitchen and stood looking into the room to see what would happen. Charles, having tasted his coffee, found it bitter and glanced about for the sugar, which Grandet had already put away.

"What do you want?" said his uncle.

"The sugar."

"Put in more milk," answered the master of the house; "your coffee will taste sweeter."

Eugenie took the saucer which Grandet had put away and placed it on the

table, looking calmly at her father as she did so. Most assuredly, the Parisian woman who held a silken ladder with her feeble arms to facilitate the flight of her lover, showed no greater courage than Eugenie displayed when she replaced the sugar upon the table. The lover rewarded his mistress when she proudly showed him her beautiful bruised arm, and bathed every swollen vein with tears and kisses till it was cured with happiness. Charles, on the other hand, never so much as knew the secret of the cruel agitation that shook and bruised the heart of his cousin, crushed as it was by the look of the old miser.

"You are not eating your breakfast, wife."

The poor helot came forward with a piteous look, cut herself a piece of bread, and took a pear. Eugenie boldly offered her father some grapes, saying, —

"Taste my preserves, papa. My cousin, you will eat some, will you not? I went to get these pretty grapes expressly for you."

"If no one stops them, they will pillage Saumur for you, nephew. When you have finished, we will go into the garden; I have something to tell you which can't be sweetened."

Eugenie and her mother cast a look on Charles whose meaning the young man could not mistake.

"What is it you mean, uncle? Since the death of my poor mother"—at these words his voice softened—"no other sorrow can touch me."

"My nephew, who knows by what afflictions God is pleased to try us?" said his aunt.

"Ta, ta, ta, ta," said Grandet, "there's your nonsense beginning. I am sorry to see those white hands of yours, nephew"; and he showed the shoulder-of-mutton fists which Nature had put at the end of his own arms. "There's a pair of hands made to pick up silver pieces. You've been brought up to put your feet in the kid out of which we make the purses we keep our money in. A bad look-out! Very bad!"

"What do you mean, uncle? I'll be hanged if I understand a single word of what you are saying."

"Come!" said Grandet.

The miser closed the blade of his knife with a snap, drank the last of his wine, and opened the door.

"My cousin, take courage!"

The tone of the young girl struck terror to Charles's heart, and he followed his terrible uncle, a prey to disquieting thoughts. Eugenie, her mother, and

Nanon went into the kitchen, moved by irresistible curiosity to watch the two actors in the scene which was about to take place in the garden, where at first the uncle walked silently ahead of the nephew. Grandet was not at all troubled at having to tell Charles of the death of his father; but he did feel a sort of compassion in knowing him to be without a penny, and he sought for some phrase or formula by which to soften the communication of that cruel truth. "You have lost your father," seemed to him a mere nothing to say; fathers die before their children. But "you are absolutely without means,"—all the misfortunes of life were summed up in those words! Grandet walked round the garden three times, the gravel crunching under his heavy step.

In the crucial moments of life our minds fasten upon the locality where joys or sorrows overwhelm us. Charles noticed with minute attention the box-borders of the little garden, the yellow leaves as they fluttered down, the dilapidated walls, the gnarled fruit-trees,—picturesque details which were destined to remain forever in his memory, blending eternally, by the mnemonics that belong exclusively to the passions, with the recollections of this solemn hour.

"It is very fine weather, very warm," said Grandet, drawing a long breath.

"Yes, uncle; but why—"

"Well, my lad," answered his uncle, "I have some bad news to give you. Your father is ill—"

"Then why am I here?" said Charles. "Nanon," he cried, "order post-horses! I can get a carriage somewhere?" he added, turning to his uncle, who stood motionless.

"Horses and carriages are useless," answered Grandet, looking at Charles, who remained silent, his eyes growing fixed. "Yes, my poor boy, you guess the truth,—he is dead. But that's nothing; there is something worse: he blew out his brains."

"My father!"

"Yes, but that's not the worst; the newspapers are all talking about it. Here, read that."

Grandet, who had borrowed the fatal article from Cruchot, thrust the paper under his nephew's eyes. The poor young man, still a child, still at an age when feelings wear no mask, burst into tears.

"That's good!" thought Grandet; "his eyes frightened me. He'll be all right if he weeps,—That is not the worst, my poor nephew," he said aloud, not noticing whether Charles heard him, "that is nothing; you will get over it: but —"

"Never, never! My father! Oh, my father!"

"He has ruined you, you haven't a penny."

"What does that matter? My father! Where is my father?"

His sobs resounded horribly against those dreary walls and reverberated in the echoes. The three women, filled with pity, wept also; for tears are often as contagious as laughter. Charles, without listening further to his uncle, ran through the court and up the staircase to his chamber, where he threw himself across the bed and hid his face in the sheets, to weep in peace for his lost parents.

"The first burst must have its way," said Grandet, entering the living-room, where Eugenie and her mother had hastily resumed their seats and were sewing with trembling hands, after wiping their eyes. "But that young man is good for nothing; his head is more taken up with the dead than with his money."

Eugenie shuddered as she heard her father's comment on the most sacred of all griefs. From that moment she began to judge him. Charles's sobs, though muffled, still sounded through the sepulchral house; and his deep groans, which seemed to come from the earth beneath, only ceased towards evening, after growing gradually feebler.

"Poor young man!" said Madame Grandet.

Fatal exclamation! Pere Grandet looked at his wife, at Eugenie, and at the sugar-bowl. He recollected the extraordinary breakfast prepared for the unfortunate youth, and he took a position in the middle of the room.

"Listen to me," he said, with his usual composure. "I hope that you will not continue this extravagance, Madame Grandet. I don't give you MY money to stuff that young fellow with sugar."

"My mother had nothing to do with it," said Eugenie; "it was I who—"

"Is it because you are of age," said Grandet, interrupting his daughter, "that you choose to contradict me? Remember, Eugenie—"

"Father, the son of your brother ought to receive from us—"

"Ta, ta, ta, ta!" exclaimed the cooper on four chromatic tones; "the son of my brother this, my nephew that! Charles is nothing at all to us; he hasn't a farthing, his father has failed; and when this dandy has cried his fill, off he goes from here. I won't have him revolutionize my household."

"What is 'failing,' father?" asked Eugenie.

"To fail," answered her father, "is to commit the most dishonorable action

that can disgrace a man."

"It must be a great sin," said Madame Grandet, "and our brother may be damned."

"There, there, don't begin with your litanies!" said Grandet, shrugging his shoulders. "To fail, Eugenie," he resumed, "is to commit a theft which the law, unfortunately, takes under its protection. People have given their property to Guillaume Grandet trusting to his reputation for honor and integrity; he has made away with it all, and left them nothing but their eyes to weep with. A highway robber is better than a bankrupt: the one attacks you and you can defend yourself, he risks his own life; but the other—in short, Charles is dishonored."

The words rang in the poor girl's heart and weighed it down with their heavy meaning. Upright and delicate as a flower born in the depths of a forest, she knew nothing of the world's maxims, of its deceitful arguments and specious sophisms; she therefore believed the atrocious explanation which her father gave her designedly, concealing the distinction which exists between an involuntary failure and an intentional one.

"Father, could you not have prevented such a misfortune?"

"My brother did not consult me. Besides, he owes four millions."

"What is a 'million,' father?" she asked, with the simplicity of a child which thinks it can find out at once all that it wants to know.

"A million?" said Grandet, "why, it is a million pieces of twenty sous each, and it takes five twenty sous pieces to make five francs."

"Dear me!" cried Eugenie, "how could my uncle possibly have had four millions? Is there any one else in France who ever had so many millions?" Pere Grandet stroked his chin, smiled, and his wen seemed to dilate. "But what will become of my cousin Charles?"

"He is going off to the West Indies by his father's request, and he will try to make his fortune there."

"Has he got the money to go with?"

"I shall pay for his journey as far as—yes, as far as Nantes."

Eugenie sprang into his arms.

"Oh, father, how good you are!"

She kissed him with a warmth that almost made Grandet ashamed of himself, for his conscience galled him a little.

"Will it take much time to amass a million?" she asked.

"Look here!" said the old miser, "you know what a napoleon is? Well, it takes fifty thousand napoleons to make a million."

"Mamma, we must say a great many neuvaines for him."

"I was thinking so," said Madame Grandet.

"That's the way, always spending my money!" cried the father. "Do you think there are francs on every bush?"

At this moment a muffled cry, more distressing than all the others, echoed through the garrets and struck a chill to the hearts of Eugenie and her mother.

"Nanon, go upstairs and see that he does not kill himself," said Grandet. "Now, then," he added, looking at his wife and daughter, who had turned pale at his words, "no nonsense, you two! I must leave you; I have got to see about the Dutchmen who are going away to-day. And then I must find Cruchot, and talk with him about all this."

He departed. As soon as he had shut the door Eugenie and her mother breathed more freely. Until this morning the young girl had never felt constrained in the presence of her father; but for the last few hours every moment wrought a change in her feelings and ideas.

"Mamma, how many louis are there in a cask of wine?"

"Your father sells his from a hundred to a hundred and fifty francs, sometimes two hundred,—at least, so I've heard say."

"Then papa must be rich?"

"Perhaps he is. But Monsieur Cruchot told me he bought Froidfond two years ago; that may have pinched him."

Eugenie, not being able to understand the question of her father's fortune, stopped short in her calculations.

"He didn't even see me, the darling!" said Nanon, coming back from her errand. "He's stretched out like a calf on his bed and crying like the Madeleine, and that's a blessing! What's the matter with the poor dear young man!"

"Let us go and console him, mamma; if any one knocks, we can come down."

Madame Grandet was helpless against the sweet persuasive tones of her daughter's voice. Eugenie was sublime: she had become a woman. The two, with beating hearts, went up to Charles's room. The door was open. The young man heard and saw nothing; plunged in grief, he only uttered inarticulate cries.

"How he loves his father!" said Eugenie in a low voice.

In the utterance of those words it was impossible to mistake the hopes of a heart that, unknown to itself, had suddenly become passionate. Madame Grandet cast a mother's look upon her daughter, and then whispered in her ear, —

"Take care, you will love him!"

"Love him!" answered Eugenie. "Ah! if you did but know what my father said to Monsieur Cruchot."

Charles turned over, and saw his aunt and cousin.

"I have lost my father, my poor father! If he had told me his secret troubles we might have worked together to repair them. My God! my poor father! I was so sure I should see him again that I think I kissed him quite coldly—"

Sobs cut short the words.

"We will pray for him," said Madame Grandet. "Resign yourself to the will of God."

"Cousin," said Eugenie, "take courage! Your loss is irreparable; therefore think only of saving your honor."

With the delicate instinct of a woman who intuitively puts her mind into all things, even at the moment when she offers consolation, Eugenie sought to cheat her cousin's grief by turning his thoughts inward upon himself.

"My honor?" exclaimed the young man, tossing aside his hair with an impatient gesture as he sat up on his bed and crossed his arms. "Ah! that is true. My uncle said my father had failed." He uttered a heart-rending cry, and hid his face in his hands. "Leave me, leave me, cousin! My God! my God! forgive my father, for he must have suffered sorely!"

There was something terribly attractive in the sight of this young sorrow, sincere without reasoning or afterthought. It was a virgin grief which the simple hearts of Eugenie and her mother were fitted to comprehend, and they obeyed the sign Charles made them to leave him to himself. They went downstairs in silence and took their accustomed places by the window and sewed for nearly an hour without exchanging a word. Eugenie had seen in the furtive glance that she cast about the young man's room—that girlish glance which sees all in the twinkling of an eye—the pretty trifles of his dressing-case, his scissors, his razors embossed with gold. This gleam of luxury across her cousin's grief only made him the more interesting to her, possibly by way of contrast. Never before had so serious an event, so dramatic a sight, touched the imaginations of these two passive beings, hitherto sunk in the stillness and calm of solitude.

"Mamma," said Eugenie, "we must wear mourning for my uncle."

"Your father will decide that," answered Madame Grandet.

They relapsed into silence. Eugenie drew her stitches with a uniform motion which revealed to an observer the teeming thoughts of her meditation. The first desire of the girl's heart was to share her cousin's mourning.

VI

About four o'clock an abrupt knock at the door struck sharply on the heart of Madame Grandet.

"What can have happened to your father?" she said to her daughter.

Grandet entered joyously. After taking off his gloves, he rubbed his hands hard enough to take off their skin as well, if his epidermis had not been tanned and cured like Russia leather,—saving, of course, the perfume of larch-trees and incense. Presently his secret escaped him.

"Wife," he said, without stuttering, "I've trapped them all! Our wine is sold! The Dutch and the Belgians have gone. I walked about the market-place in front of their inn, pretending to be doing nothing. That Belgian fellow—you know who I mean—came up to me. The owners of all the good vineyards have kept back their vintages, intending to wait; well, I didn't hinder them. The Belgian was in despair; I saw that. In a minute the bargain was made. He takes my vintage at two hundred francs the puncheon, half down. He paid me in gold; the notes are drawn. Here are six louis for you. In three months wines will have fallen."

These words, uttered in a quiet tone of voice, were nevertheless so bitterly sarcastic that the inhabitants of Saumur, grouped at this moment in the market-place and overwhelmed by the news of the sale Grandet had just effected, would have shuddered had they heard them. Their panic would have brought the price of wines down fifty per cent at once.

"Did you have a thousand puncheons this year, father?"

"Yes, little one."

That term applied to his daughter was the superlative expression of the old miser's joy.

"Then that makes two hundred thousand pieces of twenty sous each?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle Grandet."

"Then, father, you can easily help Charles."

The amazement, the anger, the stupefaction of Belshazzar when he saw the Mene-Tekel-Upharsin before his eyes is not to be compared with the cold rage of Grandet, who, having forgotten his nephew, now found him enshrined in the heart and calculations of his daughter.

"What's this? Ever since that dandy put foot in my house everything goes wrong! You behave as if you had the right to buy sugar-plums and make feasts and weddings. I won't have that sort of thing. I hope I know my duty at my time of life! I certainly sha'n't take lessons from my daughter, or from anybody else. I shall do for my nephew what it is proper to do, and you have no need to poke your nose into it. As for you, Eugenie," he added, facing her, "don't speak of this again, or I'll send you to the Abbaye des Noyers with Nanon, see if I don't; and no later than to-morrow either, if you disobey me! Where is that fellow, has he come down yet?"

"No, my friend," answered Madame Grandet.

"What is he doing then?"

"He is weeping for his father," said Eugenie.

Grandet looked at his daughter without finding a word to say; after all, he was a father. He made a couple of turns up and down the room, and then went hurriedly to his secret den to think over an investment he was meditating in the public Funds. The thinning out of his two thousand acres of forest land had yielded him six hundred thousand francs: putting this sum to that derived from the sale of his poplars and to his other gains for the last year and for the current year, he had amassed a total of nine hundred thousand francs, without counting the two hundred thousand he had got by the sale just concluded. The twenty per cent which Cruchot assured him would gain in a short time from the Funds, then quoted at seventy, tempted him. He figured out his calculation on the margin of the newspaper which gave the account of his brother's death, all the while hearing the moans of his nephew, but without listening to them. Nanon came and knocked on the wall to summon him to dinner. On the last step of the staircase he was saying to himself as he came down,—

"I'll do it; I shall get eight per cent interest. In two years I shall have fifteen hundred thousand francs, which I will then draw out in good gold,—Well, where's my nephew?"

"He says he doesn't want anything to eat," answered Nanon; "that's not good for him."

"So much saved," retorted her master.

"That's so," she said.

"Bah! he won't cry long. Hunger drives the wolves out of the woods."

The dinner was eaten in silence.

"My good friend," said Madame Grandet, when the cloth was removed, "we must put on mourning."

"Upon my word, Madame Grandet! what will you invent next to spend money on? Mourning is in the heart, and not in the clothes."

"But mourning for a brother is indispensable; and the Church commands us to—"

"Buy your mourning out of your six louis. Give me a hat-band; that's enough for me."

Eugenie raised her eyes to heaven without uttering a word. Her generous instincts, slumbering and long repressed but now suddenly and for the first time awakened, were galled at every turn. The evening passed to all appearance like a thousand other evenings of their monotonous life, yet it was certainly the most horrible. Eugenie sewed without raising her head, and did not use the workbox which Charles had despised the night before. Madame Grandet knitted her sleeves. Grandet twirled his thumbs for four hours, absorbed in calculations whose results were on the morrow to astonish Saumur. No one came to visit the family that day. The whole town was ringing with the news of the business trick just played by Grandet, the failure of his brother, and the arrival of his nephew. Obeying the desire to gossip over their mutual interests, all the upper and middle-class wine-growers in Saumur met at Monsieur des Grassins, where terrible imprecations were being fulminated against the ex-mayor. Nanon was spinning, and the whirr of her wheel was the only sound heard beneath the gray rafters of that silent hall.

"We don't waste our tongues," she said, showing her teeth, as large and white as peeled almonds.

"Nothing should be wasted," answered Grandet, rousing himself from his reverie. He saw a perspective of eight millions in three years, and he was sailing along that sheet of gold. "Let us go to bed. I will bid my nephew good-night for the rest of you, and see if he will take anything."

Madame Grandet remained on the landing of the first storey to hear the conversation that was about to take place between the goodman and his nephew. Eugenie, bolder than her mother, went up two stairs.

"Well, nephew, you are in trouble. Yes, weep, that's natural. A father is a father; but we must bear our troubles patiently. I am a good uncle to you, remember that. Come, take courage! Will you have a little glass of wine?" (Wine costs nothing in Saumur, and they offer it as tea is offered in China.) "Why!" added Grandet, "you have got no light! That's bad, very bad; you

ought to see what you are about," and he walked to the chimney-piece. "What's this?" he cried. "A wax candle! How the devil did they filch a wax candle? The spendthrifts would tear down the ceilings of my house to boil the fellow's eggs."

Hearing these words, mother and daughter slipped back into their rooms and burrowed in their beds, with the celerity of frightened mice getting back to their holes.

"Madame Grandet, have you found a mine?" said the man, coming into the chamber of his wife.

"My friend, wait; I am saying my prayers," said the poor mother in a trembling voice.

"The devil take your good God!" growled Grandet in reply.

Misers have no belief in a future life; the present is their all in all. This thought casts a terrible light upon our present epoch, in which, far more than at any former period, money sways the laws and politics and morals. Institutions, books, men, and dogmas, all conspire to undermine belief in a future life,—a belief upon which the social edifice has rested for eighteen hundred years. The grave, as a means of transition, is little feared in our day. The future, which once opened to us beyond the requiems, has now been imported into the present. To obtain per fas et nefas a terrestrial paradise of luxury and earthly enjoyment, to harden the heart and macerate the body for the sake of fleeting possessions, as the martyrs once suffered all things to reach eternal joys, this is now the universal thought—a thought written everywhere, even in the very laws which ask of the legislator, "What do you pay?" instead of asking him, "What do you think?" When this doctrine has passed down from the bourgeoisie to the populace, where will this country be?

"Madame Grandet, have you done?" asked the old man.

"My friend, I am praying for you."

"Very good! Good-night; to-morrow morning we will have a talk."

The poor woman went to sleep like a schoolboy who, not having learned his lessons, knows he will see his master's angry face on the morrow. At the moment when, filled with fear, she was drawing the sheet above her head that she might stifle hearing, Eugenie, in her night-gown and with naked feet, ran to her side and kissed her brow.

"Oh! my good mother," she said, "to-morrow I will tell him it was I."

"No; he would send you to Noyers. Leave me to manage it; he cannot eat me."

"Do you hear, mamma?"

"What?"

"He is weeping still."

"Go to bed, my daughter; you will take cold in your feet: the floor is damp."

Thus passed the solemn day which was destined to weight upon the whole life of the rich and poor heiress, whose sleep was never again to be so calm, nor yet so pure, as it had been up to this moment. It often happens that certain actions of human life seem, literally speaking, improbable, though actual. Is not this because we constantly omit to turn the stream of psychological light upon our impulsive determinations, and fail to explain the subtile reasons, mysteriously conceived in our minds, which impelled them? Perhaps Eugenie's deep passion should be analyzed in its most delicate fibres; for it became, scoffers might say, a malady which influenced her whole existence. Many people prefer to deny results rather than estimate the force of ties and links and bonds, which secretly join one fact to another in the moral order. Here, therefore, Eugenie's past life will offer to observers of human nature an explanation of her naive want of reflection and the suddenness of the emotions which overflowed her soul. The more tranquil her life had been, the more vivid was her womanly pity, the more simple-minded were the sentiments now developed in her soul.

Made restless by the events of the day, she woke at intervals to listen to her cousin, thinking she heard the sighs which still echoed in her heart. Sometimes she saw him dying of his trouble, sometimes she dreamed that he fainted from hunger. Towards morning she was certain that she heard a startling cry. She dressed at once and ran, in the dawning light, with a swift foot to her cousin's chamber, the door of which he had left open. The candle had burned down to the socket. Charles, overcome by nature, was sleeping, dressed and sitting in an armchair beside the bed, on which his head rested; he dreamed as men dream on an empty stomach. Eugenie might weep at her ease; she might admire the young and handsome face blotted with grief, the eyes swollen with weeping, that seemed, sleeping as they were, to well forth tears. Charles felt sympathetically the young girl's presence; he opened his eyes and saw her pitying him.

"Pardon me, my cousin," he said, evidently not knowing the hour nor the place in which he found himself.

"There are hearts who hear you, cousin, and we thought you might need something. You should go to bed; you tire yourself by sitting thus."

"That is true."

"Well, then, adieu!"

She escaped, ashamed and happy at having gone there. Innocence alone can dare to be so bold. Once enlightened, virtue makes her calculations as well as vice. Eugenie, who had not trembled beside her cousin, could scarcely stand upon her legs when she regained her chamber. Her ignorant life had suddenly come to an end; she reasoned, she rebuked herself with many reproaches.

"What will he think of me? He will think that I love him!"

That was what she most wished him to think. An honest love has its own prescience, and knows that love begets love. What an event for this poor solitary girl thus to have entered the chamber of a young man! Are there not thoughts and actions in the life of love which to certain souls bear the full meaning of the holiest espousals? An hour later she went to her mother and dressed her as usual. Then they both came down and sat in their places before the window waiting for Grandet, with that cruel anxiety which, according to the individual character, freezes the heart or warms it, shrivels or dilates it, when a scene is feared, a punishment expected,—a feeling so natural that even domestic animals possess it, and whine at the slightest pain of punishment, though they make no outcry when they inadvertently hurt themselves. The goodman came down; but he spoke to his wife with an absent manner, kissed Eugenie, and sat down to table without appearing to remember his threats of the night before.

"What has become of my nephew? The lad gives no trouble."

"Monsieur, he is asleep," answered Nanon.

"So much the better; he won't want a wax candle," said Grandet in a jeering tone.

This unusual clemency, this bitter gaiety, struck Madame Grandet with amazement, and she looked at her husband attentively. The goodman—here it may be well to explain that in Touraine, Anjou, Pitou, and Bretagne the word "goodman," already used to designate Grandet, is bestowed as often upon harsh and cruel men as upon those of kindly temperament, when either have reached a certain age; the title means nothing on the score of individual gentleness—the goodman took his hat and gloves, saying as he went out,—

"I am going to loiter about the market-place and find Cruchot."

"Eugenie, your father certainly has something on his mind."

Grandet, who was a poor sleeper, employed half his nights in the preliminary calculations which gave such astonishing accuracy to his views and observations and schemes, and secured to them the unfailing success at sight of which his townsmen stood amazed. All human power is a compound

of time and patience. Powerful beings will and wait. The life of a miser is the constant exercise of human power put to the service of self. It rests on two sentiments only,—self-love and self-interest; but self-interest being to a certain extent compact and intelligent self-love, the visible sign of real superiority, it follows that self-love and self-interest are two parts of the same whole,—egotism. From this arises, perhaps, the excessive curiosity shown in the habits of a miser's life whenever they are put before the world. Every nature holds by a thread to those beings who challenge all human sentiments by concentrating all in one passion. Where is the man without desire? and what social desire can be satisfied without money?

Grandet unquestionably "had something on his mind," to use his wife's expression. There was in him, as in all misers, a persistent craving to play a commercial game with other men and win their money legally. To impose upon other people was to him a sign of power, a perpetual proof that he had won the right to despise those feeble beings who suffer themselves to be preyed upon in this world. Oh! who has ever truly understood the lamb lying peacefully at the feet of God?—touching emblem of all terrestrial victims, myth of their future, suffering and weakness glorified! This lamb it is which the miser fattens, puts in his fold, slaughters, cooks, eats, and then despises. The pasture of misers is compounded of money and disdain. During the night Grandet's ideas had taken another course, which was the reason of his sudden clemency. He had hatched a plot by which to trick the Parisians, to decoy and dupe and snare them, to drive them into a trap, and make them go and come and sweat and hope and turn pale,—a plot by which to amuse himself, the old provincial cooper, sitting there beneath his gloomy rafters, or passing up and down the rotten staircase of his house in Saumur. His nephew filled his mind. He wished to save the honor of his dead brother without the cost of a penny to the son or to himself. His own funds he was about to invest for three years; he had therefore nothing further to do than to manage his property in Saumur. He needed some nutriment for his malicious activity, and he found it suddenly in his brother's failure. Feeling nothing to squeeze between his own paws, he resolved to crush the Parisians in behalf of Charles, and to play the part of a good brother on the cheapest terms. The honor of the family counted for so little in this scheme that his good intentions might be likened to the interest a gambler takes in seeing a game well played in which he has no stake. The Cruchots were a necessary part of his plan; but he would not seek them,—he resolved to make them come to him, and to lead up that very evening to a comedy whose plot he had just conceived, which should make him on the morrow an object of admiration to the whole town without its costing him a single penny.

In her father's absence Eugenie had the happiness of busying herself openly with her much-loved cousin, of spending upon him fearlessly the

treasures of her pity,—woman's sublime superiority, the sole she desires to have recognized, the sole she pardons man for letting her assume. Three or four times the young girl went to listen to her cousin's breathing, to know if he were sleeping or awake; then, when he had risen, she turned her thoughts to the cream, the eggs, the fruits, the plates, the glasses,—all that was a part of his breakfast became the object of some special care. At length she ran lightly up the old staircase to listen to the noise her cousin made. Was he dressing? Did he still weep? She reached the door.

"My cousin!"

"Yes, cousin."

"Will you breakfast downstairs, or in your room?"

"Where you like."

"How do you feel?"

"Dear cousin, I am ashamed of being hungry."

This conversation, held through the closed door, was like an episode in a poem to Eugenie.

"Well, then, we will bring your breakfast to your own room, so as not to annoy my father."

She ran to the kitchen with the swiftness and lightness of a bird.

"Nanon, go and do his room!"

That staircase, so often traversed, which echoed to the slightest noise, now lost its decaying aspect in the eyes of Eugenie. It grew luminous; it had a voice and spoke to her; it was young like herself,—young like the love it was now serving. Her mother, her kind, indulgent mother, lent herself to the caprices of the child's love, and after the room was put in order, both went to sit with the unhappy youth and keep him company. Does not Christian charity make consolation a duty? The two women drew a goodly number of little sophistries from their religion wherewith to justify their conduct. Charles was made the object of the tenderest and most loving care. His saddened heart felt the sweetness of the gentle friendship, the exquisite sympathy which these two souls, crushed under perpetual restraint, knew so well how to display when, for an instant, they were left unfettered in the regions of suffering, their natural sphere.

Claiming the right of relationship, Eugenie began to fold the linen and put in order the toilet articles which Charles had brought; thus she could marvel at her ease over each luxurious bauble and the various knick-knacks of silver or chased gold, which she held long in her hand under a pretext of examining

them. Charles could not see without emotion the generous interest his aunt and cousin felt in him; he knew society in Paris well enough to feel assured that, placed as he now was, he would find all hearts indifferent or cold. Eugenie thus appeared to him in the splendor of a special beauty, and from thenceforth he admired the innocence of life and manners which the previous evening he had been inclined to ridicule. So when Eugenie took from Nanon the bowl of coffee and cream, and began to pour it out for her cousin with the simplicity of real feeling, giving him a kindly glance, the eyes of the Parisian filled with tears; he took her hand and kissed it.

"What troubles you?" she said.

"Oh! these are tears of gratitude," he answered.

Eugenie turned abruptly to the chimney-piece to take the candlesticks.

"Here, Nanon, carry them away!" she said.

When she looked again towards her cousin she was still blushing, but her looks could at least deceive, and did not betray the excess of joy which innundated her heart; yet the eyes of both expressed the same sentiment as their souls flowed together in one thought,—the future was theirs. This soft emotion was all the more precious to Charles in the midst of his heavy grief because it was wholly unexpected. The sound of the knocker recalled the women to their usual station. Happily they were able to run downstairs with sufficient rapidity to be seated at their work when Grandet entered; had he met them under the archway it would have been enough to rouse his suspicions. After breakfast, which the goodman took standing, the keeper from Froidfond, to whom the promised indemnity had never yet been paid, made his appearance, bearing a hare and some partridges shot in the park, with eels and two pike sent as tribute by the millers.

"Ha, ha! poor Cornoiller; here he comes, like fish in Lent. Is all that fit to eat?"

"Yes, my dear, generous master; it has been killed two days."

"Come, Nanon, bestir yourself," said Grandet; "take these things, they'll do for dinner. I have invited the two Cruchots."

Nanon opened her eyes, stupid with amazement, and looked at everybody in the room.

"Well!" she said, "and how am I to get the lard and the spices?"

"Wife," said Grandet, "give Nanon six francs, and remind me to get some of the good wine out of the cellar."

"Well, then, Monsieur Grandet," said the keeper, who had come prepared

with an harangue for the purpose of settling the question of the indemnity, "Monsieur Grandet—"

"Ta, ta, ta, ta!" said Grandet; "I know what you want to say. You are a good fellow; we will see about it to-morrow, I'm too busy to-day. Wife, give him five francs," he added to Madame Grandet as he decamped.

The poor woman was only too happy to buy peace at the cost of eleven francs. She knew that Grandet would let her alone for a fortnight after he had thus taken back, franc by franc, the money he had given her.

"Here, Cornoiller," she said, slipping ten francs into the man's hand, "some day we will reward your services."

Cornoiller could say nothing, so he went away.

"Madame," said Nanon, who had put on her black coif and taken her basket, "I want only three francs. You keep the rest; it'll go fast enough somehow."

"Have a good dinner, Nanon; my cousin will come down," said Eugenie.

"Something very extraordinary is going on, I am certain of it," said Madame Grandet. "This is only the third time since our marriage that your father has given a dinner."

About four o'clock, just as Eugenie and her mother had finished setting the table for six persons, and after the master of the house had brought up a few bottles of the exquisite wine which provincials cherish with true affection, Charles came down into the hall. The young fellow was pale; his gestures, the expression of his face, his glance, and the tones of his voice, all had a sadness which was full of grace. He was not pretending grief, he truly suffered; and the veil of pain cast over his features gave him an interesting air dear to the heart of women. Eugenie loved him the more for it. Perhaps she felt that sorrow drew him nearer to her. Charles was no longer the rich and distinguished young man placed in a sphere far above her, but a relation plunged into frightful misery. Misery begets equality. Women have this in common with the angels,—suffering humanity belongs to them. Charles and Eugenie understood each other and spoke only with their eyes; for the poor fallen dandy, orphaned and impoverished, sat apart in a corner of the room, and was proudly calm and silent. Yet, from time to time, the gentle and caressing glance of the young girl shone upon him and constrained him away from his sad thoughts, drawing him with her into the fields of hope and of futurity, where she loved to hold him at her side.

VII

At this moment the town of Saumur was more excited about the dinner given by Grandet to the Cruchots than it had been the night before at the sale of his vintage, though that constituted a crime of high-treason against the whole wine-growing community. If the politic old miser had given his dinner from the same idea that cost the dog of Alcibiades his tail, he might perhaps have been called a great man; but the fact is, considering himself superior to a community which he could trick on all occasions, he paid very little heed to what Saumur might say.

The des Grassins soon learned the facts of the failure and the violent death of Guillaume Grandet, and they determined to go to their client's house that very evening to commiserate his misfortune and show him some marks of friendship, with a view of ascertaining the motives which had led him to invite the Cruchots to dinner. At precisely five o'clock Monsieur C. de Bonfons and his uncle the notary arrived in their Sunday clothes. The party sat down to table and began to dine with good appetites. Grandet was grave, Charles silent, Eugenie dumb, and Madame Grandet did not say more than usual; so that the dinner was, very properly, a repast of condolence. When they rose from table Charles said to his aunt and uncle,—

"Will you permit me to retire? I am obliged to undertake a long and painful correspondence."

"Certainly, nephew."

As soon as the goodman was certain that Charles could hear nothing and was probably deep in his letter-writing, he said, with a dissimulating glance at his wife,—

"Madame Grandet, what we have to talk about will be Latin to you; it is half-past seven; you can go and attend to your household accounts. Good-night, my daughter."

He kissed Eugenie, and the two women departed. A scene now took place in which Pere Grandet brought to bear, more than at any other moment of his life, the shrewd dexterity he had acquired in his intercourse with men, and which had won him from those whose flesh he sometimes bit too sharply the nickname of "the old dog." If the mayor of Saumur had carried his ambition higher still, if fortunate circumstances, drawing him towards the higher social spheres, had sent him into congresses where the affairs of nations were discussed, and had he there employed the genius with which his personal interests had endowed him, he would undoubtedly have proved nobly useful to his native land. Yet it is perhaps equally certain that outside of Saumur the

goodman would have cut a very sorry figure. Possibly there are minds like certain animals which cease to breed when transplanted from the climates in which they are born.

"M-m-mon-sieur le p-p-president, you said t-t-that b-b-bankruptcy—"

The stutter which for years the old miser had assumed when it suited him, and which, together with the deafness of which he sometimes complained in rainy weather, was thought in Saumur to be a natural defect, became at this crisis so wearisome to the two Cruchots that while they listened they unconsciously made faces and moved their lips, as if pronouncing the words over which he was hesitating and stuttering at will. Here it may be well to give the history of this impediment of the speech and hearing of Monsieur Grandet. No one in Anjou heard better, or could pronounce more crisply the French language (with an Angevin accent) than the wily old cooper. Some years earlier, in spite of his shrewdness, he had been taken in by an Israelite, who in the course of the discussion held his hand behind his ear to catch sounds, and mangled his meaning so thoroughly in trying to utter his words that Grandet fell a victim to his humanity and was compelled to prompt the wily Jew with the words and ideas he seemed to seek, to complete himself the arguments of the said Jew, to say what that cursed Jew ought to have said for himself; in short, to be the Jew instead of being Grandet. When the cooper came out of this curious encounter he had concluded the only bargain of which in the course of a long commercial life he ever had occasion to complain. But if he lost at the time pecuniarily, he gained morally a valuable lesson; later, he gathered its fruits. Indeed, the goodman ended by blessing that Jew for having taught him the art of irritating his commercial antagonist and leading him to forget his own thoughts in his impatience to suggest those over which his tormentor was stuttering. No affair had ever needed the assistance of deafness, impediments of speech, and all the incomprehensible circumlocutions with which Grandet enveloped his ideas, as much as the affair now in hand. In the first place, he did not mean to shoulder the responsibility of his own scheme; in the next, he was determined to remain master of the conversation and to leave his real intentions in doubt.

"M-m-monsieur de B-B-Bonfons,"—for the second time in three years Grandet called the Cruchot nephew Monsieur de Bonfons; the president felt he might consider himself the artful old fellow's son-in-law,—"you-ou said th-th-that b-b-bankruptcy c-c-could, in some c-c-cases, b-b-be p-p-prevented b-b-by —"

"By the courts of commerce themselves. It is done constantly," said Monsieur C. de Bonfons, bestriding Grandet's meaning, or thinking he guessed it, and kindly wishing to help him out with it. "Listen."

"Y-yes," said Grandet humbly, with the mischievous expression of a boy who is inwardly laughing at his teacher while he pays him the greatest attention.

"When a man so respected and important as, for example, your late brother __"

"M-my b-b-brother, yes."

"—is threatened with insolvency—"

"They c-c-call it in-ins-s-solvency?"

"Yes; when his failure is imminent, the court of commerce, to which he is amenable (please follow me attentively), has the power, by a decree, to appoint a receiver. Liquidation, you understand, is not the same as failure. When a man fails, he is dishonored; but when he merely liquidates, he remains an honest man."

"T-t-that's very d-d-different, if it d-d-doesn't c-c-cost m-m-more," said Grandet.

"But a liquidation can be managed without having recourse to the courts at all. For," said the president, sniffing a pinch of snuff, "don't you know how failures are declared?"

"N-n-no, I n-n-never t-t-thought," answered Grandet.

"In the first place," resumed the magistrate, "by filing the schedule in the record office of the court, which the merchant may do himself, or his representative for him with a power of attorney duly certified. In the second place, the failure may be declared under compulsion from the creditors. Now if the merchant does not file his schedule, and if no creditor appears before the courts to obtain a decree of insolvency against the merchant, what happens?"

"W-w-what h-h-happens?"

"Why, the family of the deceased, his representatives, his heirs, or the merchant himself, if he is not dead, or his friends if he is only hiding, liquidate his business. Perhaps you would like to liquidate your brother's affairs?"

"Ah! Grandet," said the notary, "that would be the right thing to do. There is honor down here in the provinces. If you save your name—for it is your name—you will be a man—"

"A noble man!" cried the president, interrupting his uncle.

"Certainly," answered the old man, "my b-b-brother's name was G-G-Grandet, like m-m-mine. Th-that's c-c-certain; I d-d-don't d-d-deny it. And th-th-this l-l-liquidation might be, in m-m-many ways, v-v-very advan-t-t-tageous

t-t-to the interests of m-m-my n-n-nephew, whom I l-l-love. But I must consider. I don't k-k-know the t-t-tricks of P-P-Paris. I b-b-belong to Sau-m-mur, d-d-don't you see? M-m-my vines, my d-d-drains—in short, I've my own b-b-business. I never g-g-give n-n-notes. What are n-n-notes? I t-t-take a good m-m-many, but I have never s-s-signed one. I d-d-don't understand such things. I have h-h-heard say that n-n-notes c-c-can be b-b-bought up."

"Of course," said the president. "Notes can be bought in the market, less so much per cent. Don't you understand?"

Grandet made an ear-trumpet of his hand, and the president repeated his words.

"Well, then," replied the man, "there's s-s-something to be g-g-got out of it? I k-know n-nothing at my age about such th-th-things. I l-l-live here and l-l-look after the v-v-vines. The vines g-g-grow, and it's the w-w-wine that p-p-pays. L-l-look after the v-v-vintage, t-t-that's my r-r-rule. My c-c-chief interests are at Froidfond. I c-c-can't l-l-leave my h-h-house to m-m-muddle myself with a d-d-devilish b-b-business I kn-know n-n-nothing about. You say I ought to l-l-liquidate my b-b-brother's af-f-fairs, to p-p-prevent the f-f-failure. I c-c-can't be in two p-p-places at once, unless I were a little b-b-bird, and—"

"I understand," cried the notary. "Well, my old friend, you have friends, old friends, capable of devoting themselves to your interests."

"All right!" thought Grandet, "make haste and come to the point!"

"Suppose one of them went to Paris and saw your brother Guillaume's chief creditor and said to him—"

"One m-m-moment," interrupted the goodman, "said wh-wh-what? Something l-l-like this. Monsieur Gr-Grandet of Saumur this, Monsieur Grandet of Saumur that. He l-loves his b-b-brother, he loves his n-nephew. Grandet is a g-g-good uncle; he m-m-means well. He has sold his v-v-vintage. D-d-don't declare a f-f-failure; c-c-call a meeting; l-l-liquidate; and then Gr-Gr-Grandet will see what he c-c-can do. B-b-better liquidate than l-let the l-l-law st-st-stick its n-n-nose in. Hein? isn't it so?"

"Exactly so," said the president.

"B-because, don't you see, Monsieur de B-Bonfons, a man must l-l-look b-b-before he l-leaps. If you c-c-can't, you c-c-can't. M-m-must know all about the m-m-matter, all the resources and the debts, if you d-d-don't want to be r-r-ruined. Hein? isn't it so?"

"Certainly," said the president. "I'm of opinion that in a few months the debts might be bought up for a certain sum, and then paid in full by an

agreement. Ha! ha! you can coax a dog a long way if you show him a bit of lard. If there has been no declaration of failure, and you hold a lien on the debts, you come out of the business as white as the driven snow."

"Sn-n-now," said Grandet, putting his hand to his ear, "wh-wh-what about s-now?"

"But," cried the president, "do pray attend to what I am saying."

"I am at-t-tending."

"A note is merchandise,—an article of barter which rises and falls in prices. That is a deduction from Jeremy Bentham's theory about usury. That writer has proved that the prejudice which condemned usurers to reprobation was mere folly."

"Whew!" ejaculated the goodman.

"Allowing that money, according to Bentham, is an article of merchandise, and that whatever represents money is equally merchandise," resumed the president; "allowing also that it is notorious that the commercial note, bearing this or that signature, is liable to the fluctuation of all commercial values, rises or falls in the market, is dear at one moment, and is worth nothing at another, the courts decide—ah! how stupid I am, I beg your pardon—I am inclined to think you could buy up your brother's debts for twenty-five per cent."

"D-d-did you c-c-call him Je-Je-Jeremy B-Ben?"

"Bentham, an Englishman.'

"That's a Jeremy who might save us a lot of lamentations in business," said the notary, laughing.

"Those Englishmen s-sometimes t-t-talk sense," said Grandet. "So, ac-c-cording to Ben-Bentham, if my b-b-brother's n-notes are worth n-n-nothing; if Je-Je—I'm c-c-correct, am I not? That seems c-c-clear to my m-m-mind—the c-c-creditors would be—No, would not be; I understand."

"Let me explain it all," said the president. "Legally, if you acquire a title to all the debts of the Maison Grandet, your brother or his heirs will owe nothing to any one. Very good."

"Very g-good," repeated Grandet.

"In equity, if your brother's notes are negotiated—negotiated, do you clearly understand the term?—negotiated in the market at a reduction of so much per cent in value, and if one of your friends happening to be present should buy them in, the creditors having sold them of their own free-will without constraint, the estate of the late Grandet is honorably released."

"That's t-true; b-b-business is b-business," said the cooper. "B-b-but, st-still, you know, it is d-d-difficult. I h-have n-no m-m-money and n-no t-t-time."

"Yes, but you need not undertake it. I am quite ready to go to Paris (you may pay my expenses, they will only be a trifle). I will see the creditors and talk with them and get an extension of time, and everything can be arranged if you will add something to the assets so as to buy up all title to the debts."

"We-we'll see about th-that. I c-c-can't and I w-w-won't bind myself without—He who c-c-can't, can't; don't you see?"

"That's very true."

"I'm all p-p-put ab-b-bout by what you've t-t-told me. This is the f-first t-t-time in my life I have b-been obliged to th-th-think—"

"Yes, you are not a lawyer."

"I'm only a p-p-poor wine-g-grower, and know n-nothing about wh-what you have just t-told me; I m-m-must th-think about it."

"Very good," said the president, preparing to resume his argument.

"Nephew!" said the notary, interrupting him in a warning tone.

"Well, what, uncle?" answered the president.

"Let Monsieur Grandet explain his own intentions. The matter in question is of the first importance. Our good friend ought to define his meaning clearly, and—"

A loud knock, which announced the arrival of the des Grassins family, succeeded by their entrance and salutations, hindered Cruchot from concluding his sentence. The notary was glad of the interruption, for Grandet was beginning to look suspiciously at him, and the wen gave signs of a brewing storm. In the first place, the notary did not think it becoming in a president of the Civil courts to go to Paris and manipulate creditors and lend himself to an underhand job which clashed with the laws of strict integrity; moreover, never having known old Grandet to express the slightest desire to pay anything, no matter what, he instinctively feared to see his nephew taking part in the affair. He therefore profited by the entrance of the des Grassins to take the nephew by the arm and lead him into the embrasure of the window,—

"You have said enough, nephew; you've shown enough devotion. Your desire to win the girl blinds you. The devil! you mustn't go at it tooth and nail. Let me sail the ship now; you can haul on the braces. Do you think it right to compromise your dignity as a magistrate in such a—"

He stopped, for he heard Monsieur des Grassins saying to the old cooper as

they shook hands,—

"Grandet, we have heard of the frightful misfortunes which have just befallen your family,—the failure of the house of Guillaume Grandet and the death of your brother. We have come to express our grief at these sad events."

"There is but one sad event," said the notary, interrupting the banker,—"the death of Monsieur Grandet, junior; and he would never have killed himself had he thought in time of applying to his brother for help. Our old friend, who is honorable to his finger-nails, intends to liquidate the debts of the Maison Grandet of Paris. To save him the worry of legal proceedings, my nephew, the president, has just offered to go to Paris and negotiate with the creditors for a satisfactory settlement."

These words, corroborated by Grandet's attitude as he stood silently nursing his chin, astonished the three des Grassins, who had been leisurely discussing the old man's avarice as they came along, very nearly accusing him of fratricide.

"Ah! I was sure of it," cried the banker, looking at his wife. "What did I tell you just now, Madame des Grassins? Grandet is honorable to the backbone, and would never allow his name to remain under the slightest cloud! Money without honor is a disease. There is honor in the provinces! Right, very right, Grandet. I'm an old soldier, and I can't disguise my thoughts; I speak roughly. Thunder! it is sublime!"

"Th-then s-s-sublime th-things c-c-cost d-dear," answered the goodman, as the banker warmly wrung his hand.

"But this, my dear Grandet,—if the president will excuse me,—is a purely commercial matter, and needs a consummate business man. Your agent must be some one fully acquainted with the markets,—with disbursements, rebates, interest calculations, and so forth. I am going to Paris on business of my own, and I can take charge of—"

"We'll see about t-t-trying to m-m-manage it b-b-between us, under the p-p-peculiar c-c-circumstances, b-b-but without b-b-binding m-m-myself to anything th-that I c-c-could not do," said Grandet, stuttering; "because, you see, monsieur le president naturally expects me to pay the expenses of his journey."

The goodman did not stammer over the last words.

"Eh!" cried Madame des Grassins, "why it is a pleasure to go to Paris. I would willingly pay to go myself."

She made a sign to her husband, as if to encourage him in cutting the enemy out of the commission, coute que coute; then she glanced ironically at

the two Cruchots, who looked chap-fallen. Grandet seized the banker by a button and drew him into a corner of the room.

"I have a great deal more confidence in you than in the president," he said; "besides, I've other fish to fry," he added, wriggling his wen. "I want to buy a few thousand francs in the Funds while they are at eighty. They fall, I'm told, at the end of each month. You know all about these things, don't you?"

"Bless me! then, am I to invest enough to give you a few thousand francs a year?"

"That's not much to begin with. Hush! I don't want any one to know I am going to play that game. You can make the investment by the end of the month. Say nothing to the Cruchots; that'll annoy them. If you are really going to Paris, we will see if there is anything to be done for my poor nephew."

"Well, it's all settled. I'll start to-morrow by the mail-post," said des Grassins aloud, "and I will come and take your last directions at—what hour will suit you?"

"Five o'clock, just before dinner," said Grandet, rubbing his hands.

The two parties stayed on for a short time. Des Grassins said, after a pause, striking Grandet on the shoulder,—

"It is a good thing to have a relation like him."

"Yes, yes; without making a show," said Grandet, "I am a g-good relation. I loved my brother, and I will prove it, unless it c-c-costs—"

"We must leave you, Grandet," said the banker, interrupting him fortunately before he got to the end of his sentence. "If I hurry my departure, I must attend to some matters at once."

"Very good, very good! I myself—in c-consequence of what I t-told you—I must retire to my own room and 'd-d-deliberate,' as President Cruchot says."

"Plague take him! I am no longer Monsieur de Bonfons," thought the magistrate ruefully, his face assuming the expression of a judge bored by an argument.

The heads of the two factions walked off together. Neither gave any further thought to the treachery Grandet had been guilty of in the morning against the whole wine-growing community; each tried to fathom what the other was thinking about the real intentions of the wily old man in this new affair, but in vain.

"Will you go with us to Madame Dorsonval's?" said des Grassins to the notary.

"We will go there later," answered the president. "I have promised to say good-evening to Mademoiselle de Gribeaucourt, and we will go there first, if my uncle is willing."

"Farewell for the present!" said Madame des Grassins.

When the Cruchots were a few steps off, Adolphe remarked to his father, —

"Are not they fuming, hein?"

"Hold your tongue, my son!" said his mother; "they might hear you. Besides, what you say is not in good taste,—law-school language."

"Well, uncle," cried the president when he saw the des Grassins disappearing, "I began by being de Bonfons, and I have ended as nothing but Cruchot."

"I saw that that annoyed you; but the wind has set fair for the des Grassins. What a fool you are, with all your cleverness! Let them sail off on Grandet's 'We'll see about it,' and keep yourself quiet, young man. Eugenie will none the less be your wife."

In a few moments the news of Grandet's magnanimous resolve was disseminated in three houses at the same moment, and the whole town began to talk of his fraternal devotion. Every one forgave Grandet for the sale made in defiance of the good faith pledged to the community; they admired his sense of honor, and began to laud a generosity of which they had never thought him capable. It is part of the French nature to grow enthusiastic, or angry, or fervent about some meteor of the moment. Can it be that collective beings, nationalities, peoples, are devoid of memory?

When Pere Grandet had shut the door he called Nanon.

"Don't let the dog loose, and don't go to bed; we have work to do together. At eleven o'clock Cornoiller will be at the door with the chariot from Froidfond. Listen for him and prevent his knocking; tell him to come in softly. Police regulations don't allow nocturnal racket. Besides, the whole neighborhood need not know that I am starting on a journey."

So saying, Grandet returned to his private room, where Nanon heard him moving about, rummaging, and walking to and fro, though with much precaution, for he evidently did not wish to wake his wife and daughter, and above all not to rouse the attention of his nephew, whom he had begun to anathematize when he saw a thread of light under his door. About the middle of the night Eugenie, intent on her cousin, fancied she heard a cry like that of a dying person. It must be Charles, she thought; he was so pale, so full of despair when she had seen him last,—could he have killed himself? She

wrapped herself quickly in a loose garment,—a sort of pelisse with a hood,—and was about to leave the room when a bright light coming through the chinks of her door made her think of fire. But she recovered herself as she heard Nanon's heavy steps and gruff voice mingling with the snorting of several horses.

"Can my father be carrying off my cousin?" she said to herself, opening her door with great precaution lest it should creak, and yet enough to let her see into the corridor.

Suddenly her eye encountered that of her father; and his glance, vague and unnoticing as it was, terrified her. The goodman and Nanon were yoked together by a stout stick, each end of which rested on their shoulders; a stout rope was passed over it, on which was slung a small barrel or keg like those Pere Grandet still made in his bakehouse as an amusement for his leisure hours.

"Holy Virgin, how heavy it is!" said the voice of Nanon.

"What a pity that it is only copper sous!" answered Grandet. "Take care you don't knock over the candlestick."

The scene was lighted by a single candle placed between two rails of the staircase.

"Cornoiller," said Grandet to his keeper in partibus, "have you brought your pistols?"

"No, monsieur. Mercy! what's there to fear for your copper sous?"

"Oh! nothing," said Pere Grandet.

"Besides, we shall go fast," added the man; "your farmers have picked out their best horses."

"Very good. You did not tell them where I was going?"

"I didn't know where."

"Very good. Is the carriage strong?"

"Strong? hear to that, now! Why, it can carry three thousand weight. How much does that old keg weigh?"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Nanon. "I ought to know! There's pretty nigh eighteen hundred—"

"Will you hold your tongue, Nanon! You are to tell my wife I have gone into the country. I shall be back to dinner. Drive fast, Cornoiller; I must get to Angers before nine o'clock."

The carriage drove off. Nanon bolted the great door, let loose the dog, and went off to bed with a bruised shoulder, no one in the neighborhood suspecting either the departure of Grandet or the object of his journey. The precautions of the old miser and his reticence were never relaxed. No one had ever seen a penny in that house, filled as it was with gold. Hearing in the morning, through the gossip of the port, that exchange on gold had doubled in price in consequence of certain military preparations undertaken at Nantes, and that speculators had arrived at Angers to buy coin, the old wine-grower, by the simple process of borrowing horses from his farmers, seized the chance of selling his gold and of bringing back in the form of treasury notes the sum he intended to put into the Funds, having swelled it considerably by the exchange.

VIII

"My father has gone," thought Eugenie, who heard all that took place from the head of the stairs. Silence was restored in the house, and the distant rumbling of the carriage, ceasing by degrees, no longer echoed through the sleeping town. At this moment Eugenie heard in her heart, before the sound caught her ears, a cry which pierced the partitions and came from her cousin's chamber. A line of light, thin as the blade of a sabre, shone through a chink in the door and fell horizontally on the balusters of the rotten staircase.

