

The Parisians, Book 9.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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THE PARISIANS

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

On waking some morning, have you ever felt, reader, as if a change for the brighter in the world, without and within you, had suddenly come to pass--some new glory has been given to the sunshine, some fresh balm to the air--you feel younger, and happier, and lighter, in the very beat of your heart--you almost fancy you hear the chime of some spiritual music far off, as if in the deeps of heaven? You are not at first conscious how, or wherefore, this change has been brought about. Is it the effect of a dream in the gone sleep, that has made this morning so different from mornings that have dawned before? And while vaguely asking yourself that question, you become aware that the cause is no mere illusion, that it has its substance in words spoken by living lips, in things that belong to the work-day world.

It was thus that Isaura woke the morning after the conversation with Alain de Rochebriant, and as certain words, then spoken, echoed back on her ear, she knew why she was so happy, why the world was so changed.

In those words she heard the voice of Graham Vane--nor she had not deceived herself--she was loved! she was loved! What mattered that long cold interval of absence? She had not forgotten--she could not believe that absence had brought forgetfulness. There are moments when we insist on judging another's heart by our own. All would be explained some day--all would come right.

How lovely was the face that reflected itself in the glass as she stood before it, smoothing back her long hair, murmuring sweet snatches of Italian love-song, and blushing with sweeter love-thoughts as she sang! All that had passed in that year so critical to her outer life--the authorship, the fame, the public career, the popular praise--vanished from her mind as a vapour that rolls from the face of a lake to which the sunlight restores the smile of a brightened heaven.

She was more the girl now than she had ever been since the day on which she sat reading Tasso on the craggy shore of Sorrento.

Singing still as she passed from her chamber, and entering the sitting-room, which fronted the east, and seemed bathed in the sunbeams of deepening May, she took her bird from its cage, and stopped her song to cover it with kisses, which perhaps yearned for vent somewhere.

Later in the day she went out to visit Valerie. Recalling the altered manner of her young friend, her sweet nature became troubled. She divined that Valerie had conceived some jealous pain which she longed to heal; she could not bear the thought of leaving any one that day unhappy. Ignorant before of the girl's feelings towards Alain, she now partly guessed them--one woman who loves in secret is clairvoyante as to such secrets in another.

Valerie received her visitor with a coldness she did not attempt to disguise. Not seeming to notice this, Isaura commenced the conversation with frank mention of Rochebriant. "I have to thank you so much, dear Valerie, for a pleasure you could not anticipate--that of talking about an absent friend, and hearing the praise he deserved from one so capable of appreciating excellence as M. de Rochebriant appears to be."

"You were talking to M. de Rochebriant of an absent friend--ah! you seemed indeed very much interested in the conversation--"

"Do not wonder at that, Valerie; and do not grudge me the happiest moments I have known for months."

"In talking with M. de Rochebriant! No doubt, Mademoiselle Cicogna, you found him very charming."

To her surprise and indignation, Valerie here felt the arm of Isaura tenderly entwining her waist, and her face drawn towards Isaura's sisterly kiss.

"Listen to me, naughty child--listen and believe. M. de Rochebriant can never be charming to me--never touch a chord in my heart or my fancy except as friend to another, or--kiss me in your turn, Valerie--as suitor to yourself."

Valerie here drew back her pretty childlike head, gazed keenly a moment into Isaura's eyes, felt convinced by the limpid candour of their unmistakable honesty, and flinging herself on her friend's bosom, kissed her passionately, and burst into tears.

The complete reconciliation between the two girls was thus peacefully effected; and then Isaura had to listen, at no small length, to the confidences poured into her ears by Valerie, who was fortunately too engrossed by her own hopes and doubts to exact confidences in return. Valerie's was one of those impulsive eager natures that longs for a confidante. Not so Isaura's. Only when Valerie had unburdened her heart, and been soothed and caressed into happy trust in the future, did she recall Isaura's explanatory words, and said, archly: "And your absent friend? Tell me about him. Is he as handsome as Alain?"

"Nay," said Isaura, rising to take up the mantle and hat she had laid aside on entering, "they say that the colour of a flower is in our vision, not in the leaves." Then with a grave melancholy in the look she fixed upon Valerie, she added: "Rather than distrust of me should occasion you pain, I have pained myself, in making clear to you the reason why I felt interest in M. de Rochebriant's conversation. In turn, I ask of you a favour--do not on this point question me farther. There are some things in our past which influence the present, but to which we dare not assign a future--on which we cannot talk to another. What soothsayer can tell us if the dream of a yesterday will be renewed on the night of a morrow? All is said--we trust one another, dearest."

CHAPTER II.

That evening the Morleys looked in at Isaura's on their way to a crowded

assembly at the house of one of those rich Americans, who were then outvying the English residents at Paris in the good graces of Parisian society. I think the Americans get on better with the French than the English do--I mean the higher class of Americans. They spend more money; their men speak French better; the women are better dressed, and, as a general rule, have read more largely, and converse more frankly. Mrs. Morley's affection for Isaura had increased during the last few months. As so notable an advocate of the ascendancy of her sex, she felt a sort of grateful pride in the accomplishments and growing renown of so youthful a member of the oppressed sisterhood. But, apart from that sentiment, she had conceived a tender mother-like interest for the girl who stood in the world so utterly devoid of family ties, so destitute of that household guardianship and protection which, with all her assertion of the strength and dignity of woman, and all her opinions as to woman's right of absolute emancipation from the conventions fabricated by the selfishness of man, Mrs. Morley was too sensible not to value for the individual, though she deemed it not needed for the mass. Her great desire was that Isaura should marry well, and soon. American women usually marry so young that it seemed to Mrs. Morley an anomaly in social life, that one so gifted in mind and person as Isaura should already have passed the age in which the belles of the great Republic are enthroned as wives and consecrated as mothers. We have seen that in the past year she had selected from our unworthy but necessary sex, Graham Vane as a suitable spouse to her young friend. She had divined the state of his heart--she had more than suspicions of the state of Isaura's. She was exceedingly perplexed and exceedingly chafed at the Englishman's strange disregard to his happiness and her own projects. She had counted, all this past winter, on his return to Paris; and she became convinced that some misunderstanding, possibly some lover's quarrel, was the cause of his protracted absence, and a cause that, if ascertained, could be removed. A good opportunity now presented itself--Colonel Morley was going to London the next day. He had business there which would detain him at least a week. He would see Graham; and as she considered her husband the shrewdest and wisest person in the world--I mean of the male sex--she had no doubt of his being able to turn Graham's mind thoroughly inside out, and ascertain his exact feelings and intentions. If the Englishman, thus assayed, were found of base metal, then, at least, Mrs. Morley would be free to cast him altogether aside, and coin for the uses of the matrimonial market some nobler effigy in purer gold.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Morley, in a low voice, nestling herself close to Isaura, while the Colonel, duly instructed, drew off the Venosta, "have you heard anything lately of our pleasant friend Mr. Vane?"

You can guess with what artful design Mrs. Morley put that question point-blank, fixing keen eyes on Isaura while she put it. She saw the heightened colour, the quivering lip of the girl thus abruptly appealed to, and she said inly: "I was right--she loves him!"

"I heard of Mr. Vane last night--accidentally."

"Is he coming to Paris soon?"

"Not that I know of. How charmingly that wreath becomes you! it suits the earrings so well, too."

"Frank chose it; he has good taste for a man. I trust him with my commissions to Hunt and Roskell's but I limit him as to price, he is so extravagant--men are, when they make presents. They seem to think we

value things according to their cost. They would gorge us with jewels, and let us starve for want of a smile. Not that Frank is so bad as the rest of them. But a propos of Mr. Vane--Frank will be sure to see him, and scold him well for deserting us all. I should not be surprised if he brought the deserter back with him, for I send a little note by Frank, inviting him to pay us a visit. We have spare rooms in our apartments."

Isaura's heart heaved beneath her robe, but she replied in a tone of astonishing indifference: "I believe this is the height of the London season, and Mr. Vane would probably be too engaged to profit even by an invitation so tempting."

"_Nous verrons_. How pleased he will be to hear of your triumphs! He admired you so much before you were famous: what will be his admiration now! men are so vain--they care for us so much more when people praise us. But till we have put the creatures in their proper place, we must take them for what they are."

Here the Venosta, with whom the poor Colonel had exhausted all the arts at his command for chaining her attention, could be no longer withheld from approaching Mrs. Morley, and venting her admiration of that lady's wreath, earrings, robes, flounces. This dazzling apparition had on her the effect which a candle has on a moth--she fluttered round it, and longed to absorb herself in its blaze. But the wreath especially fascinated her--a wreath which no prudent lady with colourings less pure, and features less exquisitely delicate than the pretty champion of the rights of women, could have fancied on her own brows without a shudder. But the Venosta in such matters was not prudent. "It can't be dear," she cried piteously, extending her arms towards Isaura. "I must have one exactly like. Who made it? Cara signora, give me the address."

"Ask the Colonel, dear Madame; he chose and bought it," and Mrs. Morley glanced significantly at her well-tutored Frank.

"Madame," said the Colonel, speaking in English, which he usually did with the Venosta--who valued herself on knowing that language and was flattered to be addressed in it--while he amused himself by introducing into its forms the dainty Americanisms with which he puzzled the Britisher--he might well puzzle the Florentine,--"Madame, I am too anxious for the appearance of my wife to submit to the test of a rival schemer like yourself in the same apparel. With all the homage due to a sex of which I am enthused dreadful, I decline to designate the florist from whom I purchased Mrs. Morley's head-fixings."

"Wicked man!" cried the Venosta, shaking her finger at him coquettishly. "You are jealous! Fie! a man should never be jealous of a woman's rivalry with women;" and then, with a cynicism that might have become a greybeard, she added, "but of his own sex every man should be jealous--though of his dearest friend. Isn't it so, _Colonello_?"

The Colonel looked puzzled, bowed, and made no reply. "That only shows," said Mrs. Morley, rising, "what villains the Colonel has the misfortune to call friends and fellow-men."

"I fear it is time to go," said Frank, glancing at the clock.

In theory the most rebellious, in practice the most obedient, of wives, Mrs. Morley here kissed Isaura, resettled her crinoline, and shaking hands with the Venosta, retreated to the door.

"I shall have the wreath yet," cried the Venosta, impishly. "_La speranza e fenamina_" (Hope is female).

"Alas!" said Isaura, half mournfully, half smiling, "alas! do you not remember what the poet replied when asked what disease was most mortal?-- 'the hectic fever caught from the chill of hope.'"

CHAPTER III.

Graham Vane was musing very gloomily in his solitary apartment one morning, when his servant announced Colonel Morley.

He received his visitor with more than the cordiality with which every English politician receives an American citizen. Graham liked the Colonel too well for what he was in himself to need any national title to his esteem. After some preliminary questions and answers as to the health of Mrs. Morley, the length of the Colonel's stay in London, what day he could dine with Graham at Richmond or Gravesend, the Colonel took up the ball. "We have been reckoning to see you at Paris, sir, for the last six months."

"I am very much flattered to hear that you have thought of me at all; but I am not aware of having warranted the expectation you so kindly express."

