

The Celibates - Includes: Pierrette, The Vicar of Tours, and The Two Brothers

Honore de Balzac

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THE CELIBATES

BY

HONORE DE BALZAC

INTRODUCTION

Les Celibataires, the longest number of the original Comedie Humaine under a single title, next to Illusions perdues, is not, like that book, connected by any unity of story. Indeed, the general bond of union is pretty weak; and though it is quite true that bachelors and old maids are the heroes and heroines of all three, it would be rather hard to establish any other bond of connection, and it

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is rather unlikely that any one unprompted would fix on this as a sufficient ground of partnership.

Two at least of the component parts, however, are of very high excellence. I do not myself think that *Pierrette*, which opens the series, is quite the equal of its companions. Written, as it was, for Countess Anna de Hanska, Balzac's step-daughter of the future, while she was still very young, it partakes necessarily of the rather elaborate artificiality of all attempts to suit the young person, of French attempts in particular, and it may perhaps be said of Balzac's attempts most of all. It belongs, in a way, to the Arcis series--the series which also includes the fine *Tenebreuse Affaire* and the unfinished *Depute d'Arcis*--but is not very closely connected therewith. The picture of the actual *Celibataires*, the brother and sister Rogron, with which it opens, is one of Balzac's best styles, and is executed with all his usual mastery both of the minute and of the at least partially repulsive, showing also that strange knowledge of the *bourgeois de Paris* which, somehow or other, he seems to have attained by dint of unknown foregatherings in his ten years of apprenticeship. But when we come to *Pierrette* herself, the story is, I think, rather less satisfying. Her persecutions and her end, and the devotion of the faithful Brigaut and the rest, are pathetic no doubt, but tend (I hope it is not heartless to say it) just a very little towards *sensiblerie*. The fact is that the thing is not quite in Balzac's line.

Le Cure de Tours, is certainly on a higher level, and has attracted the most magnificent eulogies from some of the novelist's admirers. I think both Mr. Henry James and Mr. Wedmore have singled out this little piece for detailed and elaborate praise, and there is no doubt that it is a happy example of a kind in which the author excelled. The opening, with its evident but not obtruded remembrance of the old and well-founded superstition--derived from the universal belief in some form of Nemesis--that an extraordinary sense of happiness, good luck, or anything of the kind, is a precursor of misfortune, and calls for some instant act of sacrifice or humiliation, is very striking; and the working out of the vengeance of the goddess by the very ungoddess-like though feminine hand of Mademoiselle Gamard has much that is commendable. Nothing in its well exemplified kind is better touched off than the Listomere coterie, from the shrewdness of Monsieur de Bourbonne to the selfishness of Madame de Listomere. I do not know that the old maid herself--cat, and far worst than cat as she is--is at all exaggerated, and the sketch of the coveted *appartement* and its ill-fated *meublier* is about as good as it can be. And the battle between Madame de Listomere and the Abbe Troubert, which has served as a model for many similar things, has, if it has often been equaled, not often been surpassed.

I cannot, however, help thinking that there is more than a little exaggeration in more than one point of the story. The Abbe Biroteau is surely a little too much of a fool; the Abbe Troubert an lago a little too much wanting in verisimilitude; and the central incident of the clause about the furniture too manifestly improbable. Taking the first and the last points together, is it likely that any one not quite an idiot should, in the first place, remain so entirely ignorant of the value of his property; should, in the second, though, ignorant or not, he attached the greatest possible *pretium affectionis* to it, contract to resign it for such a ridiculous consideration; and should, in the third, take the fatal step without so much as remembering the

condition attached thereto? If it be answered that Birotteau _was_ idiot enough to do such a thing, then it must be observed further that one's sympathy is frozen by the fact. Such a man deserved such treatment. And, again, even if French justice was, and perhaps is, as much influenced by secret considerations as Balzac loves to represent it, we must agree with that member of the Listomere society who pointed out that no tribunal could possibly uphold such an obviously iniquitous bargain. As for Troubert, the idea of the Jesuitical ecclesiastic (though Balzac was not personally hostile to the Jesuits) was a common one at the time, and no doubt popular, but the actual personage seems to me nearer to Eugene Sue's Rodin in some ways than I could have desired.

These things, however, are very much a case of "As You Like It" or "As It Strikes You," and I have said that *Le Cure de Tours* strikes some good judges as of exceptional merit, while no one can refuse it merit in a high degree. I should not, except for the opening, place it in the very highest class of the *Comedie*, but it is high beyond all doubt in the second.

The third part (The Two Brothers/A Bachelor's Establishment) of *Les Celibataires* takes very high rank among its companions. As in most of his best books, Balzac has set at work divers favorite springs of action, and has introduced personages of whom he has elsewhere given, not exactly replicas--he never did that--but companion portraits. And he has once more justified the proceeding amply. Whether he has not also justified the reproach, such as it is, of those who say that to see the most congenial expression of his fullest genius, you must go to his bad characters and not to his good, readers shall determine for themselves after reading the book.

It was the product of the year 1842, when the author was at the ripest of his powers, and after which, with the exception of *Les Parents Pauvres*, he produced not much of his very best save in continuations and rehandlings of earlier efforts. He changed his title a good deal, and in that MS. correction of a copy of the *Comedie* which has been taken, perhaps without absolutely decisive authority, as the basis of the *Edition Definitive*, he adopted *La Rabouilleuse* as his latest favorite. This, besides its quaintness, has undoubted merit as fixing the attention on one at least of the chief figures of the book, while *Un Menage de garcon* only obliquely indicates the real purport of the novel. Jean-Jacques Rouget is a most unfortunate creature, who anticipates Baron Hulot as an example of absolute dependence on things of the flesh, _plus_ a kind of cretinism, which Hulot, to do him justice, does not exhibit even in his worst degradation. But his "bachelor establishment," though undoubtedly useful for the purposes of the story, might have been changed for something else, and his personality have been considerably altered, without very much affecting the general drift of the fiction.

Flore Brazier, on the other hand, the *Rabouilleuse* herself, is essential, and with Maxence Gilet and Philippe Bridau forms the centre of the action and the passion of the book. She ranks, indeed, with those few feminine types, Valerie Marneffe, La Cousine Bette, Eugenie Grandet, Beatrix, Madame de Maufrigneuse, and perhaps Esther Gobseck, whom Balzac has tried to draw at full length. It is to be observed that though quite without morals of any kind, she is not _ab initio_ or intrinsically a she-fiend like Valerie or Lisbeth. She does not do harm for harm's sake, nor even directly to gratify spite, greed, or

other purely unsocial and detestable passions. She is a type of feminine sensuality of the less ambitious and restless sort. Given a decent education, a fair fortune, a good-looking and vigorous husband to whom she had taken a fancy, and no special temptation, and she might have been a blameless, merry, "sonsy" _commere_, and have died in an odor of very reasonable sanctity. Poverty, ignorance, the Rougets (father and son), Maxence Gilet, and Philippe Bridau came in her way, and she lived and died as Balzac has shown her. He has done nothing more "inevitable;" a few things more complete and satisfactory.

Maxence Gilet is a not much less remarkable sketch, though it is not easy to say that he is on the same level. Gilet is the man of distinct gifts, of some virtues, or caricatures of virtues, who goes to the devil through idleness, fulness of bread, and lack of any worthy occupation. He is extraordinarily unconventional for a French figure in fiction, even for a figure drawn by such a French genius as Balzac. But he is also hardly to be called a great type, and I do not quite see why he should have succumbed before Philippe as he did.

Philippe himself is more complicated, and, perhaps, more questionable. He is certainly one of Balzac's _fleurs du mal_; he is studied and personally conducted from beginning to end with an extraordinary and loving care; but is he quite "of a piece"? That he should have succeeded in defeating the combination against which his virtuous mother and brother failed is not an undue instance of the irony of life. The defeat of such adversaries as Flore and Max has, of course, the merit of poetical justice and the interest of "diamond cut diamond." But is not the terrible Philippe Bridau, the "Mephistopheles _a cheval_" of the latter part of the book, rather inconsistent with the common-place ne'er-to-well of the earlier? Not only does it require no unusual genius to waste money, when you have it, in the channels of the drinking-shop, the gaming table, and elsewhere, to sponge for more on your mother and brother, to embezzle when they are squeezed dry, and to take to downright robbery when nothing else is left; but a person who, in the various circumstances and opportunities of Bridau, finds nothing better to do than these ordinary things, can hardly be a person of exceptional intellectual resource. There is here surely that sudden and unaccounted-for change of character which the second-rate novelist and dramatists may permit himself, but from which the first-rate should abstain.

This, however, may be an academic objection, and certainly the book is of first-class interest. The minor characters, the mother and brother, the luckless aunt with her combination at last turning up when the rascal Philippe has stolen her stake-money, the satellites and abettors of Max in the club of "La Desoeuvrance," the slightly theatrical Spaniard, and all the rest of them, are excellent. The book is an eminently characteristic one--more so, indeed, than more than one of those in which people are often invited to make acquaintance with Balzac.

Pierrette, which was earlier called _Pierrette Lorrain_, was issued in 1840, first in the _Siecle_, and then in volume form, published by Souverain. In both issues it had nine chapter or book divisions with headings. With the other _Celibataires_ it entered the _Comedie_ as a _Scene de la Vie de Province_ in 1843.

Le Cure de Tours (which Balzac had at one time intended to call by

the name of the Cure's enemy, and which at first was simply called by the general title *Les Celibataires*) is much older than its companions, and appeared in 1832 in the *Scenes de la Vie Privee*. It was soon properly shifted to the *Vie de Province*, and as such in due time joined the *Comedie* bearing its present title.

The third story of *Les Celibataires* has a rather more varied bibliographical history than the others. The first part, that dealing with the early misconduct of Philippe Bridau, was published separately, as *Les Deux Freres*, in the *Presse* during the spring of 1841, and a year or so later in volumes. It had nine chapters with headings. The volume form also included under the same title the second part, which, as *Un Menage de garcon en Province*, had been published in the same newspaper in the autumn of 1842. This had sixteen chapters in both issues, and in the volumes two part-headings --one identical with the newspaper title, and the other "A qui la Succession?" The whole book then took rank in the *Comedie* under the second title, *Un Menage de garcon*, and retained this during Balzac's life and long afterwards. In the *Edition Definitive*, as observed above, he had marked it as *La Rabouilleuse*, after having also thought of *Le Bonhomme Rouget*. For English use, the better known, though not last or best title, is clearly preferable, as it can be translated, while *La Rabouilleuse* cannot.

George Saintsbury

I

PIERRETTE

BY

HONORE DE BALZAC

Translated by

Katharine Prescott Wormeley

DEDICATION

To Mademoiselle Anna Hanska:

Dear Child,--You, the joy of the household, you, whose pink or white pelerine flutters in summer among the groves of Wierzschovnia like a will-o'-the-wisp, followed by the tender eyes of your father and your mother,--how can I dedicate to *you* a story full of melancholy? And yet, ought not sorrows to be spoken of to a young girl idolized as you are, since the day may come

when your sweet hands will be called to minister to them? It is so difficult, Anna, to find in the history of our manners and morals a subject that is worthy of your eyes, that no choice has been left me; but perhaps you will be made to feel how fortunate your fate is when you read the story sent to you by

Your old friend,
De Balzac.

PIERRETTE

I

THE LORRAINS

At the dawn of an October day in 1827 a young fellow about sixteen years of age, whose clothing proclaimed what modern phraseology so insolently calls a proletary, was standing in a small square of Lower Provins. At that early hour he could examine without being observed the various houses surrounding the open space, which was oblong in form. The mills along the river were already working; the whirr of their wheels, repeated by the echoes of the Upper Town in the keen air and sparkling clearness of the early morning, only intensified the general silence so that the wheels of a diligence could be heard a league away along the highroad. The two longest sides of the square, separated by an avenue of lindens, were built in the simple style which expresses so well the peaceful and matter-of-fact life of the bourgeoisie. No signs of commerce were to be seen; on the other hand, the luxurious porte-cocheres of the rich were few, and those few turned seldom on their hinges, excepting that of Monsieur Martener, a physician, whose profession obliged him to keep a cabriolet, and to use it. A few of the house-fronts were covered by grape vines, others by roses climbing to the second-story windows, through which they wafted the fragrance of their scattered bunches. One end of the square enters the main street of the Lower Town, the gardens of which reach to the bank of one of the two rivers which water the valley of Provins. The other end of the square enters a street which runs parallel to the main street.

At the latter, which was also the quietest end of the square, the young workman recognized the house of which he was in search, which showed a front of white stone grooved in lines to represent courses, windows with closed gray blinds, and slender iron balconies decorated with rosettes painted yellow. Above the ground floor and the first floor were three dormer windows projecting from a slate roof; on the peak of the central one was a new weather-vane. This modern innovation represented a hunter in the attitude of shooting a hare. The front door was reached by three stone steps. On one side of this door a leaden pipe discharged the sink-water into a small street-gutter, showing the whereabouts of the kitchen. On the other side were two windows, carefully closed by gray shutters in which were heart-shaped openings cut to admit the light; these windows seemed to be those of the dining-room. In the elevation gained by the three steps were vent-holes to the cellar, closed by painted iron shutters fantastically cut in open-work. Everything was new. In this repaired and restored

house, the fresh-colored look of which contrasted with the time-worn exteriors of all the other houses, an observer would instantly perceive the paltry taste and perfect self-satisfaction of the retired petty shopkeeper.

The young man looked at these details with an expression of pleasure that seemed to have something rather sad in it; his eyes roved from the kitchen to the roof, with a motion that showed a deliberate purpose. The rosy glow of the rising sun fell on a calico curtain at one of the garret windows, the others being without that luxury. As he caught sight of it the young fellow's face brightened gaily. He stepped back a little way, leaned against a linden, and sang, in the drawling tone peculiar to the west of France, the following Breton ditty, published by Bruguere, a composer to whom we are indebted for many charming melodies. In Brittany, the young villagers sing this song to all newly-married couples on their wedding-day:--

"We've come to wish you happiness in marriage,
To m'sieur your husband
As well as to you:

"You have just been bound, madam' la mariee,
With bonds of gold
That only death unbinds:

"You will go no more to balls or gay assemblies;
You must stay at home
While we shall go.

"Have you thought well how you are pledged to be
True to your spouse,
And love him like yourself?

"Receive these flowers our hands do now present you;
Alas! your fleeting honors
Will fade as they."

This native air (as sweet as that adapted by Chateaubriand to *Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore*), sung in this little town of the Brie district, must have been to the ears of a Breton maiden the touchstone of imperious memories, so faithfully does it picture the manners and customs, the surroundings and the heartiness of her noble old land, where a sort of melancholy reigns, hardly to be defined; caused, perhaps, by the aspect of life in Brittany, which is deeply touching. This power of awakening a world of grave and sweet and tender memories by a familiar and sometimes lively ditty, is the privilege of those popular songs which are the superstitions of music,--if we may use the word "superstition" as signifying all that remains after the ruin of a people, all that survives their revolutions.

As he finished the first couple, the singer, who never took his eyes from the attic curtain, saw no signs of life. While he sang the second, the curtain stirred. When the words "Receive these flowers" were sung, a youthful face appeared; a white hand cautiously opened the casement, and a girl made a sign with her head to the singer as he ended with the melancholy thought of the simple verses,--"Alas! your fleeting honors will fade as they."

To her the young workman suddenly showed, drawing it from within his

jacket, a yellow flower, very common in Brittany, and sometimes to be found in La Brie (where, however, it is rare),--the furze, or broom.

"Is it really you, Brigaut?" said the girl, in a low voice.

"Yes, Pierrette, yes. I am in Paris. I have started to make my way; but I'm ready to settle here, near you."

Just then the fastening of a window creaked in a room on the first floor, directly below Pierrette's attic. The girl showed the utmost terror, and said to Brigaut, quickly:--

"Run away!"

The lad jumped like a frightened frog to a bend in the street caused by the projection of a mill just where the square opens into the main thoroughfare; but in spite of his agility his hob-nailed shoes echoed on the stones with a sound easily distinguished from the music of the mill, and no doubt heard by the person who opened the window.

That person was a woman. No man would have torn himself from the comfort of a morning nap to listen to a minstrel in a jacket; none but a maid awakes to songs of love. Not only was this woman a maid, but she was an old maid. When she had opened her blinds with the furtive motion of the bat, she looked in all directions, but saw nothing, and only heard, faintly, the flying footfalls of the lad. Can there be anything more dreadful than the matutinal apparition of an ugly old maid at her window? Of all the grotesque sights which amuse the eyes of travellers in country towns, that is the most unpleasant. It is too repulsive to laugh at. This particular old maid, whose ear was so keen, was denuded of all the adventitious aids, of whatever kind, which she employed as embellishments; her false front and her collarette were lacking; she wore that horrible little bag of black silk on which old women insist on covering their skulls, and it was now revealed beneath the night-cap which had been pushed aside in sleep. This rumpled condition gave a menacing expression to the head, such as painters bestow on witches. The temples, ears, and nape of the neck, were disclosed in all their withered horror,--the wrinkles being marked in scarlet lines that contrasted with the would-be white of the bed-gown which was tied round her neck by a narrow tape. The gaping of this garment revealed a breast to be likened only to that of an old peasant woman who cares nothing about her personal ugliness. The fleshless arm was like a stick on which a bit of stuff was hung. Seen at her window, this spinster seemed tall from the length and angularity of her face, which recalled the exaggerated proportions of certain Swiss heads. The character of their countenance--the features being marked by a total want of harmony--was that of hardness in the lines, sharpness in the tones; while an unfeeling spirit, pervading all, would have filled a physiognomist with disgust. These characteristics, fully visible at this moment, were usually modified in public by a sort of commercial smile,--a bourgeois smirk which mimicked good-humor; so that persons meeting with this old maid might very well take her for a kindly woman. She owned the house on shares with her brother. The brother, by-the-bye, was sleeping so tranquilly in his own chamber that the orchestra of the Opera-house could not have awakened him, wonderful as its diapason is said to be.

The old maid stretched her neck out of the window, twisted it, and raised her cold, pale-blue little eyes, with their short lashes set in

lids that were always rather swollen, to the attic window, endeavoring to see Pierrette. Perceiving the uselessness of that attempt, she retreated into her room with a movement like that of a tortoise which draws in its head after protruding it from its carapace. The blinds were then closed, and the silence of the street was unbroken except by peasants coming in from the country, or very early persons moving about.

When there is an old maid in a house, watch-dogs are unnecessary; not the slightest event can occur that she does not see and comment upon and pursue to its utmost consequences. The foregoing trifling circumstance was therefore destined to give rise to grave suppositions, and to open the way for one of those obscure dramas which take place in families, and are none the less terrible because they are secret,—if, indeed, we may apply the word "drama" to such domestic occurrences.

Pierrette did not go back to bed. To her, Brigaut's arrival was an immense event. During the night—that Eden of the wretched—she escaped the vexations and fault-findings she bore during the day. Like the hero of a ballad, German or Russian, I forget which, her sleep seemed to her the happy life; her waking hours a bad dream. She had just had her only pleasurable waking in three years. The memories of her childhood had sung their melodious ditties in her soul. The first couplet was heard in a dream; the second made her spring out of bed; at the third, she doubted her ears,—the sorrowful are all disciples of Saint Thomas; but when the fourth was sung, standing in her night-gown with bare feet by the window, she recognized Brigaut, the companion of her childhood. Ah, yes! it was truly the well-known square jacket with the bobtails, the pockets of which stuck out at the hips,—the jacket of blue cloth which is classic in Brittany; there, too, were the waistcoat of printed cotton, the linen shirt fastened by a gold heart, the large rolling collar, the earrings, the stout shoes, the trousers of blue-gray drilling unevenly colored by the various lengths of the warp,—in short, all those humble, strong, and durable things which make the apparel of the Breton peasantry. The big buttons of white horn which fastened the jacket made the girl's heart beat. When she saw the bunch of broom her eyes filled with tears; then a dreadful fear drove back into her heart the happy memories that were budding there. She thought her cousin sleeping in the room beneath her might have heard the noise she made in jumping out of bed and running to the window. The fear was just; the old maid was coming, and she made Brigaut the terrified sign which the lad obeyed without the least understanding it. Such instinctive submission to a girl's bidding shows one of those innocent and absolute affections which appear from century to century on this earth, where they blossom, like the aloes of Isola Bella, twice or thrice in a hundred years. Whoever had seen the lad as he ran away would have loved the ingenuous chivalry of his most ingenuous feeling.

Jacques Brigaut was worthy of Pierrette Lorrain, who was just fifteen. Two children! Pierrette could not keep from crying as she watched his flight in the terror her gesture had conveyed to him. Then she sat down in a shabby armchair placed before a little table above which hung a mirror. She rested her elbows on the table, put her head in her hands, and sat thinking for an hour, calling to memory the Marais, the village of Pen-Hoel, the perilous voyages on a pond in a boat untied for her from an old willow by little Jacques; then the old faces of her grandfather and grandmother, the sufferings of her mother, and the

handsome face of Major Brigaut,--in short, the whole of her careless childhood. It was all a dream, a luminous joy on the gloomy background of the present.

Her beautiful chestnut hair escaped in disorder from her cap, ruffled in sleep,--a cambric cap with ruffles, which she had made herself. On each side of her forehead were little ringlets escaping from gray curl-papers. From the back of her head hung a heavy braid of hair that was half unplaited. The excessive whiteness of her face betrayed that terrible malady of girlhood which goes by the name of chlorosis, deprives the body of its natural colors, destroys the appetite, and shows a disordered state of the organism. The waxy tones were in all the visible parts of her flesh. The neck and shoulders explained by their blanched paleness the wasted arms, flung forward and crossed upon the table. Her feet seemed enervated, shrunken from illness. Her night-gown came only to her knees and showed the flaccid muscles, the blue veins, the impoverished flesh of the legs. The cold, to which she paid no heed, turned her lips violet, and a sad smile, drawing up the corners of a sensitive mouth, showed teeth that were white as ivory and quite small,--pretty, transparent teeth, in keeping with the delicate ears, the rather sharp but dainty nose, and the general outline of her face, which, in spite of its roundness, was lovely. All the animation of this charming face was in the eyes, the iris of which, brown like Spanish tobacco and flecked with black, shone with golden reflections round pupils that were brilliant and intense. Pierrette was made to be gay, but she was sad. Her lost gaiety was still to be seen in the vivacious forms of the eye, in the ingenuous grace of her brow, in the smooth curve of her chin. The long eyelashes lay upon the cheek-bones, made prominent by suffering. The paleness of her face, which was unnaturally white, made the lines and all the details infinitely pure. The ear alone was a little masterpiece of modelling,--in marble, you might say. Pierrette suffered in many ways. Perhaps you would like to know her history, and this is it.

Pierrette's mother was a Demoiselle Auffray of Provins, half-sister by the father's side of Madame Rogron, mother of the present owners of the house.

Monsieur Auffray, her husband, had married at the age of eighteen; his second marriage took place when he was nearly sixty-nine. By the first, he had an only daughter, very plain, who was married at sixteen to an innkeeper of Provins named Rogron.

By his second marriage the worthy Auffray had another daughter; but this one was charming. There was, of course, an enormous difference in the ages of these daughters; the one by the first marriage was fifty years old when the second child was born. By this time the eldest, Madame Rogron, had two grown-up children.

The youngest daughter of the old man was married at eighteen to a man of her choice, a Breton officer named Lorrain, captain in the Imperial Guard. Love often makes a man ambitious. The captain, anxious to rise to a colonelcy, exchanged into a line regiment. While he, then a major, and his wife enjoyed themselves in Paris on the allowance made to them by Monsieur and Madame Auffray, or scoured Germany at the beck and call of the Emperor's battles and truces, old Auffray himself (formerly a grocer) died, at the age of eighty-eight, without having found time to make a will. His property was administered by his daughter, Madame Rogron, and her husband so completely in their own

interests that nothing remained for the old man's widow beyond the house she lived in on the little square, and a few acres of land. This widow, the mother of Madame Lorrain, was only thirty-eight at the time of her husband's death. Like many widows, she came to the unwise decision of remarrying. She sold the house and land to her step-daughter, Madame Rogron, and married a young physician named Neraud, who wasted her whole fortune. She died of grief and misery two years later.

Thus the share of her father's property which ought to have come to Madame Lorrain disappeared almost entirely, being reduced to the small sum of eight thousand francs. Major Lorrain was killed at the battle of Montereau, leaving his wife, then twenty-one years of age, with a little daughter of fourteen months, and no other means than the pension to which she was entitled and an eventual inheritance from her late husband's parents, Monsieur and Madame Lorrain, retail shopkeepers at Pen-Hoel, a village in the Vendee, situated in that part of it which is called the Marais. These Lorrains, grandfather and grandmother of Pierrette Lorrain, sold wood for building purposes, slates, tiles, pantiles, pipes, etc. Their business, either from their own incapacity or through ill-luck, did badly, and gave them scarcely enough to live on. The failure of the well-known firm of Collinet at Nantes, caused by the events of 1814 which led to a sudden fall in colonial products, deprived them of twenty-four thousand francs which they had just deposited with that house.

The arrival of their daughter-in-law was therefore welcome to them. Her pension of eight hundred francs was a handsome income at Pen-Hoel. The eight thousand francs which the widow's half-brother and sister Rogron sent to her from her father's estate (after a multitude of legal formalities) were placed by her in the Lorrains' business, they giving her a mortgage on a little house which they owned at Nantes, let for three hundred francs, and barely worth ten thousand.

Madame Lorrain the younger, Pierrette's mother, died in 1819. The child of old Auffray and his young wife was small, delicate, and weakly; the damp climate of the Marais did not agree with her. But her husband's family persuaded her, in order to keep her with them, that in no other quarter of the world could she find a more healthy region. She was so petted and tenderly cared for that her death, when it came, brought nothing but honor to the old Lorrains.

Some persons declared that Brigaut, an old Vendeen, one of those men of iron who served under Charette, under Mercier, under the Marquis de Montauran, and the Baron du Guenic, in the wars against the Republic, counted for a good deal in the willingness of the younger Madame Lorrain to remain in the Marais. If it were so, his soul must have been a truly loving and devoted one. All Pen-Hoel saw him--he was called respectfully Major Brigaut, the grade he had held in the Catholic army--spending his days and his evenings in the Lorrains' parlor, beside the window of the imperial major. Toward the last, the curate of Pen-Hoel made certain representations to old Madame Lorrain, begging her to persuade her daughter-in-law to marry Brigaut, and promising to have the major appointed justice of peace for the canton of Pen-Hoel, through the influence of the Vicomte de Kergarouet. The death of the poor young woman put an end to the matter.

Pierrette was left in charge of her grandparents who owed her four hundred francs a year, interest on the little property placed in their

hands. This small sum was now applied to her maintenance. The old people, who were growing less and less fit for business, soon found themselves confronted by an active and capable competitor, against whom they said hard things, all the while doing nothing to defeat him. Major Brigaut, their friend and adviser, died six months after his friend, the younger Madame Lorrain,--perhaps of grief, perhaps of his wounds, of which he had received twenty-seven.

Like a sound merchant, the competitor set about ruining his adversaries in order to get rid of all rivalry. With his connivance, the Lorrains borrowed money on notes, which they were unable to meet, and which drove them in their old days into bankruptcy. Pierrette's claim upon the house in Nantes was superseded by the legal rights of her grandmother, who enforced them to secure the daily bread of her poor husband. The house was sold for nine thousand five hundred francs, of which one thousand five hundred went for costs. The remaining eight thousand came to Madame Lorain, who lived upon the income of them in a sort of almshouse at Nantes, like that of Sainte-Perine in Paris, called Saint-Jacques, where the two old people had bed and board for a humble payment.

As it was impossible to keep Pierrette, their ruined little granddaughter, with them, the old Lorrains bethought themselves of her uncle and aunt Rogron, in Provins, to whom they wrote. These Rogrons were dead. The letter might, therefore, have easily been lost; but if anything here below can take the place of Providence, it is the post. Postal spirit, incomparably above public spirit, exceeds in brilliancy of resource and invention the ablest romance-writers. When the post gets hold of a letter, worth, to it, from three to ten sous, and does not immediately know where to find the person to whom that letter is addressed, it displays a financial anxiety only to be met with in very pertinacious creditors. The post goes and comes and ferrets through all the eighty-six departments. Difficulties only arouse the genius of the clerks, who may really be called men-of-letters, and who set about to search for that unknown human being with as much ardor as the mathematicians of the Bureau give to longitudes. They literally ransack the whole kingdom. At the first ray of hope all the post-offices in Paris are alert. Sometimes the receiver of a missing letter is amazed at the network of scrawled directions which covers both back and front of the missive,--glorious vouchers for the administrative persistency with which the post has been at work. If a man undertook what the post accomplishes, he would lose ten thousand francs in travel, time, and money, to recover ten sous. The letter of the old Lorrains, addressed to Monsieur Rogron of Provins (who had then been dead a year) was conveyed by the post in due time to Monsieur Rogron, son of the deceased, a mercer in the rue Saint-Denis in Paris. And this is where the postal spirit obtains its greatest triumph. An heir is always more or less anxious to know if he has picked up every scrap of his inheritance, if he has not overlooked a credit, or a trunk of old clothes. The Treasury knows that. A letter addressed to the late Rogron at Provins was certain to pique the curiosity of Rogron, Jr., or Mademoiselle Rogron, the heirs in Paris. Out of that human interest the Treasury was able to earn sixty centimes.

These Rogrons, toward whom the old Lorrains, though dreading to part with their dear little granddaughter, stretched their supplicating hands, became, in this way, and most unexpectedly, the masters of Pierrette's destiny. It is therefore indispensable to explain both their antecedents and their character.

THE ROGRONS

Pere Rogron, that innkeeper of Provins to whom old Auffray had married his daughter by his first wife, was an individual with an inflamed face, a veiny nose, and cheeks on which Bacchus had drawn his scarlet and bulbous vine-marks. Though short, fat, and pot-bellied, with stout legs and thick hands, he was gifted with the shrewdness of the Swiss innkeepers, whom he resembled. Certainly he was not handsome, and his wife looked like him. Never was a couple better matched. Rogron liked good living and to be waited upon by pretty girls. He belonged to the class of egoists whose behavior is brutal; he gave way to his vices and did their will openly in the face of Israel. Grasping, selfish, without decency, and always gratifying his own fancies, he devoured his earnings until the day when his teeth failed him. Selfishness stayed by him. In his old days he sold his inn, collected (as we have seen) all he could of his late father-in-law's property, and went to live in the little house in the square of Provins, bought for a trifle from the widow of old Auffray, Pierrette's grandmother.

Rogron and his wife had about two thousand francs a year from twenty-seven lots of land in the neighborhood of Provins, and from the sale of their inn for twenty thousand. Old Auffray's house, though out of repair, was inhabited just as it was by the Rogrons,--old rats like wrack and ruin. Rogron himself took to horticulture and spent his savings in enlarging the garden; he carried it to the river's edge between two walls and built a sort of stone embankment across the end, where aquatic nature, left to herself, displayed the charms of her flora.

In the early years of their marriage the Rogrons had a son and a daughter, both hideous; for such human beings degenerate. Put out to nurse at a low price, these luckless children came home in due time, after the worst of village training,--allowed to cry for hours after their wet-nurse, who worked in the fields, leaving them shut up to scream for her in one of those damp, dark, low rooms which serve as homes for the French peasantry. Treated thus, the features of the children coarsened; their voices grew harsh; they mortified their mother's vanity, and that made her strive to correct their bad habits by a sternness which the severity of their father converted through comparison to kindness. As a general thing, they were left to run loose about the stables and courtyards of the inn, or the streets of the town; sometimes they were whipped; sometimes they were sent, to get rid of them, to their grandfather Auffray, who did not like them. The injustice the Rogrons declared the old man did to their children, justified them to their own minds in taking the greater part of "the old scoundrel's" property. However, Rogron did send his son to school, and did buy him a man, one of his own cartmen, to save him from the conscription. As soon as his daughter, Sylvie, was thirteen, he sent her to Paris, to make her way as apprentice in a shop. Two years later he despatched his son, Jerome-Denis, to the same career. When his friends the carriers and those who frequented the inn, asked him what he meant to do with his children, Pere Rogron explained his system with a conciseness which, in view of that of most fathers, had the merit of frankness.

"When they are old enough to understand me I shall give 'em a kick and say: 'Go and make your own way in the world!'" he replied, emptying his glass and wiping his lips with the back of his hand. Then he winked at his questioner with a knowing look. "Hey! hey! they are no greater fools than I was," he added. "My father gave me three kicks; I shall only give them one; he put one louis into my hand; I shall put ten in theirs, therefore they'll be better off than I was. That's the way to do. After I'm gone, what's left will be theirs. The notaries can find them and give it to them. What nonsense to bother one's self about children. Mine owe me their life. I've fed them, and I don't ask anything from them,--I call that quits, hey, neighbor? I began as a cartman, but that didn't prevent me marrying the daughter of that old scoundrel Auffray."

Sylvie Rogron was sent (with six hundred francs for her board) as apprentice to certain shopkeepers originally from Provins and now settled in Paris in the rue Saint-Denis. Two years later she was "at par," as they say; she earned her own living; at any rate her parents paid nothing for her. That is what is called being "at par" in the rue Saint-Denis. Sylvie had a salary of four hundred francs. At nineteen years of age she was independent. At twenty, she was the second demoiselle in the Maison Julliard, wholesale silk dealers at the "Chinese Worm" rue Saint-Denis. The history of the sister was that of the brother. Young Jerome-Denis Rogron entered the establishment of one of the largest wholesale mercers in the same street, the Maison Guepin, at the "Three Distaffs." When Sylvie Rogron, aged twenty-one, had risen to be forewoman at a thousand francs a year Jerome-Denis, with even better luck, was head-clerk at eighteen, with a salary of twelve hundred francs.

Brother and sister met on Sundays and fete-days, which they passed in economical amusements; they dined out of Paris, and went to Saint-Cloud, Meudon, Belleville, or Vincennes. Towards the close of the year 1815 they clubbed their savings, amounting to about twenty thousand francs, earned by the sweat of their brows, and bought of Madame Guenee the property and good-will of her celebrated shop, the "Family Sister," one of the largest retail establishments in the quarter. Sylvie kept the books and did the writing. Jerome-Denis was master and head-clerk both. In 1821, after five years' experience, competition became so fierce that it was all the brother and sister could do to carry on the business and maintain its reputation.

Though Sylvie was at this time scarcely forty, her natural ugliness, combined with hard work and a certain crabbed look (caused as much by the conformation of her features as by her cares), made her seem like a woman of fifty. At thirty-eight Jerome Rogron presented to the eyes of his customers the silliest face that ever looked over a counter. His retreating forehead, flattened by fatigue, was marked by three long wrinkles. His grizzled hair, cut close, expressed in some indefinable way the stupidity of a cold-blooded animal. The glance of his bluish eyes had neither flame nor thought in it. His round, flat face excited no sympathy, nor even a laugh on the lips of those who might be examining the varieties of the Parisian species; on the contrary, it saddened them. He was, like his father, short and fat, but his figure lacked the latter's brutal obesity, and showed, instead, an almost ridiculous debility. His father's high color was changed in him to the livid flabbiness peculiar to persons who live in close back-shops, or in those railed cages called counting-rooms,

forever tying up bundles, receiving and making change, snarling at the clerks, and repeating the same old speeches to customers.

The small amount of brains possessed by the brother and sister had been wholly absorbed in maintaining their business, in getting and keeping money, and in learning the special laws and usages of the Parisian market. Thread, needles, ribbons, pins, buttons, tailors' furnishings, in short, the enormous quantity of things which go to make up a mercer's stock, had taken all their capacity. Outside of their business they knew absolutely nothing; they were even ignorant of Paris. To them the great city was merely a region spreading around the Rue Saint-Denis. Their narrow natures could see no field except the shop. They were clever enough in nagging their clerks and their young women and in proving them to blame. Their happiness lay in seeing all hands busy at the counters, exhibiting the merchandise, and folding it up again. When they heard the six or eight voices of the young men and women glibly gabbling the consecrated phrases by which clerks reply to the remarks of customers, the day was fine to them, the weather beautiful! But on the really fine days, when the blue of the heavens brightened all Paris, and the Parisians walked about to enjoy themselves and cared for no "goods" but those they carried on their back, the day was overcast to the Rogrons. "Bad weather for sales," said that pair of imbeciles.

The skill with which Rogron could tie up a parcel made him an object of admiration to all his apprentices. He could fold and tie and see all that happened in the street and in the farthest recesses of the shop by the time he handed the parcel to his customer with a "Here it is, madame; _nothing else_ to-day?" But the poor fool would have been ruined without his sister. Sylvie had common-sense and a genius for trade. She advised her brother in their purchases and would pitilessly send him to remote parts of France to save a trifle of cost. The shrewdness which all women more or less possess, not being employed in the service of her heart, had drifted into that of speculation. A business to pay for,—that thought was the mainspring which kept the machine going and gave it an infernal activity.

Rogron was really only head-clerk; he understood nothing of his business as a whole; self-interest, that great motor of the mind, had failed in his case to instruct him. He was often aghast when his sister ordered some article to be sold below cost, foreseeing the end of its fashion; later he admired her idiotically for her cleverness. He reasoned neither ill nor well; he was simply incapable of reasoning at all; but he had the sense to subordinate himself to his sister, and he did so from a consideration that was outside of the business. "She is my elder," he said. Perhaps an existence like his, always solitary, reduced to the satisfaction of mere needs, deprived of money and all pleasures in youth, may explain to physiologists and thinkers the clownish expression of the face, the feebleness of mind, the vacant silliness of the man. His sister had steadily prevented him from marrying, afraid perhaps to lose her power over him, and seeing only a source of expense and injury in some woman who would certainly be younger and undoubtedly less ugly than herself.

Silliness has two ways of comporting itself; it talks, or is silent. Silent silliness can be borne; but Rogron's silliness was loquacious. The man had a habit of chattering to his clerks, explaining the minutiae of the business, and ornamenting his talk with those flat jokes which may be called the "chaff" of shopkeeping. Rogron, listened

to, of course, by his subordinates and perfectly satisfied with himself, had come at last into possession of a phraseology of his own. This chatterer believed himself an orator. The necessity of explaining to customers what they want, of guessing at their desires, and giving them desires for what they do not want, exercises the tongue of all retail shopkeepers. The petty dealer acquires the faculty of uttering words and sentences in which there is absolutely no meaning, but which have a marked success. He explains to his customers matters of manufacture that they know nothing of; that alone gives him a passing superiority over them; but take him away from his thousand and one explanations about his thousand and one articles, and he is, relatively to thought, like a fish out of water in the sun.

Rogron and Sylvie, two mechanisms baptized by mistake, did not possess, latent or active, the feelings which give life to the heart. Their natures were shrivelled and harsh, hardened by toil, by privation, by the remembrance of their sufferings during a long and cruel apprenticeship to life. Neither of them complained of their trials. They were not so much implacable as impracticable in their dealings with others in misfortune. To them, virtue, honor, loyalty, all human sentiments consisted solely in the payment of their bills. Irritable and irritating, without feelings, and sordid in their economy, the brother and sister bore a dreadful reputation among the other merchants of the rue Saint-Denis. Had it not been for their connection with Provins, where they went three or four times a year, when they could close the shop for a day or two, they would have had no clerks or young women. But old Rogron, their father, sent them all the unfortunate young people of his neighborhood, whose parents wished to start them in business in Paris. He obtained these apprentices by boasting, out of vanity, of his son's success. Parents, attracted by the prospect of their children being well-trained and closely watched, and also, by the hope of their succeeding, eventually, to the business, sent whichever child was most in the way at home to the care of the brother and sister. But no sooner had the clerks or the young women found a way of escape from that dreadful establishment than they fled, with rejoicings that increased the already bad name of the Rogrons. New victims were supplied yearly by the indefatigable old father.

From the time she was fifteen, Sylvie Rogron, trained to the simpering of a saleswoman, had two faces,—the amiable face of the seller, the natural face of a sour spinster. Her acquired countenance was a marvellous bit of mimicry. She was all smiles. Her voice, soft and wheedling, gave a commercial charm to business. Her real face was that we have already seen projecting from the half-opened blinds; the mere sight of her would have put to flight the most resolute Cossack of 1815, much as that horde were said to like all kinds of Frenchwomen.

When the letter from the Lorrains reached the brother and sister, they were in mourning for their father, from whom they inherited the house which had been as good as stolen from Pierrette's grandmother, also certain lands bought by their father, and certain moneys acquired by usurious loans and mortgages to the peasantry, whose bits of ground the old drunkard expected to possess. The yearly taking of stock was just over. The price of the "Family Sister" had, at last, been paid in full. The Rogrons owned about sixty thousand francs' worth of merchandise, forty thousand in a bank or in their cash-box, and the value of their business. Sitting on a bench covered with striped-green Utrecht velvet placed in a square recess just behind their private

counter (the counter of their forewoman being similar and directly opposite) the brother and sister consulted as to what they should do. All retail shopkeepers aspire to become members of the bourgeoisie. By selling the good-will of their business, the pair would have over a hundred and fifty thousand francs, not counting the inheritance from their father. By placing their present available property in the public Funds, they would each obtain about four thousand francs a year, and by taking the proceeds of their business, when sold, they could repair and improve the house they inherited from their father, which would thus be a good investment. They could then go and live in a house of their own in Provins. Their forewoman was the daughter of a rich farmer at Donnemarie, burdened with nine children, to whom he had endeavored to give a good start in life, being aware that at his death his property, divided into nine parts, would be but little for any one of them. In five years, however, the man had lost seven children,--a fact which made the forewoman so interesting that Rogron had tried, unsuccessfully, to get her to marry him; but she showed an aversion for her master which baffled his manoeuvres. Besides, Mademoiselle Sylvie was not in favor of the match; in fact, she steadily opposed her brother's marriage, and sought, instead, to make the shrewd young woman their successor.

No passing observer can form the least idea of the cryptogramic existence of a certain class of shopkeepers; he looks at them and asks himself, "On what, and why, do they live? whence have they come? where do they go?" He is lost in such questions, but finds no answer to them. To discover the false seed of poesy which lies in those heads and fructifies in those lives, it is necessary to dig into them; and when we do that we soon come to a thin subsoil beneath the surface. The Parisian shopkeeper nurtures his soul on some hope or other, more or less attainable, without which he would doubtless perish. One dreams of building or managing a theatre; another longs for the honors of mayoralty; this one desires a country-house, ten miles from Paris with a so-called "park," which he will adorn with statues of tinted plaster and fountains which squirt mere threads of water, but on which he will spend a mint of money; others, again, dream of distinction and a high grade in the National Guard. Provins, that terrestrial paradise, filled the brother and sister with the fanatical longings which all the lovely towns of France inspire in their inhabitants. Let us say it to the glory of La Champagne, this love is warranted. Provins, one of the most charming towns in all France, rivals Frangistan and the valley of Cashmere; not only does it contain the poesy of Saadi, the Persian Homer, but it offers many pharmaceutical treasures to medical science. The crusades brought roses from Jericho to this enchanting valley, where by chance they gained new charms while losing none of their colors. The Provins roses are known the world over. But Provins is not only the French Persia, it is also Baden, Aix, Cheltenham,--for it has medicinal springs. This was the spot which appeared from time to time before the eyes of the two shopkeepers in the muddy regions of Saint-Denis.

After crossing the gray plains which lie between La Ferte-Gaucher and Provins, a desert and yet productive, a desert of wheat, you reach a hill. Suddenly you behold at your feet a town watered by two rivers; at the feet of the rock on which you stand stretches a verdant valley, full of enchanting lines and fugitive horizons. If you come from Paris you will pass through the whole length of Provins on the everlasting highroad of France, which here skirts the hillside and is encumbered with beggars and blind men, who will follow you with their pitiful

voices while you try to examine the unexpected picturesqueness of the region. If you come from Troyes you will approach the town on the valley side. The chateau, the old town, and its former ramparts are terraced on the hillside, the new town is below. They go by the names of Upper and Lower Provins. The upper is an airy town with steep streets commanding fine views, surrounded by sunken road-ways and ravines filled with chestnut trees which gash the sides of the hill with their deep gulleys. The upper town is silent, clean, solemn, surmounted by the imposing ruins of the old chateau. The lower is a town of mills, watered by the Voulzie and the Durtain, two rivers of Brie, narrow, sluggish, and deep; a town of inns, shops, retired merchants; filled with diligences, travelling-carriages, and waggons. The two towns, or rather this town with its historical memories, its melancholy ruins, the gaiety of its valley, the romantic charm of its ravines filled with tangled shrubbery and wildflowers, its rivers banked with gardens, excites the love of all its children, who do as the Auvergnats, the Savoyards, in fact, all French folks do, namely, leave Provins to make their fortunes, and always return. "Die in one's form," the proverb made for hares and faithful souls, seems also the motto of a Provins native.

Thus the two Rogrons thought constantly of their dear Provins. While Jerome sold his thread he saw the Upper town; as he piled up the cards on which were buttons he contemplated the valley; when he rolled and unrolled his ribbons he followed the shining rivers. Looking up at his shelves he saw the ravines where he had often escaped his father's anger and gone a-nutting or gathering blackberries. But the little square in the Lower town was the chief object of his thoughts; he imagined how he could improve his house: he dreamed of a new front, new bedrooms, a salon, a billiard-room, a dining-room, and the kitchen garden out of which he would make an English pleasure-ground, with lawns, grottos, fountains, and statuary. The bedrooms at present occupied by the brother and sister, on the second floor of a house with three windows front and six storeys high in the rue Saint-Denis, were furnished with the merest necessaries, yet no one in Paris had finer furniture than they--in fancy. When Jerome walked the streets he stopped short, struck with admiration at the handsome things in the upholsterers' windows, and at the draperies he coveted for his house. When he came home he would say to his sister: "I found in such a shop, such and such a piece of furniture that will just do for the salon." The next day he would buy another piece, and another, and so on. He rejected, the following month, the articles of the months before. The Budget itself, could not have paid for his architectural schemes. He wanted everything he saw, but abandoned each thing for the last thing. When he saw the balconies of new houses, when he studied external ornamentation, he thought all such things, mouldings, carvings, etc., out of place in Paris. "Ah!" he would say, "those fine things would look much better at Provins." When he stood on his doorstep leaning against the lintel, digesting his morning meal, with a vacant eye, the mercer was gazing at the house of his fancy gilded by the sun of his dream; he walked in his garden; he heard the jet from his fountain falling in pearly drops upon a slab of limestone; he played on his own billiard-table; he gathered his own flowers.

Sylvie, on the other hand, was thinking so deeply, pen in hand, that she forgot to scold the clerks; she was receiving the bourgeoisie of Provins, she was looking at herself in the mirrors of her salon, and admiring the beauties of a marvellous cap. The brother and sister began to think the atmosphere of the rue Saint-Denis unhealthy, and

the smell of the mud in the markets made them long for the fragrance of the Provins roses. They were the victims of a genuine nostalgia, and also of a monomania, frustrated at present by the necessity of selling their tapes and bobbins before they could leave Paris. The promised land of the valley of Provins attracted these Hebrews all the more because they had really suffered, and for a long time, as they crossed breathlessly the sandy wastes of a mercer's business.

The Lorrains' letter reached them in the midst of meditations inspired by this glorious future. They knew scarcely anything about their cousin, Pierrette Lorrain. Their father got possession of the Auffray property after they left home, and the old man said little to any one of his business affairs. They hardly remembered their aunt Lorrain. It took an hour of genealogical discussion before they made her out to be the younger sister of their own mother by the second marriage of their grandfather Auffray. It immediately struck them that this second marriage had been fatally injurious to their interests by dividing the Auffray property between two daughters. In times past they had heard their father, who was given to sneering, complain of it.

The brother and sister considered the application of the Lorrains from the point of view of such reminiscences, which were not at all favorable for Pierrette. To take charge of an orphan, a girl, a cousin, who might become their legal heir in case neither of them married,—this was a matter that needed discussion. The question was considered and debated under all its aspects. In the first place, they had never seen Pierrette. Then, what a trouble it would be to have a young girl to look after. Wouldn't it commit them to some obligations towards her? Could they send the girl away if they did not like her? Besides, wouldn't they have to marry her? and if Jerome found a yoke-mate among the heiresses of Provins they ought to keep all their property for his children. A yokemate for Jerome, according to Sylvie, meant a stupid, rich and ugly girl who would let herself be governed. They decided to refuse the Lorrain request. Sylvie agreed to write the answer. Business being rather urgent just then she delayed writing, and the forewoman coming forward with an offer for the stock and good-will of the "Family Sister," which the brother and sister accepted, the matter went entirely out of the old maid's mind.

Sylvie Rogron and her brother departed for Provins four years before the time when the coming of Brigaut threw such excitement into Pierrette's life. But the doings of the pair after their arrival at Provins are as necessary to relate as their life in Paris; for Provins was destined to be not less fatal to Pierrette than the commercial antecedents of her cousins!

III

PATHOLOGY OF RETIRED MERCERS

When the petty shopkeeper who has come to Paris from the provinces returns to the provinces from Paris he brings with him a few ideas; then he loses them in the habits and ways of provincial life into which he plunges, and his reforming notions leave him. From this there do result, however, certain trifling, slow, successive changes by which Paris scratches the surface of the provincial towns. This process marks the transition of the ex-shopkeeper into the substantial

bourgeois, but it acts like an illness upon him. No retail shopkeeper can pass with impunity from his perpetual chatter into dead silence, from his Parisian activity to the stillness of provincial life. When these worthy persons have laid by property they spend a portion of it on some desire over which they have long brooded and into which they now turn their remaining impulses, no longer restrained by force of will. Those who have not been nursing a fixed idea either travel or rush into the political interests of their municipality. Others take to hunting or fishing and torment their farmers or tenants; others again become usurers or stock-jobbers. As for the scheme of the Rogrons, brother and sister, we know what that was; they had to satisfy an imperious desire to handle the trowel and remodel their old house into a charming new one.

This fixed idea produced upon the square of Lower Provins the front of the building which Brigaut had been examining; also the interior arrangements of the house and its handsome furniture. The contractor did not drive a nail without consulting the owners, without requiring them to sign the plans and specifications, without explaining to them at full length and in every detail the nature of each article under discussion, where it was manufactured, and what were its various prices. As to the choicer things, each, they were told, had been used by Monsieur Tiphaine, or Madame Julliard, or Monsieur the mayor, the notables of the place. The idea of having things done as the rich bourgeois of Provins did them carried the day for the contractor.

"Oh, if Monsieur Garceland has it in his house, put it in," said Mademoiselle Rogron. "It must be all right; his taste is good."

"Sylvie, see, he wants us to have ovolos in the cornice of the corridor."

"Do you call those ovolos?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"What an odd name! I never heard it before."

"But you have seen the thing?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand Latin?"

"No."

"Well, it means eggs--from the Latin *_ovum_*."

"What queer fellows you are, you architects!" cried Rogron. "It is stepping on egg-shells to deal with you."

"Shall we paint the corridor?" asked the builder.

"Good heavens, no!" cried Sylvie. "That would be five hundred francs more!"

"Oh, but the salon and the staircase are too pretty not to have the corridor decorated too," said the man. "That little Madame Lesourd had hers painted last year."

"And now, her husband, as king's attorney, is obliged to leave Provins."

"Ah, he'll be chief justice some of these days," said the builder.

"How about Monsieur Tiphaine?"

"Monsieur Tiphaine? he's got a pretty wife and is sure to get on. He'll go to Paris. Shall we paint the corridor?"

"Yes, yes," said Rogron. "The Lesourds must be made to see that we are as good as they."

The first year after the Rogrons returned to Provins was entirely taken up by such discussions, by the pleasure of watching the workmen, by the surprise occasioned to the townspeople and the replies to questions of all kinds which resulted therefrom, and also by the attempts made by Sylvie and her brother to be socially intimate with the principal families of Provins.