"He suffers!" she said, springing up the stairs. A second moan brought her to the landing near his room. The door was ajar, she pushed it open. Charles was sleeping; his head hung over the side of the old armchair, and his hand, from which the pen had fallen, nearly touched the floor. The oppressed breathing caused by the strained posture suddenly frightened Eugenie, who entered the room hastily.

"He must be very tired," she said to herself, glancing at a dozen letters lying sealed upon the table. She read their addresses: "To Messrs. Farry, Breilmann, & Co., carriage-makers"; "To Monsieur Buisson, tailor," etc.

"He has been settling all his affairs, so as to leave France at once," she thought. Her eyes fell upon two open letters. The words, "My dear Annette," at the head of one of them, blinded her for a moment. Her heart beat fast, her feet were nailed to the floor.

"His dear Annette! He loves! he is loved! No hope! What does he say to her?"

These thoughts rushed through her head and heart. She saw the words

everywhere, even on the bricks of the floor, in letters of fire.

"Resign him already? No, no! I will not read the letter. I ought to go away —What if I do read it?"

She looked at Charles, then she gently took his head and placed it against the back of the chair; he let her do so, like a child which, though asleep, knows its mother's touch and receives, without awaking, her kisses and watchful care. Like a mother Eugenie raised the drooping hand, and like a mother she gently kissed the chestnut hair—"Dear Annette!" a demon shrieked the words in her ear.

"I am doing wrong; but I must read it, that letter," she said. She turned away her head, for her noble sense of honor reproached her. For the first time in her life good and evil struggled together in her heart. Up to that moment she had never had to blush for any action. Passion and curiosity triumphed. As she read each sentence her heart swelled more and more, and the keen glow which filled her being as she did so, only made the joys of first love still more precious.

My dear Annette,—Nothing could ever have separated us but the great misfortune which has now overwhelmed me, and which no human foresight could have prevented. My father has killed himself; his fortune and mine are irretrievably lost. I am orphaned at an age when, through the nature of my education, I am still a child; and yet I must lift myself as a man out of the abyss into which I am plunged. I have just spent half the night in facing my position. If I wish to leave France an honest man,—and there is no doubt of that,—I have not a hundred francs of my own with which to try my fate in the Indies or in America. Yes, my poor Anna, I must seek my fortune in those deadly climates. Under those skies, they tell me, I am sure to make it. As for remaining in Paris, I cannot do so. Neither my nature nor my face are made to bear the affronts, the neglect, the disdain shown to a ruined man, the son of a bankrupt! Good God! think of owing two millions! I should be killed in a duel the first week; therefore I shall not return there. Your love—the most tender and devoted love which ever ennobled the heart of man—cannot draw me back. Alas! my beloved, I have no money with which to go to you, to give and receive a last kiss from which I might derive some strength for my forlorn enterprise.

"Poor Charles! I did well to read the letter. I have gold; I will give it to him," thought Eugenie.

She wiped her eyes, and went on reading.

I have never thought of the miseries of poverty. If I have the hundred louis required for the mere costs of the journey, I have not a sou for an outfit. But

no, I have not the hundred louis, not even one louis. I don't know that anything will be left after I have paid my debts in Paris. If I have nothing, I shall go quietly to Nantes and ship as a common sailor; and I will begin in the new world like other men who have started young without a sou and brought back the wealth of the Indies. During this long day I have faced my future coolly. It seems more horrible for me than for another, because I have been so petted by a mother who adored me, so indulged by the kindest of fathers, so blessed by meeting, on my entrance into life, with the love of an Anna! The flowers of life are all I have ever known. Such happiness could not last. Nevertheless, my dear Annette, I feel more courage than a careless young man is supposed to feel,—above all a young man used to the caressing ways of the dearest woman in all Paris, cradled in family joys, on whom all things smiled in his home, whose wishes were a law to his father—oh, my father! Annette, he is dead!

Well, I have thought over my position, and yours as well. I have grown old in twenty-four hours. Dear Anna, if in order to keep me with you in Paris you were to sacrifice your luxury, your dress, your opera-box, we should even then not have enough for the expenses of my extravagant ways of living. Besides, I would never accept such sacrifices. No, we must part now and forever—

"He gives her up! Blessed Virgin! What happiness!"

Eugenie quivered with joy. Charles made a movement, and a chill of terror ran through her. Fortunately, he did not wake, and she resumed her reading.

When shall I return? I do not know. The climate of the West Indies ages a European, so they say; especially a European who works hard. Let us think what may happen ten years hence. In ten years your daughter will be eighteen; she will be your companion, your spy. To you society will be cruel, and your daughter perhaps more cruel still. We have seen cases of the harsh social judgment and ingratitude of daughters; let us take warning by them. Keep in the depths of your soul, as I shall in mine, the memory of four years of happiness, and be faithful, if you can, to the memory of your poor friend. I cannot exact such faithfulness, because, do you see, dear Annette, I must conform to the exigencies of my new life; I must take a commonplace view of them and do the best I can. Therefore I must think of marriage, which becomes one of the necessities of my future existence; and I will admit to you that I have found, here in Saumur, in my uncle's house, a cousin whose face, manners, mind, and heart would please you, and who, besides, seems to me—

"He must have been very weary to have ceased writing to her," thought Eugenie, as she gazed at the letter which stopped abruptly in the middle of the last sentence.

Already she defended him. How was it possible that an innocent girl should perceive the cold-heartedness evinced by this letter? To young girls

religiously brought up, whose minds are ignorant and pure, all is love from the moment they set their feet within the enchanted regions of that passion. They walk there bathed in a celestial light shed from their own souls, which reflects its rays upon their lover; they color all with the flame of their own emotion and attribute to him their highest thoughts. A woman's errors come almost always from her belief in good or her confidence in truth. In Eugenie's simple heart the words, "My dear Annette, my loved one," echoed like the sweetest language of love; they caressed her soul as, in childhood, the divine notes of the Venite adoremus, repeated by the organ, caressed her ear. Moreover, the tears which still lingered on the young man's lashes gave signs of that nobility of heart by which young girls are rightly won. How could she know that Charles, though he loved his father and mourned him truly, was moved far more by paternal goodness than by the goodness of his own heart? Monsieur and Madame Guillaume Grandet, by gratifying every fancy of their son, and lavishing upon him the pleasures of a large fortune, had kept him from making the horrible calculations of which so many sons in Paris become more or less guilty when, face to face with the enjoyments of the world, they form desires and conceive schemes which they see with bitterness must be put off or laid aside during the lifetime of their parents. The liberality of the father in this instance had shed into the heart of the son a real love, in which there was no afterthought of self-interest.

Nevertheless, Charles was a true child of Paris, taught by the customs of society and by Annette herself to calculate everything; already an old man under the mask of youth. He had gone through the frightful education of social life, of that world where in one evening more crimes are committed in thought and speech than justice ever punishes at the assizes; where jests and clever sayings assassinate the noblest ideas; where no one is counted strong unless his mind sees clear: and to see clear in that world is to believe in nothing, neither in feelings, nor in men, nor even in events,—for events are falsified. There, to "see clear" we must weigh a friend's purse daily, learn how to keep ourselves adroitly on the top of the wave, cautiously admire nothing, neither works of art nor glorious actions, and remember that self-interest is the mainspring of all things here below. After committing many follies, the great lady—the beautiful Annette—compelled Charles to think seriously; with her perfumed hand among his curls, she talked to him of his future position; as she rearranged his locks, she taught him lessons of worldly prudence; she made him effeminate and materialized him,—a double corruption, but a delicate and elegant corruption, in the best taste.

"You are very foolish, Charles," she would say to him. "I shall have a great deal of trouble in teaching you to understand the world. You behaved extremely ill to Monsieur des Lupeaulx. I know very well he is not an honorable man; but wait till he is no longer in power, then you may despise

him as much as you like. Do you know what Madame Campan used to tell us?—'My dears, as long as a man is a minister, adore him; when he falls, help to drag him in the gutter. Powerful, he is a sort of god; fallen, he is lower than Marat in the sewer, because he is living, and Marat is dead. Life is a series of combinations, and you must study them and understand them if you want to keep yourselves always in good position.'"

Charles was too much a man of the world, his parents had made him too happy, he had received too much adulation in society, to be possessed of noble sentiments. The grain of gold dropped by his mother into his heart was beaten thin in the smithy of Parisian society; he had spread it superficially, and it was worn away by the friction of life. Charles was only twenty-one years old. At that age the freshness of youth seems inseparable from candor and sincerity of soul. The voice, the glance, the face itself, seem in harmony with the feelings; and thus it happens that the sternest judge, the most sceptical lawyer, the least complying of usurers, always hesitate to admit decrepitude of heart or the corruption of worldly calculation while the eyes are still bathed in purity and no wrinkles seam the brow. Charles, so far, had had no occasion to apply the maxims of Parisian morality; up to this time he was still endowed with the beauty of inexperience. And yet, unknown to himself, he had been inoculated with selfishness. The germs of Parisian political economy, latent in his heart, would assuredly burst forth, sooner or later, whenever the careless spectator became an actor in the drama of real life.

Nearly all young girls succumb to the tender promises such an outward appearance seems to offer: even if Eugenie had been as prudent and observing as provincial girls are often found to be, she was not likely to distrust her cousin when his manners, words, and actions were still in unison with the aspirations of a youthful heart. A mere chance—a fatal chance—threw in her way the last effusions of real feeling which stirred the young man's soul; she heard as it were the last breathings of his conscience. She laid down the letter—to her so full of love—and began smilingly to watch her sleeping cousin; the fresh illusions of life were still, for her at least, upon his face; she vowed to herself to love him always. Then she cast her eyes on the other letter, without attaching much importance to this second indiscretion; and though she read it, it was only to obtain new proofs of the noble qualities which, like all women, she attributed to the man her heart had chosen.

My dear Alphonse,—When you receive this letter I shall be without friends; but let me assure you that while I doubt the friendship of the world, I have never doubted yours. I beg you therefore to settle all my affairs, and I trust to you to get as much as you can out of my possessions. By this time you know my situation. I have nothing left, and I intend to go at once to the Indies. I have just written to all the people to whom I think I owe money, and you will

find enclosed a list of their names, as correct as I can make it from memory. My books, my furniture, my pictures, my horses, etc., ought, I think, to pay my debts. I do not wish to keep anything, except, perhaps, a few baubles which might serve as the beginning of an outfit for my enterprise. My dear Alphonse, I will send you a proper power of attorney under which you can make these sales. Send me all my weapons. Keep Briton for yourself; nobody would pay the value of that noble beast, and I would rather give him to you—like a mourning-ring bequeathed by a dying man to his executor. Farry, Breilmann, & Co. built me a very comfortable travelling-carriage, which they have not yet delivered; persuade them to keep it and not ask for any payment on it. If they refuse, do what you can in the matter, and avoid everything that might seem dishonorable in me under my present circumstances. I owe the British Islander six louis, which I lost at cards; don't fail to pay him—

"Dear cousin!" whispered Eugenie, throwing down the letter and running softly back to her room, carrying one of the lighted candles. A thrill of pleasure passed over her as she opened the drawer of an old oak cabinet, a fine specimen of the period called the Renaissance, on which could still be seen, partly effaced, the famous royal salamander. She took from the drawer a large purse of red velvet with gold tassels, edged with a tarnished fringe of gold wire,—a relic inherited from her grandmother. She weighed it proudly in her hand, and began with delight to count over the forgotten items of her little hoard. First she took out twenty portugaises, still new, struck in the reign of John V., 1725, worth by exchange, as her father told her, five lisbonnines, or a hundred and sixty-eight francs, sixty-four centimes each; their conventional value, however, was a hundred and eighty francs apiece, on account of the rarity and beauty of the coins, which shone like little suns. Item, five genovines, or five hundred-franc pieces of Genoa; another very rare coin worth eighty-seven francs on exchange, but a hundred francs to collectors. These had formerly belonged to old Monsieur de la Bertelliere. Item, three gold quadruples, Spanish, of Philip V., struck in 1729, given to her one by one by Madame Gentillet, who never failed to say, using the same words, when she made the gift, "This dear little canary, this little yellow-boy, is worth ninety-eight francs! Keep it, my pretty one, it will be the flower of your treasure." Item (that which her father valued most of all, the gold of these coins being twenty-three carats and a fraction), a hundred Dutch ducats, made in the year 1756, and worth thirteen francs apiece. Item, a great curiosity, a species of medal precious to the soul of misers,—three rupees with the sign of the Scales, and five rupees with the sign of the Virgin, all in pure gold of twenty-four carats; the magnificent money of the Great Mogul, each of which was worth by mere weight thirty-seven francs, forty centimes, but at least fifty francs to those connoisseurs who love to handle gold. Item, the napoleon of forty francs received the day before, which she had forgotten to put away in

the velvet purse. This treasure was all in virgin coins, true works of art, which Grandet from time to time inquired after and asked to see, pointing out to his daughter their intrinsic merits,—such as the beauty of the milled edge, the clearness of the flat surface, the richness of the lettering, whose angles were not yet rubbed off.

Eugenie gave no thought to these rarities, nor to her father's mania for them, nor to the danger she incurred in depriving herself of a treasure so dear to him; no, she thought only of her cousin, and soon made out, after a few mistakes of calculation, that she possessed about five thousand eight hundred francs in actual value, which might be sold for their additional value to collectors for nearly six thousand. She looked at her wealth and clapped her hands like a happy child forced to spend its overflowing joy in artless movements of the body. Father and daughter had each counted up their fortune this night,—he, to sell his gold; Eugenie to fling hers into the ocean of affection. She put the pieces back into the old purse, took it in her hand, and ran upstairs without hesitation. The secret misery of her cousin made her forget the hour and conventional propriety; she was strong in her conscience, in her devotion, in her happiness.

As she stood upon the threshold of the door, holding the candle in one hand and the purse in the other, Charles woke, caught sight of her, and remained speechless with surprise. Eugenie came forward, put the candle on the table, and said in a quivering voice:

"My cousin, I must beg pardon for a wrong I have done you; but God will pardon me—if you—will help me to wipe it out."

"What is it?" asked Charles, rubbing his eyes.

"I have read those letters."

Charles colored.

"How did it happen?" she continued; "how came I here? Truly, I do not know. I am tempted not to regret too much that I have read them; they have made me know your heart, your soul, and—"

"And what?" asked Charles.

"Your plans, your need of a sum—"

"My dear cousin—"

"Hush, hush! my cousin, not so loud; we must not wake others. See," she said, opening her purse, "here are the savings of a poor girl who wants nothing. Charles, accept them! This morning I was ignorant of the value of money; you have taught it to me. It is but a means, after all. A cousin is almost a brother; you can surely borrow the purse of your sister."

Eugenie, as much a woman as a young girl, never dreamed of refusal; but her cousin remained silent.

"Oh! you will not refuse?" cried Eugenie, the beatings of whose heart could be heard in the deep silence.

Her cousin's hesitation mortified her; but the sore need of his position came clearer still to her mind, and she knelt down.

"I will never rise till you have taken that gold!" she said. "My cousin, I implore you, answer me! let me know if you respect me, if you are generous, if—"

As he heard this cry of noble distress the young man's tears fell upon his cousin's hands, which he had caught in his own to keep her from kneeling. As the warm tears touched her, Eugenie sprang to the purse and poured its contents upon the table.

"Ah! yes, yes, you consent?" she said, weeping with joy. "Fear nothing, my cousin, you will be rich. This gold will bring you happiness; some day you shall bring it back to me,—are we not partners? I will obey all conditions. But you should not attach such value to the gift."

Charles was at last able to express his feelings.

"Yes, Eugenie; my soul would be small indeed if I did not accept. And yet, —gift for gift, confidence for confidence."

"What do you mean?" she said, frightened.

"Listen, dear cousin; I have here—" He interrupted himself to point out a square box covered with an outer case of leather which was on the drawers. "There," he continued, "is something as precious to me as life itself. This box was a present from my mother. All day I have been thinking that if she could rise from her grave, she would herself sell the gold which her love for me lavished on this dressing-case; but were I to do so, the act would seem to me a sacrilege." Eugenie pressed his hand as she heard these last words. "No," he added, after a slight pause, during which a liquid glance of tenderness passed between them, "no, I will neither sell it nor risk its safety on my journey. Dear Eugenie, you shall be its guardian. Never did friend commit anything more sacred to another. Let me show it to you."

He went to the box, took it from its outer coverings, opened it, and showed his delighted cousin a dressing-case where the rich workmanship gave to the gold ornaments a value far above their weight.

"What you admire there is nothing," he said, pushing a secret spring which opened a hidden drawer. "Here is something which to me is worth the whole world." He drew out two portraits, masterpieces of Madame Mirbel, richly set

with pearls.

"Oh, how beautiful! Is it the lady to whom you wrote that—"

"No," he said, smiling; "this is my mother, and here is my father, your aunt and uncle. Eugenie, I beg you on my knees, keep my treasure safely. If I die and your little fortune is lost, this gold and these pearls will repay you. To you alone could I leave these portraits; you are worthy to keep them. But destroy them at last, so that they may pass into no other hands." Eugenie was silent. "Ah, yes, say yes! You consent?" he added with winning grace.

Hearing the very words she had just used to her cousin now addressed to herself, she turned upon him a look of love, her first look of loving womanhood,—a glance in which there is nearly as much of coquetry as of inmost depth. He took her hand and kissed it.

"Angel of purity! between us two money is nothing, never can be anything. Feeling, sentiment, must be all henceforth."

"You are like your mother,—was her voice as soft as yours?"

"Oh! much softer—"

"Yes, for you," she said, dropping her eyelids. "Come, Charles, go to bed; I wish it; you must be tired. Good-night." She gently disengaged her hand from those of her cousin, who followed her to her room, lighting the way. When they were both upon the threshold,—

"Ah!" he said, "why am I ruined?"

"What matter?—my father is rich; I think so," she answered.

"Poor child!" said Charles, making a step into her room and leaning his back against the wall, "if that were so, he would never have let my father die; he would not let you live in this poor way; he would live otherwise himself."

"But he owns Froidfond."

"What is Froidfond worth?"

"I don't know; but he has Noyers."

"Nothing but a poor farm!"

"He has vineyards and fields."

"Mere nothing," said Charles disdainfully. "If your father had only twenty-four thousand francs a year do you suppose you would live in this cold, barren room?" he added, making a step in advance. "Ah! there you will keep my treasures," he said, glancing at the old cabinet, as if to hide his thoughts.

"Go and sleep," she said, hindering his entrance into the disordered room.

Charles stepped back, and they bid each other good-night with a mutual smile.

Both fell asleep in the same dream; and from that moment the youth began to wear roses with his mourning. The next day, before breakfast, Madame Grandet found her daughter in the garden in company with Charles. The young man was still sad, as became a poor fellow who, plunged in misfortune, measures the depths of the abyss into which he has fallen, and sees the terrible burden of his whole future life.

"My father will not be home till dinner-time," said Eugenie, perceiving the anxious look on her mother's face.

It was easy to trace in the face and manners of the young girl and in the singular sweetness of her voice a unison of thought between her and her cousin. Their souls had espoused each other, perhaps before they even felt the force of the feelings which bound them together. Charles spent the morning in the hall, and his sadness was respected. Each of the three women had occupations of her own. Grandet had left all his affairs unattended to, and a number of persons came on business,—the plumber, the mason, the slater, the carpenter, the diggers, the dressers, the farmers; some to drive a bargain about repairs, others to pay their rent or to be paid themselves for services. Madame Grandet and Eugenie were obliged to go and come and listen to the interminable talk of all these workmen and country folk. Nanon put away in her kitchen the produce which they brought as tribute. She always waited for her master's orders before she knew what portion was to be used in the house and what was to be sold in the market. It was the goodman's custom, like that of a great many country gentlemen, to drink his bad wine and eat his spoiled fruit.

Towards five in the afternoon Grandet returned from Angers, having made fourteen thousand francs by the exchange on his gold, bringing home in his wallet good treasury-notes which bore interest until the day he should invest them in the Funds. He had left Cornoiller at Angers to look after the horses, which were well-nigh foundered, with orders to bring them home slowly after they were rested.

"I have got back from Angers, wife," he said; "I am hungry."

Nanon called out to him from the kitchen: "Haven't you eaten anything since yesterday?"

"Nothing," answered the old man.

Nanon brought in the soup. Des Grassins came to take his client's orders just as the family sat down to dinner. Grandet had not even observed his nephew.

"Go on eating, Grandet," said the banker; "we can talk. Do you know what gold is worth in Angers? They have come from Nantes after it? I shall send some of ours."

"Don't send any," said Grandet; "they have got enough. We are such old friends, I ought to save you from such a loss of time."

"But gold is worth thirteen francs fifty centimes."

"Say was worth—"

"Where the devil have they got any?"

"I went to Angers last night," answered Grandet in a low voice.

The banker shook with surprise. Then a whispered conversation began between the two, during which Grandet and des Grassins frequently looked at Charles. Presently des Grassins gave a start of astonishment; probably Grandet was then instructing him to invest the sum which was to give him a hundred thousand francs a year in the Funds.

"Monsieur Grandet," said the banker to Charles, "I am starting for Paris; if you have any commissions—"

"None, monsieur, I thank you," answered Charles.

"Thank him better than that, nephew. Monsieur is going to settle the affairs of the house of Guillaume Grandet."

"Is there any hope?" said Charles eagerly.

"What!" exclaimed his uncle, with well-acted pride, "are you not my nephew? Your honor is ours. Is not your name Grandet?"

Charles rose, seized Pere Grandet, kissed him, turned pale, and left the room. Eugenie looked at her father with admiration.

"Well, good-by, des Grassins; it is all in your hands. Decoy those people as best you can; lead 'em by the nose."

The two diplomatists shook hands. The old cooper accompanied the banker to the front door. Then, after closing it, he came back and plunged into his armchair, saying to Nanon,—

"Get me some black-currant ratafia."

Too excited, however, to remain long in one place, he got up, looked at the portrait of Monsieur de la Bertelliere, and began to sing, doing what Nanon called his dancing steps,—

"Dans les gardes francaises

J'avais un bon papa."

Nanon, Madame Grandet, and Eugenie looked at each other in silence. The hilarity of the master always frightened them when it reached its climax. The evening was soon over. Pere Grandet chose to go to bed early, and when he went to bed, everybody else was expected to go too; like as when Augustus drank, Poland was drunk. On this occasion Nanon, Charles, and Eugenie were not less tired than the master. As for Madame Grandet, she slept, ate, drank, and walked according to the will of her husband. However, during the two hours consecrated to digestion, the cooper, more facetious than he had ever been in his life, uttered a number of his own particular apothegms,—a single one of which will give the measure of his mind. When he had drunk his ratafia, he looked at his glass and said,—

"You have no sooner put your lips to a glass than it is empty! Such is life. You can't have and hold. Gold won't circulate and stay in your purse. If it were not for that, life would be too fine."

He was jovial and benevolent. When Nanon came with her spinning-wheel, "You must be tired," he said; "put away your hemp."

"Ah, bah! then I shall get sleepy," she answered.

"Poor Nanon! Will you have some ratafia?"

"I won't refuse a good offer; madame makes it a deal better than the apothecaries. What they sell is all drugs."

"They put too much sugar," said the master; "you can't taste anything else."

IX

The following day the family, meeting at eight o'clock for the early breakfast, made a picture of genuine domestic intimacy. Grief had drawn Madame Grandet, Eugenie, and Charles en rapport; even Nanon sympathized, without knowing why. The four now made one family. As to the old man, his satisfied avarice and the certainty of soon getting rid of the dandy without having to pay more than his journey to Nantes, made him nearly indifferent to his presence in the house. He left the two children, as he called Charles and Eugenie, free to conduct themselves as they pleased, under the eye of Madame Grandet, in whom he had implicit confidence as to all that concerned public and religious morality. He busied himself in straightening the boundaries of his fields and ditches along the high-road, in his poplar-plantations beside the Loire, in the winter work of his vineyards, and at Froidfond. All these things

occupied his whole time.

For Eugenie the springtime of love had come. Since the scene at night when she gave her little treasure to her cousin, her heart had followed the treasure. Confederates in the same secret, they looked at each other with a mutual intelligence which sank to the depth of their consciousness, giving a closer communion, a more intimate relation to their feelings, and putting them, so to speak, beyond the pale of ordinary life. Did not their near relationship warrant the gentleness in their tones, the tenderness in their glances? Eugenie took delight in lulling her cousin's pain with the pretty childish joys of a new-born love. Are there no sweet similitudes between the birth of love and the birth of life? Do we not rock the babe with gentle songs and softest glances? Do we not tell it marvellous tales of the golden future? Hope herself, does she not spread her radiant wings above its head? Does it not shed, with infant fickleness, its tears of sorrow and its tears of joy? Does it not fret for trifles, cry for the pretty pebbles with which to build its shifting palaces, for the flowers forgotten as soon as plucked? Is it not eager to grasp the coming time, to spring forward into life? Love is our second transformation. Childhood and love were one and the same thing to Eugenie and to Charles; it was a first passion, with all its child-like play,—the more caressing to their hearts because they now were wrapped in sadness. Struggling at birth against the gloom of mourning, their love was only the more in harmony with the provincial plainness of that gray and ruined house. As they exchanged a few words beside the well in the silent court, or lingered in the garden for the sunset hour, sitting on a mossy seat saying to each other the infinite nothings of love, or mused in the silent calm which reigned between the house and the ramparts like that beneath the arches of a church, Charles comprehended the sanctity of love; for his great lady, his dear Annette, had taught him only its stormy troubles. At this moment he left the worldly passion, coquettish, vain, and showy as it was, and turned to the true, pure love. He loved even the house, whose customs no longer seemed to him ridiculous. He got up early in the mornings that he might talk with Eugenie for a moment before her father came to dole out the provisions; when the steps of the old man sounded on the staircase he escaped into the garden. The small criminality of this morning tete-a-tete which Nanon pretended not to see, gave to their innocent love the lively charm of a forbidden joy.

After breakfast, when Grandet had gone to his fields and his other occupations, Charles remained with the mother and daughter, finding an unknown pleasure in holding their skeins, in watching them at work, in listening to their quiet prattle. The simplicity of this half-monastic life, which revealed to him the beauty of these souls, unknown and unknowing of the world, touched him keenly. He had believed such morals impossible in France, and admitted their existence nowhere but in Germany; even so, they seemed to

him fabulous, only real in the novels of Auguste Lafontaine. Soon Eugenie became to him the Margaret of Goethe—before her fall. Day by day his words, his looks enraptured the poor girl, who yielded herself up with delicious non-resistance to the current of love; she caught her happiness as a swimmer seizes the overhanging branch of a willow to draw himself from the river and lie at rest upon its shore. Did no dread of a coming absence sadden the happy hours of those fleeting days? Daily some little circumstance reminded them of the parting that was at hand.

Three days after the departure of des Grassins, Grandet took his nephew to the Civil courts, with the solemnity which country people attach to all legal acts, that he might sign a deed surrendering his rights in his father's estate. Terrible renunciation! species of domestic apostasy! Charles also went before Maitre Cruchot to make two powers of attorney,—one for des Grassins, the other for the friend whom he had charged with the sale of his belongings. After that he attended to all the formalities necessary to obtain a passport for foreign countries; and finally, when he received his simple mourning clothes from Paris, he sent for the tailor of Saumur and sold to him his useless wardrobe. This last act pleased Grandet exceedingly.

"Ah! now you look like a man prepared to embark and make your fortune," he said, when Charles appeared in a surtout of plain black cloth. "Good! very good!"

"I hope you will believe, monsieur," answered his nephew, "that I shall always try to conform to my situation."

"What's that?" said his uncle, his eyes lighting up at a handful of gold which Charles was carrying.

"Monsieur, I have collected all my buttons and rings and other superfluities which may have some value; but not knowing any one in Saumur, I wanted to ask you to—"

"To buy them?" said Grandet, interrupting him.

"No, uncle; only to tell me of an honest man who—"

"Give me those things, I will go upstairs and estimate their value; I will come back and tell you what it is to a fraction. Jeweller's gold," examining a long chain, "eighteen or nineteen carats."

The goodman held out his huge hand and received the mass of gold, which he carried away.

"Cousin," said Grandet, "may I offer you these two buttons? They can fasten ribbons round your wrists; that sort of bracelet is much the fashion just now."

"I accept without hesitation," she answered, giving him an understanding look.

"Aunt, here is my mother's thimble; I have always kept it carefully in my dressing-case," said Charles, presenting a pretty gold thimble to Madame Grandet, who for many years had longed for one.

"I cannot thank you; no words are possible, my nephew," said the poor mother, whose eyes filled with tears. "Night and morning in my prayers I shall add one for you, the most earnest of all—for those who travel. If I die, Eugenie will keep this treasure for you."

"They are worth nine hundred and eighty-nine francs, seventy-five centimes," said Grandet, opening the door. "To save you the pain of selling them, I will advance the money—in livres."

The word livres on the littoral of the Loire signifies that crown prices of six livres are to be accepted as six francs without deduction.

"I dared not propose it to you," answered Charles; "but it was most repugnant to me to sell my jewels to some second-hand dealer in your own town. People should wash their dirty linen at home, as Napoleon said. I thank you for your kindness."

Grandet scratched his ear, and there was a moment's silence.

"My dear uncle," resumed Charles, looking at him with an uneasy air, as if he feared to wound his feelings, "my aunt and cousin have been kind enough to accept a trifling remembrance of me. Will you allow me to give you these sleeve-buttons, which are useless to me now? They will remind you of a poor fellow who, far away, will always think of those who are henceforth all his family."

"My lad, my lad, you mustn't rob yourself this way! Let me see, wife, what have you got?" he added, turning eagerly to her. "Ah! a gold thimble. And you, little girl? What! diamond buttons? Yes, I'll accept your present, nephew," he answered, shaking Charles by the hand. "But—you must let me—pay—your—yes, your passage to the Indies. Yes, I wish to pay your passage because—d'ye see, my boy?—in valuing your jewels I estimated only the weight of the gold; very likely the workmanship is worth something. So let us settle it that I am to give you fifteen hundred francs—in livres; Cruchot will lend them to me. I haven't got a copper farthing here,—unless Perrotet, who is behindhand with his rent, should pay up. By the bye, I'll go and see him."

He took his hat, put on his gloves, and went out.

"Then you are really going?" said Eugenie to her cousin, with a sad look, mingled with admiration.

"I must," he said, bowing his head.

For some days past, Charles's whole bearing, manners, and speech had become those of a man who, in spite of his profound affliction, feels the weight of immense obligations and has the strength to gather courage from misfortune. He no longer repined, he became a man. Eugenie never augured better of her cousin's character than when she saw him come down in the plain black clothes which suited well with his pale face and sombre countenance. On that day the two women put on their own mourning, and all three assisted at a Requiem celebrated in the parish church for the soul of the late Guillaume Grandet.

At the second breakfast Charles received letters from Paris and began to read them.

"Well, cousin, are you satisfied with the management of your affairs?" said Eugenie in a low voice.

"Never ask such questions, my daughter," said Grandet. "What the devil! do I tell you my affairs? Why do you poke your nose into your cousin's? Let the lad alone!"

"Oh! I haven't any secrets," said Charles.

"Ta, ta, ta, ta, nephew; you'll soon find out that you must hold your tongue in business."

When the two lovers were alone in the garden, Charles said to Eugenie, drawing her down on the old bench beneath the walnut-tree,—

"I did right to trust Alphonse; he has done famously. He has managed my affairs with prudence and good faith. I now owe nothing in Paris. All my things have been sold; and he tells me that he has taken the advice of an old sea-captain and spent three thousand francs on a commercial outfit of European curiosities which will be sure to be in demand in the Indies. He has sent my trunks to Nantes, where a ship is loading for San Domingo. In five days, Eugenie, we must bid each other farewell—perhaps forever, at least for years. My outfit and ten thousand francs, which two of my friends send me, are a very small beginning. I cannot look to return for many years. My dear cousin, do not weight your life in the scales with mine; I may perish; some good marriage may be offered to you—"

"Do you love me?" she said.

"Oh, yes! indeed, yes!" he answered, with a depth of tone that revealed an equal depth of feeling.

"I shall wait, Charles—Good heavens! there is my father at his window," she said, repulsing her cousin, who leaned forward to kiss her.

She ran quickly under the archway. Charles followed her. When she saw him, she retreated to the foot of the staircase and opened the swing-door; then, scarcely knowing where she was going, Eugenie reached the corner near Nanon's den, in the darkest end of the passage. There Charles caught her hand and drew her to his heart. Passing his arm about her waist, he made her lean gently upon him. Eugenie no longer resisted; she received and gave the purest, the sweetest, and yet, withal, the most unreserved of kisses.

"Dear Eugenie, a cousin is better than a brother, for he can marry you," said Charles.

"So be it!" cried Nanon, opening the door of her lair.

The two lovers, alarmed, fled into the hall, where Eugenie took up her work and Charles began to read the litanies of the Virgin in Madame Grandet's prayer-book.

"Mercy!" cried Nanon, "now they're saying their prayers."

As soon as Charles announced his immediate departure, Grandet bestirred himself to testify much interest in his nephew. He became very liberal of all that cost him nothing; took pains to find a packer; declared the man asked too much for his cases; insisted on making them himself out of old planks; got up early in the morning to fit and plane and nail together the strips, out of which he made, to his own satisfaction, some strong cases, in which he packed all Charles's effects; he also took upon himself to send them by boat down the Loire, to insure them, and get them to Nantes in proper time.

After the kiss taken in the passage, the hours fled for Eugenie with frightful rapidity. Sometimes she thought of following her cousin. Those who have known that most endearing of all passions,—the one whose duration is each day shortened by time, by age, by mortal illness, by human chances and fatalities,—they will understand the poor girl's tortures. She wept as she walked in the garden, now so narrow to her, as indeed the court, the house, the town all seemed. She launched in thought upon the wide expanse of the ocean he was about to traverse. At last the eve of his departure came. That morning, in the absence of Grandet and of Nanon, the precious case which contained the two portraits was solemnly installed in the only drawer of the old cabinet which could be locked, where the now empty velvet purse was lying. This deposit was not made without a goodly number of tears and kisses. When Eugenie placed the key within her bosom she had no courage to forbid the kiss with which Charles sealed the act.

"It shall never leave that place, my friend," she said.

"Then my heart will be always there."

"Ah! Charles, it is not right," she said, as though she blamed him.

"Are we not married?" he said. "I have thy promise,—then take mine."

"Thine; I am thine forever!" they each said, repeating the words twice over.

No promise made upon this earth was ever purer. The innocent sincerity of Eugenie had sanctified for a moment the young man's love.

On the morrow the breakfast was sad. Nanon herself, in spite of the gold-embroidered robe and the Jeannette cross bestowed by Charles, had tears in her eyes.

"The poor dear monsieur who is going on the seas—oh, may God guide him!"

At half-past ten the whole family started to escort Charles to the diligence for Nantes. Nanon let loose the dog, locked the door, and insisted on carrying the young man's carpet-bag. All the tradesmen in the tortuous old street were on the sill of their shop-doors to watch the procession, which was joined in the market-place by Maitre Cruchot.

"Eugenie, be sure you don't cry," said her mother.

"Nephew," said Grandet, in the doorway of the inn from which the coach started, kissing Charles on both cheeks, "depart poor, return rich; you will find the honor of your father safe. I answer for that myself, I—Grandet; for it will only depend on you to—"

"Ah! my uncle, you soften the bitterness of my departure. Is it not the best gift that you could make me?"

Not understanding his uncle's words which he had thus interrupted, Charles shed tears of gratitude upon the tanned cheeks of the old miser, while Eugenie pressed the hand of her cousin and that of her father with all her strength. The notary smiled, admiring the sly speech of the old man, which he alone had understood. The family stood about the coach until it started; then as it disappeared upon the bridge, and its rumble grew fainter in the distance, Grandet said:

"Good-by to you!"

Happily no one but Maitre Cruchot heard the exclamation. Eugenie and her mother had gone to a corner of the quay from which they could still see the diligence and wave their white handkerchiefs, to which Charles made answer by displaying his.

"Ah! mother, would that I had the power of God for a single moment," said Eugenie, when she could no longer see her lover's handkerchief.

Not to interrupt the current of events which are about to take place in the bosom of the Grandet family, it is necessary to cast a forestalling eye upon the various operations which the goodman carried on in Paris by means of Monsieur des Grassins. A month after the latter's departure from Saumur, Grandet, became possessed of a certificate of a hundred thousand francs a year from his investment in the Funds, bought at eighty francs net. The particulars revealed at his death by the inventory of his property threw no light upon the means which his suspicious nature took to remit the price of the investment and receive the certificate thereof. Maitre Cruchot was of opinion that Nanon, unknown to herself, was the trusty instrument by which the money was transported; for about this time she was absent five days, under a pretext of putting things to rights at Froidfond,—as if the goodman were capable of leaving anything lying about or out of order!

In all that concerned the business of the house of Guillaume Grandet the old cooper's intentions were fulfilled to the letter. The Bank of France, as everybody knows, affords exact information about all the large fortunes in Paris and the provinces. The names of des Grassins and Felix Grandet of Saumur were well known there, and they enjoyed the esteem bestowed on financial celebrities whose wealth comes from immense and unencumbered territorial possessions. The arrival of the Saumur banker for the purpose, it was said, of honorably liquidating the affairs of Grandet of Paris, was enough to avert the shame of protested notes from the memory of the defunct merchant. The seals on the property were taken off in presence of the creditors, and the notary employed by Grandet went to work at once on the inventory of the assets. Soon after this, des Grassins called a meeting of the creditors, who unanimously elected him, conjointly with Francois Keller, the head of a rich banking-house and one of those principally interested in the affair, as liquidators, with full power to protect both the honor of the family and the interests of the claimants. The credit of Grandet of Saumur, the hopes he diffused by means of des Grassins in the minds of all concerned, facilitated the transactions. Not a single creditor proved recalcitrant; no one thought of passing his claim to his profit-and-loss account; each and all said confidently, "Grandet of Saumur will pay."

Six months went by. The Parisians had redeemed the notes in circulation as they fell due, and held them under lock and key in their desks. First result aimed at by the old cooper! Nine months after this preliminary meeting, the two liquidators distributed forty-seven per cent to each creditor on his claim. This amount was obtained by the sale of the securities, property, and possessions of all kinds belonging to the late Guillaume Grandet, and was paid over with scrupulous fidelity. Unimpeachable integrity was shown in the transaction. The creditors gratefully acknowledged the remarkable and incontestable honor displayed by the Grandets. When these praises had

circulated for a certain length of time, the creditors asked for the rest of their money. It became necessary to write a collective letter to Grandet of Saumur.

"Here it comes!" said the old man as he threw the letter into the fire. "Patience, my good friends!"

In answer to the proposals contained in the letter, Grandet of Saumur demanded that all vouchers for claims against the estate of his brother should be deposited with a notary, together with acquittances for the forty-seven per cent already paid; he made this demand under pretence of sifting the accounts and finding out the exact condition of the estate. It roused at once a variety of difficulties. Generally speaking, the creditor is a species of maniac, ready to agree to anything one day, on the next breathing fire and slaughter; later on, he grows amicable and easy-going. To-day his wife is good-humored, his last baby has cut its first tooth, all is well at home, and he is determined not to lose a sou; on the morrow it rains, he can't go out, he is gloomy, he says yes to any proposal that is made to him, so long as it will put an end to the affair; on the third day he declares he must have guarantees; by the end of the month he wants his debtor's head, and becomes at heart an executioner. The creditor is a good deal like the sparrow on whose tail confiding children are invited to put salt,—with this difference, that he applies the image to his claim, the proceeds of which he is never able to lay hold of. Grandet had studied the atmospheric variations of creditors, and the creditors of his brother justified all his calculations. Some were angry, and flatly refused to give in their vouchers.

"Very good; so much the better," said Grandet, rubbing his hands over the letter in which des Grassins announced the fact.

Others agreed to the demand, but only on condition that their rights should be fully guaranteed; they renounced none, and even reserved the power of ultimately compelling a failure. On this began a long correspondence, which ended in Grandet of Saumur agreeing to all conditions. By means of this concession the placable creditors were able to bring the dissatisfied creditors to reason. The deposit was then made, but not without sundry complaints.

"Your goodman," they said to des Grassins, "is tricking us."

Twenty-three months after the death of Guillaume Grandet many of the creditors, carried away by more pressing business in the markets of Paris, had forgotten their Grandet claims, or only thought of them to say:

"I begin to believe that forty-seven per cent is all I shall ever get out of that affair."

The old cooper had calculated on the power of time, which, as he used to say, is a pretty good devil after all. By the end of the third year des Grassins wrote to Grandet that he had brought the creditors to agree to give up their

claims for ten per cent on the two million four hundred thousand francs still due by the house of Grandet. Grandet answered that the notary and the broker whose shameful failures had caused the death of his brother were still living, that they might now have recovered their credit, and that they ought to be sued, so as to get something out of them towards lessening the total of the deficit.

By the end of the fourth year the liabilities were definitely estimated at a sum of twelve hundred thousand francs. Many negotiations, lasting over six months, took place between the creditors and the liquidators, and between the liquidators and Grandet. To make a long story short, Grandet of Saumur, anxious by this time to get out of the affair, told the liquidators, about the ninth month of the fourth year, that his nephew had made a fortune in the Indies and was disposed to pay his father's debts in full; he therefore could not take upon himself to make any settlement without previously consulting him; he had written to him, and was expecting an answer. The creditors were held in check until the middle of the fifth year by the words, "payment in full," which the wily old miser threw out from time to time as he laughed in his beard, saying with a smile and an oath, "Those Parisians!"

But the creditors were reserved for a fate unexampled in the annals of commerce. When the events of this history bring them once more into notice, they will be found still in the position Grandet had resolved to force them into from the first.

As soon as the Funds reached a hundred and fifteen, Pere Grandet sold out his interests and withdrew two million four hundred thousand francs in gold, to which he added, in his coffers, the six hundred thousand francs compound interest which he had derived from the capital. Des Grassins now lived in Paris. In the first place he had been made a deputy; then he became infatuated (father of a family as he was, though horribly bored by the provincial life of Saumur) with a pretty actress at the Theatre de Madame, known as Florine, and he presently relapsed into the old habits of his army life. It is useless to speak of his conduct; Saumur considered it profoundly immoral. His wife was fortunate in the fact of her property being settled upon herself, and in having sufficient ability to keep up the banking-house in Saumur, which was managed in her name and repaired the breach in her fortune caused by the extravagance of her husband. The Cruchotines made so much talk about the false position of the quasi-widow that she married her daughter very badly, and was forced to give up all hope of an alliance between Eugenie Grandet and her son. Adolphe joined his father in Paris and became, it was said, a worthless fellow. The Cruchots triumphed.

"Your husband hasn't common sense," said Grandet as he lent Madame des Grassins some money on a note securely endorsed. "I am very sorry for you,

for you are a good little woman."

"Ah, monsieur," said the poor lady, "who could have believed that when he left Saumur to go to Paris on your business he was going to his ruin?"

"Heaven is my witness, madame, that up to the last moment I did all I could to prevent him from going. Monsieur le president was most anxious to take his place; but he was determined to go, and now we all see why."

In this way Grandet made it quite plain that he was under no obligation to des Grassins.

In all situations women have more cause for suffering than men, and they suffer more. Man has strength and the power of exercising it; he acts, moves, thinks, occupies himself; he looks ahead, and sees consolation in the future. It was thus with Charles. But the woman stays at home; she is always face to face with the grief from which nothing distracts her; she goes down to the depths of the abyss which yawns before her, measures it, and often fills it with her tears and prayers. Thus did Eugenie. She initiated herself into her destiny. To feel, to love, to suffer, to devote herself,—is not this the sum of woman's life? Eugenie was to be in all things a woman, except in the one thing that consoles for all. Her happiness, picked up like nails scattered on a wall—to use the fine simile of Bossuet—would never so much as fill even the hollow of her hand. Sorrows are never long in coming; for her they came soon. The day after Charles's departure the house of Monsieur Grandet resumed its ordinary aspect in the eyes of all, except in those of Eugenie, to whom it grew suddenly empty. She wished, if it could be done unknown to her father, that Charles's room might be kept as he had left it. Madame Grandet and Nanon were willing accomplices in this statu quo.

"Who knows but he may come back sooner than we think for?" she said.

"Ah, don't I wish I could see him back!" answered Nanon. "I took to him! He was such a dear, sweet young man,—pretty too, with his curly hair." Eugenie looked at Nanon. "Holy Virgin! don't look at me that way, mademoiselle; your eyes are like those of a lost soul."

From that day the beauty of Mademoiselle Grandet took a new character. The solemn thoughts of love which slowly filled her soul, and the dignity of the woman beloved, gave to her features an illumination such as painters render by a halo. Before the coming of her cousin, Eugenie might be compared to the Virgin before the conception; after he had gone, she was like the Virgin Mother,—she had given birth to love. These two Marys so different, so well represented by Spanish art, embody one of those shining symbols with which Christianity abounds.

Returning from Mass on the morning after Charles's departure,—having

made a vow to hear it daily,—Eugenie bought a map of the world, which she nailed up beside her looking-glass, that she might follow her cousin on his westward way, that she might put herself, were it ever so little, day by day into the ship that bore him, and see him and ask him a thousand questions,—"Art thou well? Dost thou suffer? Dost thou think of me when the star, whose beauty and usefulness thou hast taught me to know, shines upon thee?" In the mornings she sat pensive beneath the walnut-tree, on the worm-eaten bench covered with gray lichens, where they had said to each other so many precious things, so many trifles, where they had built the pretty castles of their future home. She thought of the future now as she looked upward to the bit of sky which was all the high walls suffered her to see; then she turned her eyes to the angle where the sun crept on, and to the roof above the room in which he had slept. Hers was the solitary love, the persistent love, which glides into every thought and becomes the substance, or, as our fathers might have said, the tissue of life. When the would-be friends of Pere Grandet came in the evening for their game at cards, she was gay and dissimulating; but all the morning she talked of Charles with her mother and Nanon. Nanon had brought herself to see that she could pity the sufferings of her young mistress without failing in her duty to the old master, and she would say to Eugenie,—

"If I had a man for myself I'd—I'd follow him to hell, yes, I'd exterminate myself for him; but I've none. I shall die and never know what life is. Would you believe, mamz'elle, that old Cornoiller (a good fellow all the same) is always round my petticoats for the sake of my money,—just for all the world like the rats who come smelling after the master's cheese and paying court to you? I see it all; I've got a shrewd eye, though I am as big as a steeple. Well, mamz'elle, it pleases me, but it isn't love."

X

Two months went by. This domestic life, once so monotonous, was now quickened with the intense interest of a secret that bound these women intimately together. For them Charles lived and moved beneath the grim gray rafters of the hall. Night and morning Eugenie opened the dressing-case and gazed at the portrait of her aunt. One Sunday morning her mother surprised her as she stood absorbed in finding her cousin's features in his mother's face. Madame Grandet was then for the first time admitted into the terrible secret of the exchange made by Charles against her daughter's treasure.

"You gave him all!" cried the poor mother, terrified. "What will you say to your father on New Year's Day when he asks to see your gold?"

Eugenie's eyes grew fixed, and the two women lived through mortal terror for more than half the morning. They were so troubled in mind that they missed high Mass, and only went to the military service. In three days the year 1819 would come to an end. In three days a terrible drama would begin, a bourgeois tragedy, without poison, or dagger, or the spilling of blood; but—as regards the actors in it—more cruel than all the fabled horrors in the family of the Atrides.

"What will become of us?" said Madame Grandet to her daughter, letting her knitting fall upon her knees.

The poor mother had gone through such anxiety for the past two months that the woollen sleeves which she needed for the coming winter were not yet finished. This domestic fact, insignificant as it seems, bore sad results. For want of those sleeves, a chill seized her in the midst of a sweat caused by a terrible explosion of anger on the part of her husband.

"I have been thinking, my poor child, that if you had confided your secret to me we should have had time to write to Monsieur des Grassins in Paris. He might have sent us gold pieces like yours; though Grandet knows them all, perhaps—"

"Where could we have got the money?"

"I would have pledged my own property. Besides, Monsieur des Grassins would have—"

"It is too late," said Eugenie in a broken, hollow voice. "To-morrow morning we must go and wish him a happy New Year in his chamber."

"But, my daughter, why should I not consult the Cruchots?"

"No, no; it would be delivering me up to them, and putting ourselves in their power. Besides, I have chosen my course. I have done right, I repent of nothing. God will protect me. His will be done! Ah! mother, if you had read his letter, you, too, would have thought only of him."

The next morning, January 1, 1820, the horrible fear to which mother and daughter were a prey suggested to their minds a natural excuse by which to escape the solemn entrance into Grandet's chamber. The winter of 1819-1820 was one of the coldest of that epoch. The snow encumbered the roofs.

Madame Grandet called to her husband as soon as she heard him stirring in his chamber, and said,—

"Grandet, will you let Nanon light a fire here for me? The cold is so sharp that I am freezing under the bedclothes. At my age I need some comforts. Besides," she added, after a slight pause, "Eugenie shall come and dress here; the poor child might get an illness from dressing in her cold room in such

weather. Then we will go and wish you a happy New Year beside the fire in the hall."

"Ta, ta, ta, ta, what a tongue! a pretty way to begin the new year, Madame Grandet! You never talked so much before; but you haven't been sopping your bread in wine, I know that."

There was a moment's silence.

"Well," resumed the goodman, who no doubt had some reason of his own for agreeing to his wife's request, "I'll do what you ask, Madame Grandet. You are a good woman, and I don't want any harm to happen to you at your time of life,—though as a general thing the Bertellieres are as sound as a roach. Hein! isn't that so?" he added after a pause. "Well, I forgive them; we got their property in the end." And he coughed.

"You are very gay this morning, monsieur," said the poor woman gravely.

"I'm always gay,—

"'Gai, gai, gai, le tonnelier,

Raccommodez votre cuvier!'"

he answered, entering his wife's room fully dressed. "Yes, on my word, it is cold enough to freeze you solid. We shall have a fine breakfast, wife. Des Grassins has sent me a pate-de-foie-gras truffled! I am going now to get it at the coach-office. There'll be a double napoleon for Eugenie in the package," he whispered in Madame Grandet's ear. "I have no gold left, wife. I had a few stray pieces—I don't mind telling you that—but I had to let them go in business."

Then, by way of celebrating the new year, he kissed her on the forehead.

"Eugenie," cried the mother, when Grandet was fairly gone, "I don't know which side of the bed your father got out of, but he is good-tempered this morning. Perhaps we shall come out safe after all?"

"What's happened to the master?" said Nanon, entering her mistress's room to light the fire. "First place, he said, 'Good-morning; happy New Year, you big fool! Go and light my wife's fire, she's cold'; and then, didn't I feel silly when he held out his hand and gave me a six-franc piece, which isn't worn one bit? Just look at it, madame! Oh, the kind man! He is a good man, that's a fact. There are some people who the older they get the harder they grow; but he,—why he's getting soft and improving with time, like your ratafia! He is a good, good man—"

The secret of Grandet's joy lay in the complete success of his speculation. Monsieur des Grassins, after deducting the amount which the old cooper owed

him for the discount on a hundred and fifty thousand francs in Dutch notes, and for the surplus which he had advanced to make up the sum required for the investment in the Funds which was to produce a hundred thousand francs a year, had now sent him, by the diligence, thirty thousand francs in silver coin, the remainder of his first half-year's interest, informing him at the same time that the Funds had already gone up in value. They were then quoted at eighty-nine; the shrewdest capitalists bought in, towards the last of January, at ninety-three. Grandet had thus gained in two months twelve per cent on his capital; he had simplified his accounts, and would in future receive fifty thousand francs interest every six months, without incurring any taxes or costs for repairs. He understood at last what it was to invest money in the public securities,—a system for which provincials have always shown a marked repugnance,—and at the end of five years he found himself master of a capital of six millions, which increased without much effort of his own, and which, joined to the value and proceeds of his territorial possessions, gave him a fortune that was absolutely colossal. The six francs bestowed on Nanon were perhaps the reward of some great service which the poor servant had rendered to her master unawares.

"Oh! oh! where's Pere Grandet going? He has been scurrying about since sunrise as if to a fire," said the tradespeople to each other as they opened their shops for the day.

When they saw him coming back from the wharf, followed by a porter from the coach-office wheeling a barrow which was laden with sacks, they all had their comments to make:—

"Water flows to the river; the old fellow was running after his gold," said one.

"He gets it from Paris and Froidfond and Holland," said another.

"He'll end by buying up Saumur," cried a third.

"He doesn't mind the cold, he's so wrapped up in his gains," said a wife to her husband.

"Hey! hey! Monsieur Grandet, if that's too heavy for you," said a cloth-dealer, his nearest neighbor, "I'll take it off your hands."

