A Prince of Bohemia

Honore de Balzac

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by Honore de Balzac

Translated by Clara Bell and others

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A Prince of Bohemia

by Honore de Balzac

Translated by Clara Bell and others

DEDICATION

To Henri Heine.

I inscribe this to you, my dear Heine, to you that represent in Paris the ideas and poetry of Germany, in Germany the lively and witty criticism of France; for you better than any other will know whatsoever this Study may contain of criticism and of jest, of love and truth.

DE BALZAC.

A PRINCE OF BOHEMIA

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

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

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

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

"Do you call it good luck to go back to one's husband?"

"No; only great luck. Come, I am listening."

And Mme. de la Baudraye read as follows:

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

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

"Yes, I have them."

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

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

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

the /missi hominici/ of Charlemagne.'

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

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

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

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

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

"Ah, if you but knew how brilliantly Charles Edward accepts his obscure position! how he scoffs at the bourgeois of 1830! What Attic salt in his wit! He would be the king of Bohemia, if Bohemia would endure a king. His /verve/ is inexhaustible. To him we owe a map of the country and the names of the seven castles which Nodier could not discover."

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

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

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

" 'What, sir?'

" 'Yes, are you born? What is your name?'

" 'Godin.'

" 'Godin, eh!' exclaimed La Palferine's friend.

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

"Astonishment.

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

Come, my dear fellow--good-day.'

" 'My respects to madame,' added the friend.

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

" 'You have stood your antagonist's fire,' said the young Count, 'the witnesses declare that honor is satisfied.'

"La Palferine owed his tailor a thousand francs, and the man instead of going himself sent his assistant to ask for the money. The assistant found the unfortunate debtor up six pairs of stairs at the back of a yard at the further end of the Faubourg du Roule. The room was unfurnished save for a bed (such a bed!), a table, and such a table! La Palferine heard the preposterous demand--'A demand which I should qualify as illegal,' he said when he told us the story, 'made, as it was, at seven o'clock in the morning.'

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

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

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

" 'Why, madame,' said he, 'I am neither a surgeon nor a midwife.'

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

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

"All this, if you will permit me to make use of the phraseology employed by M. Sainte-Beuve for his biographies of obscurities--all this, I repeat, is the playful and sprightly yet already somewhat decadent side of a strong race. It smacks rather of the Parc-aux-Cerfs than of the Hotel de Rambouillet. It is a race of the strong rather than of the sweet; I incline to lay a little debauchery to its charge, and more than I should wish in brilliant and generous natures; it is gallantry after the fashion of the Marechal de Richelieu, high spirits and frolic carried rather too far; perhaps we may see in it the /outrances/ of another age, the Eighteenth Century pushed to extremes; it harks back to the Musketeers; it is an exploit stolen from Champcenetz; nay, such light-hearted inconstancy takes us back to the festooned and ornate period of the old court of the Valois. In an age as moral as the present, we are bound to regard audacity of this kind sternly; still, at the same time that 'cornet of sugar-plums' may serve to warn young girls of the perils of lingering where fancies, more charming than chastened, come thickly from the first; on the rosy flowery unguarded slopes, where trespasses ripen into errors full of equivocal effervescence, into too palpitating issues. The anecdote puts La Palferine's genius before you in all its vivacity and completeness. He realizes Pascal's /entre-deux/, he comprehends the whole scale between tenderness and pitilessness, and, like Epaminondas, he is equally great in extremes. And not merely so, his epigram stamps the epoch; the /accoucheur/ is a modern innovation. All the refinements of modern civilization are summed up in the phrase. It is monumental."

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

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

" 'Are you thinking of me, sir?'

" 'Not the least in the world,' answered the Count.

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

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

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

" 'You are very clumsy!'

" 'On the contrary; I did it on purpose.'

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

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

" 'You are wounded, monsieur!'

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

"His antagonist kept his bed for six months.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

" 'Do they allow you a carriage to go about the town in this way?'

" 'Oh! no.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

" 'CHARLES EDWARD.'