The Rogrons had never gone into any society; they had never left their shop, knowing absolutely no one in Paris, and now they were athirst for the pleasures of social life. On their arrival in Provins they found their former masters in Paris (long since returned to the provinces), Monsieur and Madame Julliard, lately of the "Chinese Worm," their children and grandchildren; the Guepin family, or rather the Guepin clan, the youngest scion of which now kept the "Three Distaffs"; and thirdly, Madame Guenee from whom they had purchased the "Family Sister," and whose three daughters were married and settled in Provins. These three races, Julliard, Guepin, and Guenee, had spread through the town like dog-grass through a lawn. The mayor, Monsieur Garceland, was the son-in-law of Monsieur Guepin; the curate, Abbe Peroux, was own brother to Madame Julliard; the judge, Monsieur Tiphaine junior, was brother to Madame Guenee, who signed herself "_nee_ Tiphaine."

The queen of the town was the beautiful Madame Tiphaine junior, only daughter of Madame Roguin, the rich wife of a former notary in Paris, whose name was never mentioned. Clever, delicate, and pretty, married in the provinces to please her mother, who for special reasons did not want her with her, and took her from a convent only a few days before the wedding, Melanie Tiphaine considered herself an exile in Provins, where she behaved to admiration. Handsomely dowered, she still had hopes. As for Monsieur Tiphaine, his old father had made to his eldest daughter Madame Guenee such advances on her inheritance that an estate worth eight thousand francs a year, situated within fifteen miles of Provins, was to come wholly to him. Consequently the Tiphaines would possess, sooner or later, some forty thousand francs a year, and were not "badly off," as they say. The one overwhelming desire of the beautiful Madame Tiphaine was to get Monsieur Tiphaine elected deputy. As deputy he would become a judge in Paris; and she was firmly resolved to push him up into the Royal courts. For these reasons she tickled all vanities and strove to please all parties; and--what is far more difficult--she succeeded. Twice a week she received the bourgeoisie of Provins at her house in the Upper town. This intelligent young woman of twenty had not as yet made a single blunder or misstep on the slippery path she had taken. She gratified everybody's self-love, and petted their hobbies; serious with the

serious, a girl with girls, instinctively a mother with mothers, gay with young wives and disposed to help them, gracious to all,--in short, a pearl, a treasure, the pride of Provins. She had never yet said a word of her intentions and wishes, but all the electors of Provins were awaiting the time when their dear Monsieur Tiphaine had reached the required age for nomination. Every man in the place, certain of his own talents, regarded the future deputy as his particular friend, his protector. Of course, Monsieur Tiphaine would attain to honors; he would be Keeper of the Seals, and then, what wouldn't he do for Provins!

Such were the pleasant means by which Madame Tiphaine had come to rule over the little town. Madame Guenee, Monsieur Tiphaine's sister, after having married her eldest daughter to Monsieur Lesourd, prosecuting attorney, her second to Monsieur Martener, the doctor, and the third to Monsieur Auffray, the notary, had herself married Monsieur Galardon, the collector. Mother and daughters all considered Monsieur Tiphaine as the richest and ablest man in the family. The prosecuting attorney had the strongest interest in sending his uncle to Paris, expecting to step into his shoes as judge of the local court of Provins. The four ladies formed a sort of court round Madame Tiphaine, whose ideas and advice they followed on all occasions. Monsieur Julliard, the eldest son of the old merchant, who had married the only daughter of a rich farmer, set up a sudden, secret, and disinterested passion for Madame Tiphaine, that angel descended from the Parisian skies. The clever Melanie, too clever to involve herself with Julliard, but quite capable of keeping him in the condition of Amadis and making the most of his folly, advised him to start a journal, intending herself to play the part of Egeria. For the last two years, therefore, Julliard, possessed by his romantic passion, had published the said newspaper, called the "Bee-hive," which contained articles literary, archaeological, and medical, written in the family. The advertisements paid expenses. The subscriptions, two hundred in all, made the profits. Every now and then melancholy verses, totally incomprehensible in La Brie, appeared, addressed, "TO HER!!!" with three exclamation marks. The clan Julliard was thus united to the other clans, and the salon of Madame Tiphaine became, naturally, the first in the town. The few aristocrats who lived in Provins were, of course, apart, and formed a single salon in the Upper town, at the house of the old Comtesse de Breautey.

During the first six months of their transplantation, the Rogrons, favored by their former acquaintance with several of these people, were received, first by Madame Julliard the elder, and by the former Madame Guenee, now Madame Galardon (from whom they had bought their business), and next, after a good deal of difficulty, by Madame Tiphaine. All parties wished to study the Rogrons before admitting them. It was difficult, of course, to keep out merchants of the rue Saint-Denis, originally from Provins, who had returned to the town to spend their fortunes. Still, the object of all society is to amalgamate persons of equal wealth, education, manners, customs, accomplishments, and character. Now the Guepins, Guenees, and Julliards had a better position among the bourgeoisie than the Rogrons, whose father had been held in contempt on account of his private life, and his conduct in the matter of the Auffray property,--the facts of which were known to the notary Auffray, Madame Galardon's son-in-law.

In the social life of these people, to which Madame Tiphaine had given

a certain tone of elegance, all was homogeneous; the component parts understood each other, knew each other's characters, and behaved and conversed in a manner that was agreeable to all. The Rogrons flattered themselves that being received by Monsieur Garceland, the mayor, they would soon be on good terms with all the best families in the town. Sylvie applied herself to learn boston. Rogron, incapable of playing a game, twirled his thumbs and had nothing to say except to discourse on his new house. Words seemed to choke him; he would get up, try to speak, become frightened, and sit down again, with comical distortion of the lips. Sylvie naively betrayed her natural self at cards. Sharp, irritable, whining when she lost, insolent when she won, nagging and quarrelsome, she annoyed her partners as much as her adversaries, and became the scourge of society. And yet, possessed by a silly, unconcealed ambition, Rogron and his sister were bent on playing a part in the society of a little town already in possession of a close corporation of twelve allied families. Allowing that the restoration of their house had cost them thirty thousand francs, the brother and sister possessed between them at least ten thousand francs a year. This they considered wealth, and with it they endeavored to impress society, which immediately took the measure of their vulgarity, crass ignorance, and foolish envy. On the evening when they were presented to the beautiful Madame Tiphaine, who had already eyed them at Madame Garceland's and at Madame Julliard the elder's, the queen of the town remarked to Julliard junior, who stayed a few moments after the rest of the company to talk with her and her husband:--

"You all seem to be taken with those Rogrons."

"No, no," said Amadis, "they bore my mother and annoy my wife. When Mademoiselle Sylvie was apprenticed, thirty years ago, to my father, none of them could endure her."

"I have a great mind," said Madame Tiphaine, putting her pretty foot on the bar of the fender, "to make it understood that my salon is not an inn."

Julliard raised his eyes to the ceiling, as if to say, "Good heavens? what wit, what intellect!"

"I wish my society to be select; and it certainly will not be if I admit those Rogrons."

"They have neither heart, nor mind, nor manners"; said Monsieur Tiphaine. "If, after selling thread for twenty years, as my sister did for example--"

"Your sister, my dear," said his wife in a parenthesis, "cannot be out of place in any salon."

"--if," he continued, "people are stupid enough not to throw off the shop and polish their manners, if they don't know any better than to mistake the Counts of Champagne for the _accounts_ of a wine-shop, as Rogron did this evening, they had better, in my opinion, stay at home."

"They are simply impudent," said Julliard. "To hear them talk you would suppose there was no other handsome house in Provins but theirs. They want to crush us; and after all, they have hardly enough to live on."

"If it was only the brother," said Madame Tiphaine, "one might put up with him; he is not so aggressive. Give him a Chinese puzzle and he will stay in a corner quietly enough; it would take him a whole winter to find it out. But Mademoiselle Sylvie, with that voice like a hoarse hyena and those lobster-claws of hands! Don't repeat all this, Julliard."

When Julliard had departed the little woman said to her husband:--

"I have aborigines enough whom I am forced to receive; these two will fairly kill me. With your permission, I shall deprive myself of their society."

"You are mistress in your own house," replied he; "but that will make enemies. The Rogrons will fling themselves into the opposition, which hitherto has had no real strength in Provins. That Rogron is already intimate with Baron Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet."

"Then," said Melanie, laughing, "they will do you some service. Where there are no opponents, there is no triumph. A liberal conspiracy, an illegal cabal, a struggle of any kind, will bring you into the foreground."

The justice looked at his young wife with a sort of alarmed admiration.

The next day it was whispered about that the Rogrons had not altogether succeeded in Madame Tiphaine's salon. That lady's speech about an inn was immensely admired. It was a whole month before she returned Mademoiselle Sylvie's visit. Insolence of this kind is very much noticed in the provinces.

During the evening which Sylvie had spent at Madame Tiphaine's a disagreeable scene occurred between herself and old Madame Julliard while playing boston, apropos of a trick which Sylvie declared the old lady had made her lose on purpose; for the old maid, who liked to trip others, could never endure the same game on herself. The next time she was invited out the mistress took care to make up the card-tables before she arrived; so that Sylvie was reduced to wandering from table to table as an onlooker, the players glancing at her with scornful eyes. At Madame Julliard senior's house, they played whist, a game Sylvie did not know.

The old maid at last understood that she was under a ban; but she had no conception of the reason of it. She fancied herself an object of jealousy to all these persons. After a time she and her brother received no invitations, but they still persisted in paying evening visits. Satirical persons made fun of them,--not spitefully, but amusingly; inveigling them to talk absurdly about the eggs in their cornice, and their wonderful cellar of wine, the like of which was not in Provins.

Before long the Rogron house was completely finished, and the brother and sister then resolved to give several sumptuous dinners, as much to return the civilities they had received as to exhibit their luxury. The invited guests accepted from curiosity only. The first dinner was given to the leading personages of the town; to Monsieur and Madame Tiphaine, with whom, however the Rogrons had never dined; to Monsieur

and Madame Julliard, senior and junior; to Monsieur Lesourd, Monsieur le cure, and Monsieur and Madame Galardon. It was one of those interminable provincial dinners, where you sit at table from five to nine o'clock. Madame Tiphaine had introduced into Provins the Parisian custom of taking leave as soon as coffee had been served. On this occasion she had company at home and was anxious to get away. The Rogrons accompanied her husband and herself to the street door, and when they returned to the salon, disconcerted at not being able to keep their chief guests, the rest of the party were preparing to imitate Madame Tiphaine's fashion with cruel provincial promptness.

"They won't see our salon lighted up," said Sylvie, "and that's the show of the house."

The Rogrons had counted on surprising their guests. It was the first time any one had been admitted to the now celebrated house, and the company assembled at Madame Tiphaine's was eagerly awaiting her opinion of the marvels of the "Rogron palace."

"Well!" cried little Madame Martener, "you've seen the Louvre; tell us all about it."

"All? Well, it would be like the dinner,--not much."

"But do describe it."

"Well, to begin with, that front door, the gilded grating of which we have all admired," said Madame Tiphaine, "opens upon a long corridor which divides the house unequally; on the right side there is one window, on the other, two. At the garden end, the corridor opens with a glass door upon a portico with steps to the lawn, where there's a sun dial and a plaster statue of Spartacus, painted to imitate bronze. Behind the kitchen, the builder has put the staircase, and a sort of larder which we are spared the sight of. The staircase, painted to imitate black marble with yellow veins, turns upon itself like those you see in cafes leading from the ground-floor to the entresol. The balustrade, of walnut with brass ornaments and dangerously slight, was pointed out to us as one of the seven wonders of the world. The cellar stairs run under it. On the other side of the corridor is the dining-room, which communicates by folding-doors with a salon of equal size, the windows of which look on the garden."

"Dear me, is there no ante-chamber?" asked Madame Auffray.

"The corridor, full of draughts, answers for an ante-chamber," replied Madame Tiphaine. "Our friends have had, they assured us, the eminently national, liberal, constitutional, and patriotic feeling to use none but French woods in the house; so the floor in the dining-room is chestnut, the sideboards, tables, and chairs, of the same. White calico window-curtains, with red borders, are held back by vulgar red straps; these magnificent draperies run on wooden curtain rods ending in brass lion's-paws. Above one of the sideboards hangs a dial suspended by a sort of napkin in gilded bronze,--an idea that seemed to please the Rogrons hugely. They tried to make me admire the invention; all I could manage to say was that if it was ever proper to wrap a napkin round a dial it was certainly in a dining-room. On the sideboard were two huge lamps like those on the counter of a restaurant. Above the other sideboard hung a barometer, excessively ornate, which seems to play a great part in their existence; Rogron

gazed at it as he might at his future wife. Between the two windows is a white porcelain stove in a niche overloaded with ornament. The walls glow with a magnificent paper, crimson and gold, such as you see in the same restaurants, where, no doubt, the Rogrons chose it. Dinner was served on white and gold china, with a dessert service of light blue with green flowers, but they showed us another service in earthenware for everyday use. Opposite to each sideboard was a large cupboard containing linen. All was clean, new, and horribly sharp in tone. However, I admit the dining-room; it has some character, though disagreeable; it represents that of the masters of the house. But there is no enduring the five engravings that hang on the walls; the Minister of the Interior ought really to frame a law against them. One was Poniatowski jumping into the Elster; the others, Napoleon pointing a cannon, the defence at Clichy, and the two Mazepas, all in gilt frames of the vulgarest description,--fit to carry off the prize of disgust. Oh! how much I prefer Madame Julliard's pastels of fruit, those excellent Louis XV. pastels, which are in keeping with the old dining-room and its gray panels,--defaced by age, it is true, but they possess the true provincial characteristics that go well with old family silver, precious china, and our simple habits. The provinces are provinces; they are only ridiculous when they mimic Paris. I prefer this old salon of my husband's forefathers, with its heavy curtains of green and white damask, the Louis XV. mantelpiece, the twisted pier-glasses, the old mirrors with their beaded mouldings, and the venerable card tables. Yes, I prefer my old Sevres vases in royal blue, mounted on copper, my clock with those impossible flowers, that rococo chandelier, and the tapestried furniture, to all the finery of the Rogron salon."

"What is the salon like?" said Monsieur Martener, delighted with the praise the handsome Parisian bestowed so adroitly on the provinces.

"As for the salon, it is all red,--the red Mademoiselle Sylvie turns when she loses at cards."

"Sylvan-red," said Monsieur Tiphaine, whose sparkling saying long remained in the vocabulary of Provins.

"Window-curtains, red; furniture, red; mantelpiece, red, veined yellow, candelabra and clock ditto mounted on bronze, common and heavy in design,--Roman standards with Greek foliage! Above the clock is that inevitable good-natured lion which looks at you with a simper, the lion of ornamentation, with a big ball under his feet, symbol of the decorative lion, who passes his life holding a black ball,--exactly like a deputy of the Left. Perhaps it is meant as a constitutional myth. The face of the clock is curious. The glass over the chimney is framed in that new fashion of applied mouldings which is so trumpery and vulgar. From the ceiling hangs a chandelier carefully wrapped in green muslin, and rightly too, for it is in the worst taste, the sharpest tint of bronze with hideous ornaments. The walls are covered with a red flock paper to imitate velvet enclosed in panels, each panel decorated with a chromo-lithograph in one of those frames festooned with stucco flowers to represent wood-carving. The furniture, in cashmere and elm-wood, consists, with classic uniformity, of two sofas, two easy-chairs, two armchairs, and six common chairs. A vase in alabaster, called a la Medicis, kept under glass stands on a table between the windows; before the windows, which are draped with magnificent red silk curtains and lace curtains under them, are card-tables. The carpet is Aubusson, and you may be sure the

Rogrons did not fail to lay hands on that most vulgar of patterns, large flowers on a red ground. The room looks as if no one ever lived there; there are no books, no engravings, none of those little knick-knacks we all have lying about," added Madame Tiphaine, glancing at her own table covered with fashionable trifles, albums, and little presents given to her by friends; "and there are no flowers,--it is all cold and barren, like Mademoiselle Sylvie herself. Buffon says the style is the man, and certainly salons have styles of their own."

From this sketch everybody can see the sort of house the brother and sister lived in, though they can never imagine the absurdities into which a clever builder dragged the ignorant pair,--new inventions, fantastic ornaments, a system for preventing smoky chimneys, another for preventing damp walls; painted marquetry panels on the staircase, colored glass, superfine locks,--in short, all those vulgarities which make a house expensive and gratify the bourgeois taste.

No one chose to visit the Rogrons, whose social plans thus came to nothing. Their invitations were refused under various excuses,--the evenings were already engaged to Madame Garceland and the other ladies of the Provins world. The Rogrons had supposed that all that was required to gain a position in society was to give a few dinners. But no one any longer accepted them, except a few young men who went to make fun of their host and hostess, and certain diners-out who went everywhere.

Frightened at the loss of forty thousand francs swallowed up without profit in what she called her "dear house," Sylvie now set to work to recover it by economy. She gave no more dinners, which had cost her forty or fifty francs without the wines, and did not fulfil her social hopes, hopes that are as hard to realize in the provinces as in Paris. She sent away her cook, took a country-girl to do the menial work, and did her own cooking, as she said, "for pleasure."

Fourteen months after their return to Provins, the brother and sister had fallen into a solitary and wholly unoccupied condition. Their banishment from society roused in Sylvie's heart a dreadful hatred against the Tiphaines, Julliards and all the other members of the social world of Provins, which she called "the clique," and with whom her personal relations became extremely cold. She would gladly have set up a rival clique, but the lesser bourgeoisie was made up of either small shopkeepers who were only free on Sundays and fete-days, or smirched individuals like the lawyer Vinet and Doctor Neraud, and wholly inadmissible Bonapartists like Baron Gouraud, with whom, however, Rogron thoughtlessly allied himself, though the upper bourgeoisie had warned him against them.

The brother and sister were, therefore, forced to sit by the fire of the stove in the dining-room, talking over their former business, trying to recall the faces of their customers and other matters they had intended to forget. By the end of the second winter ennui weighed heavily on them. They did not know how to get through each day; sometimes as they went to bed the words escaped them, "There's another over!" They dragged out the morning by staying in bed, and dressing slowly. Rogron shaved himself every day, examined his face, consulted his sister on any changes he thought he saw there, argued with the servant about the temperature of his hot water, wandered into the garden, looked to see if the shrubs were budding, sat at the edge of the water where he had built himself a kiosk, examined the joinery of

his house,--had it sprung? had the walls settled, the panels cracked? or he would come in fretting about a sick hen, and complaining to his sister, who was nagging the servant as she set the table, of the dampness which was coming out in spots upon the plaster. The barometer was Rogron's most useful bit of property. He consulted it at all hours, tapped it familiarly like a friend, saying: "Vile weather!" to which his sister would reply, "Pooh! it is only seasonable." If any one called to see him the excellence of that instrument was his chief topic of conversation.

Breakfast took up some little time; with what deliberation those two human beings masticated their food! Their digestions were perfect; cancer of the stomach was not to be dreaded by them. They managed to get along till twelve o'clock by reading the "Bee-hive" and the "Constitutionnel." The cost of subscribing to the Parisian paper was shared by Vinet the lawyer, and Baron Gouraud. Rogron himself carried the paper to Gouraud, who had been a colonel and lived on the square, and whose long yarns were Rogron's delight; the latter sometimes puzzled over the warnings he had received, and asked himself how such a lively companion could be dangerous. He was fool enough to tell the colonel he had been warned against him, and to repeat all the "clique" had said. God knows how the colonel, who feared no one, and was equally to be dreaded with pistols or a sword, gave tongue about Madame Tiphaine and her Amadis, and the ministerialists of the Upper town, persons capable of any villainy to get places, and who counted the votes at elections to suit themselves, etc.

About two o'clock Rogron started for a little walk. He was quite happy if some shopkeeper standing on the threshold of his door would stop him and say, "Well, pere Rogron, how goes it with _you_?" Then he would talk, and ask for news, and gather all the gossip of the town. He usually went as far as the Upper town, sometimes to the ravines, according to the weather. Occasionally he would meet old men taking their walks abroad like himself. Such meetings were joyful events to him. There happened to be in Provins a few men weary of Parisian life, quiet scholars who lived with their books. Fancy the bewilderment of the ignorant Rogron when he heard a deputy-judge named Desfondrilles, more of an archaeologist than a magistrate, saying to old Monsieur Martener, a really learned man, as he pointed to the valley:--

"Explain to me why the idlers of Europe go to Spa instead of coming to Provins, when the springs here have a superior curative value recognized by the French faculty,--a potential worthy of the medicinal properties of our roses."

"That is one of the caprices of caprice," said the old gentleman. "Bordeaux wine was unknown a hundred years ago. Marechal de Richelieu, one of the noted men of the last century, the French Alcibiades, was appointed governor of Guyenne. His lungs were diseased, and, heaven knows why! the wine of the country did him good and he recovered. Bordeaux instantly made a hundred millions; the marshal widened its territory to Angouleme, to Cahors,--in short, to over a hundred miles of circumference! it is hard to tell where the Bordeaux vineyards end. And yet they haven't erected an equestrian statue to the marshal in Bordeaux!"

"Ah! if anything of that kind happens to Provins," said Monsieur Desfondrilles, "let us hope that somewhere in the Upper or Lower town they will set up a bas-relief of the head of Monsieur Opoix, the

re-discoverer of the mineral waters of Provins."

"My dear friend, the revival of Provins is impossible," replied Monsieur Martener; "the town was made bankrupt long ago."

"What!" cried Rogron, opening his eyes very wide.

"It was once a capital, holding its own against Paris in the twelfth century, when the Comtes de Champagne held their court here, just as King Rene held his in Provence," replied the man of learning; "for in those days civilization, gaiety, poesy, elegance, and women, in short all social splendors, were not found exclusively in Paris. It is as difficult for towns and cities as it is for commercial houses to recover from ruin. Nothing is left to us of the old Provins but the fragrance of our historical glory and that of our roses,--and a sub-prefecture!"

"Ah! what mightn't France be if she had only preserved her feudal capitals!" said Desfondrilles. "Can sub-prefects replace the poetic, gallant, warlike race of the Thibaults who made Provins what Ferrara was to Italy, Weimar to Germany,--what Munich is trying to be to-day."

"Was Provins ever a capital?" asked Rogron.

"Why! where do you come from?" exclaimed the archaeologist. "Don't you know," he added, striking the ground of the Upper town where they stood with his cane, "don't you know that the whole of this part of Provins is built on catacombs?"

"Catacombs?"

"Yes, catacombs, the extent and height of which are yet undiscovered. They are like the naves of cathedrals, and there are pillars in them."

"Monsieur is writing a great archaeological work to explain these strange constructions," interposed Monsieur Martener, seeing that the deputy-judge was about to mount his hobby.

Rogron came home much comforted to know that his house was in the valley. The crypts of Provins kept him occupied for a week in explorations, and gave a topic of conversation to the unhappy celibates for many evenings.

In the course of these ramblings Rogron picked up various bits of information about Provins, its inhabitants, their marriages, together with stale political news; all of which he narrated to his sister. Scores of times in his walks he would stop and say,--often to the same person on the same day,--"Well, what's the news?" When he reached home he would fling himself on the sofa like a man exhausted with labor, whereas he was only worn out with the burden of his own dulness. Dinner came at last, after he had gone twenty times to the kitchen and back, compared the clocks, and opened and shut all the doors of the house. So long as the brother and sister could spend their evenings in paying visits they managed to get along till bedtime; but after they were compelled to stay at home those evenings became like a parching desert. Sometimes persons passing through the quiet little square would hear unearthly noises as though the brother were throttling the sister; a moment's listening would show that they were only yawning. These two human mechanisms, having nothing to grind between their

rusty wheels, were creaking and grating at each other. The brother talked of marrying, but only in despair. He felt old and weary; the thought of a woman frightened him. Sylvie, who began to see the necessity of having a third person in the home, suddenly remembered the little cousin, about whom no one in Provins had yet inquired, the friends of Madame Lorrain probably supposing that mother and child were both dead.

Sylvie Rogron never lost anything; she was too thoroughly an old maid even to mislay the smallest article; but she pretended to have suddenly found the Lorrains' letter, so as to mention Pierrette naturally to her brother, who was greatly pleased at the possibility of having a little girl in the house. Sylvie replied to Madame Lorrain's letter half affectionately, half commercially, as one may say, explaining the delay by their change of abode and the settlement of their affairs. She seemed desirous of receiving her little cousin, and hinted that Pierrette would perhaps inherit twelve thousand francs a year if her brother Jerome did not marry.

Perhaps it is necessary to have been, like Nebuchadnezzar, something of a wild beast, and shut up in a cage at the Jardin des Plantes without other prey than the butcher's meat doled out by the keeper, or a retired merchant deprived of the joys of tormenting his clerks, to understand the impatience with which the brother and sister awaited the arrival of their cousin Lorrain. Three days after the letter had gone, the pair were already asking themselves when she would get there.

Sylvie perceived in her spurious benevolence towards her poor cousin a means of recovering her position in the social world of Provins. She accordingly went to call on Madame Tiphaine, of whose reprobation she was conscious, in order to impart the fact of Pierrette's approaching arrival,--deploring the girl's unfortunate position, and posing herself as being only too happy to succor her and give her a position as daughter and future heiress.

"You have been rather long in discovering her," said Madame Tiphaine, with a touch of sarcasm.

A few words said in a low voice by Madame Garceland, while the cards were being dealt, recalled to the minds of those who heard her the shameful conduct of old Rogron about the Auffray property; the notary explained the iniquity.

"Where is the little girl now?" asked Monsieur Tiphaine, politely.

"In Brittany," said Rogron.

"Brittany is a large place," remarked Monsieur Lesourd.

"Her grandfather and grandmother Lorrain wrote to us--when was that, my dear?" said Rogron addressing his sister.

Sylvie, who was just then asking Madame Garceland where she had bought the stuff for her gown, answered hastily, without thinking of the effect of her words:--

"Before we sold the business."

"And have you only just answered the letter, mademoiselle?" asked the notary.

Sylvie turned as red as a live coal.

"We wrote to the Institution of Saint-Jacques," remarked Rogron.

"That is a sort of hospital or almshouse for old people," said Monsieur Desfondrilles, who knew Nantes. "She can't be there; they receive no one under sixty."

"She is there, with her grandmother Lorrain," said Rogron.

"Her mother had a little fortune, the eight thousand francs which your father--no, I mean of course your grandfather--left to her," said the notary, making the blunder intentionally.

"Ah!" said Rogron, stupidly, not understanding the notary's sarcasm.

"Then you know nothing about your cousin's position or means?" asked Monsieur Tiphaine.

"If Monsieur Rogron had known it," said the deputy-judge, "he would never have left her all this time in an establishment of that kind. I remember now that a house in Nantes belonging to Monsieur and Madame Lorrain was sold under an order of the court, and that Mademoiselle Lorrain's claim was swallowed up. I know this, for I was commissioner at the time."

The notary spoke of Colonel Lorrain, who, had he lived, would have been much amazed to know that his daughter was in such an institution. The Rogrons beat a retreat, saying to each other that the world was very malicious. Sylvie perceived that the news of her benevolence had missed its effect,--in fact, she had lost ground in all minds; and she felt that henceforth she was forbidden to attempt an intimacy with the upper class of Provins. After this evening the Rogrons no longer concealed their hatred of that class and all its adherents. The brother told the sister the scandals that Colonel Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet had put into his head about the Tiphaines, the Guenees, the Garcelands, the Julliards, and others:--

"I declare, Sylvie, I don't see why Madame Tiphaine should turn up her nose at shopkeeping in the rue Saint-Denis; it is more honest than what she comes from. Madame Roguin, her mother, is cousin to those Guillaumes of the 'Cat-playing-ball' who gave up the business to Joseph Lebas, their son-in-law. Her father is that Roguin who failed in 1819, and ruined the house of Cesar Biotteau. Madame Tiphaine's fortune was stolen,--for what else are you to call it when a notary's wife who is very rich lets her husband make a fraudulent bankruptcy? Fine doings! and she marries her daughter in Provins to get her out of the way,--all on account of her own relations with du Tillet. And such people set up to be proud! Well, well, that's the world!"

On the day when Jerome Rogron and his sister began to declaim against "the clique" they were, without being aware of it, on the road to having a society of their own; their house was to become a rendezvous for other interests seeking a centre,--those of the hitherto floating elements of the liberal party in Provins. And this is how it came about: The launch of the Rogrons in society had been watched with

great curiosity by Colonel Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet, two men drawn together, first by their ostracism, next by their opinions. They both professed patriotism and for the same reason,—they wished to become of consequence. The Liberals in Provins were, so far, confined to one old soldier who kept a cafe, an innkeeper, Monsieur Cournant a notary, Doctor Neraud, and a few stray persons, mostly farmers or those who had bought lands of the public domain.

The colonel and the lawyer, delighted to lay hands on a fool whose money would be useful to their schemes, and who might himself, in certain cases, be made to bell the cat, while his house would serve as a meeting-ground for the scattered elements of the party, made the most of the Rogrons' ill-will against the upper classes of the place. The three had already a slight tie in their united subscription to the "Constitutionnel"; it would certainly not be difficult for the colonel to make a Liberal of the ex-mercier, though Rogron knew so little of politics that he was capable of regarding the exploits of Sergeant Mercier as those of a brother shopkeeper.

The expected arrival of Pierrette brought to sudden fruition the selfish ideas of the two men, inspired as they were by the folly and ignorance of the celibates. Seeing that Sylvie had lost all chance of establishing herself in the good society of the place, an afterthought came to the colonel. Old soldiers have seen so many horrors in all lands, so many grinning corpses on battle-fields, that no physiognomies repel them; and Gouraud began to cast his eyes on the old maid's fortune. This imperial colonel, a short, fat man, wore enormous rings in ears that were bushy with tufts of hair. His sparse and grizzled whiskers were called in 1799 "fins." His jolly red face was rather discolored, like those of all who had lived to tell of the Beresina. The lower half of his big, pointed stomach marked the straight line which characterizes a cavalry officer. Gouraud had commanded the Second Hussars. His gray moustache hid a huge blustering mouth,—if we may use a term which alone describes that gulf. He did not eat his food, he engulfed it. A sabre cut had slit his nose, by which his speech was made thick and very nasal, like that attributed to Capuchins. His hands, which were short and broad, were of the kind that make women say: "You have the hands of a rascal." His legs seemed slender for his torso. In that fat and active body an absolutely lawless spirit disported itself, and a thorough experience of the things of life, together with a profound contempt for social convention, lay hidden beneath the apparent indifference of a soldier. Colonel Gouraud wore the cross of an officer of the Legion of honor, and his emoluments from that, together with his salary as a retired officer, gave him in all about three thousand francs a year.

The lawyer, tall and thin, had liberal opinions in place of talent, and his only revenue was the meagre profits of his office. In Provins lawyers plead their own cases. The court was unfavorable to Vinet on account of his opinions; consequently, even the farmers who were Liberals, when it came to lawsuits preferred to employ some lawyer who was more congenial to the judges. Vinet was regarded with disfavor in other ways. He was said to have seduced a rich girl in the neighborhood of Coulommiers, and thus have forced her parents to marry her to him. Madame Vinet was a Chargeboeuf, an old and noble family of La Brie, whose name comes from the exploit of a squire during the expedition of Saint Louis to Egypt. She incurred the displeasure of her father and mother, who arranged, unknown to Vinet, to leave their entire fortune to their son, doubtless charging him privately, to pay

over a portion of it to his sister's children.

Thus the first bold effort of the ambitious man was a failure. Pursued by poverty, and ashamed not to give his wife the means of making a suitable appearance, he had made desperate efforts to enter public life, but the Chargeboeuf family refused him their influence. These Royalists disapproved, on moral grounds, of his forced marriage; besides, he was named Vinet, and how could they be expected to protect a plebian? Thus he was driven from branch to branch when he tried to get some good out of his marriage. Repulsed by every one, filled with hatred for the family of his wife, for the government which denied him a place, for the social world of Provins, which refused to admit him, Vinet submitted to his fate; but his gall increased. He became a Liberal in the belief that his fortune might yet be made by the triumph of the opposition, and he lived in a miserable little house in the Upper town from which his wife seldom issued. Madame Vinet had found no one to defend her since her marriage except an old Madame de Chargeboeuf, a widow with one daughter, who lived at Troyes. The unfortunate young woman, destined for better things, was absolutely alone in her home with a single child.

There are some kinds of poverty which may be nobly accepted and gaily borne; but Vinet, devoured by ambition, and feeling himself guilty towards his wife, was full of darkling rage; his conscience grew elastic; and he finally came to think any means of success permissible. His young face changed. Persons about the courts were sometimes frightened as they looked at his viperish, flat head, his slit mouth, his eyes gleaming through glasses, and heard his sharp, persistent voice which rasped their nerves. His muddy skin, with its sickly tones of green and yellow, expressed the jaundice of his balked ambition, his perpetual disappointments and his hidden wretchedness. He could talk and argue; he was well-informed and shrewd, and was not without smartness and metaphor. Accustomed to look at everything from the standpoint of his own success, he was well fitted for a politician. A man who shrinks from nothing so long as it is legal, is strong; and Vinet's strength lay there.

This future athlete of parliamentary debate, who was destined to share in proclaiming the dynasty of the house of Orleans had a terrible influence on Pierrette's fate. At the present moment he was bent on making for himself a weapon by founding a newspaper at Provins. After studying the Rogrons at a distance (the colonel aiding him) he had come to the conclusion that the brother might be made useful. This time he was not mistaken; his days of poverty were over, after seven wretched years, when even his daily bread was sometimes lacking. The day when Gouraud told him in the little square that the Rogrons had finally quarrelled with the bourgeois aristocracy of the Upper town, he nudged the colonel in the ribs significantly, and said, with a knowing look:--

"One woman or another--handsome or ugly--_you_ don't care; marry Mademoiselle Rogron and we can organize something at once."

"I have been thinking of it," replied Gouraud, "but the fact is they have sent for the daughter of Colonel Lorrain, and she's their next of kin."

"You can get them to make a will in your favor. Ha! you would get a very comfortable house."

"As for the little girl--well, well, let's see her," said the colonel, with a leering and thoroughly wicked look, which proved to a man of Vinet's quality how little respect the old trooper could feel for any girl.

IV

PIERRETTE

After her grandfather and grandmother entered the sort of hospital in which they sadly expected to end their days, Pierrette, being young and proud, suffered so terribly at living there on charity that she was thankful when she heard she had rich relations. When Brigaut, the son of her mother's friend the major, and the companion of her childhood, who was learning his trade as a cabinet-maker at Nantes, heard of her departure he offered her the money to pay her way to Paris in the diligence,--sixty francs, the total of his _pour-boires_ as an apprentice, slowly amassed, and accepted by Pierrette with the sublime indifference of true affection, showing that in a like case she herself would be affronted by thanks.

Brigaut was in the habit of going every Sunday to Saint-Jacques to play with Pierrette and try to console her. The vigorous young workman knew the dear delight of bestowing a complete and devoted protection on an object involuntarily chosen by his heart. More than once he and Pierrette, sitting on Sundays in a corner of the garden, had embroidered the veil of the future with their youthful projects; the apprentice, armed with his plane, scoured the world to make their fortune, while Pierrette waited.

In October, 1824, when the child had completed her eleventh year, she was entrusted by the two old people and by Brigaut, all three sorrowfully sad, to the conductor of the diligence from Nantes to Paris, with an entreaty to put her safely on the diligence from Paris to Provins and to take good care of her. Poor Brigaut! he ran like a dog after the coach looking at his dear Pierrette as long as he was able. In spite of her signs he ran over three miles, and when at last he was exhausted his eyes, wet with tears, still followed her. She, too, was crying when she saw him no longer running by her, and putting her head out of the window she watched him, standing stock-still and looking after her, as the lumbering vehicle disappeared.

The Lorrains and Brigaut knew so little of life that the girl had not a penny when she arrived in Paris. The conductor, to whom she had mentioned her rich friends, paid her expenses at the hotel, and made the conductor of the Provins diligence pay him, telling him to take good care of the girl and to see that the charges were paid by the family, exactly as though she were a case of goods. Four days after her departure from Nantes, about nine o'clock of a Monday night, a kind old conductor of the Messageries-royales, took Pierrette by the hand, and while the porters were discharging in the Grand'Rue the packages and passengers for Provins, he led the little girl, whose only baggage was a bundle containing two dresses, two chemises, and two pairs of stockings, to Mademoiselle Rogron's house, which was pointed out to him by the director at the coach office.

"Good-evening, mademoiselle and the rest of the company. I've brought you a cousin, and here she is; and a nice little girl too, upon my word. You have forty-seven francs to pay me, and sign my book."

Mademoiselle Sylvie and her brother were dumb with pleasure and amazement.

"Excuse me," said the conductor, "the coach is waiting. Sign my book and pay me forty-seven francs, sixty centimes, and whatever you please for myself and the conductor from Nantes; we've taken care of the little girl as if she were our own; and paid for her beds and her food, also her fare to Provins, and other little things."

"Forty-seven francs, twelve sous!" said Sylvie.

"You are not going to dispute it?" cried the man.

"Where's the bill?" said Rogron.

"Bill! look at the book."

"Stop talking, and pay him," said Sylvie, "You see there's nothing else to be done."

Rogron went to get the money, and gave the man forty-seven francs, twelve sous.

"And nothing for my comrade and me?" said the conductor.

Sylvie took two francs from the depths of the old velvet bag which held her keys.

"Thank you, no," said the man; "keep 'em yourself. We would rather care for the little one for her own sake." He picked up his book and departed, saying to the servant-girl: "What a pair! it seems there are crocodiles out of Egypt!"

"Such men are always brutal," said Sylvie, who overheard the words.

"They took good care of the little girl, anyhow," said Adele with her hands on her hips.

"We don't have to live with him," remarked Rogron.

"Where's the little one to sleep?" asked Adele.

Such was the arrival of Pierrette Lorrain in the home of her cousins, who gazed at her with stolid eyes; she was tossed to them like a package, with no intermediate state between the wretched chamber at Saint-Jacques and the dining-room of her cousins, which seemed to her a palace. She was shy and speechless. To all other eyes than those of the Rogrons the little Breton girl would have seemed enchanting as she stood there in her petticoat of coarse blue flannel, with a pink cambric apron, thick shoes, blue stockings, and a white kerchief, her hands being covered by red worsted mittens edged with white, bought for her by the conductor. Her dainty Breton cap (which had been washed in Paris, for the journey from Nantes had rumbled it) was like a halo round her happy little face. This national cap, of the finest lawn, trimmed with stiffened lace pleated in flat folds, deserves

description, it was so dainty and simple. The light coming through the texture and the lace produced a partial shadow, the soft shadow of a light upon the skin, which gave her the virginal grace that all painters seek and Leopold Robert found for the Raffaelesque face of the woman who holds a child in his picture of "The Gleaners." Beneath this fluted frame of light sparkled a white and rosy and artless face, glowing with vigorous health. The warmth of the room brought the blood to the cheeks, to the tips of the pretty ears, to the lips and the end of the delicate nose, making the natural white of the complexion whiter still.

"Well, are you not going to say anything? I am your cousin Sylvie, and that is your cousin Rogron."

"Do you want something to eat?" asked Rogron.

"When did you leave Nantes?" asked Sylvie.

"Is she dumb?" said Rogron.

"Poor little dear, she has hardly any clothes," cried Adele, who had opened the child's bundle, tied up in a handkerchief of the old Lorrains.

"Kiss your cousin," said Sylvie.

Pierrette kissed Rogron.

"Kiss your cousin," said Rogron.

Pierrette kissed Sylvie.

"She is tired out with her journey, poor little thing; she wants to go to sleep," said Adele.

Pierrette was overcome with a sudden and invincible aversion for her two relatives,—a feeling that no one had ever before excited in her. Sylvie and the maid took her up to bed in the room where Brigaut afterwards noticed the white cotton curtain. In it was a little bed with a pole painted blue, from which hung a calico curtain; a walnut bureau without a marble top, a small table, a looking-glass, a very common night-table without a door, and three chairs completed the furniture of the room. The walls, which sloped in front, were hung with a shabby paper, blue with black flowers. The tiled floor, stained red and polished, was icy to the feet. There was no carpet except for a strip at the bedside. The mantelpiece of common marble was adorned by a mirror, two candelabra in copper-gilt, and a vulgar alabaster cup in which two pigeons, forming handles, were drinking.

"You will be comfortable here, my little girl?" said Sylvie.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" said the child, in her silvery voice.

"She's not difficult to please," muttered the stout servant. "Sha'n't I warm her bed?" she asked.

"Yes," said Sylvie, "the sheets may be damp."

Adele brought one of her own night-caps when she returned with the

warming-pan, and Pierrette, who had never slept in anything but the coarsest linen sheets, was amazed at the fineness and softness of the cotton ones. When she was fairly in bed and tucked up, Adele, going downstairs with Sylvie, could not refrain from saying, "All she has isn't worth three francs, mademoiselle."

Ever since her economical regime began, Sylvie had compelled the maid to sit in the dining-room so that one fire and one lamp could do for all; except when Colonel Gouraud and Vinet came, on which occasions Adele was sent to the kitchen.

Pierrette's arrival enlivened the rest of the evening.

"We must get her some clothes to-morrow," said Sylvie; "she has absolutely nothing."

"No shoes but those she had on, which weigh a pound," said Adele.

"That's always so, in their part of the country," remarked Rogron.

"How she looked at her room! though it really isn't handsome enough for a cousin of yours, mademoiselle."

"It is good enough; hold your tongue," said Sylvie.

"Gracious, what chemises! coarse enough to scratch her skin off; not a thing can she use here," said Adele, emptying the bundle.

Master, mistress, and servant were busy till past ten o'clock, deciding what cambric they should buy for the new chemises, how many pairs of stockings, how many under-petticoats, and what material, and in reckoning up the whole cost of Pierrette's outfit.

"You won't get off under three hundred francs," said Rogron, who could remember the different prices, and add them up from his former shop-keeping habit.

"Three hundred francs!" cried Sylvie.

"Yes, three hundred. Add it up."

The brother and sister went over the calculation once more, and found the cost would be fully three hundred francs, not counting the making.

"Three hundred francs at one stroke!" said Sylvie to herself as she got into bed.

* * * * *

Pierrette was one of those children of love whom love endows with its tenderness, its vivacity, its gaiety, its nobility, its devotion. Nothing had so far disturbed or wounded a heart that was delicate as that of a fawn, but which was now painfully repressed by the cold greeting of her cousins. If Brittany had been full of outward misery, at least it was full of love. The old Lorrains were the most incapable of merchants, but they were also the most loving, frank, caressing, of friends, like all who are incautious and free from calculation. Their little granddaughter had received no other education at Pen-Hoel than that of nature. Pierrette went where she liked, in a boat on the pond,

or roaming the village and the fields with Jacques Brigaut, her comrade, exactly as Paul and Virginia might have done. Petted by everybody, free as air, they gaily chased the joys of childhood. In summer they ran to watch the fishing, they caught the many-colored insects, they gathered flowers, they gardened; in winter they made slides, they built snow-men or huts, or pelted each other with snowballs. Welcomed by all, they met with smiles wherever they went.

When the time came to begin their education, disasters came, too. Jacques, left without means at the death of his father, was apprenticed by his relatives to a cabinet-maker, and fed by charity, as Pierrette was soon to be at Saint-Jacques. Until the little girl was taken with her grandparents to that asylum, she had known nothing but fond caresses and protection from every one. Accustomed to confide in so much love, the little darling missed in these rich relatives, so eagerly desired, the kindly looks and ways which all the world, even strangers and the conductors of the coaches, had bestowed upon her. Her bewilderment, already great, was increased by the moral atmosphere she had entered. The heart turns suddenly cold or hot like the body. The poor child wanted to cry, without knowing why; but being very tired she went to sleep.

The next morning, Pierrette being, like all country children, accustomed to get up early, was awake two hours before the cook. She dressed herself, stepping on tiptoe about her room, looked out at the little square, started to go downstairs and was struck with amazement by the beauties of the staircase. She stopped to examine all its details: the painted walls, the brasses, the various ornamentations, the window fixtures. Then she went down to the garden-door, but was unable to open it, and returned to her room to wait until Adele should be stirring. As soon as the woman went to the kitchen Pierrette flew to the garden and took possession of it, ran to the river, was amazed at the kiosk, and sat down in it; truly, she had enough to see and to wonder at until her cousins were up. At breakfast Sylvie said to her:--

"Was it you, little one, who was trotting over my head by daybreak, and making that racket on the stairs? You woke me so that I couldn't go to sleep again. You must be very good and quiet, and amuse yourself without noise. Your cousin doesn't like noise."

"And you must wipe your feet," said Rogron. "You went into the kiosk with your dirty shoes, and they've tracked all over the floor. Your cousin likes cleanliness. A great girl like you ought to be clean. Weren't you clean in Brittany? But I recollect when I went down there to buy thread it was pitiable to see the folks,--they were like savages. At any rate she has a good appetite," added Rogron, looking at his sister; "one would think she hadn't eaten anything for days."

Thus, from the very start Pierrette was hurt by the remarks of her two cousins,--hurt, she knew not why. Her straightforward, open nature, hitherto left to itself, was not given to reflection. Incapable of thinking that her cousins were hard, she was fated to find it out slowly through suffering. After breakfast the brother and sister, pleased with Pierrette's astonishment at the house and anxious to enjoy it, took her to the salon to show her its splendors and teach her not to touch them. Many celibates, driven by loneliness and the moral necessity of caring for something, substitute factitious affections for natural ones; they love dogs, cats, canaries, servants,

or their confessor. Rogron and Sylvie had come to the pass of loving immoderately their house and furniture, which had cost them so dear. Sylvie began by helping Adele in the mornings to dust and arrange the furniture, under pretence that she did not know how to keep it looking as good as new. This dusting was soon a desired occupation to her, and the furniture, instead of losing its value in her eyes, became ever more precious. To use things without hurting them or soiling them or scratching the woodwork or clouding the varnish, that was the problem which soon became the mania of the old maid's life. Sylvie had a closet full of bits of wool, wax, varnish, and brushes, which she had learned to use with the dexterity of a cabinet-maker; she had her feather dusters and her dusting-cloths; and she rubbed away without fear of hurting herself,--she was so strong. The glance of her cold blue eyes, hard as steel, was forever roving over the furniture and under it, and you could as soon have found a tender spot in her heart as a bit of fluff under the sofa.

After the remarks made at Madame Tiphaine's, Sylvie dared not flinch from the three hundred francs for Pierrette's clothes. During the first week her time was wholly taken up, and Pierrette's too, by frocks to order and try on, chemises and petticoats to cut out and have made by a seamstress who went out by the day. Pierrette did not know how to sew.

"That's pretty bringing up!" said Rogron. "Don't you know how to do anything, little girl?"

Pierrette, who knew nothing but how to love, made a pretty, childish gesture.

"What did you do in Brittany?" asked Rogron.

"I played," she answered, naively. "Everybody played with me. Grandmamma and grandpapa they told me stories. Ah! they all loved me!"

"Hey!" said Rogron; "didn't you take it easy!"

Pierrette opened her eyes wide, not comprehending.

"She is as stupid as an owl," said Sylvie to Mademoiselle Borain, the best seamstress in Provins.

"She's so young," said the workwoman, looking kindly at Pierrette, whose delicate little muzzle was turned up to her with a coaxing look.

Pierrette preferred the sewing-women to her relations. She was endearing in her ways with them, she watched their work, and made them those pretty speeches that seem like the flowers of childhood, and which her cousin had already silenced, for that gaunt woman loved to impress those under her with salutary awe. The sewing-women were delighted with Pierrette. Their work, however, was not carried on without many and loud grumblings.

"That child will make us pay through the nose!" cried Sylvie to her brother.

"Stand still, my dear, and don't plague us; it is all for you and not for me," she would say to Pierrette when the child was being measured. Sometimes it was, when Pierrette would ask the seamstress some

question, "Let Mademoiselle Borain do her work, and don't talk to her; it is not you who are paying for her time."

"Mademoiselle," said Mademoiselle Borain, "am I to back-stitch this?"

"Yes, do it firmly; I don't want to be making such an outfit as this every day."

Sylvie put the same spirit of emulation into Pierrette's outfit that she had formerly put into the house. She was determined that her cousin should be as well dressed as Madame Garceland's little girl. She bought the child fashionable boots of bronzed kid like those the little Tiphaines wore, very fine cotton stockings, a corset by the best maker, a dress of blue reps, a pretty cape lined with white silk, --all this that she, Sylvie, might hold her own against the children of the women who had rejected her. The underclothes were quite in keeping with the visible articles of dress, for Sylvie feared the examining eyes of the various mothers. Pierrette's chemises were of fine Madapolam calico. Mademoiselle Borain had mentioned that the sub-prefect's little girls wore cambric drawers, embroidered and trimmed in the latest style. Pierrette had the same. Sylvie ordered for her a charming little drawn bonnet of blue velvet lined with white satin, precisely like the one worn by Dr. Martener's little daughter.

Thus attired, Pierrette was the most enchanting little girl in all Provins. On Sunday, after church, all the ladies kissed her; Mesdames Tiphaine, Garceland, Galardon, Julliard, and the rest fell in love with the sweet little Breton girl. This enthusiasm was deeply flattering to old Sylvie's self-love; she regarded it as less due to Pierrette than to her own benevolence. She ended, however, in being affronted by her cousin's success. Pierrette was constantly invited out, and Sylvie allowed her to go, always for the purpose of triumphing over "those ladies." Pierrette was much in demand for games or little parties and dinners with their own little girls. She had succeeded where the Rogrons had failed; and Mademoiselle Sylvie soon grew indignant that Pierrette was asked to other children's houses when those children never came to hers. The artless little thing did not conceal the pleasure she found in her visits to these ladies, whose affectionate manners contrasted strangely with the harshness of her two cousins. A mother would have rejoiced in the happiness of her little one, but the Rogrons had taken Pierrette for their own sakes, not for hers; their feelings, far from being parental, were dyed in selfishness and a sort of commercial calculation.

The handsome outfit, the fine Sunday dresses, and the every-day frocks were the beginning of Pierrette's troubles. Like all children free to amuse themselves, who are accustomed to follow the dictates of their own lively fancies, she was very hard on her clothes, her shoes, and above all on those embroidered drawers. A mother when she reproves her child thinks only of the child; her voice is gentle; she does not raise it unless driven to extremities, or when the child is much in fault. But here, in this great matter of Pierrette's clothes, the cousins' money was the first consideration; their interests were to be thought of, not the child's. Children have the perceptions of the canine race for the sentiments of those who rule them; they know instinctively whether they are loved or only tolerated. Pure and innocent hearts are more distressed by shades of difference than by contrasts; a child does not understand evil, but it knows when the instinct of the good and the beautiful which nature has implanted in

it is shocked. The lectures which Pierrette now drew upon herself on propriety of behavior, modesty, and economy were merely the corollary of the one theme, "Pierrette will ruin us."

These perpetual fault-findings, which were destined to have a fatal result for the poor child, brought the two celibates back to the old beaten track of their shop-keeping habits, from which their removal to Provins had parted them, and in which their natures were now to expand and flourish. Accustomed in the old days to rule and to make inquisitions, to order about and reprove their clerks sharply, Rogron and his sister had actually suffered for want of victims. Little minds need to practise despotism to relieve their nerves, just as great souls thirst for equality in friendship to exercise their hearts. Narrow natures expand by persecuting as much as others through beneficence; they prove their power over their fellows by cruel tyranny as others do by loving kindness; they simply go the way their temperaments drive them. Add to this the propulsion of self-interest and you may read the enigma of most social matters.