"Heavy?" said the cooper, "I should think so; it's all sous!"

"Silver sous," said the porter in a low voice.

"If you want me to take care of you, keep your tongue between your teeth," said the goodman to the porter as they reached the door.

"The old fox! I thought he was deaf; seems he can hear fast enough in frosty weather."

"Here's twenty sous for your New Year, and mum!" said Grandet. "Be off with you! Nanon shall take back your barrow. Nanon, are the linnets at church?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then lend a hand! go to work!" he cried, piling the sacks upon her. In a few moments all were carried up to his inner room, where he shut himself in with them. "When breakfast is ready, knock on the wall," he said as he disappeared. "Take the barrow back to the coach-office."

The family did not breakfast that day until ten o'clock.

"Your father will not ask to see your gold downstairs," said Madame Grandet as they got back from Mass. "You must pretend to be very chilly. We may have time to replace the treasure before your fete-day."

Grandet came down the staircase thinking of his splendid speculation in government securities, and wondering how he could metamorphose his Parisian silver into solid gold; he was making up his mind to invest in this way everything he could lay hands on until the Funds should reach a par value. Fatal reverie for Eugenie! As soon as he came in, the two women wished him a happy New Year,—his daughter by putting her arms round his neck and caressing him; Madame Grandet gravely and with dignity.

"Ha! ha! my child," he said, kissing his daughter on both cheeks. "I work for you, don't you see? I think of your happiness. Must have money to be happy. Without money there's not a particle of happiness. Here! there's a new napoleon for you. I sent to Paris for it. On my word of honor, it's all the gold I have; you are the only one that has got any gold. I want to see your gold, little one."

"Oh! it is too cold; let us have breakfast," answered Eugenie.

"Well, after breakfast, then; it will help the digestion. That fat des Grassins sent me the pate. Eat as much as you like, my children, it costs nothing. Des Grassins is getting along very well. I am satisfied with him. The old fish is doing Charles a good service, and gratis too. He is making a very good settlement of that poor deceased Grandet's business. Hoo! hoo!" he muttered, with his mouth full, after a pause, "how good it is! Eat some, wife; that will feed you for at least two days."

"I am not hungry. I am very poorly; you know that."

"Ah, bah! you can stuff yourself as full as you please without danger, you're a Bertelliere; they are all hearty. You are a bit yellow, that's true; but I like yellow, myself."

The expectation of ignominious and public death is perhaps less horrible to

a condemned criminal than the anticipation of what was coming after breakfast to Madame Grandet and Eugenie. The more gleefully the old man talked and ate, the more their hearts shrank within them. The daughter, however, had an inward prop at this crisis,—she gathered strength through love.

"For him! for him!" she cried within her, "I would die a thousand deaths."

At this thought, she shot a glance at her mother which flamed with courage.

"Clear away," said Grandet to Nanon when, about eleven o'clock, breakfast was over, "but leave the table. We can spread your little treasure upon it," he said, looking at Eugenie. "Little? Faith! no; it isn't little. You possess, in actual value, five thousand nine hundred and fifty-nine francs and the forty I gave you just now. That makes six thousand francs, less one. Well, now see here, little one! I'll give you that one franc to make up the round number. Hey! what are you listening for, Nanon? Mind your own business; go and do your work."

Nanon disappeared.

"Now listen, Eugenie; you must give me back your gold. You won't refuse your father, my little girl, hein?"

The two women were dumb.

"I have no gold myself. I had some, but it is all gone. I'll give you in return six thousand francs in livres, and you are to put them just where I tell you. You mustn't think anything more about your 'dozen.' When I marry you (which will be soon) I shall get you a husband who can give you the finest 'dozen' ever seen in the provinces. Now attend to me, little girl. There's a fine chance for you; you can put your six thousand francs into government funds, and you will receive every six months nearly two hundred francs interest, without taxes, or repairs, or frost, or hail, or floods, or anything else to swallow up the money. Perhaps you don't like to part with your gold, hey, my girl? Never mind, bring it to me all the same. I'll get you some more like it,—like those Dutch coins and the portugaises, the rupees of Mogul, and the genovines,—I'll give you some more on your fete-days, and in three years you'll have got back half your little treasure. What's that you say? Look up, now. Come, go and get it, the precious metal. You ought to kiss me on the eyelids for telling you the secrets and the mysteries of the life and death of money. Yes, silver and gold live and swarm like men; they come, and go, and sweat, and multiply—"

Eugenie rose; but after making a few steps towards the door she turned abruptly, looked her father in the face, and said,—

"I have not got my gold."

"You have not got your gold!" cried Grandet, starting up erect, like a horse that hears a cannon fired beside him.

"No, I have not got it."

"You are mistaken, Eugenie."

"No."

"By the shears of my father!"

Whenever the old man swore that oath the rafters trembled.

"Holy Virgin! Madame is turning pale," cried Nanon.

"Grandet, your anger will kill me," said the poor mother.

"Ta, ta, ta, ta! nonsense; you never die in your family! Eugenie, what have you done with your gold?" he cried, rushing upon her.

"Monsieur," said the daughter, falling at Madame Grandet's knees, "my mother is ill. Look at her; do not kill her."

Grandet was frightened by the pallor which overspread his wife's face, usually so yellow.

"Nanon, help me to bed," said the poor woman in a feeble voice; "I am dying—"

Nanon gave her mistress an arm, Eugenie gave her another; but it was only with infinite difficulty that they could get her upstairs, she fell with exhaustion at every step. Grandet remained alone. However, in a few moments he went up six or eight stairs and called out,—

"Eugenie, when your mother is in bed, come down."

"Yes, father."

She soon came, after reassuring her mother.

"My daughter," said Grandet, "you will now tell me what you have done with your gold."

"My father, if you make me presents of which I am not the sole mistress, take them back," she answered coldly, picking up the napoleon from the chimney-piece and offering it to him.

Grandet seized the coin and slipped it into his breeches' pocket.

"I shall certainly never give you anything again. Not so much as that!" he said, clicking his thumb-nail against a front tooth. "Do you dare to despise your father? have you no confidence in him? Don't you know what a father is? If he is nothing for you, he is nothing at all. Where is your gold?"

"Father, I love and respect you, in spite of your anger; but I humbly ask you to remember that I am twenty-three years old. You have told me often that I have attained my majority, and I do not forget it. I have used my money as I chose to use it, and you may be sure that it was put to a good use—"

"What use?"

"That is an inviolable secret," she answered. "Have you no secrets?"

"I am the head of the family; I have my own affairs."

"And this is mine."

"It must be something bad if you can't tell it to your father, Mademoiselle Grandet."

"It is good, and I cannot tell it to my father."

"At least you can tell me when you parted with your gold?"

Eugenie made a negative motion with her head.

"You had it on your birthday, hein?"

She grew as crafty through love as her father was through avarice, and reiterated the negative sign.

"Was there ever such obstinacy! It's a theft," cried Grandet, his voice going up in a crescendo which gradually echoed through the house. "What! here, in my own home, under my very eyes, somebody has taken your gold!—the only gold we have!—and I'm not to know who has got it! Gold is a precious thing. Virtuous girls go wrong sometimes, and give—I don't know what; they do it among the great people, and even among the bourgeoisie. But give their gold! —for you have given it to some one, hein?—"

Eugenie was silent and impassive.

"Was there ever such a daughter? Is it possible that I am your father? If you have invested it anywhere, you must have a receipt—"

"Was I free—yes or no—to do what I would with my own? Was it not mine?"

"You are a child."

"Of age."

Dumbfounded by his daughter's logic, Grandet turned pale and stamped and swore. When at last he found words, he cried: "Serpent! Cursed girl! Ah, deceitful creature! You know I love you, and you take advantage of it. She'd cut her father's throat! Good God! you've given our fortune to that ne'er-do-well,—that dandy with morocco boots! By the shears of my father! I can't

disinherit you, but I curse you,—you and your cousin and your children! Nothing good will come of it! Do you hear? If it was to Charles—but, no; it's impossible. What! has that wretched fellow robbed me?—"

He looked at his daughter, who continued cold and silent.

"She won't stir; she won't flinch! She's more Grandet than I'm Grandet! Ha! you have not given your gold for nothing? Come, speak the truth!"

Eugenie looked at her father with a sarcastic expression that stung him.

"Eugenie, you are here, in my house,—in your father's house. If you wish to stay here, you must submit yourself to me. The priests tell you to obey me." Eugenie bowed her head. "You affront me in all I hold most dear. I will not see you again until you submit. Go to your chamber. You will stay there till I give you permission to leave it. Nanon will bring you bread and water. You hear me —go!"

Eugenie burst into tears and fled up to her mother. Grandet, after marching two or three times round the garden in the snow without heeding the cold, suddenly suspected that his daughter had gone to her mother; only too happy to find her disobedient to his orders, he climbed the stairs with the agility of a cat and appeared in Madame Grandet's room just as she was stroking Eugenie's hair, while the girl's face was hidden in her motherly bosom.

"Be comforted, my poor child," she was saying; "your father will get over it."

"She has no father!" said the old man. "Can it be you and I, Madame Grandet, who have given birth to such a disobedient child? A fine education, —religious, too! Well! why are you not in your chamber? Come, to prison, to prison, mademoiselle!"

"Would you deprive me of my daughter, monsieur?" said Madame Grandet, turning towards him a face that was now red with fever.

"If you want to keep her, carry her off! Clear out—out of my house, both of you! Thunder! where is the gold? what's become of the gold?"

Eugenie rose, looked proudly at her father, and withdrew to her room. Grandet turned the key of the door.

"Nanon," he cried, "put out the fire in the hall."

Then he sat down in an armchair beside his wife's fire and said to her,—

"Undoubtedly she has given the gold to that miserable seducer, Charles, who only wanted our money."

"I knew nothing about it," she answered, turning to the other side of the

bed, that she might escape the savage glances of her husband. "I suffer so much from your violence that I shall never leave this room, if I trust my own presentiments, till I am carried out of it in my coffin. You ought to have spared me this suffering, monsieur,—you, to whom I have caused no pain; that is, I think so. Your daughter loves you. I believe her to be as innocent as the babe unborn. Do not make her wretched. Revoke your sentence. The cold is very severe; you may give her some serious illness."

"I will not see her, neither will I speak to her. She shall stay in her room, on bread and water, until she submits to her father. What the devil! shouldn't a father know where the gold in his house has gone to? She owned the only rupees in France, perhaps, and the Dutch ducats and the genovines—"

"Monsieur, Eugenie is our only child; and even if she had thrown them into the water—"

"Into the water!" cried her husband; "into the water! You are crazy, Madame Grandet! What I have said is said; you know that well enough. If you want peace in this household, make your daughter confess, pump it out of her. Women understand how to do that better than we do. Whatever she has done, I sha'n't eat her. Is she afraid of me? Even if she has plastered Charles with gold from head to foot, he is on the high seas, and nobody can get at him, hein!"

"But, monsieur—" Excited by the nervous crisis through which she had passed, and by the fate of her daughter, which brought forth all her tenderness and all her powers of mind, Madame Grandet suddenly observed a frightful movement of her husband's wen, and, in the very act of replying, she changed her speech without changing the tones of her voice,—"But, monsieur, I have not more influence over her than you have. She has said nothing to me; she takes after you."

"Tut, tut! Your tongue is hung in the middle this morning. Ta, ta, ta, ta! You are setting me at defiance, I do believe. I daresay you are in league with her."

He looked fixedly at his wife.

"Monsieur Grandet, if you wish to kill me, you have only to go on like this. I tell you, monsieur,—and if it were to cost me my life, I would say it,—you do wrong by your daughter; she is more in the right than you are. That money belonged to her; she is incapable of making any but a good use of it, and God alone has the right to know our good deeds. Monsieur, I implore you, take Eugenie back into favor; forgive her. If you will do this you will lessen the injury your anger has done me; perhaps you will save my life. My daughter! oh, monsieur, give me back my daughter!"

"I shall decamp," he said; "the house is not habitable. A mother and

daughter talking and arguing like that! Broooouh! Pouah! A fine New Year's present you've made me, Eugenie," he called out. "Yes, yes, cry away! What you've done will bring you remorse, do you hear? What's the good of taking the sacrament six times every three months, if you give away your father's gold secretly to an idle fellow who'll eat your heart out when you've nothing else to give him? You'll find out some day what your Charles is worth, with his morocco boots and supercilious airs. He has got neither heart nor soul if he dared to carry off a young girl's treasure without the consent of her parents."

When the street-door was shut, Eugenie came out of her room and went to her mother.

"What courage you have had for your daughter's sake!" she said.

"Ah! my child, see where forbidden things may lead us. You forced me to tell a lie."

"I will ask God to punish only me."

"Is it true," cried Nanon, rushing in alarmed, "that mademoiselle is to be kept on bread and water for the rest of her life?"

"What does that signify, Nanon?" said Eugenie tranquilly.

"Goodness! do you suppose I'll eat frippe when the daughter of the house is eating dry bread? No, no!"

"Don't say a word about all this, Nanon," said Eugenie.

"I'll be as mute as a fish; but you'll see!"

Grandet dined alone for the first time in twenty-four years.

"So you're a widower, monsieur," said Nanon; "it must be disagreeable to be a widower with two women in the house."

"I did not speak to you. Hold your jaw, or I'll turn you off! What is that I hear boiling in your saucepan on the stove?"

"It is grease I'm trying out."

"There will be some company to-night. Light the fire."

The Cruchots, Madame des Grassins, and her son arrived at the usual hour of eight, and were surprised to see neither Madame Grandet nor her daughter.

"My wife is not very well, and Eugenie is with her," said the old wine-grower, whose face betrayed no emotion.

At the end of an hour spent in idle conversation, Madame des Grassins, who had gone up to see Madame Grandet, came down, and every one inquired,—

"How is Madame Grandet?"

"Not at all well," she answered; "her condition seems to me really alarming. At her age you ought to take every precaution, Papa Grandet."

"We'll see about it," said the old man in an absent way.

They all wished him good-night. When the Cruchots got into the street Madame des Grassins said to them,—

"There is something going on at the Grandets. The mother is very ill without her knowing it. The girl's eyes are red, as if she had been crying all day. Can they be trying to marry her against her will?"

When Grandet had gone to bed Nanon came softly to Eugenie's room in her stockinged feet and showed her a pate baked in a saucepan.

"See, mademoiselle," said the good soul, "Cornoiller gave me a hare. You eat so little that this pate will last you full a week; in such frosty weather it won't spoil. You sha'n't live on dry bread, I'm determined; it isn't wholesome."

"Poor Nanon!" said Eugenie, pressing her hand.

"I've made it downright good and dainty, and he never found it out. I bought the lard and the spices out of my six francs: I'm the mistress of my own money"; and she disappeared rapidly, fancying she heard Grandet.

XI

For several months the old wine-grower came constantly to his wife's room at all hours of the day, without ever uttering his daughter's name, or seeing her, or making the smallest allusion to her. Madame Grandet did not leave her chamber, and daily grew worse. Nothing softened the old man; he remained unmoved, harsh, and cold as a granite rock. He continued to go and come about his business as usual; but ceased to stutter, talked less, and was more obdurate in business transactions than ever before. Often he made mistakes in adding up his figures.

"Something is going on at the Grandets," said the Grassinists and the Cruchotines.

"What has happened in the Grandet family?" became a fixed question which everybody asked everybody else at the little evening-parties of Saumur. Eugenie went to Mass escorted by Nanon. If Madame des Grassins said a few words to her on coming out of church, she answered in an evasive manner, without satisfying any curiosity. However, at the end of two months, it became

impossible to hide, either from the three Cruchots or from Madame des Grassins, the fact that Eugenie was in confinement. There came a moment when all pretexts failed to explain her perpetual absence. Then, though it was impossible to discover by whom the secret had been betrayed, all the town became aware that ever since New Year's day Mademoiselle Grandet had been kept in her room without fire, on bread and water, by her father's orders, and that Nanon cooked little dainties and took them to her secretly at night. It was even known that the young woman was not able to see or take care of her mother, except at certain times when her father was out of the house.

Grandet's conduct was severely condemned. The whole town outlawed him, so to speak; they remembered his treachery, his hard-heartedness, and they excommunicated him. When he passed along the streets, people pointed him out and muttered at him. When his daughter came down the winding street, accompanied by Nanon, on her way to Mass or Vespers, the inhabitants ran to the windows and examined with intense curiosity the bearing of the rich heiress and her countenance, which bore the impress of angelic gentleness and melancholy. Her imprisonment and the condemnation of her father were as nothing to her. Had she not a map of the world, the little bench, the garden, the angle of the wall? Did she not taste upon her lips the honey that love's kisses left there? She was ignorant for a time that the town talked about her, just as Grandet himself was ignorant of it. Pious and pure in heart before God, her conscience and her love helped her to suffer patiently the wrath and vengeance of her father.

One deep grief silenced all others. Her mother, that gentle, tender creature, made beautiful by the light which shone from the inner to the outer as she approached the tomb,—her mother was perishing from day to day. Eugenie often reproached herself as the innocent cause of the slow, cruel malady that was wasting her away. This remorse, though her mother soothed it, bound her still closer to her love. Every morning, as soon as her father left the house, she went to the bedside of her mother, and there Nanon brought her breakfast. The poor girl, sad, and suffering through the sufferings of her mother, would turn her face to the old servant with a mute gesture, weeping, and yet not daring to speak of her cousin. It was Madame Grandet who first found courage to say,—

"Where is he? Why does he not write?"

"Let us think about him, mother, but not speak of him. You are ill—you, before all."

"All" meant "him."

"My child," said Madame Grandet, "I do not wish to live. God protects me and enables me to look with joy to the end of my misery."

Every utterance of this woman was unfalteringly pious and Christian. Sometimes, during the first months of the year, when her husband came to breakfast with her and tramped up and down the room, she would say to him a few religious words, always spoken with angelic sweetness, yet with the firmness of a woman to whom approaching death lends a courage she had lacked in life.

"Monsieur, I thank you for the interest you take in my health," she would answer when he made some commonplace inquiry; "but if you really desire to render my last moments less bitter and to ease my grief, take back your daughter: be a Christian, a husband, and a father."

When he heard these words, Grandet would sit down by the bed with the air of a man who sees the rain coming and quietly gets under the shelter of a gateway till it is over. When these touching, tender, and religious supplications had all been made, he would say,—

"You are rather pale to-day, my poor wife."

Absolute forgetfulness of his daughter seemed graven on his stony brow, on his closed lips. He was unmoved by the tears which flowed down the white cheeks of his unhappy wife as she listened to his meaningless answers.

"May God pardon you," she said, "even as I pardon you! You will some day stand in need of mercy."

Since Madame Grandet's illness he had not dared to make use of his terrible "Ta, ta, ta, ta!" Yet, for all that, his despotic nature was not disarmed by this angel of gentleness, whose ugliness day by day decreased, driven out by the ineffable expression of moral qualities which shone upon her face. She was all soul. The spirit of prayer seemed to purify her and refine those homely features and make them luminous. Who has not seen the phenomenon of a like transfiguration on sacred faces where the habits of the soul have triumphed over the plainest features, giving them that spiritual illumination whose light comes from the purity and nobility of the inward thought? The spectacle of this transformation wrought by the struggle which consumed the last shreds of the human life of this woman, did somewhat affect the old cooper, though feebly, for his nature was of iron; if his language ceased to be contemptuous, an imperturbable silence, which saved his dignity as master of the household, took its place and ruled his conduct.

When the faithful Nanon appeared in the market, many quips and quirks and complaints about the master whistled in her ears; but however loudly public opinion condemned Monsieur Grandet, the old servant defended him, for the honor of the family.

"Well!" she would say to his detractors, "don't we all get hard as we grow

old? Why shouldn't he get horny too? Stop telling lies. Mademoiselle lives like a queen. She's alone, that's true; but she likes it. Besides, my masters have good reasons."

At last, towards the end of spring, Madame Grandet, worn out by grief even more than by illness, having failed, in spite of her prayers, to reconcile the father and daughter, confided her secret troubles to the Cruchots.

"Keep a girl of twenty-three on bread and water!" cried Monsieur de Bonfons; "without any reason, too! Why, that constitutes wrongful cruelty; she can contest, as much in as upon—"

"Come, nephew, spare us your legal jargon," said the notary. "Set your mind at ease, madame; I will put a stop to such treatment to-morrow."

Eugenie, hearing herself mentioned, came out of her room.

"Gentlemen," she said, coming forward with a proud step, "I beg you not to interfere in this matter. My father is master in his own house. As long as I live under his roof I am bound to obey him. His conduct is not subject to the approbation or the disapprobation of the world; he is accountable to God only. I appeal to your friendship to keep total silence in this affair. To blame my father is to attack our family honor. I am much obliged to you for the interest you have shown in me; you will do me an additional service if you will put a stop to the offensive rumors which are current in the town, of which I am accidentally informed."

"She is right," said Madame Grandet.

"Mademoiselle, the best way to stop such rumors is to procure your liberty," answered the old notary respectfully, struck with the beauty which seclusion, melancholy, and love had stamped upon her face.

"Well, my daughter, let Monsieur Cruchot manage the matter if he is so sure of success. He understands your father, and how to manage him. If you wish to see me happy for my few remaining days, you must, at any cost, be reconciled to your father."

On the morrow Grandet, in pursuance of a custom he had begun since Eugenie's imprisonment, took a certain number of turns up and down the little garden; he had chosen the hour when Eugenie brushed and arranged her hair. When the old man reached the walnut-tree he hid behind its trunk and remained for a few moments watching his daughter's movements, hesitating, perhaps, between the course to which the obstinacy of his character impelled him and his natural desire to embrace his child. Sometimes he sat down on the rotten old bench where Charles and Eugenie had vowed eternal love; and then she, too, looked at her father secretly in the mirror before which she stood. If

he rose and continued his walk, she sat down obligingly at the window and looked at the angle of the wall where the pale flowers hung, where the Venus-hair grew from the crevices with the bindweed and the sedum,—a white or yellow stone-crop very abundant in the vineyards of Saumur and at Tours. Maitre Cruchot came early, and found the old wine-grower sitting in the fine June weather on the little bench, his back against the division wall of the garden, engaged in watching his daughter.

"What may you want, Maitre Cruchot?" he said, perceiving the notary.

"I came to speak to you on business."

"Ah! ah! have you brought some gold in exchange for my silver?"

"No, no, I have not come about money; it is about your daughter Eugenie. All the town is talking of her and you."

"What does the town meddle for? A man's house is his castle."

"Very true; and a man may kill himself if he likes, or, what is worse, he may fling his money into the gutter."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, your wife is very ill, my friend. You ought to consult Monsieur Bergerin; she is likely to die. If she does die without receiving proper care, you will not be very easy in mind, I take it."

"Ta, ta, ta, ta! you know a deal about my wife! These doctors, if they once get their foot in your house, will come five and six times a day."

"Of course you will do as you think best. We are old friends; there is no one in all Saumur who takes more interest than I in what concerns you. Therefore, I was bound to tell you this. However, happen what may, you have the right to do as you please; you can choose your own course. Besides, that is not what brings me here. There is another thing which may have serious results for you. After all, you can't wish to kill your wife; her life is too important to you. Think of your situation in connection with your daughter if Madame Grandet dies. You must render an account to Eugenie, because you enjoy your wife's estate only during her lifetime. At her death your daughter can claim a division of property, and she may force you to sell Froidfond. In short, she is her mother's heir, and you are not."

These words fell like a thunderbolt on the old man, who was not as wise about law as he was about business. He had never thought of a legal division of the estate.

"Therefore I advise you to treat her kindly," added Cruchot, in conclusion.

"But do you know what she has done, Cruchot?"

"What?" asked the notary, curious to hear the truth and find out the cause of the quarrel.

"She has given away her gold!"

"Well, wasn't it hers?" said the notary.

"They all tell me that!" exclaimed the old man, letting his arms fall to his sides with a movement that was truly tragic.

"Are you going—for a mere nothing,"—resumed Cruchot, "to put obstacles in the way of the concessions which you will be obliged to ask from your daughter as soon as her mother dies?"

"Do you call six thousand francs a mere nothing?"

"Hey! my old friend, do you know what the inventory of your wife's property will cost, if Eugenie demands the division?"

"How much?"

"Two, three, four thousand francs, perhaps! The property would have to be put up at auction and sold, to get at its actual value. Instead of that, if you are on good terms with—"

"By the shears of my father!" cried Grandet, turning pale as he suddenly sat down, "we will see about it, Cruchot."

After a moment's silence, full of anguish perhaps, the old man looked at the notary and said,—

"Life is very hard! It has many griefs! Cruchot," he continued solemnly, "you would not deceive me? Swear to me upon your honor that all you've told me is legally true. Show me the law; I must see the law!"

"My poor friend," said the notary, "don't I know my own business?"

"Then it is true! I am robbed, betrayed, killed, destroyed by my own daughter!"

"It is true that your daughter is her mother's heir."

"Why do we have children? Ah! my wife, I love her! Luckily she's sound and healthy; she's a Bertelliere."

"She has not a month to live."

Grandet struck his forehead, went a few steps, came back, cast a dreadful look on Cruchot, and said,—

"What can be done?"

"Eugenie can relinquish her claim to her mother's property. Should she do

this you would not disinherit her, I presume?—but if you want to come to such a settlement, you must not treat her harshly. What I am telling you, old man, is against my own interests. What do I live by, if it isn't liquidations, inventories, conveyances, divisions of property?—"

"We'll see, we'll see! Don't let's talk any more about it, Cruchot; it wrings my vitals. Have you received any gold?"

"No; but I have a few old louis, a dozen or so, which you may have. My good friend, make it up with Eugenie. Don't you know all Saumur is pelting you with stones?"

"The scoundrels!"

"Come, the Funds are at ninety-nine. Do be satisfied for once in your life."

"At ninety-nine! Are they, Cruchot?"

"Yes."

"Hey, hey! Ninety-nine!" repeated the old man, accompanying the notary to the street-door. Then, too agitated by what he had just heard to stay in the house, he went up to his wife's room and said,—

"Come, mother, you may have your daughter to spend the day with you. I'm going to Froidfond. Enjoy yourselves, both of you. This is our wedding-day, wife. See! here are sixty francs for your altar at the Fete-Dieu; you've wanted one for a long time. Come, cheer up, enjoy yourself, and get well! Hurrah for happiness!"

He threw ten silver pieces of six francs each upon the bed, and took his wife's head between his hands and kissed her forehead.

"My good wife, you are getting well, are not you?"

"How can you think of receiving the God of mercy in your house when you refuse to forgive your daughter?" she said with emotion.

"Ta, ta, ta, ta!" said Grandet in a coaxing voice. "We'll see about that."

"Merciful heaven! Eugenie," cried the mother, flushing with joy, "come and kiss your father; he forgives you!"

But the old man had disappeared. He was going as fast as his legs could carry him towards his vineyards, trying to get his confused ideas into order. Grandet had entered his seventy-sixth year. During the last two years his avarice had increased upon him, as all the persistent passions of men increase at a certain age. As if to illustrate an observation which applies equally to misers, ambitious men, and others whose lives are controlled by any dominant idea, his affections had fastened upon one special symbol of his passion. The

sight of gold, the possession of gold, had become a monomania. His despotic spirit had grown in proportion to his avarice, and to part with the control of the smallest fraction of his property at the death of his wife seemed to him a thing "against nature." To declare his fortune to his daughter, to give an inventory of his property, landed and personal, for the purposes of division—

"Why," he cried aloud in the midst of a field where he was pretending to examine a vine, "it would be cutting my throat!"

He came at last to a decision, and returned to Saumur in time for dinner, resolved to unbend to Eugenie, and pet and coax her, that he might die regally, holding the reins of his millions in his own hands so long as the breath was in his body. At the moment when the old man, who chanced to have his pass-key in his pocket, opened the door and climbed with a stealthy step up the stairway to go into his wife's room, Eugenie had brought the beautiful dressing-case from the oak cabinet and placed it on her mother's bed. Mother and daughter, in Grandet's absence, allowed themselves the pleasure of looking for a likeness to Charles in the portrait of his mother.

"It is exactly his forehead and his mouth," Eugenie was saying as the old man opened the door. At the look which her husband cast upon the gold, Madame Grandet cried out,—

"O God, have pity upon us!"

The old man sprang upon the box as a famished tiger might spring upon a sleeping child.

"What's this?" he said, snatching the treasure and carrying it to the window. "Gold, good gold!" he cried. "All gold,—it weighs two pounds! Ha, ha! Charles gave you that for your money, did he? Hein! Why didn't you tell me so? It was a good bargain, little one! Yes, you are my daughter, I see that —" Eugenie trembled in every limb. "This came from Charles, of course, didn't it?" continued the old man.

"Yes, father; it is not mine. It is a sacred trust."

"Ta, ta, ta, ta! He took your fortune, and now you can get it back."

"Father!"

Grandet took his knife to pry out some of the gold; to do this, he placed the dressing-case on a chair. Eugenie sprang forward to recover it; but her father, who had his eye on her and on the treasure too, pushed her back so violently with a thrust of his arm that she fell upon her mother's bed.

"Monsieur, monsieur!" cried the mother, lifting herself up.

Grandet had opened his knife, and was about to apply it to the gold.

"Father!" cried Eugenie, falling on her knees and dragging herself close to him with clasped hands, "father, in the name of all the saints and the Virgin! in the name of Christ who died upon the cross! in the name of your eternal salvation, father! for my life's sake, father!—do not touch that! It is neither yours nor mine. It is a trust placed in my hands by an unhappy relation: I must give it back to him uninjured!"

"If it is a trust, why were you looking at it? To look at it is as bad as touching it."

"Father, don't destroy it, or you will disgrace me! Father, do you hear?"

"Oh, have pity!" said the mother.

"Father!" cried Eugenie in so startling a voice that Nanon ran upstairs terrified. Eugenie sprang upon a knife that was close at hand.

"Well, what now?" said Grandet coldly, with a callous smile.

"Oh, you are killing me!" said the mother.

"Father, if your knife so much as cuts a fragment of that gold, I will stab myself with this one! You have already driven my mother to her death; you will now kill your child! Do as you choose! Wound for wound!"

Grandet held his knife over the dressing-case and hesitated as he looked at his daughter.

"Are you capable of doing it, Eugenie?" he said.

"Yes, yes!" said the mother.

"She'll do it if she says so!" cried Nanon. "Be reasonable, monsieur, for once in your life."

The old man looked at the gold and then at his daughter alternately for an instant. Madame Grandet fainted.

"There! don't you see, monsieur, that madame is dying?" cried Nanon.

"Come, come, my daughter, we won't quarrel for a box! Here, take it!" he cried hastily, flinging the case upon the bed. "Nanon, go and fetch Monsieur Bergerin! Come, mother," said he, kissing his wife's hand, "it's all over! There! we've made up—haven't we, little one? No more dry bread; you shall have all you want—Ah, she opens her eyes! Well, mother, little mother, come! See, I'm kissing Eugenie! She loves her cousin, and she may marry him if she wants to; she may keep his case. But don't die, mother; live a long time yet, my poor wife! Come, try to move! Listen! you shall have the finest altar that ever was made in Saumur."

"Oh, how can you treat your wife and daughter so!" said Madame Grandet

in a feeble voice.

"I won't do so again, never again," cried her husband; "you shall see, my poor wife!" He went to his inner room and returned with a handful of louis, which he scattered on the bed. "Here, Eugenie! see, wife! all these are for you," he said, fingering the coins. "Come, be happy, wife! feel better, get well; you sha'n't want for anything, nor Eugenie either. Here's a hundred louis d'or for her. You won't give these away, will you, Eugenie, hein?"

Madame Grandet and her daughter looked at each other in astonishment.

"Take back your money, father; we ask for nothing but your affection."

"Well, well, that's right!" he said, pocketing the coins; "let's be good friends! We will all go down to dinner to-day, and we'll play loto every evening for two sous. You shall both be happy. Hey, wife?"

"Alas! I wish I could, if it would give you pleasure," said the dying woman; "but I cannot rise from my bed."

"Poor mother," said Grandet, "you don't know how I love you! and you too, my daughter!" He took her in his arms and kissed her. "Oh, how good it is to kiss a daughter when we have been angry with her! There, mother, don't you see it's all over now? Go and put that away, Eugenie," he added, pointing to the case. "Go, don't be afraid! I shall never speak of it again, never!"

Monsieur Bergerin, the celebrated doctor of Saumur, presently arrived. After an examination, he told Grandet positively that his wife was very ill; but that perfect peace of mind, a generous diet, and great care might prolong her life until the autumn.

"Will all that cost much?" said the old man. "Will she need medicines?"

"Not much medicine, but a great deal of care," answered the doctor, who could scarcely restrain a smile.

"Now, Monsieur Bergerin," said Grandet, "you are a man of honor, are not you? I trust to you! Come and see my wife how and when you think necessary. Save my good wife! I love her,—don't you see?—though I never talk about it; I keep things to myself. I'm full of trouble. Troubles began when my brother died; I have to spend enormous sums on his affairs in Paris. Why, I'm paying through my nose; there's no end to it. Adieu, monsieur! If you can save my wife, save her. I'll spare no expense, not even if it costs me a hundred or two hundred francs."

In spite of Grandet's fervent wishes for the health of his wife, whose death threatened more than death to him; in spite of the consideration he now showed on all occasions for the least wish of his astonished wife and daughter; in spite of the tender care which Eugenie lavished upon her mother,—Madame

Grandet rapidly approached her end. Every day she grew weaker and wasted visibly, as women of her age when attacked by serious illness are wont to do. She was fragile as the foliage in autumn; the radiance of heaven shone through her as the sun strikes athwart the withering leaves and gilds them. It was a death worthy of her life,—a Christian death; and is not that sublime? In the month of October, 1822, her virtues, her angelic patience, her love for her daughter, seemed to find special expression; and then she passed away without a murmur. Lamb without spot, she went to heaven, regretting only the sweet companion of her cold and dreary life, for whom her last glance seemed to prophesy a destiny of sorrows. She shrank from leaving her ewe-lamb, white as herself, alone in the midst of a selfish world that sought to strip her of her fleece and grasp her treasures.

"My child," she said as she expired, "there is no happiness except in heaven; you will know it some day."

XII

On the morrow of this death Eugenie felt a new motive for attachment to the house in which she was born, where she had suffered so much, where her mother had just died. She could not see the window and the chair on its castors without weeping. She thought she had mistaken the heart of her old father when she found herself the object of his tenderest cares. He came in the morning and gave her his arm to take her to breakfast; he looked at her for hours together with an eye that was almost kind; he brooded over her as though she had been gold. The old man was so unlike himself, he trembled so often before his daughter, that Nanon and the Cruchotines, who witnessed his weakness, attributed it to his great age, and feared that his faculties were giving away. But the day on which the family put on their mourning, and after dinner, to which meal Maitre Cruchot (the only person who knew his secret) had been invited, the conduct of the old miser was explained.

"My dear child," he said to Eugenie when the table had been cleared and the doors carefully shut, "you are now your mother's heiress, and we have a few little matters to settle between us. Isn't that so, Cruchot?"

"Yes."

"Is it necessary to talk of them to-day, father?"

"Yes, yes, little one; I can't bear the uncertainty in which I'm placed. I think you don't want to give me pain?"

"Oh! father—"

"Well, then! let us settle it all to-night."

"What is it you wish me to do?"

"My little girl, it is not for me to say. Tell her, Cruchot."

"Mademoiselle, your father does not wish to divide the property, nor sell the estate, nor pay enormous taxes on the ready money which he may possess. Therefore, to avoid all this, he must be released from making the inventory of his whole fortune, part of which you inherit from your mother, and which is now undivided between you and your father—"

"Cruchot, are you quite sure of what you are saying before you tell it to a mere child?"

"Let me tell it my own way, Grandet."

"Yes, yes, my friend. Neither you nor my daughter wish to rob me,—do you, little one?"

"But, Monsieur Cruchot, what am I to do?" said Eugenie impatiently.

"Well," said the notary, "it is necessary to sign this deed, by which you renounce your rights to your mother's estate and leave your father the use and disposition, during his lifetime, of all the property undivided between you, of which he guarantees you the capital."

"I do not understand a word of what you are saying," returned Eugenie; "give me the deed, and show me where I am to sign it."

Pere Grandet looked alternately at the deed and at his daughter, at his daughter and at the deed, undergoing as he did so such violent emotion that he wiped the sweat from his brow.

"My little girl," he said, "if, instead of signing this deed, which will cost a great deal to record, you would simply agree to renounce your rights as heir to your poor dear, deceased mother's property, and would trust to me for the future, I should like it better. In that case I will pay you monthly the good round sum of a hundred francs. See, now, you could pay for as many masses as you want for anybody—Hein! a hundred francs a month—in livres?"

"I will do all you wish, father."

"Mademoiselle," said the notary, "it is my duty to point out to you that you are despoiling yourself without guarantee—"

"Good heavens! what is all that to me?"

"Hold your tongue, Cruchot! It's settled, all settled," cried Grandet, taking his daughter's hand and striking it with his own. "Eugenie, you won't go back on your word?—you are an honest girl, hein?"

"Oh! father!—"

He kissed her effusively, and pressed her in his arms till he almost choked her.

"Go, my good child, you restore your father's life; but you only return to him that which he gave you: we are quits. This is how business should be done. Life is a business. I bless you! you are a virtuous girl, and you love your father. Do just what you like in future. To-morrow, Cruchot," he added, looking at the horrified notary, "you will see about preparing the deed of relinquishment, and then enter it on the records of the court."

The next morning Eugenie signed the papers by which she herself completed her spoliation. At the end of the first year, however, in spite of his bargain, the old man had not given his daughter one sou of the hundred francs he had so solemnly pledged to her. When Eugenie pleasantly reminded him of this, he could not help coloring, and went hastily to his secret hiding-place, from whence he brought down about a third of the jewels he had taken from his nephew, and gave them to her.

"There, little one," he said in a sarcastic tone, "do you want those for your twelve hundred francs?"

"Oh! father, truly? will you really give them to me?"

"I'll give you as many more next year," he said, throwing them into her apron. "So before long you'll get all his gewgaws," he added, rubbing his hands, delighted to be able to speculate on his daughter's feelings.

Nevertheless, the old man, though still robust, felt the importance of initiating his daughter into the secrets of his thrift and its management. For two consecutive years he made her order the household meals in his presence and receive the rents, and he taught her slowly and successively the names and remunerative capacity of his vineyards and his farms. About the third year he had so thoroughly accustomed her to his avaricious methods that they had turned into the settled habits of her own life, and he was able to leave the household keys in her charge without anxiety, and to install her as mistress of the house.

Five years passed away without a single event to relieve the monotonous existence of Eugenie and her father. The same actions were performed daily with the automatic regularity of clockwork. The deep sadness of Mademoiselle Grandet was known to every one; but if others surmised the cause, she herself never uttered a word that justified the suspicions which all Saumur entertained about the state of the rich heiress's heart. Her only society was made up of the three Cruchots and a few of their particular friends whom they had, little by little, introduced into the Grandet household. They had

taught her to play whist, and they came every night for their game. During the year 1827 her father, feeling the weight of his infirmities, was obliged to initiate her still further into the secrets of his landed property, and told her that in case of difficulty she was to have recourse to Maitre Cruchot, whose integrity was well known to him.

Towards the end of this year the old man, then eighty-two, was seized by paralysis, which made rapid progress. Dr. Bergerin gave him up. Eugenie, feeling that she was about to be left alone in the world, came, as it were, nearer to her father, and clasped more tightly this last living link of affection. To her mind, as in that of all loving women, love was the whole of life. Charles was not there, and she devoted all her care and attention to the old father, whose faculties had begun to weaken, though his avarice remained instinctively acute. The death of this man offered no contrast to his life. In the morning he made them roll him to a spot between the chimney of his chamber and the door of the secret room, which was filled, no doubt, with gold. He asked for an explanation of every noise he heard, even the slightest; to the great astonishment of the notary, he even heard the watch-dog yawning in the court-yard. He woke up from his apparent stupor at the day and hour when the rents were due, or when accounts had to be settled with his vine-dressers, and receipts given. At such times he worked his chair forward on its castors until he faced the door of the inner room. He made his daughter open it, and watched while she placed the bags of money one upon another in his secret receptacles and relocked the door. Then she returned silently to her seat, after giving him the key, which he replaced in his waistcoat pocket and fingered from time to time. His old friend the notary, feeling sure that the rich heiress would inevitably marry his nephew the president, if Charles Grandet did not return, redoubled all his attentions; he came every day to take Grandet's orders, went on his errands to Froidfond, to the farms and the fields and the vineyards, sold the vintages, and turned everything into gold and silver, which found their way in sacks to the secret hiding-place.

At length the last struggle came, in which the strong frame of the old man slowly yielded to destruction. He was determined to sit at the chimney-corner facing the door of the secret room. He drew off and rolled up all the coverings which were laid over him, saying to Nanon, "Put them away, lock them up, for fear they should be stolen."

So long as he could open his eyes, in which his whole being had now taken refuge, he turned them to the door behind which lay his treasures, saying to his daughter, "Are they there? are they there?" in a tone of voice which revealed a sort of panic fear.

"Yes, my father," she would answer.

"Take care of the gold—put gold before me."

Eugenie would then spread coins on a table before him, and he would sit for hours together with his eyes fixed upon them, like a child who, at the moment it first begins to see, gazes in stupid contemplation at the same object, and like the child, a distressful smile would flicker upon his face.

"It warms me!" he would sometimes say, as an expression of beatitude stole across his features.

When the cure of the parish came to administer the last sacraments, the old man's eyes, sightless, apparently, for some hours, kindled at the sight of the cross, the candlesticks, and the holy-water vessel of silver; he gazed at them fixedly, and his wen moved for the last time. When the priest put the crucifix of silver-gilt to his lips, that he might kiss the Christ, he made a frightful gesture, as if to seize it; and that last effort cost him his life. He called Eugenie, whom he did not see, though she was kneeling beside him bathing with tears his stiffening hand, which was already cold.

"My father, bless me!" she entreated.

"Take care of it all. You will render me an account yonder!" he said, proving by these last words that Christianity must always be the religion of misers.

Eugenie Grandet was now alone in the world in that gray house, with none but Nanon to whom she could turn with the certainty of being heard and understood,—Nanon the sole being who loved her for herself and with whom she could speak of her sorrows. La Grande Nanon was a providence for Eugenie. She was not a servant, but a humble friend. After her father's death Eugenie learned from Maitre Cruchot that she possessed an income of three hundred thousand francs from landed and personal property in the arrondissement of Saumur; also six millions invested at three per cent in the Funds (bought at sixty, and now worth seventy-six francs); also two millions in gold coin, and a hundred thousand francs in silver crown-pieces, besides all the interest which was still to be collected. The sum total of her property reached seventeen millions.

"Where is my cousin?" was her one thought.

The day on which Maitre Cruchot handed in to his client a clear and exact schedule of the whole inheritance, Eugenie remained alone with Nanon, sitting beside the fireplace in the vacant hall, where all was now a memory, from the chair on castors which her mother had sat in, to the glass from which her cousin drank.

"Nanon, we are alone—"

"Yes, mademoiselle; and if I knew where he was, the darling, I'd go on foot to find him."

"The ocean is between us," she said.

While the poor heiress wept in company of an old servant, in that cold dark house, which was to her the universe, the whole province rang, from Nantes to Orleans, with the seventeen millions of Mademoiselle Grandet. Among her first acts she had settled an annuity of twelve hundred francs on Nanon, who, already possessed of six hundred more, became a rich and enviable match. In less than a month that good soul passed from single to wedded life under the protection of Antoine Cornoiller, who was appointed keeper of all Mademoiselle Grandet's estates. Madame Cornoiller possessed one striking advantage over her contemporaries. Although she was fifty-nine years of age, she did not look more than forty. Her strong features had resisted the ravages of time. Thanks to the healthy customs of her semi-conventual life, she laughed at old age from the vantage-ground of a rosy skin and an iron constitution. Perhaps she never looked as well in her life as she did on her marriage-day. She had all the benefits of her ugliness, and was big and fat and strong, with a look of happiness on her indestructible features which made a good many people envy Cornoiller.

"Fast colors!" said the draper.

"Quite likely to have children," said the salt merchant. "She's pickled in brine, saving your presence."

"She is rich, and that fellow Cornoiller has done a good thing for himself," said a third man.

When she came forth from the old house on her way to the parish church, Nanon, who was loved by all the neighborhood, received many compliments as she walked down the tortuous street. Eugenie had given her three dozen silver forks and spoons as a wedding present. Cornoiller, amazed at such magnificence, spoke of his mistress with tears in his eyes; he would willingly have been hacked in pieces in her behalf. Madame Cornoiller, appointed housekeeper to Mademoiselle Grandet, got as much happiness out of her new position as she did from the possession of a husband. She took charge of the weekly accounts; she locked up the provisions and gave them out daily, after the manner of her defunct master; she ruled over two servants,—a cook, and a maid whose business it was to mend the house-linen and make mademoiselle's dresses. Cornoiller combined the functions of keeper and bailiff. It is unnecessary to say that the women-servants selected by Nanon were "perfect treasures." Mademoiselle Grandet thus had four servants, whose devotion was unbounded. The farmers perceived no change after Monsieur Grandet's death; the usages and customs he had sternly established were scrupulously carried

out by Monsieur and Madame Cornoiller.

At thirty years of age Eugenie knew none of the joys of life. Her pale, sad childhood had glided on beside a mother whose heart, always misunderstood and wounded, had known only suffering. Leaving this life joyfully, the mother pitied the daughter because she still must live; and she left in her child's soul some fugitive remorse and many lasting regrets. Eugenie's first and only love was a wellspring of sadness within her. Meeting her lover for a few brief days, she had given him her heart between two kisses furtively exchanged; then he had left her, and a whole world lay between them. This love, cursed by her father, had cost the life of her mother and brought her only sorrow, mingled with a few frail hopes. Thus her upward spring towards happiness had wasted her strength and given her nothing in exchange for it. In the life of the soul, as in the physical life, there is an inspiration and a respiration; the soul needs to absorb the sentiments of another soul and assimilate them, that it may render them back enriched. Were it not for this glorious human phenomenon, there would be no life for the heart; air would be wanting; it would suffer, and then perish. Eugenie had begun to suffer. For her, wealth was neither a power nor a consolation; she could not live except through love, through religion, through faith in the future. Love explained to her the mysteries of eternity. Her heart and the Gospel taught her to know two worlds; she bathed, night and day, in the depths of two infinite thoughts, which for her may have had but one meaning. She drew back within herself, loving, and believing herself beloved. For seven years her passion had invaded everything. Her treasuries were not the millions whose revenues were rolling up; they were Charles's dressing-case, the portraits hanging above her bed, the jewels recovered from her father and proudly spread upon a bed of wool in a drawer of the oaken cabinet, the thimble of her aunt, used for a while by her mother, which she wore religiously as she worked at a piece of embroidery,—a Penelope's web, begun for the sole purpose of putting upon her finger that gold so rich in memories.

It seemed unlikely that Mademoiselle Grandet would marry during the period of her mourning. Her genuine piety was well known. Consequently the Cruchots, whose policy was sagely guided by the old abbe, contented themselves for the time being with surrounding the great heiress and paying her the most affectionate attentions. Every evening the hall was filled with a party of devoted Cruchotines, who sang the praises of its mistress in every key. She had her doctor in ordinary, her grand almoner, her chamberlain, her first lady of honor, her prime minister; above all, her chancellor, a chancellor who would fain have said much to her. If the heiress had wished for a train-bearer, one would instantly have been found. She was a queen, obsequiously flattered. Flattery never emanates from noble souls; it is the gift of little minds, who thus still further belittle themselves to worm their way into the vital being of the persons around whom they crawl. Flattery means self-interest. So the

people who, night after night, assembled in Mademoiselle Grandet's house (they called her Mademoiselle de Froidfond) outdid each other in expressions of admiration. This concert of praise, never before bestowed upon Eugenie, made her blush under its novelty; but insensibly her ear became habituated to the sound, and however coarse the compliments might be, she soon was so accustomed to hear her beauty lauded that if any new-comer had seemed to think her plain, she would have felt the reproach far more than she might have done eight years earlier. She ended at last by loving the incense, which she secretly laid at the feet of her idol. By degrees she grew accustomed to be treated as a sovereign and to see her court pressing around her every evening.

Monsieur de Bonfons was the hero of the little circle, where his wit, his person, his education, his amiability, were perpetually praised. One or another would remark that in seven years he had largely increased his fortune, that Bonfons brought in at least ten thousand francs a year, and was surrounded, like the other possessions of the Cruchots, by the vast domains of the heiress.

"Do you know, mademoiselle," said an habitual visitor, "that the Cruchots have an income of forty thousand francs among them!"

"And then, their savings!" exclaimed an elderly female Cruchotine, Mademoiselle de Gribeaucourt.

"A gentleman from Paris has lately offered Monsieur Cruchot two hundred thousand francs for his practice," said another. "He will sell it if he is appointed juge de paix."

"He wants to succeed Monsieur de Bonfons as president of the Civil courts, and is taking measures," replied Madame d'Orsonval. "Monsieur le president will certainly be made councillor."

"Yes, he is a very distinguished man," said another,—"don't you think so, mademoiselle?"

Monsieur de Bonfons endeavored to put himself in keeping with the role he sought to play. In spite of his forty years, in spite of his dusky and crabbed features, withered like most judicial faces, he dressed in youthful fashions, toyed with a bamboo cane, never took snuff in Mademoiselle de Froidfond's house, and came in a white cravat and a shirt whose pleated frill gave him a family resemblance to the race of turkeys. He addressed the beautiful heiress familiarly, and spoke of her as "Our dear Eugenie." In short, except for the number of visitors, the change from loto to whist, and the disappearance of Monsieur and Madame Grandet, the scene was about the same as the one with which this history opened. The pack were still pursuing Eugenie and her millions; but the hounds, more in number, lay better on the scent, and beset the prey more unitedly. If Charles could have dropped from the Indian Isles, he

would have found the same people and the same interests. Madame des Grassins, to whom Eugenie was full of kindness and courtesy, still persisted in tormenting the Cruchots. Eugenie, as in former days, was the central figure of the picture; and Charles, as heretofore, would still have been the sovereign of all. Yet there had been some progress. The flowers which the president formerly presented to Eugenie on her birthdays and fete-days had now become a daily institution. Every evening he brought the rich heiress a huge and magnificent bouquet, which Madame Cornoiller placed conspicuously in a vase, and secretly threw into a corner of the court-yard when the visitors had departed.

Early in the spring, Madame des Grassins attempted to trouble the peace of the Cruchotines by talking to Eugenie of the Marquis de Froidfond, whose ancient and ruined family might be restored if the heiress would give him back his estates through marriage. Madame des Grassins rang the changes on the peerage and the title of marquise, until, mistaking Eugenie's disdainful smile for acquiescence, she went about proclaiming that the marriage with "Monsieur Cruchot" was not nearly as certain as people thought.

"Though Monsieur de Froidfond is fifty," she said, "he does not look older than Monsieur Cruchot. He is a widower, and he has children, that's true. But then he is a marquis; he will be peer of France; and in times like these where you will find a better match? I know it for a fact that Pere Grandet, when he put all his money into Froidfond, intended to graft himself upon that stock; he often told me so. He was a deep one, that old man!"

"Ah! Nanon," said Eugenie, one night as she was going to bed, "how is it that in seven years he has never once written to me?"

XIII

While these events were happening in Saumur, Charles was making his fortune in the Indies. His commercial outfit had sold well. He began by realizing a sum of six thousand dollars. Crossing the line had brushed a good many cobwebs out of his brain; he perceived that the best means of attaining fortune in tropical regions, as well as in Europe, was to buy and sell men. He went to the coast of Africa and bought Negroes, combining his traffic in human flesh with that of other merchandise equally advantageous to his interests. He carried into this business an activity which left him not a moment of leisure. He was governed by the desire of reappearing in Paris with all the prestige of a large fortune, and by the hope of regaining a position even more brilliant than the one from which he had fallen.

By dint of jostling with men, travelling through many lands, and studying a variety of conflicting customs, his ideas had been modified and had become sceptical. He ceased to have fixed principles of right and wrong, for he saw what was called a crime in one country lauded as a virtue in another. In the perpetual struggle of selfish interests his heart grew cold, then contracted, and then dried up. The blood of the Grandets did not fail of its destiny; Charles became hard, and eager for prey. He sold Chinamen, Negroes, birds' nests, children, artists; he practised usury on a large scale; the habit of defrauding custom-houses soon made him less scrupulous about the rights of his fellow men. He went to the Island of St. Thomas and bought, for a mere song, merchandise that had been captured by pirates, and took it to ports where he could sell it at a good price. If the pure and noble face of Eugenie went with him on his first voyage, like that image of the Virgin which Spanish mariners fastened to their masts, if he attributed his first success to the magic influence of the prayers and intercessions of his gentle love, later on women of other kinds,—blacks, mulattoes, whites, and Indian dancing-girls,—orgies and adventures in many lands, completely effaced all recollection of his cousin, of Saumur, of the house, the bench, the kiss snatched in the dark passage. He remembered only the little garden shut in with crumbling walls, for it was there he learned the fate that had overtaken him; but he rejected all connection with his family. His uncle was an old dog who had filched his jewels; Eugenie had no place in his heart nor in his thoughts, though she did have a place in his accounts as a creditor for the sum of six thousand francs.