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

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

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

"The Count came up and walked by her side as if she had given him an assignation. He followed her with a courteous persistence, a persistence in good taste, giving the lady from time to time, and always at the right moment, an authoritative glance, which compelled her to submit to his escort. Anybody but La Palferine would have been frozen by his reception, and disconcerted by the lady's first efforts to rid herself of her cavalier, by her chilly air, her curt speeches; but no gravity, with all the will in the world, could hold out long against La Palferine's jesting replies. The fair stranger went into her milliner's shop. Charles Edward followed, took a seat, and gave his opinions and advice like a man that meant to pay. This coolness disturbed the lady. She went out.

"On the stairs she spoke to her persecutor.

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

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

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

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

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

" 'Monsieur, I like a joke----'

" 'And so do I.'

"She laughed.

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

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

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

" 'What want of address!'

" 'Oh, pshaw!' she said, smiling. 'A bird on the bough?'

" 'Good-bye, madame, you are such a woman as I seek, but my fortune is far from equaling my desire----'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So we often used to joke about Claudine and the Count--'/Toujours Claudine?/' sung to the air of /Toujours Gessle/.--'What are you making of Claudine?'--'How is Claudine?'

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

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

"/Monday (Midnight)./

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

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

" 'Tuesday is very slow of coming for my impatient mind! On

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

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

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

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

"/Wednesday/.

" 'Ah! how darkly sadness entered my heart yesterday when I found that I must give up the joy of seeing you. One single thought held me back from the arms of Death!--It was thy will! To stay away was to do thy will, to obey an order from thee. Oh! Charles, I was so pretty; I looked a lovelier woman for you than that beautiful German princess whom you gave me for an example, whom I have studied at the Opera. And yet--you might have thought that I had overstepped the limits of my nature. You have left me no confidence in myself; perhaps I am plain after all. Oh! I loathe myself, I dream of my radiant Charles Edward, and my brain turns. I shall go mad, I know I shall. Do not laugh, do not talk to me of the fickleness of women. If we are inconstant, /you/ are strangely capricious. You take away the hours of love that made a poor creature's happiness for ten whole days; the hours on which she

drew to be charming and kind to all that came to see her! After all, you were the source of my kindness to /him/; you do not know what pain you give him. I wonder what I must do to keep you, or simply to keep the right to be yours sometimes. . . . When I think that you never would come here to me! . . . With what delicious emotion I would wait upon you!--There are other women more favored than I. There are women to whom you say, 'I love you.' To me you have never said more than 'You are a good girl.' Certain speeches of yours, though you do not know it, gnaw at my heart. Clever men sometimes ask me what I am thinking. . . . I am thinking of my self-abasement--the prostration of the poorest outcast in the presence of the Saviour.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Claudine went home again, made up some kind of tale as best she could to account for her bruised forehead, and fell dangerously ill. An abscess formed in the head. The doctor--Bianchon, I believe--yes, it was Bianchon--wanted to cut off her hair. The Duchesse de Berri's hair is not more beautiful than Claudine's; she would not hear of it, she told Bianchon in confidence that she could not allow it to be cut

without leave from the Comte de Palferine. Bianchon went to Charles Edward. Charles Edward heard him with much seriousness. The doctor had explained the case at length, and showed that it was absolutely necessary to sacrifice the hair to insure the success of the operation.

" 'Cut off Claudine's hair!' cried he in peremptory tones. 'No. I would sooner lose her.'

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

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

" 'Now,' said La Palferine one day, 'what am I to do to get rid of Claudine?'

" 'Why, she is not at all troublesome; she leaves you master of your actions,' objected we.

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

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

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

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

" 'Dear,' she said, and there was a ring in her voice that betrayed the great agitation which shook her whole being, 'it is well. All this shall be done, or I will die.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

"For the ten years between 1817 and 1827 Tullia was in her glory on the heights of the stage of the Opera. With more beauty than education, a mediocre dancer with rather more sense than most of her class, she took no part in the virtuous reforms which ruined the corps de ballet; she continued the Guimard dynasty. She owed her ascendency, moreover, to various well-known protectors, to the Duc de Rhetore (the Due de Chaulieu's eldest son), to the influence of a famous Superintendent of Fine Arts, and sundry diplomatists and rich foreigners. During her apogee she had a neat little house in the Rue Chauchat, and lived as Opera nymphs used to live in the old days. Du Bruel was smitten with her about the time when the Duke's fancy came to an end in 1823. Being a mere subordinate in the Civil Service, du Bruel tolerated the Superintendent of Fine Arts, believing that he himself was really preferred. After six years this connection was almost a marriage. Tullia has always been very careful to say nothing of her family; we have a vague idea that she comes from Nanterre. One of her uncles, formerly a simple bricklayer or carpenter, is now, it

is said, a very rich contractor, thanks to her influence and generous loans. This fact leaked out through du Bruel. He happened to say that Tullia would inherit a fine fortune sooner or later. The contractor was a bachelor; he had a weakness for the niece to whom he is indebted.