Thenceforth Pierrette became a necessity to the lives of her cousins. From the day of her coming their minds were occupied,--first, with her outfit, and then with the novelty of a third presence. But every new thing, a sentiment and even a tyranny, is moulded as time goes on into fresh shapes. Sylvie began by calling Pierrette "my dear," or "little one." Then she abandoned the gentler terms for "Pierrette" only. Her reprimands, at first only cross, became sharp and angry; and no sooner were their feet on the path of fault-finding than the brother and sister made rapid strides. They were no longer bored to death! It was not their deliberate intention to be wicked and cruel; it was simply the blind instinct of an imbecile tyranny. The pair believed they were doing Pierrette a service, just as they had thought their harshness a benefit to their apprentices.

Pierrette, whose true and noble and extreme sensibility was the antipodes of the Rogrons' hardness, had a dread of being scolded; it wounded her so sharply that the tears would instantly start in her beautiful, pure eyes. She had a great struggle with herself before she could repress the enchanting sprightliness which made her so great a favorite elsewhere. After a time she displayed it only in the homes of her little friends. By the end of the first month she had learned to be passive in her cousins' house,--so much so that Rogron one day asked her if she was ill. At that sudden question, she ran to the end of the garden, and stood crying beside the river, into which her tears may have fallen as she herself was about to fall into the social torrent.

One day, in spite of all her care, she tore her best reps frock at Madame Tiphaine's, where she was spending a happy day. The poor child burst into tears, foreseeing the cruel things which would be said to her at home. Questioned by her friends, she let fall a few words about her terrible cousin. Madame Tiphaine happened to have some reps exactly like that of the frock, and she put in a new breadth herself. Mademoiselle Rogron found out the trick, as she expressed it, which the little devil had played her. From that day forth she refused to let Pierrette go to any of "those women's" houses.

The life the poor girl led in Provins was divided into three distinct phases. The first, already shown, in which she had some joy mingled with the cold kindness of her cousins and their sharp reproaches,

lasted three months. Sylvie's refusal to let her go to her little friends, backed by the necessity of beginning her education, ended the first phase of her life at Provins, the only period when that life was bearable to her.

These events, produced at the Rogrons by Pierrette's presence, were studied by Vinet and the colonel with the caution of foxes preparing to enter a poultry-yard and disturbed by seeing a strange fowl. They both called from time to time,--but seldom, so as not to alarm the old maid; they talked with Rogron under various pretexts, and made themselves masters of his mind with an affectation of reserve and modesty which the great Tartuffe himself would have respected. The colonel and the lawyer were spending the evening with Rogron on the very day when Sylvie had refused in bitter language to let Pierrette go again to Madame Tiphaine's, or elsewhere. Being told of this refusal the colonel and the lawyer looked at each other with an air which seemed to say that they at least knew Provins well.

"Madame Tiphaine intended to insult you," said the lawyer. "We have long been warning Rogron of what would happen. There's no good to be got from those people."

"What can you expect from the anti-national party!" cried the colonel, twirling his moustache and interrupting the lawyer. "But, mademoiselle, if we had tried to warn you from those people you might have supposed we had some malicious motive in what we said. If you like a game of cards in the evening, why don't you have it at home; why not play your boston here, in your own house? Is it impossible to fill the places of those idiots, the Julliards and all the rest of them? Vinet and I know how to play boston, and we can easily find a fourth. Vinet might present his wife to you; she is charming, and, what is more, a Chargeboeuf. You will not be so exacting as those apes of the Upper town; you won't require a good little housewife, who is compelled by the meanness of her family to do her own work, to dress like a duchess. Poor woman, she has the courage of a lion and the meekness of a lamb."

Sylvie Rogron showed her long yellow teeth as she smiled on the colonel, who bore the sight heroically and assumed a flattered air.

"If we are only four we can't play boston every night," said Sylvie.

"Why not? What do you suppose an old soldier of the Empire like me does with himself? And as for Vinet, his evenings are always free. Besides, you'll have plenty of other visitors; I warrant you that," he added, with a rather mysterious air.

"What you ought to do," said Vinet, "is to take an open stand against the ministerialists of Provins and form an opposition to them. You would soon see how popular that would make you; you would have a society about you at once. The Tiphaines would be furious at an opposition salon. Well, well, why not laugh at others, if others laugh at you?--and they do; the clique doesn't mince matters in talking about you."

"How's that?" demanded Sylvie.

In the provinces there is always a valve or a faucet through which gossip leaks from one social set to another. Vinet knew all the slurs

cast upon the Rogrons in the salons from which they were now excluded. The deputy-judge and archaeologist Desfondrilles belonged to neither party. With other independents like him, he repeated what he heard on both sides and Vinet made the most of it. The lawyer's spiteful tongue put venom into Madame Tiphaine's speeches, and by showing Rogron and Sylvie the ridicule they had brought upon themselves he roused an undying spirit of hatred in those bitter natures, which needed an object for their petty passions.

A few days later Vinet brought his wife, a well-bred woman, neither pretty nor plain, timid, very gentle, and deeply conscious of her false position. Madame Vinet was fair-complexioned, faded by the cares of her poor household, and very simply dressed. No woman could have pleased Sylvie more. Madame Vinet endured her airs, and bent before them like one accustomed to subjection. On the poor woman's rounded brow and delicately timid cheek and in her slow and gentle glance, were the traces of deep reflection, of those perceptive thoughts which women who are accustomed to suffer bury in total silence.

The influence of the colonel (who now displayed to Sylvie the graces of a courtier, in marked contradiction to his usual military brusqueness), together with that of the astute Vinet, was soon to harm the Breton child. Shut up in the house, no longer allowed to go out except in company with her old cousin, Pierrette, that pretty little squirrel, was at the mercy of the incessant cry, "Don't touch that, child, let that alone!" She was perpetually being lectured on her carriage and behavior; if she stooped or rounded her shoulders her cousin would call to her to be as erect as herself (Sylvie was rigid as a soldier presenting arms to his colonel); sometimes indeed the ill-natured old maid enforced the order by slaps on the back to make the girl straighten up.

Thus the free and joyous little child of the Marais learned by degrees to repress all liveliness and to make herself, as best she could, an automaton.

V

HISTORY OF POOR COUSINS IN THE HOME OF RICH ONES

One evening, which marked the beginning of Pierrette's second phase of life in her cousin's house, the child, whom the three guests had not seen during the evening, came into the room to kiss her relatives and say good-night to the company. Sylvie turned her cheek coldly to the pretty creature, as if to avoid kissing her. The motion was so cruelly significant that the tears sprang to Pierrette's eyes.

"Did you prick yourself, little girl?" said the atrocious Vinet.

"What is the matter?" asked Sylvie, severely.

"Nothing," said the poor child, going up to Rogron.

"Nothing?" said Sylvie, "that's nonsense; nobody cries for nothing."

"What is it, my little darling?" said Madame Vinet.

"My rich cousin isn't as kind to me as my poor grandmother was," sobbed Pierrette.

"Your grandmother took your money," said Sylvie, "and your cousin will leave you hers."

The colonel and the lawyer glanced at each other.

"I would rather be robbed and loved," said Pierrette.

"Then you shall be sent back whence you came."

"But what has the dear little thing done?" asked Madame Vinet.

Vinet gave his wife the terrible, fixed, cold look with which men enforce their absolute dominion. The hapless helot, punished incessantly for not having the one thing that was wanted of her, a fortune, took up her cards.

"What has she done?" said Sylvie, throwing up her head with such violence that the yellow wall-flowers in her cap nodded. "She is always looking about to annoy us. She opened my watch to see the inside, and meddled with the wheel and broke the mainspring. Mademoiselle pays no heed to what is said to her. I am all day long telling her to take care of things, and I might just as well talk to that lamp."

Pierrette, ashamed at being reprovved before strangers, crept softly out of the room.

"I am thinking all the time how to subdue that child," said Rogron.

"Isn't she old enough to go to school?" asked Madame Vinet.

Again she was silenced by a look from her husband, who had been careful to tell her nothing of his own or the colonel's schemes.

"This is what comes of taking charge of other people's children!" cried the colonel. "You may still have some of your own, you or your brother. Why don't you both marry?"

Sylvie smiled agreeably on the colonel. For the first time in her life she met a man to whom the idea that she could marry did not seem absurd.

"Madame Vinet is right," cried Rogron; "perhaps teaching would keep Pierrette quiet. A master wouldn't cost much."

The colonel's remark so preoccupied Sylvie that she made no answer to her brother.

"If you are willing to be security for that opposition journal I was talking to you about," said Vinet, "you will find an excellent master for the little cousin in the managing editor; we intend to engage that poor schoolmaster who lost his employment through the encroachments of the clergy. My wife is right; Pierrette is a rough diamond that wants polishing."

"I thought you were a baron," said Sylvie to the colonel, while the

cards were being dealt, and after a long pause in which they had all been rather thoughtful.

"Yes; but when I was made baron, in 1814, after the battle of Nangis, where my regiment performed miracles, I had money and influence enough to secure the rank. But now my barony is like the grade of general which I held in 1815,—it needs a revolution to give it back to me."

"If you will secure my endorsement by a mortgage," said Rogron, answering Vinet after long consideration, "I will give it."

"That can easily be arranged," said Vinet. "The new paper will soon restore the colonel's rights, and make your salon more powerful in Provins than those of Tiphaine and company."

"How so?" asked Sylvie.

While his wife was dealing and Vinet himself explaining the importance they would all gain by the publication of an independent newspaper, Pierrette was dissolved in tears; her heart and her mind were one in this matter; she felt and knew that her cousin was more to blame than she was. The little country girl instinctively understood that charity and benevolence ought to be a complete offering. She hated her handsome frocks and all the things that were made for her; she was forced to pay too dearly for such benefits. She wept with vexation at having given cause for complaint against her, and resolved to behave in future in such a way as to compel her cousins to find no further fault with her. The thought then came into her mind how grand Brigaut had been in giving her all his savings without a word. Poor child! she fancied her troubles were now at their worst; she little knew that other misfortunes were even now being planned for her in the salon.

A few days later Pierrette had a writing-master. She was taught to read, write, and cipher. Enormous injury was thus supposed to be done to the Rogrons' house. Ink-spots were found on the tables, on the furniture, on Pierrette's clothes; copy-books and pens were left about; sand was scattered everywhere, books were torn and dog's-eared as the result of these lessons. She was told in harsh terms that she would have to earn her own living, and not be a burden to others. As she listened to these cruel remarks Pierrette's throat contracted violently with acute pain, her heart throbbed. She was forced to restrain her tears, or she was scolded for weeping and told it was an insult to the kindness of her magnanimous cousins. Rogron had found the life that suited him. He scolded Pierrette as he used to scold his clerks; he would call her when at play, and compel her to study; he made her repeat her lessons, and became himself the almost savage master of the poor child. Sylvie, on her side, considered it a duty to teach Pierrette the little that she knew herself about women's work. Neither Rogron nor his sister had the slightest softness in their natures. Their narrow minds, which found real pleasure in worrying the poor child, passed insensibly from outward kindness to extreme severity. This severity was necessitated, they believed, by what they called the self-will of the child, which had not been broken when young and was very obstinate. Her masters were ignorant how to give to their instructions a form suited to the intelligence of the pupil,—a thing, by the bye, which marks the difference between public and private education. The fault was far less with Pierrette than with her cousins. It took her an infinite length of time to learn the rudiments. She was called stupid and dull, clumsy and awkward for mere

nothings. Incessantly abused in words, the child suffered still more from the harsh looks of her cousins. She acquired the doltish ways of a sheep; she dared not do anything of her own impulse, for all she did was misinterpreted, misjudged, and ill-received. In all things she awaited silently the good pleasure and the orders of her cousins, keeping her thoughts within her own mind and sheltering herself behind a passive obedience. Her brilliant colors began to fade. Sometimes she complained of feeling ill. When her cousin asked, "Where?" the poor little thing, who had pains all over her, answered, "Everywhere."

"Nonsense! who ever heard of any one suffering everywhere?" cried Sylvie. "If you suffered everywhere you'd be dead."

"People suffer in their chests," said Rogron, who liked to hear himself harangue, "or they have toothache, headache, pains in their feet or stomach, but no one has pains everywhere. What do you mean by everywhere? I can tell you; 'everywhere' means nowhere. Don't you know what you are doing?--you are complaining for complaining's sake."

Pierrette ended by total silence, seeing how all her girlish remarks, the flowers of her dawning intelligence, were replied to with ignorant commonplaces which her natural good sense told her were ridiculous.

"You complain," said Rogron, "but you've got the appetite of a monk."

The only person who did not bruise the delicate little flower was the fat servant woman, Adele. Adele would go up and warm her bed,--doing it on the sly after a certain evening when Sylvie had scolded her for giving that comfort to the child.

"Children should be hardened, to give them strong constitutions. Am I and my brother the worse for it?" said Sylvie. "You'll make Pierrette a peaking"; this was a word in the Rogron vocabulary which meant a puny and suffering little being.

The naturally endearing ways of the angelic child were treated as dissimulation. The fresh, pure blossoms of affection which bloomed instinctively in that young soul were pitilessly crushed. Pierrette suffered many a cruel blow on the tender flesh of her heart. If she tried to soften those ferocious natures by innocent, coaxing wiles they accused her of doing it with an object. "Tell me at once what you want?" Rogron would say, brutally; "you are not coaxing me for nothing."

Neither brother nor sister believed in affection, and Pierrette's whole being was affection. Colonel Gouraud, anxious to please Mademoiselle Rogron, approved of all she did about Pierrette. Vinet also encouraged them in what they said against her. He attributed all her so-called misdeeds to the obstinacy of the Breton character, and declared that no power, no will, could ever conquer it. Rogron and his sister were so shrewdly flattered by the two manoeuvrers that the former agreed to go security for the "Courrier de Provins," and the latter invested five thousand francs in the enterprise.

On this, the colonel and lawyer took the field. They got a hundred shares, of five hundred francs each, taken among the farmers and others called independents, and also among those who had bought lands of the national domains,--whose fears they worked upon. They even extended their operations throughout the department and along its

borders. Each shareholder of course subscribed to the paper. The judicial advertisements were divided between the "Bee-hive" and the "Courrier." The first issue of the latter contained a pompous eulogy on Rogron. He was presented to the community as the Laffitte of Provins. The public mind having thus received an impetus in this new direction, it was manifest, of course, that the coming elections would be contested. Madame Tiphaine, whose highest hope was to take her husband to Paris as deputy, was in despair. After reading an article in the new paper aimed at her and at Julliard junior, she remarked: "Unfortunately for me, I forgot that there is always a scoundrel close to a dupe, and that fools are magnets to clever men of the fox breed."

As soon as the "Courrier" was fairly launched on a radius of fifty miles, Vinet bought a new coat and decent boots, waistcoats, and trousers. He set up the gray slouch hat sacred to liberals, and showed his linen. His wife took a servant, and appeared in public dressed as the wife of a prominent man should be; her caps were pretty. Vinet proved grateful--out of policy. He and his friend Cournant, the liberal notary and the rival of the ministerial notary Auffray, became the close advisers of the Rogrons, to whom they were able to do a couple of signal services. The leases granted by old Rogron to their father in 1815, when matters were at a low ebb, were about to expire. Horticulture and vegetable gardening had developed enormously in the neighborhood of Provins. The lawyer and notary set to work to enable the Rogrons to increase their rentals. Vinet won two lawsuits against two districts on a question of planting trees, which involved five hundred poplars. The proceeds of the poplars, added to the savings of the brother and sister, who for the last three years had laid by six thousand a year at high interest, was wisely invested in the purchase of improved lands. Vinet also undertook and carried out the ejection of certain peasants to whom the elder Rogron had lent money on their farms, and who had strained every nerve to pay off the debt, but in vain. The cost of the Rogrons' fine house was thus in a measure recouped. Their landed property, lying around Provins and chosen by their father with the sagacious eye of an innkeeper, was divided into small holdings, the largest of which did not exceed five acres, and rented to safe tenants, men who owned other parcels of land, that were ample security for their leases. These investments brought in, by 1826, five thousand francs a year. Taxes were charged to the tenants, and there were no buildings needing insurance or repairs.

By the end of the second period of Pierrette's stay in Provins life had become so hard for her, the cold indifference of all who came to the house, the silly fault-finding, and the total absence of affection on the part of her cousins grew so bitter, she was conscious of a chill dampness like that of a grave creeping round her, that the bold idea of escaping, on foot and without money, to Brittany and to her grandparents took possession of her mind. Two events hindered her from attempting it. Old Lorrain died, and Rogron was appointed guardian of his little cousin. If the grandmother had died first, we may believe that Rogron, advised by Vinet, would have claimed Pierrette's eight thousand francs and reduced the old man to penury.

"You may, perhaps, inherit from Pierrette," said Vinet, with a horrid smile. "Who knows who may live and who may die?"

Enlightened by that remark, Rogron gave old Madame Lorrain no peace until she had secured to Pierrette the reversion of the eight thousand francs at her death.

Pierrette was deeply shocked by these events. She was on the point of making her first communion,--another reason for resigning the hope of escape from Provins. This ceremony, simple and customary as it was, led to great changes in the Rogron household. Sylvie learned that Monsieur le cure Peroux was instructing the little Julliards, Lesourds, Garcelands, and the rest. She therefore made it a point of honor that Pierrette should be instructed by the vicar himself, Monsieur Habert, a priest who was thought to belong to the Congregation, very zealous for the interests of the Church, and much feared in Provins,--a man who hid a vast ambition beneath the austerity of stern principles. The sister of this priest, an unmarried woman about thirty years of age, kept a school for young ladies. Brother and sister looked alike; both were thin, yellow, black-haired, and bilious.

Like a true Breton girl, cradled in the practices and poetry of Catholicism, Pierrette opened her heart and ears to the words of this imposing priest. Sufferings predispose the mind to devotion, and nearly all young girls, impelled by instinctive tenderness, are inclined to mysticism, the deepest aspect of religion. The priest found good soil in which to sow the seed of the Gospel and the dogmas of the Church. He completely changed the current of the girl's thoughts. Pierrette loved Jesus Christ in the light in which he is presented to young girls at the time of their first communion, as a celestial bridegroom; her physical and moral sufferings gained a meaning for her; she saw the finger of God in all things. Her soul, so cruelly hurt although she could not accuse her cousins of actual wrong, took refuge in that sphere to which all sufferers fly on the wings of the cardinal virtues,--Faith, Hope, Charity. She abandoned her thoughts of escape. Sylvie, surprised by the transformation Monsieur Habert had effected in Pierrette, was curious to know how it had been done. And it thus came about that the austere priest, while preparing Pierrette for her first communion, also won to God the hitherto erring soul of Mademoiselle Sylvie. Sylvie became pious. Jerome Rogron, on whom the so-called Jesuit could get no grip (for just then the influence of His Majesty the late Constitutionnel the First was more powerful over weaklings than the influence of the Church), Jerome Rogron remained faithful to Colonel Gouraud, Vinet, and Liberalism.

Mademoiselle Rogron naturally made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Habert, with whom she sympathized deeply. The two spinsters loved each other as sisters. Mademoiselle Habert offered to take Pierrette into her school to spare Sylvie the annoyance of her education; but the brother and sister both declared that Pierrette's absence would make the house too lonely; their attachment to their little cousin seemed excessive.

When Gouraud and Vinet became aware of the advent of Mademoiselle Habert on the scene they concluded that the ambitious priest her brother had the same matrimonial plan for his sister that the colonel was forming for himself and Sylvie.

"Your sister wants to get you married," said Vinet to Rogron.

"With whom?" asked Rogron.

"With that old sorceress of a schoolmistress," cried the colonel,

twirling his moustache.

"She hasn't said anything to me about it," said Rogron, naively.

So thorough an old maid as Sylvie was certain to make good progress in the way of salvation. The influence of the priest would as certainly increase, and in the end affect Rogron, over whom Sylvie had great power. The two Liberals, who were naturally alarmed, saw plainly that if the priest were resolved to marry his sister to Rogron (a far more suitable marriage than that of Sylvie to the colonel) he could then drive Sylvie in extreme devotion to the Church, and put Pierrette in a convent. They might therefore lose eighteen months' labor in flattery and meannesses of all sorts. Their minds were suddenly filled with a bitter, silent hatred to the priest and his sister, though they felt the necessity of living on good terms with them in order to track their manoeuvres. Monsieur and Mademoiselle Habert, who could play both whist and boston, now came every evening to the Rogrons. The assiduity of the one pair induced the assiduity of the other. The colonel and lawyer felt that they were pitted against adversaries who were fully as strong as they,—a presentiment that was shared by the priest and his sister. The situation soon became that of a battle-field. Precisely as the colonel was enabling Sylvie to taste the un hoped-for joys of being sought in marriage, so Mademoiselle Habert was enveloping the timid Rogron in the cotton-wool of her attentions, words, and glances. Neither side could utter that grand word of statesmanship, "Let us divide!" for each wanted the whole prey.

The two clever foxes of the Opposition made the mistake of pulling the first trigger. Vinet, under the spur of self-interest, bethought himself of his wife's only friends, and looked up Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf and her mother. The two women were living in poverty at Troyes on two thousand francs a year. Mademoiselle Bathilde de Chargeboeuf was one of those fine creatures who believe in marriage for love up to their twenty-fifth year, and change their opinion when they find themselves still unmarried. Vinet managed to persuade Madame de Chargeboeuf to join her means to his and live with his family in Provins, where Bathilde, he assured her, could marry a fool named Rogron, and, clever as she was, take her place in the best society of the place.

The arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf in the lawyer's household was a great reinforcement for the liberal party; and it created consternation among the aristocrats of Provins and also in the Tiphaine clique. Madame de Breautey, horrified to see two women of rank so misled, begged them to come to her. She was shocked that the royalists of Troyes had so neglected the mother and daughter, whose situation she now learned for the first time.

"How is it that no old country gentleman has married that dear girl, who is cut out for a lady of the manor?" she said. "They have let her run to seed, and now she is to be flung at the head of a Rogron!"

She ransacked the whole department but did not succeed in finding any gentleman willing to marry a girl whose mother had only two thousand francs a year. The "clique" and the subprefect also looked about them with the same object, but they were all too late. Madame de Breautey made terrible charges against the selfishness which degraded France, —the consequence, she said, of materialism, and of the importance now given by the laws to money: nobility was no longer of value! nor

beauty either! Such creatures as the Rogrons, the Vinets, could stand up and fight with the King of France!

Bathilde de Chargeboeuf had not only the incontestable superiority of beauty over her rival, but that of dress as well. She was dazzlingly fair. At twenty-five her shoulders were fully developed, and the curves of her beautiful figure were exquisite. The roundness of her throat, the purity of its lines, the wealth of her golden hair, the charming grace of her smile, the distinguished carriage of her head, the character of her features, the fine eyes finely placed beneath a well-formed brow, her every motion, noble and high-bred, and her light and graceful figure,--all were in harmony. Her hands were beautiful, and her feet slender. Health gave her, perhaps, too much the look of a handsome barmaid. "But that can't be a defect in the eyes of a Rogron," sighed Madame Tiphaine. Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf's dress when she made her first appearance in Provins at the Rogrons' house was very simple. Her brown merino gown edged with green embroidery was worn low-necked; but a tulle fichu, carefully drawn down by hidden strings, covered her neck and shoulders, though it opened a little in front, where its folds were caught together with a *sevigne*. Beneath this delicate fabric Bathilde's beauties seemed all the more enticing and coquettish. She took off her velvet bonnet and her shawl on arriving, and showed her pretty ears adorned with what were then called "ear-drops" in gold. She wore a little *jeannette*--a black velvet ribbon with a heart attached--round her throat, where it shone like the jet ring which fantastic nature had fastened round the tail of a white angora cat. She knew all the little tricks of a girl who seeks to marry; her fingers arranged her curls which were not in the least out of order; she entreated Rogron to fasten a cuff-button, thus showing him her wrist, a request which that dazzled fool rudely refused, hiding his emotions under the mask of indifference. The timidity of the only love he was ever to feel in the whole course of his life took an external appearance of dislike. Sylvie and her friend Celeste Habert were deceived by it; not so Vinet, the wise head of this doltish circle, among whom no one really coped with him but the priest,--the colonel being for a long time his ally.

On the other hand the colonel was behaving to Sylvie very much as Bathilde behaved to Rogron. He put on a clean shirt every evening and wore velvet stocks, which set off his martial features and the spotless white of his collar. He adopted the fashion of white pique waistcoats, and caused to be made for him a new surtout of blue cloth, on which his red rosette glowed finely; all this under pretext of doing honor to the new guests Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf. He even refrained from smoking for two hours previous to his appearance in the Rogrons' salon. His grizzled hair was brushed in a waving line across a cranium which was ochre in tone. He assumed the air and manner of a party leader, of a man who was preparing to drive out the enemies of France, the Bourbons, on short, to beat of drum.

The satanic lawyer and the wily colonel played the priest and his sister a more cruel trick than even the importation of the beautiful Madame de Chargeboeuf, who was considered by all the Liberal party and by Madame de Breautey and her aristocratic circle to be far handsomer than Madame Tiphaine. These two great statesmen of the little provincial town made everybody believe that the priest was in sympathy with their ideas; so that before long Provins began to talk of him as a liberal ecclesiastic. As soon as this news reached the bishop Monsieur Habert was sent for and admonished to cease his visits to the

Rogrons; but his sister continued to go there. Thus the salon Rogron became a fixed fact and a constituted power.

Before the year was out political intrigues were not less lively than the matrimonial schemes of the Rogron salon. While the selfish interests hidden in these hearts were struggling in deadly combat the events which resulted from them had a fatal celebrity. Everybody knows that the Villele ministry was overthrown by the elections of 1826. Vinet, the Liberal candidate at Provins, who had borrowed money of his notary to buy a domain which made him eligible for election, came very near defeating Monsieur Tiphaine, who saved his election by only two votes. The headquarters of the Liberals was the Rogron salon; among the habitues were the notary Cournant and his wife, and Doctor Neraud, whose youth was said to have been stormy, but who now took a serious view of life; he gave himself up to study and was, according to all Liberals, a far more capable man than Monsieur Martener, the aristocratic physician. As for the Rogrons, they no more understood their present triumph than they had formerly understood their ostracism.

The beautiful Bathilde, to whom Vinet had explained Pierrette as an enemy, was extremely disdainful to the girl. It seemed as though everybody's selfish schemes demanded the humiliation of that poor victim. Madame Vinet could do nothing for her, ground as she herself was beneath those implacable self-interests which the lawyer's wife had come at last to see and comprehend. Her husband's imperious will had alone taken her to the Rogron's house, where she had suffered much at the harsh treatment of the pretty little creature, who would often press up against her as if divining her secret thoughts, sometimes asking the poor lady to show her a stitch in knitting or to teach her a bit of embroidery. The child proved in return that if she were treated gently she would understand what was taught her, and succeed in what she tried to do quite marvellously. But Madame Vinet was soon no longer necessary to her husband's plans, and after the arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf she ceased to visit the Rogrons.

Sylvie, who now indulged in the idea of marrying, began to consider Pierrette as an obstacle. The girl was nearly fourteen; the pallid whiteness of her skin, a symptom of illness entirely overlooked by the ignorant old maid, made her exquisitely lovely. Sylvie took it into her head to balance the cost which Pierrette had been to them by making a servant of her. All the habitues of the house to whom she spoke of the matter advised that she should send away Adele. Why shouldn't Pierrette take care of the house and cook? If there was too much work at any time Mademoiselle Rogron could easily employ the colonel's woman-of-all-work, an excellent cook and a most respectable person. Pierrette ought to learn how to cook, and rub floors, and sweep, said the lawyer; every girl should be taught to keep house properly and go to market and know the price of things. The poor little soul, whose self-devotion was equal to her generosity, offered herself willingly, pleased to think that she could earn the bitter bread which she ate in that house. Adele was sent away, and Pierrette thus lost the only person who might have protected her.

In spite of the poor child's strength of heart she was henceforth crushed down physically as well as mentally. Her cousins had less consideration for her than for a servant; she belonged to them! She was scolded for mere nothings, for an atom of dust left on a glass

globe or a marble mantelpiece. The handsome ornaments she had once admired now became odious to her. No matter how she strove to do right, her inexorable cousins always found something to reprove in whatever she did. In the course of two years Pierrette never received the slightest praise, or heard a kindly word. Happiness for her lay in not being scolded. She bore with angelic patience the morose ill-humor of the two celibates, to whom all tender feelings were absolutely unknown, and who daily made her feel her dependence on them.

Such a life for a young girl, pressed as it were between the two chops of a vise, increased her illness. She began to feel violent internal distresses, secret pangs so sudden in their attacks that her strength was undermined and her natural development arrested. By slow degrees and through dreadful, though hidden sufferings, the poor child came to the state in which the companion of her childhood found her when he sang to her his Breton ditty at the dawn of the October day.

VI

AN OLD MAID'S JEALOUSY

Before we relate the domestic drama which the coming of Jacques Brigaut was destined to bring about in the Rogron family it is best to explain how the lad came to be in Provins; for he is, as it were, a somewhat mute personage on the scene.

When he ran from the house Brigaut was not only frightened by Pierrette's gesture, he was horrified by the change he saw in his little friend. He could scarcely recognize the voice, the eyes, the gestures that were once so lively, gay, and withal so tender. When he had gained some distance from the house his legs began to tremble under him; hot flushes ran down his back. He had seen the shadow of Pierrette, but not Pierrette herself! The lad climbed to the Upper town till he found a spot from which he could see the square and the house where Pierrette lived. He gazed at it mournfully, lost in many thoughts, as though he were entering some grief of which he could not see the end. Pierrette was ill; she was not happy; she pined for Brittany--what was the matter with her? All these questions passed and repassed through his heart and rent it, revealing to his own soul the extent of his love for his little adopted sister.

It is extremely rare to find a passion existing between two children of opposite sexes. The charming story of Paul and Virginia does not, any more than this of Pierrette and Brigaut, answer the question put by that strange moral fact. Modern history offers only the illustrious instance of the Marchesa di Pescara and her husband. Destined to marry by their parents from their earliest years, they adored each other and were married, and their union gave to the sixteenth century the noble spectacle of a perfect conjugal love without a flaw. When the marchesa became a widow at the age of thirty-four, beautiful, intellectually brilliant, universally adored, she refused to marry sovereigns and buried herself in a convent, seeing and knowing thenceforth only nuns. Such was the perfect love that suddenly developed itself in the heart of the Breton workman. Pierrette and he had often protected each other; with what bliss had he given her the money for her journey; he had almost killed himself by running after the diligence when she left him. Pierrette had known nothing of all that; but for him the

recollection had warmed and comforted the cold, hard life he had led for the last three years. For Pierrette's sake he had struggled to improve himself; he had learned his trade for Pierrette; he had come to Paris for Pierrette, intending to make his fortune for _her_. After spending a fortnight in the city, he had not been able to hold out against the desire to see her, and he had walked from Saturday night to Monday morning. He intended to return to Paris; but the moving sight of his little friend nailed him to Provins. A wonderful magnetism (still denied in spite of many proofs) acted upon him without his knowledge. Tears rolled from his eyes when they rose in hers. If to her he was Brittany and her happy childhood, to him she was life itself.

At sixteen years of age Brigaut did not yet know how to draw or to model a cornice; he was ignorant of much, but he had earned, by piece-work done in the leisure of his apprenticeship, some four or five francs a day. On this he could live in Provins and be near Pierrette; he would choose the best cabinet-maker in the town, and learn the rest of his trade in working for him, and thus keep watch over his darling.

Brigaut's mind was made up as he sat there thinking. He went back to Paris and fetched his certificate, tools, and baggage, and three days later he was a journeyman in the establishment of Monsieur Frappier, the best cabinet-maker in Provins. Active, steady workmen, not given to junketing and taverns, are so rare that masters hold to young men like Brigaut when they find them. To end Brigaut's history on this point, we will say here that by the end of the month he was made foreman, and was fed and lodged by Frappier, who taught him arithmetic and line drawing. The house and shop were in the Grand'Rue, not a hundred feet from the little square where Pierrette lived.

Brigaut buried his love in his heart and committed no imprudence. He made Madame Frappier tell him all she knew about the Rogrons. Among other things, she related to him the way in which their father had laid hands on the property of old Auffray, Pierrette's grandfather. Brigaut obtained other information as to the character of the brother and sister. He met Pierrette sometimes in the market with her cousin, and shuddered to see the heavy basket she was carrying on her arm. On Sundays he went to church to look for her, dressed in her best clothes. There, for the first time, he became aware that Pierrette was Mademoiselle Lorrain. Pierrette saw him and made him a hasty sign to keep out of sight. To him, there was a world of things in that little gesture, as there had been, a fortnight earlier, in the sign by which she told him from her window to run away. Ah! what a fortune he must make in the coming ten years in order to marry his little friend, to whom, he was told, the Rogrons were to leave their house, a hundred acres of land, and twelve thousand francs a year, not counting their savings!

The persevering Breton was determined to be thoroughly educated for his trade, and he set about acquiring all the knowledge that he lacked. As long as only the principles of his work were concerned he could learn those in Provins as well as in Paris, and thus remain near Pierrette, to whom he now became anxious to explain his projects and the sort of protection she could rely on from him. He was determined to know the reason of her pallor, and of the debility which was beginning to appear in the organ which is always the last to show the signs of failing life, namely the eyes; he would know, too, the cause of the sufferings which gave her that look as though death were near

and she might drop at any moment beneath its scythe. The two signs, the two gestures--not denying their friendship but imploring caution--alarmed the young Breton. Evidently Pierrette wished him to wait and not attempt to see her; otherwise there was danger, there was peril for her. As she left the church she was able to give him one look, and Brigaut saw that her eyes were full of tears. But he could have sooner squared the circle than have guessed what had happened in the Rogrons' house during the fortnight which had elapsed since his arrival.

It was not without keen apprehension that Pierrette came downstairs on the morning after Brigaut had invaded her morning dreams like another dream. She was certain that her cousin Sylvie must have heard the song, or she would not have risen and opened her window; but Pierrette was ignorant of the powerful reasons that made the old maid so alert. For the last eight days, strange events and bitter feelings agitated the minds of the chief personages who frequented the Rogron salon. These hidden matters, carefully concealed by all concerned, were destined to fall in their results like an avalanche on Pierrette. Such mysterious things, which we ought perhaps to call the putrescence of the human heart, lie at the base of the greatest revolutions, political, social or domestic; but in telling of them it is desirable to explain that their subtle significance cannot be given in a matter-of-fact narrative. These secret schemes and calculations do not show themselves as brutally and undisguisedly while taking place as they must when the history of them is related. To set down in writing the circumlocutions, oratorical precautions, protracted conversations, and honeyed words glossed over the venom of intentions, would make as long a book as that magnificent poem called "Clarissa Harlowe."

Mademoiselle Habert and Mademoiselle Sylvie were equally desirous of marrying, but one was ten years older than the other, and the probabilities of life allowed Celeste Habert to expect that her children would inherit all the Rogron property. Sylvie was forty-two, an age at which marriage is beset by perils. In confiding to each other their ideas, Celeste, instigated by her vindictive brother the priest, enlightened Sylvie as to the dangers she would incur. Sylvie trembled; she was terribly afraid of death, an idea which shakes all celibates to their centre. But just at this time the Martignac ministry came into power,--a Liberal victory which overthrew the Villele administration. The Vinet party now carried their heads high in Provins. Vinet himself became a personage. The Liberals prophesied his advancement; he would certainly be deputy and attorney-general. As for the colonel, he would be made mayor of Provins. Ah, to reign as Madame Garceland, the wife of the present mayor, now reigned! Sylvie could not hold out against that hope; she determined to consult a doctor, though the proceeding would only cover her with ridicule. To consult Monsieur Neraud, the Liberal physician and the rival of Monsieur Martener, would be a blunder. Celeste Habert offered to hide Sylvie in her dressing-room while she herself consulted Monsieur Martener, the physician of her establishment, on this difficult matter. Whether Martener was, or was not, Celeste's accomplice need not be discovered; at any rate, he told his client that even at thirty the danger, though slight, did exist. "But," he added, "with your constitution, you need fear nothing."

"But how about a woman over forty?" asked Mademoiselle Celeste.

"A married woman who has had children has nothing to fear."

"But I mean an unmarried woman, like Mademoiselle Rogron, for instance?"

"Oh, that's another thing," said Monsieur Martener. "Successful childbirth is then one of those miracles which God sometimes allows himself, but rarely."

"Why?" asked Celeste.

The doctor answered with a terrifying pathological description; he explained that the elasticity given by nature to youthful muscles and bones did not exist at a later age, especially in women whose lives were sedentary.

"So you think that an unmarried woman ought not to marry after forty?"

"Not unless she waits some years," replied the doctor. "But then, of course, it is not marriage, it is only an association of interests."

The result of the interview, clearly, seriously, scientifically and sensibly stated, was that an unmarried woman would make a great mistake in marrying after forty. When the doctor had departed Mademoiselle Celeste found Sylvie in a frightful state, green and yellow, and with the pupils of her eyes dilated.

"Then you really love the colonel?" asked Celeste.

"I still hoped," replied Sylvie.

"Well, then, wait!" cried Mademoiselle Habert, Jesuitically, aware that time would rid her of the colonel.

Sylvie's new devotion to the church warned her that the morality of such a marriage might be doubtful. She accordingly sounded her conscience in the confessional. The stern priest explained the opinions of the Church, which sees in marriage only the propagation of humanity, and rebukes second marriages and all passions but those with a social purpose. Sylvie's perplexities were great. These internal struggles gave extraordinary force to her passion, investing it with that inexplicable attraction which, from the days of Eve, the thing forbidden possesses for women. Mademoiselle Rogron's perturbation did not escape the lynx-eyed lawyer.

One evening, after the game had ended, Vinet approached his dear friend Sylvie, took her hand, and led her to a sofa.

"Something troubles you," he said.

She nodded sadly. The lawyer let the others depart; Rogron walked home with the Chargeboeuifs, and when Vinet was alone with the old maid he wormed the truth out of her.

"Cleverly played, abbe!" thought he. "But you've played into my hands."

The foxy lawyer was more decided in his opinion than even the doctor. He advised marriage in ten years. Inwardly he was vowing that the whole Rogron fortune should go to Bathilde. He rubbed his hands, his pinched lips closed more tightly as he hurried home. The influence

exercised by Monsieur Habert, physician of the soul, and by Vinet, doctor of the purse, balanced each other perfectly. Rogron had no piety in him; so the churchman and the man of law, the black-robed pair, were fairly matched.

On discovering the victory obtained by Celeste, in her anxiety to marry Rogron herself, over Sylvie, torn between the fear of death and the joy of being baronness and mayoress, the lawyer saw his chance of driving the colonel from the battlefield. He knew Rogron well enough to be certain he could marry him to Bathilde; Jerome had already succumbed inwardly to her charms, and Vinet knew that the first time the pair were alone together the marriage would be settled. Rogron had reached the point of keeping his eyes fixed on Celeste, so much did he fear to look at Bathilde. Vinet had now possessed himself of Sylvie's secrets, and saw the force with which she loved the colonel. He fully understood the struggle of such a passion in the heart of an old maid who was also in the grasp of religious emotion, and he saw his way to rid himself of Pierrette and the colonel both by making each the cause of the other's overthrow.

The next day, after the court had risen, Vinet met the colonel and Rogron talking a walk together, according to their daily custom.

Whenever the three men were seen in company the whole town talked of it. This triumvirate, held in horror by the sub-prefect, the magistracy, and the Tiphaine clique, was, on the other hand, a source of pride and vanity to the Liberals of Provins. Vinet was sole editor of the "Courier" and the head of the party; the colonel, the working manager, was its arm; Rogron, by means of his purse, its nerves. The Tiphaines declared that the three men were always plotting evil to the government; the Liberals admired them as the defenders of the people. When Rogron turned to go home, recalled by a sense of his dinner-hour, Vinet stopped the colonel from following him by taking Gouraud's arm.

"Well, colonel," he said, "I am going to take a fearful load off your shoulders; you can do better than marry Sylvie; if you play your cards properly you can marry that little Pierrette in two years' time."

He thereupon related the Jesuit's manoeuvre and its effect on Sylvie.

"What a skulking trick!" cried the colonel; "and spreading over years, too!"

"Colonel," said Vinet, gravely, "Pierrette is a charming creature; with her you can be happy for the rest of your life; your health is so sound that the difference in your ages won't seem disproportionate. But, all the same, you mustn't think it an easy thing to change a dreadful fate to a pleasant one. To turn a woman who loves you into a friend and confidant is as perilous a business as crossing a river under fire of the enemy. Cavalry colonel as you are, and daring too, you must study the position and manoeuvre your forces with the same wisdom you have displayed hitherto, and which has won us our present position. If I get to be attorney-general you shall command the department. Oh! if you had been an elector we should be further advanced than we are now; I should have bought the votes of those two clerks by threatening them with the loss of their places, and we should have had a majority."

The colonel had long been thinking about Pierrette, but he concealed

his thoughts with the utmost dissimulation. His roughness to the child was only a mask; but she could not understand why the man who claimed to be her father's old comrade should usually treat her so ill, when sometimes, if he met her alone, he would chuck her under the chin and give her a friendly kiss. But after the conversation with Vinet relating to Sylvie's fears of marriage Gouraud began to seek opportunities to find Pierrette alone; the rough colonel made himself as soft as a cat; he told her how brave her father was and what a misfortune it had been for her that she lost him.

A few days before Brigaut's arrival Sylvie had come suddenly upon Gouraud and Pierrette talking together. Instantly, jealousy rushed into her heart with monastic violence. Jealousy, eminently credulous and suspicious, is the passion in which fancy has most freedom, but for all that it does not give a person intelligence; on the contrary, it hinders them from having any; and in Sylvie's case jealousy only filled her with fantastic ideas. When (a few mornings later) she heard Brigaut's ditty, she jumped to the conclusion that the man who had used the words "Madam' le mariee," addressing them to Pierrette, must be the colonel. She was certain she was right, for she had noticed for a week past a change in his manners. He was the only man who, in her solitary life, had ever paid her any attention. Consequently she watched him with all her eyes, all her mind; and by giving herself up to hopes that were sometimes flourishing, sometimes blighted, she had brought the matter to such enormous proportions that she saw all things in a mental mirage. To use a common but excellent expression, by dint of looking intently she saw nothing. Alternately she repelled, admitted, and conquered the supposition of this rivalry. She compared herself with Pierrette; she was forty-two years old, with gray hair; Pierrette was delicately fair, with eyes soft enough to warm a withered heart. She had heard it said that men of fifty were apt to love young girls of just that kind. Before the colonel had come regularly to the house Sylvie had heard in the Tiphaines' salon strange stories of his life and morals. Old maids preserve in their love-affairs the exaggerated Platonic sentiments which young girls of twenty are wont to profess; they hold to these fixed doctrines like all who have little experience of life and no personal knowledge of how great social forces modify, impair, and bring to nought such grand and noble ideas. The mere thought of being jilted by the colonel was torture to Sylvie's brain. She lay in her bed going over and over her own desires, Pierrette's conduct, and the song which had awakened her with the word "marriage." Like the fool she was, instead of looking through the blinds to see the lover, she opened her window without reflecting that Pierrette would hear her. If she had had the common instinct of a spy she would have seen Brigaut, and the fatal drama then begun would never have taken place.

It was Pierrette's duty, weak as she was, to take down the bars that closed the wooden shutters of the kitchen, which she opened and fastened back; then she opened in like manner the glass door leading from the corridor to the garden. She took the various brooms that were used for sweeping the carpets, the dining-room, the passages and stairs, together with the other utensils, with a care and particularity which no servant, not even a Dutchwoman, gives to her work. She hated reproof. Happiness for her was in seeing the cold blue pallid eyes of her cousin, not satisfied (that they never were), but calm, after glancing about her with the look of an owner,--that wonderful glance which sees what escapes even the most vigilant eyes of others. Pierrette's skin was moist with her labor when she returned

to the kitchen to put it in order, and light the stove that she might carry up hot water to her two cousins (a luxury she never had for herself) and the means of lighting fires in their rooms. After this she laid the table for breakfast and lit the stove in the dining-room. For all these various fires she had to fetch wood and kindling from the cellar, leaving the warm rooms for a damp and chilly atmosphere. Such sudden transitions, made with the quickness of youth, often to escape a harsh word or obey an order, aggravated the condition of her health. She did not know she was ill, and yet she suffered. She began to have strange cravings; she liked raw vegetables and salads, and ate them secretly. The innocent child was quite unaware that her condition was that of serious illness which needed the utmost care. If Neraud, the Rogrons' doctor, had told this to Pierrette before Brigaut's arrival she would only have smiled; life was so bitter she could smile at death. But now her feelings changed; the child, to whose physical sufferings was added the anguish of Breton homesickness (a moral malady so well-known that colonels in the army allow for it among their men), was suddenly content to be in Provins. The sight of that yellow flower, the song, the presence of her friend, revived her as a plant long without water revives under rain. Unconsciously she wanted to live, and even thought she did not suffer.

Pierrette slipped timidly into her cousin's bedroom, made the fire, left the hot water, said a few words, and went to wake Rogron and do the same offices for him. Then she went down to take in the milk, the bread, and the other provisions left by the dealers. She stood some time on the sill of the door hoping that Brigaut would have the sense to come to her; but by that time he was already on his way to Paris.

She had finished the arrangement of the dining-room and was busy in the kitchen when she heard her cousin Sylvie coming down. Mademoiselle Rogron appeared in a brown silk dressing-gown and a cap with bows; her false front was awry, her night-gown showed above the silk wrapper, her slippers were down at heel. She gave an eye to everything and then came straight to Pierrette, who was awaiting her orders to know what to prepare for breakfast.

"Ha! here you are, lovesick young lady!" said Sylvie, in a mocking tone.

"What is it, cousin?"

"You came into my room like a sly cat, and you crept out the same way, though you knew very well I had something to say to you."

"To me?"

"You had a serenade this morning, as if you were a princess."

"A serenade!" exclaimed Pierrette.

"A serenade!" said Sylvie, mimicking her; "and you've a lover, too."

"What is a lover, cousin?"

Sylvie avoided answering, and said:--

"Do you dare to tell me, mademoiselle, that a man did not come under your window and talk to you of marriage?"

Persecution had taught Pierrette the wariness of slaves; so she answered bravely:--

"I don't know what you mean,--"

"Who means?--your dog?" said Sylvie, sharply.

"I should have said 'cousin,'" replied the girl, humbly.

"And didn't you get up and go in your bare feet to the window?--which will give you an illness; and serve you right, too. And perhaps you didn't talk to your lover, either?"

"No, cousin."

"I know you have many faults, but I did not think you told lies. You had better think this over, mademoiselle; you will have to explain this affair to your cousin and to me, or your cousin will be obliged to take severe measures."

The old maid, exasperated by jealousy and curiosity, meant to frighten the girl. Pierrette, like all those who suffer more than they have strength to bear, kept silence. Silence is the only weapon by which such victims can conquer; it baffles the Cossack charges of envy, the savage skirmishings of suspicion; it does at times give victory, crushing and complete,--for what is more complete than silence? it is absolute; it is one of the attributes of infinity. Sylvie watched Pierrette narrowly. The girl colored; but the color, instead of rising evenly, came out in patches on her cheekbones, in burning and significant spots. A mother, seeing that symptom of illness, would have changed her tone at once; she would have taken the child on her lap and questioned her; in fact, she would long ago have tenderly understood the signs of Pierrette's pure and perfect innocence; she would have seen her weakness and known that the disturbance of the digestive organs and the other functions of the body was about to affect the lungs. Those eloquent patches would have warned her of an imminent danger. But an old maid, one in whom the family instincts have never been awakened, to whom the needs of childhood and the precautions required for adolescence were unknown, had neither the indulgence nor the compassionate intelligence of a mother; such sufferings as those of Pierrette, instead of softening her heart only made it more callous.

"She blushes, she is guilty!" thought Sylvie.

Pierrette's silence was thus interpreted to her injury.

"Pierrette," continued Sylvie, "before your cousin comes down we must have some talk together. Come," she said, in a rather softer tone, "shut the street door; if any one comes they will rung and we shall hear them."

In spite of the damp mist which was rising from the river, Sylvie took Pierrette along the winding gravel path which led across the lawn to the edge of the rock terrace,--a picturesque little quay, covered with iris and aquatic plants. She now changed her tactics, thinking she might catch Pierrette tripping by softness; the hyena became a cat.

"Pierrette," she said, "you are no longer a child; you are nearly fifteen, and it is not at all surprising that you should have a lover."

"But, cousin," said Pierrette, raising her eyes with angelic sweetness to the cold, sour face of her cousin, "What is a lover?"

It would have been impossible for Sylvie to define a lover with truth and decency to the girl's mind. Instead of seeing in that question the proof of adorable innocence, she considered it a piece of insincerity.

"A lover, Pierrette, is a man who loves us and wishes to marry us."

"Ah," said Pierrette, "when that happens in Brittany we call the young man a suitor."

"Well, remember that in owning your feelings for a man you do no wrong, my dear. The wrong is in hiding them. Have you pleased some of the men who visit here?"

"I don't think so, cousin."

"Do you love any of them?"

"No."

"Certain?"

"Quite certain."

"Look at me, Pierrette."

Pierrette looked at Sylvie.

"A man called to you this morning in the square."

Pierrette lowered her eyes.

"You went to your window, you opened it, and you spoke to him."

"No cousin, I went to look out and I saw a peasant."

"Pierrette, you have much improved since you made your first communion; you have become pious and obedient, you love God and your relations; I am satisfied with you. I don't say this to puff you up with pride."

The horrible creature had mistaken despondency, submission, the silence of wretchedness, for virtues!

The sweetest of all consolations to suffering souls, to martyrs, to artists, in the worst of that divine agony which hatred and envy force upon them, is to meet with praise where they have hitherto found censure and injustice. Pierrette raised her grateful eyes to her cousin, feeling that she could almost forgive her for the sufferings she had caused.

"But if it is all hypocrisy, if I find you a serpent that I have warmed in my bosom, you will be a wicked girl, an infamous creature!"

"I think I have nothing to reproach myself with," said Pierrette, with a painful revulsion of her heart at the sudden change from unexpected praise to the tones of the hyena.

"You know that to lie is a mortal sin?"

"Yes, cousin."

"Well, you are now under the eye of God," said the old maid, with a solemn gesture towards the sky; "swear to me that you did not know that peasant."

"I will not swear," said Pierrette.

"Ha! he was no peasant, you little viper."

Pierrette rushed away like a frightened fawn terrified at her tone. Sylvie called her in a dreadful voice.

"The bell is ringing," she answered.

"Artful wretch!" thought Sylvie. "She is depraved in mind; and now I am certain the little adder has wound herself round the colonel. She has heard us say he was a baron. To be a baroness! little fool! Ah! I'll get rid of her, I'll apprentice her out, and soon too!"

Sylvie was so lost in thought that she did not notice her brother coming down the path and bemoaning the injury the frost had done to his dahlias.

"Sylvie! what are you thinking about? I thought you were looking at the fish; sometimes they jump out of the water."

"No," said Sylvie.

"How did you sleep?" and he began to tell her about his own dreams. "Don't you think my skin is getting tabid?"--a word in the Rogron vocabulary.

Ever since Rogron had been in love,--but let us not profane the word, --ever since he had desired to marry Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, he was very uneasy about himself and his health. At this moment Pierrette came down the garden steps and called to them from a distance that breakfast was ready. At sight of her cousin, Sylvie's skin turned green and yellow, her bile was in commotion. She looked at the floor of the corridor and declared that Pierrette ought to rub it.

"I will rub it now if you wish," said the little angel, not aware of the injury such work may do to a young girl.

The dining-room was irreproachably in order. Sylvie sat down and pretended all through breakfast to want this, that, and the other thing which she would never have thought of in a quieter moment, and which she now asked for only to make Pierrette rise again and again just as the child was beginning to eat her food. But such mere teasing was not enough; she wanted a subject on which to find fault, and was angry with herself for not finding one. She scarcely answered her brother's silly remarks, yet she looked at him only; her eyes avoided

Pierrette. Pierrette was deeply conscious of all this. She brought the milk mixed with cream for each cousin in a large silver goblet, after heating it carefully in the *_bain-marie_*. The brother and sister poured in the coffee made by Sylvie herself on the table. When Sylvie had carefully prepared hers, she saw an atom of coffee-grounds floating on the surface. On this the storm broke forth.

