

**The Human Comedy**  
**Scenes from Provincial Life**  
**Part IV**

**By**

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*Freeditorial* 

## THE MUSE OF THE DEPARTMENT

On the skirts of Le Berry stands a town which, watered by the Loire, infallibly attracts the traveler's eye. Sancerre crowns the topmost height of a chain of hills, the last of the range that gives variety to the Nivernais. The Loire floods the flats at the foot of these slopes, leaving a yellow alluvium that is extremely fertile, excepting in those places where it has deluged them with sand and destroyed them forever, by one of those terrible risings which are also incidental to the Vistula—the Loire of the northern coast.

The hill on which the houses of Sancerre are grouped is so far from the river that the little river-port of Saint-Thibault thrives on the life of Sancerre. There wine is shipped and oak staves are landed, with all the produce brought from the upper and lower Loire. At the period when this story begins the suspension bridges at Cosne and at Saint-Thibault were already built. Travelers from Paris to Sancerre by the southern road were no longer ferried across the river from Cosne to Saint-Thibault; and this of itself is enough to show that the great cross-shuffle of 1830 was a thing of the past, for the House of Orleans has always had a care for substantial improvements, though somewhat after the fashion of a husband who makes his wife presents out of her marriage portion.

Excepting that part of Sancerre which occupies the little plateau, the streets are more or less steep, and the town is surrounded by slopes known as the Great Ramparts, a name which shows that they are the highroads of the place.

Outside the ramparts lies a belt of vineyards. Wine forms the chief industry and the most important trade of the country, which yields several vintages of high-class wine full of aroma, and so nearly resembling the wines of Burgundy, that the vulgar palate is deceived. So Sancerre finds in the wineshops of Paris the quick market indispensable for liquor that will not keep for more than seven or eight years. Below the town lie a few villages, Fontenoy and Saint-Satur, almost suburbs, reminding us by their situation of the smiling vineyards about Neuchatel in Switzerland.

The town still bears much of its ancient aspect; the streets are narrow and paved with pebbles carted up from the Loire. Some old houses are to be seen there. The citadel, a relic of military power and feudal times, stood one of the most terrible sieges of our religious wars, when French Calvinists far outdid the ferocious Cameronians of Walter Scott's tales.

The town of Sancerre, rich in its greater past, but widowed now of its military importance, is doomed to an even less glorious future, for the course of trade lies on the right bank of the Loire. The sketch here given shows that

Sancerre will be left more and more lonely in spite of the two bridges connecting it with Cosne.

Sancerre, the pride of the left bank, numbers three thousand five hundred inhabitants at most, while at Cosne there are now more than six thousand. Within half a century the part played by these two towns standing opposite each other has been reversed. The advantage of situation, however, remains with the historic town, whence the view on every side is perfectly enchanting, where the air is deliciously pure, the vegetation splendid, and the residents, in harmony with nature, are friendly souls, good fellows, and devoid of Puritanism, though two-thirds of the population are Calvinists. Under such conditions, though there are the usual disadvantages of life in a small town, and each one lives under the officious eye which makes private life almost a public concern, on the other hand, the spirit of township—a sort of patriotism, which cannot indeed take the place of a love of home—flourishes triumphantly.

Thus the town of Sancerre is exceedingly proud of having given birth to one of the glories of modern medicine, Horace Bianchon, and to an author of secondary rank, Etienne Lousteau, one of our most successful journalists. The district included under the municipality of Sancerre, distressed at finding itself practically ruled by seven or eight large landowners, the wire-pullers of the elections, tried to shake off the electoral yoke of a creed which had reduced it to a rotten borough. This little conspiracy, plotted by a handful of men whose vanity was provoked, failed through the jealousy which the elevation of one of them, as the inevitable result, roused in the breasts of the others. This result showed the radical defect of the scheme, and the remedy then suggested was to rally round a champion at the next election, in the person of one of the two men who so gloriously represented Sancerre in Paris circles.

This idea was extraordinarily advanced for the provinces, for since 1830 the nomination of parochial dignitaries has increased so greatly that real statesmen are becoming rare indeed in the lower chamber.

In point of fact, this plan, of very doubtful outcome, was hatched in the brain of the Superior Woman of the borough, *dux femina fasti*, but with a view to personal interest. This idea was so widely rooted in this lady's past life, and so entirely comprehended her future prospects, that it can scarcely be understood without some sketch of her antecedent career.

Sancerre at that time could boast of a Superior Woman, long misprized indeed, but now, about 1836, enjoying a pretty extensive local reputation. This, too, was the period at which two Sancerrois in Paris were attaining, each in his own line, to the highest degree of glory for one, and of fashion for the other. Etienne Lousteau, a writer in reviews, signed his name to contributions

to a paper that had eight thousand subscribers; and Bianchon, already chief physician to a hospital, Officer of the Legion of Honor, and member of the Academy of Sciences, had just been made a professor.

If it were not that the word would to many readers seem to imply a degree of blame, it might be said that George Sand created Sandism, so true is it that, morally speaking, all good has a reverse of evil. This leprosy of sentimentality would have been charming. Still, Sandism has its good side, in that the woman attacked by it bases her assumption of superiority on feelings scorned; she is a blue-stocking of sentiment; and she is rather less of a bore, love to some extent neutralizing literature. The most conspicuous result of George Sand's celebrity was to elicit the fact that France has a perfectly enormous number of superior women, who have, however, till now been so generous as to leave the field to the Marechal de Saxe's granddaughter.

The Superior Woman of Sancerre lived at La Baudraye, a town-house and country-house in one, within ten minutes of the town, and in the village, or, if you will, the suburb of Saint-Satur. The La Baudrayes of the present day have, as is frequently the case, thrust themselves in, and are but a substitute for those La Baudrayes whose name, glorious in the Crusades, figured in the chief events of the history of Le Berry.

The story must be told.

In the time of Louis XIV. a certain sheriff named Milaud, whose forefathers had been furious Calvinists, was converted at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. To encourage this movement in one of the strong-holds of Calvinism, the King gave said Milaud a good appointment in the "Waters and Forests," granted him arms and the title of Sire (or Lord) de la Baudraye, with the fief of the old and genuine La Baudrayes. The descendants of the famous Captain la Baudraye fell, sad to say, into one of the snares laid for heretics by the new decrees, and were hanged—an unworthy deed of the great King's.

Under Louis XV. Milaud de la Baudraye, from being a mere squire, was made Chevalier, and had influence enough to obtain for his son a cornet's commission in the Musketeers. This officer perished at Fontenoy, leaving a child, to whom King Louis XVI. subsequently granted the privileges, by patent, of a farmer-general, in remembrance of his father's death on the field of battle.

This financier, a fashionable wit, great at charades, capping verses, and posies to Chlora, lived in society, was a hanger-on to the Duc de Nivernais, and fancied himself obliged to follow the nobility into exile; but he took care to carry his money with him. Thus the rich emigre was able to assist more than one family of high rank.

In 1800, tired of hoping, and perhaps tired of lending, he returned to Sancerre, bought back La Baudraye out of a feeling of vanity and imaginary pride, quite intelligible in a sheriff's grandson, though under the consulate his prospects were but slender; all the more so, indeed, because the ex-farmer-general had small hopes of his heir's perpetuating the new race of La Baudraye.

Jean Athanase Polydore Milaud de la Baudraye, his only son, more than delicate from his birth, was very evidently the child of a man whose constitution had early been exhausted by the excesses in which rich men indulge, who then marry at the first stage of premature old age, and thus bring degeneracy into the highest circles of society. During the years of the emigration Madame de la Baudraye, a girl of no fortune, chosen for her noble birth, had patiently reared this sallow, sickly boy, for whom she had the devoted love mothers feel for such changeling creatures. Her death—she was a Casteran de la Tour—contributed to bring about Monsieur de la Baudraye's return to France.

This Lucullus of the Milauds, when he died, left his son the fief, stripped indeed of its fines and dues, but graced with weathercocks bearing his coat-of-arms, a thousand louis-d'or—in 1802 a considerable sum of money—and certain receipts for claims on very distinguished emigres enclosed in a pocketbook full of verses, with this inscription on the wrapper, *Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*.

Young La Baudraye did not die, but he owed his life to habits of monastic strictness; to the economy of action which Fontenelle preached as the religion of the invalid; and, above all, to the air of Sancerre and the influence of its fine elevation, whence a panorama over the valley of the Loire may be seen extending for forty leagues.

From 1802 to 1815 young La Baudraye added several plots to his vineyards, and devoted himself to the culture of the vine. The Restoration seemed to him at first so insecure that he dared not go to Paris to claim his debts; but after Napoleon's death he tried to turn his father's collection of autographs into money, though not understanding the deep philosophy which had thus mixed up I O U's and copies of verses. But the winegrower lost so much time in impressing his identity on the Duke of Navarreins "and others," as he phrased it, that he came back to Sancerre, to his beloved vintage, without having obtained anything but offers of service.

The Restoration had raised the nobility to such a degree of lustre as made La Baudraye wish to justify his ambitions by having an heir. This happy result of matrimony he considered doubtful, or he would not so long have postponed the step; however, finding himself still above ground in 1823, at the age of

forty-three, a length of years which no doctor, astrologer, or midwife would have dared to promise him, he hoped to earn the reward of his sober life. And yet his choice showed such a lack of prudence in regard to his frail constitution, that the malicious wit of a country town could not help thinking it must be the result of some deep calculation.

Just at this time His Eminence, Monseigneur the Archbishop of Bourges, had converted to the Catholic faith a young person, the daughter of one of the citizen families, who were the first upholders of Calvinism, and who, thanks to their obscurity or to some compromise with Heaven, had escaped from the persecutions under Louis XIV. The Piedefers—a name that was obviously one of the quaint nicknames assumed by the champions of the Reformation—had set up as highly respectable cloth merchants. But in the reign of Louis XVI., Abraham Piedefer fell into difficulties, and at his death in 1786 left his two children in extreme poverty. One of them, Tobie Piedefer, went out to the Indies, leaving the pittance they had inherited to his elder brother. During the Revolution Moise Piedefer bought up the nationalized land, pulled down abbeys and churches with all the zeal of his ancestors, oddly enough, and married a Catholic, the only daughter of a member of the Convention who had perished on the scaffold. This ambitious Piedefer died in 1819, leaving a little girl of remarkable beauty. This child, brought up in the Calvinist faith, was named Dinah, in accordance with the custom in use among the sect, of taking their Christian names from the Bible, so as to have nothing in common with the Saints of the Roman Church.

Mademoiselle Dinah Piedefer was placed by her mother in one of the best schools in Bourges, that kept by the Demoiselles Chamarolles, and was soon as highly distinguished for the qualities of her mind as for her beauty; but she found herself snubbed by girls of birth and fortune, destined by-and-by to play a greater part in the world than a mere plebeian, the daughter of a mother who was dependent on the settlement of Piedefer's estate. Dinah, having raised herself for the moment above her companions, now aimed at remaining on a level with them for the rest of her life. She determined, therefore, to renounce Calvinism, in the hope that the Cardinal would extend his favor to his proselyte and interest himself in her prospects. You may from this judge of Mademoiselle Dinah's superiority, since at the age of seventeen she was a convert solely from ambition.

The Archbishop, possessed with the idea that Dinah Piedefer would adorn society, was anxious to see her married. But every family to whom the prelate made advances took fright at a damsel gifted with the looks of a princess, who was reputed to be the cleverest of Mademoiselle Chamarolles' pupils and who, at the somewhat theatrical ceremonial of prize-giving, always took a leading part. A thousand crowns a year, which was as much as she could hope for from

the estate of La Hautoy when divided between the mother and daughter, would be a mere trifle in comparison with the expenses into which a husband would be led by the personal advantages of so brilliant a creature.

As soon as all these facts came to the ears of little Polydore de la Baudraye—for they were the talk of every circle in the Department of the Cher—he went to Bourges just when Madame Piedefer, a devotee at high services, had almost made up her own mind and her daughter's to take the first comer with well-lined pockets—the first *chien coiffe*, as they say in Le Berry. And if the Cardinal was delighted to receive Monsieur de la Baudraye, Monsieur de la Baudraye was even better pleased to receive a wife from the hands of the Cardinal. The little gentleman only demanded of His Eminence a formal promise to support his claims with the President of the Council to enable him to recover his debts from the Duc de Navarreins "and others" by a lien on their indemnities. This method, however, seemed to the able Minister then occupying the Pavillon Marsan rather too sharp practice, and he gave the vine-owner to understand that his business should be attended to all in good time.

It is easy to imagine the excitement produced in the Sancerre district by the news of Monsieur de la Baudraye's imprudent marriage.

"It is quite intelligible," said President Boirouge; "the little man was very much startled, as I am told, at hearing that handsome young Milaud, the Attorney-General's deputy at Nevers, say to Monsieur de Clagny as they were looking at the turrets of La Baudraye, 'That will be mine some day.'—'But,' says Clagny, 'he may marry and have children.'—'Impossible!'—So you may imagine how such a changeling as little La Baudraye must hate that colossal Milaud."

There was at Nevers a plebeian branch of the Milauds, which had grown so rich in the cutlery trade that the present representative of that branch had been brought up to the civil service, in which he had enjoyed the patronage of Marchangy, now dead.

It will be as well to eliminate from this story, in which moral developments play the principal part, the baser material interests which alone occupied Monsieur de la Baudraye, by briefly relating the results of his negotiations in Paris. This will also throw light on certain mysterious phenomena of contemporary history, and the underground difficulties in matters of politics which hampered the Ministry at the time of the Restoration.

The promises of Ministers were so illusory that Monsieur de la Baudraye determined on going to Paris at the time when the Cardinal's presence was required there by the sitting of the Chambers.

This is how the Duc de Navarreins, the principal debtor threatened by

Monsieur de la Baudraye, got out of the scrape.

The country gentleman, lodging at the Hotel de Mayence, Rue Saint-Honore, near the Place Vendome, one morning received a visit from a confidential agent of the Ministry, who was an expert in "winding up" business. This elegant personage, who stepped out of an elegant cab, and was dressed in the most elegant style, was requested to walk up to No. 3—that is to say, to the third floor, to a small room where he found his provincial concocting a cup of coffee over his bedroom fire.

"Is it to Monsieur Milaud de la Baudraye that I have the honor—"

"Yes," said the little man, draping himself in his dressing-gown.

After examining this garment, the illicit offspring of an old chine wrapper of Madame Piedefer's and a gown of the late lamented Madame de la Baudraye, the emissary considered the man, the dressing-gown, and the little stove on which the milk was boiling in a tin saucepan, as so homogeneous and characteristic, that he deemed it needless to beat about the bush.

"I will lay a wager, monsieur," said he, audaciously, "that you dine for forty sous at Hurbain's in the Palais Royal."

"Pray, why?"

"Oh, I know you, having seen you there," replied the Parisian with perfect gravity. "All the princes' creditors dine there. You know that you recover scarcely ten per cent on debts from these fine gentlemen. I would not give you five per cent on a debt to be recovered from the estate of the late Duc d'Orleans—nor even," he added in a low voice—"from MONSIEUR."

"So you have come to buy up the bills?" said La Baudraye, thinking himself very clever.

"Buy them!" said his visitor. "Why, what do you take me for? I am Monsieur des Lupeaulx, Master of Appeals, Secretary-General to the Ministry, and I have come to propose an arrangement."

"What is that?"

"Of course, monsieur, you know the position of your debtor—"

"Of my debtors—"

"Well, monsieur, you understand the position of your debtors; they stand high in the King's good graces, but they have no money, and are obliged to make a good show.—Again, you know the difficulties of the political situation. The aristocracy has to be rehabilitated in the face of a very strong force of the third estate. The King's idea—and France does him scant justice—is to create a peerage as a national institution analogous to the English



peerage. To realize this grand idea we need years—and millions.—Noblesse oblige. The Duc de Navarreins, who is, as you know, first gentleman of the Bedchamber to the King, does not repudiate his debt; but he cannot—Now, be reasonable.—Consider the state of politics. We are emerging from the pit of the Revolution.—and you yourself are noble—He simply cannot pay—"

"Monsieur—"

"You are hasty," said des Lupeaulx. "Listen. He cannot pay in money. Well, then; you, a clever man, can take payment in favors—Royal or Ministerial."

"What! When in 1793 my father put down one hundred thousand—"

"My dear sir, recrimination is useless. Listen to a simple statement in political arithmetic: The collectorship at Sancerre is vacant; a certain paymaster-general of the forces has a claim on it, but he has no chance of getting it; you have the chance—and no claim. You will get the place. You will hold it for three months, you will then resign, and Monsieur Gravier will give twenty thousand francs for it. In addition, the Order of the Legion of Honor will be conferred on you."

"Well, that is something," said the wine-grower, tempted by the money rather than by the red ribbon.

"But then," said des Lupeaulx, "you must show your gratitude to His Excellency by restoring to Monseigneur the Duc de Navarreins all your claims on him."

La Baudraye returned to Sancerre as Collector of Taxes. Six months later he was superseded by Monsieur Gravier, regarded as one of the most agreeable financiers who had served under the Empire, and who was of course presented by Monsieur de la Baudraye to his wife.

As soon as he was released from his functions, Monsieur de la Baudraye returned to Paris to come to an understanding with some other debtors. This time he was made a Referendary under the Great Seal, Baron, and Officer of the Legion of Honor. He sold the appointment as Referendary; and then the Baron de la Baudraye called on his last remaining debtors, and reappeared at Sancerre as Master of Appeals, with an appointment as Royal Commissioner to a commercial association established in the Nivernais, at a salary of six thousand francs, an absolute sinecure. So the worthy La Baudraye, who was supposed to have committed a financial blunder, had, in fact, done very good business in the choice of a wife.

Thanks to sordid economy and an indemnity paid him for the estate belonging to his father, nationalized and sold in 1793, by the year 1827 the little man could realize the dream of his whole life. By paying four hundred

thousand francs down, and binding himself to further instalments, which compelled him to live for six years on the air as it came, to use his own expression, he was able to purchase the estate of Anzy on the banks of the Loire, about two leagues above Sancerre, and its magnificent castle built by Philibert de l'Orme, the admiration of every connoisseur, and for five centuries the property of the Uxelles family. At last he was one of the great landowners of the province! It is not absolutely certain that the satisfaction of knowing that an entail had been created, by letters patent dated back to December 1820, including the estates of Anzy, of La Baudraye, and of La Hautoy, was any compensation to Dinah on finding herself reduced to unconfessed penuriousness till 1835.

This sketch of the financial policy of the first Baron de la Baudraye explains the man completely. Those who are familiar with the manias of country folks will recognize in him the land-hunger which becomes such a consuming passion to the exclusion of every other; a sort of avarice displayed in the sight of the sun, which often leads to ruin by a want of balance between the interest on mortgages and the products of the soil. Those who, from 1802 till 1827, had merely laughed at the little man as they saw him trotting to Saint-Thibault and attending to his business, like a merchant living on his vineyards, found the answer to the riddle when the ant-lion seized his prey, after waiting for the day when the extravagance of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse culminated in the sale of that splendid property.

Madame Piedefer came to live with her daughter. The combined fortunes of Monsieur de la Baudraye and his mother-in-law, who had been content to accept an annuity of twelve hundred francs on the lands of La Hautoy which she handed over to him, amounted to an acknowledged income of about fifteen thousand francs.

During the early days of her married life, Dinah had effected some alterations which had made the house at La Baudraye a very pleasant residence. She turned a spacious forecourt into a formal garden, pulling down wine-stores, presses, and shabby outhouses. Behind the manor-house, which, though small, did not lack style with its turrets and gables, she laid out a second garden with shrubs, flower-beds, and lawns, and divided it from the vineyards by a wall hidden under creepers. She also made everything within doors as comfortable as their narrow circumstances allowed.

In order not to be ruined by a young lady so very superior as Dinah seemed to be, Monsieur de la Baudraye was shrewd enough to say nothing as to the recovery of debts in Paris. This dead secrecy as to his money matters gave a touch of mystery to his character, and lent him dignity in his wife's eyes during the first years of their married life—so majestic is silence!

The alterations effected at La Baudraye made everybody eager to see the young mistress, all the more so because Dinah would never show herself, nor receive any company, before she felt quite settled in her home and had thoroughly studied the inhabitants, and, above all, her taciturn husband. When, one spring morning in 1825, pretty Madame de la Baudraye was first seen walking on the Mall in a blue velvet dress, with her mother in black velvet, there was quite an excitement in Sancerre. This dress confirmed the young woman's reputation for superiority, brought up, as she had been, in the capital of Le Berry. Every one was afraid lest in entertaining this phoenix of the Department, the conversation should not be clever enough; and, of course, everybody was constrained in the presence of Madame de la Baudraye, who produced a sort of terror among the woman-folk. As they admired a carpet of Indian shawl-pattern in the La Baudraye drawing-room, a Pompadour writing-table carved and gilt, brocade window curtains, and a Japanese bowl full of flowers on the round table among a selection of the newest books; when they heard the fair Dinah playing at sight, without making the smallest demur before seating herself at the piano, the idea they conceived of her superiority assumed vast proportions. That she might never allow herself to become careless or the victim of bad taste, Dinah had determined to keep herself up to the mark as to the fashions and latest developments of luxury by an active correspondence with Anna Grossetete, her bosom friend at Mademoiselle Chamarolles' school.

Anna, thanks to a fine fortune, had married the Comte de Fontaine's third son. Thus those ladies who visited at La Baudraye were perpetually piqued by Dinah's success in leading the fashion; do what they would, they were always behind, or, as they say on the turf, distanced.

While all these trifles gave rise to malignant envy in the ladies of Sancerre, Dinah's conversation and wit engendered absolute aversion. In her ambition to keep her mind on the level of Parisian brilliancy, Madame de la Baudraye allowed no vacuous small talk in her presence, no old-fashioned compliments, no pointless remarks; she would never endure the yelping of tittle-tattle, the backstairs slander which forms the staple of talk in the country. She liked to hear of discoveries in science or art, or the latest pieces at the theatres, the newest poems, and by airing the cant words of the day she made a show of uttering thoughts.

The Abbe Duret, Cure of Sancerre, an old man of a lost type of clergy in France, a man of the world with a liking for cards, had not dared to indulge this taste in so liberal a district as Sancerre; he, therefore, was delighted at Madame de la Baudraye's coming, and they got on together to admiration. The sous-prefet, one Vicomte de Chargeboeuf, was delighted to find in Madame de la Baudraye's drawing-room a sort of oasis where there was a truce to

provincial life. As to Monsieur de Clagny, the Public Prosecutor, his admiration for the fair Dinah kept him bound to Sancerre. The enthusiastic lawyer refused all promotion, and became a quite pious adorer of this angel of grace and beauty. He was a tall, lean man, with a minatory countenance set off by terrible eyes in deep black circles, under enormous eyebrows; and his eloquence, very unlike his love-making, could be incisive.

Monsieur Gravier was a little, round man, who in the days of the Empire had been a charming ballad-singer; it was this accomplishment that had won him the high position of Paymaster-General of the forces. Having mixed himself up in certain important matters in Spain with generals at that time in opposition, he had made the most of these connections to the Minister, who, in consideration of the place he had lost, promised him the Receivership at Sancerre, and then allowed him to pay for the appointment. The frivolous spirit and light tone of the Empire had become ponderous in Monsieur Gravier; he did not, or would not, understand the wide difference between manners under the Restoration and under the Empire. Still, he conceived of himself as far superior to Monsieur de Clagny; his style was in better taste; he followed the fashion, was to be seen in a buff waistcoat, gray trousers, and neat, tightly-fitting coats; he wore a fashionable silk tie slipped through a diamond ring, while the lawyer never dressed in anything but black—coat, trousers, and waistcoat alike, and those often shabby.

These four men were the first to go into ecstasies over Dinah's cultivation, good taste, and refinement, and pronounced her a woman of most superior mind. Then the women said to each other, "Madame de la Baudraye must laugh at us behind our back."

This view, which was more or less correct, kept them from visiting at La Baudraye. Dinah, attainted and convicted of pedantry, because she spoke grammatically, was nicknamed the Sappho of Saint-Satur. At last everybody made insolent game of the great qualities of the woman who had thus roused the enmity of the ladies of Sancerre. And they ended by denying a superiority—after all, merely comparative!—which emphasized their ignorance, and did not forgive it. Where the whole population is hunch-backed, a straight shape is the monstrosity; Dinah was regarded as monstrous and dangerous, and she found herself in a desert.

Astonished at seeing the women of the neighborhood only at long intervals, and for visits of a few minutes, Dinah asked Monsieur de Clagny the reason of this state of things.

"You are too superior a woman to be liked by other women," said the lawyer.

Monsieur Gravier, when questioned by the forlorn fair, only, after much

entreaty, replied:

"Well, lady fair, you are not satisfied to be merely charming. You are clever and well educated, you know every book that comes out, you love poetry, you are a musician, and you talk delightfully. Women cannot forgive so much superiority."

Men said to Monsieur de la Baudraye:

"You who have such a Superior Woman for a wife are very fortunate——"  
And at last he himself would say:

"I who have a Superior Woman for a wife, am very fortunate," etc.

Madame Piedefer, flattered through her daughter, also allowed herself to say such things—"My daughter, who is a very Superior Woman, was writing yesterday to Madame de Fontaine such and such a thing."

Those who know the world—France, Paris—know how true it is that many celebrities are thus created.

Two years later, by the end of the year 1825, Dinah de la Baudraye was accused of not choosing to have any visitors but men; then it was said that she did not care for women—and that was a crime. Not a thing could she do, not her most trifling action, could escape criticism and misrepresentation. After making every sacrifice that a well-bred woman can make, and placing herself entirely in the right, Madame de la Baudraye was so rash as to say to a false friend who condoled with her on her isolation:

"I would rather have my bowl empty than with anything in it!"

This speech produced a terrible effect on Sancerre, and was cruelly retorted on the Sappho of Saint-Satur when, seeing her childless after five years of married life, little de la Baudraye became a byword for laughter. To understand this provincial witticism, readers may be reminded of the Bailli de Ferrette—some, no doubt, having known him—of whom it was said that he was the bravest man in Europe for daring to walk on his legs, and who was accused of putting lead in his shoes to save himself from being blown away. Monsieur de la Baudraye, a sallow and almost diaphanous creature, would have been engaged by the Bailli de Ferrette as first gentleman-in-waiting if that diplomatist had been the Grand Duke of Baden instead of being merely his envoy.

Monsieur de la Baudraye, whose legs were so thin that, for mere decency, he wore false calves, whose thighs were like the arms of an average man, whose body was not unlike that of a cockchafer, would have been an advantageous foil to the Bailli de Ferrette. As he walked, the little vine-owner's leg-pads often twisted round on to his shins, so little did he make a

secret of them, and he would thank any one who warned him of this little mishap. He wore knee-breeches, black silk stockings, and a white waistcoat till 1824. After his marriage he adopted blue trousers and boots with heels, which made Sancerre declare that he had added two inches to his stature that he might come up to his wife's chin. For ten years he was always seen in the same little bottle-green coat with large white-metal buttons, and a black stock that accentuated his cold stingy face, lighted up by gray-blue eyes as keen and passionless as a cat's. Being very gentle, as men are who act on a fixed plan of conduct, he seemed to make his wife happy by never contradicting her; he allowed her to do the talking, and was satisfied to move with the deliberate tenacity of an insect.

Dinah, adored for her beauty, in which she had no rival, and admired for her cleverness by the most gentlemanly men of the place, encouraged their admiration by conversations, for which it was subsequently asserted, she prepared herself beforehand. Finding herself listened to with rapture, she soon began to listen to herself, enjoyed haranguing her audience, and at last regarded her friends as the chorus in a tragedy, there only to give her her cues. In fact, she had a very fine collection of phrases and ideas, derived either from books or by assimilating the opinions of her companions, and thus became a sort of mechanical instrument, going off on a round of phrases as soon as some chance remark released the spring. To do her justice, Dinah was choke full of knowledge, and read everything, even medical books, statistics, science, and jurisprudence; for she did not know how to spend her days when she had reviewed her flower-beds and given her orders to the gardener. Gifted with an excellent memory, and the talent which some women have for hitting on the right word, she could talk on any subject with the lucidity of a studied style. And so men came from Cosne, from la Charite, and from Nevers, on the right bank; from Lere, Vailly, Argent, Blancafort, and Aubigny, on the left bank, to be introduced to Madame de la Baudraye, as they used in Switzerland, to be introduced to Madame de Stael. Those who only once heard the round of tunes emitted by this musical snuff-box went away amazed, and told such wonders of Dinah as made all the women jealous for ten leagues round.

There is an indescribable mental headiness in the admiration we inspire, or in the effect of playing a part, which fends off criticism from reaching the idol. An atmosphere, produced perhaps by unceasing nervous tension, forms a sort of halo, through which the world below is seen. How otherwise can we account for the perennial good faith which leads to so many repeated presentments of the same effects, and the constant ignoring of warnings given by children, such a terror to their parents, or by husbands, so familiar as they are with the peacock airs of their wives? Monsieur de la Baudraye had the frankness of a man who opens an umbrella at the first drop of rain. When his

wife was started on the subject of Negro emancipation or the improvement of convict prisons, he would take up his little blue cap and vanish without a sound, in the certainty of being able to get to Saint-Thibault to see off a cargo of puncheons, and return an hour later to find the discussion approaching a close. Or, if he had no business to attend to, he would go for a walk on the Mall, whence he commanded the lovely panorama of the Loire valley, and take a draught of fresh air while his wife was performing a sonata in words, or a dialectical duet.

Once fairly established as a Superior Woman, Dinah was eager to prove her devotion to the most remarkable creations of art. She threw herself into the propaganda of the romantic school, including, under Art, poetry and painting, literature and sculpture, furniture and the opera. Thus she became a mediaevalist. She was also interested in any treasures that dated from the Renaissance, and employed her allies as so many devoted commission agents. Soon after she was married, she had become possessed of the Rougets' furniture, sold at Issoudun early in 1824. She purchased some very good things at Nivernais and the Haute-Loire. At the New Year and on her birthday her friends never failed to give her some curiosities. These fancies found favor in the eyes of Monsieur de la Baudraye; they gave him an appearance of sacrificing a few crowns to his wife's taste. In point of fact, his land mania allowed him to think of nothing but the estate of Anzy.

These "antiquities" at that time cost much less than modern furniture. By the end of five or six years the ante-room, the dining-room, the two drawing-rooms, and the boudoir which Dinah had arranged on the ground floor of La Baudraye, every spot even to the staircase, were crammed with masterpieces collected in the four adjacent departments. These surroundings, which were called queer by the neighbors, were quite in harmony with Dinah. All these Marvels, so soon to be the rage, struck the imagination of the strangers introduced to her; they came expecting something unusual; and they found their expectations surpassed when, behind a bower of flowers, they saw these catacombs full of old things, piled up as Sommerard used to pile them—that "Old Mortality" of furniture. And then these finds served as so many springs which, turned on by a question, played off an essay on Jean Goujon, Michel Columb, Germain Pilon, Boulle, Van Huysum, and Boucher, the great native painter of Le Berry; on Clodion, the carver of wood, on Venetian mirrors, on Brustolone, an Italian tenor who was the Michael-Angelo of boxwood and holm oak; on the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, on the glazes of Bernard de Palissy, the enamels of Petitot, the engravings of Albrecht Durer—whom she called Dur; on illuminations on vellum, on Gothic architecture, early decorated, flamboyant and pure—enough to turn an old man's brain and fire a young man with enthusiasm.

Madame de la Baudraye, possessed with the idea of waking up Sancerre, tried to form a so-called literary circle. The Presiding Judge, Monsieur Boirouge, who happened to have a house and garden on his hands, part of the Popinot-Chandier property, favored the notion of this coterie. The wily Judge talked over the rules of the society with Madame de la Baudraye; he proposed to figure as one of the founders, and to let the house for fifteen years to the literary club. By the time it had existed a year the members were playing dominoes, billiards, and bouillotte, and drinking mulled wine, punch, and liqueurs. A few elegant little suppers were then given, and some masked balls during the Carnival. As to literature—there were the newspapers. Politics and business were discussed. Monsieur de la Baudraye was constantly there—on his wife's account, as she said jestingly.

This result deeply grieved the Superior Woman, who despaired of Sancerre, and collected the wit of the neighborhood in her own drawing-room. Nevertheless, and in spite of the efforts of Messieurs de Chargeboeuf, Gravier, and de Clagny, of the Abbe Duret and the two chief magistrates, of a young doctor, and a young Assistant Judge—all blind admirers of Dinah's—there were occasions when, weary of discussion, they allowed themselves an excursion into the domain of agreeable frivolity which constitutes the common basis of worldly conversation. Monsieur Gravier called this "from grave to gay." The Abbe Duret's rubber made another pleasing variety on the monologues of the oracle. The three rivals, tired of keeping their minds up to the level of the "high range of discussion"—as they called their conversation—but not daring to confess it, would sometimes turn with ingratiating hints to the old priest.

"Monsieur le Cure is dying for his game," they would say.

The wily priest lent himself very readily to the little trick. He protested.

"We should lose too much by ceasing to listen to our inspired hostess!" and so he would incite Dinah's magnanimity to take pity at last on her dear Abbe.

This bold manoeuvre, a device of the Sous-prefet's, was repeated with so much skill that Dinah never suspected her slaves of escaping to the prison yard, so to speak, of the cardtable; and they would leave her one of the younger functionaries to harry.

One young landowner, and the dandy of Sancerre, fell away from Dinah's good graces in consequence of some rash demonstrations. After soliciting the honor of admission to this little circle, where he flattered himself he could snatch the blossom from the constituted authorities who guarded it, he was so unfortunate as to yawn in the middle of an explanation Dinah was favoring him with—for the fourth time, it is true—of the philosophy of Kant. Monsieur de la Thaumassiere, the grandson of the historian of Le Berry, was thenceforth



regarded as a man entirely bereft of soul and brains.

The three devotees en titre each submitted to these exorbitant demands on their mind and attention, in hope of a crowning triumph, when at last Dinah should become human; for neither of them was so bold as to imagine that Dinah would give up her innocence as a wife till she should have lost all her illusions. In 1826, when she was surrounded by adorers, Dinah completed her twentieth year, and the Abbe Duret kept her in a sort of fervid Catholicism; so her worshipers had to be content to overwhelm her with little attentions and small services, only too happy to be taken for the carpet-knights of this sovereign lady, by strangers admitted to spend an evening or two at La Baudraye.

"Madame de la Baudraye is a fruit that must be left to ripen." This was the opinion of Monsieur Gravier, who was waiting.

As to the lawyer, he wrote letters four pages long, to which Dinah replied in soothing speech as she walked, leaning on his arm, round and round the lawn after dinner.

Madame de la Baudraye, thus guarded by three passions, and always under the eye of her pious mother, escaped the malignity of slander. It was so evident to all Sancerre that no two of these three men would ever leave the third alone with Madame de la Baudraye, that their jealousy was a comedy to the lookers-on.

To reach Saint-Thibault from Caesar's Gate there is a way much shorter than that by the ramparts, down what is known in mountainous districts as a *coursiere*, called at Sancerre *le Casse-cou*, or Break-neck Alley. The name is significant as applied to a path down the steepest part of the hillside, thickly strewn with stones, and shut in by the high banks of the vineyards on each side. By way of the Break-neck the distance from Sancerre to La Baudraye is much abridged. The ladies of the place, jealous of the Sappho of Saint-Satur, were wont to walk on the Mall, looking down this Longchamp of the bigwigs, whom they would stop and engage in conversation—sometimes the *Sous-prefet* and sometimes the Public Prosecutor—and who would listen with every sign of impatience or uncivil absence of mind. As the turrets of La Baudraye are visible from the Mall, many a younger man came to contemplate the abode of Dinah while envying the ten or twelve privileged persons who might spend their afternoons with the Queen of the neighborhood.

Monsieur de la Baudraye was not slow to discover the advantage he, as Dinah's husband, held over his wife's adorers, and he made use of them without any disguise, obtaining a remission of taxes, and gaining two lawsuits. In every litigation he used the Public Prosecutor's name with such good effect that the matter was carried no further, and, like all undersized men, he was

contentious and litigious in business, though in the gentlest manner.

At the same time, the more certainly guiltless she was, the less conceivable did Madame de la Baudraye's position seem to the prying eyes of these women. Frequently, at the house of the Presidente de Boirouge, the ladies of a certain age would spend a whole evening discussing the La Baudraye household, among themselves of course. They all had suspicions of a mystery, a secret such as always interests women who have had some experience of life. And, in fact, at La Baudraye one of those slow and monotonous conjugal tragedies was being played out which would have remained for ever unknown if the merciless scalpel of the nineteenth century, guided by the insistent demand for novelty, had not dissected the darkest corners of the heart, or at any rate those which the decency of past centuries left unopened. And that domestic drama sufficiently accounts for Dinah's immaculate virtue during her early married life.

A young lady, whose triumphs at school had been the outcome of her pride, and whose first scheme in life had been rewarded by a victory, was not likely to pause in such a brilliant career. Frail as Monsieur de la Baudraye might seem, he was really an unhoped-for good match for Mademoiselle Dinah Piedefer. But what was the hidden motive of this country landowner when, at forty-four, he married a girl of seventeen; and what could his wife make out of the bargain? This was the text of Dinah's first meditations.

The little man never behaved quite as his wife expected. To begin with, he allowed her to take the five precious acres now wasted in pleasure grounds round La Baudraye, and paid, almost with generosity, the seven or eight thousand francs required by Dinah for improvements in the house, enabling her to buy the furniture at the Rougets' sale at Issoudun, and to redecorate her rooms in various styles—Mediaeval, Louis XIV., and Pompadour. The young wife found it difficult to believe that Monsieur de la Baudraye was so miserly as he was reputed, or else she must have great influence with him. The illusion lasted a year and a half.

After Monsieur de la Baudraye's second journey to Paris, Dinah discovered in him the Arctic coldness of a provincial miser whenever money was in question. The first time she asked for supplies she played the sweetest of the comedies of which Eve invented the secret; but the little man put it plainly to his wife that he gave her two hundred francs a month for her personal expenses, and paid Madame Piedefer twelve hundred francs a year as a charge on the lands of La Hautoy, and that this was two hundred francs a year more than was agreed to under the marriage settlement.

"I say nothing of the cost of housekeeping," he said in conclusion. "You may give your friends cake and tea in the evening, for you must have some

amusement. But I, who spent but fifteen hundred francs a year as a bachelor, now spend six thousand, including rates and repairs, and this is rather too much in relation to the nature of our property. A winegrower is never sure of what his expenses may be—the making, the duty, the casks—while the returns depend on a scorching day or a sudden frost. Small owners, like us, whose income is far from being fixed, must base their estimates on their minimum, for they have no means of making up a deficit or a loss. What would become of us if a wine merchant became bankrupt? In my opinion, promissory notes are so many cabbage-leaves. To live as we are living, we ought always to have a year's income in hand and count on no more than two-thirds of our returns."

Any form of resistance is enough to make a woman vow to subdue it; Dinah flung herself against a will of iron padded round with gentleness. She tried to fill the little man's soul with jealousy and alarms, but it was stockaded with insolent confidence. He left Dinah, when he went to Paris, with all the conviction of Medor in Angelique's fidelity. When she affected cold disdain, to nettle this changeling by the scorn a courtesan sometimes shows to her "protector," and which acts on him with the certainty of the screw of a winepress, Monsieur de la Baudraye gazed at his wife with fixed eyes, like those of a cat which, in the midst of domestic broils, waits till a blow is threatened before stirring from its place. The strange, speechless uneasiness that was perceptible under his mute indifference almost terrified the young wife of twenty; she could not at first understand the selfish quiescence of this man, who might be compared to a cracked pot, and who, in order to live, regulated his existence with the unchangeable regularity which a clockmaker requires of a clock. So the little man always evaded his wife, while she always hit out, as it were, ten feet above his head.

Dinah's fits of fury when she saw herself condemned never to escape from La Baudraye and Sancerre are more easily imagined than described—she who had dreamed of handling a fortune and managing the dwarf whom she, the giant, had at first humored in order to command. In the hope of some day making her appearance on the greater stage of Paris, she accepted the vulgar incense of her attendant knights with a view to seeing Monsieur de la Baudraye's name drawn from the electoral urn; for she supposed him to be ambitious, after seeing him return thrice from Paris, each time a step higher on the social ladder. But when she struck on the man's heart, it was as though she had tapped on marble! The man who had been Receiver-General and Referendary, who was now Master of Appeals, Officer of the Legion of Honor, and Royal Commissioner, was but a mole throwing up its little hills round and round a vineyard! Then some lamentations were poured into the heart of the Public Prosecutor, of the Sous-prefet, even of Monsieur Gravier, and they all increased in their devotion to this sublime victim; for, like all women, she never mentioned her speculative schemes, and—again like all

women—finding such speculation vain, she ceased to speculate.

Dinah, tossed by mental storms, was still undecided when, in the autumn of 1827, the news was told of the purchase by the Baron de la Baudraye of the estate of Anzy. Then the little old man showed an impulsion of pride and glee which for a few months changed the current of his wife's ideas; she fancied there was a hidden vein of greatness in the man when she found him applying for a patent of entail. In his triumph the Baron exclaimed:

"Dinah, you shall be a countess yet!"

There was then a patched-up reunion between the husband and wife, such as can never endure, and which only humiliated and fatigued a woman whose apparent superiority was unreal, while her unseen superiority was genuine. This whimsical medley is commoner than people think. Dinah, who was ridiculous from the perversity of her cleverness, had really great qualities of soul, but circumstances did not bring these rarer powers to light, while a provincial life debased the small change of her wit from day to day. Monsieur de la Baudraye, on the contrary, devoid of soul, of strength, and of wit, was fated to figure as a man of character, simply by pursuing a plan of conduct which he was too feeble to change.

There was in their lives a first phase, lasting six years, during which Dinah, alas! became utterly provincial. In Paris there are several kinds of women: the duchess and the financier's wife, the ambassadress and the consul's wife, the wife of the minister who is a minister, and of him who is no longer a minister; then there is the lady—quite the lady—of the right bank of the Seine and of the left. But in the country there is but one kind of woman, and she, poor thing, is the provincial woman.

This remark points to one of the sores of modern society. It must be clearly understood: France in the nineteenth century is divided into two broad zones—Paris, and the provinces. The provinces jealous of Paris; Paris never thinking of the provinces but to demand money. Of old, Paris was the Capital of the provinces, and the court ruled the Capital; now, all Paris is the Court, and all the country is the town.

However lofty, beautiful, and clever a girl born in any department of France may be on entering life, if, like Dinah Piedefer, she marries in the country and remains there, she inevitably becomes the provincial woman. In spite of every determination, the commonplace of second-rate ideas, indifference to dress, the culture of vulgar people, swamp the sublimer essence hidden in the youthful plant; all is over, it falls into decay. How should it be otherwise? From their earliest years girls bred in the country see none but provincials; they cannot imagine anything superior, their choice lies among mediocrities; provincial fathers marry their daughters to provincial sons;

crossing the races is never thought of, and the brain inevitably degenerates, so that in many country towns intellect is as rare as the breed is hideous. Mankind becomes dwarfed in mind and body, for the fatal principle of conformity of fortune governs every matrimonial alliance. Men of talent, artists, superior brains—every bird of brilliant plumage flies to Paris. The provincial woman, inferior in herself, is also inferior through her husband. How is she to live happy under this crushing twofold consciousness?

But there is a third and terrible element besides her congenital and conjugal inferiority which contributes to make the figure arid and gloomy; to reduce it, narrow it, distort it fatally. Is not one of the most flattering unctions a woman can lay to her soul the assurance of being something in the existence of a superior man, chosen by herself, wittingly, as if to have some revenge on marriage, wherein her tastes were so little consulted? But if in the country the husbands are inferior beings, the bachelors are no less so. When a provincial wife commits her "little sin," she falls in love with some so-called handsome native, some indigenuous dandy, a youth who wears gloves and is supposed to ride well; but she knows at the bottom of her soul that her fancy is in pursuit of the commonplace, more or less well dressed. Dinah was preserved from this danger by the idea impressed upon her of her own superiority. Even if she had not been as carefully guarded in her early married life as she was by her mother, whose presence never weighed upon her till the day when she wanted to be rid of it, her pride, and her high sense of her own destinies, would have protected her. Flattered as she was to find herself surrounded by admirers, she saw no lover among them. No man here realized the poetical ideal which she and Anna Grossetete had been wont to sketch. When, stirred by the involuntary temptations suggested by the homage she received, she asked herself, "If I had to make a choice, who should it be?" she owned to a preference for Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, a gentleman of good family, whose appearance and manners she liked, but whose cold nature, selfishness, and narrow ambition, never rising above a prefecture and a good marriage, repelled her. At a word from his family, who were alarmed lest he should be killed for an intrigue, the Vicomte had already deserted a woman he had loved in the town where he previously had been Sous-prefet.

Monsieur de Clagny, on the other hand, the only man whose mind appealed to hers, whose ambition was founded on love, and who knew what love means, Dinah thought perfectly odious. When Dinah saw herself condemned to six years' residence at Sancerre she was on the point of accepting the devotion of Monsieur le Vicomte de Chargeboeuf; but he was appointed to a prefecture and left the district. To Monsieur de Clagny's great satisfaction, the new Sous-prefet was a married man whose wife made friends with Dinah. The lawyer had now no rival to fear but Monsieur Gravier. Now Monsieur Gravier was the typical man of forty of whom women make use

while they laugh at him, whose hopes they intentionally and remorselessly encourage, as we are kind to a beast of burden. In six years, among all the men who were introduced to her from twenty leagues round, there was not one in whose presence Dinah was conscious of the excitement caused by personal beauty, by a belief in promised happiness, by the impact of a superior soul, or the anticipation of a love affair, even an unhappy one.

Thus none of Dinah's choicest faculties had a chance of developing; she swallowed many insults to her pride, which was constantly suffering under the husband who so calmly walked the stage as supernumerary in the drama of her life. Compelled to bury her wealth of love, she showed only the surface to the world. Now and then she would try to rouse herself, try to form some manly resolution; but she was kept in leading strings by the need for money. And so, slowly and in spite of the ambitious protests and grievous recriminations of her own mind, she underwent the provincial metamorphosis here described. Each day took with it a fragment of her spirited determination. She had laid down a rule for the care of her person, which she gradually departed from. Though at first she kept up with the fashions and the little novelties of elegant life, she was obliged to limit her purchases by the amount of her allowance. Instead of six hats, caps, or gowns, she resigned herself to one gown each season. She was so much admired in a certain bonnet that she made it do duty for two seasons. So it was in everything.

Not unfrequently her artistic sense led her to sacrifice the requirements of her person to secure some bit of Gothic furniture. By the seventh year she had come so low as to think it convenient to have her morning dresses made at home by the best needlewoman in the neighborhood; and her mother, her husband, and her friends pronounced her charming in these inexpensive costumes which did credit to her taste. Her ideas were imitated! As she had no standard of comparison, Dinah fell into the snares that surround the provincial woman. If a Parisian woman's hips are too narrow or too full, her inventive wit and the desire to please help to find some heroic remedy; if she has some defect, some ugly spot, or small disfigurement, she is capable of making it an adornment; this is often seen; but the provincial woman—never! If her waist is too short and her figure ill balanced, well, she makes up her mind to the worst, and her adorers—or they do not adore her—must take her as she is, while the Parisian always insists on being taken for what she is not. Hence the preposterous bustles, the audacious flatness, the ridiculous fulness, the hideous outlines ingeniously displayed, to which a whole town will become accustomed, but which are so astounding when a provincial woman makes her appearance in Paris or among Parisians. Dinah, who was extremely slim, showed it off to excess, and never knew a dull moment when it became ridiculous; when, reduced by the dull weariness of her life, she looked like a skeleton in clothes; and her friends, seeing her every day, did not observe the

gradual change in her appearance.

This is one of the natural results of a provincial life. In spite of marriage, a young woman preserves her beauty for some time, and the town is proud of her; but everybody sees her every day, and when people meet every day their perception is dulled. If, like Madame de la Baudraye, she loses her color, it is scarcely noticed; or, again, if she flushes a little, that is intelligible and interesting. A little neglect is thought charming, and her face is so carefully studied, so well known, that slight changes are scarcely noticed, and regarded at last as "beauty spots." When Dinah ceased to have a new dress with a new season, she seemed to have made a concession to the philosophy of the place.

It is the same with matters of speech, choice of words and ideas, as it is with matters of feeling. The mind can rust as well as the body if it is not rubbed up in Paris; but the thing on which provincialism most sets its stamp is gesture, gait, and movement; these soon lose the briskness which Paris constantly keeps alive. The provincial is used to walk and move in a world devoid of accident or change, there is nothing to be avoided; so in Paris she walks on as raw recruits do, never remembering that there may be hindrances, for there are none in her way in her native place, where she is known, where she is always in her place, and every one makes way for her. Thus she loses all the charm of the unforeseen.

And have you ever noticed the effect on human beings of a life in common? By the ineffaceable instinct of simian mimicry they all tend to copy each other. Each one, without knowing it, acquires the gestures, the tone of voice, the manner, the attitudes, the very countenance of others. In six years Dinah had sunk to the pitch of the society she lived in. As she acquired Monsieur de Clagny's ideas she assumed his tone of voice; she unconsciously fell into masculine manners from seeing none but men; she fancied that by laughing at what was ridiculous in them she was safe from catching it; but, as often happens, some hue of what she laughed at remained in the grain.

A Parisian woman sees so many examples of good taste that a contrary result ensues. In Paris women learn to seize the hour and moment when they may appear to advantage; while Madame de la Baudraye, accustomed to take the stage, acquired an indefinable theatrical and domineering manner, the air of a prima donna coming forward on the boards, of which ironical smiles would soon have cured her in the capital.

But after she had acquired this stock of absurdities, and, deceived by her worshipers, imagined them to be added graces, a moment of terrible awakening came upon her like the fall of an avalanche from a mountain. In one day she was crushed by a frightful comparison.

In 1829, after the departure of Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, she was excited

by the anticipation of a little pleasure; she was expecting the Baronne de Fontaine. Anna's husband, who was now Director-General under the Minister of Finance, took advantage of leave of absence on the occasion of his father's death to take his wife to Italy. Anna wished to spend the day at Sancerre with her school-friend. This meeting was strangely disastrous. Anna, who at school had been far less handsome than Dinah, now, as Baronne de Fontaine, was a thousand times handsomer than the Baronne de la Baudraye, in spite of her fatigue and her traveling dress. Anna stepped out of an elegant traveling chaise loaded with Paris milliners' boxes, and she had with her a lady's maid, whose airs quite frightened Dinah. All the difference between a woman of Paris and a provincial was at once evident to Dinah's intelligent eye; she saw herself as her friend saw her—and Anna found her altered beyond recognition. Anna spent six thousand francs a year on herself alone, as much as kept the whole household at La Baudraye.

In twenty-four hours the friends had exchanged many confidences; and the Parisian, seeing herself so far superior to the phoenix of Mademoiselle Chamarolles' school, showed her provincial friend such kindness, such attentions, while giving her certain explanations, as were so many stabs to Dinah, though she perfectly understood that Anna's advantages all lay on the surface, while her own were for ever buried.

When Anna had left, Madame de la Baudraye, by this time two-and-twenty, fell into the depths of despair.

"What is it that ails you?" asked Monsieur de Clagny, seeing her so dejected.

"Anna," said she, "has learned to live, while I have been learning to endure."

A tragi-comedy was, in fact, being enacted in Madame de la Baudraye's house, in harmony with her struggles over money matters and her successive transformations—a drama to which no one but Monsieur de Clagny and the Abbe Duret ever knew the clue, when Dinah in sheer idleness, or perhaps sheer vanity, revealed the secret of her anonymous fame.

Though a mixture of verse and prose is a monstrous anomaly in French literature, there must be exceptions to the rule. This tale will be one of the two instances in these Studies of violation of the laws of narrative; for to give a just idea of the unconfessed struggle which may excuse, though it cannot absolve Dinah, it is necessary to give an analysis of a poem which was the outcome of her deep despair.

Her patience and her resignation alike broken by the departure of the Vicomte de Chargeboeuf, Dinah took the worthy Abbe's advice to exhale her



evil thoughts in verse—a proceeding which perhaps accounts for some poets.

"You will find such relief as those who write epitaphs or elegies over those whom they have lost. Pain is soothed in the heart as lines surge up in the brain."

This strange production caused a great ferment in the departments of the Allier, the Nièvre, and the Cher, proud to possess a poet capable of rivalry with the glories of Paris. Paquita la Sevillane, by Jan Diaz, was published in the *Echo du Morvan*, a review which for eighteen months maintained its existence in spite of provincial indifference. Some knowing persons at Nevers declared that Jan Diaz was making fun of the new school, just then bringing out its eccentric verse, full of vitality and imagery, and of brilliant effects produced by defying the Muse under pretext of adapting German, English, and Romanesque mannerisms.

The poem began with this ballad:

Ah! if you knew the fragrant plain,  
The air, the sky, of golden Spain,  
Its fervid noons, its balmy spring,  
Sad daughters of the northern gloom,  
Of love, of heav'n, of native home,  
You never would presume to sing!  
For men are there of other mould  
Than those who live in this dull cold.  
And there to music low and sweet  
Sevillian maids, from eve till dawn,  
Dance lightly on the moonlit lawn  
In satin shoes, on dainty feet.  
Ah, you would be the first to blush  
Over your dancers' romp and rush,  
And your too hideous carnival,  
That turns your cheeks all chill and blue,  
And skips the mud in hob-nail'd shoe—  
A truly dismal festival.  
To pale-faced girls, and in a squalid room,

Paquita sang; the murky town beneath  
Was Rouen whence the slender spires rise  
To chew the storm with teeth.

Rouen so hideous, noisy, full of rage—

And here followed a magnificent description of Rouen—where Dinah had never been—written with the affected brutality which, a little later, inspired so many imitations of Juvenal; a contrast drawn between the life of a manufacturing town and the careless life of Spain, between the love of Heaven and of human beauty, and the worship of machinery, in short, between poetry and sordid money-making.

Then Jan Diaz accounted for Paquita's horror of Normandy by saying:

Seville, you see, had been her native home,  
Seville, where skies are blue and evening sweet.  
She, at thirteen, the sovereign of the town,  
Had lovers at her feet.  
For her three Toreadors had gone to death  
Or victory, the prize to be a kiss—  
One kiss from those red lips of sweetest breath—  
A longed-for touch of bliss!

The features of the Spanish girl's portrait have served so often as those of the courtesan in so many self-styled poems, that it would be tiresome to quote here the hundred lines of description. To judge of the lengths to which audacity had carried Dinah, it will be enough to give the conclusion. According to Madame de la Baudraye's ardent pen, Paquita was so entirely created for love that she can hardly have met with a knight worthy of her; for

... In her passionate fire  
Every man would have swooned from the heat,  
When she at love's feast, in her fervid desire,  
As yet had but taken her seat.

"And yet she could quit the joys of Seville, its woods and fields of orange-trees, for a Norman soldier who won her love and carried her away to his hearth and home. She did not weep for her Andalusia, the Soldier was her whole joy... But the day came when he was compelled to start for Russia in the footsteps of the great Emperor."

Nothing could be more dainty than the description of the parting between the Spanish girl and the Normandy Captain of Artillery, who, in the delirium of passion expressed with feeling worthy of Byron, exacted from Paquita a vow of absolute fidelity, in the Cathedral at Rouen in front of the alter of the Blessed Virgin, who

Though a Maid is a woman, and never forgives

When lovers are false to their vows.

A large part of the poem was devoted to describing Paquita's sufferings when alone in Rouen waiting till the campaign was over; she stood writhing at the window bars as she watched happy couples go by; she suppressed her passion in her heart with a determination that consumed her; she lived on narcotics, and exhausted herself in dreams.

Almost she died, but still her heart was true;

And when at last her soldier came again,

He found her beauty ever fresh and new—

He had not loved in vain!

"But he, pale and frozen by the cold of Russia, chilled to the very marrow, met his yearning fair one with a melancholy smile."

The whole poem was written up to this situation, which was worked out with such vigor and boldness as too entirely justified the Abbe Duret.

Paquita, on reaching the limits set to real love, did not, like Julie and Heloise, throw herself into the ideal; no, she rushed into the paths of vice, which is, no doubt, shockingly natural; but she did it without any touch of magnificence, for lack of means, as it would be difficult to find in Rouen men impassioned enough to place Paquita in a suitable setting of luxury and splendor. This horrible realism, emphasized by gloomy poetic feeling, had inspired some passages such as modern poetry is too free with, rather too like the flayed anatomical figures known to artists as *ecorches*. Then, by a highly philosophical revulsion, after describing the house of ill-fame where the Andalusian ended her days, the writer came back to the ballad at the opening:

Paquita now is faded, shrunk, and old,

But she it was who sang:

"If you but knew the fragrant plain,

The air, the sky, of golden Spain," etc.

The gloomy vigor of this poem, running to about six hundred lines, and serving as a powerful foil, to use a painter's word, to the two seguidillas at the

beginning and end, the masculine utterance of inexpressible grief, alarmed the woman who found herself admired by three departments, under the black cloak of the anonymous. While she fully enjoyed the intoxicating delights of success, Dinah dreaded the malignity of provincial society, where more than one woman, if the secret should slip out, would certainly find points of resemblance between the writer and Paquita. Reflection came too late; Dinah shuddered with shame at having made "copy" of some of her woes.

"Write no more," said the Abbe Duret. "You will cease to be a woman; you will be a poet."

Moulins, Nevers, Bourges were searched to find Jan Diaz; but Dinah was impenetrable. To remove any evil impression, in case any unforeseen chance should betray her name, she wrote a charming poem in two cantos on The Mass-Oak, a legend of the Nivernais:

"Once upon a time the folks of Nevers and the folks of Saint-Saulge, at war with each other, came at daybreak to fight a battle, in which one or other should perish, and met in the forest of Faye. And then there stood between them, under an oak, a priest whose aspect in the morning sun was so commanding that the foes at his bidding heard Mass as he performed it under the oak, and at the words of the Gospel they made friends."—The oak is still shown in the forest of Faye.

This poem, immeasurably superior to Paquita la Sevillane, was far less admired.

After these two attempts Madame de la Baudraye, feeling herself a poet, had a light on her brow and a flash in her eyes that made her handsomer than ever. She cast longing looks at Paris, aspiring to fame—and fell back into her den of La Baudraye, her daily squabbles with her husband, and her little circle, where everybody's character, intentions, and remarks were too well known not to have become a bore. Though she found relief from her dreary life in literary work, and poetry echoed loudly in her empty life, though she thus found an outlet for her energies, literature increased her hatred of the gray and ponderous provincial atmosphere.

When, after the Revolution of 1830, the glory of George Sand was reflected on Le Berry, many a town envied La Chatre the privilege of having given birth to this rival of Madame de Stael and Camille Maupin, and were ready to do homage to minor feminine talent. Thus there arose in France a vast number of tenth Muses, young girls or young wives tempted from a silent life by the bait of glory. Very strange doctrines were proclaimed as to the part women should play in society. Though the sound common sense which lies at the root of the French nature was not perverted, women were suffered to express ideas and profess opinions which they would not have owned to a few

years previously.

Monsieur de Clagny took advantage of this outbreak of freedom to collect the works of Jan Diaz in a small volume printed by Desroziers at Moulins. He wrote a little notice of the author, too early snatched from the world of letters, which was amusing to those who were in the secret, but which even then had not the merit of novelty. Such practical jokes, capital so long as the author remains unknown, fall rather flat if subsequently the poet stands confessed.

From this point of view, however, the memoir of Jan Diaz, born at Bourges in 1807, the son of a Spanish prisoner, may very likely some day deceive the compiler of some Universal Biography. Nothing is overlooked; neither the names of the professors at the Bourges College, nor those of his deceased schoolfellows, such as Lousteau, Bianchon, and other famous natives of the province, who, it is said, knew the dreamy, melancholy boy, and his precocious bent towards poetry. An elegy called *Tristesse* (Melancholy), written at school; the two poems *Paquita la Sevillane* and *Le Chene de la Messe*; three sonnets, a description of the Cathedral and the House of Jacques Coeur at Bourges, with a tale called *Carola*, published as the work he was engaged on at the time of his death, constituted the whole of these literary remains; and the poet's last hours, full of misery and despair, could not fail to wring the hearts of the feeling public of the Nievre, the Bourbonnais, the Cher, and the Morvan, where he died near Chateau-Chinon, unknown to all, even to the woman he had loved!

Of this little yellow paper volume two hundred copies were printed; one hundred and fifty were sold—about fifty in each department. This average of tender and poetic souls in three departments of France is enough to revive the enthusiasm of writers as to the *Furia Francese*, which nowadays is more apt to expend itself in business than in books.

When Monsieur de Clagny had given away a certain number of copies, Dinah still had seven or eight, wrapped up in the newspapers which had published notices of the work. Twenty copies forwarded to the Paris papers were swamped in the editors' offices. Nathan was taken in as well as several of his fellow-countrymen of Le Berry, and wrote an article on the great man, in which he credited him with all the fine qualities we discover in those who are dead and buried.

Lousteau, warned by his fellow-schoolfellows, who could not remember Jan Diaz, waited for information from Sancerre, and learned that Jan Diaz was a pseudonym assumed by a woman.

Then, in and around Sancerre, Madame de la Baudraye became the rage; she was the future rival of George Sand. From Sancerre to Bourges a poem was praised which, at any other time, would certainly have been hooted. The

provincial public—like every French public, perhaps—does not share the love of the King of the French for the happy medium: it lifts you to the skies or drags you in the mud.

By this time the good Abbe, Madame de la Baudraye's counselor, was dead; he would certainly have prevented her rushing into public life. But three years of work without recognition weighed on Dinah's soul, and she accepted the clatter of fame as a substitute for her disappointed ambitions. Poetry and dreams of celebrity, which had lulled her grief since her meeting with Anna Grossetete, no longer sufficed to exhaust the activity of her morbid heart. The Abbe Duret, who had talked of the world when the voice of religion was impotent, who understood Dinah, and promised her a happy future by assuring her that God would compensate her for her sufferings bravely endured,—this good old man could no longer stand between the opening to sin and the handsome young woman he had called his daughter.

The wise old priest had more than once endeavored to enlighten Dinah as to her husband's character, telling her that the man could hate; but women are not ready to believe in such force in weak natures, and hatred is too constantly in action not to be a vital force. Dinah, finding her husband incapable of love, denied him the power to hate.

"Do not confound hatred and vengeance," said the Abbe. "They are two different sentiments. One is the instinct of small minds; the other is the outcome of law which great souls obey. God is avenged, but He does not hate. Hatred is a vice of narrow souls; they feed it with all their meanness, and make it a pretext for sordid tyranny. So beware of offending Monsieur de la Baudraye; he would forgive an infidelity, because he could make capital of it, but he would be doubly implacable if you should touch him on the spot so cruelly wounded by Monsieur Milaud of Nevers, and would make your life unendurable."

Now, at the time when the whole countryside—Nevers and Sancerre, Le Morvan and Le Berry—was priding itself on Madame de la Baudraye, and lauding her under the name of Jan Diaz, "little La Baudraye" felt her glory a mortal blow. He alone knew the secret source of Paquita la Sevillane. When this terrible work was spoken of, everybody said of Dinah—"Poor woman! Poor soul!"

The women rejoiced in being able to pity her who had so long oppressed them; never had Dinah seemed to stand higher in the eyes of the neighborhood.

The shriveled old man, more wrinkled, yellower, feebler than ever, gave no sign; but Dinah sometimes detected in his eyes, as he looked at her, a sort of icy venom which gave the lie to his increased politeness and gentleness. She

understood at last that this was not, as she had supposed, a mere domestic squabble; but when she forced an explanation with her "insect," as Monsieur Gravier called him, she found the cold, hard impassibility of steel. She flew into a passion; she reproached him for her life these eleven years past; she made—intentionally—what women call a scene. But "little La Baudraye" sat in an armchair with his eyes shut, and listened phlegmatically to the storm. And, as usual, the dwarf got the better of his wife. Dinah saw that she had done wrong in writing; she vowed never to write another line, and she kept her vow.

Then was there desolation in the Sancerrois.

"Why did not Madame de la Baudraye compose any more verses?" was the universal cry.

At this time Madame de la Baudraye had no enemies; every one rushed to see her, not a week passed without fresh introductions. The wife of the presiding judge, an august bourgeoisie, nee Popinot-Chandier, desired her son, a youth of two-and-twenty, to pay his humble respects to La Baudraye, and flattered herself that she might see her Gatien in the good graces of this Superior Woman.—The words Superior Woman had superseded the absurd nickname of The Sappho of Saint-Satur.—This lady, who for nine years had led the opposition, was so delighted at the good reception accorded to her son, that she became loud in her praises of the Muse of Sancerre.

"After all," she exclaimed, in reply to a tirade from Madame de Clagny, who hated her husband's supposed mistress, "she is the handsomest and cleverest woman in the whole province!"

After scrambling through so many brambles and setting off on so many different roads, after dreaming of love in splendor and scenting the darkest dramas, thinking such terrible joys would be cheaply purchased so weary was she of her dreary existence, one day Dinah fell into the pit she had sworn to avoid. Seeing Monsieur de Clagny always sacrificing himself, and at last refusing a high appointment in Paris, where his family wanted to see him, she said to herself, "He loves me!" She vanquished her repulsion, and seemed willing to reward so much constancy.

It was to this impulse of generosity on her part that a coalition was due, formed in Sancerre to secure the return of Monsieur de Clagny at the next elections. Madame de la Baudraye had dreamed of going to Paris in the wake of the new deputy.

But, in spite of the most solemn promises, the hundred and fifty votes to be recorded in favor of this adorer of the lovely Dinah—who hoped to see this defender of the widow and the orphan wearing the gown of the Keeper of the

Seals—figured as an imposing minority of fifty votes. The jealousy of the President de Boirouge, and Monsieur Gravier's hatred, for he believed in the candidate's supremacy in Dinah's heart, had been worked upon by a young Sous-prefet; and for this worthy deed the allies got the young man made a prefet elsewhere.

"I shall never cease to regret," said he, as he quitted Sancerre, "that I did not succeed in pleasing Madame de la Baudraye; that would have made my triumph complete!"

The household that was thus racked by domestic troubles was calm on the surface; here were two ill-assorted but resigned beings, and the indescribable propriety, the lie that society insists on, and which to Dinah was an unendurable yoke. Why did she long to throw off the mask she had worn for twelve years? Whence this weariness which, every day, increased her hope of finding herself a widow?

The reader who has noted all the phases of her existence will have understood the various illusions by which Dinah, like many another woman, had been deceived. After an attempt to master Monsieur de la Baudraye, she had indulged the hope of becoming a mother. Between those miserable disputes over household matters and the melancholy conviction as to her fate, quite a long time had elapsed. Then, when she had looked for consolation, the consoler, Monsieur de Chargeboeuf had left her. Thus, the overwhelming temptation which commonly causes women to sin had hitherto been absent. For if there are, after all, some women who make straight for unfaithfulness, are there not many more who cling to hope, and do not fall till they have wandered long in a labyrinth of secret woes?

Such was Dinah. She had so little impulse to fail in her duty, that she did not care enough for Monsieur de Clagny to forgive him his defeat.

Then the move to the Chateau d'Anzy, the rearrangement of her collected treasures and curiosities, which derived added value from the splendid setting which Philibert de Lorme seemed to have planned on purpose for this museum, occupied her for several months, giving her leisure to meditate one of those decisive steps that startle the public, ignorant of the motives which, however, it sometimes discovers by dint of gossip and suppositions.

Madame de la Baudraye had been greatly struck by the reputation of Lousteau, who was regarded as a lady's man of the first water in consequence of his intimacies among actresses; she was anxious to know him; she read his books, and was fired with enthusiasm, less perhaps for his talents than for his successes with women; and to attract him to the country, she started the notion that it was obligatory on Sancerre to return one of its great men at the elections. She made Gatien Boirouge write to the great physician Bianchon,



whom he claimed as a cousin through the Popinots. Then she persuaded an old friend of the departed Madame Lousteau to stir up the journalist's ambitions by letting him know that certain persons in Sancerre were firmly bent on electing a deputy from among the distinguished men in Paris.

Tired of her commonplace neighbors, Madame de la Baudraye would thus at last meet really illustrious men, and might give her fall the lustre of fame.

Neither Lousteau nor Bianchon replied; they were waiting perhaps till the holidays. Bianchon, who had won his professor's chair the year before after a brilliant contest, could not leave his lectures.

In the month of September, when the vintage was at its height, the two Parisians arrived in their native province, and found it absorbed in the unremitting toil of the wine-crop of 1836; there could therefore be no public demonstration in their favor. "We have fallen flat," said Lousteau to his companion, in the slang of the stage.

In 1836, Lousteau, worn by sixteen years of struggle in the Capital, and aged quite as much by pleasure as by penury, hard work, and disappointments, looked eight-and-forty, though he was no more than thirty-seven. He was already bald, and had assumed a Byronic air in harmony with his early decay and the lines furrowed in his face by over-indulgence in champagne. He ascribed these signs-manual of dissipation to the severities of a literary life, declaring that the Press was murderous; and he gave it to be understood that it consumed superior talents, so as to lend a grace to his exhaustion. In his native town he thought proper to exaggerate his affected contempt of life and his spurious misanthropy. Still, his eyes could flash with fire like a volcano supposed to be extinct, and he endeavored, by dressing fashionably, to make up for the lack of youth that might strike a woman's eye.

Horace Bianchon, who wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, was fat and burly, as beseems a fashionable physician, with a patriarchal air, his hair thick and long, a prominent brow, the frame of a hard worker, and the calm expression of a philosopher. This somewhat prosaic personality set off his more frivolous companion to advantage.

The two great men remained unrecognized during a whole morning at the inn where they had put up, and it was only by chance that Monsieur de Clagny heard of their arrival. Madame de la Baudraye, in despair at this, despatched Gatien Boirouge, who had no vineyards, to beg the two gentlemen to spend a few days at the Chateau d'Anzy. For the last year Dinah had played the chatelaine, and spent the winter only at La Baudraye. Monsieur Gravier, the Public Prosecutor, the Presiding Judge, and Gatien Boirouge combined to give a banquet to the great men, to meet the literary personages of the town.

On hearing that the beautiful Madame de la Baudraye was Jan Diaz, the Parisians went to spend three days at Anzy, fetched in a sort of wagonette driven by Gatien himself. The young man, under a genuine illusion, spoke of Madame de la Baudraye not only as the handsomest woman in those parts, a woman so superior that she might give George Sand a qualm, but as a woman who would produce a great sensation in Paris. Hence the extreme though suppressed astonishment of Doctor Bianchon and the waggish journalist when they beheld, on the garden steps of Anzy, a lady dressed in thin black cashmere with a deep tucker, in effect like a riding-habit cut short, for they quite understood the pretentiousness of such extreme simplicity. Dinah also wore a black velvet cap, like that in the portrait of Raphael, and below it her hair fell in thick curls. This attire showed off a rather pretty figure, fine eyes, and handsome eyelids somewhat faded by the weariful life that has been described. In Le Berry the singularity of this artistic costume was a cloak for the romantic affectations of the Superior Woman.

On seeing the affectations of their too amiable hostess—which were, indeed, affectations of soul and mind—the friends glanced at each other, and put on a deeply serious expression to listen to Madame de la Baudraye, who made them a set speech of thanks for coming to cheer the monotony of her days. Dinah walked her guests round and round the lawn, ornamented with large vases of flowers, which lay in front of the Chateau d'Anzy.

"How is it," said Lousteau, the practical joker, "that so handsome a woman as you, and apparently so superior, should have remained buried in the country? What do you do to make life endurable?"

"Ah! that is the crux," said the lady. "It is unendurable. Utter despair or dull resignation—there is no third alternative; that is the arid soil in which our existence is rooted, and on which a thousand stagnant ideas fall; they cannot fertilize the ground, but they supply food for the etiolated flowers of our desert souls. Never believe in indifference! Indifference is either despair or resignation. Then each woman takes up the pursuit which, according to her character, seems to promise some amusement. Some rush into jam-making and washing, household management, the rural joys of the vintage or the harvest, bottling fruit, embroidering handkerchiefs, the cares of motherhood, the intrigues of a country town. Others torment a much-enduring piano, which, at the end of seven years, sounds like an old kettle, and ends its asthmatic life at the Chateau d'Anzy. Some pious dames talk over the different brands of the Word of God—the Abbe Fritaud as compared with the Abbe Guinard. They play cards in the evening, dance with the same partners for twelve years running, in the same rooms, at the same dates. This delightful life is varied by solemn walks on the Mall, visits of politeness among the women, who ask each other where they bought their gowns.