"I guess you must have said something to my wife which led her to do more than expect--to reckon on your return. And, by the way, sir, I am charged to deliver to you this note from her, and to back the request it contains that you will avail yourself of the offer. Without summarising the points I do so."

Graham glanced over the note addressed to him

"DEAR MR. VANE,--Do you forget how beautiful the environs of Paris are in May and June? how charming it was last year at the lake of Enghien? how gay were our little dinners out of doors in the garden arbours, with the Savarins and the fair Italian, and her incomparably amusing chaperon? Frank has my orders to bring you back to renew these happy days, while the birds are in their first song, and the leaves are in their youngest green. I have prepared your rooms _chez nous_--a chamber that looks out on the Champs Elysees, and a quiet _cabinet de travail_ at the back, in which you can read, write, or sulk undisturbed. Come, and we will again visit Enghien and Montmorency. Don't talk of engagements. If man proposes, woman disposes. Hesitate not--obey. Your sincere little friend, Lizzy."

"My dear Morley," said Graham, with emotion, "I cannot find words to thank your wife sufficiently for an invitation so graciously conveyed. Alas! I cannot accept it."

"Why?" asked the Colonel, drily.

"I have too much to do in London."

"Is that the true reason, or am I to suspicion that there is anything, sir, which makes you dislike a visit to Paris?"

The Americans enjoy the reputation of being the frankest putters of questions whom liberty of speech has yet educated into *la recherche de la verite*, and certainly Colonel Morley in this instance did not impair the national reputation.

Graham Vane's brow slightly contracted, and he bit his lip as if stung by a sudden pang; but after a moment's pause, he answered with a good-humoured smile:

"No man who has taste enough to admire the most beautiful city, and appreciate the charms of the most brilliant society in the world, can dislike Paris."

"My dear sir, I did not ask you if you disliked Paris, but if there were anything that made you dislike coming back to it on a visit."

"What a notion! and what a cross-examiner you would have made if you had been called to the bar! Surely, my dear friend, you can understand that when a man has in one place business which he cannot neglect, he may decline going to another place, whatever pleasure it would give him to do so. By the way, there is a great ball at one of the Ministers' to-night; you should go there, and I will point out to you all those English notabilities in whom Americans naturally take interest. I will call for you at eleven o'clock. Lord -----, who is a connection of mine, would be charmed to know you."

Morley hesitated; but when Graham said, "How your wife will scold you if you lose such an opportunity of telling her whether the Duchess of ---- is as beautiful as report says, and whether Gladstone or Disraeli seems to your phrenological science to have the finer head!" the Colonel gave in, and it was settled that Graham should call for him at the Langham Hotel.

That matter arranged, Graham probably hoped that his inquisitive visitor would take leave for the present, but the Colonel evinced no such intention. On the contrary, settling himself more at ease in his arm-chair, he said, "if I remember aright, you do not object to the odour of tobacco?"

Graham rose and presented to his visitor a cigar-box which he took from the mantelpiece.

The Colonel shook his head, and withdrew from his breast pocket a leather case, from which he extracted a gigantic regalia; this he lighted from a gold match-box in the shape of a locket attached to his watch-chain, and took two or three preliminary puffs, with his head thrown back and his eyes meditatively intent upon the ceiling.

We know already that strange whim of the Colonel's (than whom, if he so pleased, no man could speak purer English as spoken by the Britisher) to assert the dignity of the American citizen by copious use of expressions and phrases familiar to the lips of the governing class of the great Republic--delicacies of speech which he would have carefully shunned in the polite circles of the Fifth Avenue in New York. Now the Colonel was much too experienced a man of the world not to be aware that the commission with which his Lizzy had charged him was an exceedingly

delicate one; and it occurred to his mother wit that the best way to acquit himself of it, so as to avoid the risk of giving or of receiving serious affront, would be to push that whim of his into more than wonted exaggeration. Thus he could more decidedly and briefly come to the point; and should he, in doing so, appear too meddlesome, rather provoke a laugh than a frown-retiring from the ground with the honours due to a humorist. Accordingly, in his deepest nasal intonation, and withdrawing his eyes from the ceiling, he began:

"You have not asked, sir, after the signorina, or as we popularly call her, Mademoiselle Cicogna?"

"Have I not? I hope she is quite well, and her lively companion, Signora Venosta."

"They are not sick, sir; or at least they were not so last night when my wife and I had the pleasure to see them. Of course you have read Mademoiselle Cicogna's book--a bright performance, sir, age considered."

"Certainly, I have read the book; it is full of unquestionable genius. Is Mademoiselle writing another? But of course she is."

"I am not aware of the fact, sir. It may be predicated; such a mind cannot remain inactive; and I know from M. Savarin and that rising young man Gustave Rameau, that the publishers bid high for her brains considerable. Two translations have already appeared in our country. Her fame, sir, will be world-wide. She may be another George Sand, or at least another Eulalie Grantmesnil."

Graham's cheek became as white as the paper I write on. He inclined his head as in assent, but without a word. The Colonel continued:

We ought to be very proud of her acquaintance, sir. I think you detected her gifts while they were yet un conjectured. My wife says so. You must be gratified to remember that, sir--clear grit, sir, and no mistake."

"I certainly more than once have said to Mrs. Morley, that I esteemed Mademoiselle's powers so highly that I hoped she would never become a stage-singer and actress. But this M. Rameau? You say he is a rising man. It struck me when at Paris that he was one of those charlatans with a great deal of conceit and very little information, who are always found in scores on the ultra-Liberal side of politics;-possibly I was mistaken."

"He is the responsible editor of *Le Sens Commun*, in which talented periodical Mademoiselle Cicogna's book was first raised."

"Of course, I know that; a journal which, so far as I have looked into its political or social articles, certainly written by a cleverer and an older man than M. Rameau, is for unsettling all things and settling nothing. We have writers of that kind among ourselves--I have no sympathy with them. To me it seems that when a man says, 'Off with your head,' he ought to let us know what other head he would put on our shoulders, and by what process the change of heads shall be effected. Honestly speaking, if you and your charming wife are intimate friends and admirers of Mademoiselle Cicogna, I think you could not do her a greater service than that of detaching her from all connection with men like M. Rameau, and journals like *La Sens Commun*."

The Colonel here withdrew his cigar from his lips, lowered his head to a level with Graham's, and relaxing into an arch significant smile, said: "Start to Paris, and dissuade her yourself. Start--go ahead--don't be shy--don't seesaw on the beam of speculation. You will have more influence with that young female than we can boast." Never was England in greater danger of quarrel with America than at that moment; but Graham curbed his first wrathful impulse, and replied coldly:

"It seems to me, Colonel, that you, though very unconsciously, derogate from the respect due to Mademoiselle Cicogna. That the counsel of a married couple like yourself and Mrs. Morley should be freely given to and duly heeded by a girl deprived of her natural advisers in parents, is a reasonable and honourable supposition; but to imply that the most influential adviser of a young lady so situated is a young single man, in no way related to her, appears to me a dereliction of that regard to the dignity of her sex which is the chivalrous characteristic of your countrymen--and to Mademoiselle Cicogna herself, a surmise which she would be justified in resenting as an impertinence."

"I deny both allegations," replied the Colonel serenely. "I maintain that a single man whips all connubial creation when it comes to gallantising a single young woman; and that no young lady would be justified in resenting as impertinence my friendly suggestion to the single man so deserving of her consideration as I estimate you to be, to solicit the right to advise her for life. And that's a caution."

Here the Colonel resumed his regalia, and again gazed intent on the ceiling.

"Advise her for life! You mean, I presume, as a candidate for her hand."

"You don't Turkey now. Well, I guess, you are not wide of the mark there, sir."

"You do me infinite honour, but I do not presume so far."

"So, so--not as yet. Before a man who is not without gumption runs himself for Congress, he likes to calculate how the votes will run. Well, sir, suppose we are in caucus, and let us discuss the chances of the election with closed doors."

Graham could not help smiling at the persistent officiousness of his visitor, but his smile was a very sad one.

"Pray change the subject, my dear Colonel Morley--it is not a pleasant one to me; and as regards Mademoiselle Cicogna, can you think it would not shock her to suppose that her name was dragged into the discussions you would provoke, even with closed doors?"

"Sir," replied the Colonel, imperturbably, "since the doors are closed, there is no one, unless it be a spirit-listener under the table, who can wire to Mademoiselle Cicogna the substance of debate. And, for my part, I do not believe in spiritual manifestations. Fact is, that I have the most amicable sentiments towards both parties, and if there is a misunderstanding which is opposed to the union of the States, I wish to remove it while yet in time. Now, let us suppose that you decline to be a candidate; there are plenty of others who will run; and as an elector must choose one representative or other, so a gal must choose one husband or other. And then you only repent when it is too late. It is a great

thing to be first in the field. Let us approximate to the point; the chances seem good--will you run? Yes or no?"

"I repeat, Colonel Morley, that I entertain no such presumption."

The Colonel here, rising, extended his hand, which Graham shook with constrained cordiality, and then leisurely walked to the door; there he paused, as if struck by a new thought, and said gravely, in his natural tone of voice, "You have nothing to say, sir, against the young lady's character and honour?"

"!!--heavens, no! Colonel Morley, such a question insults me."

The Colonel resumed his deepest nasal bass: "It is only, then, because you don't fancy her now so much as you did last year--fact, you are soured on her and fly off the handle. Such things do happen. The same thing has happened to myself, sir. In my days of celibacy, there was a gal at Saratoga whom I gallantised, and whom, while I was at Saratoga, I thought Heaven had made to be Mrs. Morley: I was on the very point of telling her so, when I was suddenly called off to Philadelphia; and at Philadelphia, sir, I found that Heaven had made another Mrs. Morley. I state this fact, sir, though I seldom talk of my own affairs, even when willing to tender my advice in the affairs of another, in order to prove that I do not intend to censure you if Heaven has served you in the same manner. Sir, a man may go blind for one gal when he is not yet dry behind the ears, and then, when his eyes are skinned, go in for one better. All things mortal meet with a change, as my sisters little boy said when, at the age of eight, he quitted the Methodys and turned Shaker. Threep and argue as we may, you and I are both mortals--more's the pity. Good morning, sir (glancing at the clock, which proclaimed the hour of 3 P.M.),--I err--good evening."

By the post that day the Colonel transmitted a condensed and laconic report of his conversation with Graham Vane. I can state its substance in yet fewer words. He wrote word that Graham positively declined the invitation to Paris; that he had then, agreeably to Lizzy's instruction, ventilated the Englishman, in the most delicate terms, as to his intentions with regard to Isaura, and that no intentions at all existed. The sooner all thoughts of him were relinquished, as a new suitor on the ground, the better it would be for the young lady's happiness in the only state in which happiness should be, if not found, at least sought, whether by maid or man.

