

The Parisians, Book 3.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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THE PARISIANS

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

The next day the guests at the Morleys' had assembled when Vane entered. His apology for unpunctuality was cut short by the lively hostess. "Your pardon is granted without the humiliation of asking for it; we know that the characteristic of the English is always to be a little behindhand."

She then proceeded to introduce him to the American Minister, to a distinguished American poet, with a countenance striking for mingled sweetness and power, and one or two other of her countrymen sojourning at Paris; and this ceremony over, dinner was announced, and she bade Graham offer his arm to Mademoiselle Cicogna.

"Have you ever visited the United States, Mademoiselle?" asked Vane, as they seated themselves at the table.

"No."

"It is a voyage you are sure to make soon."

"Why so?"

"Because report says you will create a great sensation at the very commencement of your career; and the New World is ever eager to welcome each celebrity that is achieved in the Old,--more especially that which belongs to your enchanting art."

"True, sir," said an American senator, solemnly striking into the conversation; "we are an appreciative people; and if that lady be as fine a singer as I am told, she might command any amount of dollars."

Isaura coloured, and turning to Graham, asked him in a low voice if he were fond of music.

"I ought of course to say 'yes,' answered Graham, in the same tone; "but I doubt if that 'yes' would be an honest one. In some moods, music--if a kind of music I like--affects me very deeply; in other moods, not at all. And I cannot bear much at a time. A concert wearies me shamefully; even an opera always seems to me a great deal too long. But I ought to add that I am no judge of music; that music was never admitted into my education; and, between ourselves, I doubt if there be one Englishman in five hundred who would care for opera or concert if it were not the fashion to say he did. Does my frankness revolt you?"

"On the contrary, I sometimes doubt, especially of late, if I am fond of music myself."

"Signorina,--pardon me,--it is impossible that you should not be. Genius can never be untrue to itself, and must love that in which it excels,

that by which it communicates joy, and," he added, with a half-suppressed sigh, "attains to glory."

"Genius is a divine word, and not to be applied to a singer," said Isaura, with a humility in which there was an earnest sadness.

Graham was touched and startled; but before he could answer, the American Minister appealed to him across the table, asking if he had quoted accurately a passage in a speech by Graham's distinguished father, in regard to the share which England ought to take in the political affairs of Europe.

The conversation now became general, very political and very serious. Graham was drawn into it, and grew animated and eloquent.

Isaura listened to him with admiration. She was struck by what seemed to her a nobleness of sentiment which elevated his theme above the level of commonplace polemics. She was pleased to notice, in the attentive silence of his intelligent listeners, that they shared the effect produced on herself. In fact, Graham Vane was a born orator, and his studies had been those of a political thinker. In common talk he was but the accomplished man of the world, easy and frank and genial, with a touch of good-natured sarcasm; but when the subject started drew him upward to those heights in which politics become the science of humanity, he seemed a changed being. His cheek glowed, his eye brightened, his voice mellowed into richer tones, his language became unconsciously adorned. In such moments there might scarcely be an audience, even differing from him in opinion, which would not have acknowledged his spell.

When the party adjourned to the salon, Isaura said softly to Graham, "I understand why you did not cultivate music; and I think, too, that I can now understand what effects the human voice can produce on human minds without recurring to the art of song."

"Ah," said Graham, with a pleased smile, "do not make me ashamed of my former rudeness by the revenge of compliment; and, above all, do not disparage your own art by supposing that any prose effect of voice in its utterance of mind can interpret that which music alone can express, even to listeners so uncultured as myself. Am I not told truly by musical composers, when I ask them to explain in words what they say in their music, that such explanation is impossible, that music has a language of its own untranslatable by words?"

"Yes," said Isaura, with thoughtful brow but brightening eyes, "you are told truly. It was only the other day that I was pondering over that truth."

"But what recesses of mind, of heart, of soul, this untranslatable language penetrates and brightens up! How incomplete the grand nature of man--though man the grandest--would be, if you struck out of his reason the comprehension of poetry, music, and religion! In each are reached and are sounded deeps in his reason otherwise concealed from himself. History, knowledge, science, stop at the point in which mystery begins. There they meet with the world of shadow. Not an inch of that world can they penetrate without the aid of poetry and religion, two necessities of intellectual man much more nearly allied than the votaries of the practical and the positive suppose. To the aid and elevation of both those necessities comes in music, and there has never existed a religion

in the world which has not demanded music as its ally. If, as I said frankly, it is only in certain moods of my mind that I enjoy music, it is only because in certain moods of my mind I am capable of quitting the guidance of prosaic reason for the world of shadow; that I am so susceptible as at every hour, were my nature perfect, I should be to the mysterious influences of poetry and religion. Do you understand what I wish to express?"

"Yes, I do, and clearly."

"Then, Signorina, you are forbidden to undervalue the gift of song. You must feel its power over the heart, when you enter the opera-house; over the soul, when you kneel in a cathedral."

"Oh," cried Isaura, with enthusiasm, a rich glow mantling over her lovely face, "how I thank you! Is it you who say you do not love music? How much better you understand it than I did till this moment!"

Here Mrs. Morley, joined by the American poet, came to the corner in which the Englishman and the singer had niched themselves. The poet began to talk, the other guests gathered round, and every one listened reverentially till the party broke up. Colonel Morley handed Isaura to her carriage; the she-mountebank again fell to the lot of Graham.

"Signor," said she, as he respectfully placed her shawl round her scarlet-and-gilt jacket, "are we so far from Paris that you cannot spare the time to call? My child does not sing in public, but at home you can hear her. It is not every woman's voice that is sweetest at home."

Graham bowed, and said he would call on the morrow. Isaura mused in silent delight over the words which had so extolled the art of the singer. Alas, poor child! she could not guess that in those words, reconciling her to the profession of the stage, the speaker was pleading against his own heart.

There was in Graham's nature, as I think it commonly is in that of most true orators, a wonderful degree of intellectual conscience which impelled him to acknowledge the benignant influences of song, and to set before the young singer the noblest incentives to the profession to which he deemed her assuredly destined; but in so doing he must have felt that he was widening the gulf between her life and his own. Perhaps he wished to widen it in proportion as he dreaded to listen to any voice in his heart which asked if the gulf might not be overleapt.

CHAPTER II.

ON the morrow Graham called at the villa at A-----. The two ladies received him in Isaura's chosen sitting-room.

Somehow or other, conversation at first languished. Graham was reserved and distant, Isaura shy and embarrassed. The Venosta had the frais of making talk to herself. Probably at another time Graham would have been amused and interested in the observation of a character new to him, and thoroughly southern,--lovable not more from its naive simplicity of kindness than from various little foibles and vanities, all of which were harmless, and some of them endearing as those of a child whom it is

easy to make happy, and whom it seems so cruel to pain; and with all the Venosta's deviations from the polished and tranquil good taste of the beau monde, she had that indescribable grace which rarely deserts a Florentine, so that you might call her odd but not vulgar; while, though uneducated, except in the way of her old profession, and never having troubled herself to read anything but a libretto and the pious books commended to her by her confessor, the artless babble of her talk every now and then flashed out with a quaint humour, lighting up terse fragments of the old Italian wisdom which had mysteriously embedded themselves in the groundwork of her mind.

But Graham was not at this time disposed to judge the poor Venosta kindly or fairly. Isaura had taken high rank in his thoughts. He felt an impatient resentment mingled with anxiety and compassionate tenderness at a companionship which seemed to him derogatory to the position he would have assigned to a creature so gifted, and unsafe as a guide amidst the perils and trials to which the youth, the beauty, and the destined profession of Isaura were exposed. Like most Englishmen--especially Englishmen wise in the knowledge of life--he held in fastidious regard the proprieties and conventions by which the dignity of woman is fenced round; and of those proprieties and conventions the Venosta naturally appeared to him a very unsatisfactory guardian and representative.

Happily unconscious of these hostile prepossessions, the elder Signora chatted on very gayly to the visitor. She was in excellent spirits; people had been very civil to her both at Colonel Morley's and M. Louvier's. The American Minister had praised the scarlet jacket. She was convinced she had made a sensation two nights running. When the _amour propre_ is pleased, the tongue is freed.

The Venosta ran on in praise of Paris and the Parisians; of Louvier and his soiree and the pistachio ice; of the Americans, and a certain _creme de maraschino_ which she hoped the Signor Inglese had not failed to taste--the _creme de maraschino_ led her thoughts back to Italy. Then she grew mournful. How she missed the native _beau ciel_! Paris was pleasant, but how absurd to call it "le Paradis des Femmes,"--as if les Femmes could find Paradise in a _brouillard_!

"But," she exclaimed, with vivacity of voice and gesticulation, "the Signor does not come to hear the parrot talk; he is engaged to come that he may hear the nightingale sing. A drop of honey attracts the fly more than a bottle of vinegar."

Graham could not help smiling at this adage. "I submit," said he, "to your comparison as regards myself; but certainly anything less like a bottle of vinegar than your amiable conversation I cannot well conceive. However, the metaphor apart, I scarcely know how I dare ask Mademoiselle to sing after the confession I made to her last night."

"What confession?" asked the Venosta.

"That I know nothing of music and doubt if I can honestly say that I am fond of it."

"Not fond of music! Impossible! You slander yourself. He who loves not music would have a dull time of it in heaven. But you are English, and perhaps have only heard the music of your own country. Bad, very bad--a heretic's music! Now listen."

Seating herself at the piano, she began an air from the "Lucia," crying out to Isaura to come and sing to her accompaniment.

"Do you really wish it?" asked Isaura of Graham, fixing on him questioning, timid eyes.

"I cannot say how much I wish to hear you."

Isaura moved to the instrument, and Graham stood behind her. Perhaps he felt that he should judge more impartially of her voice if not subjected to the charm of her face.

But the first note of the voice held him spell-bound. In itself the organ was of the rarest order, mellow and rich, but so soft that its power was lost in its sweetness, and so exquisitely fresh in every note.