"Conversation is bounded on the south by remarks on the intrigues lying hidden under the stagnant water of provincial life, on the north by proposed marriages, on the west by jealousies, and on the east by sour remarks.

"And so," she went on, striking an attitude, "you see a woman wrinkled at nine-and-twenty, ten years before the time fixed by the rules of Doctor Bianchon, a woman whose skin is ruined at an early age, who turns as yellow as a quince when she is yellow at all—we have seen some turn green. When we have reached that point, we try to justify our normal condition; then we turn and rend the terrible passion of Paris with teeth as sharp as rat's teeth. We have Puritan women here, sour enough to tear the laces of Parisian finery, and eat out all the poetry of your Parisian beauties, who undermine the happiness of others while they cry up their walnuts and rancid bacon, glorify this squalid mouse-hole, and the dingy color and conventual small of our delightful life at Sancerre."

"I admire such courage, madame," said Bianchon. "When we have to endure such misfortunes, it is well to have the wit to make a virtue of necessity."

Amazed at the brilliant move by which Dinah thus placed provincial life at the mercy of her guests, in anticipation of their sarcasms, Gatién Boirouge nudged Lousteau's elbow, with a glance and a smile, which said:

"Well! did I say too much?"

"But, madame," said Lousteau, "you are proving that we are still in Paris. I shall steal this gem of description; it will be worth ten thousand francs to me in an article."

"Oh, monsieur," she retorted, "never trust provincial women."

"And why not?" said Lousteau.

Madame de la Baudraye was wily enough—an innocent form of cunning, to be sure—to show the two Parisians, one of whom she would choose to be her conquerer, the snare into which he would fall, reflecting that she would have the upper hand at the moment when he should cease to see it.

"When you first come," said she, "you laugh at us. Then when you have forgotten the impression of Paris brilliancy, and see us in our own sphere, you pay court to us, if only as a pastime. And you, who are famous for your past passions, will be the object of attentions which will flatter you. Then take care!" cried Dinah, with a coquettish gesture, raising herself above provincial absurdities and Lousteau's irony by her own sarcastic speech. "When a poor little country-bred woman has an eccentric passion for some superior man, some Parisian who has wandered into the provinces, it is to her something

more than a sentiment; she makes it her occupation and part of all her life. There is nothing more dangerous than the attachment of such a woman; she compares, she studies, she reflects, she dreams; and she will not give up her dream, she thinks still of the man she loves when he has ceased to think of her.

"Now one of the catastrophes that weigh most heavily on a woman in the provinces is that abrupt termination of her passion which is so often seen in England. In the country, a life under minute observation as keen as an Indian's compels a woman either to keep on the rails or to start aside like a steam engine wrecked by an obstacle. The strategies of love, the coquetting which form half the composition of a Parisian woman, are utterly unknown here."

"That is true," said Lousteau. "There is in a country-bred woman's heart a store of surprises, as in some toys."

"Dear me!" Dinah went on, "a woman will have spoken to you three times in the course of a winter, and without your knowing it, you will be lodged in her heart. Then comes a picnic, an excursion, what not, and all is said—or, if you prefer it, all is done! This conduct, which seems odd to unobserving persons, is really very natural. A poet, such as you are, or a philosopher, an observer, like Doctor Bianchon, instead of vilifying the provincial woman and believing her depraved, would be able to guess the wonderful unrevealed poetry, every chapter, in short, of the sweet romance of which the last phrase falls to the benefit of some happy sub-lieutenant or some provincial bigwig."

"The provincial women I have met in Paris," said Lousteau, "were, in fact, rapid in their proceedings—"

"My word, they are strange," said the lady, giving a significant shrug of her shoulders.

"They are like the playgoers who book for the second performance, feeling sure that the piece will not fail," replied the journalist.

"And what is the cause of all these woes?" asked Bianchon.

"Paris is the monster that brings us grief," replied the Superior Woman. "The evil is seven leagues round, and devastates the whole land. Provincial life is not self-existent. It is only when a nation is divided into fifty minor states that each can have a physiognomy of its own, and then a woman reflects the glory of the sphere where she reigns. This social phenomenon, I am told, may be seen in Italy, Switzerland, and Germany; but in France, as in every country where there is but one capital, a dead level of manners must necessarily result from centralization."

"Then you would say that manners could only recover their individuality and native distinction by the formation of a federation of French states into

one empire?" said Lousteau.

"That is hardly to be wished, for France would have to conquer too many countries," said Bianchon.

"This misfortune is unknown in England," exclaimed Dinah. "London does not exert such tyranny as that by which Paris oppresses France—for which, indeed, French ingenuity will at last find a remedy; however, it has a worse disease in its vile hypocrisy, which is a far greater evil!"

"The English aristocracy," said Lousteau, hastening to put a word in, for he foresaw a Byronic paragraph, "has the advantage over ours of assimilating every form of superiority; it lives in the midst of magnificent parks; it is in London for no more than two months. It lives in the country, flourishing there, and making it flourish."

"Yes," said Madame de la Baudraye, "London is the capital of trade and speculation and the centre of government. The aristocracy hold a 'mote' there for sixty days only; it gives and takes the passwords of the day, looks in on the legislative cookery, reviews the girls to marry, the carriages to be sold, exchanges greetings, and is away again; and is so far from amusing, that it cannot bear itself for more than the few days known as 'the season.'"

"Hence," said Lousteau, hoping to stop this nimble tongue by an epigram, "in Perfidious Albion, as the Constitutionnel has it, you may happen to meet a charming woman in any part of the kingdom."

"But charming English women!" replied Madame de la Baudraye with a smile. "Here is my mother, I will introduce you," said she, seeing Madame Piedefer coming towards them.

Having introduced the two Paris lions to the ambitious skeleton that called itself woman under the name of Madame Piedefer—a tall, lean personage, with a red face, teeth that were doubtfully genuine, and hair that was undoubtedly dyed, Dinah left her visitors to themselves for a few minutes.

"Well," said Gatien to Lousteau, "what do you think of her?"

"I think that the clever woman of Sancerre is simply the greatest chatterbox," replied the journalist.

"A woman who wants to see you deputy!" cried Gatien. "An angel!"

"Forgive me, I forgot you were in love with her," said Lousteau. "Forgive the cynicism of an old scamp.—Ask Bianchon; I have no illusions left. I see things as they are. The woman has evidently dried up her mother like a partridge left to roast at too fierce a fire."

Gatien de Boirouge contrived to let Madame de la Baudraye know what

the journalist had said of her in the course of the dinner, which was copious, not to say splendid, and the lady took care not to talk too much while it was proceeding. This lack of conversation betrayed Gatien's indiscretion. Etienne tried to regain his footing, but all Dinah's advances were directed to Bianchon.

However, half-way through the evening, the Baroness was gracious to Lousteau again. Have you never observed what great meanness may be committed for small ends? Thus the haughty Dinah, who would not sacrifice herself for a fool, who in the depths of the country led such a wretched life of struggles, of suppressed rebellion, of unuttered poetry, who to get away from Lousteau had climbed the highest and steepest peak of her scorn, and who would not have come down if she had seen the sham Byron at her feet, suddenly stepped off it as she recollected her album.

Madame de la Baudraye had caught the mania for autographs; she possessed an oblong volume which deserved the name of album better than most, as two-thirds of the pages were still blank. The Baronne de Fontaine, who had kept it for three months, had with great difficulty obtained a line from Rossini, six bars written by Meyerbeer, the four lines that Victor Hugo writes in every album, a verse from Lamartine, a few words from Beranger, Calypso ne pouvait se consoler du depart d'Ulysse (the first words of Telemaque) written by George Sand, Scribe's famous lines on the Umbrella, a sentence from Charles Nodier, an outline of distance by Jules Dupre, the signature of David d'Angers, and three notes written by Hector Berlioz. Monsieur de Clagny, during a visit to Paris, added a song by Lacenaire—a much coveted autograph, two lines from Fieschi, and an extremely short note from Napoleon, which were pasted on to pages of the album. Then Monsieur Gravier, in the course of a tour, had persuaded Mademoiselle Mars to write her name on this album, with Mademoiselles Georges, Taglioni, and Grisi, and some distinguished actors, such as Frederick Lemaitre, Monrose, Bouffe, Rubini, Lablache, Nourrit, and Arnal; for he knew a set of old fellows brought up in the seraglio, as they phrased it, who did him this favor.

This beginning of a collection was all the more precious to Dinah because she was the only person for ten leagues round who owned an album. Within the last two years, however, several young ladies had acquired such books, in which they made their friends and acquaintances write more or less absurd quotations or sentiments. You who spend your lives in collecting autographs, simple and happy souls, like Dutch tulip fanciers, you will excuse Dinah when, in her fear of not keeping her guests more than two days, she begged Bianchon to enrich the volume she handed to him with a few lines of his writing.

The doctor made Lousteau smile by showing him this sentence on the first page:

"What makes the populace dangerous is that it has in its pocket an absolution for every crime.

"J. B. DE CLAGNY."

"We will second the man who is brave enough to plead in favor of the Monarchy," Desplein's great pupil whispered to Lousteau, and he wrote below:

"The distinction between Napoleon and a water-carrier is evident only to Society; Nature takes no account of it. Thus Democracy, which resists inequality, constantly appeals to Nature.

H. BIANCHON."

"Ah!" cried Dinah, amazed, "you rich men take a gold piece out of your purse as poor men bring out a farthing.... I do not know," she went on, turning to Lousteau, "whether it is taking an unfair advantage of a guest to hope for a few lines—"

"Nay, madame, you flatter me. Bianchon is a great man, but I am too insignificant!—Twenty years hence my name will be more difficult to identify than that of the Public Prosecutor whose axiom, written in your album, will designate him as an obscurer Montesquieu. And I should want at least twenty-four hours to improvise some sufficiently bitter reflections, for I could only describe what I feel."

"I wish you needed a fortnight," said Madame de la Baudraye graciously, as she handed him the book. "I should keep you here all the longer."

At five next morning all the party in the Chateau d'Anzy were astir, little La Baudraye having arranged a day's sport for the Parisians—less for their pleasure than to gratify his own conceit. He was delighted to make them walk over the twelve hundred acres of waste land that he was intending to reclaim, an undertaking that would cost some hundred thousand francs, but which might yield an increase of thirty to sixty thousand francs a year in the returns of the estate of Anzy.

"Do you know why the Public Prosecutor has not come out with us?" asked Gatién Boirouge of Monsieur Gravier.

"Why he told us that he was obliged to sit to-day; the minor cases are before the Court," replied the other.

"And did you believe that?" cried Gatién. "Well, my papa said to me, 'Monsieur Lebas will not join you early, for Monsieur de Clagny has begged him as his deputy to sit for him!'"

"Indeed!" said Gravier, changing countenance. "And Monsieur de la Baudraye is gone to La Charité!"

"But why do you meddle in such matters?" said Bianchon to Gatien.

"Horace is right," said Lousteau. "I cannot imagine why you trouble your heads so much about each other; you waste your time in frivolities."

Horace Bianchon looked at Etienne Lousteau, as much as to say that newspaper epigrams and the satire of the "funny column" were incomprehensible at Sancerre.

On reaching a copse, Monsieur Gravier left the two great men and Gatien, under the guidance of a keeper, to make their way through a little ravine.

"Well, we must wait for Monsieur Gravier," said Bianchon, when they had reached a clearing.

"You may be a great physician," said Gatien, "but you are ignorant of provincial life. You mean to wait for Monsieur Gravier?—By this time he is running like a hare, in spite of his little round stomach; he is within twenty minutes of Anzy by now——" Gatien looked at his watch. "Good! he will be just in time."

"Where?"

"At the chateau for breakfast," replied Gatien. "Do you suppose I could rest easy if Madame de la Baudraye were alone with Monsieur de Clagny? There are two of them now; they will keep an eye on each other. Dinah will be well guarded."

"Ah, ha! Then Madame de la Baudraye has not yet made up her mind?" said Lousteau.

"So mamma thinks. For my part, I am afraid that Monsieur de Clagny has at last succeeded in bewitching Madame de la Baudraye. If he has been able to show her that he had any chance of putting on the robes of the Keeper of the Seals, he may have hidden his moleskin complexion, his terrible eyes, his touzled mane, his voice like a hoarse crier's, his bony figure, like that of a starveling poet, and have assumed all the charms of Adonis. If Dinah sees Monsieur de Clagny as Attorney-General, she may see him as a handsome youth. Eloquence has great privileges.—Besides, Madame de la Baudraye is full of ambition. She does not like Sancerre, and dreams of the glories of Paris."

"But what interest have you in all this?" said Lousteau. "If she is in love with the Public Prosecutor!—Ah! you think she will not love him for long, and you hope to succeed him."

"You who live in Paris," said Gatien, "meet as many different women as there are days in the year. But at Sancerre, where there are not half a dozen, and where, of those six, five set up for the most extravagant virtue, when the



handsomest of them all keeps you at an infinite distance by looks as scornful as though she were of the blood royal, a young man of two-and-twenty may surely be allowed to make a guess at her secrets, since she must then treat him with some consideration."

"Consideration! So that is what you call it in these parts?" said the journalist with a smile.

"I should suppose Madame de la Baudraye to have too much good taste to trouble her head about that ugly ape," said Bianchon.

"Horace," said Lousteau, "look here, O learned interpreter of human nature, let us lay a trap for the Public Prosecutor; we shall be doing our friend Gatien a service, and get a laugh out of it. I do not love Public Prosecutors."

"You have a keen intuition of destiny," said Horace. "But what can we do?"

"Well, after dinner we will tell sundry little anecdotes of wives caught out by their husbands, killed, murdered under the most terrible circumstances.— Then we shall see the faces that Madame de la Baudraye and de Clagny will make."

"Not amiss!" said Bianchon; "one or the other must surely, by look or gesture—"

"I know a newspaper editor," Lousteau went on, addressing Gatien, "who, anxious to forefend a grievous fate, will take no stories but such as tell the tale of lovers burned, hewn, pounded, or cut to pieces; of wives boiled, fried, or baked; he takes them to his wife to read, hoping that sheer fear will keep her faithful—satisfied with that humble alternative, poor man! 'You see, my dear, to what the smallest error may lead you!' says he, epitomizing Arnolfe's address to Agnes."

"Madame de la Baudraye is quite guiltless; this youth sees double," said Bianchon. "Madame Piedefer seems to me far too pious to invite her daughter's lover to the Chateau d'Anzy. Madame de la Baudraye would have to hoodwink her mother, her husband, her maid, and her mother's maid; that is too much to do. I acquit her."

"Well with more reason because her husband never 'quits her,'" said Gatien, laughing at his own wit.

"We can easily remember two or three stories that will make Dinah quake," said Lousteau. "Young man—and you too, Bianchon—let me beg you to maintain a stern demeanor; be thorough diplomatists, an easy manner without exaggeration, and watch the faces of the two criminals, you know, without seeming to do so—out of the corner of your eye, or in a glass, on the sly. This morning we will hunt the hare, this evening we will hunt the Public

Prosecutor."

The evening began with a triumph for Lousteau, who returned the album to the lady with this elegy written in it:

SPLEEN

You ask for verse from me, the feeble prey  
Of this self-seeking world, a waif and stray  
    With none to whom to cling;  
From me—unhappy, purblind, hopeless devil!  
    Who e'en in what is good see only evil  
    In any earthly thing!  
This page, the pastime of a dame so fair,  
May not reflect the shadow of my care,  
    For all things have their place.  
Of love, to ladies bright, the poet sings,  
Of joy, and balls, and dress, and dainty things—  
    Nay, or of God and Grace.  
It were a bitter jest to bid the pen  
Of one so worn with life, so hating men,  
    Depict a scene of joy.  
Would you exult in sight to one born blind,  
Or—cruel! of a mother's love remind  
    Some hapless orphan boy?  
When cold despair has gripped a heart still fond,  
When there is no young heart that will respond  
    To it in love, the future is a lie.  
If there is none to weep when he is sad,  
And share his woe, a man were better dead!—  
    And so I soon must die.  
Give me your pity! often I blaspheme  
The sacred name of God. Does it not seem

That I was born in vain?  
Why should I bless him? Or why thank Him, since  
He might have made me handsome, rich, a prince—  
And I am poor and plain?

ETIENNE LOUSTEAU

September 1836, Chateau d'Anzy.

"And you have written those verses since yesterday?" cried Clagny in a suspicious tone.

"Dear me, yes, as I was following the game; it is only too evident! I would gladly have done something better for madame."

"The verses are exquisite!" cried Dinah, casting up her eyes to heaven.

"They are, alas! the expression of a too genuine feeling," replied Lousteau, in a tone of deep dejection.

The reader will, of course, have guessed that the journalist had stored these lines in his memory for ten years at least, for he had written them at the time of the Restoration in disgust at being unable to get on. Madame de la Baudraye gazed at him with such pity as the woes of genius inspire; and Monsieur de Clagny, who caught her expression, turned in hatred against this sham *Jeune Malade* (the name of an *Elegy* written by Millevoeye). He sat down to backgammon with the cure of Sancerre. The Presiding Judge's son was so extremely obliging as to place a lamp near the two players in such a way as that the light fell full on Madame de la Baudraye, who took up her work; she was embroidering in coarse wool a wicker-plait paper-basket. The three conspirators sat close at hand.

"For whom are you decorating that pretty basket, madame?" said Lousteau. "For some charity lottery, perhaps?"

"No," she said, "I think there is too much display in charity done to the sound of a trumpet."

"You are very indiscreet," said Monsieur Gravier.

"Can there be any indiscretion," said Lousteau, "in inquiring who the happy mortal may be in whose room that basket is to stand?"

"There is no happy mortal in the case," said Dinah; "it is for Monsieur de la Baudraye."

The Public Prosecutor looked slyly at Madame de la Baudraye and her work, as if he had said to himself, "I have lost my paper-basket!"

"Why, madame, may we not think him happy in having a lovely wife, happy in her decorating his paper-baskets so charmingly? The colors are red and black, like Robin Goodfellow. If ever I marry, I only hope that twelve years after, my wife's embroidered baskets may still be for me."

"And why should they not be for you?" said the lady, fixing her fine gray eyes, full of invitation, on Etienne's face.

"Parisians believe in nothing," said the lawyer bitterly. "The virtue of women is doubted above all things with terrible insolence. Yes, for some time past the books you have written, you Paris authors, your farces, your dramas, all your atrocious literature, turn on adultery—"

"Come, come, Monsieur the Public Prosecutor," retorted Etienne, laughing, "I left you to play your game in peace, I did not attack you, and here you are bringing an indictment against me. On my honor as a journalist, I have launched above a hundred articles against the writers you speak of; but I confess that in attacking them it was to attempt something like criticism. Be just; if you condemn them, you must condemn Homer, whose Iliad turns on Helen of Troy; you must condemn Milton's Paradise Lost. Eve and her serpent seem to me a pretty little case of symbolical adultery; you must suppress the Psalms of David, inspired by the highly adulterous love affairs of that Louis XIV. of Judah; you must make a bonfire of Mithridate, le Tartuffe, l'Ecole des Femmes, Phedre, Andromaque, le Mariage de Figaro, Dante's Inferno, Petrarch's Sonnets, all the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the romances of the Middle Ages, the History of France, and of Rome, etc., etc. Excepting Bossuet's Histoire des Variations and Pascal's Provinciales, I do not think there are many books left to read if you insist on eliminating all those in which illicit love is mentioned."

"Much loss that would be!" said Monsieur de Clagny.

Etienne, nettled by the superior air assumed by Monsieur de Clagny, wanted to infuriate him by one of those cold-drawn jests which consist in defending an opinion in which we have no belief, simply to rouse the wrath of a poor man who argues in good faith; a regular journalist's pleasantry.

"If we take up the political attitude into which you would force yourself," he went on, without heeding the lawyer's remark, "and assume the part of Public Prosecutor of all the ages—for every Government has its public ministry—well, the Catholic religion is infected at its fountain-head by a startling instance of illegal union. In the opinion of King Herod, and of Pilate as representing the Roman Empire, Joseph's wife figured as an adulteress, since, by her avowal, Joseph was not the father of Jesus. The heathen judge could no more recognize the Immaculate Conception than you yourself would admit the possibility of such a miracle if a new religion should nowadays be

preached as based on a similar mystery. Do you suppose that a judge and jury in a police court would give credence to the operation of the Holy Ghost! And yet who can venture to assert that God will never again redeem mankind? Is it any better now than it was under Tiberius?"

"Your argument is blasphemy," said Monsieur de Clagny.

"I grant it," said the journalist, "but not with malicious intent. You cannot suppress historical fact. In my opinion, Pilate, when he sentenced Jesus, and Anytus—who spoke for the aristocratic party at Athens—when he insisted on the death of Socrates, both represented established social interests which held themselves legitimate, invested with co-operative powers, and obliged to defend themselves. Pilate and Anytus in their time were not less logical than the public prosecutors who demanded the heads of the sergeants of La Rochelle; who, at this day, are guillotining the republicans who take up arms against the throne as established by the revolution of July, and the innovators who aim at upsetting society for their own advantage under pretence of organizing it on a better footing. In the eyes of the great families of Greece and Rome, Socrates and Jesus were criminals; to those ancient aristocracies their opinions were akin to those of the Mountain; and if their followers had been victorious, they would have produced a little 'ninety-three' in the Roman Empire or in Attica."

"What are you trying to come to, monsieur?" asked the lawyer.

"To adultery!—For thus, monsieur, a Buddhist as he smokes his pipe may very well assert that the Christian religion is founded in adultery; as we believe that Mahomet is an impostor; that his Koran is an epitome of the Old Testament and the Gospels; and that God never had the least intention of constituting that camel-driver His Prophet."

"If there were many men like you in France—and there are more than enough, unfortunately—all government would be impossible."

"And there would be no religion at all," said Madame Piedefer, who had been making strangely wry faces all through this discussion.

"You are paining them very much," said Bianchon to Lousteau in an undertone. "Do not talk of religion; you are saying things that are enough to upset them."

"If I were a writer or a romancer," said Monsieur Gravier, "I should take the side of the luckless husbands. I, who have seen many things, and strange things too, know that among the ranks of deceived husbands there are some whose attitude is not devoid of energy, men who, at a crisis, can be very dramatic, to use one of your words, monsieur," he said, addressing Etienne.

"You are very right, my dear Monsieur Gravier," said Lousteau. "I never thought that deceived husbands were ridiculous; on the contrary, I think highly of them—"

"Do you not think a husband's confidence a sublime thing?" said Bianchon. "He believes in his wife, he does not suspect her, he trusts her implicitly. But if he is so weak as to trust her, you make game of him; if he is jealous and suspicious, you hate him; what, then, I ask you, is the happy medium for a man of spirit?"

"If Monsieur de Clagny had not just expressed such vehement disapproval of the immorality of stories in which the matrimonial compact is violated, I could tell you of a husband's revenge," said Lousteau.

Monsieur de Clagny threw the dice with a convulsive jerk, and dared not look up at the journalist.

"A story, from you!" cried Madame de la Baudraye. "I should hardly have dared to hope for such a treat—"

"It is not my story, madame; I am not clever enough to invent such a tragedy. It was told me—and how delightfully!—by one of our greatest writers, the finest literary musician of our day, Charles Nodier."

"Well, tell it," said Dinah. "I never met Monsieur Nodier, so you have no comparison to fear."

"Not long after the 18th Brumaire," Etienne began, "there was, as you know, a call to arms in Brittany and la Vendee. The First Consul, anxious before all things for peace in France, opened negotiations with the rebel chiefs, and took energetic military measures; but, while combining his plans of campaign with the insinuating charm of Italian diplomacy, he also set the Machiavelian springs of the police in movement, Fouche then being at its head. And none of these means were superfluous to stifle the fire of war then blaring in the West.

"At this time a young man of the Maille family was despatched by the Chouans from Brittany to Saumur, to open communications between certain magnates of that town and its environs and the leaders of the Royalist party. The envoy was, in fact, arrested on the very day he landed—for he traveled by boat, disguised as a master mariner. However, as a man of practical intelligence, he had calculated all the risks of the undertaking; his passport and papers were all in order, and the men told off to take him were afraid of blundering.

"The Chevalier de Beauvoir—I now remember his name—had studied his part well; he appealed to the family whose name he had borrowed, persisted in

his false address, and stood his examination so boldly that he would have been set at large but for the blind belief that the spies had in their instructions, which were unfortunately only too minute. In this dilemma the authorities were more ready to risk an arbitrary act than to let a man escape to whose capture the Minister attached great importance. In those days of liberty the agents of the powers in authority cared little enough for what we now regard as legal. The Chevalier was therefore imprisoned provisionally, until the superior officials should come to some decision as to his identity. He had not long to wait for it; orders were given to guard the prisoner closely in spite of his denials.

"The Chevalier de Beauvoir was next transferred, in obedience to further orders, to the Castle of l'Escarpe, a name which sufficiently indicates its situation. This fortress, perched on very high rocks, has precipices for its trenches; it is reached on all sides by steep and dangerous paths; and, like every ancient castle, its principal gate has a drawbridge over a wide moat. The commandant of this prison, delighted to have charge of a man of family whose manners were most agreeable, who expressed himself well, and seemed highly educated, received the Chevalier as a godsend; he offered him the freedom of the place on parole, that they might together the better defy its dulness. The prisoner was more than content.

"Beauvoir was a loyal gentleman, but, unfortunately, he was also a very handsome youth. He had attractive features, a dashing air, a pleasing address, and extraordinary strength. Well made, active, full of enterprise, and loving danger, he would have made an admirable leader of guerillas, and was the very man for the part. The commandant gave his prisoner the most comfortable room, entertained him at his table, and at first had nothing but praise for the Vendean. This officer was a Corsican and married; his wife was pretty and charming, and he thought her, perhaps, not to be trusted—at any rate, he was as jealous as a Corsican and a rather ill-looking soldier may be. The lady took a fancy to Beauvoir, and he found her very much to his taste; perhaps they loved! Love in a prison is quick work. Did they commit some imprudence? Was the sentiment they entertained something warmer than the superficial gallantry which is almost a duty of men towards women?

"Beauvoir never fully explained this rather obscure episode of the story; it is at least certain that the commandant thought himself justified in treating his prisoner with excessive severity. Beauvoir was placed in the dungeon, fed on black bread and cold water, and fettered in accordance with the time-honored traditions of the treatment lavished on captives. His cell, under the fortress-yard, was vaulted with hard stone, the walls were of desperate thickness; the tower overlooked the precipice.

"When the luckless man had convinced himself of the impossibility of

escape, he fell into those day-dreams which are at once the comfort and the crowning despair of prisoners. He gave himself up to the trifles which in such cases seem so important; he counted the hours and the days; he studied the melancholy trade of being prisoner; he became absorbed in himself, and learned the value of air and sunshine; then, at the end of a fortnight, he was attacked by that terrible malady, that fever for liberty, which drives prisoners to those heroic efforts of which the prodigious achievements seem to us impossible, though true, and which my friend the doctor" (and he turned to Bianchon) "would perhaps ascribe to some unknown forces too recondite for his physiological analysis to detect, some mysteries of the human will of which the obscurity baffles science."

Bianchon shook his head in negation.

"Beauvoir was eating his heart out, for death alone could set him free. One morning the turnkey, whose duty it was to bring him his food, instead of leaving him when he had given him his meagre pittance, stood with his arms folded, looking at him with strange meaning. Conversation between them was brief, and the warder never began it. The Chevalier was therefore greatly surprised when the man said to him: 'Of course, monsieur, you know your own business when you insist on being always called Monsieur Lebrun, or citizen Lebrun. It is no concern of mine; ascertaining your name is no part of my duty. It is all the same to me whether you call yourself Peter or Paul. If every man minds his own business, the cows will not stray. At the same time, I know,' said he, with a wink, 'that you are Monsieur Charles-Felix-Theodore, Chevalier de Beauvoir, and cousin to Madame la Duchesse de Maille.—Heh?' he added after a short silence, during which he looked at his prisoner.

"Beauvoir, seeing that he was safe under lock and key, did not imagine that his position could be any the worse if his real name were known.

"'Well, and supposing I were the Chevalier de Beauvoir, what should I gain by that?' said he.

"'Oh, there is everything to be gained by it,' replied the jailer in an undertone. 'I have been paid to help you to get away; but wait a minute! If I were suspected in the smallest degree, I should be shot out of hand. So I have said that I will do no more in the matter than will just earn the money.—Look here,' said he, taking a small file out of his pocket, 'this is your key; with this you can cut through one of your bars. By the Mass, but it will not be any easy job,' he went on, glancing at the narrow loophole that let daylight into the dungeon.

"It was in a splayed recess under the deep cornice that ran round the top of the tower, between the brackets that supported the embrasures.



"'Monsieur,' said the man, 'you must take care to saw through the iron low enough to get your body through.'

"'I will get through, never fear,' said the prisoner.

"'But high enough to leave a stanchion to fasten a cord to,' the warder went on.

"'And where is the cord?' asked Beauvoir.

"'Here,' said the man, throwing down a knotted rope. 'It is made of raveled linen, that you may be supposed to have contrived it yourself, and it is long enough. When you have got to the bottom knot, let yourself drop gently, and the rest you must manage for yourself. You will probably find a carriage somewhere in the neighborhood, and friends looking out for you. But I know nothing about that.—I need not remind you that there is a man-at-arms to the right of the tower. You will take care, of course, to choose a dark night, and wait till the sentinel is asleep. You must take your chance of being shot; but—'

"'All right! All right! At least I shall not rot here,' cried the young man.

"'Well, that may happen nevertheless,' replied the jailer, with a stupid expression.

"Beauvoir thought this was merely one of the aimless remarks that such folks indulge in. The hope of freedom filled him with such joy that he could not be troubled to consider the words of a man who was no more than a better sort of peasant. He set to work at once, and had filed the bars through in the course of the day. Fearing a visit from the Governor, he stopped up the breaches with bread crumb rubbed in rust to make it look like iron; he hid his rope, and waited for a favorable night with the intensity of anticipation, the deep anguish of soul that makes a prisoner's life dramatic.

"At last, one murky night, an autumn night, he finished cutting through the bars, tied the cord firmly to the stump, and perched himself on the sill outside, holding on by one hand to the piece of iron remaining. Then he waited for the darkest hour of the night, when the sentinels would probably be asleep; this would be not long before dawn. He knew the hours of their rounds, the length of each watch, every detail with which prisoners, almost involuntarily, become familiar. He waited till the moment when one of the men-at-arms had spent two-thirds of his watch and gone into his box for shelter from the fog. Then, feeling sure that the chances were at the best for his escape, he let himself down knot by knot, hanging between earth and sky, and clinging to his rope with the strength of a giant. All was well. At the last knot but one, just as he was about to let himself drop, a prudent impulse led him to feel for the ground with his feet, and he found no footing. The predicament was awkward for a man bathed in sweat, tired, and perplexed, and in a position where his life was

at stake on even chances. He was about to risk it, when a trivial incident stopped him; his hat fell off; happily, he listened for the noise it must make in striking the ground, and he heard not a sound.

"The prisoner felt vaguely suspicious as to this state of affairs. He began to wonder whether the Commandant had not laid a trap for him—but if so, why? Torn by doubts, he almost resolved to postpone the attempt till another night. At any rate, he would wait for the first gleam of day, when it would still not be impossible to escape. His great strength enabled him to climb up again to his window; still, he was almost exhausted by the time he gained the sill, where he crouched on the lookout, exactly like a cat on the parapet of a gutter. Before long, by the pale light of dawn, he perceived as he waved the rope that there was a little interval of a hundred feet between the lowest knot and the pointed rocks below.

"Thank you, my friend, the Governor!" said he, with characteristic coolness. Then, after a brief meditation on this skilfully-planned revenge, he thought it wise to return to his cell.

"He laid his outer clothes conspicuously on the bed, left the rope outside to make it seem that he had fallen, and hid himself behind the door to await the arrival of the treacherous turnkey, arming himself with one of the iron bars he had filed out. The jailer, who returned rather earlier than usual to secure the dead man's leavings, opened the door, whistling as he came in; but when he was at arm's length, Beauvoir hit him such a tremendous blow on the head that the wretch fell in a heap without a cry; the bar had cracked his skull.

"The Chevalier hastily stripped him and put on his clothes, mimicked his walk, and, thanks to the early hour and the undoubting confidence of the warders of the great gate, he walked out and away."

It did not seem to strike either the lawyer or Madame de la Baudraye that there was in this narrative the least allusion that should apply to them. Those in the little plot looked inquiringly at each other, evidently surprised at the perfect coolness of the two supposed lovers.

"Oh! I can tell you a better story than that," said Bianchon.

"Let us hear," said the audience, at a sign from Lousteau, conveying that Bianchon had a reputation as a story-teller.

Among the stock of narratives he had in store, for every clever man has a fund of anecdotes as Madame de la Baudraye had a collection of phrases, the doctor chose that which is known as *La Grande Breteche*, and is so famous indeed, that it was put on the stage at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* under the title of *Valentine*. So it is not necessary to repeat it here, though it was then new to the inhabitants of the *Chateau d'Anzy*. And it was told with the same finish of

gesture and tone which had won such praise for Bianchon when at Mademoiselle des Touches' supper-party he had told it for the first time. The final picture of the Spanish grandee, starved to death where he stood in the cupboard walled up by Madame de Merret's husband, and that husband's last word as he replied to his wife's entreaty, "You swore on that crucifix that there was no one in that closet!" produced their full effect. There was a silent minute, highly flattering to Bianchon.

"Do you know, gentlemen," said Madame de la Baudraye, "love must be a mighty thing that it can tempt a woman to put herself in such a position?"

"I, who have certainly seen some strange things in the course of my life," said Gravier, "was cognizant in Spain of an adventure of the same kind."

"You come forward after two great performers," said Madame de la Baudraye, with coquettish flattery, as she glanced at the two Parisians. "But never mind—proceed."

"Some little time after his entry into Madrid," said the Receiver-General, "the Grand Duke of Berg invited the magnates of the capital to an entertainment given to the newly conquered city by the French army. In spite of the splendor of the affair, the Spaniards were not very cheerful; their ladies hardly danced at all, and most of the company sat down to cards. The gardens of the Duke's palace were so brilliantly illuminated, that the ladies could walk about in as perfect safety as in broad daylight. The fete was of imperial magnificence. Nothing was grudged to give the Spaniards a high idea of the Emperor, if they were to measure him by the standard of his officers.

"In an arbor near the house, between one and two in the morning, a party of French officers were discussing the chances of war, and the not too hopeful outlook prognosticated by the conduct of the Spaniards present at that grand ball.

"I can only tell you," said the surgeon-major of the company of which I was paymaster, "I applied formally to Prince Murat only yesterday to be recalled. Without being afraid exactly of leaving my bones in the Peninsula, I would rather dress the wounds made by our worthy neighbors the Germans. Their weapons do not run quite so deep into the body as these Castilian daggers. Besides, a certain dread of Spain is, with me, a sort of superstition. From my earliest youth I have read Spanish books, and a heap of gloomy romances and tales of adventures in this country have given me a serious prejudice against its manners and customs.

"Well, now, since my arrival in Madrid, I have already been, not indeed the hero, but the accomplice of a dangerous intrigue, as dark and mysterious as any romance by Lady (Mrs.) Radcliffe. I am apt to attend to my presentiments,

and I am off to-morrow. Murat will not refuse me leave, for, thanks to our varied services, we always have influential friends.'

"'Since you mean to cut your stick, tell us what's up,' said an old Republican colonel, who cared not a rap for Imperial gentility and choice language.

"The surgeon-major looked about him cautiously, as if to make sure who were his audience, and being satisfied that no Spaniard was within hearing, he said:

"'We are none but Frenchmen—then, with pleasure, Colonel Hulot. About six days since, I was quietly going home, at about eleven at night, after leaving General Montcornet, whose hotel is but a few yards from mine. We had come away together from the Quartermaster-General's, where we had played rather high at bouillotte. Suddenly, at the corner of a narrow high-street, two strangers, or rather, two demons, rushed upon me and flung a large cloak round my head and arms. I yelled out, as you may suppose, like a dog that is thrashed, but the cloth smothered my voice, and I was lifted into a chaise with dexterous rapidity. When my two companions released me from the cloak, I heard these dreadful words spoken by a woman, in bad French:

"'If you cry out, or if you attempt to escape, if you make the very least suspicious demonstration, the gentleman opposite to you will stab you without hesitation. So you had better keep quiet.—Now, I will tell you why you have been carried off. If you will take the trouble to put your hand out in this direction, you will find your case of instruments lying between us; we sent a messenger for them to your rooms, in your name. You will need them. We are taking you to a house that you may save the honor of a lady who is about to give birth to a child that she wishes to place in this gentleman's keeping without her husband's knowledge. Though monsieur rarely leaves his wife, with whom he is still passionately in love, watching over her with all the vigilance of Spanish jealousy, she had succeeded in concealing her condition; he believes her to be ill. You must bring the child into the world. The dangers of this enterprise do not concern us: only, you must obey us, otherwise the lover, who is sitting opposite to you in this carriage, and who does not understand a word of French, will kill you on the least rash movement."

"'And who are you?" I asked, feeling for the speaker's hand, for her arm was inside the sleeve of a soldier's uniform.

"'I am my lady's waiting-woman," said she, "and ready to reward you with my own person if you show yourself gallant and helpful in our necessities."

"'Gladly," said I, seeing that I was inevitably started on a perilous adventure.

"Under favor of the darkness, I felt whether the person and figure of the girl were in keeping with the idea I had formed of her from her tone of voice. The good soul had, no doubt, made up her mind from the first to accept all the chances of this strange act of kidnapping, for she kept silence very obligingly, and the coach had not been more than ten minutes on the way when she accepted and returned a very satisfactory kiss. The lover, who sat opposite to me, took no offence at an occasional quite involuntary kick; as he did not understand French, I conclude he paid no heed to them.

"I can be your mistress on one condition only," said the woman, in reply to the nonsense I poured into her ear, carried away by the fervor of an improvised passion, to which everything was unpropitious.

"And what is it?"

"That you will never attempt to find out whose servant I am. If I am to go to you, it must be at night, and you must receive me in the dark."

"Very good," said I.

"We had got as far as this, when the carriage drew up under a garden wall.

"You must allow me to bandage your eyes," said the maid. "You can lean on my arm, and I will lead you."

"She tied a handkerchief over my eyes, fastening it in a tight knot at the back of my head. I heard the sound of a key being cautiously fitted to the lock of a little side door by the speechless lover who had sat opposite to me. In a moment the waiting-woman, whose shape was slender, and who walked with an elegant jauntiness—*meneho*, as they call it," Monsieur Gravier explained in a superior tone, "a word which describes the swing which women contrive to give a certain part of their dress that shall be nameless.—'The waiting-woman'—it is the surgeon-major who is speaking," the narrator went on—"led me along the gravel walks of a large garden, till at a certain spot she stopped. From the louder sound of our footsteps, I concluded that we were close to the house. "Now silence!" said she in a whisper, "and mind what you are about. Do not overlook any of my signals; I cannot speak without terrible danger for both of us, and at this moment your life is of the first importance." Then she added: "My mistress is in a room on the ground floor. To get into it we must pass through her husband's room and close to his bed. Do not cough, walk softly, and follow me closely, so as not to knock against the furniture or tread anywhere but on the carpets I laid down."

"Here the lover gave an impatient growl, as a man annoyed by so much delay.

"The woman said no more, I heard a door open, I felt the warm air of the

house, and we stole in like thieves. Presently the girl's light hand removed the bandage. I found myself in a lofty and spacious room, badly lighted by a smoky lamp. The window was open, but the jealous husband had fitted it with iron bars. I was in the bottom of a sack, as it were.

"On the ground a woman was lying on a mat; her head was covered with a muslin veil, but I could see her eyes through it full of tears and flashing with the brightness of stars; she held a handkerchief in her mouth, biting it so hard that her teeth were set in it: I never saw finer limbs, but her body was writhing with pain like a harp-string thrown on the fire. The poor creature had made a sort of struts of her legs by setting her feet against a chest of drawers, and with both hands she held on to the bar of a chair, her arms outstretched, with every vein painfully swelled. She might have been a criminal undergoing torture. But she did not utter a cry; there was not a sound, all three speechless and motionless. The husband snored with reassuring regularity. I wanted to study the waiting-woman's face, but she had put on a mask, which she had removed, no doubt, during our drive, and I could see nothing but a pair of black eyes and a pleasingly rounded figure.

"The lover threw some towels over his mistress' legs and folded the muslin veil double over her face. As soon as I had examined the lady with care, I perceived from certain symptoms which I had noted once before on a very sad occasion in my life, that the infant was dead. I turned to the maid in order to tell her this. Instantly the suspicious stranger drew his dagger; but I had time to explain the matter to the woman, who explained in a word or two to him in a low voice. On hearing my opinion, a quick, slight shudder ran through him from head to foot like a lightning flash; I fancied I could see him turn pale under his black velvet mask.

"The waiting-woman took advantage of a moment when he was bending in despair over the dying woman, who had turned blue, to point to some glasses of lemonade standing on a table, at the same time shaking her head negatively. I understood that I was not to drink anything in spite of the dreadful thirst that parched my throat. The lover was thirsty too; he took an empty glass, poured out some fresh lemonade, and drank it off.

"At this moment the lady had a violent attack of pain, which showed me that now was the time to operate. I summoned all my courage, and in about an hour had succeeded in delivering her of the child, cutting it up to extract it. The Spaniard no longer thought of poisoning me, understanding that I had saved the mother's life. Large tears fell on his cloak. The woman uttered no sound, but she trembled like a hunted animal, and was bathed in sweat.

"At one horribly critical moment she pointed in the direction of her husband's room; he had turned in his sleep, and she alone had heard the rustle

of the sheets, the creaking of the bed or of the curtain. We all paused, and the lover and the waiting-woman, through the eyeholes of their masks, gave each other a look that said, "If he wakes, shall we kill him?"

"At that instant I put out my hand to take the glass of lemonade the Spaniard had drunk of. He, thinking that I was about to take one of the full glasses, sprang forward like a cat, and laid his long dagger over the two poisoned goblets, leaving me his own, and signing to me to drink what was left. So much was conveyed by this quick action, and it was so full of good feeling, that I forgave him his atrocious schemes for killing me, and thus burying every trace of this event.

"After two hours of care and alarms, the maid and I put her mistress to bed. The lover, forced into so perilous an adventure, had, to provide means in case of having to fly, a packet of diamonds stuck to paper; these he put into my pocket without my knowing it; and I may add parenthetically, that as I was ignorant of the Spaniard's magnificent gift, my servant stole the jewels the day after, and went off with a perfect fortune.

"I whispered my instructions to the waiting-woman as to the further care of her patient, and wanted to be gone. The maid remained with her mistress, which was not very reassuring, but I was on my guard. The lover made a bundle of the dead infant and the blood-stained clothes, tying it up tightly, and hiding it under his cloak; he passed his hand over my eyes as if to bid me to see nothing, and signed to me to take hold of the skirt of his coat. He went first out of the room, and I followed, not without a parting glance at my lady of an hour. She, seeing the Spaniard had gone out, snatched off her mask and showed me an exquisite face.

"When I found myself in the garden, in the open air, I confess that I breathed as if a heavy load had been lifted from my breast. I followed my guide at a respectful distance, watching his least movement with keen attention. Having reached the little door, he took my hand and pressed a seal to my lips, set in a ring which I had seen him wearing on a finger of his left hand, and I gave him to understand that this significant sign would be obeyed. In the street two horses were waiting; we each mounted one. My Spaniard took my bridle, held his own between his teeth, for his right hand held the bloodstained bundle, and we went off at lightning speed.

"I could not see the smallest object by which to retrace the road we came by. At dawn I found myself close by my own door, and the Spaniard fled towards the Atocha gate.'

"And you saw nothing which could lead you to suspect who the woman was whom you had attended?' the Colonel asked of the surgeon.

"One thing only,' he replied. 'When I turned the unknown lady over, I happened to remark a mole on her arm, about half-way down, as big as a lentil, and surrounded with brown hairs.'—At this instant the rash speaker turned pale. All our eyes, that had been fixed on his, followed his glance, and we saw a Spaniard, whose glittering eyes shone through a clump of orange-trees. On finding himself the object of our attention, the man vanished with the swiftness of a sylph. A young captain rushed in pursuit.

"By Heaven!' cried the surgeon, 'that basilisk stare has chilled me through, my friends. I can hear bells ringing in my ears! I may take leave of you; you will bury me here!'

"What a fool you are!' exclaimed Colonel Hulot. 'Falcon is on the track of the Spaniard who was listening, and he will call him to account.'

"Well,' cried one and another, seeing the captain return quite out of breath.

"The devil's in it,' said Falcon; 'the man went through a wall, I believe! As I do not suppose that he is a wizard, I fancy he must belong to the house! He knows every corner and turning, and easily escaped.'

"I am done for,' said the surgeon, in a gloomy voice.

"Come, come, keep calm, Bega,' said I (his name was Bega), 'we will sit on watch with you till you leave. We will not leave you this evening.'

"In point of fact, three young officers who had been losing at play went home with the surgeon to his lodgings, and one of us offered to stay with him.

"Within two days Bega had obtained his recall to France; he made arrangements to travel with a lady to whom Murat had given a strong escort, and had just finished dinner with a party of friends, when his servant came to say that a young lady wished to speak to him. The surgeon and the three officers went down suspecting mischief. The stranger could only say, 'Be on your guard—' when she dropped down dead. It was the waiting-woman, who, finding she had been poisoned, had hoped to arrive in time to warn her lover.

"Devil take it!' cried Captain Falcon, 'that is what I call love! No woman on earth but a Spaniard can run about with a dose of poison in her inside!'

"Bega remained strangely pensive. To drown the dark presentiments that haunted him, he sat down to table again, and with his companions drank immoderately. The whole party went early to bed, half drunk.

"In the middle of the night the hapless Bega was aroused by the sharp rattle of the curtain rings pulled violently along the rods. He sat up in bed, in the mechanical trepidation which we all feel on waking with such a start. He saw standing before him a Spaniard wrapped in a cloak, who fixed on him the same burning gaze that he had seen through the bushes.



"Bega shouted out, 'Help, help, come at once, friends!' But the Spaniard answered his cry of distress with a bitter laugh.—'Opium grows for all!' said he.

"Having thus pronounced sentence as it were, the stranger pointed to the three other men sleeping soundly, took from under his cloak the arm of a woman, freshly amputated, and held it out to Bega, pointing to a mole like that he had so rashly described. 'Is it the same?' he asked. By the light of the lantern the man had set on the bed, Bega recognized the arm, and his speechless amazement was answer enough.

"Without waiting for further information, the lady's husband stabbed him to the heart."

"You must tell that to the marines!" said Lousteau. "It needs their robust faith to swallow it! Can you tell me which told the tale, the dead man or the Spaniard?"

"Monsieur," replied the Receiver-General, "I nursed poor Bega, who died five days after in dreadful suffering.—That is not the end.

"At the time of the expedition sent out to restore Ferdinand VII. I was appointed to a place in Spain; but, happily for me, I got no further than Tours when I was promised the post of Receiver here at Sancerre. On the eve of setting out I was at a ball at Madame de Listomere's, where we were to meet several Spaniards of high rank. On rising from the card-table, I saw a Spanish grandee, an afrancesado in exile, who had been about a fortnight in Touraine. He had arrived very late at this ball—his first appearance in society—accompanied by his wife, whose right arm was perfectly motionless. Everybody made way in silence for this couple, whom we all watched with some excitement. Imagine a picture by Murillo come to life. Under black and hollow brows the man's eyes were like a fixed blaze; his face looked dried up, his bald skull was red, and his frame was a terror to behold, he was so emaciated. His wife—no, you cannot imagine her. Her figure had the supple swing for which the Spaniards created the word *meneho*; though pale, she was still beautiful; her complexion was dazzlingly fair—a rare thing in a Spaniard; and her gaze, full of the Spanish sun, fell on you like a stream of melted lead.

"'Madame,' said I to her, towards the end of the evening, 'what occurrence led to the loss of your arm?'

"'I lost it in the war of independence,' said she."

"Spain is a strange country," said Madame de la Baudraye. "It still shows traces of Arab manners."

"Oh!" said the journalist, laughing, "the mania for cutting off arms is an

old one there. It turns up every now and then like some of our newspaper hoaxes, for the subject has given plots for plays on the Spanish stage so early as 1570—"

"Then do you think me capable of inventing such a story?" said Monsieur Gravier, nettled by Lousteau's impertinent tone.

"Quite incapable of such a thing," said the journalist with grave irony.

"Pooh!" said Bianchon, "the inventions of romances and play-writers are quite as often transferred from their books and pieces into real life, as the events of real life are made use of on the stage or adapted to a tale. I have seen the comedy of Tartufe played out—with the exception of the close; Orgon's eyes could not be opened to the truth."

"And the tragi-comedy of Adolphe by Benjamin Constant is constantly enacted," cried Lousteau.

"And do you suppose," asked Madame de la Baudraye, "that such adventures as Monsieur Gravier has related could ever occur now, and in France?"

"Dear me!" cried Clagny, "of the ten or twelve startling crimes that are annually committed in France, quite half are mixed up with circumstances at least as extraordinary as these, and often outdoing them in romantic details. Indeed, is not this proved by the reports in the Gazette des Tribunaux—the Police news—in my opinion, one of the worst abuses of the Press? This newspaper, which was started only in 1826 or '27, was not in existence when I began my professional career, and the facts of the crime I am about to speak of were not known beyond the limits of the department where it was committed.

"In the quarter of Saint-Pierre-des-Corps at Tours a woman whose husband had disappeared at the time when the army of the Loire was disbanded, and who had mourned him deeply, was conspicuous for her excess of devotion. When the mission priests went through all the provinces to restore the crosses that had been destroyed and to efface the traces of revolutionary impiety, this widow was one of their most zealous proselytes, she carried a cross and nailed to it a silver heart pierced by an arrow; and, for a long time after, she went every evening to pray at the foot of the cross which was erected behind the Cathedral apse.

"At last, overwhelmed by remorse, she confessed to a horrible crime. She had killed her husband, as Fualdes was murdered, by bleeding him; she had salted the body and packed it in pieces into old casks, exactly as if it have been pork; and for a long time she had taken a piece every morning and thrown it into the Loire. Her confessor consulted his superiors, and told her that it would be his duty to inform the public prosecutor. The woman awaited the action of

the Law. The public prosecutor and the examining judge, on examining the cellar, found the husband's head still in pickle in one of the casks.—'Wretched woman,' said the judge to the accused, 'since you were so barbarous as to throw your husband's body into the river, why did you not get rid of the head? Then there would have been no proof.'

"'I often tried, monsieur,' said she, 'but it was too heavy.'"

"Well, and what became of the woman?" asked the two Parisians.

"She was sentenced and executed at Tours," replied the lawyer; "but her repentance and piety had attracted interest in spite of her monstrous crime."

"And do you suppose, said Bianchon, "that we know all the tragedies that are played out behind the curtain of private life that the public never lifts?—It seems to me that human justice is ill adapted to judge of crimes as between husband and wife. It has every right to intervene as the police; but in equity it knows nothing of the heart of the matter."

"The victim has in many cases been for so long the tormentor," said Madame de la Baudraye guilelessly, "that the crime would sometimes seem almost excusable if the accused could tell all."

This reply, led up to by Bianchon and by the story which Clagny had told, left the two Parisians excessively puzzled as to Dinah's position.

At bedtime council was held, one of those discussions which take place in the passages of old country-houses where the bachelors linger, candle in hand, for mysterious conversations.

Monsieur Gravier was now informed of the object in view during this entertaining evening which had brought Madame de la Baudraye's innocence to light.

"But, after all," said Lousteau, "our hostess' serenity may indicate deep depravity instead of the most child-like innocence. The Public Prosecutor looks to me quite capable of suggesting that little La Baudraye should be put in pickle——"

"He is not to return till to-morrow; who knows what may happen in the course of the night?" said Gatien.

"We will know!" cried Monsieur Gravier.

In the life of a country house a number of practical jokes are considered admissible, some of them odiously treacherous. Monsieur Gravier, who had seen so much of the world, proposed setting seals on the door of Madame de la Baudraye and of the Public Prosecutor. The ducks that denounced the poet Ibycus are as nothing in comparison with the single hair that these country

spies fasten across the opening of a door by means of two little flattened pills of wax, fixed so high up, or so low down, that the trick is never suspected. If the gallant comes out of his own door and opens the other, the broken hair tells the tale.

When everybody was supposed to be asleep, the doctor, the journalist, the receiver of taxes, and Gatien came barefoot, like robbers, and silently fastened up the two doors, agreeing to come again at five in the morning to examine the state of the fastenings. Imagine their astonishment and Gatien's delight when all four, candle in hand, and with hardly any clothes on, came to look at the hairs, and found them in perfect preservation on both doors.

"Is it the same wax?" asked Monsieur Gravier.

"Are they the same hairs?" asked Lousteau.

"Yes," replied Gatien.

"This quite alters the matter!" cried Lousteau. "You have been beating the bush for a will-o'-the-wisp."

Monsieur Gravier and Gatien exchanged questioning glances which were meant to convey, "Is there not something offensive to us in that speech? Ought we to laugh or to be angry?"

"If Dinah is virtuous," said the journalist in a whisper to Bianchon, "she is worth an effort on my part to pluck the fruit of her first love."

The idea of carrying by storm a fortress that had for nine years stood out against the besiegers of Sancerre smiled on Lousteau.

With this notion in his head, he was the first to go down and into the garden, hoping to meet his hostess. And this chance fell out all the more easily because Madame de la Baudraye on her part wished to converse with her critic. Half such chances are planned.

"You were out shooting yesterday, monsieur," said Madame de la Baudraye. "This morning I am rather puzzled as to how to find you any new amusement; unless you would like to come to La Baudraye, where you may study more of our provincial life than you can see here, for you have made but one mouthful of my absurdities. However, the saying about the handsomest girl in the world is not less true of the poor provincial woman!"

"That little simpleton Gatien has, I suppose, related to you a speech I made simply to make him confess that he adored you," said Etienne. "Your silence, during dinner the day before yesterday and throughout the evening, was enough to betray one of those indiscretions which we never commit in Paris.—What can I say? I do not flatter myself that you will understand me. In fact, I laid a plot for the telling of all those stories yesterday solely to see whether I

could rouse you and Monsieur de Clagny to a pang of remorse.—Oh! be quite easy; your innocence is fully proved.

"If you had the slightest fancy for that estimable magistrate, you would have lost all your value in my eyes.—I love perfection.

"You do not, you cannot love that cold, dried-up, taciturn little usurer on wine casks and land, who would leave any man in the lurch for twenty-five centimes on a renewal. Oh, I have fully recognized Monsieur de la Baudraye's similarity to a Parisian bill-discounter; their nature is identical.—At eight-and-twenty, handsome, well conducted, and childless—I assure you, madame, I never saw the problem of virtue more admirably expressed.—The author of Paquita la Sevillane must have dreamed many dreams!

"I can speak of such things without the hypocritical gloss lent them by young men, for I am old before my time. I have no illusions left. Can a man have any illusions in the trade I follow?"

By opening the game in this tone, Lousteau cut out all excursions in the Pays de Tendre, where genuine passion beats the bush so long; he went straight to the point and placed himself in a position to force the offer of what women often make a man pray for, for years; witness the hapless Public Prosecutor, to whom the greatest favor had consisted in clasping Dinah's hand to his heart more tenderly than usual as they walked, happy man!

And Madame de la Baudraye, to be true to her reputation as a Superior Woman, tried to console the Manfred of the Press by prophesying such a future of love as he had not had in his mind.

"You have sought pleasure," said she, "but you have never loved. Believe me, true love often comes late in life. Remember Monsieur de Gentz, who fell in love in his old age with Fanny Ellsler, and left the Revolution of July to take its course while he attended the dancer's rehearsals."

"It seems to me unlikely," replied Lousteau. "I can still believe in love, but I have ceased to believe in woman. There are in me, I suppose, certain defects which hinder me from being loved, for I have often been thrown over. Perhaps I have too strong a feeling for the ideal—like all men who have looked too closely into reality——"

Madame de la Baudraye at last heard the mind of a man who, flung into the wittiest Parisian circles, represented to her its most daring axioms, its almost artless depravity, its advanced convictions; who, if he were not really superior, acted superiority extremely well. Etienne, performing before Dinah, had all the success of a first night. Paquita of Sancerre scented the storms, the atmosphere of Paris. She spent one of the most delightful days of her life with Lousteau and Bianchon, who told her strange tales about the great men of the

day, the anecdotes which will some day form the Ana of our century; sayings and doings that were the common talk of Paris, but quite new to her.

Of course, Lousteau spoke very ill of the great female celebrity of Le Berry, with the obvious intention of flattering Madame de la Baudraye and leading her into literary confidences, by suggesting that she could rival so great a writer. This praise intoxicated Madame de la Baudraye; and Monsieur de Clagny, Monsieur Gravier, and Gatien, all thought her warmer in her manner to Etienne than she had been on the previous day. Dinah's three attaches greatly regretted having all gone to Sancerre to blow the trumpet in honor of the evening at Anzy; nothing, to hear them, had ever been so brilliant. The Hours had fled on feet so light that none had marked their pace. The two Parisians they spoke of as perfect prodigies.

These exaggerated reports loudly proclaimed on the Mall brought sixteen persons to Anzy that evening, some in family coaches, some in wagonettes, and a few bachelors on hired saddle horses. By about seven o'clock this provincial company had made a more or less graceful entry into the huge Anzy drawing-room, which Dinah, warned of the invasion, had lighted up, giving it all the lustre it was capable of by taking the holland covers off the handsome furniture, for she regarded this assembly as one of her great triumphs. Lousteau, Bianchon, and Dinah exchanged meaning looks as they studied the attitudes and listened to the speeches of these visitors, attracted by curiosity.

What invalidated ribbons, what ancestral laces, what ancient flowers, more imaginative than imitative, were boldly displayed on some perennial caps! The Presidente Boirouge, Bianchon's cousin, exchanged a few words with the doctor, from whom she extracted some "advice gratis" by expatiating on certain pains in the chest, which she declared were nervous, but which he ascribed to chronic indigestion.

"Simply drink a cup of tea every day an hour after dinner, as the English do, and you will get over it, for what you suffer from is an English malady," Bianchon replied very gravely.

"He is certainly a great physician," said the Presidente, coming back to Madame de Clagny, Madame Popinot-Chandier, and Madame Gorju, the Mayor's wife.

"They say," replied Madame de Clagny behind her fan, "that Dinah sent for him, not so much with a view to the elections as to ascertain why she has no children."

In the first excitement of this success, Lousteau introduced the great doctor as the only possible candidate at the ensuing elections. But Bianchon, to the

great satisfaction of the new Sous-prefet, remarked that it seemed to him almost impossible to give up science in favor of politics.

"Only a physician without a practice," said he, "could care to be returned as a deputy. Nominate statesmen, thinkers, men whose knowledge is universal, and who are capable of placing themselves on the high level which a legislator should occupy. That is what is lacking in our Chambers, and what our country needs."

Two or three young ladies, some of the younger men, and the elder women stared at Lousteau as if he were a mountebank.

"Monsieur Gatien Boirouge declares that Monsieur Lousteau makes twenty thousand francs a year by his writings," observed the Mayor's wife to Madame de Clagny. "Can you believe it?"

"Is it possible? Why, a Public Prosecutor gets but a thousand crowns!"

"Monsieur Gatien," said Madame Chandier, "get Monsieur Lousteau to talk a little louder. I have not heard him yet."

"What pretty boots he wears," said Mademoiselle Chandier to her brother, "and how they shine!"

"Yes—patent leather."

"Why haven't you the same?"

Lousteau began to feel that he was too much on show, and saw in the manners of the good townfolk indications of the desires that had brought them there.

"What trick can I play them?" thought he.

At this moment the footman, so called—a farm-servant put into livery—brought in the letters and papers, and among them a packet of proof, which the journalist left for Bianchon; for Madame de la Baudraye, on seeing the parcel, of which the form and string were obviously from the printers, exclaimed:

"What, does literature pursue you even here?"

"Not literature," replied he, "but a review in which I am now finishing a story to come out ten days hence. I have reached the stage of 'To be concluded in our next,' so I was obliged to give my address to the printer. Oh, we eat very hard-earned bread at the hands of these speculators in black and white! I will give you a description of these editors of magazines."

"When will the conversation begin?" Madame de Clagny asked of Dinah, as one might ask, "When do the fireworks go off?"

"I fancied we should hear some amusing stories," said Madame Popinot to

her cousin, the Presidente Boirouge.

At this moment, when the good folks of Sancerre were beginning to murmur like an impatient pit, Lousteau observed that Bianchon was lost in meditation inspired by the wrapper round the proofs.

"What is it?" asked Etienne.

"Why, here is the most fascinating romance possible on some spoiled proof used to wrap yours in. Here, read it. Olympia, or Roman Revenge."

"Let us see," said Lousteau, taking the sheet the doctor held out to him, and he read aloud as follows:—

...cavern. Rinaldo, indignant at his companions' cowardice, for they had no courage but in the open field, and dared not venture into Rome, looked at them with scorn.

"Then I go alone?" said he. He seemed to reflect, and then he went on: "You are poor wretches. I shall proceed alone, and have the rich booty to myself.—You hear me! Farewell."

"My Captain," said Lamberti, "if you should be captured without having succeeded?"

"God protects me!" said Rinaldo, pointing to the sky.

With these words he went out, and on his way he met the steward

"That is the end of the page," said Lousteau, to whom every one had listened devoutly.

"He is reading his work to us," said Gatien to Madame Popinot-Chandier's son.

"From the first word, ladies," said the journalist, jumping at an opportunity of mystifying the natives, "it is evident that the brigands are in a cave. But how careless romancers of that date were as to details which are nowadays so closely, so elaborately studied under the name of 'local color.' If the robbers were in a cavern, instead of pointing to the sky he ought to have pointed to the vault above him.—In spite of this inaccuracy, Rinaldo strikes me as a man of spirit, and his appeal to God is quite Italian. There must have been a touch of local color in this romance. Why, what with brigands, and a cavern, and one Lamberti who could foresee future possibilities—there is a whole melodrama in that page. Add to these elements a little intrigue, a peasant maiden with her hair dressed high, short skirts, and a hundred or so of bad couplets.—Oh! the public will crowd to see it! And then Rinaldo—how well the name suits Lafont! By giving him black whiskers, tightly-fitting trousers, a cloak, a moustache, a pistol, and a peaked hat—if the manager of the Vaudeville



Theatre were but bold enough to pay for a few newspaper articles, that would secure fifty performances, and six thousand francs for the author's rights, if only I were to cry it up in my columns.

"To proceed:—

The Duchess of Bracciano found her glove. Adolphe, who had brought her back to the orange grove, might certainly have supposed that there was some purpose in her forgetfulness, for at this moment the arbor was deserted. The sound of the festivities was audible in the distance.

The puppet show that had been promised had attracted all the guests to the ballroom. Never had Olympia looked more beautiful. Her lover's eyes met hers with an answering glow, and they understood each other. There was a moment of silence, delicious to their souls, and impossible to describe.

They sat down on the same bench where they had sat in the presence of the Cavaliere Paluzzi and the...

"Devil take it! Our Rinaldo has vanished!" cried Lousteau. "But a literary man once started by this page would make rapid progress in the comprehension of the plot. The Duchesse Olympia is a lady who could intentionally forget her gloves in a deserted arbor."

"Unless she may be classed between the oyster and head-clerk of an office, the two creatures nearest to marble in the zoological kingdom, it is impossible to discern in Olympia—" Bianchon began.

"A woman of thirty," Madame de la Baudraye hastily interposed, fearing some all too medical term.

"Then Adolphe must be two-and-twenty," the doctor went on, "for an Italian woman at thirty is equivalent to a Parisian of forty."

"From these two facts, the romance may easily be reconstructed," said Lousteau. "And this Cavaliere Paluzzi—what a man!—The style is weak in these two passages; the author was perhaps a clerk in the Excise Office, and wrote the novel to pay his tailor!"

"In his time," said Bianchon, "the censor flourished; you must show as much indulgence to a man who underwent the ordeal by scissors in 1805 as to those who went to the scaffold in 1793."

"Do you understand in the least?" asked Madame Gorju timidly of Madame de Clagny.

The Public Prosecutor's wife, who, to use a phrase of Monsieur Gravier's, might have put a Cossack to flight in 1814, straightened herself in her chair like a horseman in his stirrups, and made a face at her neighbor, conveying,

"They are looking at us; we must smile as if we understood."

"Charming!" said the Mayoress to Gatien. "Pray go on, Monsieur Lousteau."

Lousteau looked at the two women, two Indian idols, and contrived to keep his countenance. He thought it desirable to say, "Attention!" before going on as follows:—

...dress rustled in the silence. Suddenly Cardinal Borborigano stood before the Duchess.

"His face was gloomy, his brow was dark with clouds, and a bitter smile lurked in his wrinkles.

"Madame," said he, "you are under suspicion. If you are guilty, fly. If you are not, still fly; because, whether criminal or innocent, you will find it easier to defend yourself from a distance."

"I thank your Eminence for your solicitude," said she. "The Duke of Bracciano will reappear when I find it needful to prove that he is alive."

"Cardinal Borborigano!" exclaimed Bianchon. "By the Pope's keys! If you do not agree with me that there is a magnificent creation in the very name, if at those words dress rustled in the silence you do not feel all the poetry thrown into the part of Schedoni by Mrs. Radcliffe in *The Black Penitent*, you do not deserve to read a romance."

"For my part," said Dinah, who had some pity on the eighteen faces gazing up at Lousteau, "I see how the story is progressing. I know it all. I am in Rome; I can see the body of a murdered husband whose wife, as bold as she is wicked, has made her bed on the crater of a volcano. Every night, at every kiss, she says to herself, 'All will be discovered!'"

"Can you see her," said Lousteau, "clasping Monsieur Adolphe in her arms, to her heart, throwing her whole life into a kiss?—Adolphe I see as a well-made young man, but not clever—the sort of man an Italian woman likes. Rinaldo hovers behind the scenes of a plot we do not know, but which must be as full of incident as a melodrama by Pixerecourt. Or we can imagine Rinaldo crossing the stage in the background like a figure in one of Victor Hugo's plays."

"He, perhaps, is the husband," exclaimed Madame de la Baudraye.

"Do you understand anything of it all?" Madame Piedefer asked of the Presidente.

"Why, it is charming!" said Dinah to her mother.

All the good folks of Sancerre sat with eyes as large as five-franc pieces.

"Go on, I beg," said the hostess.

Lousteau went on:—

"Your key——"

"Have you lost it?"

"It is in the arbor."

"Let us hasten."

"Can the Cardinal have taken it?"

"No, here it is."

"What danger we have escaped!"

Olympia looked at the key, and fancied she recognized it as her own. But Rinaldo had changed it; his cunning had triumphed; he had the right key. Like a modern Cartouche, he was no less skilful than bold, and suspecting that nothing but a vast treasure could require a duchess to carry it constantly at her belt.

"Guess!" cried Lousteau. "The corresponding page is not here. We must look to page 212 to relieve our anxiety."

"If the key had been lost?"

"He would now be a dead man."

"Dead? But ought you not to grant the last request he made, and to give him his liberty on the conditions——"

"You do not know him."

"But——"

"Silence! I took you for my lover, not for my confessor."

Adolphe was silent.

"And then comes an exquisite galloping goat, a tail-piece drawn by Normand, and cut by Duplat.—the names are signed," said Lousteau.

"Well, and then?" said such of the audience as understood.

"That is the end of the chapter," said Lousteau. "The fact of this tailpiece changes my views as to the authorship. To have his book got up, under the Empire, with vignettes engraved on wood, the writer must have been a Councillor of State, or Madame Barthelemy-Hadot, or the late lamented Desforges, or Sewrin."

"'Adolphe was silent.'—Ah!" cried Bianchon, "the Duchess must have

been under thirty."

"If there is no more, invent a conclusion," said Madame de la Baudraye.

"You see," said Lousteau, "the waste sheet has been printed fair on one side only. In printer's lingo, it is a back sheet, or, to make it clearer, the other side which would have to be printed is covered all over with pages printed one above another, all experiments in making up. It would take too long to explain to you all the complications of a making-up sheet; but you may understand that it will show no more trace of the first twelve pages that were printed on it than you would in the least remember the first stroke of the bastinado if a Pasha condemned you to have fifty on the soles of your feet."

"I am quite bewildered," said Madame Popinot-Chandier to Monsieur Gravier. "I am vainly trying to connect the Councillor of State, the Cardinal, the key, and the making-up——"

"You have not the key to the jest," said Monsieur Gravier. "Well! no more have I, fair lady, if that can comfort you."

"But here is another sheet," said Bianchon, hunting on the table where the proofs had been laid.

"Capital!" said Lousteau, "and it is complete and uninjured. It is signed IV.; J, Second Edition. Ladies, the figure IV. means that this is part of the fourth volume. The letter J, the tenth letter of the alphabet, shows that this is the tenth sheet. And it is perfectly clear to me, that in spite of any publisher's tricks, this romance in four duodecimo volumes, had a great success, since it came to a second edition.—We will read on and find a clue to the mystery.

...corridor; but finding that he was pursued by the Duchess' people...

"Oh, get along!"

"But," said Madame de la Baudraye, "some important events have taken place between your waste sheet and this page."

"This complete sheet, madame, this precious made-up sheet. But does the waste sheet in which the Duchess forgets her gloves in the arbor belong to the fourth volume? Well, deuce take it—to proceed.

Rinaldo saw no safer refuge than to make forthwith for the cellar where the treasures of the Bracciano family no doubt lay hid. As light of foot as Camilla sung by the Latin poet, he flew to the entrance to the Baths of Vespasian. The torchlight already flickered on the walls when Rinaldo, with the readiness bestowed on him by nature, discovered the door concealed in the stonework, and suddenly vanished. A hideous thought then flashed on Rinaldo's brain like lightning rending a cloud: He was imprisoned!

He felt the wall with uneasy haste

"Yes, this made-up sheet follows the waste sheet. The last page of the damaged sheet was 212, and this is 217. In fact, since Rinaldo, who in the earlier fragment stole the key of the Duchess' treasure by exchanging it for another very much like it, is now—on the made-up sheet—in the palace of the Dukes of Bracciano, the story seems to me to be advancing to a conclusion of some kind. I hope it is as clear to you as it is to me.—I understand that the festivities are over, the lovers have returned to the Bracciano Palace; it is night—one o'clock in the morning. Rinaldo will have a good time."

"And Adolphe too!" said President Boirouge, who was considered rather free in his speech.

"And the style!" said Bianchon.—"Rinaldo, who saw no better refuge than to make for the cellar."

"It is quite clear that neither Maradan, nor Treuttel and Wurtz, nor Doguereau, were the printers," said Lousteau, "for they employed correctors who revised the proofs, a luxury in which our publishers might very well indulge, and the writers of the present day, would benefit greatly. Some scrubby pamphlet printer on the Quay—"

"What quay?" a lady asked of her neighbor. "They spoke of baths—"

"Pray go on," said Madame de la Baudraye.

"At any rate, it is not by a councillor," said Bianchon.

"It may be by Madame Hadot," replied Lousteau.

"What has Madame Hadot of La Charite to do with it?" the Presidente asked of her son.

"This Madame Hadot, my dear friend," the hostess answered, "was an authoress, who lived at the time of the Consulate."

"What, did women write in the Emperor's time?" asked Madame Popinot-Chandier.

"What of Madame de Genlis and Madame de Stael?" cried the Public Prosecutor, piqued on Dinah's account by this remark.

"To be sure!"

"I beg you to go on," said Madame de la Baudraye to Lousteau.

Lousteau went on saying: "Page 218.

...and gave a shriek of despair when he had vainly sought any trace of a secret spring. It was impossible to ignore the horrible truth. The door, cleverly

constructed to serve the vengeful purposes of the Duchess, could not be opened from within. Rinaldo laid his cheek against the wall in various spots; nowhere could he feel the warmer air from the passage. He had hoped he might find a crack that would show him where there was an opening in the wall, but nothing, nothing! The whole seemed to be of one block of marble.

Then he gave a hollow roar like that of a hyaena——

"Well, we fancied that the cry of the hyaena was a recent invention of our own!" said Lousteau, "and here it was already known to the literature of the Empire. It is even introduced with a certain skill in natural history, as we see in the word hollow."