Mrs. Morley was extremely put out by this untoward result of the diplomacy she had intrusted to the Colonel; and when, the next day, came a very courteous letter from Graham, thanking her gratefully for the kindness of her invitation, and expressing his regret briefly, though cordially, at his inability to profit by it, without the most distant allusion to the subject which the Colonel had brought on the tapis, or even requesting his compliments to the Signoras Venosta and Cicogna, she was more than put out, more than resentful,--she was deeply grieved. Being, however, one of those gallant heroes of womankind who do not give in at the first defeat, she began to doubt whether Frank had not rather overstrained the delicacy which he said he had put into his "soundings." He ought to have been more explicit. Meanwhile she resolved to call on Isaura, and, without mentioning Graham's refusal of her invitation, endeavour to ascertain whether the attachment which she felt persuaded the girl secretly cherished for this recalcitrant Englishman were something more than the first romantic fancy--whether it were

sufficiently deep to justify farther effort on Mrs. Morley's part to bring it to a prosperous issue.

She found Isaura at home and alone; and, to do her justice, she exhibited wonderful tact in the fulfilment of the task she had set herself. Forming her judgment by manner and look--not words--she returned home, convinced that she ought to seize the opportunity afforded to her by Graham's letter. It was one to which she might very naturally reply, and in that reply she might convey the object at her heart more felicitously than the Colonel had done. "The cleverest man is," she said to herself, "stupid compared to an ordinary woman in the real business of life, which does not consist of fighting and moneymaking."

Now there was one point she had ascertained by words in her visit to Isaura--a point on which all might depend. She had asked Isaura when and where she had seen Graham last; and when Isaura had given her that information, and she learned it was on the eventful day on which Isaura gave her consent to the publication of her MS. if approved by Savarin, in the journal to be set up by the handsome-faced young author, she leapt to the conclusion that Graham had been seized with no unnatural jealousy, and was still under the illusive glamour of that green-eyed fiend. She was confirmed in this notion, not altogether an unsound one, when asking with apparent carelessness, "And in that last interview, did you see any change in Mr. Vane's manner, especially when he took leave?"

Isaura turned away pale, and involuntarily clasping her hands--as women do when they would suppress pain--replied, in a low murmur, "His manner was changed."

Accordingly, Mrs. Morley sat down and wrote the following letter:

"DEAR MR. VANE,--I am very angry indeed with you for refusing my invitation--I had so counted on you, and I don't believe a word of your excuse. Engagements! To balls and dinners, I suppose, as if you were not much too clever to care about such silly attempts to enjoy solitude in crowds. And as to what you men call business, you have no right to have any business at all. You are not in commerce; you are not in Parliament; you told me yourself that you had no great landed estates to give you trouble; you are rich, without any necessity to take pains to remain rich, or to become richer; you have no business in the world except to please yourself: and when you will not come to Paris to see one of your truest friends--which I certainly am--it simply means, that no matter how such a visit would please me, it does not please yourself. I call that abominably rude and ungrateful.

"But I am not writing merely to scold you. I have something else on my mind, and it must come out. Certainly, when you were at Paris last year you did admire, above all other young ladies, Isaura Cicogna. And I honoured you for doing so. I know no other young lady to be called her equal. Well, if you admired her then, what would you do now if you met her? Then she was but a girl--very brilliant, very charming, it is true--but undeveloped, untested. Now she is a woman, a princess among women, but retaining all that is most lovable in a girl; so courted, yet so simple--so gifted, yet so innocent. Her head is not a bit turned by all the flattery that surrounds her. Come and judge for yourself. I still hold the door of the rooms destined to you open for repentance.

"My dear Mr. Vane, do not think me a silly match-making little woman, when I write to you thus, _a coeur ouvert_.

"I like you so much that I would fain secure to you the rarest prize which life is ever likely to offer to your ambition. Where can you hope to find another Isaura? Among the stateliest daughters of your English dukes, where is there one whom a proud man would be more proud to show to the world, saying, 'She is mine!' where one more distinguished--I will not say by mere beauty, there she might be eclipsed--but by sweetness and dignity combined--in aspect, manner, every movement, every smile?"

"And you, who are yourself so clever, so well read--you who would be so lonely with a wife who was not your companion, with whom you could not converse on equal terms of intellect,--my dear friend, where could you find a companion in whom you would not miss the poet-soul of Isaura? Of course I should not dare to obtrude all these questionings on your innermost reflection, if I had not some idea, right or wrong, that since the days when at Enghien and Montmorency, seeing you and Isaura side by side, I whispered to Frank, 'So should those two be through life,' some cloud has passed between your eyes and the future on which they gazed. Cannot that cloud be dispelled? Were you so unjust to yourself as to be jealous of a rival, perhaps of a Gustave Rameau? I write to you frankly--answer me frankly; and if you answer, 'Mrs. Morley, I don't know, what you mean; I admired Mademoiselle Cicogna as I might admire any other pretty, accomplished girl, but it is really nothing to me whether she marries Gustave Rameau or any one else,'--why, then, burn this letter--forget that it has been written; and may you never know the pang of remorseful sigh, if, in the days to come, you see her--whose name in that case I should profane did I repeat it--the comrade of another man's mind, the half of another man's heart, the pride and delight of another man's blissful home."

CHAPTER IV.

There is somewhere in Lord Lytton's writings--writings so numerous that I may be pardoned if I cannot remember where--a critical definition of the difference between dramatic and narrative art of story, instanced by that marvellous passage in the loftiest of Sir Walter Scott's works, in which all the anguish of Ravenswood on the night before he has to meet Lucy's brother in mortal combat is conveyed without the spoken words required in tragedy. It is only to be conjectured by the tramp of his heavy boots to and fro all the night long in his solitary chamber, heard below by the faithful Caleb. The drama could not have allowed that treatment; the drama must have put into words, as "soliloquy," agonies which the non-dramatic narrator knows that no soliloquy can describe. Humbly do I imitate, then, the great master of narrative in declining to put into words the conflict between love and reason that tortured the heart of Graham Vane when, dropping noiselessly the letter I have just transcribed, he covered his face with his hands and remained--I know not how long--in the same position, his head bowed, not a sound escaping from his lips.

He did not stir from his rooms that day; and had there been a Caleb's faithful ear to listen, his tread, too, might have been heard all that sleepless night passing to and fro, but pausing oft, along his solitary floors.

Possibly love would have borne down all opposing seasonings, doubts, and

prejudices, but for incidents that occurred the following evening. On that evening Graham dined *en famille* with his cousins the Altons. After dinner, the Duke produced the design for a cenotaph inscribed to the memory of his aunt, Lady Janet King, which he proposed to place in the family chapel at Alton.

"I know," said the Duke, kindly, "you would wish the old house from which she sprang to preserve some such record of her who loved you as her son; and even putting you out of the question, it gratifies me to attest the claim of our family to a daughter who continues to be famous for her goodness, and made the goodness so lovable that envy forgave it for being famous. It was a pang to me when poor Richard King decided on placing her tomb among strangers; but in conceding his rights as to her resting-place, I retain mine to her name,--*Nostris liberis virtutis exemplar*."

Graham wrung his cousin's hand—he could not speak, choked by suppressed tears.

The Duchess, who loved and honoured Lady Janet almost as much as did her husband, fairly sobbed aloud. She had, indeed, reason for grateful memories of the deceased: there had been some obstacles to her marriage with the man who had won her heart, arising from political differences and family feuds between their parents, which the gentle meditation of Lady Janet had smoothed away. And never did union founded on mutual and ardent love more belie the assertions of the great Bichat (esteemed by Dr. Buckle the finest intellect which practical philosophy has exhibited since Aristotle), that "Love is a sort of fever which does not last beyond two years," than that between those eccentric specimens of a class denounced as frivolous and artless by philosophers, English and French, who have certainly never heard of Bichat.

When the emotion the Duke had exhibited was calmed down, his wife pushed towards Graham a sheet of paper, inscribed with the epitaph composed by his hand. "Is it not beautiful," she said, falteringly—"not a word too much or too little?"

Graham read the inscription slowly, and with very dimmed eyes. It deserved the praise bestowed on it; for the Duke, though a shy and awkward speaker, was an incisive and graceful writer.

Yet, in his innermost self, Graham shivered when he read that epitaph, it expressed so emphatically the reverential nature of the love which Lady Janet had inspired--the genial influences which the holiness of a character so active in doing good had diffused around it. It brought vividly before Graham that image of perfect spotless womanhood. And a voice within him asked, "Would that cenotaph be placed amid the monuments of an illustrious lineage if the secret known to thee could transpire? What though the lost one were really as unsullied by sin as the world deems, would the name now treasured as an heirloom not be a memory of gall and a sound of shame?"

He remained so silent after putting down the inscription, that the Duke said modestly: "My dear Graham, I see that you do not like what I have written. Your pen is much more practised than mine. If I did not ask you to compose the epitaph, it was because I thought it would please you more in coming, as a spontaneous tribute due to her, from the representative of her family. But will you correct my sketch, or give me another according to your own ideas?"

"I see not a word to alter," said Graham; "forgive me if my silence wronged my emotion; the truest eloquence is that which holds us too mute for applause."

"I knew you would like it. Leopold is always so disposed to underrate himself," said the duchess, whose hand was resting fondly on her husband's shoulder. "Epitaphs are so difficult to write-especially epitaphs on women of whom in life the least said the better. Janet was the only woman I ever knew whom one could praise in safety."

"Well expressed," said the Duke, smiling: "and I wish you would make that safety clear to some lady friends of yours, to whom it might serve as a lesson. Proof against every breath of scandal herself, Janet King never uttered and never encouraged one ill-natured word against another. But I am afraid, my dear fellow, that I must leave you to a tete-a-tete with Eleanor. You know that I must be at the House this evening--I only paired till half-past nine."

"I will walk down to the House with you, if you are going on foot."

"No," said the Duchess; "you must resign yourself to me for at least half an hour. I was looking over your aunt's letters to-day, and I found one which I wish to show you; it is all about yourself, and written within the last few months of her life." Here she put her arm into Graham's, and led him into her own private drawing-room, which, though others might call it a boudoir, she dignified by the name of her study. The Duke remained for some minutes thoughtfully leaning his arm on the mantelpiece. It was no unimportant debate in the Lords that night, and on a subject in which he took great interest, and the details of which he had thoroughly mastered. He had been requested to speak, if only a few words, for his high character and his reputation for good sense gave weight to the mere utterance of his opinion. But though no one had more moral courage in action, the Duke had a terror at the very thought of addressing an audience, which made him despise himself.

"Ah!" he muttered, "if Graham Vane were but in Parliament, I could trust him to say exactly what I would rather be swallowed up by an earthquake than stand up and say for myself. But now he has got money he seems to think of nothing but saving it."

CHAPTER V.

The letter from Lady Janet, which the Duchess took from the desk and placed in Graham's hand, was in strange coincidence with the subject that for the last twenty-four hours had absorbed his thoughts and tortured his heart. Speaking of him in terms of affectionate eulogy, the writer proceeded to confide her earnest wish that he should not longer delay that change in life which, concentrating so much that is vague in the desires and aspirations of man, leaves his heart and his mind, made serene by the contentment of home, free for the steadfast consolidation of their warmth and their light upon the ennobling duties that unite the individual to his race.

