

The Parisians, Book 5.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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THE PARISIANS

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

The next day at noon M. Louvier was closeted in his study with M. Gandrin.

"Yes," cried Louvier, "I have behaved very handsomely to the beau Marquis. No one can say to the contrary."

"True," answered Gandrin. "Besides the easy terms for the transfer of the mortgages, that free bonus of one thousand louis is a generous and noble act of munificence."

"Is it not! and my youngster has already begun to do with it as I meant and expected. He has taken a fine apartment; he has bought a coupe and horses; he has placed himself in the hands of the Chevalier de Finisterre; he is entered at the Jockey Club. Parbleu, the one thousand louis will be soon gone."

"And then?"

"And then! why, he will have tasted the sweets of Parisian life; he will think with disgust of the vieux manoir. He can borrow no more. I must remain sole mortgagee, and I shall behave as handsomely in buying his estates as I have behaved in increasing his income."

Here a clerk entered and said that a monsieur wished to see M. Louvier for a few minutes in private, on urgent business.

"Tell him to send in his card."

"He has declined to do so, but states that he has already the honour of your acquaintance."

"A writer in the press, perhaps; or is he an artist?"

"I have not seen him before, Monsieur, but he has the air tres comme il faut."

"Well, you may admit him. I will not detain you longer, my dear Gandrin. My homages to Madame. Bonjour."

Louvier bowed out M. Gandrin, and then rubbed his hands complacently. He was in high spirits. "Aha, my dear Marquis, thou art in my trap now. Would it were thy father instead," he muttered chucklingly, and then took his stand on the hearth, with his back to the fireless grate. There entered a gentleman exceedingly well dressed,--dressed according to the fashion, but still as became one of ripe middle age, not desiring to pass for younger than he was.

He was tall, with a kind of lofty ease in his air and his movements; not slight of frame, but spare enough to disguise the strength and endurance which belong to sinews and thews of steel, freed from all superfluous flesh, broad across the shoulders, thin in the flanks. His dark hair had in youth been luxuriant in thickness and curl; it was now clipped short, and had become bare at the temples, but it still retained the lustre of its colour and the crispness of its ringlets. He wore neither beard nor mustache, and the darkness of his hair was contrasted by a clear fairness of complexion, healthful, though somewhat pale, and eyes of that rare gray tint which has in it no shade of blue,--peculiar eyes, which give a very distinct character to the face. The man must have been singularly handsome in youth; he was handsome still, though probably in his forty-seventh or forty-eighth year, doubtless a very different kind of comeliness. The form of the features and the contour of the face were those that suit the rounded beauty of the Greek outline, and such beauty would naturally have been the attribute of the countenance in earlier days; but the cheeks were now thin, and with lines of care and sorrow between nostril and lip, so that the shape of the face seemed lengthened, and the features had become more salient.

Louvier gazed at his visitor with a vague idea that he had seen him before, and could not remember where or when; but at all events he recognized at the first glance a man of rank and of the great world.

"Pray be seated, Monsieur," he said, resuming his own easy-chair.

The visitor obeyed the invitation with a very graceful bend of his head, drew his chair near to the financier's, stretched his limbs with the ease of a man making himself at home, and fixing his calm bright eyes quietly on Louvier, said, with a bland smile,--

"My dear old friend, do you not remember me? You are less altered than I am."

Louvier stared hard and long; his lip fell, his cheek paled, and at last he faltered out, "Ciel! is it possible! Victor, the Vicomte de Mauleon?"

"At your service, my dear Louvier."

There was a pause; the financier was evidently confused and embarrassed, and not less evidently the visit of the "dear old friend" was unwelcome.

"Vicomte," he said at last, "this is indeed a surprise; I thought you had long since quitted Paris for good."

"'L'homme propose,' etc. I have returned, and mean to enjoy the rest of my days in the metropolis of the Graces and the Pleasures. What though we are not so young as we were, Louvier,--we have more vigour in us than the new generation; and though it may no longer befit us to renew the gay carousals of old, life has still excitements as vivid for the social temperament and ambitious mind. Yes, the roi des viveurs returns to Paris for a more solid throne than he filled before."

"Are you serious?"

"As serious as the French gayety will permit one to be."

"Alas, Monsieur le Vicomte! can you flatter yourself that you will regain the society you have quitted, and the name you have--"

Louvier stopped short; something in the Vicomte's eye daunted him.

"The name I have laid aside for convenience of travel. Princes travel incognito, and so may a simple gentilhomme. 'Regain my place in society,' say you? Yes; it is not that which troubles me."

"What does?"

"The consideration whether on a very modest income I can be sufficiently esteemed for myself to render that society more pleasant than ever. Ah, mon cher! why recoil? why so frightened? Do you think I am going to ask you for money? Have I ever done so since we parted; and did I ever do so before without repaying you? Bah! you roturiers are worse than the Bourbons. You never learn or unlearn. 'Fors non mutat genus.'"

The magnificent millionaire, accustomed to the homage of grandees from the Faubourg and lions from the Chaussee d'Antin, rose to his feet in superb wrath, less at the taunting words than at the haughtiness of mien with which they were uttered.

"Monsieur, I cannot permit you to address me in that tone. Do you mean to insult me?"

"Certainly not. Tranquillize your nerves, resear yourself, and listen,-- resear yourself, I say."

Louvier dropped into his chair.

"No," resumed the Vicomte, politely, "I do not come here to insult you, neither do I come to ask money; I assume that I am in my rights when I ask Monsieur Louvier what has become of Louise Duval?"

"Louise Duval! I know nothing about her."

"Possibly not now; but you did know her well enough, when we two parted, to be a candidate for her hand. You did know her enough to solicit my good offices in promotion of your suit; and you did, at my advice, quit Paris to seek her at Aix-la-Chapelle."

"What! have you, Monsieur de Mauleon, not heard news of her since that day?"

"I decline to accept your question as an answer to mine. You went to Aix-la-Chapelle; you saw Louise Duval, at my urgent request she condescended to accept your hand."

"No, Monsieur de Mauleon, she did not accept my hand. I did not even see her. The day before I arrived at Aix-la-Chapelle she had left it,--not alone,--left it with her lover."

"Her lover! You do not mean the miserable Englishman who--"

"No Englishman," interrupted Louvier, fiercely. "Enough that the step she took placed an eternal barrier between her and myself. I have never even sought to hear of her since that day. Vicomte, that woman was the one love of my life. I loved her, as you must have known, to folly, to madness. And how was my love requited? Ah! you open a very deep wound, Monsieur le Vicomte."

"Pardon me, Louvier; I did not give you credit for feelings so keen and so genuine, nor did I think myself thus easily affected by matters belonging to a past life so remote from the present. For whom did Louise forsake you?"

"It matters not; he is dead."

"I regret to hear that; I might have avenged you."

"I need no one to avenge my wrong. Let this pass."

"Not yet. Louise, you say, fled with a seducer? So proud as she was, I can scarcely believe it."

"Oh, it was not with a roturier she fled; her pride would not have allowed that."

"He must have deceived her somehow. Did she continue to live with him?"

"That question, at least, I can answer; for though I lost all trace of her life, his life was pretty well known to me till its end; and a very few months after she fled he was enchained to another. Let us talk of her no more."

"Ay, ay," muttered De Mauleon, "some disgraces are not to be redeemed, and therefore not to be discussed. To me, though a relation, Louise Duval was but little known, and after what you tell me, I cannot dispute your right to say, 'Talk of her no more.' You loved her, and she wronged you. My poor Louvier, pardon me if I made an old wound bleed afresh."

These words were said with a certain pathetic tenderness; they softened Louvier towards the speaker.

After a short pause the Vicomte swept his hand over his brow, as if to dismiss from his mind a painful and obtrusive thought; then with a changed expression of countenance,--an expression frank and winning,--with voice and with manner in which no vestige remained of the irony or the haughtiness with which he had resented the frigidity of his reception, he drew his chair still nearer to Louvier's, and resumed: "Our situations, Paul Louvier, are much changed since we two became friends. I then could say, 'Open sesame' to whatever recesses, forbidden to vulgar footsteps, the adventurer whom I took by the hand might wish to explore. In those days my heart was warm; I liked you, Louvier,--honestly liked you. I think our personal acquaintance commenced in some gay gathering of young viveurs, whose behaviour to you offended my sense of good breeding?"

Louvier coloured and muttered inaudibly. De Mauleon continued: "I felt it due to you to rebuke their incivilities, the more so as you evinced on that occasion your own superiority in sense and temper, permit me to add, with no lack of becoming spirit."

Louvier bowed his head, evidently gratified.

"From that day we became familiar. If any obligation to me were incurred, you would not have been slow to return it. On more than one occasion when I was rapidly wasting money--and money was plentiful with you--you generously offered me your purse. On more than one occasion I

accepted the offer; and you would never have asked repayment if I had not insisted on repaying. I was no less grateful for your aid." Louvier made a movement as if to extend his hand, but he checked the impulse.

"There was another attraction which drew me towards you. I recognized in your character a certain power in sympathy with that power which I imagined lay dormant in myself, and not to be found among the _freluquets_ and _lions_ who were my more habitual associates. Do you not remember some hours of serious talk we have had together when we lounged in the Tuileries, or sipped our coffee in the garden of the Palais Royal?--hours when we forgot that those were the haunts of idlers, and thought of the stormy actions affecting the history of the world of which they had been the scene; hours when I confided to you, as I confided to no other man, the ambitious hopes for the future which my follies in the present, alas! were hourly tending to frustrate."

"Ay, I remember the starlit night; it was not in the gardens of the Tuileries nor in the Palais Royal,--it was on the Pont de la Concorde, on which we had paused, noting the starlight on the waters, that you said, pointing towards the walls of the _Corps Legislatif_, 'Paul, when I once get into the Chamber, how long will it take me to become First Minister of France?'"

"Did I say so?--possibly; but I was too young then for admission to the Chamber, and I fancied I had so many years yet to spare in idle loiterings at the Fountain of Youth. Pass over these circumstances. You became in love with Louise. I told you her troubled history; it did not diminish your love; and then I frankly favoured your suit. You set out for Aix-la-Chapelle a day or two afterwards; then fell the thunderbolt which shattered my existence, and we have never met again till this hour. You did not receive me kindly, Paul Louvier."

"But," said Louvier, falteringly, "but since you refer to that thunderbolt, you cannot but be aware that--that--"

"I was subjected to a calumny which I expect those who have known me as well as you did to assist me now to refute."

"If it be really a calumny."

"Heavens, man! could you ever doubt that?" cried De Mauleon, with heat; "ever doubt that I would rather have blown out my brains than allowed them even to conceive the idea of a crime so base?"

"Pardon me," answered Louvier, meekly, "but I did not return to Paris for months after you had disappeared. My mind was unsettled by the news that awaited me at Aix; I sought to distract it by travel,--visited Holland and England; and when I did return to Paris, all that I heard of your story was the darker side of it. I willingly listen to your own account. You never took, or at least never accepted, the Duchesse de -----'s jewels; and your friend M. de ----- never sold them to one jeweller and obtained their substitutes in paste from another?"

The Vicomte made a perceptible effort to repress an impulse of rage; then reseating himself in his chair, and with that slight shrug of the shoulder by which a Frenchman implies to himself that rage would be out of place, replied calmly, "M. de N. did as you say, but of course not employed by me, nor with my knowledge. Listen; the truth is this,--the time has come to tell it. Before you left Paris for Aix I found myself

on the brink of ruin. I had glided towards it with my characteristic recklessness, with that scorn of money for itself, that sanguine confidence in the favour of fortune, which are vices common to every *_roi des viveurs_*. Poor mock Alexanders that we spendthrifts are in youth! we divide all we have among others, and when asked by some prudent friend, 'What have you left for your own share?' answer, 'Hope.' I knew, of course, that my patrimony was rapidly vanishing; but then my horses were matchless. I had enough to last me for years on their chance of winning--of course they would win. But you may recollect when we parted that I was troubled,--creditors' bills before me--usurers' bills too,--and you, my dear Louvier, pressed on me your purse, were angry when I refused it. How could I accept? All my chance of repayment was in the speed of a horse. I believed in that chance for myself; but for a trustful friend, no. Ask your own heart now,--nay, I will not say heart,--ask your own common-sense, whether a man who then put aside your purse--spendthrift, *_vaurien_*, though he might be--was likely to steal or accept a woman's jewels. *Va, mon pauvre Louvier*, again I say, 'Fors non mutat genus.'"

Despite the repetition of the displeasing patrician motto, such reminiscences of his visitor's motley character--irregular, turbulent, the reverse of severe, but, in its own loose way, grandly generous and grandly brave--struck both on the common-sense and the heart of the listener; and the Frenchman recognized the Frenchman. Louvier doubted De Mauleon's word no more, bowed his head, and said, "Victor de Mauleon, I have wronged you; go on."

"On the day after you left for Aix came that horse-race on which my all depended: it was lost. The loss absorbed the whole of my remaining fortune; it absorbed about twenty thousand francs in excess, a debt of honour to De N., whom you called my friend. Friend he was not; imitator, follower, flatterer, yes. Still I deemed him enough my friend to say to him, 'Give me a little time to pay the money; I must sell my stud, or write to my only living relation from whom I have expectations.' You remember that relation,--Jacques de Mauleon, old and unmarried. By De N.'s advice I did write to my kinsman. No answer came; but what did come were fresh bills from creditors. I then calmly calculated my assets. The sale of my stud and effects might suffice to pay every sou that I owed, including my debt to De N.; but that was not quite certain. At all events, when the debts were paid I should be beggared. Well, you know, Louvier, what we Frenchmen are: how Nature has denied to us the quality of patience; how involuntarily suicide presents itself to us when hope is lost; and suicide seemed to me here due to honour, namely, to the certain discharge of my liabilities,--for the stud and effects of Victor de Mauleon, *_roi des viveurs_*, would command much higher prices if he died like Cato than if he ran away from his fate like Pompey. Doubtless De N. guessed my intention from my words or my manner; but on the very day in which I had made all preparations for quitting the world from which sunshine had vanished, I received in a blank envelope bank-notes amounting to seventy thousand francs, and the post-mark on the envelope was that of the town of Fontainebleau, near to which lived my rich kinsman Jacques. I took it for granted that the sum came from him. Displeased as he might have been with my wild career, still I was his natural heir. The sum sufficed to pay my debt to De N., to all creditors, and leave a surplus. My sanguine spirits returned. I would sell my stud; I would retrench, reform, go to my kinsman as the penitent son. The fatted calf would be killed, and I should wear purple yet. You understand that, Louvier?"

"Yes, yes; so like you. Go on."