"Make no more comments, monsieur," said Madame de la Baudraye.

"There, you see!" cried Bianchon. "Interest, the romantic demon, has you by the collar, as he had me a while ago."

"Read on," cried de Clagny, "I understand."

"What a coxcomb!" said the Presiding Judge in a whisper to his neighbor the Sous-prefet.

"He wants to please Madame de la Baudraye," replied the new Sous-prefet.

"Well, then I will read straight on," said Lousteau solemnly.

Everybody listened in dead silence.

A deep groan answered Rinaldo's cry, but in his alarm he took it for an echo, so weak and hollow was the sound. It could not proceed from any human breast.

"Santa Maria!" said the voice.

"If I stir from this spot I shall never find it again," thought Rinaldo, when he had recovered his usual presence of mind. "If I knock, I shall be discovered. What am I to do?"

"Who is here?" asked the voice.

"Hallo!" cried the brigand; "do the toads here talk?"

"I am the Duke of Bracciano.

Whoever you may be, if you are not a follower of the Duchess', in the name of all the saints, come towards me."

"I should have to know where to find you, Monsieur le Duc," said Rinaldo, with the insolence of a man who knows himself to be necessary.

"I can see you, my friend, for my eyes are accustomed to the darkness.

Listen: walk straight forward— good; now turn to the left—come on—this way. There, we are close to each other."

Rinaldo putting out his hands as a precaution, touched some iron bars.

"I am being deceived," cried the bandit.

"No, you are touching my cage. Sit down on a broken shaft of porphyry that is there."

"How can the Duke of Bracciano be in a cage?" asked the brigand.

"My friend, I have been here for thirty months, standing up, unable to sit down——But you, who are you?"

"I am Rinaldo, prince of the Campagna, the chief of four-and-twenty brave men whom the law describes as miscreants, whom all the ladies admire, and whom judges hang in obedience to an old habit."

"God be praised! I am saved. An honest man would have been afraid, whereas I am sure of coming to an understanding with you," cried the Duke. "Oh, my worthy deliverer, you must be armed to the teeth."

"E verissimo" (most true).

"Do you happen to have——"

"Yes, files, pincers—Corpo di Bacco! I came to borrow the treasures of the Bracciani on a long loan."

"You will earn a handsome share of them very legitimately, my good Rinaldo, and we may possibly go man hunting together——"

"You surprise me, Eccellenza!"

"Listen to me, Rinaldo. I will say nothing of the craving for vengeance that gnaws at my heart. I have been here for thirty months —you too are Italian—you will understand me! Alas, my friend, my fatigue and my horrible incarceration are nothing in comparison with the rage that devours my soul.

The Duchess of Bracciano is still one of the most beautiful women in Rome. I loved her well enough to be jealous——"

"You, her husband!"

"Yes, I was wrong, no doubt."

"It is not the correct thing, to be sure," said Rinaldo.

"My jealousy was roused by the Duchess' conduct," the Duke went on. "The event proved me right. A young Frenchman fell in love with Olympia, and she loved him. I had proofs of their reciprocal affection

"Pray excuse me, ladies," said Lousteau, "but I find it impossible to go on without remarking to you how direct this Empire literature is, going to the point without any details, a characteristic, as it seems to me, of a primitive time. The literature of that period holds a place between the summaries of chapters in *Telemaque* and the categorical reports of a public office. It had ideas, but refrained from expressing them, it was so scornful! It was observant, but would not communicate its observations to any one, it was so miserly! Nobody but Fouché ever mentioned what he had observed. 'At that time,' to quote the words of one of the most imbecile critics in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 'literature was content with a clear sketch and the simple outline of all antique statues. It did not dance over its periods.'—I should think not! It had no periods to dance over. It had no words to play with. You were plainly told that Lubin loved Toinette; that Toinette did not love Lubin; that Lubin killed Toinette and the police caught Lubin, who was put in prison, tried at the assizes, and guillotined.—A strong sketch, a clear outline! What a noble drama! Well, in these days the barbarians make words sparkle."

"Like a hair in a frost," said Monsieur de Clagny.

"So those are the airs you affect?" retorted Lousteau.

"Et quelquefois les morts," dit Monsieur de Clagny.

"Ah! Lousteau! vous vous donnez de ces R-la (airs-la)."

"What can he mean?" asked Madame de Clagny, puzzled by this vile pun.

"I seem to be walking in the dark," replied the Mayoress.

"The jest would be lost in an explanation," remarked Gatien.

"Nowadays," Lousteau went on, "a novelist draws characters, and instead of a 'simple outline,' he unveils the human heart and gives you some interest either in Lubin or in Toinette."

"For my part, I am alarmed at the progress of public knowledge in the matter of literature," said Bianchon. "Like the Russians, beaten by Charles XII., who at least learned the art of war, the reader has learned the art of writing. Formerly all that was expected of a romance was that it should be interesting. As to style, no one cared for that, not even the author; as to ideas—zero; as to local color—non est. By degrees the reader has demanded style, interest, pathos, and complete information; he insists on the five literary senses—Invention, Style, Thought, Learning, and Feeling. Then some criticism commenting on everything. The critic, incapable of inventing anything but calumny, pronounces every work that proceeds from a not perfect brain to be deformed. Some magicians, as Walter Scott, for instance, having appeared in the world, who combined all the five literary senses, such writers as had but



one—wit or learning, style or feeling—these cripples, these acephalous, maimed or purblind creatures—in a literary sense—have taken to shrieking that all is lost, and have preached a crusade against men who were spoiling the business, or have denounced their works."

"The history of your last literary quarrel!" Dinah observed.

"For pity's sake, come back to the Duke of Bracciano," cried Monsieur de Clagny.

To the despair of all the company, Lousteau went on with the made-up sheet.

I then wished to make sure of my misfortune that I might be avenged under the protection of Providence and the Law. The Duchess guessed my intentions. We were at war in our purposes before we fought with poison in our hands. We tried to tempt each other to such confidence as we could not feel, I to induce her to drink a potion, she to get possession of me. She was a woman, and she won the day; for women have a snare more than we men. I fell into it—I was happy; but I awoke next day in this iron cage. All through the day I bellowed with rage in the darkness of this cellar, over which is the Duchess' bedroom. At night an ingenious counterpoise acting as a lift raised me through the floor, and I saw the Duchess in her lover's arms. She threw me a piece of bread, my daily pittance.

"Thus have I lived for thirty months! From this marble prison my cries can reach no ear. There is no chance for me. I will hope no more. Indeed, the Duchess' room is at the furthest end of the palace, and when I am carried up there none can hear my voice. Each time I see my wife she shows me the poison I had prepared for her and her lover. I crave it for myself, but she will not let me die; she gives me bread, and I eat it.

"I have done well to eat and live; I had not reckoned on robbers!"

"Yes, Eccellenza, when those fools the honest men are asleep, we are wide awake."

"Oh, Rinaldo, all I possess shall be yours; we will share my treasure like brothers; I would give you everything—even to my Duchy——"

"Eccellenza, procure from the Pope an absolution in articulo mortis. It would be of more use to me in my walk of life."

"What you will. Only file through the bars of my cage and lend me your dagger. We have but little time, quick, quick! Oh, if my teeth were but files!—I have tried to eat through this iron."

"Eccellenza," said Rinaldo, "I have already filed through one bar."

"You are a god!"

"Your wife was at the fete given by the Princess Villaviciosa. She brought home her little Frenchman; she is drunk with love.—You have plenty of time."

"Have you done?"

"Yes."

"Your dagger?" said the Duke eagerly to the brigand.

"Here it is."

"Good. I hear the clatter of the spring."

"Do not forget me!" cried the robber, who knew what gratitude was.

"No more than my father," cried the Duke.

"Good-bye!" said Rinaldo. "Lord! How he flies up!" he added to himself as the Duke disappeared.—"No more than his father! If that is all he means to do for me.—And I had sworn a vow never to injure a woman!"

But let us leave the robber for a moment to his meditations and go up, like the Duke, to the rooms in the palace.

"Another tailpiece, a Cupid on a snail! And page 230 is blank," said the journalist. "Then there are two more blank pages before we come to the word it is such a joy to write when one is unhappily so happy as to be a novelist—Conclusion!"

Never had the Duchess been more lovely; she came from her bath clothed like a goddess, and on seeing Adolphe voluptuously reclining on piles of cushions—

"You are beautiful," said she.

"And so are you, Olympia!"

"And you still love me?"

"More and more," said he.

"Ah, none but a Frenchman knows how to love!" cried the Duchess. "Do you love me well tonight?"

"Yes."

"Then come!"

And with an impulse of love and hate—whether it was that Cardinal Borborigano had reminded her of her husband, or that she felt unwonted passion to display, she pressed the springs and held out her arms.

"That is all," said Lousteau, "for the foreman has torn off the rest in wrapping up my proofs. But it is enough to show that the author was full of promise."

"I cannot make head or tail of it," said Gatien Boirouge, who was the first to break the silence of the party from Sancerre.

"Nor I," replied Monsieur Gravier.

"And yet it is a novel of the time of the Empire," said Lousteau.

"By the way in which the brigand is made to speak," said Monsieur Gravier, "it is evident that the author knew nothing of Italy. Banditti do not allow themselves such graceful conceits."

Madame Gorju came up to Bianchon, seeing him pensive, and with a glance towards her daughter Mademoiselle Euphemie Gorju, the owner of a fairly good fortune—"What a rhodomontade!" said she. "The prescriptions you write are worth more than all that rubbish."

The Mayoress had elaborately worked up this speech, which, in her opinion, showed strong judgment.

"Well, madame, we must be lenient, we have but twenty pages out of a thousand," said Bianchon, looking at Mademoiselle Gorju, whose figure threatened terrible things after the birth of her first child.

"Well, Monsieur de Clagny," said Lousteau, "we were talking yesterday of the forms of revenge invented by husbands. What do you say to those invented by wives?"

"I say," replied the Public Prosecutor, "that the romance is not by a Councillor of State, but by a woman. For extravagant inventions the imagination of women far outdoes that of men; witness Frankenstein by Mrs. Shelley, Leone Leoni by George Sand, the works of Anne Radcliffe, and the Nouveau Promethee (New Prometheus) of Camille de Maupin."

Dinah looked steadily at Monsieur de Clagny, making him feel, by an expression that gave him a chill, that in spite of the illustrious examples he had quoted, she regarded this as a reflection on Paquita la Sevillane.

"Pooh!" said little Baudraye, "the Duke of Bracciano, whom his wife puts into a cage, and to whom she shows herself every night in the arms of her lover, will kill her—and do you call that revenge?—Our laws and our society are far more cruel."

"Why, little La Baudraye is talking!" said Monsieur Boirouge to his wife.

"Why, the woman is left to live on a small allowance, the world turns its back on her, she has no more finery, and no respect paid her—the two things

which, in my opinion, are the sum-total of woman," said the little old man.

"But she has happiness!" said Madame de la Baudraye sententiously.

"No," said the master of the house, lighting his candle to go to bed, "for she has a lover."

"For a man who thinks of nothing but his vine-stocks and poles, he has some spunk," said Lousteau.

"Well, he must have something!" replied Bianchon.

Madame de la Baudraye, the only person who could hear Bianchon's remark, laughed so knowingly, and at the same time so bitterly, that the physician could guess the mystery of this woman's life; her premature wrinkles had been puzzling him all day.

But Dinah did not guess, on her part, the ominous prophecy contained for her in her husband's little speech, which her kind old Abbe Duret, if he had been alive, would not have failed to elucidate. Little La Baudraye had detected in Dinah's eyes, when she glanced at the journalist returning the ball of his jests, that swift and luminous flash of tenderness which gilds the gleam of a woman's eye when prudence is cast to the winds, and she is fairly carried away. Dinah paid no more heed to her husband's hint to her to observe the proprieties than Lousteau had done to Dinah's significant warnings on the day of his arrival.

Any other man than Bianchon would have been surprised at Lousteau's immediate success; but he was so much the doctor, that he was not even nettled at Dinah's marked preference for the newspaper-rather than the prescription-writer! In fact, Dinah, herself famous, was naturally more alive to wit than to fame. Love generally prefers contrast to similitude. Everything was against the physician—his frankness, his simplicity, and his profession. And this is why: Women who want to love—and Dinah wanted to love as much as to be loved—have an instinctive aversion for men who are devoted to an absorbing occupation; in spite of superiority, they are all women in the matter of encroachment. Lousteau, a poet and journalist, and a libertine with a veneer of misanthropy, had that tinsel of the intellect, and led the half-idle life that attracts women. The blunt good sense and keen insight of the really great man weighed upon Dinah, who would not confess her own smallness even to herself. She said in her mind—"The doctor is perhaps the better man, but I do not like him."

Then, again, she reflected on his professional duties, wondering whether a woman could ever be anything but a subject to a medical man, who saw so many subjects in the course of a day's work. The first sentence of the aphorism written by Bianchon in her album was a medical observation striking so

directly at woman, that Dinah could not fail to be hit by it. And then Bianchon was leaving on the morrow; his practice required his return. What woman, short of having Cupid's mythological dart in her heart, could decide in so short a time?

These little things, which lead to such great catastrophes—having been seen in a mass by Bianchon, he pronounced the verdict he had come to as to Madame de la Baudraye in a few words to Lousteau, to the journalist's great amazement.

While the two friends stood talking together, a storm was gathering in the Sancerre circle, who could not in the least understand Lousteau's paraphrases and commentaries, and who vented it on their hostess. Far from finding in his talk the romance which the Public Prosecutor, the Sous-prefet, the Presiding Judge, and his deputy, Lebas, had discovered there—to say nothing of Monsieur de la Baudraye and Dinah—the ladies now gathered round the tea-table, took the matter as a practical joke, and accused the Muse of Sancerre of having a finger in it. They had all looked forward to a delightful evening, and had all strained in vain every faculty of their mind. Nothing makes provincial folks so angry as the notion of having been a laughing-stock for Paris folks.

Madame Piedefer left the table to say to her daughter, "Do go and talk to the ladies; they are quite annoyed by your behavior."

Lousteau could not fail to see Dinah's great superiority over the best women of Sancerre; she was better dressed, her movements were graceful, her complexion was exquisitely white by candlelight—in short, she stood out against this background of old faces, shy and ill-dressed girls, like a queen in the midst of her court. Visions of Paris faded from his brain; Lousteau was accepting the provincial surroundings; and while he had too much imagination to remain unimpressed by the royal splendor of this chateau, the beautiful carvings, and the antique beauty of the rooms, he had also too much experience to overlook the value of the personality which completed this gem of the Renaissance. So by the time the visitors from Sancerre had taken their leave one by one—for they had an hour's drive before them—when no one remained in the drawing-room but Monsieur de Clagny, Monsieur Lebas, Gatien, and Monsieur Gravier, who were all to sleep at Anzy—the journalist had already changed his mind about Dinah. His opinion had gone through the evolution that Madame de la Baudraye had so audaciously prophesied at their first meeting.

"Ah, what things they will say about us on the drive home!" cried the mistress of the house, as she returned to the drawing-room after seeing the President and the Presidente to their carriage with Madame and Mademoiselle Popinot-Chandier.

The rest of the evening had its pleasant side. In the intimacy of a small party each one brought to the conversation his contribution of epigrams on the figure the visitors from Sancerre had cut during Lousteau's comments on the paper wrapped round the proofs.

"My dear fellow," said Bianchon to Lousteau as they went to bed—they had an enormous room with two beds in it—"you will be the happy man of this woman's choice—*nee Piedefer!*"

"Do you think so?"

"It is quite natural. You are supposed here to have had many mistresses in Paris; and to a woman there is something indescribably inviting in a man whom other women favor—something attractive and fascinating; is it that she prides herself on being longer remembered than all the rest? that she appeals to his experience, as a sick man will pay more to a famous physician? or that she is flattered by the revival of a world-worn heart?"

"Vanity and the senses count for so much in love affairs," said Lousteau, "that there may be some truth in all those hypotheses. However, if I remain, it will be in consequence of the certificate of innocence, without ignorance, that you have given Dinah. She is handsome, is she not?"

"Love will make her beautiful," said the doctor. "And, after all, she will be a rich widow some day or other! And a child would secure her the life-interest in the Master of La Baudraye's fortune—"

"Why, it is quite an act of virtue to make love to her," said Lousteau, rolling himself up in the bed-clothes, "and to-morrow, with your help—yes, to-morrow, I—well, good-night."

On the following day, Madame de la Baudraye, to whom her husband had six months since given a pair of horses, which he also used in the fields, and an old carriage that rattled on the road, decided that she would take Bianchon so far on his way as Cosne, where he would get into the Lyons diligence as it passed through. She also took her mother and Lousteau, but she intended to drop her mother at La Baudraye, to go on to Cosne with the two Parisians, and return alone with Etienne. She was elegantly dressed, as the journalist at once perceived—bronze kid boots, gray silk stockings, a muslin dress, a green silk scarf with shaded fringe at the ends, and a pretty black lace bonnet with flowers in it. As to Lousteau, the wretch had assumed his war-paint—patent leather boots, trousers of English kerseymere with pleats in front, a very open waistcoat showing a particularly fine shirt and the black brocade waterfall of his handsome cravat, and a very thin, very short black riding-coat.

Monsieur de Clagny and Monsieur Gravier looked at each other, feeling rather silly as they beheld the two Parisians in the carriage, while they, like

two simpletons, were left standing at the foot of the steps. Monsieur de la Baudraye, who stood at the top waving his little hand in a little farewell to the doctor, could not forbear from smiling as he heard Monsieur de Clagny say to Monsieur Gravier:

"You should have escorted them on horseback."

At this juncture, Gatien, riding Monsieur de la Baudraye's quiet little mare, came out of the side road from the stables and joined the party in the chaise.

"Ah, good," said the Receiver-General, "the boy has mounted guard."

"What a bore!" cried Dinah as she saw Gatien. "In thirteen years—for I have been married nearly thirteen years—I have never had three hours' liberty."

"Married, madame?" said the journalist with a smile. "You remind me of a saying of Michaud's—he was so witty! He was setting out for the Holy Land, and his friends were remonstrating with him, urging his age, and the perils of such an expedition. 'And then,' said one, 'you are married.'—'Married!' said he, 'so little married.'"

Even the rigid Madame Piedefer could not repress a smile.

"I should not be surprised to see Monsieur de Clagny mounted on my pony to complete the escort," said Dinah.

"Well, if the Public Prosecutor does not pursue us, you can get rid of this little fellow at Sancerre. Bianchon must, of course, have left something behind on his table—the notes for the first lecture of his course—and you can ask Gatien to go back to Anzy to fetch it."

This simple little plot put Madame de la Baudraye into high spirits. From the road between Anzy to Sancerre, a glorious landscape frequently comes into view, of the noble stretches of the Loire, looking like a lake, and it was got over very pleasantly, for Dinah was happy in finding herself well understood. Love was discussed in theory, a subject allowing lovers in petto to take the measure, as it were, of each other's heart. The journalist took a tone of refined corruption to prove that love obeys no law, that the character of the lovers gives infinite variety to its incidents, that the circumstances of social life add to the multiplicity of its manifestations, that in love all is possible and true, and that any given woman, after resisting every temptation and the seductions of the most passionate lover, may be carried off her feet in the course of a few hours by a fancy, an internal whirlwind of which God alone would ever know the secret!

"Why," said he, "is not that the key to all the adventures we have talked over these three days past?"

For these three days, indeed, Dinah's lively imagination had been full of

the most insidious romances, and the conversation of the two Parisians had affected the woman as the most mischievous reading might have done. Lousteau watched the effects of this clever manoeuvre, to seize the moment when his prey, whose readiness to be caught was hidden under the abstraction caused by irresolution, should be quite dizzy.

Dinah wished to show La Baudraye to her two visitors, and the farce was duly played out of remembering the papers left by Bianchon in his room at Anzy. Gatien flew off at a gallop to obey his sovereign; Madame Piedefer went to do some shopping in Sancerre; and Dinah went on to Cosne alone with the two friends. Lousteau took his seat by the lady, Bianchon riding backwards. The two friends talked affectionately and with deep compassion for the fate of this choice nature so ill understood and in the midst of such vulgar surroundings. Bianchon served Lousteau well by making fun of the Public Prosecutor, of Monsieur Gravier, and of Gatien; there was a tone of such genuine contempt in his remarks, that Madame de la Baudraye dared not take the part of her adorers.

"I perfectly understand the position you have maintained," said the doctor as they crossed the Loire. "You were inaccessible excepting to that brain-love which often leads to heart-love; and not one of those men, it is very certain, is capable of disguising what, at an early stage of life, is disgusting to the senses in the eyes of a refined woman. To you, now, love is indispensable."

"Indispensable!" cried Dinah, looking curiously at the doctor. "Do you mean that you prescribe love to me?"

"If you go on living as you live now, in three years you will be hideous," replied Bianchon in a dictatorial tone.

"Monsieur!" said Madame de la Baudraye, almost frightened.

"Forgive my friend," said Lousteau, half jestingly. "He is always the medical man, and to him love is merely a question of hygiene. But he is quite disinterested—it is for your sake only that he speaks—as is evident, since he is starting in an hour—"

At Cosne a little crowd gathered round the old repainted chaise, with the arms on the panels granted by Louis XIV. to the new La Baudraye. Gules, a pair of scales or; on a chief azure (color on color) three cross-crosslets argent. For supporters two greyhounds argent, collared azure, chained or. The ironical motto, *Deo sic patet fides et hominibus*, had been inflicted on the converted Calvinist by Hozier the satirical.

"Let us get out; they will come and find us," said the Baroness, desiring her coachman to keep watch.



Dinah took Bianchon's arm, and the doctor set off by the banks of the Loire at so rapid a pace that the journalist had to linger behind. The physician had explained by a single wink that he meant to do Lousteau a good turn.

"You have been attracted by Etienne," said Bianchon to Dinah; "he has appealed strongly to your imagination; last night we were talking about you.—He loves you. But he is frivolous, and difficult to hold; his poverty compels him to live in Paris, while everything condemns you to live at Sancerre.—Take a lofty view of life. Make Lousteau your friend; do not ask too much of him; he will come three times a year to spend a few days with you, and you will owe to him your beauty, happiness, and fortune. Monsieur de la Baudraye may live to be a hundred; but he might die in a few days if he should leave off the flannel winding-sheet in which he swathes himself. So run no risks, be prudent both of you.—Say not a word—I have read your heart."

Madame de la Baudraye was defenceless under this serried attack, and in the presence of a man who spoke at once as a doctor, a confessor, and confidential friend.

"Indeed!" said she. "Can you suppose that any woman would care to compete with a journalist's mistresses?—Monsieur Lousteau strikes me as agreeable and witty; but he is blase, etc., etc.—"

Dinah had turned back, and was obliged to check the flow of words by which she tried to disguise her intentions; for Etienne, who seemed to be studying progress in Cosne, was coming to meet them.

"Believe me," said Bianchon, "what he wants is to be truly loved; and if he alters his course of life, it will be to the benefit of his talent."

Dinah's coachman hurried up breathlessly to say that the diligence had come in, and they walked on quickly, Madame de la Baudraye between the two men.

"Good-bye, my children!" said Bianchon, before they got into the town, "you have my blessing!"

He released Madame de la Baudraye's hand from his arm, and allowed Lousteau to draw it into his, with a tender look, as he pressed it to his heart. What a difference to Dinah! Etienne's arm thrilled her deeply. Bianchon's had not stirred her in the least. She and the journalist exchanged one of those glowing looks that are more than an avowal.

"Only provincial women wear muslin gowns in these days," thought Lousteau to himself, "the only stuff which shows every crease. This woman, who has chosen me for her lover, will make a fuss over her frock! If she had but put on a foulard skirt, I should be happy.—What is the meaning of these

difficulties——"

While Lousteau was wondering whether Dinah had put on a muslin gown on purpose to protect herself by an insuperable obstacle, Bianchon, with the help of the coachman, was seeing his luggage piled on the diligence. Finally, he came to take leave of Dinah, who was excessively friendly with him.

"Go home, Madame la Baronne, leave me here—Gatien will be coming," he added in an undertone. "It is getting late," said he aloud. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye—great man!" cried Lousteau, shaking hands with Bianchon.

When the journalist and Madame de la Baudraye, side by side in the rickety old chaise, had recrossed the Loire, they both were unready to speak. In these circumstances, the first words that break the silence are full of terrible meaning.

"Do you know how much I love you?" said the journalist point blank.

Victory might gratify Lousteau, but defeat could cause him no grief. This indifference was the secret of his audacity. He took Madame de la Baudraye's hand as he spoke these decisive words, and pressed it in both his; but Dinah gently released it.

"Yes, I am as good as an actress or a grisette," she said in a voice that trembled, though she spoke lightly. "But can you suppose that a woman who, in spite of her absurdities, has some intelligence, will have reserved the best treasures of her heart for a man who will regard her merely as a transient pleasure?—I am not surprised to hear from your lips the words which so many men have said to me—but——"

The coachman turned round.

"Here comes Monsieur Gatien," said he.

"I love you, I will have you, you shall be mine, for I have never felt for any woman the passion I have for you!" said Lousteau in her ear.

"In spite of my will, perhaps?" said she, with a smile.

"At least you must seem to have been assaulted to save my honor," said the Parisian, to whom the fatal immaculateness of clean muslin suggested a ridiculous notion.

Before Gatien had reached the end of the bridge, the outrageous journalist had crumpled up Madame de la Baudraye's muslin dress to such an effect that she was absolutely not presentable.

"Oh, monsieur!" she exclaimed in dignified reproof.

"You defied me," said the Parisian.

But Gatien now rode up with the vehemence of a duped lover. To regain a little of Madame de la Baudraye's esteem, Lousteau did his best to hide the tumbled dress from Gatien's eyes by leaning out of the chaise to speak to him from Dinah's side.

"Go back to our inn," said he, "there is still time; the diligence does not start for half an hour. The papers are on the table of the room Bianchon was in; he wants them particularly, for he will be lost without his notes for the lecture."

"Pray go, Gatien," said Dinah to her young adorer, with an imperious glance. And the boy thus commanded turned his horse and was off with a loose rein.

"Go quickly to La Baudraye," cried Lousteau to the coachman. "Madame is not well—Your mother only will know the secret of my trick," added he, taking his seat by Dinah.

"You call such infamous conduct a trick?" cried Madame de la Baudraye, swallowing down a few tears that dried up with the fire of outraged pride.

She leaned back in the corner of the chaise, crossed her arms, and gazed out at the Loire and the landscape, at anything rather than at Lousteau. The journalist put on his most ingratiating tone, and talked till they reached La Baudraye, where Dinah fled indoors, trying not to be seen by any one. In her agitation she threw herself on a sofa and burst into tears.

"If I am an object of horror to you, of aversion or scorn, I will go," said Lousteau, who had followed her. And he threw himself at her feet.

It was at this crisis that Madame Piedefer came in, saying to her daughter:

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

"Give your daughter another dress at once," said the audacious Parisian in the prim old lady's ear.

Hearing the mad gallop of Gatien's horse, Madame de la Baudraye fled to her bedroom, followed by her mother.

"There are no papers at the inn," said Gatien to Lousteau, who went out to meet him.

"And you found none at the Chateau d'Anzy either?" replied Lousteau.

"You have been making a fool of me," said Gatien, in a cold, set voice.

"Quite so," replied Lousteau. "Madame de la Baudraye was greatly annoyed by your choosing to follow her without being invited. Believe me, to bore a woman is a bad way of courting her. Dinah has played you a trick, and

you have given her a laugh; it is more than any of you has done in these thirteen years past. You owe that success to Bianchon, for your cousin was the author of the Farce of the 'Manuscript.'—Will the horse get over it?" asked Lousteau with a laugh, while Gatien was wondering whether to be angry or not.

"The horse!" said Gatien.

At this moment Madame de la Baudraye came in, dressed in a velvet gown, and accompanied by her mother, who shot angry flashes at Lousteau. It would have been too rash for Dinah to seem cold or severe to Lousteau in Gatien's presence; and Etienne, taking advantage of this, offered his arm to the supposed Lucretia; however, she declined it.

"Do you mean to cast off a man who has vowed to live for you?" said he, walking close beside her. "I shall stop at Sancerre and go home to-morrow."

"Are you coming, mamma?" said Madame de la Baudraye to Madame Piedefer, thus avoiding a reply to the direct challenge by which Lousteau was forcing her to a decision.

Lousteau handed the mother into the chaise, he helped Madame de la Baudraye by gently taking her arm, and he and Gatien took the front seat, leaving the saddle horse at La Baudraye.

"You have changed your gown," said Gatien, blunderingly, to Dinah.

"Madame la Baronne was chilled by the cool air off the river," replied Lousteau. "Bianchon advised her to put on a warm dress."

Dinah turned as red as a poppy, and Madame Piedefer assumed a stern expression.

"Poor Bianchon! he is on the road to Paris. A noble soul!" said Lousteau.

"Oh, yes!" cried Madame de la Baudraye, "he is high-minded, full of delicate feeling——"

"We were in such good spirits when we set out," said Lousteau; "now you are overdone, and you speak to me so bitterly—why? Are you not accustomed to being told how handsome and how clever you are? For my part, I say boldly, before Gatien, I give up Paris; I mean to stay at Sancerre and swell the number of your cavalieri serventi. I feel so young again in my native district; I have quite forgotten Paris and all its wickedness, and its bores, and its wearisome pleasures.—Yes, my life seems in a way purified."

Dinah allowed Lousteau to talk without even looking at him; but at last there was a moment when this serpent's rhodomontade was really so inspired by the effort he made to affect passion in phrases and ideas of which the

meaning, though hidden from Gatien, found a loud response in Dinah's heart, that she raised her eyes to his. This look seemed to crown Lousteau's joy; his wit flowed more freely, and at last he made Madame de la Baudraye laugh. When, under circumstances which so seriously compromise her pride, a woman has been made to laugh, she is finally committed.

As they drove in by the spacious graveled forecourt, with its lawn in the middle, and the large vases filled with flowers which so well set off the facade of Anzy, the journalist was saying:

"When women love, they forgive everything, even our crimes; when they do not love, they cannot forgive anything—not even our virtues.—Do you forgive me," he added in Madame de la Baudraye's ear, and pressing her arm to his heart with tender emphasis. And Dinah could not help smiling.

All through dinner, and for the rest of the evening, Etienne was in the most delightful spirits, inexhaustibly cheerful; but while thus giving vent to his intoxication, he now and then fell into the dreamy abstraction of a man who seems rapt in his own happiness.

After coffee had been served, Madame de la Baudraye and her mother left the men to wander about the gardens. Monsieur Gravier then remarked to Monsieur de Clagny:

"Did you observe that Madame de la Baudraye, after going out in a muslin gown came home in a velvet?"

"As she got into the carriage at Cosne, the muslin dress caught on a brass nail and was torn all the way down," replied Lousteau.

"Oh!" exclaimed Gatien, stricken to the heart by hearing two such different explanations.

The journalist, who understood, took Gatien by the arm and pressed it as a hint to him to be silent. A few minutes later Etienne left Dinah's three adorers and took possession of little La Baudraye. Then Gatien was cross-questioned as to the events of the day. Monsieur Gravier and Monsieur de Clagny were dismayed to hear that on the return from Cosne Lousteau had been alone with Dinah, and even more so on hearing the two versions explaining the lady's change of dress. And the three discomfited gentlemen were in a very awkward position for the rest of the evening.

Next day each, on various business, was obliged to leave Anzy; Dinah remained with her mother, Lousteau, and her husband. The annoyance vented by the three victims gave rise to an organized rebellion in Sancerre. The surrender of the Muse of Le Berry, of the Nivernais, and of Morvan was the cause of a perfect hue and cry of slander, evil report, and various guesses in

which the story of the muslin gown held a prominent place. No dress Dinah had ever worn had been so much commented on, or was half as interesting to the girls, who could not conceive what the connection might be, that made the married women laugh, between love and a muslin gown.

The Presidente Boirouge, furious at her son's discomfiture, forgot the praise she had lavished on the poem of Paquita, and fulminated terrific condemnation on the woman who could publish such a disgraceful work.

"The wretched woman commits every crime she writes about," said she. "Perhaps she will come to the same end as her heroine!"

Dinah's fate among the good folks of Sancerre was like that of Marechal Soult in the opposition newspapers; as long as he is minister he lost the battle of Toulouse; whenever he is out of the Government he won it! While she was virtuous, Dinah was a match for Camille de Maupin, a rival of the most famous women; but as soon as she was happy, she was an unhappy creature.

Monsieur de Clagny was her valiant champion; he went several times to the Chateau d'Anzy to acquire the right to contradict the rumors current as to the woman he still faithfully adored, even in her fall; and he maintained that she and Lousteau were engaged together on some great work. But the lawyer was laughed to scorn.

The month of October was lovely; autumn is the finest season in the valley of the Loire; but in 1836 it was unusually glorious. Nature seemed to aid and abet Dinah, who, as Bianchon had predicted, gradually developed a heart-felt passion. In one month she was an altered woman. She was surprised to find in herself so many inert and dormant qualities, hitherto in abeyance. To her Lousteau seemed an angel; for heart-love, the crowning need of a great nature, had made a new woman of her. Dinah was alive! She had found an outlet for her powers, she saw undreamed-of vistas in the future—in short, she was happy, happy without alarms or hindrances. The vast castle, the gardens, the park, the forest, favored love.

Lousteau found in Madame de la Baudraye an artlessness, nay, if you will, an innocence of mind which made her very original; there was much more of the unexpected and winning in her than in a girl. Lousteau was quite alive to a form of flattery which in most women is assumed, but which in Dinah was genuine; she really learned from him the ways of love; he really was the first to reign in her heart. And, indeed, he took the trouble to be exceedingly amiable.

Men, like women, have a stock in hand of recitatives, of cantabile, of nocturnes, airs and refrains—shall we say of recipes, although we speak of love—which each one believes to be exclusively his own. Men who have

reached Lousteau's age try to distribute the "movements" of this repertoire through the whole opera of a passion. Lousteau, regarding this adventure with Dinah as a mere temporary connection, was eager to stamp himself on her memory in indelible lines; and during that beautiful October he was prodigal of his most entrancing melodies and most elaborate barcarolles. In fact, he exhausted every resource of the stage management of love, to use an expression borrowed from the theatrical dictionary, and admirably descriptive of his manoeuvres.

"If that woman ever forgets me!" he would sometimes say to himself as they returned together from a long walk in the woods, "I will owe her no grudge—she will have found something better."

When two beings have sung together all the duets of that enchanting score, and still love each other, it may be said that they love truly.

Lousteau, however, had not time to repeat himself, for he was to leave Anzy in the early days of November. His paper required his presence in Paris. Before breakfast, on the day before he was to leave, the journalist and Dinah saw the master of the house come in with an artist from Nevers, who restored carvings of all kinds.

"What are you going to do?" asked Lousteau. "What is to be done to the chateau?"

"This is what I am going to do," said the little man, leading Lousteau, the local artist, and Dinah out on the terrace.

He pointed out, on the front of the building, a shield supported by two sirens, not unlike that which may be seen on the arcade, now closed, through which there used to be a passage from the Quai des Tuileries to the courtyard of the old Louvre, and over which the words may still be seen, "Bibliothèque du Cabinet du Roi." This shield bore the arms of the noble House of Uxelles, namely, Or and gules party per fess, with two lions or, dexter and sinister as supporters. Above, a knight's helm, mantled of the tincture of the shield, and surmounted by a ducal coronet. Motto, *Cy paroist!* A proud and sonorous device.

"I want to put my own coat of arms in the place of that of the Uxelles; and as they are repeated six times on the two fronts and the two wings, it is not a trifling affair."

"Your arms, so new, and since 1830!" exclaimed Dinah.

"Have I not created an entail?"

"I could understand it if you had children," said the journalist.

"Oh!" said the old man, "Madame de la Baudraye is still young; there is no

time lost."

This allusion made Lousteau smile; he did not understand Monsieur de la Baudraye.

"There, Didine!" said he in Dinah's ear, "what a waste of remorse!"

Dinah begged him to give her one day more, and the lovers parted after the manner of certain theatres, which give ten last performances of a piece that is paying. And how many promises they made! How many solemn pledges did not Dinah exact and the unblushing journalist give her!

Dinah, with superiority of the Superior Woman, accompanied Lousteau, in the face of all the world, as far as Cosne, with her mother and little La Baudraye. When, ten days later, Madame de la Baudraye saw in her drawing-room at La Baudraye, Monsieur de Clagny, Gatien, and Gravier, she found an opportunity of saying to each in turn:

"I owe it to Monsieur Lousteau that I discovered that I had not been loved for my own sake."

And what noble speeches she uttered, on man, on the nature of his feelings, on the end of his base passions, and so forth. Of Dinah's three worshipers, Monsieur de Clagny only said to her: "I love you, come what may"—and Dinah accepted him as her confidant, lavished on him all the marks of friendship which women can devise for the Gurths who are ready thus to wear the collar of gilded slavery.

In Paris once more, Lousteau had, in a few weeks, lost the impression of the happy time he had spent at the Chateau d'Anzy. This is why: Lousteau lived by his pen.

In this century, especially since the triumph of the bourgeoisie—the commonplace, money-saving citizen—who takes good care not to imitate Francis I. or Louis XIV.—to live by the pen is a form of penal servitude to which a galley-slave would prefer death. To live by the pen means to create—to create to-day, and to-morrow, and incessantly—or to seem to create; and the imitation costs as dear as the reality. So, besides his daily contribution to a newspaper, which was like the stone of Sisyphus, and which came every Monday, crashing down on to the feather of his pen, Etienne worked for three or four literary magazines. Still, do not be alarmed; he put no artistic conscientiousness into his work. This man of Sancerre had a facility, a carelessness, if you call it so, which ranked him with those writers who are mere scribes, literary hacks. In Paris, in our day, hack-work cuts a man off from every pretension to a literary position. When he can do no more, or no longer cares for advancement, the man who can write becomes a journalist and a hack.



The life he leads is not unpleasing. Blue-stockings, beginners in every walk of life, actresses at the outset or the close of a career, publishers and authors, all make much of these writers of the ready pen. Lousteau, a thorough man about town, lived at scarcely any expense beyond paying his rent. He had boxes at all the theatres; the sale of the books he reviewed or left unreviewed paid for his gloves; and he would say to those authors who published at their own expense, "I have your book always in my hands!" He took toll from vanity in the form of drawings or pictures. Every day had its engagements to dinner, every night its theatre, every morning was filled up with callers, visits, and lounging. His serial in the paper, two novels a year for weekly magazines, and his miscellaneous articles were the tax he paid for this easy-going life. And yet, to reach this position, Etienne had struggled for ten years.

At the present time, known to the literary world, liked for the good or the mischief he did with equally facile good humor, he let himself float with the stream, never caring for the future. He ruled a little set of newcomers, he had friendships—or rather, habits of fifteen years' standing, and men with whom he supped, and dined, and indulged his wit. He earned from seven to eight hundred francs a month, a sum which he found quite insufficient for the prodigality peculiar to the impecunious. Indeed, Lousteau found himself now just as hard up as when, on first appearing in Paris, he had said to himself, "If I had but five hundred francs a month, I should be rich!"

The cause of this phenomenon was as follows: Lousteau lived in the Rue des Martyrs in pretty ground-floor rooms with a garden, and splendidly furnished. When he settled there in 1833 he had come to an agreement with an upholsterer that kept his pocket money low for a long time. These rooms were let for twelve hundred francs. The months of January, April, July, and October were, as he phrased it, his indigent months. The rent and the porter's account cleaned him out. Lousteau took no fewer hackney cabs, spend a hundred francs in breakfasts all the same, smoked thirty francs' worth of cigars, and could never refuse the mistress of a day a dinner or a new dress. He thus dipped so deeply into the fluctuating earnings of the following months, that he could no more find a hundred francs on his chimney-piece now, when he was making seven or eight hundred francs a month, than he could in 1822, when he was hardly getting two hundred.

Tired, sometimes, by the incessant vicissitudes of a literary life, and as much bored by amusement as a courtesan, Lousteau would get out of the tideway and sit on the bank, and say to one and another of his intimate allies—Nathan or Bixiou, as they sat smoking in his scrap of garden, looking out on an evergreen lawn as big as a dinner-table:

"What will be the end of us? White hairs are giving us respectful hints!"

"Lord! we shall marry when we choose to give as much thought to the matter as we give to a drama or a novel," said Nathan.

"And Florine?" retorted Bixiou.

"Oh, we all have a Florine," said Etienne, flinging away the end of his cigar and thinking of Madame Schontz.

Madame Schontz was a pretty enough woman to put a very high price on the interest on her beauty, while reserving absolute ownership for Lousteau, the man of her heart. Like all those women who get the name in Paris of Lorettes, from the Church of Notre Dame de Lorette, round about which they dwell, she lived in the Rue Flechier, a stone's throw from Lousteau. This lady took a pride and delight in teasing her friends by boasting of having a Wit for her lover.

These details of Lousteau's life and fortune are indispensable, for this penury and this bohemian existence of a man to whom Parisian luxury had become a necessity, were fated to have a cruel influence on Dinah's life. Those to whom the bohemia of Paris is familiar will now understand how it was that, by the end of a fortnight, the journalist, up to his ears in the literary environment, could laugh about his Baroness with his friends and even with Madame Schontz. To such readers as regard such things as utterly mean, it is almost useless to make excuses which they will not accept.

"What did you do at Sancerre?" asked Bixiou the first time he met Lousteau.

"I did good service to three worthy provincials—a Receiver-General of Taxes, a little cousin of his, and a Public Prosecutor, who for ten years had been dancing round and round one of the hundred 'Tenth Muses' who adorn the Departments," said he. "But they had no more dared to touch her than we touch a decorated cream at dessert till some strong-minded person has made a hole in it."

"Poor boy!" said Bixiou. "I said you had gone to Sancerre to turn Pegasus out to grass."

"Your joke is as stupid as my Muse is handsome," retorted Lousteau. "Ask Bianchon, my dear fellow."

"A Muse and a Poet! A homoeopathic cure then!" said Bixiou.

On the tenth day Lousteau received a letter with the Sancerre post-mark.

"Good! very good!" said Lousteau.

"'Beloved friend, idol of my heart and soul——' twenty pages of it! all at one sitting, and dated midnight! She writes when she finds herself alone. Poor

woman! Ah, ha! And a postscript—

"I dare not ask you to write to me as I write, every day; still, I hope to have a few lines from my dear one every week, to relieve my mind.'—What a pity to burn it all! it is really well written," said Lousteau to himself, as he threw the ten sheets of paper into the fire after having read them. "That woman was born to reel off copy!"

Lousteau was not much afraid of Madame Schontz, who really loved him for himself, but he had supplanted a friend in the heart of a Marquise. This Marquise, a lady nowise coy, sometimes dropped in unexpectedly at his rooms in the evening, arriving veiled in a hackney coach; and she, as a literary woman, allowed herself to hunt through all his drawers.

A week later, Lousteau, who hardly remembered Dinah, was startled by another budget from Sancerre—eight leaves, sixteen pages! He heard a woman's step; he thought it announced a search from the Marquise, and tossed these rapturous and entrancing proofs of affections into the fire—unread!

"A woman's letter!" exclaimed Madame Schontz, as she came in. "The paper, the wax, are scented—"

"Here you are, sir," said a porter from the coach office, setting down two huge hampers in the ante-room. "Carriage paid. Please to sign my book."

"Carriage paid!" cried Madame Schontz. "It must have come from Sancerre."

"Yes, madame," said the porter.

"Your Tenth Muse is a remarkably intelligent woman," said the courtesan, opening one of the hampers, while Lousteau was writing his name. "I like a Muse who understands housekeeping, and who can make game pies as well as blots. And, oh! what beautiful flowers!" she went on, opening the second hamper. "Why, you could get none finer in Paris!—And here, and here! A hare, partridges, half a roebuck!—We will ask your friends and have a famous dinner, for Athalie has a special talent for dressing venison."

Lousteau wrote to Dinah; but instead of writing from the heart, he was clever. The letter was all the more insidious; it was like one of Mirabeau's letters to Sophie. The style of a true lover is transparent. It is a clear stream which allows the bottom of the heart to be seen between two banks, bright with the trifles of existence, and covered with the flowers of the soul that blossom afresh every day, full of intoxicating beauty—but only for two beings. As soon as a love letter has any charm for a third reader, it is beyond doubt the product of the head, not of the heart. But a woman will always be beguiled; she always believes herself to be the determining cause of this flow

of wit.

By the end of December Lousteau had ceased to read Dinah's letters; they lay in a heap in a drawer of his chest that was never locked, under his shirts, which they scented.

Then one of those chances came to Lousteau which such bohemians ought to clutch by every hair. In the middle of December, Madame Schontz, who took a real interest in Etienne, sent to beg him to call on her one morning on business.

"My dear fellow, you have a chance of marrying."

"I can marry very often, happily, my dear."

"When I say marrying, I mean marrying well. You have no prejudices: I need not mince matters. This is the position: A young lady has got into trouble; her mother knows nothing of even a kiss. Her father is an honest notary, a man of honor; he has been wise enough to keep it dark. He wants to get his daughter married within a fortnight, and he will give her a fortune of a hundred and fifty thousand francs—for he has three other children; but—and it is not a bad idea—he will add a hundred thousand francs, under the rose, hand to hand, to cover the damages. They are an old family of Paris citizens, Rue des Lombards——"

"Well, then, why does not the lover marry her?"

"Dead."

"What a romance! Such things are nowhere to be heard of but in the Rue des Lombards."

"But do not take it into your head that a jealous brother murdered the seducer. The young man died in the most commonplace way of a pleurisy caught as he came out of the theatre. A head-clerk and penniless, the man entrapped the daughter in order to marry into the business—A judgment from heaven, I call it!"

"Where did you hear the story?"

"From Malaga; the notary is her milord."

"What, Cardot, the son of that little old man in hair-powder, Florentine's first friend?"

"Just so. Malaga, whose 'fancy' is a little tomtit of a fiddler of eighteen, cannot in conscience make such a boy marry the girl. Besides, she has no cause to do him an ill turn.—Indeed, Monsieur Cardot wants a man of thirty at least. Our notary, I feel sure, will be proud to have a famous man for his son-in-law. So just feel yourself all over.—You will pay your debts, you will have

twelve thousand francs a year, and be a father without any trouble on your part; what do you say to that to the good? And, after all, you only marry a very consolable widow. There is an income of fifty thousand francs in the house, and the value of the connection, so in due time you may look forward to not less than fifteen thousand francs a year more for your share, and you will enter a family holding a fine political position; Cardot is the brother-in-law of old Camusot, the depute who lived so long with Fanny Beaupre."

"Yes," said Lousteau, "old Camusot married little Daddy Cardot's eldest daughter, and they had high times together!"

"Well!" Madame Schontz went on, "and Madame Cardot, the notary's wife, was a Chiffreville—manufacturers of chemical products, the aristocracy of these days! Potash, I tell you! Still, this is the unpleasant side of the matter. You will have a terrible mother-in-law, a woman capable of killing her daughter if she knew—! This Cardot woman is a bigot; she has lips like two faded narrow pink ribbons.

"A man of the town like you would never pass muster with that woman, who, in her well-meaning way, will spy out your bachelor life and know every fact of the past. However, Cardot says he means to exert his paternal authority. The poor man will be obliged to do the civil to his wife for some days; a woman made of wood, my dear fellow; Malaga, who has seen her, calls her a penitential scrubber. Cardot is a man of forty; he will be mayor of his district, and perhaps be elected deputy. He is prepared to give in lieu of the hundred thousand francs a nice little house in the Rue Saint-Lazare, with a forecourt and a garden, which cost him no more than sixty thousand at the time of the July overthrow; he would sell, and that would be an opportunity for you to go and come at the house, to see the daughter, and be civil to the mother.—And it would give you a look of property in Madame Cardot's eyes. You would be housed like a prince in that little mansion. Then, by Camusot's interest, you may get an appointment as librarian to some public office where there is no library.—Well, and then if you invest your money in backing up a newspaper, you will get ten thousand francs a year on it, you can earn six, your librarianship will bring you in four.—Can you do better for yourself?

"If you were to marry a lamb without spot, it might be a light woman by the end of two years. What is the damage?—an anticipated dividend! It is quite the fashion.

"Take my word for it, you can do no better than come to dine with Malaga to-morrow. You will meet your father-in-law; he will know the secret has been let out—by Malaga, with whom he cannot be angry—and then you are master of the situation. As to your wife!—Why her misconduct leaves you as free as a bachelor——"

"Your language is as blunt as a cannon ball."

"I love you for your own sake, that is all—and I can reason. Well! why do you stand there like a wax image of Abd-el-Kader? There is nothing to meditate over. Marriage is heads or tails—well, you have tossed heads up."

"You shall have my reply to-morrow," said Lousteau.

"I would sooner have it at once; Malaga will write you up to-night."

"Well, then, yes."

Lousteau spent the evening in writing a long letter to the Marquise, giving her the reasons which compelled him to marry; his constant poverty, the torpor of his imagination, his white hairs, his moral and physical exhaustion—in short, four pages of arguments.—"As to Dinah, I will send her a circular announcing the marriage," said he to himself. "As Bixiou says, I have not my match for knowing how to dock the tail of a passion."

Lousteau, who at first had been on some ceremony with himself, by next day had come to the point of dreading lest the marriage should not come off. He was pressingly civil to the notary.

"I knew monsieur your father," said he, "at Florentine's, so I may well know you here, at Mademoiselle Turquet's. Like father, like son. A very good fellow and a philosopher, was little Daddy Cardot—excuse me, we always called him so. At that time, Florine, Florentine, Tullia, Coralie, and Mariette were the five fingers of your hand, so to speak—it is fifteen years ago. My follies, as you may suppose, are a thing of the past.—In those days it was pleasure that ran away with me; now I am ambitious; but, in our day, to get on at all a man must be free from debt, have a good income, a wife, and a family. If I pay taxes enough to qualify me, I may be a deputy yet, like any other man."

Maitre Cardot appreciated this profession of faith. Lousteau had laid himself out to please and the notary liked him, feeling himself more at his ease, as may be easily imagined, with a man who had known his father's secrets than he would have been with another. On the following day Lousteau was introduced to the Cardot family as the purchaser of the house in the Rue Saint-Lazare, and three days later he dined there.

Cardot lived in an old house near the Place du Chatelet. In this house everything was "good." Economy covered every scrap of gilding with green gauze; all the furniture wore holland covers. Though it was impossible to feel a shade of uneasiness as to the wealth of the inhabitants, at the end of half an hour no one could suppress a yawn. Boredom perched in every nook; the curtains hung dolefully; the dining-room was like Harpagon's. Even if

Lousteau had not known all about Malaga, he could have guessed that the notary's real life was spent elsewhere.

The journalist saw a tall, fair girl with blue eyes, at once shy and languishing. The elder brother took a fancy to him; he was the fourth clerk in the office, but strongly attracted by the snares of literary fame, though destined to succeed his father. The younger sister was twelve years old. Lousteau, assuming a little Jesuitical air, played the Monarchist and Churchman for the benefit of the mother, was quite smooth, deliberate, and complimentary.

Within three weeks of their introduction, at his fourth dinner there, Felicie Cardot, who had been watching Lousteau out of the corner of her eye, carried him a cup of coffee where he stood in the window recess, and said in a low voice, with tears in her eyes:

"I will devote my whole life, monsieur, to thanking you for your sacrifice in favor of a poor girl——"

Lousteau was touched; there was so much expression in her look, her accent, her attitude. "She would make a good man happy," thought he, pressing her hand in reply.

Madame Cardot looked upon her son-in-law as a man with a future before him; but, above all the fine qualities she ascribed to him, she was most delighted by his high tone of morals. Etienne, prompted by the wily notary, had pledged his word that he had no natural children, no tie that could endanger the happiness of her dear Felicie.

"You may perhaps think I go rather too far," said the bigot to the journalist; "but in giving such a jewel as my Felicie to any man, one must think of the future. I am not one of those mothers who want to be rid of their daughters. Monsieur Cardot hurries matters on, urges forward his daughter's marriage; he wishes it over. This is the only point on which we differ.—Though with a man like you, monsieur, a literary man whose youth has been preserved by hard work from the moral shipwreck now so prevalent, we may feel quite safe; still, you would be the first to laugh at me if I looked for a husband for my daughter with my eyes shut. I know you are not an innocent, and I should be very sorry for my Felicie if you were" (this was said in a whisper); "but if you had any liaison—For instance, monsieur, you have heard of Madame Roguin, the wife of a notary who, unhappily for our faculty, was sadly notorious. Madame Roguin has, ever since 1820, been kept by a banker——"

"Yes, du Tillet," replied Etienne; but he bit his tongue as he recollected how rash it was to confess to an acquaintance with du Tillet.

"Yes.—Well, monsieur, if you were a mother, would you not quake at the thought that Madame du Tillet's fate might be your child's? At her age, and

nee de Granville! To have as a rival a woman of fifty and more. Sooner would I see my daughter dead than give her to a man who had such a connection with a married woman. A grisette, an actress, you take her and leave her.—There is no danger, in my opinion, from women of that stamp; love is their trade, they care for no one, one down and another to come on!—But a woman who has sinned against duty must hug her sin, her only excuse is constancy, if such a crime can ever have an excuse. At least, that is the view I hold of a respectable woman's fall, and that is what makes it so terrible——"

Instead of looking for the meaning of these speeches, Etienne made a jest of them at Malaga's, whither he went with his father-in-law elect; for the notary and the journalist were the best of friends.

Lousteau had already given himself the airs of a person of importance; his life at last was to have a purpose; he was in luck's way, and in a few days would be the owner of a delightful little house in the Rue Saint-Lazare; he was going to be married to a charming woman, he would have about twenty thousand francs a year, and could give the reins to his ambition; the young lady loved him, and he would be connected with several respectable families. In short, he was in full sail on the blue waters of hope.

Madame Cardot had expressed a wish to see the prints for *Gil Blas*, one of the illustrated volumes which the French publishers were at that time bringing out, and Lousteau had taken the first numbers for the lady's inspection. The lawyer's wife had a scheme of her own, she had borrowed the book merely to return it; she wanted an excuse for walking in on her future son-in-law quite unexpectedly. The sight of those bachelor rooms, which her husband had described as charming, would tell her more, she thought, as to Lousteau's habits of life than any information she could pick up. Her sister-in-law, Madame Camusot, who knew nothing of the fateful secret, was terrified at such a marriage for her niece. Monsieur Camusot, a Councillor of the Supreme Court, old Camusot's son by his first marriage, had given his step-mother, who was Cardot's sister, a far from flattering account of the journalist.

Lousteau, clever as he was, did not think it strange that the wife of a rich notary should wish to inspect a volume costing fifteen francs before deciding on the purchase. Your clever man never condescends to study the middle-class, who escape his ken by this want of attention; and while he is making game of them, they are at leisure to throttle him.

So one day early in January 1837, Madame Cardot and her daughter took a hackney coach and went to the Rue des Martyrs to return the parts of *Gil Blas* to Felicie's betrothed, both delighted at the thought of seeing Lousteau's rooms. These domiciliary visitations are not unusual in the old citizen class. The porter at the front gate was not in; but his daughter, on being informed by



the worthy lady that she was in the presence of Monsieur Lousteau's future mother-in-law and bride, handed over the key of the apartment—all the more readily because Madame Cardot placed a gold piece in her hand.

It was by this time about noon, the hour at which the journalist would return from breakfasting at the Cafe Anglais. As he crossed the open space between the Church of Notre-Dame de Lorette and the Rue des Martyrs, Lousteau happened to look at a hired coach that was toiling up the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, and he fancied it was a dream when he saw the face of Dinah! He stood frozen to the spot when, on reaching his house, he beheld his Didine at the coach door.

"What has brought you here?" he inquired.—He adopted the familiar tu. The formality of vous was out of the question to a woman he must get rid of.

"Why, my love," cried she, "have you not read my letters?"

"Certainly I have," said Lousteau.

"Well, then?"

"Well, then?"

"You are a father," replied the country lady.

"Faugh!" cried he, disregarding the barbarity of such an exclamation. "Well," thought he to himself, "she must be prepared for the blow."

He signed to the coachman to wait, gave his hand to Madame de la Baudraye, and left the man with the chaise full of trunks, vowing that he would send away illico, as he said to himself, the woman and her luggage, back to the place she had come from.

"Monsieur, monsieur," called out little Pamela.

The child had some sense, and felt that three women must not be allowed to meet in a bachelor's rooms.

"Well, well!" said Lousteau, dragging Dinah along.

Pamela concluded that the lady must be some relation; however, she added:

"The key is in the door; your mother-in-law is there."

In his agitation, while Madame de la Baudraye was pouring out a flood of words, Etienne understood the child to say, "Mother is there," the only circumstance that suggested itself as possible, and he went in.

Felicie and her mother, who were by this time in the bed-room, crept into a corner on seeing Etienne enter with a woman.

"At last, Etienne, my dearest, I am yours for life!" cried Dinah, throwing her arms round his neck, and clasping him closely, while he took the key from the outside of the door. "Life is a perpetual anguish to me in that house at Anzy. I could bear it no longer; and when the time came for me to proclaim my happiness—well, I had not the courage.—Here I am, your wife with your child! And you have not written to me; you have left me two months without a line."

"But, Dinah, you place me in the greatest difficulty—"

"Do you love me?"

"How can I do otherwise than love you?—But would you not have been wiser to remain at Sancerre?—I am in the most abject poverty, and I fear to drag you into it—"

"Your misery will be paradise to me. I only ask to live here, never to go out —"

"Good God! that is all very fine in words, but—" Dinah sat down and melted into tears as she heard this speech, roughly spoken.

Lousteau could not resist this distress. He clasped the Baroness in his arms and kissed her.

"Do not cry, Didine!" said he; and, as he uttered the words, he saw in the mirror the figure of Madame Cardot, looking at him from the further end of the rooms. "Come, Didine, go with Pamela and get your trunks unloaded," said he in her ear. "Go; do not cry; we will be happy!"

He led her to the door, and then came back to divert the storm.

"Monsieur," said Madame Cardot, "I congratulate myself on having resolved to see for myself the home of the man who was to have been my son-in-law. If my daughter were to die of it, she should never be the wife of such a man as you. You must devote yourself to making your Didine happy, monsieur."

And the virtuous lady walked out, followed by Felicie, who was crying too, for she had become accustomed to Etienne. The dreadful Madame Cardot got into her hackney-coach again, staring insolently at the hapless Dinah, in whose heart the sting still rankled of "that is all very fine in words"; but who, nevertheless, like every woman in love, believed in the murmured, "Do not cry, Didine!"

Lousteau, who was not lacking in the sort of decision which grows out of the vicissitudes of a storm-tossed life, reflected thus:

"Didine is high-minded; when once she knows of my proposed marriage,

she will sacrifice herself for my future prospects, and I know how I can manage to let her know." Delighted at having hit on a trick of which the success seemed certain, he danced round to a familiar tune:

"Larifla, fla, fla!—And Didine once out of the way," he went on, talking to himself, "I will treat Maman Cardot to a call and a novelette: I have seduced her Felicie at Saint-Eustache—Felicie, guilty through passion, bears in her bosom the pledge of our affection—and larifla, fla, fla! the father Ergo, the notary, his wife, and his daughter are caught, nabbed——"

And, to her great amazement, Dinah discovered Etienne performing a prohibited dance.

"Your arrival and our happiness have turned my head with joy," said he, to explain this crazy mood.

"And I had fancied you had ceased to love me!" exclaimed the poor woman, dropping the handbag she was carrying, and weeping with joy as she sank into a chair.

"Make yourself at home, my darling," said Etienne, laughing in his sleeve; "I must write two lines to excuse myself from a bachelor party, for I mean to devote myself to you. Give your orders; you are at home."

Etienne wrote to Bixiou:

"MY DEAR BOY,—My Baroness has dropped into my arms, and will be fatal to my marriage unless we perform one of the most familiar stratagems of the thousand and one comedies at the Gymnase. I rely on you to come here, like one of Moliere's old men, to scold your nephew Leandre for his folly, while the Tenth Muse lies hidden in my bedroom; you must work on her feelings; strike hard, be brutal, offensive. I, you understand, shall express my blind devotion, and shall seem to be deaf, so that you may have to shout at me.

"Come, if you can, at seven o'clock.

"Yours,

"E. LOUSTEAU."

Having sent this letter by a commissionaire to the man who, in all Paris, most delighted in such practical jokes—in the slang of artists, a "charge"—Lousteau made a great show of settling the Muse of Sancerre in his apartment. He busied himself in arranging the luggage she had brought, and informed her as to the persons and ways of the house with such perfect good faith, and a glee which overflowed in kind words and caresses, that Dinah believed herself the best-beloved woman in the world. These rooms, where everything bore the stamp of fashion, pleased her far better than her old chateau.

Pamela Migeon, the intelligent damsel of fourteen, was questioned by the journalist as to whether she would like to be waiting-maid to the imposing Baroness. Pamela, perfectly enchanted, entered on her duties at once, by going off to order dinner from a restaurant on the boulevard. Dinah was able to judge of the extreme poverty that lay hidden under the purely superficial elegance of this bachelor home when she found none of the necessaries of life. As she took possession of the closets and drawers, she indulged in the fondest dreams; she would alter Etienne's habits, she would make him home-keeping, she would fill his cup of domestic happiness.

The novelty of the position hid its disastrous side; Dinah regarded reciprocated love as the absolution of her sin; she did not yet look beyond the walls of these rooms. Pamela, whose wits were as sharp as those of a lorette, went straight to Madame Schontz to beg the loan of some plate, telling her what had happened to Lousteau. After making the child welcome to all she had, Madame Schontz went off to her friend Malaga, that Cardot might be warned of the catastrophe that had befallen his future son-in-law.

The journalist, not in the least uneasy about the crisis as affecting his marriage, was more and more charming to the lady from the provinces. The dinner was the occasion of the delightful child's-play of lovers set at liberty, and happy to be free. When they had had their coffee, and Lousteau was sitting in front of the fire, Dinah on his knee, Pamela ran in with a scared face.

"Here is Monsieur Bixiou!" said she.

"Go into the bedroom," said the journalist to his mistress; "I will soon get rid of him. He is one of my most intimate friends, and I shall have to explain to him my new start in life."

"Oh, ho! dinner for two, and a blue velvet bonnet!" cried Bixiou. "I am off.—Ah! that is what comes of marrying—one must go through some partings. How rich one feels when one begins to move one's sticks, heh?"

"Who talks of marrying?" said Lousteau.

"What! are you not going to be married, then?" cried Bixiou.

"No!"

"No? My word, what next? Are you making a fool of yourself, if you please?—What!—You, who, by the mercy of Heaven, have come across twenty thousand francs a year, and a house, and a wife connected with all the first families of the better middle class—a wife, in short, out of the Rue des Lombards—"

"That will do, Bixiou, enough; it is at an end. Be off!"

"Be off? I have a friend's privileges, and I shall take every advantage of

them.—What has come over you?"

"What has 'come over' me is my lady from Sancerre. She is a mother, and we are going to live together happily to the end of our days.—You would have heard it to-morrow, so you may as well be told it now."

"Many chimney-pots are falling on my head, as Arnal says. But if this woman really loves you, my dear fellow, she will go back to the place she came from. Did any provincial woman ever yet find her sea-legs in Paris? She will wound all your vanities. Have you forgotten what a provincial is? She will bore you as much when she is happy as when she is sad; she will have as great a talent for escaping grace as a Parisian has in inventing it.

"Lousteau, listen to me. That a passion should lead you to forget to some extent the times in which we live, is conceivable; but I, my dear fellow, have not the mythological bandage over my eyes.—Well, then consider your position. For fifteen years you have been tossing in the literary world; you are no longer young, you have padded the hoof till your soles are worn through!—Yes, my boy, you turn your socks under like a street urchin to hide the holes, so that the legs cover the heels! In short, the joke is too stale. Your excuses are more familiar than a patent medicine—"

"I may say to you, like the Regent to Cardinal Dubois, 'That is kicking enough!'" said Lousteau, laughing.

"Oh, venerable young man," replied Bixiou, "the iron has touched the sore to the quick. You are worn out, aren't you? Well, then; in the heyday of youth, under the pressure of penury, what have you done? You are not in the front rank, and you have not a thousand francs of your own. That is the sum-total of the situation. Can you, in the decline of your powers, support a family by your pen, when your wife, if she is an honest woman, will not have at her command the resources of the woman of the streets, who can extract her thousand-franc note from the depths where milord keeps it safe? You are rushing into the lowest depths of the social theatre.

"And this is only the financial side. Now, consider the political position. We are struggling in an essentially bourgeois age, in which honor, virtue, high-mindedness, talent, learning—genius, in short, is summed up in paying your way, owing nobody anything, and conducting your affairs with judgment. Be steady, be respectable, have a wife, and children, pay your rent and taxes, serve in the National Guard, and be on the same pattern as all the men of your company—then you may indulge in the loftiest pretensions, rise to the Ministry!—and you have the best chances possible, since you are no Montmorency. You were preparing to fulfil all the conditions insisted on for turning out a political personage, you are capable of every mean trick that is necessary in office, even of pretending to be commonplace—you would have

acted it to the life. And just for a woman, who will leave you in the lurch—the end of every eternal passion—in three, five, or seven years—after exhausting your last physical and intellectual powers, you turn your back on the sacred Hearth, on the Rue des Lombards, on a political career, on thirty thousand francs per annum, on respectability and respect!—Ought that to be the end of a man who has done with illusions?

"If you had kept a pot boiling for some actress who gave you your fun for it—well; that is what you may call a cabinet matter. But to live with another man's wife? It is a draft at sight on disaster; it is bolting the bitter pills of vice with none of the gilding."

"That will do. One word answers it all; I love Madame de la Baudraye, and prefer her to every fortune, to every position the world can offer.—I may have been carried away by a gust of ambition, but everything must give way to the joy of being a father."

"Ah, ha! you have a fancy for paternity? But, wretched man, we are the fathers only of our legitimate children. What is a brat that does not bear your name? The last chapter of the romance.—Your child will be taken from you! We have seen that story in twenty plays these ten years past."

"Society, my dear boy, will drop upon you sooner or later. Read Adolphe once more.—Dear me! I fancy I can see you when you and she are used to each other;—I see you dejected, hang-dog, bereft of position and fortune, and fighting like the shareholders of a bogus company when they are tricked by a director!—Your director is happiness."

"Say no more, Bixiou."

"But I have only just begun," said Bixiou. "Listen, my dear boy. Marriage has been out of favor for some time past; but, apart from the advantages it offers in being the only recognized way of certifying heredity, as it affords a good-looking young man, though penniless, the opportunity of making his fortune in two months, it survives in spite of disadvantages. And there is not the man living who would not repent, sooner or later, of having, by his own fault, lost the chance of marrying thirty thousand francs a year."

"You won't understand me," cried Lousteau, in a voice of exasperation. "Go away—she is there——"

"I beg your pardon; why did you not tell me sooner?—You are of age, and so is she," he added in a lower voice, but loud enough to be heard by Dinah. "She will make you repent bitterly of your happiness!——"

"If it is a folly, I intend to commit it.—Good-bye."

"A man gone overboard!" cried Bixiou.

"Devil take those friends who think they have a right to preach to you," said Lousteau, opening the door of the bedroom, where he found Madame de la Baudraye sunk in an armchair and dabbing her eyes with an embroidered handkerchief.

"Oh, why did I come here?" sobbed she. "Good Heavens, why indeed?—Etienne, I am not so provincial as you think me.—You are making a fool of me."

"Darling angel," replied Lousteau, taking Dinah in his arms, lifting her from her chair, and dragging her half dead into the drawing-room, "we have both pledged our future, it is sacrifice for sacrifice. While I was loving you at Sancerre, they were engaging me to be married here, but I refused.—Oh! I was extremely distressed——"

"I am going," cried Dinah, starting wildly to her feet and turning to the door.

"You will stay here, my Didine. All is at an end. And is this fortune so lightly earned after all? Must I not marry a gawky, tow-haired creature, with a red nose, the daughter of a notary, and saddle myself with a stepmother who could give Madame de Piedefer points on the score of bigotry——"

Pamela flew in, and whispered in Lousteau's ear:

"Madame Schontz!"

Lousteau rose, leaving Dinah on the sofa, and went out.

"It is all over with you, my dear," said the woman. "Cardot does not mean to quarrel with his wife for the sake of a son-in-law. The lady made a scene—something like a scene, I can tell you! So, to conclude, the head-clerk, who was the late head-clerk's deputy for two years, agrees to take the girl with the business."

"Mean wretch!" exclaimed Lousteau. "What! in two hours he has made up his mind?"

"Bless me, that is simple enough. The rascal, who knew all the dead man's little secrets, guessed what a fix his master was in from overhearing a few words of the squabble with Madame Cardot. The notary relies on your honor and good feeling, for the affair is settled. The clerk, whose conduct has been admirable, went so far as to attend mass! A finished hypocrite, I say—just suits the mamma. You and Cardot will still be friends. He is to be a director in an immense financial concern, and he may be of use to you.—So you have been waked from a sweet dream."

"I have lost a fortune, a wife, and——"

"And a mistress," said Madame Schontz, smiling. "Here you are, more than married; you will be insufferable, you will be always wanting to get home, there will be nothing loose about you, neither your clothes nor your habits. And, after all, my Arthur does things in style. I will be faithful to him and cut Malaga's acquaintance.

"Let me peep at her through the door—your Sancerre Muse," she went on. "Is there no finer bird than that to be found in the desert?" she exclaimed. "You are cheated! She is dignified, lean, lachrymose; she only needs Lady Dudley's turban!"

"What is it now?" asked Madame de la Baudraye, who had heard the rustle of a silk dress and the murmur of a woman's voice.

"It is, my darling, that we are now indissolubly united.—I have just had an answer to the letter you saw me write, which was to break off my marriage —"

"So that was the party which you gave up?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I will be more than your wife—I am your slave, I give you my life," said the poor deluded creature. "I did not believe I could love you more than I did!—Now I shall not be a mere incident, but your whole life?"

"Yes, my beautiful, my generous Didine."

"Swear to me," said she, "that only death shall divide us."

Lousteau was ready to sweeten his vows with the most fascinating prettinesses. And this was why. Between the door of the apartment where he had taken the lorette's farewell kiss, and that of the drawing-room, where the Muse was reclining, bewildered by such a succession of shocks, Lousteau had remembered little De la Baudraye's precarious health, his fine fortune, and Bianchon's remark about Dinah, "She will be a rich widow!" and he said to himself, "I would a hundred times rather have Madame de la Baudraye for a wife than Felicie!"

His plan of action was quickly decided on; he determined to play the farce of passion once more, and to perfection. His mean self-interestedness and his false vehemence of passion had disastrous results. Madame de la Baudraye, when she set out from Sancerre for Paris, had intended to live in rooms of her own quite near to Lousteau; but the proofs of devotion her lover had given her by giving up such brilliant prospects, and yet more the perfect happiness of the first days of their illicit union, kept her from mentioning such a parting. The second day was to be—and indeed was—a high festival, in which such a suggestion proposed to "her angel" would have been a discordant note.



Lousteau, on his part, anxious to make Dinah feel herself dependent on him, kept her in a state of constant intoxication by incessant amusement. These circumstances hindered two persons so clever as these were from avoiding the slough into which they fell—that of a life in common, a piece of folly of which, unfortunately, many instances may be seen in Paris in literary circles.

And thus was the whole programme played out of a provincial amour, so satirically described by Lousteau to Madame de la Baudraye—a fact which neither he nor she remembered. Passion is born a deaf-mute.

This winter in Paris was to Madame de la Baudraye all that the month of October had been at Sancerre. Etienne, to initiate "his wife" into Paris life, varied this honeymoon by evenings at the play, where Dinah would only go to the stage box. At first Madame de la Baudraye preserved some remnants of her countrified modesty; she was afraid of being seen; she hid her happiness. She would say:

"Monsieur de Clagny or Monsieur Gravier may have followed me to Paris." She was afraid on Sancerre even in Paris.

Lousteau, who was excessively vain, educated Dinah, took her to the best dressmakers, and pointed out to her the most fashionable women, advising her to take them as models for imitation. And Madame de la Baudraye's provincial appearance was soon a thing of the past. Lousteau, when his friends met him, was congratulated on his conquest.