" 'He is not clever enough to be ungrateful,' said she.

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

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

"Cursy before his marriage was supposed to be a jolly companion; now and again he stayed out all night, and to some extent led the life of a Bohemian; he would unbend at a supper-party. He went out to all appearance to a rehearsal at the Opera-Comique, and found himself in some unaccountable way at Dieppe, or Baden, or Saint-Germain; he gave dinners, led the Titanic thriftless life of artists, journalists, and writers; levied his tribute on all the greenrooms of Paris; and, in short, was one of us. Finot, Lousteau, du Tillet, Desroches, Bixiou, Blondet, Couture, and des Lupeaulx tolerated him in spite of his pedantic manner and ponderous official attitude. But once married, Tullia made a slave of du Bruel. There was no help for it. He was in love with Tullia, poor devil.

" 'Tullia' (so he said) 'had left the stage to be his alone, to be a good and charming wife.' And somehow Tullia managed to induce the most Puritanical members of du Bruel's family to accept her. From the very first, before any one suspected her motives, she assiduously visited old Mme. de Bonfalot, who bored her horribly; she made handsome presents to mean old Mme. de Chisse, du Bruel's great-aunt; she spent a summer with the latter lady, and never missed a single mass. She

even went to confession, received absolution, and took the sacrament; but this, you must remember, was in the country, and under the aunt's eyes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

childish days when they lived on raw apples, to quote the expression of a journalist. The day when the bed-spread was torn to tatters marked a new epoch in her married life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

was laid to her charge; if there had been any, she certainly had been very careful of appearances.

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

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

" 'My dear fellow,' said the caricaturist, 'perhaps he is right to be in the wrong.'

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

" 'We live in grand style,' said he, smiling; 'we are free. Each is independent.'

"We were admitted. Du Bruel spoke to Claudine. 'I have asked a few people to dinner to-day--"

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

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

" 'Oh, yes, yes,' she continued quickly, in answer to this mute dissent. 'I know all about it, du Bruel, my dear, I that have been like a queen in my house all my life till I married you. My wishes were guessed, fulfilled, and more than fulfilled. After all, I am thirty-five, and at five-and-thirty a woman cannot expect to be loved. Ah, if I were a girl of sixteen, if I had not lost something that is dearly bought at the Opera, what attention you would pay me, M. du Bruel! I feel the most supreme contempt for men who boast that they can love and grow careless and neglectful in little things as time

grows on. You are short and insignificant, you see, du Bruel; you love to torment a woman; it is your only way of showing your strength. A Napoleon is ready to be swayed by the woman he loves; he loses nothing by it; but as for such as you, you believe that you are nothing apparently, you do not wish to be ruled.--Five-and-thirty, my dear boy,' she continued, turning to me, 'that is the clue to the riddle.--"No," does he say again?--You know quite well that I am thirty-seven. I am very sorry, but just ask your friends to dine at the /Rocher de Cancale/. I /could/ have them here, but I will not; they shall not come. And then perhaps my poor little monologue may engrave that salutary maxim, "Each is master at home," upon your memory. That is our character,' she added, laughing, with a return of the opera girl's giddiness and caprice.

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

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

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

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

" 'I will kick the stuffing out of her!'

" 'And why?'

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

"But instead of going to his guests, Cursy strode up and down the boulevard between the Rue de Richelieu and the Rue du Mont Blanc, indulging in the most fearful imprecations, his unbounded language was most comical to hear. His paroxysm of fury in the street contrasted

oddly with his peaceable demeanor in the house. Exercise assisted him to work off his nervous agitation and inward tempest. About two o'clock, on a sudden frantic impulse, he exclaimed:

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

The Marquise could not help smiling.