"What is the matter?" asked Rogron.

"The matter is that mademoiselle has put dust in my milk. Do you suppose I am going to drink coffee with ashes in it? Well, I am not surprised; no one can do two things at once. She wasn't thinking of the milk! a blackbird might have flown through the kitchen to-day and she wouldn't have seen it! how should she see the dust flying! and then it was my coffee, ha! that didn't signify!"

As she spoke she was laying on the side of her plate the coffee-grounds that had run through the filter.

"But, cousin, that is coffee," said Pierrette.

"Oh! then it is I who tell lies, is it?" cried Sylvie, looking at Pierrette and blasting her with a fearful flash of anger from her eyes.

Organizations which have not been exhausted by powerful emotions often have a vast amount of the vital fluid at their service. This phenomenon of the extreme clearness of the eye in moments of anger was the more marked in Mademoiselle Rogron because she had often exercised the power of her eyes in her shop by opening them to their full extent for the purpose of inspiring her dependents with salutary fear.

"You had better dare to give me the lie!" continued Sylvie; "you deserve to be sent from the table to go and eat by yourself in the kitchen."

"What's the matter with you two?" cried Rogron, "you are as cross as bears this morning."

"Mademoiselle knows what I have against her," said Sylvie. "I leave her to make up her mind before speaking to you; for I mean to show her more kindness than she deserves."

Pierrette was looking out of the window to avoid her cousin's eyes, which frightened her.

"Look at her! she pays no more attention to what I am saying than if I were that sugar-basin! And yet mademoiselle has a sharp ear; she can hear and answer from the top of the house when some one talks to her from below. She is perversity itself,--perversity, I say; and you needn't expect any good of her; do you hear me, Jerome?"

"What has she done wrong?" asked Rogron.

"At her age, too! to begin so young!" screamed the angry old maid.

Pierrette rose to clear the table and give herself something to do, for she could hardly bear the scene any longer. Though such language was not new to her, she had never been able to get used to it. Her

cousin's rage seemed to accuse her of some crime. She imagined what her fury would be if she came to know about Brigaut. Perhaps her cousin would have him sent away, and she should lose him! All the many thoughts, the deep and rapid thoughts of a slave came to her, and she resolved to keep absolute silence about a circumstance in which her conscience told her there was nothing wrong. But the cruel, bitter words she had been made to hear and the wounding suspicion so shocked her that as she reached the kitchen she was taken with a convulsion of the stomach and turned deadly sick. She dared not complain; she was not sure that any one would help her. When she returned to the dining-room she was white as a sheet, and, saying she was not well, she started to go to bed, dragging herself up step by step by the baluster and thinking that she was going to die. "Poor Brigaut!" she thought.

"The girl is ill," said Rogron.

"She ill! That's only _shamming_," replied Sylvie, in a loud voice that Pierrette might hear. "She was well enough this morning, I can tell you."

This last blow struck Pierrette to the earth; she went to bed weeping and praying to God to take her out of this world.

VII

DOMESTIC TYRANNY

For a month past Rogron had ceased to carry the "Constitutionnel" to Gouraud; the colonel came obsequiously to fetch his paper, gossip a little, and take Rogron off to walk if the weather was fine. Sure of seeing the colonel and being able to question him, Sylvie dressed herself as coquettishly as she knew how. The old maid thought she was attractive in a green gown, a yellow shawl with a red border, and a white bonnet with straggling gray feathers. About the hour when the colonel usually came Sylvie stationed herself in the salon with her brother, whom she had compelled to stay in the house in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"It is a fine day, colonel," said Rogron, when Gouraud with his heavy step entered the room. "But I'm not dressed; my sister wanted to go out, and I was going to keep the house. Wait for me; I'll be ready soon."

So saying, Rogron left Sylvie alone with the colonel.

"Where were you going? you are dressed divinely," said Gouraud, who noticed a certain solemnity on the pock-marked face of the old maid.

"I wanted very much to go out, but my little cousin is ill, and I cannot leave her."

"What is the matter with her?"

"I don't know; she had to go to bed."

Gouraud's caution, not to say his distrust, was constantly excited by the results of his alliance with Vinet. It certainly appeared that the

lawyer had got the lion's share in their enterprise. Vinet controlled the paper, he reigned as sole master over it, he took the revenues; whereas the colonel, the responsible editor, earned little. Vinet and Cournant had done the Rogrons great services; whereas Gouraud, a colonel on half-pay, could do nothing. Who was to be deputy? Vinet. Who was the chief authority in the party? Vinet. Whom did the liberals all consult? Vinet. Moreover, the colonel knew fully as well as Vinet himself the extent and depth of the passion suddenly aroused in Rogron by the beautiful Bathilde de Chargeboeuf. This passion had now become intense, like all the last passions of men. Bathilde's voice made him tremble. Absorbed in his desires Rogron hid them; he dared not hope for such a marriage. To sound him, the colonel mentioned that he was thinking himself of asking for Bathilde's hand. Rogron turned pale at the thought of such a formidable rival, and had since then shown coldness and even hatred to Gouraud.

Thus Vinet reigned supreme in the Rogron household while he, the colonel, had no hold there except by the extremely hypothetical tie of his mendacious affection for Sylvie, which it was not yet clear that Sylvie reciprocated. When the lawyer told him of the priest's manoeuvre, and advised him to break with Sylvie and marry Pierrette, he certainly flattered Gouraud's foible; but after analyzing the inner purpose of that advice and examining the ground all about him, the colonel thought he perceived in his ally the intention of separating him from Sylvie, and profiting by her fears to throw the whole Rogron property into the hands of Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf.

Therefore, when the colonel was left alone with Sylvie his perspicacity possessed itself immediately of certain signs which betrayed her uneasiness. He saw at once that she was under arms and had made this plan for seeing him alone. As he already suspected Vinet of playing him some trick, he attributed the conference to the instigation of the lawyer, and was instantly on his guard, as he would have been in an enemy's country,--with an eye all about him, an ear to the faintest sound, his mind on the *qui vive*, and his hand on a weapon. The colonel had the defect of never believing a single word said to him by a woman; so that when the old maid brought Pierrette on the scene, and told him she had gone to bed before midday, he concluded that Sylvie had locked her up by way of punishment and out of jealousy.

"She is getting to be quite pretty, that little thing," he said with an easy air.

"She will be pretty," replied Mademoiselle Rogron.

"You ought to send her to Paris and put her in a shop," continued the colonel. "She would make her fortune. The milliners all want pretty girls."

"Is that really your advice?" asked Sylvie, in a troubled voice.

"Good!" thought the colonel, "I was right. Vinet advised me to marry Pierrette just to spoil my chance with the old harridan. But," he said aloud, "what else can you do with her? There's that beautiful girl Bathilde de Chargeboeuf, noble and well-connected, reduced to single-blessedness,--nobody will have her. Pierrette has nothing, and she'll never marry. As for beauty, what is it? To me, for example, youth and beauty are nothing; for haven't I been a captain of cavalry

in the imperial guard, and carried my spurs into all the capitals of Europe, and known all the handsomest women of these capitals? Don't talk to me; I tell you youth and beauty are devilishly common and silly. At forty-eight," he went on, adding a few years to his age, to match Sylvie's, "after surviving the retreat from Moscow and going through that terrible campaign of France, a man is broken down; I'm nothing but an old fellow now. A woman like you would pet me and care for me, and her money, joined to my poor pension, would give me ease in my old days; of course I should prefer such a woman to a little minx who would worry the life out of me, and be thirty years old, with passions, when I should be sixty, with rheumatism. At my age, a man considers and calculates. To tell you the truth between ourselves, I should not wish to have children."

Sylvie's face was an open book to the colonel during this tirade, and her next question proved to him Vinet's perfidy.

"Then you don't love Pierrette?" she said.

"Heavens! are you out of your mind, my dear Sylvie?" he cried. "Can those who have no teeth crack nuts? Thank God I've got some common-sense and know what I'm about."

Sylvie thus reassured resolved not to show her own hand, and thought herself very shrewd in putting her own ideas into her brother's mouth.

"Jerome," she said, "thought of the match."

"How could your brother take up such an incongruous idea? Why, it is only a few days ago that, in order to find out his secrets, I told him I loved Bathilde. He turned as white as your collar."

"My brother! does he love Bathilde?" asked Sylvie.

"Madly,--and yet Bathilde is only after his money." ("One for you, Vinet!" thought the colonel.) "I can't understand why he should have told you that about Pierrette. No, Sylvie," he said, taking her hand and pressing it in a certain way, "since you have opened this matter" (he drew nearer to her), "well" (he kissed her hand; as a cavalry captain he had already proved his courage), "let me tell you that I desire no wife but you. Though such a marriage may look like one of convenience, I feel, on my side, a sincere affection for you."

"But if I wish you to marry Pierrette? if I leave her my fortune --eh, colonel?"

"But I don't want to be miserable in my home, and in less than ten years see a popinjay like Julliard hovering round my wife and addressing verses to her in the newspapers. I'm too much of a man to stand that. No, I will never make a marriage that is disproportionate in age."

"Well, colonel, we will talk seriously of this another time," said Sylvie, casting a glance upon him which she supposed to be full of love, though, in point of fact, it was a good deal like that of an ogress. Her cold, blue lips of a violet tinge drew back from the yellow teeth, and she thought she smiled.

"I'm ready," said Rogron, coming in and carrying off the colonel, who

bowed in a lover-like way to the old maid.

Gouraud determined to press on his marriage with Sylvie, and make himself master of the house; resolving to rid himself, through his influence over Sylvie during the honeymoon, of Bathilde and Celeste Habert. So, during their walk, he told Rogron he had been joking the other day; that he had no real intention of aspiring to Bathilde; that he was not rich enough to marry a woman without fortune; and then he confided to him his real wishes, declaring that he had long chosen Sylvie for her good qualities,--in short, he aspired to the honor of being Rogron's brother-in-law.

"Ah, colonel, my dear baron! if nothing is wanting but my consent you have it with no further delay than the law requires," cried Rogron, delighted to be rid of his formidable rival.

Sylvie spent the morning in her own room considering how the new household could be arranged. She determined to build a second storey for her brother and to furnish the rest for herself and her husband; but she also resolved, in the true old-maidish spirit, to subject the colonel to certain proofs by which to judge of his heart and his morals before she finally committed herself. She was still suspicious, and wanted to make sure that Pierrette had no private intercourse with the colonel.

Pierrette came down before the dinner-hour to lay the table. Sylvie had been forced to cook the dinner, and had sworn at that "cursed Pierrette" for a spot she had made on her gown,--wasn't it plain that if Pierrette had done her own work Sylvie wouldn't have got that grease-spot on her silk dress?

"Oh, here you are, peakling? You are like the dog of the marshal who woke up as soon as the saucepans rattled. Ha! you want us to think you are ill, you little liar!"

That idea: "You did not tell the truth about what happened in the square this morning, therefore you lie in everything," was a hammer with which Sylvie battered the head and also the heart of the poor girl incessantly.

To Pierrette's great astonishment Sylvie sent her to dress in her best clothes after dinner. The liveliest imagination is never up to the level of the activity which suspicion excites in the mind of an old maid. In this particular case, this particular old maid carried the day against politicians, lawyers, notaries, and all other self-interests. Sylvie determined to consult Vinet, after examining herself into all the suspicious circumstances. She kept Pierrette close to her, so as to find out from the girl's face whether the colonel had told her the truth.

On this particular evening the Chargeboeuf ladies were the first to arrive. Bathilde, by Vinet's advice, had become more elaborate in her dress. She now wore a charming gown of blue velveteen, with the same transparent fichu, garnet pendants in her ears, her hair in ringlets, the wily jeannette round her throat, black satin slippers, gray silk stockings, and gants de Suede; add to these things the manners of a queen and the coquetry of a young girl determined to capture Rogron. Her mother, calm and dignified, retained, as did her daughter, a certain aristocratic insolence, with which the two women hedged

themselves and preserved the spirit of their caste. Bathilde was a woman of intelligence, a fact which Vinet alone had discovered during the two months' stay the ladies had made at his house. When he had fully fathomed the mind of the girl, wounded and disappointed as it was by the fruitlessness of her beauty and her youth, and enlightened by the contempt she felt for the men of a period in which money was the only idol, Vinet, himself surprised, exclaimed,--

"If I could only have married you, Bathilde, I should to-day be Keeper of the Seals. I should call myself Vinet de Chargeboeuf, and take my seat as deputy of the Right."

Bathilde had no vulgar idea in her marriage intentions. She did not marry to be a mother, nor to possess a husband; she married for freedom, to gain a responsible position, to be called "madame," and to act as men act. Rogron was nothing but a name to her; she expected to make something of the fool,--a voting deputy, for instance, whose instigator she would be; moreover, she longed to avenge herself on her family, who had taken no notice of a girl without money. Vinet had much enlarged and strengthened her ideas by admiring and approving them.

"My dear Bathilde," he said, while explaining to her the influence of women, and showing her the sphere of action in which she ought to work, "do you suppose that Tiphaine, a man of the most ordinary capacity, could ever get to be a judge of the Royal court in Paris by himself? No, it is Madame Tiphaine who has got him elected deputy, and it is she who will push him when they get to Paris. Her mother, Madame Roguin, is a shrewd woman, who does what she likes with the famous banker du Tillet, a crony of Nucingen, and both of them allies of the Kellers. The administration is on the best of terms with those lynxes of the bank. There is no reason why Tiphaine should not be judge, through his wife, of a Royal court. Marry Rogron; we'll have him elected deputy from Provins as soon as I gain another precinct in the Seine-et-Marne. You can then get him a place as receiver-general, where he'll have nothing to do but sign his name. We shall belong to the opposition _if_ the Liberals triumph, but if the Bourbons remain --ah! then we shall lean gently, gently towards the centre. Besides, you must remember Rogron can't live forever, and then you can marry a titled man. In short, put yourself in a good position, and the Chargeboeufts will be ready enough to serve us. Your poverty has no doubt taught you, as mine did me, to know what men are worth. We must make use of them as we do of post-horses. A man, or a woman, will take us along to such or such a distance."

Vinet ended by making Bathilde a small edition of Catherine de Medicis. He left his wife at home, rejoiced to be alone with her two children, while he went every night to the Rogrons' with Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf. He arrived there in all the glory of better circumstances. His spectacles were of gold, his waistcoat silk; a white cravat, black trousers, thin boots, a black coat made in Paris, and a gold watch and chain, made up his apparel. In place of the former Vinet, pale and thin, snarling and gloomy, the present Vinet bore himself with the air and manner of a man of importance; he marched boldly forward, certain of success, with that peculiar show of security which belongs to lawyers who know the hidden places of the law. His sly little head was well-brushed, his chin well-shaved, which gave him a mincing though frigid look, that made him seem agreeable in the style of Robespierre. Certainly he would make a fine

attorney-general, endowed with elastic, mischievous, and even murderous eloquence, or an orator of the shrewd type of Benjamin Constant. The bitterness and the hatred which formerly actuated him had now turned into soft-spoken perfidy; the poison was transformed into anodyne.

"Good-evening, my dear; how are you?" said Madame de Chargeboeuf, greeting Sylvie.

Bathilde went straight to the fireplace, took off her bonnet, looked at herself in the glass, and placed her pretty foot on the fender that Rogron might admire it.

"What is the matter with you?" she said to him, looking directly in his face. "You have not bowed to me. Pray why should we put on our best velvet gowns to please you?"

She pushed past Pierrette to lay down her hat, which the latter took from her hand, and which she let her take exactly as though she were a servant. Men are supposed to be ferocious, and tigers too; but neither tigers, vipers, diplomatists, lawyers, executioners or kings ever approach, in their greatest atrocities, the gentle cruelty, the poisoned sweetness, the savage disdain of one young woman for another, when she thinks herself superior in birth, or fortune, or grace, and some question of marriage, or precedence, or any of the feminine rivalries, is raised. The "Thank you, mademoiselle," which Bathilde said to Pierrette was a poem in many strophes. She was named Bathilde, and the other Pierrette. She was a Chargeboeuf, the other a Lorrain. Pierrette was small and weak, Bathilde was tall and full of life. Pierrette was living on charity, Bathilde and her mother lived on their means. Pierrette wore a stuff gown with a chemisette, Bathilde made the velvet of hers undulate. Bathilde had the finest shoulders in the department, and the arm of a queen; Pierrette's shoulder-blades were skin and bone. Pierrette was Cinderella, Bathilde was the fairy. Bathilde was about to marry, Pierrette was to die a maid. Bathilde was adored, Pierrette was loved by none. Bathilde's hair was ravishingly dressed, she had so much taste; Pierrette's was hidden beneath her Breton cap, and she knew nothing of the fashions. Moral, Bathilde was everything, Pierrette nothing. The proud little Breton girl understood this tragic poem.

"Good-evening, little girl," said Madame de Chargeboeuf, from the height of her condescending grandeur, and in the tone of voice which her pinched nose gave her.

Vinet put the last touch to this sort of insult by looking fixedly at Pierrette and saying, in three keys, "Oh! oh! oh! how fine we are to-night, Pierrette!"

"Fine!" said the poor child; "you should say that to Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, not to me."

"Oh! she is always beautifully dressed," replied the lawyer. "Isn't she, Rogron?" he added, turning to the master of the house, and grasping his hand.

"Yes," said Rogron.

"Why do you force him to say what he does not think?" said Bathilde; "nothing about me pleases him. Isn't that true?" she added, going up

to Rogron and standing before him. "Look at me, and say if it isn't true."

Rogron looked at her from head to foot, and gently closed his eyes like a cat whose head is being scratched.

"You are too beautiful," he said; "too dangerous."

"Why?"

Rogron looked at the fire and was silent. Just then Mademoiselle Habert entered the room, followed by the colonel.

Celeste Habert, who had now become the common enemy, could only reckon Sylvie on her side; nevertheless, everybody present showed her the more civility and amiable attention because each was undermining her. Her brother, though no longer able to be on the scene of action, was well aware of what was going on, and as soon as he perceived that his sister's hopes were killed he became an implacable and terrible antagonist to the Rogrons.

Every one will immediately picture to themselves Mademoiselle Habert when they know that if she had not kept an institution for young ladies she would still have had the air of a school-mistress. School-mistresses have a way of their own in putting on their caps. Just as old Englishwomen have acquired a monopoly in turbans, school-mistresses have a monopoly of these caps. Flowers nod above the frame-work, flowers that are more than artificial; lying by in closets for years the cap is both new and old, even on the day it is first worn. These spinsters make it a point of honor to resemble the lay figures of a painter; they sit on their hips, never on their chairs. When any one speaks to them they turn their whole busts instead of simply turning their heads; and when their gowns creak one is tempted to believe that the mechanism of these beings is out of order. Mademoiselle Habert, an ideal of her species, had a stern eye, a grim mouth, and beneath her wrinkled chin the strings of her cap, always limp and faded, floated as she moved. Two moles, rather large and brown, adorned that chin, and from them sprouted hairs which she allowed to grow rampant like clematis. And finally, to complete her portrait, she took snuff, and took it ungracefully.

The company went to work at their boston. Mademoiselle Habert sat opposite to Sylvie, with the colonel at her side opposite to Madame de Chargeboeuf. Bathilde was near her mother and Rogron. Sylvie placed Pierrette between herself and the colonel; Rogron had set out a second card-table, in case other company arrived. Two lamps were on the chimney-piece between the candelabra and the clock, and the tables were lighted by candles at forty sous a pound, paid for by the price of the cards.

"Come, Pierrette, take your work, my dear," said Sylvie, with treacherous softness, noticing that the girl was watching the colonel's game.

She usually affected to treat Pierrette well before company. This deception irritated the honest Breton girl, and made her despise her cousin. She took her embroidery, but as she drew her stitches she still watched Gouraud's play. Gouraud behaved as if he did not know the girl was near him. Sylvie noticed this apparent indifference and

thought it extremely suspicious. Presently she undertook a _grande misere_ in hearts, the pool being full of counters, besides containing twenty-seven sous. The rest of the company had now arrived; among them the deputy-judge Desfondrilles, who for the last two months had abandoned the Tiphaine party and connected himself more or less with the Vinets. He was standing before the chimney-piece, with his back to the fire and the tails of his coat over his arms, looking round the fine salon of which Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf was the shining ornament; for it really seemed as if all the reds of its decoration had been made expressly to enhance her style of beauty. Silence reigned; Pierrette was watching the game, Sylvie's attention was distracted from her by the interest of the _grande misere_.

"Play that," said Pierrette to the colonel, pointing to a heart in his hand.

The colonel began a sequence in hearts; the hearts all lay between himself and Sylvie; the colonel won her ace, though it was protected by five small hearts.

"That's not fair!" she cried. "Pierrette saw my hand, and the colonel took her advice."

"But, mademoiselle," said Celeste, "it was the colonel's game to play hearts after you began them."

The scene made Monsieur Desfondrilles smile; his was a keen mind, which found much amusement in watching the play of all the self-interests in Provins.

"Yes, it was certainly the colonel's game," said Cournant the notary, not knowing what the question was.

Sylvie threw a look at Mademoiselle Habert,--one of those glances which pass from old maid to old maid, feline and cruel.

"Pierrette, you did see my hand," said Sylvie fixing her eyes on the girl.

"No, cousin."

"I was looking at you all," said the deputy-judge, "and I can swear that Pierrette saw no one's hand but the colonel's."

"Pooh!" said Gouraud, alarmed, "little girls know how to slide their eyes into everything."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"Yes," continued Gouraud. "I dare say she looked into your hand to play you a trick. Didn't you, little one?"

"No," said the truthful Breton, "I wouldn't do such a thing; if I had, it would have been in my cousin's interests."

"You know you are a story-teller and a little fool," cried Sylvie. "After what happened this morning do you suppose I can believe a word you say? You are a--"

Pierrette did not wait for Sylvie to finish her sentence; foreseeing a torrent of insults, she rushed away without a light and ran to her room. Sylvie turned white with anger and muttered between her teeth, "She shall pay for this!"

"Shall you pay for the _misere_?" said Madame de Chargeboeuf.

As she spoke Pierrette struck her head against the door of the passage which some one had left open.

"Good! I'm glad of it," cried Sylvie, as they heard the blow.

"She must be hurt," said Desfondrilles.

"She deserves it," replied Sylvie.

"It was a bad blow," said Mademoiselle Habert.

Sylvie thought she might escape paying her _misere_ if she went to see after Pierrette, but Madame de Chargeboeuf stopped her.

"Pay us first," she said, laughing; "you will forget it when you come back."

The remark, based on the old maid's trickery and her bad faith in paying her debts at cards was approved by the others. Sylvie sat down and thought no more of Pierrette,--an indifference which surprised no one. When the game was over, about half past nine o'clock, she flung herself into an easy chair at the corner of the fireplace and did not even rise as her guests departed. The colonel was torturing her; she did not know what to think of him.

"Men are so false!" she cried, as she went to bed.

Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow on the head, just above the ear, at the spot where young girls part their hair when they put their "front hair" in curlpapers. The next day there was a large swelling.

"God has punished you," said Sylvie at the breakfast table. "You disobeyed me; you treated me with disrespect in leaving the room before I had finished my sentence; you got what you deserved."

"Nevertheless," said Rogron, "she ought to put on a compress of salt and water."

"Oh, it is nothing at all, cousin," said Pierrette.

The poor child had reached a point where even such a remark seemed to her a proof of kindness.

VIII

THE LOVES OF JACQUES AND PIERRETTE

The week ended as it had begun, in continual torture. Sylvie grew ingenious, and found refinements of tyranny with almost savage

cruelty; the red Indians might have taken a lesson from her. Pierrette dared not complain of her vague sufferings, nor of the actual pains she now felt in her head. The origin of her cousin's present anger was the non-revelation of Brigaut's arrival. With Breton obstinacy Pierrette was determined to keep silence,--a resolution that is perfectly explicable. It is easy to see how her thoughts turned to Brigaut, fearing some danger for him if he were discovered, yet instinctively longing to have him near her, and happy in knowing he was in Provins. What joy to have seen him! That single glimpse was like the look an exile casts upon his country, or the martyr lifts to heaven, where his eyes, gifted with second-sight, can enter while flames consume his body.

Pierrette's glance had been so thoroughly understood by the major's son that, as he planed his planks or took his measures or joined his wood, he was working his brains to find out some way of communicating with her. He ended by choosing the simplest of all schemes. At a certain hour of the night Pierrette must lower a letter by a string from her window. In the midst of the girl's own sufferings, she too was sustained by the hope of being able to communicate with Brigaut. The same desire was in both hearts; parted, they understood each other! At every shock to her heart, every throb of pain in her head, Pierrette said to herself, "Brigaut is here!" and that thought enabled her to live without complaint.

One morning in the market, Brigaut, lying in wait, was able to get near her. Though he saw her tremble and turn pale, like an autumn leaf about to flutter down, he did not lose his head, but quietly bought fruit of the market-woman with whom Sylvie was bargaining. He found his chance of slipping a note to Pierrette, all the while joking the woman with the ease of a man accustomed to such manoeuvres; so cool was he in action, though the blood hummed in his ears and rushed boiling through his veins and arteries. He had the firmness of a galley-slave without, and the shrinkings of innocence within him, --like certain mothers in their moments of mortal trial, when held between two dangers, two catastrophes.

Pierrette's inward commotion was like Brigaut's. She slipped the note into the pocket of her apron. The hectic spots upon her cheekbones turned to a cherry-scarlet. These two children went through, all unknown to themselves, many more emotions than go to the make-up of a dozen ordinary loves. This moment in the market-place left in their souls a well-spring of passionate feeling. Sylvie, who did not recognize the Breton accent, took no notice of Brigaut, and Pierrette went home safely with her treasure.

The letters of these two poor children were fated to serve as documents in a terrible judicial inquiry; otherwise, without the fatal circumstances that occasioned that inquiry, they would never have been heard of. Here is the one which Pierrette read that night in her chamber:--

My dear Pierrette,--At midnight, when everybody is asleep but me, who am watching you, I will come every night under your window. Let down a string long enough to reach me; it will not make any noise; you must fasten to the end of it whatever you write to me. I will tie my letter in the same way. I hear they have taught you to read and write,--those wicked relations who were to do you good, and have done you so much harm. You, Pierrette, the daughter

of a colonel who died for France, reduced by those monsters to be their servant! That is where all your pretty color and health have gone. My Pierrette, what has become of her? what have they done with her. I see plainly you are not the same, not happy. Oh! Pierrette, let us go back to Brittany. I can earn enough now to give you what you need; for you yourself can earn three francs a day and I can earn four or five; and thirty sous is all I want to live on. Ah! Pierrette, how I have prayed the good God for you ever since I came here! I have asked him to give me all your sufferings, and you all pleasures. Why do you stay with them? why do they keep you? Your grandmother is more to you than they. They are vipers; they have taken your gaiety away from you. You do not even walk as you once did in Brittany. Let us go back. I am here to serve you, to do your will; tell me what you wish. If you need money I have a hundred and fifty francs; I can send them up by the string, though I would like to kiss your dear hands and lay the money in them. Ah, dear Pierrette, it is a long time now that the blue sky has been overcast for me. I have not had two hours' happiness since I put you into that diligence of evil. And when I saw you the other morning, looking like a shadow, I could not reach you; that hag of a cousin came between us. But at least we can have the consolation of praying to God together every Sunday in church; perhaps he will hear us all the more when we pray together.

Not good-by, my dear, Pierrette, but _to-night_.

This letter so affected Pierrette that she sat for more than an hour reading and re-reading and gazing at it. Then she remembered with anguish that she had nothing to write with. She summoned courage to make the difficult journey from her garret to the dining-room, where she obtained pen, paper, and ink, and returned safely without waking her terrible cousin. A few minutes before midnight she had finished the following letter:--

My Friend,--Oh! yes, my friend; for there is no one but you, Jacques, and my grandmother to love me. God forgive me, but you are the only two persons whom I love, both alike, neither more nor less. I was too little to know my dear mamma; but you, Jacques, and my grandmother, and my grandfather,--God grant him heaven, for he suffered much from his ruin, which was mine,--but you two who are left, I love you both, unhappy as I am. Indeed, to know how much I love you, you will have to know how much I suffer; but I don't wish that, it would grieve you too much. _They_ speak to me as we would not speak to a dog; _they_ treat me like the worst of girls; and yet I do examine myself before God, and I cannot find that I do wrong by them. Before you sang to me the marriage song I saw the mercy of God in my sufferings; for I had prayed to him to take me from the world, and I felt so ill I said to myself, "God hears me!" But, Jacques, now you are here, I want to live and go back to Brittany, to my grandmamma who loves me, though _they_ say she stole eight thousand francs of mine. Jacques, is that so? If they are mine could you get them! But it is not true, for if my grandmother had eight thousand francs she would not live at Saint-Jacques.

I don't want to trouble her last days, my kind, good grandmamma, with the knowledge of my troubles; she might die of it. Ah! if she knew they made her grandchild scrub the pots and pans,--she who

used to say to me, when I wanted to help her after her troubles, "Don't touch that, my darling; leave it--leave it--you will spoil your pretty fingers." Ah! my hands are never clean now. Sometimes I can hardly carry the basket home from market, it cuts my arm. Still I don't think my cousins mean to be cruel; but it is their way always to scold, and it seems that I have no right to leave them. My cousin Rogron is my guardian. One day when I wanted to run away because I could not bear it, and told them so, my cousin Sylvie said the gendarmes would go after me, for the law was my master. Oh! I know now that cousins cannot take the place of father or mother, any more than the saints can take the place of God.

My poor Jacques, what do you suppose I could do with your money? Keep it for our journey. Oh! how I think of you and Pen-Hoel, and the big pong,--that's where we had our only happy days. I shall have no more, for I feel I am going from bad to worse. I am very ill, Jacques. I have dreadful pains in my head, and in my bones, and back, which kill me, and I have no appetite except for horrid things,--roots and leaves and such things. Sometimes I cry, when I am all alone, for they won't let me do anything I like if they know it, not even cry. I have to hide to offer my tears to Him to whom we owe the mercies which we call afflictions. It must have been He who gave you the blessed thought to come and sing the marriage song beneath my window. Ah! Jacques, my cousin heard you, and she said I had a lover. If you wish to be my lover, love me well. I promise to love you always, as I did in the past, and to be

Your faithful servant,
Pierrette Lorrain.

You will love me always, won't you?

She had brought a crust of bread from the kitchen, in which she now made a hole for the letter, and fastened it like a weight to her string. At midnight, having opened her window with extreme caution, she lowered the letter with the crust, which made no noise against either the wall of the house or the blinds. Presently she felt the string pulled by Brigaut, who broke it and then crept softly away. When he reached the middle of the square she could see him indistinctly by the starlight; but he saw her quite clearly in the zone of light thrown by the candle. The two children stood thus for over an hour, Pierrette making him signs to go, he starting, she remaining, he coming back to his post, and Pierrette again signing that he must leave her. This was repeated till the child closed her window, went to bed, and blew out the candle. Once in bed she fell asleep, happy in heart though suffering in body,--she had Brigaut's letter under her pillow. She slept as the persecuted sleep,--a slumber bright with angels; that slumber full of heavenly arabesques, in atmospheres of gold and lapis-lazuli, perceived and given to us by Raffaele.

The moral nature had such empire over that frail physical nature that on the morrow Pierrette rose light and joyous as a lark, as radiant and as gay. Such a change could not escape the vigilant eye of her cousin Sylvie, who, this time, instead of scolding her, set about watching her with the scrutiny of a magpie. "What reason is there for such happiness?" was a thought of jealousy, not of tyranny. If the

colonel had not been in Sylvie's mind she would have said to Pierrette as formerly, "Pierrette, you are very noisy, and very regardless of what you have often been told." But now the old maid resolved to spy upon her as only old maids can spy. The day was still and gloomy, like the weather that precedes a storm.

"You don't appear to be ill now, mademoiselle," said Sylvie at dinner. "Didn't I tell you she put it all on to annoy us?" she cried, addressing her brother, and not waiting for Pierrette's answer.

"On the contrary, cousin, I have a sort of fever--"

"Fever! what fever? You are as gay as a lark. Perhaps you have seen some one again?"

Pierrette trembled and dropped her eyes on her plate.

"Tartufe!" cried Sylvie; "and only fourteen years old! what a nature! Do you mean to come to a bad end?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Pierrette, raising her sweet and luminous brown eyes to her cousin.

"This evening," said Sylvie, "you are to stay in the dining-room with a candle, and do your sewing. You are not wanted in the salon; I sha'n't have you looking into my hand to help your favorites."

Pierrette made no sign.

"Artful creature!" cried Sylvie, leaving the room.

Rogron, who did not understand his sister's anger, said to Pierrette: "What is all this about? Try to please your cousin, Pierrette; she is very indulgent to you, very gentle, and if you put her out of temper the fault is certainly yours. Why do you squabble so? For my part I like to live in peace. Look at Mademoiselle Bathilde and take pattern by her."

Pierrette felt able to bear everything. Brigaut would come at midnight and bring her an answer, and that hope was the viaticum of her day. But she was using up her last strength. She did not go to bed, and stood waiting for the hour to strike. At last midnight sounded; softly she opened the window; this time she used a string made by tying bits of twine together. She heard Brigaut's step, and on drawing up the cord she found the following letter, which filled her with joy:--

My dear Pierrette,--As you are so ill you must not tire yourself by waiting for me. You will hear me if I cry like an owl. Happily my father taught me to imitate their note. So when you hear the cry three times you will know I am there, and then you must let down the cord. But I shall not come again for some days. I hope then to bring you good news.

Oh! Pierrette, don't talk of dying! Pierrette, don't think such things! All my heart shook, I felt as though I were dead myself at the mere idea. No, my Pierrette, you must not die; you will live happy, and soon you shall be delivered from your persecutors. If I do not succeed in what I am undertaking for your rescue, I shall appeal to the law, and I shall speak out before heaven and earth

and tell how your wicked relations are treating you. I am certain that you have not many more days to suffer; have patience, my Pierrette! Jacques is watching over you as in the old days when we slid on the pond and I pulled you out of the hole in which we were nearly drowned together.

Adieu, my dear Pierrette; in a few days, if God wills, we shall be happy. Alas, I dare not tell you the only thing that may hinder our meeting. But God loves us! In a few days I shall see my dear Pierrette at liberty, without troubles, without any one to hinder my looking at you--for, ah! Pierrette, I hunger to see you --Pierrette, Pierrette, who deigns to love me and to tell me so. Yes, Pierrette, I will be your lover when I have earned the fortune you deserve; till then I will be to you only a devoted servant whose life is yours to do what you please with it. Adieu.

Jacques Brigaut.

Here is a letter of which the major's son said nothing to Pierrette. He wrote it to Madame Lorrain at Nantes:--

Madame Lorrain,--Your granddaughter will die, worn-out with ill-treatment, if you do not come to fetch her. I could scarcely recognize her; and to show you the state of things I enclose a letter I have received from Pierrette. You are thought here to have taken the money of your granddaughter, and you ought to justify yourself. If you can, come at once. We may still be happy; but if delay Pierrette will be dead.

I am, with respect, your devoted servant,
Jacques Brigaut.

At Monsieur Frappier's, Cabinet-maker, Grand'Rue, Provins.

Brigaut's fear was that the grandmother was dead.

Though this letter of the youth whom in her innocence she called her lover was almost enigmatical to Pierrette, she believed in it with all her virgin faith. Her heart was filled with that sensation which travellers in the desert feel when they see from afar the palm-trees round a well. In a few days her misery would end--Jacques said so. She relied on this promise of her childhood's friend; and yet, as she laid the letter beside the other, a dreadful thought came to her in foreboding words.

"Poor Jacques," she said to herself, "he does not know the hole into which I have now fallen!"

Sylvie had heard Pierrette, and she had also heard Brigaut under her window. She jumped out of bed and rushed to the window to look through the blinds into the square and there she saw, in the moonlight, a man hurrying in the direction of the colonel's house, in front of which Brigaut happened to stop. The old maid gently opened her door, went upstairs, was amazed to find a light in Pierrette's room, looked through the keyhole, and could see nothing.

"Pierrette," she said, "are you ill?"

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, surprised.

"Why is your candle burning at this time of night? Open the door; I must know what this means."

Pierrette went to the door bare-footed, and as soon as Sylvie entered the room she saw the cord, which Pierrette had forgotten to put away, not dreaming of a surprise. Sylvie jumped upon it.

"What is that for?" she asked.

"Nothing, cousin."

"Nothing!" she cried. "Always lying; you'll never get to heaven that way. Go to bed; you'll take cold."

She asked no more questions and went away, leaving Pierrette terrified by her unusual clemency. Instead of exploding with rage, Sylvie had suddenly determined to surprise Pierrette and the colonel together, to seize their letters and confound the two lovers who were deceiving her. Pierrette, inspired by a sense of danger, sewed the letters into her corset and covered them with calico.

Here end the loves of Pierrette and Brigaut.

Pierrette rejoiced in the thought that Jacques had determined to hold no communication with her for some days, because her cousin's suspicions would be quieted by finding nothing to feed them. Sylvie did in fact spend the next three nights on her legs, and each evening in watching the innocent colonel, without discovering either in him or in Pierrette, or in the house or out of it, anything that betrayed their understanding. She sent Pierrette to confession, and seized that moment to search the child's room, with the method and penetration of a spy or a custom-house officer. She found nothing. Her fury reached the apogee of human sentiments. If Pierrette had been there she would certainly have struck her remorselessly. To a woman of her temper, jealousy was less a sentiment than an occupation; she existed in it, it made her heart beat, she felt emotions hitherto completely unknown to her; the slightest sound or movement kept her on the qui vive; she watched Pierrette with gloomy intentness.

"That miserable little wretch will kill me," she said.

Sylvie's severity to her cousin reached the point of refined cruelty, and made the deplorable condition of the poor girl worse daily. She had fever regularly, and the pains in her head became intolerable. By the end of the week even the visitors at the house noticed her suffering face, which would have touched to pity all selfishness less cruel than theirs. It happened that Doctor Neraud, possibly by Vinet's advice, did not come to the house during that week. The colonel, knowing himself suspected by Sylvie, was afraid to risk his marriage by showing any solicitude for Pierrette. Bathilde explained the visible change in the girl by her natural growth. But at last, one Sunday evening, when Pierrette was in the salon, her sufferings overcame her and she fainted away. The colonel, who first saw her going, caught her in his arms and carried her to a sofa.

"She did it on purpose," said Sylvie, looking at Mademoiselle Habert

and the rest who were playing boston with her.

"I assure you that your cousin is very ill," said the colonel.

"She seemed well enough in your arms," Sylvie said to him in a low voice, with a savage smile.

"The colonel is right," said Madame de Chargeboeuf. "You ought to send for a doctor. This morning at church every one was speaking, as they came out, of Mademoiselle Lorrain's appearance."

"I am dying," said Pierrette.

Desfondrilles called to Sylvie and told her to unfasten her cousin's gown. Sylvie went up to the girl, saying, "It is only a tantrum."

She unfastened the gown and was about to touch the corset, when Pierrette, roused by the danger, sat up with superhuman strength, exclaiming, "No, no, I will go to bed."

Sylvie had, however, touched the corset and felt the papers. She let Pierrette go, saying to the company:

"What do you think now of her illness? I tell you it is all a pretence. You have no idea of the perversity of that child."

After the card-playing was over she kept Vinet from following the other guests; she was furious and wanted vengeance, and was grossly rude to the colonel when he bade her good-night. Gouraud threw a look at the lawyer which threatened him to the depths of his being and seemed to put a ball in his entrails. Sylvie told Vinet to remain. When they were alone, she said,--

"Never in my life, never in my born days, will I marry the colonel."

"Now that you have come to that decision I may speak," said the lawyer. "The colonel is my friend, but I am more yours than his. Rogron has done me services which I can never forget. I am as strong a friend as I am an enemy. Once in the Chamber I shall rise to power, and I will make your brother a receiver-general. Now swear to me, before I say more, that you will never repeat what I tell you." (Sylvie made an affirmative sign.) "In the first place, the brave colonel is a gambler--"

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"If it had not been for the embarrassments this vice has brought upon him, he might have been a marshal of France," continued Vinet. "He is capable of running through your property; but he is very astute; you cannot be sure of not having children, and you told me yourself the risks you feared. No, if you want to marry, wait till I am in the Chamber and then take that old Desfondrilles, who shall be made chief justice. If you want revenge on the colonel make your brother marry Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf,--I can get her consent; she has two thousand francs a year, and you will be connected with the de Chargeboeuifs as I am. Recollect what I tell you, the Chargeboeuifs will be glad to claim us for cousins some day."

"Gouraud loves Pierrette," was Sylvie's only answer.

"He is quite capable of it," said Vinet, "and capable of marrying her after your death."

"A fine calculation!" she said.

"I tell you that man has the shrewdness of the devil. Marry your brother and announce that you mean to remain unmarried and will leave your property to your nephews and nieces. That will strike a blow at Gouraud and Pierrette both! and you'll see the faces they'll make."

"Ah! that's true," cried the old maid, "I can serve them both right. She shall go to a shop, and get nothing from me. She hasn't a sou; let her do as we did,--work."

Vinet departed, having put his plan into Sylvie's head, her dogged obstinacy being well-known to him. The old maid, he was certain, would think the scheme her own, and carry it out.

The lawyer found the colonel in the square, smoking a cigar while he waited for him.

"Halt!" said Gouraud; "you have pulled me down, but stones enough came with me to bury you--"

"Colonel!--"

"Colonel or not, I shall give you your deserts. In the first place, you shall not be deputy--"

"Colonel!--"

"I control ten votes and the election depends on--"

"Colonel, listen to me. Is there no one to marry but that old Sylvie? I have just been defending you to her; you are accused and convicted of writing to Pierrette; she saw you leave your house at midnight and come to the girl's window--"

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"She means to marry her brother to Bathilde and leave her fortune to their children."

"Rogron won't have any."

"Yes he will," replied Vinet. "But I promise to find you some young and agreeable woman with a hundred and fifty thousand francs? Don't be a fool; how can you and I afford to quarrel? Things have gone against you in spite of all my care; but you don't understand me."

"Then we must understand each other," said the colonel. "Get me a wife with a hundred and fifty thousand francs before the elections; if not --look out for yourself! I don't like unpleasant bed-fellows, and you've pulled the blankets all over to your side. Good-evening."

"You shall see," said Vinet, grasping the colonel's hand affectionately.

* * * * *

About one o'clock that night three clear, sharp cries of an owl, wonderfully well imitated, echoed through the square. Pierrette heard them in her feverish sleep; she jumped up, moist with perspiration, opened her window, saw Brigaut, and flung down a ball of silk, to which he fastened a letter. Sylvie, agitated by the events of the day and her own indecision of mind, was not asleep; she heard the owl.

"Ah, bird of ill-omen!" she thought. "Why, Pierrette is getting up! What is she after?"

Hearing the attic window open softly, Sylvie rushed to her own window and heard the rustle of paper against her blinds. She fastened the strings of her bed-gown and went quickly upstairs to Pierrette's room, where she found the poor girl unwinding the silk and freeing the letter.

"Ha! I've caught you!" cried the old woman, rushing to the window, from which she saw Jacques running at full speed. "Give me that letter."

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, who, by one of those strong inspirations of youth sustained by her own soul, rose to a grandeur of resistance such as we admire in the history of certain peoples reduced to despair.

"Ha! you will not?" cried Sylvie, advancing upon the girl with a face full of hatred and fury.

Pierrette fell back to get time to put her letter in her hand, which she clenched with unnatural force. Seeing this manoeuvre Sylvie grasped the delicate white hand of the girl in her lobster claws and tried to open it. It was a frightful struggle, an infamous struggle; it was more than a physical struggle; it assailed the mind, the sole treasure of the human being, the thought, which God has placed beyond all earthly power and guards as the secret way between the sufferer and Himself. The two women, one dying, the other in the vigor of health, looked at each other fixedly. Pierrette's eyes darted on her executioner the look the famous Templar on the rack cast upon Philippe le Bel, who could not bear it and fled thunderstricken. Sylvie, a woman and a jealous woman, answered that magnetic look with malignant flashes. A dreadful silence reigned. The clenched hand of the Breton girl resisted her cousin's efforts like a block of steel. Sylvie twisted Pierrette's arm, she tried to force the fingers open; unable to do so she stuck her nails into the flesh. At last, in her madness, she set her teeth into the wrist, trying to conquer the girl by pain. Pierrette defied her still, with that same terrible glance of innocence. The anger of the old maid grew to such a pitch that it became blind fury. She seized Pierrette's arm and struck the closed fist upon the window-sill, and then upon the marble of the mantelpiece, as we crack a nut to get the kernel.

"Help! help!" cried Pierrette, "they are murdering me!"

"Ha! you may well scream, when I catch you with a lover in the dead of night."

And she beat the hand pitilessly.

"Help! help!" cried Pierrette, the blood flowing.

At that instant, loud knocks were heard at the front door. Exhausted, the two women paused a moment.

Rogron, awakened and uneasy, not knowing what was happening, had got up, gone to his sister's room, and not finding her was frightened. Hearing the knocks he went down, unfastened the front door, and was nearly knocked over by Brigaut, followed by a sort of phantom.

At this moment Sylvie's eyes chanced to fall on Pierrette's corset, and she remembered the papers. Releasing the girl's wrist she sprang upon the corset like a tiger on its prey, and showed it to Pierrette with a smile,--the smile of an Iroquois over his victim before he scalps him.

"I am dying," said Pierrette, falling on her knees, "oh, who will save me?"

"!" said a woman with white hair and an aged parchment face, in which two gray eyes glittered.

"Ah! grandmother, you have come too late," cried the poor child, bursting into tears.

Pierrette fell upon her bed, her strength all gone, half-dead with the exhaustion which, in her feeble state, followed so violent a struggle. The tall gray woman took her in her arms, as a nurse lifts a child, and went out, followed by Brigaut, without a word to Sylvie, on whom she cast one glance of majestic accusation.

The apparition of that august old woman, in her Breton costume, shrouded in her coif (a sort of hooded mantle of black cloth), accompanied by Brigaut, appalled Sylvie; she fancied she saw death. She slowly went down the stairs, listened to the front door closing behind them, and came face to face with her brother, who exclaimed: "Then they haven't killed you?"

"Go to bed," said Sylvie. "To-morrow we will see what we must do."

She went back to her own bed, ripped open the corset, and read Brigaut's two letters, which confounded her. She went to sleep in the greatest perplexity,--not imagining the terrible results to which her conduct was to lead.

* * * * *

The letters sent by Brigaut to old Madame Lorrain reached her in a moment of ineffable joy, which the perusal of them troubled. The poor old woman had grieved deeply in living without her Pierrette beside her, but she had consoled her loneliness with the thought that the sacrifice of herself was in the interests of her grandchild. She was blessed with one of those ever-young hearts which are upheld and invigorated by the idea of sacrifice. Her old husband, whose only joy was his little granddaughter, had grieved for Pierrette; every day he had seemed to look for her. It was an old man's grief,--on which such old men live, of which they die.

Every one can now imagine the happiness which this poor old woman, living in a sort of almshouse, felt when she learned of a generous action, rare indeed but not impossible in France. The head of the house of Collinet, whose failure in 1814 had caused the Lorrains a loss of twenty-four thousand francs, had gone to America with his children after his disasters. He had too high a courage to remain a ruined man. After eleven years of untold effort crowned by success he returned to Nantes to recover his position, leaving his eldest son in charge of his transatlantic house. He found Madame Lorrain of Pen-Hoel in the institution of Saint-Jacques, and was witness of the resignation with which this most unfortunate of his creditors bore her misery.

"God forgive you!" said the old woman, "since you give me on the borders of my grave the means of securing the happiness of my dear granddaughter; but alas! it will not clear the debts of my poor husband!"

Monsieur Collinet made over to the widow both the capital and the accrued interest, amounting to about forty-two thousand francs. His other creditors, prosperous, rich, and intelligent merchants, had easily born their losses, whereas the misfortunes of the Lorrains seemed so irremediable to old Monsieur Collinet that he promised the widow to pay off her husband's debts, to the amount of forty thousand francs more. When the Bourse of Nantes heard of this generous reparation they wished to receive Collinet to their board before his certificates were granted by the Royal court at Rennes; but the merchant refused the honor, preferring to submit to the ordinary commercial rule.

Madame Lorrain had received the money only the day before the post brought her Brigaut's letter, enclosing that of Pierrette. Her first thought had been, as she signed the receipt: "Now I can live with my Pierrette and marry her to that good Brigaut, who will make a fortune with my money."

Therefore the moment she had read the fatal letters she made instant preparations to start for Provins. She left Nantes that night by the mail; for some one had explained to her its celerity. In Paris she took the diligence for Troyes, which passes through Provins, and by half-past eleven at night she reached Frappier's, where Brigaut, shocked at her despairing looks, told her of Pierrette's state and promised to bring the poor girl to her instantly. His words so terrified the grandmother that she could not control her impatience and followed him to the square. When Pierrette screamed, the horror of that cry went to her heart as sharply as it did to Brigaut's. Together they would have roused the neighborhood if Rogron, in his terror, had not opened the door. The scream of the young girl at bay gave her grandmother the sudden strength of anger with which she carried her dear Pierrette in her arms to Frappier's house, where Madame Frappier hastily arranged Brigaut's own room for the old woman and her treasure. In that poor room, on a bed half-made, the sufferer was deposited; and there she fainted away, holding her hand still clenched, wounded, bleeding, with the nails deep bedded in the flesh. Brigaut, Frappier, his wife, and the old woman stood looking at Pierrette in silence, all four of them in a state of indescribable amazement.

"Why is her hand bloody?" said the grandmother at last.

Pierrette, overcome by the sleep which follows all abnormal displays of strength, and dimly conscious that she was safe from violence, gradually unbent her fingers. Brigaut's letter fell from them like an answer.

"They tried to take my letter from her," said Brigaut, falling on his knees and picking up the lines in which he had told his little friend to come instantly and softly away from the house. He kissed with pious love the martyr's hand.

It was a sight that made those present tremble when they saw the old gray woman, a sublime spectre, standing beside her grandchild's pillow. Terror and vengeance wrote their fierce expressions in the wrinkles that lined her skin of yellow ivory; her forehead, half hidden by the straggling meshes of her gray hair, expressed a solemn anger. She read, with a power of intuition given to the aged when near their grave, Pierrette's whole life, on which her mind had dwelt throughout her journey. She divined the illness of her darling, and knew that she was threatened with death. Two big tears painfully rose in her wan gray eyes, from which her troubles had worn both lashes and eyebrows, two pearls of anguish, forming within them and giving them a dreadful brightness; then each tear swelled and rolled down the withered cheek, but did not wet it.

"They have killed her!" she said at last, clasping her hands.

She fell on her knees which struck sharp blows on the brick-laid floor, making a vow no doubt to Saint Anne d'Auray, the most powerful of the madonnas of Brittany.

"A doctor from Paris," she said to Brigaut. "Go and fetch one, Brigaut, go!"

She took him by the shoulder and gave him a despotic push to send him from the room.

"I was coming, my lad, when you wrote me; I am rich,--here, take this," she cried, recalling him, and unfastening as she spoke the strings that tied her short-gown. Then she drew a paper from her bosom in which were forty-two bank-bills, saying, "Take what is necessary, and bring back the greatest doctor in Paris."

"Keep those," said Frappier; "he can't change thousand franc notes now. I have money, and the diligence will be passing presently; he can certainly find a place on it. But before he goes we had better consult Doctor Martener; he will tell us the best physician in Paris. The diligence won't pass for over an hour,--we have time enough."