But the singer's charm was less in voice than in feeling; she conveyed to the listener so much more than was said by the words, or even implied by the music. Her song in this caught the art of the painter who impresses the mind with the consciousness of a something which the eye cannot detect on the canvas.

She seemed to breathe out from the depths of her heart the intense pathos of the original romance, so far exceeding that of the opera,—the human tenderness, the mystic terror of a tragic love-tale more solemn in its sweetness than that of Verona.

When her voice died away no applause came,—not even a murmur. Isaura bashfully turned round to steal a glance at her silent listener, and beheld moistened eyes and quivering lips. At that moment she was reconciled to her art. Graham rose abruptly and walked to the window.

"Do you doubt now if you are fond of music?" cried the Venosta.

"This is more than music," answered Graham, still with averted face. Then, after a short pause, he approached Isaura, and said, with a melancholy half-smile,—

"I do not think, Mademoiselle, that I could dare to hear you often; it would take me too far from the hard real world: and he who would not be left behindhand on the road that he must journey cannot indulge frequent excursions into fairyland."

"Yet," said Isaura, in a tone yet sadder, "I was told in my childhood, by one whose genius gives authority to her words, that beside the real world lies the ideal. The real world then seemed rough to me. 'Escape,' said my counsellor, 'is granted from that stony thoroughfare into the fields beyond its formal hedgerows. The ideal world has its sorrows, but it never admits despair.' That counsel then, methought, decided my choice of life. I know not now if it has done so."

"Fate," answered Graham, slowly and thoughtfully, "Fate, which is not the ruler but the servant of Providence, decides our choice of life, and rarely from outward circumstances. Usually the motive power is within. We apply the word 'genius' to the minds of the gifted few; but in all of us there is a genius that is inborn, a pervading something which distinguishes our very identity, and dictates to the conscience that which we are best fitted to do and to be. In so dictating it compels our choice of life; or if we resist the dictate, we find at the close

that we have gone astray. My choice of life thus compelled is on the stony thoroughfares, yours in the green fields."

As he thus said, his face became clouded and mournful. The Venosta, quickly tired of a conversation in which she had no part, and having various little household matters to attend to, had during this dialogue slipped unobserved from the room; yet neither Isaura nor Graham felt the sudden consciousness that they were alone which belongs to lovers. "Why," asked Isaura, with that magic smile reflected in countless dimples which, even when her words were those of a man's reasoning, made them seem gentle with a woman's sentiment,--"why must your road through the world be so exclusively the stony one? It is not from necessity, it can not be from taste; and whatever definition you give to genius, surely it is not your own inborn genius that dictates to you a constant exclusive adherence to the commonplace of life."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, do not misrepresent me. I did not say that I could not sometimes quit the real world for fairyland,--I said that I could not do so often. My vocation is not that of a poet or artist."

"It is that of an orator, I know," said Isaura, kindling; "so they tell me, and I believe them. But is not the orator somewhat akin to the poet? Is not oratory an art?"

"Let us dismiss the word orator; as applied to English public life, it is a very deceptive expression. The Englishman who wishes to influence his countrymen by force of words spoken must mix with them in their beaten thoroughfares; must make himself master of their practical views and interests; must be conversant with their prosaic occupations and business; must understand how to adjust their loftiest aspirations to their material welfare; must avoid as the fault most dangerous to himself and to others that kind of eloquence which is called oratory in France, and which has helped to make the French the worst politicians in Europe. Alas! Mademoiselle, I fear that an English statesman would appear to you a very dull orator."

"I see that I spoke foolishly,--yes, you show me that the world of the statesman lies apart from that of the artist. Yet--"

"Yet what?"

"May not the ambition of both be the same?"

"How so?"

"To refine the rude, to exalt the mean; to identify their own fame with some new beauty, some new glory, added to the treasure-house of all."

Graham bowed his head reverently, and then raised it with the flush of enthusiasm on his cheek and brow.

"Oh, Mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "what a sure guide and what a noble inspirer to a true Englishman's ambition nature has fitted you to be, were it not--" He paused abruptly.

This outburst took Isaura utterly by surprise. She had been accustomed to the language of compliment till it had begun to pall, but a compliment of this kind was the first that had ever reached her ear. She had no words in answer to it; involuntarily she placed her hand on her heart as

if to still its beatings. But the unfinished exclamation, "Were it not," troubled her more than the preceding words had flattered, and mechanically she murmured, "Were it not--what?"

"Oh," answered Graham, affecting a tone of gayety, "I felt too ashamed of my selfishness as man to finish my sentence."

"Do so, or I shall fancy you refrained lest you might wound me as woman."

"Not so; on the contrary, had I gone on it would have been to say that a woman of your genius, and more especially of such mastery in the most popular and fascinating of all arts, could not be contented if she inspired nobler thoughts in a single breast,--she must belong to the public, or rather the public must belong to her; it is but a corner of her heart that an individual can occupy, and even that individual must merge his existence in hers, must be contented to reflect a ray of the light she sheds on admiring thousands. Who could dare to say to you, 'Renounce your career; confine your genius, your art, to the petty circle of home'? To an actress, a singer, with whose fame the world rings, home would be a prison. Pardon me, pardon--"

Isaura had turned away her face to hide tears that would force their way; but she held out her hand to him with a childlike frankness, and said softly, "I am not offended." Graham did not trust himself to continue the same strain of conversation. Breaking into a new subject, he said, after a constrained pause, "Will you think it very impertinent in so new an acquaintance, if I ask how it is that you, an Italian, know our language as a native; and is it by Italian teachers that you have been trained to think and to feel?"

"Mr. Selby, my second father, was an Englishman, and did not speak any other language with comfort to himself. He was very fond of me; and had he been really my father I could not have loved him more. We were constant companions till--till I lost him."

"And no mother left to console you!"

Isaura shook her head mournfully, and the Venosta here re-entered. Graham felt conscious that he had already stayed too long, and took leave.

They knew that they were to meet that evening at the Savarins'.

To Graham that thought was not one of unmixed pleasure; the more he knew of Isaura, the more he felt self-reproach that he had allowed himself to know her at all.

But after he had left, Isaura sang low to herself the song which had so affected her listener; then she fell into abstracted reverie, but she felt a strange and new sort of happiness. In dressing for M. Savarin's dinner, and twining the classic ivy wreath in her dark locks, her Italian servant exclaimed, "How beautiful the Signorina looks to-night!"

CHAPTER III.

M. Savarin was one of the most brilliant of that galaxy of literary men

which shed lustre on the reign of Louis Philippe.

His was an intellect peculiarly French in its lightness and grace. Neither England nor Germany nor America has produced any resemblance to it. Ireland has, in Thomas Moore; but then in Irish genius there is so much that is French.

M. Savarin was free from the ostentatious extravagance which had come into vogue with the Empire. His house and establishment were modestly maintained within the limit of an income chiefly, perhaps entirely, derived from literary profits.

Though he gave frequent dinners, it was but to few at a time, and without show or pretence. Yet the dinners, though simple, were perfect of their kind; and the host so contrived to infuse his own playful gayety into the temper of his guests, that the feasts at his house were considered the pleasantest at Paris. On this occasion the party extended to ten, the largest number his table admitted.

All the French guests belonged to the Liberal party, though in changing tints of the tricolor. Place aux dames! first to be named were the Countess de Craon and Madame Vertot, both without husbands. The Countess had buried the Count, Madame Vertot had separated from Monsieur. The Countess was very handsome, but she was sixty; Madame Vertot was twenty years younger, but she was very plain. She had quarrelled with the distinguished author for whose sake she had separated from Monsieur, and no man had since presumed to think that he could console a lady so plain for the loss of an author so distinguished.

Both these ladies were very clever. The Countess had written lyrical poems entitled "Cries of Liberty," and a drama of which Danton was the hero, and the moral too revolutionary for admission to the stage; but at heart the Countess was not at all a revolutionist,--the last person in the world to do or desire anything that could bring a washerwoman an inch nearer to a countess. She was one of those persons who play with fire in order to appear enlightened.

Madame Vertot was of severer mould. She had knelt at the feet of M. Thiers, and went into the historico-political line. She had written a remarkable book upon the modern Carthage (meaning England), and more recently a work that had excited much attention upon the Balance of Power, in which she proved it to be the interest of civilization and the necessity of Europe that Belgium should be added to France, and Prussia circumscribed to the bounds of its original margraviate. She showed how easily these two objects could have been effected by a constitutional monarch instead of an egotistical Emperor. Madame Vertot was a decided Orleanist.

Both these ladies condescended to put aside authorship in general society. Next amongst our guests let me place the Count de Passy and Madame son espouse. The Count was seventy-one, and, it is needless to add, a type of Frenchman rapidly vanishing, and not likely to find itself renewed. How shall I describe him so as to make my English reader understand? Let me try by analogy. Suppose a man of great birth and fortune, who in his youth had been an enthusiastic friend of Lord Byron and a jocund companion of George IV.; who had in him an immense degree of lofty romantic sentiment with an equal degree of well-bred worldly cynicism, but who, on account of that admixture, which is so rare, kept a high rank in either of the two societies into which, speaking broadly,

civilized life divides itself,--the romantic and the cynical. The Count de Passy had been the most ardent among the young disciples of Chateaubriand, the most brilliant among the young courtiers of Charles X. Need I add that he had been a terrible lady-killer?