"There is no one," wrote Lady Janet, "whose character and career a felicitous choice in marriage can have greater influence over than this dear adopted son of mine. I do not fear that in any case he will be

liable to the errors of his brilliant father. His early reverse of fortune here seems to me one of those blessings which Heaven conceals in the form of affliction. For in youth, the genial freshness of his gay animal spirits, a native generosity mingled with desire of display and thirst for applause, made me somewhat alarmed for his future. But, though he still retains these attributes of character, they are no longer predominant; they are modified and chastened. He has learned prudence. But what I now fear most for him is that which he does not show in the world, which neither Leopold nor you seem to detect,—it is an exceeding sensitiveness of pride. I know not how else to describe it. It is so interwoven with the highest qualities, that I sometimes dread injury to them could it be torn away from the faultier ones which it supports.

"It is interwoven with that lofty independence of spirit which has made him refuse openings the most alluring to his ambition; it communicates a touching grandeur to his self-denying thrift; it makes him so tenacious of his word once given, so cautious before he gives it. Public life to him is essential; without it he would be incomplete; and yet I sigh to think that whatever success he may achieve in it will be attended with proportionate pain. Calumny goes side by side with fame, and courting fame as a man, he is as thin-skinned to calumny as a woman.

"The wife for Graham should have qualities, not taken individually, uncommon in English wives, but in combination somewhat rare.

"She must have mind enough to appreciate his—not to clash with it. She must be fitted with sympathies to be his dearest companion, his confidante in the hopes and fears which the slightest want of sympathy would make him keep ever afterwards pent within his breast. In herself worthy of distinction, she must merge all distinction in his. You have met in the world men who, marrying professed beauties, or professed literary geniuses, are spoken of as the husband of the beautiful Mrs. A-----, or of the clever Mrs. B-----: can you fancy Graham Vane in the reflected light of one of those husbands? I trembled last year when I thought he was attracted by a face which the artists raved about, and again by a tongue which dropped *bons mots* that went the round of the club. I was relieved, when, sounding him, he said, laughingly, 'No, dear aunt, I should be one sore from head to foot if I married a wife that was talked about for anything but goodness.'

"No,—Graham Vane will have pains sharp enough if he live to be talked about himself. But that tenderest half of himself, the bearer of the name he would make, and for the dignity of which he alone would be responsible,—if that were the town talk, he would curse the hour he gave any one the right to take on herself his man's burden of calumny and fame. I know not which I should pity the most, Graham Vane or his wife.

"Do you understand me, dearest Eleanor? No doubt you do so far, that you comprehend that the women whom men most admire are not the women we, as women ourselves, would wish our sons or brothers to marry. But perhaps you do not comprehend my cause of fear, which is this—for in such matters men do not see as we women do—Graham abhors, in the girls of our time, frivolity and insipidity. Very rightly, you will say. True, but then he is too likely to be allured by contrasts. I have seen him attracted by the very girls we recoil from more than we do from those we allow to be frivolous and insipid. I accused him of admiration for a certain young lady whom you call 'odious,' and whom the slang that has come into vogue calls 'fast;' and I was not satisfied with his answer, 'Certainly I admire her; she is not a doll—she has ideas.' I would

rather of the two see Graham married to what men call a doll, than to a girl with ideas which are distasteful to women."

Lady Janet then went on to question the Duchess about a Miss Asterisk, with whom this tale will have nothing to do, but who, from the little which Lady Janet had seen of her, might possess all the requisites that fastidious correspondent would exact for the wife of her adopted son.

This Miss Asterisk had been introduced into the London world by the Duchess. The Duchess had replied to Lady Janet, that if earth could be ransacked, a more suitable wife for Graham Vane than Miss Asterisk could not be found; she was well born--an heiress; the estates she inherited were in the county of--(viz., the county in which the ancestors of D'Altons and Vanes had for centuries established their whereabouts). Miss Asterisk was pretty enough to please any man's eye, but not with the beauty of which artists rave; well informed enough to be companion to a well-informed man, but certainly not witty enough to supply bons mots to the clubs. Miss Asterisk was one of those women of whom a husband might be proud, yet with whom a husband would feel safe from being talked about.

And in submitting the letter we have read to Graham's eye, the Duchess had the cause of Miss Asterisk pointedly in view. Miss Asterisk had confided to her friend, that, of all men she had seen, Mr. Graham Vane was the one she would feel the least inclined to refuse.

So when Graham Vane returned the letter to the Duchess, simply saying, "How well my dear aunt divined what is weakest in me!" the Duchess replied quickly, "Miss Asterisk dines here to-morrow; pray come; you would like her if you knew more of her."

"To-morrow I am engaged--an American friend of mine dines with me; but 'tis no matter, for I shall never feel more for Miss Asterisk than I feel for Mont Blanc."

CHAPTER VI.

On leaving his cousin's house Graham walked on, he scarce knew or cared whither, the image of the beloved dead so forcibly recalled the solemnity of the mission with which he had been intrusted, and which hitherto he had failed to fulfil. What if the only mode by which he could, without causing questions and suspicions that might result in dragging to day the terrible nature of the trust he held, enrich the daughter of Richard King, repair all wrong hitherto done to her, and guard the sanctity of Lady Janet's home,--should be in that union which Richard King had commended to him while his heart was yet free? In such a case, would not gratitude to the dead, duty to the living, make that union imperative at whatever sacrifice of happiness to himself? The two years to which Richard King had limited the suspense of research were not yet expired. Then, too, that letter of Lady Janet's,--so tenderly anxious for his future, so clear-sighted as to the elements of his own character in its strength or its infirmities--combined with graver causes to withhold his heart from its yearning impulse, and--no, not steel it against Isaura, but forbid it to realise, in the fair creature and creator of romance, his ideal of the woman to whom an earnest, sagacious, aspiring man commits all the destinies involved in the serene dignity of his hearth.

He could not but own that this gifted author--this eager seeker after fame--this brilliant and bold competitor with men on their own stormy battle-ground--was the very person from whom Lady Janet would have warned away his choice. She (Isaura) merge her own distinctions in a husband's;--she leave exclusively to him the burden of fame and calumny! --she shun "to be talked about!" she who could feel her life to be a success or a failure, according to the extent and the loudness of the talk which it courted!

While these thoughts racked his mind, a kindly hand was laid on his arm, and a cheery voice accosted him. "Well met, my dear Vane! I see we are bound to the same place; there will be a good gathering to-night."

"What do you mean, Bevil? I am going nowhere, except to my own quiet rooms."

"Pooh! Come in here at least for a few minutes,"--and Bevil drew him up to the door-step of a house close by, where, on certain evenings, a well-known club drew together men who seldom meet so familiarly elsewhere--men of all callings; a club especially favoured by wits, authors, and the _flaneurs_ of polite society.

Graham shook his head, about to refuse, when Bevil added, "I have just come from Paris, and can give you the last news, literary, political, and social. By the way, I saw Savarin the other night at the Cicogna's--he introduced me there." Graham winced; he was spelled by the music of a name, and followed his acquaintance into the crowded room, and, after returning many greetings and nods, withdrew into a remote corner, and motioned Bevil to a seat beside him.

"So you met Savarin? Where, did you say?"

"At the house of the new lady-author--I hate the word authoress--Mademoiselle Cicogna! Of course you have read her book?"

"Yes."

"Full of fine things, is it not?--though somewhat highflown and sentimental: however, nothing succeeds like success. No book has been more talked about at Paris: the only thing more talked about is the lady-author herself."

"Indeed, and how?"

"She doesn't look twenty, a mere girl--of that kind of beauty which so arrests the eye that you pass by other faces to gaze on it, and the dullest stranger would ask, 'Who, and what is she?' A girl, I say, like that--who lives as independently as if she were a middle-aged widow, receives every week (she has her Thursdays), with no other chaperon than an old _ci-devant_ Italian singing woman, dressed like a guy--must set Parisian tongues into play even if she had not written the crack book of the season."

"Mademoiselle Cicogna receives on Thursdays,--no harm in that; and if she have no other chaperon than the Italian lady you mention, it is because Mademoiselle Cicogna is an orphan, and having a fortune, such as it is, of her own, I do not see why she should not live as independently as many an unmarried woman in London placed under similar circumstances. I suppose she receives chiefly persons in the literary or artistic world,

and if they are all as respectable as the Savarins, I do not think ill-nature itself could find fault with her social circle."

"Ah! you know the Cicogna, I presume. I am sure I did not wish to say anything that could offend her best friends, only I do think it is a pity she is not married, poor girl!"

"Mademoiselle Cicogna, accomplished, beautiful, of good birth (the Cicogna's rank among the oldest of Lombard families), is not likely to want offers."

"Offers of marriage,--h'm--well, I dare say, from authors and artists. You know Paris better even than I do, but I don't suppose authors and artists there make the most desirable husbands; and I scarcely know a marriage in France between a man-author and lady-author which does not end in the deadliest of all animosities--that of wounded amour propre. Perhaps the man admires his own genius too much to do proper homage to his wife's."

"But the choice of Mademoiselle Cicogna need not be restricted to the pale of authorship--doubtless she has many admirers beyond that quarrelsome borderland."

"Certainly--countless adorers. Enguerrand de Vandemar--you know that diamond of dandies?"

"Perfectly--is he an admirer?"

"Cela va sans dire--he told me that though she was not the handsomest woman in Paris, all other women looked less handsome since he had seen her. But, of course, French lady-killers like Enguerrand, when it comes to marriage, leave it to their parents to choose their wives and arrange the terms of the contract. Talking of lady-killers, I beheld amid the throng at Mademoiselle Cicogna's the ci-devant Lovelace whom I remember some twenty-three years ago as the darling of wives and the terror of husbands--Victor de Mauleon."

"Victor de Mauleon at Mademoiselle Cicogna's!--what, is that man restored to society?"

"Ah! you are thinking of the ugly old story about the jewels--oh, yes, he has got over that; all his grand relations, the Vandemars, Beauvilliers, Rochebriant, and others, took him by the hand when he reappeared at Paris last year; and though I believe he is still avoided by many, he is courted by still more--and avoided, I fancy, rather from political than social causes. The Imperialist set, of course, execrate and prescribe him. You know he is the writer of those biting articles signed Pierre Firmin in the Sens Commun; and I am told he is the proprietor of that very clever journal, which has become a power."

"So, so--that is the journal in which Mademoiselle Cicogna's roman first appeared. So, so--Victor de Mauleon one of her associates, her counsellor and friend--ah!"

"No, I didn't say that; on the contrary, he was presented to her the first time the evening I was at the house. I saw that young silk-haired coxcomb, Gustave Rameau, introduce him to her. You don't perhaps know Rameau, editor of the Sens Commun--writes poems and criticisms. They say he is a Red Republican, but De Mauleon keeps truculent French politics

subdued if not suppressed in his cynical journal. Somebody told me that the Cicogna is very much in love with Rameau; certainly he has a handsome face of his own, and that is the reason why she was so rude to the Russian Prince X-----."

"How rude! Did the Prince propose to her?"

"Propose! you forget--he is married. Don't you know the Princess? Still there are other kinds of proposals than those of marriage which a rich Russian prince may venture to make to a pretty novelist brought up for the stage."

"Bevil!" cried Graham, grasping the man's arm fiercely, "how dare you?"