Brigaut woke up Monsieur Martener, and brought him at once. The doctor was not a little surprised to find Mademoiselle Lorrain at Frappier's. Brigaut told him of the scene that had just taken place at the Rogrons'; but even so the doctor did not at first suspect the horror of it, nor the extent of the injury done. Martener gave the address of the celebrated Horace Bianchon, and Brigaut started for Paris by the diligence. Monsieur Martener then sat down and examined first the bruised and bloody hand which lay outside the bed.

"She could not have given these wounds herself," he said.

"No; the horrible woman to whom I had the misfortune to trust her was murdering her," said the grandmother. "My poor Pierrette was screaming 'Help! help! I'm dying,'--enough to touch the heart of an executioner."

"But why was it?" said the doctor, feeling Pierrette's pulse. "She is very ill," he added, examining her with a light. "She must have suffered terribly; I don't understand why she has not been properly cared for."

"I shall complain to the authorities," said the grandmother. "Those Rogrons asked me for my child in a letter, saying they had twelve thousand francs a year and would take care of her; had they the right to make her their servant and force her to do work for which she had not the strength?"

"They did not choose to see the most visible of all maladies to which young girls are liable. She needed the utmost care," cried Monsieur Martener.

Pierrette was awakened by the light which Madame Frappier was holding near her face, and by the horrible sufferings in her head caused by the reaction of her struggle.

"Ah! Monsieur Martener, I am very ill," she said in her pretty voice.

"Where is the pain, my little friend?" asked the doctor.

"Here," she said, touching her head above the left ear.

"There's an abscess," said the doctor, after feeling the head for a long time and questioning Pierrette on her sufferings. "You must tell us all, my child, so that we may know how to cure you. Why is your hand like this? You could not have given yourself that wound."

Pierrette related the struggle between herself and her cousin Sylvie.

"Make her talk," said the doctor to the grandmother, "and find out the whole truth. I will await the arrival of the doctor from Paris; and we will send for the surgeon in charge of the hospital here, and have a consultation. The case seems to me a very serious one. Meantime I will send you a quieting draught so that mademoiselle may sleep; she needs sleep."

Left alone with her granddaughter the old Breton woman exerted her influence over the child and made her tell all; she let her know that she had money enough now for all three, and promised that Brigaut should live with them. The poor girl admitted her martyrdom, not imagining the events to which her admissions would give rise. The monstrosity of two beings without affection and without conception of family life opened to the old woman a world of woe as far from her knowledge as the morals of savages may have seemed to the first discoverers who set foot in America.

The arrival of her grandmother, the certainty of living with her in comfort soothed Pierrette's mind as the sleeping draught soothed her body. The old woman watched her darling, kissing her forehead, hair, and hands, as the holy women of old kissed the hands of Jesus when

they laid him in the tomb.

IX

THE FAMILY COUNCIL

At nine o'clock that morning Monsieur Martener went to see Monsieur Tiphaine, and related to him the scene between Pierrette and Sylvie, and the tortures of all kinds, moral and physical, to which the Rogrons had subjected their cousin, and the two alarming forms of illness which their cruelty had developed. Monsieur Tiphaine sent for Auffray the notary, one of Pierrette's own relations on the maternal side.

At this particular time the war between the Vinet party and the Tiphaine party was at its height. The scandals which the Rogrons and their adherents were disseminating through the town about the liaison of Madame Tiphaine's mother with the banker du Tillet, and the bankruptcy of her father (a forger, they said), were all the more exasperating to the Tiphaines because these things were malicious truths, not libels. Such wounds cut deep; they go to the quick of feelings and of interests. These speeches, repeated to the partisans of the Tiphaines by the same mouths which told the Rogrons of the sneers of "those women" of the Tiphaine clique, fed the hatreds of both sides, now increased by the political element. The animosities caused at this time in France by the spirit of party, the violences of which were excessive, were everywhere mixed up, as in Provins, with selfish schemes and wounded or vindictive individual interests. Each party eagerly seized on whatever might injure the rival party. Personal hatreds and self-love mingled as much as political animosity in even the smallest matters, and were carried to hitherto unheard-of lengths. A whole town would be roused to excitement over some private struggle, until it took the character of a political debate.

Monsieur Tiphaine at once perceived in the case of Pierrette against the Rogrons a means of humbling, mortifying, and dishonoring the masters of that salon where plans against the monarchy were made and an opposition journal born. The public prosecutor was called in; and together with Monsieur Auffray the notary, Pierrette's relation, and Monsieur Martener, a cautious consultation was held in the utmost secrecy as to the proper course to follow. Monsieur Martener agreed to advise Pierrette's grandmother to apply to the courts to have Auffray appointed guardian to his young relation. The guardian could then convene a "Family Council," and, backed by the testimony of three doctors, demand the girl's release from the authority of the Rogrons. The affair thus managed would have to go before the courts, and the public prosecutor, Monsieur Lesourd, would see that it was taken to a criminal court by demanding an inquiry.

Towards midday all Provins was roused by the strange news of what had happened during the night at the Rogrons'. Pierrette's cries had been faintly heard, though they were soon over. No one had risen to inquire what they meant, but every one said the next day, "Did you hear those screams about one in the morning?" Gossip and comments soon magnified the horrible drama, and a crowd collected in front of Frappier's shop, asking the worthy cabinet-maker for information, and hearing from him how Pierrette was brought to his house with her fingers broken and the

hand bloody.

Towards one in the afternoon the post-chaise of Doctor Bianchon, who was accompanied by Brigaut, stopped before the house, and Madame Frappier went at once to summon Monsieur Martener and the surgeon in charge of the hospital. Thus the gossip of the town received confirmation. The Rogrons were declared to have ill-used their cousin deliberately, and to have come near killing her. Vinet heard the news while attending to his business in the law courts; he left everything and hurried to the Rogrons. Rogron and his sister had just finished breakfast. Sylvie was reluctant to tell her brother of her discomfiture of the night before; but he pressed her with questions, to which she would make no answer than, "That's not your business." She went and came from the kitchen to the dining-room on pretence of preparing the breakfast, but chiefly to avoid discussion. She was alone when Vinet entered.

"You know what's happened?" said the lawyer.

"No," said Sylvie.

"You will be arrested on a criminal charge," replied Vinet, "from the way things are now going about Pierrette."

"A criminal charge!" cried Rogron, who had come into the room. "Why? What for?"

"First of all," said the lawyer, looking at Sylvie, "explain to me without concealment and as if you stood before God, what happened in this house last night--they talk of amputating Pierrette's hand."

Sylvie turned livid and shuddered.

"Then there is some truth in it?" said Vinet.

Mademoiselle Rogron related the scene, trying to excuse herself; but, prodded with questions, she acknowledged the facts of the horrible struggle.

"If you have only injured her fingers you will be taken before the police court for a misdemeanor; but if they cut off her hand you may be tried at the Assizes for a worse offence. The Tiphaines will do their best to get you there."

Sylvie, more dead than alive, confessed her jealousy, and, what was harder to do, confessed also that her suspicions were unfounded.

"Heavens, what a case this will make!" cried the lawyer. "You and your brother may be ruined by it; you will be abandoned by most people whether you win or lose. If you lose, you will have to leave Provins."

"Oh, my dear Monsieur Vinet, you who are such a great lawyer," said Rogron, terrified, "advise us! save us!"

The crafty Vinet worked the terror of the two imbeciles to its utmost, declaring that Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf might be unwilling to enter their house again. To be abandoned by women of their rank would be a terrible condemnation. At length, after an hour of adroit manoeuvring, it was agreed that Vinet must have some

powerful motive in taking the case, that would impress the minds of all Provins and explain his efforts on behalf of the Rogrons. This motive they determined should be Rogron's marriage to Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf; it should be announced that very day and the banns published on Sunday. The contract could be drawn immediately. Mademoiselle Rogron agreed, in consideration of the marriage, to appear in the contract as settling her capital on her brother, retaining only the income of it. Vinet made Rogron and his sister comprehend the necessity of antedating the document by two or three days, so as to commit the mother and daughter in the eyes of the public and give them a reason for continuing their visits.

"Sign that contract and I'll take upon myself to get you safely out of this affair," said the lawyer. "There will be a terrible fight; but I will put my whole soul into it--you'll have to make me a votive offering."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Rogron.

By half-past eleven the lawyer had plenary powers to draw the contract and conduct the defence of the Rogrons. At twelve o'clock application was made to Monsieur Tiphaine, as a judge sitting in chambers, against Brigaut and the widow Lorrain for having abducted Pierrette Lorrain, a minor, from the house of her legal guardian. In this way the bold lawyer became the aggressor and made Rogron the injured party. He spoke of the matter from this point of view in the court-house.

The judge postponed the hearing till four o'clock. Needless to describe the excitement in the town. Monsieur Tiphaine knew that by three o'clock the consultation of doctors would be over and their report drawn up; he wished Auffray, as surrogate-guardian, to be at the hearing armed with that report.

The announcement of Rogron's marriage and the sacrifices made to it by Sylvie in the contract alienated two important supporters from the brother and sister, namely,--Mademoiselle Habert and the colonel, whose hopes were thus annihilated. They remained, however, ostensibly on the Rogron side for the purpose of injuring it. Consequently, as soon as Monsieur Martener mentioned the alarming condition of Pierrette's head, Celeste and the colonel told of the blow she had given herself during the evening when Sylvie had forced her to leave the salon; and they related the old maid's barbarous and unfeeling comments, with other statements proving her cruelty to her suffering cousin. Vinet had foreseen this storm; but he had secured the entire fortune of the Rogrons for Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, and he promised himself that in a few weeks she should be mistress of the Rogron house, and reign with him over Provins, and even bring about a fusion with the Breauteys and the aristocrats in the interests of his ambition.

From midday to four o'clock all the ladies of the Tiphaine clique sent to inquire after Mademoiselle Lorrain. She, poor girl, was wholly ignorant of the commotion she was causing in the little town. In the midst of her sufferings she was ineffably happy in recovering her grandmother and Brigaut, the two objects of her affection. Brigaut's eyes were constantly full of tears. The old grandmother sat by the bed and caressed her darling. To the three doctors she told every detail she had obtained from Pierrette as to her life in the Rogron house. Horace Bianchon expressed his indignation in vehement language.

Shocked at such barbarity he insisted on all the physicians in the town being called in to see the case; the consequence was that Dr. Neraud, the friend of the Rogrons, was present. The report was unanimously signed. It is useless to give a text of it here. If Moliere's medical terms were barbarous, those of modern science have the advantage of being so clear that the explanation of Pierrette's malady, though natural and unfortunately common, horrified all ears.

At four o'clock, after the usual rising of the court, president Tiphaine again took his seat, when Madame Lorrain, accompanied by Monsieur Auffray and Brigaut and a crowd of interested persons, entered the court-room. Vinet was alone. This contrast struck the minds of those present. The lawyer, who still wore his robe, turned his cold face to the judge, settled his spectacles on his pallid green eyes, and then in a shrill, persistent voice he stated that two strangers had forced themselves at night into the Rogron domicile and had abducted therefrom the minor Lorrain. The legal rights were with the guardian, who now demanded the restoration of his ward.

Monsieur Auffray rose, as surrogate-guardian, and requested to be heard.

"If the judge," he said, "will admit the report, which I hold in my hand, signed by one of the most famous physicians in Paris, and by all the physicians in Provins, he will understand not only that the demand of the Sieur Rogron is senseless, but also that the grandmother of the minor had grave cause to instantly remove her from her persecutors. Here are the facts. The report of these physicians attribute the almost dying condition of the said minor to the ill-treatment she has received from the Sieur Rogron and his sister. We shall, as the law directs, convoke a Family Council with the least possible delay, and discuss the question as to whether or not the guardian should be deposed. And we now ask that the minor be not returned to the domicile of the said guardian but that she be confided to some member of her family who shall be designated by the judge."

Vinet replied, declaring that the physicians' report ought to have been submitted to him in order that he might have disproved it.

"Not submitted to your side," said the judge, severely, "but possibly to the procureur du roi. The case is heard."

The judge then wrote at the bottom of the petition the following order:--

"Whereas it appears, from a deliberate and unanimous report of all the physicians of this town, together with Doctor Bianchon of the medical faculty of Paris, that the minor Lorrain, claimed by Jerome-Denis Rogron, her guardian, is extremely ill in consequence of ill-treatment and personal assault in the house of the said guardian and his sister:

"We, president of the court of Provins, passing upon the said petition, order that until the Family Council is held the minor Lorrain is not to be returned to the household of her said guardian, but shall be kept in that of her surrogate-guardian.

"And further, considering the state in which the said minor now is, and the traces of violence which, according to the report of

the physicians, are now upon her person, we commission the attending physician and the surgeon in charge of the hospital of Provins to visit her, and in case the injuries from the said assault become alarming, the matter will be held to await the action of the criminal courts; and this without prejudice to the civil suit undertaken by Auffray the surrogate-guardian."

This severe judgment was read out by President Tiphaine in a loud and distinct voice.

"Why not send them to the galleys at once?" said Vinet. "And all this fuss about a girl who was carrying on an intrigue with an apprentice to a cabinet-maker! If the case goes on in this way," he cried, insolently, "we shall demand other judges on the ground of legitimate suspicion."

Vinet left the court-room, and went among the chief men of his party to explain Rogron's position, declaring that he had never so much as given a flip to his cousin, and that the judge had viewed him much less as Pierrette's guardian than as a leading elector in Provins.

To hear Vinet, people might have supposed that the Tiphaines were making a great fuss about nothing; the mounting was bringing forth a mouse. Sylvie, an eminently virtuous and pious woman, had discovered an intrigue between her brother's ward and a workman, a Breton named Brigaut. The scoundrel knew very well that the girl would have her grandmother's money, and he wished to seduce her (Vinet to talk of that!). Mademoiselle Rogron, who had discovered letters proving the depravity of the girl, was not as much to blame as the Tiphaines were trying to make out. If she did use some violence to get possession of those letters (which was no wonder, when we consider what Breton obstinacy is), how could Rogron be considered responsible for all that?

The lawyer went on to make the matter a partisan affair, and to give it a political color.

"They who listen to only one bell hear only one sound," said the wise men. "Have you heard what Vinet says? Vinet explains things clearly."

Frappier's house being thought injurious to Pierrette, owing to the noise in the street which increased the sufferings in her head, she was taken to that of her surrogate guardian, the change being as necessary medically as it was judicially. The removal was made with the utmost caution, and was calculated to produce a great public effect. Pierrette was laid on a mattress and carried on a stretcher by two men; a Gray Sister walked beside her with a bottle of sal volatile in her hand, while the grandmother, Brigaut, Madame Auffray, and her maid followed. People were at their windows and doors to see the procession pass. Certainly the state in which they saw Pierrette, pale as death, gave immense advantage to the party against the Rogrons. The Auffrays were determined to prove to the whole town that the judge was right in the decision he had given. Pierrette and her grandmother were installed on the second floor of Monsieur Auffray's house. The notary and his wife gave her every care with the greatest hospitality, which was not without a little ostentation in it. Pierrette had her grandmother to nurse her; and Monsieur Martener and the head-surgeon of the hospital attended her.

On the evening of this day exaggerations began on both sides. The Rogron salon was crowded. Vinet had stirred up the whole Liberal party on the subject. The Chargeboeuf ladies dined with the Rogrons, for the contract was to be signed that evening. Vinet had had the banns posted at the mayor's office in the afternoon. He made light of the Pierrette affair. If the Provins court was prejudiced, the Royal courts would appreciate the facts, he said, and the Auffrays would think twice before they flung themselves into such a suit. The alliance of the Rogrons with the Chargeboeuks was an immense consideration in the minds of a certain class of people. To them it made the Rogrons as white as snow and Pierrette an evilly disposed little girl, a serpent warmed in their bosom.

In Madame Tiphaine's salon vengeance was had for all the mischievous scandals that the Vinet party had disseminated for the past two years. The Rogrons were monsters, and the guardian should undergo a criminal trial. In the Lower town, Pierrette was quite well; in the Upper town she was dying; at the Rogrons' she scratched her wrist; at Madame Tiphaine's her fingers were fractured and one was to be cut off. The next day the "Courrier de Provins," had a plausible article, extremely well-written, a masterpiece of insinuations mixed with legal points, which showed that there was no case whatever against Rogron. The "Bee-hive," which did not appear till two days later, could not answer without becoming defamatory; it replied, however, that in an affair like this it was best to wait until the law took its course.

The Family Council was selected by the judge de paix of the canton of Provins, and consisted of Rogron and the two Messieurs Auffray, the nearest relatives, and Monsieur Ciprey, nephew of Pierrette's maternal grandmother. To these were joined Monsieur Habert, Pierrette's confessor, and Colonel Gouraud, who had always professed himself a comrade and friend of her father, Colonel Lorrain. The impartiality of the judge in these selections was much applauded,—Monsieur Habert and Colonel Gouraud being considered the firm friends of the Rogrons.

The serious situation in which Rogron found himself made him ask for the assistance of a lawyer (and he named Vinet) at the Family Council. By this manoeuvre, evidently advised by Vinet himself, Rogron succeeded in postponing the meeting of the council till the end of December. At that time Monsieur Tiphaine and his wife would be settled in Paris for the opening of the Chambers; and the ministerial party would be left without its head. Vinet had already worked upon Desfondrilles, the deputy-judge, in case the matter should go, after the hearing before the council, to the criminal courts.

Vinet spoke for three hours before the Family Council; he proved the existence of an intrigue between Pierrette and Brigaut, which justified all Mademoiselle Rogron's severity. He showed how natural it was that the guardian should have left the management of his ward to a woman; he dwelt on the fact that Rogron had not interfered with Pierrette's education as planned by his sister Sylvie. But in spite of Vinet's efforts the Council were unanimous in removing Rogron from the guardianship. Monsieur Auffray was appointed in his place, and Monsieur Ciprey was made surrogate. The Council summoned before it and examined Adele, the servant-woman, who testified against her late masters; also Mademoiselle Habert, who related the cruel remarks made by Mademoiselle Rogron on the evening when Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow, heard by all the company, and the speech of Madame de Chargeboeuf about the girl's health. Brigaut produced the letter he

had received from Pierrette, which proved their innocence and stated her ill-treatment. Proof was given that the condition of the minor was the result of neglect on the part of the guardian, who was responsible for all that concerned his ward. Pierrette's illness had been apparent to every one, even to persons in the town who were strangers to the family, yet the guardian had done nothing for her. The charge of ill-treatment was therefore sustained against Rogron; and the case would now go before the public.

Rogron, advised by Vinet, opposed the acceptance of the report of the Council by the court. The authorities then intervened in consequence of Pierrette's state, which was daily growing worse. The trial of the case, though placed at once upon the docket, was postponed until the month of March, 1828, to wait events.

X

VERDICTS--LEGAL AND OTHER

Meantime Rogron's marriage with Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf took place. Sylvie moved to the second floor of the house, which she shared with Madame de Chargeboeuf, for the first floor was entirely taken up by the new wife. The beautiful Madame Rogron succeeded to the social place of the beautiful Madame Tiphaine. The influence of the marriage was immense. No one now came to visit Sylvie, but Madame Rogron's salon was always full.

Sustained by the influence of his mother-in-law and the bankers du Tillet and Nucingen, Monsieur Tiphaine was fortunate enough to do some service to the administration; he became one of its chief orators, was made judge in the civil courts, and obtained the appointment of his nephew Lesourd to his own vacant place as president of the court of Provins. This appointment greatly annoyed Desfondrilles. The Keeper of the Seals sent down one of his own proteges to fill Lesourd's place. The promotion of Monsieur Tiphaine and his translation to Paris were therefore of no benefit at all to the Vinet party; but Vinet nevertheless made a clever use of the result. He had always told the Provins people that they were being used as a stepping-stone to raise the crafty Madame Tiphaine into grandeur; Tiphaine himself had tricked them; Madame Tiphaine despised both Provins and its people in her heart, and would never return there again. Just at this crisis Monsieur Tiphaine's father died; his son inherited a fine estate and sold his house in Provins to Monsieur Julliard. The sale proved to the minds of all how little the Tiphaines thought of Provins. Vinet was right; Vinet had been a true prophet. These things had great influence on the question of Pierrette's guardianship.

Thus the dreadful martyrdom brutally inflicted on the poor child by two imbecile tyrants (which led, through its consequences, to the terrible operation of trepanning, performed by Monsieur Martener under the advice of Doctor Bianchon),--all this horrible drama reduced to judicial form was left to float in the vile mess called in legal parlance the calendar. The case was made to drag through the delays and the interminable labyrinths of the law, by the shufflings of an unprincipled lawyer; and during all this time the calumniated girl languished in the agony of the worst pain known to science.

Monsieur Martener, together with the Auffray family, were soon charmed by the beauty of Pierrette's nature and the character of her old grandmother, whose feelings, ideas, and ways bore the stamp of Roman antiquity,--this matron of the Marais was like a woman in Plutarch.

Doctor Martener struggled bravely with death, which already grasped its prey. From the first, Bianchon and the hospital surgeon had considered Pierrette doomed; and there now took place between the doctor and the disease, the former relying on Pierrette's youth, one of those struggles which physicians alone comprehend,--the reward of which, in case of success, is never found in the venal pay nor in the patients themselves, but in the gentle satisfaction of conscience, in the invisible ideal palm gathered by true artists from the contentment which fills their soul after accomplishing a noble work. The physician strains towards good as an artist towards beauty, each impelled by that grand sentiment which we call virtue. This daily contest wiped out of Doctor Martener's mind the petty irritations of that other contest of the Tiphaines and the Vinets,--as always happens to men when they find themselves face to face with a great and real misery to conquer.

Monsieur Martener had begun his career in Paris; but the cruel activity of the city and its insensibility to its masses of suffering had shocked his gentle soul, fitted only for the quiet life of the provinces. Moreover, he was under the yoke of his beautiful native land. He returned to Provins, where he married and settled, and cared almost lovingly for the people, who were to him like a large family. During the whole of Pierrette's illness he was careful not to speak of her. His reluctance to answer the questions of those who asked about her was so evident that persons soon ceased to put them. Pierrette was to him, what indeed she truly was, a poem, mysterious, profound, vast in suffering, such as doctors find at times in their terrible experience. He felt an admiration for this delicate young creature which he would not share with any one.

This feeling of the physician for his patient was, however, unconsciously communicated (like all true feelings) to Monsieur and Madame Auffray, whose house became, so long as Pierrette was in it, quiet and silent. The children, who had formerly played so joyously with her, agreed among themselves with the loving grace of childhood to be neither noisy nor troublesome. They made it a point of honor to be good because Pierrette was ill. Monsieur Auffray's house was in the Upper town, beneath the ruins of the Chateau, and it was built upon a sort of terrace formed by the overthrow of the old ramparts. The occupants could have a view of the valley from the little fruit-garden enclosed by walls which overlooked the town. The roofs of the other houses came to about the level of the lower wall of this garden. Along the terrace ran a path, by which Monsieur Auffray's study could be entered through a glass door; at the other end of the path was an arbor of grape vines and a fig-tree, beneath which stood a round table, a bench and some chairs, painted green. Pierrette's bedroom was above the study of her new guardian. Madame Lorrain slept in a cot beside her grandchild. From her window Pierrette could see the whole of the glorious valley of Provins, which she hardly knew, so seldom had she left that dreadful house of the Rogrons. When the weather was fine she loved to drag herself, resting on her grandmother's arm, to the vine-clad arbor. Brigaut, unable to work, came three times a day to see his little friend; he was gnawed by a grief which made him indifferent to life. He lay in wait like a dog for Monsieur Martener,

and followed him when he left the house. The old grandmother, drunk with grief, had the courage to conceal her despair; she showed her darling the smiling face she formerly wore at Pen-Hoel. In her desire to produce that illusion in the girl's mind, she made her a little Breton cap like the one Pierrette had worn on her first arrival in Provins; it made the darling seem more like her childlike self; in it she was delightful to look upon, her sweet face circled with a halo of cambric and fluted lace. Her skin, white with the whiteness of unglazed porcelain, her forehead, where suffering had printed the semblance of deep thought, the purity of the lines refined by illness, the slowness of the glances, and the occasional fixity of the eyes, made Pierrette an almost perfect embodiment of melancholy. She was served by all with a sort of fanaticism; she was felt to be so gentle, so tender, so loving. Madame Martener sent her piano to her sister Madame Auffray, thinking to amuse Pierrette who was passionately fond of music. It was a poem to watch her listening to a theme of Weber, or Beethoven, or Herold,--her eyes raised, her lips silent, regretting no doubt the life escaping her. The cure Peroux and Monsieur Habert, her two religious comforters, admired her saintly resignation. Surely the seraphic perfection of young girls and young men marked with the hectic of death, is a wonderful fact worthy of the attention alike of philosophers and of heedless minds. He who has ever seen one of these sublime departures from this life can never remain, or become, an unbeliever. Such beings exhale, as it were, a celestial fragrance; their glances speak of God; the voices are eloquent in the simplest words; often they ring like some seraphic instrument revealing the secrets of the future. When Monsieur Martener praised her for having faithfully followed a harsh prescription the little angel replied, and with what a glance!--

"I want to live, dear Monsieur Martener; but less for myself than for my grandmother, for my Brigaut, for all of you who will grieve at my death."

The first time she went into the garden on a beautiful sunny day in November attended by all the household, Madame Auffray asked her if she was tired.

"No, now that I have no sufferings but those God sends I can bear all," she said. "The joy of being loved gives me strength to suffer."

That was the only time (and then vaguely) that she ever alluded to her horrible martyrdom at the Rogrons, whom she never mentioned, and of whom no one reminded her, knowing well how painful the memory must be.

"Dear Madame Auffray," she said one day at noon on the terrace, as she gazed at the valley, warmed by a glorious sun and colored with the glowing tints of autumn, "my death in your house gives me more happiness than I have had since I left Brittany."

Madame Auffray whispered in her sister Martener's ear:--

"How she would have loved!"

In truth, her tones, her looks gave to her words a priceless value.

Monsieur Martener corresponded with Doctor Bianchon, and did nothing of importance without his advice. He hoped in the first place to regular the functions of nature and to draw away the abscess in the

head through the ear. The more Pierrette suffered, the more he hoped. He gained some slight success at times, and that was a great triumph. For several days Pierrette's appetite returned and enabled her to take nourishing food for which her illness had given her a repugnance; the color of her skin changed; but the condition of her head was terrible. Monsieur Martener entreated the great physician his adviser to come down. Bianchon came, stayed two days, and resolved to undertake an operation. To spare the feelings of poor Martener he went to Paris and brought back with him the celebrated Desplein. Thus the operation was performed by the greatest surgeon of ancient or modern times; but that terrible diviner said to Martener as he departed with Bianchon, his best-loved pupil:--

"Nothing but a miracle can save her. As Horace told you, caries of the bone has begun. At her age the bones are so tender."

The operation was performed at the beginning of March, 1828. During all that month, distressed by Pierrette's horrible sufferings, Monsieur Martener made several journeys to Paris; there he consulted Desplein and Bianchon, and even went so far as to propose to them an operation of the nature of lithotrity, which consists in passing into the head a hollow instrument by the help of which an heroic remedy can be applied to the diseased bone, to arrest the progress of the caries. Even the bold Desplein dared not attempt that high-handed surgical measure, which despair alone had suggested to Martener. When he returned home from Paris he seemed to his friends morose and gloomy. He was forced to announce on that fatal evening to the Auffrays and Madame Lorrain and to the two priests and Brigaut that science could do no more for Pierrette, whose recovery was now in God's hands only. The consternation among them was terrible. The grandmother made a vow, and requested the priests to say a mass every morning at daybreak before Pierrette rose,--a mass at which she and Brigaut might be present.

The trial came on. While the victim lay dying, Vinet was calumniating her in court. The judge approved and accepted the report of the Family Council, and Vinet instantly appealed. The newly appointed _procureur du roi_ made a requisition which necessitated fresh evidence. Rogron and his sister were forced to give bail to avoid going to prison. The order for fresh evidence included that of Pierrette herself. When Monsieur Desfondrilles came to the Auffrays' to receive it, Pierrette was dying, her confessor was at her bedside about to administer extreme unction. At that moment she entreated all present to forgive her cousins as she herself forgave them, saying with her simple good sense that the judgment of these things belonged to God alone.

"Grandmother," she said, "leave all you have to Brigaut" (Brigaut burst into tears); "and," continued Pierrette, "give a thousand francs to that kind Adele who warmed my bed. If Adele had remained with my cousins I should not now be dying."

It was at three o'clock on the Tuesday of Easter week, on a beautiful, bright day, that the angel ceased to suffer. Her heroic grandmother wished to watch all that night with the priests, and to sew with her stiff old fingers her darling's shroud. Towards evening Brigaut left the Auffray's house and went to Frappier's.

"I need not ask you, my poor boy, for news," said the cabinet-maker.

"Pere Frappier, yes, it is ended for her--but not for me."

He cast a look upon the different woods piled up around the shop,--a look of painful meaning.

"I understand you, Brigaut," said his worthy master. "Take all you want." And he showed him the oaken planks of two-inch thickness.

"Don't help me, Monsieur Frappier," said the Breton, "I wish to do it alone."

He passed the night in planing and fitting Pierrette's coffin, and more than once his plane took off at a single pass a ribbon of wood which was wet with tears. The good man Frappier smoked his pipe and watched him silently, saying only, when the four pieces were joined together,--

"Make the cover to slide; her poor grandmother will not hear the nails."

At daybreak Brigaut went out to fetch the lead to line the coffin. By a strange chance, the sheets of lead cost just the sum he had given Pierrette for her journey from Nantes to Provins. The brave Breton, who was able to resist the awful pain of himself making the coffin of his dear one and lining with his memories those burial planks, could not bear up against this strange reminder. His strength gave way; he was not able to lift the lead, and the plumber, seeing this, came with him, and offered to accompany him to the house and solder the last sheet when the body had been laid in the coffin.

The Breton burned the plane and all the tools he had used. Then he settled his accounts with Frappier and bade him farewell. The heroism with which the poor lad personally performed, like the grandmother, the last offices for Pierrette made him a sharer in the awful scene which crowned the tyranny of the Rogrons.

Brigaut and the plumber reached the house of Monsieur Auffray just in time to decide by their own main force an infamous and shocking judicial question. The room where the dead girl lay was full of people, and presented to the eyes of the two men a singular sight. The Rogron emissaries were standing beside the body of their victim, to torture her even after death. The corpse of the child, solemn in its beauty, lay on the cot-bed of her grandmother. Pierrette's eyes were closed, the brown hair smoothed upon her brow, the body swathed in a coarse cotton sheet.

Before the bed, on her knees, her hair in disorder, her hands stretched out, her face on fire, the old Lorrain was crying out, "No, no, it shall not be done!"

At the foot of the bed stood Monsieur Auffray and the two priests. The tapers were still burning.

Opposite to the grandmother was the surgeon of the hospital, with an assistant, and near him stood Doctor Neraud and Vinet. The surgeon wore his dissecting apron; the assistant had opened a case of instruments and was handing him a knife.

This scene was interrupted by the noise of the coffin which Brigaut

and the plumber set down upon the floor. Then Brigaut, advancing, was horrified at the sight of Madame Lorrain, who was now weeping.

"What is the matter?" he asked, standing beside her and grasping the chisel convulsively in his hand.

"This," said the old woman, "_this_", Brigaut: they want to open the body of my child and cut into her head, and stab her heart after her death as they did when she was living."

"Who?" said Brigaut, in a voice that might have deafened the men of law.

"The Rogrons."

"In the sacred name of God!--"

"Stop, Brigaut," said Monsieur Auffray, seeing the lad brandish his chisel.

"Monsieur Auffray," said Brigaut, as white as his dead companion, "I hear you because you are Monsieur Auffray, but at this moment I will not listen to--"

"The law!" said Auffray.

"Is there law? is there justice?" cried the Breton. "Justice, this is it!" and he advanced to the lawyer and the doctors, threatening them with his chisel.

"My friend," said the curate, "the law has been invoked by the lawyer of Monsieur Rogron, who is under the weight of a serious accusation; and it is impossible for us to refuse him the means of justification. The lawyer of Monsieur Rogron claims that if the poor child died of an abscess in her head her former guardian cannot be blamed, for it is proved that Pierrette concealed the effects of the blow which she gave to herself--"

"Enough!" said Brigaut.

"My client--" began Vinet.

"Your client," cried the Breton, "shall go to hell and I to the scaffold; for if one of you dares to touch her whom your client has killed, I will kill him if my weapon does its duty."

"This is interference with the law," said Vinet. "I shall instantly inform the court."

The five men left the room.

"Oh, my son!" cried the old woman, rising from her knees and falling on Brigaut's neck, "let us bury her quick,--they will come back."

"If we solder the lead," said the plumber, "they may not dare to open it."

Monsieur Auffray hastened to his brother-in-law, Monsieur Lesourd, to try and settle the matter. Vinet was not unwilling. Pierrette being

dead the suit about the guardianship fell, of course, to the ground. All the astute lawyer wanted was the effect produced by his request.

At midday Monsieur Desfondrilles made his report on the case, and the court rendered a decision that there was no ground for further action.

Rogron dared not go to Pierrette's funeral, at which the whole town was present. Vinet wished to force him there, but the miserable man was afraid of exciting universal horror.

Brigaut left Provins after watching the filling up of the grave where Pierrette lay, and went on foot to Paris. He wrote a petition to the Dauphiness asking, in the name of his father, that he might enter the Royal guard, to which he was at once admitted. When the expedition to Algiers was undertaken he wrote to her again, to obtain employment in it. He was then a sergeant; Marshal Bourmont gave him an appointment as sub-lieutenant in a line regiment. The major's son behaved like a man who wished to die. Death has, however, respected Jacques Brigaut up to the present time; although he has distinguished himself in all the recent expeditions he has never yet been wounded. He is now major in a regiment of infantry. No officer is more taciturn or more trustworthy. Outside of his duty he is almost mute; he walks alone and lives mechanically. Every one divines and respects a hidden sorrow. He possesses forty-six thousand francs, which old Madame Lorrain, who died in Paris in 1829, bequeathed to him.

At the elections of 1830 Vinet was made a deputy. The services he rendered the new government have now earned him the position of procureur-general. His influence is such that he will always remain a deputy. Rogron is receiver-general in the same town where Vinet fulfils his legal functions; and by one of those curious tricks of chance which do so often occur, Monsieur Tiphaine is president of the Royal court in the same town,--for the worthy man gave in his adhesion to the dynasty of July without the slightest hesitation. The ex-beautiful Madame Tiphaine lives on excellent terms with the beautiful Madame Rogron. Vinet is hand in glove with Madame Tiphaine.

As to the imbecile Rogron, he makes such remarks as, "Louis-Philippe will never be really king till he is able to make nobles."

The speech is evidently not his own. His health is failing, which allows Madame Rogron to hope she may soon marry the General Marquis de Montriveau, peer of France, who commands the department, and is paying her attentions. Vinet is in his element, seeking victims; he never believes in the innocence of an accused person. This thoroughbred prosecutor is held to be one of the most amiable men on the circuit; and he is no less liked in Paris and in the Chamber; at court he is a charming courtier.

According to a certain promise made by Vinet, General Baron Gouraud, that noble relic of our glorious armies, married a Mademoiselle Matifat, twenty-five years old, daughter of a druggist in the rue des Lombards, whose dowry was a hundred thousand francs. He commands (as Vinet prophesied) a department in the neighborhood of Paris. He was named peer of France for his conduct in the riots which occurred during the ministry of Casimir Perier. Baron Gouraud was one of the generals who took the church of Saint-Merry, delighted to rap those rascally civilians who had vexed him for years over the knuckles; for which service he was rewarded with the grand cordon of the Legion of

honor.

None of the personages connected with Pierrette's death ever felt the slightest remorse about it. Monsieur Desfondrilles is still archaeological, but, in order to compass his own election, the _procureur general_ Vinet took pains to have him appointed president of the Provins court. Sylvie has a little circle, and manages her brother's property; she lends her own money at high interest, and does not spend more than twelve hundred francs a year.

From time to time, when some former son or daughter of Provins returns from Paris to settle down, you may hear them ask, as they leave Mademoiselle Rogron's house, "Wasn't there a painful story against the Rogrons,--something about a ward?"

"Mere prejudice," replies Monsieur Desfondrilles. "Certain persons tried to make us believe falsehoods. Out of kindness of heart the Rogrons took in a girl named Pierrette, quite pretty but with no money. Just as she was growing up she had an intrigue with a young man, and stood at her window barefooted talking to him. The lovers passed notes to each other by a string. She took cold in this way and died, having no constitution. The Rogrons behaved admirably. They made no claim on certain property which was to come to her,--they gave it all up to the grandmother. The moral of it was, my good friend, that the devil punishes those who try to benefit others."

"Ah! that is quite another story from the one old Frappier told me."

"Frappier consults his wine-cellar more than he does his memory," remarked another of Mademoiselle Rogron's visitors.

"But that old priest, Monsieur Habert says--"

"Oh, he! don't you know why?"

"No."

"He wanted to marry his sister to Monsieur Rogron, the receiver-general."

* * * * *

Two men think of Pierrette daily: Doctor Martener and Major Brigaut; they alone know the hideous truth.

To give that truth its true proportions we must transport the scene to the Rome of the middle ages, where a sublime young girl, Beatrice Cenci, was brought to the scaffold by motives and intrigues that were almost identical with those which laid our Pierrette in her grave. Beatrice Cenci had but one defender,--an artist, a painter. In our day history, and living men, on the faith of Guido Reni's portrait, condemn the Pope, and know that Beatrice was a most tender victim of infamous passions and base feuds.

We must all agree that legality would be a fine thing for social scoundrelism IF THERE WERE NO GOD.

ADDENDUM

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

Bianchon, Horace

Father Goriot

The Atheist's Mass

Cesar Birotteau

The Commission in Lunacy

Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

A Bachelor's Establishment

The Secrets of a Princess

The Government Clerks

A Study of Woman

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Honorine

The Seamy Side of History

The Magic Skin

A Second Home

A Prince of Bohemia

Letters of Two Brides

The Muse of the Department

The Imaginary Mistress

The Middle Classes

Cousin Betty

The Country Parson

In addition, M. Bianchon narrated the following:

Another Study of Woman

La Grande Breteche

Brigaut, Major

The Chouans

Desplein

The Atheist's Mass

Cousin Pons

Lost Illusions

The Thirteen

The Government Clerks

A Bachelor's Establishment

The Seamy Side of History

Modeste Mignon

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Honorine

Gouraud, General, Baron

Cousin Pons

Keller, Adolphe

The Middle Classes

Cesar Birotteau

Matifat, Mademoiselle

Cesar Birotteau

The Firm of Nucingen

Montriveau, General Marquis Armand de

The Thirteen
Father Goriot
Lost Illusions
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
Another Study of Woman
The Member for Arcis

Nucingen, Baron Frederic de
The Firm of Nucingen
Father Goriot
Cesar Birotteau
Lost Illusions
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Another Study of Woman
The Secrets of a Princess
A Man of Business
Cousin Betty
The Muse of the Department
The Unconscious Humorists

Roguin
Cesar Birotteau
Eugenie Grandet
A Bachelor's Establishment
The Vendetta

Roguin, Madame
Cesar Birotteau
At the Sign of the Cat and Racket
A Second Home
A Daughter of Eve

Tillet, Ferdinand du
Cesar Birotteau
The Firm of Nucingen
The Middle Classes
A Bachelor's Establishment
Melmoth Reconciled
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
The Secrets of a Princess
A Daughter of Eve
The Member for Arcis
Cousin Betty
The Unconscious Humorists

Tiphaine, Madame
The Vendetta

Vinet
The Member for Arcis
The Middle Classes
Cousin Pons

BY
HONORE DE BALZAC

Translated by
Katharine Prescott Wormeley

DEDICATION

To David, Sculptor:

The permanence of the work on which I inscribe your name --twice made illustrious in this century--is very problematical; whereas you have graven mine in bronze which survives nations --if only in their coins. The day may come when numismatists, discovering amid the ashes of Paris existences perpetuated by you, will wonder at the number of heads crowned in your atelier and endeavour to find in them new dynasties.

To you, this divine privilege; to me, gratitude.

De Balzac.

THE VICAR OF TOURS

I

Early in the autumn of 1826 the Abbe Birotteau, the principal personage of this history, was overtaken by a shower of rain as he returned home from a friend's house, where he had been passing the evening. He therefore crossed, as quickly as his corpulence would allow, the deserted little square called "The Cloister," which lies directly behind the chancel of the cathedral of Saint-Gatien at Tours.

The Abbe Birotteau, a short little man, apoplectic in constitution and about sixty years old, had already gone through several attacks of gout. Now, among the petty miseries of human life the one for which the worthy priest felt the deepest aversion was the sudden sprinkling of his shoes, adorned with silver buckles, and the wetting of their soles. Notwithstanding the woollen socks in which at all seasons he enveloped his feet with the extreme care that ecclesiastics take of themselves, he was apt at such times to get them a little damp, and the next day gout was sure to give him certain infallible proofs of constancy. Nevertheless, as the pavement of the Cloister was likely to be dry, and as the abbe had won three francs ten sous in his rubber with Madame de Listomere, he bore the rain resignedly from the middle of the place de l'Archeveche, where it began to come down in earnest. Besides, he was fondling his chimera,--a desire already twelve years

old, the desire of a priest, a desire formed anew every evening and now, apparently, very near accomplishment; in short, he had wrapped himself so completely in the fur cape of a canon that he did not feel the inclemency of the weather. During the evening several of the company who habitually gathered at Madame de Listomere's had almost guaranteed to him his nomination to the office of canon (then vacant in the metropolitan Chapter of Saint-Gatien), assuring him that no one deserved such promotion as he, whose rights, long overlooked, were indisputable.

If he had lost the rubber, if he had heard that his rival, the Abbe Poirel, was named canon, the worthy man would have thought the rain extremely chilling; he might even have thought ill of life. But it so chanced that he was in one of those rare moments when happy inward sensations make a man oblivious of discomfort. In hastening his steps he obeyed a more mechanical impulse, and truth (so essential in a history of manners and morals) compels us to say that he was thinking of neither rain nor gout.

In former days there was in the Cloister, on the side towards the Grand'Rue, a cluster of houses forming a Close and belonging to the cathedral, where several of the dignitaries of the Chapter lived. After the confiscation of ecclesiastical property the town had turned the passage through this close into a narrow street, called the Rue de la Psalette, by which pedestrians passed from the Cloister to the Grand'Rue. The name of this street, proves clearly enough that the precentor and his pupils and those connected with the choir formerly lived there. The other side, the left side, of the street is occupied by a single house, the walls of which are overshadowed by the buttresses of Saint-Gatien, which have their base in the narrow little garden of the house, leaving it doubtful whether the cathedral was

built before or after this venerable dwelling. An archaeologist examining the arabesques, the shape of the windows, the arch of the door, the whole exterior of the house, now mellow with age, would see at once that it had always been a part of the magnificent edifice with which it is blended.

An antiquary (had there been one at Tours,--one of the least literary towns in all France) would even discover, where the narrow street enters the Cloister, several vestiges of an old arcade, which formerly made a portico to these ecclesiastical dwellings, and was, no doubt, harmonious in style with the general character of the architecture.

The house of which we speak, standing on the north side of the cathedral, was always in the shadow thrown by that vast edifice, on which time had cast its dingy mantle, marked its furrows, and shed its chill humidity, its lichen, mosses, and rank herbs. The darkened dwelling was wrapped in silence, broken only by the bells, by the chanting of the offices heard through the windows of the church, by the call of the jackdaws nesting in the belfries. The region is a desert of stones, a solitude with a character of its own, an arid spot, which could only be inhabited by beings who had either attained to absolute nullity, or were gifted with some abnormal strength of soul. The house in question had always been occupied by abbes, and it belonged to an old maid named Mademoiselle Gamard. Though the property had been bought from the national domain under the Reign of Terror by the father of Mademoiselle Gamard, no one objected under the Restoration to the old maid's retaining it, because she took priests

to board and was very devout; it may be that religious persons gave her credit for the intention of leaving the property to the Chapter.

The Abbe Birotteau was making his way to this house, where he had lived for the last two years. His apartment had been (as was now the canonry) an object of envy and his "hoc erat in votis" for a dozen years. To be Mademoiselle Gamard's boarder and to become a canon were the two great desires of his life; in fact they do present accurately the ambition of a priest, who, considering himself on the highroad to eternity, can wish for nothing in this world but good lodging, good food, clean garments, shoes with silver buckles, a sufficiency of things for the needs of the animal, and a canonry to satisfy self-love, that inexpressible sentiment which follows us, they say, into the presence of God,—for there are grades among the saints. But the covetous desire for the apartment which the Abbe Birotteau was now inhabiting (a very harmless desire in the eyes of worldly people) had been to the abbe nothing less than a passion, a passion full of obstacles, and, like more guilty passions, full of hopes, pleasures, and remorse.

The interior arrangements of the house did not allow Mademoiselle Gamard to take more than two lodgers. Now, for about twelve years before the day when Birotteau went to live with her she had undertaken to keep in health and contentment two priests; namely, Monsieur l'Abbe Troubert and Monsieur l'Abbe Chapeloud. The Abbe Troubert still lived. The Abbe Chapeloud was dead; and Birotteau had stepped into his place.

The late Abbe Chapeloud, in life a canon of Saint-Gatien, had been an intimate friend of the Abbe Birotteau. Every time that the latter paid a visit to the canon he had constantly admired the apartment, the furniture and the library. Out of this admiration grew the desire to possess these beautiful things. It had been impossible for the Abbe Birotteau to stifle this desire; though it often made him suffer terribly when he reflected that the death of his best friend could alone satisfy his secret covetousness, which increased as time went on. The Abbe Chapeloud and his friend Birotteau were not rich. Both were sons of peasants; and their slender savings had been spent in the mere costs of living during the disastrous years of the Revolution. When Napoleon restored the Catholic worship the Abbe Chapeloud was appointed canon of the cathedral and Birotteau was made vicar of it. Chapeloud then went to board with Mademoiselle Gamard. When Birotteau first came to visit his friend, he thought the arrangement of the rooms excellent, but he noticed nothing more. The outset of this concupiscence of chattels was very like that of a true passion, which often begins, in a young man, with cold admiration for a woman whom he ends in loving forever.

The apartment, reached by a stone staircase, was on the side of the house that faced south. The Abbe Troubert occupied the ground-floor, and Mademoiselle Gamard the first floor of the main building, looking on the street. When Chapeloud took possession of his rooms they were bare of furniture, and the ceilings were blackened with smoke. The stone mantelpieces, which were very badly cut, had never been painted. At first, the only furniture the poor canon could put in was a bed, a table, a few chairs, and the books he possessed. The apartment was like a beautiful woman in rags. But two or three years later, an old lady having left the Abbe Chapeloud two thousand francs, he spent that sum on the purchase of an oak bookcase, the relic of a chateau pulled down by the Bande Noire, the carving of which deserved the admiration

of all artists. The abbe made the purchase less because it was very cheap than because the dimensions of the bookcase exactly fitted the space it was to fill in his gallery. His savings enabled him to renovate the whole gallery, which up to this time had been neglected and shabby. The floor was carefully waxed, the ceiling whitened, the wood-work painted to resemble the grain and knots of oak. A long table in ebony and two cabinets by Boulle completed the decoration, and gave to this gallery a certain air that was full of character. In the course of two years the liberality of devout persons, and legacies, though small ones, from pious penitents, filled the shelves of the bookcase, till then half empty. Moreover, Chapeloud's uncle, an old Oratorian, had left him his collection in folio of the Fathers of the Church, and several other important works that were precious to a priest.

Birotteau, more and more surprised by the successive improvements of the gallery, once so bare, came by degrees to a condition of involuntary envy. He wished he could possess that apartment, so thoroughly in keeping with the gravity of ecclesiastical life. The passion increased from day to day. Working, sometimes for days together, in this retreat, the vicar could appreciate the silence and the peace that reigned there. During the following year the Abbe Chapeloud turned a small room into an oratory, which his pious friends took pleasure in beautifying. Still later, another lady gave the canon a set of furniture for his bedroom, the covering of which she had embroidered under the eyes of the worthy man without his ever suspecting its destination. The bedroom then had the same effect upon the vicar that the gallery had long had; it dazzled him. Lastly, about three years before the Abbe Chapeloud's death, he completed the comfort of his apartment by decorating the salon. Though the furniture was plainly covered in red Utrecht velvet, it fascinated Birotteau. From the day when the canon's friend first laid eyes on the red damask curtains, the mahogany furniture, the Aubusson carpet which adorned the vast room, then lately painted, his envy of Chapeloud's apartment became a monomania hidden within his breast. To live there, to sleep in that bed with the silk curtains where the canon slept, to have all Chapeloud's comforts about him, would be, Birotteau felt, complete happiness; he saw nothing beyond it. All the envy, all the ambition which the things of this world give birth to in the hearts of other men concentrated themselves for Birotteau in the deep and secret longing he felt for an apartment like that which the Abbe Chapeloud had created for himself. When his friend fell ill he went to him out of true affection; but all the same, when he first heard of his illness, and when he sat by his bed to keep him company, there arose in the depths of his consciousness, in spite of himself, a crowd of thoughts the simple formula of which was always, "If Chapeloud dies I can have this apartment." And yet--Birotteau having an excellent heart, contracted ideas, and a limited mind--he did not go so far as to think of means by which to make his friend bequeath to him the library and the furniture.

The Abbe Chapeloud, an amiable, indulgent egoist, fathomed his friend's desires--not a difficult thing to do--and forgave them; which may seem less easy to a priest; but it must be remembered that the vicar, whose friendship was faithful, did not fail to take a daily walk with his friend along their usual path in the Mail de Tours, never once depriving him of an instant of the time devoted for over twenty years to that exercise. Birotteau, who regarded his secret wishes as crimes, would have been capable, out of contrition, of the

utmost devotion to his friend. The latter paid his debt of gratitude for a friendship so ingenuously sincere by saying, a few days before his death, as the vicar sat by him reading the "Quotidienne" aloud: "This time you will certainly get the apartment. I feel it is all over with me now."

Accordingly, it was found that the Abbe Chapeloud had left his library and all his furniture to his friend Birotteau. The possession of these things, so keenly desired, and the prospect of being taken to board by Mademoiselle Gamard, certainly did allay the grief which Birotteau felt at the death of his friend the canon. He might not have been willing to resuscitate him; but he mourned him. For several days he was like Gargantus, who, when his wife died in giving birth to Pantagruel, did not know whether to rejoice at the birth of a son or grieve at having buried his good Babette, and therefore cheated himself by rejoicing at the death of his wife, and deploring the advent of Pantagruel.

The Abbe Birotteau spent the first days of his mourning in verifying the books in his library, in making use of his furniture, in examining the whole of his inheritance, saying in a tone which, unfortunately, was not noted at the time, "Poor Chapeloud!" His joy and his grief so completely absorbed him that he felt no pain when he found that the office of canon, in which the late Chapeloud had hoped his friend Birotteau might succeed him, was given to another. Mademoiselle Gamard having cheerfully agreed to take the vicar to board, the latter was thenceforth a participator in all those felicities of material comfort of which the deceased canon had been wont to boast.

Incalculable they were! According to the Abbe Chapeloud none of the priests who inhabited the city of Tours, not even the archbishop, had ever been the object of such minute and delicate attentions as those bestowed by Mademoiselle Gamard on her two lodgers. The first words the canon said to his friend when they met for their walk on the Mail referred usually to the succulent dinner he had just eaten; and it was a very rare thing if during the walks of each week he did not say at least fourteen times, "That excellent spinster certainly has a vocation for serving ecclesiastics."