But in spite of his admiration of Chateaubriand and his allegiance to Charles X., the Count had been always true to those caprices of the French noblesse from which he descended,--caprices which destroyed them in the old Revolution; caprices belonging to the splendid ignorance of their nation in general and their order in particular. Speaking without regard to partial exceptions, the French *gentilhomme* is essentially a Parisian; a Parisian is essentially impressionable to the impulse or fashion of the moment. Is it *à la mode* for the moment to be Liberal or anti-Liberal? Parisians embrace and kiss each other, and swear through life and death to adhere forever to the mode of the moment. The Three Days were the mode of the moment,--the Count de Passy became an enthusiastic Orleanist. Louis Philippe was very gracious to him. He was decorated; he was named *prefet* of his department; he was created senator; he was about to be sent Minister to a German Court when Louis Philippe fell. The Republic was proclaimed. The Count caught the popular contagion, and after exchanging tears and kisses with patriots whom a week before he had called *canaille*, he swore eternal fidelity to the Republic. The fashion of the moment suddenly became Napoleonic, and with the *coup d'etat* the Republic was metamorphosed into an Empire. The Count wept on the bosoms of all the *Vieilles Moustaches* he could find, and rejoiced that the sun of Austerlitz had re-arisen. But after the affair of Mexico the sun of Austerlitz waxed very sickly. Imperialism was fast going out of fashion. The Count transferred his affection to Jules Favre, and joined the ranks of the advanced Liberals. During all these political changes, the Count had remained very much the same man in private life; agreeable, good-natured, witty, and, above all, a devotee of the fair sex. When he had reached the age of sixty-eight he was still *fort bel homme*, unmarried, with a grand presence and charming manner. At that age he said, "Je me range," and married a young lady of eighteen. She adored her husband, and was wildly jealous of him; while the Count did not seem at all jealous of her, and submitted to her adoration with a gentle shrug of the shoulders.

The three other guests who, with Graham and the two Italian ladies, made up the complement of ten, were the German Count von Rudesheim, a celebrated French physician named Bacourt, and a young author whom Savarin had admitted into his clique and declared to be of rare promise. This author, whose real name was Gustave Rameau, but who, to prove, I suppose, the sincerity of that scorn for ancestry which he professed, published his verses under the patrician designation of Alphonse de Valcour, was about twenty-four, and might have passed at the first glance for younger; but, looking at him closely, the signs of old age were already stamped on his visage.

He was undersized, and of a feeble slender frame. In the eyes of women and artists the defects of his frame were redeemed by the extraordinary beauty of the face. His black hair, carefully parted in the centre, and worn long and flowing, contrasted the whiteness of a high though narrow forehead, and the delicate pallor of his cheeks. His features were very regular, his eyes singularly bright; but the expression of the face spoke of fatigue and exhaustion; the silky locks were already thin, and interspersed with threads of silver; the bright eyes shone out from sunken orbits; the lines round the mouth were marked as they are in the middle age of one who has lived too fast.

It was a countenance that might have excited a compassionate and tender interest but for something arrogant and supercilious in the expression, - something that demanded not tender pity but enthusiastic admiration. Yet that expression was displeasing rather to men than to women; and one could well conceive that, among the latter, the enthusiastic admiration it challenged would be largely conceded.

The conversation at dinner was in complete contrast to that at the Americans' the day before. There the talk, though animated, had been chiefly earnest and serious; here it was all touch and go, sally and repartee. The subjects were the light on lots and lively anecdotes of the day, not free from literature and politics, but both treated as matters of persiflage, hovered round with a jest and quitted with an epigram. The two French lady authors, the Count de Passy, the physician, and the host far outspoke all the other guests. Now and then, however, the German Count struck in with an ironical remark condensing a great deal of grave wisdom, and the young author with ruder and more biting sarcasm. If the sarcasm told, he showed his triumph by a low-pitched laugh; if it failed, he evinced his displeasure by a contemptuous sneer or a grim scowl.

Isaura and Graham were not seated near each other, and were for the most part contented to be listeners.

On adjourning to the salon after dinner, Graham, however, was approaching the chair in which Isaura had placed herself, when the young author, forestalling him, dropped into the seat next to her, and began a conversation in a voice so low that it might have passed for a whisper. The Englishman drew back and observed them. He soon perceived, with a pang of jealousy not unmingled with scorn, that the author's talk appeared to interest Isaura. She listened with evident attention; and when she spoke in return, though Graham did not hear her words, he could observe on her expressive countenance an increased gentleness of aspect.

"I hope," said the physician, joining Graham, as most of the other guests gathered round Savarin, who was in his liveliest vein of anecdote and wit,--"I hope that the fair Italian will not allow that ink-bottle imp to persuade her that she has fallen in love with him."

"Do young ladies generally find him so seductive?" asked Graham, with a forced smile.

"Probably enough. He has the reputation of being very clever and very wicked, and that is a sort of character which has the serpent's fascination for the daughters of Eve."

"Is the reputation merited?"

"As to the cleverness, I am not a fair judge. I dislike that sort of writing which is neither manlike nor womanlike, and in which young Rameau excels. He has the knack of finding very exaggerated phrases by which to express commonplace thoughts. He writes verses about love in words so stormy that you might fancy that Jove was descending upon Semele; but when you examine his words, as a sober pathologist like myself is disposed to do, your fear for the peace of households vanishes,--they are *Fox et proeterea nihil*; no man really in love would use them. He writes prose about the wrongs of humanity. You feel for humanity; you say, 'Grant the wrongs, now for the remedy,'--and you find nothing but

balderdash. Still I am bound to say that both in verse and prose Gustave Rameau is in unison with a corrupt taste of the day, and therefore he is coming into vogue. So much as to his writings; as to his wickedness, you have only to look at him to feel sure that he is not a hundredth part so wicked as he wishes to seem. In a word, then, M. Gustave Rameau is a type of that somewhat numerous class among the youth of Paris, which I call 'the lost Tribe of Absinthe.' There is a set of men who begin to live full gallop while they are still boys. As a general rule, they are originally of the sickly frames which can scarcely even trot, much less gallop without the spur of stimulants, and no stimulant so fascinates their peculiar nervous system as absinthe. The number of patients in this set who at the age of thirty are more worn out than septuagenarians increases so rapidly as to make one dread to think what will be the next race of Frenchmen. To the predilection for absinthe young Rameau and the writers of his set add the imitation of Heine, after, indeed, the manner of caricaturists, who effect a likeness striking in proportion as it is ugly. It is not easy to imitate the pathos and the wit of Heine; but it is easy to imitate his defiance of the Deity, his mockery of right and wrong, his relentless war on that heroic standard of thought and action which the writers who exalt their nation intuitively preserve. Rameau cannot be a Heine, but he can be to Heine what a misshapen snarling dwarf is to a mangled blaspheming Titan. Yet he interests the women in general, and he evidently interests the fair Signorina in especial."

Just as Bacourt finished that last sentence, Isaura lifted the head which had hitherto bent in an earnest listening attitude that seemed to justify the Doctor's remarks, and looked round. Her eyes met Graham's with the fearless candour which made half the charm of their bright yet soft intelligence; but she dropped them suddenly with a half-start and a change of colour, for the expression of Graham's face was unlike that which she had hitherto seen on it,—it was hard, stern, and somewhat disdainful. A minute or so afterwards she rose, and in passing across the room towards the group round the host, paused at a table covered with books and prints near to which Graham was standing alone. The Doctor had departed in company with the German Count.

Isaura took up one of the prints.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "Sorrento, my Sorrento. Have you ever visited Sorrento, Mr. Vane?"

Her question and her movement were evidently in conciliation. Was the conciliation prompted by coquetry, or by a sentiment more innocent and artless?

Graham doubted, and replied coldly, as he bent over the print,—

"I once stayed there a few days, but my recollection of it is not sufficiently lively to enable me to recognize its features in this design."

"That is the house, at least so they say, of Tasso's father; of course you visited that?"

"Yes, it was a hotel in my time; I lodged there."

"And I too. There I first read 'The Gerusalemine.'" The last words were said in Italian, with a low measured tone, inwardly and dreamily.

A somewhat sharp and incisive voice speaking in French here struck in and prevented Graham's rejoinder: "Quel joli dessin! What is it, Mademoiselle?"

Graham recoiled; the speaker was Gustave Rameau, who had, unobserved, first watched Isaura, then rejoined her side.

"A view of Sorrento, Monsieur, but it does not do justice to the place. I was pointing out the house which belonged to Tasso's father."

"Tasso! Hein! and which is the fair Eleonora's?"

"Monsieur," answered Isaura, rather startled at that question, from a professed *_homme de lettres_*, "Eleonora did not live at Sorrento."

"Tant pis pour Sorrente," said the *homme de lettres*, carelessly. "No one would care for Tasso if it were not for Eleonora."

"I should rather have thought," said Graham, "that no one would have cared for Eleonora if it were not for Tasso."

Rameau glanced at the Englishman superciliously. "Pardon, Monsieur, in every age a love-story keeps its interest; but who cares nowadays for le *cliquant du Tasse*?"

"Le *cliquant du Tasse*!" exclaimed Isaura, indignantly.

"The expression is Boileau's, Mademoiselle, in ridicule of the 'Sot de qualite,' who prefers--

"Le *cliquant du Tasse* a tout l'or de Virgile.'

"But for my part I have as little faith in the last as the first."

"I do not know Latin, and have therefore not read Virgil," said Isaura.

"Possibly," remarked Graham, "Monsieur does not know Italian, and has therefore not read Tasso."

"If that be meant in sarcasm," retorted Rameau, "I construe it as a compliment. A Frenchman who is contented to study the masterpieces of modern literature need learn no language and read no authors but his own."

Isaura laughed her pleasant silvery laugh. "I should admire the frankness of that boast, Monsieur, if in our talk just now you had not spoken as contemptuously of what we are accustomed to consider French masterpieces as you have done of Virgil and Tasso."

"Ah, Mademoiselle! it is not my fault if you have had teachers of taste so *_rococo_* as to bid you find masterpieces in the tiresome stilted tragedies of Corneille and Racine. Poetry of a court, not of a people, one simple novel, one simple stanza that probes the hidden recesses of the human heart, reveals the sores of this wretched social state, denounces the evils of superstition, kingcraft, and priestcraft, is worth a library of the rubbish which pedagogues call 'the classics.' We agree, at least, in one thing, Mademoiselle; we both do homage to the genius of your friend Madame de Grantmesnil."

"Your friend, Signorina!" cried Graham, incredulously; "is Madame de Grantmesnil your friend?"