Such conduct and such ideas explain Charles Grandet's silence. In the Indies, at St. Thomas, on the coast of Africa, at Lisbon, and in the United States the adventurer had taken the pseudonym of Shepherd, that he might not compromise his own name. Charles Shepherd could safely be indefatigable, bold, grasping, and greedy of gain, like a man who resolves to snatch his fortune quibus cumque viis, and makes haste to have done with villany, that he may spend the rest of his life as an honest man.

With such methods, prosperity was rapid and brilliant; and in 1827 Charles Grandet returned to Bordeaux on the "Marie Caroline," a fine brig belonging to a royalist house of business. He brought with him nineteen hundred thousand francs worth of gold-dust, from which he expected to derive seven or eight per cent more at the Paris mint. On the brig he met a gentleman-in-ordinary to His Majesty Charles X., Monsieur d'Aubrion, a worthy old man who had committed the folly of marrying a woman of fashion with a fortune derived from the West India Islands. To meet the costs of Madame d'Aubrion's extravagance, he had gone out to the Indies to sell the property, and was now returning with his family to France.

Monsieur and Madame d'Aubrion, of the house of d'Aubrion de Buch, a

family of southern France, whose last captal, or chief, died before 1789, were now reduced to an income of about twenty thousand francs, and they possessed an ugly daughter whom the mother was resolved to marry without a dot,—the family fortune being scarcely sufficient for the demands of her own life in Paris. This was an enterprise whose success might have seemed problematical to most men of the world, in spite of the cleverness with which such men credit a fashionable woman; in fact, Madame d'Aubrion herself, when she looked at her daughter, almost despaired of getting rid of her to any one, even to a man craving connection with nobility. Mademoiselle d'Aubrion was a long, spare, spindling demoiselle, like her namesake the insect; her mouth was disdainful; over it hung a nose that was too long, thick at the end, sallow in its normal condition, but very red after a meal,—a sort of vegetable phenomenon which is particularly disagreeable when it appears in the middle of a pale, dull, and uninteresting face. In one sense she was all that a worldly mother, thirty-eight years of age and still a beauty with claims to admiration, could have wished. However, to counterbalance her personal defects, the marquise gave her daughter a distinguished air, subjected her to hygienic treatment which provisionally kept her nose at a reasonable flesh-tint, taught her the art of dressing well, endowed her with charming manners, showed her the trick of melancholy glances which interest a man and make him believe that he has found a long-sought angel, taught her the manoeuvre of the foot,—letting it peep beneath the petticoat, to show its tiny size, at the moment when the nose became aggressively red; in short, Madame d'Aubrion had cleverly made the very best of her offspring. By means of full sleeves, deceptive pads, puffed dresses amply trimmed, and high-pressure corsets, she had obtained such curious feminine developments that she ought, for the instruction of mothers, to have exhibited them in a museum.

Charles became very intimate with Madame d'Aubrion precisely because she was desirous of becoming intimate with him. Persons who were on board the brig declared that the handsome Madame d'Aubrion neglected no means of capturing so rich a son-in-law. On landing at Bordeaux in June, 1827, Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle d'Aubrion, and Charles lodged at the same hotel and started together for Paris. The hotel d'Aubrion was hampered with mortgages; Charles was destined to free it. The mother told him how delighted she would be to give up the ground-floor to a son-in-law. Not sharing Monsieur d'Aubrion's prejudices on the score of nobility, she promised Charles Grandet to obtain a royal ordinance from Charles X. which would authorize him, Grandet, to take the name and arms of d'Aubrion and to succeed, by purchasing the entailed estate for thirty-six thousand francs a year, to the titles of Captal de Buch and Marquis d'Aubrion. By thus uniting their fortunes, living on good terms, and profiting by sinecures, the two families might occupy the hotel d'Aubrion with an income of over a hundred thousand francs.

"And when a man has a hundred thousand francs a year, a name, a family, and a position at court,—for I will get you appointed as gentleman-of-the-bedchamber,—he can do what he likes," she said to Charles. "You can then become anything you choose,—master of the rolls in the council of State, prefect, secretary to an embassy, the ambassador himself, if you like. Charles X. is fond of d'Aubrion; they have known each other from childhood."

Intoxicated with ambition, Charles toyed with the hopes thus cleverly presented to him in the guise of confidences poured from heart to heart. Believing his father's affairs to have been settled by his uncle, he imagined himself suddenly anchored in the Faubourg Saint-Germain,—that social object of all desire, where, under shelter of Mademoiselle Mathilde's purple nose, he was to reappear as the Comte d'Aubrion, very much as the Dreux reappeared in Breze. Dazzled by the prosperity of the Restoration, which was tottering when he left France, fascinated by the splendor of aristocratic ideas, his intoxication, which began on the brig, increased after he reached Paris, and he finally determined to take the course and reach the high position which the selfish hopes of his would-be mother-in-law pointed out to him. His cousin counted for no more than a speck in this brilliant perspective; but he went to see Annette. True woman of the world, Annette advised her old friend to make the marriage, and promised him her support in all his ambitious projects. In her heart she was enchanted to fasten an ugly and uninteresting girl on Charles, whose life in the West Indies had rendered him very attractive. His complexion had bronzed, his manners had grown decided and bold, like those of a man accustomed to make sharp decisions, to rule, and to succeed. Charles breathed more at his ease in Paris, conscious that he now had a part to play.

Des Grassins, hearing of his return, of his approaching marriage and his large fortune, came to see him, and inquired about the three hundred thousand francs still required to settle his father's debts. He found Grandet in conference with a goldsmith, from whom he had ordered jewels for Mademoiselle d'Aubrion's corbeille, and who was then submitting the designs. Charles had brought back magnificent diamonds, and the value of their setting, together with the plate and jewelry of the new establishment, amounted to more than two hundred thousand francs. He received des Grassins, whom he did not recognize, with the impertinence of a young man of fashion conscious of having killed four men in as many duels in the Indies. Monsieur des Grassins had already called several times. Charles listened to him coldly, and then replied, without fully understanding what had been said to him,—

"My father's affairs are not mine. I am much obliged, monsieur, for the trouble you have been good enough to take,—by which, however, I really cannot profit. I have not earned two millions by the sweat of my brow to fling them at the head of my father's creditors."

"But suppose that your father's estate were within a few days to be declared bankrupt?"

"Monsieur, in a few days I shall be called the Comte d'Aubrion; you will understand, therefore, that what you threaten is of no consequence to me. Besides, you know as well as I do that when a man has an income of a hundred thousand francs his father has never failed." So saying, he politely edged Monsieur des Grassins to the door.

At the beginning of August in the same year, Eugenie was sitting on the little wooden bench where her cousin had sworn to love her eternally, and where she usually breakfasted if the weather were fine. The poor girl was happy, for the moment, in the fresh and joyous summer air, letting her memory recall the great and the little events of her love and the catastrophes which had followed it. The sun had just reached the angle of the ruined wall, so full of chinks, which no one, through a caprice of the mistress, was allowed to touch, though Cornoiller often remarked to his wife that "it would fall and crush somebody one of these days." At this moment the postman knocked, and gave a letter to Madame Cornoiller, who ran into the garden, crying out:

"Mademoiselle, a letter!" She gave it to her mistress, adding, "Is it the one you expected?"

The words rang as loudly in the heart of Eugenie as they echoed in sound from wall to wall of the court and garden.

"Paris—from him—he has returned!"

Eugenie turned pale and held the letter for a moment. She trembled so violently that she could not break the seal. La Grande Nanon stood before her, both hands on her hips, her joy puffing as it were like smoke through the cracks of her brown face.

"Read it, mademoiselle!"

"Ah, Nanon, why did he return to Paris? He went from Saumur."

"Read it, and you'll find out."

Eugenie opened the letter with trembling fingers. A cheque on the house of "Madame des Grassins and Coret, of Saumur," fluttered down. Nanon picked it up.

My dear Cousin,—

"No longer 'Eugenie,'" she thought, and her heart quailed.

You—

"He once said 'thou.'" She folded her arms and dared not read another

word; great tears gathered in her eyes.

"Is he dead?" asked Nanon.

"If he were, he could not write," said Eugenie.

She then read the whole letter, which was as follows:

My dear Cousin,—You will, I am sure, hear with pleasure of the success of my enterprise. You brought me luck; I have come back rich, and I have followed the advice of my uncle, whose death, together with that of my aunt, I have just learned from Monsieur des Grassins. The death of parents is in the course of nature, and we must succeed them. I trust you are by this time consoled. Nothing can resist time, as I am well aware. Yes, my dear cousin, the day of illusions is, unfortunately, gone for me. How could it be otherwise? Travelling through many lands, I have reflected upon life. I was a child when I went away,—I have come back a man. To-day, I think of many I did not dream of then. You are free, my dear cousin, and I am free still. Nothing apparently hinders the realization of our early hopes; but my nature is too loyal to hide from you the situation in which I find myself. I have not forgotten our relations; I have always remembered, throughout my long wanderings, the little wooden seat—

Eugenie rose as if she were sitting on live coals, and went away and sat down on the stone steps of the court.

—the little wooden seat where we vowed to love each other forever, the passage, the gray hall, my attic chamber, and the night when, by your delicate kindness, you made my future easier to me. Yes, these recollections sustained my courage; I said in my heart that you were thinking of me at the hour we had agreed upon. Have you always looked at the clouds at nine o'clock? Yes, I am sure of it. I cannot betray so true a friendship,—no, I must not deceive you. An alliance has been proposed to me which satisfies all my ideas of matrimony. Love in marriage is a delusion. My present experience warns me that in marrying we are bound to obey all social laws and meet the conventional demands of the world. Now, between you and me there are differences which might affect your future, my dear cousin, even more than they would mine. I will not here speak of your customs and inclinations, your education, nor yet of your habits, none of which are in keeping with Parisian life, or with the future which I have marked out for myself. My intention is to keep my household on a stately footing, to receive much company,—in short, to live in the world; and I think I remember that you love a quiet and tranquil life. I will be frank, and make you the judge of my situation; you have the right to understand it and to judge it.

I possess at the present moment an income of eighty thousand francs. This

fortune enables me to marry into the family of Aubrion, whose heiress, a young girl nineteen years of age, brings me a title, a place of gentleman-of-the-bed-chamber to His Majesty, and a very brilliant position. I will admit to you, my dear cousin, that I do not love Mademoiselle d'Aubrion; but in marrying her I secure to my children a social rank whose advantages will one day be incalculable: monarchical principles are daily coming more and more into favor. Thus in course of time my son, when he becomes Marquis d'Aubrion, having, as he then will have, an entailed estate with a rental of forty thousand francs a year, can obtain any position in the State which he may think proper to select. We owe ourselves to our children.

You see, my cousin, with what good faith I lay the state of my heart, my hopes, and my fortune before you. Possibly, after seven years' separation, you have yourself forgotten our youthful loves; but I have never forgotten either your kindness or my own words. I remember all, even words that were lightly uttered,—words by which a man less conscientious than I, with a heart less youthful and less upright, would scarcely feel himself bound. In telling you that the marriage I propose to make is solely one of convenience, that I still remember our childish love, am I not putting myself entirely in your hands and making you the mistress of my fate? am I not telling you that if I must renounce my social ambitions, I shall willingly content myself with the pure and simple happiness of which you have shown me so sweet an image?

"Tan, ta, ta—tan, ta, ti," sang Charles Grandet to the air of Non piu andrai, as he signed himself,—

Your devoted cousin, Charles.

"Thunder! that's doing it handsomely!" he said, as he looked about him for the cheque; having found it, he added the words:—

P.S.—I enclose a cheque on the des Grassins bank for eight thousand francs to your order, payable in gold, which includes the capital and interest of the sum you were kind enough to lend me. I am expecting a case from Bordeaux which contains a few things which you must allow me to offer you as a mark of my unceasing gratitude. You can send my dressing-case by the diligence to the hotel d'Aubrion, rue Hillerin-Bertin.

"By the diligence!" said Eugenie. "A thing for which I would have laid down my life!"

Terrible and utter disaster! The ship went down, leaving not a spar, not a plank, on a vast ocean of hope! Some women when they see themselves abandoned will try to tear their lover from the arms of a rival, they will kill her, and rush to the ends of the earth,—to the scaffold, to their tomb. That, no doubt, is fine; the motive of the crime is a great passion, which awes even

human justice. Other women bow their heads and suffer in silence; they go their way dying, resigned, weeping, forgiving, praying, and recollecting, till they draw their last breath. This is love,—true love, the love of angels, the proud love which lives upon its anguish and dies of it. Such was Eugenie's love after she had read that dreadful letter. She raised her eyes to heaven, thinking of the last words uttered by her dying mother, who, with the prescience of death, had looked into the future with clear and penetrating eyes: Eugenie, remembering that prophetic death, that prophetic life, measured with one glance her own destiny. Nothing was left for her; she could only unfold her wings, stretch upward to the skies, and live in prayer until the day of her deliverance.

"My mother was right," she said, weeping. "Suffer—and die!"

XIV

Eugenie came slowly back from the garden to the house, and avoided passing, as was her custom, through the corridor. But the memory of her cousin was in the gray old hall and on the chimney-piece, where stood a certain saucer and the old Sevres sugar-bowl which she used every morning at her breakfast.

This day was destined to be solemn throughout and full of events. Nanon announced the cure of the parish church. He was related to the Cruchots, and therefore in the interests of Monsieur de Bonfons. For some time past the old abbe had urged him to speak to Mademoiselle Grandet, from a purely religious point of view, about the duty of marriage for a woman in her position. When she saw her pastor, Eugenie supposed he had come for the thousand francs which she gave monthly to the poor, and she told Nanon to go and fetch them; but the cure only smiled.

"To-day, mademoiselle," he said, "I have come to speak to you about a poor girl in whom the whole town of Saumur takes an interest, who, through lack of charity to herself, neglects her Christian duties."

"Monsieur le cure, you have come to me at a moment when I cannot think of my neighbor, I am filled with thoughts of myself. I am very unhappy; my only refuge is in the Church; her bosom is large enough to hold all human woe, her love so full that we may draw from its depths and never drain it dry."

"Mademoiselle, in speaking of this young girl we shall speak of you. Listen! If you wish to insure your salvation you have only two paths to take,—either leave the world or obey its laws. Obey either your earthly destiny or

your heavenly destiny."

"Ah! your voice speaks to me when I need to hear a voice. Yes, God has sent you to me; I will bid farewell to the world and live for God alone, in silence and seclusion."

"My daughter, you must think long before you take so violent a step. Marriage is life, the veil is death."

"Yes, death,—a quick death!" she said, with dreadful eagerness.

"Death? but you have great obligations to fulfil to society, mademoiselle. Are you not the mother of the poor, to whom you give clothes and wood in winter and work in summer? Your great fortune is a loan which you must return, and you have sacredly accepted it as such. To bury yourself in a convent would be selfishness; to remain an old maid is to fail in duty. In the first place, can you manage your vast property alone? May you not lose it? You will have law-suits, you will find yourself surrounded by inextricable difficulties. Believe your pastor: a husband is useful; you are bound to preserve what God has bestowed upon you. I speak to you as a precious lamb of my flock. You love God too truly not to find your salvation in the midst of his world, of which you are noble ornament and to which you owe your example."

At this moment Madame des Grassins was announced. She came incited by vengeance and the sense of a great despair.

"Mademoiselle," she said—"Ah! here is monsieur le cure; I am silent. I came to speak to you on business; but I see that you are conferring with—"

"Madame," said the cure, "I leave the field to you."

"Oh! monsieur le cure," said Eugenie, "come back later; your support is very necessary to me just now."

"Ah, yes, indeed, my poor child!" said Madame des Grassins.

"What do you mean?" asked Eugenie and the cure together.

"Don't I know about your cousin's return, and his marriage with Mademoiselle d'Aubrion? A woman doesn't carry her wits in her pocket."

Eugenie blushed, and remained silent for a moment. From this day forth she assumed the impassible countenance for which her father had been so remarkable.

"Well, madame," she presently said, ironically, "no doubt I carry my wits in my pocket, for I do not understand you. Speak, say what you mean, before monsieur le cure; you know he is my director."

"Well, then, mademoiselle, here is what des Grassins writes me. Read it."

Eugenie read the following letter:—

My dear Wife,—Charles Grandet has returned from the Indies and has been in Paris about a month—

"A month!" thought Eugenie, her hand falling to her side. After a pause she resumed the letter,—

I had to dance attendance before I was allowed to see the future Vicomte d'Aubrion. Though all Paris is talking of his marriage and the banns are published—

"He wrote to me after that!" thought Eugenie. She did not conclude the thought; she did not cry out, as a Parisian woman would have done, "The villain!" but though she said it not, contempt was none the less present in her mind.

The marriage, however, will not come off. The Marquis d'Aubrion will never give his daughter to the son of a bankrupt. I went to tell Grandet of the steps his uncle and I took in his father's business, and the clever manoeuvres by which we had managed to keep the creditor's quiet until the present time. The insolent fellow had the face to say to me—to me, who for five years have devoted myself night and day to his interests and his honor!—that his father's affairs were not his! A solicitor would have had the right to demand fees amounting to thirty or forty thousand francs, one per cent on the total of the debts. But patience! there are twelve hundred thousand francs legitimately owing to the creditors, and I shall at once declare his father a bankrupt.

I went into this business on the word of that old crocodile Grandet, and I have made promises in the name of his family. If Monsieur de vicomte d'Aubrion does not care for his honor, I care for mine. I shall explain my position to the creditors. Still, I have too much respect for Mademoiselle Eugenie (to whom under happier circumstances we once hoped to be allied) to act in this matter before you have spoken to her about it—

There Eugenie paused, and coldly returned the letter without finishing it.

"I thank you," she said to Madame des Grassins.

"Ah! you have the voice and manner of your deceased father," Madame des Grassins replied.

"Madame, you have eight thousand francs to pay us," said Nanon, producing Charles's cheque.

"That's true; have the kindness to come with me now, Madame Cornoiller."

"Monsieur le cure," said Eugenie with a noble composure, inspired by the

thought she was about to express, "would it be a sin to remain a virgin after marriage?"

"That is a case of conscience whose solution is not within my knowledge. If you wish to know what the celebrated Sanchez says of it in his treatise 'De Matrimonio,' I shall be able to tell you to-morrow."

The cure went away; Mademoiselle Grandet went up to her father's secret room and spent the day there alone, without coming down to dinner, in spite of Nanon's entreaties. She appeared in the evening at the hour when the usual company began to arrive. Never was the old hall so full as on this occasion. The news of Charles's return and his foolish treachery had spread through the whole town. But however watchful the curiosity of the visitors might be, it was left unsatisfied. Eugenie, who expected scrutiny, allowed none of the cruel emotions that wrung her soul to appear on the calm surface of her face. She was able to show a smiling front in answer to all who tried to testify their interest by mournful looks or melancholy speeches. She hid her misery behind a veil of courtesy. Towards nine o'clock the games ended and the players left the tables, paying their losses and discussing points of the game as they joined the rest of the company. At the moment when the whole party rose to take leave, an unexpected and striking event occurred, which resounded through the length and breadth of Saumur, from thence through the arrondissement, and even to the four surrounding prefectures.

"Stay, monsieur le president," said Eugenie to Monsieur de Bonfons as she saw him take his cane.

There was not a person in that numerous assembly who was unmoved by these words. The president turned pale, and was forced to sit down.

"The president gets the millions," said Mademoiselle de Gribeaucourt.

"It is plain enough; the president marries Mademoiselle Grandet," cried Madame d'Orsonval.

"All the trumps in one hand," said the abbe.

"A love game," said the notary.

Each and all said his say, made his pun, and looked at the heiress mounted on her millions as on a pedestal. The drama begun nine years before had reached its conclusion. To tell the president, in face of all Saumur, to "stay," was surely the same thing as proclaiming him her husband. In provincial towns social conventionalities are so rigidly enforced than an infraction like this constituted a solemn promise.

"Monsieur le president," said Eugenie in a voice of some emotion when they were left alone, "I know what pleases you in me. Swear to leave me free

during my whole life, to claim none of the rights which marriage will give you over me, and my hand is yours. Oh!" she added, seeing him about to kneel at her feet, "I have more to say. I must not deceive you. In my heart I cherish one inextinguishable feeling. Friendship is the only sentiment which I can give to a husband. I wish neither to affront him nor to violate the laws of my own heart. But you can possess my hand and my fortune only at the cost of doing me an inestimable service."

"I am ready for all things," said the president.

"Here are fifteen hundred thousand francs," she said, drawing from her bosom a certificate of a hundred shares in the Bank of France. "Go to Paris,—not to-morrow, but instantly. Find Monsieur des Grassins, learn the names of my uncle's creditors, call them together, pay them in full all that was owing, with interest at five per cent from the day the debt was incurred to the present time. Be careful to obtain a full and legal receipt, in proper form, before a notary. You are a magistrate, and I can trust this matter in your hands. You are a man of honor; I will put faith in your word, and meet the dangers of life under shelter of your name. Let us have mutual indulgence. We have known each other so long that we are almost related; you would not wish to render me unhappy."

The president fell at the feet of the rich heiress, his heart beating and wrung with joy.

"I will be your slave!" he said.

"When you obtain the receipts, monsieur," she resumed, with a cold glance, "you will take them with all the other papers to my cousin Grandet, and you will give him this letter. On your return I will keep my word."

The president understood perfectly that he owed the acquiescence of Mademoiselle Grandet to some bitterness of love, and he made haste to obey her orders, lest time should effect a reconciliation between the pair.

When Monsieur de Bonfons left her, Eugenie fell back in her chair and burst into tears. All was over.

The president took the mail-post, and reached Paris the next evening. The morning after his arrival he went to see des Grassins, and together they summoned the creditors to meet at the notary's office where the vouchers had been deposited. Not a single creditor failed to be present. Creditors though they were, justice must be done to them,—they were all punctual. Monsieur de Bonfons, in the name of Mademoiselle Grandet, paid them the amount of their claims with interest. The payment of interest was a remarkable event in the Parisian commerce of that day. When the receipts were all legally registered, and des Grassins had received for his services the sum of fifty thousand francs

allowed to him by Eugenie, the president made his way to the hotel d'Aubrion and found Charles just entering his own apartment after a serious encounter with his prospective father-in-law. The old marquis had told him plainly that he should not marry his daughter until all the creditors of Guillaume Grandet had been paid in full.

The president gave Charles the following letter:—

My Cousin,—Monsieur le president de Bonfons has undertaken to place in your hands the aquittance for all claims upon my uncle, also a receipt by which I acknowledge having received from you the sum total of those claims. I have heard of a possible failure, and I think that the son of a bankrupt may not be able to marry Mademoiselle d'Aubrion. Yes, my cousin, you judged rightly of my mind and of my manners. I have, it is true, no part in the world; I understand neither its calculations nor its customs; and I could not give you the pleasures that you seek in it. Be happy, according to the social conventions to which you have sacrificed our love. To make your happiness complete I can only offer you your father's honor. Adieu! You will always have a faithful friend in your cousin

Eugenie.

The president smiled at the exclamation which the ambitious young man could not repress as he received the documents.

"We shall announce our marriages at the same time," remarked Monsieur de Bonfons.

"Ah! you marry Eugenie? Well, I am delighted; she is a good girl. But," added Charles, struck with a luminous idea, "she must be rich?"

"She had," said the president, with a mischievous smile, "about nineteen millions four days ago; but she has only seventeen millions to-day."

Charles looked at him thunderstruck.

"Seventeen mil—"

"Seventeen millions; yes, monsieur. We shall muster, Mademoiselle Grandet and I, an income of seven hundred and fifty thousand francs when we marry."

"My dear cousin," said Charles, recovering a little of his assurance, "we can push each other's fortunes."

"Agreed," said the president. "Here is also a little case which I am charged to give into your own hands," he added, placing on the table the leather box which contained the dressing-case.

"Well, my dear friend," said Madame d'Aubrion, entering the room without

noticing the president, "don't pay any attention to what poor Monsieur d'Aubrion has just said to you; the Duchesse de Chaulieu has turned his head. I repeat, nothing shall interfere with the marriage—"

"Very good, madame. The three millions which my father owed were paid yesterday."

"In money?" she asked.

"Yes, in full, capital and interest; and I am about to do honor to his memory—"

"What folly!" exclaimed his mother-in-law. "Who is this?" she whispered in Grandet's ear, perceiving the president.

"My man of business," he answered in a low voice.

The marquise bowed superciliously to Monsieur de Bonfons.

"We are pushing each other's fortunes already," said the president, taking up his hat. "Good-by, cousin."

"He is laughing at me, the old cockatoo! I'd like to put six inches of iron into him!" muttered Charles.

The president was out of hearing. Three days later Monsieur de Bonfons, on his return to Saumur, announced his marriage with Eugenie. Six months after the marriage he was appointed councillor in the Cour royale at Angers. Before leaving Saumur Madame de Bonfons had the gold of certain jewels, once so precious to her, melted up, and put, together with the eight thousand francs paid back by her cousin, into a golden pyx, which she gave to the parish church where she had so long prayed for him. She now spent her time between Angers and Saumur. Her husband, who had shown some public spirit on a certain occasion, became a judge in the superior courts, and finally, after a few years, president of them. He was anxiously awaiting a general election, in the hope of being returned to the Chamber of deputies. He hankered after a peerage; and then—

"The king will be his cousin, won't he?" said Nanon, la Grande Nanon, Madame Cornoiller, bourgeoise of Saumur, as she listened to her mistress, who was recounting the honors to which she was called.

Nevertheless, Monsieur de Bonfons (he had finally abolished his patronymic of Cruchot) did not realize any of his ambitious ideas. He died eight days after his election as deputy of Saumur. God, who sees all and never strikes amiss, punished him, no doubt, for his sordid calculations and the legal cleverness with which, accurante Cruchot, he had drawn up his marriage contract, in which husband and wife gave to each other, "in case they should have no children, their entire property of every kind, landed or otherwise,

without exception or reservation, dispensing even with the formality of an inventory; provided that said omission of said inventory shall not injure their heirs and assigns, it being understood that this deed of gift is, etc., etc." This clause of the contract will explain the profound respect which monsieur le president always testified for the wishes, and above all, for the solitude of Madame de Bonfons. Women cited him as the most considerate and delicate of men, pitied him, and even went so far as to find fault with the passion and grief of Eugenie, blaming her, as women know so well how to blame, with cruel but discreet insinuation.

"Madame de Bonfons must be very ill to leave her husband entirely alone. Poor woman! Is she likely to get well? What is it? Something gastric? A cancer?"—"She has grown perfectly yellow. She ought to consult some celebrated doctor in Paris."—"How can she be happy without a child? They say she loves her husband; then why not give him an heir?—in his position, too!"—"Do you know, it is really dreadful! If it is the result of mere caprice, it is unpardonable. Poor president!"

Endowed with the delicate perception which a solitary soul acquires through constant meditation, through the exquisite clear-sightedness with which a mind aloof from life fastens on all that falls within its sphere, Eugenie, taught by suffering and by her later education to divine thought, knew well that the president desired her death that he might step into possession of their immense fortune, augmented by the property of his uncle the notary and his uncle the abbe, whom it had lately pleased God to call to himself. The poor solitary pitied the president. Providence avenged her for the calculations and the indifference of a husband who respected the hopeless passion on which she spent her life because it was his surest safeguard. To give life to a child would give death to his hopes,—the hopes of selfishness, the joys of ambition, which the president cherished as he looked into the future.

God thus flung piles of gold upon this prisoner to whom gold was a matter of indifference, who longed for heaven, who lived, pious and good, in holy thoughts, succoring the unfortunate in secret, and never wearying of such deeds. Madame de Bonfons became a widow at thirty-six. She is still beautiful, but with the beauty of a woman who is nearly forty years of age. Her face is white and placid and calm; her voice gentle and self-possessed; her manners are simple. She has the noblest qualities of sorrow, the saintliness of one who has never soiled her soul by contact with the world; but she has also the rigid bearing of an old maid and the petty habits inseparable from the narrow round of provincial life. In spite of her vast wealth, she lives as the poor Eugenie Grandet once lived. The fire is never lighted on her hearth until the day when her father allowed it to be lighted in the hall, and it is put out in

conformity with the rules which governed her youthful years. She dresses as her mother dressed. The house in Saumur, without sun, without warmth, always in shadow, melancholy, is an image of her life. She carefully accumulates her income, and might seem parsimonious did she not disarm criticism by a noble employment of her wealth. Pious and charitable institutions, a hospital for old age, Christian schools for children, a public library richly endowed, bear testimony against the charge of avarice which some persons lay at her door. The churches of Saumur owe much of their embellishment to her. Madame de Bonfons (sometimes ironically spoken of as mademoiselle) inspires for the most part reverential respect: and yet that noble heart, beating only with tenderest emotions, has been, from first to last, subjected to the calculations of human selfishness; money has cast its frigid influence upon that hallowed life and taught distrust of feelings to a woman who is all feeling.

"I have none but you to love me," she says to Nanon.

The hand of this woman stanches the secret wounds in many families. She goes on her way to heaven attended by a train of benefactions. The grandeur of her soul redeems the narrowness of her education and the petty habits of her early life.

Such is the history of Eugenie Grandet, who is in the world but not of it; who, created to be supremely a wife and mother, has neither husband nor children nor family. Lately there has been some question of her marrying again. The Saumur people talk of her and of the Marquis de Froidfond, whose family are beginning to beset the rich widow just as, in former days, the Cruchots laid siege to the rich heiress. Nanon and Cornoiller are, it is said, in the interests of the marquis. Nothing could be more false. Neither la Grande Nanon nor Cornoiller has sufficient mind to understand the corruptions of the world.

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PIERRETTE

I. THE LORRAINS

At the dawn of an October day in 1827 a young fellow about sixteen years of age, whose clothing proclaimed what modern phraseology so insolently calls a proletary, was standing in a small square of Lower Provins. At that early hour he could examine without being observed the various houses

surrounding the open space, which was oblong in form. The mills along the river were already working; the whirr of their wheels, repeated by the echoes of the Upper Town in the keen air and sparkling clearness of the early morning, only intensified the general silence so that the wheels of a diligence could be heard a league away along the highroad. The two longest sides of the square, separated by an avenue of lindens, were built in the simple style which expresses so well the peaceful and matter-of-fact life of the bourgeoisie. No signs of commerce were to be seen; on the other hand, the luxurious porte-cocheres of the rich were few, and those few turned seldom on their hinges, excepting that of Monsieur Martener, a physician, whose profession obliged him to keep a cabriolet, and to use it. A few of the house-fronts were covered by grape vines, others by roses climbing to the second-story windows, through which they wafted the fragrance of their scattered bunches. One end of the square enters the main street of the Lower Town, the gardens of which reach to the bank of one of the two rivers which water the valley of Provins. The other end of the square enters a street which runs parallel to the main street.

At the latter, which was also the quietest end of the square, the young workman recognized the house of which he was in search, which showed a front of white stone grooved in lines to represent courses, windows with closed gray blinds, and slender iron balconies decorated with rosettes painted yellow. Above the ground floor and the first floor were three dormer windows projecting from a slate roof; on the peak of the central one was a new weather-vane. This modern innovation represented a hunter in the attitude of shooting a hare. The front door was reached by three stone steps. On one side of this door a leaden pipe discharged the sink-water into a small street-gutter, showing the whereabouts of the kitchen. On the other side were two windows, carefully closed by gray shutters in which were heart-shaped openings cut to admit the light; these windows seemed to be those of the dining-room. In the elevation gained by the three steps were vent-holes to the cellar, closed by painted iron shutters fantastically cut in open-work. Everything was new. In this repaired and restored house, the fresh-colored look of which contrasted with the time-worn exteriors of all the other houses, an observer would instantly perceive the paltry taste and perfect self-satisfaction of the retired petty shopkeeper.

The young man looked at these details with an expression of pleasure that seemed to have something rather sad in it; his eyes roved from the kitchen to the roof, with a motion that showed a deliberate purpose. The rosy glow of the rising sun fell on a calico curtain at one of the garret windows, the others being without that luxury. As he caught sight of it the young fellow's face brightened gaily. He stepped back a little way, leaned against a linden, and sang, in the drawling tone peculiar to the west of France, the following Breton ditty, published by Bruguiere, a composer to whom we are indebted for many charming melodies. In Brittany, the young villagers sing this song to all

newly-married couples on their wedding-day:—

"We've come to wish you happiness in marriage,

To m'sieur your husband

As well as to you:

"You have just been bound, madam' la mariee,

With bonds of gold

That only death unbinds:

"You will go no more to balls or gay assemblies;

You must stay at home

While we shall go.

"Have you thought well how you are pledged to be

True to your spouse,

And love him like yourself?

"Receive these flowers our hands do now present you;

Alas! your fleeting honors

Will fade as they."

This native air (as sweet as that adapted by Chateaubriand to Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore), sung in this little town of the Brie district, must have been to the ears of a Breton maiden the touchstone of imperious memories, so faithfully does it picture the manners and customs, the surroundings and the heartiness of her noble old land, where a sort of melancholy reigns, hardly to be defined; caused, perhaps, by the aspect of life in Brittany, which is deeply touching. This power of awakening a world of grave and sweet and tender memories by a familiar and sometimes lively ditty, is the privilege of those popular songs which are the superstitions of music,—if we may use the word "superstition" as signifying all that remains after the ruin of a people, all that survives their revolutions.

As he finished the first couple, the singer, who never took his eyes from the attic curtain, saw no signs of life. While he sang the second, the curtain stirred. When the words "Receive these flowers" were sung, a youthful face appeared; a white hand cautiously opened the casement, and a girl made a sign with her head to the singer as he ended with the melancholy thought of the simple verses,—"Alas! your fleeting honors will fade as they."

To her the young workman suddenly showed, drawing it from within his

jacket, a yellow flower, very common in Brittany, and sometimes to be found in La Brie (where, however, it is rare),—the furze, or broom.

"Is it really you, Brigaut?" said the girl, in a low voice.

"Yes, Pierrette, yes. I am in Paris. I have started to make my way; but I'm ready to settle here, near you."

Just then the fastening of a window creaked in a room on the first floor, directly below Pierrette's attic. The girl showed the utmost terror, and said to Brigaut, quickly:—

"Run away!"

The lad jumped like a frightened frog to a bend in the street caused by the projection of a mill just where the square opens into the main thoroughfare; but in spite of his agility his hob-nailed shoes echoed on the stones with a sound easily distinguished from the music of the mill, and no doubt heard by the person who opened the window.

That person was a woman. No man would have torn himself from the comfort of a morning nap to listen to a minstrel in a jacket; none but a maid awakes to songs of love. Not only was this woman a maid, but she was an old maid. When she had opened her blinds with the furtive motion of the bat, she looked in all directions, but saw nothing, and only heard, faintly, the flying footfalls of the lad. Can there be anything more dreadful than the matutinal apparition of an ugly old maid at her window? Of all the grotesque sights which amuse the eyes of travellers in country towns, that is the most unpleasant. It is too repulsive to laugh at. This particular old maid, whose ear was so keen, was denuded of all the adventitious aids, of whatever kind, which she employed as embellishments; her false front and her collarette were lacking; she wore that horrible little bag of black silk on which old women insist on covering their skulls, and it was now revealed beneath the night-cap which had been pushed aside in sleep. This rumpled condition gave a menacing expression to the head, such as painters bestow on witches. The temples, ears, and nape of the neck, were disclosed in all their withered horror, —the wrinkles being marked in scarlet lines that contrasted with the would-be white of the bed-gown which was tied round her neck by a narrow tape. The gaping of this garment revealed a breast to be likened only to that of an old peasant woman who cares nothing about her personal ugliness. The fleshless arm was like a stick on which a bit of stuff was hung. Seen at her window, this spinster seemed tall from the length and angularity of her face, which recalled the exaggerated proportions of certain Swiss heads. The character of their countenance—the features being marked by a total want of harmony—was that of hardness in the lines, sharpness in the tones; while an unfeeling spirit, pervading all, would have filled a physiognomist with disgust. These

characteristics, fully visible at this moment, were usually modified in public by a sort of commercial smile,—a bourgeois smirk which mimicked good-humor; so that persons meeting with this old maid might very well take her for a kindly woman. She owned the house on shares with her brother. The brother, by-the-bye, was sleeping so tranquilly in his own chamber that the orchestra of the Opera-house could not have awakened him, wonderful as its diapason is said to be.

The old maid stretched her neck out of the window, twisted it, and raised her cold, pale-blue little eyes, with their short lashes set in lids that were always rather swollen, to the attic window, endeavoring to see Pierrette. Perceiving the uselessness of that attempt, she retreated into her room with a movement like that of a tortoise which draws in its head after protruding it from its carapace. The blinds were then closed, and the silence of the street was unbroken except by peasants coming in from the country, or very early persons moving about.

When there is an old maid in a house, watch-dogs are unnecessary; not the slightest event can occur that she does not see and comment upon and pursue to its utmost consequences. The foregoing trifling circumstance was therefore destined to give rise to grave suppositions, and to open the way for one of those obscure dramas which take place in families, and are none the less terrible because they are secret,—if, indeed, we may apply the word "drama" to such domestic occurrences.

Pierrette did not go back to bed. To her, Brigaut's arrival was an immense event. During the night—that Eden of the wretched—she escaped the vexations and fault-findings she bore during the day. Like the hero of a ballad, German or Russian, I forget which, her sleep seemed to her the happy life; her waking hours a bad dream. She had just had her only pleasurable waking in three years. The memories of her childhood had sung their melodious ditties in her soul. The first couplet was heard in a dream; the second made her spring out of bed; at the third, she doubted her ears,—the sorrowful are all disciples of Saint Thomas; but when the fourth was sung, standing in her night-gown with bare feet by the window, she recognized Brigaut, the companion of her childhood. Ah, yes! it was truly the well-known square jacket with the bobtails, the pockets of which stuck out at the hips,—the jacket of blue cloth which is classic in Brittany; there, too, were the waistcoat of printed cotton, the linen shirt fastened by a gold heart, the large rolling collar, the earrings, the stout shoes, the trousers of blue-gray drilling unevenly colored by the various lengths of the warp,—in short, all those humble, strong, and durable things which make the apparel of the Breton peasantry. The big buttons of white horn which fastened the jacket made the girl's heart beat. When she saw the bunch of broom her eyes filled with tears; then a dreadful fear drove back into her

heart the happy memories that were budding there. She thought her cousin sleeping in the room beneath her might have heard the noise she made in jumping out of bed and running to the window. The fear was just; the old maid was coming, and she made Brigaut the terrified sign which the lad obeyed without the least understanding it. Such instinctive submission to a girl's bidding shows one of those innocent and absolute affections which appear from century to century on this earth, where they blossom, like the aloes of Isola Bella, twice or thrice in a hundred years. Whoever had seen the lad as he ran away would have loved the ingenuous chivalry of his most ingenuous feeling.

Jacques Brigaut was worthy of Pierrette Lorrain, who was just fifteen. Two children! Pierrette could not keep from crying as she watched his flight in the terror her gesture had conveyed to him. Then she sat down in a shabby armchair placed before a little table above which hung a mirror. She rested her elbows on the table, put her head in her hands, and sat thinking for an hour, calling to memory the Marais, the village of Pen-Hoel, the perilous voyages on a pond in a boat untied for her from an old willow by little Jacques; then the old faces of her grandfather and grandmother, the sufferings of her mother, and the handsome face of Major Brigaut,—in short, the whole of her careless childhood. It was all a dream, a luminous joy on the gloomy background of the present.

Her beautiful chestnut hair escaped in disorder from her cap, rumpled in sleep,—a cambric cap with ruffles, which she had made herself. On each side of her forehead were little ringlets escaping from gray curl-papers. From the back of her head hung a heavy braid of hair that was half unplaited. The excessive whiteness of her face betrayed that terrible malady of girlhood which goes by the name of chlorosis, deprives the body of its natural colors, destroys the appetite, and shows a disordered state of the organism. The waxy tones were in all the visible parts of her flesh. The neck and shoulders explained by their blanched paleness the wasted arms, flung forward and crossed upon the table. Her feet seemed enervated, shrunken from illness. Her night-gown came only to her knees and showed the flaccid muscles, the blue veins, the impoverished flesh of the legs. The cold, to which she paid no heed, turned her lips violet, and a sad smile, drawing up the corners of a sensitive mouth, showed teeth that were white as ivory and quite small,—pretty, transparent teeth, in keeping with the delicate ears, the rather sharp but dainty nose, and the general outline of her face, which, in spite of its roundness, was lovely. All the animation of this charming face was in the eyes, the iris of which, brown like Spanish tobacco and flecked with black, shone with golden reflections round pupils that were brilliant and intense. Pierrette was made to be gay, but she was sad. Her lost gaiety was still to be seen in the vivacious forms of the eye, in the ingenuous grace of her brow, in the smooth curve of

her chin. The long eyelashes lay upon the cheek-bones, made prominent by suffering. The paleness of her face, which was unnaturally white, made the lines and all the details infinitely pure. The ear alone was a little masterpiece of modelling,—in marble, you might say. Pierrette suffered in many ways. Perhaps you would like to know her history, and this is it.

Pierrette's mother was a Demoiselle Auffray of Provins, half-sister by the father's side of Madame Rogron, mother of the present owners of the house.

Monsieur Auffray, her husband, had married at the age of eighteen; his second marriage took place when he was nearly sixty-nine. By the first, he had an only daughter, very plain, who was married at sixteen to an innkeeper of Provins named Rogron.

By his second marriage the worthy Auffray had another daughter; but this one was charming. There was, of course, an enormous difference in the ages of these daughters; the one by the first marriage was fifty years old when the second child was born. By this time the eldest, Madame Rogron, had two grown-up children.

The youngest daughter of the old man was married at eighteen to a man of her choice, a Breton officer named Lorrain, captain in the Imperial Guard. Love often makes a man ambitious. The captain, anxious to rise to a colonelcy, exchanged into a line regiment. While he, then a major, and his wife enjoyed themselves in Paris on the allowance made to them by Monsieur and Madame Auffray, or scoured Germany at the beck and call of the Emperor's battles and truces, old Auffray himself (formerly a grocer) died, at the age of eighty-eight, without having found time to make a will. His property was administered by his daughter, Madame Rogron, and her husband so completely in their own interests that nothing remained for the old man's widow beyond the house she lived in on the little square, and a few acres of land. This widow, the mother of Madame Lorrain, was only thirty-eight at the time of her husband's death. Like many widows, she came to the unwise decision of remarrying. She sold the house and land to her step-daughter, Madame Rogron, and married a young physician named Neraud, who wasted her whole fortune. She died of grief and misery two years later.

Thus the share of her father's property which ought to have come to Madame Lorrain disappeared almost entirely, being reduced to the small sum of eight thousand francs. Major Lorrain was killed at the battle of Montereau, leaving his wife, then twenty-one years of age, with a little daughter of fourteen months, and no other means than the pension to which she was entitled and an eventual inheritance from her late husband's parents, Monsieur and Madame Lorrain, retail shopkeepers at Pen-Hoel, a village in the Vendee, situated in that part of it which is called the Marais. These Lorrains,

grandfather and grandmother of Pierrette Lorrain, sold wood for building purposes, slates, tiles, pantiles, pipes, etc. Their business, either from their own incapacity or through ill-luck, did badly, and gave them scarcely enough to live on. The failure of the well-known firm of Collinet at Nantes, caused by the events of 1814 which led to a sudden fall in colonial products, deprived them of twenty-four thousand francs which they had just deposited with that house.

The arrival of their daughter-in-law was therefore welcome to them. Her pension of eight hundred francs was a handsome income at Pen-Hoel. The eight thousand francs which the widow's half-brother and sister Rogron sent to her from her father's estate (after a multitude of legal formalities) were placed by her in the Lorrains' business, they giving her a mortgage on a little house which they owned at Nantes, let for three hundred francs, and barely worth ten thousand.

Madame Lorrain the younger, Pierrette's mother, died in 1819. The child of old Auffray and his young wife was small, delicate, and weakly; the damp climate of the Marais did not agree with her. But her husband's family persuaded her, in order to keep her with them, that in no other quarter of the world could she find a more healthy region. She was so petted and tenderly cared for that her death, when it came, brought nothing but honor to the old Lorrains.

Some persons declared that Brigaut, an old Vendeen, one of those men of iron who served under Charette, under Mercier, under the Marquis de Montauran, and the Baron du Guenic, in the wars against the Republic, counted for a good deal in the willingness of the younger Madame Lorrain to remain in the Marais. If it were so, his soul must have been a truly loving and devoted one. All Pen-Hoel saw him—he was called respectfully Major Brigaut, the grade he had held in the Catholic army—spending his days and his evenings in the Lorrains' parlor, beside the window of the imperial major. Toward the last, the curate of Pen-Hoel made certain representations to old Madame Lorrain, begging her to persuade her daughter-in-law to marry Brigaut, and promising to have the major appointed justice of peace for the canton of Pen-Hoel, through the influence of the Vicomte de Kergarouet. The death of the poor young woman put an end to the matter.

Pierrette was left in charge of her grandparents who owed her four hundred francs a year, interest on the little property placed in their hands. This small sum was now applied to her maintenance. The old people, who were growing less and less fit for business, soon found themselves confronted by an active and capable competitor, against whom they said hard things, all the while doing nothing to defeat him. Major Brigaut, their friend and adviser, died six months after his friend, the younger Madame Lorrain,—perhaps of grief,

perhaps of his wounds, of which he had received twenty-seven.

Like a sound merchant, the competitor set about ruining his adversaries in order to get rid of all rivalry. With his connivance, the Lorrains borrowed money on notes, which they were unable to meet, and which drove them in their old days into bankruptcy. Pierrette's claim upon the house in Nantes was superseded by the legal rights of her grandmother, who enforced them to secure the daily bread of her poor husband. The house was sold for nine thousand five hundred francs, of which one thousand five hundred went for costs. The remaining eight thousand came to Madame Lorain, who lived upon the income of them in a sort of almshouse at Nantes, like that of Sainte-Perine in Paris, called Saint-Jacques, where the two old people had bed and board for a humble payment.

As it was impossible to keep Pierrette, their ruined little granddaughter, with them, the old Lorrains bethought themselves of her uncle and aunt Rogron, in Provins, to whom they wrote. These Rogrons were dead. The letter might, therefore, have easily been lost; but if anything here below can take the place of Providence, it is the post. Postal spirit, incomparably above public spirit, exceeds in brilliancy of resource and invention the ablest romance-writers. When the post gets hold of a letter, worth, to it, from three to ten sous, and does not immediately know where to find the person to whom that letter is addressed, it displays a financial anxiety only to be met with in very pertinacious creditors. The post goes and comes and ferrets through all the eighty-six departments. Difficulties only arouse the genius of the clerks, who may really be called men-of-letters, and who set about to search for that unknown human being with as much ardor as the mathematicians of the Bureau give to longitudes. They literally ransack the whole kingdom. At the first ray of hope all the post-offices in Paris are alert. Sometimes the receiver of a missing letter is amazed at the network of scrawled directions which covers both back and front of the missive,—glorious vouchers for the administrative persistency with which the post has been at work. If a man undertook what the post accomplishes, he would lose ten thousand francs in travel, time, and money, to recover ten sous. The letter of the old Lorrains, addressed to Monsieur Rogron of Provins (who had then been dead a year) was conveyed by the post in due time to Monsieur Rogron, son of the deceased, a mercer in the rue Saint-Denis in Paris. And this is where the postal spirit obtains its greatest triumph. An heir is always more or less anxious to know if he has picked up every scrap of his inheritance, if he has not overlooked a credit, or a trunk of old clothes. The Treasury knows that. A letter addressed to the late Rogron at Provins was certain to pique the curiosity of Rogron, Jr., or Mademoiselle Rogron, the heirs in Paris. Out of that human interest the Treasury was able to earn sixty centimes.

These Rogrons, toward whom the old Lorrains, though dreading to part with their dear little granddaughter, stretched their supplicating hands, became, in this way, and most unexpectedly, the masters of Pierrette's destiny. It is therefore indispensable to explain both their antecedents and their character.

II. THE ROGRONS

Pere Rogron, that innkeeper of Provins to whom old Auffray had married his daughter by his first wife, was an individual with an inflamed face, a veiny nose, and cheeks on which Bacchus had drawn his scarlet and bulbous vine-marks. Though short, fat, and pot-bellied, with stout legs and thick hands, he was gifted with the shrewdness of the Swiss innkeepers, whom he resembled. Certainly he was not handsome, and his wife looked like him. Never was a couple better matched. Rogron liked good living and to be waited upon by pretty girls. He belonged to the class of egoists whose behavior is brutal; he gave way to his vices and did their will openly in the face of Israel. Grasping, selfish, without decency, and always gratifying his own fancies, he devoured his earnings until the day when his teeth failed him. Selfishness stayed by him. In his old days he sold his inn, collected (as we have seen) all he could of his late father-in-law's property, and went to live in the little house in the square of Provins, bought for a trifle from the widow of old Auffray, Pierrette's grandmother.

Rogron and his wife had about two thousand francs a year from twenty-seven lots of land in the neighborhood of Provins, and from the sale of their inn for twenty thousand. Old Auffray's house, though out of repair, was inhabited just as it was by the Rogrons,—old rats like wrack and ruin. Rogron himself took to horticulture and spent his savings in enlarging the garden; he carried it to the river's edge between two walls and built a sort of stone embankment across the end, where aquatic nature, left to herself, displayed the charms of her flora.

In the early years of their marriage the Rogrons had a son and a daughter, both hideous; for such human beings degenerate. Put out to nurse at a low price, these luckless children came home in due time, after the worst of village training,—allowed to cry for hours after their wet-nurse, who worked in the fields, leaving them shut up to scream for her in one of those damp, dark, low rooms which serve as homes for the French peasantry. Treated thus, the features of the children coarsened; their voices grew harsh; they mortified their mother's vanity, and that made her strive to correct their bad habits by a

sternness which the severity of their father converted through comparison to kindness. As a general thing, they were left to run loose about the stables and courtyards of the inn, or the streets of the town; sometimes they were whipped; sometimes they were sent, to get rid of them, to their grandfather Auffray, who did not like them. The injustice the Rogrons declared the old man did to their children, justified them to their own minds in taking the greater part of "the old scoundrel's" property. However, Rogron did send his son to school, and did buy him a man, one of his own cartmen, to save him from the conscription. As soon as his daughter, Sylvie, was thirteen, he sent her to Paris, to make her way as apprentice in a shop. Two years later he despatched his son, Jerome-Denis, to the same career. When his friends the carriers and those who frequented the inn, asked him what he meant to do with his children, Pere Rogron explained his system with a conciseness which, in view of that of most fathers, had the merit of frankness.

"When they are old enough to understand me I shall give 'em a kick and say: 'Go and make your own way in the world!'" he replied, emptying his glass and wiping his lips with the back of his hand. Then he winked at his questioner with a knowing look. "Hey! hey! they are no greater fools than I was," he added. "My father gave me three kicks; I shall only give them one; he put one louis into my hand; I shall put ten in theirs, therefore they'll be better off than I was. That's the way to do. After I'm gone, what's left will be theirs. The notaries can find them and give it to them. What nonsense to bother one's self about children. Mine owe me their life. I've fed them, and I don't ask anything from them,—I call that quits, hey, neighbor? I began as a cartman, but that didn't prevent me marrying the daughter of that old scoundrel Auffray."

Sylvie Rogron was sent (with six hundred francs for her board) as apprentice to certain shopkeepers originally from Provins and now settled in Paris in the rue Saint-Denis. Two years later she was "at par," as they say; she earned her own living; at any rate her parents paid nothing for her. That is what is called being "at par" in the rue Saint-Denis. Sylvie had a salary of four hundred francs. At nineteen years of age she was independent. At twenty, she was the second demoiselle in the Maison Julliard, wholesale silk dealers at the "Chinese Worm" rue Saint-Denis. The history of the sister was that of the brother. Young Jerome-Denis Rogron entered the establishment of one of the largest wholesale mercers in the same street, the Maison Guepin, at the "Three Distaffs." When Sylvie Rogron, aged twenty-one, had risen to be forewoman at a thousand francs a year Jerome-Denis, with even better luck, was head-clerk at eighteen, with a salary of twelve hundred francs.