All through that season Etienne wrote little and got very much into debt, though Dinah, who was proud, bought all her clothes out of her savings, and fancied she had not been the smallest expense to her beloved. By the end of three months Dinah was acclimatized; she had reveled in the music at the Italian opera; she knew the pieces "on" at all theatres, and the actors and jests of the day; she had become inured to this life of perpetual excitement, this rapid torrent in which everything is forgotten. She no longer craned her neck or stood with her nose in the air, like an image of Amazement, at the constant surprises that Paris has for a stranger. She had learned to breathe that witty, vitalizing, teeming atmosphere where clever people feel themselves in their element, and which they can no longer bear to quit.

One morning, as she read the papers, for Lousteau had them all, two lines carried her back to Sancerre and the past, two lines that seemed not unfamiliar—as follows:

"Monsieur le Baron de Clagny, Public Prosecutor to the Criminal Court at Sancerre, has been appointed Deputy Public Prosecutor to the Supreme Court in Paris."

"How well that worthy lawyer loves you!" said the journalist, smiling.

"Poor man!" said she. "What did I tell you? He is following me."

Etienne and Dinah were just then at the most dazzling and fervid stage of a passion when each is perfectly accustomed to the other, and yet love has not lost its freshness and relish. The lovers know each other well, but all is not yet understood; they have not been a second time to the same secret haunts of the soul; they have not studied each other till they know, as they must later, the very thought, word, and gesture that responds to every event, the greatest and the smallest. Enchantment reigns; there are no collisions, no differences of opinion, no cold looks. Their two souls are always on the same side. And Dinah would speak the magical words, emphasized by the yet more magical expression and looks which every woman can use under such circumstances.

"When you cease to love me, kill me.—If you should cease to love me, I believe I could kill you first and myself after."

To this sweet exaggeration, Lousteau would reply:

"All I ask of God is to see you as constant as I shall be. It is you who will desert me!"

"My love is supreme."

"Supreme," echoed Lousteau. "Come, now? Suppose I am dragged away to a bachelor party, and find there one of my former mistresses, and she makes fun of me; I, out of vanity, behave as if I were free, and do not come in here till next morning—would you still love me?"

"A woman is only sure of being loved when she is preferred; and if you came back to me, if—Oh! you make me understand what the happiness would be of forgiving the man I adore."

"Well, then, I am truly loved for the first time in my life!" cried Lousteau.

"At last you understand that!" said she.

Lousteau proposed that they should each write a letter setting forth the reasons which would compel them to end by suicide. Once in possession of such a document, each might kill the other without danger in case of infidelity. But in spite of mutual promises, neither wrote the letter.

The journalist, happy for the moment, promised himself that he would deceive Dinah when he should be tired of her, and would sacrifice everything to the requirements of that deception. To him Madame de la Baudraye was a fortune in herself. At the same time, he felt the yoke.

Dinah, by consenting to this union, showed a generous mind and the power derived from self-respect. In this absolute intimacy, in which both lovers put

off their masks, the young woman never abdicated her modesty, her masculine rectitude, and the strength peculiar to ambitious souls, which formed the basis of her character. Lousteau involuntarily held her in high esteem. As a Parisian, Dinah was superior to the most fascinating courtesan; she could be as amusing and as witty as Malaga; but her extensive information, her habits of mind, her vast reading enabled her to generalize her wit, while the Florines and the Schontzes exerted theirs over a very narrow circle.

"There is in Dinah," said Etienne to Bixiou, "the stuff to make both a Ninon and a De Stael."

"A woman who combines an encyclopaedia and a seraglio is very dangerous," replied the mocking spirit.

When the expected infant became a visible fact, Madame de la Baudraye would be seen no more; but before shutting herself up, never to go out unless into the country, she was bent on being present at the first performance of a play by Nathan. This literary solemnity occupied the minds of the two thousand persons who regard themselves as constituting "all Paris." Dinah, who had never been at a first night's performance, was very full of natural curiosity. She had by this time arrived at such a pitch of affection for Lousteau that she gloried in her misconduct; she exerted a sort of savage strength to defy the world; she was determined to look it in the face without turning her head aside.

She dressed herself to perfection, in a style suited to her delicate looks and the sickly whiteness of her face. Her pallid complexion gave her an expression of refinement, and her black hair in smooth bands enhanced her pallor. Her brilliant gray eyes looked finer than ever, set in dark rings. But a terribly distressing incident awaited her. By a very simple chance, the box given to the journalist, on the first tier, was next to that which Anna Grossetete had taken. The two intimate friends did not even bow; neither chose to acknowledge the other. At the end of the first act Lousteau left his seat, abandoning Dinah to the fire of eyes, the glare of opera-glasses; while the Baronne de Fontaine and the Comtesse Marie de Vandenesse, who accompanied her, received some of the most distinguished men of fashion.

Dinah's solitude was all the more distressing because she had not the art of putting a good face to the matter by examining the company through her opera-glass. In vain did she try to assume a dignified and thoughtful attitude, and fix her eyes on vacancy; she was overpoweringly conscious of being the object of general attention; she could not disguise her discomfort, and lapsed a little into provincialism, displaying her handkerchief and making involuntary movements of which she had almost cured herself. At last, between the second and third acts, a man had himself admitted to Dinah's box! It was Monsieur de

Clagny.

"I am happy to see you, to tell you how much I am pleased by your promotion," said she.

"Oh! Madame, for whom should I come to Paris——?"

"What!" said she. "Have I anything to do with your appointment?"

"Everything," said he. "Since you left Sancerre, it had become intolerable to me; I was dying——"

"Your sincere friendship does me good," replied she, holding out her hand. "I am in a position to make much of my true friends; I now know their value.—I feared I must have lost your esteem, but the proof you have given me by this visit touches me more deeply than your ten years' attachment."

"You are an object of curiosity to the whole house," said the lawyer. "Oh! my dear, is this a part for you to be playing? Could you not be happy and yet remain honored?—I have just heard that you are Monsieur Etienne Lousteau's mistress, that you live together as man and wife!—You have broken for ever with society; even if you should some day marry your lover, the time will come when you will feel the want of the respectability you now despise. Ought you not to be in a home of your own with your mother, who loves you well enough to protect you with her aegis?—Appearances at least would be saved."

"I am in the wrong to have come here," replied she, "that is all.—I have bid farewell to all the advantages which the world confers on women who know how to reconcile happiness and the proprieties. My abnegation is so complete that I only wish I could clear a vast space about me to make a desert of my love, full of God, of him, and of myself.—We have made too many sacrifices on both sides not to be united—united by disgrace if you will, but indissolubly one. I am happy; so happy that I can love freely, my friend, and confide in you more than of old—for I need a friend."

The lawyer was magnanimous, nay, truly great. To this declaration, in which Dinah's soul thrilled, he replied in heartrending tones:

"I wanted to go to see you, to be sure that you were loved: I shall now be easy and no longer alarmed as to your future.—But will your lover appreciate the magnitude of your sacrifice; is there any gratitude in his affection?"

"Come to the Rue des Martyrs and you will see!"

"Yes, I will call," he replied. "I have already passed your door without daring to inquire for you.—You do not yet know the literary world. There are glorious exceptions, no doubt; but these men of letters drag terrible evils in their train; among these I account publicity as one of the greatest, for it blights

everything. A woman may commit herself with—"

"With a Public Prosecutor?" the Baronne put in with a smile.

"Well!—and then after a rupture there is still something to fall back on; the world has known nothing. But with a more or less famous man the public is thoroughly informed. Why look there! What an example you have close at hand! You are sitting back to back with the Comtesse Marie Vandenesse, who was within an ace of committing the utmost folly for a more celebrated man than Lousteau—for Nathan—and now they do not even recognize each other. After going to the very edge of the precipice, the Countess was saved, no one knows how; she neither left her husband nor her house; but as a famous man was scorned, she was the talk of the town for a whole winter. But her husband's great fortune, great name, and high position, but for the admirable management of that true statesman—whose conduct to his wife, they say, was perfect—she would have been ruined; in her position no other woman would have remained respected as she is."

"And how was Sancerre when you came away?" asked Madame de la Baudraye, to change the subject.

"Monsieur de la Baudraye announced that your expected confinement after so many years made it necessary that it should take place in Paris, and that he had insisted on your going to be attended by the first physicians," replied Monsieur de Clagny, guessing what it was that Dinah most wanted to know. "And so, in spite of the commotion to which your departure gave rise, you still have your legal status."

"Why!" she exclaimed, "can Monsieur de la Baudraye still hope——"

"Your husband, madame, did what he always does—made a little calculation."

The lawyer left the box when the journalist returned, bowing with dignity.

"You are a greater hit than the piece," said Etienne to Dinah.

This brief triumph brought greater happiness to the poor woman than she had ever known in the whole of her provincial existence; still, as they left the theatre she was very grave.

"What ails you, my Didine?" asked Lousteau.

"I am wondering how a woman succeeds in conquering the world?"

"There are two ways. One is by being Madame de Stael, the other is by having two hundred thousand francs a year."

"Society," said she, "asserts its hold on us by appealing to our vanity, our love of appearances.—Pooh! We will be philosophers!"

That evening was the last gleam of the delusive well-being in which Madame de la Baudraye had lived since coming to Paris. Three days later she observed a cloud on Lousteau's brow as he walked round the little garden-plot smoking a cigar. This woman, who had acquired from her husband the habit and the pleasure of never owing anybody a sou, was informed that the household was penniless, with two quarters' rent owing, and on the eve, in fact, of an execution.

This reality of Paris life pierced Dinah's heart like a thorn; she repented of having tempted Etienne into the extravagances of love. It is so difficult to pass from pleasure to work, that happiness has wrecked more poems than sorrows ever helped to flow in sparkling jets. Dinah, happy in seeing Etienne taking his ease, smoking a cigar after breakfast, his face beaming as he basked like a lizard in the sunshine, could not summon up courage enough to make herself the bum-bailiff of a magazine.

It struck her that through the worthy Migeon, Pamela's father, she might pawn the few jewels she possessed, on which her "uncle," for she was learning to talk the slang of the town, advanced her nine hundred francs. She kept three hundred for her baby-clothes and the expenses of her illness, and joyfully presented the sum due to Lousteau, who was ploughing, furrow by furrow, or, if you will, line by line, through a novel for a periodical.

"Dearest heart," said she, "finish your novel without making any sacrifice to necessity; polish the style, work up the subject.—I have played the fine lady too long; I am going to be the housewife and attend to business."

For the last four months Etienne had been taking Dinah to the Cafe Riche to dine every day, a corner being always kept for them. The countrywoman was in dismay at being told that five hundred francs were owing for the last fortnight.

"What! we have been drinking wine at six francs a bottle! A sole Normande costs five francs!—and twenty centimes for a roll?" she exclaimed, as she looked through the bill Lousteau showed her.

"Well, it makes very little difference to us whether we are robbed at a restaurant or by a cook," said Lousteau.

"Henceforth, for the cost of your dinner, you shall live like a prince."

Having induced the landlord to let her have a kitchen and two servants' rooms, Madame de la Baudraye wrote a few lines to her mother, begging her to send her some linen and a loan of a thousand francs. She received two trunks full of linen, some plate, and two thousand francs, sent by the hand of an honest and pious cook recommended her by her mother.

Ten days after the evening at the theatre when they had met, Monsieur de Clagny came to call at four o'clock, after coming out of court, and found Madame de la Baudraye making a little cap. The sight of this proud and ambitious woman, whose mind was so accomplished, and who had queened it so well at the Chateau d'Anzy, now condescending to household cares and sewing for the coming infant, moved the poor lawyer, who had just left the bench. And as he saw the pricks on one of the taper fingers he had so often kissed, he understood that Madame de la Baudraye was not merely playing at this maternal task.

In the course of this first interview the magistrate saw to the depths of Dinah's soul. This perspicacity in a man so much in love was a superhuman effort. He saw that Didine meant to be the journalist's guardian spirit and lead him into a nobler road; she had seen that the difficulties of his practical life were due to some moral defects. Between two beings united by love—in one so genuine, and in the other so well feigned—more than one confidence had been exchanged in the course of four months. Notwithstanding the care with which Etienne wrapped up his true self, a word now and then had not failed to enlighten Dinah as to the previous life of a man whose talents were so hampered by poverty, so perverted by bad examples, so thwarted by obstacles beyond his courage to surmount. "He will be a greater man if life is easy to him," said she to herself. And she strove to make him happy, to give him the sense of a sheltered home by dint of such economy and method as are familiar to provincial folks. Thus Dinah became a housekeeper, as she had become a poet, by the soaring of her soul towards the heights.

"His happiness will be my absolution."

These words, wrung from Madame de la Baudraye by her friend the lawyer, accounted for the existing state of things. The publicity of his triumph, flaunted by Etienne on the evening of the first performance, had very plainly shown the lawyer what Lousteau's purpose was. To Etienne, Madame de la Baudraye was, to use his own phrase, "a fine feather in his cap." Far from preferring the joys of a shy and mysterious passion, of hiding such exquisite happiness from the eyes of the world, he found a vulgar satisfaction in displaying the first woman of respectability who had ever honored him with her affection.

The Judge, however, was for some time deceived by the attentions which any man would lavish on any woman in Madame de la Baudraye's situation, and Lousteau made them doubly charming by the ingratiating ways characteristic of men whose manners are naturally attractive. There are, in fact, men who have something of the monkey in them by nature, and to whom the assumption of the most engaging forms of sentiment is so easy that the actor is not detected; and Lousteau's natural gifts had been fully developed on

the stage on which he had hitherto figured.

Between the months of April and July, when Dinah expected her confinement, she discovered why it was that Lousteau had not triumphed over poverty; he was idle and had no power of will. The brain, to be sure, must obey its own laws; it recognizes neither the exigencies of life nor the voice of honor; a man cannot write a great book because a woman is dying, or to pay a discreditable debt, or to bring up a family; at the same time, there is no great talent without a strong will. These twin forces are requisite for the erection of the vast edifice of personal glory. A distinguished genius keeps his brain in a productive condition, just as the knights of old kept their weapons always ready for battle. They conquer indolence, they deny themselves enervating pleasures, or indulge only to a fixed limit proportioned to their powers. This explains the life of such men as Walter Scott, Cuvier, Voltaire, Newton, Buffon, Bayle, Bossuet, Leibnitz, Lopez de Vega, Calderon, Boccacio, Aretino, Aristotle—in short, every man who delighted, governed, or led his contemporaries.

A man may and ought to pride himself more on his will than on his talent. Though Talent has its germ in a cultivated gift, Will means the incessant conquest of his instincts, of proclivities subdued and mortified, and difficulties of every kind heroically defeated. The abuse of smoking encouraged Lousteau's indolence. Tobacco, which can lull grief, inevitably numbs a man's energy.

Then, while the cigar deteriorated him physically, criticism as a profession morally stultified a man so easily tempted by pleasure. Criticism is as fatal to the critic as seeing two sides to a question is to a pleader. In these professions the judgment is undermined, the mind loses its lucid rectitude. The writer lives by taking sides. Thus, we may distinguish two kinds of criticism, as in painting we may distinguish art from practical dexterity. Criticism, after the pattern of most contemporary leader-writers, is the expression of judgments formed at random in a more or less witty way, just as an advocate pleads in court on the most contradictory briefs. The newspaper critic always finds a subject to work up in the book he is discussing. Done after this fashion, the business is well adapted to indolent brains, to men devoid of the sublime faculty of imagination, or, possessed of it indeed, but lacking courage to cultivate it. Every play, every book comes to their pen as a subject, making no demand on their imagination, and of which they simply write a report, seriously or in irony, according to the mood of the moment. As to an opinion, whatever it may be, French wit can always justify it, being admirably ready to defend either side of any case. And conscience counts for so little, these bravi have so little value for their own words, that they will loudly praise in the greenroom the work they tear to tatters in print.



Nay, men have been known to transfer their services from one paper to another without being at the pains to consider that the opinions of the new sheet must be diametrically antagonistic to those of the old. Madame de la Baudraye could smile to see Lousteau with one article on the Legitimist side and one on the side of the new dynasty, both on the same occasion. She admired the maxim he preached:

"We are the attorneys of public opinion."

The other kind of criticism is a science. It necessitates a thorough comprehension of each work, a lucid insight into the tendencies of the age, the adoption of a system, and faith in fixed principles—that is to say, a scheme of jurisprudence, a summing-up, and a verdict. The critic is then a magistrate of ideas, the censor of his time; he fulfils a sacred function; while in the former case he is but an acrobat who turns somersaults for a living so long as he had a leg to stand on. Between Claude Vignon and Lousteau lay the gulf that divides mere dexterity from art.

Dinah, whose mind was soon freed from rust, and whose intellect was by no means narrow, had ere long taken literary measure of her idol. She saw Lousteau working up to the last minute under the most discreditable compulsion, and scamping his work, as painters say of a picture from which sound technique is absent; but she would excuse him by saying, "He is a poet!" so anxious was she to justify him in her own eyes. When she thus guessed the secret of many a writer's existence, she also guessed that Lousteau's pen could never be trusted to as a resource.

Then her love for him led her to take a step she would never had thought of for her own sake. Through her mother she tried to negotiate with her husband for an allowance, but without Etienne's knowledge; for, as she thought, it would be an offence to his delicate feelings, which must be considered. A few days before the end of July, Dinah crumbled up in her wrath the letter from her mother containing Monsieur de la Baudraye's ultimatum:

"Madame de la Baudraye cannot need an allowance in Paris when she can live in perfect luxury at her Chateau of Anzy: she may return."

Lousteau picked up this letter and read it.

"I will avenge you!" said he to Dinah in the ominous tone that delights a woman when her antipathies are flattered.

Five days after this Bianchon and Duriau, the famous ladies' doctor, were engaged at Lousteau's; for he, ever since little La Baudraye's reply, had been making a great display of his joy and importance over the advent of the infant. Monsieur de Clagny and Madame Piedefer—sent for in all haste were to be the godparents, for the cautious magistrate feared lest Lousteau should commit

some compromising blunder. Madame de la Baudraye gave birth to a boy that might have filled a queen with envy who hoped for an heir-presumptive.

Bianchon and Monsieur de Clagny went off to register the child at the Mayor's office as the son of Monsieur and Madame de la Baudraye, unknown to Etienne, who, on his part, rushed off to a printer's to have this circular set up:

"Madame la Baronne de la Baudraye is happily delivered of a son.

"Monsieur Etienne Lousteau has the pleasure of informing you of the fact.

"The mother and child are doing well."

Lousteau had already sent out sixty of these announcements when Monsieur de Clagny, on coming to make inquiries, happened to see the list of persons at Sancerre to whom Lousteau proposed to send this amazing notice, written below the names of the persons in Paris to whom it was already gone. The lawyer confiscated the list and the remainder of the circulars, showed them to Madame Piedefer, begging her on no account to allow Lousteau to carry on this atrocious jest, and jumped into a cab. The devoted friend then ordered from the same printer another announcement in the following words:

"Madame la Baronne de la Baudraye is happily delivered of a son.

"Monsieur le Baron de la Baudraye has the honor of informing you of the fact.

"Mother and child are doing well."

After seeing the proofs destroyed, the form of type, everything that could bear witness to the existence of the former document, Monsieur de Clagny set to work to intercept those that had been sent; in many cases he changed them at the porter's lodge, he got back thirty into his own hands, and at last, after three days of hard work, only one of the original notes existed, that, namely sent to Nathan.

Five times had the lawyer called on the great man without finding him. By the time Monsieur de Clagny was admitted, after requesting an interview, the story of the announcement was known to all Paris. Some persons regarded it as one of those waggish calumnies, a sort of stab to which every reputation, even the most ephemeral, is exposed; others said they had read the paper and returned it to some friend of the La Baudraye family; a great many declaimed against the immorality of journalists; in short, this last remaining specimen was regarded as a curiosity. Florine, with whom Nathan was living, had shown it about, stamped in the post as paid, and addressed in Etienne's hand. So, as soon as the judge spoke of the announcement, Nathan began to smile.

"Give up that monument of recklessness and folly?" cried he. "That

autograph is one of those weapons which an athlete in the circus cannot afford to lay down. That note proves that Lousteau has no heart, no taste, no dignity; that he knows nothing of the world nor of public morality; that he insults himself when he can find no one else to insult.—None but the son of a provincial citizen imported from Sancerre to become a poet, but who is only the bravo of some contemptible magazine, could ever have sent out such a circular letter, as you must allow, monsieur. This is a document indispensable to the archives of the age.—To-day Lousteau flatters me, to-morrow he may ask for my head.—Excuse me, I forgot you were a judge.

"I have gone through a passion for a lady, a great lady, as far superior to Madame de la Baudraye as your fine feeling, monsieur, is superior to Lousteau's vulgar retaliation; but I would have died rather than utter her name. A few months of her airs and graces cost me a hundred thousand francs and my prospects for life; but I do not think the price too high!—And I have never murmured!—If a woman betrays the secret of her passion, it is the supreme offering of her love, but a man!—He must be a Lousteau!

"No, I would not give up that paper for a thousand crowns."

"Monsieur," said the lawyer at last, after an eloquent battle lasting half an hour, "I have called on fifteen or sixteen men of letters about this affair, and can it be that you are the only one immovable by an appeal of honor? It is not for Etienne Lousteau that I plead, but for a woman and child, both equally ignorant of the damage done to their fortune, their prospects, and their honor.—Who knows, monsieur, whether you might not some day be compelled to plead for some favor of justice for a friend, for some person whose honor was dearer to you than your own.—It might be remembered against you that you had been ruthless.—Can such a man as you are hesitate?" added Monsieur de Clagny.

"I only wished you to understand the extent of the sacrifice," replied Nathan, giving up the letter, as he reflected on the judge's influence and accepted this implied bargain.

When the journalist's stupid jest had been counteracted, Monsieur de Clagny went to give him a rating in the presence of Madame Piedefer; but he found Lousteau fuming with irritation.

"What I did monsieur, I did with a purpose!" replied Etienne. "Monsieur de la Baudraye has sixty thousand francs a year and refuses to make his wife an allowance; I wished to make him feel that the child is in my power."

"Yes, monsieur, I quite suspected it," replied the lawyer. "For that reason I readily agreed to be little Polydore's godfather, and he is registered as the son of the Baron and Baronne de la Baudraye; if you have the feelings of a father,

you ought to rejoice in knowing that the child is heir to one of the finest entailed estates in France."

"And pray, sir, is the mother to die of hunger?"

"Be quite easy," said the lawyer bitterly, having dragged from Lousteau the expression of feeling he had so long been expecting. "I will undertake to transact the matter with Monsieur de la Baudraye."

Monsieur de Clagny left the house with a chill at his heart.

Dinah, his idol, was loved for her money. Would she not, when too late, have her eyes opened?

"Poor woman!" said the lawyer, as he walked away. And this justice we will do him—for to whom should justice be done unless to a Judge?—he loved Dinah too sincerely to regard her degradation as a means of triumph one day; he was all pity and devotion; he really loved her.

The care and nursing of the infant, its cries, the quiet needed for the mother during the first few days, and the ubiquity of Madame Piedefer, were so entirely adverse to literary labors, that Lousteau moved up to the three rooms taken on the first floor for the old bigot. The journalist, obliged to go to the first performances without Dinah, and living apart from her, found an indescribable charm in the use of his liberty. More than once he submitted to be taken by the arm and dragged off to some jollification; more than once he found himself at the house of a friend's mistress in the heart of bohemia. He again saw women brilliantly young and splendidly dressed, in whom economy seemed treason to their youth and power. Dinah, in spite of her striking beauty, after nursing her baby for three months, could not stand comparison with these perishable blossoms, so soon faded, but so showy as long as they live rooted in opulence.

Home life had, nevertheless, a strong attraction for Etienne. In three months the mother and daughter, with the help of the cook from Sancerre and of little Pamela, had given the apartment a quite changed appearance. The journalist found his breakfast and his dinner served with a sort of luxury. Dinah, handsome and nicely dressed, was careful to anticipate her dear Etienne's wishes, and he felt himself the king of his home, where everything, even the baby, was subject to his selfishness. Dinah's affection was to be seen in every trifle, Lousteau could not possibly cease the entrancing deceptions of his unreal passion.

Dinah, meanwhile, was aware of a source of ruin, both to her love and to the household, in the kind of life into which Lousteau had allowed himself to drift. At the end of ten months she weaned her baby, installed her mother in the upstairs rooms, and restored the family intimacy which indissolubly links a

man and woman when the woman is loving and clever. One of the most striking circumstances in Benjamin Constant's novel, one of the explanations of Ellenore's desertion, is the want of daily—or, if you will, of nightly—intercourse between her and Adolphe. Each of the lovers has a separate home; they have both submitted to the world and saved appearances. Ellenore, repeatedly left to herself, is compelled to vast labors of affection to expel the thoughts of release which captivate Adolphe when absent. The constant exchange of glances and thoughts in domestic life gives a woman such power that a man needs stronger reasons for desertion than she will ever give him so long as she loves him.

This was an entirely new phase both to Etienne and to Dinah. Dinah intended to be indispensable; she wanted to infuse fresh energy into this man, whose weakness smiled upon her, for she thought it a security. She found him subjects, sketched the treatment, and at a pinch, would write whole chapters. She revived the vitality of this dying talent by transfusing fresh blood into his veins; she supplied him with ideas and opinions. In short, she produced two books which were a success. More than once she saved Lousteau's self-esteem by dictating, correcting, or finishing his articles when he was in despair at his own lack of ideas. The secret of this collaboration was strictly preserved; Madame Piedefer knew nothing of it.

This mental galvanism was rewarded by improved pay, enabling them to live comfortably till the end of 1838. Lousteau became used to seeing Dinah do his work, and he paid her—as the French people say in their vigorous lingo—in "monkey money," nothing for her pains. This expenditure in self-sacrifice becomes a treasure which generous souls prize, and the more she gave the more she loved Lousteau; the time soon came when Dinah felt that it would be too bitter a grief ever to give him up.

But then another child was coming, and this year was a terrible trial. In spite of the precautions of the two women, Etienne contracted debts; he worked himself to death to pay them off while Dinah was laid up; and, knowing him as she did, she thought him heroic. But after this effort, appalled at having two women, two children, and two maids on his hands, he was incapable of the struggle to maintain a family by his pen when he had failed to maintain even himself. So he let things take their chance. Then the ruthless speculator exaggerated the farce of love-making at home to secure greater liberty abroad.

Dinah proudly endured the burden of life without support. The one idea, "He loves me!" gave her superhuman strength. She worked as hard as the most energetic spirits of our time. At the risk of her beauty and health, Dinah was to Lousteau what Mademoiselle Delachaux was to Gardane in Diderot's noble and true tale. But while sacrificing herself, she committed the magnanimous

blunder of sacrificing dress. She had her gowns dyed, and wore nothing but black. She stank of black, as Malaga said, making fun mercilessly of Lousteau.

By the end of 1839, Etienne, following the example of Louis XV., had, by dint of gradual capitulations of conscience, come to the point of establishing a distinction between his own money and the housekeeping money, just as Louis XV. drew the line between his privy purse and the public moneys. He deceived Dinah as to his earnings. On discovering this baseness, Madame de la Baudraye went through fearful tortures of jealousy. She wanted to live two lives—the life of the world and the life of a literary woman; she accompanied Lousteau to every first-night performance, and could detect in him many impulses of wounded vanity, for her black attire rubbed off, as it were, on him, clouding his brow, and sometimes leading him to be quite brutal. He was really the woman of the two; and he had all a woman's exacting perversity; he would reproach Dinah for the dowdiness of her appearance, even while benefiting by the sacrifice, which to a mistress is so cruel—exactly like a woman who, after sending a man through a gutter to save her honor, tells him she "cannot bear dirt!" when he comes out.

Dinah then found herself obliged to gather up the rather loose reins of power by which a clever woman drives a man devoid of will. But in so doing she could not fail to lose much of her moral lustre. Such suspicions as she betrayed drag a woman into quarrels which lead to disrespect, because she herself comes down from the high level on which she had at first placed herself. Next she made some concession; Lousteau was allowed to entertain several of his friends—Nathan, Bixiou, Blondet, Finot, whose manners, language, and intercourse were depraving. They tried to convince Madame de la Baudraye that her principles and aversions were a survival of provincial prudishness; and they preached the creed of woman's superiority.

Before long, her jealousy put weapons into Lousteau's hands. During the carnival of 1840, she disguised herself to go to the balls at the Opera-house, and to suppers where she met courtesans, in order to keep an eye on all Etienne's amusements.

On the day of Mid-Lent—or rather, at eight on the morning after—Dinah came home from the ball in her fancy dress to go to bed. She had gone to spy on Lousteau, who, believing her to be ill, had engaged himself for that evening to Fanny Beaupre. The journalist, warned by a friend, had behaved so as to deceive the poor woman, only too ready to be deceived.

As she stepped out of the hired cab, Dinah met Monsieur de la Baudraye, to whom the porter pointed her out. The little old man took his wife by the arm, saying, in an icy tone:

"So this is you, madame!"

This sudden advent of conjugal authority, before which she felt herself so small, and, above all, these words, almost froze the heart of the unhappy woman caught in the costume of a debardeur. To escape Etienne's eye the more effectually, she had chosen a dress he was not likely to detect her in. She took advantage of the mask she still had on to escape without replying, changed her dress, and went up to her mother's rooms, where she found her husband waiting for her. In spite of her assumed dignity, she blushed in the old man's presence.

"What do you want of me, monsieur?" she asked. "Are we not separated forever?"

"Actually, yes," said Monsieur de la Baudraye. "Legally, no."

Madame Piedefer was telegraphing signals to her daughter, which Dinah presently observed and understood.

"Nothing could have brought you here but your own interests," she said, in a bitter tone.

"Our interests," said the little man coldly, "for we have two children.—Your Uncle Silas Piedefer is dead, at New York, where, after having made and lost several fortunes in various parts of the world, he has finally left some seven or eight hundred thousand francs—they say twelve—but there is stock-in-trade to be sold. I am the chief in our common interests, and act for you."

"Oh!" cried Dinah, "in everything that relates to business, I trust no one but Monsieur de Clagny. He knows the law, come to terms with him; what he does, will be done right."

"I have no occasion for Monsieur de Clagny," answered Monsieur de la Baudraye, "to take my children from you—"

"Your children!" exclaimed Dinah. "Your children, to whom you have not sent a sou! Your children!" She burst into a loud shout of laughter; but Monsieur de la Baudraye's unmoved coolness threw ice on the explosion.

"Your mother has just brought them to show me," he went on. "They are charming boys. I do not intend to part from them. I shall take them to our house at Anzy, if it were only to save them from seeing their mother disguised like a—"

"Silence!" said Madame de la Baudraye imperatively. "What do you want of me that brought you here?"

"A power of attorney to receive our Uncle Silas' property."

Dinah took a pen, wrote two lines to Monsieur de Clagny, and desired her husband to call again in the afternoon.

At five o'clock, Monsieur de Clagny—who had been promoted to the post of Attorney-General—enlightened Madame de la Baudraye as to her position; still, he undertook to arrange everything by a bargain with the old fellow, whose visit had been prompted by avarice alone. Monsieur de la Baudraye, to whom his wife's power of attorney was indispensable to enable him to deal with the business as he wished, purchased it by certain concessions. In the first place, he undertook to allow her ten thousand francs a year so long as she found it convenient—so the document was worded—to reside in Paris; the children, each on attaining the age of six, were to be placed in Monsieur de la Baudraye's keeping. Finally, the lawyer extracted the payment of the allowance in advance.

Little La Baudraye, who came jauntily enough to say good-bye to his wife and his children, appeared in a white india-rubber overcoat. He was so firm on his feet, and so exactly like the La Baudraye of 1836, that Dinah despaired of ever burying the dreadful little dwarf. From the garden, where he was smoking a cigar, the journalist could watch Monsieur de la Baudraye for so long as it took the little reptile to cross the forecourt, but that was enough for Lousteau; it was plain to him that the little man had intended to wreck every hope of his dying that his wife might have conceived.

This short scene made a considerable change in the writer's secret scheming. As he smoked a second cigar, he seriously reviewed the position.

His life with Madame de la Baudraye had hitherto cost him quite as much as it had cost her. To use the language of business, the two sides of the account balanced, and they could, if necessary, cry quits. Considering how small his income was, and how hardly he earned it, Lousteau regarded himself, morally speaking, as the creditor. It was, no doubt, a favorable moment for throwing the woman over. Tired at the end of three years of playing a comedy which never can become a habit, he was perpetually concealing his weariness; and this fellow, who was accustomed to disguise none of his feelings, compelled himself to wear a smile at home like that of a debtor in the presence of his creditor. This compulsion was every day more intolerable.

Hitherto the immense advantages he foresaw in the future had given him strength; but when he saw Monsieur de la Baudraye embark for the United States, as briskly as if it were to go down to Rouen in a steamboat, he ceased to believe in the future.

He went in from the garden to the pretty drawing-room, where Dinah had just taken leave of her husband.

"Etienne," said Madame de la Baudraye, "do you know what my lord and master has proposed to me? In the event of my wishing to return to live at Anzy during his absence, he has left his orders, and he hopes that my mother's



good advice will weigh with me, and that I shall go back there with my children."

"It is very good advice," replied Lousteau drily, knowing the passionate disclaimer that Dinah expected, and indeed begged for with her eyes.

The tone, the words, the cold look, all hit the hapless woman so hard, who lived only in her love, that two large tears trickled slowly down her cheeks, while she did not speak a word, and Lousteau only saw them when she took out her handkerchief to wipe away these two beads of anguish.

"What is it, Didine?" he asked, touched to the heart by this excessive sensibility.

"Just as I was priding myself on having won our freedom," said she—"at the cost of my fortune—by selling—what is most precious to a mother's heart—selling my children!—for he is to have them from the age of six—and I cannot see them without going to Sancerre!—and that is torture!—Ah, dear God! What have I done——?"

Lousteau knelt down by her and kissed her hands with a lavish display of coaxing and petting.

"You do not understand me," said he. "I blame myself, for I am not worth such sacrifices, dear angel. I am, in a literary sense, a quite second-rate man. If the day comes when I can no longer cut a figure at the bottom of the newspaper, the editors will let me lie, like an old shoe flung into the rubbish heap. Remember, we tight-rope dancers have no retiring pension! The State would have too many clever men on its hands if it started on such a career of beneficence. I am forty-two, and I am as idle as a marmot. I feel it—I know it"—and he took her by the hand—"my love can only be fatal to you.

"As you know, at two-and-twenty I lived on Florine; but what is excusable in a youth, what then seems smart and charming, is a disgrace to a man of forty. Hitherto we have shared the burden of existence, and it has not been lovely for this year and half. Out of devotion to me you wear nothing but black, and that does me no credit."—Dinah gave one of those magnanimous shrugs which are worth all the words ever spoken.—"Yes," Etienne went on, "I know you sacrifice everything to my whims, even your beauty. And I, with a heart worn out in past struggles, a soul full of dark presentiments as to the future, I cannot repay your exquisite love with an equal affection. We were very happy—without a cloud—for a long time.—Well, then, I cannot bear to see so sweet a poem end badly. Am I wrong?"

Madame de la Baudraye loved Etienne so truly, that this prudence, worthy of de Clagny, gratified her and stanchd her tears.

"He loves me for myself alone!" thought she, looking at him with smiling eyes.

After four years of intimacy, this woman's love now combined every shade of affection which our powers of analysis can discern, and which modern society has created; one of the most remarkable men of our age, whose death is a recent loss to the world of letters, Beyle (Stendhal), was the first to delineate them to perfection.

Lousteau could produce in Dinah the acute agitation which may be compared to magnetism, that upsets every power of the mind and body, and overcomes every instinct of resistance in a woman. A look from him, or his hand laid on hers, reduced her to implicit obedience. A kind word or a smile wreathed the poor woman's soul with flowers; a fond look elated, a cold look depressed her. When she walked, taking his arm and keeping step with him in the street or on the boulevard, she was so entirely absorbed in him that she lost all sense of herself. Fascinated by this fellow's wit, magnetized by his airs, his vices were but trivial defects in her eyes. She loved the puffs of cigar smoke that the wind brought into her room from the garden; she went to inhale them, and made no wry faces, hiding herself to enjoy them. She hated the publisher or the newspaper editor who refused Lousteau money on the ground of the enormous advances he had had already. She deluded herself so far as to believe that her bohemian was writing a novel, for which the payment was to come, instead of working off a debt long since incurred.

This, no doubt, is true love, and includes every mode of loving; the love of the heart and of the head—passion, caprice, and taste—to accept Beyle's definitions. Didine loved him so wholly, that in certain moments when her critical judgment, just by nature, and constantly exercised since she had lived in Paris, compelled her to read to the bottom of Lousteau's soul, sense was still too much for reason, and suggested excuses.

"And what am I?" she replied. "A woman who has put herself outside the pale. Since I have sacrificed all a woman's honor, why should you not sacrifice to me some of a man's honor? Do we not live outside the limits of social conventionality? Why not accept from me what Nathan can accept from Florine? We will square accounts when we part, and only death can part us—you know. My happiness is your honor, Etienne, as my constancy and your happiness are mine. If I fail to make you happy, all is at an end. If I cause you a pang, condemn me.

"Our debts are paid; we have ten thousand francs a year, and between us we can certainly make eight thousand francs a year—I will write theatrical articles.—With fifteen hundred francs a month we shall be as rich as Rothschild.—Be quite easy. I will have some lovely dresses, and give you

every day some gratified vanity, as on the first night of Nathan's play—"

"And what about your mother, who goes to Mass every day, and wants to bring a priest to the house and make you give up this way of life?"

"Every one has a pet vice. You smoke, she preaches at me, poor woman! But she takes great care of the children, she takes them out, she is absolutely devoted, and idolizes me. Would you hinder her from crying?"

"What will be thought of me?"

"But we do not live for the world!" cried she, raising Etienne and making him sit by her. "Besides, we shall be married some day—we have the risks of a sea voyage——"

"I never thought of that," said Lousteau simply; and he added to himself, "Time enough to part when little La Baudraye is safe back again."

From that day forth Etienne lived in luxury; and Dinah, on first nights, could hold her own with the best dressed women in Paris. Lousteau was so fatuous as to affect, among his friends, the attitude of a man overborne, bored to extinction, ruined by Madame de la Baudraye.

"Oh, what would I not give to the friend who would deliver me from Dinah! But no one ever can!" said he. "She loves me enough to throw herself out of the window if I told her."

The journalist was duly pitied; he would take precautions against Dinah's jealousy when he accepted an invitation. And then he was shamelessly unfaithful. Monsieur de Clagny, really in despair at seeing Dinah in such disgraceful circumstances when she might have been so rich, and in so wretched a position at the time when her original ambitions would have been fulfilled, came to warn her, to tell her—"You are betrayed," and she only replied, "I know it."

The lawyer was silenced; still he found his tongue to say one thing.

Madame de la Baudraye interrupted him when he had scarcely spoken a word.

"Do you still love me?" she asked.

"I would lose my soul for you!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet.

The hapless man's eyes flashed like torches, he trembled like a leaf, his throat was rigid, his hair thrilled to the roots; he believed he was so blessed as to be accepted as his idol's avenger, and this poor joy filled him with rapture.

"Why are you so startled?" said she, making him sit down again. "That is how I love him."

The lawyer understood this argument ad hominem. And there were tears in the eyes of the Judge, who had just condemned a man to death!

Lousteau's satiety, that odious conclusion of such illicit relations, had betrayed itself in a thousand little things, which are like grains of sand thrown against the panes of the little magical hut where those who love dwell and dream. These grains of sand, which grow to be pebbles, had never been discerned by Dinah till they were as big as rocks. Madame de la Baudraye had at last thoroughly understood Lousteau's character.

"He is," she said to her mother, "a poet, defenceless against disaster, mean out of laziness, not for want of heart, and rather too prone to pleasure; in short, a great cat, whom it is impossible to hate. What would become of him without me? I hindered his marriage; he has no prospects. His talent would perish in privations."

"Oh, my Dinah!" Madame Piedefer had exclaimed, "what a hell you live in! What is the feeling that gives you strength enough to persist?"

"I will be a mother to him!" she had replied.

There are certain horrible situations in which we come to no decision till the moment when our friends discern our dishonor. We accept compromises with ourself so long as we escape a censor who comes to play prosecutor. Monsieur de Clagny, as clumsy as a tortured man, had been torturing Dinah.

"To preserve my love I will be all that Madame de Pompadour was to preserve her power," said she to herself when Monsieur de Clagny had left her. And this phrase sufficiently proves that her love was becoming a burden to her, and would presently be a toil rather than a pleasure.

The part now assumed by Dinah was horribly painful, and Lousteau made it no easier to play. When he wanted to go out after dinner he would perform the tenderest little farces of affection, and address Dinah in words full of devotion; he would take her by the chain, and when he had bruised her with it, even while he hurt her, the lordly ingrate would say, "Did I wound you?"

These false caresses and deceptions had degrading consequences for Dinah, who believed in a revival of his love. The mother, alas, gave way to the mistress with shameful readiness. She felt herself a mere plaything in the man's hands, and at last she confessed to herself:

"Well, then, I will be his plaything!" finding joy in it—the rapture of damnation.

When this woman, of a really manly spirit, pictured herself as living in solitude, she felt her courage fail. She preferred the anticipated and inevitable miseries of this fierce intimacy to the absence of the joys, which were all the

more exquisite because they arose from the midst of remorse, of terrible struggles with herself, of a No persuaded to be Yes. At every moment she seemed to come across the pool of bitter water found in a desert, and drunk with greater relish than the traveler would find in sipping the finest wines at a prince's table.

When Dinah wondered to herself at midnight:

"Will he come home, or will he not?" she was not alive again till she heard the familiar sound of Lousteau's boots, and his well-known ring at the bell.

She would often try to restrain him by giving him pleasure; she would hope to be a match for her rivals, and leave them no hold on that agitated heart. How many times a day would she rehearse the tragedy of *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamne*, saying to herself, "To-morrow we part." And how often would a word, a look, a kiss full of apparently artless feeling, bring her back to the depths of her love!

It was terrible. More than once had she meditated suicide as she paced the little town garden where a few pale flowers bloomed. In fact, she had not yet exhausted the vast treasure of devotion and love which a loving woman bears in her heart.

The romance of *Adolphe* was her Bible, her study, for above all else she would not be an *Ellenore*. She allowed herself no tears, she avoided all the bitterness so cleverly described by the critic to whom we owe an analysis of this striking work; whose comments indeed seemed to Dinah almost superior to the book. And she read again and again this fine essay by the only real critic who has written in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, an article now printed at the beginning of the new edition of *Adolphe*.

"No," she would say to herself, as she repeated the author's fateful words, "no, I will not 'give my requests the form of an order,' I will not 'fly to tears as a means of revenge,' I will not 'condemn the things I once approved without reservation,' I will not 'dog his footsteps with a prying eye'; if he plays truant, he shall not on his return 'see a scornful lip, whose kiss is an unanswerable command.' No, 'my silence shall not be a reproach nor my first word a quarrel.'—I will not be like every other woman!" she went on, laying on her table the little yellow paper volume which had already attracted Lousteau's remark, "What! are you studying *Adolphe*?"—"If for one day only he should recognize my merits and say, 'That victim never uttered a cry!'—it will be all I ask. And besides, the others only have him for an hour; I have him for life!"

Thinking himself justified by his private tribunal in punishing his wife, Monsieur de la Baudraye robbed her to achieve his cherished enterprise of reclaiming three thousand acres of moorland, to which he had devoted himself

ever since 1836, living like a mouse. He manipulated the property left by Monsieur Silas Piederfer so ingeniously, that he contrived to reduce the proved value to eight hundred thousand francs, while pocketing twelve hundred thousand. He did not announce his return; but while his wife was enduring unspeakable woes, he was building farms, digging trenches, and ploughing rough ground with a courage that ranked him among the most remarkable agriculturists of the province.

The four hundred thousand francs he had filched from his wife were spent in three years on this undertaking, and the estate of Anzy was expected to return seventy-two thousand francs a year of net profits after the taxes were paid. The eight hundred thousand he invested at four and a half per cent in the funds, buying at eighty francs, at the time of the financial crisis brought about by the Ministry of the First of March, as it was called. By thus securing to his wife an income of forty-eight thousand francs he considered himself no longer in her debt. Could he not restore the odd twelve hundred thousand as soon as the four and a half per cents had risen above a hundred? He was now the greatest man in Sancerre, with the exception of one—the richest proprietor in France—whose rival he considered himself. He saw himself with an income of a hundred and forty thousand francs, of which ninety thousand formed the revenue from the lands he had entailed. Having calculated that besides this net income he paid ten thousand francs in taxes, three thousand in working expenses, ten thousand to his wife, and twelve hundred to his mother-in-law, he would say in the literary circles of Sancerre:

"I am reputed miserly, and said to spend nothing; but my outlay amounts to twenty-six thousand five hundred francs a year. And I have still to pay for the education of my two children! I daresay it is not a pleasing fact to the Milauds of Nevers, but the second house of La Baudraye may yet have as noble a center as the first.—I shall most likely go to Paris and petition the King of the French to grant me the title of Count—Monsieur Roy is a Count—and my wife would be pleased to be Madame la Comtesse."

And this was said with such splendid coolness that no one would have dared to laugh at the little man. Only Monsieur Boirouge, the Presiding Judge, remarked:

"In your place, I should not be happy unless I had a daughter."

"Well, I shall go to Paris before long——" said the Baron.

In the early part of 1842 Madame de la Baudraye, feeling that she was to Lousteau no more than a reserve in the background, had again sacrificed herself absolutely to secure his comfort; she had resumed her black raiment, but now it was in sign of mourning, for her pleasure was turning to remorse. She was too often put to shame not to feel the weight of the chain, and her

mother found her sunk in those moods of meditation into which visions of the future cast unhappy souls in a sort of torpor.

Madame Piedefer, by the advice of her spiritual director, was on the watch for the moment of exhaustion, which the priest told her would inevitably supervene, and then she pleaded in behalf of the children. She restricted herself to urging that Dinah and Lousteau should live apart, not asking her to give him up. In real life these violent situations are not closed as they are in books, by death or cleverly contrived catastrophes; they end far less poetically—in disgust, in the blighting of every flower of the soul, in the commonplace of habit, and very often too in another passion, which robs a wife of the interest which is traditionally ascribed to women. So, when common sense, the law of social proprieties, family interest—all the mixed elements which, since the Restoration, have been dignified by the mane of Public Morals, out of sheer aversion to the name of the Catholic religion—where this is seconded by a sense of insults a little too offensive; when the fatigue of constant self-sacrifice has almost reached the point of exhaustion; and when, under these circumstances, a too cruel blow—one of those mean acts which a man never lets a woman know of unless he believes himself to be her assured master—puts the crowning touch to her revulsion and disenchantment, the moment has come for the intervention of the friend who undertakes the cure. Madame Piedefer had no great difficulty now in removing the film from her daughter's eyes.

She sent for Monsieur de Clagny, who completed the work by assuring Madame de la Baudraye that if she would give up Etienne, her husband would allow her to keep the children and to live in Paris, and would restore her to the command of her own fortune.

"And what a life you are leading!" said he. "With care and judgment, and the support of some pious and charitable persons, you may have a salon and conquer a position. Paris is not Sancerre."

Dinah left it to Monsieur de Clagny to negotiate a reconciliation with the old man.

Monsieur de la Baudraye had sold his wine well, he had sold his wool, he had felled his timber, and, without telling his wife, he had come to Paris to invest two hundred thousand francs in the purchase of a delightful residence in the Rue de l'Arcade, that was being sold in liquidation of an aristocratic House that was in difficulties. He had been a member of the Council for the Department since 1826, and now, paying ten thousand francs in taxes, he was doubly qualified for a peerage under the conditions of the new legislation.

Some time before the elections of 1842 he had put himself forward as candidate unless he were meanwhile called to the Upper House as Peer of

France. At the same time, he asked for the title of Count, and for promotion to the higher grade of the Legion of Honor. In the matter of the elections, the dynastic nominations; now, in the event of Monsieur de la Baudraye being won over to the Government, Sancerre would be more than ever a rotten borough of royalism. Monsieur de Clagny, whose talents and modesty were more and more highly appreciated by the authorities, gave Monsieur de la Baudraye his support; he pointed out that by raising this enterprising agriculturist to the peerage, a guarantee would be offered to such important undertakings.

Monsieur de la Baudraye, then, a Count, a Peer of France, and Commander of the Legion of Honor, was vain enough to wish to cut a figure with a wife and handsomely appointed house.—"He wanted to enjoy life," he said.

He therefore addressed a letter to his wife, dictated by Monsieur de Clagny, begging her to live under his roof and to furnish the house, giving play to the taste of which the evidences, he said, had charmed him at the Chateau d'Anzy. The newly made Count pointed out to his wife that while the interests of their property forbade his leaving Sancerre, the education of their boys required her presence in Paris. The accommodating husband desired Monsieur de Clagny to place sixty thousand francs at the disposal of Madame la Comtesse for the interior decoration of their mansion, requesting that she would have a marble tablet inserted over the gateway with the inscription: Hotel de la Baudraye.

He then accounted to his wife for the money derived from the estate of Silas Piedefer, told her of the investment at four and a half per cent of the eight hundred thousand francs he had brought from New York, and allowed her that income for her expenses, including the education of the children. As he would be compelled to stay in Paris during some part of the session of the House of Peers, he requested his wife to reserve for him a little suite of rooms in an entresol over the kitchens.

"Bless me! why, he is growing young again—a gentleman!—a magnifico!—What will he become next? It is quite alarming," said Madame de la Baudraye.

"He now fulfils all your wishes at the age of twenty," replied the lawyer.

The comparison of her future prospects with her present position was unendurable to Dinah. Only the day before, Anna de Fontaine had turned her head away in order to avoid seeing her bosom friend at the Chamarolles' school.

"I am a countess," said Dinah to herself. "I shall have the peer's blue hammer-cloth on my carriage, and the leaders of the literary world in my



drawing-room—and I will look at her!"—And it was this little triumph that told with all its weight at the moment of her rehabilitation, as the world's contempt had of old weighed on her happiness.

One fine day, in May 1842, Madame de la Baudraye paid all her little household debts and left a thousand crowns on top of the packet of receipted bills. After sending her mother and the children away to the Hotel de la Baudraye, she awaited Lousteau, dressed ready to leave the house. When the deposed king of her heart came into dinner, she said:

"I have upset the pot, my dear. Madame de la Baudraye requests the pleasure of your company at the Rocher de Cancale."

She carried off Lousteau, quite bewildered by the light and easy manners assumed by the woman who till that morning has been the slave of his least whim, for she too had been acting a farce for two months past.

"Madame de la Baudraye is figged out as if for a first night," said he—une premiere, the slang abbreviation for a first performance.

"Do not forget the respect you owe to Madame de la Baudraye," said Dinah gravely. "I do not mean to understand such a word as figged out."

"Didine a rebel!" said he, putting his arm round her waist.

"There is no such person as Didine; you have killed her, my dear," she replied, releasing herself. "I am taking you to the first performance of Madame la Comtesse de la Baudraye."

"It is true, then, that our insect is a peer of France?"

"The nomination is to be gazetted in this evening's Moniteur, as I am told by Monsieur de Clagny, who is promoted to the Court of Appeal."

"Well, it is quite right," said the journalist. "The entomology of society ought to be represented in the Upper House."

"My friend, we are parting for ever," said Madame de la Baudraye, trying to control the trembling of her voice. "I have dismissed the two servants. When you go in, you will find the house in order, and no debts. I shall always feel a mother's affection for you, but in secret. Let us part calmly, without a fuss, like decent people.

"Have you had a fault to find with my conduct during the past six years?"

"None, but that you have spoiled my life, and wrecked my prospects," said he in a hard tone. "You have read Benjamin Constant's book very diligently; you have even studied the last critique on it; but you have read with a woman's eyes. Though you have one of those superior intellects which would make a fortune of a poet, you have never dared to take the man's point of view.

"That book, my dear, is of both sexes.—We agreed that books were male or female, dark or fair. In Adolphe women see nothing but Ellenore; young men see only Adolphe; men of experience see Ellenore and Adolphe; political men see the whole of social existence. You did not think it necessary to read the soul of Adolphe—any more than your critic indeed, who saw only Ellenore. What kills that poor fellow, my dear, is that he has sacrificed his future for a woman; that he never can be what he might have been—an ambassador, a minister, a chamberlain, a poet—and rich. He gives up six years of his energy at that stage of his life when a man is ready to submit to the hardships of any apprenticeship—to a petticoat, which he outstrips in the career of ingratitude, for the woman who has thrown over her first lover is certain sooner or later to desert the second. Adolphe is, in fact, a tow-haired German, who has not spirit enough to be false to Ellenore. There are Adolphes who spare their Ellenores all ignominious quarreling and reproaches, who say to themselves, 'I will not talk of what I have sacrificed; I will not for ever be showing the stump of my wrist to let that incarnate selfishness I have made my queen,' as Ramorny does in *The Fair Maid of Perth*. But men like that, my dear, get cast aside.

"Adolphe is a man of birth, an aristocratic nature, who wants to get back into the highroad to honors and recover his social birthright, his blighted position.—You, at this moment, are playing both parts. You are suffering from the pangs of having lost your position, and think yourself justified in throwing over a hapless lover whose misfortune it has been that he fancied you so far superior as to understand that, though a man's heart ought to be true, his sex may be allowed to indulge its caprices."

"And do you suppose that I shall not make it my business to restore to you all you have lost by me? Be quite easy," said Madame de la Baudraye, astounded by this attack. "Your Ellenore is not dying; and if God gives her life, if you amend your ways, if you give up courtesans and actresses, we will find you a better match than a Felicie Cardot."

The two lovers were sullen. Lousteau affected dejection, he aimed at appearing hard and cold; while Dinah, really distressed, listened to the reproaches of her heart.

"Why," said Lousteau presently, "why not end as we ought to have begun—hide our love from all eyes, and see each other in secret?"

"Never!" cried the new-made Countess, with an icy look. "Do you not comprehend that we are, after all, but finite creatures? Our feelings seem infinite by reason of our anticipation of heaven, but here on earth they are limited by the strength of our physical being. There are some feeble, mean natures which may receive an endless number of wounds and live on; but there

are some more highly-tempered souls which snap at last under repeated blows. You have—"

"Oh! enough!" cried he. "No more copy! Your dissertation is unnecessary, since you can justify yourself by merely saying—I have ceased to love!"

"What!" she exclaimed in bewilderment. "Is it I who have ceased to love?"

"Certainly. You have calculated that I gave you more trouble, more vexation than pleasure, and you desert your partner—"

"I desert!——" cried she, clasping her hands.

"Have not you yourself just said 'Never'?"

"Well, then, yes! Never," she repeated vehemently.

This final Never, spoken in the fear of falling once more under Lousteau's influence, was interpreted by him as the death-warrant of his power, since Dinah remained insensible to his sarcastic scorn.

The journalist could not suppress a tear. He was losing a sincere and unbounded affection. He had found in Dinah the gentlest La Valliere, the most delightful Pompadour that any egoist short of a king could hope for; and, like a boy who has discovered that by dint of tormenting a cockchafer he has killed it, Lousteau shed a tear.

Madame de la Baudraye rushed out of the private room where they had been dining, paid the bill, and fled home to the Rue de l'Arcade, scolding herself and thinking herself a brute.

Dinah, who had made her house a model of comfort, now metamorphosed herself. This double metamorphosis cost thirty thousand francs more than her husband had anticipated.

The fatal accident which in 1842 deprived the House of Orleans of the heir-presumptive having necessitated a meeting of the Chambers in August of that year, little La Baudraye came to present his titles to the Upper House sooner than he had expected, and then saw what his wife had done. He was so much delighted, that he paid the thirty thousand francs without a word, just as he had formerly paid eight thousand for decorating La Baudraye.

On his return from the Luxembourg, where he had been presented according to custom by two of his peers—the Baron de Nucingen and the Marquis de Montriveau—the new Count met the old Duc de Chaulieu, a former creditor, walking along, umbrella in hand, while he himself sat perched in a low chaise on which his coat-of-arms was resplendent, with the motto, *Deo sic patet fides et hominibus*. This contrast filled his heart with a large draught of the balm on which the middle class has been getting drunk ever

since 1840.

Madame de la Baudraye was shocked to see her husband improved and looking better than on the day of his marriage. The little dwarf, full of rapturous delight, at sixty-four triumphed in the life which had so long been denied him; in the family, which his handsome cousin Milaud of Nevers had declared he would never have; and in his wife—who had asked Monsieur and Madame de Clagny to dinner to meet the cure of the parish and his two sponsors to the Chamber of Peers. He petted the children with fatuous delight.

The handsome display on the table met with his approval.

"These are the fleeces of the Berry sheep," said he, showing Monsieur de Nucingen the dish-covers surmounted by his newly-won coronet. "They are of silver, you see!"

Though consumed by melancholy, which she concealed with the determination of a really superior woman, Dinah was charming, witty, and above all, young again in her court mourning.

"You might declare," cried La Baudraye to Monsieur de Nucingen with a wave of his hand to his wife, "that the Countess was not yet thirty."

"Ah, ha! Matame is a voman of dirty!" replied the baron, who was prone to time-honored remarks, which he took to be the small change of conversation.

"In every sense of the words," replied the Countess. "I am, in fact, five-and-thirty, and mean to set up a little passion—"

"Oh, yes, my wife ruins me in curiosities and china images—"

"She started that mania at an early age," said the Marquis de Montriveau with a smile.

"Yes," said La Baudraye, with a cold stare at the Marquis, whom he had known at Bourges, "you know that in '25, '26, and '27, she picked a million francs' worth of treasures. Anzy is a perfect museum."

"What a cool hand!" thought Monsieur de Clagny, as he saw this little country miser quite on the level of his new position.

But misers have savings of all kinds ready for use.

On the day after the vote on the Regency had passed the Chambers, the little Count went back to Sancerre for the vintage and resumed his old habits.

In the course of that winter, the Comtesse de la Baudraye, with the support of the Attorney-General to the Court of Appeals, tried to form a little circle. Of course, she had an "at home" day, she made a selection among men of mark, receiving none but those of serious purpose and ripe years. She tried to amuse

herself by going to the Opera, French and Italian. Twice a week she appeared there with her mother and Madame de Clagny, who was made by her husband to visit Dinah. Still, in spite of her cleverness, her charming manners, her fashionable stylishness, she was never really happy but with her children, on whom she lavished all her disappointed affection.

Worthy Monsieur de Clagny tried to recruit women for the Countess' circle, and he succeeded; but he was more successful among the advocates of piety than the women of fashion.

"And they bore her!" said he to himself with horror, as he saw his idol matured by grief, pale from remorse, and then, in all the splendor of recovered beauty, restored by a life of luxury and care for her boys. This devoted friend, encouraged in his efforts by her mother and by the cure was full of expedient. Every Wednesday he introduced some celebrity from Germany, England, Italy, or Prussia to his dear Countess; he spoke of her as a quite exceptional woman to people to whom she hardly addressed two words; but she listened to them with such deep attention that they went away fully convinced of her superiority. In Paris, Dinah conquered by silence, as at Sancerre she had conquered by loquacity. Now and then, some smart saying about affairs, or sarcasm on an absurdity, betrayed a woman accustomed to deal with ideas—the woman who, four years since, had given new life to Lousteau's articles.

This phase was to the poor lawyer's hapless passion like the late season known as the Indian summer after a sunless year. He affected to be older than he was, to have the right to befriend Dinah without doing her an injury, and kept himself at a distance as though he were young, handsome, and compromising, like a man who has happiness to conceal. He tried to keep his little attentions a profound secret, and the trifling gifts which Dinah showed to every one; he endeavored to suggest a dangerous meaning for his little services.

"He plays at passion," said the Countess, laughing. She made fun of Monsieur de Clagny to his face, and the lawyer said, "She notices me."

"I impress that poor man so deeply," said she to her mother, laughing, "that if I would say Yes, I believe he would say No."

One evening Monsieur de Clagny and his wife were taking his dear Countess home from the theatre, and she was deeply pensive. They had been to the first performance of Leon Gozlan's first play, *La Main Droite et la Main Gauche* (The Right Hand and the Left).

"What are you thinking about?" asked the lawyer, alarmed at his idol's dejection.

This deep and persistent melancholy, though disguised by the Countess,

was a perilous malady for which Monsieur de Clagny knew no remedy; for true love is often clumsy, especially when it is not reciprocated. True love takes its expression from the character. Now, this good man loved after the fashion of Alceste, when Madame de la Baudraye wanted to be loved after the manner of Philinte. The meaner side of love can never get on with the Misanthrope's loyalty. Thus, Dinah had taken care never to open her heart to this man. How could she confess to him that she sometimes regretted the slough she had left?

She felt a void in this fashionable life; she had no one for whom to dress, or whom to tell of her successes and triumphs. Sometimes the memory of her wretchedness came to her, mingled with memories of consuming joys. She would hate Lousteau for not taking any pains to follow her; she would have liked to get tender or furious letters from him.

Dinah made no reply, so Monsieur de Clagny repeated the question, taking the Countess' hand and pressing it between his own with devout respect.

"Will you have the right hand or the left?" said she, smiling.

"The left," said he, "for I suppose you mean the truth or a fib."

"Well, then, I saw him," she said, speaking into the lawyer's ear. "And as I saw him looking so sad, so out of heart, I said to myself, Has he a cigar? Has he any money?"

"If you wish for the truth, I can tell it you," said the lawyer. "He is living as a husband with Fanny Beaupre. You have forced me to tell you this secret; I should never have told you, for you might have suspected me perhaps of an ungenerous motive."

Madame de la Baudraye grasped his hand.

"Your husband," said she to her chaperon, "is one of the rarest souls!—Ah! Why——"

She shrank into her corner, looking out of the window, but she did not finish her sentence, of which the lawyer could guess the end: "Why had not Lousteau a little of your husband's generosity of heart?"

This information served, however, to cure Dinah of her melancholy; she threw herself into the whirl of fashion. She wished for success, and she achieved it; still, she did not make much way with women, and found it difficult to get introductions.

In the month of March, Madame Piedefer's friends the priests and Monsieur de Clagny made a fine stroke by getting Madame de la Baudraye appointed receiver of subscriptions for the great charitable work founded by Madame de Carcado. Then she was commissioned to collect from the Royal

Family their donations for the benefit of the sufferers from the earthquake at Guadeloupe. The Marquise d'Espard, to whom Monsieur de Canalis read the list of ladies thus appointed, one evening at the Opera, said, on hearing that of the Countess:

"I have lived a long time in the world, and I can remember nothing finer than the manoeuvres undertaken for the rehabilitation of Madame de la Baudraye."

In the early spring, which, by some whim of our planets, smiled on Paris in the first week of March in 1843, making the Champs-Elysees green and leafy before Longchamp, Fanny Beaupre's attache had seen Madame de la Baudraye several times without being seen by her. More than once he was stung to the heart by one of those promptings of jealousy and envy familiar to those who are born and bred provincials, when he beheld his former mistress comfortably ensconced in a handsome carriage, well dressed, with dreamy eyes, and his two little boys, one at each window. He accused himself with all the more virulence because he was waging war with the sharpest poverty of all—poverty unconfessed. Like all essentially light and frivolous natures, he cherished the singular point of honor which consists in never derogating in the eyes of one's own little public, which makes men on the Bourse commit crimes to escape expulsion from the temple of the goddess Per-cent, and has given some criminals courage enough to perform acts of virtue.

Lousteau dined and breakfasted and smoked as if he were a rich man. Not for an inheritance would he have bought any but the dearest cigars, for himself as well as for the playwright or author with whom he went into the shop. The journalist took his walks abroad in patent leather boots; but he was constantly afraid of an execution on goods which, to use the bailiff's slang, had already received the last sacrament. Fanny Beaupre had nothing left to pawn, and her salary was pledged to pay her debts. After exhausting every possible advance of pay from newspapers, magazines, and publishers, Etienne knew not of what ink he could churn gold. Gambling-houses, so ruthlessly suppressed, could no longer, as of old, cash I O U's drawn over the green table by beggary in despair. In short, the journalist was reduced to such extremity that he had just borrowed a hundred francs of the poorest of his friends, Bixiou, from whom he had never yet asked for a franc. What distressed Lousteau was not the fact of owing five thousand francs, but seeing himself bereft of his elegance, and of the furniture purchased at the cost of so many privations, and added to by Madame de la Baudraye.

On April the 3rd, a yellow poster, torn down by the porter after being displayed on the wall, announced the sale of a handsome suite of furniture on the following Saturday, the day fixed for sales under legal authority. Lousteau was taking a walk, smoking cigars, and seeking ideas—for, in Paris, ideas are

in the air, they smile on you from a street corner, they splash up with a spurt of mud from under the wheels of a cab! Thus loafing, he had been seeking ideas for articles, and subjects for novels for a month past, and had found nothing but friends who carried him off to dinner or to the play, and who intoxicated his woes, telling him that champagne would inspire him.

"Beware," said the virulent Bixiou one night, the man who would at the same moment give a comrade a hundred francs and stab him to the heart with a sarcasm; "if you go to sleep drunk every night, one day you will wake up mad."

On the day before, the Friday, the unhappy wretch, although he was accustomed to poverty, felt like a man condemned to death. Of old he would have said:

"Well, the furniture is very old! I will buy new."

But he was incapable now of literary legerdemain. Publishers, undermined by piracy, paid badly; the newspapers made close bargains with hard-driven writers, as the Opera managers did with tenors that sang flat.

He walked on, his eye on the crowd, though seeing nothing, a cigar in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets, every feature of his face twitching, and an affected smile on his lips. Then he saw Madame de la Baudraye go by in a carriage; she was going to the Boulevard by the Rue de la Chaussee d'Antin to drive in the Bois.

"There is nothing else left!" said he to himself, and he went home to smarten himself up.

That evening, at seven, he arrived in a hackney cab at Madame de la Baudraye's door, and begged the porter to send a note up to the Countess—a few lines, as follows:

"Would Madame la Comtesse do Monsieur Lousteau the favor of receiving him for a moment, and at once?"

This note was sealed with a seal which as lovers they had both used. Madame de la Baudraye had had the word *Parce que* engraved on a genuine Oriental carnelian—a potent word—a woman's word—the word that accounts for everything, even for the Creation.

The Countess had just finished dressing to go to the Opera; Friday was her night in turn for her box. At the sight of this seal she turned pale.

"I will come," she said, tucking the note into her dress.

She was firm enough to conceal her agitation, and begged her mother to see the children put to bed. She then sent for Lousteau, and received him in a



boudoir, next to the great drawing-room, with open doors. She was going to a ball after the Opera, and was wearing a beautiful dress of brocade in stripes alternately plain and flowered with pale blue. Her gloves, trimmed with tassels, showed off her beautiful white arms. She was shimmering with lace and all the dainty trifles required by fashion. Her hair, dressed a la Sevigne, gave her a look of elegance; a necklace of pearls lay on her bosom like bubbles on snow.

"What is the matter, monsieur?" said the Countess, putting out her foot from below her skirt to rest it on a velvet cushion. "I thought, I hoped, I was quite forgotten."

"If I should reply Never, you would refuse to believe me," said Lousteau, who remained standing, or walked about the room, chewing the flowers he plucked from the flower-stands full of plants that scented the room.

For a moment silence reigned. Madame de la Baudraye, studying Lousteau, saw that he was dressed as the most fastidious dandy might have been.

"You are the only person in the world who can help me, or hold out a plank to me—for I am drowning, and have already swallowed more than one mouthful——" said he, standing still in front of Dinah, and seeming to yield to an overpowering impulse. "Since you see me here, it is because my affairs are going to the devil."

"That is enough," said she; "I understand."

There was another pause, during which Lousteau turned away, took out his handkerchief, and seemed to wipe away a tear.

"How much do you want, Etienne," she went on in motherly tones. "We are at this moment old comrades; speak to me as you would to—to Bixiou."

"To save my furniture from vanishing into thin air to-morrow morning at the auction mart, eighteen hundred francs! To repay my friends, as much again! Three quarters' rent to the landlord—whom you know.—My 'uncle' wants five hundred francs——"

"And you!—to live on?"

"Oh! I have my pen——"

"It is heavier to lift than any one could believe who reads your articles," said she, with a subtle smile.—"I have not such a sum as you need, but come to-morrow at eight; the bailiff will surely wait till nine, especially if you bring him away to pay him."

She must, she felt, dismiss Lousteau, who affected to be unable to look at

her; she herself felt such pity as might cut every social Gordian knot.

"Thank you," she added, rising and offering her hand to Lousteau. "Your confidence has done me good! It is long indeed since my heart has known such joy——"

Lousteau took her hand and pressed it tenderly to his heart.

"A drop of water in the desert—and sent by the hand of an angel! God always does things handsomely!"

He spoke half in jest and half pathetically; but, believe me, as a piece of acting it was as fine as Talma's in his famous part of Leicester, which was played throughout with touches of this kind. Dinah felt his heart beating through his coat; it was throbbing with satisfaction, for the journalist had had a narrow escape from the hulks of justice; but it also beat with a very natural fire at seeing Dinah rejuvenescent and restored by wealth.

Madame de la Baudraye, stealing an examining glance at Etienne, saw that his expression was in harmony with the flowers of love, which, as she thought, had blossomed again in that throbbing heart; she tried to look once into the eyes of the man she had loved so well, but the seething blood rushed through her veins and mounted to her brain. Their eyes met with the same fiery glow as had encouraged Lousteau on the Quay by the Loire to crumple Dinah's muslin gown. The Bohemian put his arm round her waist, she yielded, and their cheeks were touching.

"Here comes my mother, hide!" cried Dinah in alarm. And she hurried forward to intercept Madame Piedefer.

"Mamma," said she—this word was to the stern old lady a coaxing expression which never failed of its effect—"will you do me a great favor? Take the carriage and go yourself to my banker, Monsieur Mongenod, with a note I will give you, and bring back six thousand francs. Come, come—it is an act of charity; come into my room."

And she dragged away her mother, who seemed very anxious to see who it was that her daughter had been talking with in the boudoir.

Two days afterwards, Madame Piedefer held a conference with the cure of the parish. After listening to the lamentations of the old mother, who was in despair, the priest said very gravely:

"Any moral regeneration which is not based on a strong religious sentiment, and carried out in the bosom of the Church, is built on sand.—The many means of grace enjoined by the Catholic religion, small as they are, and not understood, are so many dams necessary to restrain the violence of evil promptings. Persuade your daughter to perform all her religious duties, and we

shall save her yet."

Within ten days of this meeting the Hotel de la Baudraye was shut up. The Countess, the children, and her mother, in short, the whole household, including a tutor, had gone away to Sancerre, where Dinah intended to spend the summer. She was everything that was nice to the Count, people said.

And so the Muse of Sancerre had simply come back to family and married life; but certain evil tongues declared that she had been compelled to come back, for that the little peer's wishes would no doubt be fulfilled—he hoped for a little girl.

Gatien and Monsieur Gravier lavished every care, every servile attention on the handsome Countess. Gatien, who during Madame de la Baudraye's long absence had been to Paris to learn the art of lionnerie or dandyism, was supposed to have a good chance of finding favor in the eyes of the disenchanted "Superior Woman." Others bet on the tutor; Madame Piedefer urged the claims of religion.

In 1844, about the middle of June, as the Comte de la Baudraye was taking a walk on the Mall at Sancerre with the two fine little boys, he met Monsieur Milaud, the Public Prosecutor, who was at Sancerre on business, and said to him:

"These are my children, cousin."

"Ah, ha! so these are our children!" replied the lawyer, with a mischievous twinkle.

PARIS, June 1843-August 1844.

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## **THE ILLUSTRIOUS GAUDISSERT**

### **CHAPTER I**

The commercial traveller, a personage unknown to antiquity, is one of the striking figures created by the manners and customs of our present epoch. May he not, in some conceivable order of things, be destined to mark for coming philosophers the great transition which welds a period of material enterprise to the period of intellectual strength? Our century will bind the realm of isolated power, abounding as it does in creative genius, to the realm of universal but levelling might; equalizing all products, spreading them broadcast among the

masses, and being itself controlled by the principle of unity,—the final expression of all societies. Do we not find the dead level of barbarism succeeding the saturnalia of popular thought and the last struggles of those civilizations which accumulated the treasures of the world in one direction?