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

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

" 'Good,' exclaimed du Bruel, 'what did I tell you?'

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

" 'Send a note to the /Rocher de Cancale/,' she said, 'and ask your guests to dine here.'

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

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

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

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

" 'Well, dearest, I have not spoken to any one of them,' he said.

" 'How well we understand each other!' quoth she.

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

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

" 'Such is life, my dear fellow,' he said to me, 'ups and downs and contrasts.'

" 'Especially life off the stage,' I put in.

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

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

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

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

" 'What is this about?' I inquired.

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

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

" 'I am quite willing,' returned du Bruel. 'But we shall ruin ourselves.'

" 'If you run into debt,' she said, 'my uncle's money will clear it off some day.'

" 'You are quite capable of leaving me the debts and taking the property.'

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

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

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

"Du Bruel looked ghastly at this. Two days afterwards we met in the

/foyer/ at the Opera, and took a few turns together. The conversation fell on Tullia.

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

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

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

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

" 'I will get it for you.'

"La Palferine burst into a peal of Homeric laughter.

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

"She turned to me.

" 'What is the Southern Cross?' she asked, in a sad, downcast voice.

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

" 'Very well, Charles, let us go,' said she.

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

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

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

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

"And the catastrophe?" queried Lousteau, returning just at the end of Mme. de la Baudraye's story.

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

"But there is a catastrophe," persisted Nathan.

"What is it?"

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

"Oh, unhappy woman!" cried Mme. de la Baudraye.

"Not so unhappy," said Nathan, "for Maxime de Trailles and La Palferine have brought about a rupture between the Marquis and Mme.

Schontz, and they mean to make it up between Arthur and Beatrix."

1839 - 1845.

ADDENDUM

The following personages appear in other stories of the Human Comedy.

Bianchon, Horace
  Father Goriot
  The Atheist's Mass
  Cesar Birotteau
  The Commission in Lunacy
  Lost Illusions
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  A Bachelor's Establishment
  The Secrets of a Princess
  The Government Clerks
  Pierrette
  A Study of Woman
  Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
  Honorine
  The Seamy Side of History
  The Magic Skin
  A Second Home
  Letters of Two Brides
  The Muse of the Department
  The Imaginary Mistress
  The Middle Classes
  Cousin Betty
  The Country Parson
In addition, M. Bianchon narrated the following:
  Another Study of Woman
  La Grande Breteche

Bruel, Jean Francois du
  A Bachelor's Establishment
  The Government Clerks
  A Start in Life
  The Middle Classes
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  A Daughter of Eve

Bruel, Claudine Chaffaroux, Madame du
  A Bachelor's Establishment
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  Letters of Two Brides
  The Middle Classes

Chaffaroux
  Cesar Birotteau
  The Middle Classes

Chocardelle, Mademoiselle
  Beatrix
  A Man of Business
  Cousin Betty
  The Member for Arcis

La Baudraye, Madame Polydore Milaud de
  The Muse of the Department
  Cousin Betty

Laguerre, Mademoiselle
  The Peasantry

La Palferine, Comte de
  A Man of Business
  Cousin Betty
  Beatrix
  The Imaginary Mistress

Lousteau, Etienne
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  A Bachelor's Establishment
  Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
  A Daughter of Eve
  Beatrix
  The Muse of the Department
  Cousin Betty
  A Man of Business
  The Middle Classes
  The Unconscious Humorists

Marcas, Zephirin
  Z. Marcas

Nathan, Raoul
  Lost Illusions
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
  The Secrets of a Princess
  A Daughter of Eve
  Letters of Two Brides
  The Seamy Side of History
  The Muse of the Department
  A Man of Business
  The Unconscious Humorists

Nathan, Madame Raoul
  The Muse of the Department
  Lost Illusions
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
  The Government Clerks
  A Bachelor's Establishment
  Ursule Mirouet
  Eugenie Grandet
  The Imaginary Mistress
  A Daughter of Eve

The Unconscious Humorists

Popinot, Madame Anselme
Cesar Birotteau
Cousin Betty
Cousin Pons

Rochefide, Marquise de
Beatrix
The Secrets of a Princess
A Daughter of Eve
Sarrasine

Tissot, Pierre-Francois
Father Goriot

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