Brother and sister met on Sundays and fete-days, which they passed in economical amusements; they dined out of Paris, and went to Saint-Cloud,

Meudon, Belleville, or Vincennes. Towards the close of the year 1815 they clubbed their savings, amounting to about twenty thousand francs, earned by the sweat of their brows, and bought of Madame Guenee the property and good-will of her celebrated shop, the "Family Sister," one of the largest retail establishments in the quarter. Sylvie kept the books and did the writing. Jerome-Denis was master and head-clerk both. In 1821, after five years' experience, competition became so fierce that it was all the brother and sister could do to carry on the business and maintain its reputation.

Though Sylvie was at this time scarcely forty, her natural ugliness, combined with hard work and a certain crabbed look (caused as much by the conformation of her features as by her cares), made her seem like a woman of fifty. At thirty-eight Jerome Rogron presented to the eyes of his customers the silliest face that ever looked over a counter. His retreating forehead, flattened by fatigue, was marked by three long wrinkles. His grizzled hair, cut close, expressed in some indefinable way the stupidity of a cold-blooded animal. The glance of his bluish eyes had neither flame nor thought in it. His round, flat face excited no sympathy, nor even a laugh on the lips of those who might be examining the varieties of the Parisian species; on the contrary, it saddened them. He was, like his father, short and fat, but his figure lacked the latter's brutal obesity, and showed, instead, an almost ridiculous debility. His father's high color was changed in him to the livid flabbiness peculiar to persons who live in close back-shops, or in those railed cages called counting-rooms, forever tying up bundles, receiving and making change, snarling at the clerks, and repeating the same old speeches to customers.

The small amount of brains possessed by the brother and sister had been wholly absorbed in maintaining their business, in getting and keeping money, and in learning the special laws and usages of the Parisian market. Thread, needles, ribbons, pins, buttons, tailors' furnishings, in short, the enormous quantity of things which go to make up a mercer's stock, had taken all their capacity. Outside of their business they knew absolutely nothing; they were even ignorant of Paris. To them the great city was merely a region spreading around the Rue Saint-Denis. Their narrow natures could see no field except the shop. They were clever enough in nagging their clerks and their young women and in proving them to blame. Their happiness lay in seeing all hands busy at the counters, exhibiting the merchandise, and folding it up again. When they heard the six or eight voices of the young men and women glibly gabbling the consecrated phrases by which clerks reply to the remarks of customers, the day was fine to them, the weather beautiful! But on the really fine days, when the blue of the heavens brightened all Paris, and the Parisians walked about to enjoy themselves and cared for no "goods" but those they carried on their back, the day was overcast to the Rogrons. "Bad weather for sales," said that pair of imbeciles.

The skill with which Rogron could tie up a parcel made him an object of admiration to all his apprentices. He could fold and tie and see all that happened in the street and in the farthest recesses of the shop by the time he handed the parcel to his customer with a "Here it is, madame; nothing else to-day?" But the poor fool would have been ruined without his sister. Sylvie had common-sense and a genius for trade. She advised her brother in their purchases and would pitilessly send him to remote parts of France to save a trifle of cost. The shrewdness which all women more or less possess, not being employed in the service of her heart, had drifted into that of speculation. A business to pay for,—that thought was the mainspring which kept the machine going and gave it an infernal activity.

Rogron was really only head-clerk; he understood nothing of his business as a whole; self-interest, that great motor of the mind, had failed in his case to instruct him. He was often aghast when his sister ordered some article to be sold below cost, foreseeing the end of its fashion; later he admired her idiotically for her cleverness. He reasoned neither ill nor well; he was simply incapable of reasoning at all; but he had the sense to subordinate himself to his sister, and he did so from a consideration that was outside of the business. "She is my elder," he said. Perhaps an existence like his, always solitary, reduced to the satisfaction of mere needs, deprived of money and all pleasures in youth, may explain to physiologists and thinkers the clownish expression of the face, the feebleness of mind, the vacant silliness of the man. His sister had steadily prevented him from marrying, afraid perhaps to lose her power over him, and seeing only a source of expense and injury in some woman who would certainly be younger and undoubtedly less ugly than herself.

Silliness has two ways of comporting itself; it talks, or is silent. Silent silliness can be borne; but Rogron's silliness was loquacious. The man had a habit of chattering to his clerks, explaining the minutiae of the business, and ornamenting his talk with those flat jokes which may be called the "chaff" of shopkeeping. Rogron, listened to, of course, by his subordinates and perfectly satisfied with himself, had come at last into possession of a phraseology of his own. This chatterer believed himself an orator. The necessity of explaining to customers what they want, of guessing at their desires, and giving them desires for what they do not want, exercises the tongue of all retail shopkeepers. The petty dealer acquires the faculty of uttering words and sentences in which there is absolutely no meaning, but which have a marked success. He explains to his customers matters of manufacture that they know nothing of; that alone gives him a passing superiority over them; but take him away from his thousand and one explanations about his thousand and one articles, and he is, relatively to thought, like a fish out of water in the sun.

Rogron and Sylvie, two mechanisms baptized by mistake, did not possess,

latent or active, the feelings which give life to the heart. Their natures were shrivelled and harsh, hardened by toil, by privation, by the remembrance of their sufferings during a long and cruel apprenticeship to life. Neither of them complained of their trials. They were not so much implacable as impracticable in their dealings with others in misfortune. To them, virtue, honor, loyalty, all human sentiments consisted solely in the payment of their bills. Irritable and irritating, without feelings, and sordid in their economy, the brother and sister bore a dreadful reputation among the other merchants of the rue Saint-Denis. Had it not been for their connection with Provins, where they went three or four times a year, when they could close the shop for a day or two, they would have had no clerks or young women. But old Rogron, their father, sent them all the unfortunate young people of his neighborhood, whose parents wished to start them in business in Paris. He obtained these apprentices by boasting, out of vanity, of his son's success. Parents, attracted by the prospect of their children being well-trained and closely watched, and also, by the hope of their succeeding, eventually, to the business, sent whichever child was most in the way at home to the care of the brother and sister. But no sooner had the clerks or the young women found a way of escape from that dreadful establishment than they fled, with rejoicings that increased the already bad name of the Rogrons. New victims were supplied yearly by the indefatigable old father.

From the time she was fifteen, Sylvie Rogron, trained to the simpering of a saleswoman, had two faces,—the amiable face of the seller, the natural face of a sour spinster. Her acquired countenance was a marvellous bit of mimicry. She was all smiles. Her voice, soft and wheedling, gave a commercial charm to business. Her real face was that we have already seen projecting from the half-opened blinds; the mere sight of her would have put to flight the most resolute Cossack of 1815, much as that horde were said to like all kinds of Frenchwomen.

When the letter from the Lorrains reached the brother and sister, they were in mourning for their father, from whom they inherited the house which had been as good as stolen from Pierrette's grandmother, also certain lands bought by their father, and certain moneys acquired by usurious loans and mortgages to the peasantry, whose bits of ground the old drunkard expected to possess. The yearly taking of stock was just over. The price of the "Family Sister" had, at last, been paid in full. The Rogrons owned about sixty thousand francs' worth of merchandise, forty thousand in a bank or in their cash-box, and the value of their business. Sitting on a bench covered with striped-green Utrecht velvet placed in a square recess just behind their private counter (the counter of their forewoman being similar and directly opposite) the brother and sister consulted as to what they should do. All retail shopkeepers aspire to become members of the bourgeoisie. By selling the good-will of their business, the pair would have over a hundred and fifty thousand francs, not counting the

inheritance from their father. By placing their present available property in the public Funds, they would each obtain about four thousand francs a year, and by taking the proceeds of their business, when sold, they could repair and improve the house they inherited from their father, which would thus be a good investment. They could then go and live in a house of their own in Provins. Their forewoman was the daughter of a rich farmer at Donnemarie, burdened with nine children, to whom he had endeavored to give a good start in life, being aware that at his death his property, divided into nine parts, would be but little for any one of them. In five years, however, the man had lost seven children,—a fact which made the forewoman so interesting that Rogron had tried, unsuccessfully, to get her to marry him; but she showed an aversion for her master which baffled his manoeuvres. Besides, Mademoiselle Sylvie was not in favor of the match; in fact, she steadily opposed her brother's marriage, and sought, instead, to make the shrewd young woman their successor.

No passing observer can form the least idea of the cryptogramic existence of a certain class of shopkeepers; he looks at them and asks himself, "On what, and why, do they live? whence have they come? where do they go?" He is lost in such questions, but finds no answer to them. To discover the false seed of poesy which lies in those heads and fructifies in those lives, it is necessary to dig into them; and when we do that we soon come to a thin subsoil beneath the surface. The Parisian shopkeeper nurtures his soul on some hope or other, more or less attainable, without which he would doubtless perish. One dreams of building or managing a theatre; another longs for the honors of mayoralty; this one desires a country-house, ten miles from Paris with a so-called "park," which he will adorn with statues of tinted plaster and fountains which squirt mere threads of water, but on which he will spend a mint of money; others, again, dream of distinction and a high grade in the National Guard. Provins, that terrestrial paradise, filled the brother and sister with the fanatical longings which all the lovely towns of France inspire in their inhabitants. Let us say it to the glory of La Champagne, this love is warranted. Provins, one of the most charming towns in all France, rivals Frangistan and the valley of Cashmere; not only does it contain the poesy of Saadi, the Persian Homer, but it offers many pharmaceutical treasures to medical science. The crusades brought roses from Jericho to this enchanting valley, where by chance they gained new charms while losing none of their colors. The Provins roses are known the world over. But Provins is not only the French Persia, it is also Baden, Aix, Cheltenham,—for it has medicinal springs. This was the spot which appeared from time to time before the eyes of the two shopkeepers in the muddy regions of Saint-Denis.

After crossing the gray plains which lie between La Ferte-Gaucher and Provins, a desert and yet productive, a desert of wheat, you reach a hill.

Suddenly you behold at your feet a town watered by two rivers; at the feet of the rock on which you stand stretches a verdant valley, full of enchanting lines and fugitive horizons. If you come from Paris you will pass through the whole length of Provins on the everlasting highroad of France, which here skirts the hillside and is encumbered with beggars and blind men, who will follow you with their pitiful voices while you try to examine the unexpected picturesqueness of the region. If you come from Troyes you will approach the town on the valley side. The chateau, the old town, and its former ramparts are terraced on the hillside, the new town is below. They go by the names of Upper and Lower Provins. The upper is an airy town with steep streets commanding fine views, surrounded by sunken road-ways and ravines filled with chestnut trees which gash the sides of the hill with their deep gulleys. The upper town is silent, clean, solemn, surmounted by the imposing ruins of the old chateau. The lower is a town of mills, watered by the Voulzie and the Durtain, two rivers of Brie, narrow, sluggish, and deep; a town of inns, shops, retired merchants; filled with diligences, travelling-carriages, and waggons. The two towns, or rather this town with its historical memories, its melancholy ruins, the gaiety of its valley, the romantic charm of its ravines filled with tangled shrubbery and wildflowers, its rivers banked with gardens, excites the love of all its children, who do as the Auvergnats, the Savoyards, in fact, all French folks do, namely, leave Provins to make their fortunes, and always return. "Die in one's form," the proverb made for hares and faithful souls, seems also the motto of a Provins native.

Thus the two Rogrons thought constantly of their dear Provins. While Jerome sold his thread he saw the Upper town; as he piled up the cards on which were buttons he contemplated the valley; when he rolled and unrolled his ribbons he followed the shining rivers. Looking up at his shelves he saw the ravines where he had often escaped his father's anger and gone a-nutting or gathering blackberries. But the little square in the Lower town was the chief object of his thoughts; he imagined how he could improve his house: he dreamed of a new front, new bedrooms, a salon, a billiard-room, a dining-room, and the kitchen garden out of which he would make an English pleasure-ground, with lawns, grottos, fountains, and statuary. The bedrooms at present occupied by the brother and sister, on the second floor of a house with three windows front and six storeys high in the rue Saint-Denis, were furnished with the merest necessaries, yet no one in Paris had finer furniture than they—in fancy. When Jerome walked the streets he stopped short, struck with admiration at the handsome things in the upholsterers' windows, and at the draperies he coveted for his house. When he came home he would say to his sister: "I found in such a shop, such and such a piece of furniture that will just do for the salon." The next day he would buy another piece, and another, and so on. He rejected, the following month, the articles of the months before.

The Budget itself, could not have paid for his architectural schemes. He wanted everything he saw, but abandoned each thing for the last thing. When he saw the balconies of new houses, when he studied external ornamentation, he thought all such things, mouldings, carvings, etc., out of place in Paris. "Ah!" he would say, "those fine things would look much better at Provins." When he stood on his doorstep leaning against the lintel, digesting his morning meal, with a vacant eye, the mercer was gazing at the house of his fancy gilded by the sun of his dream; he walked in his garden; he heard the jet from his fountain falling in pearly drops upon a slab of limestone; he played on his own billiard-table; he gathered his own flowers.

Sylvie, on the other hand, was thinking so deeply, pen in hand, that she forgot to scold the clerks; she was receiving the bourgeoisie of Provins, she was looking at herself in the mirrors of her salon, and admiring the beauties of a marvellous cap. The brother and sister began to think the atmosphere of the rue Saint-Denis unhealthy, and the smell of the mud in the markets made them long for the fragrance of the Provins roses. They were the victims of a genuine nostalgia, and also of a monomania, frustrated at present by the necessity of selling their tapes and bobbins before they could leave Paris. The promised land of the valley of Provins attracted these Hebrews all the more because they had really suffered, and for a long time, as they crossed breathlessly the sandy wastes of a mercer's business.

The Lorrains' letter reached them in the midst of meditations inspired by this glorious future. They knew scarcely anything about their cousin, Pierrette Lorrain. Their father got possession of the Auffray property after they left home, and the old man said little to any one of his business affairs. They hardly remembered their aunt Lorrain. It took an hour of genealogical discussion before they made her out to be the younger sister of their own mother by the second marriage of their grandfather Auffray. It immediately struck them that this second marriage had been fatally injurious to their interests by dividing the Auffray property between two daughters. In times past they had heard their father, who was given to sneering, complain of it.

The brother and sister considered the application of the Lorrains from the point of view of such reminiscences, which were not at all favorable for Pierrette. To take charge of an orphan, a girl, a cousin, who might become their legal heir in case neither of them married,—this was a matter that needed discussion. The question was considered and debated under all its aspects. In the first place, they had never seen Pierrette. Then, what a trouble it would be to have a young girl to look after. Wouldn't it commit them to some obligations towards her? Could they send the girl away if they did not like her? Besides, wouldn't they have to marry her? and if Jerome found a yoke-mate among the heiresses of Provins they ought to keep all their property for

his children. A yokemate for Jerome, according to Sylvie, meant a stupid, rich and ugly girl who would let herself be governed. They decided to refuse the Lorrain request. Sylvie agreed to write the answer. Business being rather urgent just then she delayed writing, and the forewoman coming forward with an offer for the stock and good-will of the "Family Sister," which the brother and sister accepted, the matter went entirely out of the old maid's mind.

Sylvie Rogron and her brother departed for Provins four years before the time when the coming of Brigaut threw such excitement into Pierrette's life. But the doings of the pair after their arrival at Provins are as necessary to relate as their life in Paris; for Provins was destined to be not less fatal to Pierrette than the commercial antecedents of her cousins!

III. PATHOLOGY OF RETIRED MERCERS

When the petty shopkeeper who has come to Paris from the provinces returns to the provinces from Paris he brings with him a few ideas; then he loses them in the habits and ways of provincial life into which he plunges, and his reforming notions leave him. From this there do result, however, certain trifling, slow, successive changes by which Paris scratches the surface of the provincial towns. This process marks the transition of the ex-shopkeeper into the substantial bourgeois, but it acts like an illness upon him. No retail shopkeeper can pass with impunity from his perpetual chatter into dead silence, from his Parisian activity to the stillness of provincial life. When these worthy persons have laid by property they spend a portion of it on some desire over which they have long brooded and into which they now turn their remaining impulses, no longer restrained by force of will. Those who have not been nursing a fixed idea either travel or rush into the political interests of their municipality. Others take to hunting or fishing and torment their farmers or tenants; others again become usurers or stock-jobbers. As for the scheme of the Rogrons, brother and sister, we know what that was; they had to satisfy an imperious desire to handle the trowel and remodel their old house into a charming new one.

This fixed idea produced upon the square of Lower Provins the front of the building which Brigaut had been examining; also the interior arrangements of the house and its handsome furniture. The contractor did not drive a nail without consulting the owners, without requiring them to sign the plans and specifications, without explaining to them at full length and in every detail the nature of each article under discussion, where it was manufactured, and what were its various prices. As to the choicer things, each, they were told, had been

used by Monsieur Tiphaine, or Madame Julliard, or Monsieur the mayor, the notables of the place. The idea of having things done as the rich bourgeois of Provins did them carried the day for the contractor.

"Oh, if Monsieur Garceland has it in his house, put it in," said Mademoiselle Rogron. "It must be all right; his taste is good."

"Sylvie, see, he wants us to have ovolos in the cornice of the corridor."

"Do you call those ovolos?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"What an odd name! I never heard it before."

"But you have seen the thing?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand Latin?"

"No."

"Well, it means eggs—from the Latin ovum."

"What queer fellows you are, you architects!" cried Rogron. "It is stepping on egg-shells to deal with you."

"Shall we paint the corridor?" asked the builder.

"Good heavens, no!" cried Sylvie. "That would be five hundred francs more!"

"Oh, but the salon and the staircase are too pretty not to have the corridor decorated too," said the man. "That little Madame Lesourd had hers painted last year."

"And now, her husband, as king's attorney, is obliged to leave Provins."

"Ah, he'll be chief justice some of these days," said the builder.

"How about Monsieur Tiphaine?"

"Monsieur Tiphaine? he's got a pretty wife and is sure to get on. He'll go to Paris. Shall we paint the corridor?"

"Yes, yes," said Rogron. "The Lesourds must be made to see that we are as good as they."

The first year after the Rogrons returned to Provins was entirely taken up by such discussions, by the pleasure of watching the workmen, by the surprise occasioned to the townspeople and the replies to questions of all kinds which resulted therefrom, and also by the attempts made by Sylvie and her brother to be socially intimate with the principal families of Provins.

The Rogrons had never gone into any society; they had never left their shop, knowing absolutely no one in Paris, and now they were athirst for the pleasures of social life. On their arrival in Provins they found their former masters in Paris (long since returned to the provinces), Monsieur and Madame Julliard, lately of the "Chinese Worm," their children and grandchildren; the Guepin family, or rather the Guepin clan, the youngest scion of which now kept the "Three Distaffs"; and thirdly, Madame Guenee from whom they had purchased the "Family Sister," and whose three daughters were married and settled in Provins. These three races, Julliard, Guepin, and Guenee, had spread through the town like dog-grass through a lawn. The mayor, Monsieur Garceland, was the son-in-law of Monsieur Guepin; the curate, Abbe Peroux, was own brother to Madame Julliard; the judge, Monsieur Tiphaine junior, was brother to Madame Guenee, who signed herself "nee Tiphaine."

The queen of the town was the beautiful Madame Tiphaine junior, only daughter of Madame Roguin, the rich wife of a former notary in Paris, whose name was never mentioned. Clever, delicate, and pretty, married in the provinces to please her mother, who for special reasons did not want her with her, and took her from a convent only a few days before the wedding, Melanie Tiphaine considered herself an exile in Provins, where she behaved to admiration. Handsomely dowered, she still had hopes. As for Monsieur Tiphaine, his old father had made to his eldest daughter Madame Guenee such advances on her inheritance that an estate worth eight thousand francs a year, situated within fifteen miles of Provins, was to come wholly to him. Consequently the Tiphaines would possess, sooner or later, some forty thousand francs a year, and were not "badly off," as they say. The one overwhelming desire of the beautiful Madame Tiphaine was to get Monsieur Tiphaine elected deputy. As deputy he would become a judge in Paris; and she was firmly resolved to push him up into the Royal courts. For these reasons she tickled all vanities and strove to please all parties; and—what is far more difficult—she succeeded. Twice a week she received the bourgeoisie of Provins at her house in the Upper town. This intelligent young woman of twenty had not as yet made a single blunder or misstep on the slippery path she had taken. She gratified everybody's self-love, and petted their hobbies; serious with the serious, a girl with girls, instinctively a mother with mothers, gay with young wives and disposed to help them, gracious to all,—in short, a pearl, a treasure, the pride of Provins. She had never yet said a word of her intentions and wishes, but all the electors of Provins were awaiting the time when their dear Monsieur Tiphaine had reached the required age for nomination. Every man in the place, certain of his own talents, regarded the future deputy as his particular friend, his protector. Of course, Monsieur Tiphaine would attain to honors; he would be Keeper of the Seals, and then, what wouldn't he do for Provins!

Such were the pleasant means by which Madame Tiphaine had come to rule over the little town. Madame Guenee, Monsieur Tiphaine's sister, after having married her eldest daughter to Monsieur Lesourd, prosecuting attorney, her second to Monsieur Martener, the doctor, and the third to Monsieur Auffray, the notary, had herself married Monsieur Galardon, the collector. Mother and daughters all considered Monsieur Tiphaine as the richest and ablest man in the family. The prosecuting attorney had the strongest interest in sending his uncle to Paris, expecting to step into his shoes as judge of the local court of Provins. The four ladies formed a sort of court round Madame Tiphaine, whose ideas and advice they followed on all occasions. Monsieur Julliard, the eldest son of the old merchant, who had married the only daughter of a rich farmer, set up a sudden, secret, and disinterested passion for Madame Tiphaine, that angel descended from the Parisian skies. The clever Melanie, too clever to involve herself with Julliard, but quite capable of keeping him in the condition of Amadis and making the most of his folly, advised him to start a journal, intending herself to play the part of Egeria. For the last two years, therefore, Julliard, possessed by his romantic passion, had published the said newspaper, called the "Bee-hive," which contained articles literary, archaeological, and medical, written in the family. The advertisements paid expenses. The subscriptions, two hundred in all, made the profits. Every now and then melancholy verses, totally incomprehensible in La Brie, appeared, addressed, "TO HER!!!" with three exclamation marks. The clan Julliard was thus united to the other clans, and the salon of Madame Tiphaine became, naturally, the first in the town. The few aristocrats who lived in Provins were, of course, apart, and formed a single salon in the Upper town, at the house of the old Comtesse de Breautey.

During the first six months of their transplantation, the Rogrons, favored by their former acquaintance with several of these people, were received, first by Madame Julliard the elder, and by the former Madame Guenee, now Madame Galardon (from whom they had bought their business), and next, after a good deal of difficulty, by Madame Tiphaine. All parties wished to study the Rogrons before admitting them. It was difficult, of course, to keep out merchants of the rue Saint-Denis, originally from Provins, who had returned to the town to spend their fortunes. Still, the object of all society is to amalgamate persons of equal wealth, education, manners, customs, accomplishments, and character. Now the Guepins, Guenees, and Julliards had a better position among the bourgeoisie than the Rogrons, whose father had been held in contempt on account of his private life, and his conduct in the matter of the Auffray property,—the facts of which were known to the notary Auffray, Madame Galardon's son-in-law.

In the social life of these people, to which Madame Tiphaine had given a certain tone of elegance, all was homogeneous; the component parts

understood each other, knew each other's characters, and behaved and conversed in a manner that was agreeable to all. The Rogrons flattered themselves that being received by Monsieur Garceland, the mayor, they would soon be on good terms with all the best families in the town. Sylvie applied herself to learn boston. Rogron, incapable of playing a game, twirled his thumbs and had nothing to say except to discourse on his new house. Words seemed to choke him; he would get up, try to speak, become frightened, and sit down again, with comical distortion of the lips. Sylvie naively betrayed her natural self at cards. Sharp, irritable, whining when she lost, insolent when she won, nagging and quarrelsome, she annoyed her partners as much as her adversaries, and became the scourge of society. And yet, possessed by a silly, unconcealed ambition, Rogron and his sister were bent on playing a part in the society of a little town already in possession of a close corporation of twelve allied families. Allowing that the restoration of their house had cost them thirty thousand francs, the brother and sister possessed between them at least ten thousand francs a year. This they considered wealth, and with it they endeavored to impress society, which immediately took the measure of their vulgarity, crass ignorance, and foolish envy. On the evening when they were presented to the beautiful Madame Tiphaine, who had already eyed them at Madame Garceland's and at Madame Julliard the elder's, the queen of the town remarked to Julliard junior, who stayed a few moments after the rest of the company to talk with her and her husband:—

"You all seem to be taken with those Rogrons."

"No, no," said Amadis, "they bore my mother and annoy my wife. When Mademoiselle Sylvie was apprenticed, thirty years ago, to my father, none of them could endure her."

"I have a great mind," said Madame Tiphaine, putting her pretty foot on the bar of the fender, "to make it understood that my salon is not an inn."

Julliard raised his eyes to the ceiling, as if to say, "Good heavens? what wit, what intellect!"

"I wish my society to be select; and it certainly will not be if I admit those Rogrons."

"They have neither heart, nor mind, nor manners"; said Monsieur Tiphaine. "If, after selling thread for twenty years, as my sister did for example—"

"Your sister, my dear," said his wife in a parenthesis, "cannot be out of place in any salon."

"—if," he continued, "people are stupid enough not to throw off the shop and polish their manners, if they don't know any better than to mistake the Counts of Champagne for the accounts of a wine-shop, as Rogron did this

evening, they had better, in my opinion, stay at home."

"They are simply impudent," said Julliard. "To hear them talk you would suppose there was no other handsome house in Provins but theirs. They want to crush us; and after all, they have hardly enough to live on."

"If it was only the brother," said Madame Tiphaine, "one might put up with him; he is not so aggressive. Give him a Chinese puzzle and he will stay in a corner quietly enough; it would take him a whole winter to find it out. But Mademoiselle Sylvie, with that voice like a hoarse hyena and those lobster-claws of hands! Don't repeat all this, Julliard."

When Julliard had departed the little woman said to her husband:—

"I have aborigines enough whom I am forced to receive; these two will fairly kill me. With your permission, I shall deprive myself of their society."

"You are mistress in your own house," replied he; "but that will make enemies. The Rogrons will fling themselves into the opposition, which hitherto has had no real strength in Provins. That Rogron is already intimate with Baron Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet."

"Then," said Melanie, laughing, "they will do you some service. Where there are no opponents, there is no triumph. A liberal conspiracy, an illegal cabal, a struggle of any kind, will bring you into the foreground."

The justice looked at his young wife with a sort of alarmed admiration.

The next day it was whispered about that the Rogrons had not altogether succeeded in Madame Tiphaine's salon. That lady's speech about an inn was immensely admired. It was a whole month before she returned Mademoiselle Sylvie's visit. Insolence of this kind is very much noticed in the provinces.

During the evening which Sylvie had spent at Madame Tiphaine's a disagreeable scene occurred between herself and old Madame Julliard while playing boston, apropos of a trick which Sylvie declared the old lady had made her lose on purpose; for the old maid, who liked to trip others, could never endure the same game on herself. The next time she was invited out the mistress took care to make up the card-tables before she arrived; so that Sylvie was reduced to wandering from table to table as an onlooker, the players glancing at her with scornful eyes. At Madame Julliard senior's house, they played whist, a game Sylvie did not know.

The old maid at last understood that she was under a ban; but she had no conception of the reason of it. She fancied herself an object of jealousy to all these persons. After a time she and her brother received no invitations, but they still persisted in paying evening visits. Satirical persons made fun of them,—not spitefully, but amusingly; inveigling them to talk absurdly about

the eggs in their cornice, and their wonderful cellar of wine, the like of which was not in Provins.

Before long the Rogron house was completely finished, and the brother and sister then resolved to give several sumptuous dinners, as much to return the civilities they had received as to exhibit their luxury. The invited guests accepted from curiosity only. The first dinner was given to the leading personages of the town; to Monsieur and Madame Tiphaine, with whom, however the Rogrons had never dined; to Monsieur and Madame Julliard, senior and junior; to Monsieur Lesourd, Monsieur le cure, and Monsieur and Madame Galardon. It was one of those interminable provincial dinners, where you sit at table from five to nine o'clock. Madame Tiphaine had introduced into Provins the Parisian custom of taking leave as soon as coffee had been served. On this occasion she had company at home and was anxious to get away. The Rogrons accompanied her husband and herself to the street door, and when they returned to the salon, disconcerted at not being able to keep their chief guests, the rest of the party were preparing to imitate Madame Tiphaine's fashion with cruel provincial promptness.

"They won't see our salon lighted up," said Sylvie, "and that's the show of the house."

The Rogrons had counted on surprising their guests. It was the first time any one had been admitted to the now celebrated house, and the company assembled at Madame Tiphaine's was eagerly awaiting her opinion of the marvels of the "Rogron palace."

"Well!" cried little Madame Martener, "you've seen the Louvre; tell us all about it."

"All? Well, it would be like the dinner,—not much."

"But do describe it."

"Well, to begin with, that front door, the gilded grating of which we have all admired," said Madame Tiphaine, "opens upon a long corridor which divides the house unequally; on the right side there is one window, on the other, two. At the garden end, the corridor opens with a glass door upon a portico with steps to the lawn, where there's a sun dial and a plaster statue of Spartacus, painted to imitate bronze. Behind the kitchen, the builder has put the staircase, and a sort of larder which we are spared the sight of. The staircase, painted to imitate black marble with yellow veins, turns upon itself like those you see in cafes leading from the ground-floor to the entresol. The balustrade, of walnut with brass ornaments and dangerously slight, was pointed out to us as one of the seven wonders of the world. The cellar stairs run under it. On the other side of the corridor is the dining-room, which

communicates by folding-doors with a salon of equal size, the windows of which look on the garden."

"Dear me, is there no ante-chamber?" asked Madame Auffray.

"The corridor, full of draughts, answers for an ante-chamber," replied Madame Tiphaine. "Our friends have had, they assured us, the eminently national, liberal, constitutional, and patriotic feeling to use none but French woods in the house; so the floor in the dining-room is chestnut, the sideboards, tables, and chairs, of the same. White calico window-curtains, with red borders, are held back by vulgar red straps; these magnificent draperies run on wooden curtain rods ending in brass lion's-paws. Above one of the sideboards hangs a dial suspended by a sort of napkin in gilded bronze,—an idea that seemed to please the Rogrons hugely. They tried to make me admire the invention; all I could manage to say was that if it was ever proper to wrap a napkin round a dial it was certainly in a dining-room. On the sideboard were two huge lamps like those on the counter of a restaurant. Above the other sideboard hung a barometer, excessively ornate, which seems to play a great part in their existence; Rogron gazed at it as he might at his future wife. Between the two windows is a white porcelain stove in a niche overloaded with ornament. The walls glow with a magnificent paper, crimson and gold, such as you see in the same restaurants, where, no doubt, the Rogrons chose it. Dinner was served on white and gold china, with a dessert service of light blue with green flowers, but they showed us another service in earthenware for everyday use. Opposite to each sideboard was a large cupboard containing linen. All was clean, new, and horribly sharp in tone. However, I admit the dining-room; it has some character, though disagreeable; it represents that of the masters of the house. But there is no enduring the five engravings that hang on the walls; the Minister of the Interior ought really to frame a law against them. One was Poniatowski jumping into the Elster; the others, Napoleon pointing a cannon, the defence at Clichy, and the two Mazepas, all in gilt frames of the vulgarest description,—fit to carry off the prize of disgust. Oh! how much I prefer Madame Julliard's pastels of fruit, those excellent Louis XV. pastels, which are in keeping with the old dining-room and its gray panels,—defaced by age, it is true, but they possess the true provincial characteristics that go well with old family silver, precious china, and our simple habits. The provinces are provinces; they are only ridiculous when they mimic Paris. I prefer this old salon of my husband's forefathers, with its heavy curtains of green and white damask, the Louis XV. mantelpiece, the twisted pier-glasses, the old mirrors with their beaded mouldings, and the venerable card tables. Yes, I prefer my old Sevres vases in royal blue, mounted on copper, my clock with those impossible flowers, that rococco chandelier, and the tapestried furniture, to all the finery of the Rogron salon."

"What is the salon like?" said Monsieur Martener, delighted with the praise the handsome Parisian bestowed so adroitly on the provinces.

"As for the salon, it is all red,—the red Mademoiselle Sylvie turns when she loses at cards."

"Sylvan-red," said Monsieur Tiphaine, whose sparkling saying long remained in the vocabulary of Provins.

"Window-curtains, red; furniture, red; mantelpiece, red, veined yellow, candelabra and clock ditto mounted on bronze, common and heavy in design,—Roman standards with Greek foliage! Above the clock is that inevitable good-natured lion which looks at you with a simper, the lion of ornamentation, with a big ball under his feet, symbol of the decorative lion, who passes his life holding a black ball,—exactly like a deputy of the Left. Perhaps it is meant as a constitutional myth. The face of the clock is curious. The glass over the chimney is framed in that new fashion of applied mouldings which is so trumpery and vulgar. From the ceiling hangs a chandelier carefully wrapped in green muslin, and rightly too, for it is in the worst taste, the sharpest tint of bronze with hideous ornaments. The walls are covered with a red flock paper to imitate velvet enclosed in panels, each panel decorated with a chromo-lithograph in one of those frames festooned with stucco flowers to represent wood-carving. The furniture, in cashmere and elm-wood, consists, with classic uniformity, of two sofas, two easy-chairs, two armchairs, and six common chairs. A vase in alabaster, called a la Medicis, kept under glass stands on a table between the windows; before the windows, which are draped with magnificent red silk curtains and lace curtains under them, are card-tables. The carpet is Aubusson, and you may be sure the Rogrons did not fail to lay hands on that most vulgar of patterns, large flowers on a red ground. The room looks as if no one ever lived there; there are no books, no engravings, none of those little knick-knacks we all have lying about," added Madame Tiphaine, glancing at her own table covered with fashionable trifles, albums, and little presents given to her by friends; "and there are no flowers,—it is all cold and barren, like Mademoiselle Sylvie herself. Buffon says the style is the man, and certainly salons have styles of their own."

From this sketch everybody can see the sort of house the brother and sister lived in, though they can never imagine the absurdities into which a clever builder dragged the ignorant pair,—new inventions, fantastic ornaments, a system for preventing smoky chimneys, another for preventing damp walls; painted marquetry panels on the staircase, colored glass, superfine locks,—in short, all those vulgarities which make a house expensive and gratify the bourgeois taste.

No one chose to visit the Rogrons, whose social plans thus came to

nothing. Their invitations were refused under various excuses,—the evenings were already engaged to Madame Garceland and the other ladies of the Provins world. The Rogrons had supposed that all that was required to gain a position in society was to give a few dinners. But no one any longer accepted them, except a few young men who went to make fun of their host and hostess, and certain diners-out who went everywhere.

Frightened at the loss of forty thousand francs swallowed up without profit in what she called her "dear house," Sylvie now set to work to recover it by economy. She gave no more dinners, which had cost her forty or fifty francs without the wines, and did not fulfil her social hopes, hopes that are as hard to realize in the provinces as in Paris. She sent away her cook, took a country-girl to do the menial work, and did her own cooking, as she said, "for pleasure."

Fourteen months after their return to Provins, the brother and sister had fallen into a solitary and wholly unoccupied condition. Their banishment from society roused in Sylvie's heart a dreadful hatred against the Tiphaines, Julliards and all the other members of the social world of Provins, which she called "the clique," and with whom her personal relations became extremely cold. She would gladly have set up a rival clique, but the lesser bourgeoisie was made up of either small shopkeepers who were only free on Sundays and fete-days, or smirched individuals like the lawyer Vinet and Doctor Neraud, and wholly inadmissible Bonapartists like Baron Gouraud, with whom, however, Rogron thoughtlessly allied himself, though the upper bourgeoisie had warned him against them.

The brother and sister were, therefore, forced to sit by the fire of the stove in the dining-room, talking over their former business, trying to recall the faces of their customers and other matters they had intended to forget. By the end of the second winter ennui weighed heavily on them. They did not know how to get through each day; sometimes as they went to bed the words escaped them, "There's another over!" They dragged out the morning by staying in bed, and dressing slowly. Rogron shaved himself every day, examined his face, consulted his sister on any changes he thought he saw there, argued with the servant about the temperature of his hot water, wandered into the garden, looked to see if the shrubs were budding, sat at the edge of the water where he had built himself a kiosk, examined the joinery of his house,—had it sprung? had the walls settled, the panels cracked? or he would come in fretting about a sick hen, and complaining to his sister, who was nagging the servant as she set the table, of the dampness which was coming out in spots upon the plaster. The barometer was Rogron's most useful bit of property. He consulted it at all hours, tapped it familiarly like a friend, saying: "Vile weather!" to which his sister would reply, "Pooh! it is only seasonable." If any one called to see him the excellence of that instrument was

his chief topic of conversation.

Breakfast took up some little time; with what deliberation those two human beings masticated their food! Their digestions were perfect; cancer of the stomach was not to be dreaded by them. They managed to get along till twelve o'clock by reading the "Bee-hive" and the "Constitutionnel." The cost of subscribing to the Parisian paper was shared by Vinet the lawyer, and Baron Gouraud. Rogron himself carried the paper to Gouraud, who had been a colonel and lived on the square, and whose long yarns were Rogron's delight; the latter sometimes puzzled over the warnings he had received, and asked himself how such a lively companion could be dangerous. He was fool enough to tell the colonel he had been warned against him, and to repeat all the "clique" had said. God knows how the colonel, who feared no one, and was equally to be dreaded with pistols or a sword, gave tongue about Madame Tiphaine and her Amadis, and the ministerialists of the Upper town, persons capable of any villany to get places, and who counted the votes at elections to suit themselves, etc.

About two o'clock Rogron started for a little walk. He was quite happy if some shopkeeper standing on the threshold of his door would stop him and say, "Well, pere Rogron, how goes it with you?" Then he would talk, and ask for news, and gather all the gossip of the town. He usually went as far as the Upper town, sometimes to the ravines, according to the weather. Occasionally he would meet old men taking their walks abroad like himself. Such meetings were joyful events to him. There happened to be in Provins a few men weary of Parisian life, quiet scholars who lived with their books. Fancy the bewilderment of the ignorant Rogron when he heard a deputy-judge named Desfondrilles, more of an archaeologist than a magistrate, saying to old Monsieur Martener, a really learned man, as he pointed to the valley:—

"Explain to me why the idlers of Europe go to Spa instead of coming to Provins, when the springs here have a superior curative value recognized by the French faculty,—a potential worthy of the medicinal properties of our roses."

"That is one of the caprices of caprice," said the old gentleman. "Bordeaux wine was unknown a hundred years ago. Marechal de Richelieu, one of the noted men of the last century, the French Alcibiades, was appointed governor of Guyenne. His lungs were diseased, and, heaven knows why! the wine of the country did him good and he recovered. Bordeaux instantly made a hundred millions; the marshal widened its territory to Angouleme, to Cahors,—in short, to over a hundred miles of circumference! it is hard to tell where the Bordeaux vineyards end. And yet they haven't erected an equestrian statue to the marshal in Bordeaux!"

"Ah! if anything of that kind happens to Provins," said Monsieur Desfondrilles, "let us hope that somewhere in the Upper or Lower town they will set up a bas-relief of the head of Monsieur Opoix, the re-discoverer of the mineral waters of Provins."

"My dear friend, the revival of Provins is impossible," replied Monsieur Martener; "the town was made bankrupt long ago."

"What!" cried Rogron, opening his eyes very wide.

"It was once a capital, holding its own against Paris in the twelfth century, when the Comtes de Champagne held their court here, just as King Rene held his in Provence," replied the man of learning; "for in those days civilization, gaiety, poesy, elegance, and women, in short all social splendors, were not found exclusively in Paris. It is as difficult for towns and cities as it is for commercial houses to recover from ruin. Nothing is left to us of the old Provins but the fragrance of our historical glory and that of our roses,—and a sub-prefecture!"

"Ah! what mightn't France be if she had only preserved her feudal capitals!" said Desfondrilles. "Can sub-prefects replace the poetic, gallant, warlike race of the Thibaults who made Provins what Ferrara was to Italy, Weimar to Germany,—what Munich is trying to be to-day."

"Was Provins ever a capital?" asked Rogron.

"Why! where do you come from?" exclaimed the archaeologist. "Don't you know," he added, striking the ground of the Upper town where they stood with his cane, "don't you know that the whole of this part of Provins is built on catacombs?"

"Catacombs?"

"Yes, catacombs, the extent and height of which are yet undiscovered. They are like the naves of cathedrals, and there are pillars in them."

"Monsieur is writing a great archaeological work to explain these strange constructions," interposed Monsieur Martener, seeing that the deputy-judge was about to mount his hobby.

Rogron came home much comforted to know that his house was in the valley. The crypts of Provins kept him occupied for a week in explorations, and gave a topic of conversation to the unhappy celibates for many evenings.

In the course of these ramblings Rogron picked up various bits of information about Provins, its inhabitants, their marriages, together with stale political news; all of which he narrated to his sister. Scores of times in his walks he would stop and say,—often to the same person on the same day,—"Well, what's the news?" When he reached home he would fling himself on

the sofa like a man exhausted with labor, whereas he was only worn out with the burden of his own dulness. Dinner came at last, after he had gone twenty times to the kitchen and back, compared the clocks, and opened and shut all the doors of the house. So long as the brother and sister could spend their evenings in paying visits they managed to get along till bedtime; but after they were compelled to stay at home those evenings became like a parching desert. Sometimes persons passing through the quiet little square would hear unearthly noises as though the brother were throttling the sister; a moment's listening would show that they were only yawning. These two human mechanisms, having nothing to grind between their rusty wheels, were creaking and grating at each other. The brother talked of marrying, but only in despair. He felt old and weary; the thought of a woman frightened him. Sylvie, who began to see the necessity of having a third person in the home, suddenly remembered the little cousin, about whom no one in Provins had yet inquired, the friends of Madame Lorrain probably supposing that mother and child were both dead.

Sylvie Rogron never lost anything; she was too thoroughly an old maid even to mislay the smallest article; but she pretended to have suddenly found the Lorrains' letter, so as to mention Pierrette naturally to her brother, who was greatly pleased at the possibility of having a little girl in the house. Sylvie replied to Madame Lorrain's letter half affectionately, half commercially, as one may say, explaining the delay by their change of abode and the settlement of their affairs. She seemed desirous of receiving her little cousin, and hinted that Pierrette would perhaps inherit twelve thousand francs a year if her brother Jerome did not marry.

Perhaps it is necessary to have been, like Nebuchadnezzar, something of a wild beast, and shut up in a cage at the Jardin des Plantes without other prey than the butcher's meat doled out by the keeper, or a retired merchant deprived of the joys of tormenting his clerks, to understand the impatience with which the brother and sister awaited the arrival of their cousin Lorrain. Three days after the letter had gone, the pair were already asking themselves when she would get there.

Sylvie perceived in her spurious benevolence towards her poor cousin a means of recovering her position in the social world of Provins. She accordingly went to call on Madame Tiphaine, of whose reprobation she was conscious, in order to impart the fact of Pierrette's approaching arrival,—deploring the girl's unfortunate position, and posing herself as being only too happy to succor her and give her a position as daughter and future heiress.

"You have been rather long in discovering her," said Madame Tiphaine, with a touch of sarcasm.

A few words said in a low voice by Madame Garceland, while the cards were being dealt, recalled to the minds of those who heard her the shameful conduct of old Rogron about the Auffray property; the notary explained the iniquity.

"Where is the little girl now?" asked Monsieur Tiphaine, politely.

"In Brittany," said Rogron.

"Brittany is a large place," remarked Monsieur Lesourd.

"Her grandfather and grandmother Lorrain wrote to us—when was that, my dear?" said Rogron addressing his sister.

Sylvie, who was just then asking Madame Garceland where she had bought the stuff for her gown, answered hastily, without thinking of the effect of her words:—

"Before we sold the business."

"And have you only just answered the letter, mademoiselle?" asked the notary.

Sylvie turned as red as a live coal.

"We wrote to the Institution of Saint-Jacques," remarked Rogron.

"That is a sort of hospital or almshouse for old people," said Monsieur Desfondrilles, who knew Nantes. "She can't be there; they receive no one under sixty."

"She is there, with her grandmother Lorrain," said Rogron.

"Her mother had a little fortune, the eight thousand francs which your father—no, I mean of course your grandfather—left to her," said the notary, making the blunder intentionally.

"Ah!" said Rogron, stupidly, not understanding the notary's sarcasm.

"Then you know nothing about your cousin's position or means?" asked Monsieur Tiphaine.

"If Monsieur Rogron had known it," said the deputy-judge, "he would never have left her all this time in an establishment of that kind. I remember now that a house in Nantes belonging to Monsieur and Madame Lorrain was sold under an order of the court, and that Mademoiselle Lorrain's claim was swallowed up. I know this, for I was commissioner at the time."

The notary spoke of Colonel Lorrain, who, had he lived, would have been much amazed to know that his daughter was in such an institution. The Rogrons beat a retreat, saying to each other that the world was very malicious.

Sylvie perceived that the news of her benevolence had missed its effect,—in fact, she had lost ground in all minds; and she felt that henceforth she was forbidden to attempt an intimacy with the upper class of Provins. After this evening the Rogrons no longer concealed their hatred of that class and all its adherents. The brother told the sister the scandals that Colonel Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet had put into his head about the Tiphaines, the Guenees, the Garcelands, the Julliards, and others:—

"I declare, Sylvie, I don't see why Madame Tiphaine should turn up her nose at shopkeeping in the rue Saint-Denis; it is more honest than what she comes from. Madame Roguin, her mother, is cousin to those Guillaumes of the 'Cat-playing-ball' who gave up the business to Joseph Lebas, their son-in-law. Her father is that Roguin who failed in 1819, and ruined the house of Cesar Birotteau. Madame Tiphaine's fortune was stolen,—for what else are you to call it when a notary's wife who is very rich lets her husband make a fraudulent bankruptcy? Fine doings! and she marries her daughter in Provins to get her out of the way,—all on account of her own relations with du Tillet. And such people set up to be proud! Well, well, that's the world!"

On the day when Jerome Rogron and his sister began to declaim against "the clique" they were, without being aware of it, on the road to having a society of their own; their house was to become a rendezvous for other interests seeking a centre,—those of the hitherto floating elements of the liberal party in Provins. And this is how it came about: The launch of the Rogrons in society had been watched with great curiosity by Colonel Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet, two men drawn together, first by their ostracism, next by their opinions. They both professed patriotism and for the same reason,—they wished to become of consequence. The Liberals in Provins were, so far, confined to one old soldier who kept a cafe, an innkeeper, Monsieur Cournant a notary, Doctor Neraud, and a few stray persons, mostly farmers or those who had bought lands of the public domain.

The colonel and the lawyer, delighted to lay hands on a fool whose money would be useful to their schemes, and who might himself, in certain cases, be made to bell the cat, while his house would serve as a meeting-ground for the scattered elements of the party, made the most of the Rogrons' ill-will against the upper classes of the place. The three had already a slight tie in their united subscription to the "Constitutionnel"; it would certainly not be difficult for the colonel to make a Liberal of the ex-mercer, though Rogron knew so little of politics that he was capable of regarding the exploits of Sergeant Mercier as those of a brother shopkeeper.

The expected arrival of Pierrette brought to sudden fruition the selfish ideas of the two men, inspired as they were by the folly and ignorance of the celibates. Seeing that Sylvie had lost all chance of establishing herself in the

good society of the place, an afterthought came to the colonel. Old soldiers have seen so many horrors in all lands, so many grinning corpses on battle-fields, that no physiognomies repel them; and Gouraud began to cast his eyes on the old maid's fortune. This imperial colonel, a short, fat man, wore enormous rings in ears that were bushy with tufts of hair. His sparse and grizzled whiskers were called in 1799 "fins." His jolly red face was rather discolored, like those of all who had lived to tell of the Beresina. The lower half of his big, pointed stomach marked the straight line which characterizes a cavalry officer. Gouraud had commanded the Second Hussars. His gray moustache hid a huge blustering mouth,—if we may use a term which alone describes that gulf. He did not eat his food, he engulfed it. A sabre cut had slit his nose, by which his speech was made thick and very nasal, like that attributed to Capuchins. His hands, which were short and broad, were of the kind that make women say: "You have the hands of a rascal." His legs seemed slender for his torso. In that fat and active body an absolutely lawless spirit disported itself, and a thorough experience of the things of life, together with a profound contempt for social convention, lay hidden beneath the apparent indifference of a soldier. Colonel Gouraud wore the cross of an officer of the Legion of honor, and his emoluments from that, together with his salary as a retired officer, gave him in all about three thousand francs a year.

The lawyer, tall and thin, had liberal opinions in place of talent, and his only revenue was the meagre profits of his office. In Provins lawyers plead their own cases. The court was unfavorable to Vinet on account of his opinions; consequently, even the farmers who were Liberals, when it came to lawsuits preferred to employ some lawyer who was more congenial to the judges. Vinet was regarded with disfavor in other ways. He was said to have seduced a rich girl in the neighborhood of Coulommiers, and thus have forced her parents to marry her to him. Madame Vinet was a Chargeboeuf, an old and noble family of La Brie, whose name comes from the exploit of a squire during the expedition of Saint Louis to Egypt. She incurred the displeasure of her father and mother, who arranged, unknown to Vinet, to leave their entire fortune to their son, doubtless charging him privately, to pay over a portion of it to his sister's children.

Thus the first bold effort of the ambitious man was a failure. Pursued by poverty, and ashamed not to give his wife the means of making a suitable appearance, he had made desperate efforts to enter public life, but the Chargeboeuf family refused him their influence. These Royalists disapproved, on moral grounds, of his forced marriage; besides, he was named Vinet, and how could they be expected to protect a plebian? Thus he was driven from branch to branch when he tried to get some good out of his marriage. Repulsed by every one, filled with hatred for the family of his wife, for the government which denied him a place, for the social world of Provins, which refused to

admit him, Vinet submitted to his fate; but his gall increased. He became a Liberal in the belief that his fortune might yet be made by the triumph of the opposition, and he lived in a miserable little house in the Upper town from which his wife seldom issued. Madame Vinet had found no one to defend her since her marriage except an old Madame de Chargeboeuf, a widow with one daughter, who lived at Troyes. The unfortunate young woman, destined for better things, was absolutely alone in her home with a single child.

There are some kinds of poverty which may be nobly accepted and gaily borne; but Vinet, devoured by ambition, and feeling himself guilty towards his wife, was full of darkling rage; his conscience grew elastic; and he finally came to think any means of success permissible. His young face changed. Persons about the courts were sometimes frightened as they looked at his viperish, flat head, his slit mouth, his eyes gleaming through glasses, and heard his sharp, persistent voice which rasped their nerves. His muddy skin, with its sickly tones of green and yellow, expressed the jaundice of his balked ambition, his perpetual disappointments and his hidden wretchedness. He could talk and argue; he was well-informed and shrewd, and was not without smartness and metaphor. Accustomed to look at everything from the standpoint of his own success, he was well fitted for a politician. A man who shrinks from nothing so long as it is legal, is strong; and Vinet's strength lay there.

This future athlete of parliamentary debate, who was destined to share in proclaiming the dynasty of the house of Orleans had a terrible influence on Pierrette's fate. At the present moment he was bent on making for himself a weapon by founding a newspaper at Provins. After studying the Rogrons at a distance (the colonel aiding him) he had come to the conclusion that the brother might be made useful. This time he was not mistaken; his days of poverty were over, after seven wretched years, when even his daily bread was sometimes lacking. The day when Gouraud told him in the little square that the Rogrons had finally quarrelled with the bourgeois aristocracy of the Upper town, he nudged the colonel in the ribs significantly, and said, with a knowing look:—

"One woman or another—handsome or ugly—you don't care; marry Mademoiselle Rogron and we can organize something at once."

"I have been thinking of it," replied Gouraud, "but the fact is they have sent for the daughter of Colonel Lorrain, and she's their next of kin."

"You can get them to make a will in your favor. Ha! you would get a very comfortable house."

"As for the little girl—well, well, let's see her," said the colonel, with a leering and thoroughly wicked look, which proved to a man of Vinet's quality

how little respect the old trooper could feel for any girl.

IV. PIERRETTE

After her grandfather and grandmother entered the sort of hospital in which they sadly expected to end their days, Pierrette, being young and proud, suffered so terribly at living there on charity that she was thankful when she heard she had rich relations. When Brigaut, the son of her mother's friend the major, and the companion of her childhood, who was learning his trade as a cabinet-maker at Nantes, heard of her departure he offered her the money to pay her way to Paris in the diligence,—sixty francs, the total of his pour-boires as an apprentice, slowly amassed, and accepted by Pierrette with the sublime indifference of true affection, showing that in a like case she herself would be affronted by thanks.