The commercial traveller! Is he not to the realm of ideas what our stage-coaches are to men and things? He is their vehicle; he sets them going, carries them along, rubs them up with one another. He takes from the luminous centre a handful of light, and scatters it broadcast among the drowsy populations of the duller regions. This human pyrotechnic is a scholar without learning, a juggler hoaxed by himself, an unbelieving priest of mysteries and dogmas, which he expounds all the better for his want of faith. Curious being! He has seen everything, known everything, and is up in all the ways of the world. Soaked in the vices of Paris, he affects to be the fellow-well-met of the provinces. He is the link which connects the village with the capital; though essentially he is neither Parisian nor provincial,—he is a traveller. He sees nothing to the core: men and places he knows by their names; as for things, he looks merely at their surface, and he has his own little tape-line with which to measure them. His glance shoots over all things and penetrates none. He occupies himself with a great deal, yet nothing occupies him.

Jester and jolly fellow, he keeps on good terms with all political opinions, and is patriotic to the bottom of his soul. A capital mimic, he knows how to put on, turn and turn about, the smiles of persuasion, satisfaction, and good-nature, or drop them for the normal expression of his natural man. He is compelled to be an observer of a certain sort in the interests of his trade. He must probe men with a glance and guess their habits, wants, and above all their solvency. To economize time he must come to quick decisions as to his chances of success,—a practice that makes him more or less a man of judgment; on the strength of which he sets up as a judge of theatres, and discourses about those of Paris and the provinces.

He knows all the good and bad haunts in France, "de actu et visu." He can pilot you, on occasion, to vice or virtue with equal assurance. Blest with the eloquence of a hot-water spigot turned on at will, he can check or let run, without floundering, the collection of phrases which he keeps on tap, and which produce upon his victims the effect of a moral shower-bath. Loquacious as a cricket, he smokes, drinks, wears a profusion of trinkets, overawes the common people, passes for a lord in the villages, and never permits himself to be "stumped,"—a slang expression all his own. He knows how to slap his pockets at the right time, and make his money jingle if he thinks the servants of the second-class houses which he wants to enter (always eminently suspicious) are likely to take him for a thief. Activity is not the least surprising quality of this human machine. Not the hawk swooping upon its prey, not the

stag doubling before the huntsman and the hounds, nor the hounds themselves catching scent of the game, can be compared with him for the rapidity of his dart when he spies a "commission," for the agility with which he trips up a rival and gets ahead of him, for the keenness of his scent as he noses a customer and discovers the sport where he can get off his wares.

How many great qualities must such a man possess! You will find in all countries many such diplomats of low degree; consummate negotiators arguing in the interests of calico, jewels, frippery, wines; and often displaying more true diplomacy than ambassadors themselves, who, for the most part, know only the forms of it. No one in France can doubt the powers of the commercial traveller; that intrepid soul who dares all, and boldly brings the genius of civilization and the modern inventions of Paris into a struggle with the plain commonsense of remote villages, and the ignorant and boorish treadmill of provincial ways. Can we ever forget the skilful manoeuvres by which he worms himself into the minds of the populace, bringing a volume of words to bear upon the refractory, reminding us of the indefatigable worker in marbles whose file eats slowly into a block of porphyry? Would you seek to know the utmost power of language, or the strongest pressure that a phrase can bring to bear against rebellious lucre, against the miserly proprietor squatting in the recesses of his country lair?—listen to one of these great ambassadors of Parisian industry as he revolves and works and sucks like an intelligent piston of the steam-engine called Speculation.

"Monsieur," said a wise political economist, the director-cashier-manager and secretary-general of a celebrated fire-insurance company, "out of every five hundred thousand francs of policies to be renewed in the provinces, not more than fifty thousand are paid up voluntarily. The other four hundred and fifty thousand are got in by the activity of our agents, who go about among those who are in arrears and worry them with stories of horrible incendiaries until they are driven to sign the new policies. Thus you see that eloquence, the labial flux, is nine tenths of the ways and means of our business."

To talk, to make people listen to you,—that is seduction in itself. A nation that has two Chambers, a woman who lends both ears, are soon lost. Eve and her serpent are the everlasting myth of an hourly fact which began, and may end, with the world itself.

"A conversation of two hours ought to capture your man," said a retired lawyer.

Let us walk round the commercial traveller, and look at him well. Don't forget his overcoat, olive green, nor his cloak with its morocco collar, nor the striped blue cotton shirt. In this queer figure—so original that we cannot rub it out—how many divers personalities we come across! In the first place, what

an acrobat, what a circus, what a battery, all in one, is the man himself, his vocation, and his tongue! Intrepid mariner, he plunges in, armed with a few phrases, to catch five or six thousand francs in the frozen seas, in the domain of the red Indians who inhabit the interior of France. The provincial fish will not rise to harpoons and torches; it can only be taken with seines and nets and gentlest persuasions. The traveller's business is to extract the gold in country caches by a purely intellectual operation, and to extract it pleasantly and without pain. Can you think without a shudder of the flood of phrases which, day by day, renewed each dawn, leaps in cascades the length and breadth of sunny France?

You know the species; let us now take a look at the individual.

There lives in Paris an incomparable commercial traveller, the paragon of his race, a man who possesses in the highest degree all the qualifications necessary to the nature of his success. His speech is vitriol and likewise glue,—glue to catch and entangle his victim and make him sticky and easy to grip; vitriol to dissolve hard heads, close fists, and closer calculations. His line was once the hat; but his talents and the art with which he snared the wariest provincial had brought him such commercial celebrity that all vendors of the "article Paris" paid court to him, and humbly begged that he would deign to take their commissions.

Thus, when he returned to Paris in the intervals of his triumphant progress through France, he lived a life of perpetual festivity in the shape of weddings and suppers. When he was in the provinces, the correspondents in the smaller towns made much of him; in Paris, the great houses feted and caressed him. Welcomed, flattered, and fed wherever he went, it came to pass that to breakfast or to dine alone was a novelty, an event. He lived the life of a sovereign, or, better still, of a journalist; in fact, he was the perambulating "feuilleton" of Parisian commerce.

His name was Gaudissart; and his renown, his vogue, the flatteries showered upon him, were such as to win for him the surname of Illustrious. Wherever the fellow went,—behind a counter or before a bar, into a salon or to the top of a stage-coach, up to a garret or to dine with a banker,—every one said, the moment they saw him, "Ah! here comes the illustrious Gaudissart!" No name was ever so in keeping with the style, the manners, the countenance, the voice, the language, of any man. All things smiled upon our traveller, and the traveller smiled back in return. "Similia similibus,"—he believed in homoeopathy. Puns, horse-laugh, monkish face, skin of a friar, true Rabelaisian exterior, clothing, body, mind, and features, all pulled together to put a devil-may-care jollity into every inch of his person. Free-handed and easy-going, he might be recognized at once as the favorite of grisettes, the man who jumps lightly to the top of a stage-coach, gives a hand to the timid

lady who fears to step down, jokes with the postillion about his neckerchief and contrives to sell him a cap, smiles at the maid and catches her round the waist or by the heart; gurgles at dinner like a bottle of wine and pretends to draw the cork by sounding a filip on his distended cheek; plays a tune with his knife on the champagne glasses without breaking them, and says to the company, "Let me see you do that"; chaffs the timid traveller, contradicts the knowing one, lords it over a dinner-table and manages to get the titbits for himself. A strong fellow, nevertheless, he can throw aside all this nonsense and mean business when he flings away the stump of his cigar and says, with a glance at some town, "I'll go and see what those people have got in their stomachs."

When buckled down to his work he became the slyest and cleverest of diplomats. All things to all men, he knew how to accost a banker like a capitalist, a magistrate like a functionary, a royalist with pious and monarchical sentiments, a bourgeois as one of themselves. In short, wherever he was he was just what he ought to be; he left Gaudissart at the door when he went in, and picked him up when he came out.

Until 1830 the illustrious Gaudissart was faithful to the article Paris. In his close relation to the caprices of humanity, the varied paths of commerce had enabled him to observe the windings of the heart of man. He had learned the secret of persuasive eloquence, the knack of loosening the tightest purse-strings, the art of rousing desire in the souls of husbands, wives, children, and servants; and what is more, he knew how to satisfy it. No one had greater faculty than he for inveigling a merchant by the charms of a bargain, and disappearing at the instant when desire had reached its crisis. Full of gratitude to the hat-making trade, he always declared that it was his efforts in behalf of the exterior of the human head which had enabled him to understand its interior: he had capped and crowned so many people, he was always flinging himself at their heads, etc. His jokes about hats and heads were irrepressible, though perhaps not dazzling.

Nevertheless, after August and October, 1830, he abandoned the hat trade and the article Paris, and tore himself from things mechanical and visible to mount into the higher spheres of Parisian speculation. "He forsook," to use his own words, "matter for mind; manufactured products for the infinitely purer elaborations of human intelligence." This requires some explanation.

The general upset of 1830 brought to birth, as everybody knows, a number of old ideas which clever speculators tried to pass off in new bodies. After 1830 ideas became property. A writer, too wise to publish his writings, once remarked that "more ideas are stolen than pocket-handkerchiefs." Perhaps in course of time we may have an Exchange for thought; in fact, even now ideas, good or bad, have their consols, are bought up, imported, exported, sold, and

quoted like stocks. If ideas are not on hand ready for sale, speculators try to pass off words in their stead, and actually live upon them as a bird lives on the seeds of his millet. Pray do not laugh; a word is worth quite as much as an idea in a land where the ticket on a sack is of more importance than the contents. Have we not seen libraries working off the word "picturesque" when literature would have cut the throat of the word "fantastic"? Fiscal genius has guessed the proper tax on intellect; it has accurately estimated the profits of advertising; it has registered a prospectus of the quantity and exact value of the property, weighing its thought at the intellectual Stamp Office in the Rue de la Paix.

Having become an article of commerce, intellect and all its products must naturally obey the laws which bind other manufacturing interests. Thus it often happens that ideas, conceived in their cups by certain apparently idle Parisians,—who nevertheless fight many a moral battle over their champagne and their pheasants,—are handed down at their birth from the brain to the commercial travellers who are employed to spread them discreetly, "urbi et orbi," through Paris and the provinces, seasoned with the fried pork of advertisement and prospectus, by means of which they catch in their rat-trap the departmental rodent commonly called subscriber, sometimes stockholder, occasionally corresponding member or patron, but invariably fool.

"I am a fool!" many a poor country proprietor has said when, caught by the prospect of being the first to launch a new idea, he finds that he has, in point of fact, launched his thousand or twelve hundred francs into a gulf.

"Subscribers are fools who never can be brought to understand that to go ahead in the intellectual world they must start with more money than they need for the tour of Europe," say the speculators.

Consequently there is endless warfare between the recalcitrant public which refuses to pay the Parisian imposts and the tax-gatherer who, living by his receipt of custom, lards the public with new ideas, turns it on the spit of lively projects, roasts it with prospectuses (basting all the while with flattery), and finally gobbles it up with some toothsome sauce in which it is caught and intoxicated like a fly with a black-lead. Moreover, since 1830 what honors and emoluments have been scattered throughout France to stimulate the zeal and self-love of the "progressive and intelligent masses"! Titles, medals, diplomas, a sort of legion of honor invented for the army of martyrs, have followed each other with marvellous rapidity. Speculators in the manufactured products of the intellect have developed a spice, a ginger, all their own. From this have come premiums, forestalled dividends, and that conscription of noted names which is levied without the knowledge of the unfortunate writers who bear them, and who thus find themselves actual co-operators in more enterprises than there are days in the year; for the law, we may remark, takes no account



of the theft of a patronymic. Worse than all is the rape of ideas which these caterers for the public mind, like the slave-merchants of Asia, tear from the paternal brain before they are well matured, and drag half-clothed before the eyes of their blockhead of a sultan, their Shahabaham, their terrible public, which, if they don't amuse it, will cut off their heads by curtailing the ingots and emptying their pockets.

This madness of our epoch reacted upon the illustrious Gaudissart, and here follows the history of how it happened. A life-insurance company having been told of his irresistible eloquence offered him an unheard-of commission, which he graciously accepted. The bargain concluded and the treaty signed, our traveller was put in training, or we might say weaned, by the secretary-general of the enterprise, who freed his mind of its swaddling-clothes, showed him the dark holes of the business, taught him its dialect, took the mechanism apart bit by bit, dissected for his instruction the particular public he was expected to gull, crammed him with phrases, fed him with impromptu replies, provisioned him with unanswerable arguments, and, so to speak, sharpened the file of the tongue which was about to operate upon the life of France.

The puppet amply rewarded the pains bestowed upon him. The heads of the company boasted of the illustrious Gaudissart, showed him such attention and proclaimed the great talents of this perambulating prospectus so loudly in the sphere of exalted banking and commercial diplomacy, that the financial managers of two newspapers (celebrated at that time but since defunct) were seized with the idea of employing him to get subscribers. The proprietors of the "Globe," an organ of Saint-Simonism, and the "Movement," a republican journal, each invited the illustrious Gaudissart to a conference, and proposed to give him ten francs a head for every subscriber, provided he brought in a thousand, but only five francs if he got no more than five hundred. The cause of political journalism not interfering with the pre-accepted cause of life insurance, the bargain was struck; although Gaudissart demanded an indemnity from the Saint-Simonians for the eight days he was forced to spend in studying the doctrines of their apostle, asserting that a prodigious effort of memory and intellect was necessary to get to the bottom of that "article" and to reason upon it suitably. He asked nothing, however, from the republicans. In the first place, he inclined in republican ideas,—the only ones, according to gadissardian philosophy, which could bring about a rational equality. Besides which he had already dipped into the conspiracies of the French "carbonari"; he had been arrested, and released for want of proof; and finally, as he called the newspaper proprietors to observe, he had lately grown a mustache, and needed only a hat of certain shape and a pair of spurs to represent, with due propriety, the Republic.

## CHAPTER II

For one whole week this commanding genius went every morning to be Saint-Simonized at the office of the "Globe," and every afternoon he betook himself to the life-insurance company, where he learned the intricacies of financial diplomacy. His aptitude and his memory were prodigious; so that he was able to start on his peregrinations by the 15th of April, the date at which he usually opened the spring campaign. Two large commercial houses, alarmed at the decline of business, implored the ambitious Gaudissart not to desert the article Paris, and seduced him, it was said, with large offers, to take their commissions once more. The king of travellers was amenable to the claims of his old friends, enforced as they were by the enormous premiums offered to him.

"Listen, my little Jenny," he said in a hackney-coach to a pretty florist.

All truly great men delight in allowing themselves to be tyrannized over by a feeble being, and Gaudissart had found his tyrant in Jenny. He was bringing her home at eleven o'clock from the Gymnase, whither he had taken her, in full dress, to a proscenium box on the first tier.

"On my return, Jenny, I shall refurnish your room in superior style. That big Matilda, who pesters you with comparisons and her real India shawls imported by the suite of the Russian ambassador, and her silver plate and her Russian prince,—who to my mind is nothing but a humbug,—won't have a word to say then. I consecrate to the adornment of your room all the 'Children' I shall get in the provinces."

"Well, that's a pretty thing to say!" cried the florist. "Monster of a man! Do you dare to talk to me of your children? Do you suppose I am going to stand that sort of thing?"

"Oh, what a goose you are, my Jenny! That's only a figure of speech in our business."

"A fine business, then!"

"Well, but listen; if you talk all the time you'll always be in the right."

"I mean to be. Upon my word, you take things easy!"

"You don't let me finish. I have taken under my protection a superlative idea,—a journal, a newspaper, written for children. In our profession, when travellers have caught, let us suppose, ten subscribers to the 'Children's Journal,' they say, 'I've got ten Children,' just as I say when I get ten subscriptions to a newspaper called the 'Movement,' 'I've got ten Movements.'

Now don't you see?"

"That's all right. Are you going into politics? If you do you'll get into Saint-Pelagie, and I shall have to trot down there after you. Oh! if one only knew what one puts one's foot into when we love a man, on my word of honor we would let you alone to take care of yourselves, you men! However, if you are going away to-morrow we won't talk of disagreeable things,—that would be silly."

The coach stopped before a pretty house, newly built in the Rue d'Artois, where Gaudissart and Jenny climbed to the fourth story. This was the abode of Mademoiselle Jenny Courand, commonly reported to be privately married to the illustrious Gaudissart, a rumor which that individual did not deny. To maintain her supremacy, Jenny kept him to the performance of innumerable small attentions, and threatened continually to turn him off if he omitted the least of them. She now ordered him to write to her from every town, and render a minute account of all his proceedings.

"How many 'Children' will it take to furnish my chamber?" she asked, throwing off her shawl and sitting down by a good fire.

"I get five sous for each subscriber."

"Delightful! And is it with five sous that you expect to make me rich? Perhaps you are like the Wandering Jew with your pockets full of money."

"But, Jenny, I shall get a thousand 'Children.' Just reflect that children have never had a newspaper to themselves before. But what a fool I am to try to explain matters to you,—you can't understand such things."

"Can't I? Then tell me,—tell me, Gaudissart, if I'm such a goose why do you love me?"

"Just because you are a goose,—a sublime goose! Listen, Jenny. See here, I am going to undertake the 'Globe,' the 'Movement,' the 'Children,' the insurance business, and some of my old articles Paris; instead of earning a miserable eight thousand a year, I'll bring back twenty thousand at least from each trip."

"Unlace me, Gaudissart, and do it right; don't tighten me."

"Yes, truly," said the traveller, complacently; "I shall become a shareholder in the newspapers, like Finot, one of my friends, the son of a hatter, who now has thirty thousand francs income, and is going to make himself a peer of France. When one thinks of that little Popinot,—ah, mon Dieu! I forgot to tell you that Monsieur Popinot was named minister of commerce yesterday. Why shouldn't I be ambitious too? Ha! ha! I could easily pick up the jargon of those fellows who talk in the chamber, and bluster with the rest of them. Now, listen

to me:—

"Gentlemen," he said, standing behind a chair, "the Press is neither a tool nor an article of barter: it is, viewed under its political aspects, an institution. We are bound, in virtue of our position as legislators, to consider all things politically, and therefore" (here he stopped to get breath)—"and therefore we must examine the Press and ask ourselves if it is useful or noxious, if it should be encouraged or put down, taxed or free. These are serious questions. I feel that I do not waste the time, always precious, of this Chamber by examining this article—the Press—and explaining to you its qualities. We are on the verge of an abyss. Undoubtedly the laws have not the nap which they ought to have—Hein?" he said, looking at Jenny. "All orators put France on the verge of an abyss. They either say that or they talk about the chariot of state, or convulsions, or political horizons. Don't I know their dodges? I'm up to all the tricks of all the trades. Do you know why? Because I was born with a caul; my mother has got it, but I'll give it to you. You'll see! I shall soon be in the government."

"You!"

"Why shouldn't I be the Baron Gaudissart, peer of France? Haven't they twice elected Monsieur Popinot as deputy from the fourth arrondissement? He dines with Louis Phillippe. There's Finot; he is going to be, they say, a member of the Council. Suppose they send me as ambassador to London? I tell you I'd nonplus those English! No man ever got the better of Gaudissart, the illustrious Gaudissart, and nobody ever will. Yes, I say it! no one ever outwitted me, and no one can—in any walk of life, politics or impolitics, here or elsewhere. But, for the time being, I must give myself wholly to the capitalists; to the 'Globe,' the 'Movement,' the 'Children,' and my article Paris."

"You will be brought up with a round turn, you and your newspapers. I'll bet you won't get further than Poitiers before the police will nab you."

"What will you bet?"

"A shawl."

"Done! If I lose that shawl I'll go back to the article Paris and the hat business. But as for getting the better of Gaudissart—never! never!"

And the illustrious traveller threw himself into position before Jenny, looked at her proudly, one hand in his waistcoat, his head at three-quarter profile,—an attitude truly Napoleonic.

"Oh, how funny you are! what have you been eating to-night?"

Gaudissart was thirty-eight years of age, of medium height, stout and fat like men who roll about continually in stage-coaches, with a face as round as a

pumpkin, ruddy cheeks, and regular features of the type which sculptors of all lands adopt as a model for statues of Abundance, Law, Force, Commerce, and the like. His protuberant stomach swelled forth in the shape of a pear; his legs were small, but active and vigorous. He caught Jenny up in his arms like a baby and kissed her.

"Hold your tongue, young woman!" he said. "What do you know about Saint-Simonism, antagonism, Fourierism, criticism, heroic enterprise, or woman's freedom? I'll tell you what they are,—ten francs for each subscription, Madame Gaudissart."

"On my word of honor, you are going crazy, Gaudissart."

"More and more crazy about you," he replied, flinging his hat upon the sofa.

The next morning Gaudissart, having breakfasted gloriously with Jenny, departed on horseback to work up the chief towns of the district to which he was assigned by the various enterprises in whose interests he was now about to exercise his great talents. After spending forty-five days in beating up the country between Paris and Blois, he remained two weeks at the latter place to write up his correspondence and make short visits to the various market towns of the department. The night before he left Blois for Tours he indited a letter to Mademoiselle Jenny Courand. As the conciseness and charm of this epistle cannot be equalled by any narration of ours, and as, moreover, it proves the legitimacy of the tie which united these two individuals, we produce it here:—

"My dear Jenny,—You will lose your wager. Like Napoleon, Gaudissart the illustrious has his star, but not his Waterloo. I triumph everywhere. Life insurance has done well. Between Paris and Blois I lodged two millions. But as I get to the centre of France heads become infinitely harder and millions correspondingly scarce. The article Paris keeps up its own little jog-trot. It is a ring on the finger. With all my well-known cunning I spit these shop-keepers like larks. I got off one hundred and sixty-two Ternaux shawls at Orleans. I am sure I don't know what they will do with them, unless they return them to the backs of the sheep.

"As to the article journal—the devil! that's a horse of another color. Holy saints! how one has to warble before you can teach these bumpkins a new tune. I have only made sixty-two 'Movements': exactly a hundred less for the whole trip than the shawls in one town. Those republican rogues! they won't subscribe. They talk, they talk; they share your opinions, and presently you are all agreed that every existing thing must be overturned. You feel sure your man is going to subscribe. Not a bit of it! If he owns three feet of ground, enough to grow ten cabbages, or a few trees to slice into toothpicks, the fellow begins to talk of consolidated property, taxes, revenues, indemnities,—a whole

lot of stuff, and I have wasted my time and breath on patriotism. It's a bad business! Candidly, the 'Movement' does not move. I have written to the directors and told them so. I am sorry for it—on account of my political opinions.

"As for the 'Globe,' that's another breed altogether. Just set to work and talk new doctrines to people you fancy are fools enough to believe such lies,—why, they think you want to burn their houses down! It is vain for me to tell them that I speak for futurity, for posterity, for self-interest properly understood; for enterprise where nothing can be lost; that man has preyed upon man long enough; that woman is a slave; that the great providential thought should be made to triumph; that a way must be found to arrive at a rational co-ordination of the social fabric, —in short, the whole reverberation of my sentences. Well, what do you think? when I open upon them with such ideas these provincials lock their cupboards as if I wanted to steal their spoons and beg me to go away! Are not they fools? geese? The 'Globe' is smashed. I said to the proprietors, 'You are too advanced, you go ahead too fast: you ought to get a few results; the provinces like results.' However, I have made a hundred 'Globes,' and I must say, considering the thick-headedness of these clodhoppers, it is a miracle. But to do it I had to make them such a lot of promises that I am sure I don't know how the globites, globists, globules, or whatever they call themselves, will ever get out of them. But they always tell me they can make the world a great deal better than it is, so I go ahead and prophesy to the value of ten francs for each subscription. There was one farmer who thought the paper was agricultural because of its name. I Globed him. Bah! he gave in at once; he had a projecting forehead; all men with projecting foreheads are ideologists.

"But the 'Children'; oh! ah! as to the 'Children'! I got two thousand between Paris and Blois. Jolly business! but there is not much to say. You just show a little vignette to the mother, pretending to hide it from the child: naturally the child wants to see, and pulls mamma's gown and cries for its newspaper, because 'Papa has dot his.' Mamma can't let her brat tear the gown; the gown costs thirty francs, the subscription six—economy; result, subscription. It is an excellent thing, meets an actual want; it holds a place between dolls and sugar-plums, the two eternal necessities of childhood.

"I have had a quarrel here at the table d'hote about the newspapers and my opinions. I was unsuspectingly eating my dinner next to a man with a gray hat who was reading the 'Debats.' I said to myself, 'Now for my rostrum eloquence. He is tied to the dynasty; I'll cook him; this triumph will be capital practice for my ministerial talents.' So I went to work and praised his 'Debats.' Hein! if I didn't lead him along! Thread by thread, I began to net my man. I launched my four-horse phrases, and the F-sharp arguments, and all the rest of

the cursed stuff. Everybody listened; and I saw a man who had July as plain as day on his mustache, just ready to nibble at a 'Movement.' Well, I don't know how it was, but I unluckily let fall the word 'blockhead.' Thunder! you should have seen my gray hat, my dynastic hat (shocking bad hat, anyhow), who got the bit in his teeth and was furiously angry. I put on my grand air—you know—and said to him: 'Ah, ca! Monsieur, you are remarkably aggressive; if you are not content, I am ready to give you satisfaction; I fought in July.' 'Though the father of a family,' he replied, 'I am ready—' 'Father of a family!' I exclaimed; 'my dear sir, have you any children?' 'Yes.' 'Twelve years old?' 'Just about.' 'Well, then, the "Children's Journal" is the very thing for you; six francs a year, one number a month, double columns, edited by great literary lights, well got up, good paper, engravings from charming sketches by our best artists, actual colored drawings of the Indies—will not fade.' I fired my broadside 'feelings of a father, etc., etc.,'—in short, a subscription instead of a quarrel. 'There's nobody but Gaudissart who can get out of things like that,' said that little cricket Lamard to the big Bulot at the cafe, when he told him the story.

"I leave to-morrow for Amboise. I shall do up Amboise in two days, and I will write next from Tours, where I shall measure swords with the inhabitants of that colorless region; colorless, I mean, from the intellectual and speculative point of view. But, on the word of a Gaudissart, they shall be toppled over, toppled down—floored, I say.

"Adieu, my kitten. Love me always; be faithful; fidelity through thick and thin is one of the attributes of the Free Woman. Who is kissing you on the eyelids?

"Thy Felix Forever."

### CHAPTER III

Five days later Gaudissart started from the Hotel des Faisans, at which he had put up in Tours, and went to Vouvray, a rich and populous district where the public mind seemed to him susceptible of cultivation. Mounted upon his horse, he trotted along the embankment thinking no more of his phrases than an actor thinks of his part which he has played for a hundred times. It was thus that the illustrious Gaudissart went his cheerful way, admiring the landscape, and little dreaming that in the happy valleys of Vouvray his commercial infallibility was about to perish.

Here a few remarks upon the public mind of Touraine are essential to our

story. The subtle, satirical, epigrammatic tale-telling spirit stamped on every page of Rabelais is the faithful expression of the Tourangian mind,—a mind polished and refined as it should be in a land where the kings of France long held their court; ardent, artistic, poetic, voluptuous, yet whose first impulses subside quickly. The softness of the atmosphere, the beauty of the climate, a certain ease of life and joviality of manners, smother before long the sentiment of art, narrow the widest heart, and enervate the strongest will. Transplant the Tourangian, and his fine qualities develop and lead to great results, as we may see in many spheres of action: look at Rabelais and Semblancay, Plantin the printer and Descartes, Boucicault, the Napoleon of his day, and Pinaigrier, who painted most of the colored glass in our cathedrals; also Verville and Courier. But the Tourangian, distinguished though he may be in other regions, sits in his own home like an Indian on his mat or a Turk on his divan. He employs his wit in laughing at his neighbor and in making merry all his days; and when at last he reaches the end of his life, he is still a happy man. Touraine is like the Abbaye of Theleme, so vaunted in the history of Gargantua. There we may find the complying sisterhoods of that famous tale, and there the good cheer celebrated by Rabelais reigns in glory.

As to the do-nothingness of that blessed land it is sublime and well expressed in a certain popular legend: "Tourangian, are you hungry, do you want some soup?" "Yes." "Bring your porringer." "Then I am not hungry." Is it to the joys of the vineyard and the harmonious loveliness of this garden land of France, is it to the peace and tranquillity of a region where the step of an invader has never trodden, that we owe the soft compliance of these unconstrained and easy manners? To such questions no answer. Enter this Turkey of sunny France, and you will stay there,—lazy, idle, happy. You may be as ambitious as Napoleon, as poetic as Lord Byron, and yet a power unknown, invisible, will compel you to bury your poetry within your soul and turn your projects into dreams.

The illustrious Gaudissart was fated to encounter here in Vouvray one of those indigenous jesters whose jests are not intolerable solely because they have reached the perfection of the mocking art. Right or wrong, the Tourangians are fond of inheriting from their parents. Consequently the doctrines of Saint-Simon were especially hated and villified among them. In Touraine hatred and villification take the form of superb disdain and witty maliciousness worthy of the land of good stories and practical jokes,—a spirit which, alas! is yielding, day by day, to that other spirit which Lord Byron has characterized as "English cant."

For his sins, after getting down at the Soleil d'Or, an inn kept by a former grenadier of the imperial guard named Mitouflet, married to a rich widow, the illustrious traveller, after a brief consultation with the landlord, betook himself



to the knave of Vouvray, the jovial merry-maker, the comic man of the neighborhood, compelled by fame and nature to supply the town with merriment. This country Figaro was once a dyer, and now possessed about seven or eight thousand francs a year, a pretty house on the slope of the hill, a plump little wife, and robust health. For ten years he had had nothing to do but take care of his wife and his garden, marry his daughter, play whist in the evenings, keep the run of all the gossip in the neighborhood, meddle with the elections, squabble with the large proprietors, and order good dinners; or else trot along the embankment to find out what was going on in Tours, torment the cure, and finally, by way of dramatic entertainment, assist at the sale of lands in the neighborhood of his vineyards. In short, he led the true Tourangian life,—the life of a little country-townsman. He was, moreover, an important member of the bourgeoisie,—a leader among the small proprietors, all of them envious, jealous, delighted to catch up and retail gossip and calumnies against the aristocracy; dragging things down to their own level; and at war with all kinds of superiority, which they deposited with the fine composure of ignorance. Monsieur Vernier—such was the name of this great little man—was just finishing his breakfast, with his wife and daughter on either side of him, when Gaudissart entered the room through a window that looked out on the Loire and the Cher, and lighted one of the gayest dining-rooms of that gay land.

"Is this Monsieur Vernier himself?" said the traveller, bending his vertebral column with such grace that it seemed to be elastic.

"Yes, Monsieur," said the mischievous ex-dyer, with a scrutinizing look which took in the style of man he had to deal with.

"I come, Monsieur," resumed Gaudissart, "to solicit the aid of your knowledge and insight to guide my efforts in this district, where Mitouflet tells me you have the greatest influence. Monsieur, I am sent into the provinces on an enterprise of the utmost importance, undertaken by bankers who—"

"Who mean to win our tricks," said Vernier, long used to the ways of commercial travellers and to their periodical visits.

"Precisely," replied Gaudissart, with native impudence. "But with your fine tact, Monsieur, you must be aware that we can't win tricks from people unless it is their interest to play at cards. I beg you not to confound me with the vulgar herd of travellers who succeed by humbug or importunity. I am no longer a commercial traveller. I was one, and I glory in it; but to-day my mission is of higher importance, and should place me, in the minds of superior people, among those who devote themselves to the enlightenment of their country. The most distinguished bankers in Paris take part in this affair; not fictitiously, as in some shameful speculations which I call rat-traps. No, no,

nothing of the kind! I should never condescend—never!—to hawk about such catch-fools. No, Monsieur; the most respectable houses in Paris are concerned in this enterprise; and their interests guarantee—"

Hereupon Gaudissart drew forth his whole string of phrases, and Monsieur Vernier let him go the length of his tether, listening with apparent interest which completely deceived him. But after the word "guarantee" Vernier paid no further attention to our traveller's rhetoric, and turned over in his mind how to play him some malicious trick and deliver a land, justly considered half-savage by speculators unable to get a bite of it, from the inroads of these Parisian caterpillars.

At the head of an enchanting valley, called the Valley Coquette because of its windings and the curves which return upon each other at every step, and seem more and more lovely as we advance, whether we ascend or descend them, there lived, in a little house surrounded by vineyards, a half-insane man named Margaritis. He was of Italian origin, married, but childless; and his wife took care of him with a courage fully appreciated by the neighborhood. Madame Margaritis was undoubtedly in real danger from a man who, among other fancies, persisted in carrying about with him two long-bladed knives with which he sometimes threatened her. Who has not seen the wonderful self-devotion shown by provincials who consecrate their lives to the care of sufferers, possibly because of the disgrace heaped upon a bourgeoisie if she allows her husband or children to be taken to a public hospital? Moreover, who does not know the repugnance which these people feel to the payment of the two or three thousand francs required at Charenton or in the private lunatic asylums? If any one had spoken to Madame Margaritis of Doctors Dubuisson, Esquirol, Blanche, and others, she would have preferred, with noble indignation, to keep her thousands and take care of the "good-man" at home.

As the incomprehensible whims of this lunatic are connected with the current of our story, we are compelled to exhibit the most striking of them. Margaritis went out as soon as it rained, and walked about bare-headed in his vineyard. At home he made incessant inquiries for newspapers; to satisfy him his wife and the maid-servant used to give him an old journal called the "Indre-et-Loire," and for seven years he had never yet perceived that he was reading the same number over and over again. Perhaps a doctor would have observed with interest the connection that evidently existed between the recurring and spasmodic demands for the newspaper and the atmospheric variations of the weather.

Usually when his wife had company, which happened nearly every evening, for the neighbors, pitying her situation, would frequently come to play at boston in her salon, Margaritis remained silent in a corner and never stirred. But the moment ten o'clock began to strike on a clock which he kept

shut up in a large oblong closet, he rose at the stroke with the mechanical precision of the figures which are made to move by springs in the German toys. He would then advance slowly towards the players, give them a glance like the automatic gaze of the Greeks and Turks exhibited on the Boulevard du Temple, and say sternly, "Go away!" There were days when he had lucid intervals and could give his wife excellent advice as to the sale of their wines; but at such times he became extremely annoying, and would ransack her closets and steal her delicacies, which he devoured in secret. Occasionally, when the usual visitors made their appearance he would treat them with civility; but as a general thing his remarks and replies were incoherent. For instance, a lady once asked him, "How do you feel to-day, Monsieur Margaritis?" "I have grown a beard," he replied, "have you?" "Are you better?" asked another. "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" was the answer. But the greater part of the time he gazed stolidly at his guests without uttering a word; and then his wife would say, "The good-man does not hear anything to-day."

On two or three occasions in the course of five years, and usually about the time of the equinox, this remark had driven him to frenzy; he flourished his knives and shouted, "That joke dishonors me!"

As for his daily life, he ate, drank, and walked about like other men in sound health; and so it happened that he was treated with about the same respect and attention that we give to a heavy piece of furniture. Among his many absurdities was one of which no man had as yet discovered the object, although by long practice the wiseheads of the community had learned to unravel the meaning of most of his vagaries. He insisted on keeping a sack of flour and two puncheons of wine in the cellar of his house, and he would allow no one to lay hands on them. But then the month of June came round he grew uneasy with the restless anxiety of a madman about the sale of the sack and the puncheons. Madame Margaritis could nearly always persuade him that the wine had been sold at an enormous price, which she paid over to him, and which he hid so cautiously that neither his wife nor the servant who watched him had ever been able to discover its hiding-place.

The evening before Gaudissart reached Vouvray Madame Margaritis had had more difficulty than usual in deceiving her husband, whose mind happened to be uncommonly lucid.

"I really don't know how I shall get through to-morrow," she had said to Madame Vernier. "Would you believe it, the good-man insists on watching his two casks of wine. He has worried me so this whole day, that I had to show him two full puncheons. Our neighbor, Pierre Champlain, fortunately had two which he had not sold. I asked him to kindly let me have them rolled into our cellar; and oh, dear! now that the good-man has seen them he insists on bottling them off himself!"

Madame Vernier had related the poor woman's trouble to her husband just before the entrance of Gaudissart, and at the first words of the famous traveller Vernier determined that he should be made to grapple with Margaritis.

"Monsieur," said the ex-dyer, as soon as the illustrious Gaudissart had fired his first broadside, "I will not hide from you the great difficulties which my native place offers to your enterprise. This part of the country goes along, as it were, in the rough,—'suo modo.' It is a country where new ideas don't take hold. We live as our fathers lived, we amuse ourselves with four meals a day, and we cultivate our vineyards and sell our wines to the best advantage. Our business principle is to sell things for more than they cost us; we shall stick in that rut, and neither God nor the devil can get us out of it. I will, however, give you some advice, and good advice is an egg in the hand. There is in this town a retired banker in whose wisdom I have—I, particularly—the greatest confidence. If you can obtain his support, I will add mine. If your proposals have real merit, if we are convinced of the advantage of your enterprise, the approval of Monsieur Margaritis (which carries with it mine) will open to you at least twenty rich houses in Vouvray who will be glad to try your specifics."

When Madame Vernier heard the name of the lunatic she raised her head and looked at her husband.

"Ah, precisely; my wife intends to call on Madame Margaritis with one of our neighbors. Wait a moment, and you can accompany these ladies—You can pick up Madame Fontanieu on your way," said the wily dyer, winking at his wife.

To pick out the greatest gossip, the sharpest tongue, the most inveterate cackler of the neighborhood! It meant that Madame Vernier was to take a witness to the scene between the traveller and the lunatic which should keep the town in laughter for a month. Monsieur and Madame Vernier played their part so well that Gaudissart had no suspicions, and straightway fell into the trap. He gallantly offered his arm to Madame Vernier, and believed that he made, as they went along, the conquest of both ladies, for those benefit he sparkled with wit and humor and undetected puns.

The house of the pretended banker stood at the entrance to the Valley Coquette. The place, called La Fuye, had nothing remarkable about it. On the ground floor was a large wainscoted salon, on either side of which opened the bedroom of the good-man and that of his wife. The salon was entered from an ante-chamber, which served as the dining-room and communicated with the kitchen. This lower door, which was wholly without the external charm usually seen even in the humblest dwellings in Touraine, was covered by a mansard story, reached by a stairway built on the outside of the house against the gable end and protected by a shed-roof. A little garden, full of marigolds,

syringas, and elder-bushes, separated the house from the fields; and all around the courtyard were detached buildings which were used in the vintage season for the various processes of making wine.

## CHAPTER IV

Margaritis was seated in an arm-chair covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, near the window of the salon, and he did not stir as the two ladies entered with Gaudissart. His thoughts were running on the casks of wine. He was a spare man, and his bald head, garnished with a few spare locks at the back of it, was pear-shaped in conformation. His sunken eyes, overtopped by heavy black brows and surrounded by discolored circles, his nose, thin and sharp like the blade of a knife, the strongly marked jawbone, the hollow cheeks, and the oblong tendency of all these lines, together with his unnaturally long and flat chin, contributed to give a peculiar expression to his countenance,—something between that of a retired professor of rhetoric and a rag-picker.

"Monsieur Margaritis," cried Madame Vernier, addressing him, "come, stir about! Here is a gentleman whom my husband sends to you, and you must listen to him with great attention. Put away your mathematics and talk to him."

On hearing these words the lunatic rose, looked at Gaudissart, made him a sign to sit down, and said, "Let us converse, Monsieur."

The two women went into Madame Margaritis' bedroom, leaving the door open so as to hear the conversation, and interpose if it became necessary. They were hardly installed before Monsieur Vernier crept softly up through the field and, opening a window, got into the bedroom without noise.

"Monsieur has doubtless been in business—?" began Gaudissart.

"Public business," answered Margaritis, interrupting him. "I pacificated Calabria under the reign of King Murat."

"Bless me! if he hasn't gone to Calabria!" whispered Monsieur Vernier.

"In that case," said Gaudissart, "we shall quickly understand each other."

"I am listening," said Margaritis, striking the attitude taken by a man when he poses to a portrait-painter.

"Monsieur," said Gaudissart, who chanced to be turning his watch-key with a rotatory and periodical click which caught the attention of the lunatic and contributed no doubt to keep him quiet. "Monsieur, if you were not a man of superior intelligence" (the fool bowed), "I should content myself with

merely laying before you the material advantages of this enterprise, whose psychological aspects it would be a waste of time to explain to you. Listen! Of all kinds of social wealth, is not time the most precious? To economize time is, consequently, to become wealthy. Now, is there anything that consumes so much time as those anxieties which I call 'pot-boiling'?—a vulgar expression, but it puts the whole question in a nutshell. For instance, what can eat up more time than the inability to give proper security to persons from whom you seek to borrow money when, poor at the moment, you are nevertheless rich in hope?"

"Money,—yes, that's right," said Margaritis.

"Well, Monsieur, I am sent into the departments by a company of bankers and capitalists, who have apprehended the enormous waste which rising men of talent are thus making of time, and, consequently, of intelligence and productive ability. We have seized the idea of capitalizing for such men their future prospects, and cashing their talents by discounting—what? time; securing the value of it to their survivors. I may say that it is no longer a question of economizing time, but of giving it a price, a quotation; of representing in a pecuniary sense those products developed by time which presumably you possess in the region of your intellect; of representing also the moral qualities with which you are endowed, and which are, Monsieur, living forces,—as living as a cataract, as a steam-engine of three, ten, twenty, fifty horse-power. Ha! this is progress! the movement onward to a better state of things; a movement born of the spirit of our epoch; a movement essentially progressive, as I shall prove to you when we come to consider the principles involved in the logical co-ordination of the social fabric. I will now explain my meaning by literal examples, leaving aside all purely abstract reasoning, which I call the mathematics of thought. Instead of being, as you are, a proprietor living upon your income, let us suppose that you are painter, a musician, an artist, or a poet—"

"I am a painter," said the lunatic.

"Well, so be it. I see you take my metaphor. You are a painter; you have a glorious future, a rich future before you. But I go still farther—"

At these words the madman looked anxiously at Gaudissart, thinking he meant to go away; but was reassured when he saw that he kept his seat.

"You may even be nothing at all," said Gaudissart, going on with his phrases, "but you are conscious of yourself; you feel yourself—"

"I feel myself," said the lunatic.

"—you feel yourself a great man; you say to yourself, 'I will be a minister of state.' Well, then, you—painter, artist, man of letters, statesman of the future

—you reckon upon your talents, you estimate their value, you rate them, let us say, at a hundred thousand crowns—"

"Do you give me a hundred thousand crowns?"

"Yes, Monsieur, as you will see. Either your heirs and assigns will receive them if you die, for the company contemplates that event, or you will receive them in the long run through your works of art, your writings, or your fortunate speculations during your lifetime. But, as I have already had the honor to tell you, when you have once fixed upon the value of your intellectual capital,—for it is intellectual capital,—seize that idea firmly,—intellectual—"

"I understand," said the fool.

"You sign a policy of insurance with a company which recognizes in you a value of a hundred thousand crowns; in you, poet—"

"I am a painter," said the lunatic.

"Yes," resumed Gaudissart,—"painter, poet, musician, statesman—and binds itself to pay them over to your family, your heirs, if, by reason of your death, the hopes founded on your intellectual capital should be overthrown for you personally. The payment of the premium is all that is required to protect—"

"The money-box," said the lunatic, sharply interrupting him.

"Ah! naturally; yes. I see that Monsieur understands business."

"Yes," said the madman. "I established the Territorial Bank in the Rue des Fosses-Montmartre at Paris in 1798."

"For," resumed Gaudissart, going back to his premium, "in order to meet the payments on the intellectual capital which each man recognizes and esteems in himself, it is of course necessary that each should pay a certain premium, three per cent; an annual due of three per cent. Thus, by the payment of this trifling sum, a mere nothing, you protect your family from disastrous results at your death—"

"But I live," said the fool.

"Ah! yes; you mean if you should live long? That is the usual objection,—a vulgar prejudice. I fully agree that if we had not foreseen and demolished it we might feel we were unworthy of being—what? What are we, after all? Book-keepers in the great Bureau of Intellect. Monsieur, I don't apply these remarks to you, but I meet on all sides men who make it a business to teach new ideas and disclose chains of reasoning to people who turn pale at the first word. On my word of honor, it is pitiable! But that's the way of the world, and

I don't pretend to reform it. Your objection, Monsieur, is really sheer nonsense."

"Why?" asked the lunatic.

"Why?—this is why: because, if you live and possess the qualities which are estimated in your policy against the chances of death,—now, attend to this —"

"I am attending."

"Well, then, you have succeeded in life; and you have succeeded because of the said insurance. You doubled your chances of success by getting rid of the anxieties you were dragging about with you in the shape of wife and children who might otherwise be left destitute at your death. If you attain this certainty, you have touched the value of your intellectual capital, on which the cost of insurance is but a trifle,—a mere trifle, a bagatelle."

"That's a fine idea!"

"Ah! is it not, Monsieur?" cried Gaudissart. "I call this enterprise the exchequer of beneficence; a mutual insurance against poverty; or, if you like it better, the discounting, the cashing, of talent. For talent, Monsieur, is a bill of exchange which Nature gives to the man of genius, and which often has a long time to run before it falls due."

"That is usury!" cried Margaritis.

"The devil! he's keen, the old fellow! I've made a mistake," thought Gaudissart, "I must catch him with other chaff. I'll try humbug No. 1. Not at all," he said aloud, "for you who—"

"Will you take a glass of wine?" asked Margaritis.

"With pleasure," replied Gaudissart.

"Wife, give us a bottle of the wine that is in the puncheons. You are here at the very head of Vouvray," he continued, with a gesture of the hand, "the vineyard of Margaritis."

The maid-servant brought glasses and a bottle of wine of the vintage of 1819. The good-man filled a glass with circumspection and offered it to Gaudissart, who drank it up.

"Ah, you are joking, Monsieur!" exclaimed the commercial traveller. "Surely this is Madeira, true Madeira?"

"So you think," said the fool. "The trouble with our Vouvray wine is that it is neither a common wine, nor a wine that can be drunk with the entremets. It is too generous, too strong. It is often sold in Paris adulterated with brandy and



called Madeira. The wine-merchants buy it up, when our vintage has not been good enough for the Dutch and Belgian markets, to mix it with wines grown in the neighborhood of Paris, and call it Bordeaux. But what you are drinking just now, my good Monsieur, is a wine for kings, the pure Head of Vouvray,—that's its name. I have two puncheons, only two puncheons of it left. People who like fine wines, high-class wines, who furnish their table with qualities that can't be bought in the regular trade,—and there are many persons in Paris who have that vanity,—well, such people send direct to us for this wine. Do you know any one who—?"

"Let us go on with what we were saying," interposed Gaudissart.

"We are going on," said the fool. "My wine is capital; you are capital, capitalist, intellectual capital, capital wine,—all the same etymology, don't you see? hein? Capital, 'caput,' head, Head of Vouvray, that's my wine,—it's all one thing."

"So that you have realized your intellectual capital through your wines? Ah, I see!" said Gaudissart.

"I have realized," said the lunatic. "Would you like to buy my puncheons? you shall have them on good terms."

"No, I was merely speaking," said the illustrious Gaudissart, "of the results of insurance and the employment of intellectual capital. I will resume my argument."

The lunatic calmed down, and fell once more into position.

"I remarked, Monsieur, that if you die the capital will be paid to your family without discussion."

"Without discussion?"

"Yes, unless there were suicide."

"That's quibbling."

"No, Monsieur; you are aware that suicide is one of those acts which are easy to prove—"

"In France," said the fool; "but—"

"But in other countries?" said Gaudissart. "Well, Monsieur, to cut short discussion on this point, I will say, once for all, that death in foreign countries or on the field of battle is outside of our—"

"Then what are you insuring? Nothing at all!" cried Margaritis. "My bank, my Territorial Bank, rested upon—"

"Nothing at all?" exclaimed Gaudissart, interrupting the good-man.

"Nothing at all? What do you call sickness, and afflictions, and poverty, and passions? Don't go off on exceptional points."

"No, no! no points," said the lunatic.

"Now, what's the result of all this?" cried Gaudissart. "To you, a banker, I can sum up the profits in a few words. Listen. A man lives; he has a future; he appears well; he lives, let us say, by his art; he wants money; he tries to get it, —he fails. Civilization withholds cash from this man whose thought could master civilization, and ought to master it, and will master it some day with a brush, a chisel, with words, ideas, theories, systems. Civilization is atrocious! It denies bread to the men who give it luxury. It starves them on sneers and curses, the beggarly rascal! My words may be strong, but I shall not retract them. Well, this great but neglected man comes to us; we recognize his greatness; we salute him with respect; we listen to him. He says to us: 'Gentlemen, my life and talents are worth so much; on my productions I will pay you such or such percentage.' Very good; what do we do? Instantly, without reserve or hesitation, we admit him to the great festivals of civilization as an honored guest—"

"You need wine for that," interposed the madman.

"—as an honored guest. He signs the insurance policy; he takes our bits of paper,—scraps, rags, miserable rags!—which, nevertheless, have more power in the world than his unaided genius. Then, if he wants money, every one will lend it to him on those rags. At the Bourse, among bankers, wherever he goes, even at the usurers, he will find money because he can give security. Well, Monsieur, is not that a great gulf to bridge over in our social system? But that is only one aspect of our work. We insure debtors by another scheme of policies and premiums. We offer annuities at rates graduated according to ages, on a sliding-scale infinitely more advantageous than what are called tontines, which are based on tables of mortality that are notoriously false. Our company deals with large masses of men; consequently the annuitants are secure from those distressing fears which sadden old age,—too sad already!—fears which pursue those who receive annuities from private sources. You see, Monsieur, that we have estimated life under all its aspects."

"Sucked it at both ends," said the lunatic. "Take another glass of wine. You've earned it. You must line your inside with velvet if you are going to pump at it like that every day. Monsieur, the wine of Vouvray, if well kept, is downright velvet."

"Now, what do you think of it all?" said Gaudissart, emptying his glass.

"It is very fine, very new, very useful; but I like the discounts I get at my Territorial Bank, Rue des Fosses-Montmartre."

"You are quite right, Monsieur," answered Gaudissart; "but that sort of thing is taken and retaken, made and remade, every day. You have also hypothecating banks which lend upon landed property and redeem it on a large scale. But that is a narrow idea compared to our system of consolidating hopes,—consolidating hopes! coagulating, so to speak, the aspirations born in every soul, and insuring the realization of our dreams. It needed our epoch, Monsieur, the epoch of transition—transition and progress—"

"Yes, progress," muttered the lunatic, with his glass at his lips. "I like progress. That is what I've told them many times—"

"The 'Times'!" cried Gaudissart, who did not catch the whole sentence. "The 'Times' is a bad newspaper. If you read that, I am sorry for you."

"The newspaper!" cried Margaritis. "Of course! Wife! wife! where is the newspaper?" he cried, going towards the next room.

"If you are interested in newspapers," said Gaudissart, changing his attack, "we are sure to understand each other."

"Yes; but before we say anything about that, tell me what you think of this wine."

"Delicious!"

"Then let us finish the bottle." The lunatic poured out a thimbleful for himself and filled Gaudissart's glass. "Well, Monsieur, I have two puncheons left of the same wine; if you find it good we can come to terms."

"Exactly," said Gaudissart. "The fathers of the Saint-Simonian faith have authorized me to send them all the commodities I—But allow me to tell you about their noble newspaper. You, who have understood the whole question of insurance so thoroughly, and who are willing to assist my work in this district —"

"Yes," said Margaritis, "if—"

"If I take your wine; I understand perfectly. Your wine is very good, Monsieur; it puts the stomach in a glow."

"They make champagne out of it; there is a man from Paris who comes here and makes it in Tours."

"I have no doubt of it, Monsieur. The 'Globe,' of which we were speaking —"

"Yes, I've gone over it," said Margaritis.

"I was sure of it!" exclaimed Gaudissart. "Monsieur, you have a fine frontal development; a pate—excuse the word—which our gentlemen call

'horse-head.' There's a horse element in the head of every great man. Genius will make itself known; but sometimes it happens that great men, in spite of their gifts, remain obscure. Such was very nearly the case with Saint-Simon; also with Monsieur Vico,—a strong man just beginning to shoot up; I am proud of Vico. Now, here we enter upon the new theory and formula of humanity. Attention, if you please."

"Attention!" said the fool, falling into position.

"Man's spoliation of man—by which I mean bodies of men living upon the labor of other men—ought to have ceased with the coming of Christ, I say Christ, who was sent to proclaim the equality of man in the sight of God. But what is the fact? Equality up to our day has been an 'ignus fatuus,' a chimera. Saint-Simon has arisen as the complement of Christ; as the modern exponent of the doctrine of equality, or rather of its practice, for theory has served its time—"

"Is he liberated?" asked the lunatic.

"Like liberalism, it has had its day. There is a nobler future before us: a new faith, free labor, free growth, free production, individual progress, a social co-ordination in which each man shall receive the full worth of his individual labor, in which no man shall be preyed upon by other men who, without capacity of their own, compel all to work for the profit of one. From this comes the doctrine of—"

"How about servants?" demanded the lunatic.

"They will remain servants if they have no capacity beyond it."

"Then what's the good of your doctrine?"

"To judge of this doctrine, Monsieur, you must consider it from a higher point of view: you must take a general survey of humanity. Here we come to the theories of Ballance: do you know his Palingenesis?"

"I am fond of them," said the fool, who thought he said "ices."

"Good!" returned Gaudissart. "Well, then, if the palingenistic aspects of the successive transformations of the spiritualized globe have struck, stirred, roused you, then, my dear sir, the 'Globe' newspaper,—noble name which proclaims its mission,—the 'Globe' is an organ, a guide, who will explain to you with the coming of each day the conditions under which this vast political and moral change will be effected. The gentlemen who—"

"Do they drink wine?"

"Yes, Monsieur; their houses are kept up in the highest style; I may say, in prophetic style. Superb salons, large receptions, the apex of social life—"

"Well," remarked the lunatic, "the workmen who pull things down want wine as much as those who put things up."

"True," said the illustrious Gaudissart, "and all the more, Monsieur, when they pull down with one hand and build up with the other, like the apostles of the 'Globe.'"

"They want good wine; Head of Vouvray, two puncheons, three hundred bottles, only one hundred francs,—a trifle."

"How much is that a bottle?" said Gaudissart, calculating. "Let me see; there's the freight and the duty,—it will come to about seven sous. Why, it wouldn't be a bad thing: they give more for worse wines—(Good! I've got him!" thought Gaudissart, "he wants to sell me wine which I want; I'll master him)—Well, Monsieur," he continued, "those who argue usually come to an agreement. Let us be frank with each other. You have great influence in this district—"

"I should think so!" said the madman; "I am the Head of Vouvray!"

"Well, I see that you thoroughly comprehend the insurance of intellectual capital—"

"Thoroughly."

"—and that you have measured the full importance of the 'Globe'—"

"Twice; on foot."

Gaudissart was listening to himself and not to the replies of his hearer.

"Therefore, in view of your circumstances and of your age, I quite understand that you have no need of insurance for yourself; but, Monsieur, you might induce others to insure, either because of their inherent qualities which need development, or for the protection of their families against a precarious future. Now, if you will subscribe to the 'Globe,' and give me your personal assistance in this district on behalf of insurance, especially life-annuity,—for the provinces are much attached to annuities—Well, if you will do this, then we can come to an understanding about the wine. Will you take the 'Globe'?"

"I stand on the globe."

"Will you advance its interests in this district?"

"I advance."

"And?"

"And—"

"And I—but you do subscribe, don't you, to the 'Globe'?"

"The globe, good thing, for life," said the lunatic.

"For life, Monsieur?—ah, I see! yes, you are right: it is full of life, vigor, intellect, science,—absolutely crammed with science,—well printed, clear type, well set up; what I call 'good nap.' None of your botched stuff, cotton and wool, trumpery; flimsy rubbish that rips if you look at it. It is deep; it states questions on which you can meditate at your leisure; it is the very thing to make time pass agreeably in the country."

"That suits me," said the lunatic.

"It only costs a trifle,—eighty francs."

"That won't suit me," said the lunatic.

"Monsieur!" cried Gaudissart, "of course you have got grandchildren? There's the 'Children's Journal'; that only costs seven francs a year."

"Very good; take my wine, and I will subscribe to the children. That suits me very well: a fine idea! intellectual product, child. That's man living upon man, hein?"

"You've hit it, Monsieur," said Gaudissart.

"I've hit it!"

"You consent to push me in the district?"

"In the district."

"I have your approbation?"

"You have it."

"Well, then, Monsieur, I take your wine at a hundred francs—"

"No, no! hundred and ten—"

"Monsieur! A hundred and ten for the company, but a hundred to me. I enable you to make a sale; you owe me a commission."

"Charge 'em a hundred and twenty,"—"cent vingt" ("sans vin," without wine).

"Capital pun that!"

"No, puncheons. About that wine—"

"Better and better! why, you are a wit."

"Yes, I'm that," said the fool. "Come out and see my vineyards."

"Willingly, the wine is getting into my head," said the illustrious

Gaudissart, following Monsieur Margaritis, who marched him from row to row and hillock to hillock among the vines. The three ladies and Monsieur Vernier, left to themselves, went off into fits of laughter as they watched the traveller and the lunatic discussing, gesticulating, stopping short, resuming their walk, and talking vehemently.

"I wish the good-man hadn't carried him off," said Vernier.

Finally the pair returned, walking with the eager step of men who were in haste to finish up a matter of business.

"He has got the better of the Parisian, damn him!" cried Vernier.

And so it was. To the huge delight of the lunatic our illustrious Gaudissart sat down at a card-table and wrote an order for the delivery of the two casks of wine. Margaritis, having carefully read it over, counted out seven francs for his subscription to the "Children's Journal" and gave them to the traveller.

"Adieu until to-morrow, Monsieur," said Gaudissart, twisting his watch-key. "I shall have the honor to call for you to-morrow. Meantime, send the wine at once to Paris to the address I have given you, and the price will be remitted immediately."

Gaudissart, however, was a Norman, and he had no idea of making any agreement which was not reciprocal. He therefore required his promised supporter to sign a bond (which the lunatic carefully read over) to deliver two puncheons of the wine called "Head of Vouvray," vineyard of Margaritis.

This done, the illustrious Gaudissart departed in high feather, humming, as he skipped along,—

"The King of the South,  
He burned his mouth," etc.

## CHAPTER V

The illustrious Gaudissart returned to the Soleil d'Or, where he naturally conversed with the landlord while waiting for dinner. Mitouflet was an old soldier, guilelessly crafty, like the peasantry of the Loire; he never laughed at a jest, but took it with the gravity of a man accustomed to the roar of cannon and to make his own jokes under arms.

"You have some very strong-minded people here," said Gaudissart, leaning against the door-post and lighting his cigar at Mitouflet's pipe.

"How do you mean?" asked Mitouflet.

"I mean people who are rough-shod on political and financial ideas."

"Whom have you seen? if I may ask without indiscretion," said the landlord innocently, expectorating after the adroit and periodical fashion of smokers.

"A fine, energetic fellow named Margaritis."

Mitouflet cast two glances in succession at his guest which were expressive of chilling irony.

"May be; the good-man knows a deal. He knows too much for other folks, who can't always understand him."

"I can believe it, for he thoroughly comprehends the abstruse principles of finance."

"Yes," said the innkeeper, "and for my part, I am sorry he is a lunatic."

"A lunatic! What do you mean?"

"Well, crazy,—cracked, as people are when they are insane," answered Mitouflet. "But he is not dangerous; his wife takes care of him. Have you been arguing with him?" added the pitiless landlord; "that must have been funny!"

"Funny!" cried Gaudissart. "Funny! Then your Monsieur Vernier has been making fun of me!"

"Did he send you there?"

"Yes."

"Wife! wife! come here and listen. If Monsieur Vernier didn't take it into his head to send this gentleman to talk to Margaritis!"

"What in the world did you say to each other, my dear, good Monsieur?" said the wife. "Why, he's crazy!"

"He sold me two casks of wine."

"Did you buy them?"

"Yes."

"But that is his delusion; he thinks he sells his wine, and he hasn't any."

"Ha!" snorted the traveller, "then I'll go straight to Monsieur Vernier and thank him."

And Gaudissart departed, boiling over with rage, to shake the ex-dyer, whom he found in his salon, laughing with a company of friends to whom he had already recounted the tale.



"Monsieur," said the prince of travellers, darting a savage glance at his enemy, "you are a scoundrel and a blackguard; and under pain of being thought a turn-key,—a species of being far below a galley-slave,—you will give me satisfaction for the insult you dared to offer me in sending me to a man whom you knew to be a lunatic! Do you hear me, Monsieur Vernier, dyer?"

Such was the harangue which Gaudissart prepared as he went along, as a tragedian makes ready for his entrance on the scene.

"What!" cried Vernier, delighted at the presence of an audience, "do you think we have no right to make fun of a man who comes here, bag and baggage, and demands that we hand over our property because, forsooth, he is pleased to call us great men, painters, artists, poets,—mixing us up gratuitously with a set of fools who have neither house nor home, nor sous nor sense? Why should we put up with a rascal who comes here and wants us to feather his nest by subscribing to a newspaper which preaches a new religion whose first doctrine is, if you please, that we are not to inherit from our fathers and mothers? On my sacred word of honor, Pere Margaritis said things a great deal more sensible. And now, what are you complaining about? You and Margaritis seemed to understand each other. The gentlemen here present can testify that if you had talked to the whole canton you couldn't have been as well understood."

"That's all very well for you to say; but I have been insulted, Monsieur, and I demand satisfaction!"

"Very good, Monsieur! consider yourself insulted, if you like. I shall not give you satisfaction, because there is neither rhyme nor reason nor satisfaction to be found in the whole business. What an absurd fool he is, to be sure!"

At these words Gaudissart flew at the dyer to give him a slap on the face, but the listening crowd rushed between them, so that the illustrious traveller only contrived to knock off the wig of his enemy, which fell on the head of Mademoiselle Clara Vernier.

"If you are not satisfied, Monsieur," he said, "I shall be at the Soleil d'Or until to-morrow morning, and you will find me ready to show you what it means to give satisfaction. I fought in July, Monsieur."

"And you shall fight in Vouvray," answered the dyer; "and what is more, you shall stay here longer than you imagine."

Gaudissart marched off, turning over in his mind this prophetic remark, which seemed to him full of sinister portent. For the first time in his life the prince of travellers did not dine jovially. The whole town of Vouvray was put

in a ferment about the "affair" between Monsieur Vernier and the apostle of Saint-Simonism. Never before had the tragic event of a duel been so much as heard of in that benign and happy valley.

"Monsieur Mitouflet, I am to fight to-morrow with Monsieur Vernier," said Gaudissart to his landlord. "I know no one here: will you be my second?"

"Willingly," said the host.

Gaudissart had scarcely finished his dinner before Madame Fontanieu and the assistant-mayor of Vouvray came to the Soleil d'Or and took Mitouflet aside. They told him it would be a painful and injurious thing to the whole canton if a violent death were the result of this affair; they represented the pitiable distress of Madame Vernier, and conjured him to find some way to arrange matters and save the credit of the district.

"I take it all upon myself," said the sagacious landlord.

In the evening he went up to the traveller's room carrying pens, ink, and paper.

"What have you got there?" asked Gaudissart.

"If you are going to fight to-morrow," answered Mitouflet, "you had better make some settlement of your affairs; and perhaps you have letters to write,—we all have beings who are dear to us. Writing doesn't kill, you know. Are you a good swordsman? Would you like to get your hand in? I have some foils."

"Yes, gladly."

Mitouflet returned with foils and masks.

"Now, then, let us see what you can do."

The pair put themselves on guard. Mitouflet, with his former prowess as grenadier of the guard, made sixty-two passes at Gaudissart, pushed him about right and left, and finally pinned him up against the wall.

"The deuce! you are strong," said Gaudissart, out of breath.

"Monsieur Vernier is stronger than I am."

"The devil! Damn it, I shall fight with pistols."

"I advise you to do so; because, if you take large holster pistols and load them up to their muzzles, you can't risk anything. They are sure to fire wide of the mark, and both parties can retire from the field with honor. Let me manage all that. Hein! 'sapristi,' two brave men would be arrant fools to kill each other for a joke."

"Are you sure the pistols will carry wide enough? I should be sorry to kill

the man, after all," said Gaudissart.

"Sleep in peace," answered Mitouflet, departing.

The next morning the two adversaries, more or less pale, met beside the bridge of La Cise. The brave Vernier came near shooting a cow which was peaceably feeding by the roadside.

"Ah, you fired in the air!" cried Gaudissart.

At these words the enemies embraced.

"Monsieur," said the traveller, "your joke was rather rough, but it was a good one for all that. I am sorry I apostrophized you: I was excited. I regard you as a man of honor."

"Monsieur, we take twenty subscriptions to the 'Children's Journal,'" replied the dyer, still pale.

"That being so," said Gaudissart, "why shouldn't we all breakfast together? Men who fight are always the ones to come to a good understanding."

"Monsieur Mitouflet," said Gaudissart on his return to the inn, "of course you have got a sheriff's officer here?"

"What for?"

"I want to send a summons to my good friend Margaritis to deliver the two casks of wine."

"But he has not got them," said Vernier.

"No matter for that; the affair can be arranged by the payment of an indemnity. I won't have it said that Vouvray outwitted the illustrious Gaudissart."

Madame Margaritis, alarmed at the prospect of a suit in which the plaintiff would certainly win his case, brought thirty francs to the placable traveller, who thereupon considered himself quits with the happiest region of sunny France,—a region which is also, we must add, the most recalcitrant to new and progressive ideas.

On returning from his trip through the southern departments, the illustrious Gaudissart occupied the coupe of a diligence, where he met a young man to whom, as they journeyed between Angouleme and Paris, he deigned to explain the enigmas of life, taking him, apparently, for an infant.

As they passed Vouvray the young man exclaimed, "What a fine site!"

"Yes, Monsieur," said Gaudissart, "but not habitable on account of the people. You get into duels every day. Why, it is not three months since I fought

one just there," pointing to the bridge of La Cise, "with a damned dyer; but I made an end of him,—he bit the dust!"

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## AN OLD MAID

### CHAPTER I. ONE OF MANY CHEVALIERS DE VALOIS

Most persons have encountered, in certain provinces in France, a number of Chevaliers de Valois. One lived in Normandy, another at Bourges, a third (with whom we have here to do) flourished in Alencon, and doubtless the South possesses others. The number of the Valesian tribe is, however, of no consequence to the present tale. All these chevaliers, among whom were doubtless some who were Valois as Louis XIV. was Bourbon, knew so little of one another that it was not advisable to speak to one about the others. They were all willing to leave the Bourbons in tranquil possession of the throne of France; for it was too plainly established that Henri IV. became king for want of a male heir in the first Orleans branch called the Valois. If there are any Valois, they descend from Charles de Valois, Duc d'Angouleme, son of Charles IX. and Marie Touchet, the male line from whom ended, until proof to the contrary be produced, in the person of the Abbe de Rothelin. The Valois-Saint-Remy, who descended from Henri II., also came to an end in the famous Lamothe-Valois implicated in the affair of the Diamond Necklace.

Each of these many chevaliers, if we may believe reports, was, like the Chevalier of Alencon, an old gentleman, tall, thin, withered, and moneyless. He of Bourges had emigrated; he of Touraine hid himself; he of Alencon fought in La Vendee and "chouanized" somewhat. The youth of the latter was spend in Paris, where the Revolution overtook him when thirty years of age in the midst of his conquests and gallantries.

The Chevalier de Valois of Alencon was accepted by the highest aristocracy of the province as a genuine Valois; and he distinguished himself, like the rest of his homonyms, by excellent manners, which proved him a man of society. He dined out every day, and played cards every evening. He was thought witty, thanks to his foible for relating a quantity of anecdotes on the reign of Louis XV. and the beginnings of the Revolution. When these tales were heard for the first time, they were held to be well narrated. He had, moreover, the great merit of not repeating his personal bons mots and of never speaking of his love-affairs, though his smiles and his airs and graces were

delightfully indiscreet. The worthy gentleman used his privilege as a Voltairean noble to stay away from mass; and great indulgence was shown to his irreligion because of his devotion to the royal cause. One of his particular graces was the air and manner (imitated, no doubt, from Mole) with which he took snuff from a gold box adorned with the portrait of the Princess Goritzka,— a charming Hungarian, celebrated for her beauty in the last years of the reign of Louis XV. Having been attached during his youth to that illustrious stranger, he still mentioned her with emotion. For her sake he had fought a duel with Monsieur de Lauzun.

The chevalier, now fifty-eight years of age, owned to only fifty; and he might well allow himself that innocent deception, for, among the other advantages granted to fair thin persons, he managed to preserve the still youthful figure which saves men as well as women from an appearance of old age. Yes, remember this: all of life, or rather all the elegance that expresses life, is in the figure. Among the chevalier's other possessions must be counted an enormous nose with which nature had endowed him. This nose vigorously divided a pale face into two sections which seemed to have no knowledge of each other, for one side would redden under the process of digestion, while the other continued white. This fact is worthy of remark at a period when physiology is so busy with the human heart. The incandescence, so to call it, was on the left side. Though his long slim legs, supporting a lank body, and his pallid skin, were not indicative of health, Monsieur de Valois ate like an ogre and declared he had a malady called in the provinces "hot liver," perhaps to excuse his monstrous appetite. The circumstance of his singular flush confirmed this declaration; but in a region where repasts are developed on the line of thirty or forty dishes and last four hours, the chevalier's stomach would seem to have been a blessing bestowed by Providence on the good town of Alencon. According to certain doctors, heat on the left side denotes a prodigal heart. The chevalier's gallantries confirmed this scientific assertion, the responsibility for which does not rest, fortunately, on the historian.

In spite of these symptoms, Monsieur de Valois' constitution was vigorous, consequently long-lived. If his liver "heated," to use an old-fashioned word, his heart was not less inflammable. His face was wrinkled and his hair silvered; but an intelligent observer would have recognized at once the stigmata of passion and the furrows of pleasure which appeared in the crow's-feet and the marches-du-palais, so prized at the court of Cythera. Everything about this dainty chevalier bespoke the "ladies' man." He was so minute in his ablutions that his cheeks were a pleasure to look upon; they seemed to have been laved in some miraculous water. The part of his skull which his hair refused to cover shone like ivory. His eyebrows, like his hair, affected youth by the care and regularity with which they were combed. His skin, already white, seemed to have been extra-whitened by some secret compound.

Without using perfumes, the chevalier exhaled a certain fragrance of youth, that refreshed the atmosphere. His hands, which were those of a gentleman, and were cared for like the hands of a pretty woman, attracted the eye to their rosy, well-shaped nails. In short, had it not been for his magisterial and stupendous nose, the chevalier might have been thought a trifle too dainty.

We must here compel ourselves to spoil this portrait by the avowal of a littleness. The chevalier put cotton in his ears, and wore, appended to them, two little ear-rings representing negroes' heads in diamonds, of admirable workmanship. He clung to these singular appendages, explaining that since his ears had been bored he had ceased to have headaches (he had had headaches). We do not present the chevalier as an accomplished man; but surely we can pardon, in an old celibate whose heart sends so much blood to his left cheek, these adorable qualities, founded, perhaps, on some sublime secret history.

Besides, the Chevalier de Valois redeemed those negroes' heads by so many other graces that society felt itself sufficiently compensated. He really took such immense trouble to conceal his age and give pleasure to his friends. In the first place, we must call attention to the extreme care he gave to his linen, the only distinction that well-bred men can nowadays exhibit in their clothes. The linen of the chevalier was invariably of a fineness and whiteness that were truly aristocratic. As for his coat, though remarkable for its cleanliness, it was always half worn-out, but without spots or creases. The preservation of that garment was something marvellous to those who noticed the chevalier's high-bred indifference to its shabbiness. He did not go so far as to scrape the seams with glass,—a refinement invented by the Prince of Wales; but he did practice the rudiments of English elegance with a personal satisfaction little understood by the people of Alencon. The world owes a great deal to persons who take such pains to please it. In this there is certainly some accomplishment of that most difficult precept of the Gospel about rendering good for evil. This freshness of ablution and all the other little cares harmonized charmingly with the blue eyes, the ivory teeth, and the blond person of the old chevalier.

The only blemish was that this retired Adonis had nothing manly about him; he seemed to be employing this toilet varnish to hide the ruins occasioned by the military service of gallantry only. But we must hasten to add that his voice produced what might be called an antithesis to his blond delicacy. Unless you adopted the opinion of certain observers of the human heart, and thought that the chevalier had the voice of his nose, his organ of speech would have amazed you by its full and redundant sound. Without possessing the volume of classical bass voices, the tone of it was pleasing from a slightly muffled quality like that of an English bugle, which is firm and sweet, strong but velvety.