"Just think," the canon would say to Birotteau, "that for twelve consecutive years nothing has ever been amiss,--linen in perfect order, bands, albs, surplices; I find everything in its place, always in sufficient quantity, and smelling of orris-root. My furniture is rubbed and kept so bright that I don't know when I have seen any dust--did you ever see a speck of it in my rooms? Then the firewood is so well selected. The least little things are excellent. In fact, Mademoiselle Gamard keeps an incessant watch over my wants. I can't remember having rung twice for anything--no matter what--in ten years. That's what I call living! I never have to look for a single thing, not even my slippers. Always a good fire, always a good dinner. Once the bellows annoyed me, the nozzle was choked up; but I only mentioned it once, and the next day Mademoiselle gave me a very pretty pair, also those nice tongs you see me mend the fire with."

For all answer Birotteau would say, "Smelling of orris-root!" That "smelling of orris-root" always affected him. The canon's remarks revealed ideal joys to the poor vicar, whose bands and albs were the plague of his life, for he was totally devoid of method and often

forgot to order his dinner. Therefore, if he saw Mademoiselle Gamard at Saint-Gatien while saying mass or taking round the plate, he never failed to give her a kindly and benevolent look,--such a look as Saint Teresa might have cast to heaven.

Though the comforts which all creatures desire, and for which he had so often longed, thus fell to his share, the Abbe Birotteau, like the rest of the world, found it difficult, even for a priest, to live without something to hanker for. Consequently, for the last eighteen months he had replaced his two satisfied passions by an ardent longing for a canonry. The title of Canon had become to him very much what a peerage is to a plebeian minister. The prospect of an appointment, hopes of which had just been held out to him at Madame de Listomere's, so completely turned his head that he did not observe until he reached his own door that he had left his umbrella behind him. Perhaps, even then, if the rain were not falling in torrents he might not have missed it, so absorbed was he in the pleasure of going over and over in his mind what had been said to him on the subject of his promotion by the company at Madame de Listomere's,--an old lady with whom he spent every Wednesday evening.

The vicar rang loudly, as if to let the servant know she was not to keep him waiting. Then he stood close to the door to avoid, if he could, getting showered; but the drip from the roof fell precisely on the toes of his shoes, and the wind blew gusts of rain into his face that were much like a shower-bath. Having calculated the time necessary for the woman to leave the kitchen and pull the string of the outer door, he rang again, this time in a manner that resulted in a very significant peal of the bell.

"They can't be out," he said to himself, not hearing any movement on the premises.

Again he rang, producing a sound that echoed sharply through the house and was taken up and repeated by all the echoes of the cathedral, so that no one could avoid waking up at the remonstrating racket. Accordingly, in a few moments, he heard, not without some pleasure in his wrath, the wooden shoes of the servant-woman clacking along the paved path which led to the outer door. But even then the discomforts of the gouty old gentleman were not so quickly over as he hoped. Instead of pulling the string, Marianne was obliged to turn the lock of the door with its heavy key, and pull back all the bolts.

"Why did you let me ring three times in such weather?" said the vicar.

"But, monsieur, don't you see the door was locked? We have all been in bed ever so long; it struck a quarter to eleven some time ago. Mademoiselle must have thought you were in."

"You saw me go out, yourself. Besides, Mademoiselle knows very well I always go to Madame de Listomere's on Wednesday evening."

"I only did as Mademoiselle told me, monsieur."

These words struck the vicar a blow, which he felt the more because his late revery had made him completely happy. He said nothing and followed Marianne towards the kitchen to get his candlestick, which he supposed had been left there as usual. But instead of entering the kitchen Marianne went on to his own apartments, and there the vicar

beheld his candlestick on a table close to the door of the red salon, in a sort of antechamber formed by the landing of the staircase, which the late canon had inclosed with a glass partition. Mute with amazement, he entered his bedroom hastily, found no fire, and called to Marianne, who had not had time to get downstairs.

"You have not lighted the fire!" he said.

"Beg pardon, Monsieur l'abbe, I did," she said; "it must have gone out."

Birotteau looked again at the hearth, and felt convinced that the fire had been out since morning.

"I must dry my feet," he said. "Make the fire."

Marianne obeyed with the haste of a person who wants to get back to her night's rest. While looking about him for his slippers, which were not in the middle of his bedside carpet as usual, the abbe took mental notes of the state of Marianne's dress, which convinced him that she had not got out of bed to open the door as she said she had. He then recollected that for the last two weeks he had been deprived of various little attentions which for eighteen months had made life sweet to him. Now, as the nature of narrow minds induces them to study trifles, Birotteau plunged suddenly into deep meditation on these four circumstances, imperceptible in their meaning to others, but to him indicative of four catastrophes. The total loss of his happiness was evidently foreshadowed in the neglect to place his slippers, in Marianne's falsehood about the fire, in the unusual removal of his candlestick to the table of the antechamber, and in the evident intention to keep him waiting in the rain.

When the fire was burning on the hearth, and the lamp was lighted, and Marianne had departed without saying, as usual, "Does Monsieur want anything more?" the Abbe Birotteau let himself fall gently into the wide and handsome easy-chair of his late friend; but there was something mournful in the movement with which he dropped upon it. The good soul was crushed by a presentiment of coming calamity. His eyes roved successively to the handsome tall clock, the bureau, curtains, chairs, carpets, to the stately bed, the basin of holy-water, the crucifix, to a Virgin by Valentin, a Christ by Lebrun,--in short, to all the accessories of this cherished room, while his face expressed the anguish of the tenderest farewell that a lover ever took of his first mistress, or an old man of his lately planted trees. The vicar had just perceived, somewhat late it is true, the signs of a dumb persecution instituted against him for the last three months by Mademoiselle Gamard, whose evil intentions would doubtless have been fathomed much sooner by a more intelligent man. Old maids have a special talent for accentuating the words and actions which their dislikes suggest to them. They scratch like cats. They not only wound but they take pleasure in wounding, and in making their victim see that he is wounded. A man of the world would never have allowed himself to be scratched twice; the good abbe, on the contrary, had taken several blows from those sharp claws before he could be brought to believe in any evil intention.

But when he did perceive it, he set to work, with the inquisitorial sagacity which priests acquire by directing consciences and burrowing into the nothings of the confessional, to establish, as though it were

a matter of religious controversy, the following proposition:

"Admitting that Mademoiselle Gamard did not remember it was Madame de Listomere's evening, and that Marianne did think I was home, and did really forget to make my fire, it is impossible, inasmuch as I myself took down my candlestick this morning, that Mademoiselle Gamard, seeing it in her salon, could have supposed I had gone to bed. Ergo, Mademoiselle Gamard intended that I should stand out in the rain, and, by carrying my candlestick upstairs, she meant to make me understand it. What does it all mean?" he said aloud, roused by the gravity of these circumstances, and rising as he spoke to take off his damp clothes, get into his dressing-gown, and do up his head for the night. Then he returned from the bed to the fireplace, gesticulating, and launching forth in various tones the following sentences, all of which ended in a high falsetto key, like notes of interjection:

"What the deuce have I done to her? Why is she angry with me? Marianne did not forget my fire! Mademoiselle told her not to light it! I must be a child if I can't see, from the tone and manner she has been taking to me, that I've done something to displease her. Nothing like it ever happened to Chapeloud! I can't live in the midst of such torments as--At my age--"

He went to bed hoping that the morrow might enlighten him on the causes of the dislike which threatened to destroy forever the happiness he had now enjoyed two years after wishing for it so long. Alas! the secret reasons for the inimical feelings Mademoiselle Gamard bore to the luckless abbe were fated to remain eternally unknown to him,--not that they were difficult to fathom, but simply because he lacked the good faith and candor by which great souls and scoundrels look within and judge themselves. A man of genius or a trickster says to himself, "I did wrong." Self-interest and native talent are the only infallible and lucid guides. Now the Abbe Birotteau, whose goodness amounted to stupidity, whose knowledge was only, as it were, plastered on him by dint of study, who had no experience whatever of the world and its ways, who lived between the mass and the confessional, chiefly occupied in dealing the most trivial matters of conscience in his capacity of confessor to all the schools in town and to a few noble souls who rightly appreciated him,--the Abbe Birotteau must be regarded as a great child, to whom most of the practices of social life were utterly unknown. And yet, the natural selfishness of all human beings, reinforced by the selfishness peculiar to the priesthood and that of the narrow life of the provinces had insensibly, and unknown to himself, developed within him. If any one had felt enough interest in the good man to probe his spirit and prove to him that in the numerous petty details of his life and in the minute duties of his daily existence he was essentially lacking in the self-sacrifice he professed, he would have punished and mortified himself in good faith. But those whom we offend by such unconscious selfishness pay little heed to our real innocence; what they want is vengeance, and they take it. Thus it happened that Birotteau, weak brother that he was, was made to undergo the decrees of that great distributive Justice which goes about compelling the world to execute its judgments,--called by ninnies "the misfortunes of life."

There was this difference between the late Chapeloud and the vicar, --one was a shrewd and clever egoist, the other a simple-minded and clumsy one. When the canon went to board with Mademoiselle Gamard he knew exactly how to judge of his landlady's character. The confessional had taught him to understand the bitterness that the

sense of being kept outside the social pale puts into the heart of an old maid; he therefore calculated his own treatment of Mademoiselle Gamard very wisely. She was then about thirty-eight years old, and still retained a few pretensions, which, in well-behaved persons of her condition, change, rather later, into strong personal self-esteem. The canon saw plainly that to live comfortably with his landlady he must pay her invariably the same attentions and be more infallible than the pope himself. To compass this result, he allowed no points of contact between himself and her except those that politeness demanded, and those which necessarily exist between two persons living under the same roof. Thus, though he and the Abbe Troubert took their regular three meals a day, he avoided the family breakfast by inducing Mademoiselle Gamard to send his coffee to his own room. He also avoided the annoyance of supper by taking tea in the houses of friends with whom he spent his evenings. In this way he seldom saw his landlady except at dinner; but he always came down to that meal a few minutes in advance of the hour. During this visit of courtesy, as it may be called, he talked to her, for the twelve years he had lived under her roof, on nearly the same topics, receiving from her the same answers. How she had slept, her breakfast, the trivial domestic events, her looks, her health, the weather, the time the church services had lasted, the incidents of the mass, the health of such or such a priest,—these were the subjects of their daily conversation. During dinner he invariably paid her certain indirect compliments; the fish had an excellent flavor; the seasoning of a sauce was delicious; Mademoiselle Gamard's capacities and virtues as mistress of a household were great. He was sure of flattering the old maid's vanity by praising the skill with which she made or prepared her preserves and pickles and pates and other gastronomical inventions. To cap all, the wily canon never left his landlady's yellow salon after dinner without remarking that there was no house in Tours where he could get such good coffee as that he had just imbibed.

Thanks to this thorough understanding of Mademoiselle Gamard's character, and to the science of existence which he had put in practice for the last twelve years, no matter of discussion on the internal arrangements of the household had ever come up between them. The Abbe Chapeloud had taken note of the spinster's angles, asperities, and crabbedness, and had so arranged his avoidance of her that he obtained without the least difficulty all the concessions that were necessary to the happiness and tranquility of his life. The result was that Mademoiselle Gamard frequently remarked to her friends and acquaintances that the Abbe Chapeloud was a very amiable man, extremely easy to live with, and a fine mind.

As to her other lodger, the Abbe Troubert, she said absolutely nothing about him. Completely involved in the round of her life, like a satellite in the orbit of a planet, Troubert was to her a sort of intermediary creature between the individuals of the human species and those of the canine species; he was classed in her heart next, but directly before, the place intended for friends but now occupied by a fat and wheezy pug which she tenderly loved. She ruled Troubert completely, and the intermingling of their interests was so obvious that many persons of her social sphere believed that the Abbe Troubert had designs on the old maid's property, and was binding her to him unawares with infinite patience, and really directing her while he seemed to be obeying without ever letting her perceive in him the slightest wish on his part to govern her.

When the Abbe Chapeloud died, the old maid, who desired a lodger with quiet ways, naturally thought of the vicar. Before the canon's will was made known she had meditated offering his rooms to the Abbe Troubert, who was not very comfortable on the ground-floor. But when the Abbe Birotteau, on receiving his legacy, came to settle in writing the terms of his board she saw he was so in love with the apartment, for which he might now admit his long cherished desires, that she dared not propose the exchange, and accordingly sacrificed her sentiments of friendship to the demands of self-interest. But in order to console her beloved canon, Mademoiselle took up the large white Chateau-Renaud bricks that made the floors of his apartment and replaced them by wooden floors laid in "point de Hongrie." She also rebuilt a smoky chimney.

For twelve years the Abbe Birotteau had seen his friend Chapeloud in that house without ever giving a thought to the motive of the canon's extreme circumspection in his relations to Mademoiselle Gamard. When he came himself to live with that saintly woman he was in the condition of a lover on the point of being made happy. Even if he had not been by nature purblind of intellect, his eyes were too dazzled by his new happiness to allow him to judge of the landlady, or to reflect on the limits which he ought to impose on their daily intercourse. Mademoiselle Gamard, seen from afar and through the prism of those material felicities which the vicar dreamed of enjoying in her house, seemed to him a perfect being, a faultless Christian, essentially charitable, the woman of the Gospel, the wise virgin, adorned by all those humble and modest virtues which shed celestial fragrance upon life.

So, with the enthusiasm of one who attains an object long desired, with the candor of a child, and the blundering foolishness of an old man utterly without worldly experience, he fell into the life of Mademoiselle Gamard precisely as a fly is caught in a spider's web. The first day that he went to dine and sleep at the house he was detained in the salon after dinner, partly to make his landlady's acquaintance, but chiefly by that inexplicable embarrassment which often assails timid people and makes them fear to seem impolite by breaking off a conversation in order to take leave. Consequently he remained there the whole evening. Then a friend of his, a certain Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix, came to see him, and this gave Mademoiselle Gamard the happiness of forming a card-table; so that when the vicar went to bed he felt that he had passed a very agreeable evening. Knowing Mademoiselle Gamard and the Abbe Troubert but slightly, he saw only the superficial aspects of their characters; few persons bare their defects at once, they generally take on a becoming veneer.

The worthy abbe was thus led to suggest to himself the charming plan of devoting all his evenings to Mademoiselle Gamard, instead of spending them, as Chapeloud had done, elsewhere. The old maid had for years been possessed by a desire which grew stronger day by day. This

desire, often formed by old persons and even by pretty women, had become in Mademoiselle Gamard's soul as ardent a longing as that of Birotteau for Chapeloud's apartment; and it was strengthened by all those feelings of pride, egotism, envy, and vanity which pre-exist in the breasts of worldly people.

This history is of all time; it suffices to widen slightly the narrow

circle in which these personages are about to act to find the coefficient reasons of events which take place in the very highest spheres of social life.

Mademoiselle Gamard spent her evenings by rotation in six or eight different houses. Whether it was that she disliked being obliged to go out to seek society, and considered that at her age she had a right to expect some return; or that her pride was wounded at receiving no company in her house; or that her self-love craved the compliments she saw her various hostesses receive,—certain it is that her whole ambition was to make her salon a centre towards which a given number of persons should nightly make their way with pleasure. One morning as she left Saint-Gatien, after Birotteau and his friend Mademoiselle Salomon had spent a few evenings with her and with the faithful and patient Troubert, she said to certain of her good friends whom she met at the church door, and whose slave she had hitherto considered herself, that those who wished to see her could certainly come once a week to her house, where she had friends enough to make a card-table; she could not leave the Abbe Birotteau; Mademoiselle Salomon had not missed a single evening that week; she was devoted to friends; and—et cetera, et cetera. Her speech was all the more humbly haughty and softly persuasive because Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix belonged to the most aristocratic society in Tours. For though Mademoiselle Salomon came to Mademoiselle Gamard's house solely out of friendship for the vicar, the old maid triumphed in receiving her, and saw that, thanks to Birotteau, she was on the point of succeeding in her great desire to form a circle as numerous and as agreeable as those of Madame de Listomere, Mademoiselle Merlin de la Blottiere, and other devout ladies who were in the habit of receiving the pious and ecclesiastical society of Tours.

But alas! the abbe Birotteau himself caused this cherished hope to miscarry. Now if those persons who in the course of their lives have attained to the enjoyment of a long desired happiness and have therefore comprehended the joy of the vicar when he stepped into Chapeloud's vacant place, they will also have gained some faint idea of Mademoiselle Gamard's distress at the overthrow of her favorite plan.

After accepting his happiness in the old maid's salon for six months with tolerable patience, Birotteau deserted the house of an evening, carrying with him Mademoiselle Salomon. In spite of her utmost efforts the ambitious Gamard had recruited barely six visitors, whose faithful attendance was more than problematical; and boston could not be played night after night unless at least four persons were present. The defection of her two principal guests obliged her therefore to make suitable apologies and return to her evening visiting among former friends; for old maids find their own company so distasteful that they prefer to seek the doubtful pleasures of society.

The cause of this desertion is plain enough. Although the vicar was one of those to whom heaven is hereafter to belong in virtue of the decree "Blessed are the poor in spirit," he could not, like some fools, endure the annoyance that other fools caused him. Persons without minds are like weeds that delight in good earth; they want to be amused by others, all the more because they are dull within. The incarnation of ennui to which they are victims, joined to the need they feel of getting a divorce from themselves, produces that passion for moving about, for being somewhere else than where they are, which

distinguishes their species,--and also that of all beings devoid of sensitiveness, and those who have missed their destiny, or who suffer by their own fault.

Without really fathoming the vacuity and emptiness of Mademoiselle Gamard's mind, or stating to himself the pettiness of her ideas, the poor abbe perceived, unfortunately too late, the defects which she shared with all old maids, and those which were peculiar to herself. The bad points of others show out so strongly against the good that they usually strike our eyes before they wound us. This moral phenomenon might, at a pinch, be made to excuse the tendency we all have, more or less, to gossip. It is so natural, socially speaking, to laugh at the failings of others that we ought to forgive the ridicule our own absurdities excite, and be annoyed only by calumny. But in this instance the eyes of the good vicar never reached the optical range which enables men of the world to see and evade their neighbours' rough points. Before he could be brought to perceive the faults of his landlady he was forced to undergo the warning which Nature gives to all her creatures--pain.

Old maids who have never yielded in their habits of life or in their characters to other lives and other characters, as the fate of woman exacts, have, as a general thing, a mania for making others give way to them. In Mademoiselle Gamard this sentiment had degenerated into despotism, but a despotism that could only exercise itself on little things. For instance (among a hundred other examples), the basket of counters placed on the card-table for the Abbe Birotteau was to stand exactly where she placed it; and the abbe annoyed her terribly by moving it, which he did nearly every evening. How is this sensitiveness stupidly spent on nothings to be accounted for? what is the object of it? No one could have told in this case; Mademoiselle Gamard herself knew no reason for it. The vicar, though a sheep by nature, did not like, any more than other sheep, to feel the crook too often, especially when it bristled with spikes. Not seeking to explain to himself the patience of the Abbe Troubert, Birotteau simply withdrew from the happiness which Mademoiselle Gamard believed that she seasoned to his liking,--for she regarded happiness as a thing to be made, like her preserves. But the luckless abbe made the break in a clumsy way, the natural way of his own naive character, and it was not carried out without much nagging and sharp-shooting, which the Abbe Birotteau endeavored to bear as if he did not feel them.

By the end of the first year of his sojourn under Mademoiselle Gamard's roof the vicar had resumed his former habits; spending two evenings a week with Madame de Listomere, three with Mademoiselle Salomon, and the other two with Mademoiselle Merlin de la Blottiere. These ladies belonged to the aristocratic circles of Tourainean society, to which Mademoiselle Gamard was not admitted. Therefore the abbe's abandonment was the more insulting, because it made her feel her want of social value; all choice implies contempt for the thing rejected.

"Monsieur Birotteau does not find us agreeable enough," said the Abbe Troubert to Mademoiselle Gamard's friends when she was forced to tell them that her "evenings" must be given up. "He is a man of the world, and a good liver! He wants fashion, luxury, witty conversation, and the scandals of the town."

These words of course obliged Mademoiselle Gamard to defend herself at

Birotteau's expense.

"He is not much a man of the world," she said. "If it had not been for the Abbe Chapeloud he would never have been received at Madame de Listomere's. Oh, what didn't I lose in losing the Abbe Chapeloud! Such an amiable man, and so easy to live with! In twelve whole years I never had the slightest difficulty or disagreement with him."

Presented thus, the innocent abbe was considered by this bourgeois society, which secretly hated the aristocratic society, as a man essentially exacting and hard to get along with. For a week Mademoiselle Gamard enjoyed the pleasure of being pitied by friends who, without really thinking one word of what they said, kept repeating to her: "How could he have turned against you?--so kind and gentle as you are!" or, "Console yourself, dear Mademoiselle Gamard, you are so well known that--" et cetera.

Nevertheless, these friends, enchanted to escape one evening a week in the Cloister, the darkest, dreariest, and most out of the way corner in Tours, blessed the poor vicar in their hearts.

Between persons who are perpetually in each other's company dislike or love increases daily; every moment brings reasons to love or hate each other more and more. The Abbe Birotteau soon became intolerable to Mademoiselle Gamard. Eighteen months after she had taken him to board, and at the moment when the worthy man was mistaking the silence of hatred for the peacefulness of content, and applauding himself for having, as he said, "managed matters so well with the old maid," he was really the object of an underhand persecution and a vengeance deliberately planned. The four marked circumstances of the locked door, the forgotten slippers, the lack of fire, and the removal of the candlestick, were the first signs that revealed to him a terrible enmity, the final consequences of which were destined not to strike him until the time came when they were irreparable.

As he went to bed the worthy vicar worked his brains--quite uselessly, for he was soon at the end of them--to explain to himself the extraordinarily discourteous conduct of Mademoiselle Gamard. The fact was that, having all along acted logically in obeying the natural laws of his own egotism, it was impossible that he should now perceive his own faults towards his landlady.

Though the great things of life are simple to understand and easy to express, the littlenesses require a vast number of details to explain them. The foregoing events, which may be called a sort of prologue to this bourgeois drama, in which we shall find passions as violent as those excited by great interests, required this long introduction; and it would have been difficult for any faithful historian to shorten the account of these minute developments.

II

The next morning, on awaking, Birotteau thought so much of his prospective canonry that he forgot the four circumstances in which he had seen, the night before, such threatening prognostics of a future full of misery. The vicar was not a man to get up without a fire. He rang to let Marianne know that he was awake and that she must come to him; then he remained, as his habit was, absorbed in somnolent

musings. The servant's custom was to make the fire and gently draw him from his half sleep by the murmured sound of her movements,--a sort of music which he loved. Twenty minutes passed and Marianne had not appeared. The vicar, now half a canon, was about to ring again, when he let go the bell-pull, hearing a man's step on the staircase. In a minute more the Abbe Troubert, after discreetly knocking at the door, obeyed Birotteau's invitation and entered the room. This visit, which the two abbe's usually paid each other once a month, was no surprise to the vicar. The canon at once exclaimed when he saw that Marianne had not made the fire of his quasi-colleague. He opened the window and called to her harshly, telling her to come at once to the abbe; then, turning round to his ecclesiastical brother, he said, "If Mademoiselle knew that you had no fire she would scold Marianne."

After this speech he inquired about Birotteau's health, and asked in a gentle voice if he had had any recent news that gave him hopes of his canonry. The vicar explained the steps he had taken, and told, naively, the names of the persons with whom Madam de Listomere was using her influence, quite unaware that Troubert had never forgiven that lady for not admitting him--the Abbe Troubert, twice proposed by the bishop as vicar-general!--to her house.

It would be impossible to find two figures which presented so many contrasts to each other as those of the two abbés. Troubert, tall and lean, was yellow and bilious, while the vicar was what we call, familiarly, plump. Birotteau's face, round and ruddy, proclaimed a kindly nature barren of ideas, while that of the Abbe Troubert, long and ploughed by many wrinkles, took on at times an expression of sarcasm, or else of contempt; but it was necessary to watch him very closely before those sentiments could be detected. The canon's habitual condition was perfect calmness, and his eyelids were usually lowered over his orange-colored eyes, which could, however, give clear and piercing glances when he liked. Reddish hair added to the gloomy effect of this countenance, which was always obscured by the veil which deep meditation drew across its features. Many persons at first sight thought him absorbed in high and earnest ambitions; but those who claimed to know him better denied that impression, insisting that he was only stupidly dull under Mademoiselle Gamard's despotism, or else worn out by too much fasting. He seldom spoke, and never laughed. When it did so happen that he felt agreeably moved, a feeble smile would flicker on his lips and lose itself in the wrinkles of his face.

Birotteau, on the other hand, was all expansion, all frankness; he loved good things and was amused by trifles with the simplicity of a man who knew no spite or malice. The Abbe Troubert roused, at first sight, an involuntary feeling of fear, while the vicar's presence brought a kindly smile to the lips of all who looked at him. When the tall canon marched with solemn step through the naves and cloisters of Saint-Gatien, his head bowed, his eye stern, respect followed him; that bent face was in harmony with the yellowing arches of the cathedral; the folds of his cassock fell in monumental lines that were worthy of statuary. The good vicar, on the contrary, perambulated about with no gravity at all. He trotted and ambled and seemed at times to roll himself along. But with all this there was one point of resemblance between the two men. For, precisely as Troubert's ambitious air, which made him feared, had contributed probably to keep him down to the insignificant position of a mere canon, so the character and ways of Birotteau marked him out as perpetually the vicar of the cathedral and nothing higher.

Yet the Abbe Troubert, now fifty years of age, had entirely removed, partly by the circumspection of his conduct and the apparent lack of all ambitions, and partly by his saintly life, the fears which his suspected ability and his powerful presence had roused in the minds of his superiors. His health having seriously failed him during the last year, it seemed probable that he would soon be raised to the office of vicar-general of the archbishopric. His competitors themselves desired the appointment, so that their own plans might have time to mature during the few remaining days which a malady, now become chronic, might allow him. Far from offering the same hopes to rivals, Birotteau's triple chin showed to all who wanted his coveted canonry an evidence of the soundest health; even his gout seemed to them, in accordance with the proverb, an assurance of longevity.

The Abbe Chapeloud, a man of great good sense, whose amiability had made the leaders of the diocese and the members of the best society in Tours seek his company, had steadily opposed, though secretly and with much judgment, the elevation of the Abbe Troubert. He had even adroitly managed to prevent his access to the salons of the best society. Nevertheless, during Chapeloud's lifetime Troubert treated him invariably with great respect, and showed him on all occasions the utmost deference. This constant submission did not, however, change the opinion of the late canon, who said to Birotteau during the last walk they took together: "Distrust that lean stick of a Troubert, --Sixtus the Fifth reduced to the limits of a bishopric!"

Such was the friend, the abiding guest of Mademoiselle Gamard, who now came, the morning after the old maid had, as it were, declared war against the poor vicar, to pay his brother a visit and show him marks of friendship.

"You must excuse Marianne," said the canon, as the woman entered. "I suppose she went first to my rooms. They are very damp, and I coughed all night. You are most healthily situated here," he added, looking up at the cornice.

"Yes; I am lodged like a canon," replied Birotteau.

"And I like a vicar," said the other, humbly.

"But you will soon be settled in the archbishop's palace," said the kindly vicar, who wanted everybody to be happy.

"Yes, or in the cemetery, but God's will be done!" and Troubert raised his eyes to heaven resignedly. "I came," he said, "to ask you to lend me the 'Register of Bishops.' You are the only man in Tours I know who has a copy."

"Take it out of my library," replied Birotteau, reminded by the canon's words of the greatest happiness of his life.

The canon passed into the library and stayed there while the vicar dressed. Presently the breakfast bell rang, and the gouty vicar reflected that if it had not been for Troubert's visit he would have had no fire to dress by. "He's a kind man," thought he.

The two priests went downstairs together, each armed with a huge folio which they laid on one of the side tables in the dining-room.

"What's all that?" asked Mademoiselle Gamard, in a sharp voice, addressing Birotteau. "I hope you are not going to litter up my dining-room with your old books!"

"They are books I wanted," replied the Abbe Troubert. "Monsieur Birotteau has been kind enough to lend them to me."

"I might have guessed it," she said, with a contemptuous smile. "Monsieur Birotteau doesn't often read books of that size."

"How are you, mademoiselle?" said the vicar, in a mellifluous voice.

"Not very well," she replied, shortly. "You woke me up last night out of my first sleep, and I was wakeful for the rest of the night." Then, sitting down, she added, "Gentlemen, the milk is getting cold."

Stupefied at being so ill-naturedly received by his landlady, from whom he half expected an apology, and yet alarmed, like all timid people at the prospect of a discussion, especially if it relates to themselves, the poor vicar took his seat in silence. Then, observing in Mademoiselle Gamard's face the visible signs of ill-humour, he was goaded into a struggle between his reason, which told him that he ought not to submit to such discourtesy from a landlady, and his natural character, which prompted him to avoid a quarrel.

Torn by this inward misery, Birotteau fell to examining attentively the broad green lines painted on the oilcloth which, from custom immemorial, Mademoiselle Gamard left on the table at breakfast-time, without regard to the ragged edges or the various scars displayed on its surface. The priests sat opposite to each other in cane-seated arm-chairs on either side of the square table, the head of which was taken by the landlady, who seemed to dominate the whole from a high chair raised on casters, filled with cushions, and standing very near to the dining-room stove. This room and the salon were on the ground-floor beneath the salon and bedroom of the Abbe Birotteau.

When the vicar had received his cup of coffee, duly sugared, from Mademoiselle Gamard, he felt chilled to the bone at the grim silence in which he was forced to proceed with the usually gay function of breakfast. He dared not look at Troubert's dried-up features, nor at the threatening visage of the old maid; and he therefore turned, to keep himself in countenance, to the plethoric pug which was lying on a cushion near the stove,--a position that victim of obesity seldom quitted, having a little plate of dainties always at his left side, and a bowl of fresh water at his right.

"Well, my pretty," said the vicar, "are you waiting for your coffee?"

The personage thus addressed, one of the most important in the household, though the least troublesome inasmuch as he had ceased to bark and left the talking to his mistress, turned his little eyes, sunk in rolls of fat, upon Birotteau. Then he closed them peevishly. To explain the misery of the poor vicar it should be said that being endowed by nature with an empty and sonorous loquacity, like the resounding of a football, he was in the habit of asserting, without any medical reason to back him, that speech favored digestion. Mademoiselle Gamard, who believed in this hygienic doctrine, had not as yet refrained, in spite of their coolness, from talking at meals;

though, for the last few mornings, the vicar had been forced to strain his mind to find beguiling topics on which to loosen her tongue. If the narrow limits of this history permitted us to report even one of the conversations which often brought a bitter and sarcastic smile to the lips of the Abbe Troubert, it would offer a finished picture of the Boeotian life of the provinces. The singular revelations of the Abbe Birotteau and Mademoiselle Gamard relating to their personal opinions on politics, religion, and literature would delight observing minds. It would be highly entertaining to transcribe the reasons on which they mutually doubted the death of Napoleon in 1820, or the conjectures by which they mutually believed that the Dauphin was living,--rescued from the Temple in the hollow of a huge log of wood. Who could have helped laughing to hear them assert and prove, by reasons evidently their own, that the King of France alone imposed the taxes, that the Chambers were convoked to destroy the clergy, that thirteen hundred thousand persons had perished on the scaffold during the Revolution? They frequently discussed the press, without either of them having the faintest idea of what that modern engine really was. Monsieur Birotteau listened with acceptance to Mademoiselle Gamard when she told him that a man who ate an egg every morning would die in a year, and that facts proved it; that a roll of light bread eaten without drinking for several days together would cure sciatica; that all the workmen who assisted in pulling down the Abbey Saint-Martin had died in six months; that a certain prefect, under orders from Bonaparte, had done his best to damage the towers of Saint-Gatien, --with a hundred other absurd tales.

But on this occasion poor Birotteau felt he was tongue-tied, and he resigned himself to eat a meal without engaging in conversation. After a while, however, the thought crossed his mind that silence was dangerous for his digestion, and he boldly remarked, "This coffee is excellent."

That act of courage was completely wasted. Then, after looking at the scrap of sky visible above the garden between the two buttresses of Saint-Gatien, the vicar again summoned nerve to say, "It will be finer weather to-day than it was yesterday."

At that remark Mademoiselle Gamard cast her most gracious look on the Abbe Troubert, and immediately turned her eyes with terrible severity on Birotteau, who fortunately by that time was looking on his plate.

No creature of the feminine gender was ever more capable of presenting to the mind the elegaic nature of an old maid than Mademoiselle Sophie Gamard. In order to describe a being whose character gives a momentous interest to the petty events of the present drama and to the anterior lives of the actors in it, it may be useful to give a summary of the ideas which find expression in the being of an Old Maid,--remembering always that the habits of life form the soul, and the soul forms the physical presence.

Though all things in society as well as in the universe are said to have a purpose, there do exist here below certain beings whose purpose and utility seem inexplicable. Moral philosophy and political economy both condemn the individual who consumes without producing; who fills a place on the earth but does not shed upon it either good or evil, --for evil is sometimes good the meaning of which is not at once made manifest. It is seldom that old maids of their own motion enter the ranks of these unproductive beings. Now, if the consciousness of work

done gives to the workers a sense of satisfaction which helps them to support life, the certainty of being a useless burden must, one would think, produce a contrary effect, and fill the minds of such fruitless beings with the same contempt for themselves which they inspire in others. This harsh social reprobation is one of the causes which contribute to fill the souls of old maids with the distress that appears in their faces. Prejudice, in which there is truth, does cast, throughout the world but especially in France, a great stigma on the woman with whom no man has been willing to share the blessings or endure the ills of life. Now, there comes to all unmarried women a period when the world, be it right or wrong, condemns them on the fact of this contempt, this rejection. If they are ugly, the goodness of their characters ought to have compensated for their natural imperfections; if, on the contrary, they are handsome, that fact argues that their misfortune has some serious cause. It is impossible to say which of the two classes is most deserving of rejection. If, on the other hand, their celibacy is deliberate, if it proceeds from a desire for independence, neither men nor mothers will forgive their disloyalty to womanly devotion, evidenced in their refusal to feed those passions which render their sex so affecting. To renounce the pangs of womanhood is to abjure its poetry and cease to merit the consolations to which mothers have inalienable rights.

Moreover, the generous sentiments, the exquisite qualities of a woman will not develop unless by constant exercise. By remaining unmarried, a creature of the female sex becomes void of meaning; selfish and cold, she creates repulsion. This implacable judgment of the world is unfortunately too just to leave old maids in ignorance of its causes. Such ideas shoot up in their hearts as naturally as the effects of their saddened lives appear upon their features. Consequently they wither, because the constant expression of happiness which blooms on the faces of other women and gives so soft a grace to their movements has never existed for them. They grow sharp and peevish because all human beings who miss their vocation are unhappy; they suffer, and suffering gives birth to the bitterness of ill-will. In fact, before an old maid blames herself for her isolation she blames others, and there is but one step between reproach and the desire for revenge.

But more than this, the ill grace and want of charm noticeable in these women are the necessary result of their lives. Never having felt a desire to please, elegance and the refinements of good taste are foreign to them. They see only themselves in themselves. This instinct brings them, unconsciously, to choose the things that are most convenient to themselves, at the sacrifice of those which might be more agreeable to others. Without rendering account to their own minds of the difference between themselves and other women, they end by feeling that difference and suffering under it. Jealousy is an indelible sentiment in the female breast. An old maid's soul is jealous and yet void; for she knows but one side--the miserable side--of the only passion men will allow (because it flatters them) to women. Thus thwarted in all their hopes, forced to deny themselves the natural development of their natures, old maids endure an inward torment to which they never grow accustomed. It is hard at any age, above all for a woman, to see a feeling of repulsion on the faces of others, when her true destiny is to move all hearts about her to emotions of grace and love. One result of this inward trouble is that an old maid's glance is always oblique, less from modesty than from fear and shame. Such beings never forgive society for their false position because they never forgive themselves for it.

Now it is impossible for a woman who is perpetually at war with herself and living in contradiction to her true life, to leave others in peace or refrain from envying their happiness. The whole range of these sad truths could be read in the dulled gray eyes of Mademoiselle Gamard; the dark circles that surrounded those eyes told of the inward conflicts of her solitary life. All the wrinkles on her face were in straight lines. The structure of her forehead and cheeks was rigid and prominent. She allowed, with apparent indifference, certain scattered hairs, once brown, to grow upon her chin. Her thin lips scarcely covered teeth that were too long, though still quite white. Her complexion was dark, and her hair, originally black, had turned gray from frightful headaches,--a misfortune which obliged her to wear a false front. Not knowing how to put it on so as to conceal the junction between the real and the false, there were often little gaps between the border of her cap and the black string with which this semi-wig (always badly curled) was fastened to her head. Her gown, silk in summer, merino in winter, and always brown in color, was invariably rather tight for her angular figure and thin arms. Her collar, limp and bent, exposed too much the red skin of a neck which was ribbed like an oak-leaf in winter seen in the light. Her origin explains to some extent the defects of her conformation. She was the daughter of a wood-merchant, a peasant, who had risen from the ranks. She might have been plump at eighteen, but no trace remained of the fair complexion and pretty color of which she was wont to boast. The tones of her flesh had taken the pallid tints so often seen in "devotes." Her aquiline nose was the feature that chiefly proclaimed the despotism of her nature, and the flat shape of her forehead the narrowness of her mind. Her movements had an odd abruptness which precluded all grace; the mere motion with which she twitched her handkerchief from her bag and blew her nose with a loud noise would have shown her character and habits to a keen observer. Being rather tall, she held herself very erect, and justified the remark of a naturalist who once explained the peculiar gait of old maids by declaring that their joints were consolidating. When she walked her movements were not equally distributed over her whole person, as they are in other women, producing those graceful undulations which are so attractive. She moved, so to speak, in a single block, seeming to advance at each step like the statue of the Commendatore. When she felt in good humour she was apt, like other old maids, to tell of the chances she had had to marry, and of her fortunate discovery in time of the want of means of her lovers,--proving, unconsciously, that her worldly judgment was better than her heart.

This typical figure of the genus Old Maid was well framed by the grotesque designs, representing Turkish landscapes, on a varnished paper which decorated the walls of the dining-room. Mademoiselle Gamard usually sat in this room, which boasted of two pier tables and a barometer. Before the chair of each abbe was a little cushion covered with worsted work, the colors of which were faded. The salon in which she received company was worthy of its mistress. It will be visible to the eye at once when we state that it went by the name of the "yellow salon." The curtains were yellow, the furniture and walls yellow; on the mantelpiece, surmounted by a mirror in a gilt frame, the candlesticks and a clock all of crystal struck the eye with sharp brilliancy. As to the private apartment of Mademoiselle Gamard, no one had ever been permitted to look into it. Conjecture alone suggested that it was full of odds and ends, worn-out furniture, and bits of stuff and pieces dear to the hearts of all old maids.

Such was the woman destined to exert a vast influence on the last years of the Abbe Birotteau.

For want of exercising in nature's own way the activity bestowed upon women, and yet impelled to spend it in some way or other, Mademoiselle Gamard had acquired the habit of using it in petty intrigues, provincial cabals, and those self-seeking schemes which occupy, sooner or later, the lives of all old maids. Birotteau, unhappily, had developed in Sophie Gamard the only sentiments which it was possible for that poor creature to feel,--those of hatred; a passion hitherto latent under the calmness and monotony of provincial life, but which was now to become the more intense because it was spent on petty things and in the midst of a narrow sphere. Birotteau was one of those beings who are predestined to suffer because, being unable to see things, they cannot avoid them; to them the worst happens.

"Yes, it will be a fine day," replied the canon, after a pause, apparently issuing from a reverie and wishing to conform to the rules of politeness.

Birotteau, frightened at the length of time which had elapsed between the question and the answer,--for he had, for the first time in his life, taken his coffee without uttering a word,--now left the dining-room where his heart was squeezed as if in a vise. Feeling that the coffee lay heavy on his stomach, he went to walk in a sad mood among the narrow, box-edged garden paths which outlined a star in the little garden. As he turned after making the first round, he saw Mademoiselle Gamard and the Abbe Troubert standing stock-still and silent on the threshold of the door,--he with his arms folded and motionless like a statue on a tomb; she leaning against the blind door. Both seemed to be gazing at him and counting his steps. Nothing is so embarrassing to a creature naturally timid as to feel itself the object of a close examination, and if that is made by the eyes of hatred, the sort of suffering it causes is changed into intolerable martyrdom.

Presently Birotteau fancied he was preventing Mademoiselle Gamard and the abbe from walking in the narrow path. That idea, inspired equally by fear and kindness, became so strong that he left the garden and went to the church, thinking no longer of his canonry, so absorbed was he by the disheartening tyranny of the old maid. Luckily for him he happened to find much to do at Saint-Gatien,--several funerals, a marriage, and two baptisms. Thus employed he forgot his griefs. When his stomach told him that dinner was ready he drew out his watch and saw, not without alarm, that it was some minutes after four. Being well aware of Mademoiselle Gamard's punctuality, he hurried back to the house.

He saw at once on passing the kitchen door that the first course had been removed. When he reached the dining-room the old maid said, with a tone of voice in which were mingled sour rebuke and joy at being able to blame him:--

"It is half-past four, Monsieur Birotteau. You know we are not to wait for you."

The vicar looked at the clock in the dining-room, and saw at once, by the way the gauze which protected it from dust had been moved, that his landlady had opened the face of the dial and set the hands in

advance of the clock of the cathedral. He could make no remark. Had he uttered his suspicion it would only have caused and apparently justified one of those fierce and eloquent expositions to which Mademoiselle Gamard, like other women of her class, knew very well how to give vent in particular cases. The thousand and one annoyances which a servant will sometimes make her master bear, or a woman her husband, were instinctively divined by Mademoiselle Gamard and used upon Birotteau. The way in which she delighted in plotting against the poor vicar's domestic comfort bore all the marks of what we must call a profoundly malignant genius. Yet she so managed that she was never, so far as eye could see, in the wrong.

III

Eight days after the date on which this history began, the new arrangements of the household and the relations which grew up between the Abbe Birotteau and Mademoiselle Gamard revealed to the former the existence of a plot which had been hatching for the last six months.

As long as the old maid exercised her vengeance in an underhand way, and the vicar was able to shut his eyes to it and refuse to believe in her malevolent intentions, the moral effect upon him was slight. But since the affair of the candlestick and the altered clock, Birotteau would doubt no longer that he was under an eye of hatred turned fully upon him. From that moment he fell into despair, seeing everywhere the skinny, clawlike fingers of Mademoiselle Gamard ready to hook into his heart. The old maid, happy in a sentiment as fruitful of emotions as that of vengeance, enjoyed circling and swooping above the vicar as a bird of prey hovers and swoops above a field-mouse before pouncing down upon it and devouring it. She had long since laid a plan which the poor dumbfounded priest was quite incapable of imagining, and which she now proceeded to unfold with that genius for little things often shown by solitary persons, whose souls, incapable of feeling the grandeur of true piety, fling themselves into the details of outward devotion.

The petty nature of his troubles prevented Birotteau, always effusive and liking to be pitied and consoled, from enjoying the soothing pleasure of taking his friends into his confidence,—a last but cruel aggravation of his misery. The little amount of tact which he derived from his timidity made him fear to seem ridiculous in concerning himself with such pettiness. And yet those petty things made up the sum of his existence,—that cherished existence, full of busyness about nothings, and of nothingness in its business; a colorless barren life in which strong feelings were misfortunes, and the absence of emotion happiness. The poor priest's paradise was changed, in a moment, into hell. His sufferings became intolerable. The terror he felt at the prospect of a discussion with Mademoiselle Gamard increased day by day; the secret distress which blighted his life began to injure his health. One morning, as he put on his mottled blue stockings, he noticed a marked diminution in the circumference of his calves. Horrified by so cruel and undeniable a symptom, he resolved to make an effort and appeal to the Abbe Troubert, requesting him to intervene, officially, between Mademoiselle Gamard and himself.

When he found himself in presence of the imposing canon, who, in order to receive his visitor in a bare and cheerless room, had hastily quitted a study full of papers, where he worked incessantly, and where

no one was ever admitted, the vicar felt half ashamed at speaking of Mademoiselle Gamard's provocations to a man who appeared to be so gravely occupied. But after going through the agony of the mental deliberations which all humble, undecided, and feeble persons endure about things of even no importance, he decided, not without much swelling and beating of the heart, to explain his position to the Abbe Troubert.

The canon listened in a cold, grave manner, trying, but in vain, to repress an occasional smile which to more intelligent eyes than those of the vicar might have betrayed the emotions of a secret satisfaction. A flame seemed to dart from his eyelids when Birotteau pictured with the eloquence of genuine feeling the constant bitterness he was made to swallow; but Troubert laid his hand above those lids with a gesture very common to thinkers, maintaining the dignified demeanor which was usual with him. When the vicar had ceased to speak he would indeed have been puzzled had he sought on Troubert's face, marbled with yellow blotches even more yellow than his usually bilious skin, for any trace of the feelings he must have excited in that mysterious priest.

After a moment's silence the canon made one of those answers which required long study before their meaning could be thoroughly perceived, though later they proved to reflecting persons the astonishing depths of his spirit and the power of his mind. He simply crushed Birotteau by telling him that "these things amazed him all the more because he should never have suspected their existence were it not for his brother's confession. He attributed such stupidity on his part to the gravity of his occupations, his labors, the absorption in which his mind was held by certain elevated thoughts which prevented his taking due notice of the petty details of life." He made the vicar observe, but without appearing to censure the conduct of a man whose age and connections deserved all respect, that "in former days, recluses thought little about their food and lodging in the solitude of their retreats, where they were lost in holy contemplations," and that "in our days, priests could make a retreat for themselves in the solitude of their own hearts." Then, reverting to Birotteau's affairs, he added that "such disagreements were a novelty to him. For twelve years nothing of the kind had occurred between Mademoiselle Gamard and the venerable Abbe Chapeloud. As for himself, he might, no doubt, be an arbitrator between the vicar and their landlady, because his friendship for that person had never gone beyond the limits imposed by the Church on her faithful servants; but if so, justice demanded that he should hear both sides. He certainly saw no change in Mademoiselle Gamard, who seemed to him the same as ever; he had always submitted to a few of her caprices, knowing that the excellent woman was kindness and gentleness itself; the slight fluctuations of her temper should be attributed, he thought, to sufferings caused by a pulmonary affection, of which she said little, resigning herself to bear them in a truly Christian spirit." He ended by assuring the vicar that "if he stayed a few years longer in Mademoiselle Gamard's house he would learn to understand her better and acknowledge the real value of her excellent nature."

Birotteau left the room confounded. In the direful necessity of consulting no one, he now judged Mademoiselle Gamard as he would himself, and the poor man fancied that if he left her house for a few days he might extinguish, for want of fuel, the dislike the old maid felt for him. He accordingly resolved to spend, as he formerly did, a

week or so at a country-house where Madame de Listomere passed her autumns, a season when the sky is usually pure and tender in Touraine. Poor man! in so doing he did the thing that was most desired by his terrible enemy, whose plans could only have been brought to nought by the resistant patience of a monk. But the vicar, unable to divine them, not understanding even his own affairs, was doomed to fall, like a lamb, at the butcher's first blow.

Madame de Listomere's country-place, situated on the embankment which lies between Tours and the heights of Saint-Georges, with a southern exposure and surrounded by rocks, combined the charms of the country with the pleasures of the town. It took but ten minutes from the bridge of Tours to reach the house, which was called the "Alouette," --a great advantage in a region where no one will put himself out for anything whatsoever, not even to seek a pleasure.

The Abbe Birotteau had been about ten days at the Alouette, when, one morning while he was breakfasting, the porter came to say that Monsieur Caron desired to speak with him. Monsieur Caron was Mademoiselle Gamard's lawyer, and had charge of her affairs. Birotteau, not remembering this, and unable to think of any matter of litigation between himself and others, left the table to see the lawyer in a stage of great agitation. He found him modestly seated on the balustrade of a terrace.

"Your intention of ceasing to reside in Mademoiselle Gamard's house being made evident--" began the man of business.

"Eh! monsieur," cried the Abbe Birotteau, interrupting him, "I have not the slightest intention of leaving it."

"Nevertheless, monsieur," replied the lawyer, "you must have had some agreement in the matter with Mademoiselle, for she has sent me to ask how long you intend to remain in the country. The event of a long absence was not foreseen in the agreement, and may lead to a contest. Now, Mademoiselle Gamard understanding that your board--"

"Monsieur," said Birotteau, amazed, and again interrupting the lawyer, "I did not suppose it necessary to employ, as it were, legal means to--"

"Mademoiselle Gamard, who is anxious to avoid all dispute," said Monsieur Caron, "has sent me to come to an understanding with you."

"Well, if you will have the goodness to return to-morrow," said the abbe, "I shall then have taken advice in the matter."

The quill-driver withdrew. The poor vicar, frightened at the persistence with which Mademoiselle Gamard pursued him, returned to the dining-room with his face so convulsed that everybody cried out when they saw him: "What is the matter, Monsieur Birotteau?"

The abbe, in despair, sat down without a word, so crushed was he by the vague presence of approaching disaster. But after breakfast, when his friends gathered round him before a comfortable fire, Birotteau naively related the history of his troubles. His hearers, who were beginning to weary of the monotony of a country-house, were keenly interested in a plot so thoroughly in keeping with the life of the provinces. They all took sides with the abbe against the old maid.

"Don't you see, my dear friend," said Madame de Listomere, "that the Abbe Troubert wants your apartment?"

Here the historian ought to sketch this lady; but it occurs to him that even those who are ignorant of Sterne's system of "cognomology," cannot pronounce the three words "Madame de Listomere" without picturing her to themselves as noble and dignified, softening the sternness of rigid devotion by the gracious elegance and the courteous manners of the old monarchical regime; kind, but a little stiff; slightly nasal in voice; allowing herself the perusal of "La Nouvelle Heloise"; and still wearing her own hair.

"The Abbe Birotteau must not yield to that old vixen," cried Monsieur de Listomere, a lieutenant in the navy who was spending a furlough with his aunt. "If the vicar has pluck and will follow my suggestions he will soon recover his tranquillity."

All present began to analyze the conduct of Mademoiselle Gamard with the keen perceptions which characterize provincials, to whom no one can deny the talent of knowing how to lay bare the most secret motives of human actions.

"You don't see the whole thing yet," said an old landowner who knew the region well. "There is something serious behind all this which I can't yet make out. The Abbe Troubert is too deep to be fathomed at once. Our dear Birotteau is at the beginning of his troubles. Besides, would he be left in peace and comfort even if he did give up his lodging to Troubert? I doubt it. If Caron came here to tell you that you intended to leave Mademoiselle Gamard," he added, turning to the bewildered priest, "no doubt Mademoiselle Gamard's intention is to turn you out. Therefore you will have to go, whether you like it or not. Her sort of people play a sure game, they risk nothing."

This old gentleman, Monsieur de Bourbonne, could sum up and estimate provincial ideas as correctly as Voltaire summarized the spirit of his times. He was thin and tall, and chose to exhibit in the matter of clothes the quiet indifference of a landowner whose territorial value is quoted in the department. His face, tanned by the Touraine sun, was less intellectual than shrewd. Accustomed to weigh his words and measure his actions, he concealed a profound vigilance behind a misleading appearance of simplicity. A very slight observation of him sufficed to show that, like a Norman peasant, he invariably held the upper hand in business matters. He was an authority on wine-making, the leading science of Touraine. He had managed to extend the meadow lands of his domain by taking in a part of the alluvial soil of the Loire without getting into difficulties with the State. This clever proceeding gave him the reputation of a man of talent. If Monsieur de Bourbonne's conversation pleased you and you were to ask who he was of a Tourainean, "Ho! a sly old fox!" would be the answer of those who were envious of him--and they were many. In Touraine, as in many of the provinces, jealousy is the root of language.