"My dear boy," said Bevil, very much astonished, "I really did not know that your interest in the young lady was so great. If I have wounded you in relating a mere _on dit_ picked up at the Jockey Club, I beg you a thousand pardons. I dare say there was not a word of truth in it."

"Not a word of truth, you may be sure, if the _on dit_ was injurious to Mademoiselle Cicogna. It is true, I have a strong interest in her; any man--any gentleman--would have such interest in a girl so brilliant and seemingly so friendless. It shames one of human nature to think that the reward which the world makes to those who elevate its platitudes, brighten its dulness, delight its leisure, is Slander! I have had the honour to make the acquaintance of this lady before she became a 'celebrity,' and I have never met in my paths through life a purer heart or a nobler nature. What is the wretched _on dit_ you condescend to circulate? Permit me to add:

"He who repeats a slander shares the crime."

"Upon my honour, my dear Vane," said Bevil seriously (he did not want for spirit), "I hardly know you this evening. It is not because duelling is out of fashion that a man should allow himself to speak in a tone that gives offence to another who intended none; and if duelling is out of fashion in England, it is still possible in France.--_Entre nous_, I would rather cross the Channel with you than submit to language that conveys unmerited insult."

Graham's cheek, before ashen pale, flushed into dark red. "I understand you," he said quietly, "and will be at Boulogne to-morrow."

"Graham Vane," replied Bevil, with much dignity, "you and I have known each other a great many years, and neither of us has cause to question the courage of the other; but I am much older than yourself--permit me to take the melancholy advantage of seniority. A duel between us in consequence of careless words said about a lady in no way connected with either, would be a cruel injury to her; a duel on grounds so slight would little injure me--a man about town, who would not sit an hour in the House of Commons if you paid him a thousand pounds a minute. But you, Graham Vane--you whose destiny it is to canvass electors and make laws--would it not be an injury to you to be questioned at the hustings why you broke the law, and why you sought another man's life? Come, come! shake hands and consider all that seconds, if we chose them, would exact, is said, every affront on either side retracted, every apology on either side made."

"Bevil, you disarm and conquer me. I spoke like a hotheaded fool; forget

it--forgive. But--but--I can listen calmly now--what is that _on dit_?"

"One that thoroughly bears out your own very manly upholding of the poor young orphan, whose name I shall never again mention without such respect as would satisfy her most sensitive champion. It was said that the Prince X----- boasted that before a week was out Mademoiselle Cicogna should appear in his carriage at the Bois de Boulogne, and wear at the opera diamonds he had sent to her; that this boast was enforced by a wager, and the terms of the wager compelled the Prince to confess the means he had taken to succeed, and produce the evidence that he had lost or won. According to this _on dit_, the Prince had written to Mademoiselle Cicogna, and the letter had been accompanied by a _parure_ that cost him half a million of francs; that the diamonds had been sent back with a few words of such scorn as a queen might address to an upstart lackey. But, my dear Vane, it is a mournful position for the girl to receive such offers; and you must agree with me in wishing she were safely married, even to Monsieur Rameau, coxcomb though he be. Let us hope that they will be an exception to French authors, male and female, in general, and live like turtle-doves."

CHAPTER VII.

A few days after the date of the last chapter, Colonel Morley returned to Paris. He had dined with Graham at Greenwich, had met him afterwards in society, and paid him a farewell visit on the day before the Colonel's departure; but the name of Isaura Cicogna had not again been uttered by either. Morley was surprised that his wife did not question him minutely as to the mode in which he had executed her delicate commission, and the manner as well as words with which Graham had replied to his "ventilations." But his Lizzy cut him short when he began his recital:

"I don't want to hear anything more about the man. He has thrown away a prize richer than his ambition will ever gain, even if it gained him a throne."

"That it can't gain him in the old country. The people are loyal to the present dynasty, whatever you may be told to the contrary."

"Don't be so horribly literal, Frank; that subject is done with. How was the Duchess of ----- dressed?"

But when the Colonel had retired to what the French call the _cabinet de travail_--and which he more accurately termed his "smoke den"--and there indulged in the cigar which, despite his American citizenship, was forbidden in the drawing-room of the tyrant who ruled his life, Mrs. Morley took from her desk a letter received three days before, and brooded over it intently, studying every word. When she had thus reperused it, her tears fell upon the page. "Poor Isaura!" she muttered --"poor Isaura! I know she loves him--and how deeply a nature like hers can love! But I must break it to her. If I did not, she would remain nursing a vain dream, and refuse every chance of real happiness for the sake of nursing it." Then she mechanically folded up the letter--I need not say it was from Graham Vane--restored it to the desk, and remained musing till the Colonel looked in at the door and said peremptorily, "Very late--come to bed."

The next day Madame Savarin called on Isaura.

"_Chere enfant_" said she, "I have bad news for you. Poor Gustave is very ill--an attack of the lungs and fever; you know how delicate he is."

"I am sincerely grieved," said Isaura, in earnest tender tones; "it must be a very sudden attack: he was here last Thursday."

"The malady only declared itself yesterday morning, but surely you must have observed how ill he has been looking for several days past? It pained me to see him."

"I did not notice any change in him," said Isaura, somewhat conscience-stricken. Wrapt in her own happy thoughts, she would not have noticed change in faces yet more familiar to her than that of her young admirer.

"Isaura," said Madame Savarin, "I suspect there are moral causes for our friend's failing health. Why should I disguise my meaning? You know well how madly he is in love with you, and have you denied him hope?"

"I like M. Rameau as a friend; I admire him--at times I pity him."

"Pity is akin to love."

"I doubt the truth of that saying, at all events as you apply it now. I could not love M. Rameau; I never gave him cause to think I could."

"I wish for both your sakes that you could make me a different answer; for his sake, because, knowing his faults and failings, I am persuaded that they would vanish in a companionship so pure, so elevating as yours: you could make him not only so much happier but so much better a man. Hush! let me go on, let me come to yourself,--I say for your sake I wish it. Your pursuits, your ambition, are akin to his; you should not marry one who could not sympathise with you in these. If you did, he might either restrict the exercise of your genius or be chafed at its display. The only authoress I ever knew whose married lot was serenely happy to the last, was the greatest of English poetesses married to a great English poet. You cannot, you ought not, to devote yourself to the splendid career to which your genius irresistibly impels you, without that counsel, that support, that protection, which a husband alone can give. My dear child, as the wife myself of a man of letters, and familiarised to all the gossip, all the scandal, to which they who give their names to the public are exposed, I declare that if I had a daughter who inherited Savarin's talents, and was ambitious of attaining to his renown, I would rather shut her up in a convent than let her publish a book that was in every one's hands until she had sheltered her name under that of a husband; and if I say this of my child, with a father so wise in the world's ways, and so popularly respected as my _bon homme_, what must I feel to be essential to your safety, poor stranger in our land! poor solitary orphan! with no other advice or guardian than the singing mistress whom you touchingly call '_Madre_!' I see how I distress and pain you--I cannot help it. Listen! The other evening Savarin came back from his favourite cafe in a state of excitement that made me think he came to announce a revolution. It was about you; he stormed, he wept--actually wept--my philosophical laughing Savarin. He had just heard of that atrocious wager made by a Russian barbarian. Every one praised you for the contempt with which you had treated the savage's insolence. But that you should have been submitted to such an insult without one male friend who had the right to resent and chastise it,--you cannot think how

Savarin was chafed and galled. You know how he admires, but you cannot guess how he reveres you; and since then he says to me every day: 'That girl must not remain single. Better marry any man who has a heart to defend a wife's honour and the nerve to fire a pistol: every Frenchman has those qualifications!'"

Here Isaura could no longer restrain her emotions; she burst into sobs so vehement, so convulsive, that Madame Savarin became alarmed; but when she attempted to embrace and soothe her, Isaura recoiled with a visible shudder, and gasping out, "Cruel, cruel!" turned to the door, and rushed to her own room.

A few minutes afterwards a maid entered the salon with a message to Madame Savarin that Mademoiselle was so unwell that she must beg Madame to excuse her return to the salon.

Later in the day Mrs. Morley called, but Isaura would not see her.

Meanwhile poor Rameau was stretched on his sick-bed, and in sharp struggle between life and death. It is difficult to disentangle, one by one, all the threads in a nature so complex as Rameau's; but if we may hazard a conjecture, the grief of disappointed love was not the immediate cause of his illness, and yet it had much to do with it. The goad of Isaura's refusal had driven him into seeking distraction in excesses which a stronger frame could not have courted with impunity. The man was thoroughly Parisian in many things, but especially in impatience of any trouble. Did love trouble him--love could be drowned in absinthe; and too much absinthe may be a more immediate cause of congested lungs than the love which the absinthe had lulled to sleep.

His bedside was not watched by hirelings. When first taken thus ill--too ill to attend to his editorial duties--information was conveyed to the publisher of the *Sens Commun*, and in consequence of that information, Victor de Mauleon came to see the sick man. By his bed he found Savarin, who had called, as it were by chance, and seen the doctor, who had said, "It is grave. He must be well nursed." Savarin whispered to De Mauleon, "Shall we call in a professional nurse, or a _soeur de charite_?"

De Mauleon replied, also in a whisper, "Somebody told me that the man had a mother."

It was true--Savarin had forgotten it. Rameau never mentioned his parents--he was not proud of them.

They belonged to a lower class of the bourgeoisie, retired shopkeepers, and a Red Republican is sworn to hate of the bourgeoisie, high or low; while a beautiful young author pushing his way into the *Chaussee d'Antin* does not proclaim to the world that his parents had sold hosiery in the *Rue St. Denis*.

Nevertheless Savarin knew that Rameau had such parents still living, and took the hint. Two hours afterwards Rameau was leaning his burning forehead on his mother's breast.

The next morning the doctor said to the mother, "You are worth ten of me. If you can stay here we shall pull him through."

"Stay here!--my own boy!" cried indignantly the poor mother.

CHAPTER VIII.

The day which had inflicted on Isaura so keen an anguish was marked by a great trial in the life of Alain de Rochebriant.

In the morning he received the notice "of un commandement tendant a saisie immobiliere," on the part of his creditor, M. Louvier; in plain English, an announcement that his property at Rochebriant would be put up to public sale on a certain day, in case all debts due to the mortgagee were not paid before. An hour afterwards came a note from Duplessis stating that "he had returned from Bretagne on the previous evening, and would be very happy to see the Marquis de Rochebriant before two o'clock, if not inconvenient to call."

Alain put the "commandement" into his pocket, and repaired to the Hotel Duplessis.

The financier received him with very cordial civility. Then he began: "I am happy to say I left your excellent aunt in very good health. She honoured the letter of introduction to her which I owe to your politeness with the most amiable hospitalities; she insisted on my removing from the auberge at which I first put up and becoming a guest under your venerable roof--a most agreeable lady, and a most interesting chateau."

"I fear your accommodation was in striking contrast to your comforts at Paris; my chateau is only interesting to an antiquarian enamoured of ruins."

"Pardon me, 'ruins' is an exaggerated expression. I do not say that the chateau does not want some repairs, but they would not be costly; the outer walls are strong enough to defy time for centuries to come, and a few internal decorations and some modern additions of furniture would make the old manoir a home fit for a prince. I have been over the whole estate, too, with the worthy M. Hebert,--a superb property."