"The dearest I have in the world."

Graham's face darkened; he turned away in silence, and in another minute vanished from the room, persuading himself that he felt not one pang of jealousy in leaving Gustave Rameau by the side of Isaura. "Her dearest friend Madame de Grantmesnil!" he muttered.

A word now on Isaura's chief correspondent. Madame de Grantmesnil was a woman of noble birth and ample fortune. She had separated from her husband in the second year after marriage. She was a singularly eloquent writer, surpassed among contemporaries of her sex in popularity and renown only by Georges Sand.

At least as fearless as that great novelist in the frank exposition of her views, she had commenced her career in letters by a work of astonishing power and pathos, directed against the institution of marriage as regulated in Roman Catholic communities. I do not know that it said more on this delicate subject than the English Milton has said; but then Milton did not write for a Roman Catholic community, nor adopt a style likely to captivate the working classes. Madame de Grantmesnil's first book was deemed an attack on the religion of the country, and captivated those among the working classes who had already abjured that religion. This work was followed up by others more or less in defiance of "received opinions,"--some with political, some with social revolutionary aim and tendency, but always with a singular purity of style. Search all her books, and however you might revolt from her doctrine, you could not find a hazardous expression. The novels of English young ladies are naughty in comparison. Of late years, whatever might be hard or audacious in her political or social doctrines softened itself into charm amid the golden haze of romance. Her writings had grown more and more purely artistic,--poetizing what is good and beautiful in the realities of life rather than creating a false ideal out of what is vicious and deformed. Such a woman, separated young from her husband, could not enunciate such opinions and lead a life so independent and uncontrolled as Madame de Grantmesnil had done, without scandal, without calumny. Nothing, however, in her actual life had ever been so proved against her as to lower the high position she occupied in right of birth, fortune, renown. Wherever she went she was *fetee*, as in England foreign princes, and in America foreign authors, are *fetes*. Those who knew her well concurred in praise of her lofty, generous, lovable qualities. Madame de Grantmesnil had known Mr. Selby; and when, at his death, Isaura, in the innocent age between childhood and youth, had been left the most sorrowful and most lonely creature on the face of the earth, this famous woman, worshipped by the rich for her intellect, adored by the poor for her beneficence, came to the orphan's friendless side, breathing love once more into her pining heart, and waking for the first time the desires of genius, the aspirations of art, in the dim self-consciousness of a soul between sleep and waking.

But, my dear Englishman, put yourself in Graham's place, and suppose that you were beginning to fall in love with a girl whom for many good reasons you ought not to marry; suppose that in the same hour in which you were angrily conscious of jealousy on account of a man whom it wounds your self-esteem to consider a rival, the girl tells you that her dearest friend is a woman who is famed for her hostility to the institution of marriage!

CHAPTER IV.

On the same day in which Graham dined with the Savarins, M. Louvier assembled round his table the elite of the young Parisians who constituted the oligarchy of fashion, to meet whom he had invited his new friend the Marquis de Rochebriant. Most of them belonged to the Legitimist party, the noblesse of the faubourg; those who did not, belonged to no political party at all,--indifferent to the cares of mortal States as the gods of Epicurus. Foremost among this *Jeunesse doree* were Alain's kinsmen, Raoul and Enguerrand de Vandemar. To these Louvier introduced him with a burly parental bonhomie, as if he were the head of the family. "I need not bid you, young folks, to make friends with each other. A Vandemar and a Rochebriant are not made friends,--they are born friends." So saying he turned to his other guests.

Almost in an instant Alain felt his constraint melt away in the cordial warmth with which his cousins greeted him. These young men had a striking family likeness to each other, and yet in feature, colouring, and expression, in all save that strange family likeness, they were contrasts. Raoul was tall, and, though inclined to be slender, with sufficient breadth of shoulder to indicate no inconsiderable strength of frame. His hair worn short and his silky beard worn long were dark; so were his eyes, shaded by curved drooping lashes; his complexion was pale, but clear and healthful. In repose the expression of his face was that of a somewhat melancholy indolence, but in speaking it became singularly sweet, with a smile of the exquisite urbanity which no artificial politeness can bestow; it must emanate from that native high breeding which has its source in goodness of heart.

Enguerrand was fair, with curly locks of a golden chestnut. He wore no beard, only a small mustache rather darker than his hair. His complexion might in itself be called effeminate, its bloom was so fresh and delicate; but there was so much of boldness and energy in the play of his countenance, the hardy outline of the lips, and the open breadth of the forehead, that "effeminate" was an epithet no one ever assigned to his aspect. He was somewhat under the middle height, but beautifully proportioned, carried himself well, and somehow or other did not look short even by the side of tall men. Altogether he seemed formed to be a mother's darling, and spoiled by women, yet to hold his own among men with a strength of will more evident in his look and his bearing than it was in those of his graver and statelier brother.

Both were considered by their young co-equals models in dress, but in Raoul there was no sign that care or thought upon dress had been bestowed; the simplicity of his costume was absolute and severe. On his plain shirt-front there gleamed not a stud, on his fingers there sparkled not a ring. Enguerrand, on the contrary, was not without pretension in his attire; the broderie in his shirt-front seemed woven by the Queen of the Fairies. His rings of turquoise and opal, his studs and wrist-buttons of pearl and brilliants, must have cost double the rental of Rochebriant, but probably they cost him nothing. He was one of those happy Lotharios to whom Calistas make constant presents. All about him was so bright that the atmosphere around seemed gayer for his presence.

In one respect at least the brothers closely resembled each other,--in

that exquisite graciousness of manner for which the genuine French noble is traditionally renowned; a graciousness that did not desert them even when they came reluctantly into contact with _roturiers_ or republicans; but the graciousness became _egalite, fraternite_, towards one of their caste and kindred.

"We must do our best to make Paris pleasant to you," said Raoul, still retaining in his grasp the hand he had taken.

"_Vilain cousin_," said the livelier Enguerrand, "to have been in Paris twenty-four hours, and without letting us know."

"Has not your father told you that I called upon him?"

"Our father," answered Raoul, "was not so savage as to conceal that fact; but he said you were only here on business for a day or two, had declined his invitation, and would not give your address. _Pauvre pere_! we scolded him well for letting you escape from us thus. My mother has not forgiven him yet; we must present you to her to-morrow. I answer for your liking her almost as much as she will like you."

Before Alain could answer dinner was announced. Alain's place at dinner was between his cousins. How pleasant they made themselves! It was the first time in which Alain had been brought into such familiar conversation with countrymen of his own rank as well as his own age. His heart warmed to them. The general talk of the other guests was strange to his ear; it ran much upon horses and races, upon the opera and the ballet; it was enlivened with satirical anecdotes of persons whose names were unknown to the Provincial; not a word was said that showed the smallest interest in politics or the slightest acquaintance with literature. The world of these well-born guests seemed one from which all that concerned the great mass of mankind was excluded, yet the talk was that which could only be found in a very polished society. In it there was not much wit, but there was a prevalent vein of gayety, and the

gayety was never violent, the laughter was never loud; the scandals circulated might imply cynicism the most absolute, but in language the most refined. The Jockey Club of Paris has its perfume.

Raoul did not mix in the general conversation; he devoted himself pointedly to the amusement of his cousin, explaining to him the point of the anecdotes circulated, or hitting off in terse sentences the characters of the talkers.

Enguerrand was evidently of temper more vivacious than his brother, and contributed freely to the current play of light gossip and mirthful sally.

Louvier, seated between a duke and a Russian prince, said little except to recommend a wine or an entree, but kept his eye constantly on the Vandemars and Alain.

Immediately after coffee the guests departed. Before they did so, however, Raoul introduced his cousin to those of the party most distinguished by hereditary rank or social position. With these the name of Rochebriant was too historically famous not to insure respect of its owner; they welcomed him among them as if he were their brother.

The French duke claimed him as a connection by an alliance in the

fourteenth century; the Russian prince had known the late Marquis, and trusted that the son would allow him to improve into friendship the acquaintance he had formed with the father.

Those ceremonials over, Raoul linked his arm in Alain's and said: "I am not going to release you so soon after we have caught you. You must come with me to a house in which I at least spend an hour or two every evening. I am at home there. Bah! I take no refusal. Do not suppose I carry you off to Bohemia,--a country which, I am sorry to say, Enguerrand now and then visits, but which is to me as unknown as the mountains of the moon. The house I speak of is *_comme il faut_* to the utmost. It is that of the Contessa di Rimini,--a charming Italian by marriage, but by birth and in character *_on ne peut plus Francaise_*. My mother adores her."

That dinner at M. Louvier's had already effected a great change in the mood and temper of Alain de Rochebriant; he felt, as if by magic, the sense of youth, of rank, of station, which had been so suddenly checked and stifled, warmed to life within his veins. He should have deemed himself a boor had he refused the invitation so frankly tendered.

But on reaching the *_coupe_* which the brothers kept in common, and seeing it only held two, he drew back.

"Nay, enter, mon cher," said Raoul, divining the cause of his hesitation; "Enguerrand has gone on to his club."

CHAPTER V.

"Tell me," said Raoul, when they were in the carriage, "how you came to know M. Louvier."

"He is my chief mortgagee."

"H'm! that explains it. But you might be in worse hands; the man has a character for liberality."

"Did your father mention to you my circumstances, and the reason that brings me to Paris?"

"Since you put the question point-blank, my dear cousin, he did."

"He told you how poor I am, and how keen must be my lifelong struggle to keep Rochebriant as the home of my race?"

"He told us all that could make us still more respect the Marquis de Rochebriant, and still more eagerly long to know our cousin and the head of our house," answered Raoul, with a certain nobleness of tone and manner.

Alain pressed his kinsman's hand with grateful emotion. "Yet," he said falteringly, "your father agreed with me that my circumstances would not allow me to--"

"Bah!" interrupted Raoul, with a gentle laugh; "my father is a very clever man, doubtless, but he knows only the world of his own day,

nothing of the world of ours. I and Enguerrand will call on you to-morrow, to take you to my mother, and before doing so, to consult as to affairs in general. On this last matter Enguerrand is an oracle. Here we are at the Contessa's."