Brigaut was in the habit of going every Sunday to Saint-Jacques to play with Pierrette and try to console her. The vigorous young workman knew the dear delight of bestowing a complete and devoted protection on an object involuntarily chosen by his heart. More than once he and Pierrette, sitting on Sundays in a corner of the garden, had embroidered the veil of the future with their youthful projects; the apprentice, armed with his plane, scoured the world to make their fortune, while Pierrette waited.

In October, 1824, when the child had completed her eleventh year, she was entrusted by the two old people and by Brigaut, all three sorrowfully sad, to the conductor of the diligence from Nantes to Paris, with an entreaty to put her safely on the diligence from Paris to Provins and to take good care of her. Poor Brigaut! he ran like a dog after the coach looking at his dear Pierrette as long as he was able. In spite of her signs he ran over three miles, and when at last he was exhausted his eyes, wet with tears, still followed her. She, too, was crying when she saw him no longer running by her, and putting her head out of the window she watched him, standing stock-still and looking after her, as the lumbering vehicle disappeared.

The Lorrains and Brigaut knew so little of life that the girl had not a penny when she arrived in Paris. The conductor, to whom she had mentioned her rich friends, paid her expenses at the hotel, and made the conductor of the Provins diligence pay him, telling him to take good care of the girl and to see that the charges were paid by the family, exactly as though she were a case of goods. Four days after her departure from Nantes, about nine o'clock of a Monday night, a kind old conductor of the Messageries-royales, took Pierrette by the hand, and while the porters were discharging in the Grand'Rue the packages

and passengers for Provins, he led the little girl, whose only baggage was a bundle containing two dresses, two chemises, and two pairs of stockings, to Mademoiselle Rogron's house, which was pointed out to him by the director at the coach office.

"Good-evening, mademoiselle and the rest of the company. I've brought you a cousin, and here she is; and a nice little girl too, upon my word. You have forty-seven francs to pay me, and sign my book."

Mademoiselle Sylvie and her brother were dumb with pleasure and amazement.

"Excuse me," said the conductor, "the coach is waiting. Sign my book and pay me forty-seven francs, sixty centimes, and whatever you please for myself and the conductor from Nantes; we've taken care of the little girl as if she were our own; and paid for her beds and her food, also her fare to Provins, and other little things."

"Forty-seven francs, twelve sous!" said Sylvie.

"You are not going to dispute it?" cried the man.

"Where's the bill?" said Rogron.

"Bill! look at the book."

"Stop talking, and pay him," said Sylvie, "You see there's nothing else to be done."

Rogron went to get the money, and gave the man forty-seven francs, twelve sous.

"And nothing for my comrade and me?" said the conductor.

Sylvie took two francs from the depths of the old velvet bag which held her keys.

"Thank you, no," said the man; "keep 'em yourself. We would rather care for the little one for her own sake." He picked up his book and departed, saying to the servant-girl: "What a pair! it seems there are crocodiles out of Egypt!"

"Such men are always brutal," said Sylvie, who overhead the words.

"They took good care of the little girl, anyhow," said Adele with her hands on her hips.

"We don't have to live with him," remarked Rogron.

"Where's the little one to sleep?" asked Adele.

Such was the arrival of Pierrette Lorrain in the home of her cousins, who

gazed at her with stolid eyes; she was tossed to them like a package, with no intermediate state between the wretched chamber at Saint-Jacques and the dining-room of her cousins, which seemed to her a palace. She was shy and speechless. To all other eyes than those of the Rogrons the little Breton girl would have seemed enchanting as she stood there in her petticoat of coarse blue flannel, with a pink cambric apron, thick shoes, blue stockings, and a white kerchief, her hands being covered by red worsted mittens edged with white, bought for her by the conductor. Her dainty Breton cap (which had been washed in Paris, for the journey from Nantes had rumpled it) was like a halo round her happy little face. This national cap, of the finest lawn, trimmed with stiffened lace pleated in flat folds, deserves description, it was so dainty and simple. The light coming through the texture and the lace produced a partial shadow, the soft shadow of a light upon the skin, which gave her the virginal grace that all painters seek and Leopold Robert found for the Raffaelesque face of the woman who holds a child in his picture of "The Gleaners." Beneath this fluted frame of light sparkled a white and rosy and artless face, glowing with vigorous health. The warmth of the room brought the blood to the cheeks, to the tips of the pretty ears, to the lips and the end of the delicate nose, making the natural white of the complexion whiter still.

"Well, are you not going to say anything? I am your cousin Sylvie, and that is your cousin Rogron."

"Do you want something to eat?" asked Rogron.

"When did you leave Nantes?" asked Sylvie.

"Is she dumb?" said Rogron.

"Poor little dear, she has hardly any clothes," cried Adele, who had opened the child's bundle, tied up in a handkerchief of the old Lorrains.

"Kiss your cousin," said Sylvie.

Pierrette kissed Rogron.

"Kiss your cousin," said Rogron.

Pierrette kissed Sylvie.

"She is tired out with her journey, poor little thing; she wants to go to sleep," said Adele.

Pierrette was overcome with a sudden and invincible aversion for her two relatives,—a feeling that no one had ever before excited in her. Sylvie and the maid took her up to bed in the room where Brigaut afterwards noticed the white cotton curtain. In it was a little bed with a pole painted blue, from which hung a calico curtain; a walnut bureau without a marble top, a small table, a looking-glass, a very common night-table without a door, and three chairs

completed the furniture of the room. The walls, which sloped in front, were hung with a shabby paper, blue with black flowers. The tiled floor, stained red and polished, was icy to the feet. There was no carpet except for a strip at the bedside. The mantelpiece of common marble was adorned by a mirror, two candelabra in copper-gilt, and a vulgar alabaster cup in which two pigeons, forming handles, were drinking.

"You will be comfortable here, my little girl?" said Sylvie.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" said the child, in her silvery voice.

"She's not difficult to please," muttered the stout servant. "Sha'n't I warm her bed?" she asked.

"Yes," said Sylvie, "the sheets may be damp."

Adele brought one of her own night-caps when she returned with the warming-pan, and Pierrette, who had never slept in anything but the coarsest linen sheets, was amazed at the fineness and softness of the cotton ones. When she was fairly in bed and tucked up, Adele, going downstairs with Sylvie, could not refrain from saying, "All she has isn't worth three francs, mademoiselle."

Ever since her economical regime began, Sylvie had compelled the maid to sit in the dining-room so that one fire and one lamp could do for all; except when Colonel Gouraud and Vinet came, on which occasions Adele was sent to the kitchen.

Pierrette's arrival enlivened the rest of the evening.

"We must get her some clothes to-morrow," said Sylvie; "she has absolutely nothing."

"No shoes but those she had on, which weigh a pound," said Adele.

"That's always so, in their part of the country," remarked Rogron.

"How she looked at her room! though it really isn't handsome enough for a cousin of yours, mademoiselle."

"It is good enough; hold your tongue," said Sylvie.

"Gracious, what chemises! coarse enough to scratch her skin off; not a thing can she use here," said Adele, emptying the bundle.

Master, mistress, and servant were busy till past ten o'clock, deciding what cambric they should buy for the new chemises, how many pairs of stockings, how many under-petticoats, and what material, and in reckoning up the whole cost of Pierrette's outfit.

"You won't get off under three hundred francs," said Rogron, who could

remember the different prices, and add them up from his former shop-keeping habit.

"Three hundred francs!" cried Sylvie.

"Yes, three hundred. Add it up."

The brother and sister went over the calculation once more, and found the cost would be fully three hundred francs, not counting the making.

"Three hundred francs at one stroke!" said Sylvie to herself as she got into bed.

Pierrette was one of those children of love whom love endows with its tenderness, its vivacity, its gaiety, its nobility, its devotion. Nothing had so far disturbed or wounded a heart that was delicate as that of a fawn, but which was now painfully repressed by the cold greeting of her cousins. If Brittany had been full of outward misery, at least it was full of love. The old Lorrains were the most incapable of merchants, but they were also the most loving, frank, caressing, of friends, like all who are incautious and free from calculation. Their little granddaughter had received no other education at Pen-Hoel than that of nature. Pierrette went where she liked, in a boat on the pond, or roaming the village and the fields with Jacques Brigaut, her comrade, exactly as Paul and Virginia might have done. Petted by everybody, free as air, they gaily chased the joys of childhood. In summer they ran to watch the fishing, they caught the many-colored insects, they gathered flowers, they gardened; in winter they made slides, they built snow-men or huts, or pelted each other with snowballs. Welcomed by all, they met with smiles wherever they went.

When the time came to begin their education, disasters came, too. Jacques, left without means at the death of his father, was apprenticed by his relatives to a cabinet-maker, and fed by charity, as Pierrette was soon to be at Saint-Jacques. Until the little girl was taken with her grandparents to that asylum, she had known nothing but fond caresses and protection from every one. Accustomed to confide in so much love, the little darling missed in these rich relatives, so eagerly desired, the kindly looks and ways which all the world, even strangers and the conductors of the coaches, had bestowed upon her. Her bewilderment, already great, was increased by the moral atmosphere she had entered. The heart turns suddenly cold or hot like the body. The poor child wanted to cry, without knowing why; but being very tired she went to sleep.

The next morning, Pierrette being, like all country children, accustomed to get up early, was awake two hours before the cook. She dressed herself, stepping on tiptoe about her room, looked out at the little square, started to go downstairs and was struck with amazement by the beauties of the staircase.

She stopped to examine all its details: the painted walls, the brasses, the various ornamentations, the window fixtures. Then she went down to the garden-door, but was unable to open it, and returned to her room to wait until Adele should be stirring. As soon as the woman went to the kitchen Pierrette flew to the garden and took possession of it, ran to the river, was amazed at the kiosk, and sat down in it; truly, she had enough to see and to wonder at until her cousins were up. At breakfast Sylvie said to her:—

"Was it you, little one, who was trotting over my head by daybreak, and making that racket on the stairs? You woke me so that I couldn't go to sleep again. You must be very good and quiet, and amuse yourself without noise. Your cousin doesn't like noise."

"And you must wipe your feet," said Rogron. "You went into the kiosk with your dirty shoes, and they've tracked all over the floor. Your cousin likes cleanliness. A great girl like you ought to be clean. Weren't you clean in Brittany? But I recollect when I went down there to buy thread it was pitiable to see the folks,—they were like savages. At any rate she has a good appetite," added Rogron, looking at his sister; "one would think she hadn't eaten anything for days."

Thus, from the very start Pierrette was hurt by the remarks of her two cousins,—hurt, she knew not why. Her straightforward, open nature, hitherto left to itself, was not given to reflection. Incapable of thinking that her cousins were hard, she was fated to find it out slowly through suffering. After breakfast the brother and sister, pleased with Pierrette's astonishment at the house and anxious to enjoy it, took her to the salon to show her its splendors and teach her not to touch them. Many celibates, driven by loneliness and the moral necessity of caring for something, substitute factitious affections for natural ones; they love dogs, cats, canaries, servants, or their confessor. Rogron and Sylvie had come to the pass of loving immoderately their house and furniture, which had cost them so dear. Sylvie began by helping Adele in the mornings to dust and arrange the furniture, under pretence that she did not know how to keep it looking as good as new. This dusting was soon a desired occupation to her, and the furniture, instead of losing its value in her eyes, became ever more precious. To use things without hurting them or soiling them or scratching the woodwork or clouding the varnish, that was the problem which soon became the mania of the old maid's life. Sylvie had a closet full of bits of wool, wax, varnish, and brushes, which she had learned to use with the dexterity of a cabinet-maker; she had her feather dusters and her dusting-cloths; and she rubbed away without fear of hurting herself,—she was so strong. The glance of her cold blue eyes, hard as steel, was forever roving over the furniture and under it, and you could as soon have found a tender spot in her heart as a bit of fluff under the sofa.

After the remarks made at Madame Tiphaine's, Sylvie dared not flinch from the three hundred francs for Pierrette's clothes. During the first week her time was wholly taken up, and Pierrette's too, by frocks to order and try on, chemises and petticoats to cut out and have made by a seamstress who went out by the day. Pierrette did not know how to sew.

"That's pretty bringing up!" said Rogron. "Don't you know how to do anything, little girl?"

Pierrette, who knew nothing but how to love, made a pretty, childish gesture.

"What did you do in Brittany?" asked Rogron.

"I played," she answered, naively. "Everybody played with me. Grandmamma and grandpapa they told me stories. Ah! they all loved me!"

"Hey!" said Rogron; "didn't you take it easy!"

Pierrette opened her eyes wide, not comprehending.

"She is as stupid as an owl," said Sylvie to Mademoiselle Borain, the best seamstress in Provins.

"She's so young," said the workwoman, looking kindly at Pierrette, whose delicate little muzzle was turned up to her with a coaxing look.

Pierrette preferred the sewing-women to her relations. She was endearing in her ways with them, she watched their work, and made them those pretty speeches that seem like the flowers of childhood, and which her cousin had already silenced, for that gaunt woman loved to impress those under her with salutary awe. The sewing-women were delighted with Pierrette. Their work, however, was not carried on without many and loud grumblings.

"That child will make us pay through the nose!" cried Sylvie to her brother.

"Stand still, my dear, and don't plague us; it is all for you and not for me," she would say to Pierrette when the child was being measured. Sometimes it was, when Pierrette would ask the seamstress some question, "Let Mademoiselle Borain do her work, and don't talk to her; it is not you who are paying for her time."

"Mademoiselle," said Mademoiselle Borain, "am I to back-stitch this?"

"Yes, do it firmly; I don't want to be making such an outfit as this every day."

Sylvie put the same spirit of emulation into Pierrette's outfit that she had formerly put into the house. She was determined that her cousin should be as well dressed as Madame Garceland's little girl. She bought the child

fashionable boots of bronzed kid like those the little Tiphaines wore, very fine cotton stockings, a corset by the best maker, a dress of blue reps, a pretty cape lined with white silk,—all this that she, Sylvie, might hold her own against the children of the women who had rejected her. The underclothes were quite in keeping with the visible articles of dress, for Sylvie feared the examining eyes of the various mothers. Pierrette's chemises were of fine Madapolam calico. Mademoiselle Borain had mentioned that the sub-prefect's little girls wore cambric drawers, embroidered and trimmed in the latest style. Pierrette had the same. Sylvie ordered for her a charming little drawn bonnet of blue velvet lined with white satin, precisely like the one worn by Dr. Martener's little daughter.

Thus attired, Pierrette was the most enchanting little girl in all Provins. On Sunday, after church, all the ladies kissed her; Mesdames Tiphaine, Garceland, Galardon, Julliard, and the rest fell in love with the sweet little Breton girl. This enthusiasm was deeply flattering to old Sylvie's self-love; she regarded it as less due to Pierrette than to her own benevolence. She ended, however, in being affronted by her cousin's success. Pierrette was constantly invited out, and Sylvie allowed her to go, always for the purpose of triumphing over "those ladies." Pierrette was much in demand for games or little parties and dinners with their own little girls. She had succeeded where the Rogrons had failed; and Mademoiselle Sylvie soon grew indignant that Pierrette was asked to other children's houses when those children never came to hers. The artless little thing did not conceal the pleasure she found in her visits to these ladies, whose affectionate manners contrasted strangely with the harshness of her two cousins. A mother would have rejoiced in the happiness of her little one, but the Rogrons had taken Pierrette for their own sakes, not for hers; their feelings, far from being parental, were dyed in selfishness and a sort of commercial calculation.

The handsome outfit, the fine Sunday dresses, and the every-day frocks were the beginning of Pierrette's troubles. Like all children free to amuse themselves, who are accustomed to follow the dictates of their own lively fancies, she was very hard on her clothes, her shoes, and above all on those embroidered drawers. A mother when she reproves her child thinks only of the child; her voice is gentle; she does not raise it unless driven to extremities, or when the child is much in fault. But here, in this great matter of Pierrette's clothes, the cousins' money was the first consideration; their interests were to be thought of, not the child's. Children have the perceptions of the canine race for the sentiments of those who rule them; they know instinctively whether they are loved or only tolerated. Pure and innocent hearts are more distressed by shades of difference than by contrasts; a child does not understand evil, but it knows when the instinct of the good and the beautiful which nature has implanted in it is shocked. The lectures which Pierrette now drew upon herself

on propriety of behavior, modesty, and economy were merely the corollary of the one theme, "Pierrette will ruin us."

These perpetual fault-findings, which were destined to have a fatal result for the poor child, brought the two celibates back to the old beaten track of their shop-keeping habits, from which their removal to Provins had parted them, and in which their natures were now to expand and flourish. Accustomed in the old days to rule and to make inquisitions, to order about and reprove their clerks sharply, Rogron and his sister had actually suffered for want of victims. Little minds need to practise despotism to relieve their nerves, just as great souls thirst for equality in friendship to exercise their hearts. Narrow natures expand by persecuting as much as others through beneficence; they prove their power over their fellows by cruel tyranny as others do by loving kindness; they simply go the way their temperaments drive them. Add to this the propulsion of self-interest and you may read the enigma of most social matters.

Thenceforth Pierrette became a necessity to the lives of her cousins. From the day of her coming their minds were occupied,—first, with her outfit, and then with the novelty of a third presence. But every new thing, a sentiment and even a tyranny, is moulded as time goes on into fresh shapes. Sylvie began by calling Pierrette "my dear," or "little one." Then she abandoned the gentler terms for "Pierrette" only. Her reprimands, at first only cross, became sharp and angry; and no sooner were their feet on the path of fault-finding than the brother and sister made rapid strides. They were no longer bored to death! It was not their deliberate intention to be wicked and cruel; it was simply the blind instinct of an imbecile tyranny. The pair believed they were doing Pierrette a service, just as they had thought their harshness a benefit to their apprentices.

Pierrette, whose true and noble and extreme sensibility was the antipodes of the Rogrons' hardness, had a dread of being scolded; it wounded her so sharply that the tears would instantly start in her beautiful, pure eyes. She had a great struggle with herself before she could repress the enchanting sprightliness which made her so great a favorite elsewhere. After a time she displayed it only in the homes of her little friends. By the end of the first month she had learned to be passive in her cousins' house,—so much so that Rogron one day asked her if she was ill. At that sudden question, she ran to the end of the garden, and stood crying beside the river, into which her tears may have fallen as she herself was about to fall into the social torrent.

One day, in spite of all her care, she tore her best reps frock at Madame Tiphaine's, where she was spending a happy day. The poor child burst into tears, foreseeing the cruel things which would be said to her at home. Questioned by her friends, she let fall a few words about her terrible cousin.

Madame Tiphaine happened to have some reps exactly like that of the frock, and she put in a new breadth herself. Mademoiselle Rogron found out the trick, as she expressed it, which the little devil had played her. From that day forth she refused to let Pierrette go to any of "those women's" houses.

The life the poor girl led in Provins was divided into three distinct phases. The first, already shown, in which she had some joy mingled with the cold kindness of her cousins and their sharp reproaches, lasted three months. Sylvie's refusal to let her go to her little friends, backed by the necessity of beginning her education, ended the first phase of her life at Provins, the only period when that life was bearable to her.

These events, produced at the Rogrons by Pierrette's presence, were studied by Vinet and the colonel with the caution of foxes preparing to enter a poultry-yard and disturbed by seeing a strange fowl. They both called from time to time,—but seldom, so as not to alarm the old maid; they talked with Rogron under various pretexts, and made themselves masters of his mind with an affectation of reserve and modesty which the great Tartuffe himself would have respected. The colonel and the lawyer were spending the evening with Rogron on the very day when Sylvie had refused in bitter language to let Pierrette go again to Madame Tiphaine's, or elsewhere. Being told of this refusal the colonel and the lawyer looked at each other with an air which seemed to say that they at least knew Provins well.

"Madame Tiphaine intended to insult you," said the lawyer. "We have long been warning Rogron of what would happen. There's no good to be got from those people."

"What can you expect from the anti-national party!" cried the colonel, twirling his moustache and interrupting the lawyer. "But, mademoiselle, if we had tried to warn you from those people you might have supposed we had some malicious motive in what we said. If you like a game of cards in the evening, why don't you have it at home; why not play your boston here, in your own house? Is it impossible to fill the places of those idiots, the Julliards and all the rest of them? Vinet and I know how to play boston, and we can easily find a fourth. Vinet might present his wife to you; she is charming, and, what is more, a Chargeboeuf. You will not be so exacting as those apes of the Upper town; you won't require a good little housewife, who is compelled by the meanness of her family to do her own work, to dress like a duchess. Poor woman, she has the courage of a lion and the meekness of a lamb."

Sylvie Rogron showed her long yellow teeth as she smiled on the colonel, who bore the sight heroically and assumed a flattered air.

"If we are only four we can't play boston every night," said Sylvie.

"Why not? What do you suppose an old soldier of the Empire like me does with himself? And as for Vinet, his evenings are always free. Besides, you'll have plenty of other visitors; I warrant you that," he added, with a rather mysterious air.

"What you ought to do," said Vinet, "is to take an open stand against the ministerialists of Provins and form an opposition to them. You would soon see how popular that would make you; you would have a society about you at once. The Tiphaines would be furious at an opposition salon. Well, well, why not laugh at others, if others laugh at you?—and they do; the clique doesn't mince matters in talking about you."

"How's that?" demanded Sylvie.

In the provinces there is always a valve or a faucet through which gossip leaks from one social set to another. Vinet knew all the slurs cast upon the Rogrons in the salons from which they were now excluded. The deputy-judge and archaeologist Desfondrilles belonged to neither party. With other independents like him, he repeated what he heard on both sides and Vinet made the most of it. The lawyer's spiteful tongue put venom into Madame Tiphaine's speeches, and by showing Rogron and Sylvie the ridicule they had brought upon themselves he roused an undying spirit of hatred in those bitter natures, which needed an object for their petty passions.

A few days later Vinet brought his wife, a well-bred woman, neither pretty nor plain, timid, very gentle, and deeply conscious of her false position. Madame Vinet was fair-complexioned, faded by the cares of her poor household, and very simply dressed. No woman could have pleased Sylvie more. Madame Vinet endured her airs, and bent before them like one accustomed to subjection. On the poor woman's rounded brow and delicately timid cheek and in her slow and gentle glance, were the traces of deep reflection, of those perceptive thoughts which women who are accustomed to suffer bury in total silence.

The influence of the colonel (who now displayed to Sylvie the graces of a courtier, in marked contradiction to his usual military brusqueness), together with that of the astute Vinet, was soon to harm the Breton child. Shut up in the house, no longer allowed to go out except in company with her old cousin, Pierrette, that pretty little squirrel, was at the mercy of the incessant cry, "Don't touch that, child, let that alone!" She was perpetually being lectured on her carriage and behavior; if she stooped or rounded her shoulders her cousin would call to her to be as erect as herself (Sylvie was rigid as a soldier presenting arms to his colonel); sometimes indeed the ill-natured old maid enforced the order by slaps on the back to make the girl straighten up.

Thus the free and joyous little child of the Marais learned by degrees to

repress all liveliness and to make herself, as best she could, an automaton.

V. HISTORY OF POOR COUSINS IN THE HOME OF RICH ONES

One evening, which marked the beginning of Pierrette's second phase of life in her cousin's house, the child, whom the three guests had not seen during the evening, came into the room to kiss her relatives and say good-night to the company. Sylvie turned her cheek coldly to the pretty creature, as if to avoid kissing her. The motion was so cruelly significant that the tears sprang to Pierrette's eyes.

"Did you prick yourself, little girl?" said the atrocious Vinet.

"What is the matter?" asked Sylvie, severely.

"Nothing," said the poor child, going up to Rogron.

"Nothing?" said Sylvie, "that's nonsense; nobody cries for nothing."

"What is it, my little darling?" said Madame Vinet.

"My rich cousin isn't as kind to me as my poor grandmother was," sobbed Pierrette.

"Your grandmother took your money," said Sylvie, "and your cousin will leave you hers."

The colonel and the lawyer glanced at each other.

"I would rather be robbed and loved," said Pierrette.

"Then you shall be sent back whence you came."

"But what has the dear little thing done?" asked Madame Vinet.

Vinet gave his wife the terrible, fixed, cold look with which men enforce their absolute dominion. The hapless helot, punished incessantly for not having the one thing that was wanted of her, a fortune, took up her cards.

"What has she done?" said Sylvie, throwing up her head with such violence that the yellow wall-flowers in her cap nodded. "She is always looking about to annoy us. She opened my watch to see the inside, and meddled with the wheel and broke the mainspring. Mademoiselle pays no heed to what is said to her. I am all day long telling her to take care of things, and I might just as well talk to that lamp."

Pierrette, ashamed at being reproved before strangers, crept softly out of the room.

"I am thinking all the time how to subdue that child," said Rogron.

"Isn't she old enough to go to school?" asked Madame Vinet.

Again she was silenced by a look from her husband, who had been careful to tell her nothing of his own or the colonel's schemes.

"This is what comes of taking charge of other people's children!" cried the colonel. "You may still have some of your own, you or your brother. Why don't you both marry?"

Sylvie smiled agreeably on the colonel. For the first time in her life she met a man to whom the idea that she could marry did not seem absurd.

"Madame Vinet is right," cried Rogron; "perhaps teaching would keep Pierrette quiet. A master wouldn't cost much."

The colonel's remark so preoccupied Sylvie that she made no answer to her brother.

"If you are willing to be security for that opposition journal I was talking to you about," said Vinet, "you will find an excellent master for the little cousin in the managing editor; we intend to engage that poor schoolmaster who lost his employment through the encroachments of the clergy. My wife is right; Pierrette is a rough diamond that wants polishing."

"I thought you were a baron," said Sylvie to the colonel, while the cards were being dealt, and after a long pause in which they had all been rather thoughtful.

"Yes; but when I was made baron, in 1814, after the battle of Nangis, where my regiment performed miracles, I had money and influence enough to secure the rank. But now my barony is like the grade of general which I held in 1815,—it needs a revolution to give it back to me."

"If you will secure my endorsement by a mortgage," said Rogron, answering Vinet after long consideration, "I will give it."

"That can easily be arranged," said Vinet. "The new paper will soon restore the colonel's rights, and make your salon more powerful in Provins than those of Tiphaine and company."

"How so?" asked Sylvie.

While his wife was dealing and Vinet himself explaining the importance they would all gain by the publication of an independent newspaper, Pierrette was dissolved in tears; her heart and her mind were one in this matter; she felt and knew that her cousin was more to blame than she was. The little country girl instinctively understood that charity and benevolence ought to be a complete offering. She hated her handsome frocks and all the things that were

made for her; she was forced to pay too dearly for such benefits. She wept with vexation at having given cause for complaint against her, and resolved to behave in future in such a way as to compel her cousins to find no further fault with her. The thought then came into her mind how grand Brigaut had been in giving her all his savings without a word. Poor child! she fancied her troubles were now at their worst; she little knew that other misfortunes were even now being planned for her in the salon.

A few days later Pierrette had a writing-master. She was taught to read, write, and cipher. Enormous injury was thus supposed to be done to the Rogrons' house. Ink-spots were found on the tables, on the furniture, on Pierrette's clothes; copy-books and pens were left about; sand was scattered everywhere, books were torn and dog's-eared as the result of these lessons. She was told in harsh terms that she would have to earn her own living, and not be a burden to others. As she listened to these cruel remarks Pierrette's throat contracted violently with acute pain, her heart throbbed. She was forced to restrain her tears, or she was scolded for weeping and told it was an insult to the kindness of her magnanimous cousins. Rogron had found the life that suited him. He scolded Pierrette as he used to scold his clerks; he would call her when at play, and compel her to study; he made her repeat her lessons, and became himself the almost savage master of the poor child. Sylvie, on her side, considered it a duty to teach Pierrette the little that she knew herself about women's work. Neither Rogron nor his sister had the slightest softness in their natures. Their narrow minds, which found real pleasure in worrying the poor child, passed insensibly from outward kindness to extreme severity. This severity was necessitated, they believed, by what they called the self-will of the child, which had not been broken when young and was very obstinate. Her masters were ignorant how to give to their instructions a form suited to the intelligence of the pupil,—a thing, by the bye, which marks the difference between public and private education. The fault was far less with Pierrette than with her cousins. It took her an infinite length of time to learn the rudiments. She was called stupid and dull, clumsy and awkward for mere nothings. Incessantly abused in words, the child suffered still more from the harsh looks of her cousins. She acquired the doltish ways of a sheep; she dared not do anything of her own impulse, for all she did was misinterpreted, misjudged, and ill-received. In all things she awaited silently the good pleasure and the orders of her cousins, keeping her thoughts within her own mind and sheltering herself behind a passive obedience. Her brilliant colors began to fade. Sometimes she complained of feeling ill. When her cousin asked, "Where?" the poor little thing, who had pains all over her, answered, "Everywhere."

"Nonsense! who ever heard of any one suffering everywhere?" cried Sylvie. "If you suffered everywhere you'd be dead."

"People suffer in their chests," said Rogron, who liked to hear himself harangue, "or they have toothache, headache, pains in their feet or stomach, but no one has pains everywhere. What do you mean by everywhere? I can tell you; 'everywhere' means nowhere. Don't you know what you are doing?—you are complaining for complaining's sake."

Pierrette ended by total silence, seeing how all her girlish remarks, the flowers of her dawning intelligence, were replied to with ignorant commonplaces which her natural good sense told her were ridiculous.

"You complain," said Rogron, "but you've got the appetite of a monk."

The only person who did not bruise the delicate little flower was the fat servant woman, Adele. Adele would go up and warm her bed,—doing it on the sly after a certain evening when Sylvie had scolded her for giving that comfort to the child.

"Children should be hardened, to give them strong constitutions. Am I and my brother the worse for it?" said Sylvie. "You'll make Pierrette a peakling"; this was a word in the Rogron vocabulary which meant a puny and suffering little being.

The naturally endearing ways of the angelic child were treated as dissimulation. The fresh, pure blossoms of affection which bloomed instinctively in that young soul were pitilessly crushed. Pierrette suffered many a cruel blow on the tender flesh of her heart. If she tried to soften those ferocious natures by innocent, coaxing wiles they accused her of doing it with an object. "Tell me at once what you want?" Rogron would say, brutally; "you are not coaxing me for nothing."

Neither brother nor sister believed in affection, and Pierrette's whole being was affection. Colonel Gouraud, anxious to please Mademoiselle Rogron, approved of all she did about Pierrette. Vinet also encouraged them in what they said against her. He attributed all her so-called misdeeds to the obstinacy of the Breton character, and declared that no power, no will, could ever conquer it. Rogron and his sister were so shrewdly flattered by the two manoeuvrers that the former agreed to go security for the "Courrier de Provins," and the latter invested five thousand francs in the enterprise.

On this, the colonel and lawyer took the field. They got a hundred shares, of five hundred francs each, taken among the farmers and others called independents, and also among those who had bought lands of the national domains,—whose fears they worked upon. They even extended their operations throughout the department and along its borders. Each shareholder of course subscribed to the paper. The judicial advertisements were divided between the "Bee-hive" and the "Courrier." The first issue of the latter

contained a pompous eulogy on Rogron. He was presented to the community as the Laffitte of Provins. The public mind having thus received an impetus in this new direction, it was manifest, of course, that the coming elections would be contested. Madame Tiphaine, whose highest hope was to take her husband to Paris as deputy, was in despair. After reading an article in the new paper aimed at her and at Julliard junior, she remarked: "Unfortunately for me, I forgot that there is always a scoundrel close to a dupe, and that fools are magnets to clever men of the fox breed."

As soon as the "Courrier" was fairly launched on a radius of fifty miles, Vinet bought a new coat and decent boots, waistcoats, and trousers. He set up the gray slouch hat sacred to liberals, and showed his linen. His wife took a servant, and appeared in public dressed as the wife of a prominent man should be; her caps were pretty. Vinet proved grateful—out of policy. He and his friend Cournant, the liberal notary and the rival of the ministerial notary Auffray, became the close advisers of the Rogrons, to whom they were able to do a couple of signal services. The leases granted by old Rogron to their father in 1815, when matters were at a low ebb, were about to expire. Horticulture and vegetable gardening had developed enormously in the neighborhood of Provins. The lawyer and notary set to work to enable the Rogrons to increase their rentals. Vinet won two lawsuits against two districts on a question of planting trees, which involved five hundred poplars. The proceeds of the poplars, added to the savings of the brother and sister, who for the last three years had laid by six thousand a year at high interest, was wisely invested in the purchase of improved lands. Vinet also undertook and carried out the ejectment of certain peasants to whom the elder Rogron had lent money on their farms, and who had strained every nerve to pay off the debt, but in vain. The cost of the Rogrons' fine house was thus in a measure recouped. Their landed property, lying around Provins and chosen by their father with the sagacious eye of an innkeeper, was divided into small holdings, the largest of which did not exceed five acres, and rented to safe tenants, men who owned other parcels of land, that were ample security for their leases. These investments brought in, by 1826, five thousand francs a year. Taxes were charged to the tenants, and there were no buildings needing insurance or repairs.

By the end of the second period of Pierrette's stay in Provins life had become so hard for her, the cold indifference of all who came to the house, the silly fault-finding, and the total absence of affection on the part of her cousins grew so bitter, she was conscious of a chill dampness like that of a grave creeping round her, that the bold idea of escaping, on foot and without money, to Brittany and to her grandparents took possession of her mind. Two events hindered her from attempting it. Old Lorrain died, and Rogron was appointed guardian of his little cousin. If the grandmother had died first, we may believe

that Rogron, advised by Vinet, would have claimed Pierrette's eight thousand francs and reduced the old man to penury.

"You may, perhaps, inherit from Pierrette," said Vinet, with a horrid smile. "Who knows who may live and who may die?"

Enlightened by that remark, Rogron gave old Madame Lorrain no peace until she had secured to Pierrette the reversion of the eight thousand francs at her death.

Pierrette was deeply shocked by these events. She was on the point of making her first communion,—another reason for resigning the hope of escape from Provins. This ceremony, simple and customary as it was, led to great changes in the Rogron household. Sylvie learned that Monsieur le cure Peroux was instructing the little Julliards, Lesourds, Garcelands, and the rest. She therefore made it a point of honor that Pierrette should be instructed by the vicar himself, Monsieur Habert, a priest who was thought to belong to the Congregation, very zealous for the interests of the Church, and much feared in Provins,—a man who hid a vast ambition beneath the austerity of stern principles. The sister of this priest, an unmarried woman about thirty years of age, kept a school for young ladies. Brother and sister looked alike; both were thin, yellow, black-haired, and bilious.

Like a true Breton girl, cradled in the practices and poetry of Catholicism, Pierrette opened her heart and ears to the words of this imposing priest. Sufferings predispose the mind to devotion, and nearly all young girls, impelled by instinctive tenderness, are inclined to mysticism, the deepest aspect of religion. The priest found good soil in which to sow the seed of the Gospel and the dogmas of the Church. He completely changed the current of the girl's thoughts. Pierrette loved Jesus Christ in the light in which he is presented to young girls at the time of their first communion, as a celestial bridegroom; her physical and moral sufferings gained a meaning for her; she saw the finger of God in all things. Her soul, so cruelly hurt although she could not accuse her cousins of actual wrong, took refuge in that sphere to which all sufferers fly on the wings of the cardinal virtues,—Faith, Hope, Charity. She abandoned her thoughts of escape. Sylvie, surprised by the transformation Monsieur Habert had effected in Pierrette, was curious to know how it had been done. And it thus came about that the austere priest, while preparing Pierrette for her first communion, also won to God the hitherto erring soul of Mademoiselle Sylvie. Sylvie became pious. Jerome Rogron, on whom the so-called Jesuit could get no grip (for just then the influence of His Majesty the late Constitutionnel the First was more powerful over weaklings than the influence of the Church), Jerome Rogron remained faithful to Colonel Gouraud, Vinet, and Liberalism.

Mademoiselle Rogron naturally made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Habert, with whom she sympathized deeply. The two spinsters loved each other as sisters. Mademoiselle Habert offered to take Pierrette into her school to spare Sylvie the annoyance of her education; but the brother and sister both declared that Pierrette's absence would make the house too lonely; their attachment to their little cousin seemed excessive.

When Gouraud and Vinet became aware of the advent of Mademoiselle Habert on the scene they concluded that the ambitious priest her brother had the same matrimonial plan for his sister that the colonel was forming for himself and Sylvie.

"Your sister wants to get you married," said Vinet to Rogron.

"With whom?" asked Rogron.

"With that old sorceress of a schoolmistress," cried the colonel, twirling his moustache.

"She hasn't said anything to me about it," said Rogron, naively.

So thorough an old maid as Sylvie was certain to make good progress in the way of salvation. The influence of the priest would as certainly increase, and in the end affect Rogron, over whom Sylvie had great power. The two Liberals, who were naturally alarmed, saw plainly that if the priest were resolved to marry his sister to Rogron (a far more suitable marriage than that of Sylvie to the colonel) he could then drive Sylvie in extreme devotion to the Church, and put Pierrette in a convent. They might therefore lose eighteen months' labor in flattery and meannesses of all sorts. Their minds were suddenly filled with a bitter, silent hatred to the priest and his sister, though they felt the necessity of living on good terms with them in order to track their manoeuvres. Monsieur and Mademoiselle Habert, who could play both whist and boston, now came every evening to the Rogrons. The assiduity of the one pair induced the assiduity of the other. The colonel and lawyer felt that they were pitted against adversaries who were fully as strong as they,—a presentiment that was shared by the priest and his sister. The situation soon became that of a battle-field. Precisely as the colonel was enabling Sylvie to taste the unhoped-for joys of being sought in marriage, so Mademoiselle Habert was enveloping the timid Rogron in the cotton-wool of her attentions, words, and glances. Neither side could utter that grand word of statesmanship, "Let us divide!" for each wanted the whole prey.

The two clever foxes of the Opposition made the mistake of pulling the first trigger. Vinet, under the spur of self-interest, bethought himself of his wife's only friends, and looked up Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf and her mother. The two women were living in poverty at Troyes on two thousand

francs a year. Mademoiselle Bathilde de Chargeboeuf was one of those fine creatures who believe in marriage for love up to their twenty-fifth year, and change their opinion when they find themselves still unmarried. Vinet managed to persuade Madame de Chargeboeuf to join her means to his and live with his family in Provins, where Bathilde, he assured her, could marry a fool named Rogron, and, clever as she was, take her place in the best society of the place.

The arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf in the lawyer's household was a great reinforcement for the liberal party; and it created consternation among the aristocrats of Provins and also in the Tiphaine clique. Madame de Breautey, horrified to see two women of rank so misled, begged them to come to her. She was shocked that the royalists of Troyes had so neglected the mother and daughter, whose situation she now learned for the first time.

"How is it that no old country gentleman has married that dear girl, who is cut out for a lady of the manor?" she said. "They have let her run to seed, and now she is to be flung at the head of a Rogron!"

She ransacked the whole department but did not succeed in finding any gentleman willing to marry a girl whose mother had only two thousand francs a year. The "clique" and the subprefect also looked about them with the same object, but they were all too late. Madame de Breautey made terrible charges against the selfishness which degraded France,—the consequence, she said, of materialism, and of the importance now given by the laws to money: nobility was no longer of value! nor beauty either! Such creatures as the Rogrons, the Vinets, could stand up and fight with the King of France!

Bathilde de Chargeboeuf had not only the incontestable superiority of beauty over her rival, but that of dress as well. She was dazzlingly fair. At twenty-five her shoulders were fully developed, and the curves of her beautiful figure were exquisite. The roundness of her throat, the purity of its lines, the wealth of her golden hair, the charming grace of her smile, the distinguished carriage of her head, the character of her features, the fine eyes finely placed beneath a well-formed brow, her every motion, noble and high-bred, and her light and graceful figure,—all were in harmony. Her hands were beautiful, and her feet slender. Health gave her, perhaps, too much the look of a handsome barmaid. "But that can't be a defect in the eyes of a Rogron," sighed Madame Tiphaine. Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf's dress when she made her first appearance in Provins at the Rogrons' house was very simple. Her brown merino gown edged with green embroidery was worn low-necked; but a tulle fichu, carefully drawn down by hidden strings, covered her neck and shoulders, though it opened a little in front, where its folds were caught together with a sevigne. Beneath this delicate fabric Bathilde's beauties

seemed all the more enticing and coquettish. She took off her velvet bonnet and her shawl on arriving, and showed her pretty ears adorned with what were then called "ear-drops" in gold. She wore a little jeannette—a black velvet ribbon with a heart attached—round her throat, where it shone like the jet ring which fantastic nature had fastened round the tail of a white angora cat. She knew all the little tricks of a girl who seeks to marry; her fingers arranged her curls which were not in the least out of order; she entreated Rogron to fasten a cuff-button, thus showing him her wrist, a request which that dazzled fool rudely refused, hiding his emotions under the mask of indifference. The timidity of the only love he was ever to feel in the whole course of his life took an external appearance of dislike. Sylvie and her friend Celeste Habert were deceived by it; not so Vinet, the wise head of this doltish circle, among whom no one really coped with him but the priest,—the colonel being for a long time his ally.

On the other hand the colonel was behaving to Sylvie very much as Bathilde behaved to Rogron. He put on a clean shirt every evening and wore velvet stocks, which set off his martial features and the spotless white of his collar. He adopted the fashion of white pique waistcoats, and caused to be made for him a new surtout of blue cloth, on which his red rosette glowed finely; all this under pretext of doing honor to the new guests Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf. He even refrained from smoking for two hours previous to his appearance in the Rogrons' salon. His grizzled hair was brushed in a waving line across a cranium which was ochre in tone. He assumed the air and manner of a party leader, of a man who was preparing to drive out the enemies of France, the Bourbons, on short, to beat of drum.

The satanic lawyer and the wily colonel played the priest and his sister a more cruel trick than even the importation of the beautiful Madame de Chargeboeuf, who was considered by all the Liberal party and by Madame de Breautey and her aristocratic circle to be far handsomer than Madame Tiphaine. These two great statesmen of the little provincial town made everybody believe that the priest was in sympathy with their ideas; so that before long Provins began to talk of him as a liberal ecclesiastic. As soon as this news reached the bishop Monsieur Habert was sent for and admonished to cease his visits to the Rogrons; but his sister continued to go there. Thus the salon Rogron became a fixed fact and a constituted power.

Before the year was out political intrigues were not less lively than the matrimonial schemes of the Rogron salon. While the selfish interests hidden in these hearts were struggling in deadly combat the events which resulted from them had a fatal celebrity. Everybody knows that the Villele ministry was overthrown by the elections of 1826. Vinet, the Liberal candidate at Provins, who had borrowed money of his notary to buy a domain which made him

eligible for election, came very near defeating Monsieur Tiphaine, who saved his election by only two votes. The headquarters of the Liberals was the Rogron salon; among the habitues were the notary Cournant and his wife, and Doctor Neraud, whose youth was said to have been stormy, but who now took a serious view of life; he gave himself up to study and was, according to all Liberals, a far more capable man than Monsieur Martener, the aristocratic physician. As for the Rogrons, they no more understood their present triumph than they had formerly understood their ostracism.

The beautiful Bathilde, to whom Vinet had explained Pierrette as an enemy, was extremely disdainful to the girl. It seemed as though everybody's selfish schemes demanded the humiliation of that poor victim. Madame Vinet could do nothing for her, ground as she herself was beneath those implacable self-interests which the lawyer's wife had come at last to see and comprehend. Her husband's imperious will had alone taken her to the Rogron's house, where she had suffered much at the harsh treatment of the pretty little creature, who would often press up against her as if divining her secret thoughts, sometimes asking the poor lady to show her a stitch in knitting or to teach her a bit of embroidery. The child proved in return that if she were treated gently she would understand what was taught her, and succeed in what she tried to do quite marvellously. But Madame Vinet was soon no longer necessary to her husband's plans, and after the arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf she ceased to visit the Rogrons.

Sylvie, who now indulged in the idea of marrying, began to consider Pierrette as an obstacle. The girl was nearly fourteen; the pallid whiteness of her skin, a symptom of illness entirely overlooked by the ignorant old maid, made her exquisitely lovely. Sylvie took it into her head to balance the cost which Pierrette had been to them by making a servant of her. All the habitues of the house to whom she spoke of the matter advised that she should send away Adele. Why shouldn't Pierrette take care of the house and cook? If there was too much work at any time Mademoiselle Rogron could easily employ the colonel's woman-of-all-work, an excellent cook and a most respectable person. Pierrette ought to learn how to cook, and rub floors, and sweep, said the lawyer; every girl should be taught to keep house properly and go to market and know the price of things. The poor little soul, whose self-devotion was equal to her generosity, offered herself willingly, pleased to think that she could earn the bitter bread which she ate in that house. Adele was sent away, and Pierrette thus lost the only person who might have protected her.

In spite of the poor child's strength of heart she was henceforth crushed down physically as well as mentally. Her cousins had less consideration for her than for a servant; she belonged to them! She was scolded for mere nothings, for an atom of dust left on a glass globe or a marble mantelpiece.

The handsome ornaments she had once admired now became odious to her. No matter how she strove to do right, her inexorable cousins always found something to reprove in whatever she did. In the course of two years Pierrette never received the slightest praise, or heard a kindly word. Happiness for her lay in not being scolded. She bore with angelic patience the morose ill-humor of the two celibates, to whom all tender feelings were absolutely unknown, and who daily made her feel her dependence on them.

Such a life for a young girl, pressed as it were between the two chops of a vise, increased her illness. She began to feel violent internal distresses, secret pangs so sudden in their attacks that her strength was undermined and her natural development arrested. By slow degrees and through dreadful, though hidden sufferings, the poor child came to the state in which the companion of her childhood found her when he sang to her his Breton ditty at the dawn of the October day.

VI. AN OLD MAID'S JEALOUSY

Before we relate the domestic drama which the coming of Jacques Brigaut was destined to bring about in the Rogron family it is best to explain how the lad came to be in Provins; for he is, as it were, a somewhat mute personage on the scene.

When he ran from the house Brigaut was not only frightened by Pierrette's gesture, he was horrified by the change he saw in his little friend. He could scarcely recognize the voice, the eyes, the gestures that were once so lively, gay, and withal so tender. When he had gained some distance from the house his legs began to tremble under him; hot flushes ran down his back. He had seen the shadow of Pierrette, but not Pierrette herself! The lad climbed to the Upper town till he found a spot from which he could see the square and the house where Pierrette lived. He gazed at it mournfully, lost in many thoughts, as though he were entering some grief of which he could not see the end. Pierrette was ill; she was not happy; she pined for Brittany—what was the matter with her? All these questions passed and repassed through his heart and rent it, revealing to his own soul the extent of his love for his little adopted sister.

It is extremely rare to find a passion existing between two children of opposite sexes. The charming story of Paul and Virginia does not, any more than this of Pierrette and Brigaut, answer the question put by that strange moral fact. Modern history offers only the illustrious instance of the Marchesa di Pescara and her husband. Destined to marry by their parents from their

earliest years, they adored each other and were married, and their union gave to the sixteenth century the noble spectacle of a perfect conjugal love without a flaw. When the marchesa became a widow at the age of thirty-four, beautiful, intellectually brilliant, universally adored, she refused to marry sovereigns and buried herself in a convent, seeing and knowing thenceforth only nuns. Such was the perfect love that suddenly developed itself in the heart of the Breton workman. Pierrette and he had often protected each other; with what bliss had he given her the money for her journey; he had almost killed himself by running after the diligence when she left him. Pierrette had known nothing of all that; but for him the recollection had warmed and comforted the cold, hard life he had led for the last three years. For Pierrette's sake he had struggled to improve himself; he had learned his trade for Pierrette; he had come to Paris for Pierrette, intending to make his fortune for her. After spending a fortnight in the city, he had not been able to hold out against the desire to see her, and he had walked from Saturday night to Monday morning. He intended to return to Paris; but the moving sight of his little friend nailed him to Provins. A wonderful magnetism (still denied in spite of many proofs) acted upon him without his knowledge. Tears rolled from his eyes when they rose in hers. If to her he was Brittany and her happy childhood, to him she was life itself.

At sixteen years of age Brigaut did not yet know how to draw or to model a cornice; he was ignorant of much, but he had earned, by piece-work done in the leisure of his apprenticeship, some four or five francs a day. On this he could live in Provins and be near Pierrette; he would choose the best cabinet-maker in the town, and learn the rest of his trade in working for him, and thus keep watch over his darling.

Brigaut's mind was made up as he sat there thinking. He went back to Paris and fetched his certificate, tools, and baggage, and three days later he was a journeyman in the establishment of Monsieur Frappier, the best cabinet-maker in Provins. Active, steady workmen, not given to junketing and taverns, are so rare that masters hold to young men like Brigaut when they find them. To end Brigaut's history on this point, we will say here that by the end of the month he was made foreman, and was fed and lodged by Frappier, who taught him arithmetic and line drawing. The house and shop were in the Grand'Rue, not a hundred feet from the little square where Pierrette lived.

Brigaut buried his love in his heart and committed no imprudence. He made Madame Frappier tell him all she knew about the Rogrons. Among other things, she related to him the way in which their father had laid hands on the property of old Auffray, Pierrette's grandfather. Brigaut obtained other information as to the character of the brother and sister. He met Pierrette sometimes in the market with her cousin, and shuddered to see the heavy basket she was carrying on her arm. On Sundays he went to church to look for

her, dressed in her best clothes. There, for the first time, he became aware that Pierrette was Mademoiselle Lorrain. Pierrette saw him and made him a hasty sign to keep out of sight. To him, there was a world of things in that little gesture, as there had been, a fortnight earlier, in the sign by which she told him from her window to run away. Ah! what a fortune he must make in the coming ten years in order to marry his little friend, to whom, he was told, the Rogrons were to leave their house, a hundred acres of land, and twelve thousand francs a year, not counting their savings!

The persevering Breton was determined to be thoroughly educated for his trade, and he set about acquiring all the knowledge that he lacked. As long as only the principles of his work were concerned he could learn those in Provins as well as in Paris, and thus remain near Pierrette, to whom he now became anxious to explain his projects and the sort of protection she could rely on from him. He was determined to know the reason of her pallor, and of the debility which was beginning to appear in the organ which is always the last to show the signs of failing life, namely the eyes; he would know, too, the cause of the sufferings which gave her that look as though death were near and she might drop at any moment beneath its scythe. The two signs, the two gestures —not denying their friendship but imploring caution—alarmed the young Breton. Evidently Pierrette wished him to wait and not attempt to see her; otherwise there was danger, there was peril for her. As she left the church she was able to give him one look, and Brigaut saw that her eyes were full of tears. But he could have sooner squared the circle than have guessed what had happened in the Rogrons' house during the fortnight which had elapsed since his arrival.

It was not without keen apprehension that Pierrette came downstairs on the morning after Brigaut had invaded her morning dreams like another dream. She was certain that her cousin Sylvie must have heard the song, or she would not have risen and opened her window; but Pierrette was ignorant of the powerful reasons that made the old maid so alert. For the last eight days, strange events and bitter feelings agitated the minds of the chief personages who frequented the Rogron salon. These hidden matters, carefully concealed by all concerned, were destined to fall in their results like an avalanche on Pierrette. Such mysterious things, which we ought perhaps to call the putrescence of the human heart, lie at the base of the greatest revolutions, political, social or domestic; but in telling of them it is desirable to explain that their subtle significance cannot be given in a matter-of-fact narrative. These secret schemes and calculations do not show themselves as brutally and undisguisedly while taking place as they must when the history of them is related. To set down in writing the circumlocutions, oratorical precautions, protracted conversations, and honeyed words glossed over the venom of intentions, would make as long a book as that magnificent poem called

"Clarissa Harlowe."

Mademoiselle Habert and Mademoiselle Sylvie were equally desirous of marrying, but one was ten years older than the other, and the probabilities of life allowed Celeste Habert to expect that her children would inherit all the Rogron property. Sylvie was forty-two, an age at which marriage is beset by perils. In confiding to each other their ideas, Celeste, instigated by her vindictive brother the priest, enlightened Sylvie as to the dangers she would incur. Sylvie trembled; she was terribly afraid of death, an idea which shakes all celibates to their centre. But just at this time the Martignac ministry came into power,—a Liberal victory which overthrew the Villele administration. The Vinet party now carried their heads high in Provins. Vinet himself became a personage. The Liberals prophesied his advancement; he would certainly be deputy and attorney-general. As for the colonel, he would be made mayor of Provins. Ah, to reign as Madame Garceland, the wife of the present mayor, now reigned! Sylvie could not hold out against that hope; she determined to consult a doctor, though the proceeding would only cover her with ridicule. To consult Monsieur Neraud, the Liberal physician and the rival of Monsieur Martener, would be a blunder. Celeste Habert offered to hide Sylvie in her dressing-room while she herself consulted Monsieur Martener, the physician of her establishment, on this difficult matter. Whether Martener was, or was not, Celeste's accomplice need not be discovered; at any rate, he told his client that even at thirty the danger, though slight, did exist. "But," he added, "with your constitution, you need fear nothing."