"Which M. Louvier appears to appreciate," said Alain, with a somewhat melancholy smile, extending to Duplessis the menacing notice.

Duplessis glanced at it, and said drily: "M. Louvier knows what he is about. But I think we had better put an immediate stop to formalities which must be painful to a creditor so benevolent. I do not presume to offer to pay the interest due on the security you can give for the repayment. If you refused that offer from so old a friend as Lemercier, of course you could not accept it from me. I make another proposal, to which you can scarcely object. I do not like to give my scheming rival on the Bourse the triumph of so profoundly planned a speculation. Aid me to defeat him. Let me take the mortgage on myself, and become sole mortgagee--hush!--on this condition,--that there should be an entire union of interests between us two; that I should be at liberty to make the improvements I desire, and when the improvements be made, there should be a fair arrangement as to the proportion of profits due to me as mortgagee and improver, to you as original owner. Attend, my dear Marquis,--I am speaking as a mere man of business. I see my way to adding more than a third, I might even say a half--to the present

revenues of Rochbriant. The woods have been sadly neglected, drainage alone would add greatly to their produce. Your orchards might be rendered magnificent supplies to Paris with better cultivation. Lastly, I would devote to building purposes or to market gardens all the lands round the two towns of ----- and ----- . I think I can lay my hands on suitable speculators for these last experiments. In a word, though the market value of Rochebriant, as it now stands, would not be equivalent to the debt on it, in five or six years it could be made worth--well, I will not say how much--but we shall be both well satisfied with the result. Meanwhile, if you allow me to find purchasers for your timber, and if you will not suffer the Chevalier de Finisterre to regulate your expenses, you need have no fear that the interest due to me will not be regularly paid, even though I shall be compelled, for the first year or two at least, to ask a higher rate of interest than Louvier exacted--say a quarter per cent. more; and in suggesting that, you will comprehend that this is now a matter of business between us, and not of friendship."

Alain turned his head aside to conceal his emotion, and then, with the quick affectionate impulse of the genuine French nature, threw himself on the financier's breast and kissed him on both cheeks.

"You save me! you save the home and the tombs of my ancestors! Thank you I cannot; but I believe in God--I pray--I will pray for you as for a father; and if ever," he hurried on in broken words, "I am mean enough to squander on idle luxuries one franc that I should save for the debt due to you, chide me as a father would chide a graceless son."

Moved as Alain was, Duplessis was moved yet more deeply. "What father would not be proud of such a son? Ah, if I had such a one!" he said softly. Then, quickly recovering his wonted composure, he added, with the sardonic smile which often chilled his friends and alarmed his foes, "Monsieur Louvier is about to pass that which I ventured to promise him, _a 'mauvais quart-d'heure.' Lend me that _commandement tendant a saisie_. I must be off to my _avoue_ with instructions. If you have no better engagement, pray dine with me to-day and accompany Valerie and myself to the opera."

I need not say that Alain accepted the invitation. How happy Valerie was that evening!

CHAPTER IX.

The next day Duplessis was surprised by a visit from M. Louvier--that magnate of millionaires had never before set foot in the house of his younger and less famous rival.

The burly man entered the room with a face much flushed, and with more than his usual mixture of jovial brusquerie and opulent swagger.

"Startled to see me, I dare say," began Louvier, as soon as the door was closed. "I have this morning received a communication from your agent containing a cheque for the interest due to me from M. Rochebriant, and a formal notice of your intention to pay off the principal on behalf of that popinjay prodigal. Though we two have not hitherto been the best friends in the world, I thought it fair to a man in your station to come

to you direct and say, 'Cher confrere, what swindler has bubbled you? You don't know the real condition of this Breton property, or you would never so throw away your millions. The property is not worth the mortgage I have on it by 30,000 louis.'

"Then, M. Louvier, you will be 30,000 louis the richer if I take the mortgage off your hands."

"I can afford the loss--no offence--better than you can; and I may have fancies which I don't mind paying for, but which cannot influence another. See, I have brought with me the exact schedule of all details respecting this property. You need not question their accuracy; they have been arranged by the Marquis's own agents, M. Gandrin and M. Hebert. They contain, you will perceive, every possible item of revenue, down to an apple-tree. Now, look at that, and tell me if you are justified in lending such a sum on such a property."

"Thank you very much for an interest in my affairs that I scarcely ventured to expect M. Louvier to entertain; but I see that I have a duplicate of this paper, furnished to me very honestly by M. Hebert himself. Besides, I, too, have fancies which I don't mind paying for, and among them may be a fancy for the lands of Rochebriant."

"Look you, Duplessis, when a man like me asks a favour, you may be sure that he has the power to repay it. Let me have my whim here, and ask anything you like from me in return!"

"_Desole_ not to oblige you, but this has become not only a whim of mine, but a matter of honour; and honour you know, my dear M. Louvier, is the first principle of sound finance. I have myself, after careful inspection of the Rochebriant property, volunteered to its owner to advance the money to pay off your hypotheque; and what would be said on the Bourse if Lucien Duplessis failed in an obligation?"

"I think I can guess what will one day be said of Lucien Duplessis if he make an irrevocable enemy of Paul Louvier. _Corbleu_! mon cher, a man of thrice your capital, who watched every speculation of yours with a hostile eye, might some _beau jour_ make even you a bankrupt!"

"Forewarned, forearmed!" replied Duplessis, imperturbably, "Fas est ab hoste doceri,--I mean, 'It is right to be taught by an enemy;' and I never remember the day when you were otherwise, and yet I am not a bankrupt, though I receive you in a house which, thanks to you, is so modest in point of size!"

"Bah! that was a mistake of mine,--and, ha! ha! you had your revenge there--that forest!"

"Well, as a peace offering, I will give you up the forest, and content my ambition as a landed proprietor with this bad speculation of Rochebriant!"

"Confound the forest, I don't care for it now! I can sell my place for more than it has cost me to one of your imperial favourites. Build a palace in your forest. Let me have Rochebriant, and name your terms."

"A thousand pardons! but I have already had the honour to inform you, that I have contracted an obligation which does not allow me to listen to terms."

As a serpent, that, after all crawlings and windings, rears itself on end, Louvier rose, crest erect:

"So then it is finished. I came here disposed to offer peace--you refuse, and declare war."

"Not at all, I do not declare war; I accept it if forced on me."

"Is that your last word, M. Duplessis?"

"Monsieur Louvier, it is."

"Bon jour!"

And Louvier strode to the door; here he paused: "Take a day to consider."

"Not a moment."

"Your servant, Monsieur,--your very humble servant." Louvier vanished.

Duplessis leaned his large thoughtful forehead on his thin nervous hand. "This loan will pinch me," he muttered. "I must be very wary now with such a foe. Well, why should I care to be rich? Valerie's dot, Valerie's happiness, are secured."

CHAPTER X.

Madame Savarin wrote a very kind and very apologetic letter to Isaura, but no answer was returned to it. Madame Savarin did not venture to communicate to her husband the substance of a conversation which had ended so painfully. He had, in theory, a delicacy of tact, which, if he did not always exhibit it in practice, made him a very severe critic of its deficiency in others. Therefore, unconscious of the offence given, he made a point of calling at Isaura's apartments, and leaving word with her servant that "he was sure she would be pleased to hear M. Rameau was somewhat better, though still in danger."

It was not till the third day after her interview with Madame Savarin that Isaura left her own room,--she did so to receive Mrs. Morley.

The fair American was shocked to see the change in Isaura's countenance. She was very pale, and with that indescribable appearance of exhaustion which betrays continued want of sleep; her soft eyes were dim, the play of her lips was gone, her light step weary and languid.

"My poor darling!" cried Mrs. Morley, embracing her, "you have indeed been ill! What is the matter?--who attends you?"

"I need no physician, it was but a passing cold--the air of Paris is very trying. Never mind me, dear--what is the last news?"

Therewith Mrs. Morley ran glibly through the principal topics of the hour: the breach threatened between M. Ollivier and his former liberal partisans; the tone unexpectedly taken by M. de Girardin; the

speculations as to the result of the trial of the alleged conspirators against the Emperor's life, which was fixed to take place towards the end of that month of June,--all matters of no slight importance to the interests of an empire. Sunk deep into the recesses of her fauteuil, Isaura seemed to listen quietly, till, when a pause came, she said in cold clear tones:

"And Mr. Graham Vane--he has refused your invitation?"

"I am sorry to say he has--he is so engaged in London."

"I knew he had refused," said Isaura, with a low bitter laugh.

"How? who told you?"

"My own good sense told me. One may have good sense, though one is a poor scribbler."

"Don't talk in that way; it is beneath you to angle for compliments."

"Compliments, ah! And so Mr. Vane has refused to come to Paris; never mind, he will come next year. I shall not be in Paris then. Did Colonel Morley see Mr. Vane?"

"Oh, yes; two or three times."

"He is well?"

"Quite well, I believe--at least Frank did not say to the contrary; but, from what I hear, he is not the person I took him for. Many people told Frank that he is much changed since he came into his fortune--is grown very stingy, quite miserly indeed; declines even a seat in Parliament because of the expense. It is astonishing how money does spoil a man."

"He had come into his fortune when he was here. Money had not spoiled him then."

Isaura paused, pressing her hands tightly together; then she suddenly rose to her feet, the colour on her cheek mantling and receding rapidly, and fixing on her startled visitor eyes no longer dim, but with something half fierce, half imploring in the passion of their gaze, said: "Your husband spoke of me to Mr. Vane: I know he did. What did Mr. Vane answer? Do not evade my question. The truth! the truth! I only ask the truth!"

"Give me your hand; sit here beside me, dearest child."

"Child!--no, I am a woman!--weak as a woman, but strong as a woman too!--The truth!"

Mrs. Morley had come prepared to carry out the resolution she had formed and "break" to Isaura "the truth," that which the girl now demanded. But then she had meant to break the truth in her own gentle, gradual way. Thus suddenly called upon, her courage failed her. She burst into tears. Isaura gazed at her dry-eyed.

"Your tears answer me. Mr. Vane has heard that I have been insulted. A man like him does not stoop to love for a woman who has known an insult. I do not blame him; I honour him the more--he is right."

"No-no-no!--you insulted! Who dared to insult you? (Mrs. Morley had never heard the story about the Russian Prince.) Mr. Vane spoke to Frank, and writes of you to me as of one whom it is impossible not to admire, to respect; but--I cannot say it--you will have the truth,--there, read and judge for yourself." And Mrs. Morley drew forth and thrust into Isaura's hands the letter she had concealed from her husband. The letter was not very long; it began with expressions of warm gratitude to Mrs. Morley, not for her invitation only, but for the interest she had conceived in his happiness. It went on thus "I join with my whole heart in all that you say, with such eloquent justice, of the mental and personal gifts so bounteously lavished by nature on the young lady whom you name.

"No one can feel more sensible than I of the charm of so exquisite a loveliness; no one can more sincerely join in the belief that the praise which greets the commencement of her career is but the whisper of the praise that will cheer its progress with louder and louder plaudits.