The chevalier had repudiated the ridiculous costume still preserved by certain monarchical old men; he had frankly modernized himself. He was always seen in a maroon-colored coat with gilt buttons, half-tight breeches of poul-de-soie with gold buckles, a white waistcoat without embroidery, and a tight cravat showing no shirt-collar,—a last vestige of the old French costume which he did not renounce, perhaps, because it enabled him to show a neck like that of the sleekest abbe. His shoes were noticeable for their square buckles, a style of which the present generation has no knowledge; these buckles were fastened to a square of polished black leather. The chevalier allowed two watch-chains to hang parallel to each other from each of his waistcoat pockets,—another vestige of the eighteenth century, which the Incroyables had not disdained to use under the Directory. This transition costume, uniting as it did two centuries, was worn by the chevalier with the high-bred grace of an old French marquis, the secret of which is lost to France since the day when Fleury, Mole's last pupil, vanished.

The private life of this old bachelor was apparently open to all eyes, though in fact it was quite mysterious. He lived in a lodging that was modest, to say the best of it, in the rue du Cours, on the second floor of a house belonging to Madame Lardot, the best and busiest washerwoman in the town. This circumstance will explain the excessive nicety of his linen. Ill-luck would have it that the day came when Alencon was guilty of believing that the chevalier had not always comported himself as a gentleman should, and that in fact he was secretly married in his old age to a certain Cesarine,—the mother of a child which had had the impertinence to come into the world without being called for.

"He had given his hand," as a certain Monsieur du Bousquier remarked, "to the person who had long had him under irons."

This horrible calumny embittered the last days of the dainty chevalier all the more because, as the present Scene will show, he had lost a hope long cherished to which he had made many sacrifices.

Madame Lardot leased to the chevalier two rooms on the second floor of her house, for the modest sum of one hundred francs a year. The worthy gentleman dined out every day, returning only in time to go to bed. His sole expense therefore was for breakfast, invariably composed of a cup of chocolate, with bread and butter and fruits in their season. He made no fire except in the coldest winter, and then only enough to get up by. Between eleven and four o'clock he walked about, went to read the papers, and paid visits. From the time of his settling in Alencon he had nobly admitted his poverty, saying that his whole fortune consisted in an annuity of six hundred francs a year, the sole remains of his former opulence,—a property which obliged him to see his man of business (who held the annuity papers)

quarterly. In truth, one of the Alencon bankers paid him every three months one hundred and fifty francs, sent down by Monsieur Bordin of Paris, the last of the procureurs du Chatelet. Every one knew these details because the chevalier exacted the utmost secrecy from the persons to whom he first confided them.

Monsieur de Valois gathered the fruit of his misfortunes. His place at table was laid in all the most distinguished houses in Alencon, and he was bidden to all soirees. His talents as a card-player, a narrator, an amiable man of the highest breeding, were so well known and appreciated that parties would have seemed a failure if the dainty connoisseur was absent. Masters of houses and their wives felt the need of his approving grimace. When a young woman heard the chevalier say at a ball, "You are delightfully well-dressed!" she was more pleased at such praise than she would have been at mortifying a rival. Monsieur de Valois was the only man who could perfectly pronounce certain phrases of the olden time. The words, "my heart," "my jewel," "my little pet," "my queen," and the amorous diminutives of 1770, had a grace that was quite irresistible when they came from his lips. In short, the chevalier had the privilege of superlatives. His compliments, of which he was stingy, won the good graces of all the old women; he made himself agreeable to every one, even to the officials of the government, from whom he wanted nothing. His behavior at cards had a lofty distinction which everybody noticed: he never complained; he praised his adversaries when they lost; he did not rebuke or teach his partners by showing them how they ought to have played. When, in the course of a deal, those sickening dissertations on the game would take place, the chevalier invariably drew out his snuff-box with a gesture that was worthy of Mole, looked at the Princess Goritza, raised the cover with dignity, shook, sifted, massed the snuff, and gathered his pinch, so that by the time the cards were dealt he had decorated both nostrils and replaced the princess in his waistcoat pocket,—always on his left side. A gentleman of the "good" century (in distinction from the "grand" century) could alone have invented that compromise between contemptuous silence and a sarcasm which might not have been understood. He accepted poor players and knew how to make the best of them. His delightful equability of temper made many persons say,—

"I do admire the Chevalier de Valois!"

His conversation, his manners, seemed bland, like his person. He endeavored to shock neither man nor woman. Indulgent to defects both physical and mental, he listened patiently (by the help of the Princess Goritza) to the many dull people who related to him the petty miseries of provincial life,—an egg ill-boiled for breakfast, coffee with feathered cream, burlesque details about health, disturbed sleep, dreams, visits. The chevalier could call up a languishing look, he could take on a classic attitude to feign compassion,



which made him a most valuable listener; he could put in an "Ah!" and a "Bah!" and a "What DID you do?" with charming appropriateness. He died without any one suspecting him of even an allusion to the tender passages of his romance with the Princess Goritza. Has any one ever reflected on the service a dead sentiment can do to society; how love may become both social and useful? This will serve to explain why, in spite of his constant winning at play (he never left a salon without carrying off with him about six francs), the old chevalier remained the spoilt darling of the town. His losses—which, by the bye, he always proclaimed, were very rare.

All who know him declare that they have never met, not even in the Egyptian museum at Turin, so agreeable a mummy. In no country in the world did parasitism ever take on so pleasant a form. Never did selfishness of a most concentrated kind appear less forth-putting, less offensive, than in this old gentleman; it stood him in place of devoted friendship. If some one asked Monsieur de Valois to do him a little service which might have discommoded him, that some one did not part from the worthy chevalier without being truly enchanted with him, and quite convinced that he either could not do the service demanded, or that he should injure the affair if he meddled in it.

To explain the problematic existence of the chevalier, the historian, whom Truth, that cruel wanton, grasps by the throat, is compelled to say that after the "glorious" sad days of July, Alencon discovered that the chevalier's nightly winnings amounted to about one hundred and fifty francs every three months; and that the clever old nobleman had had the pluck to send to himself his annuity in order not to appear in the eyes of a community, which loves the main chance, to be entirely without resources. Many of his friends (he was by that time dead, you will please remark) have contested mordicus this curious fact, declaring it to be a fable, and upholding the Chevalier de Valois as a respectable and worthy gentleman whom the liberals calumniated. Luckily for shrewd players, there are people to be found among the spectators who will always sustain them. Ashamed of having to defend a piece of wrong-doing, they stoutly deny it. Do not accuse them of wilful infatuation; such men have a sense of their dignity; governments set them the example of a virtue which consists in burying their dead without chanting the Misere of their defeats. If the chevalier did allow himself this bit of shrewd practice,—which, by the bye, would have won him the regard of the Chevalier de Gramont, a smile from the Baron de Foeneste, a shake of the hand from the Marquis de Moncade,—was he any the less that amiable guest, that witty talker, that imperturbable card-player, that famous teller of anecdotes, in whom all Alencon took delight? Besides, in what way was this action, which is certainly within the rights of a man's own will,—in what way was it contrary to the ethics of a gentleman? When so many persons are forced to pay annuities to others, what more natural than to pay one to his own best friend? But Laius is

dead—

To return to the period of which we are writing: after about fifteen years of this way of life the chevalier had amassed ten thousand and some odd hundred francs. On the return of the Bourbons, one of his old friends, the Marquis de Pombreton, formerly lieutenant in the Black mousquetaires, returned to him—so he said—twelve hundred pistoles which he had lent to the marquis for the purpose of emigrating. This event made a sensation; it was used later to refute the sarcasms of the "Constitutionnel," on the method employed by some emigres in paying their debts. When this noble act of the Marquis de Pombreton was lauded before the chevalier, the good man reddened even to his right cheek. Every one rejoiced frankly at this windfall for Monsieur de Valois, who went about consulting moneyed people as to the safest manner of investing this fragment of his past opulence. Confiding in the future of the Restoration, he finally placed his money on the Grand-Livre at the moment when the funds were at fifty-six francs and twenty-five centimes. Messieurs de Lenoncourt, de Navarreins, de Verneuil, de Fontaine, and La Billardiere, to whom he was known, he said, obtained for him, from the king's privy purse, a pension of three hundred francs, and sent him, moreover, the cross of Saint-Louis. Never was it known positively by what means the old chevalier obtained these two solemn consecrations of his title and merits. But one thing is certain; the cross of Saint-Louis authorized him to take the rank of retired colonel in view of his service in the Catholic armies of the West.

Besides his fiction of an annuity, about which no one at the present time knew anything, the chevalier really had, therefore, a bona fide income of a thousand francs. But in spite of this bettering of his circumstances, he made no change in his life, manners, or appearance, except that the red ribbon made a fine effect on his maroon-colored coat, and completed, so to speak, the physiognomy of a gentleman. After 1802, the chevalier sealed his letters with a very old seal, ill-engraved to be sure, by which the Casterans, the d'Esgrignons, the Troisvilles were enabled to see that he bore: Party of France, two cottises gemelled gules, and gules, five mascles or, placed end to end; on a chief sable, a cross argent. For crest, a knight's helmet. For motto: "Valeo." Bearing such noble arms, the so-called bastard of the Valois had the right to get into all the royal carriages of the world.

Many persons envied the quiet existence of this old bachelor, spent on whist, boston, backgammon, reversi, and piquet, all well played, on dinners well digested, snuff gracefully inhaled, and tranquil walks about the town. Nearly all Alencon believed this life to be exempt from ambitions and serious interests; but no man has a life as simple as envious neighbors attribute to him. You will find in the most out-of-the way villages human mollusks, creatures apparently dead, who have passions for lepidoptera or for conchology, let us

say,—beings who will give themselves infinite pains about moths, butterflies, or the concha Veneris. Not only did the chevalier have his own particular shells, but he cherished an ambitious desire which he pursued with a craft so profound as to be worthy of Sixtus the Fifth: he wanted to marry a certain rich old maid, with the intention, no doubt, of making her a stepping-stone by which to reach the more elevated regions of the court. There, then, lay the secret of his royal bearing and of his residence in Alencon.

## CHAPTER II. SUSANNAH AND THE ELDERS

On a Wednesday morning, early, toward the middle of spring, in the year 16,—such was his mode of reckoning,—at the moment when the chevalier was putting on his old green-flowered damask dressing-gown, he heard, despite the cotton in his ears, the light step of a young girl who was running up the stairway. Presently three taps were discreetly struck upon the door; then, without waiting for any response, a handsome girl slipped like an eel into the room occupied by the old bachelor.

"Ah! is it you, Suzanne?" said the Chevalier de Valois, without discontinuing his occupation, which was that of stropping his razor. "What have you come for, my dear little jewel of mischief?"

"I have come to tell you something which may perhaps give you as much pleasure as pain?"

"Is it anything about Cesarine?"

"Cesarine! much I care about your Cesarine!" she said with a saucy air, half serious, half indifferent.

This charming Suzanne, whose present comical performance was to exercise a great influence in the principal personages of our history, was a work-girl at Madame Lardot's. One word here on the topography of the house. The wash-rooms occupied the whole of the ground floor. The little courtyard was used to hang out on wire cords embroidered handkerchiefs, collarets, capes, cuffs, frilled shirts, cravats, laces, embroidered dresses,—in short, all the fine linen of the best families of the town. The chevalier assumed to know from the number of her capes in the wash how the love-affairs of the wife of the prefect were going on. Though he guessed much from observations of this kind, the chevalier was discretion itself; he was never betrayed into an epigram (he had plenty of wit) which might have closed to him an agreeable salon. You are therefore to consider Monsieur de Valois as a man of superior manners, whose talents, like those of many others, were lost in a narrow

sphere. Only—for, after all, he was a man—he permitted himself certain penetrating glances which could make some women tremble; although they all loved him heartily as soon as they discovered the depth of his discretion and the sympathy that he felt for their little weaknesses.

The head woman, Madame Lardot's factotum, an old maid of forty-six, hideous to behold, lived on the opposite side of the passage to the chevalier. Above them were the attics where the linen was dried in winter. Each apartment had two rooms,—one lighted from the street, the other from the courtyard. Beneath the chevalier's room there lived a paralytic, Madame Lardot's grandfather, an old buccaneer named Grevin, who had served under Admiral Simeuse in India, and was now stone-deaf. As for Madame Lardot, who occupied the other lodging on the first floor, she had so great a weakness for persons of condition that she may well have been thought blind to the ways of the chevalier. To her, Monsieur de Valois was a despotic monarch who did right in all things. Had any of her workwomen been guilty of a happiness attributed to the chevalier she would have said, "He is so lovable!" Thus, though the house was of glass, like all provincial houses, it was discreet as a robber's cave.

A born confidant to all the little intrigues of the work-rooms, the chevalier never passed the door, which usually stood open, without giving something to his little ducks,—chocolate, bonbons, ribbons, laces, gilt crosses, and such like trifles adored by grisettes; consequently, the kind old gentleman was adored in return. Women have an instinct which enables them to divine the men who love them, who like to be near them, and exact no payment for gallantries. In this respect women have the instinct of dogs, who in a mixed company will go straight to the man to whom animals are sacred.

The poor Chevalier de Valois retained from his former life the need of bestowing gallant protection, a quality of the seigneurs of other days. Faithful to the system of the "petite maison," he liked to enrich women,—the only beings who know how to receive, because they can always return. But the poor chevalier could no longer ruin himself for a mistress. Instead of the choicest bonbons wrapped in bank-bills, he gallantly presented paper-bags full of toffee. Let us say to the glory of Alençon that the toffee was accepted with more joy than la Duthe ever showed at a gilt service or a fine equipage offered by the Comte d'Artois. All these grisettes fully understood the fallen majesty of the Chevalier de Valois, and they kept their private familiarities with him a profound secret for his sake. If they were questioned about him in certain houses when they carried home the linen, they always spoke respectfully of the chevalier, and made him out older than he really was; they talked of him as a most respectable monsieur, whose life was a flower of sanctity; but once in their own regions they perched on his shoulders like so many parrots. He liked

to be told the secrets which washerwomen discover in the bosom of households, and day after day these girls would tell him the cancans which were going the round of Alencon. He called them his "petticoat gazettes," his "talking feuilletons." Never did Monsieur de Sartines have spies more intelligent and less expensive, or minions who showed more honor while displaying their rascality of mind. So it may be said that in the mornings, while breakfasting, the chevalier usually amused himself as much as the saints in heaven.

Suzanne was one of his favorites, a clever, ambitious girl, made of the stuff of a Sophie Arnold, and handsome withal, as the handsomest courtesan invited by Titian to pose on black velvet for a model of Venus; although her face, fine about the eyes and forehead, degenerated, lower down, into commonness of outline. Hers was a Norman beauty, fresh, high-colored, redundant, the flesh of Rubens covering the muscles of the Farnese Hercules, and not the slender articulations of the Venus de' Medici, Apollo's graceful consort.

"Well, my child, tell me your great or your little adventure, whatever it is."

The particular point about the chevalier which would have made him noticeable from Paris to Peking, was the gentle paternity of his manner to grisettes. They reminded him of the illustrious operatic queens of his early days, whose celebrity was European during a good third of the eighteenth century. It is certain that the old gentleman, who had lived in days gone by with that feminine nation now as much forgotten as many other great things,—like the Jesuits, the Buccaneers, the Abbesses, and the Farmers-General,—had acquired an irresistible good-humor, a kindly ease, a *laissez-aller* devoid of egotism, the self-effacement of Jupiter with Alcmena, of the king intending to be duped, who casts his thunderbolts to the devil, wants his Olympus full of follies, little suppers, feminine profusions—but with Juno out of the way, be it understood.

In spite of his old green damask dressing-gown and the bareness of the room in which he sat, where the floor was covered with a shabby tapestry in place of carpet, and the walls were hung with tavern-paper presenting the profiles of Louis XVI. and members of his family, traced among the branches of a weeping willow with other sentimentalities invented by royalism during the Terror,—in spite of his ruins, the chevalier, trimming his beard before a shabby old toilet-table, draped with trumpery lace, exhaled an essence of the eighteenth century. All the libertine graces of his youth reappeared; he seemed to have the wealth of three hundred thousand francs of debt, while his *vis-a-vis* waited before the door. He was grand,—like Berthier on the retreat from Moscow, issuing orders to an army that existed no longer.

"Monsieur le chevalier," replied Suzanne, drolly, "seems to me I needn't

tell you anything; you've only to look."

And Suzanne presented a side view of herself which gave a sort of lawyer's comment to her words. The chevalier, who, you must know, was a sly old bird, lowered his right eye on the grisette, still holding the razor at his throat, and pretended to understand.

"Well, well, my little duck, we'll talk about that presently. But you are rather previous, it seems to me."

"Why, Monsieur le chevalier, ought I to wait until my mother beats me and Madame Lardot turns me off? If I don't get away soon to Paris, I shall never be able to marry here, where men are so ridiculous."

"It can't be helped, my dear; society is changing; women are just as much victims to the present state of things as the nobility themselves. After political overturn comes the overturn of morals. Alas! before long woman won't exist" (he took out the cotton-wool to arrange his ears): "she'll lose everything by rushing into sentiment; she'll wring her nerves; good-bye to all the good little pleasures of our time, desired without shame, accepted without nonsense." (He polished up the little negroes' heads.) "Women had hysterics in those days to get their ends, but now" (he began to laugh) "their vapors end in charcoal. In short, marriage" (here he picked up his pincers to remove a hair) "will become a thing intolerable; whereas it used to be so gay in my day! The reigns of Louis XIV. and Louis XV.—remember this, my child—said farewell to the finest manners and morals ever known to the world."

"But, Monsieur le chevalier," said the grisette, "the matter now concerns the morals and honor of your poor little Suzanne, and I hope you won't abandon her."

"Abandon her!" cried the chevalier, finishing his hair; "I'd sooner abandon my own name."

"Ah!" exclaimed Suzanne.

"Now, listen to me, you little mischief," said the chevalier, sitting down on a huge sofa, formerly called a duchesse, which Madame Lardot had been at some pains to find for him.

He drew the magnificent Suzanne before him, holding her legs between his knees. She let him do as he liked, although in the street she was offish enough to other men, refusing their familiarities partly from decorum and partly for contempt for their commonness. She now stood audaciously in front of the chevalier, who, having fathomed in his day many other mysteries in minds that were far more wily, took in the situation at a single glance. He knew very well that no young girl would joke about a real dishonor; but he took good care not

to knock over the pretty scaffolding of her lie as he touched it.

"We slander ourselves," he said with inimitable craft; "we are as virtuous as that beautiful biblical girl whose name we bear; we can always marry as we please, but we are thirsty for Paris, where charming creatures—and we are no fool—get rich without trouble. We want to go and see if the great capital of pleasures hasn't some young Chevalier de Valois in store for us, with a carriage, diamonds, an opera-box, and so forth. Russians, Austrians, Britons, have millions on which we have an eye. Besides, we are patriotic; we want to help France in getting back her money from the pockets of those gentry. Hey! hey! my dear little devil's duck! it isn't a bad plan. The world you live in may cry out a bit, but success justifies all things. The worst thing in this world, my dear, is to be without money; that's our disease, yours and mine. Now inasmuch as we have plenty of wit, we thought it would be a good thing to parade our dear little honor, or dishonor, to catch an old boy; but that old boy, my dear heart, knows the Alpha and Omega of female tricks,—which means that you could easier put salt on a sparrow's tail than to make me believe I have anything to do with your little affair. Go to Paris, my dear; go at the cost of an old celibate, I won't prevent it; in fact, I'll help you, for an old bachelor, Suzanne, is the natural money-box of a young girl. But don't drag me into the matter. Listen, my queen, you who know life pretty well; you would me great harm and give me much pain,—harm, because you would prevent my marriage in a town where people cling to morality; pain, because if you are in trouble (which I deny, you sly puss!) I haven't a penny to get you out of it. I'm as poor as a church mouse; you know that, my dear. Ah! if I marry Mademoiselle Cormon, if I am once more rich, of course I would prefer you to Cesarine. You've always seemed to me as fine as the gold they gild on lead; you were made to be the love of a great seigneur. I think you so clever that the trick you are trying to play off on me doesn't surprise me one bit; I expected it. You are flinging the scabbard after the sword, and that's daring for a girl. It takes nerve and superior ideas to do it, my angel, and therefore you have won my respectful esteem."

"Monsieur le chevalier, I assure you, you are mistaken, and—"

She colored, and did not dare to say more. The chevalier, with a single glance, had guessed and fathomed her whole plan.

"Yes, yes! I understand: you want me to believe it," he said. "Well! I do believe it. But take my advice: go to Monsieur du Bousquier. Haven't you taken linen there for the last six or eight months? I'm not asking what went on between you; but I know the man: he has immense conceit; he is an old bachelor, and very rich; and he only spends a quarter of a comfortable income. If you are as clever as I suppose, you can go to Paris at his expense. There, run along, my little doe; go and twist him round your finger. Only, mind this: be as

supple as silk; at every word take a double turn round him and make a knot. He is a man to fear scandal, and if he has given you a chance to put him in the pillory—in short, understand; threaten him with the ladies of the Maternity Hospital. Besides, he's ambitious. A man succeeds through his wife, and you are handsome and clever enough to make the fortune of a husband. Hey! the mischief! you could hold your own against all the court ladies."

Suzanne, whose mind took in at a flash the chevalier's last words, was eager to run off to du Bousquier, but, not wishing to depart too abruptly, she questioned the chevalier about Paris, all the while helping him to dress. The chevalier, however, divined her desire to be off, and favored it by asking her to tell Cesarine to bring up his chocolate, which Madame Lardot made for him every morning. Suzanne then slipped away to her new victim, whose biography must here be given.

Born of an old Alencon family, du Bousquier was a cross between the bourgeois and the country squire. Finding himself without means on the death of his father, he went, like other ruined provincials, to Paris. On the breaking out of the Revolution he took part in public affairs. In spite of revolutionary principles, which made a hobby of republican honesty, the management of public business in those days was by no means clean. A political spy, a stock-jobber, a contractor, a man who confiscated in collusion with the syndic of a commune the property of emigres in order to sell them and buy them in, a minister, and a general were all equally engaged in public business. From 1793 to 1799 du Bousquier was commissary of provisions to the French armies. He lived in a magnificent hotel and was one of the matadors of finance, did business with Ouvrard, kept open house, and led the scandalous life of the period,—the life of a Cincinnatus, on sacks of corn harvested without trouble, stolen rations, "little houses" full of mistresses, in which were given splendid fetes to the Directors of the Republic.

The citizen du Bousquier was one of Barras' familiars; he was on the best of terms with Fouché, stood very well with Bernadotte, and fully expected to become a minister by throwing himself into the party which secretly caballed against Bonaparte until Marengo. If it had not been for Kellermann's charge and Desaix's death, du Bousquier would probably have become a minister. He was one of the chief assistances of that secret government whom Napoleon's luck sent behind the scenes in 1793. (See "An Historical Mystery.") The unexpected victory of Marengo was the defeat of that party who actually had their proclamations printed to return to the principles of the Montagne in case the First Consul succumbed.

Convinced of the impossibility of Bonaparte's triumph, du Bousquier staked the greater part of his property on a fall in the Funds, and kept two couriers on the field of battle. The first started for Paris when Melas' victory



was certain; the second, starting four hours later, brought the news of the defeat of the Austrians. Du Bousquier cursed Kellermann and Desaix; he dared not curse Bonaparte, who might owe him millions. This alternative of millions to be earned and present ruin staring him in the face, deprived the purveyor of most of his faculties: he became nearly imbecile for several days; the man had so abused his health by excesses that when the thunderbolt fell upon him he had no strength to resist. The payment of his bills against the Exchequer gave him some hopes for the future, but, in spite of all efforts to ingratiate himself, Napoleon's hatred to the contractors who had speculated on his defeat made itself felt; du Bousquier was left without a sou. The immorality of his private life, his intimacy with Barras and Bernadotte, displeased the First Consul even more than his manoeuvres at the Bourse, and he struck du Bousquier's name from the list of the government contractors.

Out of all his past opulence du Bousquier saved only twelve hundred francs a year from an investment in the Grand Livre, which he had happened to place there by pure caprice, and which saved him from penury. A man ruined by the First Consul interested the town of Alençon, to which he now returned, where royalism was secretly dominant. Du Bousquier, furious against Bonaparte, relating stories against him of his meanness, of Josephine's improprieties, and all the other scandalous anecdotes of the last ten years, was well received.

About this time, when he was somewhere between forty and fifty, du Bousquier's appearance was that of a bachelor of thirty-six, of medium height, plump as a purveyor, proud of his vigorous calves, with a strongly marked countenance, a flattened nose, the nostrils garnished with hair, black eyes with thick lashes, from which darted shrewd glances like those of Monsieur de Talleyrand, though somewhat dulled. He still wore republican whiskers and his hair very long; his hands, adorned with bunches of hair on each knuckle, showed the power of his muscular system in their prominent blue veins. He had the chest of the Farnese Hercules, and shoulders fit to carry the stocks. Such shoulders are seen nowadays only at Tortoni's. This wealth of masculine vigor counted for much in du Bousquier's relations with others. And yet in him, as in the chevalier, symptoms appeared which contrasted oddly with the general aspect of their persons. The late purveyor had not the voice of his muscles. We do not mean that his voice was a mere thread, such as we sometimes hear issuing from the mouth of these walruses; on the contrary, it was a strong voice, but stifled, an idea of which can be given only by comparing it with the noise of a saw cutting into soft and moistened wood,—the voice of a worn-out speculator.

In spite of the claims which the enmity of the First Consul gave Monsieur du Bousquier to enter the royalist society of the province, he was not received

in the seven or eight families who composed the faubourg Saint-Germain of Alençon, among whom the Chevalier de Valois was welcome. He had offered himself in marriage, through her notary, to Mademoiselle Armande, sister of the most distinguished noble in the town; to which offer he received a refusal. He consoled himself as best he could in the society of a dozen rich families, former manufacturers of the old point d'Alençon, owners of pastures and cattle, or merchants doing a wholesale business in linen, among whom, as he hoped, he might find a wealthy wife. In fact, all his hopes now converged to the perspective of a fortunate marriage. He was not without a certain financial ability, which many persons used to their profit. Like a ruined gambler who advises neophytes, he pointed out enterprises and speculations, together with the means and chances of conducting them. He was thought a good administrator, and it was often a question of making him mayor of Alençon; but the memory of his underhand jobbery still clung to him, and he was never received at the prefecture. All the succeeding governments, even that of the Hundred Days, refused to appoint him mayor of Alençon,—a place he coveted, which, could he have had it, would, he thought, have won him the hand of a certain old maid on whom his matrimonial views now turned.

Du Bousquier's aversion to the Imperial government had thrown him at first into the royalist circles of Alençon, where he remained in spite of the rebuffs he received there; but when, after the first return of the Bourbons, he was still excluded from the prefecture, that mortification inspired him with a hatred as deep as it was secret against the royalists. He now returned to his old opinions, and became the leader of the liberal party in Alençon, the invisible manipulator of elections, and did immense harm to the Restoration by the cleverness of his underhand proceedings and the perfidy of his outward behavior. Du Bousquier, like all those who live by their heads only, carried on his hatreds with the quiet tranquillity of a rivulet, feeble apparently, but inexhaustible. His hatred was that of a negro, so peaceful that it deceived the enemy. His vengeance, brooded over for fifteen years, was as yet satisfied by no victory, not even that of July, 1830.

It was not without some private intention that the Chevalier de Valois had turned Suzanne's designs upon Monsieur du Bousquier. The liberal and the royalist had mutually divined each other in spite of the wide dissimulation with which they hid their common hope from the rest of the town. The two old bachelors were secretly rivals. Each had formed a plan to marry the Demoiselle Cormon, whom Monsieur de Valois had mentioned to Suzanne. Both, ensconced in their idea and wearing the armor of apparent indifference, awaited the moment when some lucky chance might deliver the old maid over to them. Thus, if the two old bachelors had not been kept asunder by the two political systems of which they each offered a living expression, their private rivalry would still have made them enemies. Epochs put their mark on men.

These two individuals proved the truth of that axiom by the opposing historic tints that were visible in their faces, in their conversation, in their ideas, and in their clothes. One, abrupt, energetic, with loud, brusque manners, curt, rude speech, dark in tone, in hair, in look, terrible apparently, in reality as impotent as an insurrection, represented the republic admirably. The other, gentle and polished, elegant and nice, attaining his ends by the slow and infallible means of diplomacy, faithful to good taste, was the express image of the old courtier regime.

The two enemies met nearly every evening on the same ground. The war was courteous and benign on the side of the chevalier; but du Bousquier showed less ceremony on his, though still preserving the outward appearances demanded by society, for he did not wish to be driven from the place. They themselves fully understood each other; but in spite of the shrewd observation which provincials bestow on the petty interests of their own little centre, no one in the town suspected the rivalry of these two men. Monsieur le Chevalier de Valois occupied a vantage-ground: he had never asked for the hand of Mademoiselle Cormon; whereas du Bousquier, who entered the lists soon after his rejection by the most distinguished family in the place, had been refused. But the chevalier believed that his rival had still such strong chances of success that he dealt him this coup de Jarnac with a blade (namely, Suzanne) that was finely tempered for the purpose. The chevalier had cast his plummet-line into the waters of du Bousquier; and, as we shall see by the sequel, he was not mistaken in any of his conjectures.

Suzanne tripped with a light foot from the rue du Cours, by the rue de la Porte de Seez and the rue du Bercail, to the rue du Cygne, where, about five years earlier, du Bousquier had bought a little house built of gray Jura stone, which is something between Breton slate and Norman granite. There he established himself more comfortably than any householder in town; for he had managed to preserve certain furniture and decorations from the days of his splendor. But provincial manners and morals obscured, little by little, the rays of this fallen Sardanapalus; these vestiges of his former luxury now produced the effect of a glass chandelier in a barn. Harmony, that bond of all work, human or divine, was lacking in great things as well as in little ones. The stairs, up which everybody mounted without wiping their feet, were never polished; the walls, painted by some wretched artisan of the neighborhood, were a terror to the eye; the stone mantel-piece, ill-carved, "swore" with the handsome clock, which was further degraded by the company of contemptible candlesticks. Like the period which du Bousquier himself represented, the house was a jumble of dirt and magnificence. Being considered a man of leisure, du Bousquier led the same parasite life as the chevalier; and he who does not spend his income is always rich. His only servant was a sort of Jocrisse, a lad of the neighborhood, rather a ninny, trained slowly and with

difficulty to du Bousquier's requirements. His master had taught him, as he might an orang-outang, to rub the floors, dust the furniture, black his boots, brush his coats, and bring a lantern to guide him home at night if the weather were cloudy, and clogs if it rained. Like many other human beings, this lad hadn't stuff enough in him for more than one vice; he was a glutton. Often, when du Bousquier went to a grand dinner, he would take Rene to wait at table; on such occasions he made him take off his blue cotton jacket, with its big pockets hanging round his hips, and always bulging with handkerchiefs, clasp-knives, fruits, or a handful of nuts, and forced him to put on a regulation coat. Rene would then stuff his fill with the other servants. This duty, which du Bousquier had turned into a reward, won him the most absolute discretion from the Breton servant.

"You here, mademoiselle!" said Rene to Suzanne when she entered; "'t isn't your day. We haven't any linen for the wash, tell Madame Lardot."

"Old stupid!" said Suzanne, laughing.

The pretty girl went upstairs, leaving Rene to finish his porringer of buckwheat in boiled milk. Du Bousquier, still in bed, was revolving in his mind his plans of fortune; for ambition was all that was left to him, as to other men who have sucked dry the orange of pleasure. Ambition and play are inexhaustible; in a well-organized man the passions which proceed from the brain will always survive the passions of the heart.

"Here am I," said Suzanne, sitting down on the bed and jangling the curtain-rings back along the rod with despotic vehemence.

"Quesaco, my charmer?" said the old bachelor, sitting up in bed.

"Monsieur," said Suzanne, gravely, "you must be astonished to see me here at this hour; but I find myself in a condition which obliges me not to care for what people may say about it."

"What does all that mean?" said du Bousquier, crossing his arms.

"Don't you understand me?" said Suzanne. "I know," she continued, making a pretty little face, "how ridiculous it is in a poor girl to come and nag at a man for what he thinks a mere nothing. But if you really knew me, monsieur, if you knew all that I am capable of for a man who would attach himself to me as much as I'm attached to you, you would never repent having married me. Of course it isn't here, in Alencon, that I should be of service to you; but if we went to Paris, you would see where I could lead a man with your mind and your capacities; and just at this time too, when they are remaking the government from top to toe. So—between ourselves, be it said—is what has happened a misfortune? Isn't it rather a piece of luck, which will pay you well? Who and what are you working for now?"

"For myself, of course!" cried du Bousquier, brutally.

"Monster! you'll never be a father!" said Suzanne, giving a tone of prophetic malediction to the words.

"Come, don't talk nonsense, Suzanne," replied du Bousquier; "I really think I am still dreaming."

"How much more reality do you want?" cried Suzanne, standing up.

Du Bousquier rubbed his cotton night-cap to the top of his head with a rotatory motion, which plainly indicated the tremendous fermentation of his ideas.

"He actually believes it!" thought Suzanne, "and he's flattered. Heaven! how easy it is to gull men!"

"Suzanne, what the devil must I do? It is so extraordinary—I, who thought—The fact is that—No, no, it can't be—"

"What? you can't marry me?"

"Oh! as for that, no; I have engagements."

"With Mademoiselle Armande or Mademoiselle Cormon, who have both refused you? Listen to me, Monsieur du Bousquier, my honor doesn't need gendarmes to drag you to the mayor's office. I sha'n't lack for husbands, thank goodness! and I don't want a man who can't appreciate what I'm worth. But some day you'll repent of the way you are behaving; for I tell you now that nothing on earth, neither gold nor silver, will induce me to return the good thing that belongs to you, if you refuse to accept it to-day."

"But, Suzanne, are you sure?"

"Oh, monsieur!" cried the grisette, wrapping her virtue round her, "what do you take me for? I don't remind you of the promises you made me, which have ruined a poor young girl whose only blame was to have as much ambition as love."

Du Bousquier was torn with conflicting sentiments, joy, distrust, calculation. He had long determined to marry Mademoiselle Cormon; for the Charter, on which he had just been ruminating, offered to his ambition, through the half of her property, the political career of a deputy. Besides, his marriage with the old maid would put him socially so high in the town that he would have great influence. Consequently, the storm upraised by that malicious Suzanne drove him into the wildest embarrassment. Without this secret scheme, he would have married Suzanne without hesitation. In which case, he could openly assume the leadership of the liberal party in Alencon. After such a marriage he would, of course, renounce the best society and take

up with the bourgeois class of tradesmen, rich manufacturers and graziers, who would certainly carry him in triumph as their candidate. Du Bousquier already foresaw the Left side.

This solemn deliberation he did not conceal; he rubbed his hands over his head, displacing the cap which covered its disastrous baldness. Suzanne, meantime, like all those persons who succeed beyond their hopes, was silent and amazed. To hide her astonishment, she assumed the melancholy pose of an injured girl at the mercy of her seducer; inwardly she was laughing like a grisette at her clever trick.

"My dear child," said du Bousquier at length, "I'm not to be taken in with such bosh, not I!"

Such was the curt remark which ended du Bousquier's meditation. He plumed himself on belonging to the class of cynical philosophers who could never be "taken in" by women,—putting them, one and all, unto the same category, as suspicious. These strong-minded persons are usually weak men who have a special catechism in the matter of womenkind. To them the whole sex, from queens of France to milliners, are essentially depraved, licentious, intriguing, not a little rascally, fundamentally deceitful, and incapable of thought about anything but trifles. To them, women are evil-doing queens, who must be allowed to dance and sing and laugh as they please; they see nothing sacred or saintly in them, nor anything grand; to them there is no poetry in the senses, only gross sensuality. Where such jurisprudence prevails, if a woman is not perpetually tyrannized over, she reduces the man to the condition of a slave. Under this aspect du Bousquier was again the antithesis of the chevalier. When he made his final remark, he flung his night-cap to the foot of the bed, as Pope Gregory did the taper when he fulminated an excommunication; Suzanne then learned for the first time that du Bousquier wore a toupet covering his bald spot.

"Please to remember, Monsieur du Bousquier," she replied majestically, "that in coming here to tell you of this matter I have done my duty; remember that I have offered you my hand, and asked for yours; but remember also that I behaved with the dignity of a woman who respects herself. I have not abased myself to weep like a silly fool; I have not insisted; I have not tormented you. You now know my situation. You must see that I cannot stay in Alençon: my mother would beat me, and Madame Lardot rides a hobby of principles; she'll turn me off. Poor work-girl that I am, must I go to the hospital? must I beg my bread? No! I'd rather throw myself into the Brillante or the Sarthe. But isn't it better that I should go to Paris? My mother could find an excuse to send me there,—an uncle who wants me, or a dying aunt, or a lady who sends for me. But I must have some money for the journey and for—you know what."

This extraordinary piece of news was far more startling to du Bousquier than to the Chevalier de Valois. Suzanne's fiction introduced such confusion into the ideas of the old bachelor that he was literally incapable of sober reflection. Without this agitation and without his inward delight (for vanity is a swindler which never fails of its dupe), he would certainly have reflected that, supposing it were true, a girl like Suzanne, whose heart was not yet spoiled, would have died a thousand deaths before beginning a discussion of this kind and asking for money.

"Will you really go to Paris, then?" he said.

A flash of gayety lighted Suzanne's gray eyes as she heard these words; but the self-satisfied du Bousquier saw nothing.

"Yes, monsieur," she said.

Du Bousquier then began bitter lamentations: he had the last payments to make on his house; the painter, the mason, the upholsterers must be paid. Suzanne let him run on; she was listening for the figures. Du Bousquier offered her three hundred francs. Suzanne made what is called on the stage a false exit; that is, she marched toward the door.

"Stop, stop! where are you going?" said du Bousquier, uneasily. "This is what comes of a bachelor's life!" thought he. "The devil take me if I ever did anything more than rumple her collar, and, lo and behold! she makes THAT a ground to put her hand in one's pocket!"

"I'm going, monsieur," replied Suzanne, "to Madame Granson, the treasurer of the Maternity Society, who, to my knowledge, has saved many a poor girl in my condition from suicide."

"Madame Granson!"

"Yes," said Suzanne, "a relation of Mademoiselle Cormon, the president of the Maternity Society. Saving your presence, the ladies of the town have created an institution to protect poor creatures from destroying their infants, like that handsome Faustine of Argentan who was executed for it three years ago."

"Here, Suzanne," said du Bousquier, giving her a key, "open that secretary, and take out the bag you'll find there: there's about six hundred francs in it; it is all I possess."

"Old cheat!" thought Suzanne, doing as he told her, "I'll tell about your false toupet."

She compared du Bousquier with that charming chevalier, who had given her nothing, it is true, but who had comprehended her, advised her, and carried all grisettes in his heart.

"If you deceive me, Suzanne," cried du Bousquier, as he saw her with her hand in the drawer, "you—"

"Monsieur," she said, interrupting him with ineffable impertinence, "wouldn't you have given me money if I had asked for it?"

Recalled to a sense of gallantry, du Bousquier had a remembrance of past happiness and grunted his assent. Suzanne took the bag and departed, after allowing the old bachelor to kiss her, which he did with an air that seemed to say, "It is a right which costs me dear; but it is better than being harried by a lawyer in the court of assizes as the seducer of a girl accused of infanticide."

Suzanne hid the sack in a sort of gamebag made of osier which she had on her arm, all the while cursing du Bousquier for his stinginess; for one thousand francs was the sum she wanted. Once tempted of the devil to desire that sum, a girl will go far when she has set foot on the path of trickery. As she made her way along the rue du Bercail, it came into her head that the Maternity Society, presided over by Mademoiselle Cormon, might be induced to complete the sum at which she had reckoned her journey to Paris, which to a grisette of Alençon seemed considerable. Besides, she hated du Bousquier. The latter had evidently feared a revelation of his supposed misconduct to Madame Granson; and Suzanne, at the risk of not getting a penny from the society, was possessed with the desire, on leaving Alençon, of entangling the old bachelor in the inextricable meshes of a provincial slander. In all grisettes there is something of the malevolent mischief of a monkey. Accordingly, Suzanne now went to see Madame Granson, composing her face to an expression of the deepest dejection.

### CHAPTER III. ATHANASE

Madame Granson, widow of a lieutenant-colonel of artillery killed at Jena, possessed, as her whole means of livelihood, a meagre pension of nine hundred francs a year, and three hundred francs from property of her own, plus a son whose support and education had eaten up all her savings. She occupied, in the rue du Bercail, one of those melancholy ground-floor apartments which a traveller passing along the principal street of a little provincial town can look through at a glance. The street door opened at the top of three steep steps; a passage led to an interior courtyard, at the end of which was the staircase covered by a wooden gallery. On one side of the passage was the dining-room and the kitchen; on the other side, a salon put to many uses, and the widow's bedchamber.



Athanase Granson, a young man twenty-three years of age, who slept in an attic room above the second floor of the house, added six hundred francs to the income of his poor mother, by the salary of a little place which the influence of his relation, Mademoiselle Cormon, had obtained for him in the mayor's office, where he was placed in charge of the archives.

From these indications it is easy to imagine Madame Granson in her cold salon with its yellow curtains and Utrecht velvet furniture, also yellow, as she straightened the round straw mats which were placed before each chair, that visitors might not soil the red-tiled floor while they sat there; after which she returned to her cushioned armchair and little work-table placed beneath the portrait of the lieutenant-colonel of artillery between two windows,—a point from which her eye could rake the rue du Bercail and see all comers. She was a good woman, dressed with bourgeois simplicity in keeping with her wan face furrowed by grief. The rigorous humbleness of poverty made itself felt in all the accessories of this household, the very air of which was charged with the stern and upright morals of the provinces. At this moment the son and mother were together in the dining-room, where they were breakfasting with a cup of coffee, with bread and butter and radishes. To make the pleasure which Suzanne's visit was to give to Madame Granson intelligible, we must explain certain secret interests of the mother and son.

Athanase Granson was a thin and pale young man, of medium height, with a hollow face in which his two black eyes, sparkling with thoughts, gave the effect of bits of coal. The rather irregular lines of his face, the curve of his lips, a prominent chin, the fine modelling of his forehead, his melancholy countenance, caused by a sense of his poverty warring with the powers that he felt within him, were all indications of repressed and imprisoned talent. In any other place than the town of Alencon the mere aspect of his person would have won him the assistance of superior men, or of women who are able to recognize genius in obscurity. If his was not genius, it was at any rate the form and aspect of it; if he had not the actual force of a great heart, the glow of such a heart was in his glance. Although he was capable of expressing the highest feeling, a casing of timidity destroyed all the graces of his youth, just as the ice of poverty kept him from daring to put forth all his powers. Provincial life, without an opening, without appreciation, without encouragement, described a circle about him in which languished and died the power of thought,—a power which as yet had scarcely reached its dawn. Moreover, Athanase possessed that savage pride which poverty intensifies in noble minds, exalting them in their struggle with men and things; although at their start in life it is an obstacle to their advancement. Genius proceeds in two ways: either it takes its opportunity—like Napoleon, like Moliere—the moment that it sees it, or it waits to be sought when it has patiently revealed itself. Young Granson belonged to that class of men of talent who distrust themselves and are easily

discouraged. His soul was contemplative. He lived more by thought than by action. Perhaps he might have seemed deficient or incomplete to those who cannot conceive of genius without the sparkle of French passion; but he was powerful in the world of mind, and he was liable to reach, through a series of emotions imperceptible to common souls, those sudden determinations which make fools say of a man, "He is mad."

The contempt which the world pours out on poverty was death to Athanase; the enervating heat of solitude, without a breath or current of air, relaxed the bow which ever strove to tighten itself; his soul grew weary in this painful effort without results. Athanase was a man who might have taken his place among the glories of France; but, eagle as he was, cooped in a cage without his proper nourishment, he was about to die of hunger after contemplating with an ardent eye the fields of air and the mountain heights where genius soars. His work in the city library escaped attention, and he buried in his soul his thoughts of fame, fearing that they might injure him; but deeper than all lay buried within him the secret of his heart,—a passion which hollowed his cheeks and yellowed his brow. He loved his distant cousin, this very Mademoiselle Cormon whom the Chevalier de Valois and du Bousquier, his hidden rivals, were stalking. This love had had its origin in calculation. Mademoiselle Cormon was thought to be one of the richest persons in the town: the poor lad had therefore been led to love her by desires for material happiness, by the hope, long indulged, of gilding with comfort his mother's last years, by eager longing for the ease of life so needful to men who live by thought; but this most innocent point of departure degraded his passion in his own eyes. Moreover, he feared the ridicule the world would cast upon the love of a young man of twenty-three for an old maid of forty.

And yet his passion was real; whatever may seem false about such a love elsewhere, it can be realized as a fact in the provinces, where, manners and morals being without change or chance or movement or mystery, marriage becomes a necessity of life. No family will accept a young man of dissolute habits. However natural the liaison of a young man, like Athanase, with a handsome girl, like Suzanne, for instance, might seem in a capital, it alarms provincial parents, and destroys the hopes of marriage of a poor young man when possibly the fortune of a rich one might cause such an unfortunate antecedent to be overlooked. Between the depravity of certain liaisons and a sincere love, a man of honor and no fortune will not hesitate: he prefers the misfortunes of virtue to the evils of vice. But in the provinces women with whom a young man call fall in love are rare. A rich young girl he cannot obtain in a region where all is calculation; a poor young girl he is prevented from loving; it would be, as provincials say, marrying hunger and thirst. Such monkish solitude is, however, dangerous to youth.

These reflections explain why provincial life is so firmly based on marriage. Thus we find that ardent and vigorous genius, forced to rely on the independence of its own poverty, quits these cold regions where thought is persecuted by brutal indifference, where no woman is willing to be a sister of charity to a man of talent, of art, of science.

Who will really understand Athanase Granson's love for Mademoiselle Cormon? Certainly neither rich men—those sultans of society who fill their harems—nor middle-class men, who follow the well-beaten high-road of prejudices; nor women who, not choosing to understand the passions of artists, impose the yoke of their virtues upon men of genius, imagining that the two sexes are governed by the same laws.

Here, perhaps, we should appeal to those young men who suffer from the repression of their first desires at the moment when all their forces are developing; to artists sick of their own genius smothering under the pressure of poverty; to men of talent, persecuted and without influence, often without friends at the start, who have ended by triumphing over that double anguish, equally agonizing, of soul and body. Such men will well understand the lancinating pains of the cancer which was now consuming Athanase; they have gone through those long and bitter deliberations made in presence of some grandiose purpose they had not the means to carry out; they have endured those secret miscarriages in which the fructifying seed of genius falls on arid soil. Such men know that the grandeur of desires is in proportion to the height and breadth of the imagination. The higher they spring, the lower they fall; and how can it be that ties and bonds should not be broken by such a fall? Their piercing eye has seen—as did Athanase—the brilliant future which awaited them, and from which they fancied that only a thin gauze parted them; but that gauze through which their eyes could see is changed by Society into a wall of iron. Impelled by a vocation, by a sentiment of art, they endeavor again and again to live by sentiments which society as incessantly materializes. Alas! the provinces calculate and arrange marriage with the one view of material comfort, and a poor artist or man of science is forbidden to double its purpose and make it the saviour of his genius by securing to him the means of subsistence!

Moved by such ideas, Athanase Granson first thought of marriage with Mademoiselle Cormon as a means of obtaining a livelihood which would be permanent. Thence he could rise to fame, and make his mother happy, knowing at the same time that he was capable of faithfully loving his wife. But soon his own will created, although he did not know it, a genuine passion. He began to study the old maid, and, by dint of the charm which habit gives, he ended by seeing only her beauties and ignoring her defects.

In a young man of twenty-three the senses count for much in love; their

fire produces a sort of prism between his eyes and the woman. From this point of view the clasp with which Beaumarchis' Cherubin seizes Marceline is a stroke of genius. But when we reflect that in the utter isolation to which poverty condemned poor Athanase, Mademoiselle Cormon was the only figure presented to his gaze, that she attracted his eye incessantly, that all the light he had was concentrated on her, surely his love may be considered natural.

This sentiment, so carefully hidden, increased from day to day. Desires, sufferings, hopes, and meditations swelled in quietness and silence the lake widening ever in the young man's breast, as hour by hour added its drop of water to the volume. And the wider this inward circle, drawn by the imagination, aided by the senses, grew, the more imposing Mademoiselle Cormon appeared to Athanase, and the more his own timidity increased.

The mother had divined the truth. Like all provincial mothers, she calculated candidly in her own mind the advantages of the match. She told herself that Mademoiselle Cormon would be very lucky to secure a husband in a young man of twenty-three, full of talent, who would always be an honor to his family and the neighborhood; at the same time the obstacles which her son's want of fortune and Mademoiselle Cormon's age presented to the marriage seemed to her almost insurmountable; she could think of nothing but patience as being able to vanquish them. Like du Bousquier, like the Chevalier de Valois, she had a policy of her own; she was on the watch for circumstances, awaiting the propitious moment for a move with the shrewdness of maternal instinct. Madame Granson had no fears at all as to the chevalier, but she did suppose that du Bousquier, although refused, retained certain hopes. As an able and underhand enemy to the latter, she did him much secret harm in the interests of her son; from whom, by the bye, she carefully concealed all such proceedings.

After this explanation it is easy to understand the importance which Suzanne's lie, confided to Madame Granson, was about to acquire. What a weapon put into the hands of this charitable lady, the treasurer of the Maternity Society! How she would gently and demurely spread the news while collecting assistance for the chaste Suzanne!

At the present moment Athanase, leaning pensively on his elbow at the breakfast table, was twirling his spoon in his empty cup and contemplating with a preoccupied eye the poor room with its red brick floor, its straw chairs, its painted wooden buffet, its pink and white curtains chequered like a backgammon board, which communicated with the kitchen through a glass door. As his back was to the chimney which his mother faced, and as the chimney was opposite to the door, his pallid face, strongly lighted from the window, framed in beautiful black hair, the eyes gleaming with despair and fiery with morning thoughts, was the first object which met the eyes of the

incoming Suzanne. The grisette, who belonged to a class which certainly has the instinct of misery and the sufferings of the heart, suddenly felt that electric spark, darting from Heaven knows where, which can never be explained, which some strong minds deny, but the sympathetic stroke of which has been felt by many men and many women. It is at once a light which lightens the darkness of the future, a presentiment of the sacred joys of a shared love, the certainty of mutual comprehension. Above all, it is like the touch of a firm and able hand on the keyboard of the senses. The eyes are fascinated by an irresistible attraction; the heart is stirred; the melodies of happiness echo in the soul and in the ears; a voice cries out, "It is he!" Often reflection casts a douche of cold water on this boiling emotion, and all is over.

In a moment, as rapid as the flash of the lightning, Suzanne received the broadside of this emotion in her heart. The flame of a real love burned up the evil weeds fostered by a libertine and dissipated life. She saw how much she was losing of decency and value by accusing herself falsely. What had seemed to her a joke the night before became to her eyes a serious charge against herself. She recoiled at her own success. But the impossibility of any result; the poverty of the young man; a vague hope of enriching herself, of going to Paris, and returning with full hands to say, "I love you! here are the means of happiness!" or mere fate, if you will have it so, dried up the next moment this beneficent dew.

The ambitious grisette asked with a timid air for a moment's interview with Madame Granson, who took her at once into her bedchamber. When Suzanne came out she looked again at Athanase; he was still in the same position, and the tears came into her eyes. As for Madame Granson, she was radiant with joy. At last she had a weapon, and a terrible one, against du Bousquier; she could now deal him a mortal blow. She had of course promised the poor seduced girl the support of all charitable ladies and that of the members of the Maternity Society in particular; she foresaw a dozen visits which would occupy her whole day, and brew up a frightful storm on the head of the guilty du Bousquier. The Chevalier de Valois, while foreseeing the turn the affair would take, had really no idea of the scandal which would result from his own action.

"My dear child," said Madame Granson to her son, "we are to dine, you know, with Mademoiselle Cormon; do take a little pains with your appearance. You are wrong to neglect your dress as you do. Put on that handsome frilled shirt and your green coat of Elbeuf cloth. I have my reasons," she added slyly. "Besides, Mademoiselle Cormon is going to Prebaudet, and many persons will doubtless call to bid her good-bye. When a young man is marriageable he ought to take every means to make himself agreeable. If girls would only tell the truth, heavens! my dear boy, you'd be astonished at what makes them fall

in love. Often it suffices for a man to ride past them at the head of a company of artillery, or show himself at a ball in tight clothes. Sometimes a mere turn of the head, a melancholy attitude, makes them suppose a man's whole life; they'll invent a romance to match the hero—who is often a mere brute, but the marriage is made. Watch the Chevalier de Valois: study him; copy his manners; see with what ease he presents himself; he never puts on a stiff air, as you do. Talk a little more; one would really think you didn't know anything,—you, who know Hebrew by heart."

Athanase listened to his mother with a surprised but submissive air; then he rose, took his cap, and went off to the mayor's office, saying to himself, "Can my mother suspect my secret?"

He passed through the rue du Val-Noble, where Mademoiselle Cormon lived,—a little pleasure which he gave himself every morning, thinking, as usual, a variety of fanciful things:—

"How little she knows that a young man is passing before her house who loves her well, who would be faithful to her, who would never cause her any grief; who would leave her the entire management of her fortune without interference. Good God! what fatality! here, side by side, in the same town, are two persons in our mutual condition, and yet nothing can bring them together. Suppose I were to speak to her this evening?"

During this time Suzanne had returned to her mother's house thinking of Athanase; and, like many other women who have longed to help an adored man beyond the limit of human powers, she felt herself capable of making her body a stepping-stone on which he could rise to attain his throne.

It is now necessary to enter the house of this old maid toward whom so many interests are converging, where the actors in this scene, with the exception of Suzanne, were all to meet this very evening. As for Suzanne, that handsome individual bold enough to burn her ships like Alexander at her start in life, and to begin the battle by a falsehood, she disappears from the stage, having introduced upon it a violent element of interest. Her utmost wishes were gratified. She quitted her native town a few days later, well supplied with money and good clothes, among which was a fine dress of green reps and a charming green bonnet lined with pink, the gift of Monsieur de Valois,—a present which she preferred to all the rest, even the money. If the chevalier had gone to Paris in the days of her future brilliancy, she would certainly have left every one for him. Like the chaste Susannah of the Bible, whom the Elders hardly saw, she established herself joyously and full of hope in Paris, while all Alencon was deploring her misfortunes, for which the ladies of two Societies (Charity and Maternity) manifested the liveliest sympathy. Though Suzanne is a fair specimen of those handsome Norman women whom a learned physician

reckons as comprising one third of her fallen class whom our monstrous Paris absorbs, it must be stated that she remained in the upper and more decent regions of gallantry. At an epoch when, as Monsieur de Valois said, Woman no longer existed, she was simply "Madame du Val-Noble"; in other days she would have rivalled the Rhodopes, the Imperias, the Ninons of the past. One of the most distinguished writers of the Restoration has taken her under his protection; perhaps he may marry her. He is a journalist, and consequently above public opinion, inasmuch as he manufactures it afresh every year or two.

#### CHAPTER IV. MADEMOISELLE CORMON

In nearly all the second-class prefectures of France there exists one salon which is the meeting-ground of those considerable and well-considered persons of the community who are, nevertheless, not the cream of the best society. The master and mistress of such an establishment are counted among the leading persons of the town; they are received wherever it may please them to visit; no fete is given, no formal or diplomatic dinner takes place, to which they are not invited. But the chateau people, heads of families possessing great estates, in short, the highest personages in the department, do not go to their houses; social intercourse between them is carried on by cards from one to the other, and a dinner or soiree accepted and returned.

This salon, in which the lesser nobility, the clergy, and the magistracy meet together, exerts a great influence. The judgment and mind of the region reside in that solid, unostentatious society, where each man knows the resources of his neighbor, where complete indifference is shown to luxury and dress,—pleasures which are thought childish in comparison to that of obtaining ten or twelve acres of pasture land,—a purchase coveted for years, which has probably given rise to endless diplomatic combinations. Immovable in its prejudices, good or evil, this social circle follows a beaten track, looking neither before it nor behind it. It accepts nothing from Paris without long examination and trial; it rejects cashmeres as it does investments on the Grand-Livre; it scoffs at fashions and novelties; reads nothing, prefers ignorance, whether of science, literature, or industrial inventions. It insists on the removal of a prefect when that official does not suit it; and if the administration resists, it isolates him, after the manner of bees who wall up a snail in wax when it gets into their hive.

In this society gossip is often turned into solemn verdicts. Young women are seldom seen there; when they come it is to seek approbation of their

conduct,—a consecration of their self-importance. This supremacy granted to one house is apt to wound the sensibilities of other natives of the region, who console themselves by adding up the cost it involves, and by which they profit. If it so happens that there is no fortune large enough to keep open house in this way, the big-wigs of the place choose a place of meeting, as they did at Alencon, in the house of some inoffensive person, whose settled life and character and position offers no umbrage to the vanities or the interests of any one.

For some years the upper classes of Alencon had met in this way at the house of an old maid, whose fortune was, unknown to herself, the aim and object of Madame Granson, her second cousin, and of the two old bachelors whose secret hopes in that direction we have just unveiled. This lady lived with her maternal uncle, a former grand-vicar of the bishopric of Seez, once her guardian, and whose heir she was. The family of which Rose-Marie-Victoire Cormon was the present representative had been in earlier days among the most considerable in the province. Though belonging to the middle classes, she consorted with the nobility, among whom she was more or less allied, her family having furnished, in past years, stewards to the Duc d'Alencon, many magistrates to the long robe, and various bishops to the clergy. Monsieur de Sponde, the maternal grandfather of Mademoiselle Cormon, was elected by the Nobility to the States-General, and Monsieur Cormon, her father, by the Tiers-Etat, though neither accepted the mission. For the last hundred years the daughters of the family had married nobles belonging to the provinces; consequently, this family had thrown out so many suckers throughout the duchy as to appear on nearly all the genealogical trees. No bourgeois family had ever seemed so like nobility.

The house in which Mademoiselle Cormon lived, build in Henri IV.'s time, by Pierre Cormon, the steward of the last Duc d'Alencon, had always belonged to the family; and among the old maid's visible possessions this one was particularly stimulating to the covetous desires of the two old lovers. Yet, far from producing revenue, the house was a cause of expense. But it is so rare to find in the very centre of a provincial town a private dwelling without unpleasant surroundings, handsome in outward structure and convenient within, that Alencon shared the envy of the lovers.

This old mansion stands exactly in the middle of the rue du Val-Noble. It is remarkable for the strength of its construction,—a style of building introduced by Marie de' Medici. Though built of granite,—a stone which is hard to work,—its angles, and the casings of the doors and windows, are decorated with corner blocks cut into diamond facets. It has only one clear story above the ground-floor; but the roof, rising steeply, has several projecting windows, with carved spandrels rather elegantly enclosed in oaken frames, and externally



adorned with balustrades. Between each of these windows is a gargoyle presenting the fantastic jaws of an animal without a body, vomiting the rain-water upon large stones pierced with five holes. The two gables are surmounted by leaden bouquets,—a symbol of the bourgeoisie; for nobles alone had the privilege in former days of having weather-vanes. To right of the courtyard are the stables and coach-house; to left, the kitchen, wood-house, and laundry.

One side of the porte-cochere, being left open, allowed the passers in the street to see in the midst of the vast courtyard a flower-bed, the raised earth of which was held in place by a low privet hedge. A few monthly roses, pinkes, lilies, and Spanish broom filled this bed, around which in the summer season boxes of paurestinus, pomegranates, and myrtle were placed. Struck by the scrupulous cleanliness of the courtyard and its dependencies, a stranger would at once have divined that the place belonged to an old maid. The eye which presided there must have been an unoccupied, ferreting eye; minutely careful, less from nature than for want of something to do. An old maid, forced to employ her vacant days, could alone see to the grass being hoed from between the paving stones, the tops of the walls kept clean, the broom continually going, and the leather curtains of the coach-house always closed. She alone would have introduced, out of busy idleness, a sort of Dutch cleanliness into a house on the confines of Bretagne and Normandie,—a region where they take pride in professing an utter indifference to comfort.

Never did the Chevalier de Valois, or du Bousquier, mount the steps of the double stairway leading to the portico of this house without saying to himself, one, that it was fit for a peer of France, the other, that the mayor of the town ought to live there.

A glass door gave entrance from this portico into an antechamber, a species of gallery paved in red tiles and wainscoted, which served as a hospital for the family portraits,—some having an eye put out, others suffering from a dislocated shoulder; this one held his hat in a hand that no longer existed; that one was a case of amputation at the knee. Here were deposited the cloaks, clogs, overshoes, umbrellas, hoods, and pelisses of the guests. It was an arsenal where each arrival left his baggage on arriving, and took it up when departing. Along each wall was a bench for the servants who arrived with lanterns, and a large stove, to counteract the north wind, which blew through this hall from the garden to the courtyard.

The house was divided in two equal parts. On one side, toward the courtyard, was the well of the staircase, a large dining-room looking to the garden, and an office or pantry which communicated with the kitchen. On the other side was the salon, with four windows, beyond which were two smaller rooms,—one looking on the garden, and used as a boudoir, the other lighted

from the courtyard, and used as a sort of office.

The upper floor contained a complete apartment for a family household, and a suite of rooms where the venerable Abbe de Sponde had his abode. The garrets offered fine quarters to the rats and mice, whose nocturnal performances were related by Mademoiselle Cormon to the Chevalier de Valois, with many expressions of surprise at the inutility of her efforts to get rid of them. The garden, about half an acre in size, is margined by the Brillante, so named from the particles of mica which sparkle in its bed elsewhere than in the Val-Noble, where its shallow waters are stained by the dyehouses, and loaded with refuse from the other industries of the town. The shore opposite to Mademoiselle Cormon's garden is crowded with houses where a variety of trades are carried on; happily for her, the occupants are quiet people,—a baker, a cleaner, an upholsterer, and several bourgeois. The garden, full of common flowers, ends in a natural terrace, forming a quay, down which are several steps leading to the river. Imagine on the balustrade of this terrace a number of tall vases of blue and white pottery, in which are gilliflowers; and to right and left, along the neighboring walls, hedges of linden closely trimmed in, and you will gain an idea of the landscape, full of tranquil chastity, modest cheerfulness, but commonplace withal, which surrounded the venerable edifice of the Cormon family. What peace! what tranquillity! nothing pretentious, but nothing transitory; all seems eternal there!

The ground-floor is devoted wholly to the reception-rooms. The old, unchangeable provincial spirit pervades them. The great square salon has four windows, modestly cased in woodwork painted gray. A single oblong mirror is placed above the fireplace; the top of its frame represented the Dawn led by the Hours, and painted in camaieu (two shades of one color). This style of painting infested the decorative art of the day, especially above door-frames, where the artist displayed his eternal Seasons, and made you, in most houses in the centre of France, abhor the odious Cupids, endlessly employed in skating, gleaning, twirling, or garlanding one another with flowers. Each window was draped in green damask curtains, looped up by heavy cords, which made them resemble a vast dais. The furniture, covered with tapestry, the woodwork, painted and varnished, and remarkable for the twisted forms so much the fashion in the last century, bore scenes from the fables of La Fontaine on the chair-backs; some of this tapestry had been mended. The ceiling was divided at the centre of the room by a huge beam, from which depended an old chandelier of rock-crystal swathed in green gauze. On the fireplace were two vases in Sevres blue, and two old girandoles attached to the frame of the mirror, and a clock, the subject of which, taken from the last scene of the "Deserteur," proved the enormous popularity of Sedaine's work. This clock, of bronze-gilt, bore eleven personages upon it, each about four

inches tall. At the back the Deserter was seen issuing from prison between the soldiers; in the foreground the young woman lay fainting, and pointing to his pardon. On the walls of this salon were several of the more recent portraits of the family,—one or two by Rigaud, and three pastels by Latour. Four card tables, a backgammon board, and a piquet table occupied the vast room, the only one in the house, by the bye, which was ceiled.

The dining-room, paved in black and white stone, not ceiled, and its beams painted, was furnished with one of those enormous sideboards with marble tops, required by the war waged in the provinces against the human stomach. The walls, painted in fresco, represented a flowery trellis. The seats were of varnished cane, and the doors of natural wood. All things about the place carried out the patriarchal air which emanated from the inside as well as the outside of the house. The genius of the provinces preserved everything; nothing was new or old, neither young nor decrepit. A cold precision made itself felt throughout.

Tourists in Normandy, Brittany, Maine, and Anjou must all have seen in the capitals of those provinces many houses which resemble more or less that of the Cormons; for it is, in its way, an archetype of the burgher houses in that region of France, and it deserves a place in this history because it serves to explain manners and customs, and represents ideas. Who does not already feel that life must have been calm and monotonously regular in this old edifice? It contained a library; but that was placed below the level of the river. The books were well bound and shelved, and the dust, far from injuring them, only made them valuable. They were preserved with the care given in these provinces deprived of vineyards to other native products, desirable for their antique perfume, and issued by the presses of Bourgogne, Touraine, Gascogne, and the South. The cost of transportation was too great to allow any but the best products to be imported.

The basis of Mademoiselle Cormon's society consisted of about one hundred and fifty persons; some went at times to the country; others were occasionally ill; a few travelled about the department on business; but certain of the faithful came every night (unless invited elsewhere), and so did certain others compelled by duties or by habit to live permanently in the town. All the personages were of ripe age; few among them had ever travelled; nearly all had spent their lives in the provinces, and some had taken part in the chouannerie. The latter were beginning to speak fearlessly of that war, now that rewards were being showered on the defenders of the good cause. Monsieur de Valois, one of the movers in the last uprising (during which the Marquis de Montauran, betrayed by his mistress, perished in spite of the devotion of Marche-a-Terre, now tranquilly raising cattle for the market near Mayenne),—Monsieur de Valois had, during the last six months, given the key

to several choice stratagems practised upon an old republican named Hulot, the commander of a demi-brigade stationed at Alençon from 1798 to 1800, who had left many memories in the place. [See "The Chouans."]

The women of this society took little pains with their dress, except on Wednesdays, when Mademoiselle Cormon gave a dinner, on which occasion the guests invited on the previous Wednesday paid their "visit of digestion." Wednesdays were gala days: the assembly was numerous; guests and visitors appeared in fiocchi; some women brought their sewing, knitting, or worsted work; the young girls were not ashamed to make patterns for the Alençon point lace, with the proceeds of which they paid for their personal expenses. Certain husbands brought their wives out of policy, for young men were few in that house; not a word could be whispered in any ear without attracting the attention of all; there was therefore no danger, either for young girls or wives, of love-making.

Every evening, at six o'clock, the long antechamber received its furniture. Each habitue brought his cane, his cloak, his lantern. All these persons knew each other so well, and their habits and ways were so familiarly patriarchal, that if by chance the old Abbe de Sponde was lying down, or Mademoiselle Cormon was in her chamber, neither Josette, the maid, nor Jacquelin, the manservant, nor Mariette, the cook, informed them. The first comer received the second; then, when the company were sufficiently numerous for whist, piquet, or boston, they began the game without awaiting either the Abbe de Sponde or mademoiselle. If it was dark, Josette or Jacquelin would hasten to light the candles as soon as the first bell rang. Seeing the salon lighted up, the abbe would slowly hurry to come down. Every evening the backgammon and the piquet tables, the three boston tables, and the whist table were filled,—which gave occupation to twenty-five or thirty persons; but as many as forty were usually present. Jacquelin would then light the candles in the other rooms.

Between eight and nine o'clock the servants began to arrive in the antechamber to accompany their masters home; and, short of a revolution, no one remained in the salon at ten o'clock. At that hour the guests were departing in groups along the street, discoursing on the game, or continuing conversations on the land they were covetous of buying, on the terms of some one's will, on quarrels among heirs, on the haughty assumption of the aristocratic portion of the community. It was like Paris when the audience of a theatre disperses.

Certain persons who talk much of poesy and know nothing about it, declaim against the habits of life in the provinces. But put your forehead in your left hand, rest one foot on the fender, and your elbow on your knee; then, if you compass the idea of this quiet and uniform scene, this house and its interior, this company and its interests, heightened by the pettiness of its

intellect like goldleaf beaten between sheets of parchment, ask yourself, What is human life? Try to decide between him who scribbles jokes on Egyptian obelisks, and him who has "bostoned" for twenty years with Du Bousquier, Monsieur de Valois, Mademoiselle Cormon, the judge of the court, the king's attorney, the Abbe de Sponde, Madame Granson, and tutti quanti. If the daily and punctual return of the same steps to the same path is not happiness, it imitates happiness so well that men driven by the storms of an agitated life to reflect upon the blessings of tranquillity would say that here was happiness enough.

To reckon the importance of Mademoiselle Cormon's salon at its true value, it will suffice to say that the born statistician of the society, du Bousquier, had estimated that the persons who frequented it controlled one hundred and thirty-one votes in the electoral college, and mustered among themselves eighteen hundred thousand francs a year from landed estate in the neighborhood.

The town of Alencon, however, was not entirely represented by this salon. The higher aristocracy had a salon of their own; moreover, that of the receiver-general was like an administration inn kept by the government, where society danced, plotted, fluttered, loved, and supped. These two salons communicated by means of certain mixed individuals with the house of Cormon, and vice-versa; but the Cormon establishment sat severely in judgment on the two other camps. The luxury of their dinners was criticised; the ices at their balls were pondered; the behavior of the women, the dresses, and "novelties" there produced were discussed and disapproved.

Mademoiselle Cormon, a species of firm, as one might say, under whose name was comprised an imposing coterie, was naturally the aim and object of two ambitious men as deep and wily as the Chevalier de Valois and du Bousquier. To the one as well as to the other, she meant election as deputy, resulting, for the noble, in the peerage, for the purveyor, in a receiver-generalship. A leading salon is a difficult thing to create, whether in Paris or the provinces, and here was one already created. To marry Mademoiselle Cormon was to reign in Alencon. Athanase Granson, the only one of the three suitors for the hand of the old maid who no longer calculated profits, now loved her person as well as her fortune.

To employ the jargon of the day, is there not a singular drama in the situation of these four personages? Surely there is something odd and fantastic in three rivalries silently encompassing a woman who never guessed their existence, in spite of an eager and legitimate desire to be married. And yet, though all these circumstances make the spinsterhood of this old maid an extraordinary thing, it is not difficult to explain how and why, in spite of her fortune and her three lovers, she was still unmarried. In the first place,

Mademoiselle Cormon, following the custom and rule of her house, had always desired to marry a nobleman; but from 1788 to 1798 public circumstances were very unfavorable to such pretensions. Though she wanted to be a woman of condition, as the saying is, she was horribly afraid of the Revolutionary tribunal. The two sentiments, equal in force, kept her stationary by a law as true in ethics as it is in statics. This state of uncertain expectation is pleasing to unmarried women as long as they feel themselves young, and in a position to choose a husband. France knows that the political system of Napoleon resulted in making many widows. Under that regime heiresses were entirely out of proportion in numbers to the bachelors who wanted to marry. When the Consulate restored internal order, external difficulties made the marriage of Mademoiselle Cormon as difficult to arrange as it had been in the past. If, on the one hand, Rose-Marie-Victoire refused to marry an old man, on the other, the fear of ridicule forbade her to marry a very young one.

In the provinces, families marry their sons early to escape the conscription. In addition to all this, she was obstinately determined not to marry a soldier: she did not intend to take a man and then give him up to the Emperor; she wanted him for herself alone. With these views, she found it therefore impossible, from 1804 to 1815, to enter the lists with young girls who were rivalling each other for suitable matches.

Besides her predilection for the nobility, Mademoiselle Cormon had another and very excusable mania: that of being loved for herself. You could hardly believe the lengths to which this desire led her. She employed her mind on setting traps for her possible lovers, in order to test their real sentiments. Her nets were so well laid that the luckless suitors were all caught, and succumbed to the test she applied to them without their knowledge. Mademoiselle Cormon did not study them; she watched them. A single word said heedlessly, a joke (that she often was unable to understand), sufficed to make her reject an aspirant as unworthy: this one had neither heart nor delicacy; that one told lies, and was not religious; a third only wanted to coin money under the cloak of marriage; another was not of a nature to make a woman happy; here she suspected hereditary gout; there certain immoral antecedents alarmed her. Like the Church, she required a noble priest at her altar; she even wanted to be married for imaginary ugliness and pretended defects, just as other women wish to be loved for the good qualities they have not, and for imaginary beauties. Mademoiselle Cormon's ambition took its rise in the most delicate and sensitive feminine feeling; she longed to reward a lover by revealing to him a thousand virtues after marriage, as other women then betray the imperfections they have hitherto concealed. But she was ill understood. The noble woman met with none but common souls in whom the reckoning of actual interests was paramount, and who knew nothing of the nobler calculations of sentiment.