"But how about a woman over forty?" asked Mademoiselle Celeste.

"A married woman who has had children has nothing to fear."

"But I mean an unmarried woman, like Mademoiselle Rogron, for instance?"

"Oh, that's another thing," said Monsieur Martener. "Successful childbirth is then one of those miracles which God sometimes allows himself, but rarely."

"Why?" asked Celeste.

The doctor answered with a terrifying pathological description; he explained that the elasticity given by nature to youthful muscles and bones did not exist at a later age, especially in women whose lives were sedentary.

"So you think that an unmarried woman ought not to marry after forty?"

"Not unless she waits some years," replied the doctor. "But then, of course, it is not marriage, it is only an association of interests."

The result of the interview, clearly, seriously, scientifically and sensibly

stated, was that an unmarried woman would make a great mistake in marrying after forty. When the doctor had departed Mademoiselle Celeste found Sylvie in a frightful state, green and yellow, and with the pupils of her eyes dilated.

"Then you really love the colonel?" asked Celeste.

"I still hoped," replied Sylvie.

"Well, then, wait!" cried Mademoiselle Habert, Jesuitically, aware that time would rid her of the colonel.

Sylvie's new devotion to the church warned her that the morality of such a marriage might be doubtful. She accordingly sounded her conscience in the confessional. The stern priest explained the opinions of the Church, which sees in marriage only the propagation of humanity, and rebukes second marriages and all passions but those with a social purpose. Sylvie's perplexities were great. These internal struggles gave extraordinary force to her passion, investing it with that inexplicable attraction which, from the days of Eve, the thing forbidden possesses for women. Mademoiselle Rogron's perturbation did not escape the lynx-eyed lawyer.

One evening, after the game had ended, Vinet approached his dear friend Sylvie, took her hand, and led her to a sofa.

"Something troubles you," he said.

She nodded sadly. The lawyer let the others depart; Rogron walked home with the Chargeboeufs, and when Vinet was alone with the old maid he wormed the truth out of her.

"Cleverly played, abbe!" thought he. "But you've played into my hands."

The foxy lawyer was more decided in his opinion than even the doctor. He advised marriage in ten years. Inwardly he was vowing that the whole Rogron fortune should go to Bathilde. He rubbed his hands, his pinched lips closed more tightly as he hurried home. The influence exercised by Monsieur Habert, physician of the soul, and by Vinet, doctor of the purse, balanced each other perfectly. Rogron had no piety in him; so the churchman and the man of law, the black-robed pair, were fairly matched.

On discovering the victory obtained by Celeste, in her anxiety to marry Rogron herself, over Sylvie, torn between the fear of death and the joy of being baronness and mayoress, the lawyer saw his chance of driving the colonel from the battlefield. He knew Rogron well enough to be certain he could marry him to Bathilde; Jerome had already succumbed inwardly to her charms, and Vinet knew that the first time the pair were alone together the marriage would be settled. Rogron had reached the point of keeping his eyes fixed on Celeste, so much did he fear to look at Bathilde. Vinet had now

possessed himself of Sylvie's secrets, and saw the force with which she loved the colonel. He fully understood the struggle of such a passion in the heart of an old maid who was also in the grasp of religious emotion, and he saw his way to rid himself of Pierrette and the colonel both by making each the cause of the other's overthrow.

The next day, after the court had risen, Vinet met the colonel and Rogron talking a walk together, according to their daily custom.

Whenever the three men were seen in company the whole town talked of it. This triumvirate, held in horror by the sub-prefect, the magistracy, and the Tiphaine clique, was, on the other hand, a source of pride and vanity to the Liberals of Provins. Vinet was sole editor of the "Courrier" and the head of the party; the colonel, the working manager, was its arm; Rogron, by means of his purse, its nerves. The Tiphaines declared that the three men were always plotting evil to the government; the Liberals admired them as the defenders of the people. When Rogron turned to go home, recalled by a sense of his dinner-hour, Vinet stopped the colonel from following him by taking Gouraud's arm.

"Well, colonel," he said, "I am going to take a fearful load off your shoulders; you can do better than marry Sylvie; if you play your cards properly you can marry that little Pierrette in two years' time."

He thereupon related the Jesuit's manoeuvre and its effect on Sylvie.

"What a skulking trick!" cried the colonel; "and spreading over years, too!"

"Colonel," said Vinet, gravely, "Pierrette is a charming creature; with her you can be happy for the rest of your life; your health is so sound that the difference in your ages won't seem disproportionate. But, all the same, you mustn't think it an easy thing to change a dreadful fate to a pleasant one. To turn a woman who loves you into a friend and confidant is as perilous a business as crossing a river under fire of the enemy. Cavalry colonel as you are, and daring too, you must study the position and manoeuvre your forces with the same wisdom you have displayed hitherto, and which has won us our present position. If I get to be attorney-general you shall command the department. Oh! if you had been an elector we should be further advanced than we are now; I should have bought the votes of those two clerks by threatening them with the loss of their places, and we should have had a majority."

The colonel had long been thinking about Pierrette, but he concealed his thoughts with the utmost dissimulation. His roughness to the child was only a mask; but she could not understand why the man who claimed to be her father's old comrade should usually treat her so ill, when sometimes, if he met her alone, he would chuck her under the chin and give her a friendly kiss. But

after the conversation with Vinet relating to Sylvie's fears of marriage Gouraud began to seek opportunities to find Pierrette alone; the rough colonel made himself as soft as a cat; he told her how brave her father was and what a misfortune it had been for her that she lost him.

A few days before Brigaut's arrival Sylvie had come suddenly upon Gouraud and Pierrette talking together. Instantly, jealousy rushed into her heart with monastic violence. Jealousy, eminently credulous and suspicious, is the passion in which fancy has most freedom, but for all that it does not give a person intelligence; on the contrary, it hinders them from having any; and in Sylvie's case jealousy only filled her with fantastic ideas. When (a few mornings later) she heard Brigaut's ditty, she jumped to the conclusion that the man who had used the words "Madam' le mariee," addressing them to Pierrette, must be the colonel. She was certain she was right, for she had noticed for a week past a change in his manners. He was the only man who, in her solitary life, had ever paid her any attention. Consequently she watched him with all her eyes, all her mind; and by giving herself up to hopes that were sometimes flourishing, sometimes blighted, she had brought the matter to such enormous proportions that she saw all things in a mental mirage. To use a common but excellent expression, by dint of looking intently she saw nothing. Alternately she repelled, admitted, and conquered the supposition of this rivalry. She compared herself with Pierrette; she was forty-two years old, with gray hair; Pierrette was delicately fair, with eyes soft enough to warm a withered heart. She had heard it said that men of fifty were apt to love young girls of just that kind. Before the colonel had come regularly to the house Sylvie had heard in the Tiphaines' salon strange stories of his life and morals. Old maids preserve in their love-affairs the exaggerated Platonic sentiments which young girls of twenty are wont to profess; they hold to these fixed doctrines like all who have little experience of life and no personal knowledge of how great social forces modify, impair, and bring to nought such grand and noble ideas. The mere thought of being jilted by the colonel was torture to Sylvie's brain. She lay in her bed going over and over her own desires, Pierrette's conduct, and the song which had awakened her with the word "marriage." Like the fool she was, instead of looking through the blinds to see the lover, she opened her window without reflecting that Pierrette would hear her. If she had had the common instinct of a spy she would have seen Brigaut, and the fatal drama then begun would never have taken place.

It was Pierrette's duty, weak as she was, to take down the bars that closed the wooden shutters of the kitchen, which she opened and fastened back; then she opened in like manner the glass door leading from the corridor to the garden. She took the various brooms that were used for sweeping the carpets, the dining-room, the passages and stairs, together with the other utensils, with a care and particularity which no servant, not even a Dutchwoman, gives to

her work. She hated reproof. Happiness for her was in seeing the cold blue pallid eyes of her cousin, not satisfied (that they never were), but calm, after glancing about her with the look of an owner,—that wonderful glance which sees what escapes even the most vigilant eyes of others. Pierrette's skin was moist with her labor when she returned to the kitchen to put it in order, and light the stove that she might carry up hot water to her two cousins (a luxury she never had for herself) and the means of lighting fires in their rooms. After this she laid the table for breakfast and lit the stove in the dining-room. For all these various fires she had to fetch wood and kindling from the cellar, leaving the warm rooms for a damp and chilly atmosphere. Such sudden transitions, made with the quickness of youth, often to escape a harsh word or obey an order, aggravated the condition of her health. She did not know she was ill, and yet she suffered. She began to have strange cravings; she liked raw vegetables and salads, and ate them secretly. The innocent child was quite unaware that her condition was that of serious illness which needed the utmost care. If Neraud, the Rogrons' doctor, had told this to Pierrette before Brigaut's arrival she would only have smiled; life was so bitter she could smile at death. But now her feelings changed; the child, to whose physical sufferings was added the anguish of Breton homesickness (a moral malady so well-known that colonels in the army allow for it among their men), was suddenly content to be in Provins. The sight of that yellow flower, the song, the presence of her friend, revived her as a plant long without water revives under rain. Unconsciously she wanted to live, and even thought she did not suffer.

Pierrette slipped timidly into her cousin's bedroom, made the fire, left the hot water, said a few words, and went to wake Rogron and do the same offices for him. Then she went down to take in the milk, the bread, and the other provisions left by the dealers. She stood some time on the sill of the door hoping that Brigaut would have the sense to come to her; but by that time he was already on his way to Paris.

She had finished the arrangement of the dining-room and was busy in the kitchen when she heard her cousin Sylvie coming down. Mademoiselle Rogron appeared in a brown silk dressing-gown and a cap with bows; her false front was awry, her night-gown showed above the silk wrapper, her slippers were down at heel. She gave an eye to everything and then came straight to Pierrette, who was awaiting her orders to know what to prepare for breakfast.

"Ha! here you are, lovesick young lady!" said Sylvie, in a mocking tone.

"What is it, cousin?"

"You came into my room like a sly cat, and you crept out the same way, though you knew very well I had something to say to you."

"To me?"

"You had a serenade this morning, as if you were a princess."

"A serenade!" exclaimed Pierrette.

"A serenade!" said Sylvie, mimicking her; "and you've a lover, too."

"What is a lover, cousin?"

Sylvie avoided answering, and said:—

"Do you dare to tell me, mademoiselle, that a man did not come under your window and talk to you of marriage?"

Persecution had taught Pierrette the wariness of slaves; so she answered bravely:—

"I don't know what you mean,—"

"Who means?—your dog?" said Sylvie, sharply.

"I should have said 'cousin,'" replied the girl, humbly.

"And didn't you get up and go in your bare feet to the window?—which will give you an illness; and serve you right, too. And perhaps you didn't talk to your lover, either?"

"No, cousin."

"I know you have many faults, but I did not think you told lies. You had better think this over, mademoiselle; you will have to explain this affair to your cousin and to me, or your cousin will be obliged to take severe measures."

The old maid, exasperated by jealousy and curiosity, meant to frighten the girl. Pierrette, like all those who suffer more than they have strength to bear, kept silence. Silence is the only weapon by which such victims can conquer; it baffles the Cossack charges of envy, the savage skirmishings of suspicion; it does at times give victory, crushing and complete,—for what is more complete than silence? it is absolute; it is one of the attributes of infinity. Sylvie watched Pierrette narrowly. The girl colored; but the color, instead of rising evenly, came out in patches on her cheekbones, in burning and significant spots. A mother, seeing that symptom of illness, would have changed her tone at once; she would have taken the child on her lap and questioned her; in fact, she would long ago have tenderly understood the signs of Pierrette's pure and perfect innocence; she would have seen her weakness and known that the disturbance of the digestive organs and the other functions of the body was about to affect the lungs. Those eloquent patches would have warned her of an imminent danger. But an old maid, one in whom the family instincts have never been awakened, to whom the needs of childhood and the precautions required for adolescence were unknown, had neither the indulgence nor the

compassionate intelligence of a mother; such sufferings as those of Pierrette, instead of softening her heart only made it more callous.

"She blushes, she is guilty!" thought Sylvie.

Pierrette's silence was thus interpreted to her injury.

"Pierrette," continued Sylvie, "before your cousin comes down we must have some talk together. Come," she said, in a rather softer tone, "shut the street door; if any one comes they will rung and we shall hear them."

In spite of the damp mist which was rising from the river, Sylvie took Pierrette along the winding gravel path which led across the lawn to the edge of the rock terrace,—a picturesque little quay, covered with iris and aquatic plants. She now changed her tactics, thinking she might catch Pierrette tripping by softness; the hyena became a cat.

"Pierrette," she said, "you are no longer a child; you are nearly fifteen, and it is not at all surprising that you should have a lover."

"But, cousin," said Pierrette, raising her eyes with angelic sweetness to the cold, sour face of her cousin, "What is a lover?"

It would have been impossible for Sylvie to define a lover with truth and decency to the girl's mind. Instead of seeing in that question the proof of adorable innocence, she considered it a piece of insincerity.

"A lover, Pierrette, is a man who loves us and wishes to marry us."

"Ah," said Pierrette, "when that happens in Brittany we call the young man a suitor."

"Well, remember that in owning your feelings for a man you do no wrong, my dear. The wrong is in hiding them. Have you pleased some of the men who visit here?"

"I don't think so, cousin."

"Do you love any of them?"

"No."

"Certain?"

"Quite certain."

"Look at me, Pierrette."

Pierrette looked at Sylvie.

"A man called to you this morning in the square."

Pierrette lowered her eyes.

"You went to your window, you opened it, and you spoke to him."

"No cousin, I went to look out and I saw a peasant."

"Pierrette, you have much improved since you made your first communion; you have become pious and obedient, you love God and your relations; I am satisfied with you. I don't say this to puff you up with pride."

The horrible creature had mistaken despondency, submission, the silence of wretchedness, for virtues!

The sweetest of all consolations to suffering souls, to martyrs, to artists, in the worst of that divine agony which hatred and envy force upon them, is to meet with praise where they have hitherto found censure and injustice. Pierrette raised her grateful eyes to her cousin, feeling that she could almost forgive her for the sufferings she had caused.

"But if it is all hypocrisy, if I find you a serpent that I have warmed in my bosom, you will be a wicked girl, an infamous creature!"

"I think I have nothing to reproach myself with," said Pierrette, with a painful revulsion of her heart at the sudden change from unexpected praise to the tones of the hyena.

"You know that to lie is a mortal sin?"

"Yes, cousin."

"Well, you are now under the eye of God," said the old maid, with a solemn gesture towards the sky; "swear to me that you did not know that peasant."

"I will not swear," said Pierrette.

"Ha! he was no peasant, you little viper."

Pierrette rushed away like a frightened fawn terrified at her tone. Sylvie called her in a dreadful voice.

"The bell is ringing," she answered.

"Artful wretch!" thought Sylvie. "She is depraved in mind; and now I am certain the little adder has wound herself round the colonel. She has heard us say he was a baron. To be a baroness! little fool! Ah! I'll get rid of her, I'll apprentice her out, and soon too!"

Sylvie was so lost in thought that she did not notice her brother coming down the path and bemoaning the injury the frost had done to his dahlias.

"Sylvie! what are you thinking about? I thought you were looking at the fish; sometimes they jump out of the water."

"No," said Sylvie.

"How did you sleep?" and he began to tell her about his own dreams. "Don't you think my skin is getting tabid?"—a word in the Rogron vocabulary.

Ever since Rogron had been in love,—but let us not profane the word,—ever since he had desired to marry Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, he was very uneasy about himself and his health. At this moment Pierrette came down the garden steps and called to them from a distance that breakfast was ready. At sight of her cousin, Sylvie's skin turned green and yellow, her bile was in commotion. She looked at the floor of the corridor and declared that Pierrette ought to rub it.

"I will rub it now if you wish," said the little angel, not aware of the injury such work may do to a young girl.

The dining-room was irreproachably in order. Sylvie sat down and pretended all through breakfast to want this, that, and the other thing which she would never have thought of in a quieter moment, and which she now asked for only to make Pierrette rise again and again just as the child was beginning to eat her food. But such mere teasing was not enough; she wanted a subject on which to find fault, and was angry with herself for not finding one. She scarcely answered her brother's silly remarks, yet she looked at him only; her eyes avoided Pierrette. Pierrette was deeply conscious of all this. She brought the milk mixed with cream for each cousin in a large silver goblet, after heating it carefully in the bain-marie. The brother and sister poured in the coffee made by Sylvie herself on the table. When Sylvie had carefully prepared hers, she saw an atom of coffee-grounds floating on the surface. On this the storm broke forth.

"What is the matter?" asked Rogron.

"The matter is that mademoiselle has put dust in my milk. Do you suppose I am going to drink coffee with ashes in it? Well, I am not surprised; no one can do two things at once. She wasn't thinking of the milk! a blackbird might have flown through the kitchen to-day and she wouldn't have seen it! how should she see the dust flying! and then it was my coffee, ha! that didn't signify!"

As she spoke she was laying on the side of her plate the coffee-grounds that had run through the filter.

"But, cousin, that is coffee," said Pierrette.

"Oh! then it is I who tell lies, is it?" cried Sylvie, looking at Pierrette and blasting her with a fearful flash of anger from her eyes.

Organizations which have not been exhausted by powerful emotions often

have a vast amount of the vital fluid at their service. This phenomenon of the extreme clearness of the eye in moments of anger was the more marked in Mademoiselle Rogron because she had often exercised the power of her eyes in her shop by opening them to their full extent for the purpose of inspiring her dependents with salutary fear.

"You had better dare to give me the lie!" continued Sylvie; "you deserve to be sent from the table to go and eat by yourself in the kitchen."

"What's the matter with you two?" cried Rogron, "you are as cross as bears this morning."

"Mademoiselle knows what I have against her," said Sylvie. "I leave her to make up her mind before speaking to you; for I mean to show her more kindness than she deserves."

Pierrette was looking out of the window to avoid her cousin's eyes, which frightened her.

"Look at her! she pays no more attention to what I am saying than if I were that sugar-basin! And yet mademoiselle has a sharp ear; she can hear and answer from the top of the house when some one talks to her from below. She is perversity itself,—perversity, I say; and you needn't expect any good of her; do you hear me, Jerome?"

"What has she done wrong?" asked Rogron.

"At her age, too! to begin so young!" screamed the angry old maid.

Pierrette rose to clear the table and give herself something to do, for she could hardly bear the scene any longer. Though such language was not new to her, she had never been able to get used to it. Her cousin's rage seemed to accuse her of some crime. She imagined what her fury would be if she came to know about Brigaut. Perhaps her cousin would have him sent away, and she should lose him! All the many thoughts, the deep and rapid thoughts of a slave came to her, and she resolved to keep absolute silence about a circumstance in which her conscience told her there was nothing wrong. But the cruel, bitter words she had been made to hear and the wounding suspicion so shocked her that as she reached the kitchen she was taken with a convulsion of the stomach and turned deadly sick. She dared not complain; she was not sure that any one would help her. When she returned to the dining-room she was white as a sheet, and, saying she was not well, she started to go to bed, dragging herself up step by step by the baluster and thinking that she was going to die. "Poor Brigaut!" she thought.

"The girl is ill," said Rogron.

"She ill! That's only shamming," replied Sylvie, in a loud voice that

Pierrette might hear. "She was well enough this morning, I can tell you."

This last blow struck Pierrette to the earth; she went to bed weeping and praying to God to take her out of this world.

VII. DOMESTIC TYRANNY

For a month past Rogron had ceased to carry the "Constitutionnel" to Gouraud; the colonel came obsequiously to fetch his paper, gossip a little, and take Rogron off to walk if the weather was fine. Sure of seeing the colonel and being able to question him, Sylvie dressed herself as coquettishly as she knew how. The old maid thought she was attractive in a green gown, a yellow shawl with a red border, and a white bonnet with straggling gray feathers. About the hour when the colonel usually came Sylvie stationed herself in the salon with her brother, whom she had compelled to stay in the house in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"It is a fine day, colonel," said Rogron, when Gouraud with his heavy step entered the room. "But I'm not dressed; my sister wanted to go out, and I was going to keep the house. Wait for me; I'll be ready soon."

So saying, Rogron left Sylvie alone with the colonel.

"Where were you going? you are dressed divinely," said Gouraud, who noticed a certain solemnity on the pock-marked face of the old maid.

"I wanted very much to go out, but my little cousin is ill, and I cannot leave her."

"What is the matter with her?"

"I don't know; she had to go to bed."

Gouraud's caution, not to say his distrust, was constantly excited by the results of his alliance with Vinet. It certainly appeared that the lawyer had got the lion's share in their enterprise. Vinet controlled the paper, he reigned as sole master over it, he took the revenues; whereas the colonel, the responsible editor, earned little. Vinet and Cournant had done the Rogrons great services; whereas Gouraud, a colonel on half-pay, could do nothing. Who was to be deputy? Vinet. Who was the chief authority in the party? Vinet. Whom did the liberals all consult? Vinet. Moreover, the colonel knew fully as well as Vinet himself the extent and depth of the passion suddenly aroused in Rogron by the beautiful Bathilde de Chargeboeuf. This passion had now become intense, like all the last passions of men. Bathilde's voice made him tremble. Absorbed in his desires Rogron hid them; he dared not hope for such a marriage. To sound

him, the colonel mentioned that he was thinking himself of asking for Bathilde's hand. Rogron turned pale at the thought of such a formidable rival, and had since then shown coldness and even hatred to Gouraud.

Thus Vinet reigned supreme in the Rogron household while he, the colonel, had no hold there except by the extremely hypothetical tie of his mendacious affection for Sylvie, which it was not yet clear that Sylvie reciprocated. When the lawyer told him of the priest's manoeuvre, and advised him to break with Sylvie and marry Pierrette, he certainly flattered Gouraud's foible; but after analyzing the inner purpose of that advice and examining the ground all about him, the colonel thought he perceived in his ally the intention of separating him from Sylvie, and profiting by her fears to throw the whole Rogron property into the hands of Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf.

Therefore, when the colonel was left alone with Sylvie his perspicacity possessed itself immediately of certain signs which betrayed her uneasiness. He saw at once that she was under arms and had made this plan for seeing him alone. As he already suspected Vinet of playing him some trick, he attributed the conference to the instigation of the lawyer, and was instantly on his guard, as he would have been in an enemy's country,—with an eye all about him, an ear to the faintest sound, his mind on the qui vive, and his hand on a weapon. The colonel had the defect of never believing a single word said to him by a woman; so that when the old maid brought Pierrette on the scene, and told him she had gone to bed before midday, he concluded that Sylvie had locked her up by way of punishment and out of jealousy.

"She is getting to be quite pretty, that little thing," he said with an easy air.

"She will be pretty," replied Mademoiselle Rogron.

"You ought to send her to Paris and put her in a shop," continued the colonel. "She would make her fortune. The milliners all want pretty girls."

"Is that really your advice?" asked Sylvie, in a troubled voice.

"Good!" thought the colonel, "I was right. Vinet advised me to marry Pierrette just to spoil my chance with the old harridan. But," he said aloud, "what else can you do with her? There's that beautiful girl Bathilde de Chargeboeuf, noble and well-connected, reduced to single-blessedness,—nobody will have her. Pierrette has nothing, and she'll never marry. As for beauty, what is it? To me, for example, youth and beauty are nothing; for haven't I been a captain of cavalry in the imperial guard, and carried my spurs into all the capitals of Europe, and known all the handsomest women of these capitals? Don't talk to me; I tell you youth and beauty are devilishly common and silly. At forty-eight," he went on, adding a few years to his age, to match Sylvie's, "after surviving the retreat from Moscow and going through that

terrible campaign of France, a man is broken down; I'm nothing but an old fellow now. A woman like you would pet me and care for me, and her money, joined to my poor pension, would give me ease in my old days; of course I should prefer such a woman to a little minx who would worry the life out of me, and be thirty years old, with passions, when I should be sixty, with rheumatism. At my age, a man considers and calculates. To tell you the truth between ourselves, I should not wish to have children."

Sylvie's face was an open book to the colonel during this tirade, and her next question proved to him Vinet's perfidy.

"Then you don't love Pierrette?" she said.

"Heavens! are you out of your mind, my dear Sylvie?" he cried. "Can those who have no teeth crack nuts? Thank God I've got some common-sense and know what I'm about."

Sylvie thus reassured resolved not to show her own hand, and thought herself very shrewd in putting her own ideas into her brother's mouth.

"Jerome," she said, "thought of the match."

"How could your brother take up such an incongruous idea? Why, it is only a few days ago that, in order to find out his secrets, I told him I loved Bathilde. He turned as white as your collar."

"My brother! does he love Bathilde?" asked Sylvie.

"Madly,—and yet Bathilde is only after his money." ("One for you, Vinet!" thought the colonel.) "I can't understand why he should have told you that about Pierrette. No, Sylvie," he said, taking her hand and pressing it in a certain way, "since you have opened this matter" (he drew nearer to her), "well" (he kissed her hand; as a cavalry captain he had already proved his courage), "let me tell you that I desire no wife but you. Though such a marriage may look like one of convenience, I feel, on my side, a sincere affection for you."

"But if I wish you to marry Pierrette? if I leave her my fortune—eh, colonel?"

"But I don't want to be miserable in my home, and in less than ten years see a popinjay like Julliard hovering round my wife and addressing verses to her in the newspapers. I'm too much of a man to stand that. No, I will never make a marriage that is disproportionate in age."

"Well, colonel, we will talk seriously of this another time," said Sylvie, casting a glance upon him which she supposed to be full of love, though, in point of fact, it was a good deal like that of an ogress. Her cold, blue lips of a violet tinge drew back from the yellow teeth, and she thought she smiled.

"I'm ready," said Rogron, coming in and carrying off the colonel, who bowed in a lover-like way to the old maid.

Gouraud determined to press on his marriage with Sylvie, and make himself master of the house; resolving to rid himself, through his influence over Sylvie during the honeymoon, of Bathilde and Celeste Habert. So, during their walk, he told Rogron he had been joking the other day; that he had no real intention of aspiring to Bathilde; that he was not rich enough to marry a woman without fortune; and then he confided to him his real wishes, declaring that he had long chosen Sylvie for her good qualities,—in short, he aspired to the honor of being Rogron's brother-in-law.

"Ah, colonel, my dear baron! if nothing is wanting but my consent you have it with no further delay than the law requires," cried Rogron, delighted to be rid of his formidable rival.

Sylvie spent the morning in her own room considering how the new household could be arranged. She determined to build a second storey for her brother and to furnish the rest for herself and her husband; but she also resolved, in the true old-maidish spirit, to subject the colonel to certain proofs by which to judge of his heart and his morals before she finally committed herself. She was still suspicious, and wanted to make sure that Pierrette had no private intercourse with the colonel.

Pierrette came down before the dinner-hour to lay the table. Sylvie had been forced to cook the dinner, and had sworn at that "cursed Pierrette" for a spot she had made on her gown,—wasn't it plain that if Pierrette had done her own work Sylvie wouldn't have got that grease-spot on her silk dress?

"Oh, here you are, peakling? You are like the dog of the marshal who woke up as soon as the saucepans rattled. Ha! you want us to think you are ill, you little liar!"

That idea: "You did not tell the truth about what happened in the square this morning, therefore you lie in everything," was a hammer with which Sylvie battered the head and also the heart of the poor girl incessantly.

To Pierrette's great astonishment Sylvie sent her to dress in her best clothes after dinner. The liveliest imagination is never up to the level of the activity which suspicion excites in the mind of an old maid. In this particular case, this particular old maid carried the day against politicians, lawyers, notaries, and all other self-interests. Sylvie determined to consult Vinet, after examining herself into all the suspicious circumstances. She kept Pierrette close to her, so as to find out from the girl's face whether the colonel had told her the truth.

On this particular evening the Chargeboeuf ladies were the first to arrive. Bathilde, by Vinet's advice, had become more elaborate in her dress. She now

wore a charming gown of blue velveteen, with the same transparent fichu, garnet pendants in her ears, her hair in ringlets, the wily jeannette round her throat, black satin slippers, gray silk stockings, and gants de Suede; add to these things the manners of a queen and the coquetry of a young girl determined to capture Rogron. Her mother, calm and dignified, retained, as did her daughter, a certain aristocratic insolence, with which the two women hedged themselves and preserved the spirit of their caste. Bathilde was a woman of intelligence, a fact which Vinet alone had discovered during the two months' stay the ladies had made at his house. When he had fully fathomed the mind of the girl, wounded and disappointed as it was by the fruitlessness of her beauty and her youth, and enlightened by the contempt she felt for the men of a period in which money was the only idol, Vinet, himself surprised, exclaimed,—

"If I could only have married you, Bathilde, I should to-day be Keeper of the Seals. I should call myself Vinet de Chargeboeuf, and take my seat as deputy of the Right."

Bathilde had no vulgar idea in her marriage intentions. She did not marry to be a mother, nor to possess a husband; she married for freedom, to gain a responsible position, to be called "madame," and to act as men act. Rogron was nothing but a name to her; she expected to make something of the fool,—a voting deputy, for instance, whose instigator she would be; moreover, she longed to avenge herself on her family, who had taken no notice of a girl without money. Vinet had much enlarged and strengthened her ideas by admiring and approving them.

"My dear Bathilde," he said, while explaining to her the influence of women, and showing her the sphere of action in which she ought to work, "do you suppose that Tiphaine, a man of the most ordinary capacity, could ever get to be a judge of the Royal court in Paris by himself? No, it is Madame Tiphaine who has got him elected deputy, and it is she who will push him when they get to Paris. Her mother, Madame Roguin, is a shrewd woman, who does what she likes with the famous banker du Tillet, a crony of Nucingen, and both of them allies of the Kellers. The administration is on the best of terms with those lynxes of the bank. There is no reason why Tiphaine should not be judge, through his wife, of a Royal court. Marry Rogron; we'll have him elected deputy from Provins as soon as I gain another precinct in the Seine-et-Marne. You can then get him a place as receiver-general, where he'll have nothing to do but sign his name. We shall belong to the opposition if the Liberals triumph, but if the Bourbons remain—ah! then we shall lean gently, gently towards the centre. Besides, you must remember Rogron can't live forever, and then you can marry a titled man. In short, put yourself in a good position, and the Chargeboeufs will be ready enough to serve us. Your poverty

has no doubt taught you, as mine did me, to know what men are worth. We must make use of them as we do of post-horses. A man, or a woman, will take us along to such or such a distance."

Vinet ended by making Bathilde a small edition of Catherine de Medicis. He left his wife at home, rejoiced to be alone with her two children, while he went every night to the Rogrons' with Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf. He arrived there in all the glory of better circumstances. His spectacles were of gold, his waistcoat silk; a white cravat, black trousers, thin boots, a black coat made in Paris, and a gold watch and chain, made up his apparel. In place of the former Vinet, pale and thin, snarling and gloomy, the present Vinet bore himself with the air and manner of a man of importance; he marched boldly forward, certain of success, with that peculiar show of security which belongs to lawyers who know the hidden places of the law. His sly little head was well-brushed, his chin well-shaved, which gave him a mincing though frigid look, that made him seem agreeable in the style of Robespierre. Certainly he would make a fine attorney-general, endowed with elastic, mischievous, and even murderous eloquence, or an orator of the shrewd type of Benjamin Constant. The bitterness and the hatred which formerly actuated him had now turned into soft-spoken perfidy; the poison was transformed into anodyne.

"Good-evening, my dear; how are you?" said Madame de Chargeboeuf, greeting Sylvie.

Bathilde went straight to the fireplace, took off her bonnet, looked at herself in the glass, and placed her pretty foot on the fender that Rogron might admire it.

"What is the matter with you?" she said to him, looking directly in his face. "You have not bowed to me. Pray why should we put on our best velvet gowns to please you?"

She pushed past Pierrette to lay down her hat, which the latter took from her hand, and which she let her take exactly as though she were a servant. Men are supposed to be ferocious, and tigers too; but neither tigers, vipers, diplomatists, lawyers, executioners or kings ever approach, in their greatest atrocities, the gentle cruelty, the poisoned sweetness, the savage disdain of one young woman for another, when she thinks herself superior in birth, or fortune, or grace, and some question of marriage, or precedence, or any of the feminine rivalries, is raised. The "Thank you, mademoiselle," which Bathilde said to Pierrette was a poem in many strophes. She was named Bathilde, and the other Pierrette. She was a Chargeboeuf, the other a Lorrain. Pierrette was small and weak, Bathilde was tall and full of life. Pierrette was living on charity, Bathilde and her mother lived on their means. Pierrette wore a stuff

gown with a chemisette, Bathilde made the velvet of hers undulate. Bathilde had the finest shoulders in the department, and the arm of a queen; Pierrette's shoulder-blades were skin and bone. Pierrette was Cinderella, Bathilde was the fairy. Bathilde was about to marry, Pierrette was to die a maid. Bathilde was adored, Pierrette was loved by none. Bathilde's hair was ravishingly dressed, she had so much taste; Pierrette's was hidden beneath her Breton cap, and she knew nothing of the fashions. Moral, Bathilde was everything, Pierrette nothing. The proud little Breton girl understood this tragic poem.

"Good-evening, little girl," said Madame de Chargeboeuf, from the height of her condescending grandeur, and in the tone of voice which her pinched nose gave her.

Vinet put the last touch to this sort of insult by looking fixedly at Pierrette and saying, in three keys, "Oh! oh! oh! how fine we are to-night, Pierrette!"

"Fine!" said the poor child; "you should say that to Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, not to me."

"Oh! she is always beautifully dressed," replied the lawyer. "Isn't she, Rogron?" he added, turning to the master of the house, and grasping his hand.

"Yes," said Rogron.

"Why do you force him to say what he does not think?" said Bathilde; "nothing about me pleases him. Isn't that true?" she added, going up to Rogron and standing before him. "Look at me, and say if it isn't true."

Rogron looked at her from head to foot, and gently closed his eyes like a cat whose head is being scratched.

"You are too beautiful," he said; "too dangerous."

"Why?"

Rogron looked at the fire and was silent. Just then Mademoiselle Habert entered the room, followed by the colonel.

Celeste Habert, who had now become the common enemy, could only reckon Sylvie on her side; nevertheless, everybody present showed her the more civility and amiable attention because each was undermining her. Her brother, though no longer able to be on the scene of action, was well aware of what was going on, and as soon as he perceived that his sister's hopes were killed he became an implacable and terrible antagonist to the Rogrons.

Every one will immediately picture to themselves Mademoiselle Habert when they know that if she had not kept an institution for young ladies she would still have had the air of a school-mistress. School-mistresses have a way of their own in putting on their caps. Just as old Englishwomen have acquired

a monopoly in turbans, school-mistresses have a monopoly of these caps. Flowers nod above the frame-work, flowers that are more than artificial; lying by in closets for years the cap is both new and old, even on the day it is first worn. These spinsters make it a point of honor to resemble the lay figures of a painter; they sit on their hips, never on their chairs. When any one speaks to them they turn their whole busts instead of simply turning their heads; and when their gowns creak one is tempted to believe that the mechanism of these beings is out of order. Mademoiselle Habert, an ideal of her species, had a stern eye, a grim mouth, and beneath her wrinkled chin the strings of her cap, always limp and faded, floated as she moved. Two moles, rather large and brown, adorned that chin, and from them sprouted hairs which she allowed to grow rampant like clematis. And finally, to complete her portrait, she took snuff, and took it ungracefully.

The company went to work at their boston. Mademoiselle Habert sat opposite to Sylvie, with the colonel at her side opposite to Madame de Chargeboeuf. Bathilde was near her mother and Rogron. Sylvie placed Pierrette between herself and the colonel; Rogron had set out a second card-table, in case other company arrived. Two lamps were on the chimney-piece between the candelabra and the clock, and the tables were lighted by candles at forty sous a pound, paid for by the price of the cards.

"Come, Pierrette, take your work, my dear," said Sylvie, with treacherous softness, noticing that the girl was watching the colonel's game.

She usually affected to treat Pierrette well before company. This deception irritated the honest Breton girl, and made her despise her cousin. She took her embroidery, but as she drew her stitches she still watched Gouraud's play. Gouraud behaved as if he did not know the girl was near him. Sylvie noticed this apparent indifference and thought it extremely suspicious. Presently she undertook a grande misere in hearts, the pool being full of counters, besides containing twenty-seven sous. The rest of the company had now arrived; among them the deputy-judge Desfondrilles, who for the last two months had abandoned the Tiphaine party and connected himself more or less with the Vinets. He was standing before the chimney-piece, with his back to the fire and the tails of his coat over his arms, looking round the fine salon of which Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf was the shining ornament; for it really seemed as if all the reds of its decoration had been made expressly to enhance her style of beauty. Silence reigned; Pierrette was watching the game, Sylvie's attention was distracted from her by the interest of the grande misere.

"Play that," said Pierrette to the colonel, pointing to a heart in his hand.

The colonel began a sequence in hearts; the hearts all lay between himself and Sylvie; the colonel won her ace, though it was protected by five small

hearts.

"That's not fair!" she cried. "Pierrette saw my hand, and the colonel took her advice."

"But, mademoiselle," said Celeste, "it was the colonel's game to play hearts after you began them."

The scene made Monsieur Desfondrilles smile; his was a keen mind, which found much amusement in watching the play of all the self-interests in Provins.

"Yes, it was certainly the colonel's game," said Cournant the notary, not knowing what the question was.

Sylvie threw a look at Mademoiselle Habert,—one of those glances which pass from old maid to old maid, feline and cruel.

"Pierrette, you did see my hand," said Sylvie fixing her eyes on the girl.

"No, cousin."

"I was looking at you all," said the deputy-judge, "and I can swear that Pierrette saw no one's hand but the colonel's."

"Pooh!" said Gouraud, alarmed, "little girls know how to slide their eyes into everything."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"Yes," continued Gouraud. "I dare say she looked into your hand to play you a trick. Didn't you, little one?"

"No," said the truthful Breton, "I wouldn't do such a thing; if I had, it would have been in my cousin's interests."

"You know you are a story-teller and a little fool," cried Sylvie. "After what happened this morning do you suppose I can believe a word you say? You are a—"

Pierrette did not wait for Sylvie to finish her sentence; foreseeing a torrent of insults, she rushed away without a light and ran to her room. Sylvie turned white with anger and muttered between her teeth, "She shall pay for this!"

"Shall you pay for the misere?" said Madame de Chargeboeuf.

As she spoke Pierrette struck her head against the door of the passage which some one had left open.

"Good! I'm glad of it," cried Sylvie, as they heard the blow.

"She must be hurt," said Desfondrilles.

"She deserves it," replied Sylvie.

"It was a bad blow," said Mademoiselle Habert.

Sylvie thought she might escape paying her misere if she went to see after Pierrette, but Madame de Chargeboeuf stopped her.

"Pay us first," she said, laughing; "you will forget it when you come back."

The remark, based on the old maid's trickery and her bad faith in paying her debts at cards was approved by the others. Sylvie sat down and thought no more of Pierrette,—an indifference which surprised no one. When the game was over, about half past nine o'clock, she flung herself into an easy chair at the corner of the fireplace and did not even rise as her guests departed. The colonel was torturing her; she did not know what to think of him.

"Men are so false!" she cried, as she went to bed.

Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow on the head, just above the ear, at the spot where young girls part their hair when they put their "front hair" in curlpapers. The next day there was a large swelling.

"God has punished you," said Sylvie at the breakfast table. "You disobeyed me; you treated me with disrespect in leaving the room before I had finished my sentence; you got what you deserved."

"Nevertheless," said Rogron, "she ought to put on a compress of salt and water."

"Oh, it is nothing at all, cousin," said Pierrette.

The poor child had reached a point where even such a remark seemed to her a proof of kindness.

VIII. THE LOVES OF JACQUES AND PIERRETTE

The week ended as it had begun, in continual torture. Sylvie grew ingenious, and found refinements of tyranny with almost savage cruelty; the red Indians might have taken a lesson from her. Pierrette dared not complain of her vague sufferings, nor of the actual pains she now felt in her head. The origin of her cousin's present anger was the non-revelation of Brigaut's arrival. With Breton obstinacy Pierrette was determined to keep silence,—a resolution that is perfectly explicable. It is easy to see how her thoughts turned to Brigaut, fearing some danger for him if he were discovered, yet instinctively longing to have him near her, and happy in knowing he was in Provins. What joy to have seen him! That single glimpse was like the look an exile casts

upon his country, or the martyr lifts to heaven, where his eyes, gifted with second-sight, can enter while flames consume his body.

Pierrette's glance had been so thoroughly understood by the major's son that, as he planed his planks or took his measures or joined his wood, he was working his brains to find out some way of communicating with her. He ended by choosing the simplest of all schemes. At a certain hour of the night Pierrette must lower a letter by a string from her window. In the midst of the girl's own sufferings, she too was sustained by the hope of being able to communicate with Brigaut. The same desire was in both hearts; parted, they understood each other! At every shock to her heart, every throb of pain in her head, Pierrette said to herself, "Brigaut is here!" and that thought enabled her to live without complaint.

One morning in the market, Brigaut, lying in wait, was able to get near her. Though he saw her tremble and turn pale, like an autumn leaf about to flutter down, he did not lose his head, but quietly bought fruit of the market-woman with whom Sylvie was bargaining. He found his chance of slipping a note to Pierrette, all the while joking the woman with the ease of a man accustomed to such manoeuvres; so cool was he in action, though the blood hummed in his ears and rushed boiling through his veins and arteries. He had the firmness of a galley-slave without, and the shrinkings of innocence within him,—like certain mothers in their moments of mortal trial, when held between two dangers, two catastrophes.

Pierrette's inward commotion was like Brigaut's. She slipped the note into the pocket of her apron. The hectic spots upon her cheekbones turned to a cherry-scarlet. These two children went through, all unknown to themselves, many more emotions than go to the make-up of a dozen ordinary loves. This moment in the market-place left in their souls a well-spring of passionate feeling. Sylvie, who did not recognize the Breton accent, took no notice of Brigaut, and Pierrette went home safely with her treasure.

The letters of these two poor children were fated to serve as documents in a terrible judicial inquiry; otherwise, without the fatal circumstances that occasioned that inquiry, they would never have been heard of. Here is the one which Pierrette read that night in her chamber:—

My dear Pierrette,—At midnight, when everybody is asleep but me, who am watching you, I will come every night under your window. Let down a string long enough to reach me; it will not make any noise; you must fasten to the end of it whatever you write to me. I will tie my letter in the same way. I hear they have taught you to read and write,—those wicked relations who were to do you good, and have done you so much harm. You, Pierrette, the daughter of a colonel who died for France, reduced by those monsters to be

their servant! That is where all your pretty color and health have gone. My Pierrette, what has become of her? what have they done with her. I see plainly you are not the same, not happy. Oh! Pierrette, let us go back to Brittany. I can earn enough now to give you what you need; for you yourself can earn three francs a day and I can earn four or five; and thirty sous is all I want to live on. Ah! Pierrette, how I have prayed the good God for you ever since I came here! I have asked him to give me all your sufferings, and you all pleasures. Why do you stay with them? why do they keep you? Your grandmother is more to you than they. They are vipers; they have taken your gaiety away from you. You do not even walk as you once did in Brittany. Let us go back. I am here to serve you, to do your will; tell me what you wish. If you need money I have a hundred and fifty francs; I can send them up by the string, though I would like to kiss your dear hands and lay the money in them. Ah, dear Pierrette, it is a long time now that the blue sky has been overcast for me. I have not had two hours' happiness since I put you into that diligence of evil. And when I saw you the other morning, looking like a shadow, I could not reach you; that hag of a cousin came between us. But at least we can have the consolation of praying to God together every Sunday in church; perhaps he will hear us all the more when we pray together.

Not good-by, my dear, Pierrette, but to-night.

This letter so affected Pierrette that she sat for more than an hour reading and re-reading and gazing at it. Then she remembered with anguish that she had nothing to write with. She summoned courage to make the difficult journey from her garret to the dining-room, where she obtained pen, paper, and ink, and returned safely without waking her terrible cousin. A few minutes before midnight she had finished the following letter:—

My Friend,—Oh! yes, my friend; for there is no one but you, Jacques, and my grandmother to love me. God forgive me, but you are the only two persons whom I love, both alike, neither more nor less. I was too little to know my dear mamma; but you, Jacques, and my grandmother, and my grandfather,—God grant him heaven, for he suffered much from his ruin, which was mine,—but you two who are left, I love you both, unhappy as I am. Indeed, to know how much I love you, you will have to know how much I suffer; but I don't wish that, it would grieve you too much. They speak to me as we would not speak to a dog; they treat me like the worst of girls; and yet I do examine myself before God, and I cannot find that I do wrong by them. Before you sang to me the marriage song I saw the mercy of God in my sufferings; for I had prayed to him to take me from the world, and I felt so ill I said to myself, "God hears me!" But, Jacques, now you are here, I want to live and go back to Brittany, to my grandmamma who loves me, though they say she stole eight thousand francs of mine. Jacques, is that so? If they are mine could you get

them! But it is not true, for if my grandmother had eight thousand francs she would not live at Saint-Jacques.

I don't want to trouble her last days, my kind, good grandmamma, with the knowledge of my troubles; she might die of it. Ah! if she knew they made her grandchild scrub the pots and pans,—she who used to say to me, when I wanted to help her after her troubles, "Don't touch that, my darling; leave it—leave it—you will spoil your pretty fingers." Ah! my hands are never clean now. Sometimes I can hardly carry the basket home from market, it cuts my arm. Still I don't think my cousins mean to be cruel; but it is their way always to scold, and it seems that I have no right to leave them. My cousin Rogron is my guardian. One day when I wanted to run away because I could not bear it, and told them so, my cousin Sylvie said the gendarmes would go after me, for the law was my master. Oh! I know now that cousins cannot take the place of father or mother, any more than the saints can take the place of God.

My poor Jacques, what do you suppose I could do with your money? Keep it for our journey. Oh! how I think of you and Pen-Hoel, and the big pong,—that's where we had our only happy days. I shall have no more, for I feel I am going from bad to worse. I am very ill, Jacques. I have dreadful pains in my head, and in my bones, and back, which kill me, and I have no appetite except for horrid things,—roots and leaves and such things. Sometimes I cry, when I am all alone, for they won't let me do anything I like if they know it, not even cry. I have to hide to offer my tears to Him to whom we owe the mercies which we call afflictions. It must have been He who gave you the blessed thought to come and sing the marriage song beneath my window. Ah! Jacques, my cousin heard you, and she said I had a lover. If you wish to be my lover, love me well. I promise to love you always, as I did in the past, and to be

Your faithful servant,

Pierrette Lorrain.

You will love me always, won't you?

She had brought a crust of bread from the kitchen, in which she now made a hole for the letter, and fastened it like a weight to her string. At midnight, having opened her window with extreme caution, she lowered the letter with the crust, which made no noise against either the wall of the house or the blinds. Presently she felt the string pulled by Brigaut, who broke it and then crept softly away. When he reached the middle of the square she could see him indistinctly by the starlight; but he saw her quite clearly in the zone of light thrown by the candle. The two children stood thus for over an hour, Pierrette making him signs to go, he starting, she remaining, he coming back to his post, and Pierrette again signing that he must leave her. This was repeated till the child closed her window, went to bed, and blew out the candle. Once in

bed she fell asleep, happy in heart though suffering in body,—she had Brigaut's letter under her pillow. She slept as the persecuted sleep,—a slumber bright with angels; that slumber full of heavenly arabesques, in atmospheres of gold and lapis-lazuli, perceived and given to us by Raffaelle.

The moral nature had such empire over that frail physical nature that on the morrow Pierrette rose light and joyous as a lark, as radiant and as gay. Such a change could not escape the vigilant eye of her cousin Sylvie, who, this time, instead of scolding her, set about watching her with the scrutiny of a magpie. "What reason is there for such happiness?" was a thought of jealousy, not of tyranny. If the colonel had not been in Sylvie's mind she would have said to Pierrette as formerly, "Pierrette, you are very noise, and very regardless of what you have often been told." But now the old maid resolved to spy upon her as only old maids can spy. The day was still and gloomy, like the weather that precedes a storm.

"You don't appear to be ill now, mademoiselle," said Sylvie at dinner. "Didn't I tell you she put it all on to annoy us?" she cried, addressing her brother, and not waiting for Pierrette's answer.

"On the contrary, cousin, I have a sort of fever—"

"Fever! what fever? You are as gay as a lark. Perhaps you have seen some one again?"

Pierrette trembled and dropped her eyes on her plate.

"Tartufe!" cried Sylvie; "and only fourteen years old! what a nature! Do you mean to come to a bad end?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Pierrette, raising her sweet and luminous brown eyes to her cousin.

"This evening," said Sylvie, "you are to stay in the dining-room with a candle, and do your sewing. You are not wanted in the salon; I sha'n't have you looking into my hand to help your favorites."

Pierrette made no sign.

"Artful creature!" cried Sylvie, leaving the room.

Rogron, who did not understand his sister's anger, said to Pierrette: "What is all this about? Try to please your cousin, Pierrette; she is very indulgent to you, very gentle, and if you put her out of temper the fault is certainly yours. Why do you squabble so? For my part I like to live in peace. Look at Mademoiselle Bathilde and take pattern by her."

Pierrette felt able to bear everything. Brigaut would come at midnight and bring her an answer, and that hope was the viaticum of her day. But she was

using up her last strength. She did not go to bed, and stood waiting for the hour to strike. At last midnight sounded; softly she opened the window; this time she used a string made by tying bits of twine together. She heard Brigaut's step, and on drawing up the cord she found the following letter, which filled her with joy:—

My dear Pierrette,—As you are so ill you must not tire yourself by waiting for me. You will hear me if I cry like an owl. Happily my father taught me to imitate their note. So when you hear the cry three times you will know I am there, and then you must let down the cord. But I shall not come again for some days. I hope then to bring you good news.

Oh! Pierrette, don't talk of dying! Pierrette, don't think such things! All my heart shook, I felt as though I were dead myself at the mere idea. No, my Pierrette, you must not die; you will live happy, and soon you shall be delivered from your persecutors. If I do not succeed in what I am undertaking for your rescue, I shall appeal to the law, and I shall speak out before heaven and earth and tell how your wicked relations are treating you. I am certain that you have not many more days to suffer; have patience, my Pierrette! Jacques is watching over you as in the old days when we slid on the pond and I pulled you out of the hole in which we were nearly drowned together.

Adieu, my dear Pierrette; in a few days, if God wills, we shall be happy. Alas, I dare not tell you the only thing that may hinder our meeting. But God loves us! In a few days I shall see my dear Pierrette at liberty, without troubles, without any one to hinder my looking at you—for, ah! Pierrette, I hunger to see you —Pierrette, Pierrette, who deigns to love me and to tell me so.

Yes, Pierrette, I will be your lover when I have earned the fortune you deserve; till then I will be to you only a devoted servant whose life is yours to do what you please with it. Adieu.

Jacques Brigaut.

Here is a letter of which the major's son said nothing to Pierrette. He wrote it to Madame Lorrain at Nantes:—

Madame Lorrain,—Your granddaughter will die, worn-out with ill-treatment, if you do not come to fetch her. I could scarcely recognize her; and to show you the state of things I enclose a letter I have received from Pierrette. You are thought here to have taken the money of your granddaughter, and you ought to justify yourself. If you can, come at once. We may still be happy; but if delay Pierrette will be dead.

I am, with respect, your devoted servant,

Jacques Brigaut.

At Monsieur Frappier's, Cabinet-maker, Grand'Rue, Provins.

Brigaut's fear was that the grandmother was dead.

Though this letter of the youth whom in her innocence she called her lover was almost enigmatical to Pierrette, she believed in it with all her virgin faith. Her heart was filled with that sensation which travellers in the desert feel when they see from afar the palm-trees round a well. In a few days her misery would end—Jacques said so. She relied on this promise of her childhood's friend; and yet, as she laid the letter beside the other, a dreadful thought came to her in foreboding words.

"Poor Jacques," she said to herself, "he does not know the hole into which I have now fallen!"

Sylvie had heard Pierrette, and she had also heard Brigaut under her window. She jumped out of bed and rushed to the window to look through the blinds into the square and there she saw, in the moonlight, a man hurrying in the direction of the colonel's house, in front of which Brigaut happened to stop. The old maid gently opened her door, went upstairs, was amazed to find a light in Pierrette's room, looked through the keyhole, and could see nothing.

"Pierrette," she said, "are you ill?"

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, surprised.

"Why is your candle burning at this time of night? Open the door; I must know what this means."

Pierrette went to the door bare-footed, and as soon as Sylvie entered the room she saw the cord, which Pierrette had forgotten to put away, not dreaming of a surprise. Sylvie jumped upon it.

"What is that for?" she asked.

"Nothing, cousin."