"Now, then, came the thunderbolt! Ah! in those sunny days you used to envy me for being so spoiled by women. The Duchesse de ----- had conceived for me one of those romantic fancies which women without children and with ample leisure for the waste of affection do sometimes conceive for very ordinary men younger than themselves, but in whom they imagine they discover sinners to reform or heroes to exalt. I had been honoured by some notes from the Duchesse in which this sort of romance was owned. I had not replied to them encouragingly. In truth, my heart was then devoted to another,--the English girl whom I had wooed as my wife; who, despite her parents' retraction of their consent to our union when they learned how dilapidated were my fortunes, pledged herself to remain faithful to me, and wait for better days." Again De Mauleon paused in suppressed emotion, and then went on hurriedly: "No, the Duchesse did not inspire me with guilty passion, but she did inspire me with an affectionate respect. I felt that she was by nature meant to be a great and noble creature, and was, nevertheless, at that moment wholly misled from her right place amongst women by an illusion of mere imagination about a man who happened then to be very much talked about, and perhaps resembled some Lothario in the novels which she was always reading. We lodged, as you may remember, in the same house."

"Yes, I remember. I remember how you once took me to a great ball given by the Duchesse; how handsome I thought her, though no longer young; and you say right--how I did envy you, that night!"

"From that night, however, the Duc, not unnaturally, became jealous. He reproved the Duchesse for her too amiable manner towards a *_mauvais sujet_* like myself, and forbade her in future to receive my visits. It was then that these notes became frequent and clandestine, brought to me by her maid, who took back my somewhat chilling replies.

"But to proceed. In the flush of my high spirits, and in the insolence of magnificent ease with which I paid De N----- the trifle I owed him, something he said made my heart stand still."

"I told him that the money received had come from Jacques de Mauleon, and that I was going down to his house that day to thank him. He replied, 'Don't go; it did not come from him.' 'It must; see the post-mark of the envelope,--Fontainebleau.' 'I posted it at Fontainebleau.' 'You sent me the money, you!' 'Nay, that is beyond my means. Where it came from,' said this *_miserable_*, 'much more may yet come;' and then he narrated, with that cynicism so in vogue at Paris, how he had told the Duchesse (who knew him as my intimate associate) of my stress of circumstance, of his fear that I meditated something desperate; how she gave him the jewels to sell and to substitute; how, in order to baffle my suspicion and frustrate my scruples, he had gone to Fontainebleau and there posted the envelope containing the bank-notes, out of which he secured for himself the payment he deemed otherwise imperilled. De N. having made this confession, hurried down the stairs swiftly enough to save himself a descent by the window. Do you believe me still?"

"Yes; you were always so hot-blooded, and De N. so considerate of self, I believe you implicitly."

"Of course I did what any man would do; I wrote a hasty letter to the Duchesse, stating all my gratitude for an act of pure friendship so noble; urging also the reasons that rendered it impossible for a man of

honour to profit by such an act. Unhappily, what had been sent was paid away ere I knew the facts; but I could not bear the thought of life till my debt to her was acquitted; in short, Louvier, conceive for yourself the sort of letter which I--which any honest man--would write, under circumstances so cruel."

"H'm!" grunted Louvier.

"Something, however, in my letter, conjoined with what De N. had told her as to my state of mind, alarmed this poor woman, who had deigned to take in me an interest so little deserved. Her reply, very agitated and incoherent, was brought to me by her maid, who had taken my letter, and by whom, as I before said, our correspondence had been of late carried on. In her reply she implored me to decide, to reflect on nothing till I had seen her; stated how the rest of her day was pre-engaged; and since to visit her openly had been made impossible by the Due's interdict, enclosed the key to the private entrance to her rooms, by which I could gain an interview with her at ten o'clock that night, an hour at which the Duc had informed her he should be out till late at his club. Now, however great the indiscretion which the Duchesse here committed, it is due to her memory to say that I am convinced that her dominant idea was that I meditated self-destruction; that no time was to be lost to save me from it; and for the rest she trusted to the influence which a woman's tears and adjurations and reasonings have over even the strongest and hardest men. It is only one of those coxcombs in whom the world of fashion abounds who could have admitted a thought that would have done wrong to the impulsive, generous, imprudent eagerness of a woman to be in time to save from death by his own hand a fellow-being for whom she had conceived an interest. I so construed her note. At the hour she named I admitted myself into the rooms by the key she sent. You know the rest: I was discovered by the Duc and by the agents of police in the cabinet in which the Duchesse's jewels were kept. The key that admitted me into the cabinet was found in my possession."

De Mauleon's voice here faltered, and he covered his face with a convulsive hand. Almost in the same breath he recovered from visible sign of emotion, and went on with a half laugh.

"Ah! you envied me, did you, for being spoiled by the women? Envidable position indeed was mine that night! The Duc obeyed the first impulse of his wrath. He imagined that I had dishonoured him; he would dishonour me in return. Easier to his pride, too, a charge against the robber of jewels than against a favoured lover of his wife. But when I, obeying the first necessary obligation of honour, invented on the spur of the moment the story by which the Duchesse's reputation was cleared from suspicion, accused myself of a frantic passion and the trickery of a fabricated key, the Due's true nature of gentleman came back. He retracted the charge which he could scarcely even at the first blush have felt to be well-founded; and as the sole charge left was simply that which men *_comme il faut_* do not refer to criminal courts and police investigations, I was left to make my bow unmolested and retreat to my own rooms, awaiting there such communciations as the Duc might deem it right to convey to me on the morrow.

"But on the morrow the Duc, with his wife and personal suite, quitted Paris en route for Spain; the bulk of his retinue, including the offending Abigail, was discharged; and, whether through these servants or through the police, the story before evening was in the mouth of every gossip in club or cafe,--exaggerated, distorted, to my ignominy and

shame. My detection in the cabinet, the sale of the jewels, the substitution of paste by De N., who was known to be my servile imitator and reputed to be my abject tool, all my losses on the turf, my debts,-- all these scattered fibres of flax were twisted together in a rope that would have hanged a dog with a much better name than mine. If some disbelieved that I could be a thief, few of those who should have known me best held me guiltless of a baseness almost equal to that of theft,-- the exaction of profit from the love of a foolish woman."

"But you could have told your own tale, shown the letters you had received from the Duchesse, and cleared away every stain on your honour."

"How?--shown her letters, ruined her character, even stated that she had caused her jewels to be sold for the uses of a young roue! Ah, no, Louvier! I would rather have gone to the galleys."

"H'm!" grunted Louvier again.

"The Duc generously gave me better means of righting myself. Three days after he quitted Paris I received a letter from him, very politely written, expressing his great regret that any words implying the suspicion too monstrous and absurd to need refutation should have escaped him in the surprise of the moment; but stating that since the offence I had owned was one that he could not overlook, he was under the necessity of asking the only reparation I could make. That if it 'deranged' me to quit Paris, he would return to it for the purpose required; but that if I would give him the additional satisfaction of suiting his convenience, he should prefer to await my arrival at Bayonne, where he was detained by the indisposition of the Duchesse."

"You have still that letter?" asked Louvier, quickly. "Yes; with other more important documents constituting what I may call my pieces justificatives."

"I need not say that I replied stating the time at which I should arrive at Bayonne, and the hotel at which I should await the Duc's command. Accordingly I set out that same day, gained the hotel named, despatched to the Duc the announcement of my arrival, and was considering how I should obtain a second in some officer quartered in the town--for my soreness and resentment at the marked coldness of my former acquaintances at Paris had forbidden me to seek a second among any of that faithless number--when the Duc himself entered my room. Judge of my amaze at seeing him in person; judge how much greater the amaze became when he advanced with a grave but cordial smile, offering me his hand!"

"'Monsieur de Mauleon,' said he, 'since I wrote to you, facts have become known to me which would induce me rather to ask your friendship than call on you to defend your life. Madame la Duchesse has been seriously ill since we left Paris, and I refrained from all explanations likely to add to the hysterical excitement under which she was suffering. It is only this day that her mind became collected, and she herself then gave me her entire confidence. Monsieur, she insisted on my reading the letters that you addressed to her. Those letters, Monsieur, suffice to prove your innocence of any design against my peace. The Duchesse has so candidly avowed her own indiscretion, has so clearly established the distinction between indiscretion and guilt, that I have granted her my pardon with a lightened heart and a firm belief that we shall be happier together than we have been yet.'

"The Due continued his journey the next day, but he subsequently honoured me with two or three letters written as friend to friend, and in which you will find repeated the substance of what I have stated him to say by word of mouth."

"But why not then have returned to Paris? Such letters, at least, you might have shown, and in braving your calumniators you would have soon lived them down."

"You forget that I was a ruined man. When, by the sale of my horses, etc., my debts, including what was owed to the Duchesse, and which I remitted to the Duc, were discharged, the balance left to me would not have maintained me a week at Paris. Besides, I felt so sore, so indignant. Paris and the Parisians had become to me so hateful. And to crown all, that girl, that English girl whom I had so loved, on whose fidelity I had so counted--well, I received a letter from her, gently but coldly bidding me farewell forever. I do not think she believed me guilty of theft; but doubtless the offence I had confessed, in order to save the honour of the Duchesse, could but seem to her all sufficient! Broken in spirit, bleeding at heart to the very core, still self-destruction was no longer to be thought of. I would not die till I could once more lift up my head as Victor de Mauleon."

"What then became of you, my poor Victor?"

"Ah! that is a tale too long for recital. I have played so many parts that I am puzzled to recognize my own identity with the Victor de Mauleon whose name I abandoned. I have been a soldier in Algeria, and won my cross on the field of battle,--that cross and my colonel's letter are among my pieces justificatives; I have been a gold-digger in California, a speculator in New York, of late in callings obscure and humble. But in all my adventures, under whatever name, I have earned testimonials of probity, could manifestations of so vulgar a virtue be held of account by the enlightened people of Paris. I come now to a close. The Vicomte de Mauleon is about to re-appear in Paris, and the first to whom he announces that sublime avatar is Paul Louvier. When settled in some modest apartment, I shall place in your hands my pieces justificatives. I shall ask you to summon my surviving relations or connections, among which are the Counts de Vandemar, Beauvilliers, De Passy, and the Marquis de Rochebriant, with any friends of your own who sway the opinions of the Great World. You will place my justification before them, expressing your own opinion that it suffices; in a word, you will give me the sanction of your countenance. For the rest, I trust to myself to propitiate the kindly and to silence the calumnious. I have spoken; what say you?"

"You overrate my power in society. Why not appeal yourself to your high-born relations?"

"No, Louvier; I have too well considered the case to alter my decision. It is through you, and you alone, that I shall approach my relations. My vindicator must be a man of whom the vulgar cannot say, 'Oh, he is a relation,--a fellow-noble; those aristocrats whitewash each other.' It must be an authority with the public at large,--a bourgeois, a millionaire, a roi de la Bourse. I choose you, and that ends the discussion."

Louvier could not help laughing good-humouredly at the sang froid of the Vicomte. He was once more under the domination of a man who had for

a time dominated all with whom he lived.

De Mauleon continued: "Your task will be easy enough. Society changes rapidly at Paris. Few persons now exist who have more than a vague recollection of the circumstances which can be so easily explained to my complete vindication when the vindication comes from a man of your solid respectability and social influence. Besides, I have political objects in view. You are a Liberal; the Vandemars and Rochebriants are Legitimists. I prefer a godfather on the Liberal side. _Pardieu, mon ami_, why such coquettish hesitation? Said and done. Your hand on it."

"There is my hand then. I will do all I can to help you."

"I know you will, old friend; and you do both kindly and wisely." Here De Mauleon cordially pressed the hand he held, and departed.

On gaining the street, the Vicomte glided into a neighbouring courtyard, in which he had left his fiacre, and bade the coachman drive towards the Boulevard Sebastopol. On the way, he took from a small bag that he had left in the carriage the flaxen wig and pale whiskers which distinguished M. Lebeau, and mantled his elegant habiliments in an immense cloak, which he had also left in the fiacre. Arrived at the Boulevard Sebastopol, he drew up the collar of the cloak so as to conceal much of his face, stopped the driver, paid him quickly, and, bag in hand, hurried on to another stand of fiacres at a little distance, entered one, drove to the Faubourg Montmartre, dismissed the vehicle at the mouth of a street not far from M. Lebeau's office, and gained on foot the private side-door of the house, let himself in with his latchkey, entered the private room on the inner side of his office, locked the door, and proceeded leisurely to exchange the brilliant appearance which the Vicomte de Mauleon had borne on his visit to the millionaire for the sober raiment and bourgeois air of M. Lebeau, the letter-writer.

Then after locking up his former costume in a drawer of his secretaire, he sat himself down and wrote the following lines:--

DEAR MONSIEUR GEORGES,--I advise you strongly, from information that has just reached me, to lose no time in pressing M. Savarin to repay the sum I recommended you to lend him, and for which you hold his bill due this day. The scandal of legal measures against a writer so distinguished should be avoided if possible. He will avoid it and get the money somehow; but he must be urgently pressed. If you neglect this warning, my responsibility is past. _Agreez mes sentimens les plus sincerés_.

J. L.

CHAPTER II.

The Marquis de Rochebriant is no longer domiciled in an attic in the gloomy Faubourg. See him now in a charming _appartement de garcon an premier_ in the Rue du Helder, close by the promenades and haunts of the mode. It had been furnished and inhabited by a brilliant young provincial from Bordeaux, who, coming into an inheritance of one hundred thousand francs, had rushed up to Paris to enjoy himself, and make his million at the Bourse. He had enjoyed himself thoroughly,--he had been a darling of the _demi monde_; he had been a successful and an inconstant

gallant. Zélie had listened to his vows of eternal love, and his offers of unlimited cachemires; Desirée, succeeding Zélie, had assigned to him her whole heart--or all that was left of it--in gratitude for the ardour of his passion, and the diamonds and coupe which accompanied and attested the ardour; the superb Hortense, supplanting Desirée, received his visits in the charming apartment he furnished for her, and entertained him and his friends at the most delicate little suppers, for the moderate sum of four thousand francs a month. Yes, he had enjoyed himself thoroughly, but he had not made a million at the Bourse. Before the year was out, the one hundred thousand francs were gone. Compelled to return to his province, and by his hard-hearted relations ordained, on penalty of starvation, to marry the daughter of an avoué, for the sake of her dot and a share in the hated drudgery of the avoué's business,--his apartment was to be had for a tenth part of the original cost of its furniture. A certain Chevalier de Finisterre, to whom Louvier had introduced the Marquis as a useful fellow who knew Paris, and would save him from being cheated, had secured this bijou of an apartment for Alain, and concluded the bargain for the bagatelle of L500. The Chevalier took the same advantageous occasion to purchase the English well-bred hack and the neat coupe and horses which the Bordelais was also necessitated to dispose of. These purchases made, the Marquis had some five thousand francs (L200) left out of Louvier's premium of L1,000. The Marquis, however, did not seem alarmed or dejected by the sudden diminution of capital so expeditiously effected. The easy life thus commenced seemed to him too natural to be fraught with danger; and easy though it was, it was a very simple and modest sort of life compared with that of many other men of his age to whom Enguerrand had introduced him, though most of them had an income less than his, and few, indeed, of them were his equals in dignity of birth. Could a Marquis de Rochebriant, if he lived at Paris at all, give less than three thousand francs a year for his apartment, or mount a more humble establishment than that confined to a valet and a tiger, two horses for his coupe and one for the saddle? "Impossible," said the Chevalier de Finisterre, decidedly; and the Marquis bowed to so high an authority. He thought within himself, "If I find in a few months that I am exceeding my means, I can but dispose of my rooms and my horses, and return to Rochebriant a richer man by far than I left it."