Monsieur de Bourbonne's remark occasioned a momentary silence, during which the persons who composed the little party seemed to be reflecting. Meanwhile Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix was announced. She came from Tours in the hope of being useful to the poor abbe, and the news she brought completely changed the aspect of the affair. As she entered, every one except Monsieur de Bourbonne was urging

Birotteau to hold his own against Troubert and Gamard, under the auspices of the aristocratic society of the place, which would certainly stand by him.

"The vicar-general, to whom the appointments to office are entrusted, is very ill," said Mademoiselle Salomon, "and the archbishop has delegated his powers to the Abbe Troubert provisionally. The canonry will, of course, depend wholly upon him. Now last evening, at Mademoiselle de la Blottiere's the Abbe Poirel talked about the annoyances which the Abbe Birotteau had inflicted on Mademoiselle Gamard, as though he were trying to cast all the blame on our good abbe. 'The Abbe Birotteau,' he said, 'is a man to whom the Abbe Chapeloud was absolutely necessary, and since the death of that venerable man, he has shown'--and then came suggestions, calumnies! you understand?"

"Troubert will be made vicar-general," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, sententiously.

"Come!" cried Madame de Listomere, turning to Birotteau, "which do you prefer, to be made a canon, or continue to live with Mademoiselle Gamard?"

"To be a canon!" cried the whole company.

"Well, then," resumed Madame de Listomere, "you must let the Abbe Troubert and Mademoiselle Gamard have things their own way. By sending Caron here they mean to let you know indirectly that if you consent to leave the house you shall be made canon,--one good turn deserves another."

Every one present applauded Madame de Listomere's sagacity, except her nephew the Baron de Listomere, who remarked in a comic tone to Monsieur de Bourbonne, "I would like to have seen a fight between the Gamard and the Birotteau."

But, unhappily for the vicar, forces were not equal between these persons of the best society and the old maid supported by the Abbe Troubert. The time soon came when the struggle developed openly, went on increasing, and finally assumed immense proportions. By the advice of Madame de Listomere and most of her friends, who were now eagerly enlisted in a matter which threw such excitement into their vapid provincial lives, a servant was sent to bring back Monsieur Caron. The lawyer returned with surprising celerity, which alarmed no one but Monsieur de Bourbonne.

"Let us postpone all decision until we are better informed," was the advice of that Fabius in a dressing-gown, whose prudent reflections revealed to him the meaning of these moves on the Touraine chess-board. He tried to enlighten Birotteau on the dangers of his position; but the wisdom of the old "sly-boots" did not serve the passions of the moment, and he obtained but little attention.

The conference between the lawyer and Birotteau was short. The vicar came back quite terrified.

"He wants me to sign a paper stating my relinquishment of domicile."

"That's formidable language!" said the naval lieutenant.

"What does it mean?" asked Madame de Listomere.

"Merely that the abbe must declare in writing his intention of leaving Mademoiselle Gamard's house," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, taking a pinch of snuff.

"Is that all?" said Madame de Listomere. "Then sign it at once," she added, turning to Birotteau. "If you positively decide to leave her house, there can be no harm in declaring that such is your will."

Birotteau's will!

"That is true," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, closing his snuff-box with a gesture the significance of which it is impossible to render, for it was a language in itself. "But writing is always dangerous," he added, putting his snuff-box on the mantelpiece with an air and manner that alarmed the vicar.

Birotteau was so bewildered by the upsetting of all his ideas, by the rapidity of events which found him defenceless, by the ease with which his friends were settling the most cherished matters of his solitary life, that he remained silent and motionless as if moonstruck, thinking of nothing, though listening and striving to understand the meaning of the rapid sentences the assembled company addressed to him. He took the paper Monsieur Caron had given him and read it, as if he were giving his mind to the lawyer's document, but the act was merely mechanical. He signed the paper, by which he declared that he left Mademoiselle Gamard's house of his own wish and will, and that he had been fed and lodged while there according to the terms originally agreed upon. When the vicar had signed the document, Monsieur Caron took it and asked where his client was to send the things left by the abbe in her house and belonging to him. Birotteau replied that they could be sent to Madame de Listomere's,--that lady making him a sign that she would receive him, never doubting that he would soon be a canon. Monsieur de Bourbonne asked to see the paper, the deed of relinquishment, which the abbe had just signed. Monsieur Caron gave it to him.

"How is this?" he said to the vicar after reading it. "It appears that written documents already exist between you and Mademoiselle Gamard. Where are they? and what do they stipulate?"

"The deed is in my library," replied Birotteau.

"Do you know the tenor of it?" said Monsieur de Bourbonne to the lawyer.

"No, monsieur," said Caron, stretching out his hand to regain the fatal document.

"Ha!" thought the old man; "you know, my good friend, what that deed contains, but you are not paid to tell us," and he returned the paper to the lawyer.

"Where can I put my things?" cried Birotteau; "my books, my beautiful book-shelves, and pictures, my red furniture, and all my treasures?"

The helpless despair of the poor man thus torn up as it were by the

roots was so artless, it showed so plainly the purity of his ways and his ignorance of the things of life, that Madame de Listomere and Mademoiselle de Salomon talked to him and consoled him in the tone which mothers take when they promise a plaything to their children.

"Don't fret about such trifles," they said. "We will find you some place less cold and dismal than Mademoiselle Gamard's gloomy house. If we can't find anything you like, one or other of us will take you to live with us. Come, let's play a game of backgammon. To-morrow you can go and see the Abbe Troubert and ask him to push your claims to the canonry, and you'll see how cordially he will receive you."

Feeble folk are as easily reassured as they are frightened. So the poor abbe, dazzled at the prospect of living with Madame de Listomere, forgot the destruction, now completed, of the happiness he had so long desired, and so delightfully enjoyed. But at night before going to sleep, the distress of a man to whom the fuss of moving and the breaking up of all his habits was like the end of the world, came upon him, and he racked his brains to imagine how he could ever find such a good place for his book-case as the gallery in the old maid's house. Fancying he saw his books scattered about, his furniture defaced, his regular life turned topsy-turvy, he asked himself for the thousandth time why the first year spent in Mademoiselle Gamard's house had been so sweet, the second so cruel. His troubles were a pit in which his reason floundered. The canonry seemed to him small compensation for so much misery, and he compared his life to a stocking in which a single dropped stitch resulted in destroying the whole fabric. Mademoiselle Salomon remained to him. But, alas, in losing his old illusions the poor priest dared not trust in any later friendship.

In the "citta dolente" of spinsterhood we often meet, especially in France, with women whose lives are a sacrifice nobly and daily offered to noble sentiments. Some remain proudly faithful to a heart which death tore from them; martyrs of love, they learn the secrets of womanhood only through their souls. Others obey some family pride (which in our days, and to our shame, decreases steadily); these devote themselves to the welfare of a brother, or to orphan nephews; they are mothers while remaining virgins. Such old maids attain to the highest heroism of their sex by consecrating all feminine feelings to the help of sorrow. They idealize womanhood by renouncing the rewards of woman's destiny, accepting its pains. They live surrounded by the splendour of their devotion, and men respectfully bow the head before their faded features. Mademoiselle de Sombreuil was neither wife nor maid; she was and ever will be a living poem. Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix belonged to the race of these heroic beings. Her devotion was religiously sublime, inasmuch as it won her no glory after being, for years, a daily agony. Beautiful and young, she loved and was beloved; her lover lost his reason. For five years she gave herself, with love's devotion, to the mere mechanical well-being of that unhappy man, whose madness she so penetrated that she never believed him mad. She was simple in manner, frank in speech, and her pallid face was not lacking in strength and character, though its features were regular. She never spoke of the events of her life. But at times a sudden quiver passed over her as she listened to the story of some sad or dreadful incident, thus betraying the emotions that great sufferings had developed within her. She had come to live at Tours after losing the companion of her life; but she was not appreciated there at her true value and was thought to be merely an amiable woman. She did much good, and attached herself, by preference, to feeble

beings. For that reason the poor vicar had naturally inspired her with a deep interest.

Mademoiselle de Villenoix, who returned to Tours the next morning, took Birotteau with her and set him down on the quay of the cathedral leaving him to make his own way to the Cloister, where he was bent on going, to save at least the canonry and to superintend the removal of his furniture. He rang, not without violent palpitations of the heart, at the door of the house whither, for fourteen years, he had come daily, and where he had lived blissfully, and from which he was now exiled forever, after dreaming that he should die there in peace like his friend Chapeloud. Marianne was surprised at the vicar's visit. He told her that he had come to see the Abbe Troubert, and turned towards the ground-floor apartment where the canon lived; but Marianne called to him:--

"Not there, monsieur le vicaire; the Abbe Troubert is in your old apartment."

These words gave the vicar a frightful shock. He was forced to comprehend both Troubert's character and the depths of the revenge so slowly brought about when he found the canon settled in Chapeloud's library, seated in Chapeloud's handsome armchair, sleeping, no doubt, in Chapeloud's bed, and disinheriting at last the friend of Chapeloud, the man who, for so many years, had confined him to Mademoiselle Gamard's house, by preventing his advancement in the church, and closing the best salons in Tours against him. By what magic wand had the present transformation taken place? Surely these things belonged to Birotteau? And yet, observing the sardonic air with which Troubert glanced at that bookcase, the poor abbe knew that the future vicar-general felt certain of possessing the spoils of those he had so bitterly hated,--Chapeloud as an enemy, and Birotteau, in and through whom Chapeloud still thwarted him. Ideas rose in the heart of the poor man at the sight, and plunged him into a sort of vision. He stood motionless, as though fascinated by Troubert's eyes which fixed themselves upon him.

"I do not suppose, monsieur," said Birotteau at last, "that you intend to deprive me of the things that belong to me. Mademoiselle may have been impatient to give you better lodgings, but she ought to have been sufficiently just to give me time to pack my books and remove my furniture."

"Monsieur," said the Abbe Troubert, coldly, not permitting any sign of emotion to appear on his face, "Mademoiselle Gamard told me yesterday of your departure, the cause of which is still unknown to me. If she installed me here at once, it was from necessity. The Abbe Poirel has taken my apartment. I do not know if the furniture and things that are in these rooms belong to you or to Mademoiselle; but if they are yours, you know her scrupulous honesty; the sanctity of her life is the guarantee of her rectitude. As for me, you are well aware of my simple modes of living. I have slept for fifteen years in a bare room without complaining of the dampness,--which, eventually will have caused my death. Nevertheless, if you wish to return to this apartment I will cede it to you willingly."

After hearing these terrible words, Birotteau forgot the canonry and ran downstairs as quickly as a young man to find Mademoiselle Gamard. He met her at the foot of the staircase, on the broad, tiled landing

which united the two wings of the house.

"Mademoiselle," he said, bowing to her without paying any attention to the bitter and derisive smile that was on her lips, nor to the extraordinary flame in her eyes which made them lucent as a tiger's, "I cannot understand how it is that you have not waited until I removed my furniture before--"

"What!" she said, interrupting him, "is it possible that your things have not been left at Madame de Listomere's?"

"But my furniture?"

"Haven't you read your deed?" said the old maid, in a tone which would have to be rendered in music before the shades of meaning that hatred is able to put into the accent of every word could be fully shown.

Mademoiselle Gamard seemed to rise in stature, her eyes shone, her face expanded, her whole person quivered with pleasure. The Abbe Troubert opened a window to get a better light on the folio volume he was reading. Birotteau stood as if a thunderbolt had stricken him. Mademoiselle Gamard made his ears hum when she enunciated in a voice as clear as a cornet the following sentence:--

"Was it not agreed that if you left my house your furniture should belong to me, to indemnify me for the difference in the price of board paid by you and that paid by the late venerable Abbe Chapeloud? Now, as the Abbe Poirel has just been appointed canon--"

Hearing the last words Birotteau made a feeble bow as if to take leave of the old maid, and left the house precipitately. He was afraid if he stayed longer that he should break down utterly, and give too great a triumph to his implacable enemies. Walking like a drunken man he at last reached Madame de Listomere's house, where he found in one of the lower rooms his linen, his clothing, and all his papers packed in a trunk. When he eyes fell on these few remnants of his possessions the unhappy priest sat down and hid his face in his hands to conceal his tears from the sight of others. The Abbe Poirel was canon! He, Birotteau, had neither home, nor means, nor furniture!

Fortunately Mademoiselle Salomon happened to drive past the house, and the porter, who saw and comprehended the despair of the poor abbe, made a sign to the coachman. After exchanging a few words with Mademoiselle Salomon the porter persuaded the vicar to let himself be placed, half dead as he was, in the carriage of his faithful friend, to whom he was unable to speak connectedly. Mademoiselle Salomon, alarmed at the momentary derangement of a head that was always feeble, took him back at once to the Alouette, believing that this beginning of mental alienation was an effect produced by the sudden news of Abbe Poirel's nomination. She knew nothing, of course, of the fatal agreement made by the abbe with Mademoiselle Gamard, for the excellent reason that he did not know of it himself; and because it is in the nature of things that the comical is often mingled with the pathetic, the singular replies of the poor abbe made her smile.

"Chapeloud was right," he said; "he is a monster!"

"Who?" she asked.

"Chapeloud. He has taken all."

"You mean Poirel?"

"No, Troubert."

At last they reached the Alouette, where the priest's friends gave him such tender care that towards evening he grew calmer and was able to give them an account of what had happened during the morning.

The phlegmatic old fox asked to see the deed which, on thinking the matter over, seemed to him to contain the solution of the enigma. Birotteau drew the fatal stamped paper from his pocket and gave it to Monsieur de Bourbonne, who read it rapidly and soon came upon the following clause:--

"Whereas a difference exists of eight hundred francs yearly between the price of board paid by the late Abbe Chapeloud and that at which the said Sophie Gamard agrees to take into her house, on the above-named stipulated condition, the said Francois Birotteau; and whereas it is understood that the undersigned Francois Birotteau is not able for some years to pay the full price charged to the other boarders of Mademoiselle Gamard, more especially the Abbe Troubert; the said Birotteau does hereby engage, in consideration of certain sums of money advanced by the undersigned Sophie Gamard, to leave her, as indemnity, all the household property of which he may die possessed, or to transfer the same to her should he, for any reason whatever or at any time, voluntarily give up the apartment now leased to him, and thus derive no further profit from the above-named engagements made by Mademoiselle Gamard for his benefit--"

"Confound her! what an agreement!" cried the old gentleman. "The said Sophie Gamard is armed with claws."

Poor Birotteau never imagined in his childish brain that anything could ever separate him from that house where he expected to live and die with Mademoiselle Gamard. He had no remembrance whatever of that clause, the terms of which he had not discussed, for they had seemed quite just to him at a time when, in his great anxiety to enter the old maid's house, he would readily have signed any and all legal documents she had offered him. His simplicity was so guileless and Mademoiselle Gamard's conduct so atrocious, the fate of the poor old man seemed so deplorable, and his natural helplessness made him so touching, that in the first glow of her indignation Madame de Listomere exclaimed: "I made you put your signature to that document which has ruined you; I am bound to give you back the happiness of which I have deprived you."

"But," remarked Monsieur de Bourbonne, "that deed constitutes a fraud; there may be ground for a lawsuit."

"Then Birotteau shall go to the law. If he loses at Tours he may win at Orleans; if he loses at Orleans, he'll win in Paris," cried the Baron de Listomere.

"But if he does go to law," continued Monsieur de Bourbonne, coldly, "I should advise him to resign his vicariat."

"We will consult lawyers," said Madame de Listomere, "and go to law if

law is best. But this affair is so disgraceful for Mademoiselle Gamard, and is likely to be so injurious to the Abbe Troubert, that I think we can compromise."

After mature deliberation all present promised their assistance to the Abbe Birotteau in the struggle which was now inevitable between the poor priest and his antagonists and all their adherents. A true presentiment, an infallible provincial instinct, led them to couple the names of Gamard and Troubert. But none of the persons assembled on this occasion in Madame de Listomere's salon, except the old fox, had any real idea of the nature and importance of such a struggle. Monsieur de Bourbonne took the poor abbe aside into a corner of the room.

"Of the fourteen persons now present," he said, in a low voice, "not one will stand by you a fortnight hence. If the time comes when you need some one to support you you may find that I am the only person in Tours bold enough to take up your defence; for I know the provinces and men and things, and, better still, I know self-interests. But these friends of yours, though full of the best intentions, are leading you astray into a bad path, from which you won't be able to extricate yourself. Take my advice; if you want to live in peace, resign the vicariat of Saint-Gatien and leave Tours. Don't say where you are going, but find some distant parish where Troubert cannot get hold of you."

"Leave Tours!" exclaimed the vicar, with indescribable terror.

To him it was a kind of death; the tearing up of all the roots by which he held to life. Celibates substitute habits for feelings; and when to that moral system, which makes them pass through life instead of really living it, is added a feeble character, external things assume an extraordinary power over them. Birotteau was like certain vegetables; transplant them, and you stop their ripening. Just as a tree needs daily the same sustenance, and must always send its roots into the same soil, so Birotteau needed to trot about Saint-Gatien, and amble along the Mail where he took his daily walk, and saunter through the streets, and visit the three salons where, night after night, he played his whist or his backgammon.

"Ah! I did not think of it!" replied Monsieur de Bourbonne, gazing at the priest with a sort of pity.

All Tours was soon aware that Madame la Baronne de Listomere, widow of a lieutenant-general, had invited the Abbe Birotteau, vicar of Saint-Gatien, to stay at her house. That act, which many persons questioned, presented the matter sharply and divided the town into parties, especially after Mademoiselle Salomon spoke openly of a fraud and a lawsuit. With the subtle vanity which is common to old maids, and the fanatic self-love which characterizes them, Mademoiselle Gamard was deeply wounded by the course taken by Madame de Listomere. The baroness was a woman of high rank, elegant in her habits and ways, whose good taste, courteous manners, and true piety could not be gainsaid. By receiving Birotteau as her guest she gave a formal denial to all Mademoiselle Gamard's assertions, and indirectly censured her conduct by maintaining the vicar's cause against his former landlady.

It is necessary for the full understanding of this history to explain how the natural discernment and spirit of analysis which old women

bring to bear on the actions of others gave power to Mademoiselle Gamard, and what were the resources on her side. Accompanied by the taciturn Abbe Troubert she made a round of evening visits to five or six houses, at each of which she met a circle of a dozen or more persons, united by kindred tastes and the same general situation in life. Among them were one or two men who were influenced by the gossip and prejudices of their servants; five or six old maids who spent their time in sifting the words and scrutinizing the actions of their neighbours and others in the class below them; besides these, there were several old women who busied themselves in retailing scandal, keeping an exact account of each person's fortune, striving to control or influence the actions of others, prognosticating marriages, and blaming the conduct of friends as sharply as that of enemies. These persons, spread about the town like the capillary fibres of a plant, sucked in, with the thirst of a leaf for the dew, the news and the secrets of each household, and transmitted them mechanically to the Abbe Troubert, as the leaves convey to the branch the moisture they absorb.

Accordingly, during every evening of the week, these good devotees, excited by that need of emotion which exists in all of us, rendered an exact account of the current condition of the town with a sagacity worthy of the Council of Ten, and were, in fact, a species of police, armed with the unerring gift of spying bestowed by passions. When they had divined the secret meaning of some event their vanity led them to appropriate to themselves the wisdom of their sanhedrim, and set the tone to the gossip of their respective spheres. This idle but ever busy fraternity, invisible, yet seeing all things, dumb, but perpetually talking, possessed an influence which its nonentity seemed to render harmless, though it was in fact terrible in its effects when it concerned itself with serious interests. For a long time nothing had entered the sphere of these existences so serious and so momentous to each one of them as the struggle of Birotteau, supported by Madame de Listomere, against Mademoiselle Gamard and the Abbe Troubert. The three salons of Madame de Listomere and the Demoiselles Merlin de la Blottiere and de Villenoix being considered as enemies by all the salons which Mademoiselle Gamard frequented, there was at the bottom of the quarrel a class sentiment with all its jealousies. It was the old Roman struggle of people and senate in a molehill, a tempest in a teacup, as Montesquieu remarked when speaking of the Republic of San Marino, whose public offices are filled by the day only,--despotic power being easily seized by any citizen.

But this tempest, petty as it seems, did develop in the souls of these persons as many passions as would have been called forth by the highest social interests. It is a mistake to think that none but souls concerned in mighty projects, which stir their lives and set them foaming, find time too fleeting. The hours of the Abbe Troubert fled by as eagerly, laden with thoughts as anxious, harassed by despairs and hopes as deep as the cruellest hours of the gambler, the lover, or the statesman. God alone is in the secret of the energy we expend upon our occult triumphs over man, over things, over ourselves. Though we know not always whither we are going we know well what the journey costs us. If it be permissible for the historian to turn aside for a moment from the drama he is narrating and ask his readers to cast a glance upon the lives of these old maids and abbes, and seek the cause of the evil which vitiates them at their source, we may find it demonstrated that man must experience certain passions before he can develop within him those virtues which give grandeur to life by

widening his sphere and checking the selfishness which is inherent in every created being.

Madame de Listomere returned to town without being aware that for the previous week her friends had felt obliged to refute a rumour (at which she would have laughed had she known if it) that her affection for her nephew had an almost criminal motive. She took Birotteau to her lawyer, who did not regard the case as an easy one. The vicar's friends, inspired by the belief that justice was certain in so good a cause, or inclined to procrastinate in a matter which did not concern them personally, had put off bringing the suit until they returned to Tours. Consequently the friends of Mademoiselle Gamard had taken the initiative, and told the affair wherever they could to the injury of Birotteau. The lawyer, whose practice was exclusively among the most devout church people, amazed Madame de Listomere by advising her not to embark on such a suit; he ended the consultation by saying that "he himself would not be able to undertake it, for, according to the terms of the deed, Mademoiselle Gamard had the law on her side, and in equity, that is to say outside of strict legal justice, the Abbe Birotteau would undoubtedly seem to the judges as well as to all respectable laymen to have derogated from the peaceable, conciliatory, and mild character hitherto attributed to him; that Mademoiselle Gamard, known to be a kindly woman and easy to live with, had put Birotteau under obligations to her by lending him the money he needed to pay the legacy duties on Chapeloud's bequest without taking from him a receipt; that Birotteau was not of an age or character to sign a deed without knowing what it contained or understanding the importance of it; that in leaving Mademoiselle Gamard's house at the end of two years, when his friend Chapeloud had lived there twelve and Troubert fifteen, he must have had some purpose known to himself only; and that the lawsuit, if undertaken, would strike the public as an act of ingratitude;" and so forth. Letting Birotteau go before them to the staircase, the lawyer detained Madame de Listomere a moment to entreat her, if she valued her own peace of mind, not to involve herself in the matter.

But that evening the poor vicar, suffering the torments of a man under sentence of death who awaits in the condemned cell at Bicetre the result of his appeal for mercy, could not refrain from telling his assembled friends the result of his visit to the lawyer.

"I don't know a single pettifogger in Tours," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, "except that Radical lawyer, who would be willing to take the case,--unless for the purpose of losing it; I don't advise you to undertake it."

"Then it is infamous!" cried the navel lieutenant. "I myself will take the abbe to the Radical--"

"Go at night," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, interrupting him.

"Why?"

"I have just learned that the Abbe Troubert is appointed vicar-general in place of the other man, who died yesterday."

"I don't care a fig for the Abbe Troubert."

Unfortunately the Baron de Listomere (a man thirty-six years of age)

did not see the sign Monsieur de Bourbonne made him to be cautious in what he said, motioning as he did so to a friend of Troubert, a councillor of the Prefecture, who was present. The lieutenant therefore continued:--

"If the Abbe Troubert is a scoundrel--"

"Oh," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, cutting him short, "why bring Monsieur Troubert into a matter which doesn't concern him?"

"Not concern him?" cried the baron; "isn't he enjoying the use of the Abbe Birotteau's household property? I remember that when I called on the Abbe Chapeloud I noticed two valuable pictures. Say that they are worth ten thousand francs; do you suppose that Monsieur Birotteau meant to give ten thousand francs for living two years with that Gamard woman,--not to speak of the library and furniture, which are worth as much more?"

The Abbe Birotteau opened his eyes at hearing he had once possessed so enormous a fortune.

The baron, getting warmer than ever, went on to say: "By Jove! there's that Monsieur Salmon, formerly an expert at the Museum in Paris; he is down here on a visit to his mother-in-law. I'll go and see him this very evening with the Abbe Birotteau and ask him to look at those pictures and estimate their value. From there I'll take the abbe to the lawyer."

Two days after this conversation the suit was begun. This employment of the Liberal lawyer did harm to the vicar's cause. Those who were opposed to the government, and all who were known to dislike the priests, or religion (two things quite distinct which many persons confound), got hold of the affair and the whole town talked of it. The Museum expert estimated the Virgin of Valentin and the Christ of Lebrun, two paintings of great beauty, at eleven thousand francs. As to the bookshelves and the gothic furniture, the taste for such things was increasing so rapidly in Paris that their immediate value was at least twelve thousand. In short, the appraisal of the whole property by the expert reached the sum of over thirty-six thousand francs. Now it was very evident that Birotteau never intended to give Mademoiselle Gamard such an enormous sum of money for the small amount he might owe her under the terms of the deed; therefore he had, legally speaking, equitable grounds on which to demand an amendment of the agreement; if this were denied, Mademoiselle Gamard was plainly guilty of intentional fraud. The Radical lawyer accordingly began the affair by serving a writ on Mademoiselle Gamard. Though very harsh in language, this document, strengthened by citations of precedents and supported by certain clauses in the Code, was a masterpiece of legal argument, and so evidently just in its condemnation of the old maid that thirty or forty copies were made and maliciously distributed through the town.

IV

A few days after this commencement of hostilities between Birotteau and the old maid, the Baron de Listomere, who expected to be included as captain of a corvette in a coming promotion lately announced by the minister of the Navy, received a letter from one of his friends

warning him that there was some intention of putting him on the retired list. Greatly astonished by this information he started for Paris immediately, and went at once to the minister, who seemed to be amazed himself, and even laughed at the baron's fears. The next day, however, in spite of the minister's assurance, Monsieur de Listomere made inquiries in the different offices. By an indiscretion (often practised by heads of departments in favor of their friends) one of the secretaries showed him a document confirming the fatal news, which was only waiting the signature of the director, who was ill, to be submitted to the minister.

The Baron de Listomere went immediately to an uncle of his, a deputy, who could see the minister of the Navy at the chamber without loss of time, and begged him to find out the real intentions of his Excellency in a matter which threatened the loss of his whole future. He waited in his uncle's carriage with the utmost anxiety for the end of the session. His uncle came out before the Chamber rose, and said to him at once as they drove away: "Why the devil have you meddled in a priest's quarrel? The minister began by telling me you had put yourself at the head of the Radicals in Tours; that your political opinions were objectionable; you were not following in the lines of the government,--with other remarks as much involved as if he were addressing the Chamber. On that I said to him, 'Nonsense; let us come to the point.' The end was that his Excellency told me frankly you were in bad odor with the diocese. In short, I made a few inquiries among my colleagues, and I find that you have been talking slightly of a certain Abbe Troubert, the vicar-general, but a very important personage in the province, where he represents the Jesuits. I have made myself responsible to the minister for your future conduct. My good nephew, if you want to make your way be careful not to excite ecclesiastical enmities. Go at once to Tours and try to make your peace with that devil of a vicar-general; remember that such priests are men with whom we absolutely must live in harmony. Good heavens! when we are all striving and working to re-establish religion it is actually stupid, in a lieutenant who wants to be made a captain, to affront the priests. If you don't make up matters with that Abbe Troubert you needn't count on me; I shall abandon you. The minister of

ecclesiastical affairs told me just now that Troubert was certain to be made bishop before long; if he takes a dislike to our family he could hinder me from being included in the next batch of peers. Don't you understand?"

These words explained to the naval officer the nature of Troubert's secret occupations, about which Birotteau often remarked in his silly way: "I can't think what he does with himself,--sitting up all night."

The canon's position in the midst of his female senate, converted so adroitly into provincial detectives, and his personal capacity, had induced the Congregation of Jesus to select him out of all the ecclesiastics in the town, as the secret proconsul of Touraine. Archbishop, general, prefect, all men, great and small, were under his occult dominion. The Baron de Listomere decided at once on his course.

"I shall take care," he said to his uncle, "not to get another round shot below my water-line."

Three days after this diplomatic conference between the uncle and nephew, the latter, returning hurriedly in a post-chaise, informed his

aunt, the very night of his arrival, of the dangers the family were running if they persisted in supporting that "fool of a Birotteau." The baron had detained Monsieur de Bourbonne as the old gentleman was taking his hat and cane after the usual rubber of whist. The clear-sightedness of that sly old fox seemed indispensable for an understanding of the reefs among which the Listomere family suddenly found themselves; and perhaps the action of taking his hat and cane was only a ruse to have it whispered in his ear: "Stay after the others; we want to talk to you."

The baron's sudden return, his apparent satisfaction, which was quite out of keeping with a harrassed look that occasionally crossed his face, informed Monsieur de Bourbonne vaguely that the lieutenant had met with some check in his crusade against Gamard and Troubert. He showed no surprise when the baron revealed the secret power of the Jesuit vicar-general.

"I knew that," he said.

"Then why," cried the baroness, "did you not warn us?"

"Madame," he said, sharply, "forget that I was aware of the invisible influence of that priest, and I will forget that you knew it equally well. If we do not keep this secret now we shall be thought his accomplices, and shall be more feared and hated than we are. Do as I do; pretend to be duped; but look carefully where you set your feet. I did warn you sufficiently, but you would not understand me, and I did not choose to compromise myself."

"What must we do now?" said the baron.

The abandonment of Birotteau was not even made a question; it was a first condition tactily accepted by the three deliberators.

"To beat a retreat with the honors of war has always been the triumph of the ablest generals," replied Monsieur de Bourbonne. "Bow to Troubert, and if his hatred is less strong than his vanity you will make him your ally; but if you bow too low he will walk over you rough-shod; make believe that you intend to leave the service, and you'll escape him, Monsieur le baron. Send away Birotteau, madame, and you will set things right with Mademoiselle Gamard. Ask the Abbe Troubert, when you meet him at the archbishop's, if he can play whist. He will say yes. Then invite him to your salon, where he wants to be received; he'll be sure to come. You are a woman, and you can certainly win a priest to your interests. When the baron is promoted, his uncle peer of France, and Troubert a bishop, you can make Birotteau a canon if you choose. Meantime yield,--but yield gracefully, all the while with a slight menace. Your family can give Troubert quite as much support as he can give you. You'll understand each other perfectly on that score. As for you, sailor, carry your deep-sea line about you."

"Poor Birotteau?" said the baroness.

"Oh, get rid of him at once," replied the old man, as he rose to take leave. "If some clever Radical lays hold of that empty head of his, he may cause you much trouble. After all, the court would certainly give a verdict in his favour, and Troubert must fear that. He may forgive you for beginning the struggle, but if they were defeated he would be

implacable. I have said my say."

He snapped his snuff-box, put on his overshoes, and departed.

The next day after breakfast the baroness took the vicar aside and said to him, not without visible embarrassment:--

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau, you will think what I am about to ask of you very unjust and very inconsistent; but it is necessary, both for you and for us, that your lawsuit with Mademoiselle Gamard be withdrawn by resigning your claims, and also that you should leave my house."

As he heard these words the poor abbe turned pale.

"I am," she continued, "the innocent cause of your misfortunes, and, moreover, if it had not been for my nephew you would never have begun this lawsuit, which has now turned to your injury and to ours. But listen to me."

She told him succinctly the immense ramifications of the affair, and explained the serious nature of its consequences. Her own meditations during the night had told her something of the probable antecedents of Troubert's life; she was able, without misleading Birotteau, to show him the net so ably woven round him by revenge, and to make him see the power and great capacity of his enemy, whose hatred to Chapeloud, under whom he had been forced to crouch for a dozen years, now found vent in seizing Chapeloud's property and in persecuting Chapeloud in the person of his friend. The harmless Birotteau clasped his hands as if to pray, and wept with distress at the sight of human horrors that his own pure soul was incapable of suspecting. As frightened as though he had suddenly found himself at the edge of a precipice, he listened, with fixed, moist eyes in which there was no expression, to the revelations of his friend, who ended by saying: "I know the wrong I do in abandoning your cause; but, my dear abbe, family duties must be considered before those of friendship. Yield, as I do, to this storm, and I will prove to you my gratitude. I am not talking of your worldly interests, for those I take charge of. You shall be made free of all such anxieties for the rest of your life. By means of Monsieur de Bourbonne, who will know how to save appearances, I shall arrange matters so that you shall lack nothing. My friend, grant me the right to abandon you. I shall ever be your friend, though forced to conform to the axioms of the world. You must decide."

The poor, bewildered abbe cried aloud: "Chapeloud was right when he said that if Troubert could drag him by the feet out of his grave he would do it! He sleeps in Chapeloud's bed!"

"There is no use in lamenting," said Madame de Listomere, "and we have little time now left to us. How will you decide?"

Birotteau was too good and kind not to obey in a great crisis the unreflecting impulse of the moment. Besides, his life was already in the agony of what to him was death. He said, with a despairing look at his protectress which cut her to the heart, "I trust myself to you--I am but the stubble of the streets."

He used the Touraine word "bourrier" which has no other meaning than a "bit of straw." But there are pretty little straws, yellow,

polished, and shining, the delight of children, whereas the bourrier is straw discolored, muddy, sodden in the puddles, whirled by the tempest, crushed under feet of men.

"But, madame, I cannot let the Abbe Troubert keep Chapeloud's portrait. It was painted for me, it belongs to me; obtain that for me, and I will give up all the rest."

"Well," said Madame de Listomere. "I will go myself to Mademoiselle Gamard." The words were said in a tone which plainly showed the immense effort the Baronne de Listomere was making in lowering herself to flatter the pride of the old maid. "I will see what can be done," she said; "I hardly dare hope anything. Go and consult Monsieur de Bourbonne; ask him to put your renunciation into proper form, and bring me the paper. I will see the archbishop, and with his help we may be able to stop the matter here."

Birotteau left the house dismayed. Troubert assumed in his eyes the dimensions of an Egyptian pyramid. The hands of that man were in Paris, his elbows in the Cloister of Saint-Gatien.

"He!" said the victim to himself, "_He_ to prevent the Baron de Listomere from becoming peer of France!--and, perhaps, 'by the help of the archbishop we may be able to stop the matter here!'"

In presence of such great interests Birotteau felt he was a mere worm; he judged himself harshly.

The news of Birotteau's removal from Madame de Listomere's house seemed all the more amazing because the reason of it was wholly impenetrable. Madame de Listomere said that her nephew was intending to marry and leave the navy, and she wanted the vicar's apartment to enlarge her own. Birotteau's relinquishment was still unknown. The advice of Monsieur de Bourbonne was followed. Whenever the two facts reached the ears of the vicar-general his self-love was certain to be gratified by the assurance they gave that even if the Listomere family did not capitulate they would at least remain neutral and tacitly recognize the occult power of the Congregation,--to recognize it was, in fact, to submit to it. But the lawsuit was still sub judice; his opponents yielded and threatened at the same time.

The Listomeres had thus taken precisely the same attitude as the vicar-general himself; they held themselves aloof, and yet were able to direct others. But just at this crisis an event occurred which complicated the plans laid by Monsieur de Bourbonne and the Listomeres to quiet the Gamard and Troubert party, and made them more difficult to carry out.

Mademoiselle Gamard took cold one evening in coming out of the cathedral; the next day she was confined to her bed, and soon after became dangerously ill. The whole town rang with pity and false commiseration: "Mademoiselle Gamard's sensitive nature has not been able to bear the scandal of this lawsuit. In spite of the justice of her cause she was likely to die of grief. Birotteau has killed his benefactress." Such were the speeches poured through the capillary tubes of the great female conclave, and taken up and repeated by the whole town of Tours.

Madame de Listomere went the day after Mademoiselle Gamard took cold

to pay the promised visit, and she had the mortification of that act without obtaining any benefit from it, for the old maid was too ill to see her. She then asked politely to speak to the vicar-general.

Gratified, no doubt, to receive in Chapeloud's library, at the corner of the fireplace above which hung the two contested pictures, the woman who had hitherto ignored him, Troubert kept the baroness waiting a moment before he consented to admit her. No courtier and no diplomatist ever put into a discussion of their personal interests or into the management of some great national negotiation more shrewdness, dissimulation, and ability than the baroness and the priest displayed when they met face to face for the struggle.

Like the seconds or sponsors who in the Middle Age armed the champion, and strengthened his valor by useful counsel until he entered the lists, so the sly old fox had said to the baroness at the last moment: "Don't forget your cue. You are a mediator, and not an interested party. Troubert also is a mediator. Weigh your words; study the inflection of the man's voice. If he strokes his chin you have got him."

Some sketchers are fond of caricaturing the contrast often observable between "what is said" and "what is thought" by the speaker. To catch the full meaning of the duel of words which now took place between the priest and the lady, it is necessary to unveil the thoughts that each hid from the other under spoken sentences of apparent insignificance. Madame de Listomere began by expressing the regret she had felt at Birotteau's lawsuit; and then went on to speak of her desire to settle the matter to the satisfaction of both parties.

"The harm is done, madame," said the priest, in a grave voice. "The pious and excellent Mademoiselle Gamard is dying." ("I don't care a fig for the old thing," thought he, "but I mean to put her death on your shoulders and harass your conscience if you are such a fool as to listen to it.")

"On hearing of her illness," replied the baroness, "I entreated Monsieur Birotteau to relinquish his claims; I have brought the document, intending to give it to that excellent woman." ("I see what you mean, you wily scoundrel," thought she, "but we are safe now from your calumnies. If you take this document you'll cut your own fingers by admitting you are an accomplice.")

There was silence for a moment.

"Mademoiselle Gamard's temporal affairs do not concern me," said the priest at last, lowering the large lids over his eagle eyes to veil his emotions. ("Ho! ho!" thought he, "you can't compromise me. Thank God, those damned lawyers won't dare to plead any cause that could smirch me. What do these Listomeres expect to get by crouching in this way?")

"Monsieur," replied the baroness, "Monsieur Birotteau's affairs are no more mine than those of Mademoiselle Gamard are yours; but, unfortunately, religion is injured by such a quarrel, and I come to you as a mediator--just as I myself am seeking to make peace." ("We are not deceiving each other, Monsieur Troubert," thought she. "Don't you feel the sarcasm of that answer?")

"Injury to religion, madame!" exclaimed the vicar-general. "Religion is too lofty for the actions of men to injure." ("My religion is I," thought he.) "God makes no mistake in His judgments, madame; I recognize no tribunal but His."

"Then, monsieur," she replied, "let us endeavor to bring the judgments of men into harmony with the judgments of God." ("Yes, indeed, your religion is you.")

The Abbe Troubert suddenly changed his tone.

"Your nephew has been to Paris, I believe." ("You found out about me there," thought he; "you know now that I can crush you, you who dared to slight me, and you have come to capitulate.")

"Yes, monsieur; thank you for the interest you take in him. He returns to-night; the minister, who is very considerate of us, sent for him; he does not want Monsieur de Listomere to leave the service." ("Jesuit, you can't crush us," thought she. "I understand your civility.")

A moment's silence.

"I did not think my nephew's conduct in this affair quite the thing," she added; "but naval men must be excused; they know nothing of law." ("Come, we had better make peace," thought she; "we sha'n't gain anything by battling in this way.")

A slight smile wandered over the priest's face and was lost in its wrinkles.

"He has done us the service of getting a proper estimate on the value of those paintings," he said, looking up at the pictures. "They will be a noble ornament to the chapel of the Virgin." ("You shot a sarcasm at me," thought he, "and there's another in return; we are quits, madame.")

"If you intend to give them to Saint-Gatien, allow me to offer frames that will be more suitable and worthy of the place, and of the works themselves." ("I wish I could force you to betray that you have taken Birotteau's things for your own," thought she.)

"They do not belong to me," said the priest, on his guard.

"Here is the deed of relinquishment," said Madame de Listomere; "it ends all discussion, and makes them over to Mademoiselle Gamard." She laid the document on the table. ("See the confidence I place in you," thought she.) "It is worthy of you, monsieur," she added, "worthy of your noble character, to reconcile two Christians,--though at present I am not especially concerned for Monsieur Birotteau--"

"He is living in your house," said Troubert, interrupting her.

"No, monsieur, he is no longer there." ("That peerage and my nephew's promotion force me to do base things," thought she.)

The priest remained impassible, but his calm exterior was an indication of violent emotion. Monsieur Bourbonne alone had fathomed

the secret of that apparent tranquillity. The priest had triumphed!

"Why did you take upon yourself to bring that relinquishment," he asked, with a feeling analogous to that which impels a woman to fish for compliments.

"I could not avoid a feeling of compassion. Birotteau, whose feeble nature must be well known to you, entreated me to see Madaemoiselle Gamard and to obtain as the price of his renunciation--"

The priest frowned.

"of rights upheld by distinguished lawyers, the portrait of--"

Troubert looked fixedly at Madame de Listomere.

"the portrait of Chapeloud," she said, continuing: "I leave you to judge of his claim." ("You will be certain to lose your case if we go to law, and you know it," thought she.)

The tone of her voice as she said the words "distinguished lawyers" showed the priest that she knew very well both the strength and weakness of the enemy. She made her talent so plain to this connoisseur emeritus in the course of a conversation which lasted a long time in the tone here given, that Troubert finally went down to Mademoiselle Gamard to obtain her answer to Birotteau's request for the portrait.

He soon returned.

"Madame," he said, "I bring you the words of a dying woman. 'The Abbe Chapeloud was so true a friend to me,' she said, 'that I cannot consent to part with his picture.' As for me," added Troubert, "if it were mine I would not yield it. My feelings to my late friend were so faithful that I should feel my right to his portrait was above that of others."

"Well, there's no need to quarrel over a bad picture." ("I care as little about it as you do," thought she.) "Keep it, and I will have a copy made of it. I take some credit to myself for having averted this deplorable lawsuit; and I have gained, personally, the pleasure of your acquaintance. I hear you have a great talent for whist. You will forgive a woman for curiosity," she said, smiling. "If you will come and play at my house sometimes you cannot doubt your welcome."

Troubert stroked his chin. ("Caught! Bourbonne was right!" thought she; "he has his quantum of vanity!")

It was true. The vicar-general was feeling the delightful sensation which Mirabeau was unable to subdue when in the days of his power he found gates opening to his carriage which were barred to him in earlier days.

"Madame," he replied, "my avocations prevent my going much into society; but for you, what will not a man do?" ("The old maid is going to die; I'll get a footing at the Listomere's, and serve them if they serve me," thought he. "It is better to have them for friends than enemies.")

Madame de Listomere went home, hoping that the archbishop would complete the work of peace so auspiciously begun. But Birotteau was fated to gain nothing by his relinquishment. Mademoiselle Gamard died the next day. No one felt surprised when her will was opened to find that she had left everything to the Abbe Troubert. Her fortune was appraised at three hundred thousand francs. The vicar-general sent to Madame de Listomere two notes of invitation for the services and for the funeral procession of his friend; one for herself and one for her nephew.

"We must go," she said.

"It can't be helped," said Monsieur de Bourbonne. "It is a test to which Troubert puts you. Baron, you must go to the cemetery," he added, turning to the lieutenant, who, unluckily for him, had not left Tours.

The services took place, and were performed with unusual ecclesiastical magnificence. Only one person wept, and that was Birotteau, who, kneeling in a side chapel and seen by none, believed himself guilty of the death and prayed sincerely for the soul of the deceased, bitterly deploring that he was not able to obtain her forgiveness before she died.

The Abbe Troubert followed the body of his friend to the grave; at the verge of which he delivered a discourse in which, thanks to his eloquence, the narrow life the old maid had lived was enlarged to monumental proportions. Those present took particular note of the

following words in the peroration:--

"This life of days devoted to God and to His religion, a life adorned with noble actions silently performed, and with modest and hidden virtues, was crushed by a sorrow which we might call undeserved if we could forget, here at the verge of this grave, that our afflictions are sent by God. The numerous friends of this saintly woman, knowing the innocence and nobility of her soul, foresaw that she would issue safely from her trials in spite of the accusations which blasted her life. It may be that Providence has called her to the bosom of God to withdraw her from those trials. Happy they who can rest here below in the peace of their own hearts as Sophie now is resting in her robe of innocence among the blest."

"When he had ended his pompous discourse," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, after relating the incidents of the internment to Madame de Listomere when whist was over, the doors shut, and they were alone with the baron, "this Louis XI. in a cassock--imagine him if you can!--gave a last flourish to the sprinkler and aspersed the coffin with holy water." Monsieur de Bourbonne picked up the tongs and imitated the priest's gesture so satirically that the baron and his aunt could not help laughing. "Not until then," continued the old gentleman, "did he contradict himself. Up to that time his behavior had been perfect; but it was no doubt impossible for him to put the old maid, whom he despised so heartily and hated almost as much as he hated Chapeloud, out of sight forever without allowing his joy to appear in that last gesture."

The next day Mademoiselle Salomon came to breakfast with Madame de Listomere, chiefly to say, with deep emotion: "Our poor Abbe Birotteau

has just received a frightful blow, which shows the most determined hatred. He is appointed curate of Saint-Symphorien."

Saint-Symphorien is a suburb of Tours lying beyond the bridge. That bridge, one of the finest monuments of French architecture, is nineteen hundred feet long, and the two open squares which surround each end are precisely alike.

"Don't you see the misery of it?" she said, after a pause, amazed at the coldness with which Madame de Listomere received the news. "It is just as if the abbe were a hundred miles from Tours, from his friends, from everything! It is a frightful exile, and all the more cruel because he is kept within sight of the town where he can hardly ever come. Since his troubles he walks very feebly, yet he will have to walk three miles to see his old friends. He has taken to his bed, just now, with fever. The parsonage at Saint-Symphorien is very cold and damp, and the parish is too poor to repair it. The poor old man will be buried in a living tomb. Oh, it is an infamous plot!"

To end this history it will suffice to relate a few events in a simple way, and to give one last picture of its chief personages.

Five months later the vicar-general was made Bishop of Troyes; and Madame de Listomere was dead, leaving an annuity of fifteen hundred francs to the Abbe Birotteau. The day on which the dispositions in her will were made known Monseigneur Hyacinthe, Bishop of Troyes, was on the point of leaving Tours to reside in his diocese, but he delayed his departure on receiving the news. Furious at being foiled by a woman to whom he had lately given his countenance while she had been secretly holding the hand of a man whom he regarded as his enemy, Troubert again threatened the baron's future career, and put in jeopardy the peerage of his uncle. He made in the salon of the archbishop, and before an assembled party, one of those priestly speeches which are big with vengeance and soft with honied mildness. The Baron de Listomere went the next day to see this implacable enemy, who must have imposed sundry hard conditions on him, for the baron's subsequent conduct showed the most entire submission to the will of the terrible Jesuit.

The new bishop made over Mademoiselle Gamard's house by deed of gift to the Chapter of the cathedral; he gave Chapeloud's books and bookcases to the seminary; he presented the two disputed pictures to the Chapel of the Virgin; but he kept Chapeloud's portrait. No one knew how to explain this almost total renunciation of Mademoiselle Gamard's bequest. Monsieur de Bourbonne supposed that the bishop had secretly kept moneys that were invested, so as to support his rank with dignity in Paris, where of course he would take his seat on the Bishops' bench in the Upper Chamber. It was not until the night before Monseigneur Troubert's departure from Tours that the sly old fox unearthed the hidden reason of this strange action, the deathblow given by the most persistent vengeance to the feeblest of victims. Madame de Listomere's legacy to Birotteau was contested by the Baron de Listomere under a pretence of undue influence!

A few days after the case was brought the baron was promoted to the rank of captain. As a measure of ecclesiastical discipline, the curate of Saint-Symphorien was suspended. His superiors judged him guilty. The murderer of Sophie Gamard was also a swindler. If Monseigneur Troubert had kept Mademoiselle Gamard's property he would have found

it difficult to make the ecclesiastical authorities censure Birotteau.

At the moment when Monseigneur Hyacinthe, Bishop of Troyes, drove along the quay Saint-Symphorien in a post-chaise on his way to Paris poor Birotteau had been placed in an armchair in the sun on a terrace above the road. The unhappy priest, smitten by the archbishop, was pale and haggard. Grief, stamped on every feature, distorted the face that was once so mildly gay. Illness had dimmed his eyes, formerly brightened by the pleasures of good living and devoid of serious ideas, with a veil which simulated thought. It was but the skeleton of the old Birotteau who had rolled only one year earlier so vacuous but so content along the Cloister. The bishop cast one look of pity and contempt upon his victim; then he consented to forget him, and went his way.

There is no doubt that Troubert would have been in other times a Hildebrand or an Alexander the Sixth. In these days the Church is no longer a political power, and does not absorb the whole strength of her solitaries. Celibacy, however, presents the inherent vice of concentrating the faculties of man upon a single passion, egotism, which renders celibates either useless or mischievous. We live at a period when the defect of governments is to make Man for Society rather than Society for Man. There is a perpetual struggle going on between the Individual and the Social system which insists on using him, while he is endeavoring to use it to his own profit; whereas, in former days, man, really more free, was also more loyal to the public weal. The round in which men struggle in these days has been insensibly widened; the soul which can grasp it as a whole will ever be a magnificent exception; for, as a general thing, in morals as in physics, impulsion loses in intensity what it gains in extension. Society can not be based on exceptions. Man in the first instance was purely and simply, father; his heart beat warmly, concentrated in the one ray of Family. Later, he lived for a clan, or a small community; hence the great historical devotions of Greece and Rome. After that he was a man of caste or of a religion, to maintain the greatness of which he often proved himself sublime; but by that time the field of his interests became enlarged by many intellectual regions. In our day, his life is attached to that of a vast country; sooner or later his family will be, it is predicted, the entire universe.

Will this moral cosmopolitanism, the hope of Christian Rome, prove to be only a sublime error? It is so natural to believe in the realization of a noble vision, in the Brotherhood of Man. But, alas! the human machine does not have such divine proportions. Souls that are vast enough to grasp a range of feelings bestowed on great men only will never belong to either fathers of families or simple citizens. Some physiologists have thought that as the brain enlarges the heart narrows; but they are mistaken. The apparent egotism of men who bear a science, a nation, a code of laws in their bosom is the noblest of passions; it is, as one may say, the maternity of the masses; to give birth to new peoples, to produce new ideas they must unite within their mighty brains the breasts of woman and the force of God. The history of such men as Innocent the Third and Peter the Great, and all great leaders of their age and nation will show, if need be, in the highest spheres the same vast thought of which Troubert was made the representative in the quiet depths of the Cloister of Saint-Gatien.

ADDENDUM

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

Birotteau, Abbe Francois
The Lily of the Valley
Cesar Birotteau

Bourbonne, De
Madame Firmiani

Listomere, Baronne de
Cesar Birotteau
The Muse of the Department

Troubert, Abbe Hyacinthe
The Member for Arcis

Villenoix, Pauline Salomon de
Louis Lambert
A Seaside Tragedy

THE TWO BROTHERS

BY

HONORE DE BALZAC

Translated by

Katharine Prescott Wormeley

DEDICATION

To Monsieur Charles Nodier, member of the French Academy, etc.

Here, my dear Nodier, is a book filled with deeds that are screened from the action of the laws by the closed doors of domestic life; but as to which the finger of God, often called chance, supplies the place of human justice, and in which the moral is none the less striking and instructive because it is pointed by a scoffer.

To my mind, such deeds contain great lessons for the Family and for Maternity. We shall some day realize, perhaps too late, the effects produced by the diminution of paternal authority. That authority, which formerly ceased only at the death of the father, was the sole human tribunal before which domestic crimes could be arraigned; kings themselves, on special occasions, took part in executing its judgments.