"He only would be worthy of her hand, who, if not equal to herself in genius, would feel raised into partnership with it by sympathy with its objects and joy in its triumphs. For myself, the same pain with which I should have learned she had adopted the profession which she originally contemplated, saddened and stung me when, choosing a career that confers a renown yet more lasting than the stage, she no less left behind her the peaceful immunities of private life. Were I even free to consult only my own heart in the choice of the one sole partner of my destinies (which I cannot at present honestly say that I am, though I had expected to be so ere this, when I last saw you at Paris); could I even hope--which I have no right to do--that I could chain to myself any private portion of thoughts which now flow into the large channels by which poets enrich the blood of the world,--still (I say it in self-reproach, it may be the fault of my English rearing, it may rather be the fault of an egotism peculiar to myself)--still I doubt if I could render happy any woman whose world could not be narrowed to the Home that she adorned and blessed.

"And yet not even the jealous tyranny of man's love could dare to say to natures like hers of whom we speak, 'Limit to the household glory of one the light which genius has placed in its firmament for the use and enjoyment of all.'"

"I thank you so much," said Isaura, calmly; "suspense makes a woman so weak--certainty so strong." Mechanically she smoothed and refolded the letter--mechanically, with slow, lingering hands--then she extended it to her friend, smiling.

"Nay, will you not keep it yourself?" said Mrs. Morley. "The more you examine the narrow-minded prejudices, the English arrogant man's jealous dread of superiority--nay, of equality--in the woman he 'can only value as he does his house or his horse, because she is his exclusive property, the more you will be rejoiced to find yourself free for a more worthy choice. Keep the letter; read it till you feel for the writer forgiveness and disdain."

Isaura took back the letter, and leaned her cheek on her hand, looking dreamily into space. It was some moments before she replied, and her words then had no reference to Mrs. Morley's consolatory exhortation.

"He was so pleased when he learned that I renounced the career on which I had set my ambition. I thought he would have been so pleased when I sought in another career to raise myself nearer to his level--I see now how sadly I was mistaken. All that perplexed me before in him is explained. I did not guess how foolishly I had deceived myself till three days ago,--then I did guess it; and it was that guess which tortured me so terribly that I could not keep my heart to myself when I saw you to-day; in spite of all womanly pride it would force its way--to the truth.

"Hush! I must tell you what was said to me by another friend of mine--a good friend, a wise and kind one. Yet I was so angry when she said it that I thought I could never see her more."

"My sweet darling! who was this friend, and what did she say to you?"

"The friend was Madame Savarin."

"No woman loves you more except myself--and she said?"

"That she would have suffered no daughter of hers to commit her name to the talk of the world as I have done--be exposed to the risk of insult as I have been--until she had the shelter and protection denied to me. And I have thus overleaped the bound that a prudent mother would prescribe to her child, have become one whose hand men do not seek, unless they themselves take the same roads to notoriety. Do you not think she was right?"

"Not as you so morbidly put it, silly girl,--certainly not right. But I do wish that you had the shelter and protection which Madame Savarin meant to express; I do wish that you were happily married to one very different from Mr. Vane--one who would be more proud of your genius than of your beauty--one who would say, 'My name, safer far in its enduring nobility than those that depend on titles and lands--which are held on the tenure of the popular breath--must be honoured by posterity, for She has deigned to make it hers. No democratic revolution can disenoble me.'"

"Ay, ay, you believe that men will be found to think with complacency that they owe to a wife a name they could not achieve for themselves. Possibly there are such men. Where?--among those that are already united by sympathies in the same callings, the same labours, the same hopes and fears with the women who have left behind them the privacies of home. Madame de Grantmesnil was wrong. Artists should wed with artists. True--true!"

Here she passed her hand over her forehead--it was a pretty way of hers when seeking to concentrate thought--and was silent a moment or so.

"Did you ever feel," she then asked dreamily, "that there are moments in life when a dark curtain seems to fall over one's past that a day before was so clear, so blended with the present? One cannot any longer look behind; the gaze is attracted onward, and a track of fire flashes upon the future,--the future which yesterday was invisible. There is a line by some English poet--Mr. Vane once quoted it, not to me, but to M. Savarin, and in illustration of his argument, that the most complicated recesses of thought are best reached by the simplest forms of expression. I said to myself, 'I will study that truth if ever I take to literature

as I have taken to song;' and--yes--it was that evening that the ambition fatal to woman fixed on me its relentless fangs--at Enghien--we were on the lake--the sun was setting."

"But you do not tell me the line that so impressed you," said Mrs. Morley, with a woman's kindly tact.

"The line--which line? Oh, I remember; the line was this:

"I see as from a tower the end of all."

"And now--kiss me, dearest--never a word again to me about this conversation: never a word about Mr. Vane--the dark curtain has fallen on the past."

CHAPTER XI.

Men and women are much more like each other in certain large elements of character than is generally supposed, but it is that very resemblance which makes their differences the more incomprehensible to each other; just as in politics, theology, or that most disputatious of all things disputable, metaphysics, the nearer the reasoners approach each other in points that to an uncritical bystander seem the most important, the more sure they are to start off in opposite directions upon reaching the speck of a pin-prick.

Now there are certain grand meeting-places between man and woman--the grandest of all is on the ground of love, and yet here also is the great field of quarrel. And here the teller of a tale such as mine ought, if he is sufficiently wise to be humble, to know that it is almost profanation if, as man, he presumes to enter the penetralia of a woman's innermost heart, and repeat, as a man would repeat, all the vibrations of sound which the heart of a woman sends forth undistinguishable even to her own ear.

I know Isaura as intimately as if I had rocked her in her cradle, played with her in her childhood, educated and trained her in her youth; and yet I can no more tell you faithfully what passed in her mind during the forty-eight hours that intervened between her conversation with that American lady and her reappearance in some commonplace drawing-room, than I can tell you what the Man in the Moon might feel if the sun that his world reflected were blotted out of creation.

I can only say that when she reappeared in that commonplace drawing-room world, there was a change in her face not very perceptible to the ordinary observer. If anything, to his eye she was handsomer--the eye was brighter--the complexion (always lustrous, though somewhat pale, the limpid paleness that suits so well with dark hair) was yet more lustrous,--it was flushed into delicate rose hues--hues that still better suit with dark hair. What, then, was the change, and change not for the better? The lips, once so pensively sweet, had grown hard; on the brow that had seemed to laugh when the lips did, there was no longer sympathy between brow and lip; there was scarcely seen a fine threadlike line that in a few years would be a furrow on the space between the eyes; the voice was not so tenderly soft; the step was haughtier. What all such change denoted it is for a woman to decide-I can only guess. In the mean while,

Mademoiselle Cicogna had sent her servant daily to inquire after M. Rameau. That, I think, she would have done under any circumstances. Meanwhile, too, she had called on Madame Savarin--made it up with her--sealed the reconciliation by a cold kiss. That, too, under any circumstances, I think she would have done--under some circumstances the kiss might have been less cold.

There was one thing unwonted in her habits. I mention it, though it is only a woman who can say if it means anything worth noticing.

For six days she had left a letter from Madame de Grantmesnil unanswered. With Madame de Grantmesnil was connected the whole of her innermost life--from the day when the lonely desolate child had seen, beyond the dusty thoroughfares of life, gleams of the faery land in poetry and art--onward through her restless, dreamy, aspiring youth--onward--onward--till now, through all that constitutes the glorious reality that we call romance.

Never before had she left for two days unanswered letters which were to her as Sibylline leaves to some unquiet neophyte yearning for solutions to enigmas suggested whether by the world without or by the soul within. For six days Madame de Grantmesnil's letter remained unanswered, unread, neglected, thrust out of sight; just as when some imperious necessity compels us to grapple with a world that is, we cast aside the romance which, in our holiday hours, had beguiled us to a world with which we have interests and sympathies no more.

CHAPTER XII.

Gustave recovered, but slowly. The physician pronounced him out of all immediate danger, but said frankly to him, and somewhat more guardedly to his parents, "There is ample cause to beware." "Look you, my young friend," he added to Rameau, "mere brain-work seldom kills a man once accustomed to it like you; but heart-work, and stomach-work, and nerve-work, added to brain-work, may soon consign to the coffin a frame ten times more robust than yours. Write as much as you will--that is your vocation; but it is not your vocation to drink absinthe--to preside at orgies in the Maison Doree. Regulate yourself, and not after the fashion of the fabulous Don Juan. Marry--live soberly and quietly--and you may survive the grandchildren of viveurs. Go on as you have done, and before the year is out you are in Pere la Chaise."

Rameau listened languidly, but with a profound conviction that the physician thoroughly understood his case.

Lying helpless on his bed, he had no desire for orgies at the Maison Doree; with parched lips thirsty for innocent tisane of lime-blossoms, the thought of absinthe was as odious to him as the liquid fire of Phlegethon. If ever sinner became suddenly convinced that there was a good deal to be said in favour of a moral life, that sinner at the moment I speak of was Gustave Rameau: Certainly a moral life--'Domus et placens uxor',--was essential to the poet who, aspiring to immortal glory, was condemned to the ailments of a very perishable frame.

"Ah," he murmured plaintively to himself, "that girl Isaura can have no true sympathy with genius! It is no ordinary man that she will kill in me!"

And so murmuring he fell asleep. When he woke and found his head pillowed on his mother's breast, it was much as a sensitive, delicate man may wake after having drunk too much the night before. Repentant, mournful, maudlin, he began to weep, and in the course of his weeping he confided to his mother the secret of his heart.

Isaura had refused him--that refusal had made him desperate.

"Ah! with Isaura how changed would be his habits! how pure! how healthful!" His mother listened fondly, and did her best to comfort him and cheer his drooping spirits.

She told him of Isaura's messages of inquiry duly twice a day. Rameau, who knew more about women in general, and Isaura in particular, than his mother conjectured, shook his head mournfully. "She could not do less," he said. "Has no one offered to do more?"--he thought of Julie when he asked that--Madame Rameau hesitated.

The poor Parisians! it is the mode to preach against them; and before my book closes, I shall have to preach--no, not to preach, but to imply--plenty of faults to consider and amend. Meanwhile I try my best to take them, as the philosophy of life tells us to take other people, for what they are.

I do not think the domestic relations of the Parisian bourgeoisie are as bad as they are said to be in French novels. Madame Rameau is not an uncommon type of her class. She had been when she first married singularly handsome. It was from her that Gustave inherited his beauty; and her husband was a very ordinary type of the French shopkeeper--very plain, by no means intellectual, but gay, good-humoured, devotedly attached to his wife, and with implicit trust in her conjugal virtue. Never was trust better placed. There was not a happier nor a more faithful couple in the quartier in which they resided. Madame Rameau hesitated when her boy, thinking of Julie, asked if no one had done more than send to inquire after him as Isaura had done.

After that hesitating pause she said, "Yes--a young lady calling herself Mademoiselle Julie Caumartin wished to instal herself here as your nurse. When I said, 'But I am his mother--he needs no other nurses,' she would have retreated, and looked ashamed--poor thing! I don't blame her if she loved my son. But, my son, I say this,--if you love her, don't talk to me about that Mademoiselle Cicogna; and if you love Mademoiselle Cicogna, why, then your father will take care that the poor girl who loved you not knowing that you loved another is not left to the temptation of penury."