To say truth, the brilliant seductions of Paris had already produced their effect, not only on the habits, but on the character and cast of thought, which the young noble had brought with him from the feudal and melancholy Bretagne.

Warmed by the kindness with which, once introduced by his popular kinsmen, he was everywhere received, the reserve or shyness which is the compromise between the haughtiness of self-esteem and the painful doubt of appreciation by others rapidly melted away. He caught insensibly the polished tone, at once so light and so cordial, of his new-made friends. With all the efforts of the democrats to establish equality and fraternity, it is among the aristocrats that equality and fraternity are most to be found. All gentilshommes in the best society are equals; and whether they embrace or fight each other, they embrace or fight as brothers of the same family. But with the tone of manners Alain de Rochebriant imbibed still more insensibly the lore of that philosophy which young idlers in pursuit of pleasure teach to each other. Probably in all civilized and luxurious capitals that philosophy is very much the same among the same class of idlers at the same age; probably it flourishes in Pekin not less than at Paris. If Paris has the credit, or discredit, of it more than any other capital, it is because in Paris more

than in any other capital it charms the eye by grace and amuses the ear by wit. A philosophy which takes the things of this life very easily; which has a smile and a shrug of the shoulders for any pretender to the Heroic; which subdivides the wealth of passion into the pocket-money of caprices, is always in or out of love ankle-deep, never venturing a plunge; which, light of heart as of tongue, turns "the solemn plausibilities" of earth into subjects for epigrams and bons mots,-- jests at loyalty to kings and turns up its nose at enthusiasm for commonwealths, abjures all grave studies and shuns all profound emotions. We have crowds of such philosophers in London; but there they are less noticed, because the agreeable attributes of the sect are there dimmed and obfuscated. It is not a philosophy that flowers richly in the reek of fogs and in the teeth of east winds; it wants for full development the light atmosphere of Paris. Now this philosophy began rapidly to exercise its charms upon Alain de Rochebriant. Even in the society of professed Legitimists, he felt that faith had deserted the Legitimist creed or taken refuge only as a companion of religion in the hearts of high-born women and a small minority of priests. His chivalrous loyalty still struggled to keep its ground, but its roots were very much loosened. He saw--for his natural intellect was keen--that the cause of the Bourbon was hopeless, at least for the present, because it had ceased, at least for the present, to be a cause. His political creed thus shaken, with it was shaken also that adherence to the past which had stifled his ambition of a future. That ambition began to breathe and to stir, though he owned it not to others, though, as yet, he scarce distinguished its whispers, much less directed its movements towards any definite object. Meanwhile, all that he knew of his ambition was the new-born desire for social success.

We see him, then, under the quick operation of this change in sentiments and habits, reclined on the _fauteuil_ before his fireside, and listening to his college friend, of whom we have so long lost sight, Frederic Lemercier. Frederic had breakfasted with Alain,--a breakfast such as might have contented the author of the "Almanach des Gourmands," and provided from the cafe Anglais. Frederic has just thrown aside his regalia.

"Pardieu! my dear Alain. If Louvier has no sinister object in the generosity of his dealings with you, he will have raised himself prodigiously in my estimation. I shall forsake, in his favour, my allegiance to Duplessis, though that clever fellow has just made a wondrous coup in the Egyptians, and I gain forty thousand francs by having followed his advice. But if Duplessis has a head as long as Louvier's, he certainly has not an equal greatness of soul. Still, my dear friend, will you pardon me if I speak frankly, and in the way of a warning homily?"

"Speak; you cannot oblige me more."

"Well, then, I know that you can no more live at Paris in the way you are doing, or mean to do, without some fresh addition to your income, than a lion could live in the Jardin des Plantes upon an allowance of two mice a week."

"I don't see that. Deducting what I pay to my aunt,--and I cannot get her to take more than six thousand francs a year,--I have seven hundred napoleons left, net and clear. My rooms and stables are equipped, and I have twenty-five hundred francs in hand. On seven hundred napoleons a year, I calculate that I can very easily live as I do; and if I fail--

well, I must return to Pochebriant. Seven hundred napoleons a year will be a magnificent rental there."

Frederic shook his head. "You do not know how one expense leads to another. Above all, you do not calculate the chief part of one's expenditure,--the unforeseen. You will play at the Jockey Club, and lose half your income in a night."

"I shall never touch a card."

"So you say now, innocent as a lamb of the force of example. At all events, *_beau seigneur_*, I presume you are not going to resuscitate the part of the *Ermite de la Chaussee d'Antin*; and the fair *Parisiennes* are demons of extravagance."

"Demons whom I shall not court."

"Did I say you would? They will court you. Before another month has flown you will be inundated with *billets-doux*."

"It is not a shower that will devastate my humble harvest. But, *mon cher*, we are falling upon very gloomy topics. *_Laissez-moi tranquille_* in my illusions, if illusions they be. Ah, you cannot conceive what a new life opens to the man who, like myself, has passed the dawn of his youth in privation and fear, when he suddenly acquires competence and hope. If it lasts only a year, it will be something to say 'Vixi.'"

"Alain," said Frederic; very earnestly, "believe me, I should not have assumed the ungracious and inappropriate task of Mentor, if it were only a year's experience at stake, or if you were in the position of men like myself,--free from the encumbrance of a great name and heavily mortgaged lands. Should you fail to pay regularly the interest due to Louvier, he has the power to put up at public auction, and there to buy in for himself, your chateau and domain."

"I am aware that in strict law he would have such power, though I doubt if he would use it. Louvier is certainly a much better and more generous fellow than I could have expected; and if I believe De Finisterre, he has taken a sincere liking to me on account of affection to my poor father. But why should not the interest be paid regularly? The revenues from Rochebriant are not likely to decrease, and the charge on them is lightened by the contract with Louvier. And I will confide to you a hope I entertain of a very large addition to my rental."

"How?"

"A chief part of my rental is derived from forests, and De Finisterre has heard of a capitalist who is disposed to make a contract for their sale at the fall this year, and may probably extend it to future years, at a price far exceeding that which I have hitherto obtained."

"Pray be cautious. De Finisterre is not a man I should implicitly trust in such matters."

"Why? Do you know anything against him? He is in the best society,--perfect gentleman,--and, as his name may tell you, a fellow-Breton. You yourself allow, and so does Enguerrand, that the purchases he made for me--in this apartment, my horses, etc.--are singularly advantageous."

"Quite true; the Chevalier is reputed sharp and clever, is said to be very amusing, and a first-rate piquet-player. I don't know him personally,--I am not in his set. I have no valid reason to disparage his character, nor do I conjecture any motive he could have to injure or mislead you. Still, I say, be cautious how far you trust to his advice or recommendation."

"Again I ask why?"

"He is unlucky to his friends. He attaches himself much to men younger than himself; and somehow or other I have observed that most of them have come to grief. Besides, a person in whose sagacity I have great confidence warned me against making the Chevalier's acquaintance, and said to me, in his blunt way, 'De Finisterre came to Paris with nothing; he has succeeded to nothing; he belongs to no ostensible profession by which anything can be made. But evidently now he has picked up a good deal; and in proportion as any young associate of his becomes poorer, De Finisterre seems mysteriously to become richer. Shun that sort of acquaintance.'"

"Who is your sagacious adviser!"

"Duplessis."

"Ah, I thought so. That bird of prey fancies every other bird looking out for pigeons. I fancy that Duplessis is, like all those money-getters, a seeker after fashion, and De Finisterre has not returned his bow."

"My dear Alain, I am to blame; nothing is so irritating as a dispute about the worth of the men we like. I began it, now let it be dropped; only make me one promise,--that if you should be in arrear, or if need presses, you will come at once to me. It was very well to be absurdly proud in an attic, but that pride will be out of place in your _appartement au premier_."

"You are the best fellow in the world, Frederic, and I make you the promise you ask," said Alain, cheerfully, but yet with a secret emotion of tenderness and gratitude. "And now, _mon cher_, what day will you dine with me to meet Raoul and Enguerrand, and some others whom you would like to know?"

"Thanks, and hearty ones, but we move now in different spheres, and I shall not trespass on yours. _Je suis trop bourgeois_ to incur the ridicule of _le bourgeois gentilhomme_."

"Frederic, how dare you speak thus? My dear fellow, my friends shall honour you as I do."

"But that will be on your account, not mine. No; honestly that kind of society neither tempts nor suits me. I am a sort of king in my own walk; and I prefer my Bohemian royalty to vassalage in higher regions. Say no more of it. It will flatter my vanity enough if you will now and then descend to my coteries, and allow me to parade a Rochebriant as my familiar crony, slap him on the shoulder, and call him Alain."

"Fie! you who stopped me and the English aristocrat in the Champs Elysees, to humble us with your boast of having fascinated _une grande dame_,--I think you said a duchesse."

"Oh," said Lemercier, conceitedly, and passing his hand through his scented locks, "women are different; love levels all ranks. I don't blame Ruy Blas for accepting the love of a queen, but I do blame him for passing himself off as a noble,--a plagiarism, by the by, from an English play. I do not love the English enough to copy them. *_A propos_*, what has become of *_ce beau_* Garm Varn? I have not seen him of late."

"Neither have I."

"Nor the belle Italienne?"

"Nor her," said Alain, slightly blushing.

At this moment Enguerrand lounged into the room. Alain stopped Lemercier to introduce him to his kinsman. "Enguerrand, I present to you M. Lemercier, my earliest and one of my dearest friends."

The young noble held out his hand with the bright and joyous grace which accompanied all his movements, and expressed in cordial words his delight to make M. Lemercier's acquaintance. Bold and assured as Frederic was in his own circles, he was more discomposed than set at ease by the gracious accost of a lion, whom he felt at once to be of a breed superior to his own. He muttered some confused phrases, in which *_ravi_* and *_flatte_* were alone audible, and vanished.

"I know M. Lemercier by sight very well," said Enguerrand, seating himself. "One sees him very often in the Bois; and I have met him in the *_Coulisses_* and the *_Bal Mabilille_*. I think, too, that he plays at the Bourse, and is *_lie_* with M. Duplessis, who bids fair to rival Louvier one of these days. Is Duplessis also one of your dearest friends?"

"No, indeed. I once met him, and was not prepossessed in his favour."

"Nevertheless, he is a man much to be admired and respected."

"Why so?"

"Because he understands so well the art of making what we all covet,--money. I will introduce you to him."

"I have been already introduced."

"Then I will re-introduce you. He is much courted in a society which I have recently been permitted by my father to frequent,--the society, of the Imperial Court."

"You frequent that society, and the Count permits it?"

"Yes; better the Imperialists than the Republicans; and my father begins to own that truth, though he is too old or too indolent to act on it."

"And Raoul?"

"Oh, Raoul, the melancholy and philosophical Raoul, has no ambition of any kind, so long as--thanks somewhat to me--his purse is always replenished for the wants of his stately existence, among the foremost of which wants are the means to supply the wants of others. That is the true reason why he consents to our glove-shop. Raoul belongs, with some

other young men of the Faubourg, to a society enrolled under the name of Saint Francois de Sales, for the relief of the poor. He visits their houses, and is at home by their sickbeds as at their stunted boards. Nor does he confine his visitations to the limits of our Faubourg; he extends his travels to Montmartre and Belleville. As to our upper world, he does not concern himself much with its changes. He says that we have destroyed too much ever to rebuild solidly; and that whatever we do build could be upset any day by a Paris mob, which he declares to be the only institution we have left. A wonderful fellow is Raoul,--full of mind, though he does little with it; full of heart, which he devotes to suffering humanity, and to a poetic, knightly reverence (not to be confounded with earthly love, and not to be degraded into that sickly sentiment called Platonic affection) for the Comtesse di Rimini, who is six years older than himself, and who is very faithfully attached to her husband, Raoul's intimate friend, whose honour he would guard as his own. It is an episode in the drama of Parisian life, and one not so uncommon as the malignant may suppose. Di Rimini knows and approves of his veneration; my mother, the best of women, sanctions it, and deems truly that it preserves Raoul safe from all the temptations to which ignobler youth is exposed. I mention this lest you should imagine there was anything in Raoul's worship of his star less pure than it is. For the rest, Raoul, to the grief and amazement of that disciple of Voltaire, my respected father, is one of the very few men I know in our circles who is sincerely religious,--an orthodox Catholic,--and the only man I know who practises the religion he professes; charitable, chaste, benevolent; and no bigot, no intolerant ascetic. His only weakness is his entire submission to the worldly common-sense of his good-for-nothing, covetous, ambitious brother Enguerrand. I cannot say how I love him for that. If he had not such a weakness, his excellence would gall me, and I believe I should hate him."

Alain bowed his head at this eulogium. Such had been the character that a few months ago he would have sought as example and model. He seemed to gaze upon a flattered portrait of himself as he had been.

"But," said Enguerrand, "I have not come here to indulge in the overflow of brotherly affection. I come to take you to your relation, the Duchesse of Tarascon. I have pledged myself to her to bring you, and she is at home on purpose to receive you."

"In that case I cannot be such a churl as to refuse. And, indeed, I no longer feel quite the same prejudices against her and the Imperialists as I brought from Bretagne. Shall I order my carriage?"

"No; mine is at the door. Yours can meet you where you will, later.
Allons."

CHAPTER III.

The Duchesse de Tarascon occupied a vast apartment in the Rue Royale, close to the Tuileries. She held a high post among the ladies who graced the brilliant court of the Empress. She had survived her second husband the duke, who left no issue, and the title died with him.