CHAPTER VI.

The Contessa di Rimini received her visitors in a boudoir furnished with much apparent simplicity, but a simplicity by no means inexpensive. The draperies were but of chintz, and the walls covered with the same material,--a lively pattern, in which the prevalents were rose-colour and white; but the ornaments on the mantelpiece, the china stored in the cabinets or arranged on the shelves, the small knickknacks scattered on the tables, were costly rarities of art.

The Contessa herself was a woman who had somewhat passed her thirtieth year,--not strikingly handsome, but exquisitely pretty. "There is," said a great French writer, "only one way in which a woman can be handsome, but a hundred thousand ways in which she can be pretty;" and it would be impossible to reckon up the number of ways in which Adeline di Rimini carried off the prize in prettiness.

Yet it would be unjust to the personal attractions of the Contessa to class them all under the word "prettiness." When regarded more attentively, there was an expression in her countenance that might almost be called divine, it spoke so unmistakably of a sweet nature and an untroubled soul. An English poet once described her by repeating the old lines,

"Her face is like the milky way I' the sky,
--A meeting of gentle lights without a name."

She was not alone; an elderly lady sat on an armchair by the fire, engaged in knitting; and a man, also elderly, and whose dress proclaimed him an ecclesiastic, sat at the opposite corner, with a large Angora cat on his lap.

"I present to you, Madame," said Raoul, "my new-found cousin, the seventeenth Marquis de Rochebriant, whom I am proud to consider on the male side the head of our house, representing its eldest branch. Welcome him for my sake,--in future he will be welcome for his own."

The Contessa replied very graciously to this introduction, and made room for Alain on the divan from which she had risen.

The old lady looked up from her knitting; the ecclesiastic removed the cat from his lap. Said the old lady, "I announce myself to M. le Marquis. I knew his mother well enough to be invited to his christening; otherwise I have no pretension to the acquaintance of a cavalier _si beau_, being old, rather deaf, very stupid, exceedingly poor--"

"And," interrupted Raoul, "the woman in all Paris the most adored for _bonte_, and consulted for _savoir vivre_ by the young cavaliers whom she deigns to receive. Alain, I present you to Madame de Maury, the widow of a distinguished author and academician, and the daughter of the brave Henri de Gerval, who fought for the good cause in La Vendee. I present

you also to the Abbe Vertpre, who has passed his life in the vain endeavour to make other men as good as himself."

"Base flatterer!" said the Abbe, pinching Raoul's ear with one hand, while he extended the other to Alain. "Do not let your cousin frighten you from knowing me, Monsieur le Marquis; when he was my pupil, he so convinced me of the incorrigibility of perverse human nature, that I now chiefly address myself to the moral improvement of the brute creation. Ask the Contessa if I have not achieved a *beau succes* with her Angora cat. Three months ago that creature had the two worst propensities of man,--he was at once savage and mean; he bit, he stole. Does he ever bite now? No. Does he ever steal? No. Why? I have awakened in that cat the dormant conscience, and that done, the conscience regulates his actions; once made aware of the difference between wrong and right, the cat maintains it unswervingly, as if it were a law of nature. But if, with prodigious labour, one does awaken conscience in a human sinner, it has no steady effect on his conduct,--he continues to sin all the same. Mankind at Paris, Monsieur le Marquis, is divided between two classes,--one bites and the other steals. Shun both; devote yourself to cats."

The Abbe delivered this oration with a gravity of mien and tone which made it difficult to guess whether he spoke in sport or in earnest, in simple playfulness or with latent sarcasm.

But on the brow and in the eye of the priest there was a general expression of quiet benevolence, which made Alain incline to the belief that he was only speaking as a pleasant humourist; and the Marquis replied gayly,--

"Monsieur L'Abbe, admitting the superior virtue of cats when taught by so intelligent a preceptor, still the business of human life is not transacted by cats; and since men must deal with men, permit me, as a preliminary caution, to inquire in which class I must rank myself. Do you bite or do you steal?"

This sally, which showed that the Marquis was already shaking off his provincial reserve, met with great success. Raoul and the Contessa laughed merrily; Madame de Maury clapped her hands, and cried "Bien!"

The Abbe replied, with unmoved gravity, "Both. I am a priest; it is my duty to bite the bad and steal from the good, as you will see, Monsieur le Marquis, if you will glance at this paper."

Here he handed to Alain a memorial on behalf of an afflicted family who had been burnt out of their home, and reduced from comparative ease to absolute want. There was a list appended of some twenty subscribers, the last being the Contessa, fifty francs, and Madame de Maury, five.

"Allow me, Marquis," said the Abbe, "to steal from you. Bless you two-fold, *mon fils!*" (taking the napoleon Alain extended to him) "first for your charity; secondly, for the effect of its example upon the heart of your cousin. Raoul de Vandemar, stand and deliver. Bah! what! only ten francs."

Raoul made a sign to the Abbe, unperceived by the rest, as he answered, "Abbe, I should excel your expectations of my career if I always continue worth half as much as my cousin."

Alain felt to the bottom of his heart the delicate tact of his richer

kinsman in giving less than himself, and the Abbe replied, "Niggard, you are pardoned. Humility is a more difficult virtue to produce than charity, and in your case an instance of it is so rare that it merits encouragement."

The "tea equipage" was now served in what at Paris is called the English fashion; the Contessa presided over it, the guests gathered round the table, and the evening passed away in the innocent gayety of a domestic circle. The talk, if not especially intellectual, was at least not fashionable. Books were not discussed, neither were scandals; yet somehow or other it was cheery and animated, like that of a happy family in a country-house. Alain thought still the better of Raoul that, Parisian though he was, he could appreciate the charm of an evening so innocently spent.

On taking leave, the Contessa gave Alain a general invitation to drop in whenever he was not better engaged.

"I except only the opera nights," said she. "My husband has gone to Milan on his affairs, and during his absence I do not go to parties; the opera I cannot resist."

Raoul set Alain down at his lodgings. "Au revoir; tomorrow at one o'clock expect Enguerrand and myself."

CHAPTER VII.

Raul and Enguerrand called on Alain at the hour fixed. "In the first place," said Raoul, "I must beg you to accept my mother's regrets that she cannot receive you to-day. She and the Contessa belong to a society of ladies formed for visiting the poor, and this is their day; but to-morrow you must dine with us *_en famille_*. Now to business. Allow me to light my cigar while you confide the whole state of affairs to Enguerrand. Whatever he counsels, I am sure to approve."

Alain, as briefly as he could, stated his circumstances, his mortgages, and the hopes which his avow had encouraged him to place in the friendly disposition of M. Louvier. When he had concluded, Enguerrand mused for a few moments before replying. At last he said, "Will you trust me to call on Louvier on your behalf? I shall but inquire if he is inclined to take on himself the other mortgages; and if so, on what terms. Our relationship gives me the excuse for my interference; and to say truth, I have had much familiar intercourse with the man. I too am a speculator, and have often profited by Louvier's advice. You may ask what can be his object in serving me; he can gain nothing by it. To this I answer, the key to his good offices is in his character. Audacious though he be as a speculator, he is wonderfully prudent as a politician. This belle France of ours is like a stage tumbler; one can never be sure whether it will stand on its head or its feet. Louvier very wisely wishes to feel himself safe whatever party comes uppermost. He has no faith in the duration of the Empire; and as, at all events, the Empire will not confiscate his millions, he takes no trouble in conciliating Imperialists. But on the principle which induces certain savages to worship the devil and neglect the *_bon Dieu_*, because the devil is spiteful and the bon Dieu is too beneficent to injure them, Louvier, at heart detesting as well as dreading a republic, lays himself out to

secure friends with the Republicans of all classes, and pretends to espouse their cause; next to them, he is very conciliatory to the Orleanists; lastly, though he thinks the Legitimists have no chance, he desires to keep well with the nobles of that party, because they exercise a considerable influence over that sphere of opinion which belongs to fashion,--for fashion is never powerless in Paris. Raoul and myself are no mean authorities in salons and clubs, and a good word from us is worth having.

"Besides, Louvier himself in his youth set up for a dandy; and that deposed ruler of dandies, our unfortunate kinsman, Victor de Mauleon, shed some of his own radiance on the money-lender's son. But when Victor's star was eclipsed, Louvier ceased to gleam. The dandies cut him. In his heart he exults that the dandies now throng to his _soirees_.

"Bref, the millionaire is especially civil to me,--the more so as I know intimately two or three eminent journalists; and Louvier takes pains to plant garrisons in the press. I trust I have explained the grounds on which I may be a better diplomatist to employ than your _avoue_ ; and with your leave I will go to Louvier at once."

"Let him go," said Raoul. "Enguerrand never fails in anything he undertakes; especially," he added, with a smile half sad, half tender, "when one wishes to replenish one's purse."

"I too gratefully grant such an ambassador all powers to treat," said Alain. "I am only ashamed to consign to him a post so much beneath his genius," and "his birth" he was about to add, but wisely checked himself. Enguerrand said, shrugging his shoulders, "You can't do me a greater kindness than by setting my wits at work. I fall a martyr to _ennui_ when I am not in action;" he said, and was gone.

"It makes me very melancholy at times," said Raoul, flinging away the end of his cigar, "to think that a man so clever and so energetic as Enguerrand should be as much excluded from the service of his country as if he were an Iroquois Indian. He would have made a great diplomatist."

"Alas!" replied Alain, with a sigh, "I begin to doubt whether we Legitimists are justified in maintaining a useless loyalty to a sovereign who renders us morally exiles in the land of our birth."