The farther she advanced towards that fatal epoch so adroitly called the "second youth," the more her distrust increased. She affected to present herself in the most unfavorable light, and played her part so well that the last wooers hesitated to link their fate to that of a person whose virtuous blind-man's-buff required an amount of penetration that men who want the virtuous ready-made would not bestow upon it. The constant fear of being married for her money rendered her suspicious and uneasy beyond all reason. She turned to the rich men; but the rich are in search of great marriages; she feared the poor men, in whom she denied the disinterestedness she sought so eagerly. After each disappointment in marriage, the poor lady, led to despise mankind, began to see them all in a false light. Her character acquired, necessarily, a secret misanthropy, which threw a tinge of bitterness into her conversation, and some severity into her eyes. Celibacy gave to her manners and habits a certain increasing rigidity; for she endeavored to sanctify herself in despair of fate. Noble vengeance! she was cutting for God the rough diamond rejected by man. Before long public opinion was against her; for society accepts the verdict an independent woman renders on herself by not marrying, either through losing suitors or rejecting them. Everybody supposed that these rejections were founded on secret reasons, always ill interpreted. One said she was deformed; another suggested some hidden fault; but the poor girl was really as pure as a saint, as healthy as an infant, and full of loving kindness; Nature had intended her for all the pleasures, all the joys, and all the fatigues of motherhood.

Mademoiselle Cormon did not possess in her person an obliging auxiliary to her desires. She had no other beauty than that very improperly called *la beauté du diable*, which consists of a buxom freshness of youth that the devil, theologically speaking, could never have,—though perhaps the expression may be explained by the constant desire that must surely possess him to cool and refresh himself. The feet of the heiress were broad and flat. Her leg, which she often exposed to sight by her manner (be it said without malice) of lifting her gown when it rained, could never have been taken for the leg of a woman. It was sinewy, with a thick projecting calf like a sailor's. A stout waist, the plumpness of a wet-nurse, strong dimpled arms, red hands, were all in keeping with the swelling outlines and the fat whiteness of Norman beauty. Projecting eyes, undecided in color, gave to her face, the rounded outline of which had no dignity, an air of surprise and sheepish simplicity, which was suitable perhaps for an old maid. If Rose had not been, as she was, really innocent, she would have seemed so. An aquiline nose contrasted curiously with the narrowness of her forehead; for it is rare that that form of nose does not carry with it a fine brow. In spite of her thick red lips, a sign of great kindness, the forehead revealed too great a lack of ideas to allow of the heart being guided by intellect; she was evidently benevolent without grace. How severely we

reproach Virtue for its defects, and how full of indulgence we all are for the pleasanter qualities of Vice!

Chestnut hair of extraordinary length gave to Rose Cormon's face a beauty which results from vigor and abundance,—the physical qualities most apparent in her person. In the days of her chief pretensions, Rose affected to hold her head at the three-quarter angle, in order to exhibit a very pretty ear, which detached itself from the blue-veined whiteness of her throat and temples, set off, as it was, by her wealth of hair. Seen thus in a ball-dress, she might have seemed handsome. Her protuberant outlines and her vigorous health did, in fact, draw from the officers of the Empire the approving exclamation,—

"What a fine slip of a girl!"

But, as years rolled on, this plumpness, encouraged by a tranquil, wholesome life, had insensibly so ill spread itself over the whole of Mademoiselle Cormon's body that her primitive proportions were destroyed. At the present moment, no corset could restore a pair of hips to the poor lady, who seemed to have been cast in a single mould. The youthful harmony of her bosom existed no longer; and its excessive amplitude made the spectator fear that if she stooped its heavy masses might topple her over. But nature had provided against this by giving her a natural counterpoise, which rendered needless the deceitful adjunct of a bustle; in Rose Cormon everything was genuine. Her chin, as it doubled, reduced the length of her neck, and hindered the easy carriage of her head. Rose had no wrinkles, but she had folds of flesh; and jesters declared that to save chafing she powdered her skin as they do an infant's.

This ample person offered to a young man full of ardent desires like Athanase an attraction to which he had succumbed. Young imaginations, essentially eager and courageous, like to rove upon these fine living sheets of flesh. Rose was like a plump partridge attracting the knife of a gourmet. Many an elegant deep in debt would very willingly have resigned himself to make the happiness of Mademoiselle Cormon. But, alas! the poor girl was now forty years old. At this period, after vainly seeking to put into her life those interests which make the Woman, and finding herself forced to be still unmarried, she fortified her virtue by stern religious practices. She had recourse to religion, the great consoler of oppressed virginity. A confessor had, for the last three years, directed Mademoiselle Cormon rather stupidly in the path of maceration; he advised the use of scourging, which, if modern medical science is to be believed, produces an effect quite the contrary to that expected by the worthy priest, whose hygienic knowledge was not extensive.

These absurd practices were beginning to shed a monastic tint over the



face of Rose Cormon, who now saw with something like despair her white skin assuming the yellow tones which proclaim maturity. A slight down on her upper lip, about the corners, began to spread and darken like a trail of smoke; her temples grew shiny; decadence was beginning! It was authentic in Alencon that Mademoiselle Cormon suffered from rush of blood to the head. She confided her ills to the Chevalier de Valois, enumerating her foot-baths, and consulting him as to refrigerants. On such occasions the shrewd old gentleman would pull out his snuff-box, gaze at the Princess Goritza, and say, by way of conclusion:—

"The right composing draught, my dear lady, is a good and kind husband."

"But whom can one trust?" she replied.

The chevalier would then brush away the snuff which had settled in the folds of his waistcoat or his paduasoy breeches. To the world at large this gesture would have seemed very natural; but it always gave extreme uneasiness to the poor woman.

The violence of this hope without an object was so great that Rose was afraid to look a man in the face lest he should perceive in her eyes the feelings that filled her soul. By a wilfulness, which was perhaps only the continuation of her earlier methods, though she felt herself attracted toward the men who might still suit her, she was so afraid of being accused of folly that she treated them ungraciously. Most persons in her society, being incapable of appreciating her motives, which were always noble, explained her manner towards her co-celibates as the revenge of a refusal received or expected. When the year 1815 began, Rose had reached that fatal age which she dared not avow. She was forty-two years old. Her desire for marriage then acquired an intensity which bordered on monomania, for she saw plainly that all chance of progeny was about to escape her; and the thing which in her celestial ignorance she desired above all things was the possession of children. Not a person in all Alencon ever attributed to this virtuous woman a single desire for amorous license. She loved, as it were, in bulk without the slightest imagination of love. Rose was a Catholic Agnes, incapable of inventing even one of the wiles of Moliere's Agnes.

For some months past she had counted on chance. The disbandment of the Imperial troops and the reorganization of the Royal army caused a change in the destination of many officers, who returned, some on half-pay, others with or without a pension, to their native towns,—all having a desire to counteract their luckless fate, and to end their life in a way which might to Rose Cormon be a happy beginning of hers. It would surely be strange if, among those who returned to Alencon or its neighborhood, no brave, honorable, and, above all, sound and healthy officer of suitable age could be found, whose character

would be a passport among Bonaparte opinions; or some ci-devant noble who, to regain his lost position, would join the ranks of the royalists. This hope kept Mademoiselle Cormon in heart during the early months of that year. But, alas! all the soldiers who thus returned were either too old or too young; too aggressively Bonapartist, or too dissipated; in short, their several situations were out of keeping with the rank, fortune, and morals of Mademoiselle Cormon, who now grew daily more and more desperate. The poor woman in vain prayed to God to send her a husband with whom she could be piously happy: it was doubtless written above that she should die both virgin and martyr; no man suitable for a husband presented himself. The conversations in her salon every evening kept her informed of the arrival of all strangers in Alencon, and of the facts of their fortunes, rank, and habits. But Alencon is not a town which attracts visitors; it is not on the road to any capital; even sailors, travelling from Brest to Paris, never stop there. The poor woman ended by admitting to herself that she was reduced to the aborigines. Her eye now began to assume a certain savage expression, to which the malicious chevalier responded by a shrewd look as he drew out his snuff-box and gazed at the Princess Goritza. Monsieur de Valois was well aware that in the feminine ethics of love fidelity to a first attachment is considered a pledge for the future.

But Mademoiselle Cormon—we must admit it—was wanting in intellect, and did not understand the snuff-box performance. She redoubled her vigilance against "the evil spirit"; her rigid devotion and fixed principles kept her cruel sufferings hidden among the mysteries of private life. Every evening, after the company had left her, she thought of her lost youth, her faded bloom, the hopes of thwarted nature; and, all the while immolating her passions at the feet of the Cross (like poems condemned to stay in a desk), she resolved firmly that if, by chance, any suitor presented himself, to subject him to no tests, but to accept him at once for whatever he might be. She even went so far as to think of marrying a sub-lieutenant, a man who smoked tobacco, whom she proposed to render, by dint of care and kindness, one of the best men in the world, although he was hampered with debts.

But it was only in the silence of night watches that these fantastic marriages, in which she played the sublime role of guardian angel, took place. The next day, though Josette found her mistress' bed in a tossed and tumbled condition, Mademoiselle Cormon had recovered her dignity, and could only think of a man of forty, a land-owner, well preserved, and a quasi-young man.

The Abbe de Sponde was incapable of giving his niece the slightest aid in her matrimonial manoeuvres. The worthy soul, now seventy years of age, attributed the disasters of the French Revolution to the design of Providence, eager to punish a dissolute Church. He had therefore flung himself into the

path, long since abandoned, which anchorites once followed in order to reach heaven: he led an ascetic life without proclaiming it, and without external credit. He hid from the world his works of charity, his continual prayers, his penances; he thought that all priests should have acted thus during the days of wrath and terror, and he preached by example. While presenting to the world a calm and smiling face, he had ended by detaching himself utterly from earthly interests; his mind turned exclusively to sufferers, to the needs of the Church, and to his own salvation. He left the management of his property to his niece, who gave him the income of it, and to whom he paid a slender board in order to spend the surplus in secret alms and gifts to the Church.

All the abbe's affections were concentrated on his niece, who regarded him as a father, but an abstracted father, unable to conceive the agitations of the flesh, and thanking God for maintaining his dear daughter in a state of celibacy; for he had, from his youth up, adopted the principles of Saint John Chrysostom, who wrote that "the virgin state is as far above the marriage state as the angel is above humanity." Accustomed to reverence her uncle, Mademoiselle Cormon dared not initiate him into the desires which filled her soul for a change of state. The worthy man, accustomed, on his side, to the ways of the house, would scarcely have liked the introduction of a husband. Preoccupied by the sufferings he soothed, lost in the depths of prayer, the Abbe de Sponde had periods of abstraction which the habitues of the house regarded as absent-mindedness. In any case, he talked little; but his silence was affable and benevolent. He was a man of great height and spare, with grave and solemn manners, though his face expressed all gentle sentiments and an inward calm; while his mere presence carried with it a sacred authority. He was very fond of the Voltairean chevalier. Those two majestic relics of the nobility and clergy, though of very different habits and morals, recognized each other by their generous traits. Besides, the chevalier was as unctuous with the abbe as he was paternal with the grisettes.

Some persons may fancy that Mademoiselle Cormon used every means to attain her end; and that among the legitimate lures of womanhood she devoted herself to dress, wore low-necked gowns, and employed the negative coquetries of a magnificent display of arms. Not at all! She was as heroic and immovable in her high-necked chemisette as a sentry in his box. Her gowns, bonnets, and chiffons were all cut and made by the dressmaker and the milliner of Alencon, two hump-backed sisters, who were not without some taste. In spite of the entreaties of these artists, Mademoiselle Cormon refused to employ the airy deceits of elegance; she chose to be substantial in all things, flesh and feathers. But perhaps the heavy fashion of her gowns was best suited to her cast of countenance. Let those laugh who will at this poor girl; you would have thought her sublime, O generous souls! who care but little what form true feeling takes, but admire it where it is.

Here some light-minded person may exclaim against the truth of this statement; they will say that there is not in all France a girl so silly as to be ignorant of the art of angling for men; that Mademoiselle Cormon is one of those monstrous exceptions which commonsense should prevent a writer from using as a type; that the most virtuous and also the silliest girl who desires to catch her fish knows well how to bait the hook. But these criticisms fall before the fact that the noble catholic, apostolic, and Roman religion is still erect in Brittany and in the ancient duchy of Alencon. Faith and piety admit of no subtleties. Mademoiselle Cormon trod the path of salvation, preferring the sorrows of her virginity so cruelly prolonged to the evils of trickery and the sin of a snare. In a woman armed with a scourge virtue could never compromise; consequently both love and self-interest were forced to seek her, and seek her resolutely. And here let us have the courage to make a cruel observation, in days when religion is nothing more than a useful means to some, and a poesy to others. Devotion causes a moral ophthalmia. By some providential grace, it takes from souls on the road to eternity the sight of many little earthly things. In a word, pious persons, devotes, are stupid on various points. This stupidity proves with what force they turn their minds to celestial matters; although the Voltairean Chevalier de Valois declared that it was difficult to decide whether stupid people became naturally pious, or whether piety had the effect of making intelligent young women stupid. But reflect upon this carefully: the purest catholic virtue, with its loving acceptance of all cups, with its pious submission to the will of God, with its belief in the print of the divine finger on the clay of all earthly life, is the mysterious light which glides into the innermost folds of human history, setting them in relief and magnifying them in the eyes of those who still have Faith. Besides, if there be stupidity, why not concern ourselves with the sorrows of stupidity as well as with the sorrows of genius? The former is a social element infinitely more abundant than the latter.

So, then, Mademoiselle Cormon was guilty in the eyes of the world of the divine ignorance of virgins. She was no observer, and her behavior with her suitors proved it. At this very moment, a young girl of sixteen, who had never opened a novel, would have read a hundred chapters of a love story in the eyes of Athanase Granson, where Mademoiselle Cormon saw absolutely nothing. Shy herself, she never suspected shyness in others; she did not recognize in the quavering tones of his speech the force of a sentiment he could not utter. Capable of inventing those refinements of sentimental grandeur which hindered her marriage in her early years, she yet could not recognize them in Athanase. This moral phenomenon will not seem surprising to persons who know that the qualities of the heart are as distinct from those of the mind as the faculties of genius are from the nobility of soul. A perfect, all-rounded man is so rare that Socrates, one of the noblest pearls of humanity, declared (as a phrenologist of that day) that he was born to be a scamp, and a very bad one.

A great general may save his country at Zurich, and take commissions from purveyors. A great musician may conceive the sublimest music and commit a forgery. A woman of true feeling may be a fool. In short, a devotee may have a sublime soul and yet be unable to recognize the tones of a noble soul beside her. The caprices produced by physical infirmities are equally to be met with in the mental and moral regions.

This good creature, who grieved at making her yearly preserves for no one but her uncle and herself, was becoming almost ridiculous. Those who felt a sympathy for her on account of her good qualities, and others on account of her defects, now made fun of her abortive marriages. More than one conversation was based on what would become of so fine a property, together with the old maid's savings and her uncle's inheritance. For some time past she had been suspected of being *au fond*, in spite of appearances, an "original." In the provinces it was not permissible to be original: being original means having ideas that are not understood by others; the provinces demand equality of mind as well as equality of manners and customs.

The marriage of Mademoiselle Cormon seemed, after 1804, a thing so problematical that the saying "married like Mademoiselle Cormon" became proverbial in Alençon as applied to ridiculous failures. Surely the sarcastic mood must be an imperative need in France, that so excellent a woman should excite the laughter of Alençon. Not only did she receive the whole society of the place at her house, not only was she charitable, pious, incapable of saying an unkind thing, but she was fully in accord with the spirit of the place and the habits and customs of the inhabitants, who liked her as the symbol of their lives; she was absolutely inlaid into the ways of the provinces; she had never quitted them; she imbibed all their prejudices; she espoused all their interests; she adored them.

In spite of her income of eighteen thousand francs from landed property, a very considerable fortune in the provinces, she lived on a footing with families who were less rich. When she went to her country-place at Prebaudet, she drove there in an old wicker carriage, hung on two straps of white leather, drawn by a wheezy mare, and scarcely protected by two leather curtains rusty with age. This carriage, known to all the town, was cared for by Jacquelin as though it were the finest coupe in all Paris. Mademoiselle valued it; she had used it for twelve years,—a fact to which she called attention with the triumphant joy of happy avarice. Most of the inhabitants of the town were grateful to Mademoiselle Cormon for not humiliating them by the luxury she could have displayed; we may even believe that had she imported a caleche from Paris they would have gossiped more about that than about her various matrimonial failures. The most brilliant equipage would, after all, have only taken her, like the old carriage, to Prebaudet. Now the provinces, which look

solely to results, care little about the beauty or elegance of the means, provided they are efficient.

## CHAPTER V. AN OLD MAID'S HOUSEHOLD

To complete the picture of the internal habits and ways of this house, it is necessary to group around Mademoiselle Cormon and the Abbe de Sponde Jacquelin, Josette, and Mariette, the cook, who employed themselves in providing for the comfort of uncle and niece.

Jacquelin, a man of forty, short, fat, ruddy, and brown, with a face like a Breton sailor, had been in the service of the house for twenty-two years. He waited at table, groomed the mare, gardened, blacked the abbe's boots, went on errands, chopped the wood, drove the carriage, and fetched the oats, straw, and hay from Prebaudet. He sat in the antechamber during the evening, where he slept like a dormouse. He was in love with Josette, a girl of thirty, whom Mademoiselle would have dismissed had she married him. So the poor fond pair laid by their wages, and loved each other silently, waiting, hoping for mademoiselle's own marriage, as the Jews are waiting for the Messiah. Josette, born between Alencon and Mortagne, was short and plump; her face, which looked like a dirty apricot, was not wanting in sense and character; it was said that she ruled her mistress. Josette and Jacquelin, sure of results, endeavored to hide an inward satisfaction which allows it to be supposed that, as lovers, they had discounted the future. Mariette, the cook, who had been fifteen years in the household, knew how to make all the dishes held in most honor in Alencon.

Perhaps we ought to count for much the fat old Norman brown-bay mare, which drew Mademoiselle Cormon to her country-seat at Prebaudet; for the five inhabitants of the house bore to this animal a maniacal affection. She was called Penelope, and had served the family for eighteen years; but she was kept so carefully and fed with such regularity that mademoiselle and Jacquelin both hoped to use her for ten years longer. This beast was the subject of perpetual talk and occupation; it seemed as if poor Mademoiselle Cormon, having no children on whom her repressed motherly feelings could expend themselves, had turned those sentiments wholly on this most fortunate animal.

The four faithful servants—for Penelope's intelligence raised her to the level of the other good servants; while they, on the other hand, had lowered themselves to the mute, submissive regularity of the beast—went and came daily in the same occupations with the infallible accuracy of mechanism. But, as they said in their idiom, they had eaten their white bread first.

Mademoiselle Cormon, like all persons nervously agitated by a fixed idea, became hard to please, and nagging, less by nature than from the need of employing her activity. Having no husband or children to occupy her, she fell back on petty details. She talked for hours about mere nothings, on a dozen napkins marked "Z," placed in the closet before the "O's."

"What can Josette be thinking of?" she exclaimed. "Josette is beginning to neglect things."

Mademoiselle inquired for eight days running whether Penelope had had her oats at two o'clock, because on one occasion Jacquelin was a trifle late. Her narrow imagination spent itself on trifles. A layer of dust forgotten by the feather-duster, a slice of toast ill-made by Mariette, Josette's delay in closing the blinds when the sun came round to fade the colors of the furniture,—all these great little things gave rise to serious quarrels in which mademoiselle grew angry. "Everything was changing," she would cry; "she did not know her own servants; the fact was she spoiled them!" On one occasion Josette gave her the "Journee du Chretien" instead of the "Quinzaine de Paques." The whole town heard of this disaster the same evening. Mademoiselle had been forced to leave the church and return home; and her sudden departure, upsetting the chairs, made people suppose a catastrophe had happened. She was therefore obliged to explain the facts to her friends.

"Josette," she said gently, "such a thing must never happen again."

Mademoiselle Cormon was, without being aware of it, made happier by such little quarrels, which served as cathartics to relieve her bitterness. The soul has its needs, and, like the body, its gymnastics. These uncertainties of temper were accepted by Josette and Jacquelin as changes in the weather are accepted by husbandmen. Those worthy souls remark, "It is fine to-day," or "It rains," without arraiging the heavens. And so when they met in the morning the servants would wonder in what humor mademoiselle would get up, just as a farmer wonders about the mists at dawn.

Mademoiselle Cormon had ended, as it was natural she should end, in contemplating herself only in the infinite pettinesses of her life. Herself and God, her confessor and the weekly wash, her preserves and the church services, and her uncle to care for, absorbed her feeble intellect. To her the atoms of life were magnified by an optic peculiar to persons who are selfish by nature or self-absorbed by some accident. Her perfect health gave alarming meaning to the least little derangement of her digestive organs. She lived under the iron rod of the medical science of our forefathers, and took yearly four precautionary doses, strong enough to have killed Penelope, though they seemed to rejuvenate her mistress. If Josette, when dressing her, chanced to discover a little pimple on the still satiny shoulders of mademoiselle, it

became the subject of endless inquiries as to the various alimentary articles of the preceding week. And what a triumph when Josette reminded her mistress of a certain hare that was rather "high," and had doubtless raised that accursed pimple! With what joy they said to each other: "No doubt, no doubt, it was the hare!"

"Marianne over-seasoned it," said mademoiselle. "I am always telling her to do so lightly for my uncle and for me; but Marianne has no more memory than —"

"The hare," said Josette.

"Just so," replied Mademoiselle; "she has no more memory than a hare,—a very just remark."

Four times a year, at the beginning of each season, Mademoiselle Cormon went to pass a certain number of days on her estate of Prebaudet. It was now the middle of May, the period at which she wished to see how her apple-trees had "snowed," a saying of that region which expressed the effect produced beneath the trees by the falling of their blossoms. When the circular deposit of these fallen petals resembled a layer of snow the owner of the trees might hope for an abundant supply of cider. While she thus gauged her vats, Mademoiselle Cormon also attended to the repairs which the winter necessitated; she ordered the digging of her flower-beds and her vegetable garden, from which she supplied her table. Every season had its own business. Mademoiselle always gave a dinner of farewell to her intimate friends the day before her departure, although she was certain to see them again within three weeks. It was always a piece of news which echoed through Alencon when Mademoiselle Cormon departed. All her visitors, especially those who had missed a visit, came to bid her good-bye; the salon was thronged, and every one said farewell as though she were starting for Calcutta. The next day the shopkeepers would stand at their doors to see the old carriage pass, and they seemed to be telling one another some news by repeating from shop to shop:—

"So Mademoiselle Cormon is going to Prebaudet!"

Some said: "Her bread is baked."

"Hey! my lad," replied the next man. "She's a worthy woman; if money always came into such hands we shouldn't see a beggar in the country."

Another said: "Dear me, I shouldn't be surprised if the vineyards were in bloom; here's Mademoiselle Cormon going to Prebaudet. How happens it she doesn't marry?"

"I'd marry her myself," said a wag; "in fact, the marriage is half-made, for here's one consenting party; but the other side won't. Pooh! the oven is heating



for Monsieur du Bousquier."

"Monsieur du Bousquier! Why, she has refused him."

That evening at all the gatherings it was told gravely:—

"Mademoiselle Cormon has gone."

Or:—

"So you have really let Mademoiselle Cormon go."

The Wednesday chosen by Suzanne to make known her scandal happened to be this farewell Wednesday,—a day on which Mademoiselle Cormon drove Josette distracted on the subject of packing. During the morning, therefore, things had been said and done in the town which lent the utmost interest to this farewell meeting. Madame Granson had gone the round of a dozen houses while the old maid was deliberating on the things she needed for the journey; and the malicious Chevalier de Valois was playing piquet with Mademoiselle Armande, sister of a distinguished old marquis, and the queen of the salon of the aristocrats. If it was not uninteresting to any one to see what figure the seducer would cut that evening, it was all important for the chevalier and Madame Granson to know how Mademoiselle Cormon would take the news in her double capacity of marriageable woman and president of the Maternity Society. As for the innocent du Bousquier, he was taking a walk on the promenade, and beginning to suspect that Suzanne had tricked him; this suspicion confirmed him in his principles as to women.

On gala days the table was laid at Mademoiselle Cormon's about half-past three o'clock. At that period the fashionable people of Alençon dined at four. Under the Empire they still dined as in former times at half-past two; but then they supped! One of the pleasures which Mademoiselle Cormon valued most was (without meaning any malice, although the fact certainly rests on egotism) the unspeakable satisfaction she derived from seeing herself dressed as mistress of the house to receive her guests. When she was thus under arms a ray of hope would glide into the darkness of her heart; a voice told her that nature had not so abundantly provided for her in vain, and that some man, brave and enterprising, would surely present himself. Her desire was refreshed like her person; she contemplated herself in her heavy stuffs with a sort of intoxication, and this satisfaction continued when she descended the stairs to cast her redoubtable eye on the salon, the dinner-table, and the boudoir. She would then walk about with the naive contentment of the rich,—who remember at all moments that they are rich and will never want for anything. She looked at her eternal furniture, her curiosities, her lacquers, and said to herself that all these fine things wanted was a master. After admiring the dining-room, and the oblong dinner-table, on which was spread a snow-white

cloth adorned with twenty covers placed at equal distances; after verifying the squadron of bottles she had ordered to be brought up, and which all bore honorable labels; after carefully verifying the names written on little bits of paper in the trembling handwriting of the abbe (the only duty he assumed in the household, and one which gave rise to grave discussions on the place of each guest),—after going through all these preliminary acts mademoiselle went, in her fine clothes, to her uncle, who was accustomed at this, the best hour in the day, to take his walk on the terrace which overlooked the Brillante, where he could listen to the warble of birds which were resting in the coppice, unafraid of either sportsmen or children. At such times of waiting she never joined the Abbe de Sponde without asking him some ridiculous question, in order to draw the old man into a discussion which might serve to amuse him. And her reason was this,—which will serve to complete our picture of this excellent woman's nature:—

Mademoiselle Cormon regarded it as one of her duties to talk; not that she was talkative, for she had unfortunately too few ideas, and did not know enough phrases to converse readily. But she believed she was accomplishing one of the social duties enjoined by religion, which orders us to make ourselves agreeable to our neighbor. This obligation cost her so much that she consulted her director, the Abbe Couturier, upon the subject of this honest but puerile civility. In spite of the humble remark of his penitent, confessing the inward labor of her mind in finding anything to say, the old priest, rigid on the point of discipline, read her a passage from Saint-Francois de Sales on the duties of women in society, which dwelt on the decent gayety of pious Christian women, who were bound to reserve their sternness for themselves, and to be amiable and pleasing in their homes, and see that their neighbors enjoyed themselves. Thus, filled with a sense of duty, and wishing, at all costs, to obey her director, who bade her converse with amenity, the poor soul perspired in her corset when the talk around her languished, so much did she suffer from the effort of emitting ideas in order to revive it. Under such circumstances she would put forth the silliest statements, such as: "No one can be in two places at once—unless it is a little bird," by which she one day roused, and not without success, a discussion on the ubiquity of the apostles, which she was unable to comprehend. Such efforts at conversation won her the appellation of "that good Mademoiselle Cormon," which, from the lips of the beaux esprits of society, means that she was as ignorant as a carp, and rather a poor fool; but many persons of her own calibre took the remark in its literal sense, and answered:—

"Yes; oh yes! Mademoiselle Cormon is an excellent woman."

Sometimes she would put such absurd questions (always for the purpose of fulfilling her duties to society, and making herself agreeable to her guests) that

everybody burst out laughing. She asked, for instance, what the government did with the taxes they were always receiving; and why the Bible had not been printed in the days of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as it was written by Moses. Her mental powers were those of the English "country gentleman" who, hearing constant mention of "posterity" in the House of Commons, rose to make the speech that has since become celebrated: "Gentlemen," he said, "I hear much talk in this place about Posterity. I should be glad to know what that power has ever done for England."

Under these circumstances the heroic Chevalier de Valois would bring to the succor of the old maid all the powers of his clever diplomacy, whenever he saw the pitiless smile of wiser heads. The old gentleman, who loved to assist women, turned Mademoiselle Cormon's sayings into wit by sustaining them paradoxically, and he often covered the retreat so well that it seemed as if the good woman had said nothing silly. She asserted very seriously one evening that she did not see any difference between an ox and a bull. The dear chevalier instantly arrested the peals of laughter by asserting that there was only the difference between a sheep and a lamb.

But the Chevalier de Valois served an ungrateful dame, for never did Mademoiselle Cormon comprehend his chivalrous services. Observing that the conversation grew lively, she simply thought that she was not so stupid as she was,—the result being that she settled down into her ignorance with some complacency; she lost her timidity, and acquired a self-possession which gave to her "speeches" something of the solemnity with which the British enunciate their patriotic absurdities,—the self-conceit of stupidity, as it may be called.

As she approached her uncle, on this occasion, with a majestic step, she was ruminating over a question that might draw him from a silence, which always troubled her, for she feared he was dull.

"Uncle," she said, leaning on his arm and clinging to his side (this was one of her fictions; for she said to herself "If I had a husband I should do just so"),—"uncle, if everything here below happens according to the will of God, there must be a reason for everything."

"Certainly," replied the abbe, gravely. The worthy man, who cherished his niece, always allowed her to tear him from his meditations with angelic patience.

"Then if I remain unmarried,—supposing that I do,—God wills it?"

"Yes, my child," replied the abbe.

"And yet, as nothing prevents me from marrying to-morrow if I choose, His will can be destroyed by mine?"

"That would be true if we knew what was really the will of God," replied the former prior of the Sorbonne. "Observe, my daughter, that you put in an if."

The poor woman, who expected to draw her uncle into a matrimonial discussion by an argument *ad omnipotentem*, was stupefied; but persons of obtuse mind have the terrible logic of children, which consists in turning from answer to question,—a logic that is frequently embarrassing.

"But, uncle, God did not make women intending them not to marry; otherwise they ought all to stay unmarried; if not, they ought all to marry. There's great injustice in the distribution of parts."

"Daughter," said the worthy abbe, "you are blaming the Church, which declares celibacy to be the better way to God."

"But if the Church is right, and all the world were good Catholics, wouldn't the human race come to an end, uncle?"

"You have too much mind, Rose; you don't need so much to be happy."

That remark brought a smile of satisfaction to the lips of the poor woman, and confirmed her in the good opinion she was beginning to acquire about herself. That is how the world, our friends, and our enemies are the accomplices of our defects!

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the successive arrival of the guests. On these ceremonial days, friendly familiarities were exchanged between the servants of the house and the company. Mariette remarked to the chief-justice as he passed the kitchen:—

"Ah, Monsieur du Ronceret, I've cooked the cauliflowers au gratin expressly for you, for mademoiselle knows how you like them; and she said to me: 'Now don't forget, Mariette, for Monsieur du Ronceret is coming.'"

"That good Mademoiselle Cormon!" ejaculated the chief legal authority of the town. "Mariette, did you steep them in gravy instead of soup-stock? it is much richer."

The chief-justice was not above entering the chamber of council where Mariette held court; he cast the eye of a gastronome around it, and offered the advice of a past master in cookery.

"Good-day, madame," said Josette to Madame Granson, who courted the maid. "Mademoiselle has thought of you, and there's fish for dinner."

As for the Chevalier de Valois, he remarked to Mariette, in the easy tone of a great seigneur who condescends to be familiar:—

"Well, my dear cordon-bleu, to whom I should give the cross of the Legion

of honor, is there some little dainty for which I had better reserve myself?"

"Yes, yes, Monsieur de Valois,—a hare sent from Prebaudet; weighs fourteen pounds."

Du Bousquier was not invited. Mademoiselle Cormon, faithful to the system which we know of, treated that fifty-year-old suitor extremely ill, although she felt inexplicable sentiments towards him in the depths of her heart. She had refused him; yet at times she repented; and a presentiment that she should yet marry him, together with a terror at the idea which prevented her from wishing for the marriage, assailed her. Her mind, stimulated by these feelings, was much occupied by du Bousquier. Without being aware of it, she was influenced by the herculean form of the republican. Madame Granson and the Chevalier de Valois, although they could not explain to themselves Mademoiselle Cormon's inconsistencies, had detected her naive glances in that direction, the meaning of which seemed clear enough to make them both resolve to ruin the hopes of the already rejected purveyor,—hopes which it was evident he still indulged.

Two guests, whose functions excused them, kept the dinner waiting. One was Monsieur du Coudrai, the recorder of mortgages; the other Monsieur Choisnel, former bailiff to the house of Esgrignon, and now the notary of the upper aristocracy, by whom he was received with a distinction due to his virtues; he was also a man of considerable wealth. When the two belated guests arrived, Jacquelin said to them as he saw them about to enter the salon:—

"They are all in the garden."

No doubt the assembled stomachs were impatient; for on the appearance of the register of mortgages—who had no defect except that of having married for her money an intolerable old woman, and of perpetrating endless puns, at which he was the first to laugh—the gentle murmur by which such late-comers are welcomed arose. While awaiting the official announcement of dinner, the company were sauntering on the terrace above the river, and gazing at the water-plants, the mosaic of the currents, and the various pretty details of the houses clustering across the river, their old wooden galleries, their mouldering window-frames, their little gardens where clothes were drying, the cabinet-maker's shop,—in short, the many details of a small community to which the vicinity of a river, a weeping willow, flowers, rose-bushes, added a certain grace, making the scene quite worthy of a landscape painter.

The chevalier studied all faces, for he knew that his firebrand had been very successfully introduced into the chief houses of the place. But no one as yet referred openly to the great news of Suzanne and du Bousquier. Provincials possess in the highest degree the art of distilling gossip; the right

moment for openly discussing this strange affair had not arrived; it was first necessary that all present should put themselves on record. So the whispers went round from ear to ear:—

"You have heard?"

"Yes."

"Du Bousquier?"

"And that handsome Suzanne."

"Does Mademoiselle Cormon know of it?"

"No."

"Ha!"

This was the piano of the scandal; the *rinforzando* would break forth as soon as the first course had been removed. Suddenly Monsieur de Valois's eyes lighted on Madame Granson, arrayed in her green hat with bunches of auriculas, and beaming with evident joy. Was it merely the joy of opening the concert? Though such a piece of news was like a gold mine to work in the monotonous lives of these personages, the observant and distrustful chevalier thought he recognized in the worthy woman a far more extended sentiment; namely, the joy caused by the triumph of self-interest. Instantly he turned to examine Athanase, and detected him in the significant silence of deep meditation. Presently, a look cast by the young man on Mademoiselle Cormon carried to the soul of the chevalier a sudden gleam. That momentary flash of lightning enabled him to read the past.

"Ha! the devil!" he said to himself; "what a checkmate I'm exposed to!"

Monsieur de Valois now approached Mademoiselle Cormon, and offered his arm. The old maid's feeling to the chevalier was that of respectful consideration; and certainly his name, together with the position he occupied among the aristocratic constellations of the department made him the most brilliant ornament of her salon. In her inmost mind Mademoiselle Cormon had wished for the last dozen years to become Madame de Valois. That name was like the branch of a tree, to which the ideas which swarmed in her mind about rank, nobility, and the external qualities of a husband had fastened. But, though the Chevalier de Valois was the man chosen by her heart, and mind, and ambition, that elderly ruin, combed and curled like a little Saint-John in a procession, alarmed Mademoiselle Cormon. She saw the gentleman in him, but she could not see a husband. The indifference which the chevalier affected as to marriage, above all, the apparent purity of his morals in a house which abounded in grisettes, did singular harm in her mind to Monsieur de Valois against his expectations. The worthy man, who showed such judgment in the

matter of his annuity, was at fault here. Without being herself aware of it, the thoughts of Mademoiselle Cormon on the too virtuous chevalier might be translated thus:—

"What a pity that he isn't a trifle dissipated!"

Observers of the human heart have remarked the leaning of pious women toward scamps; some have expressed surprise at this taste, considering it opposed to Christian virtue. But, in the first place, what nobler destiny can you offer to a virtuous woman than to purify, like charcoal, the muddy waters of vice? How is it some observers fail to see that these noble creatures, obliged by the sternness of their own principles never to infringe on conjugal fidelity, must naturally desire a husband of wider practical experience than their own? The scamps of social life are great men in love. Thus the poor woman groaned in spirit at finding her chosen vessel parted into two pieces. God alone could solder together a Chevalier de Valois and a du Bousquier.

In order to explain the importance of the few words which the chevalier and Mademoiselle Cormon are about to say to each other, it is necessary to reveal two serious matters which agitated the town, and about which opinions were divided; besides, du Bousquier was mysteriously connected with them.

One concerns the rector of Alencon, who had formerly taken the constitutional oath, and who was now conquering the repugnance of the Catholics by a display of the highest virtues. He was Cheverus on a small scale, and became in time so fully appreciated that when he died the whole town mourned him. Mademoiselle Cormon and the Abbe de Sponde belonged to that "little Church," sublime in its orthodoxy, which was to the court of Rome what the Ultras were to be to Louis XVIII. The abbe, more especially, refused to recognize a Church which had compromised with the constitutionals. The rector was therefore not received in the Cormon household, whose sympathies were all given to the curate of Saint-Leonard, the aristocratic parish of Alencon. Du Bousquier, that fanatic liberal now concealed under the skin of a royalist, knowing how necessary rallying points are to all discontents (which are really at the bottom of all oppositions), had drawn the sympathies of the middle classes around the rector. So much for the first case; the second was this:—

Under the secret inspiration of du Bousquier the idea of building a theatre had dawned on Alencon. The henchmen of the purveyor did not know their Mohammed; and they thought they were ardent in carrying out their own conception. Athanase Granson was one of the warmest partisans for the theatre; and of late he had urged at the mayor's office a cause which all the other young clerks had eagerly adopted.

The chevalier, as we have said, offered his arm to the old maid for a turn

on the terrace. She accepted it, not without thanking him by a happy look for this attention, to which the chevalier replied by motioning toward Athanase with a meaning eye.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "you have so much sense and judgment in social proprieties, and also, you are connected with that young man by certain ties—"

"Distant ones," she said, interrupting him.

"Ought you not," he continued, "to use the influence you have over his mother and over himself by saving him from perdition? He is not very religious, as you know; indeed he approves of the rector; but that is not all; there is something far more serious; isn't he throwing himself headlong into an opposition without considering what influence his present conduct may exert upon his future? He is working for the construction of a theatre. In this affair he is simply the dupe of that disguised republican du Bousquier—"

"Good gracious! Monsieur de Valois," she replied; "his mother is always telling me he has so much mind, and yet he can't say two words; he stands planted before me as mum as a post—"

"Which doesn't think at all!" cried the recorder of mortgages. "I caught your words on the fly. I present my compliments to Monsieur de Valois," he added, bowing to that gentleman with much emphasis.

The chevalier returned the salutation stiffly, and drew Mademoiselle Cormon toward some flower-pots at a little distance, in order to show the interrupter that he did not choose to be spied upon.

"How is it possible," he continued, lowering his voice, and leaning towards Mademoiselle Cormon's ear, "that a young man brought up in those detestable lyceums should have ideas? Only sound morals and noble habits will ever produce great ideas and a true love. It is easy to see by a mere look at him that the poor lad is likely to be imbecile, and come, perhaps, to some sad end. See how pale and haggard he is!"

"His mother declares he works too hard," replied the old maid, innocently. "He sits up late, and for what? reading books and writing! What business ought to require a young man to write at night?"

"It exhausts him," replied the chevalier, trying to bring the old maid's thoughts back to the ground where he hoped to inspire her with horror for her youthful lover. "The morals of those Imperial lyceums are really shocking."

"Oh, yes!" said the ingenuous creature. "They march the pupils about with drums at their head. The masters have no more religion than pagans. And they put the poor lads in uniform, as if they were troops. What ideas!"



"And behold the product!" said the chevalier, motioning to Athanase. "In my day, young men were not so shy of looking at a pretty woman. As for him, he drops his eyes whenever he sees you. That young man frightens me because I am really interested in him. Tell him not to intrigue with the Bonapartists, as he is now doing about that theatre. When all these petty folks cease to ask for it insurrectionally,—which to my mind is the synonym of constitutionally,—the government will build it. Besides which, tell his mother to keep an eye on him."

"Oh, I'm sure she will prevent him from seeing those half-pay, questionable people. I'll talk to her," said Mademoiselle Cormon, "for he might lose his place in the mayor's office; and then what would he and his mother have to live on? It makes me shudder."

As Monsieur de Talleyrand said of his wife, so the chevalier said to himself, looking at Mademoiselle Cormon:—

"Find me another as stupid! Good powers! isn't virtue which drives out intellect vice? But what an adorable wife for a man of my age! What principles! what ignorance!"

Remember that this monologue, addressed to the Princess Goritza, was mentally uttered while he took a pinch of snuff.

Madame Granson had divined that the chevalier was talking about Athanase. Eager to know the result of the conversation, she followed Mademoiselle Cormon, who was now approaching the young man with much dignity. But at this moment Jacquelin appeared to announce that mademoiselle was served. The old maid gave a glance of appeal to the chevalier; but the gallant recorder of mortgages, who was beginning to see in the manners of that gentleman the barrier which the provincial nobles were setting up about this time between themselves and the bourgeoisie, made the most of his chance to cut out Monsieur de Valois. He was close to Mademoiselle Cormon, and promptly offered his arm, which she found herself compelled to accept. The chevalier then darted, out of policy, upon Madame Granson.

"Mademoiselle Cormon, my dear lady," he said to her, walking slowly after all the other guests, "feels the liveliest interest in your dear Athanase; but I fear it will vanish through his own fault. He is irreligious and liberal; he is agitating this matter of the theatre; he frequents the Bonapartists; he takes the side of that rector. Such conduct may make him lose his place in the mayor's office. You know with what care the government is beginning to weed out such opinions. If your dear Athanase loses his place, where can he find other employment? I advise him not to get himself in bad odor with the administration."

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said the poor frightened mother, "how grateful I am to you! You are right: my son is the tool of a bad set of people; I shall enlighten him."

The chevalier had long since fathomed the nature of Athanase, and recognized in it that unyielding element of republican convictions to which in his youth a young man is willing to sacrifice everything, carried away by the word "liberty," so ill-defined and so little understood, but which to persons disdained by fate is a banner of revolt; and to such, revolt is vengeance. Athanase would certainly persist in that faith, for his opinions were woven in with his artistic sorrows, with his bitter contemplation of the social state. He was ignorant of the fact that at thirty-six years of age,—the period of life when a man has judged men and social interests and relations,—the opinions for which he was ready to sacrifice his future would be modified in him, as they are in all men of real superiority. To remain faithful to the Left side of Alencon was to gain the aversion of Mademoiselle Cormon. There, indeed, the chevalier saw true.

Thus we see that this society, so peaceful in appearance, was internally as agitated as any diplomatic circle, where craft, ability, and passions group themselves around the grave questions of an empire. The guests were now seated at the table laden with the first course, which they ate as provincials eat, without shame at possessing a good appetite, and not as in Paris, where it seems as if jaws gnashed under sumptuary laws, which made it their business to contradict the laws of anatomy. In Paris people eat with their teeth, and trifle with their pleasure; in the provinces things are done naturally, and interest is perhaps rather too much concentrated on the grand and universal means of existence to which God has condemned his creatures.

It was at the end of the first course that Mademoiselle Cormon made the most celebrated of her "speeches"; it was talked about for fully two years, and is still told at the gatherings of the lesser bourgeoisie whenever the topic of her marriage comes up.

The conversation, becoming lively as the penultimate entree was reached, had turned naturally on the affair of the theatre and the constitutionally sworn rector. In the first fervor of royalty, during the year 1816, those who later were called Jesuits were all for the expulsion of the Abbe Francois from his parish. Du Bousquier, suspected by Monsieur de Valois of sustaining the priest and being at the bottom of the theatre intrigues, and on whose back the adroit chevalier would in any case have put those sins with his customary cleverness, was in the dock with no lawyer to defend him. Athanase, the only guest loyal enough to stand by du Bousquier, had not the nerve to emit his ideas in the presence of those potentates of Alencon, whom in his heart he thought stupid. None but provincial youths now retain a respectful demeanor before men of a

certain age, and dare neither to censure nor contradict them. The talk, diminished under the effect of certain delicious ducks dressed with olives, was falling flat. Mademoiselle Cormon, feeling the necessity of maintaining it against her own ducks, attempted to defend du Bousquier, who was being represented as a pernicious fomenter of intrigues, capable of any trickery.

"As for me," she said, "I thought that Monsieur du Bousquier cared chiefly for childish things."

Under existing circumstances the remark had enormous success. Mademoiselle Cormon obtained a great triumph; she brought the nose of the Princess Goritza flat on the table. The chevalier, who little expected such an apt remark from his Dulcinea, was so amazed that he could at first find no words to express his admiration; he applauded noiselessly, as they do at the Opera, tapping his fingers together to imitate applause.

"She is adorably witty," he said to Madame Granson. "I always said that some day she would unmask her batteries."

"In private she is always charming," replied the widow.

"In private, madame, all women have wit," returned the chevalier.

The Homeric laugh thus raised having subsided, Mademoiselle Cormon asked the reason of her success. Then began the forte of the gossip. Du Bousquier was depicted as a species of celibate Pere Gigogne, a monster, who for the last fifteen years had kept the Foundling Hospital supplied. His immoral habits were at last revealed! these Parisian saturnalias were the result of them, etc., etc. Conducted by the Chevalier de Valois, a most able leader of an orchestra of this kind, the opening of the cancan was magnificent.

"I really don't know," he said, "what should hinder a du Bousquier from marrying a Mademoiselle Suzanne What's-her-name. What is her name, do you know? Suzette! Though I have lodgings at Madame Lardot's, I know her girls only by sight. If this Suzette is a tall, fine, saucy girl, with gray eyes, a slim waist, and a pretty foot, whom I have occasionally seen, and whose behavior always seemed to me extremely insolent, she is far superior in manners to du Bousquier. Besides, the girl has the nobility of beauty; from that point of view the marriage would be a poor one for her; she might do better. You know how the Emperor Joseph had the curiosity to see the du Barry at Luciennes. He offered her his arm to walk about, and the poor thing was so surprised at the honor that she hesitated to accept it: 'Beauty is ever a queen,' said the Emperor. And he, you know, was an Austrian-German," added the chevalier. "But I can tell you that Germany, which is thought here very rustic, is a land of noble chivalry and fine manners, especially in Poland and Hungary, where—"

Here the chevalier stopped, fearing to slip into some allusion to his personal happiness; he took out his snuff-box, and confided the rest of his remarks to the princess, who had smiled upon him for thirty-six years and more.

"That speech was rather a delicate one for Louis XV.," said du Ronceret.

"But it was, I think, the Emperor Joseph who made it, and not Louis XV.," remarked Mademoiselle Cormon, in a correcting tone.

"Mademoiselle," said the chevalier, observing the malicious glance exchanged between the judge, the notary, and the recorder, "Madame du Barry was the Suzanne of Louis XV.,—a circumstance well known to scamps like ourselves, but unsuitable for the knowledge of young ladies. Your ignorance proves you to be a flawless diamond; historical corruptions do not enter your mind."

The Abbe de Sponde looked graciously at the Chevalier de Valois, and nodded his head in sign of his laudatory approbation.

"Doesn't mademoiselle know history?" asked the recorder of mortgages.

"If you mix up Louis XV. and this girl Suzanne, how am I to know history?" replied Mademoiselle Cormon, angelically, glad to see that the dish of ducks was empty at last, and the conversation so ready to revive that all present laughed with their mouths full at her last remark.

"Poor girl!" said the Abbe de Sponde. "When a great misfortune happens, charity, which is divine love, and as blind as pagan love, ought not to look into the causes of it. Niece, you are president of the Maternity Society; you must succor that poor girl, who will now find it difficult to marry."

"Poor child!" ejaculated Mademoiselle Cormon.

"Do you suppose du Bousquier would marry her?" asked the judge.

"If he is an honorable man he ought to do so," said Madame Granson; "but really, to tell the truth, my dog has better morals than he—"

"Azor is, however, a good purveyor," said the recorder of mortgages, with the air of saying a witty thing.

At dessert du Bousquier was still the topic of conversation, having given rise to various little jokes which the wine rendered sparkling. Following the example of the recorder, each guest capped his neighbor's joke with another: Du Bousquier was a father, but not a confessor; he was father less; he was father LY; he was not a reverend father; nor yet a conscript-father—

"Nor can he be a foster-father," said the Abbe de Sponde, with a gravity which stopped the laughter.

"Nor a noble father," added the chevalier.

The Church and the nobility descended thus into the arena of puns, without, however, losing their dignity.

"Hush!" exclaimed the recorder of mortgages. "I hear the creaking of du Bousquier's boots."

It usually happens that a man is ignorant of rumors that are afloat about him. A whole town may be talking of his affairs; may calumniate and decry him, but if he has no good friends, he will know nothing about it. Now the innocent du Bousquier was superb in his ignorance. No one had told him as yet of Suzanne's revelations; he therefore appeared very jaunty and slightly conceited when the company, leaving the dining-room, returned to the salon for their coffee; several other guests had meantime assembled for the evening. Mademoiselle Cormon, from a sense of shamefacedness, dared not look at the terrible seducer. She seized upon Athanase, and began to lecture him with the queerest platitudes about royalist politics and religious morality. Not possessing, like the Chevalier de Valois, a snuff-box adorned with a princess, by the help of which he could stand this torrent of silliness, the poor poet listened to the words of her whom he loved with a stupid air, gazing, meanwhile, at her enormous bust, which held itself before him in that still repose which is the attribute of all great masses. His love produced in him a sort of intoxication which changed the shrill voice of the old maid into a soft murmur, and her flat remarks into witty speeches. Love is a maker of false coin, continually changing copper pennies into gold-pieces, and sometimes turning its real gold into copper.

"Well, Athanase, will you promise me?"

This final sentence struck the ear of the absorbed young man like one of those noises which wake us with a bound.

"What, mademoiselle?"

Mademoiselle Cormon rose hastily, and looked at du Bousquier, who at that moment resembled the stout god of Fable which the Republic stamped upon her coins. She walked up to Madame Granson, and said in her ear:—

"My dear friend, your son is an idiot. That lyceum has ruined him," she added, remembering the insistence with which the chevalier had spoken of the evils of education in such schools.

What a catastrophe! Unknown to himself, the luckless Athanase had had an occasion to fling an ember of his own fire upon the pile of brush gathered in the heart of the old maid. Had he listened to her, he might have made her, then and there, perceive his passion; for, in the agitated state of Mademoiselle

Cormon's mind, a single word would have sufficed. But that stupid absorption in his own sentiments, which characterizes young and true love, had ruined him, as a child full of life sometimes kills itself out of ignorance.

"What have you been saying to Mademoiselle Cormon?" demanded his mother.

"Nothing."

"Nothing; well, I can explain that," she thought to herself, putting off till the next day all further reflection on the matter, and attaching but little importance to Mademoiselle Cormon's words; for she fully believed that du Bousquier was forever lost in the old maid's esteem after the revelation of that evening.

Soon the four tables were filled with their sixteen players. Four persons were playing piquet,—an expensive game, at which the most money was lost. Monsieur Choisnel, the procureur-du-roi, and two ladies went into the boudoir for a game at backgammon. The glass lustres were lighted; and then the flower of Mademoiselle Cormon's company gathered before the fireplace, on sofas, and around the tables, and each couple said to her as they arrived,—

"So you are going to-morrow to Prebaudet?"

"Yes, I really must," she replied.

On this occasion the mistress of the house appeared preoccupied. Madame Granson was the first to perceive the quite unnatural state of the old maid's mind,—Mademoiselle Cormon was thinking!

"What are you thinking of, cousin?" she said at last, finding her seated in the boudoir.

"I am thinking," she replied, "of that poor girl. As the president of the Maternity Society, I will give you fifty francs for her."

"Fifty francs!" cried Madame Granson. "But you have never given as much as that."

"But, my dear cousin, it is so natural to have children."

That immoral speech coming from the heart of the old maid staggered the treasurer of the Maternity Society. Du Bousquier had evidently advanced in the estimation of Mademoiselle Cormon.

"Upon my word," said Madame Granson, "du Bousquier is not only a monster, he is a villain. When a man has done a wrong like that, he ought to pay the indemnity. Isn't it his place rather than ours to look after the girl?—who, to tell you the truth, seems to me rather questionable; there are plenty of better men in Alencon than that cynic du Bousquier. A girl must be depraved,

indeed, to go after him."

"Cynic! Your son teaches you to talk Latin, my dear, which is wholly incomprehensible. Certainly I don't wish to excuse Monsieur du Bousquier; but pray explain to me why a woman is depraved because she prefers one man to another."

"My dear cousin, suppose you married my son Athanase; nothing could be more natural. He is young and handsome, full of promise, and he will be the glory of Alencon; and yet everybody will exclaim against you: evil tongues will say all sorts of things; jealous women will accuse you of depravity,—but what will that matter? you will be loved, and loved truly. If Athanase seemed to you an idiot, my dear, it is that he has too many ideas; extremes meet. He lives the life of a girl of fifteen; he has never wallowed in the impurities of Paris, not he! Well, change the terms, as my poor husband used to say; it is the same thing with du Bousquier in connection with Suzanne. You would be calumniated; but in the case of du Bousquier, the charge would be true. Don't you understand me?"

"No more than if you were talking Greek," replied Mademoiselle Cormon, who opened her eyes wide, and strained all the forces of her intellect.

"Well, cousin, if I must dot all the i's, it is impossible for Suzanne to love du Bousquier. And if the heart counts for nothing in this affair—"

"But, cousin, what do people love with if not their hearts?"

Here Madame Granson said to herself, as the chevalier had previously thought: "My poor cousin is altogether too innocent; such stupidity passes all bounds!—Dear child," she continued aloud, "it seems to me that children are not conceived by the spirit only."

"Why, yes, my dear; the Holy Virgin herself—"

"But, my love, du Bousquier isn't the Holy Ghost!"

"True," said the old maid; "he is a man!—a man whose personal appearance makes him dangerous enough for his friends to advise him to marry."

"You could yourself bring about that result, cousin."

"How so?" said the old maid, with the meekness of Christian charity.

"By not receiving him in your house until he marries. You owe it to good morals and to religion to manifest under such circumstances an exemplary displeasure."

"On my return from Prebaudet we will talk further of this, my dear Madame Granson. I will consult my uncle and the Abbe Couturier," said

Mademoiselle Cormon, returning to the salon, where the animation was now at its height.

The lights, the group of women in their best clothes, the solemn tone, the dignified air of the assembly, made Mademoiselle Cormon not a little proud of her company. To many persons nothing better could be seen in Paris in the highest society.

At this moment du Bousquier, who was playing whist with the chevalier and two old ladies,—Madame du Coudrai and Madame du Ronceret,—was the object of deep but silent curiosity. A few young women arrived, who, under pretext of watching the game, gazed fixedly at him in so singular a manner, though slyly, that the old bachelor began to think that there must be some deficiency in his toilet.

"Can my false front be crooked?" he asked himself, seized by one of those anxieties which beset old bachelors.

He took advantage of a lost trick, which ended a seventh rubber, to rise and leave the table.

"I can't touch a card without losing," he said. "I am decidedly too unlucky."

"But you are lucky in other ways," said the chevalier, giving him a sly look.

That speech naturally made the rounds of the salon, where every one exclaimed on the exquisite taste of the chevalier, the Prince de Talleyrand of the province.

"There's no one like Monsieur de Valois for such wit."

Du Bousquier went to look at himself in a little oblong mirror, placed above the "Deserter," but he saw nothing strange in his appearance.

After innumerable repetitions of the same text, varied in all keys, the departure of the company took place about ten o'clock, through the long antechamber, Mademoiselle Cormon conducting certain of her favorite guests to the portico. There the groups parted; some followed the Bretagne road towards the chateau; the others went in the direction of the river Sarthe. Then began the usual conversation, which for twenty years had echoed at that hour through this particular street of Alençon. It was invariably:—

"Mademoiselle Cormon looked very well to-night."

"Mademoiselle Cormon? why, I thought her rather strange."

"How that poor abbe fails! Did you notice that he slept? He does not know what cards he holds; he is getting very absent-minded."



"We shall soon have the grief of losing him."

"What a fine night! It will be a fine day to-morrow."

"Good weather for the apple-blossoms."

"You beat us; but when you play with Monsieur de Valois you never do otherwise."

"How much did he win?"

"Well, to-night, three or four francs; he never loses."

"True; and don't you know there are three hundred and sixty-five days a year? At that price his gains are the value of a farm."

"Ah! what hands we had to-night!"

"Here you are at home, monsieur and madame, how lucky you are, while we have half the town to cross!"

"I don't pity you; you could afford a carriage, and dispense with the fatigue of going on foot."

"Ah, monsieur! we have a daughter to marry, which takes off one wheel, and the support of our son in Paris carries off another."

"You persist in making a magistrate of him?"

"What else can be done with a young man? Besides, there's no shame in serving the king."

Sometimes a discussion on ciders and flax, always couched in the same terms, and returning at the same time of year, was continued on the homeward way. If any observer of human customs had lived in this street, he would have known the months and seasons by simply overhearing the conversations.

On this occasion it was exclusively jocose; for du Bousquier, who chanced to march alone in front of the groups, was humming the well-known air,—little thinking of its appropriateness,—"Tender woman! hear the warble of the birds," etc. To some, du Bousquier was a strong man and a misjudged man. Ever since he had been confirmed in his present office by a royal decree, Monsieur du Ronceret had been in favor of du Bousquier. To others the purveyor seemed dangerous,—a man of bad habits, capable of anything. In the provinces, as in Paris, men before the public eye are like that statue in the fine allegorical tale of Addison, for which two knights on arriving near it fought; for one saw it white, the other saw it black. Then, when they were both off their horses, they saw it was white one side and black the other. A third knight coming along declared it red.

When the chevalier went home that night, he made many reflections, as

follows:—

"It is high time now to spread a rumor of my marriage with Mademoiselle Cormon. It will leak out from the d'Esgrignon salon, and go straight to the bishop at Seez, and so get round through the grand vicars to the curate of Saint-Leonard's, who will be certain to tell it to the Abbe Couturier; and Mademoiselle Cormon will get the shot in her upper works. The old Marquis d'Esgrignon shall invite the Abbe de Sponde to dinner, so as to stop all gossip about Mademoiselle Cormon if I decide against her, or about me if she refuses me. The abbe shall be well cajoled; and Mademoiselle Cormon will certainly not hold out against a visit from Mademoiselle Armande, who will show her the grandeur and future chances of such an alliance. The abbe's property is undoubtedly as much as three hundred thousand; her own savings must amount to more than two hundred thousand; she has her house and Prebaudet and fifteen thousand francs a year. A word to my friend the Comte de Fontaine, and I should be mayor of Alencon to-morrow, and deputy. Then, once seated on the Right benches, we shall reach the peerage, shouting, 'Cloture!' 'Ordre!'"

As soon as she reached home Madame Granson had a lively argument with her son, who could not be made to see the connection which existed between his love and his political opinions. It was the first quarrel that had ever troubled that poor household.

## **CHAPTER VI. FINAL DISAPPOINTMENT AND ITS FIRST RESULT**

The next day, Mademoiselle Cormon, packed into the old carriage with Josette, and looking like a pyramid on a vast sea of parcels, drove up the rue Saint-Blaise on her way to Prebaudet, where she was overtaken by an event which hurried on her marriage,—an event entirely unlooked for by either Madame Granson, du Bousquier, Monsieur de Valois, or Mademoiselle Cormon himself. Chance is the greatest of all artificers.

The day after her arrival at Prebaudet, she was innocently employed, about eight o'clock in the morning, in listening, as she breakfasted, to the various reports of her keeper and her gardener, when Jacquelin made a violent irruption into the dining-room.

"Mademoiselle," he cried, out of breath, "Monsieur l'abbe sends you an express, the son of Mere Grosmort, with a letter. The lad left Alencon before daylight, and he has just arrived; he ran like Penelope! Can't I give him a glass of wine?"

"What can have happened, Josette? Do you think my uncle can be—"

"He couldn't write if he were," said Josette, guessing her mistress's fears.

"Quick! quick!" cried Mademoiselle Cormon, as soon as she had read the first lines. "Tell Jacquelin to harness Penelope—Get ready, Josette; pack up everything in half an hour. We must go back to town—"

"Jacquelin!" called Josette, excited by the sentiment she saw on her mistress's face.

Jacquelin, informed by Josette, came in to say,—

"But, mademoiselle, Penelope is eating her oats."

"What does that signify? I must start at once."

"But, mademoiselle, it is going to rain."

"Then we shall get wet."

"The house is on fire!" muttered Josette, piqued at the silence her mistress kept as to the contents of the letter, which she read and reread.

"Finish your coffee, at any rate, mademoiselle; don't excite your blood; just see how red you are."

"Am I red, Josette?" she said, going to a mirror, from which the quicksilver was peeling, and which presented her features to her upside down.

"Good heavens!" thought Mademoiselle Cormon, "suppose I should look ugly! Come, Josette; come, my dear, dress me at once; I want to be ready before Jacquelin has harnessed Penelope. If you can't pack my things in time, I will leave them here rather than lose a single minute."

If you have thoroughly comprehended the positive monomania to which the desire of marriage had brought Mademoiselle Cormon, you will share her emotion. The worthy uncle announced in this sudden missive that Monsieur de Troisville, of the Russian army during the Emigration, grandson of one of his best friends, was desirous of retiring to Alencon, and asked his, the abbe's hospitality, on the ground of his friendship for his grandfather, the Vicomte de Troisville. The old abbe, alarmed at the responsibility, entreated his niece to return instantly and help him to receive this guest, and do the honors of the house; for the viscount's letter had been delayed, and he might descend upon his shoulders that very night.

After reading this missive could there be a question of the demands of Prebaudet? The keeper and the gardener, witnesses to Mademoiselle Cormon's excitement, stood aside and awaited her orders. But when, as she was about to leave the room, they stopped her to ask for instructions, for the first time in her

life the despotic old maid, who saw to everything at Prebaudet with her own eyes, said, to their stupefaction, "Do what you like." This from a mistress who carried her administration to the point of counting her fruits, and marking them so as to order their consumption according to the number and condition of each!

"I believe I'm dreaming," thought Josette, as she saw her mistress flying down the staircase like an elephant to which God has given wings.

Presently, in spite of a driving rain, Mademoiselle Cormon drove away from Prebaudet, leaving her factotums with the reins on their necks. Jacquelin dared not take upon himself to hasten the usual little trot of the peaceable Penelope, who, like the beautiful queen whose name she bore, had an appearance of making as many steps backward as she made forward. Impatient with the pace, mademoiselle ordered Jacquelin in a sharp voice to drive at a gallop, with the whip, if necessary, to the great astonishment of the poor beast, so afraid was she of not having time to arrange the house suitably to receive Monsieur de Troisville. She calculated that the grandson of her uncle's friend was probably about forty years of age; a soldier just from service was undoubtedly a bachelor; and she resolved, her uncle aiding, not to let Monsieur de Troisville quit their house in the condition he entered it. Though Penelope galloped, Mademoiselle Cormon, absorbed in thoughts of her trousseau and the wedding-day, declared again and again that Jacquelin made no way at all. She twisted about in the carriage without replying to Josette's questions, and talked to herself like a person who is mentally revolving important designs.

The carriage at last arrived in the main street of Alençon, called the rue Saint-Blaise at the end toward Montagne, but near the hotel du More it takes the name of the rue de la Porte-de-Seez, and becomes the rue du Bercail as it enters the road to Brittany. If the departure of Mademoiselle Cormon made a great noise in Alençon, it is easy to imagine the uproar caused by her sudden return on the following day, in a pouring rain which beat her face without her apparently minding it. Penelope at a full gallop was observed by every one, and Jacquelin's grin, the early hour, the parcels stuffed into the carriage topsyturvy, and the evident impatience of Mademoiselle Cormon were all noted.

The property of the house of Troisville lay between Alençon and Mortagne. Josette knew the various branches of the family. A word dropped by mademoiselle as they entered Alençon had put Josette on the scent of the affair; and a discussion having started between them, it was settled that the expected de Troisville must be between forty and forty-two years of age, a bachelor, and neither rich nor poor. Mademoiselle Cormon beheld herself speedily Vicomtesse de Troisville.

"And to think that my uncle told me nothing! thinks of nothing! inquires nothing! That's my uncle all over. He'd forget his own nose if it wasn't fastened to his face."

Have you never remarked that, under circumstances such as these, old maids become, like Richard III., keen-witted, fierce, bold, promissory,—if one may so use the word,—and, like inebriate clerks, no longer in awe of anything?

Immediately the town of Alencon, speedily informed from the farther end of the rue de Saint-Blaise to the gate of Seez of this precipitate return, accompanied by singular circumstances, was perturbed throughout its viscera, both public and domestic. Cooks, shopkeepers, street passengers, told the news from door to door; thence it rose to the upper regions. Soon the words: "Mademoiselle Cormon has returned!" burst like a bombshell into all households. At that moment Jacquelin was descending from his wooden seat (polished by a process unknown to cabinet-makers), on which he perched in front of the carriole. He opened the great green gate, round at the top, and closed in sign of mourning; for during Mademoiselle Cormon's absence the evening assemblies did not take place. The faithful invited the Abbe de Sponde to their several houses; and Monsieur de Valois paid his debt by inviting him to dine at the Marquis d'Esgrignon's. Jacquelin, having opened the gate, called familiarly to Penelope, whom he had left in the middle of the street. That animal, accustomed to this proceeding, turned in of herself, and circled round the courtyard in a manner to avoid injuring the flower-bed. Jacquelin then took her bridle, and led the carriage to the portico.

"Marianne!" cried Mademoiselle Cormon.

"Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Marianne, who was occupied in closing the gate.

"Has the gentleman arrived?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Where's my uncle?"

"He is at church, mademoiselle."

Jacquelin and Josette were by this time on the first step of the portico, holding out their hands to manoeuvre the exit of their mistress from the carriole as she pulled herself up by the sides of the vehicle and clung to the curtains. Mademoiselle then threw herself into their arms; because for the last two years she dared not risk her weight on the iron step, affixed to the frame of the carriage by a horrible mechanism of clumsy bolts.

When Mademoiselle Cormon reached the level of the portico she looked

about her courtyard with an air of satisfaction.

"Come, come, Mariette, leave that gate alone; I want you."

"There's something in the wind," whispered Jacquelin, as Mariette passed the carriage.

"Mariette, what provisions have you in the house?" asked Mademoiselle Cormon, sitting down on the bench in the long antechamber like a person overcome with fatigue.

"I haven't anything," replied Mariette, with her hands on her hips. "Mademoiselle knows very well that during her absence Monsieur l'abbe dines out every day. Yesterday I went to fetch him from Mademoiselle Armande's."

"Where is he now?"

"Monsieur l'abbe? Why, at church; he won't be in before three o'clock."

"He thinks of nothing! he ought to have told you to go to market. Mariette, go at once; and without wasting money, don't spare it; get all there is that is good and delicate. Go to the diligence office and see if you can send for pates; and I want shrimps from the Brillante. What o'clock is it?"

"A quarter to nine."

"Good heavens! Mariette, don't stop to chatter. The person my uncle expects may arrive at any moment. If we had to give him breakfast, where should we be with nothing in the house?"

Mariette turned back to Penelope in a lather, and looked at Jacquelin as if she would say, "Mademoiselle has put her hand on a husband this time."

"Now, Josette," continued the old maid, "let us see where we had better put Monsieur de Troisville to sleep."

With what joy she said the words, "Put Monsieur de Troisville" (pronounced Treville) "to sleep." How many ideas in those few words! The old maid was bathed in hope.

"Will you put him in the green chamber?"

"The bishop's room? No; that's too near mine," said Mademoiselle Cormon. "All very well for monseigneur; he's a saintly man."

"Give him your uncle's room."

"Oh, that's so bare; it is actually indecent."

"Well, then, mademoiselle, why not arrange a bed in your boudoir? It is easily done; and there's a fire-place. Moreau can certainly find in his warerooms a bed to match the hangings."

"You are right, Josette. Go yourself to Moreau; consult with him what to do; I authorize you to get what is wanted. If the bed could be put up to-night without Monsieur de Troisville observing it (in case Monsieur de Troisville arrives while Moreau is here), I should like it. If Moreau won't engage to do this, then I must put Monsieur de Troisville in the green room, although Monsieur de Troisville would be so very near to me."

Josette was departing when her mistress recalled her.

"Stop! explain the matter to Jacquelin," she cried, in a loud nervous tone. "Tell him to go to Moreau; I must be dressed! Fancy if Monsieur de Troisville surprised me as I am now! and my uncle not here to receive him! Oh, uncle, uncle! Come, Josette; come and dress me at once."

"But Penelope?" said Josette, imprudently.

"Always Penelope! Penelope this, Penelope that! Is Penelope the mistress of this house?"

"But she is all of a lather, and she hasn't had time to eat her oats."

"Then let her starve!" cried Mademoiselle Cormon; "provided I marry," she thought to herself.

Hearing these words, which seemed to her like homicide, Josette stood still for a moment, speechless. Then, at a gesture from her mistress, she ran headlong down the steps of the portico.

"The devil is in her, Jacquelin," were the first words she uttered.

Thus all things conspired on this fateful day to produce the great scenic effect which decided the future life of Mademoiselle Cormon. The town was already topsy-turvy in mind, as a consequence of the five extraordinary circumstances which accompanied Mademoiselle Cormon's return; to wit, the pouring rain; Penelope at a gallop, in a lather, and blown; the early hour; the parcels half-packed; and the singular air of the excited old maid. But when Mariette made an invasion of the market, and bought all the best things; when Jacquelin went to the principal upholsterer in Alencon, two doors from the church, in search of a bed,—there was matter for the gravest conjectures. These extraordinary events were discussed on all sides; they occupied the minds of every one, even Mademoiselle Armande herself, with whom was Monsieur de Valois. Within two days the town of Alencon had been agitated by such startling events that certain good women were heard to remark that the world was coming to an end. This last news, however, resolved itself into a single question, "What is happening at the Cormons?"

The Abbe de Sponde, adroitly questioned when he left Saint-Leonard's to take his daily walk with the Abbe Couturier, replied with his usual kindness

that he expected the Vicomte de Troisville, a nobleman in the service of Russia during the Emigration, who was returning to Alencon to settle there. From two to five o'clock a species of labial telegraphy went on throughout the town; and all the inhabitants learned that Mademoiselle Cormon had at last found a husband by letter, and was about to marry the Vicomte de Troisville. Some said, "Moreau has sold them a bed." The bed was six feet wide in that quarter; it was four feet wide at Madame Granson's, in the rue du Bercail; but it was reduced to a simple couch at Monsieur du Ronceret's, where du Bousquier was dining. The lesser bourgeoisie declared that the cost was eleven hundred francs. But generally it was thought that, as to this, rumor was counting the chickens before they were hatched. In other quarters it was said that Mariette had made such a raid on the market that the price of carp had risen. At the end of the rue Saint-Blaise, Penelope had dropped dead. This decease was doubted in the house of the receiver-general; but at the Prefecture it was authenticated that the poor beast had expired as she turned into the courtyard of the hotel Cormon, with such velocity had the old maid flown to meet her husband. The harness-maker, who lived at the corner of the rue de Seez, was bold enough to call at the house and ask if anything had happened to Mademoiselle Cormon's carriage, in order to discover whether Penelope was really dead. From the end of the rue Saint-Blaise to the end of the rue du Bercail, it was then made known that, thanks to Jacquelin's devotion, Penelope, that silent victim of her mistress's impetuosity, still lived, though she seemed to be suffering.

Along the road to Brittany the Vicomte de Troisville was stated to be a younger son without a penny, for the estates in Perche belonged to the Marquis de Troisville, peer of France, who had children; the marriage would be, therefore, an enormous piece of luck for a poor emigre. The aristocracy along that road approved of the marriage; Mademoiselle Cormon could not do better with her money. But among the Bourgeoisie, the Vicomte de Troisville was a Russian general who had fought against France, and was now returning with a great fortune made at the court of Saint-Petersburg; he was a foreigner; one of those allies so hated by the liberals; the Abbe de Sponde had slyly negotiated this marriage. All the persons who had a right to call upon Mademoiselle Cormon determined to do so that very evening.