Alain and Enguerrand were ushered up the grand staircase, lined with tiers of costly exotics as if for a fete; but in that and in all kinds of

female luxury, the Duchesse lived in a state of *fete perpetuelle*. The doors on the landing-place were screened by heavy portieres of Genoa velvet, richly embroidered in gold with the ducal crown and cipher. The two salons through which the visitors passed to the private cabinet or boudoir were decorated with Gobelin tapestries, fresh, with a mixture of roseate hues, and depicting incidents in the career of the first emperor; while the effigies of the late duke's father--the gallant founder of a short-lived race figured modestly in the background. On a table of Russian malachite within the recess of the central window lay, preserved in glass cases, the baton and the sword, the epaulettes and the decorations of the brave Marshal. On the consoles and the mantelpieces stood clocks and vases of Sevres that could scarcely be eclipsed by those in the Imperial palaces. Entering the cabinet, they found the Duchesse seated at her writing-table, with a small Skye terrier, hideous in the beauty of the purest breed, nestled at her feet. This room was an exquisite combination of costliness and comfort,--Luxury at home. The hangings were of geranium-coloured silk, with double curtains of white satin; near to the writing-table a conservatory, with a white marble fountain at play in the centre, and a trellised aviary at the back. The walls were covered with small pictures,--chiefly portraits and miniatures of the members of the imperial family, of the late Duc, of his father the Marshal and Madame la Marechale, of the present Duchesse herself, and of some of the principal ladies of the court.

The Duchesse was still in the prime of life. She had passed her fortieth year, but was so well "conserved" that you might have guessed her to be ten years younger. She was tall; not large, but with rounded figure inclined to *en bon point*; with dark hair and eyes, but fair complexion, injured in effect rather than improved by pearl-powder, and that atrocious barbarism of a dark stain on the eyelids which has of late years been a baneful fashion; dressed,--I am a man, and cannot describe her dress; all I know is that she had the acknowledged fame of the best-dressed subject of France. As she rose from her seat there was in her look and air the unmistakable evidence of grande dame,--a family likeness in feature to Alain himself, a stronger likeness to the picture of her first cousin (his mother) which was preserved at Rochebriant. Her descent was indeed from ancient and noble houses. But to the distinction of race she added that of fashion, crowning both with a tranquil consciousness of lofty position and unblemished reputation.

"Unnatural cousin!" she said to Alain, offering her hand to him, with a gracious smile,--"all this age in Paris, and I see you for the first time. But there is joy on earth as in heaven over sinners who truly repent. You repent truly--n'est ce pas?"

It is impossible to describe the caressing charm which the Duchesse threw into her words, voice, and look. Alain was fascinated and subdued.

"Ah, Madame la Duchesse," said he, bowing over the fait hand he lightly held, "it was not sin, unless modesty be a sin, which made a rustic hesitate long before he dared to offer his homage to the queen of the graces."

"Not badly said for a rustic," cried Enguerrand; "eh, Madame?"

"My cousin, you are pardoned," said the Duchesse. "Compliment is the perfume of *gentilhomme*; and if you brought enough of that perfume from the flowers of Rochebriant to distribute among the ladies at court,

you will be terribly the mode there. Seducer!"--here she gave the Marquis a playful tap on the cheek, not in a coquettish but in a mother-like familiarity, and looking at him attentively, said: "Why, you are even handsomer than your father. I shall be proud to present to their Imperial Majesties so becoming a cousin. But seat yourselves here, Messieurs, close to my arm-chair, _caussons_."

The Duchesse then took up the ball of the conversation. She talked without any apparent artifice, but with admirable tact; put just the questions about Rochebriant most calculated to please Alain, shunning all that might have pained him; asking him for descriptions of the surrounding scenery, the Breton legends; hoping that the old castle would never be spoiled by modernizing restorations; inquiring tenderly after his aunt, whom she had in her childhood once seen, and still remembered with her sweet, grave face; paused little for replies; then turned to Enguerrand with sprightly small-talk on the topics of the day, and every now and then bringing Alain into the pale of the talk, leading on insensibly until she got Enguerrand himself to introduce the subject of the emperor, and the political troubles which were darkening a reign heretofore so prosperous and splendid.

Her countenance then changed; it became serious, and even grave in its expression.

"It is true," she said, "that the times grow menacing, menacing not only to the throne, but to order and property and France. One by one they are removing all the breakwaters which the empire had constructed between the executive and the most fickle and impulsive population that ever shouted 'long live' one day to the man whom they would send to the guillotine the next. They are denouncing what they call personal government. Grant that it has its evils; but what would they substitute,--a constitutional monarchy like the English? That is impossible with universal suffrage and without an hereditary chamber. The nearest approach to it was the monarchy of Louis Philippe,--we know how sick they became of that. A republic?--mon Dieu! composed of Republicans terrified out of their wits at each other. The moderate men, mimics of the Girondins, with the Reds and the Socialists and the Communists, ready to tear them to pieces. And then--What then?--the commercialists, the agriculturists, the middle class combining to elect some dictator who will cannonade the mob and become a mimic Napoleon, grafted on a mimic Necker or a mimic Danton. Oh, Messieurs, I am French to the core. You inheritors of such names must be as French as I am; and yet you men insist on remaining more useless to France in the midst of her need than I am,--I, a woman who can but talk and weep."

The Duchesse spoke with a warmth of emotion which startled and profoundly affected Alain. He remained silent, leaving it to Enguerrand to answer.

"Dear Madame," said the latter, "I do not see how either myself or our kinsman can merit your reproach. We are not legislators. I doubt if there is a single department in France that would elect us, if we offered ourselves. It is not our fault if the various floods of revolution leave men of our birth and opinions stranded wrecks of a perished world. The emperor chooses his own advisers, and if they are bad ones, his Majesty certainly will not ask Alain and me to replace them."

"You do not answer--you evade me," said the Duchesse; with a mournful smile. "You are too skilled a man of the world, Monsieur Enguerrand, not to know that it is not only legislators and ministers that are necessary

to the support of a throne, and the safeguard of a nation. Do you not see how great a help it is to both throne and nation when that section of public opinion which is represented by names illustrious in history, identified with records of chivalrous deeds and loyal devotion, rallies round the order established? Let that section of public opinion stand

aloof, soured and discontented, excluded from active life, lending no counter-balance to the perilous oscillations of democratic passion, and tell me if it is not an enemy to itself as well as a traitor to the principles it embodies?"

"The principles it embodies, Madame," said Alain, "are those of fidelity to a race of kings unjustly set aside, less for the vices than the virtues of ancestors. Louis XV. was the worst of the Bourbons,--he was the *bien aime*: he escapes. Louis XVI. was in moral attributes the best of the Bourbons,--he dies the death of a felon. Louis XVIII., against whom much may be said, restored to the throne by foreign bayonets, reigning as a disciple of Voltaire might reign, secretly scoffing alike at the royalty and the religion which were crowned in his person, dies peacefully in his bed. Charles X., redeeming the errors of his youth by a reign untarnished by a vice, by a religion earnest and sincere, is sent into exile for defending established order from the very inroads which you lament. He leaves an heir against whom calumny cannot invent a tale, and that heir remains an outlaw simply because he descends from Henry IV., and has a right to reign. Madame, you appeal to us as among the representatives of the chivalrous deeds and loyal devotion which characterized the old nobility of France. Should we deserve that character if we forsook the unfortunate, and gained wealth and honour in forsaking?"

"Your words endear you to me. I am proud to call you cousin," said the Duchesse. "But do you, or does any man in his senses believe that if you upset the Empire you could get back the Bourbons; that you would not be in imminent danger of a Government infinitely more opposed to the theories on which rests the creed of Legitimists than that of Louis Napoleon? After all, what is there in the loyalty of you Bourbonites that has in it the solid worth of an argument which can appeal to the comprehension of mankind, except it be the principle of a hereditary monarchy? Nobody nowadays can maintain the right divine of a single regal family to impose itself upon a nation. That dogma has ceased to be a living principle; it is only a dead reminiscence. But the institution of monarchy is a principle strong and vital, and appealing to the practical interests of vast sections of society. Would you sacrifice the principle which concerns the welfare of millions, because you cannot embody it in the person of an individual utterly insignificant in himself? In a word, if you prefer monarchy to the hazard of republicanism for such a country as France, accept the monarchy you find, since it is quite clear you cannot rebuild the monarchy you would prefer. Does it not embrace all the great objects for which you call yourself Legitimist? Under it religion is honoured, a national Church secured, in reality if not in name; under it you have united the votes of millions to the establishment of the throne; under it all the material interests of the country, commercial, agricultural, have advanced with an unequalled rapidity of progress; under it Paris has become the wonder of the world for riches, for splendour, for grace and beauty; under it the old traditional enemies of France have been humbled and rendered impotent. The policy of Richelieu has been achieved in the abasement of Austria; the policy of Napoleon I. has been consummated in the salvation of Europe from the semi-barbarous ambition of Russia. England no longer casts her

trident in the opposition scale of the balance of European power. Satisfied with the honour of our alliance, she has lost every other ally; and her forces neglected, her spirit enervated, her statesmen dreaming believers in the safety of their island, provided they withdraw from the affairs of Europe, may sometimes scold us, but will certainly not dare to fight. With France she is but an inferior satellite; without France she is--nothing. Add to all this a court more brilliant than that of Louis XIV., a sovereign not indeed without faults and errors, but singularly mild in his nature, warm-hearted to friends, forgiving to foes, whom personally no one could familiarly know and not be charmed with a bonte of character, lovable as that of Henri IV.,--and tell me what more than all this could you expect from the reign of a Bourbon?"

"With such results," said Alain, "from the monarchy you so eloquently praise, I fail to discover what the emperor's throne could possibly gain by a few powerless converts from an unpopular, and you say, no doubt truly, from a hopeless cause."

"I say monarchy gains much by the loyal adhesion of any man of courage, ability, and honour. Every new monarchy gains much by conversions from the ranks by which the older monarchies were strengthened and adorned. But I do not here invoke your aid merely to this monarchy, my cousin; I demand your devotion to the interests of France; I demand that you should not rest an outlaw from her service. Ah, you think that France is in no danger, that you may desert or oppose the Empire as you list, and that society will remain safe! You are mistaken. Ask Enguerrand."

"Madame," said Enguerrand, "you overrate my political knowledge in that appeal; but, honestly speaking, I subscribe to your reasonings. I agree with you that the empire sorely needs the support of men of honour; it has one cause of rot which now undermines it,--dishonest jobbery in its administrative departments; even in that of the army, which apparently is so heeded and cared for. I agree with you that France is in danger, and may need the swords of all her better sons, whether against the foreigner or against her worst enemies,--the mobs of her great towns. I myself received a military education, and but for my reluctance to separate myself from my father and Raoul, I should be a candidate for employments more congenial to me than those of the Bourse and my trade in the glove-shop. But Alain is happily free from all family ties, and Alain knows that my advice to him is not hostile to your exhortations."

"I am glad to think he is under so salutary an influence," said the Duchesse; and seeing that Alain remained silent and thoughtful, she wisely changed the subject, and shortly afterwards the two friends took leave.

CHAPTER IV.

Three days elapsed before Graham again saw M. Lebeau. The letter-writer did not show himself at the cafe, and was not to be found at his office, the ordinary business of which was transacted by his clerk, saying that his master was much engaged on important matters that took him from home.

Graham naturally thought that these matters concerned the discovery of Louise Duval, and was reconciled to suspense. At the cafe, awaiting Lebeau, he had slid into some acquaintance with the ouvrier Armand

Monnier, whose face and talk had before excited his interest. Indeed, the acquaintance had been commenced by the _ouvrier_, who seated himself at a table near to Graham's, and, after looking at him earnestly for some minutes, said, "You are waiting for your antagonist at dominos, M. Lebeau,--a very remarkable man."

"So he seems. I know, however, but little of him. You, perhaps, have known him longer?"

"Several months. Many of your countrymen frequent this cafe, but you do not seem to care to associate with the blouses."

"It is not that; but we islanders are shy, and don't make acquaintance with each other readily. By the way, since you so courteously accost me, I may take the liberty of saying that I overheard you defend the other night, against one of my countrymen, who seemed to me to talk great nonsense, the existence of le bon Dieu. You had much the best of it. I rather gathered from your argument that you went somewhat further, and were not too enlightened to admit of Christianity."

Armand Monnier looked pleased. He liked praise; and he liked to hear himself talk, and he plunged at once into a very complicated sort of Christianity,--partly Arian, partly Saint Simonian, with a little of Rousseau and a great deal of Armand Monnier. Into this we need not follow him; but, in sum, it was a sort of Christianity, the main heads of which consisted in the removal of your neighbour's landmarks, in the right of the poor to appropriate the property of the rich, in the right of love to dispense with marriage, and the duty of the State to provide for any children that might result from such union,--the parents being incapacitated to do so, as whatever they might leave was due to the treasury in common. Graham listened to these doctrines with melancholy not unmixed with contempt. "Are these opinions of yours," he asked, "derived from reading or your own reflection?"

"Well, from both, but from circumstances in life that induced me to read and reflect. I am one of the many victims of the tyrannical law of marriage. When very young I married a woman who made me miserable, and then forsook me. Morally, she has ceased to be my wife; legally, she is. I then met with another woman who suits me, who loves me. She lives with me; I cannot marry her; she has to submit to humiliations, to be called contemptuously an _ouvrier's_ mistress. Then, though before I was only a Republican, I felt there was something wrong in society which needed a greater change than that of a merely political government; and then, too, when I was all troubled and sore, I chanced to read one of Madame de Grantmesnil's books. A glorious genius that woman's!"

"She has genius, certainly," said Graham, with a keen pang at his heart, --Madame de Grantmesnil, the dearest friend of Isaura! "But," he added, "though I believe that eloquent author has indirectly assailed certain social institutions, including that of marriage, I am perfectly persuaded that she never designed to effect such complete overthrow of the system which all civilized communities have hitherto held in reverence as your doctrines would attempt; and, after all, she but expresses her ideas through the medium of fabulous incidents and characters. And men of your sense should not look for a creed in the fictions of poets and romance-writers."

"Ah," said Monnier, "I dare say neither Madame de Grantmesnil nor even Rousseau ever even guessed the ideas they awoke in their readers; but one

idea leads on to another. And genuine poetry and romance touch the heart so much more than dry treatises. In a word, Madame de Grantmesnil's book set me thinking; and then I read other books, and talked with clever men, and educated myself. And so I became the man I am." Here, with a self-satisfied air, Monnier bowed to the Englishman, and joined a group at the other end of the room.

The next evening, just before dusk, Graham Vane was seated musingly in his own apartment in the Faubourg Montmartre, when there came a slight knock at his door. He was so wrapped in thought that he did not hear the sound, though twice repeated. The door opened gently, and M. Lebeau appeared on the threshold. The room was lighted only by the gas-lamp from the street without.