"I have no doubt on the subject," said Raoul. "We are not justified on the score of policy, but we have no option at present on the score of honour. We should gain so much for ourselves if we adopted the State livery and took the State wages that no man would esteem us as patriots; we should only be despised as apostates. So long as Henry V. lives, and does not resign his claim, we cannot be active citizens; we must be mournful lookers-on. But what matters it? We nobles of the old race are becoming rapidly extinct. Under any form of government likely to be established in France we are equally doomed. The French people, aiming at an impossible equality, will never again tolerate a race of gentilshommes. They cannot prevent, without destroying commerce and capital altogether, a quick succession of men of the day, who form nominal aristocracies much more opposed to equality than any hereditary class of nobles; but they refuse these fleeting substitutes of born patricians all permanent stake in the country, since whatever estate they buy must be subdivided at their death my poor Alain, you are making it the one ambition of your life to preserve to your posterity the home and

lands of your forefathers. How is that possible, even supposing you could redeem the mortgages? You marry some day; you have children, and Rochebriant must then be sold to pay for their separate portions. How this condition of things, while rendering us so ineffective to perform the normal functions of a noblesse in public life, affects us in private life, may be easily conceived.

"Condemned to a career of pleasure and frivolity, we can scarcely escape from the contagion of extravagant luxury which forms the vice of the time. With grand names to keep up, and small fortunes whereon to keep them, we readily incur embarrassment and debt. Then neediness conquers pride. We cannot be great merchants, but we can be small gamblers on the Bourse, or, thanks to the Credit Mobilier, imitate a cabinet minister, and keep a shop under another name. Perhaps you have heard that Enguerrand and I keep a shop. Pray, buy your gloves there. Strange fate for men whose ancestors fought in the first Crusade--_mais que voulez-vous_?"

"I was told of the shop," said Alain; "but the moment I knew you I disbelieved the story."

"Quite true. Shall I confide to you why we resorted to that means of finding ourselves in pocket-money? My father gives us rooms in his hotel; the use of his table, which we do not much profit by; and an allowance, on which we could not live as young men of our class live at Paris. Enguerrand had his means of spending pocket-money, I mine; but it came to the same thing,--the pockets were emptied. We incurred debts. Two years ago my father straitened himself to pay them, saying, 'The next time you come to me with debts, however small, you must pay them yourselves, or you must marry, and leave it to me to find you wives.' This threat appalled us both. A month afterwards, Enguerrand made a lucky hit at the Bourse, and proposed to invest the proceeds in a shop. I resisted as long as I could; but Enguerrand triumphed over me, as he always does. He found an excellent deputy in a _bonne_ who had nursed us in childhood, and married a journeyman perfumer who understands the business. It answers well; we are not in debt, and we have preserved our freedom."

After these confessions Raoul went away, and Alain fell into a mournful revery, from which he was roused by a loud ring at his bell. He opened the door, and beheld M. Louvier. The burly financier was much out of breath after making so steep an ascent. It was in gasps that he muttered, "Bon jour; excuse me if I derange you." Then entering and seating himself on a chair, he took some minutes to recover speech, rolling his eyes staringly round the meagre, unluxurious room, and then concentrating their gaze upon its occupier.

"_Peste_, my dear Marquis!" he said at last, "I hope the next time I visit you the ascent may be less arduous. One would think you were in training to ascend the Himalaya."

The haughty noble writhed under this jest, and the spirit inborn in his order spoke in his answer.

"I am accustomed to dwell on heights, Monsieur Louvier; the castle of Rochebriant is not on a level with the town." An angry gleam shot out from the eyes of the millionaire, but there was no other sign of displeasure in his answer. "_Bien dit, mon cher_"; how you remind me of your father! Now, give me leave to speak on affairs. I have seen your

cousin Enguerrand de Vandemar. *Homme de moyens*, though *joli garçon*. He proposed that you should call on me. I said 'no' to the *cher petit* Enguerrand,--a visit from me was due to you. To cut matters short, M. Gandrin has allowed me to look into your papers. I was disposed to serve you from the first; I am still more disposed to serve you now. I undertake to pay off all your other mortgages, and become sole mortgagee, and on terms that I have jotted down on this paper, and which I hope will content you."

He placed a paper in Alain's hand, and took out a box, from which he extracted a jujube, placed it in his mouth, folded his hands, and reclined back in his chair, with his eyes half closed, as if exhausted alike by his ascent and his generosity.

In effect, the terms were unexpectedly liberal. The reduced interest on the mortgages would leave the Marquis an income of L1,000 a year instead of L400. Louvier proposed to take on himself the legal cost of transfer, and to pay to the Marquis 25,000 francs, on the completion of the deed, as a bonus. The mortgage did not exempt the building-land, as Hebert desired. In all else it was singularly advantageous, and Alain could but feel a thrill of grateful delight at an offer by which his stinted income was raised to comparative affluence.

"Well, Marquis," said Louvier, "what does the castle say to the town?"

"Monsieur Louvier," answered Alain, extending his hand with cordial eagerness, "accept my sincere apologies for the indiscretion of my metaphor. Poverty is proverbially sensitive to jests on it. I owe it to you if I cannot hereafter make that excuse for any words of mine that may displease you. The terms you propose are most liberal, and I close with them at once."

"*Bon*," said Louvier, shaking vehemently the hand offered to him; "I will take the paper to Gandrin, and instruct him accordingly. And now, may I attach a condition to the agreement which is not put down on paper? It may have surprised you perhaps that I should propose a gratuity of 25,000 francs on completion of the contract. It is a droll thing to do, and not in the ordinary way of business, therefore I must explain. Marquis, pardon the liberty I take, but you have inspired me with an interest in your future. With your birth, connections, and figure you should push your way in the world far and fast. But you can't do so in a province. You must find your opening at Paris. I wish you to spend a year in the capital, and live, not extravagantly, like a *nouveau riche*, but in a way not unsuited to your rank, and permitting you all the social advantages that belong to it. These 25,000 francs, in addition to your improved income, will enable you to gratify my wish in this respect. Spend the money in Paris; you will want every sou of it in the course of the year. It will be money well spent. Take my advice, *cher Marquis*. *Au plaisir*."

The financier bowed himself out. The young Marquis forgot all the mournful reflections with which Raoul's conversation had inspired him. He gave a new touch to his toilette, and sallied forth with the air of a man on whose morning of life a sun heretofore clouded has burst forth and bathed the landscape in its light.

CHAPTER VIII.

Since the evening spent at the Savarins', Graham had seen no more of Isaura. He had avoided all chance of seeing her; in fact, the jealousy with which he had viewed her manner towards Rameau, and the angry amazement with which he had heard her proclaim her friendship for Madame de Grantmesnil, served to strengthen the grave and secret reasons which made him desire to keep his heart yet free and his hand yet unpledged. But alas! the heart was enslaved already. It was under the most fatal of all spells,--first love conceived at first sight. He was wretched; and in his wretchedness his resolves became involuntarily weakened. He found himself making excuses for the beloved. What cause had he, after all, for that jealousy of the young poet which had so offended him; and if in her youth and inexperience Isaura had made her dearest friend of a great writer by whose genius she might be dazzled, and of whose opinions she might scarcely be aware, was it a crime that necessitated her eternal banishment from the reverence which belongs to all manly love? Certainly he found no satisfactory answers to such self-questionings. And then those grave reasons known only to himself, and never to be confided to another--why he should yet reserve his hand unpledged--were not so imperative as to admit of no compromise. They might entail a sacrifice, and not a small one to a man of Graham's views and ambition. But what is love if it can think any sacrifice, short of duty and honour, too great to offer up unknown and uncomprehended, to the one beloved? Still, while thus softened in his feelings towards Isaura, he became, perhaps in consequence of such softening, more and more restlessly impatient to fulfil the object for which he had come to Paris, the great step towards which was the discovery of the undiscoverable Louise Duval.

He had written more than once to M. Renard since the interview with that functionary already recorded, demanding whether Renard had not made some progress in the research on which he was employed, and had received short unsatisfactory replies preaching patience and implying hope.

The plain truth, however, was that M. Renard had taken no further pains in the matter. He considered it utter waste of time and thought to attempt a discovery to which the traces were so faint and so obsolete. If the discovery were effected, it must be by one of those chances which occur without labour or forethought of our own. He trusted only to such a chance in continuing the charge he had undertaken. But during the last day or two Graham had become yet more impatient than before, and peremptorily requested another visit from this dilatory confidant.

In that visit, finding himself pressed hard, and though naturally willing, if possible, to retain a client unusually generous, yet being on the whole an honest member of his profession, and feeling it to be somewhat unfair to accept large remuneration for doing nothing, M. Renard said frankly, "Monsieur, this affair is beyond me; the keenest agent of our police could make nothing of it. Unless you can tell me more than you have done, I am utterly without a clue. I resign, therefore, the task with which you honoured me, willing to resume it again if you can give me information that could render me of use."

"What sort of information?"

"At least the names of some of the lady's relations who may yet be living."

"But it strikes me that, if I could get at that piece of knowledge, I

should not require the services of the police. The relations would tell me what had become of Louise Duval quite as readily as they would tell a police agent."

"Quite true, Monsieur. It would really be picking your pockets if I did not at once retire from your service. Nay, Monsieur, pardon me, no further payments; I have already accepted too much. Your most obedient servant."

Graham, left alone, fell into a very gloomy revery. He could not but be sensible of the difficulties in the way of the object which had brought him to Paris, with somewhat sanguine expectations of success founded on a belief in the omniscience of the Parisian police, which is only to be justified when they have to deal with a murderess or a political incendiary. But the name of Louise Duval is about as common in France as that of Mary Smith in England; and the English reader may judge what would be the likely result of inquiring through the ablest of our detectives after some Mary Smith of whom you could give little more information than that she was the daughter of a drawing-master who had died twenty years ago, that it was about fifteen years since anything had been heard of her, that you could not say if through marriage or for other causes she had changed her name or not, and you had reasons for declining resort to public advertisements. In the course of inquiry so instituted, the probability would be that you might hear of a great many Mary Smiths, in the pursuit of whom your employee would lose all sight and scent of the one Mary Smith for whom the chase was instituted.