Rameau's pale lips withered into a phantom-like sneer! Julie! the resplendent Julie!--true, only a ballet-dancer, but whose equipage in the Bois had once been the envy of duchesses--Julie! who had sacrificed fortune for his sake--who, freed from him, could have millionaires again at her feet!--Julie! to be saved from penury, as a shopkeeper would save an erring nursemaid--Julie! the irrepressible Julie! who had written to him, the day before his illness, in a pen dipped, not in ink, but in blood from a vein she had opened in her arm:

"Traitor!--I have not seen thee for three days. Dost thou dare to love another? If so, I care not how thou attempt to conceal it--woe to her! Ingrat! woe to thee! Love is not love, unless, when betrayed by Love, it appeals to death. Answer me quick--quick.

JULIE."

Poor Gustave thought of that letter and groaned. Certainly his mother was right--he ought to get rid of Julie; but he did not clearly see how Julie was to be got rid of. He replied to Madame Rameau peevishly, "Don't trouble your head about Mademoiselle Caumartin; she is in no want of money. Of course, if I could hope for Isaura--but, alas! I dare not hope. Give me my _tisane_."

When the doctor called next day, he looked grave, and, drawing Madame Rameau into the next room, he said, "We are not getting on so well as I had hoped; the fever is gone, but there is much to apprehend from the debility left behind. His spirits are sadly depressed." Then added the doctor, pleasantly, and with that wonderful insight into our complex humanity in which physicians excel poets, and in which Parisian physicians are not excelled by any physicians in the world: "Can't you think of any bit of good news--that 'M. Thiers raves about your son's last poem! that 'it is a question among the Academicians between him and Jules Janin'--or that 'the beautiful Duchesse de ----- has been placed in a lunatic asylum because she has gone mad for love of a certain young Red Republican whose name begins with R.'--can't you think of any bit of similar good news? If you can, it will be a tonic to the relaxed state of your dear boy's _amour propre_, compared to which all the drugs in the Pharmacopoeia are moonshine and water; and meanwhile be sure to remove him to your own house, and out of the reach of his giddy young friends, as soon as you possibly can."

When that great authority thus left his patient's case in the hands of the mother, she said, "The boy shall be saved."

CHAPTER XIII.

Isaura was seated beside the Venosta,--to whom, of late, she seemed to cling with greater fondness than ever,--working at some piece of embroidery--a labour from which she had been estranged for years; but now she had taken writing, reading, music, into passionate disgust. Isaura was thus seated, silently intent upon her work, and the Venosta in full talk, when the servant announced Madame Rameau.

The name startled both; the Venosta had never heard that the poet had a mother living, and immediately jumped to the conclusion that Madame Rameau must be a wife he had hitherto kept unrevealed. And when a woman, still very handsome, with a countenance grave and sad, entered the salon, the Venosta murmured, "The husband's perfidy reveals itself on a wife's face," and took out her handkerchief in preparation for sympathising tears.

"Mademoiselle," said the visitor, halting, with eyes fixed on Isaura. "Pardon my intrusion--my son has the honour to be known to you. Every one who knows him must share in my sorrow--so young--so promising, and in such danger--my poor boy!" Madame Rameau stopped abruptly. Her tears forced their way--she turned aside to conceal them.

In her twofold condition of being--womanhood and genius--Isaura was too largely endowed with that quickness of sympathy which distinguishes woman from man, and genius from talent, not to be wondrously susceptible to

pity.

Already she had wound her arm round the grieving mother--already drawn her to the seat from which she herself had risen--and bending over her had said some words--true, conventional enough in themselves,--but cooed forth in a voice the softest I ever expect to hear, save in dreams, on this side of the grave.

Madame Rameau swept her hand over her eyes, glanced round the room, and noticing the Venosta in dressing-robe and slippers, staring with those Italian eyes, in seeming so quietly innocent, in reality so searchingly shrewd, she whispered pleadingly, "May I speak to you a few minutes alone?" This was not a request that Isaura could refuse, though she was embarrassed and troubled by the surmise of Madame Rameau's object in asking it; accordingly she led her visitor into the adjoining room, and making an apologetic sign to the Venosta, closed the door.

CHAPTER XIV.

When they were alone, Madame Rameau took Isaura's hand in both her own, and, gazing wistfully into her face, said, "No wonder you are so loved--yours is the beauty that sinks into the hearts and rests there. I prize my boy more, now that I have seen you. But, oh, Mademoiselle! pardon me--do not withdraw your hand--pardon the mother who comes from the sick-bed of her only son and asks if you will assist to save him! A word from you is life or death to him!"

"Nay, nay, do not speak thus, Madame; your son knows how much I value, how sincerely I return, his friendship; but--but," she paused a moment, and continued sadly and with tearful eyes--"I have no heart to give to him--to any one."

"I do not--I would not if I dared--ask what it would be violence to yourself to promise. I do not ask you to bid me return to my son and say, 'Hope and recover,' but let me take some healing message from your lips. If I understand your words rightly, I at least may say that you do not give to another the hopes you, deny to him?"

"So far you understand me rightly, Madame. It has been said, that romance-writers give away so much of their hearts to heroes or heroines of their own creation, that they leave nothing worth the giving to human beings like themselves. Perhaps it is so; yet, Madame," added Isaura, with a smile of exquisite sweetness in its melancholy, "I have heart enough left to feel for you."

Madame Rameau was touched. "Ah, Mademoiselle, I do not believe in the saying you have quoted. But I must not abuse your goodness by pressing further upon you subjects from which you shrink. Only one word more: you know that my husband and I are but quiet tradesfolks, not in the society, nor aspiring to it, to which my son's talents have raised himself; yet dare I ask that you will not close here the acquaintance that I have obtruded on you?--dare I ask, that I may, now and then, call on you--that now and then I may see you at my own home? Believe that I would not here ask anything which your own mother would disapprove if she overlooked disparities of station. Humble as our home is, slander never passed its threshold."

"Ah, Madame, I and the Signora Venosta, whom in our Italian tongue I call mother, can but feel honoured and grateful whenever it pleases you to receive visits from us."

"It would be a base return for such gracious compliance with my request if I concealed from you the reason why I pray Heaven to bless you for that answer. The physician says that it may be long before my son is sufficiently convalescent to dispense with a mother's care, and resume his former life and occupation in the great world. It is everything for us if we can coax him into coming under our own roof-tree. This is difficult to do. It is natural for a young man launched into the world to like his own *chez lui*. Then what will happen to Gustave? He, lonely and heart-stricken, will ask friends, young as himself, but far stronger, to come and cheer him; or he will seek to distract his thoughts by the overwork of his brain; in either case he is doomed. But I have stronger motives yet to fix him a while at our hearth. This is just the moment, once lost never to be regained, when soothing companionship, gentle reproachless advice, can fix him lastingly in the habits and modes of life which will banish all fears of his future from the hearts of his parents. You at least honour him with friendship, with kindly interest--you at least would desire to wean him from all that a friend may disapprove or lament--a creature whom Providence meant to be good, and perhaps great. If I say to him, 'It will be long before you can go out and see your friends, but at my house your friends shall come and see you--among them Signora Venosta and Mademoiselle Cicogna will now and then drop in'--my victory is gained, and my son is saved."

"Madame," said Isaura, half sobbing, "what a blessing to have a mother like you! Love so noble ennobles those who hear its voice. Tell your son how ardently I wish him to be well, and to fulfil more than the promise of his genius; tell him also this--how I envy him his mother."

CHAPTER XV.

It needs no length of words to inform thee, my intelligent reader, be thou man or woman--but more especially woman--of the consequences following each other, as wave follows wave in a tide, that resulted from the interview with which my last chapter closed. Gustave is removed to his parents' house; he remains for weeks confined within doors, or, on sunny days, takes an hour or so in his own carriage, drawn by the horse bought from Rochebriant, into by-roads remote from the fashionable world; Isaura visits his mother, liking, respecting, influenced by her more and more; in those visits she sits beside the sofa on which Rameau reclines. Gradually, gently--more and more by his mother's lips--is impressed on her the belief that it is in her power to save a human life, and to animate its career towards those goals which are never based wholly upon earth in the earnest eyes of genius, or perhaps in the yet more upward vision of pure-souled believing woman.

And Gustave himself, as he passes through the slow stages of convalescence, seems so gratefully to ascribe to her every step in his progress--seems so gently softened in character--seems so refined from the old affectations, so ennobled above the old cynicism--and, above all, so needing her presence, so sunless without it, that--well, need I finish the sentence?--the reader will complete what I leave unsaid.

Enough, that one day Isaura returned home from a visit at Madame Rameau's with the knowledge that her hand was pledged--her future life disposed of; and that, escaping from the Venosta, whom she so fondly, and in her hunger for a mother's love, called Madre, the girl shut herself up in her own room with locked doors.

Ah, poor child! ah, sweet-voiced Isaura! whose delicate image I feel myself too rude and too hard to transfer to this page in the purity of its outlines, and the blended softnesses of its hues--thou who, when saying things serious in the words men use, saidst them with a seriousness so charming, and with looks so feminine--thou, of whom no man I ever knew was quite worthy--ah, poor, simple, miserable girl, as I see thee now in the solitude of that white-curtained virginal room; hast thou, then, merged at last thy peculiar star into the cluster of all these commonplace girls whose lips have said "Ay," when their hearts said "No"?--thou, O brilliant Isaura! thou, O motherless child!

She had sunk into her chair--her own favourite chair, the covering of it had been embroidered by Madame de Grantmesnil, and bestowed on her as a birthday present last year--the year in which she had first learned what it is to love--the year in which she had first learned what it is to strive for fame. And somehow uniting, as many young people do, love and fame in dreams of the future, that silken seat had been to her as the Tripod of Delphi was to the Pythian: she had taken to it, as it were intuitively, in all those hours, whether of joy or sorrow, when youth seeks to prophesy, and does but dream.

There she sat now, in a sort of stupor--a sort of dreary bewilderment--the illusion of the Pythian gone--desire of dream and of prophecy alike extinct--pressing her hands together, and muttering to herself, "What has happened?--what have I done?"

Three hours later you would not have recognised the same face that you see now. For then the bravery, the honour, the loyalty of the girl's nature had asserted their command. Her promise had been given to one man--it could not be recalled. Thought itself of any other man must be banished. On her hearth lay ashes and tinder--the last remains of every treasured note from Graham Vane; of the hoarded newspaper extracts that contained his name; of the dry treatise he had published, and which had made the lovely romance-writer first desire "to know something about politics." Ay, if the treatise had been upon fox-hunting, she would have desired "to know something about" that! Above all, yet distinguishable from the rest--as the sparks still upon stem and leaf here and there faintly glowed and twinkled--the withered flowers which recorded that happy hour in the arbour, and the walks of the forsaken garden--the hour in which she had so blissfully pledged herself to renounce that career in art wherein fame would have been secured, but which would not have united Fame with Love--in dreams evermore over now.

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