Lebeau advanced through the gloom, and quietly seated himself in the corner of the fireplace opposite to Graham before he spoke. "A thousand pardons for disturbing your slumbers, Monsieur Lamb."

Startled then by the voice so near him, Graham raised his head, looked round, and beheld very indistinctly the person seated so near him.

"Monsieur Lebeau?"

"At your service. I promise to give an answer to your question; accept my apologies that it has been deferred so long. I shall not this evening go to our cafe. I took the liberty of calling--"

"Monsieur Lebeau, you are a brick."

"A what, Monsieur!--a brique?"

"I forgot; you are not up to our fashionable London idioms. A brick means a jolly fellow, and it is very kind in you to call. What is your decision?"

"Monsieur, I can give you some information, but it is so slight that I offer it gratis, and forego all thought of undertaking further inquiries. They could only be prosecuted in another country, and it would not be worth my while to leave Paris on the chance of gaining so trifling a reward as you propose. Judge for yourself. In the year 1849, and in the month of July, Louise Duval left Paris for Aix-la-Chapelle. There she remained some weeks, and then left it. I can learn no further traces of her movements."

"Aix-la-Chapelle! What could she do there?"

"It is a Spa in great request; crowded during the summer season with visitors from all countries. She might have gone there for health or for pleasure."

"Do you think that one could learn more at the Spa itself if one went there?"

"Possibly. But it is so long,--twenty years ago."

"She might have revisited the place."

"Certainly; but I know no more."

"Was she there under the same name,--Duval?"

"I am sure of that."

"Do you think she left it alone or with others? You tell me she was awfully belle; she might have attracted admirers."

"If," answered Lebeau, reluctantly, "I could believe the report of my informant, Louise Duval left Aix not alone, but with some gallant; not an Englishman. They are said to have parted soon, and the man is now dead. But, speaking frankly, I do not think Mademoiselle Duval would have thus compromised her honour and sacrificed her future. I believe she would have scorned all proposals that were not those of marriage. But all I can say for certainty is that nothing is known to me of her fate since she quitted Aix-la-Chapelle."

"In 1849? She had then a child living."

"A child? I never heard that she had any child; and I do not believe she could have had any child in 1849."

Graham mused. Somewhat less than five years after 1849 Louise Duval had been seen at Aix-la-Chapelle. Possibly she found some attraction at that place, and might yet be discovered there. "Monsieur Lebeau," said Graham, "you know this lady by sight; you would recognize her in spite of the lapse of years. Will you go to Aix and find out there what you can? Of course, expenses will be paid, and the reward will be given if you succeed."

"I cannot oblige you. My interest in this poor lady is not very strong, though I should be willing to serve her, and glad to know that she were alive. I have now business on hand which interests me much more, and which will take me from Paris, but not in the direction of Aix."

"If I wrote to my employer, and got him to raise the reward to some higher amount, that might make it worth your while?"

"I should still answer that my affairs will not permit such a journey. But if there be any chance of tracing Louise Duval at Aix,--and there may be,--you would succeed quite as well as I should. You must judge for yourself if it be worth your trouble to attempt such a task; and if you do attempt it, and do succeed, pray let me know.--A line to my office will reach me for some little time, even if I am absent from Paris. Adieu, Monsieur Lamb."

Here M. Lebeau rose and departed.

Graham relapsed into thought; but a train of thought much more active, much more concentrated than before. "No," thus ran his meditations,--"no, it would not be safe to employ that man further. The reasons that forbid me to offer any very high reward for the discovery of this woman operate still more strongly against tendering to her own relation a sum that might indeed secure his aid, but would unquestionably arouse his suspicions, and perhaps drag into light all that must be concealed. Oh, this cruel mission! I am, indeed, an impostor to myself till it be fulfilled. I will go to Aix, and take Renard with me. I am impatient till I set out, but I cannot quit Paris without once more seeing Isaura. She consents to relinquish the stage; surely I could wean her too from intimate friendship with a woman whose genius has so fatal an effect upon

enthusiastic minds. And then--and then?"

He fell into a delightful reverie; and contemplating Isaura as his future wife, he surrounded her sweet image with all those attributes of dignity and respect with which an Englishman is accustomed to invest the destined bearer of his name, the gentle sovereign of his household, the sacred mother of his children. In this picture the more brilliant qualities of Isaura found, perhaps, but faint presentation. Her glow of sentiment, her play of fancy, her artistic yearnings for truths remote, for the invisible fairyland of beautiful romance, receded into the background of the picture. It was all these, no doubt, that had so strengthened and enriched the love at first sight, which had shaken the equilibrium of his positive existence; and yet he now viewed all these as subordinate to the one image of mild decorous matronage into which wedlock was to transform the child of genius, longing for angel wings and unlimited space.

CHAPTER V.

On quitting the sorry apartment of the false M. Lamb, Lebeau walked on with slow steps and bended head, like a man absorbed in thought. He threaded a labyrinth of obscure streets, no longer in the Faubourg Montmartre, and dived at last into one of the few courts which preserve the cachet of the moyen age untouched by the ruthless spirit of improvement which during the second empire has so altered the face of Paris. At the bottom of the court stood a large house, much dilapidated, but bearing the trace of former grandeur in pilasters and fretwork in the style of the Renaissance, and a defaced coat of arms, surmounted with a ducal coronet, over the doorway. The house had the aspect of desertion: many of the windows were broken; others were jealously closed with mouldering shutters. The door stood ajar; Lebeau pushed it open, and the action set in movement a bell within a porter's lodge. The house, then, was not uninhabited; it retained the dignity of a concierge. A man with a large grizzled beard cut square, and holding a journal in his hand, emerged from the lodge, and moved his cap with a certain bluff and surly reverence on recognizing Lebeau.

"What! so early, citizen?"

"Is it too early?" said Lebeau, glancing at his watch. "So it is; I was not aware of the time. But I am tired with waiting; let me into the salon. I will wait for the rest; I shall not be sorry for a little repose."

"Bon," said the porter, sententiously; "while man reposes men advance."

"A profound truth, citizen Le Roux; though if they advance on a reposing foe, they have blundering leaders unless they march through unguarded by-paths and with noiseless tread."

Following the porter up a dingy broad staircase, Lebeau was admitted into a large room, void of all other furniture than a table, two benches at its sides, and a fauteuil at its head. On the mantelpiece there was a huge clock, and some iron sconces were fixed on the panelled walls.

Lebeau flung himself, with a wearied air, into the fauteuil. The porter looked at him with a kindly expression. He had a liking to Lebeau, whom

he had served in his proper profession of messenger or commissionaire before being placed by that courteous employer in the easy post he now held. Lebeau, indeed, had the art, when he pleased, of charming inferiors; his knowledge of mankind allowed him to distinguish peculiarities in each individual, and flatter the amour propre by deference to such eccentricities. Marc le Roux, the roughest of "red caps," had a wife of whom he was very proud. He would have called the empress Citoyenne Eugenie, but he always spoke of his wife as Madame. Lebeau won his heart by always asking after Madame.

"You look tired, citizen," said the porter; "let me bring you a glass of wine."

"Thank you, mon ami, no. Perhaps later, if I have time, after we break up, to pay my respects to Madame."

The porter smiled, bowed, and retired muttering, "Nom d'un petit bonhomme; il n'y a rien de tel que les belles manieres."

Left alone, Lebeau leaned his elbow on the table, resting his chin on his hand, and gazing into the dim space,--for it was now, indeed, night, and little light came through the grimy panes of the one window left unclosed by shutters. He was musing deeply. This man was, in much, an enigma to himself. Was he seeking to unriddle it? A strange compound of contradictory elements. In his stormy youth there had been lightning-like flashes of good instincts, of irregular honour, of inconsistent generosity,--a puissant wild nature, with strong passions of love and of hate, without fear, but not without shame. In other forms of society that love of applause which had made him seek and exult in the notoriety which he mistook for fame might have settled down into some solid and useful ambition. He might have become great in the world's eye, for at the service of his desires there were no ordinary talents. Though too true a Parisian to be a severe student, still, on the whole, he had acquired much general information, partly from books, partly from varied commerce with mankind. He had the gift, both by tongue and by pen, of expressing himself with force and warmth; time and necessity had improved that gift. Coveting, during his brief career of fashion, the distinctions which necessitate lavish expenditure, he had been the most reckless of spendthrifts; but the neediness which follows waste had never destroyed his original sense of personal honour. Certainly Victor de Mauleon was not, at the date of his fall, a man to whom the thought of accepting, much less of stealing, the jewels of a woman who loved him could have occurred as a possible question of casuistry between honour and temptation. Nor could that sort of question have, throughout the sternest trials or the humblest callings to which his after-life had been subjected, forced admission into his brain. He was one of those men, perhaps the most terrible though unconscious criminals, who are the offsprings produced by intellectual power and egotistical ambition. If you had offered to Victor de Mauleon the crown of the Caesars, on condition of his doing one of those base things which "a gentleman" cannot do, pick a pocket, cheat at cards,--Victor de Mauleon would have refused the crown. He would not have refused on account of any laws of morality affecting the foundations of the social system, but from the pride of his own personality. "I, Victor de Mauleon! I pick a pocket! I cheat at cards! I!" But when something incalculably worse for the interests of society than picking a pocket or cheating at cards was concerned; when for the sake either of private ambition or political experiment hitherto untested, and therefore very doubtful, the peace and order and happiness of millions might be exposed to the release of the

most savage passions, rushing on revolutionary madness or civil massacre, then this French dare-devil would have been just as unscrupulous as any English philosopher whom a metropolitan borough might elect as its representative. The system of the empire was in the way of Victor de Mauleon,—in the way of his private ambition, in the way of his political dogmas; and therefore it must be destroyed, no matter what nor whom it crushed beneath its ruins. He was one of those plotters of revolutions not uncommon in democracies, ancient and modern, who invoke popular agencies with the less scruple because they have a supreme contempt for the populace. A man with mental powers equal to De Mauleon's, and who sincerely loves the people and respects the grandeur of aspiration with which, in the great upheaving of their masses, they so often contrast the irrational credulities of their ignorance and the blind fury of their wrath, is always exceedingly loath to pass the terrible gulf that divides reform from revolution. He knows how rarely it happens that genuine liberty is not disarmed in the passage, and what sufferings must be undergone by those who live by their labour during the dismal intervals between the sudden destruction of one form of society and the gradual settlement of another. Such a man, however, has no type in a Victor de Mauleon. The circumstances of his life had placed this strong nature at war with society, and corrupted into misanthropy affections that had once been ardent. That misanthropy made his ambition more intense, because it increased his scorn for the human instruments it employed.

Victor de Mauleon knew that however innocent of the charges that had so long darkened his name, and however—thanks to his rank, his manners, his savoir vivre, the aid of Louvier's countenance and the support of his own high-born connections—he might restore himself to his rightful grade in private life, the higher prizes in public life would scarcely be within reach, to a man of his antecedents and stunted means, in the existent form and conditions of established political order. Perforce, the aristocrat must make himself democrat if he would become a political chief. Could he assist in turning upside down the actual state of things, he trusted to his individual force of character to find himself among the uppermost in the general _bouleversement_. And in the first stage of popular revolution the mob has no greater darling than the noble who deserts his order, though in the second stage it may guillotine him at the denunciation of his cobbler. A mind so sanguine and so audacious as that of Victor de Mauleon never thinks of the second step if it sees a way to the first.

CHAPTER VI.

The room was in complete darkness, save where a ray from a gas-lamp at the mouth of the court came aslant through the window, when citizen Le Roux re-entered, closed the window, lighted two of the sconces, and drew forth from a drawer in the table implements of writing, which he placed thereon noiselessly, as if he feared to disturb M. Lebeau, whose head, buried in his hands, rested on the table. He seemed in a profound sleep. At last the porter gently touched the arm of the slumberer, and whispered in his ear, "It is on the stroke of ten, citizen; they will be here in a minute or so." Lebeau lifted his head drowsily.

"Eh," said he—"what?"

"You have been asleep."

"I suppose so, for I have been dreaming. Ha! I hear the door-bell. I am wide awake now."

The porter left him, and in a few minutes conducted into the salon two men wrapped in cloaks, despite the warmth of the summer night. Lebeau shook hands with them silently, and not less silently they laid aside their cloaks and seated themselves. Both these men appeared to belong to the upper section of the middle class. One, strongly built, with a keen expression of countenance, was a surgeon considered able in his profession, but with limited practice, owing to a current suspicion against his honour in connection with a forged will. The other, tall, meagre, with long grizzled hair and a wild unsettled look about the eyes, was a man of science; had written works well esteemed upon mathematics and electricity, also against the existence of any other creative power than that which he called "nebulosity," and defined to be the combination of heat and moisture. The surgeon was about the age of forty, the atheist a few years older. In another minute or so, a knock was heard against the wall. One of the men rose and touched a spring in the panel, which then flew back, and showed an opening upon a narrow stair, by which, one after the other, entered three other members of the society. Evidently there was more than one mode of ingress and exit.

The three new-comers were not Frenchmen,--one might see that at a glance; probably they had reasons for greater precaution than those who entered by the front door. One, a tall, powerfully-built man, with fair hair and beard, dressed with a certain pretension to elegance,--faded threadbare elegance,--exhibiting no appearance of linen, was a Pole. One, a slight bald man, very dark and sallow, was an Italian. The third, who seemed like an ouvrier in his holiday clothes, was a Belgian.

Lebeau greeted them all with an equal courtesy, and each with an equal silence took his seat at the table.

Lebeau glanced at the clock. "Confreres," he said, "our number as fixed for this seance still needs two to be complete, and doubtless they will arrive in a few minutes. Till they come, we can but talk upon trifles. Permit me to offer you my cigar-case." And so saying, he who professed to be no smoker handed his next neighbour, who was the Pole, a large cigar-case amply furnished; and the Pole, helping himself to two cigars, handed the case to the man next him,--two only declining the luxury, the Italian and the Belgian. But the Pole was the only man who took two cigars.

Steps were now heard on the stairs, the door opened, and citizen Le Toux ushered in, one after the other, two men, this time unmistakably French, --to an experienced eye unmistakably Parisians: the one, a young beardless man, who seemed almost boyish, with a beautiful face, and a stunted, meagre frame; the other, a stalwart man of about eight-and-twenty, dressed partly as an ouvrier, not in his Sunday clothes, rather affecting the blouse,--not that he wore that antique garment, but that he was in rough costume unbrushed and stained, with thick shoes and coarse stockings, and a workman's cap. But of all who gathered round the table at which M. Lebeau presided, he had the most distinguished exterior,--a virile honest exterior, a massive open forehead, intelligent eyes, a handsome clear-cut incisive profile, and solid jaw. The expression of the face was stern, but not mean,--an expression which might have become an ancient baron as well as a modern workman; in it plenty of haughtiness and of will, and still more of self-esteem.