"Nothing!" she cried. "Always lying; you'll never get to heaven that way. Go to bed; you'll take cold."

She asked no more questions and went away, leaving Pierrette terrified by her unusual clemency. Instead of exploding with rage, Sylvie had suddenly determined to surprise Pierrette and the colonel together, to seize their letters and confound the two lovers who were deceiving her. Pierrette, inspired by a sense of danger, sewed the letters into her corset and covered them with calico.

Here end the loves of Pierrette and Brigaut.

Pierrette rejoiced in the thought that Jacques had determined to hold no

communication with her for some days, because her cousin's suspicions would be quieted by finding nothing to feed them. Sylvie did in fact spend the next three nights on her legs, and each evening in watching the innocent colonel, without discovering either in him or in Pierrette, or in the house or out of it, anything that betrayed their understanding. She sent Pierrette to confession, and seized that moment to search the child's room, with the method and penetration of a spy or a custom-house officer. She found nothing. Her fury reached the apogee of human sentiments. If Pierrette had been there she would certainly have struck her remorselessly. To a woman of her temper, jealousy was less a sentiment than an occupation; she existed in it, it made her heart beat, she felt emotions hitherto completely unknown to her; the slightest sound or movement kept her on the qui vive; she watched Pierrette with gloomy intentness.

"That miserable little wretch will kill me," she said.

Sylvie's severity to her cousin reached the point of refined cruelty, and made the deplorable condition of the poor girl worse daily. She had fever regularly, and the pains in her head became intolerable. By the end of the week even the visitors at the house noticed her suffering face, which would have touched to pity all selfishness less cruel than theirs. It happened that Doctor Neraud, possibly by Vinet's advice, did not come to the house during that week. The colonel, knowing himself suspected by Sylvie, was afraid to risk his marriage by showing any solicitude for Pierrette. Bathilde explained the visible change in the girl by her natural growth. But at last, one Sunday evening, when Pierrette was in the salon, her sufferings overcame her and she fainted away. The colonel, who first saw her going, caught her in his arms and carried her to a sofa.

"She did it on purpose," said Sylvie, looking at Mademoiselle Habert and the rest who were playing boston with her.

"I assure you that your cousin is very ill," said the colonel.

"She seemed well enough in your arms," Sylvie said to him in a low voice, with a savage smile.

"The colonel is right," said Madame de Chargeboeuf. "You ought to send for a doctor. This morning at church every one was speaking, as they came out, of Mademoiselle Lorrain's appearance."

"I am dying," said Pierrette.

Desfondrilles called to Sylvie and told her to unfasten her cousin's gown. Sylvie went up to the girl, saying, "It is only a tantrum."

She unfastened the gown and was about to touch the corset, when Pierrette,

roused by the danger, sat up with superhuman strength, exclaiming, "No, no, I will go to bed."

Sylvie had, however, touched the corset and felt the papers. She let Pierrette go, saying to the company:

"What do you think now of her illness? I tell you it is all a pretence. You have no idea of the perversity of that child."

After the card-playing was over she kept Vinet from following the other guests; she was furious and wanted vengeance, and was grossly rude to the colonel when he bade her good-night. Gouraud threw a look at the lawyer which threatened him to the depths of his being and seemed to put a ball in his entrails. Sylvie told Vinet to remain. When they were alone, she said,—

"Never in my life, never in my born days, will I marry the colonel."

"Now that you have come to that decision I may speak," said the lawyer. "The colonel is my friend, but I am more yours than his. Rogron has done me services which I can never forget. I am as strong a friend as I am an enemy. Once in the Chamber I shall rise to power, and I will make your brother a receiver-general. Now swear to me, before I say more, that you will never repeat what I tell you." (Sylvie made an affirmative sign.) "In the first place, the brave colonel is a gambler—"

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"If it had not been for the embarrassments this vice has brought upon him, he might have been a marshal of France," continued Vinet. "He is capable of running through your property; but he is very astute; you cannot be sure of not having children, and you told me yourself the risks you feared. No, if you want to marry, wait till I am in the Chamber and then take that old Desfondrilles, who shall be made chief justice. If you want revenge on the colonel make your brother marry Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf,—I can get her consent; she has two thousand francs a year, and you will be connected with the de Chargeboeufs as I am. Recollect what I tell you, the Chargeboeufs will be glad to claim us for cousins some day."

"Gouraud loves Pierrette," was Sylvie's only answer.

"He is quite capable of it," said Vinet, "and capable of marrying her after your death."

"A fine calculation!" she said.

"I tell you that man has the shrewdness of the devil. Marry your brother and announce that you mean to remain unmarried and will leave your property to your nephews and nieces. That will strike a blow at Gouraud and Pierrette both! and you'll see the faces they'll make."

"Ah! that's true," cried the old maid, "I can serve them both right. She shall go to a shop, and get nothing from me. She hasn't a sou; let her do as we did, —work."

Vinet departed, having put his plan into Sylvie's head, her dogged obstinacy being well-known to him. The old maid, he was certain, would think the scheme her own, and carry it out.

The lawyer found the colonel in the square, smoking a cigar while he waited for him.

"Halt!" said Gouraud; "you have pulled me down, but stones enough came with me to bury you—"

"Colonel!—"

"Colonel or not, I shall give you your deserts. In the first place, you shall not be deputy—"

"Colonel!—"

"I control ten votes and the election depends on—"

"Colonel, listen to me. Is there no one to marry but that old Sylvie? I have just been defending you to her; you are accused and convicted of writing to Pierrette; she saw you leave your house at midnight and come to the girl's window—"

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"She means to marry her brother to Bathilde and leave her fortune to their children."

"Rogron won't have any."

"Yes he will," replied Vinet. "But I promise to find you some young and agreeable woman with a hundred and fifty thousand francs? Don't be a fool; how can you and I afford to quarrel? Things have gone against you in spite of all my care; but you don't understand me."

"Then we must understand each other," said the colonel. "Get me a wife with a hundred and fifty thousand francs before the elections; if not—look out for yourself! I don't like unpleasant bed-fellows, and you've pulled the blankets all over to your side. Good-evening."

"You shall see," said Vinet, grasping the colonel's hand affectionately.

About one o'clock that night three clear, sharp cries of an owl, wonderfully well imitated, echoed through the square. Pierrette heard them in her feverish sleep; she jumped up, moist with perspiration, opened her window, saw Brigaut, and flung down a ball of silk, to which he fastened a letter. Sylvie,

agitated by the events of the day and her own indecision of mind, was not asleep; she heard the owl.

"Ah, bird of ill-omen!" she thought. "Why, Pierrette is getting up! What is she after?"

Hearing the attic window open softly, Sylvie rushed to her own window and heard the rustle of paper against her blinds. She fastened the strings of her bed-gown and went quickly upstairs to Pierrette's room, where she found the poor girl unwinding the silk and freeing the letter.

"Ha! I've caught you!" cried the old woman, rushing to the window, from which she saw Jacques running at full speed. "Give me that letter."

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, who, by one of those strong inspirations of youth sustained by her own soul, rose to a grandeur of resistance such as we admire in the history of certain peoples reduced to despair.

"Ha! you will not?" cried Sylvie, advancing upon the girl with a face full of hatred and fury.

Pierrette fell back to get time to put her letter in her hand, which she clenched with unnatural force. Seeing this manoeuvre Sylvie grasped the delicate white hand of the girl in her lobster claws and tried to open it. It was a frightful struggle, an infamous struggle; it was more than a physical struggle; it assailed the mind, the sole treasure of the human being, the thought, which God has placed beyond all earthly power and guards as the secret way between the sufferer and Himself. The two women, one dying, the other in the vigor of health, looked at each other fixedly. Pierrette's eyes darted on her executioner the look the famous Templar on the rack cast upon Philippe le Bel, who could not bear it and fled thunderstricken. Sylvie, a woman and a jealous woman, answered that magnetic look with malignant flashes. A dreadful silence reigned. The clenched hand of the Breton girl resisted her cousin's efforts like a block of steel. Sylvie twisted Pierrette's arm, she tried to force the fingers open; unable to do so she stuck her nails into the flesh. At last, in her madness, she set her teeth into the wrist, trying to conquer the girl by pain. Pierrette defied her still, with that same terrible glance of innocence. The anger of the old maid grew to such a pitch that it became blind fury. She seized Pierrette's arm and struck the closed fist upon the window-sill, and then upon the marble of the mantelpiece, as we crack a nut to get the kernel.

"Help! help!" cried Pierrette, "they are murdering me!"

"Ha! you may well scream, when I catch you with a lover in the dead of night."

And she beat the hand pitilessly.

"Help! help!" cried Pierrette, the blood flowing.

At that instant, loud knocks were heard at the front door. Exhausted, the two women paused a moment.

Rogron, awakened and uneasy, not knowing what was happening, had got up, gone to his sister's room, and not finding her was frightened. Hearing the knocks he went down, unfastened the front door, and was nearly knocked over by Brigaut, followed by a sort of phantom.

At this moment Sylvie's eyes chanced to fall on Pierrette's corset, and she remembered the papers. Releasing the girl's wrist she sprang upon the corset like a tiger on its prey, and showed it to Pierrette with a smile,—the smile of an Iroquois over his victim before he scalps him.

"I am dying," said Pierrette, falling on her knees, "oh, who will save me?"

"I!" said a woman with white hair and an aged parchment face, in which two gray eyes glittered.

"Ah! grandmother, you have come too late," cried the poor child, bursting into tears.

Pierrette fell upon her bed, her strength all gone, half-dead with the exhaustion which, in her feeble state, followed so violent a struggle. The tall gray woman took her in her arms, as a nurse lifts a child, and went out, followed by Brigaut, without a word to Sylvie, on whom she cast one glance of majestic accusation.

The apparition of that august old woman, in her Breton costume, shrouded in her coif (a sort of hooded mantle of black cloth), accompanied by Brigaut, appalled Sylvie; she fancied she saw death. She slowly went down the stairs, listened to the front door closing behind them, and came face to face with her brother, who exclaimed: "Then they haven't killed you?"

"Go to bed," said Sylvie. "To-morrow we will see what we must do."

She went back to her own bed, ripped open the corset, and read Brigaut's two letters, which confounded her. She went to sleep in the greatest perplexity, —not imagining the terrible results to which her conduct was to lead.

The letters sent by Brigaut to old Madame Lorrain reached her in a moment of ineffable joy, which the perusal of them troubled. The poor old woman had grieved deeply in living without her Pierrette beside her, but she had consoled her loneliness with the thought that the sacrifice of herself was in the interests of her grandchild. She was blessed with one of those ever-young hearts which are upheld and invigorated by the idea of sacrifice. Her old husband, whose only joy was his little granddaughter, had grieved for Pierrette; every day he had seemed to look for her. It was an old man's grief,—

on which such old men live, of which they die.

Every one can now imagine the happiness which this poor old woman, living in a sort of almshouse, felt when she learned of a generous action, rare indeed but not impossible in France. The head of the house of Collinet, whose failure in 1814 had caused the Lorrains a loss of twenty-four thousand francs, had gone to America with his children after his disasters. He had too high a courage to remain a ruined man. After eleven years of untold effort crowned by success he returned to Nantes to recover his position, leaving his eldest son in charge of his transatlantic house. He found Madame Lorrain of Pen-Hoel in the institution of Saint-Jacques, and was witness of the resignation with which this most unfortunate of his creditors bore her misery.

"God forgive you!" said the old woman, "since you give me on the borders of my grave the means of securing the happiness of my dear granddaughter; but alas! it will not clear the debts of my poor husband!"

Monsieur Collinet made over to the widow both the capital and the accrued interest, amounting to about forty-two thousand francs. His other creditors, prosperous, rich, and intelligent merchants, had easily born their losses, whereas the misfortunes of the Lorrains seemed so irremediable to old Monsieur Collinet that he promised the widow to pay off her husband's debts, to the amount of forty thousand francs more. When the Bourse of Nantes heard of this generous reparation they wished to receive Collinet to their board before his certificates were granted by the Royal court at Rennes; but the merchant refused the honor, preferring to submit to the ordinary commercial rule.

Madame Lorrain had received the money only the day before the post brought her Brigaut's letter, enclosing that of Pierrette. Her first thought had been, as she signed the receipt: "Now I can live with my Pierrette and marry her to that good Brigaut, who will make a fortune with my money."

Therefore the moment she had read the fatal letters she made instant preparations to start for Provins. She left Nantes that night by the mail; for some one had explained to her its celerity. In Paris she took the diligence for Troyes, which passes through Provins, and by half-past eleven at night she reached Frappier's, where Brigaut, shocked at her despairing looks, told her of Pierrette's state and promised to bring the poor girl to her instantly. His words so terrified the grandmother that she could not control her impatience and followed him to the square. When Pierrette screamed, the horror of that cry went to her heart as sharply as it did to Brigaut's. Together they would have roused the neighborhood if Rogron, in his terror, had not opened the door. The scream of the young girl at bay gave her grandmother the sudden strength of anger with which she carried her dear Pierrette in her arms to Frappier's house,

where Madame Frappier hastily arranged Brigaut's own room for the old woman and her treasure. In that poor room, on a bed half-made, the sufferer was deposited; and there she fainted away, holding her hand still clenched, wounded, bleeding, with the nails deep bedded in the flesh. Brigaut, Frappier, his wife, and the old woman stood looking at Pierrette in silence, all four of them in a state of indescribable amazement.

"Why is her hand bloody?" said the grandmother at last.

Pierrette, overcome by the sleep which follows all abnormal displays of strength, and dimly conscious that she was safe from violence, gradually unbent her fingers. Brigaut's letter fell from them like an answer.

"They tried to take my letter from her," said Brigaut, falling on his knees and picking up the lines in which he had told his little friend to come instantly and softly away from the house. He kissed with pious love the martyr's hand.

It was a sight that made those present tremble when they saw the old gray woman, a sublime spectre, standing beside her grandchild's pillow. Terror and vengeance wrote their fierce expressions in the wrinkles that lined her skin of yellow ivory; her forehead, half hidden by the straggling meshes of her gray hair, expressed a solemn anger. She read, with a power of intuition given to the aged when near their grave, Pierrette's whole life, on which her mind had dwelt throughout her journey. She divined the illness of her darling, and knew that she was threatened with death. Two big tears painfully rose in her wan gray eyes, from which her troubles had worn both lashes and eyebrows, two pearls of anguish, forming within them and giving them a dreadful brightness; then each tear swelled and rolled down the withered cheek, but did not wet it.

"They have killed her!" she said at last, clasping her hands.

She fell on her knees which struck sharp blows on the brick-laid floor, making a vow no doubt to Saint Anne d'Auray, the most powerful of the madonnas of Brittany.

"A doctor from Paris," she said to Brigaut. "Go and fetch one, Brigaut, go!"

She took him by the shoulder and gave him a despotic push to send him from the room.

"I was coming, my lad, when you wrote me; I am rich,—here, take this," she cried, recalling him, and unfastening as she spoke the strings that tied her short-gown. Then she drew a paper from her bosom in which were forty-two bank-bills, saying, "Take what is necessary, and bring back the greatest doctor in Paris."

"Keep those," said Frappier; "he can't change thousand franc notes now. I

have money, and the diligence will be passing presently; he can certainly find a place on it. But before he goes we had better consult Doctor Martener; he will tell us the best physician in Paris. The diligence won't pass for over an hour,—we have time enough."

Brigaut woke up Monsieur Martener, and brought him at once. The doctor was not a little surprised to find Mademoiselle Lorrain at Frappier's. Brigaut told him of the scene that had just taken place at the Rogrons'; but even so the doctor did not at first suspect the horror of it, nor the extent of the injury done. Martener gave the address of the celebrated Horace Bianchon, and Brigaut started for Paris by the diligence. Monsieur Martener then sat down and examined first the bruised and bloody hand which lay outside the bed.

"She could not have given these wounds herself," he said.

"No; the horrible woman to whom I had the misfortune to trust her was murdering her," said the grandmother. "My poor Pierrette was screaming 'Help! help! I'm dying,'—enough to touch the heart of an executioner."

"But why was it?" said the doctor, feeling Pierrette's pulse. "She is very ill," he added, examining her with a light. "She must have suffered terribly; I don't understand why she has not been properly cared for."

"I shall complain to the authorities," said the grandmother. "Those Rogrons asked me for my child in a letter, saying they had twelve thousand francs a year and would take care of her; had they the right to make her their servant and force her to do work for which she had not the strength?"

"They did not choose to see the most visible of all maladies to which young girls are liable. She needed the utmost care," cried Monsieur Martener.

Pierrette was awakened by the light which Madame Frappier was holding near her face, and by the horrible sufferings in her head caused by the reaction of her struggle.

"Ah! Monsieur Martener, I am very ill," she said in her pretty voice.

"Where is the pain, my little friend?" asked the doctor.

"Here," she said, touching her head above the left ear.

"There's an abscess," said the doctor, after feeling the head for a long time and questioning Pierrette on her sufferings. "You must tell us all, my child, so that we may know how to cure you. Why is your hand like this? You could not have given yourself that wound."

Pierrette related the struggle between herself and her cousin Sylvie.

"Make her talk," said the doctor to the grandmother, "and find out the whole truth. I will await the arrival of the doctor from Paris; and we will send

for the surgeon in charge of the hospital here, and have a consultation. The case seems to me a very serious one. Meantime I will send you a quieting draught so that mademoiselle may sleep; she needs sleep."

Left alone with her granddaughter the old Breton woman exerted her influence over the child and made her tell all; she let her know that she had money enough now for all three, and promised that Brigaut should live with them. The poor girl admitted her martyrdom, not imagining the events to which her admissions would give rise. The monstrosity of two beings without affection and without conception of family life opened to the old woman a world of woe as far from her knowledge as the morals of savages may have seemed to the first discoverers who set foot in America.

The arrival of her grandmother, the certainty of living with her in comfort soothed Pierrette's mind as the sleeping draught soothed her body. The old woman watched her darling, kissing her forehead, hair, and hands, as the holy women of old kissed the hands of Jesus when they laid him in the tomb.

IX. THE FAMILY COUNCIL

At nine o'clock that morning Monsieur Martener went to see Monsieur Tiphaine, and related to him the scene between Pierrette and Sylvie, and the tortures of all kinds, moral and physical, to which the Rogrons had subjected their cousin, and the two alarming forms of illness which their cruelty had developed. Monsieur Tiphaine sent for Auffray the notary, one of Pierrette's own relations on the maternal side.

At this particular time the war between the Vinet party and the Tiphaine party was at its height. The scandals which the Rogrons and their adherents were disseminating through the town about the liaison of Madame Tiphaine's mother with the banker du Tillet, and the bankruptcy of her father (a forger, they said), were all the more exasperating to the Tiphaines because these things were malicious truths, not libels. Such wounds cut deep; they go to the quick of feelings and of interests. These speeches, repeated to the partisans of the Tiphaines by the same mouths which told the Rogrons of the sneers of "those women" of the Tiphaine clique, fed the hatreds of both sides, now increased by the political element. The animosities caused at this time in France by the spirit of party, the violences of which were excessive, were everywhere mixed up, as in Provins, with selfish schemes and wounded or vindictive individual interests. Each party eagerly seized on whatever might injure the rival party. Personal hatreds and self-love mingled as much as political animosity in even the smallest matters, and were carried to hitherto

unheard-of lengths. A whole town would be roused to excitement over some private struggle, until it took the character of a political debate.

Monsieur Tiphaine at once perceived in the case of Pierrette against the Rogrons a means of humbling, mortifying, and dishonoring the masters of that salon where plans against the monarchy were made and an opposition journal born. The public prosecutor was called in; and together with Monsieur Auffray the notary, Pierrette's relation, and Monsieur Martener, a cautious consultation was held in the utmost secrecy as to the proper course to follow. Monsieur Martener agreed to advise Pierrette's grandmother to apply to the courts to have Auffray appointed guardian to his young relation. The guardian could then convene a "Family Council," and, backed by the testimony of three doctors, demand the girl's release from the authority of the Rogrons. The affair thus managed would have to go before the courts, and the public prosecutor, Monsieur Lesourd, would see that it was taken to a criminal court by demanding an inquiry.

Towards midday all Provins was roused by the strange news of what had happened during the night at the Rogrons'. Pierrette's cries had been faintly heard, though they were soon over. No one had risen to inquire what they meant, but every one said the next day, "Did you hear those screams about one in the morning?" Gossip and comments soon magnified the horrible drama, and a crowd collected in front of Frappier's shop, asking the worthy cabinet-maker for information, and hearing from him how Pierrette was brought to his house with her fingers broken and the hand bloody.

Towards one in the afternoon the post-chaise of Doctor Bianchon, who was accompanied by Brigaut, stopped before the house, and Madame Frappier went at once to summon Monsieur Martener and the surgeon in charge of the hospital. Thus the gossip of the town received confirmation. The Rogrons were declared to have ill-used their cousin deliberately, and to have come near killing her. Vinet heard the news while attending to his business in the law courts; he left everything and hurried to the Rogrons. Rogron and his sister had just finished breakfast. Sylvie was reluctant to tell her brother of her discomfiture of the night before; but he pressed her with questions, to which she would make no answer than, "That's not your business." She went and came from the kitchen to the dining-room on pretence of preparing the breakfast, but chiefly to avoid discussion. She was alone when Vinet entered.

"You know what's happened?" said the lawyer.

"No," said Sylvie.

"You will be arrested on a criminal charge," replied Vinet, "from the way things are now going about Pierrette."

"A criminal charge!" cried Rogron, who had come into the room. "Why? What for?"

"First of all," said the lawyer, looking at Sylvie, "explain to me without concealment and as if you stood before God, what happened in this house last night—they talk of amputating Pierrette's hand."

Sylvie turned livid and shuddered.

"Then there is some truth in it?" said Vinet.

Mademoiselle Rogron related the scene, trying to excuse herself; but, prodded with questions, she acknowledged the facts of the horrible struggle.

"If you have only injured her fingers you will be taken before the police court for a misdemeanor; but if they cut off her hand you may be tried at the Assizes for a worse offence. The Tiphaines will do their best to get you there."

Sylvie, more dead than alive, confessed her jealousy, and, what was harder to do, confessed also that her suspicions were unfounded.

"Heavens, what a case this will make!" cried the lawyer. "You and your brother may be ruined by it; you will be abandoned by most people whether you win or lose. If you lose, you will have to leave Provins."

"Oh, my dear Monsieur Vinet, you who are such a great lawyer," said Rogron, terrified, "advise us! save us!"

The crafty Vinet worked the terror of the two imbeciles to its utmost, declaring that Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf might be unwilling to enter their house again. To be abandoned by women of their rank would be a terrible condemnation. At length, after an hour of adroit manoeuvring, it was agreed that Vinet must have some powerful motive in taking the case, that would impress the minds of all Provins and explain his efforts on behalf of the Rogrons. This motive they determined should be Rogron's marriage to Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf; it should be announced that very day and the banns published on Sunday. The contract could be drawn immediately. Mademoiselle Rogron agreed, in consideration of the marriage, to appear in the contract as settling her capital on her brother, retaining only the income of it. Vinet made Rogron and his sister comprehend the necessity of antedating the document by two or three days, so as to commit the mother and daughter in the eyes of the public and give them a reason for continuing their visits.

"Sign that contract and I'll take upon myself to get you safely out of this affair," said the lawyer. "There will be a terrible fight; but I will put my whole soul into it—you'll have to make me a votive offering."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Rogron.

By half-past eleven the lawyer had plenary powers to draw the contract and conduct the defence of the Rogrons. At twelve o'clock application was made to Monsieur Tiphaine, as a judge sitting in chambers, against Brigaut and the widow Lorrain for having abducted Pierrette Lorrain, a minor, from the house of her legal guardian. In this way the bold lawyer became the aggressor and made Rogron the injured party. He spoke of the matter from this point of view in the court-house.

The judge postponed the hearing till four o'clock. Needless to describe the excitement in the town. Monsieur Tiphaine knew that by three o'clock the consultation of doctors would be over and their report drawn up; he wished Auffray, as surrogate-guardian, to be at the hearing armed with that report.

The announcement of Rogron's marriage and the sacrifices made to it by Sylvie in the contract alienated two important supporters from the brother and sister, namely,—Mademoiselle Habert and the colonel, whose hopes were thus annihilated. They remained, however, ostensibly on the Rogron side for the purpose of injuring it. Consequently, as soon as Monsieur Martener mentioned the alarming condition of Pierrette's head, Celeste and the colonel told of the blow she had given herself during the evening when Sylvie had forced her to leave the salon; and they related the old maid's barbarous and unfeeling comments, with other statements proving her cruelty to her suffering cousin. Vinet had foreseen this storm; but he had secured the entire fortune of the Rogrons for Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, and he promised himself that in a few weeks she should be mistress of the Rogron house, and reign with him over Provins, and even bring about a fusion with the Breauteys and the aristocrats in the interests of his ambition.

From midday to four o'clock all the ladies of the Tiphaine clique sent to inquire after Mademoiselle Lorrain. She, poor girl, was wholly ignorant of the commotion she was causing in the little town. In the midst of her sufferings she was ineffably happy in recovering her grandmother and Brigaut, the two objects of her affection. Brigaut's eyes were constantly full of tears. The old grandmother sat by the bed and caressed her darling. To the three doctors she told every detail she had obtained from Pierrette as to her life in the Rogron house. Horace Bianchon expressed his indignation in vehement language. Shocked at such barbarity he insisted on all the physicians in the town being called in to see the case; the consequence was that Dr. Neraud, the friend of the Rogrons, was present. The report was unanimously signed. It is useless to give a text of it here. If Moliere's medical terms were barbarous, those of modern science have the advantage of being so clear that the explanation of Pierrette's malady, though natural and unfortunately common, horrified all ears.

At four o'clock, after the usual rising of the court, president Tiphaine again

took his seat, when Madame Lorrain, accompanied by Monsieur Auffray and Brigaut and a crowd of interested persons, entered the court-room. Vinet was alone. This contrast struck the minds of those present. The lawyer, who still wore his robe, turned his cold face to the judge, settled his spectacles on his pallid green eyes, and then in a shrill, persistent voice he stated that two strangers had forced themselves at night into the Rogron domicile and had abducted therefrom the minor Lorrain. The legal rights were with the guardian, who now demanded the restoration of his ward.

Monsieur Auffray rose, as surrogate-guardian, and requested to be heard.

"If the judge," he said, "will admit the report, which I hold in my hand, signed by one of the most famous physicians in Paris, and by all the physicians in Provins, he will understand not only that the demand of the Sieur Rogron is senseless, but also that the grandmother of the minor had grave cause to instantly remove her from her persecutors. Here are the facts. The report of these physicians attribute the almost dying condition of the said minor to the ill-treatment she has received from the Sieur Rogron and his sister. We shall, as the law directs, convoke a Family Council with the least possible delay, and discuss the question as to whether or not the guardian should be deposed. And we now ask that the minor be not returned to the domicile of the said guardian but that she be confided to some member of her family who shall be designated by the judge."

Vinet replied, declaring that the physicians' report ought to have been submitted to him in order that he might have disproved it.

"Not submitted to your side," said the judge, severely, "but possibly to the procureur du roi. The case is heard."

The judge then wrote at the bottom of the petition the following order:—

"Whereas it appears, from a deliberate and unanimous report of all the physicians of this town, together with Doctor Bianchon of the medical faculty of Paris, that the minor Lorrain, claimed by Jerome-Denis Rogron, her guardian, is extremely ill in consequence of ill-treatment and personal assault in the house of the said guardian and his sister:

"We, president of the court of Provins, passing upon the said petition, order that until the Family Council is held the minor Lorrain is not to be returned to the household of her said guardian, but shall be kept in that of her surrogate-guardian.

"And further, considering the state in which the said minor now is, and the traces of violence which, according to the report of the physicians, are now upon her person, we commission the attending physician and the surgeon in charge of the hospital of Provins to visit her, and in case the injuries from the

said assault become alarming, the matter will be held to await the action of the criminal courts; and this without prejudice to the civil suit undertaken by Auffray the surrogate-guardian."

This severe judgment was read out by President Tiphaine in a loud and distinct voice.

"Why not send them to the galleys at once?" said Vinet. "And all this fuss about a girl who was carrying on an intrigue with an apprentice to a cabinet-maker! If the case goes on in this way," he cried, insolently, "we shall demand other judges on the ground of legitimate suspicion."

Vinet left the court-room, and went among the chief men of his party to explain Rogron's position, declaring that he had never so much as given a flip to his cousin, and that the judge had viewed him much less as Pierrette's guardian than as a leading elector in Provins.

To hear Vinet, people might have supposed that the Tiphaines were making a great fuss about nothing; the mounting was bringing forth a mouse. Sylvie, an eminently virtuous and pious woman, had discovered an intrigue between her brother's ward and a workman, a Breton named Brigaut. The scoundrel knew very well that the girl would have her grandmother's money, and he wished to seduce her (Vinet to talk of that!). Mademoiselle Rogron, who had discovered letters proving the depravity of the girl, was not as much to blame as the Tiphaines were trying to make out. If she did use some violence to get possession of those letters (which was no wonder, when we consider what Breton obstinacy is), how could Rogron be considered responsible for all that?

The lawyer went on to make the matter a partisan affair, and to give it a political color.

"They who listen to only one bell hear only one sound," said the wise men. "Have you heard what Vinet says? Vinet explains things clearly."

Frappier's house being thought injurious to Pierrette, owing to the noise in the street which increased the sufferings in her head, she was taken to that of her surrogate guardian, the change being as necessary medically as it was judicially. The removal was made with the utmost caution, and was calculated to produce a great public effect. Pierrette was laid on a mattress and carried on a stretcher by two men; a Gray Sister walked beside her with a bottle of sal volatile in her hand, while the grandmother, Brigaut, Madame Auffray, and her maid followed. People were at their windows and doors to see the procession pass. Certainly the state in which they saw Pierrette, pale as death, gave immense advantage to the party against the Rogrons. The Auffrays were determined to prove to the whole town that the judge was right in the decision he had given. Pierrette and her grandmother were installed on the second floor

of Monsieur Auffray's house. The notary and his wife gave her every care with the greatest hospitality, which was not without a little ostentation in it. Pierrette had her grandmother to nurse her; and Monsieur Martener and the head-surgeon of the hospital attended her.

On the evening of this day exaggerations began on both sides. The Rogron salon was crowded. Vinet had stirred up the whole Liberal party on the subject. The Chargeboeuf ladies dined with the Rogrons, for the contract was to be signed that evening. Vinet had had the banns posted at the mayor's office in the afternoon. He made light of the Pierrette affair. If the Provins court was prejudiced, the Royal courts would appreciate the facts, he said, and the Auffrays would think twice before they flung themselves into such a suit. The alliance of the Rogrons with the Chargeboeufs was an immense consideration in the minds of a certain class of people. To them it made the Rogrons as white as snow and Pierrette an evilly disposed little girl, a serpent warmed in their bosom.

In Madame Tiphaine's salon vengeance was had for all the mischievous scandals that the Vinet party had disseminated for the past two years. The Rogrons were monsters, and the guardian should undergo a criminal trial. In the Lower town, Pierrette was quite well; in the Upper town she was dying; at the Rogrons' she scratched her wrist; at Madame Tiphaine's her fingers were fractured and one was to be cut off. The next day the "Courrier de Provins," had a plausible article, extremely well-written, a masterpiece of insinuations mixed with legal points, which showed that there was no case whatever against Rogron. The "Bee-hive," which did not appear till two days later, could not answer without becoming defamatory; it replied, however, that in an affair like this it was best to wait until the law took its course.

The Family Council was selected by the juge de paix of the canton of Provins, and consisted of Rogron and the two Messieurs Auffray, the nearest relatives, and Monsieur Ciprey, nephew of Pierrette's maternal grandmother. To these were joined Monsieur Habert, Pierrette's confessor, and Colonel Gouraud, who had always professed himself a comrade and friend of her father, Colonel Lorrain. The impartiality of the judge in these selections was much applauded,—Monsieur Habert and Colonel Gouraud being considered the firm friends of the Rogrons.

The serious situation in which Rogron found himself made him ask for the assistance of a lawyer (and he named Vinet) at the Family Council. By this manoeuvre, evidently advised by Vinet himself, Rogron succeeded in postponing the meeting of the council till the end of December. At that time Monsieur Tiphaine and his wife would be settled in Paris for the opening of the Chambers; and the ministerial party would be left without its head. Vinet had already worked upon Desfondrilles, the deputy-judge, in case the matter

should go, after the hearing before the council, to the criminal courts.

Vinet spoke for three hours before the Family Council; he proved the existence of an intrigue between Pierrette and Brigaut, which justified all Mademoiselle Rogron's severity. He showed how natural it was that the guardian should have left the management of his ward to a woman; he dwelt on the fact that Rogron had not interfered with Pierrette's education as planned by his sister Sylvie. But in spite of Vinet's efforts the Council were unanimous in removing Rogron from the guardianship. Monsieur Auffray was appointed in his place, and Monsieur Ciprey was made surrogate. The Council summoned before it and examined Adele, the servant-woman, who testified against her late masters; also Mademoiselle Habert, who related the cruel remarks made by Mademoiselle Rogron on the evening when Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow, heard by all the company, and the speech of Madame de Chargeboeuf about the girl's health. Brigaut produced the letter he had received from Pierrette, which proved their innocence and stated her ill-treatment. Proof was given that the condition of the minor was the result of neglect on the part of the guardian, who was responsible for all that concerned his ward. Pierrette's illness had been apparent to every one, even to persons in the town who were strangers to the family, yet the guardian had done nothing for her. The charge of ill-treatment was therefore sustained against Rogron; and the case would now go before the public.

Rogron, advised by Vinet, opposed the acceptance of the report of the Council by the court. The authorities then intervened in consequence of Pierrette's state, which was daily growing worse. The trial of the case, though placed at once upon the docket, was postponed until the month of March, 1828, to wait events.

X. VERDICTS—LEGAL AND OTHER

Meantime Rogron's marriage with Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf took place. Sylvie moved to the second floor of the house, which she shared with Madame de Chargeboeuf, for the first floor was entirely taken up by the new wife. The beautiful Madame Rogron succeeded to the social place of the beautiful Madame Tiphaine. The influence of the marriage was immense. No one now came to visit Sylvie, but Madame Rogron's salon was always full.

Sustained by the influence of his mother-in-law and the bankers du Tillet and Nucingen, Monsieur Tiphaine was fortunate enough to do some service to the administration; he became one of its chief orators, was made judge in the civil courts, and obtained the appointment of his nephew Lesourd to his own

vacant place as president of the court of Provins. This appointment greatly annoyed Desfondrilles. The Keeper of the Seals sent down one of his own proteges to fill Lesourd's place. The promotion of Monsieur Tiphaine and his translation to Paris were therefore of no benefit at all to the Vinet party; but Vinet nevertheless made a clever use of the result. He had always told the Provins people that they were being used as a stepping-stone to raise the crafty Madame Tiphaine into grandeur; Tiphaine himself had tricked them; Madame Tiphaine despised both Provins and its people in her heart, and would never return there again. Just at this crisis Monsieur Tiphaine's father died; his son inherited a fine estate and sold his house in Provins to Monsieur Julliard. The sale proved to the minds of all how little the Tiphaines thought of Provins. Vinet was right; Vinet had been a true prophet. These things had great influence on the question of Pierrette's guardianship.

Thus the dreadful martyrdom brutally inflicted on the poor child by two imbecile tyrants (which led, through its consequences, to the terrible operation of trepanning, performed by Monsieur Martener under the advice of Doctor Bianchon),—all this horrible drama reduced to judicial form was left to float in the vile mess called in legal parlance the calendar. The case was made to drag through the delays and the interminable labyrinths of the law, by the shufflings of an unprincipled lawyer; and during all this time the calumniated girl languished in the agony of the worst pain known to science.

Monsieur Martener, together with the Auffray family, were soon charmed by the beauty of Pierrette's nature and the character of her old grandmother, whose feelings, ideas, and ways bore the stamp of Roman antiquity,—this matron of the Marais was like a woman in Plutarch.

Doctor Martener struggled bravely with death, which already grasped its prey. From the first, Bianchon and the hospital surgeon had considered Pierrette doomed; and there now took place between the doctor and the disease, the former relying on Pierrette's youth, one of those struggles which physicians alone comprehend,—the reward of which, in case of success, is never found in the venal pay nor in the patients themselves, but in the gentle satisfaction of conscience, in the invisible ideal palm gathered by true artists from the contentment which fills their soul after accomplishing a noble work. The physician strains towards good as an artist towards beauty, each impelled by that grand sentiment which we call virtue. This daily contest wiped out of Doctor Martener's mind the petty irritations of that other contest of the Tiphaines and the Vinets,—as always happens to men when they find themselves face to face with a great and real misery to conquer.

Monsieur Martener had begun his career in Paris; but the cruel activity of the city and its insensibility to its masses of suffering had shocked his gentle soul, fitted only for the quiet life of the provinces. Moreover, he was under the

yoke of his beautiful native land. He returned to Provins, where he married and settled, and cared almost lovingly for the people, who were to him like a large family. During the whole of Pierrette's illness he was careful not to speak of her. His reluctance to answer the questions of those who asked about her was so evident that persons soon ceased to put them. Pierrette was to him, what indeed she truly was, a poem, mysterious, profound, vast in suffering, such as doctors find at times in their terrible experience. He felt an admiration for this delicate young creature which he would not share with any one.

This feeling of the physician for his patient was, however, unconsciously communicated (like all true feelings) to Monsieur and Madame Auffray, whose house became, so long as Pierrette was in it, quiet and silent. The children, who had formerly played so joyously with her, agreed among themselves with the loving grace of childhood to be neither noisy nor troublesome. They made it a point of honor to be good because Pierrette was ill. Monsieur Auffray's house was in the Upper town, beneath the ruins of the Chateau, and it was built upon a sort of terrace formed by the overthrow of the old ramparts. The occupants could have a view of the valley from the little fruit-garden enclosed by walls which overlooked the town. The roofs of the other houses came to about the level of the lower wall of this garden. Along the terrace ran a path, by which Monsieur Auffray's study could be entered through a glass door; at the other end of the path was an arbor of grape vines and a fig-tree, beneath which stood a round table, a bench and some chairs, painted green. Pierrette's bedroom was above the study of her new guardian. Madame Lorrain slept in a cot beside her grandchild. From her window Pierrette could see the whole of the glorious valley of Provins, which she hardly knew, so seldom had she left that dreadful house of the Rogrons. When the weather was fine she loved to drag herself, resting on her grandmother's arm, to the vine-clad arbor. Brigaut, unable to work, came three times a day to see his little friend; he was gnawed by a grief which made him indifferent to life. He lay in wait like a dog for Monsieur Martener, and followed him when he left the house. The old grandmother, drunk with grief, had the courage to conceal her despair; she showed her darling the smiling face she formerly wore at Pen-Hoel. In her desire to produce that illusion in the girl's mind, she made her a little Breton cap like the one Pierrette had worn on her first arrival in Provins; it made the darling seem more like her childlike self; in it she was delightful to look upon, her sweet face circled with a halo of cambric and fluted lace. Her skin, white with the whiteness of unglazed porcelain, her forehead, where suffering had printed the semblance of deep thought, the purity of the lines refined by illness, the slowness of the glances, and the occasional fixity of the eyes, made Pierrette an almost perfect embodiment of melancholy. She was served by all with a sort of fanaticism; she was felt to be so gentle, so tender, so loving. Madame Martener sent her piano to her sister

Madame Auffray, thinking to amuse Pierrette who was passionately fond of music. It was a poem to watch her listening to a theme of Weber, or Beethoven, or Herold,—her eyes raised, her lips silent, regretting no doubt the life escaping her. The cure Peroux and Monsieur Habert, her two religious comforters, admired her saintly resignation. Surely the seraphic perfection of young girls and young men marked with the hectic of death, is a wonderful fact worthy of the attention alike of philosophers and of heedless minds. He who has ever seen one of these sublime departures from this life can never remain, or become, an unbeliever. Such beings exhale, as it were, a celestial fragrance; their glances speak of God; the voices are eloquent in the simplest words; often they ring like some seraphic instrument revealing the secrets of the future. When Monsieur Martener praised her for having faithfully followed a harsh prescription the little angel replied, and with what a glance—!

"I want to live, dear Monsieur Martener; but less for myself than for my grandmother, for my Brigaut, for all of you who will grieve at my death."

The first time she went into the garden on a beautiful sunny day in November attended by all the household, Madame Auffray asked her if she was tired.

"No, now that I have no sufferings but those God sends I can bear all," she said. "The joy of being loved gives me strength to suffer."

That was the only time (and then vaguely) that she ever alluded to her horrible martyrdom at the Rogrons, whom she never mentioned, and of whom no one reminded her, knowing well how painful the memory must be.

"Dear Madame Auffray," she said one day at noon on the terrace, as she gazed at the valley, warmed by a glorious sun and colored with the glowing tints of autumn, "my death in your house gives me more happiness than I have had since I left Brittany."

Madame Auffray whispered in her sister Martener's ear:—

"How she would have loved!"

In truth, her tones, her looks gave to her words a priceless value.

Monsieur Martener corresponded with Doctor Bianchon, and did nothing of importance without his advice. He hoped in the first place to regular the functions of nature and to draw away the abscess in the head through the ear. The more Pierrette suffered, the more he hoped. He gained some slight success at times, and that was a great triumph. For several days Pierrette's appetite returned and enabled her to take nourishing food for which her illness had given her a repugnance; the color of her skin changed; but the condition of her head was terrible. Monsieur Martener entreated the great physician his adviser

to come down. Bianchon came, stayed two days, and resolved to undertake an operation. To spare the feelings of poor Martener he went to Paris and brought back with him the celebrated Desplein. Thus the operation was performed by the greatest surgeon of ancient or modern times; but that terrible diviner said to Martener as he departed with Bianchon, his best-loved pupil:—

"Nothing but a miracle can save her. As Horace told you, caries of the bone has begun. At her age the bones are so tender."

The operation was performed at the beginning of March, 1828. During all that month, distressed by Pierrette's horrible sufferings, Monsieur Martener made several journeys to Paris; there he consulted Desplein and Bianchon, and even went so far as to propose to them an operation of the nature of lithotrity, which consists in passing into the head a hollow instrument by the help of which an heroic remedy can be applied to the diseased bone, to arrest the progress of the caries. Even the bold Desplein dared not attempt that high-handed surgical measure, which despair alone had suggested to Martener. When he returned home from Paris he seemed to his friends morose and gloomy. He was forced to announce on that fatal evening to the Auffrays and Madame Lorrain and to the two priests and Brigaut that science could do no more for Pierrette, whose recovery was now in God's hands only. The consternation among them was terrible. The grandmother made a vow, and requested the priests to say a mass every morning at daybreak before Pierrette rose,—a mass at which she and Brigaut might be present.

The trial came on. While the victim lay dying, Vinet was calumniating her in court. The judge approved and accepted the report of the Family Council, and Vinet instantly appealed. The newly appointed procureur du roi made a requisition which necessitated fresh evidence. Rogron and his sister were forced to give bail to avoid going to prison. The order for fresh evidence included that of Pierrette herself. When Monsieur Desfondrilles came to the Auffrays' to receive it, Pierrette was dying, her confessor was at her bedside about to administer extreme unction. At that moment she entreated all present to forgive her cousins as she herself forgave them, saying with her simple good sense that the judgment of these things belonged to God alone.

"Grandmother," she said, "leave all you have to Brigaut" (Brigaut burst into tears); "and," continued Pierrette, "give a thousand francs to that kind Adele who warmed my bed. If Adele had remained with my cousins I should not now be dying."

It was at three o'clock on the Tuesday of Easter week, on a beautiful, bright day, that the angel ceased to suffer. Her heroic grandmother wished to watch all that night with the priests, and to sew with her stiff old fingers her darling's shroud. Towards evening Brigaut left the Auffray's house and went to

Frappier's.

"I need not ask you, my poor boy, for news," said the cabinet-maker.

"Pere Frappier, yes, it is ended for her—but not for me."

He cast a look upon the different woods piled up around the shop,—a look of painful meaning.

"I understand you, Brigaut," said his worthy master. "Take all you want." And he showed him the oaken planks of two-inch thickness.

"Don't help me, Monsieur Frappier," said the Breton, "I wish to do it alone."

He passed the night in planing and fitting Pierrette's coffin, and more than once his plane took off at a single pass a ribbon of wood which was wet with tears. The good man Frappier smoked his pipe and watched him silently, saying only, when the four pieces were joined together,—

"Make the cover to slide; her poor grandmother will not hear the nails."

At daybreak Brigaut went out to fetch the lead to line the coffin. By a strange chance, the sheets of lead cost just the sum he had given Pierrette for her journey from Nantes to Provins. The brave Breton, who was able to resist the awful pain of himself making the coffin of his dear one and lining with his memories those burial planks, could not bear up against this strange reminder. His strength gave way; he was not able to lift the lead, and the plumber, seeing this, came with him, and offered to accompany him to the house and solder the last sheet when the body had been laid in the coffin.

The Breton burned the plane and all the tools he had used. Then he settled his accounts with Frappier and bade him farewell. The heroism with which the poor lad personally performed, like the grandmother, the last offices for Pierrette made him a sharer in the awful scene which crowned the tyranny of the Rogrons.

Brigaut and the plumber reached the house of Monsieur Auffray just in time to decide by their own main force an infamous and shocking judicial question. The room where the dead girl lay was full of people, and presented to the eyes of the two men a singular sight. The Rogron emissaries were standing beside the body of their victim, to torture her even after death. The corpse of the child, solemn in its beauty, lay on the cot-bed of her grandmother. Pierrette's eyes were closed, the brown hair smoothed upon her brow, the body swathed in a coarse cotton sheet.

Before the bed, on her knees, her hair in disorder, her hands stretched out, her face on fire, the old Lorrain was crying out, "No, no, it shall not be done!"

At the foot of the bed stood Monsieur Auffray and the two priests. The tapers were still burning.

Opposite to the grandmother was the surgeon of the hospital, with an assistant, and near him stood Doctor Neraud and Vinet. The surgeon wore his dissecting apron; the assistant had opened a case of instruments and was handing him a knife.

This scene was interrupted by the noise of the coffin which Brigaut and the plumber set down upon the floor. Then Brigaut, advancing, was horrified at the sight of Madame Lorrain, who was now weeping.

"What is the matter?" he asked, standing beside her and grasping the chisel convulsively in his hand.

"This," said the old woman, "this, Brigaut: they want to open the body of my child and cut into her head, and stab her heart after her death as they did when she was living."

"Who?" said Brigaut, in a voice that might have deafened the men of law.

"The Rogrons."

"In the sacred name of God!—"

"Stop, Brigaut," said Monsieur Auffray, seeing the lad brandish his chisel.

"Monsieur Auffray," said Brigaut, as white as his dead companion, "I hear you because you are Monsieur Auffray, but at this moment I will not listen to —"

"The law!" said Auffray.

"Is there law? is there justice?" cried the Breton. "Justice, this is it!" and he advanced to the lawyer and the doctors, threatening them with his chisel.

"My friend," said the curate, "the law has been invoked by the lawyer of Monsieur Rogron, who is under the weight of a serious accusation; and it is impossible for us to refuse him the means of justification. The lawyer of Monsieur Rogron claims that if the poor child died of an abscess in her head her former guardian cannot be blamed, for it is proved that Pierrette concealed the effects of the blow which she gave to herself—"

"Enough!" said Brigaut.

"My client—" began Vinet.

"Your client," cried the Breton, "shall go to hell and I to the scaffold; for if one of you dares to touch her whom your client has killed, I will kill him if my weapon does its duty."

"This is interference with the law," said Vinet. "I shall instantly inform the court."

The five men left the room.

"Oh, my son!" cried the old woman, rising from her knees and falling on Brigaut's neck, "let us bury her quick,—they will come back."

"If we solder the lead," said the plumber, "they may not dare to open it."

Monsieur Auffray hastened to his brother-in-law, Monsieur Lesourd, to try and settle the matter. Vinet was not unwilling. Pierrette being dead the suit about the guardianship fell, of course, to the ground. All the astute lawyer wanted was the effect produced by his request.

At midday Monsieur Desfondrilles made his report on the case, and the court rendered a decision that there was no ground for further action.

Rogron dared not go to Pierrette's funeral, at which the whole town was present. Vinet wished to force him there, but the miserable man was afraid of exciting universal horror.

Brigaut left Provins after watching the filling up of the grave where Pierrette lay, and went on foot to Paris. He wrote a petition to the Dauphiness asking, in the name of his father, that he might enter the Royal guard, to which he was at once admitted. When the expedition to Algiers was undertaken he wrote to her again, to obtain employment in it. He was then a sergeant; Marshal Bourmont gave him an appointment as sub-lieutenant in a line regiment. The major's son behaved like a man who wished to die. Death has, however, respected Jacques Brigaut up to the present time; although he has distinguished himself in all the recent expeditions he has never yet been wounded. He is now major in a regiment of infantry. No officer is more taciturn or more trustworthy. Outside of his duty he is almost mute; he walks alone and lives mechanically. Every one divines and respects a hidden sorrow. He possesses forty-six thousand francs, which old Madame Lorrain, who died in Paris in 1829, bequeathed to him.

At the elections of 1830 Vinet was made a deputy. The services he rendered the new government have now earned him the position of procureur-general. His influence is such that he will always remain a deputy. Rogron is receiver-general in the same town where Vinet fulfils his legal functions; and by one of those curious tricks of chance which do so often occur, Monsieur Tiphaine is president of the Royal court in the same town,—for the worthy man gave in his adhesion to the dynasty of July without the slightest hesitation. The ex-beautiful Madame Tiphaine lives on excellent terms with the beautiful Madame Rogron. Vinet is hand in glove with Madame Tiphaine.

As to the imbecile Rogron, he makes such remarks as, "Louis-Philippe will never be really king till he is able to make nobles."

The speech is evidently not his own. His health is failing, which allows Madame Rogron to hope she may soon marry the General Marquis de Montriveau, peer of France, who commands the department, and is paying her attentions. Vinet is in his element, seeking victims; he never believes in the innocence of an accused person. This thoroughbred prosecutor is held to be one of the most amiable men on the circuit; and he is no less liked in Paris and in the Chamber; at court he is a charming courtier.

According to a certain promise made by Vinet, General Baron Gouraud, that noble relic of our glorious armies, married a Mademoiselle Matifat, twenty-five years old, daughter of a druggist in the rue des Lombards, whose dowry was a hundred thousand francs. He commands (as Vinet prophesied) a department in the neighborhood of Paris. He was named peer of France for his conduct in the riots which occurred during the ministry of Casimir Perier. Baron Gouraud was one of the generals who took the church of Saint-Merry, delighted to rap those rascally civilians who had vexed him for years over the knuckles; for which service he was rewarded with the grand cordon of the Legion of honor.

None of the personages connected with Pierrette's death ever felt the slightest remorse about it. Monsieur Desfondrilles is still archaeological, but, in order to compass his own election, the procureur general Vinet took pains to have him appointed president of the Provins court. Sylvie has a little circle, and manages her brother's property; she lends her own money at high interest, and does not spend more than twelve hundred francs a year.

From time to time, when some former son or daughter of Provins returns from Paris to settle down, you may hear them ask, as they leave Mademoiselle Rogron's house, "Wasn't there a painful story against the Rogrons,—something about a ward?"

"Mere prejudice," replies Monsieur Desfondrilles. "Certain persons tried to make us believe falsehoods. Out of kindness of heart the Rogrons took in a girl named Pierrette, quite pretty but with no money. Just as she was growing up she had an intrigue with a young man, and stood at her window barefooted talking to him. The lovers passed notes to each other by a string. She took cold in this way and died, having no constitution. The Rogrons behaved admirably. They made no claim on certain property which was to come to her,—they gave it all up to the grandmother. The moral of it was, my good friend, that the devil punishes those who try to benefit others."

"Ah! that is quite another story from the one old Frappier told me."

"Frappier consults his wine-cellar more than he does his memory," remarked another of Mademoiselle Rogron's visitors.

"But that old priest, Monsieur Habert says—"

"Oh, he! don't you know why?"

"No."

"He wanted to marry his sister to Monsieur Rogron, the receiver-general."

Two men think of Pierrette daily: Doctor Martener and Major Brigaut; they alone know the hideous truth.

To give that truth its true proportions we must transport the scene to the Rome of the middle ages, where a sublime young girl, Beatrice Cenci, was brought to the scaffold by motives and intrigues that were almost identical with those which laid our Pierrette in her grave. Beatrice Cenci had but one defender,—an artist, a painter. In our day history, and living men, on the faith of Guido Reni's portrait, condemn the Pope, and know that Beatrice was a most tender victim of infamous passions and base feuds.

We must all agree that legality would be a fine thing for social scoundrelism IF THERE WERE NO GOD.