During this transurban excitement, which made that of Suzanne almost a forgotten affair, Mademoiselle was not less agitated; she was filled with a variety of novel emotions. Looking about her salon, dining-room, and boudoir, cruel apprehensions took possession of her. A species of demon showed her with a sneer her old-fashioned luxury. The handsome things she had admired from her youth up she suddenly suspected of age and absurdity. In short, she felt that fear which takes possession of nearly all authors when they read over a work they have hitherto thought proof against every exacting or blase critic:



new situations seem timeworn; the best-turned and most highly polished phrases limp and squint; metaphors and images grin or contradict each other; whatsoever is false strikes the eye. In like manner this poor woman trembled lest she should see on the lips of Monsieur de Troisville a smile of contempt for this episcopal salon; she dreaded the cold look he might cast over that ancient dining-room; in short, she feared the frame might injure and age the portrait. Suppose these antiquities should cast a reflected light of old age upon herself? This question made her flesh creep. She would gladly, at that moment, spend half her savings on refitting her house if some fairy wand could do it in a moment. Where is the general who has not trembled on the eve of a battle? The poor woman was now between her Austerlitz and her Waterloo.

"Madame la Vicomtesse de Troisville," she said to herself; "a noble name! Our property will go to a good family, at any rate."

She fell a prey to an irritation which made every fibre of her nerves quiver to all their papillae, long sunk in flesh. Her blood, lashed by this new hope, was in motion. She felt the strength to converse, if necessary, with Monsieur de Troisville.

It is useless to relate the activity with which Josette, Jacquelin, Mariette, Moreau, and his agents went about their functions. It was like the busyness of ants about their eggs. All that daily care had already rendered neat and clean was again gone over and brushed and rubbed and scrubbed. The china of ceremony saw the light; the damask linen marked "A, B, C" was drawn from depths where it lay under a triple guard of wrappings, still further defended by formidable lines of pins. Above all, Mademoiselle Cormon sacrificed on the altar of her hopes three bottles of the famous liqueurs of Madame Amphoux, the most illustrious of all the distillers of the tropics,—a name very dear to gourmets. Thanks to the devotion of her lieutenants, mademoiselle was soon ready for the conflict. The different weapons—furniture, cookery, provisions, in short, all the various munitions of war, together with a body of reserve forces—were ready along the whole line. Jacquelin, Mariette, and Josette received orders to appear in full dress. The garden was raked. The old maid regretted that she couldn't come to an understanding with the nightingales nesting in the trees, in order to obtain their finest trilling.

At last, about four o'clock, at the very moment when the Abbe de Sponde returned home, and just as mademoiselle began to think she had set the table with the best plate and linen and prepared the choicest dishes to no purpose, the click-clack of a postilion was heard in the Val-Noble.

"'Tis he!" she said to herself, the snap of the whip echoing in her heart.

True enough; heralded by all this gossip, a post-chaise, in which was a single gentleman, made so great a sensation coming down the rue Saint-Blaise

and turning into the rue du Cours that several little gamains and some grown persons followed it, and stood in groups about the gate of the hotel Cormon to see it enter. Jacquelin, who foresaw his own marriage in that of his mistress, had also heard the click-clack in the rue Saint-Blaise, and had opened wide the gates into the courtyard. The postilion, a friend of his, took pride in making a fine turn-in, and drew up sharply before the portico. The abbe came forward to greet his guest, whose carriage was emptied with a speed that highwaymen might put into the operation; the chaise itself was rolled into the coach-house, the gates closed, and in a few moments all signs of Monsieur de Troisville's arrival had disappeared. Never did two chemicals blend into each other with greater rapidity than the hotel Cormon displayed in absorbing the Vicomte de Troisville.

Mademoiselle, whose heart was beating like a lizard caught by a herdsman, sat heroically still on her sofa, beside the fire in the salon. Josette opened the door; and the Vicomte de Troisville, followed by the Abbe de Sponde, presented himself to the eyes of the spinster.

"Niece, this is Monsieur le Vicomte de Troisville, the grandson of one of my old schoolmates; Monsieur de Troisville, my niece, Mademoiselle Cormon."

"Ah! that good uncle; how well he does it!" thought Rose-Marie-Victoire.

The Vicomte de Troisville was, to paint him in two words, *du Bousquier* ennobled. Between the two men there was precisely the difference which separates the vulgar style from the noble style. If they had both been present, the most fanatic liberal would not have denied the existence of aristocracy. The viscount's strength had all the distinction of elegance; his figure had preserved its magnificent dignity. He had blue eyes, black hair, an olive skin, and looked to be about forty-six years of age. You might have thought him a handsome Spaniard preserved in the ice of Russia. His manner, carriage, and attitude, all denoted a diplomat who had seen Europe. His dress was that of a well-bred traveller. As he seemed fatigued, the abbe offered to show him to his room, and was much amazed when his niece threw open the door of the boudoir, transformed into a bedroom.

Mademoiselle Cormon and her uncle then left the noble stranger to attend to his own affairs, aided by Jacquelin, who brought up his luggage, and went themselves to walk beside the river until their guest had made his toilet. Although the Abbe de Sponde chanced to be even more absent-minded than usual, Mademoiselle Cormon was not less preoccupied. They both walked on in silence. The old maid had never before met any man as seductive as this Olympian viscount. She might have said to herself, as the Germans do, "This is my ideal!" instead of which she felt herself bound from head to foot, and

could only say, "Here's my affair!" Then she flew to Mariette to know if the dinner could be put back a while without loss of excellence.

"Uncle, your Monsieur de Troisville is very amiable," she said, on returning.

"Why, niece, he hasn't as yet said a word."

"But you can see it in his ways, his manners, his face. Is he a bachelor?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the abbe, who was thinking of a discussion on mercy, lately begun between the Abbe Couturier and himself. "Monsieur de Troisville wrote me that he wanted to buy a house here. If he was married, he wouldn't come alone on such an errand," added the abbe, carelessly, not conceiving the idea that his niece could be thinking of marriage.

"Is he rich?"

"He is a younger son of the younger branch," replied her uncle. "His grandfather commanded a squadron, but the father of this young man made a bad marriage."

"Young man!" exclaimed the old maid. "It seems to me, uncle, that he must be at least forty-five." She felt the strongest desire to put their years on a par.

"Yes," said the abbe; "but to a poor priest of seventy, Rose, a man of forty seems a youth."

All Alencon knew by this time that Monsieur de Troisville had arrived at the Cormons. The traveller soon rejoined his hosts, and began to admire the Brillante, the garden, and the house.

"Monsieur l'abbe," he said, "my whole ambition is to have a house like this." The old maid fancied a declaration lurked in that speech, and she lowered her eyes. "You must enjoy it very much, mademoiselle," added the viscount.

"How could it be otherwise? It has been in our family since 1574, the period at which one of our ancestors, steward to the Duc d'Alencon, acquired the land and built the house," replied Mademoiselle Cormon. "It is built on piles," she added.

Jacquelin announced dinner. Monsieur de Troisville offered his arm to the happy woman, who endeavored not to lean too heavily upon it; she feared, as usual, to seem to make advances.

"Everything is so harmonious here," said the viscount, as he seated himself at table.

"Yes, our trees are full of birds, which give us concerts for nothing; no one

ever frightens them; and the nightingales sing at night," said Mademoiselle Cormon.

"I was speaking of the interior of the house," remarked the viscount, who did not trouble himself to observe Mademoiselle Cormon, and therefore did not perceive the dulness of her mind. "Everything is so in keeping,—the tones of color, the furniture, the general character."

"But it costs a great deal; taxes are enormous," responded the excellent woman.

"Ah! taxes are high, are they?" said the viscount, preoccupied with his own ideas.

"I don't know," replied the abbe. "My niece manages the property of each of us."

"Taxes are not of much importance to the rich," said Mademoiselle Cormon, not wishing to be thought miserly. "As for the furniture, I shall leave it as it is, and change nothing,—unless I marry; and then, of course, everything here must suit the husband."

"You have noble principles, mademoiselle," said the viscount, smiling. "You will make one happy man."

"No one ever made to me such a pretty speech," thought the old maid.

The viscount complimented Mademoiselle Cormon on the excellence of her service and the admirable arrangements of the house, remarking that he had supposed the provinces behind the age in that respect; but, on the contrary, he found them, as the English say, "very comfortable."

"What can that word mean?" she thought. "Oh, where is the chevalier to explain it to me? 'Comfortable,'—there seem to be several words in it. Well, courage!" she said to herself. "I can't be expected to answer a foreign language—But," she continued aloud, feeling her tongue untied by the eloquence which nearly all human creatures find in momentous circumstances, "we have a very brilliant society here, monsieur. It assembles at my house, and you shall judge of it this evening, for some of my faithful friends have no doubt heard of my return and your arrival. Among them is the Chevalier de Valois, a seigneur of the old court, a man of infinite wit and taste; then there is Monsieur le Marquis d'Esgrignon and Mademoiselle Armande, his sister" (she bit her tongue with vexation),—"a woman remarkable in her way," she added. "She resolved to remain unmarried in order to leave all her fortune to her brother and nephew."

"Ah!" exclaimed the viscount. "Yes, the d'Esgrignons,—I remember them."

"Alencon is very gay," continued the old maid, now fairly launched. "There's much amusement: the receiver-general gives balls; the prefect is an

amiable man; and Monseigneur the bishop sometimes honors us with a visit —"

"Well, then," said the viscount, smiling, "I have done wisely to come back, like the hare, to die in my form."

"Yes," she said. "I, too, attach myself or I die."

The viscount smiled.

"Ah!" thought the old maid, "all is well; he understands me."

The conversation continued on generalities. By one of those mysterious unknown and undefinable faculties, Mademoiselle Cormon found in her brain, under the pressure of her desire to be agreeable, all the phrases and opinions of the Chevalier de Valois. It was like a duel in which the devil himself pointed the pistol. Never was any adversary better aimed at. The viscount was far too well-bred to speak of the excellence of the dinner; but his silence was praise. As he drank the delicious wines which Jacquelin served to him profusely, he seemed to feel he was with friends, and to meet them with pleasure; for the true connoisseur does not applaud, he enjoys. He inquired the price of land, of houses, of estates; he made Mademoiselle Cormon describe at length the confluence of the Sarthe and the Brillante; he expressed surprise that the town was placed so far from the river, and seemed to be much interested in the topography of the place.

The silent abbe left his niece to throw the dice of conversation; and she truly felt that she pleased Monsieur de Troisville, who smiled at her gracefully, and committed himself during this dinner far more than her most eager suitors had ever done in ten days. Imagine, therefore, the little attentions with which he was petted; you might have thought him a cherished lover, whose return brought joy to the household. Mademoiselle foresaw the moment when the viscount wanted bread; she watched his every look; when he turned his head she adroitly put upon his plate a portion of some dish he seemed to like; had he been a gourmand, she would almost have killed him; but what a delightful specimen of the attentions she would show to a husband! She did not commit the folly of depreciating herself; on the contrary, she set every sail bravely, ran up all her flags, assumed the bearing of the queen of Alencon, and boasted of her excellent preserves. In fact, she fished for compliments in speaking of herself, for she saw that she pleased the viscount; the truth being that her eager desire had so transformed her that she became almost a woman.

At dessert she heard, not without emotions of delight, certain sounds in the antechamber and salon which denoted the arrival of her usual guests. She called the attention of her uncle and Monsieur de Troisville to this prompt attendance as a proof of the affection that was felt for her; whereas it was

really the result of the poignant curiosity which had seized upon the town. Impatient to show herself in all her glory, Mademoiselle Cormon told Jacquelin to serve coffee and liqueurs in the salon, where he presently set out, in view of the whole company, a magnificent liqueur-stand of Dresden china which saw the light only twice a year. This circumstance was taken note of by the company, standing ready to gossip over the merest trifle:—

"The deuce!" muttered du Bousquier. "Actually Madame Amphoux's liqueurs, which they only serve at the four church festivals!"

"Undoubtedly the marriage was arranged a year ago by letter," said the chief-justice du Ronceret. "The postmaster tells me his office has received letters postmarked Odessa for more than a year."

Madame Granson trembled. The Chevalier de Valois, though he had dined with the appetite of four men, turned pale even to the left section of his face. Feeling that he was about to betray himself, he said hastily,—

"Don't you think it is very cold to-day? I am almost frozen."

"The neighborhood of Russia, perhaps," said du Bousquier.

The chevalier looked at him as if to say, "Well played!"

Mademoiselle Cormon appeared so radiant, so triumphant, that the company thought her handsome. This extraordinary brilliancy was not the effect of sentiment only. Since early morning her blood had been whirling tempestuously within her, and her nerves were agitated by the presentiment of some great crisis. It required all these circumstances combined to make her so unlike herself. With what joy did she now make her solemn presentation of the viscount to the chevalier, the chevalier to the viscount, and all Alencon to Monsieur de Troisville, and Monsieur de Troisville to all Alencon!

By an accident wholly explainable, the viscount and chevalier, aristocrats by nature, came instantly into unison; they recognized each other at once as men belonging to the same sphere. Accordingly, they began to converse together, standing before the fireplace. A circle formed around them; and their conversation, though uttered in a low voice, was listened to in religious silence. To give the effect of this scene it is necessary to dramatize it, and to picture Mademoiselle Cormon occupied in pouring out the coffee of her imaginary suitor, with her back to the fireplace.

Monsieur de Valois. "Monsieur le vicomte has come, I am told, to settle in Alencon?"

Monsieur de Troisville. "Yes, monsieur, I am looking for a house." [Mademoiselle Cormon, cup in hand, turns round.] "It must be a large house" [Mademoiselle Cormon offers him the cup] "to lodge my whole family." [The

eyes of the old maid are troubled.]

Monsieur de Valois. "Are you married?"

Monsieur de Troisville. "Yes, for the last sixteen years, to a daughter of the Princess Scherbellof."

Mademoiselle Cormon fainted; du Bousquier, who saw her stagger, sprang forward and received her in his arms; some one opened the door and allowed him to pass out with his enormous burden. The fiery republican, instructed by Josette, found strength to carry the old maid to her bedroom, where he laid her out on the bed. Josette, armed with scissors, cut the corset, which was terribly tight. Du Bousquier flung water on Mademoiselle Cormon's face and bosom, which, released from the corset, overflowed like the Loire in flood. The poor woman opened her eyes, saw du Bousquier, and gave a cry of modesty at the sight of him. Du Bousquier retired at once, leaving six women, at the head of whom was Madame Granson, radiant with joy, to take care of the invalid.

What had the Chevalier de Valois been about all this time? Faithful to his system, he had covered the retreat.

"That poor Mademoiselle Cormon," he said to Monsieur de Troisville, gazing at the assembly, whose laughter was repressed by his cool aristocratic glances, "her blood is horribly out of order; she wouldn't be bled before going to Preboudet (her estate),—and see the result!"

"She came back this morning in the rain," said the Abbe de Sponde, "and she may have taken cold. It won't be anything; it is only a little upset she is subject to."

"She told me yesterday she had not had one for three months, adding that she was afraid it would play her a trick at last," said the chevalier.

"Ha! so you are married?" said Jacquelin to himself as he looked at Monsieur de Troisville, who was quietly sipping his coffee.

The faithful servant espoused his mistress's disappointment; he divined it, and he promptly carried away the liqueurs of Madame Amphoux, which were offered to a bachelor, and not to the husband of a Russian woman.

All these details were noticed and laughed at. The Abbe de Sponde knew the object of Monsieur de Troisville's journey; but, absent-minded as usual, he forgot it, not supposing that his niece could have the slightest interest in Monsieur de Troisville's marriage. As for the viscount, preoccupied with the object of his journey, and, like many husbands, not eager to talk about his wife, he had had no occasion to say he was married; besides, he would naturally suppose that Mademoiselle Cormon knew it.

Du Bousquier reappeared, and was questioned furiously. One of the six

women came down soon after, and announced that Mademoiselle Cormon was much better, and that the doctor had come. She intended to stay in bed, as it was necessary to bleed her. The salon was now full. Mademoiselle Cormon's absence allowed the ladies present to discuss the tragi-comic scene—embellished, extended, historified, embroidered, wreathed, colored, and adorned—which had just taken place, and which, on the morrow, was destined to occupy all Alencon.

"That good Monsieur du Bousquier! how well he carried you!" said Josette to her mistress. "He was really pale at the sight of you; he loves you still."

That speech served as closure to this solemn and terrible evening.

Throughout the morning of the next day every circumstance of the late comedy was known in the household of Alencon, and—let us say it to the shame of that town,—they caused inextinguishable laughter. But on that day Mademoiselle Cormon (much benefited by the bleeding) would have seemed sublime even to the boldest scoffers, had they witnessed the noble dignity, the splendid Christian resignation which influenced her as she gave her arm to her involuntary deceiver to go into breakfast. Cruel jesters! why could you not have seen her as she said to the viscount,—

"Madame de Troisville will have difficulty in finding a suitable house; do me the favor, monsieur, of accepting the use of mine during the time you are in search of yours."

"But, mademoiselle, I have two sons and two daughters; we should greatly inconvenience you."

"Pray do not refuse me," she said earnestly.

"I made you the same offer in the answer I wrote to your letter," said the abbe; "but you did not receive it."

"What, uncle! then you knew—"

The poor woman stopped. Josette sighed. Neither the viscount nor the abbe observed anything amiss. After breakfast the Abbe de Sponde carried off his guest, as agreed upon the previous evening, to show him the various houses in Alencon which could be bought, and the lots of lands on which he might build.

Left alone in the salon, Mademoiselle Cormon said to Josette, with a deeply distressed air, "My child, I am now the talk of the whole town."

"Well, then, mademoiselle, you should marry."

"But I am not prepared to make a choice."

"Bah! if I were in your place, I should take Monsieur du Bousquier."



"Josette, Monsieur de Valois says he is so republican."

"They don't know what they say, your gentlemen: sometimes they declare that he robbed the republic; he couldn't love it if he did that," said Josette, departing.

"That girl has an amazing amount of sense," thought Mademoiselle Cormon, who remained alone, a prey to her perplexities.

She saw plainly that a prompt marriage was the only way to silence the town. This last checkmate, so evidently mortifying, was of a nature to drive her into some extreme action; for persons deficient in mind find difficulty in getting out of any path, either good or evil, into which they have entered.

Each of the two old bachelors had fully understood the situation in which Mademoiselle Cormon was about to find herself; consequently, each resolved to call in the course of that morning to ask after her health, and take occasion, in bachelor language, to "press his point." Monsieur de Valois considered that such an occasion demanded a painstaking toilet; he therefore took a bath and groomed himself with extraordinary care. For the first and last time Cesarine observed him putting on with incredible art a suspicion of rouge. Du Bousquier, on the other hand, that coarse republican, spurred by a brisk will, paid no attention to his dress, and arrived the first.

Such little things decide the fortunes of men, as they do of empires. Kellerman's charge at Marengo, Blucher's arrival at Waterloo, Louis XIV.'s disdain for Prince Eugene, the rector of Denain,—all these great causes of fortune or catastrophe history has recorded; but no one ever profits by them to avoid the small neglects of their own life. Consequently, observe what happens: the Duchesse de Langeais (see "History of the Thirteen") makes herself a nun for the lack of ten minutes' patience; Judge Popinot (see "Commission in Lunacy") puts off till the morrow the duty of examining the Marquis d'Espard; Charles Grandet (see "Eugenie Grandet") goes to Paris from Bordeaux instead of returning by Nantes; and such events are called chance or fatality! A touch of rouge carefully applied destroyed the hopes of the Chevalier de Valois; could that nobleman perish in any other way? He had lived by the Graces, and he was doomed to die by their hand. While the chevalier was giving this last touch to his toilet the rough du Bousquier was entering the salon of the desolate old maid. This entrance produced a thought in Mademoiselle Cormon's mind which was favorable to the republican, although in all other respects the Chevalier de Valois held the advantages.

"God wills it!" she said piously, on seeing du Bousquier.

"Mademoiselle, you will not, I trust, think my eagerness importunate. I could not trust to my stupid Rene to bring news of your condition, and

therefore I have come myself."

"I am perfectly recovered," she replied, in a tone of emotion. "I thank you, Monsieur du Bousquier," she added, after a slight pause, and in a significant tone of voice, "for the trouble you have taken, and for that which I gave you yesterday—"

She remembered having been in his arms, and that again seemed to her an order from heaven. She had been seen for the first time by a man with her laces cut, her treasures violently bursting from their casket.

"I carried you with such joy that you seemed to me light."

Here Mademoiselle Cormon looked at du Bousquier as she had never yet looked at any man in the world. Thus encouraged, the purveyor cast upon the old maid a glance which reached her heart.

"I would," he said, "that that moment had given me the right to keep you as mine forever" [she listened with a delighted air]; "as you lay fainting upon that bed, you were enchanting. I have never in my life seen a more beautiful person,—and I have seen many handsome women. Plump ladies have this advantage: they are superb to look upon; they have only to show themselves and they triumph."

"I fear you are making fun of me," said the old maid, "and that is not kind when all the town will probably misinterpret what happened to me yesterday."

"As true as my name is du Bousquier, mademoiselle, I have never changed in my feelings toward you; and your first refusal has not discouraged me."

The old maid's eyes were lowered. There was a moment of cruel silence for du Bousquier, and then Mademoiselle Cormon decided on her course. She raised her eyelids; tears flowed from her eyes, and she gave du Bousquier a tender glance.

"If that is so, monsieur," she said, in a trembling voice, "promise me to live in a Christian manner, and not oppose my religious customs, but to leave me the right to select my confessors, and I will grant you my hand"; as she said the words, she held it out to him.

Du Bousquier seized the good fat hand so full of money, and kissed it solemnly.

"But," she said, allowing him to kiss it, "one thing more I must require of you."

"If it is a possible thing, it is granted," replied the purveyor.

"Alas!" returned the old maid. "For my sake, I must ask you to take upon yourself a sin which I feel to be enormous,—for to lie is one of the capital

sins. But you will confess it, will you not? We will do penance for it together" [they looked at each other tenderly]. "Besides, it may be one of those lies which the Church permits as necessary—"

"Can she be as Suzanne says she is?" thought du Bousquier. "What luck! Well, mademoiselle, what is it?" he said aloud.

"That you will take upon yourself to—"

"What?"

"To say that this marriage has been agreed upon between us for the last six months."

"Charming woman," said the purveyor, in the tone of a man willing to devote himself, "such sacrifices can be made only for a creature adored these ten years."

"In spite of my harshness?" she said.

"Yes, in spite of your harshness."

"Monsieur du Bousquier, I have misjudged you."

Again she held out the fat red hand, which du Bousquier kissed again.

At this moment the door opened; the betrothed pair, looking round to see who entered, beheld the delightful, but tardy Chevalier de Valois.

"Ah!" he said, on entering, "I see you are about to be up, fair queen."

She smiled at the chevalier, feeling a weight upon her heart. Monsieur de Valois, remarkably young and seductive, had the air of a Lauzun re-entering the apartments of the Grande Mademoiselle in the Palais-Royal.

"Hey! dear du Bousquier," said he, in a jaunty tone, so sure was he of success, "Monsieur de Troisville and the Abbe de Sponde are examining your house like appraisers."

"Faith!" said du Bousquier, "if the Vicomte de Troisville wants it, it is his for forty thousand francs. It is useless to me now. If mademoiselle will permit—it must soon be known—Mademoiselle, may I tell it?—Yes! Well, then, be the first, my dear Chevalier, to hear" [Mademoiselle Cormon dropped her eyes] "of the honor that mademoiselle has done me, the secret of which I have kept for some months. We shall be married in a few days; the contract is already drawn, and we shall sign it to-morrow. You see, therefore, that my house in the rue du Cygne is useless to me. I have been privately looking for a purchaser for some time; and the Abbe de Sponde, who knew that fact, has naturally taken Monsieur de Troisville to see the house."

This falsehood bore such an appearance of truth that the chevalier was

taken in by it. That "my dear chevalier" was like the revenge taken by Peter the Great on Charles XII. at Pultawa for all his past defeats. Du Bousquier revenged himself deliciously for the thousand little shafts he had long borne in silence; but in his triumph he made a lively youthful gesture by running his hands through his hair, and in so doing he—knocked aside his false front.

"I congratulate you both," said the chevalier, with an agreeable air; "and I wish that the marriage may end like a fairy tale: They were happy ever after, and had—many—children!" So saying, he took a pinch of snuff. "But, monsieur," he added satirically, "you forget—that you are wearing a false front."

Du Bousquier blushed. The false front was hanging half a dozen inches from his skull. Mademoiselle Cormon raised her eyes, saw that skull in all its nudity, and lowered them, abashed. Du Bousquier cast upon the chevalier the most venomous look that toad ever darted on its prey.

"Dogs of aristocrats who despise me," thought he, "I'll crush you some day."

The chevalier thought he had recovered his advantage. But Mademoiselle Cormon was not a woman to understand the connection which the chevalier intimated between his congratulatory wish and the false front. Besides, even if she had comprehended it, her word was passed, her hand given. Monsieur de Valois saw at once that all was lost. The innocent woman, with the two now silent men before her, wished, true to her sense of duty, to amuse them.

"Why not play a game of piquet together?" she said artlessly, without the slightest malice.

Du Bousquier smiled, and went, as the future master of the house, to fetch the piquet table. Whether the Chevalier de Valois lost his head, or whether he wanted to stay and study the causes of his disaster and remedy it, certain it is that he allowed himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. He had received the most violent knock-down blow that ever struck a man; any nobleman would have lost his senses for less.

The Abbe de Sponde and the Vicomte de Troisville soon returned. Mademoiselle Cormon instantly rose, hurried into the antechamber, and took her uncle apart to tell him her resolution. Learning that the house in the rue du Cygne exactly suited the viscount, she begged her future husband to do her the kindness to tell him that her uncle knew it was for sale. She dared not confide that lie to the abbe, fearing his absent-mindedness. The lie, however, prospered better than if it had been a virtuous action. In the course of that evening all Alencon heard the news. For the last four days the town had had as much to think of as during the fatal days of 1814 and 1815. Some laughed;

others admitted the marriage. These blamed it; those approved it. The middle classes of Alencon rejoiced; they regarded it as a victory. The next day, among friends, the Chevalier de Valois said a cruel thing:—

"The Cormons end as they began; there's only a hand's breadth between a steward and a purveyor."

## CHAPTER VII. OTHER RESULTS

The news of Mademoiselle Cormon's choice stabbed poor Athanase Granson to the heart; but he showed no outward sign of the terrible agitation within him. When he first heard of the marriage he was at the house of the chief-justice, du Ronceret, where his mother was playing boston. Madame Granson looked at her son in a mirror, and thought him pale; but he had been so all day, for a vague rumor of the matter had already reached him.

Mademoiselle Cormon was the card on which Athanase had staked his life; and the cold presentiment of a catastrophe was already upon him. When the soul and the imagination have magnified a misfortune and made it too heavy for the shoulders and the brain to bear; when a hope long cherished, the realization of which would pacify the vulture feeding on the heart, is balked, and the man has faith neither in himself, despite his powers, nor in the future, despite of the Divine power,—then that man is lost. Athanase was a fruit of the Imperial system of education. Fatality, the Emperor's religion, had filtered down from the throne to the lowest ranks of the army and the benches of the lyceums. Athanase sat still, with his eyes fixed on Madame du Ronceret's cards, in a stupor that might so well pass for indifference that Madame Granson herself was deceived about his feelings. This apparent unconcern explained her son's refusal to make a sacrifice for this marriage of his liberal opinions,—the term "liberal" having lately been created for the Emperor Alexander by, I think, Madame de Stael, through the lips of Benjamin Constant.

After that fatal evening the young man took to rambling among the picturesque regions of the Sarthe, the banks of which are much frequented by sketchers who come to Alencon for points of view. Windmills are there, and the river is gay in the meadows. The shores of the Sarthe are bordered with beautiful trees, well grouped. Though the landscape is flat, it is not without those modest graces which distinguish France, where the eye is never wearied by the brilliancy of Oriental skies, nor saddened by constant fog. The place is solitary. In the provinces no one pays much attention to a fine view, either because provincials are blinded on the beauty around them, or because they

have no poesy in their souls. If there exists in the provinces a mall, a promenade, a vantage-ground from which a fine view can be obtained, that is the point to which no one goes. Athanase was fond of this solitude, enlivened by the sparkling water, where the fields were the first to green under the earliest smiling of the springtide sun. Those persons who saw him sitting beneath a poplar, and who noticed the vacant eye which he turned to them, would say to Madame Granson:—

"Something is the matter with your son."

"I know what it is," the mother would reply; hinting that he was meditating over some great work.

Athanase no longer took part in politics: he ceased to have opinions; but he appeared at times quite gay,—gay with the satire of those who think to insult a whole world with their own individual scorn. This young man, outside of all the ideas and all the pleasures of the provinces, interested few persons; he was not even an object of curiosity. If persons spoke of him to his mother, it was for her sake, not his. There was not a single soul in Alencon that sympathized with his; not a woman, not a friend came near to dry his tears; they dropped into the Sarthe. If the gorgeous Suzanne had happened that way, how many young miseries might have been born of the meeting! for the two would surely have loved each other.

She did come, however. Suzanne's ambition was early excited by the tale of a strange adventure which had happened at the tavern of the More,—a tale which had taken possession of her childish brain. A Parisian woman, beautiful as the angels, was sent by Fouche to entangle the Marquis de Montauran, otherwise called "The Gars," in a love-affair (see "The Chouans"). She met him at the tavern of the More on his return from an expedition to Mortagne; she cajoled him, made him love her, and then betrayed him. That fantastic power—the power of beauty over mankind; in fact, the whole story of Marie de Verneuil and the Gars—dazzled Suzanne; she longed to grow up in order to play upon men. Some months after her hasty departure she passed through her native town with an artist on his way to Brittany. She wanted to see Fougères, where the adventure of the Marquis de Montauran culminated, and to stand upon the scene of that picturesque war, the tragedies of which, still so little known, had filled her childish mind. Besides this, she had a fancy to pass through Alencon so elegantly equipped that no one could recognize her; to put her mother above the reach of necessity, and also to send to poor Athanase, in a delicate manner, a sum of money,—which in our age is to genius what in the middle ages was the charger and the coat of mail that Rebecca conveyed to Ivanhoe.

One month passed away in the strangest uncertainties respecting the

marriage of Mademoiselle Cormon. A party of unbelievers denied the marriage altogether; the believers, on the other hand, affirmed it. At the end of two weeks, the faction of unbelief received a vigorous blow in the sale of du Bousquier's house to the Marquis de Troisville, who only wanted a simple establishment in Alencon, intending to go to Paris after the death of the Princess Scherbellof; he proposed to await that inheritance in retirement, and then to reconstitute his estates. This seemed positive. The unbelievers, however, were not crushed. They declared that du Bousquier, married or not, had made an excellent sale, for the house had only cost him twenty-seven thousand francs. The believers were depressed by this practical observation of the incredulous. Choisnel, Mademoiselle Cormon's notary, asserted the latter, had heard nothing about the marriage contract; but the believers, still firm in their faith, carried off, on the twentieth day, a signal victory: Monsieur Lepressoir, the notary of the liberals, went to Mademoiselle Cormon's house, and the contract was signed.

This was the first of the numerous sacrifices which Mademoiselle Cormon was destined to make to her husband. Du Bousquier bore the deepest hatred to Choisnel; to him he owed the refusal of the hand of Mademoiselle Armande, —a refusal which, as he believed, had influenced that of Mademoiselle Cormon. This circumstance alone made the marriage drag along. Mademoiselle received several anonymous letters. She learned, to her great astonishment, that Suzanne was as truly a virgin as herself so far as du Bousquier was concerned, for that seducer with the false toupet could never be the hero of any such adventure. Mademoiselle Cormon disdained anonymous letters; but she wrote to Suzanne herself, on the ground of enlightening the Maternity Society. Suzanne, who had no doubt heard of du Bousquier's proposed marriage, acknowledged her trick, sent a thousand francs to the society, and did all the harm she could to the old purveyor. Mademoiselle Cormon convoked the Maternity Society, which held a special meeting at which it was voted that the association would not in future assist any misfortunes about to happen, but solely those that had happened.

In spite of all these various events which kept the town in the choicest gossip, the banns were published in the churches and at the mayor's office. Athanase prepared the deeds. As a matter of propriety and public decency, the bride retired to Prebaudet, where du Bousquier, bearing sumptuous and horrible bouquets, betook himself every morning, returning home for dinner.

At last, on a dull and rainy morning in June, the marriage of Mademoiselle Cormon and the Sieur du Bousquier took place at noon in the parish church of Alencon, in sight of the whole town. The bridal pair went from their own house to the mayor's office, and from the mayor's office to the church in an open caleche, a magnificent vehicle for Alencon, which du Bousquier had sent

for secretly to Paris. The loss of the old carriole was a species of calamity in the eyes of the community. The harness-maker of the Porte de Seez bemoaned it, for he lost the fifty francs a year which it cost in repairs. Alencon saw with alarm the possibility of luxury being thus introduced into the town. Every one feared a rise in the price of rents and provisions, and a coming invasion of Parisian furniture. Some persons were sufficiently pricked by curiosity to give ten sous to Jacquelin to allow them a close inspection of the vehicle which threatened to upset the whole economy of the region. A pair of horses, bought in Normandie, were also most alarming.

"If we bought our own horses," said the Ronceret circle, "we couldn't sell them to those who come to buy."

Stupid as it was, this reasoning seemed sound; for surely such a course would prevent the region from grasping the money of foreigners. In the eyes of the provinces wealth consisted less in the rapid turning over of money than in sterile accumulation. It may be mentioned here that Penelope succumbed to a pleurisy which she acquired about six weeks before the marriage; nothing could save her.

Madame Granson, Mariette, Madame du Coudrai, Madame du Ronceret, and through them the whole town, remarked that Madame du Bousquier entered the church with her left foot,—an omen all the more dreadful because the term Left was beginning to acquire a political meaning. The priest whose duty it was to read the opening formula opened his book by chance at the *De Profundis*. Thus the marriage was accompanied by circumstances so fateful, so alarming, so annihilating that no one dared to augur well of it. Matters, in fact, went from bad to worse. There was no wedding party; the married pair departed immediately for Prebaudet. Parisian customs, said the community, were about to triumph over time-honored provincial ways.

The marriage of Jacquelin and Josette now took place: it was gay; and they were the only two persons in Alencon who refuted the sinister prophecies relating to the marriage of their mistress.

Du Bousquier determined to use the proceeds of the sale of his late residence in restoring and modernizing the hotel Cormon. He decided to remain through two seasons at Prebaudet, and took the Abbe de Sponde with them. This news spread terror through the town, where every individual felt that du Bousquier was about to drag the community into the fatal path of "comfort." This fear increased when the inhabitants of Alencon saw the bridegroom driving in from Prebaudet one morning to inspect his works, in a fine tilbury drawn by a new horse, having Rene at his side in livery. The first act of his administration had been to place his wife's savings on the Grand-Livre, which was then quoted at 67 fr. 50 cent. In the space of one year, during



which he played constantly for a rise, he made himself a personal fortune almost as considerable as that of his wife.

But all these foreboding prophecies, these perturbing innovations, were superseded and surpassed by an event connected with this marriage which gave a still more fatal aspect to it.

On the very evening of the ceremony, Athanase and his mother were sitting, after their dinner, over a little fire of fagots, which the servant lighted usually at dessert.

"Well, we will go this evening to the du Roncerets', inasmuch as we have lost Mademoiselle Cormon," said Madame Granson. "Heavens! how shall I ever accustom myself to call her Madame du Bousquier! that name burns my lips."

Athanase looked at his mother with a constrained and melancholy air; he could not smile; but he seemed to wish to welcome that naive sentiment which soothed his wound, though it could not cure his anguish.

"Mamma," he said, in the voice of his childhood, so tender was it, and using the name he had abandoned for several years,— "my dear mamma, do not let us go out just yet; it is so pleasant here before the fire."

The mother heard, without comprehending, that supreme prayer of a mortal sorrow.

"Yes, let us stay, my child," she said. "I like much better to talk with you and listen to your projects than to play at boston and lose my money."

"You are so handsome to-night I love to look at you. Besides, I am in a current of ideas which harmonize with this poor little salon where we have suffered so much."

"And where we shall still suffer, my poor Athanase, until your works succeed. For myself, I am trained to poverty; but you, my treasure! to see your youth go by without a joy! nothing but toil for my poor boy in life! That thought is like an illness to a mother; it tortures me at night; it wakes me in the morning. O God! what have I done? for what crime dost thou punish me thus?"

She left her sofa, took a little chair, and sat close to Athanase, so as to lay her head on the bosom of her child. There is always the grace of love in true motherhood. Athanase kissed her on the eyes, on her gray hair, on her forehead, with the sacred desire of laying his soul wherever he applied his lips.

"I shall never succeed," he said, trying to deceive his mother as to the fatal resolution he was revolving in his mind.

"Pooh! don't get discouraged. As you often say, thought can do all things. With ten bottles of ink, ten reams of paper, and his powerful will, Luther upset all Europe. Well, you'll make yourself famous; you will do good things by the same means which he used to do evil things. Haven't you said so yourself? For my part, I listen to you; I understand you a great deal more than you think I do,—for I still bear you in my bosom, and your every thought still stirs me as your slightest motion did in other days."

"I shall never succeed here, mamma; and I don't want you to witness the sight of my struggles, my misery, my anguish. Oh, mother, let me leave Alencon! I want to suffer away from you."

"And I wish to be at your side," replied his mother, proudly. "Suffer without your mother!—that poor mother who would be your servant if necessary; who will efface herself rather than injure you; your mother, who will never shame you. No, no, Athanase; we must not part."

Athanase clung to his mother with the ardor of a dying man who clings to life.

"But I wish it, nevertheless. If not, you will lose me; this double grief, yours and mine, is killing me. You would rather I lived than died?"

Madame Granson looked at her son with a haggard eye.

"So this is what you have been brooding?" she said. "They told me right. Do you really mean to go?"

"Yes."

"You will not go without telling me; without warning me? You must have an outfit and money. I have some louis sewn into my petticoat; I shall give them to you."

Athanase wept.

"That's all I wanted to tell you," he said. "Now I'll take you to the du Roncerets'. Come."

The mother and the son went out. Athanase left his mother at the door of the house where she intended to pass the evening. He looked long at the light which came through the shutters; he clung closely to the wall, and a frenzied joy came over him when he presently heard his mother say, "He has great independence of heart."

"Poor mother! I have deceived her," he cried, as he made his way to the Sarthe.

He reached the noble poplar beneath which he had meditated so much for the last forty days, and where he had placed two heavy stones on which he

now sat down. He contemplated that beautiful nature lighted by the moon; he reviewed once more the glorious future he had longed for; he passed through towns that were stirred by his name; he heard the applauding crowds; he breathed the incense of his fame; he adored that life long dreamed of; radiant, he sprang to radiant triumphs; he raised his stature; he evoked his illusions to bid them farewell in a last Olympic feast. The magic had been potent for a moment; but now it vanished forever. In that awful hour he clung to the beautiful tree to which, as to a friend, he had attached himself; then he put the two stones into the pockets of his overcoat, which he buttoned across his breast. He had come intentionally without a hat. He now went to the deep pool he had long selected, and glided into it resolutely, trying to make as little noise as possible, and, in fact, making scarcely any.

When, at half-past nine o'clock, Madame Granson returned home, her servant said nothing of Athanase, but gave her a letter. She opened it and read these few words,—

"My good mother, I have departed; don't be angry with me."

"A pretty trick he has played me!" she thought. "And his linen! and the money! Well, he will write to me, and then I'll follow him. These poor children think they are so much cleverer than their fathers and mothers."

And she went to bed in peace.

During the preceding morning the Sarthe had risen to a height foreseen by the fisherman. These sudden rises of muddy water brought eels from their various runlets. It so happened that a fisherman had spread his net at the very place where poor Athanase had flung himself, believing that no one would ever find him. About six o'clock in the morning the man drew in his net, and with it the young body. The few friends of the poor mother took every precaution in preparing her to receive the dreadful remains. The news of this suicide made, as may well be supposed, a great excitement in Alencon. The poor young man of genius had no protector the night before, but on the morrow of his death a thousand voices cried aloud, "I would have helped him." It is so easy and convenient to be charitable gratis!

The suicide was explained by the Chevalier de Valois. He revealed, in a spirit of revenge, the artless, sincere, and genuine love of Athanase for Mademoiselle Cormon. Madame Granson, enlightened by the chevalier, remembered a thousand little circumstances which confirmed the chevalier's statement. The story then became touching, and many women wept over it. Madame Granson's grief was silent, concentrated, and little understood. There are two forms of mourning for mothers. Often the world can enter fully into the nature of their loss: their son, admired, appreciated, young, perhaps handsome, with a noble path before him, leading to fortune, possibly to fame,

excites universal regret; society joins in the grief, and alleviates while it magnifies it. But there is another sorrow of mothers who alone know what their child was really; who alone have received his smiles and observed the treasures of a life too soon cut short. That sorrow hides its woe, the blackness of which surpasses all other mourning; it cannot be described; happily there are but few women whose heart-strings are thus severed.

Before Madame du Bousquier returned to town, Madame du Ronceret, one of her good friends, had driven out to Prebaudet to fling this corpse upon the roses of her joy, to show her the love she had ignored, and sweetly shed a thousand drops of wormwood into the honey of her bridal month. As Madame du Bousquier drove back to Alencon, she chanced to meet Madame Granson at the corner of the rue Val-Noble. The glance of the mother, dying of her grief, struck to the heart of the poor woman. A thousand maledictions, a thousand flaming reproaches, were in that look: Madame du Bousquier was horror-struck; that glance predicted and called down evil upon her head.

The evening after the catastrophe, Madame Granson, one of the persons most opposed to the rector of the town, and who had hitherto supported the minister of Saint-Leonard, began to tremble as she thought of the inflexible Catholic doctrines professed by her own party. After placing her son's body in its shroud with her own hands, thinking of the mother of the Saviour, she went, with a soul convulsed by anguish, to the house of the hated rector. There she found the modest priest in an outer room, engaged in putting away the flax and yarns with which he supplied poor women, in order that they might never be wholly out of work,—a form of charity which saved many who were incapable of begging from actual penury. The rector left his yarns and hastened to take Madame Granson into his dining-room, where the wretched mother noticed, as she looked at his supper, the frugal method of his own living.

"Monsieur l'abbe," she said, "I have come to implore you—" She burst into tears, unable to continue.

"I know what brings you," replied the saintly man. "I must trust to you, madame, and to your relation, Madame du Bousquier, to pacify Monseigneur the Bishop at Seez. Yes, I will pray for your unhappy child; yes, I will say the masses. But we must avoid all scandal, and give no opportunity for evil-judging persons to assemble in the church. I alone, without other clergy, at night—"

"Yes, yes, as you think best; if only he may lie in consecrated ground," said the poor mother, taking the priest's hand and kissing it.

Toward midnight a coffin was clandestinely borne to the parish church by four young men, comrades whom Athanase had liked the best. A few friends

of Madame Granson, women dressed in black, and veiled, were present; and half a dozen other young men who had been somewhat intimate with this lost genius. Four torches flickered on the coffin, which was covered with crape. The rector, assisted by one discreet choirboy, said the mortuary mass. Then the body of the suicide was noiselessly carried to a corner of the cemetery, where a black wooden cross, without inscription, was all that indicated its place hereafter to the mother. Athanase lived and died in shadow. No voice was raised to blame the rector; the bishop kept silence. The piety of the mother redeemed the impiety of the son's last act.

Some months later, the poor woman, half beside herself with grief, and moved by one of those inexplicable thirsts which misery feels to steep its lips in the bitter chalice, determined to see the spot where her son was drowned. Her instinct may have told her that thoughts of his could be recovered beneath that poplar; perhaps, too, she desired to see what his eyes had seen for the last time. Some mothers would die of the sight; others give themselves up to it in saintly adoration. Patient anatomists of human nature cannot too often enunciate the truths before which all educations, laws, and philosophical systems must give way. Let us repeat continually: it is absurd to force sentiments into one formula: appearing as they do, in each individual man, they combine with the elements that form his nature and take his own physiognomy.

Madame Granson, as she stood on that fatal spot, saw a woman approach it, who exclaimed,—

"Was it here?"

That woman wept as the mother wept. It was Suzanne. Arriving that morning at the hotel du More, she had been told of the catastrophe. If poor Athanase had been living, she meant to do as many noble souls, who are moneyless, dream of doing, and as the rich never think of doing,—she meant to have sent him several thousand francs, writing up the envelope the words: "Money due to your father from a comrade who makes restitution to you." This tender scheme had been arranged by Suzanne during her journey.

The courtesan caught sight of Madame Granson and moved rapidly away, whispering as she passed her, "I loved him!"

Suzanne, faithful to her nature, did not leave Alencon on this occasion without changing the orange-blossoms of the bride to rue. She was the first to declare that Madame du Bousquier would never be anything but Mademoiselle Cormon. With one stab of her tongue she revenged poor Athanase and her dear chevalier.

Alencon now witnessed a suicide that was slower and quite differently

pitiful from that of poor Athanase, who was quickly forgotten by society, which always makes haste to forget its dead. The poor Chevalier de Valois died in life; his suicide was a daily occurrence for fourteen years. Three months after the du Bousquier marriage society remarked, not without astonishment, that the linen of the chevalier was frayed and rusty, that his hair was irregularly combed and brushed. With a frowsy head the Chevalier de Valois could no longer be said to exist! A few of his ivory teeth deserted, though the keenest observers of human life were unable to discover to what body they had hitherto belonged, whether to a foreign legion or whether they were indigenous, vegetable or animal; whether age had pulled them from the chevalier's mouth, or whether they were left forgotten in the drawer of his dressing-table. The cravat was crooked, indifferent to elegance. The negroes' heads grew pale with dust and grease. The wrinkles of the face were blackened and puckered; the skin became parchment. The nails, neglected, were often seen, alas! with a black velvet edging. The waistcoat was tracked and stained with droppings which spread upon its surface like autumn leaves. The cotton in the ears was seldom changed. Sadness reigned upon that brow, and slipped its yellowing tints into the depths of each furrow. In short, the ruins, hitherto so cleverly hidden, now showed through the cracks and crevices of that fine edifice, and proved the power of the soul over the body; for the fair and dainty man, the cavalier, the young blood, died when hope deserted him. Until then the nose of the chevalier was ever delicate and nice; never had a damp black blotch, nor an amber drop fall from it; but now that nose, smeared with tobacco around the nostrils, degraded by the driblets which took advantage of the natural gutter placed between itself and the upper lip,—that nose, which no longer cared to seem agreeable, revealed the infinite pains which the chevalier had formerly taken with his person, and made observers comprehend, by the extent of its degradation, the greatness and persistence of the man's designs upon Mademoiselle Cormon.

Alas, too, the anecdotes went the way of the teeth; the clever sayings grew rare. The appetite, however, remained; the old nobleman saved nothing but his stomach from the wreck of his hopes; though he languidly prepared his pinches of snuff, he ate alarming dinners. Perhaps you will more fully understand the disaster that this marriage was to the mind and heart of the chevalier when you learn that his intercourse with the Princess Goritza became less frequent.

One day he appeared in Mademoiselle Armande's salon with the calf of his leg on the shin-bone. This bankruptcy of the graces was, I do assure you, terrible, and struck all Alencon with horror. The late young man had become an old one; this human being, who, by the breaking-down of his spirit, had passed at once from fifty to ninety years of age, frightened society. Besides, his secret was betrayed; he had waited and watched for Mademoiselle

Cormon; he had, like a patient hunter, adjusted his aim for ten whole years, and finally had missed the game! In short, the impotent Republic had won the day from Valiant Chivalry, and that, too, under the Restoration! Form triumphed; mind was vanquished by matter, diplomacy by insurrection. And, O final blow! a mortified grisette revealed the secret of the chevalier's mornings, and he now passed for a libertine. The liberals cast at his door all the foundlings hitherto attributed to du Bousquier. But the faubourg Saint-Germain of Alencon accepted them proudly: it even said, "That poor chevalier, what else could he do?" The faubourg pitied him, gathered him closer to their circle, and brought back a few rare smiles to his face; but frightful enmity was piled upon the head of du Bousquier. Eleven persons deserted the Cormon salon, and passed to that of the d'Esgrignons.

The old maid's marriage had a signal effect in defining the two parties in Alencon. The salon d'Esgrignon represented the upper aristocracy (the returning Troisvilles attached themselves to it); the Cormon salon represented, under the clever influence of du Bousquier, that fatal class of opinions which, without being truly liberal or resolutely royalist, gave birth to the 221 on that famous day when the struggle openly began between the most august, grandest, and only true power, royalty, and the most false, most changeable, most oppressive of all powers,—the power called parliamentary, which elective assemblies exercise. The salon du Ronceret, secretly allied to the Cormon salon, was boldly liberal.

The Abbe de Sponde, after his return from Prebaudet, bore many and continual sufferings, which he kept within his breast, saying no word of them to his niece. But to Mademoiselle Armande he opened his heart, admitting that, folly for folly, he would much have preferred the Chevalier de Valois to Monsieur du Bousquier. Never would the dear chevalier have had the bad taste to contradict and oppose a poor old man who had but a few days more to live; du Bousquier had destroyed everything in the good old home. The abbe said, with scanty tears moistening his aged eyes,—

"Mademoiselle, I haven't even the little grove where I have walked for fifty years. My beloved lindens are all cut down! At the moment of my death the Republic appears to me more than ever under the form of a horrible destruction of the Home."

"You must pardon your niece," said the Chevalier de Valois. "Republican ideas are the first error of youth which seeks for liberty; later it finds it the worst of despotisms,—that of an impotent canaille. Your poor niece is punished where she sinned."

"What will become of me in a house where naked women are painted on the walls?" said the poor abbe. "Where shall I find other lindens beneath

which to read my breviary?"

Like Kant, who was unable to collect his thoughts after the fir-tree at which he was accustomed to gaze while meditating was cut down, so the poor abbe could never attain the ardor of his former prayers while walking up and down the shadeless paths. Du Bousquier had planted an English garden.

"It was best," said Madame du Bousquier, without thinking so; but the Abbe Couterier had authorized her to commit many wrongs to please her husband.

These restorations destroyed all the venerable dignity, cordiality, and patriarchal air of the old house. Like the Chevalier de Valois, whose personal neglect might be called an abdication, the bourgeois dignity of the Cormon salon no longer existed when it was turned to white and gold, with mahogany ottomans covered in blue satin. The dining-room, adorned in modern taste, was colder in tone than it used to be, and the dinners were eaten with less appetite than formerly. Monsieur du Coudrai declared that he felt his puns stick in his throat as he glanced at the figures painted on the walls, which looked him out of countenance. Externally, the house was still provincial; but internally everything revealed the purveyor of the Directory and the bad taste of the money-changer,—for instance, columns in stucco, glass doors, Greek mouldings, meaningless outlines, all styles conglomerated, magnificence out of place and out of season.

The town of Alencon gabbled for two weeks over this luxury, which seemed unparalleled; but a few months later the community was proud of it, and several rich manufacturers restored their houses and set up fine salons. Modern furniture came into the town, and astral lamps were seen!

The Abbe de Sponde was among the first to perceive the secret unhappiness this marriage now brought to the private life of his beloved niece. The character of noble simplicity which had hitherto ruled their lives was lost during the first winter, when du Bousquier gave two balls every month. Oh, to hear violins and profane music at these worldly entertainments in the sacred old house! The abbe prayed on his knees while the revels lasted. Next the political system of the sober salon was slowly perverted. The abbe fathomed du Bousquier; he shuddered at his imperious tone; he saw the tears in his niece's eyes when she felt herself losing all control over her own property; for her husband now left nothing in her hands but the management of the linen, the table, and things of a kind which are the lot of women. Rose had no longer any orders to give. Monsieur's will was alone regarded by Jacquelin, now become coachman, by Rene, the groom, and by the chef, who came from Paris, Mariette being reduced to kitchen maid. Madame du Bousquier had no one to rule but Josette. Who knows what it costs to relinquish the delights of



power? If the triumph of the will is one of the intoxicating pleasures in the lives of great men, it is the ALL of life to narrow minds. One must needs have been a minister dismissed from power to comprehend the bitter pain which came upon Madame du Bousquier when she found herself reduced to this absolute servitude. She often got into the carriage against her will; she saw herself surrounded by servants who were distasteful to her; she no longer had the handling of her dear money,—she who had known herself free to spend money, and did not spend it.

All imposed limits make the human being desire to go beyond them. The keenest sufferings come from the thwarting of self-will. The beginning of this state of things was, however, rose-colored. Every concession made to marital authority was an effect of the love which the poor woman felt for her husband. Du Bousquier behaved, in the first instance, admirably to his wife: he was wise; he was excellent; he gave her the best of reasons for each new encroachment. So for the first two years of her marriage Madame du Bousquier appeared to be satisfied. She had that deliberate, demure little air which distinguishes young women who have married for love. The rush of blood to her head no longer tormented her. This appearance of satisfaction routed the scoffers, contradicted certain rumors about du Bousquier, and puzzled all observers of the human heart. Rose-Marie-Victoire was so afraid that if she displeased her husband or opposed him, she would lose his affection and be deprived of his company, that she would willingly have sacrificed all to him, even her uncle. Her silly little forms of pleasure deceived even the poor abbe for a time, who endured his own trials all the better for thinking that his niece was happy, after all.

Alencon at first thought the same. But there was one man more difficult to deceive than the whole town put together. The Chevalier de Valois, who had taken refuge on the Sacred Mount of the upper aristocracy, now passed his life at the d'Esgrignons. He listened to the gossip and the gabble, and he thought day and night upon his vengeance. He meant to strike du Bousquier to the heart.

The poor abbe fully understood the baseness of this first and last love of his niece; he shuddered as, little by little, he perceived the hypocritical nature of his nephew and his treacherous manoeuvres. Though du Bousquier restrained himself, as he thought of the abbe's property, and wished not to cause him vexation, it was his hand that dealt the blow that sent the old priest to his grave. If you will interpret the word intolerance as firmness of principle, if you do not wish to condemn in the catholic soul of the Abbe de Sponde the stoicism which Walter Scott has made you admire in the puritan soul of Jeanie Deans' father; if you are willing to recognize in the Roman Church the *Potius mori quam foedari* that you admire in republican tenets,—you will understand

the sorrow of the Abbe de Sponde when he saw in his niece's salon the apostate priest, the renegade, the pervert, the heretic, that enemy of the Church, the guilty taker of the Constitutional oath. Du Bousquier, whose secret ambition was to lay down the law to the town, wished, as a first proof of his power, to reconcile the minister of Saint-Leonard with the rector of the parish, and he succeeded. His wife thought he had accomplished a work of peace where the immovable abbe saw only treachery. The bishop came to visit du Bousquier, and seemed glad of the cessation of hostilities. The virtues of the Abbe Francois had conquered prejudice, except that of the aged Roman Catholic, who exclaimed with Cornelle, "Alas! what virtues do you make me hate!"

The abbe died when orthodoxy thus expired in the diocese.

In 1819, the property of the Abbe de Sponde increased Madame du Bousquier's income from real estate to twenty-five thousand francs without counting Prebaudet or the house in the Val-Noble. About this time du Bousquier returned to his wife the capital of her savings which she had yielded to him; and he made her use it in purchasing lands contiguous to Prebaudet, which made that domain one of the most considerable in the department, for the estates of the Abbe de Sponde also adjoined it. Du Bousquier thus passed for one of the richest men of the department. This able man, the constant candidate of the liberals, missing by seven or eight votes only in all the electoral battles fought under the Restoration, and who ostensibly repudiated the liberals by trying to be elected as a ministerial royalist (without ever being able to conquer the aversion of the administration),—this rancorous republican, mad with ambition, resolved to rival the royalism and aristocracy of Alencon at the moment when they once more had the upper hand. He strengthened himself with the Church by the deceitful appearance of a well-feigned piety: he accompanied his wife to mass; he gave money for the convents of the town; he assisted the congregation of the Sacre-Coeur; he took sides with the clergy on all occasions when the clergy came into collision with the town, the department, or the State. Secretly supported by the liberals, protected by the Church, calling himself a constitutional royalist, he kept beside the aristocracy of the department in the one hope of ruining it,—and he did ruin it. Ever on the watch for the faults and blunders of the nobility and the government, he laid plans for his vengeance against the "chateau-people," and especially against the d'Esgrignons, in whose bosom he was one day to thrust a poisoned dagger.

Among other benefits to the town he gave money liberally to revive the manufacture of point d'Alencon; he renewed the trade in linens, and the town had a factory. Inscribing himself thus upon the interests and heart of the masses, by doing what the royalists did not do, du Bousquier did not really

risk a farthing. Backed by his fortune, he could afford to wait results which enterprising persons who involve themselves are forced to abandon to luckier successors.

Du Bousquier now posed as a banker. This miniature Lafitte was a partner in all new enterprises, taking good security. He served himself while apparently serving the interests of the community. He was the prime mover of insurance companies, the protector of new enterprises for public conveyance; he suggested petitions for asking the administration for the necessary roads and bridges. Thus warned, the government considered this action an encroachment of its own authority. A struggle was begun injudiciously, for the good of the community compelled the authorities to yield in the end. Du Bousquier embittered the provincial nobility against the court nobility and the peerage; and finally he brought about the shocking adhesion of a strong party of constitutional royalists to the warfare sustained by the "Journal des Debats," and M. de Chateaubriand against the throne,—an ungrateful opposition based on ignoble interests, which was one cause of the triumph of the bourgeoisie and journalism in 1830.

Thus du Bousquier, in common with the class he represented, had the satisfaction of beholding the funeral of royalty. The old republican, smothered with masses, who for fifteen years had played that comedy to satisfy his vendetta, himself threw down with his own hand the white flag of the mayoralty to the applause of the multitude. No man in France cast upon the new throne raised in August, 1830, a glance of more intoxicated, joyous vengeance. The accession of the Younger Branch was the triumph of the Revolution. To him the victory of the tricolor meant the resurrection of Montagne, which this time should surely bring the nobility down to the dust by means more certain than that of the guillotine, because less violent. The peerage without heredity; the National Guard, which puts on the same camp-bed the corner grocer and the marquis; the abolition of the entails demanded by a bourgeois lawyer; the Catholic Church deprived of its supremacy; and all the other legislative inventions of August, 1830,—were to du Bousquier the wisest possible application of the principles of 1793.

Since 1830 this man has been a receiver-general. He relied for his advancement on his relations with the Duc d'Orleans, father of Louis Philippe, and with Monsieur de Folmon, formerly steward to the Duchess-dowager of Orleans. He receives about eighty thousand francs a year. In the eyes of the people about him Monsieur du Bousquier is a man of means,—a respectable man, steady in his principles, upright, and obliging. Alencon owes to him its connection with the industrial movement by which Brittany may possibly some day be joined to what is popularly called modern civilization. Alencon, which up to 1816 could boast of only two private carriages, saw, without

amazement, in the course of ten years, coupes, landaus, tilburies, and cabriolets rolling through her streets. The burghers and the land-owners, alarmed at first lest the price of everything should increase, recognized later that this increase in the style of living had a contrary effect upon their revenues. The prophetic remark of du Ronceret, "Du Bousquier is a very strong man," was adopted by the whole country-side.

But, unhappily for the wife, that saying has a double meaning. The husband does not in any way resemble the public politician. This great citizen, so liberal to the world about him, so kindly inspired with love for his native place, is a despot in his own house, and utterly devoid of conjugal affection. This man, so profoundly astute, hypocritical, and sly; this Cromwell of the Val-Noble,—behaves in his home as he behaves to the aristocracy, whom he caresses in hopes to throttle them. Like his friend Bernadotte, he wears a velvet glove upon his iron hand. His wife has given him no children. Suzanne's remark and the chevalier's insinuations were therefore justified. But the liberal bourgeoisie, the constitutional-royalist-bourgeoisie, the country-squires, the magistracy, and the "church party" laid the blame on Madame du Bousquier. "She was too old," they said; "Monsieur du Bousquier had married her too late. Besides, it was very lucky for the poor woman; it was dangerous at her age to bear children!" When Madame du Bousquier confided, weeping, her periodic despair to Mesdames du Coudrai and du Ronceret, those ladies would reply,—

"But you are crazy, my dear; you don't know what you are wishing for; a child would be your death."

Many men, whose hopes were fastened on du Bousquier's triumph, sang his praises to their wives, who in turn repeated them to the poor wife in some such speech as this:—

"You are very lucky, dear, to have married such an able man; you'll escape the misery of women whose husbands are men without energy, incapable of managing their property, or bringing up their children."

"Your husband is making you queen of the department, my love. He'll never leave you embarrassed, not he! Why, he leads all Alencon."

"But I wish," said the poor wife, "that he gave less time to the public and —"

"You are hard to please, my dear Madame du Bousquier. I assure you that all the women in town envy you your husband."

Misjudged by society, which began by blaming her, the pious woman found ample opportunity in her home to display her virtues. She lived in tears, but she never ceased to present to others a placid face. To so Christian a soul a

certain thought which pecked forever at her heart was a crime: "I loved the Chevalier de Valois," it said; "but I have married du Bousquier." The love of poor Athanase Granson also rose like a phantom of remorse, and pursued her even in her dreams. The death of her uncle, whose griefs at the last burst forth, made her life still more sorrowful; for she now felt the suffering her uncle must have endured in witnessing the change of political and religious opinion in the old house. Sorrow often falls like a thunderbolt, as it did on Madame Granson; but in this old maid it slowly spread like a drop of oil, which never leaves the stuff that slowly imbibes it.

The Chevalier de Valois was the malicious manipulator who brought about the crowning misfortune of Madame du Bousquier's life. His heart was set on undeceiving her pious simplicity; for the chevalier, expert in love, divined du Bousquier, the married man, as he had divined du Bousquier, the bachelor. But the wary republican was difficult of attack. His salon was, of course, closed to the Chevalier de Valois, as to all those who, in the early days of his marriage, had slighted the Cormon mansion. He was, moreover, impervious to ridicule; he possessed a vast fortune; he reigned in Alençon; he cared as little for his wife as Richard III. cared for the dead horse which had helped him win a battle. To please her husband, Madame du Bousquier had broken off relations with the d'Esgrignon household, where she went no longer, except that sometimes when her husband left her during his trips to Paris, she would pay a brief visit to Mademoiselle Armande.

About three years after her marriage, at the time of the Abbe de Sponde's death, Mademoiselle Armande joined Madame du Bousquier as they were leaving Saint-Leonard's, where they had gone to hear a requiem said for him. The generous demoiselle thought that on this occasion she owed her sympathy to the niece in trouble. They walked together, talking of the dear deceased, until they reached the forbidden house, into which Mademoiselle Armande enticed Madame du Bousquier by the charm of her manner and conversation. The poor desolate woman was glad to talk of her uncle with one whom he truly loved. Moreover, she wanted to receive the condolences of the old marquis, whom she had not seen for nearly three years. It was half-past one o'clock, and she found at the hotel d'Esgrignon the Chevalier de Valois, who had come to dinner. As he bowed to her, he took her by the hands.

"Well, dear, virtuous, and beloved lady," he said, in a tone of emotion, "we have lost our sainted friend; we share your grief. Yes, your loss is as keenly felt here as in your own home,—more so," he added, alluding to du Bousquier.

After a few more words of funeral oration, in which all present spoke from the heart, the chevalier took Madame du Bousquier's arm, and, gallantly placing it within his own, pressed it adoringly as he led her to the recess of a window.

"Are you happy?" he said in a fatherly voice.

"Yes," she said, dropping her eyes.

Hearing that "Yes," Madame de Troisville, the daughter of the Princess Scherbellof, and the old Marquise de Casteran came up and joined the chevalier, together with Mademoiselle Armande. They all went to walk in the garden until dinner was served, without any perception on the part of Madame du Bousquier that a little conspiracy was afoot. "We have her! now let us find out the secret of the case," were the words written in the eyes of all present.

"To make your happiness complete," said Mademoiselle Armande, "you ought to have children,—a fine lad like my nephew—"

Tears seemed to start in Madame du Bousquier's eyes.

"I have heard it said that you were the one to blame in the matter, and that you feared the dangers of a pregnancy," said the chevalier.

"I!" she said artlessly. "I would buy a child with a hundred years of purgatory if I could."

On the question thus started a discussion arose, conducted by Madame de Troisville and the old Marquise de Casteran with such delicacy and adroitness that the poor victim revealed, without being aware of it, the secrets of her house. Mademoiselle Armande had taken the chevalier's arm, and walked away so as to leave the three women free to discuss wedlock. Madame du Bousquier was then enlightened on the various deceptions of her marriage; and as she was still the same simpleton she had always been, she amused her advisers by delightful naivetes.

Although at first the deceptive marriage of Mademoiselle Cormon made a laugh throughout the town, which was soon initiated into the story of the case, before long Madame du Bousquier won the esteem and sympathy of all the women. The fact that Mademoiselle Cormon had flung herself headlong into marriage without succeeding in being married, made everybody laugh at her; but when they learned the exceptional position in which the sternness of her religious principles placed her, all the world admired her. "That poor Madame du Bousquier" took the place of "That good Mademoiselle Cormon."

Thus the chevalier contrived to render du Bousquier both ridiculous and odious for a time; but ridicule ends by weakening; when all had said their say about him, the gossip died out. Besides, at fifty-seven years of age the dumb republican seemed to many people to have a right to retire. This affair, however, envenomed the hatred which du Bousquier already bore to the house of Esgrignon to such a degree that it made him pitiless when the day of vengeance came. [See "The Gallery of Antiquities."] Madame du Bousquier

received orders never again to set foot into that house. By way of reprisals upon the chevalier for the trick thus played him, du Bousquier, who had just created the journal called the "Courrier de l'Orne," caused the following notice to be inserted in it:—

"Bonds to the amount of one thousand francs a year will be paid to any person who can prove the existence of one Monsieur de Pombreton before, during, or after the Emigration."

Although her marriage was essentially negative, Madame du Bousquier saw some advantages in it: was it not better to interest herself in the most remarkable man in the town than to live alone? Du Bousquier was preferable to a dog, or cat, or those canaries that spinsters love. He showed for his wife a sentiment more real and less selfish than that which is felt by servants, confessors, and hopeful heirs. Later in life she came to consider her husband as the instrument of divine wrath; for she then saw innumerable sins in her former desires for marriage; she regarded herself as justly punished for the sorrow she had brought on Madame Granson, and for the hastened death of her uncle. Obedient to that religion which commands us to kiss the rod with which the punishment is inflicted, she praised her husband, and publicly approved him. But in the confessional, or at night, when praying, she wept often, imploring God's forgiveness for the apostasy of the man who thought the contrary of what he professed, and who desired the destruction of the aristocracy and the Church,—the two religions of the house of Cormon.

With all her feelings bruised and immolated within her, compelled by duty to make her husband happy, attached to him by a certain indefinable affection, born, perhaps, of habit, her life became one perpetual contradiction. She had married a man whose conduct and opinions she hated, but whom she was bound to care for with dutiful tenderness. Often she walked with the angels when du Bousquier ate her preserves or thought the dinner good. She watched to see that his slightest wish was satisfied. If he tore off the cover of his newspaper and left it on a table, instead of throwing it away, she would say:—

"Rene, leave that where it is; monsieur did not place it there without intention."

If du Bousquier had a journey to take, she was anxious about his trunk, his linen; she took the most minute precautions for his material benefit. If he went to Prebaudet, she consulted the barometer the evening before to know if the weather would be fine. She watched for his will in his eyes, like a dog which hears and sees its master while sleeping. When the stout du Bousquier, touched by this scrupulous love, would take her round the waist and kiss her forehead, saying, "What a good woman you are!" tears of pleasure would come into the eyes of the poor creature. It is probably that du Bousquier felt

himself obliged to make certain concessions which obtained for him the respect of Rose-Marie-Victoire; for Catholic virtue does not require a dissimulation as complete as that of Madame du Bousquier. Often the good saint sat mutely by and listened to the hatred of men who concealed themselves under the cloak of constitutional royalists. She shuddered as she foresaw the ruin of the Church. Occasionally she risked a stupid word, an observation which du Bousquier cut short with a glance.

The worries of such an existence ended by stupefying Madame du Bousquier, who found it easier and also more dignified to concentrate her intelligence on her own thoughts and resign herself to lead a life that was purely animal. She then adopted the submission of a slave, and regarded it as a meritorious deed to accept the degradation in which her husband placed her. The fulfilment of his will never once caused her to murmur. The timid sheep went henceforth in the way the shepherd led her; she gave herself up to the severest religious practices, and thought no more of Satan and his works and vanities. Thus she presented to the eyes of the world a union of all Christian virtues; and du Bousquier was certainly one of the luckiest men in the kingdom of France and of Navarre.

"She will be a simpleton to her last breath," said the former collector, who, however, dined with her twice a week.

This history would be strangely incomplete if no mention were made of the coincidence of the Chevalier de Valois's death occurring at the same time as that of Suzanne's mother. The chevalier died with the monarchy, in August, 1830. He had joined the cortege of Charles X. at Nonancourt, and piously escorted it to Cherbourg with the Troisvilles, Casterans, d'Esgrignons, Verneuil, etc. The old gentleman had taken with him fifty thousand francs,—the sum to which his savings then amounted. He offered them to one of the faithful friends of the king for transmission to his master, speaking of his approaching death, and declaring that the money came originally from the goodness of the king, and, moreover, that the property of the last of the Valois belonged of right to the crown. It is not known whether the fervor of his zeal conquered the reluctance of the Bourbon, who abandoned his fine kingdom of France without carrying away with him a farthing, and who ought to have been touched by the devotion of the chevalier. It is certain, however, that Cesarine, the residuary legatee of the old man, received from his estate only six hundred francs a year. The chevalier returned to Alençon, cruelly weakened by grief and by fatigue; he died on the very day when Charles X. arrived on a foreign shore.

Madame du Val-Noble and her protector, who was just then afraid of the vengeance of the liberal party, were glad of a pretext to remain incognito in the village where Suzanne's mother died. At the sale of the chevalier's effects,



which took place at that time, Suzanne, anxious to obtain a souvenir of her first and last friend, pushed up the price of the famous snuff-box, which was finally knocked down to her for a thousand francs. The portrait of the Princess Goritzza was alone worth that sum. Two years later, a young dandy, who was making a collection of the fine snuff-boxes of the last century, obtained from Madame du Val-Noble the chevalier's treasure. The charming confidant of many a love and the pleasure of an old age is now on exhibition in a species of private museum. If the dead could know what happens after them, the chevalier's head would surely blush upon its left cheek.

If this history has no other effect than to inspire the possessors of precious relics with holy fear, and induce them to make codicils to secure these touching souvenirs of joys that are no more by bequeathing them to loving hands, it will have done an immense service to the chivalrous and romantic portion of the community; but it does, in truth, contain a far higher moral. Does it not show the necessity for a new species of education? Does it not invoke, from the enlightened solicitude of the ministers of Public Instruction, the creation of chairs of anthropology,—a science in which Germany outstrips us? Modern myths are even less understood than ancient ones, harried as we are with myths. Myths are pressing us from every point; they serve all theories, they explain all questions. They are, according to human ideas, the torches of history; they would save empires from revolution if only the professors of history would force the explanations they give into the mind of the provincial masses. If Mademoiselle Cormon had been a reader or a student, and if there had existed in the department of the Orne a professor of anthropology, or even had she read Ariosto, the frightful disasters of her conjugal life would never have occurred. She would probably have known why the Italian poet makes Angelica prefer Medoro, who was a blond Chevalier de Valois, to Orlando, whose mare was dead, and who knew no better than to fly into a passion. Is not Medoro the mythic form for all courtiers of feminine royalty, and Orlando the myth of disorderly, furious, and impotent revolutions, which destroy but cannot produce? We publish, but without assuming any responsibility for it, this opinion of a pupil of Monsieur Ballanche.

No information has reached us as to the fate of the negroes' heads in diamonds. You may see Madame du Val-Noble every evening at the Opera. Thanks to the education given her by the Chevalier de Valois, she has almost the air of a well-bred woman.

Madame du Bousquier still lives; is not that as much as to say she still suffers? After reaching the age of sixty—the period at which women allow themselves to make confessions—she said confidentially to Madame du Coudrai, that she had never been able to endure the idea of dying an old maid.



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