"Confreres," said Lebeau, rising, and every eye turned to him, "our number for the present seance is complete. To business. Since we last met, our cause has advanced with rapid and not with noiseless stride. I need not tell you that Louis Bonaparte has virtually abnegated _Les idees Napoleoniennes,--a fatal mistake for him, a glorious advance for us. The liberty of the press must very shortly be achieved, and with it personal government must end. When the autocrat once is compelled to go by the advice of his ministers, look for sudden changes. His ministers will be but weathercocks, turned hither and thither according as the wind chops at Paris; and Paris is the temple of the winds. The new revolution is almost at hand. [Murmurs of applause.] It would move the laughter of the Tuileries and its ministers, of the Bourse and of its gamblers, of every dainty salon of this silken city of would-be philosophers and wits, if they were told that here within this mouldering baraque, eight men, so little blessed by fortune, so little known to fame as ourselves, met to concert the fall of an empire. The Government would not deem us important enough to notice our existence."

"I know not that," interrupted the Pole.

"Ah, pardon," resumed the orator; "I should have confined my remark to the five of us who are French. I did injustice to the illustrious antecedents of our foreign allies. I know that you, Thaddeus Loubisky, that you, Leonardo Raselli, have been too eminent for hands hostile to tyrants not to be marked with a black cross in the books of the police; I know that you, Jan Vanderstegen, if hitherto unscarred by those wounds in defence of freedom which despots and cowards would fain miscall the brands of the felon, still owe it to your special fraternity to keep your movements rigidly concealed. The tyrant would suppress the International Society, and forbids it the liberty of congress. To you three is granted the secret entrance to our council-hall. But we Frenchmen are as yet safe in our supposed insignificance. Confreres, permit me to impress on you the causes why, insignificant as we seem, we are really formidable. In the first place, we are few: the great mistake in most secret associations has been to admit many councillors; and disunion enters wherever many tongues can wrangle. In the next place, though so few in council, we are legion when the time comes for action; because we are representative men, each of his own section, and each section is capable of an indefinite expansion.

"You, valiant Pole, you, politic Italian, enjoy the confidence of thousands now latent in unwatched homes and harmless callings, but who, when you lift a finger, will, like the buried dragon's teeth, spring up into armed men. You, Jan Vanderstegen, the trusted delegate from Verviers, that swarming camp of wronged labour in its revolt from the iniquities of capital,--you, when the hour arrives, can touch the wire that flashes the telegram 'Arise' through all the lands in which workmen combine against their oppressors.

"Of us five Frenchmen, let me speak more modestly. You, sage and scholar, Felix Ruvigny, honoured alike for the profundity of your science and the probity of your manners, induced to join us by your abhorrence of priestcraft and superstition,--you made a wide connection among all the enlightened reasoners who would emancipate the mind of man from the trammels of Church-born fable, and when the hour arrives in which it is safe to say, 'Delenda est Roma,' you know where to find the pens that are more victorious than swords against a Church and a Creed. You" (turning to the surgeon)--"you, Gaspard le Noy, whom a vile calumny has robbed of

the throne in your profession so justly due to your skill, you, nobly scorning the rich and great, have devoted yourself to tend and heal the humble and the penniless, so that you have won the popular title of the 'Medecin des Pauvres,' when the time comes wherein soldiers shall fly before the sansculottes, and the mob shall begin the work which they who move mobs will complete, the clients of Gaspard le Noy will be the avengers of his wrongs.

"You, Armand Monnier, simple ouvrier, but of illustrious parentage, for your grandsire was the beloved friend of the virtuous Robespierre, your father perished a hero and a martyr in the massacre of the coup d'etat; you, cultured in the eloquence of Robespierre himself, and in the persuasive philosophy of Robespierre's teacher, Rousseau; you, the idolized orator of the Red Republicans,--you will be indeed a chief of dauntless bands when the trumpet sounds for battle. Young publicist and poet, Gustave Rameau,--I care not which you are at present, I know what you will be soon, you need nothing for the development of your powers over the many but an organ for their manifestation. Of that anon. I now descend into the bathos of egotism. I am compelled lastly to speak of myself. It was at Marseilles and Lyons, as you already know, that I first conceived the plan of this representative association. For years before I had been in familiar intercourse with the friends of freedom,--that is, with the foes of the Empire. They are not all poor; some few are rich and generous. I do not say these rich and few concur in the ultimate objects of the poor and many; 'but they concur in the first object, the demolition of that which exists,--the Empire. In the course of my special calling of negotiator or agent in the towns of the Midi, I formed friendships with some of these prosperous malcontents; and out of these friendships I conceived the idea which is embodied in this council.

"According to that conception, while the council may communicate as it will with all societies, secret or open, having revolution for their object, the council refuses to merge itself in any other confederation; it stands aloof and independent; it declines to admit into its code any special articles of faith in a future beyond the bounds to which it limits its design and its force. That design unites us; to go beyond would divide. We all agree to destroy the Napoleonic dynasty; none of us might agree as to what we should place in its stead. All of us here present might say, 'A republic.' Ay, but of what kind? Vanderstegen would have it socialistic; Monnier goes further, and would have it communistic, on the principles of Fourier; Le Noy adheres to the policy of Danton, and would commence the republic by a reign of terror; our Italian ally abhors the notion of general massacre, and advocates individual assassination. Ruvigny would annihilate the worship of a Deity; Monnier holds with Voltaire and Robespierre, that, 'if there were no Deity, it would be necessary to man to create one.' Bref, we could not agree upon any plan for the new edifice, and therefore we refuse to discuss one till the ploughshare has gone over the ruins of the old. But I have another and more practical reason for keeping our council distinct from all societies with professed objects beyond that of demolition. We need a certain command of money. It is I who bring to you that, and--how? Not from my own resources,--they but suffice to support myself; not by contributions from ouvriers who, as you well know, will subscribe only for their own ends in the victory of workmen over masters. I bring money to you from the coffers of the rich malcontents. Their politics are not those of most present; their politics are what they term moderate. Some are indeed for a republic, but for a republic strong in defence of order, in support of property; others--and they are more numerous and the more rich--for a constitutional monarchy, and, if

possible, for the abridgment of universal suffrage, which in their eyes tends only to anarchy in the towns and arbitrary rule under priestly influence in the rural districts. They would not subscribe a sou if they thought it went to further the designs whether of Ruvigny the atheist, or of Monnier, who would enlist the Deity of Rousseau on the side of the drapeau rouge; not a sou if they knew I had the honour to boast such confreres as I see around me. They subscribe, as we concert, for the fall of Bonaparte. The policy I adopt I borrow from the policy of the English Liberals. In England, potent millionnaires, high-born dukes, devoted Churchmen, belonging to the Liberal party, accept the services of men who look forward to measures which would ruin capital, eradicate aristocracy, and destroy the Church, provided these men combine with them in some immediate step onward against the Tories. They have a proverb which I thus adapt to French localities: if a train passes Fontainebleau on its way to Marseilles, why should I not take it to Fontainebleau because other passengers are going on to Marseilles?

"Confreres, it seems to me the moment has come when we may venture some of the fund placed at my disposal to other purposes than those to which it has been hitherto devoted. I propose, therefore, to set up a journal under the auspices of Gustave Rameau as editor-in-chief,--a journal which, if he listen to my advice, will create no small sensation. It will begin with a tone of impartiality; it will refrain from all violence of invective; it will have wit, it will have sentiment, and eloquence; it will win its way into the salons and cafes of educated men; and then, and then, when it does change from polished satire into fierce denunciation and sides with the blouses, its effect will be startling and terrific. Of this I will say more to citizen Rameau in private. To you I need not enlarge upon the fact that, at Paris, a combination of men, though immeasurably superior to us in status or influence, without a journal at command is nowhere; with such a journal, written not to alarm but to seduce fluctuating opinions, a combination of men immeasurably inferior to us may be anywhere.

"Confreres, this affair settled, I proceed to distribute amongst you sums of which each who receives will render me an account, except our valued confrere the Pole. All that we can subscribe to the cause of humanity a representative of Poland requires for himself." (A suppressed laugh among all but the Pole, who looked round with a grave, imposing air, as much as to say, "What is there to laugh at?--a simple truth.")

M. Lebeau then presented to each of his confreres a sealed envelope, containing no doubt a bank-note, and perhaps also private instructions as to its disposal. It was one of his rules to make the amount of any sum granted to an individual member of the society from the fund at his disposal a confidential secret between himself and the recipient. Thus jealousy was avoided if the sums were unequal; and unequal they generally were. In the present instance the two largest sums were given to the "Medecin des Pauvres" and to the delegate from Verviers. Both were no doubt to be distributed among "the poor," at the discretion of the trustee appointed.

Whatever rules with regard to the distribution of money M. Lebeau laid down were acquiesced in without demur, for the money was found exclusively by himself, and furnished without the pale of the Secret Council, of which he had made himself founder and dictator. Some other business was then discussed, sealed reports from each member were handed to the president, who placed them unopened in his pocket, and resumed, "Confreres, our seance is now concluded. The period for our next meeting

must remain indefinite, for I myself shall leave Paris as soon as I have set on foot the journal, on the details of which I will confer with citizen Rameau. I am not satisfied with the progress made by the two travelling missionaries who complete our Council of Ten; and though I do not question their zeal, I think my experience may guide it if I take a journey to the towns of Bordeaux and Marseilles, where they now are. But should circumstances demanding concert or action arise, you may be sure that I will either summon a meeting or transmit instructions to such of our members as may be most usefully employed. For the present, confreres, you are relieved. Remain only you, dear young author."

CHAPTER VII.

Left alone with Gustave Rameau, the President of the Secret Council remained silently musing for some moments; but his countenance was no longer moody and overcast,—his nostrils were dilated, as in triumph; there was a half-smile of pride on his lips. Rameau watched him curiously and admiringly. The young man had the impressionable, excitable temperament common to Parisian genius,—especially when it nourishes itself on absinthe. He enjoyed the romance of belonging to a secret society; he was acute enough to recognize the sagacity by which this small conclave was kept out of those crazed combinations for impracticable theories more likely to lead adventurers to the Tarpeian Rock than to the Capitol, while yet those crazed combinations might, in some critical moment, become strong instruments in the hands of practical ambition. Lebeau fascinated him, and took colossal proportions in his intoxicated vision,—vision indeed intoxicated at this moment, for before it floated the realized image of his aspirations,—a journal of which he was to be the editor-in-chief; in which his poetry, his prose, should occupy space as large as he pleased; through which his name, hitherto scarce known beyond a literary clique, would resound in salon and club and cafe, and become a familiar music on the lips of fashion. And he owed this to the man seated there,—a prodigious man.

"Cher poete," said Lebeau, breaking silence, "it gives me no mean pleasure to think I am opening a career to one whose talents fit him for those goals on which they who reach write names that posterity shall read. Struck with certain articles of yours in the journal made celebrated by the wit and gayety of Savarin, I took pains privately to inquire into your birth, your history, connections, antecedents. All confirmed my first impression,—that you were exactly the writer I wish to secure to our cause. I therefore sought you in your rooms, unintroduced and a stranger, in order to express my admiration of your compositions. Bref, we soon became friends; and after comparing minds, I admitted you, at your request, into this Secret Council. Now, in proposing to you the conduct of the journal I would establish, for which I am prepared to find all necessary funds, I am compelled to make imperative conditions. Nominally you will be editor-in-chief: that station, if the journal succeeds, will secure you position and fortune; if it fail, you fail with it. But we will not speak of failure; I must have it succeed. Our interest, then, is the same. Before that interest all puerile vanities fade away. Nominally, I say, you are editor-in-chief; but all the real work of editing will, at first, be done by others."

"Ah!" exclaimed Rameau, aghast and stunned. Lebeau resumed,

"To establish the journal I propose needs more than the genius of youth; it needs the tact and experience of mature years."

Rameau sank back on his chair with a sullen sneer on his pale lips. Decidedly Lebeau was not so great a man as he had thought.

"A certain portion of the journal," continued Lebeau, "will be exclusively appropriated to your pen."

Rameau's lip lost the sneer.

"But your pen must be therein restricted to compositions of pure fancy, disporting in a world that does not exist; or, if on graver themes connected with the beings of the world that does exist, the subjects will be dictated to you and revised. Yet even in the higher departments of a journal intended to make way at its first start, we need the aid, not indeed of men who write better than you, but of men whose fame is established,—whose writings, good or bad, the public run to read, and will find good even if they are bad. You must consign one column to the playful comments and witticisms of Savarin."

"Savarin? But he has a journal of his own. He will not, as an author, condescend to write in one just set up by me; and as a politician, he as certainly will not aid in an ultrademocratic revolution. If he care for politics at all, he is a constitutionalist, an Orleanist."

"Enfant! as an author Savarin will condescend to contribute to your journal, first, because it in no way attempts to interfere with his own; secondly,—I can tell you a secret, Savarin's journal no longer suffices for his existence. He has sold more than two-thirds of its property; he is in debt, and his creditor is urgent; and to-morrow you will offer Savarin thirty thousand francs for one column from his pen, and signed by his name, for two months from the day the journal starts. He will accept, partly because the sum will clear off the debt that hampers him, partly because he will take care that the amount becomes known; and that will help him to command higher terms for the sale of the remaining shares in the journal he now edits, for the new book which you told me he intended to write, and for the new journal which he will be sure to set up as soon as he has disposed of the old one. You say that, as a politician, Savarin, an Orleanist, will not aid in an ultra-democratic revolution. Who asks him to do so? Did I not imply at the meeting that we commence our journal with politics the mildest? Though revolutions are not made with rose-water, it is rose-water that nourishes their roots. The polite cynicism of authors, read by those who float on the surface of society, prepares the way for the social ferment in its deeps. Had there been no Voltaire, there would have been no Camille Desmoulins; had there been no Diderot, there would have been no Marat. We start as polite cynics. Of all cynics Savarin is the politest. But when I bid high for him, it is his clique that I bid for. Without his clique he is but a wit; with his clique, a power. Partly out of that clique, partly out of a circle beyond it, which Savarin can more or less influence, I select ten. Here is the list of them; study it. *Entre nous*, I esteem their writings as little as I do artificial flies; but they are the artificial flies at which, in this particular season of the year, the public rise. You must procure at least five of the ten; and I leave you carte blanche as to the terms. Savarin gained, the best of them will be proud of being his associates. Observe, none of these messieurs of brilliant imagination are to write political articles; those will be

furnished to you anonymously, and inserted without erasure or omission. When you have secured Savarin, and five at least of the collaborateurs in the list, write to me at my office. I give you four days to do this; and the day the journal starts you enter into the income of fifteen thousand francs a year, with a rise in salary proportioned to profits. Are you contented with the terms?"