In the midst of Graham's despairing reflections his laquais announced M. Frederic Lemerrier.

"_Cher_ Gram-Varn. A thousand pardons if I disturb you at this late hour of the evening; but you remember the request you made me when you first arrived in Paris this season?"

"Of course I do,--in case you should ever chance in your wide round of acquaintance to fall in with a Madame or Mademoiselle Duval of about the age of forty, or a year or so less, to let me know; and you did fall in with two ladies of that name, but they were not the right one, not the person whom my friend begged me to discover; both much too young."

"_Eh bien, mon cher_. If you will come with me to the _bal champetre_ in the Champs Elysees to-night, I can show you a third Madame Duval,--her Christian name is Louise, too, of the age you mention,--though she does her best to look younger, and is still very handsome. You said your Duval was handsome. It was only last evening that I met this lady at a _soiree_ given by Mademoiselle Julie Caumartin, _coryphee distinguee_, in love with young Rameau."

"In love with young Rameau? I am very glad to hear it. He returns the love?"

"I suppose so. He seems very proud of it. But apropos of Madame Duval, she has been long absent from Paris, just returned, and looking out for conquests. She says she has a great penchant for the English; promises me to be at this ball. Come."

"Hearty thanks, my dear Lemerrier. I am at your service."

CHAPTER IX.

The *bal champetre* was gay and brilliant, as such festal scenes are at Paris. A lovely night in the midst of May, lamps below and stars above; the society mixed, of course. Evidently, when Graham has singled out Frederic Lemer cier from all his acquaintances at Paris to conjoin with the official aid of M. Renard in search of the mysterious lady, he had conjectured the probability that she might be found in the Bohemian world so familiar to Frederic; if not as an inhabitant, at least as an explorer. Bohemia was largely represented at the *bal champetre*, but not without a fair sprinkling of what we call the "respectable classes," especially English and Americans, who brought their wives there to take care of them. Frenchmen, not needing such care, prudently left their wives at home. Among the Frenchmen of station were the Comte de Passy and the Vicomte de Breze.

On first entering the gardens, Graham's eye was attracted and dazzled by a brilliant form. It was standing under a festoon of flowers extended from tree to tree, and a gas jet opposite shone full upon the face,—the face of a girl in all the freshness of youth. If the freshness owed anything to art, the art was so well disguised that it seemed nature. The beauty of the countenance was Hebe-like, joyous, and radiant; and yet one could not look at the girl without a sentiment of deep mournfulness. She was surrounded by a group of young men, and the ring of her laugh jarred upon Graham's ear. He pressed Frederic's arm, and directing his attention to the girl, asked who she was.

"Who? Don't you know? That is Julie Caumartin. A little while ago her equipage was the most admired in the Bois, and great ladies condescended to copy her dress or her coiffure; but she has lost her splendour, and dismissed the rich admirer who supplied the fuel for its blaze, since she fell in love with Gustave Rameau. Doubtless she is expecting him to-night. You ought to know her; shall I present you?"

"No," answered Graham, with a compassionate expression in his manly face. "So young; seemingly so gay. How I pity her!"

"What! for throwing herself away on Rameau? True. There is a great deal of good in that girl's nature, if she had been properly trained. Rameau wrote a pretty poem on her which turned her head and won her heart, in which she is styled the 'Ondine of Paris,'—a nymph-like type of Paris itself."

"Vanishing type, like her namesake; born of the spray, and vanishing soon into the deep," said Graham. "Pray go and look for the Duval; you will find me seated yonder."

Graham passed into a retired alley, and threw himself on a solitary bench, while Lemer cier went in search of Madame Duval. In a few minutes the Frenchman reappeared. By his side was a lady well dressed, and as she passed under the lamps Graham perceived that, though of a certain age, she was undeniably handsome. His heart beat more quickly. Surely this was the Louise Duval he sought.

He rose from his seat, and was presented in due form to the lady, with whom Frederic then discreetly left him. "M. Lemer cier tells me that you think that we were once acquainted with each other."

"Nay, Madame; I should not fail to recognize you were that the case. A friend of mine had the honour of knowing a lady of your name; and should I be fortunate enough to meet that lady, I am charged with a commission that may not be unwelcome to her. M. Lemer cier tells me your nom de bapteme is Louise."

"Louise Corinne, Monsieur."

"And I presume that Duval is the name you take from your parents?"

"No; my father's name was Bernard. I married, when I was a mere child, M. Duval, in the wine trade at Bordeaux."

"Ah, indeed!" said Graham, much disappointed, but looking at her with a keen, searching eye, which she met with a decided frankness. Evidently, in his judgment, she was speaking the truth.

"You know English, I think, Madame," he resumed, addressing her in that language.

"A leetle; speak un peu."

"Only a little?"

Madame Duval looked puzzled, and replied in French, with a laugh, "Is it that you were told that I spoke English by your countryman, Milord Sare Boulby? _Petit scelerat_, I hope he is well. He sends you a commission for me,--so he ought; he behaved to me like a monster."

"Alas! I know nothing of Milord Sir Boulby. Were you never in England yourself?"

"Never," with a coquettish side-glance; "I should like so much to go. I have a foible for the English in spite of that _vilain petit Boulby_. Who is it gave you the commission for me? Ha! I guess, le Capitaine Nelton."

"No. What year, Madame, if not impertinent, were you at Aix-la-Chapelle?"

"You mean Baden? I was there seven years ago, when I met le Capitaine Nelton, _bel homme aux cheveux rouges_."

"But you have been at Aix?"

"Never."

"I have, then, been mistaken, Madame, and have only to offer my most humble apologies."

"But perhaps you will favour me with a visit, and we may on further conversation find that you are not mistaken. I can't stay now, for I am engaged to dance with the Belgian of whom, no doubt, M. Lemer cier has told you."

"No, Madame, he has not."

"Well, then, he will tell you. The Belgian is very jealous; but I am

always at home between three and four; this is my card."

Graham eagerly took the card, and exclaimed, "Is this you're your own handwriting, Madame?"

"Yes, indeed."

"_Tres belle ecriture_," said Graham, and receded with a ceremonious bow. "Anything so unlike her handwriting! Another disappointment," muttered the Englishman as the lady went back to the ball.

A few minutes later Graham joined Lemercier, who was talking with De Passy and De Breze.

"Well," said Lemercier, when his eye rested on Graham, "I hit the right nail on the head this time, eh?"

Graham shook his head.

"What! is she not the right Louise Duval?"

"Certainly not."

The Count de Passy overheard the name, and turned. "Louise Duval," he said; "does Monsieur Vane know a Louise Duval?"

"No; but a friend asked me to inquire after a lady of that name whom he had met many years ago at Paris." The Count mused a moment, and said, "Is it possible that your friend knew the family De Mauleon?"

"I really can't say. What then?"

"The old Vicomte de Mauleon was one of my most intimate associates. In fact, our houses are connected. And he was extremely grieved, poor man, when his daughter Louise married her drawing-master, Auguste Duval."

"Her drawing-master, Auguste Duval? Pray say on. I think the Louise Duval my friend knew must have been her daughter. She was the only child of a drawing-master or artist named Auguste Duval, and probably enough her Christian name would have been derived from her mother. A Mademoiselle de Mauleon, then, married M. Auguste Duval?"

"Yes; the old Vicomte had espoused *_en premieres nocces_* Mademoiselle Camille de Chavigny, a lady of birth equal to his own; had by her one daughter, Louise. I recollect her well,--a plain girl, with a high nose and a sour expression. She was just of age when the first Vicomtesse died, and by the marriage settlement she succeeded at once to her mother's fortune, which was not large. The Vicomte was, however, so poor that the loss of that income was no trifle to him. Though much past fifty, he was still very handsome. Men of that generation did not age soon, Monsieur," said the Count, expanding his fine chest and laughing exultingly.

"He married, *_en secondes nocces_*, a lady of still higher birth than the first, and with a much larger *_dot_*. Louise was indignant at this, hated her stepmother; and when a son was born by the second marriage she left the paternal roof, went to reside with an old female relative near the Luxembourg, and there married this drawing-master. Her father and the family did all they could to prevent it; but in these democratic days a

woman who has attained her majority can, if she persist in her determination, marry to please herself and disgrace her ancestors. After that _mesalliance_ her father never would see her again. I tried in vain to soften him. All his parental affections settled on his handsome Victor.

"Ah! you are too young to have known Victor de Mauleon during his short reign at Paris, as _roi des viveurs_."

"Yes, he was before my time; but I have heard of him as a young man of great fashion; said to be very clever, a duellist, and a sort of Don Juan."

"Exactly."

"And then I remember vaguely to have heard that he committed, or was said to have committed, some villanous action connected with a great lady's jewels, and to have left Paris in consequence."

"Ah, yes; a sad scrape. At that time there was a political crisis; we were under a Republic; anything against a noble was believed. But I am sure Victor de Mauleon was not the man to commit a larceny. However, it is quite true that he left Paris, and I don't know what has become of him since." Here he touched De Breze, who, though still near, had not been listening to this conversation, but interchanging jest and laughter with Lemercier on the motley scene of the dance.

"De Breze, have you ever heard what became of poor dear Victor de Mauleon?--you knew him."

"Knew him? I should think so. Who could be in the great world and not know _le beau_ Victor? No; after he vanished I never heard more of him; doubtless long since dead. A good-hearted fellow in spite of all his sins."

"My dear Monsieur de Breze, did you know his half-sister?" asked Graham, --"a Madame Duval?"

"No. I never heard he had a half-sister. Halt there; I recollect that I met Victor once, in the garden at Versailles, walking arm-in-arm with the most beautiful girl I ever saw; and when I complimented him afterwards at the Jockey Club on his new conquest, he replied very gravely that the young lady was his niece. 'Niece!' said I; 'why, there can't be more than five or six years between you.' 'About that, I suppose,' said he; 'my half-sister, her mother, was more than twenty years older than I at the time of my birth.' I doubted the truth of his story at the time; but since you say he really had a sister, my doubt wronged him."