"Of course I am; but supposing I do not gain the aid of Savarin, or five at least of the list you give, which I see at a glance contains names the most *a la mode* in this kind of writing, more than one of them of high social rank, whom it is difficult for me even to approach,--if, I say, I fail?"

"What! with a *carte blanche* of terms? fie! Are you a Parisian? Well, to answer you frankly, if you fail in so easy a task, you are not the man to edit our journal, and I shall find another. *Allez, courage!* Take my advice; see Savarin the first thing to-morrow morning. Of course, my name and calling you will keep a profound secret from him, as from all. Say as mysteriously as you can that parties you are forbidden to name instruct you to treat with M. Savarin, and offer him the terms I have specified, the thirty thousand francs paid to him in advance the moment he signs the simple memorandum of agreement. The more mysterious you are, the more you will impose,--that is, wherever you offer money and don't ask for it."

Here Lebeau took up his hat, and, with a courteous nod of adieu, lightly descended the gloomy stairs.

CHAPTER VIII.

At night, after this final interview with Lebeau, Graham took leave for good of his lodgings in Montmartre, and returned to his apartment in the Rue d'Anjou. He spent several hours of the next morning in answering numerous letters accumulated during his absence. Late in the afternoon he had an interview with M. Renard, who, as at that season of the year he was not over-busied with other affairs, engaged to obtain leave to place his services at Graham's command during the time requisite for inquiries at Aix, and to be in readiness to start the next day. Graham then went forth to pay one or two farewell visits; and these over, bent his way through the Champs Elysees towards Isaura's villa, when he suddenly encountered Rochebriant on horseback. The Marquis courteously dismounted, committing his horse to the care of the groom, and linking his arm in Graham's, expressed his pleasure at seeing him again; then, with some visible hesitation and embarrassment, he turned the conversation towards the political aspects of France.

"There was," he said, "much in certain words of yours, when we last walked together in this very path, that sank deeply into my mind at the time, and over which I have of late still more earnestly reflected. You spoke of the duties a Frenchman owed to France, and the 'impolicy' of remaining aloof from all public employment on the part of those attached to the Legitimist cause."

"True; it cannot be the policy of any party to forget that between the irrevocable past and the uncertain future there intervenes the action of the present time."

"Should you, as an impartial bystander, consider it dishonourable in me if I entered the military service under the ruling sovereign?"

"Certainly not, if your country needed you."

"And it may, may it not? I hear vague rumours of coming war in almost every salon I frequent. There has been gunpowder in the atmosphere we breathe ever since the battle of Sadowa. What think you of German arrogance and ambition? Will they suffer the swords of France to rust in their scabbards?"

"My dear Marquis, I should incline to put the question otherwise. Will the jealous *amour propre* of France permit the swords of Germany to remain sheathed? But in either case, no politician can see without grave apprehension two nations so warlike, close to each other, divided by a borderland that one covets and the other will not yield, each armed to the teeth,--the one resolved to brook no rival, the other equally determined to resist all aggression. And therefore, as you say, war is in the atmosphere; and we may also hear, in the clouds that give no sign of dispersion, the growl of the gathering thunder. War may come any day; and if France be not at once the victor--"

"France not at once the victor?" interrupted Alain, passionately; "and against a Prussian! Permit me to say no Frenchman can believe that."

"Let no man despise a foe," said Graham, smiling half sadly. "However, I must not incur the danger of wounding your national susceptibilities. To return to the point you raise. If France needed the aid of her best and bravest, a true descendant of Henri Quatre ought to blush for his ancient noblesse were a Rochebriant to say, 'But I don't like the colour of the flag.'"

"Thank you," said Alain, simply; "that is enough." There was a pause, the young men walking on slowly, arm in arm. And then there flashed across Graham's mind the recollection of talk on another subject in that very path. Here he had spoken to Alain in deprecation of any possible alliance with Isaura Cicogna, the destined actress and public singer. His cheek flushed; his heart smote him. What! had he spoken slightly of her--of her? What if she became his own wife? What! had he himself failed in the respect which he would demand as her right from the loftiest of his high-born kindred? What, too, would this man, of fairer youth than himself, think of that disparaging counsel, when he heard that the monitor had won the prize from which he had warned another? Would it not seem that he had but spoken in the mean cunning dictated by the fear of a worthier rival? Stung by these thoughts, he arrested his steps, and, looking the Marquis full in the face, said, "You remind me of one subject in our talk many weeks since; it is my duty to remind you of another. At that time you, and, speaking frankly, I myself, acknowledged the charm in the face of a young Italian lady. I told you then that, on learning she was intended for the stage, the charm for me had vanished. I said bluntly that it should vanish perhaps still more utterly for a noble of your illustrious name; you remember?"

"Yes," answered Alain, hesitatingly, and with a look of surprise.

"I wish now to retract all I said thereon. Mademoiselle Cicogna is not bent on the profession for which she was educated. She would willingly renounce all idea of entering it. The only counterweight which, viewed

whether by my reason or my prejudices, could be placed in the opposite scale to that of the excellences which might make any man proud to win her, is withdrawn. I have become acquainted with her since the date of our conversation. Hers is a mind which harmonizes with the loveliness of her face. In one word, Marquis, I should deem myself honoured, as well as blest, by such a bride. It was due to her that I should say this; it was due also to you, in case you should retain the impression I sought in ignorance to efface. And I am bound, as a gentleman, to obey this twofold duty, even though in so doing I bring upon myself the affliction of a candidate for the hand to which I would fain myself aspire,--a candidate with pretensions in every way far superior to my own."

An older or a more cynical man than Alain de Rochebriant might well have found something suspicious in a confession thus singularly volunteered; but the Marquis was himself so loyal that he had no doubt of the loyalty of Graham.

"I reply to you," he said, "with a frankness which finds an example in your own. The first fair face which attracted my fancy since my arrival at Paris was that of the Italian demoiselle of whom you speak in terms of such respect. I do think if I had then been thrown into her society, and found her to be such as you no doubt truthfully describe, that fancy might have become a very grave emotion. I was then so poor, so friendless, so despondent! Your words of warning impressed me at the time, but less durably than you might suppose; for that very night as I sat in my solitary attic I said to myself, 'Why should I shrink, with an obsolete old-world prejudice, from what my forefathers would have termed a mesalliance? What is the value of my birthright now? None,--worse than none. It excludes me from all careers; my name is but a load that weighs me down. Why should I make that name a curse as well as a burden? Nothing is left to me but that which is permitted to all men,--wedded and holy love. Could I win to my heart the smile of a woman who brings me that dower, the home of my fathers would lose its gloom.' And therefore, if at that time I had become familiarly acquainted with her who had thus attracted my eye and engaged my thoughts, she might have become my destiny; but now!"

"But now?"

"Things have changed. I am no longer poor, friendless, solitary. I have entered the world of my equals as a Rochebriant; I have made myself responsible for the dignity of my name. I could not give that name to one, however peerless in herself, of whom the world would say, 'But for her marriage she would have been a singer on the stage!' I will own

more: the fancy I conceived for the first fair face, other fair faces have dispelled. At this moment, however, I have no thought of marriage; and having known the anguish of struggle, the privations of poverty, I would ask no woman to share the hazard of my return to them. You might present me, then, safely to this beautiful Italian,--certain, indeed, that I should be her admirer; equally certain that I could not become your rival."

There was something in this speech that jarred upon Graham's sensitive pride; but on the whole, he felt relieved, both in honour and in heart. After a few more words, the two young men shook hands and parted. Alain remounted his horse. The day was now declining. Graham hailed a vacant fiacre, and directed the driver to Isaura's villa.

CHAPTER IX.

ISAURA.

The sun was sinking slowly as Isaura sat at her window, gazing dreamily on the rose-hued clouds that made the western borderland between earth and heaven. On the table before her lay a few sheets of manuscript hastily written, not yet reperused. That restless mind of hers had left its trace on the manuscript.

It is characteristic perhaps of the different genius of the sexes, that woman takes to written composition more impulsively, more intuitively, than man,—letter-writing, to him a task-work, is to her a recreation. Between the age of sixteen and the date of marriage, six well-educated clever girls out of ten keep a journal; not one well-educated man in ten thousand does. So, without serious and settled intention of becoming an author, how naturally a girl of ardent feeling and vivid fancy seeks in poetry or romance a confessional,—an outpouring of thought and sentiment, which are mysteries to herself till she has given them words, and which, frankly revealed on the page, she would not, perhaps could not, utter orally to a living ear.

During the last few days, the desire to create in the realm of fable beings constructed by her own breath, spiritualized by her own soul, had grown irresistibly upon this fair child of song. In fact, when Graham's words had decided the renunciation of her destined career, her instinctive yearnings for the utterance of those sentiments or thoughts which can only find expression in some form of art, denied the one vent, irresistibly impelled her to the other. And in this impulse she was confirmed by the thought that here at least there was nothing which her English friend could disapprove,—none of the perils that beset the actress. Here it seemed as if, could she but succeed, her fame would be grateful to the pride of all who loved her. Here was a career ennobled by many a woman, and side by side in rivalry with renowned men. To her it seemed that, could she in this achieve an honoured name, that name took its place at once amid the higher ranks of the social world, and in itself brought a priceless dowry and a starry crown. It was, however, not till after the visit to Enghien that this ambition took practical life and form. One evening after her return to Paris, by an effort so involuntary that it seemed to her no effort, she had commenced a tale,—without plan, without method, without knowing in one page what would fill the next. Her slight fingers hurried on as if, like the pretended spirit manifestations, impelled by an invisible agency without the pale of the world. She was intoxicated by the mere joy of inventing ideal images. In her own special art an elaborate artist, here she had no thought of art; if art was in her work, it sprang unconsciously from the harmony between herself and her subject,—as it is, perhaps, with the early soarings of the genuine lyric poets, in contrast to the dramatic. For the true lyric poet is intensely personal, intensely subjective. It is himself that he expresses, that he represents; and he almost ceases to be lyrical when he seeks to go out of his own existence into that of others with whom he has no sympathy, no rapport. This tale was vivid with genius as yet untutored,—genius in its morning freshness, full of beauties, full of faults. Isaura distinguished not the faults from the beauties. She felt only a vague persuasion that there was a something higher and brighter—a something more true to her own idiosyncrasy—than

could be achieved by the art that "sings other people's words to other people's music." From the work thus commenced she had now paused; and it seemed to her fancies that between her inner self and the scene without, whether in the skies and air and sunset, or in the abodes of men stretching far and near till lost amid the roofs and domes of the great city, she had fixed and riveted the link of a sympathy hitherto fluctuating, unsubstantial, evanescent, undefined. Absorbed in her reverie, she did not notice the deepening of the short twilight, till the servant entering drew the curtains between her and the world without, and placed the lamp on the table beside her. Then she turned away with a restless sigh; her eyes fell on the manuscript, but the charm of it was gone. A sentiment of distrust in its worth had crept into her thoughts, unconsciously to herself, and the page open before her at an uncompleted sentence seemed unwelcome and wearisome as a copy-book is to a child condemned to relinquish a fairy tale half told, and apply himself to a task half done. She fell again into a reverie, when, starting as from a dream, she heard herself addressed by name, and turning round saw Savarin and Gustave Rameau in the room.

"We are come, Signorina," said Savarin, "to announce to you a piece of news, and to hazard a petition. The news is this: my young friend here has found a Maecenas who has the good taste so to admire his lucubrations under the *_nom de plume_* of Alphonse de Valcour as to volunteer the expenses for starting a new journal, of which Gustave Rameau is to be editor-in-chief; and I have promised to assist him as contributor for the first two months. I have given him notes of introduction to certain other *_feuilletonistes_* and critics whom he has on his list. But all put together would not serve to float the journal like a short *_roman_* from Madame de Grantmesnil. Knowing your intimacy with that eminent artist, I venture to back Rameau's supplication that you would exert your influence on his, behalf. As to the *_honoraires_*, she has but to name them."

"Carte blanche," cried Rameau, eagerly.

"You know Eulalie too well, Monsieur Savarin," answered Isaura, with a smile half reproachful, "to suppose that she is a mercenary in letters, and sells her services to the best bidder."

"Bah, belle enfant!" said Savarin, with his gay light laugh. "Business is business, and books as well as razors are made to sell. But, of course, a proper prospectus of the journal must accompany your request to write in it. Meanwhile Rameau will explain to you, as he has done to me, that the journal in question is designed for circulation among readers of *_haute classe_* it is to be pleasant and airy, full of *_bons mots_* and anecdote; witty, but not ill-natured. Politics to be Liberal, of course, but of elegant admixture,--champagne and seltzer-water. In fact, however, I suspect that the politics will be a very inconsiderable feature in this organ of fine arts and manners; some amateur scribbler in the *_beau monde_* will supply them. For the rest, if my introductory letters are successful, Madame de Grantmesnil will not be in bad company."

"You will write to Madame de Grantmesnil?" asked Rameau, pleadingly.

"Certainly I will, as soon--"

"As soon as you have the prospectus, and the names of the collaborateurs," interrupted Rameau. "I hope to send you these in a very few days."

While Rameau was thus speaking, Savarin had seated himself by the table, and his eye mechanically resting on the open manuscript lighted by chance upon a sentence--an aphorism--embodying a very delicate sentiment in very felicitous diction,--one of those choice condensations of thought, suggesting so much more than is said, which are never found in mediocre writers, and, rare even in the best, come upon us like truths seized by surprise.

"Parbleu!" exclaimed Savarin, in the impulse of genuine admiration, "but this is beautiful; what is more, it is original,"--and he read the words aloud. Blushing with shame and resentment, Isaura turned and hastily placed her hand on the manuscript.

"Pardon," said Savarin, humbly; "I confess my sin, but it was so unpremeditated that it does not merit a severe penance. Do not look at me so reproachfully. We all know that young ladies keep commonplace books in which they enter passages that strike them in the works they read; and you have but shown an exquisite taste in selecting this gem. Do tell me where you found it. Is it somewhere in Lamartine?"

"No," answered Isaura, half inaudibly, and with an effort to withdraw the paper. Savarin gently detained her hand, and looking earnestly into her tell-tale face, divined her secret.

"It is your own, Signorina! Accept the congratulations of a very practised and somewhat fastidious critic. If the rest of what you write resembles this sentence, contribute to Rameau's journal, and I answer for its success."

Rameau approached, half incredulous, half envious.

"My dear child," resumed Savarin, drawing away the manuscript from Isaura's coy, reluctant clasp, "do permit me to cast a glance over these papers. For what I yet know, there may be here more promise of fame than even you could gain as a singer."

The electric chord in Isaura's heart was touched. Who cannot conceive what the young writer feels, especially the young woman-writer, when hearing the first cheery note of praise from the lips of a writer of established fame?

"Nay, this cannot be worth your reading," said Isaura, falteringly; "I have never written anything of the kind before, and this is a riddle to me. I know not," she added, with a sweet low laugh, "why I began, nor how I should end it."

"So much the better," said Savarin; and he took the manuscript, withdrew to a recess by the farther window, and seated himself there, reading silently and quickly, but now and then with a brief pause of reflection.

Rameau placed himself beside Isaura on the divan, and began talking with her earnestly,--earnestly, for it was about himself and his aspiring hopes. Isaura, on the other hand, more woman-like than author-like, ashamed even to seem absorbed in herself and her hopes, and with her back turned, in the instinct of that shame, against the reader of her manuscript,--Isaura listened and sought to interest herself solely in the young fellow-author. Seeking to do so she succeeded genuinely, for ready sympathy was a prevalent characteristic of her nature.

"Oh," said Rameau, "I am at the turning-point of my life. Ever since boyhood I have been haunted with the words of Andre Chenier on the morning he was led to the scaffold 'And yet there was something here,' striking his forehead. Yes, I, poor, low-born, launching myself headlong in the chase of a name; I, underrated, uncomprehended, indebted even for a hearing to the patronage of an amiable trifler like Savarin, ranked by petty rivals in a grade below themselves,--I now see before me, suddenly, abruptly presented, the expanding gates into fame and fortune. Assist me, you!"

"But how?" said Isaura, already forgetting her manuscript; and certainly Rameau did not refer to that.

"How!" echoed Rameau; "how! But do you not see--or at least, do you not conjecture--this journal of which Savarin speaks contains my present and my future? Present independence, opening to fortune and renown. Ay,--and who shall say? renown beyond that of the mere writer. Behind the gaudy scaffolding of this rickety Empire, a new social edifice unperceived arises; and in that edifice the halls of State shall be given to the men who help obscurely to build it,--to men like me." Here, drawing her hand into his own, fixing on her the most imploring gaze of his dark persuasive eyes, and utterly unconscious of bathos in his adjuration, he added: "Plead for me with your whole mind and heart; use your uttermost influence with the illustrious writer whose pen can assure the fates of my journal."

Here the door suddenly opened, and following the servant, who announced unintelligibly his name, there entered Graham Vane.

CHAPTER X.

The Englishman halted at the threshold. His eye, passing rapidly over the figure of Savarin reading in the window-niche, rested upon Rameau and Isaura seated on the same divan, he with her hand clasped in both his own, and bending his face towards hers so closely that a loose tress of her hair seemed to touch his forehead.

The Englishman halted, and no revolution which changes the habitudes and forms of States was ever so sudden as that which passed without a word in the depths of his un conjectured heart. The heart has no history which philosophers can recognize. An ordinary political observer, contemplating the condition of a nation, may very safely tell us what effects must follow the causes patent to his eyes; but the wisest and most far-seeing sage, looking at a man at one o'clock, cannot tell us what revulsions of his whole being may be made ere the clock strike two.

As Isaura rose to greet her visitor, Savarin came from the window-niche, the manuscript in his hand.

"Son of perfidious Albion," said Savarin, gayly, "we feared you had deserted the French alliance. Welcome back to Paris, and the _entente cordiale_."

"Would I could stay to enjoy such welcome! but I must again quit Paris."

"Soon to return, _n'est ce pas_? Paris is an irresistible magnet to _les beaux esprits_. _A propos_ of _beaux esprits_, be sure to leave orders with your bookseller, if you have one, to enter your name as subscriber to a new journal."

"Certainly, if Monsieur Savarin recommends it."

"He recommends it as a matter of course; he writes in it," said Rameau.

"A sufficient guarantee for its excellence. What is the name of the journal?"

"Not yet thought of," answered Savarin. "Babes must be born before they are christened; but it will be instruction enough to your bookseller to order the new journal to be edited by Gustave Rameau."

Bowing ceremoniously to the editor in prospect, Graham said, half ironically, "May I hope that in the department of criticism you will not be too hard upon poor Tasso?"

"Never fear; the Signorina, who adores Tasso, will take him under her special protection," said Savarin, interrupting Rameau's sullen and embarrassed reply.

Graham's brow slightly contracted. "Mademoiselle," he said, "is then to be united in the conduct of this journal with M. Gustave Rameau?"

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Isaura, somewhat frightened at the idea.

"But I hope," said Savarin, "that the Signorina may become a contributor too important for an editor to offend by insulting her favourites, Tasso included. Rameau and I came hither to entreat her influence with her intimate and illustrious friend, Madame de Grantmesnil, to insure the success of our undertaking by sanctioning the announcement of her name as a contributor."

"Upon social questions,--such as the laws of marriage?" said Graham, with a sarcastic smile, which concealed the quiver of his lip and the pain in his voice.

"Nay," answered Savarin, "our journal will be too sportive, I hope, for matters so profound. We would rather have Madame de Grantmesnil's aid in some short _roman_, which will charm the fancy of all and offend the opinions of none. But since I came into the room, I care less for the Signorina's influence with the great authoress," and he glanced significantly at the manuscript.

"How so?" asked Graham, his eye following the glance.

"If the writer of this manuscript will conclude what she has begun, we shall be independent of Madame de Grantmesnil."

"Fie!" cried Isaura, impulsively, her face and neck bathed in blushes,--"fie! such words are a mockery."

Graham gazed at her intently, and then turned his eyes on Savarin. He guessed aright the truth. "Mademoiselle then is an author? In the style of her friend Madame de Grantmesnil?"

"Bah!" said Savarin, "I should indeed be guilty of mockery if I paid the Signorina so false a compliment as to say that in a first effort she attained to the style of one of the most finished sovereigns of language that has ever swayed the literature of France. When I say, 'Give us this tale completed, and I shall be consoled if the journal does not gain the aid of Madame de Grantmesnil,' I mean that in these pages there is that nameless charm of freshness and novelty which compensates for many faults never committed by a practised pen like Madame de Grantmesnil's. My dear young lady, go on with this story,--finish it; when finished, do not disdain any suggestions I may offer in the way of correction,--and I will venture to predict to you so brilliant a career as author, that you will not regret should you resign for that career the bravoes you could command as actress and singer."

The Englishman pressed his hand convulsively to his heart, as if smitten by a sudden spasm. But as his eyes rested on Isaura's face, which had become radiant with the enthusiastic delight of genius when the path it would select opens before it as if by a flash from heaven, whatever of jealous irritation, whatever of selfish pain he might before have felt; was gone, merged in a sentiment of unutterable sadness and compassion. Practical man as he was, he knew so well all the dangers, all the snares, all the sorrows, all the scandals menacing name and fame, that in the world of Paris must beset the fatherless girl who, not less in authorship than on the stage, leaves the safeguard of private life forever behind her, who becomes a prey to the tongues of the public. At Paris, how slender is the line that divides the authoress from the Bohemienne! He sank into his chair silently, and passed his hand over his eyes, as if to shut out a vision of the future.

Isaura in her excitement did not notice the effect on her English visitor. She could not have divined such an effect as possible. On the contrary, even subordinate to her joy at the thought that she had not mistaken the instincts which led her to a nobler vocation than that of the singer, that the cage-bar was opened, and space bathed in sunshine was inviting the new-felt wings,--subordinate even to that joy was a joy more wholly, more simply woman's. "If," thought she, in this joy, "if this be true, my proud ambition is realized; all disparities of worth and

fortune are annulled between me and him to whom I would bring no shame of mesalliance!" Poor dreamer, poor child!

"You will let me see what you have written," said Rameau, somewhat imperiously, in the sharp voice habitual to him, and which pierced Graham's ear like a splinter of glass.

"No, not now; when finished."

"You will finish it?"

"Oh, yes; how can I help it after such encouragement?" She held out her hand to Savarin, who kissed it gallantly; then her eyes intuitively sought Graham's. By that time he had recovered his self-possession. He met her look tranquilly, and with a smile; but the smile chilled her, she knew not why.

The conversation then passed upon books and authors of the day, and was chiefly supported by the satirical pleasantries of Savarin, who was in high good-spirits.

Graham, who, as we know, had come with the hope of seeing Isaura alone, and with the intention of uttering words which, however guarded, might yet in absence serve as links of union, now no longer coveted that interview, no longer meditated those words. He soon rose to depart.

"Will you dine with me to-morrow?" asked Savarin. "Perhaps I may induce the Signorina and Rameau to offer you the temptation of meeting them."

"By to-morrow I shall be leagues away."

Isaura's heart sank. This time the manuscript was fairly forgotten.

"You never said you were going so soon," cried Savarin. "When do you come back, vile deserter?"

"I cannot even guess. Monsieur Rameau, count me among your subscribers. Mademoiselle, my best regards to Signora Venosta. When I see you again, no doubt you will have become famous."

Isaura here could not control herself. She rose impulsively, and approached him, holding out her hand, and attempting a smile.

"But not famous in the way that you warned me from," she said in whispered tones. "You are friends with me still?" It was like the piteous wail of a child seeking to make it up with one who wants to quarrel, the child knows not why. Graham was moved, but what could he say? Could he have the right to warn her from this profession also; forbid all desires, all roads of fame to this brilliant aspirant? Even a declared and accepted lover might well have deemed that that would be to ask too much. He replied, "Yes, always a friend, if you could ever need one." Her hand slid from his, and she turned away wounded to the quick.

"Have you your coupe at the door?" asked Savarin.

"Simply a fiacre."

"And are going back at once to Paris?"

"Yes."

"Will you kindly drop me in the Rue de Rivoli?"

"Charmed to be of use."

CHAPTER XI.

As the fiacre bore to Paris Savarin and Graham, the former said, "I cannot conceive what rich simpleton could entertain so high an opinion of Gustave Rameau as to select a man so young, and of reputation though promising so undecided, for an enterprise which requires such a degree of tact and judgment as the conduct of a new journal,--and a journal, too, which is to address itself to the beau monde. However, it is not for me to criticise a selection which brings a god-send to myself."

"To yourself? You jest; you have a journal of your own. It can only be through an excess of good-nature that you lend your name and pen to the

service of M. Gustave Rameau."

"My good-nature does not go to that extent. It is Rameau who confers a service upon me. *_Peste! mon cher_*, we French authors have not the rents of you rich English milords. And though I am the most economical of our tribe, yet that journal of mine has failed me of late; and this morning I did not exactly see how I was to repay a sum I had been obliged to borrow of a money-lender,--for I am too proud to borrow of friends, and too sagacious to borrow of publishers,--when in walks *_ce cher petit_* Gustave with an offer, for a few trifles towards starting this new-born journal, which makes a new man of me. Now I am in the undertaking, my *_amour propre_* and my reputation are concerned in its success; and I shall take care that collaborateurs of whose company I am not ashamed are in the same boat. But that charming girl, Isaura! What an enigma the gift of the pen is! No one can ever guess who has it until tried."

"The young lady's manuscript, then, really merits the praise you bestowed on it?"

"Much more praise, though a great deal of blame, which I did not bestow,--for in a first work faults insure success as much as beauties. Anything better than tame correctness. Yes, her first work, to judge by what is written, must make a hit,--a great hit. And that will decide her career. A singer, an actress, may retire,--often does when she marries an author; but once an author always an author."

"Ah! is it so? If you had a beloved daughter, Savarin, would you encourage her to be an author?"

"Frankly, no: principally because in that case the chances are that she would marry an author; and French authors, at least in the imaginative school, make very uncomfortable husbands."

"Ah! you think the Signorina will marry one of those uncomfortable husbands,--M. Rameau, perhaps?"

"Rameau! Hein! nothing more likely. That beautiful face of his has its fascination. And to tell you the truth, my wife, who is a striking illustration of the truth that what woman wills heaven wills, is bent upon that improvement in Gustave's moral life which she thinks a union with Mademoiselle Cicogna would achieve. At all events, the fair Italian would have in Rameau a husband who would not suffer her to bury her talents under a bushel. If she succeeds as a writer (by succeeding I mean making money), he will see that her ink-bottle is never empty; and if she don't succeed as a writer, he will take care that the world shall gain an actress or a singer. For Gustave Rameau has a great taste for luxury and show; and whatever his wife can make, I will venture to say that he will manage to spend."

"I thought you had an esteem and regard for Mademoiselle Cicogna. It is Madame your wife, I suppose, who has a grudge against her?"

"On the contrary, my wife idolizes her."

"Savages sacrifice to their idols the things they deem of value; civilized Parisians sacrifice their idols themselves, and to a thing that is worthless."

"Rameau is not worthless; he has beauty and youth and talent. My wife

thinks more highly of him than I do; but I must respect a man who has found admirers so sincere as to set him up in a journal, and give him _carte blanche_ for terms to contributors. I know of no man in Paris more valuable to me. His worth to me this morning is thirty thousand francs. I own I do not think him likely to be a very safe husband; but then French female authors and artists seldom take any husbands except upon short leases. There are no vulgar connubial prejudices in the pure atmosphere of art. Women of genius, like Madame de Grantmesnil, and perhaps like our charming young friend, resemble canary-birds,--to sing their best you must separate them from their mates."

The Englishman suppressed a groan, and turned the conversation.

When he had set down his lively companion, Vane dismissed his _fiacre_, and walked to his lodgings musingly.

"No," he said inly; "I must wrench myself from the very memory of that haunting face,--the friend and pupil of Madame de Grantmesnil, the associate of Gustave Rameau, the rival of Julie Caumartin, the aspirant to that pure atmosphere of art in which there are no vulgar connubial prejudices! Could I--whether I be rich or poor--see in her the ideal of an English wife? As it is--as it is--with this mystery which oppresses me, which, till solved, leaves my own career insoluble,--as it is, how fortunate that I did not find her alone; did not utter the words that would fain have leaped from my heart; did not say, 'I may not be the rich man I seem, but in that case I shall be yet more ambitious, because struggle and labour are the sinews of ambition! Should I be rich, will you adorn my station? Should I be poor, will you enrich poverty with your smile? And can you, in either case, forego--really, painlessly forego, as you led me to hope--the pride in your own art?' My ambition were killed did I marry an actress, a singer. Better that than the hungerer after excitements which are never allayed, the struggler in a career which admits of no retirement,--the woman to whom marriage is no goal, who remains to the last the property of the public, and glories to dwell in a house of glass into which every bystander has a right to peer. Is this the ideal of an Englishman's wife and home? No, no!--woe is me, no!"

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