"Have you never seen that same young lady since?"

"Never."

"How many years ago was this?"

"Let me see, about twenty or twenty-one years ago. How time flies!"

Graham still continued to question, but could learn no further particulars. He turned to quit the gardens just as the band was striking up for a fresh dance, a wild German waltz air; and mingled with that

German music his ear caught the sprightly sounds of the French laugh, one laugh distinguished from the rest by a more genuine ring of light-hearted joy, the laugh that he had heard on entering the gardens, and the sound of which had then saddened him. Looking towards the quarter from which it came, he again saw the "Ondine of Paris." She was not now the centre of a group. She had just found Gustave Rameau, and was clinging to his arm with a look of happiness in her face, frank and innocent as a child's; and so they passed amid the dancers down a solitary lamplit alley, till lost to the Englishman's lingering gaze.

CHAPTER X.

The next morning Graham sent again for M. Renard. "Well," he cried, when that dignitary appeared and took a seat beside him, "chance has favoured me."

"I always counted on chance, Monsieur. Chance has more wit in its little finger than the Paris police in its whole body."

"I have ascertained the relations, on the mother's side, of Louise Duval, and the only question is how to get at them." Here Graham related what he had heard, and ended by saying, "This Victor de Mauleon is therefore my Louise Duval's uncle. He was, no doubt, taking charge of her in the year that the persons interested in her discovery lost sight of her in Paris; and surely he must know what became of her afterwards."

"Very probably; and chance may befriend us yet in the discovery of Victor de Mauleon. You seem not to know the particulars of that story about the jewels which brought him into some connection with the police, and resulted in his disappearance from Paris."

"No; tell me the particulars."

"Victor de Mauleon was heir to some 60,000 or 70,000 francs a year, chiefly on the mother's side; for his father, though the representative of one of the most ancient houses in Normandy, was very poor, having little of his own except the emoluments of an appointment in the Court of Louis Philippe.

"But before, by the death of his parents, Victor came into that inheritance, he very largely forestalled it. His tastes were magnificent. He took to 'sport,' kept a famous stud, was a great favourite with the English, and spoke their language fluently. Indeed he was considered very accomplished, and of considerable intellectual powers. It was generally said that some day or other, when he had sown his wild oats, he would, if he took to politics, be an eminent man. Altogether he was a very strong creature. That was a very strong age under Louis Philippe. The *viveurs* of Paris were fine types for the heroes of Dumas and Sue,--full of animal life and spirits. Victor de Mauleon was a romance of Dumas, incarnated."

"Monsieur Renard, forgive me that I did not before do justice to your taste in polite literature."

"Monsieur, a man in my profession does not attain even to my humble eminence if he be not something else than a professional. He must study

mankind wherever they are described, even in *_les romans_*. To return to Victor de Mauleon. Though he was a 'sportman,' a gambler, a Don Juan, a duel list, nothing was ever said against his honour. On the contrary, on matters of honour he was a received oracle; and even though he had fought several duels (that was the age of duels), and was reported without a superior, almost without an equal, in either weapon, the sword or the pistol, he is said never to have wantonly provoked an encounter, and to have so used his skill that he contrived never to slay, nor even gravely to wound, an antagonist.

"I remember one instance of his generosity in this respect; for it was much talked of at the time. One of your countrymen, who had never handled a fencing-foil nor fired a pistol, took offence at something M. de Mauleon had said in disparagement of the Duke of Wellington, and called him out. Victor de Mauleon accepted the challenge, discharged his pistol, not in the air--that might have been an affront--but so as to be wide of the mark, walked up to the lines to be shot at, and when missed, said, 'Excuse the susceptibility of a Frenchman loath to believe that his countryman can be beaten save by accident, and accept every apology one gentleman can make to another for having forgotten the respect due to one of the most renowned of your national heroes.' The Englishman's name was Vane. Could it have been your father?"

"Very probably; just like my father to call out any man who insulted the honour of his country, as represented by its men. I hope the two combatants became friends?"

"That I never heard; the duel was over; there my story ends."

"Pray go on."

"One day--it was in the midst of political events which would have silenced most subjects of private gossip--the *_beau monde_* was startled by the news that the Vicomte (he was then, by his father's death, Vicomte) de Mauleon had been given into the custody of the police on the charge of stealing the jewels of the Duchesse de (the wife of a distinguished foreigner). It seems that some days before this event, the Duc, wishing to make Madame his spouse an agreeable surprise, had resolved to have a diamond necklace belonging to her, and which was of setting so old-fashioned that she had not lately worn it, reset for her birthday. He therefore secretly possessed himself of the key to an iron safe in a cabinet adjoining her dressing-room (in which safe her more valuable jewels were kept), and took from it the necklace. Imagine his dismay when the jeweller in the Rue Vivienne to whom he carried it recognized the pretended diamonds as imitation paste which he himself had some days previously inserted into an empty setting brought to him by a Monsieur with whose name he was unacquainted. The Duchesse was at that time in delicate health; and as the Duc's suspicions naturally fell on the servants, especially on the *_femme de chambre_*, who was in great favour with his wife, he did not like to alarm Madame, nor through her to put the servants on their guard. He resolved, therefore, to place the matter in the hands of the famous -----, who was then the pride and ornament of the Parisian police. And the very night afterwards the Vicomte de Mauleon was caught and apprehended in the cabinet where the jewels were kept, and to which he had got access by a false key, or at least a duplicate key, found in his possession. I should observe that M. de Mauleon occupied the entresol in the same hotel in which the upper rooms were devoted to the Duc and Duchesse and their suite. As soon as this charge against the Vicomte was made known (and it was known the next

morning), the extent of his debts and the utterness of his ruin (before scarcely conjectured or wholly unheeded) became public through the medium of the journals, and furnished an obvious motive for the crime of which he was accused. We Parisians, Monsieur, are subject to the most startling reactions of feeling. The men we adore one day we execrate the next. The Vicomte passed at once from the popular admiration one bestows on a hero to the popular contempt with which one regards a petty larcener. Society wondered how it had ever condescended to receive into its bosom the gambler, the duellist, the Don Juan. However, one compensation in the way of amusement he might still afford to society for the grave injuries he had done it. Society would attend his trial, witness his demeanour at the bar, and watch the expression of his face when he was sentenced to the galleys. But, Monsieur, this wretch completed the measure of his iniquities. He was not tried at all. The Duc and Duchesse quitted Paris for Spain, and the Duc instructed his lawyer to withdraw his charge, stating his conviction of the Vicomte's complete innocence of any other offence than that which he himself had confessed."

"What did the Vicomte confess? You omitted to state that."

"The Vicomte, when apprehended, confessed that, smitten by an insane passion for the Duchesse, which she had, on his presuming to declare it, met with indignant scorn, he had taken advantage of his lodgment in the same house to admit himself into the cabinet adjoining her dressing-room by means of a key which he had procured, made from an impression of the key-hole taken in wax.

"No evidence in support of any other charge against the Vicomte was forthcoming,--nothing, in short, beyond the *_infraction du domicile_* caused by the madness of youthful love, and for which there was no prosecution. The law, therefore, could have little to say against him. But society was more rigid; and exceedingly angry to find that a man who had been so conspicuous for luxury should prove to be a pauper, insisted on believing that M. de Mauleon was guilty of the meaner, though not perhaps, in the eyes of husbands and fathers, the more heinous, of the two offences. I presume that the Vicomte felt that he had got into a dilemma from which no pistol-shot or sword-thrust could free him, for he left Paris abruptly, and has not since reappeared. The sale of his stud and effects sufficed, I believe, to pay his debts, for I will do him the justice to say that they were paid."

"But though the Vicomte de Mauleon has disappeared, he must have left relations at Paris, who would perhaps know what has become of him and of his niece."

"I doubt it. He had no very near relations. The nearest was an old *_celibataire_* of the same name, from whom he had some expectations, but who died shortly after this *esclandre*, and did not name the Vicomte in his will. M. Victor had numerous connections among the highest families, the Rochebriants, Chavignys, Vandemars, Passys, Beauvilliers; but they are not likely to have retained any connection with a ruined *_vaurien_*, and still less with a niece of his who was the child of a drawing-master. But now you have given me a clew, I will try to follow it up. We must find the Vicomte, and I am not without hope of doing so. Pardon me if I decline to say more at present. I would not raise false expectations; but in a week or two I will have the honour to call again upon Monsieur."

"Wait one instant. You have really a hope of discovering M. de Mauleon?"

"Yes. I cannot say more at present."

M. Renard departed. Still that hope, however faint it might prove, served to reanimate Graham; and with that hope his heart, as if a load had been lifted from its mainspring, returned instinctively to the thought of Isaura. Whatever seemed to promise an early discharge of the commission connected with the discovery of Louise Duval seemed to bring Isaura nearer to him, or at least to excuse his yearning desire to see more of her, to understand her better. Faded into thin air was the vague jealousy of Gustave Rameau which he had so unreasonably conceived; he felt as if it were impossible that the man whom the "Ondine of Paris" claimed as her lover could dare to woo or hope to win an Isaura. He even forgot the friendship with the eloquent denouncer of the marriage-bond, which a little while ago had seemed to him an unpardonable offence. He remembered only the lovely face, so innocent, yet so intelligent; only the sweet voice, which had for the first time breathed music into his own soul; only the gentle hand, whose touch had for the first time sent through his veins the thrill which distinguishes from all her sex the woman whom we love. He went forth elated and joyous, and took his way to Isaura's villa. As he went, the leaves on the trees under which he passed seemed stirred by the soft May breeze in sympathy with his own delight. Perhaps it was rather the reverse: his own silent delight sympathized with all delight in awakening Nature. The lover seeking reconciliation with the loved one from whom some trifle has unreasonably estranged him, in a cloudless day of May,--if he be not happy enough to feel a brotherhood in all things happy,--a leaf in bloom, a bird in song,--then indeed he may call himself lover, but he does not know what is love.

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