However good and tender a mother may be, she cannot fulfil the function of the patriarchal royalty any more than a woman can take the place of a king upon the throne. Perhaps I have never drawn a picture that shows more plainly how essential to European society is the indissoluble marriage bond, how fatal the results of feminine weakness, how great the dangers arising from selfish interests when indulged without restraint. May a society which is based solely on the power of wealth shudder as it sees the impotence of the law in dealing with the workings of a system which deifies success, and pardons every means of attaining it. May it return to the Catholic religion, for the purification of its masses through the inspiration of religious feeling, and by means of an education other than that of a lay university.

In the "Scenes from Military Life" so many fine natures, so many high and noble self-devotions will be set forth, that I may here be allowed to point out the depraving effect of the necessities of war upon certain minds who venture to act in domestic life as if upon the field of battle.

You have cast a sagacious glance over the events of our own time; its philosophy shines, in more than one bitter reflection, through your elegant pages; you have appreciated, more clearly than other men, the havoc wrought in the mind of our country by the existence of four distinct political systems. I cannot, therefore, place this history under the protection of a more competent authority. Your name may, perhaps, defend my work against the criticisms that are certain to follow it,—for where is the patient who keeps silence when the surgeon lifts the dressing from his wound?

To the pleasure of dedicating this Scene to you, is joined the pride I feel in thus making known your friendship for one who here subscribes himself

Your sincere admirer,

De Balzac
Paris, November, 1842.

THE TWO BROTHERS

CHAPTER I

In 1792 the townspeople of Issoudun enjoyed the services of a physician named Rouget, whom they held to be a man of consummate malignity. Were we to believe certain bold tongues, he made his wife extremely unhappy, although she was the most beautiful woman of the neighborhood. Perhaps, indeed, she was rather silly. But the prying of friends, the slander of enemies, and the gossip of acquaintances, had never succeeded in laying bare the interior of that household. Doctor Rouget was a man of whom we say in common parlance, "He is not

pleasant to deal with." Consequently, during his lifetime, his townsmen kept silence about him and treated him civilly. His wife, a demoiselle Descoings, feeble in health during her girlhood (which was said to be a reason why the doctor married her), gave birth to a son, and also to a daughter who arrived, unexpectedly, ten years after her brother, and whose birth took the husband, doctor though he were, by surprise. This late-comer was named Agathe.

These little facts are so simple, so commonplace, that a writer seems scarcely justified in placing them in the fore-front of his history; yet if they are not known, a man of Doctor Rouget's stamp would be thought a monster, an unnatural father, when, in point of fact, he was only following out the evil tendencies which many people shelter under the terrible axiom that "men should have strength of character,"--a masculine phrase that has caused many a woman's misery.

The Descoings, father-in-law and mother-in-law of the doctor, were commission merchants in the wool-trade, and did a double business by selling for the producers and buying for the manufacturers of the golden fleeces of Berry; thus pocketing a commission on both sides. In this way they grew rich and miserly--the outcome of many such lives. Descoings the son, younger brother of Madame Rouget, did not like Issoudun. He went to seek his fortune in Paris, where he set up as a grocer in the rue Saint-Honore. That step led to his ruin. But nothing could have hindered it: a grocer is drawn to his business by an attracting force quite equal to the repelling force which drives artists away from it. We do not sufficiently study the social potentialities which make up the various vocations of life. It would be interesting to know what determines one man to be a stationer rather than a baker; since, in our day, sons are not compelled to follow the calling of their fathers, as they were among the Egyptians. In this instance, love decided the vocation of Descoings. He said to himself, "I, too, will be a grocer!" and in the same breath he said (also to himself) some other things regarding his employer,--a beautiful creature, with whom he had fallen desperately in love. Without other help than patience and the trifling sum of money his father and mother sent him, he married the widow of his predecessor, Monsieur Bixiou.

In 1792 Descoings was thought to be doing an excellent business. At that time, the old Descoings were still living. They had retired from the wool-trade, and were employing their capital in buying up the forfeited estates,--another golden fleece! Their son-in-law Doctor Rouget, who, about this time, felt pretty sure that he should soon have to mourn for the death of his wife, sent his daughter to Paris to the care of his brother-in-law, partly to let her see the capital, but still more to carry out an artful scheme of his own. Descoings had no children. Madame Descoings, twelve years older than her husband, was in good health, but as fat as a thrush after harvest; and the canny Rouget knew enough professionally to be certain that Monsieur and Madame Descoings, contrary to the moral of fairy tales, would live happy ever after without having any children. The pair might therefore become attached to Agathe.

That young girl, the handsomest maiden in Issoudun, did not resemble either father or mother. Her birth had caused a lasting breach between Doctor Rouget and his intimate friend Monsieur Lousteau, a former sub-delegate who had lately removed from the town. When a family expatriates itself, the natives of a place as attractive as Issoudun

have a right to inquire into the reasons of so surprising a step. It was said by certain sharp tongues that Doctor Rouget, a vindictive man, had been heard to exclaim that Monsieur Lousteau should die by his hand. Uttered by a physician, this declaration had the force of a cannon-ball. When the National Assembly suppressed the sub-delegates, Lousteau and his family left Issoudun, and never returned there. After their departure Madame Rouget spent most of her time with the sister of the late sub-delegate, Madame Hochon, who was the godmother of her daughter, and the only person to whom she confided her griefs. The little that the good town of Issoudun ever really knew of the beautiful Madame Rouget was told by Madame Hochon,--though not until after the doctor's death.

The first words of Madame Rouget, when informed by her husband that he meant to send Agathe to Paris, were: "I shall never see my daughter again."

"And she was right," said the worthy Madame Hochon.

After this, the poor mother grew as yellow as a quince, and her appearance did not contradict the tongues of those who declared that Doctor Rouget was killing her by inches. The behavior of her booby of a son must have added to the misery of the poor woman so unjustly accused. Not restrained, possibly encouraged by his father, the young fellow, who was in every way stupid, paid her neither the attentions nor the respect which a son owes to a mother. Jean-Jacques Rouget was like his father, especially on the latter's worst side; and the doctor at his best was far from satisfactory, either morally or physically.

The arrival of the charming Agathe Rouget did not bring happiness to her uncle Descoings; for in the same week (or rather, we should say decade, for the Republic had then been proclaimed) he was imprisoned on a hint from Robespierre given to Fouquier-Tinville. Descoings, who was imprudent enough to think the famine fictitious, had the additional folly, under the impression that opinions were free, to express that opinion to several of his male and female customers as he served them in the grocery. The citoyenne Duplay, wife of a cabinet-maker with whom Robespierre lodged, and who looked after the affairs of that eminent citizen, patronized, unfortunately, the Descoings establishment. She considered the opinions of the grocer insulting to Maximilian the First. Already displeased with the manners of Descoings, this illustrious "tricoteuse" of the Jacobin club regarded the beauty of his wife as a kind of aristocracy. She infused a venom of her own into the grocer's remarks when she repeated them to her good and gentle master, and the poor man was speedily arrested on the well-worn charge of "accapuration."

No sooner was he put in prison, than his wife set to work to obtain his release. But the steps she took were so ill-judged that any one hearing her talk to the arbiters of his fate might have thought that she was in reality seeking to get rid of him. Madame Descoings knew Bridau, one of the secretaries of Roland, then minister of the interior,--the right-hand man of all the ministers who succeeded each other in that office. She put Bridau on the war-path to save her grocer. That incorruptible official--one of the virtuous dupes who are always admirably disinterested--was careful not to corrupt the men on whom the fate of the poor grocer depended; on the contrary, he endeavored to enlighten them. Enlighten people in those days! As well might he have begged them to bring back the Bourbons. The Girondist

minister, who was then contending against Robespierre, said to his secretary, "Why do you meddle in the matter?" and all others to whom the worthy Bridau appealed made the same atrocious reply: "Why do you meddle?" Bridau then sagely advised Madame Descoings to keep quiet and await events. But instead of conciliating Robespierre's housekeeper, she fretted and fumed against that informer, and even complained to a member of the Convention, who, trembling for himself, replied hastily, "I will speak of it to Robespierre." The handsome petitioner put faith in this promise, which the other carefully forgot. A few loaves of sugar, or a bottle or two of good liqueur, given to the citoyenne Duplay would have saved Descoings.

This little mishap proves that in revolutionary times it is quite as dangerous to employ honest men as scoundrels; we should rely on ourselves alone. Descoings perished; but he had the glory of going to the scaffold with Andre Chenier. There, no doubt, grocery and poetry embraced for the first time in the flesh; although they have, and ever have had, intimate secret relations. The death of Descoings produced far more sensation than that of Andre Chenier. It has taken thirty years to prove to France that she lost more by the death of Chenier than by that of Descoings.

This act of Robespierre led to one good result: the terrified grocers let politics alone until 1830. Descoings's shop was not a hundred yards from Robespierre's lodging. His successor was scarcely more fortunate than himself. Cesar Birotteau, the celebrated perfumer of the "Queen of Roses," bought the premises; but, as if the scaffold had left some inexplicable contagion behind it, the inventor of the "Paste of Sultans" and the "Carminative Balm" came to his ruin in that very shop. The solution of the problem here suggested belongs to the realm of occult science.

During the visits which Roland's secretary paid to the unfortunate Madame Descoings, he was struck with the cold, calm, innocent beauty of Agathe Rouget. While consoling the widow, who, however, was too inconsolable to carry on the business of her second deceased husband, he married the charming girl, with the consent of her father, who hastened to give his approval to the match. Doctor Rouget, delighted to hear that matters were going beyond his expectations,--for his wife, on the death of her brother, had become sole heiress of the Descoings,--rushed to Paris, not so much to be present at the wedding as to see that the marriage contract was drawn to suit him. The ardent and disinterested love of citizen Bridau gave carte blanche to the perfidious doctor, who made the most of his son-in-law's blindness, as the following history will show.

Madame Rouget, or, to speak more correctly, the doctor, inherited all the property, landed and personal, of Monsieur and Madame Descoings the elder, who died within two years of each other; and soon after that, Rouget got the better, as we may say, of his wife, for she died at the beginning of the year 1799. So he had vineyards and he bought farms, he owned iron-works and he sold fleeces. His well-beloved son was stupidly incapable of doing anything; but the father destined him for the state in life of a land proprietor and allowed him to grow up in wealth and silliness, certain that the lad would know as much as the wisest if he simply let himself live and die. After 1799, the cipherers of Issoudun put, at the very least, thirty thousand francs' income to the doctor's credit. From the time of his wife's death he led a debauched life, though he regulated it, so to speak, and kept it

within the closed doors of his own house. This man, endowed with "strength of character," died in 1805, and God only knows what the townspeople of Issoudun said about him then, and how many anecdotes they related of his horrible private life. Jean-Jacques Rouget, whom his father, recognizing his stupidity, had latterly treated with severity, remained a bachelor for certain reasons, the explanation of which will form an important part of this history. His celibacy was partly his father's fault, as we shall see later.

Meantime, it is well to inquire into the results of the secret vengeance the doctor took on a daughter whom he did not recognize as his own, but who, you must understand at once, was legitimately his. Not a person in Issoudun had noticed one of those capricious facts that make the whole subject of generation a vast abyss in which science flounders. Agathe bore a strong likeness to the mother of Doctor Rouget. Just as gout is said to skip a generation and pass from grandfather to grandson, resemblances not uncommonly follow the same course.

In like manner, the eldest of Agathe's children, who physically resembled his mother, had the moral qualities of his grandfather, Doctor Rouget. We will leave the solution of this problem to the twentieth century, with a fine collection of microscopic animalculae; our descendants may perhaps write as much nonsense as the scientific schools of the nineteenth century have uttered on this mysterious and perplexing question.

Agathe Rouget attracted the admiration of everyone by a face destined, like that of Mary, the mother of our Lord, to continue ever virgin, even after marriage. Her portrait, still to be seen in the atelier of Bridau, shows a perfect oval and a clear whiteness of complexion, without the faintest tinge of color, in spite of her golden hair. More than one artist, looking at the pure brow, the discreet, composed mouth, the delicate nose, the small ears, the long lashes, and the dark-blue eyes filled with tenderness,—in short, at the whole countenance expressive of placidity,—has asked the great artist, "Is that a copy of a Raphael?" No man ever acted under a truer inspiration than the minister's secretary when he married this young girl. Agathe was an embodiment of the ideal housekeeper brought up in the provinces and never parted from her mother. Pious, though far from sanctimonious, she had no other education than that given to women by the Church. Judged, by ordinary standards, she was an accomplished wife, yet her ignorance of life paved the way for great misfortunes. The epitaph on the Roman matron, "She did needlework and kept the house," gives a faithful picture of her simple, pure, and tranquil existence.

Under the Consulate, Bridau attached himself fanatically to Napoleon, who placed him at the head of a department in the ministry of the interior in 1804, a year before the death of Doctor Rouget. With a salary of twelve thousand francs and very handsome emoluments, Bridau was quite indifferent to the scandalous settlement of the property at Issoudun, by which Agathe was deprived of her rightful inheritance. Six months before Doctor Rouget's death he had sold one-half of his property to his son, to whom the other half was bequeathed as a gift, and also in accordance with his rights as heir. An advance of fifty thousand francs on her inheritance, made to Agathe at the time of her marriage, represented her share of the property of her father and mother.

Bridau idolized the Emperor, and served him with the devotion of a Mohammedan for his prophet; striving to carry out the vast conceptions of the modern demi-god, who, finding the whole fabric of France destroyed, went to work to reconstruct everything. The new official never showed fatigue, never cried "Enough." Projects, reports, notes, studies, he accepted all, even the hardest labors, happy in the consciousness of aiding his Emperor. He loved him as a man, he adored him as a sovereign, and he would never allow the least criticism of his acts or his purposes.

From 1804 to 1808, the Bridaus lived in a handsome suite of rooms on the Quai Voltaire, a few steps from the ministry of the interior and close to the Tuileries. A cook and footman were the only servants of the household during this period of Madame Bridau's grandeur. Agathe, early afoot, went to market with her cook. While the latter did the rooms, she prepared the breakfast. Bridau never went to the ministry before eleven o'clock. As long as their union lasted, his wife took the same unwearying pleasure in preparing for him an exquisite breakfast, the only meal he really enjoyed. At all seasons and in all weathers, Agathe watched her husband from the window as he walked toward his office, and never drew in her head until she had seen him turn the corner of the rue du Bac. Then she cleared the breakfast-table herself, gave an eye to the arrangement of the rooms, dressed for the day, played with her children and took them to walk, or received the visits of friends; all the while waiting in spirit for Bridau's return. If her husband brought him important business that had to be attended to, she would station herself close to the writing-table in his study, silent as a statue, knitting while he wrote, sitting up as late as he did, and going to bed only a few moments before him. Occasionally, the pair went to some theatre, occupying one of the ministerial boxes. On those days, they dined at a restaurant, and the gay scenes of that establishment never ceased to give Madame Bridau the same lively pleasure they afford to provincials who are new to Paris. Agathe, who was obliged to accept the formal dinners sometimes given to the head of a department in a ministry, paid due attention to the luxurious requirements of the then mode of dress, but she took off the rich apparel with delight when she returned home, and resumed the simple garb of a provincial. One day in the week, Thursday, Bridau received his friends, and he also gave a grand ball, annually, on Shrove Tuesday.

These few words contain the whole history of their conjugal life, which had but three events; the births of two children, born three years apart, and the death of Bridau, who died in 1808, killed by overwork at the very moment when the Emperor was about to appoint him director-general, count, and councillor of state. At this period of his reign, Napoleon was particularly absorbed in the affairs of the interior; he overwhelmed Bridau with work, and finally wrecked the health of that dauntless bureaucrat. The Emperor, of whom Bridau had never asked a favor, made inquiries into his habits and fortune. Finding that this devoted servant literally had nothing but his situation, Napoleon recognized him as one of the incorruptible natures which raised the character of his government and gave moral weight to it, and he wished to surprise him by the gift of some distinguished reward. But the effort to complete a certain work, involving immense labor, before the departure of the Emperor for Spain caused the death of the devoted servant, who was seized with an inflammatory fever. When the Emperor, who remained in Paris for a few days after his

return to prepare for the campaign of 1809, was told of Bridau's death he said: "There are men who can never be replaced." Struck by the spectacle of a devotion which could receive none of the brilliant recognitions that reward a soldier, the Emperor resolved to create an order to requite civil services, just as he had already created the Legion of honor to reward the military. The impression he received from the death of Bridau led him to plan the order of the Reunion. He had not time, however, to mature this aristocratic scheme, the recollection of which is now so completely effaced that many of my readers may ask what were its insignia: the order was worn with a blue ribbon. The Emperor called it the Reunion, under the idea of uniting the order of the Golden Fleece of Spain with the order of the Golden Fleece of Austria. "Providence," said a Prussian diplomatist, "took care to frustrate the profanation."

After Bridau's death the Emperor inquired into the circumstances of his widow. Her two sons each received a scholarship in the Imperial Lyceum, and the Emperor paid the whole costs of their education from his privy purse. He gave Madame Bridau a pension of four thousand francs, intending, no doubt, to advance the fortune of her sons in future years.

From the time of her marriage to the death of her husband, Agathe had held no communication with Issoudun. She lost her mother just as she was on the point of giving birth to her youngest son, and when her father, who, as she well knew, loved her little, died, the coronation of the Emperor was at hand, and that event gave Bridau so much additional work that she was unwilling to leave him. Her brother, Jean-Jacques Rouget, had not written to her since she left Issoudun. Though grieved by the tacit repudiation of her family, Agathe had come to think seldom of those who never thought of her. Once a year she received a letter from her godmother, Madame Hochon, to whom she replied with commonplaces, paying no heed to the advice which that pious and excellent woman gave to her, disguised in cautious words.

Some time before the death of Doctor Rouget, Madame Hochon had written to her goddaughter warning her that she would get nothing from her father's estate unless she gave a power of attorney to Monsieur Hochon. Agathe was very reluctant to harass her brother. Whether it were that Bridau thought the spoliation of his wife in accordance with the laws and customs of Berry, or that, high-minded as he was, he shared the magnanimity of his wife, certain it is that he would not listen to Roguin, his notary, who advised him to take advantage of his ministerial position to contest the deeds by which the father had deprived the daughter of her legitimate inheritance. Husband and wife thus tacitly sanctioned what was done at Issoudun. Nevertheless, Roguin had forced Bridau to reflect upon the future interests of his wife which were thus compromised. He saw that if he died before her, Agathe would be left without property, and this led him to look into his own affairs. He found that between 1793 and 1805 his wife and he had been obliged to use nearly thirty thousand of the fifty thousand francs in cash which old Rouget had given to his daughter at the time of her marriage. He at once invested the remaining twenty thousand in the public funds, then quoted at forty, and from this source Agathe received about two thousand francs a year. As a widow, Madame Bridau could live suitably on an income of six thousand francs. With provincial good sense, she thought of changing her residence, dismissing the footman, and keeping no servant except a cook; but her intimate friend, Madame Descoings, who insisted on being considered

her aunt, sold her own establishment and came to live with Agathe, turning the study of the late Bridau into her bedroom.

The two widows clubbed their revenues, and so were in possession of a joint income of twelve thousand francs a year. This seems a very simple and natural proceeding. But nothing in life is more deserving of attention than the things that are called natural; we are on our guard against the unnatural and extraordinary. For this reason, you will find men of experience--lawyers, judges, doctors, and priests--attaching immense importance to simple matters; and they are often thought over-scrupulous. But the serpent amid flowers is one of the finest myths that antiquity has bequeathed for the guidance of our lives. How often we hear fools, trying to excuse themselves in their own eyes or in the eyes of others, exclaiming, "It was all so natural that any one would have been taken in."

In 1809, Madame Descoings, who never told her age, was sixty-five. In her heyday she had been popularly called a beauty, and was now one of those rare women whom time respects. She owed to her excellent constitution the privilege of preserving her good looks, which, however, would not bear close examination. She was of medium height, plump, and fresh, with fine shoulders and a rather rosy complexion. Her blond hair, bordering on chestnut, showed, in spite of her husband's catastrophe, not a tinge of gray. She loved good cheer, and liked to concoct nice little made dishes; yet, fond as she was of eating, she also adored the theatre and cherished a vice which she wrapped in impenetrable mystery--she bought into lotteries. Can that be the abyss of which mythology warns us under the fable of the Danaides and their cask? Madame Descoings, like other women who are lucky enough to keep young for many years, spend rather too much upon her dress; but aside from these trifling defects she was the pleasantest of women to live with. Of every one's opinion, never opposing anybody, her kindly and communicative gaiety gave pleasure to all. She had, moreover, a Parisian quality which charmed the retired clerks and elderly merchants of her circle,--she could take and give a jest. If she did not marry a third time it was no doubt the fault of the times. During the wars of the Empire, marrying men found rich and handsome girls too easily to trouble themselves about women of sixty.

Madame Descoings, always anxious to cheer Madame Bridau, often took the latter to the theatre, or to drive; prepared excellent little dinners for her delectation, and even tried to marry her to her own son by her first husband, Bixiou. Alas! to do this, she was forced to reveal a terrible secret, carefully kept by her, by her late husband, and by her notary. The young and beautiful Madame Descoings, who passed for thirty-six years old, had a son who was thirty-five, named Bixiou, already a widower, a major in the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, who subsequently perished at Lutzen, leaving behind him an only son. Madame Descoings, who only saw her grandson secretly, gave out that he was the son of the first wife of her first husband. The revelation was partly a prudential act; for this grandson was being educated with Madame Bridau's sons at the Imperial Lyceum, where he had a half-scholarship. The lad, who was clever and shrewd at school, soon after made himself a great reputation as draughtsman and designer, and also as a wit.

Agathe, who lived only for her children, declined to re-marry, as much from good sense as from fidelity to her husband. But it is easier for a woman to be a good wife than to be a good mother. A widow has two

tasks before her, whose duties clash: she is a mother, and yet she must exercise parental authority. Few women are firm enough to understand and practise this double duty. Thus it happened that Agathe, notwithstanding her many virtues, was the innocent cause of great unhappiness. In the first place, through her lack of intelligence and the blind confidence to which such noble natures are prone, Agathe fell a victim to Madame Descoings, who brought a terrible misfortune on the family. That worthy soul was nursing up a combination of three numbers called a "trey" in a lottery, and lotteries give no credit to their customers. As manager of the joint household, she was able to pay up her stakes with the money intended for their current expenses, and she went deeper and deeper into debt, with the hope of ultimately enriching her grandson Bixiou, her dear Agathe, and the little Bridaus. When the debts amounted to ten thousand francs, she increased her stakes, trusting that her favorite trey, which had not turned up in nine years, would come at last, and fill to overflowing the abysmal deficit.

From that moment the debt rolled up rapidly. When it reached twenty thousand francs, Madame Descoings lost her head, still failing to win the trey. She tried to mortgage her own property to pay her niece, but Roguin, who was her notary, showed her the impossibility of carrying out that honorable intention. The late Doctor Rouget had laid hold of the property of the brother-in-law after the grocer's execution, and had, as it were, disinherited Madame Descoings by securing to her a life-interest on the property of his own son, Jean-Jacques Rouget. No money-lender would think of advancing twenty thousand francs to a woman sixty-six years of age, on an annuity of about four thousand, at a period when ten per cent could easily be got for an investment. So one morning Madame Descoings fell at the feet of her niece, and with sobs confessed the state of things. Madame Bridau did not reproach her; she sent away the footman and cook, sold all but the bare necessities of her furniture, sold also three-fourths of her government funds, paid off the debts, and bade farewell to her appartement.

CHAPTER II

One of the worst corners in all Paris is undoubtedly that part of the rue Mazarin which lies between the rue Guenegard and its junction with the rue de Seine, behind the palace of the Institute. The high gray walls of the college and of the library which Cardinal Mazarin presented to the city of Paris, and which the French Academy was in after days to inhabit, cast chill shadows over this angle of the street, where the sun seldom shines, and the north wind blows. The poor ruined widow came to live on the third floor of a house standing at this damp, dark, cold corner. Opposite, rose the Institute buildings, in which were the dens of ferocious animals known to the bourgeoisie under the name of artists,--under that of tyro, or rapin, in the studios. Into these dens they enter rapins, but they may come forth prix de Rome. The transformation does not take place without extraordinary uproar and disturbance at the time of year when the examinations are going on, and the competitors are shut up in their cells. To win a prize, they were obliged, within a given time, to make, if a sculptor, a clay model; if a painter, a picture such as may be seen at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts; if a musician, a cantata; if an architect, the plans for a public building. At the time when we are

penning the words, this menagerie has already been removed from these cold and cheerless buildings, and taken to the elegant Palais des Beaux-Arts, which stands near by.

From the windows of Madame Bridau's new abode, a glance could penetrate the depths of those melancholy barred cages. To the north, the view was shut in by the dome of the Institute; looking up the street, the only distraction to the eye was a file of hackney-coaches, which stood at the upper end of the rue Mazarin. After a while, the widow put boxes of earth in front of her windows, and cultivated those aerial gardens that police regulations forbid, though their vegetable products purify the atmosphere. The house, which backed up against another fronting on the rue de Seine, was necessarily shallow, and the staircase wound round upon itself. The third floor was the last. Three windows to three rooms, namely, a dining-room, a small salon, and a chamber on one side of the landing; on the other, a little kitchen, and two single rooms; above, an immense garret without partitions. Madame Bridau chose this lodging for three reasons: economy, for it cost only four hundred francs a year, so that she took a lease of it for nine years; proximity to her sons' school, the Imperial Lyceum being at a short distance; thirdly, because it was in the quarter to which she was used.

The inside of the _appartement_ was in keeping with the general look of the house. The dining-room, hung with a yellow paper covered with little green flowers, and floored with tiles that were not glazed, contained nothing that was not strictly necessary,--namely, a table, two sideboards, and six chairs, brought from the other _appartement_. The salon was adorned with an Aubusson carpet given to Bridau when the ministry of the interior was refurnished. To the furniture of this room the widow added one of those commonplace mahogany sofas with the Egyptian heads that Jacob Desmaller manufactured by the gross in 1806, covering them with a silken green stuff bearing a design of white geometric circles. Above this piece of furniture hung a portrait of Bridau, done in pastel by the hand of an amateur, which at once attracted the eye. Though art might have something to say against it, no one could fail to recognize the firmness of the noble and obscure citizen upon that brow. The serenity of the eyes, gentle, yet proud, was well given; the sagacious mind, to which the prudent lips bore testimony, the frank smile, the atmosphere of the man of whom the Emperor had said, "Justum et tenacem," had all been caught, if not with talent, at least with fidelity. Studying that face, an observer could see that the man had done his duty. His countenance bore signs of the incorruptibility which we attribute to several men who served the Republic. On the opposite wall, over a card-table, flashed a picture of the Emperor in brilliant colors, done by Vernet; Napoleon was riding rapidly, attended by his escort.

Agathe had bestowed upon herself two large birdcages; one filled with canaries, the other with Java sparrows. She had given herself up to this juvenile fancy since the loss of her husband, irreparable to her, as, in fact, it was to many others. By the end of three months, her widowed chamber had become what it was destined to remain until the appointed day when she left it forever,--a litter of confusion which words are powerless to describe. Cats were domiciled on the sofa. The canaries, occasionally let loose, left their commas on the furniture. The poor dear woman scattered little heaps of millet and bits of chickweed about the room, and put tidbits for the cats in broken saucers. Garments lay everywhere. The room breathed of the provinces

and of constancy. Everything that once belonged to Bridau was scrupulously preserved. Even the implements in his desk received the care which the widow of a paladin might have bestowed upon her husband's armor. One slight detail here will serve to bring the tender devotion of this woman before the reader's mind. She had wrapped up a pen and sealed the package, on which she wrote these words, "Last pen used by my dear husband." The cup from which he drank his last draught was on the fireplace; caps and false hair were tossed, at a later period, over the glass globes which covered these precious relics. After Bridau's death not a trace of coquetry, not even a woman's ordinary care of her person, was left in the young widow of thirty-five. Parted from the only man she had ever known, esteemed, and loved, from one who had never caused her the slightest unhappiness, she was no longer conscious of her womanhood; all things were as nothing to her; she no longer even thought of her dress. Nothing was ever more simply done or more complete than this laying down of conjugal happiness and personal charm. Some human beings obtain through love the power of transferring their self--their I--to the being of another; and when death takes that other, no life of their own is possible for them.

Agathe, who now lived only for her children, was infinitely sad at the thought of the privations this financial ruin would bring upon them. From the time of her removal to the rue Mazarin a shade of melancholy came upon her face, which made it very touching. She hoped a little in the Emperor; but the Emperor at that time could do no more than he was already doing; he was giving three hundred francs a year to each child from his privy purse, besides the scholarships.

As for the brilliant Descoings, she occupied an appartement on the second floor similar to that of her niece above her. She had made Madame Bridau an assignment of three thousand francs out of her annuity. Roguin, the notary, attended to this in Madame Bridau's interest; but it would take seven years of such slow repayment to make good the loss. The Descoings, thus reduced to an income of twelve hundred francs, lived with her niece in a small way. These excellent but timid creatures employed a woman-of-all-work for the morning hours only. Madame Descoings, who liked to cook, prepared the dinner. In the evenings a few old friends, persons employed at the ministry who owed their places to Bridau, came for a game of cards with the two widows. Madame Descoings still cherished her trety, which she declared was obstinate about turning up. She expected, by one grand stroke, to repay the enforced loan she had made upon her niece. She was fonder of the little Bridaus than she was of her grandson Bixiou,--partly from a sense of the wrong she had done them, partly because she felt the kindness of her niece, who, under her worst deprivations, never uttered a word of reproach. So Philippe and Joseph were cossetted, and the old gambler in the Imperial Lottery of France (like others who have a vice or a weakness to atone for) cooked them nice little dinners with plenty of sweets. Later on, Philippe and Joseph could extract from her pocket, with the utmost facility, small sums of money, which the younger used for pencils, paper, charcoal and prints, the elder to buy tennis-shoes, marbles, twine, and pocket-knives. Madame Descoings's passion forced her to be content with fifty francs a month for her domestic expenses, so as to gamble with the rest.

On the other hand, Madame Bridau, motherly love, kept her expenses down to the same sum. By way of penance for her former over-confidence, she heroically cut off her own little enjoyments. As with

other timid souls of limited intelligence, one shock to her feelings rousing her distrust led her to exaggerate a defect in her character until it assumed the consistency of a virtue. The Emperor, she said to herself, might forget them; he might die in battle; her pension, at any rate, ceased with her life. She shuddered at the risk her children ran of being left alone in the world without means. Quite incapable of understanding Roguin when he explained to her that in seven years Madame Descoings's assignment would replace the money she had sold out of the Funds, she persisted in trusting neither the notary nor her aunt, nor even the government; she believed in nothing but herself and the privations she was practising. By laying aside three thousand francs every year from her pension, she would have thirty thousand francs at the end of ten years; which would give fifteen hundred a year to her children. At thirty-six, she might expect to live twenty years longer; and if she kept to the same system of economy she might leave to each child enough for the bare necessities of life.

Thus the two widows passed from hollow opulence to voluntary poverty, --one under the pressure of a vice, the other through the promptings of the purest virtue. None of these petty details are useless in teaching the lesson which ought to be learned from this present history, drawn as it is from the most commonplace interests of life, but whose bearings are, it may be, only the more widespread. The view from the windows into the student dens; the tumult of the rapins below; the necessity of looking up at the sky to escape the miserable sights of the damp angle of the street; the presence of that portrait, full of soul and grandeur despite the workmanship of an amateur painter; the sight of the rich colors, now old and harmonious, in that calm and placid home; the preference of the mother for her eldest child; her opposition to the tastes of the younger; in short, the whole body of facts and circumstances which make the preamble of this history are perhaps the generating causes to which we owe Joseph Bridau, one of the greatest painters of the modern French school of art.

Philippe, the elder of the two sons, was strikingly like his mother. Though a blond lad, with blue eyes, he had the daring look which is readily taken for intrepidity and courage. Old Claparon, who entered the ministry of the interior at the same time as Bridau, and was one of the faithful friends who played whist every night with the two widows, used to say of Philippe two or three times a month, giving him a tap on the cheek, "Here's a young rascal who'll stand to his guns!" The boy, thus stimulated, naturally and out of bravado, assumed a resolute manner. That turn once given to his character, he became very adroit at all bodily exercises; his fights at the Lyceum taught him the endurance and contempt for pain which lays the foundation of military valor. He also acquired, very naturally, a distaste for study; public education being unable to solve the difficult problem of developing "pari passu" the body and the mind.

Agathe believed that the purely physical resemblance which Philippe bore to her carried with it a moral likeness; and she confidently expected him to show at a future day her own delicacy of feeling, heightened by the vigor of manhood. Philippe was fifteen years old when his mother moved into the melancholy appartement in the rue Mazarin; and the winning ways of a lad of that age went far to confirm the maternal beliefs. Joseph, three years younger, was like his father, but only on the defective side. In the first place, his thick black hair was always in disorder, no matter what pains were taken

with it; while Philippe's, notwithstanding his vivacity, was invariably neat. Then, by some mysterious fatality, Joseph could not keep his clothes clean; dress him in new clothes, and he immediately made them look like old ones. The elder, on the other hand, took care of his things out of mere vanity. Unconsciously, the mother acquired a habit of scolding Joseph and holding up his brother as an example to him. Agathe did not treat the two children alike; when she went to fetch them from school, the thought in her mind as to Joseph always was, "What sort of state shall I find him in?" These trifles drove her heart into the gulf of maternal preference.

No one among the very ordinary persons who made the society of the two widows--neither old Du Bruel nor old Claparon, nor Desroches the father, nor even the Abbe Loraux, Agathe's confessor--noticed Joseph's faculty for observation. Absorbed in the line of his own tastes, the future colorist paid no attention to anything that concerned himself. During his childhood this disposition was so like torpor that his father grew uneasy about him. The remarkable size of the head and the width of the brow roused a fear that the child might be liable to water on the brain. His distressful face, whose originality was thought ugliness by those who had no eye for the moral value of a countenance, wore rather a sullen expression during his childhood. The features, which developed later in life, were pinched, and the close attention the child paid to what went on about him still further contracted them. Philippe flattered his mother's vanity, but Joseph won no compliments. Philippe sparkled with the clever sayings and lively answers that lead parents to believe their boys will turn out remarkable men; Joseph was taciturn, and a dreamer. The mother hoped great things of Philippe, and expected nothing of Joseph.

Joseph's predilection for art was developed by a very commonplace incident. During the Easter holidays of 1812, as he was coming home from a walk in the Tuileries with his brother and Madame Descoings, he saw a pupil drawing a caricature of some professor on the wall of the Institute, and stopped short with admiration at the charcoal sketch, which was full of satire. The next day the child stood at the window watching the pupils as they entered the building by the door on the rue Mazarin; then he ran downstairs and slipped furtively into the long courtyard of the Institute, full of statues, busts, half-finished marbles, plasters, and baked clays; at all of which he gazed feverishly, for his instinct was awakened, and his vocation stirred within him. He entered a room on the ground-floor, the door of which was half open; and there he saw a dozen young men drawing from a statue, who at once began to make fun of him.

"Hi! little one," cried the first to see him, taking the crumbs of his bread and scattering them at the child.

"Whose child is he?"

"Goodness, how ugly!"

For a quarter of an hour Joseph stood still and bore the brunt of much teasing in the atelier of the great sculptor, Chaudet. But after laughing at him for a time, the pupils were struck with his persistency and with the expression of his face. They asked him what he wanted. Joseph answered that he wished to know how to draw; thereupon they all encouraged him. Won by such friendliness, the child told them he was Madame Bridau's son.

"Oh! if you are Madame Bridau's son," they cried, from all parts of the room, "you will certainly be a great man. Long live the son of Madame Bridau! Is your mother pretty? If you are a sample of her, she must be stylish!"

"Ha! you want to be an artist?" said the eldest pupil, coming up to Joseph, "but don't you know that that requires pluck; you'll have to bear all sorts of trials,--yes, trials,--enough to break your legs and arms and soul and body. All the fellows you see here have gone through regular ordeals. That one, for instance, he went seven days without eating! Let me see, now, if you can be an artist."

He took one of the child's arms and stretched it straight up in the air; then he placed the other arm as if Joseph were in the act of delivering a blow with his fist.

"Now that's what we call the telegraph trial," said the pupil. "If you can stand like that, without lowering or changing the position of your arms for a quarter of an hour, then you'll have proved yourself a plucky one."

"Courage, little one, courage!" cried all the rest. "You must suffer if you want to be an artist."

Joseph, with the good faith of his thirteen years, stood motionless for five minutes, all the pupils gazing solemnly at him.

"There! you are moving," cried one.

"Steady, steady, confound you!" cried another.

"The Emperor Napoleon stood a whole month as you see him there," said a third, pointing to the fine statue by Chaudet, which was in the room.

That statue, which represents the Emperor standing with the Imperial sceptre in his hand, was torn down in 1814 from the column it surmounted so well.

At the end of ten minutes the sweat stood in drops on Joseph's forehead. At that moment a bald-headed little man, pale and sickly in appearance, entered the atelier, where respectful silence reigned at once.

"What you are about, you urchins?" he exclaimed, as he looked at the youthful martyr.

"That is a good little fellow, who is posing," said the tall pupil who had placed Joseph.

"Are you not ashamed to torture a poor child in that way?" said Chaudet, lowering Joseph's arms. "How long have you been standing there?" he asked the boy, giving him a friendly little pat on the cheek.

"A quarter of an hour."

"What brought you here?"

"I want to be an artist."

"Where do you belong? where do you come from?"

"From mamma's house."

"Oh! mamma!" cried the pupils.

"Silence at the easels!" cried Chaudet. "Who is your mamma?"

"She is Madame Bridau. My papa, who is dead, was a friend of the Emperor; and if you will teach me to draw, the Emperor will pay all you ask for it."

"His father was head of a department at the ministry of the Interior," exclaimed Chaudet, struck by a recollection. "So you want to be an artist, at your age?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, come here just as much as you like; we'll amuse you. Give him a board, and paper, and chinks, and let him alone. You are to know, you young scamps, that his father did me a service. Here, Corde-a-puits, go and get some cakes and sugar-plums," he said to the pupil who had tortured Joseph, giving him some small change. "We'll see if you are to be artist by the way you gobble up the dainties," added the sculptor, chucking Joseph under the chin.

Then he went round examining the pupils' works, followed by the child, who looked and listened, and tried to understand him. The sweets were brought, Chaudet, himself, the child, and the whole studio all had their teeth in them; and Joseph was petted quite as much as he had been teased. The whole scene, in which the rough play and real heart of artists were revealed, and which the boy instinctively understood, made a great impression on his mind. The apparition of the sculptor, --for whom the Emperor's protection opened a way to future glory, closed soon after by his premature death,--was like a vision to little Joseph. The child said nothing to his mother about this adventure, but he spent two hours every Sunday and every Thursday in Chaudet's atelier. From that time forth, Madame Descoings, who humored the fancies of the two cherubim, kept Joseph supplied with pencils and red chinks, prints and drawing-paper. At school, the future colorist sketched his masters, drew his comrades, charcoaled the dormitories, and showed surprising assiduity in the drawing-class. Lemire, the drawing-master, struck not only with the lad's inclination but also with his actual progress, came to tell Madame Bridau of her son's faculty. Agathe, like a true provincial, who knows as little of art as she knows much of housekeeping, was terrified. When Lemire left her, she burst into tears.

"Ah!" she cried, when Madame Descoings went to ask what was the matter. "What is to become of me! Joseph, whom I meant to make a government clerk, whose career was all marked out for him at the ministry of the interior, where, protected by his father's memory, he might have risen to be chief of a division before he was twenty-five, he, my boy, he wants to be a painter,--a vagabond! I always knew that child would give me nothing but trouble."

Madame Descoings confessed that for several months past she had encouraged Joseph's passion, aiding and abetting his Sunday and Thursday visits to the Institute. At the Salon, to which she had taken him, the little fellow had shown an interest in the pictures, which was, she declared, nothing short of miraculous.

"If he understands painting at thirteen, my dear," she said, "your Joseph will be a man of genius."

"Yes; and see what genius did for his father,--killed him with overwork at forty!"

At the close of autumn, just as Joseph was entering his fourteenth year, Agathe, contrary to Madame Descoings's entreaties, went to see Chaudet, and requested that he would cease to debauch her son. She found the sculptor in a blue smock, modelling his last statue; he received the widow of the man who formerly had served him at a critical moment, rather roughly; but, already at death's door, he was struggling with passionate ardor to do in a few hours work he could hardly have accomplished in several months. As Madame Bridau entered, he had just found an effect long sought for, and was handling his tools and clay with spasmodic jerks and movements that seemed to the ignorant Agathe like those of a maniac. At any other time Chaudet would have laughed; but now, as he heard the mother bewailing the destiny he had opened to her child, abusing art, and insisting that Joseph should no longer be allowed to enter the atelier, he burst into a holy wrath.

"I was under obligations to your deceased husband, I wished to help his son, to watch his first steps in the noblest of all careers," he cried. "Yes, madame, learn, if you do not know it, that a great artist is a king, and more than a king; he is happier, he is independent, he lives as he likes, he reigns in the world of fancy. Your son has a glorious future before him. Faculties like his are rare; they are only disclosed at his age in such beings as the Giotto's, Raphaels, Titians, Rubens, Murillos,--for, in my opinion, he will make a better painter than sculptor. God of heaven! if I had such a son, I should be as happy as the Emperor is to have given himself the King of Rome. Well, you are mistress of your child's fate. Go your own way, madame; make him a fool, a miserable quill-driver, tie him to a desk, and you've murdered him! But I hope, in spite of all your efforts, that he will stay an artist. A true vocation is stronger than all the obstacles that can be opposed to it. Vocation! why the very word means a call; ay, the election of God himself! You will make your child unhappy, that's all." He flung the clay he no longer needed violently into a tub, and said to his model, "That will do for to-day."

Agathe raised her eyes and saw, in a corner of the atelier where her glance had not before penetrated, a nude woman sitting on a stool, the sight of whom drove her away horrified.

"You are not to have the little Bridau here any more," said Chaudet to his pupils, "it annoys his mother."

"Eugh!" they all cried, as Agathe closed the door.

No sooner did the students of sculpture and painting find out that Madame Bridau did not wish her son to be an artist, than their whole happiness centred on getting Joseph among them. In spite of a promise

not to go to the Institute which his mother exacted from him, the child often slipped into Regnauld the painter's studio, where he was encouraged to daub canvas. When the widow complained that the bargain was not kept, Chaudet's pupils assured her that Regnauld was not Chaudet, and they hadn't the bringing up of her son, with other impertinences; and the atrocious young scamps composed a song with a hundred and thirty-seven couplets on Madame Bridau.

On the evening of that sad day Agathe refused to play at cards, and sat on her sofa plunged in such grief that the tears stood in her handsome eyes.

"What is the matter, Madame Bridau?" asked old Claparon.

"She thinks her boy will have to beg his bread because he has got the bump of painting," said Madame Descoings; "but, for my part, I am not the least uneasy about the future of my step-son, little Bixiou, who has a passion for drawing. Men are born to get on."

"You are right," said the hard and severe Desroches, who, in spite of his talents, had never himself got on in the position of assistant-head of a department. "Happily I have only one son; otherwise, with my eighteen hundred francs a year, and a wife who makes barely twelve hundred out of her stamped-paper office, I don't know what would become of me. I have just placed my boy as under-clerk to a lawyer; he gets twenty-five francs a month and his breakfast. I give him as much more, and he dines and sleeps at home. That's all he gets; he must manage for himself, but he'll make his way. I keep the fellow harder at work than if he were at school, and some day he will be a barrister. When I give him money to go to the theatre, he is as happy as a king and kisses me. Oh, I keep a tight hand on him, and he renders me an account of all he spends. You are too good to your children, Madame Bridau; if your son wants to go through hardships and privations, let him; they'll make a man of him."

"As for my boy," said Du Bruel, a former chief of a division, who had just retired on a pension, "he is only sixteen; his mother dotes on him; but I shouldn't listen to his choosing a profession at his age, --a mere fancy, a notion that may pass off. In my opinion, boys should be guided and controlled."

"Ah, monsieur! you are rich, you are a man, and you have but one son," said Agathe.

"Faith!" said Claparon, "children do tyrannize over us--over our hearts, I mean. Mine makes me furious; he has nearly ruined me, and now I won't have anything to do with him--it's a sort of independence. Well, he is the happier for it, and so am I. That fellow was partly the cause of his mother's death. He chose to be a commercial traveller; and the trade just suited him, for he was no sooner in the house than he wanted to be out of it; he couldn't keep in one place, and he wouldn't learn anything. All I ask of God is that I may die before he dishonors my name. Those who have no children lose many pleasures, but they escape great sufferings."

"And these men are fathers!" thought Agathe, weeping anew.

"What I am trying to show you, my dear Madame Bridau, is that you had better let your boy be a painter; if not, you will only waste your

time."

"If you were able to coerce him," said the sour Desroches, "I should advise you to oppose his tastes; but weak as I see you are, you had better let him daub if he likes."

"Console yourself, Agathe," said Madame Descoings, "Joseph will turn out a great man."

After this discussion, which was like all discussions, the widow's friends united in giving her one and the same advice; which advice did not in the least relieve her anxieties. They advised her to let Joseph follow his bent.

"If he doesn't turn out a genius," said Du Bruel, who always tried to please Agathe, "you can then get him into some government office."

When Madame Descoings accompanied the old clerks to the door she assured them, at the head of the stairs, that they were "Grecian sages."

"Madame Bridau ought to be glad her son is willing to do anything," said Claparon.

"Besides," said Desroches, "if God preserves the Emperor, Joseph will always be looked after. Why should she worry?"

"She is timid about everything that concerns her children," answered Madame Descoings. "Well, my good girl," she said, returning to Agathe, "you see they are unanimous; why are you still crying?"

"If it was Philippe, I should have no anxiety. But you don't know what goes on in that atelier; they have naked women!"

"I hope they keep good fires," said Madame Descoings.

A few days after this, the disasters of the retreat from Moscow became known. Napoleon returned to Paris to organize fresh troops, and to ask further sacrifices from the country. The poor mother was then plunged into very different anxieties. Philippe, who was tired of school, wanted to serve under the Emperor; he saw a review at the Tuileries, --the last Napoleon ever held,--and he became infatuated with the idea of a soldier's life. In those days military splendor, the show of uniforms, the authority of epaulets, offered irresistible seductions to a certain style of youth. Philippe thought he had the same vocation for the army that his brother Joseph showed for art. Without his mother's knowledge, he wrote a petition to the Emperor, which read as follows:--

Sire,--I am the son of your Bridau; eighteen years of age, five feet six inches; I have good legs, a good constitution, and wish to be one of your soldiers. I ask you to let me enter the army, etc.

Within twenty-four hours, the Emperor had sent Philippe to the Imperial Lyceum at Saint-Cyr, and six months later, in November, 1813, he appointed him sub-lieutenant in a regiment of cavalry. Philippe spent the greater part of that winter in cantonments, but as soon as he knew how to ride a horse he was dispatched to the front, and went

eagerly. During the campaign in France he was made a lieutenant, after an affair at the outposts where his bravery had saved his colonel's life. The Emperor named him captain at the battle of La Fere-Champenoise, and took him on his staff. Inspired by such promotion, Philippe won the cross at Montereau. He witnessed Napoleon's farewell at Fontainebleau, raved at the sight, and refused to serve the Bourbons. When he returned to his mother, in July, 1814, he found her ruined.

Joseph's scholarship was withdrawn after the holidays, and Madame Bridau, whose pension came from the Emperor's privy purse, vainly entreated that it might be inscribed on the rolls of the ministry of the interior. Joseph, more of a painter than ever, was delighted with the turn of events, and entreated his mother to let him go to Monsieur Regnaud, promising to earn his own living. He declared he was quite sufficiently advanced in the second class to get on without rhetoric. Philippe, a captain at nineteen and decorated, who had, moreover, served the Emperor as an aide-de-camp in two battles, flattered the mother's vanity immensely. Coarse, blustering, and without real merit beyond the vulgar bravery of a cavalry officer, he was to her mind a man of genius; whereas Joseph, puny and sickly, with unkempt hair and absent mind, seeking peace, loving quiet, and dreaming of an artist's glory, would only bring her, she thought, worries and anxieties.

The winter of 1814-1815 was a lucky one for Joseph. Secretly encouraged by Madame Descoings and Bixiou, a pupil of Gros, he went to work in the celebrated atelier of that painter, whence a vast variety of talent issued in its day, and there he formed the closest intimacy with Schinner. The return from Elba came; Captain Bridau joined the Emperor at Lyons, accompanied him to the Tuileries, and was appointed to the command of a squadron in the dragoons of the Guard. After the battle of Waterloo--in which he was slightly wounded, and where he won the cross of an officer of the Legion of honor--he happened to be near Marshal Davoust at Saint-Denis, and was not with the army of the Loire. In consequence of this, and through Davoust's intercession, his cross and his rank were secured to him, but he was placed on half-pay.

Joseph, anxious about his future, studied all through this period with an ardor which several times made him ill in the midst of these tumultuous events.

"It is the smell of the paints," Agathe said to Madame Descoings. "He ought to give up a business so injurious to his health."

However, all Agathe's anxieties were at this time for her son the lieutenant-colonel. When she saw him again in 1816, reduced from the salary of nine thousand francs (paid to a commander in the dragoons of the Imperial Guard) to a half-pay of three hundred francs a month, she fitted up her attic rooms for him, and spent her savings in doing so. Philippe was one of the faithful Bonapartes of the cafe Lemblin, that constitutional Boeotia; he acquired the habits, manners, style, and life of a half-pay officer; indeed, like any other young man of twenty-one, he exaggerated them, vowed in good earnest a mortal enmity to the Bourbons, never reported himself at the War department, and even refused opportunities which were offered to him for employment in the infantry with his rank of lieutenant-colonel. In his mother's eyes, Philippe seemed in all this to be displaying a noble character.

"The father himself could have done no more," she said.

Philippe's half-pay sufficed him; he cost nothing at home, whereas all Joseph's expenses were paid by the two widows. From that moment, Agathe's preference for Philippe was openly shown. Up to that time it had been secret; but the persecution of this faithful servant of the Emperor, the recollection of the wound received by her cherished son, his courage in adversity, which, voluntary though it were, seemed to her a glorious adversity, drew forth all Agathe's tenderness. The one sentence, "He is unfortunate," explained and justified everything. Joseph himself,--with the innate simplicity which superabounds in the artist-soul in its opening years, and who was, moreover, brought up to admire his big brother,--so far from being hurt by the preference of their mother, encouraged it by sharing her worship of the hero who had carried Napoleon's orders on two battlefields, and was wounded at Waterloo. How could he doubt the superiority of the grand brother, whom he had beheld in the green and gold uniform of the dragoons of the Guard, commanding his squadron on the Champ de Mars?

Agathe, notwithstanding this preference, was an excellent mother. She loved Joseph, though not blindly; she simply was unable to understand him. Joseph adored his mother; Philippe let his mother adore him. Towards her, the dragoon softened his military brutality; but he never concealed the contempt he felt for Joseph,--expressing it, however, in a friendly way. When he looked at his brother, weak and sickly as he was at seventeen years of age, shrunken with determined toil, and over-weighted with his powerful head, he nicknamed him "Cub." Philippe's patronizing manners would have wounded any one less carelessly indifferent than the artist, who had, moreover, a firm belief in the goodness of heart which soldiers hid, he thought, beneath a brutal exterior. Joseph did not yet know, poor boy, that soldiers of genius are as gentle and courteous in manner as other superior men in any walk of life. All genius is alike, wherever found.

"Poor boy!" said Philippe to his mother, "we mustn't plague him; let him do as he likes."

To his mother's eyes the colonel's contempt was a mark of fraternal affection.

"Philippe will always love and protect his brother," she thought to herself.

CHAPTER III

In 1816, Joseph obtained his mother's permission to convert the garret which adjoined his attic room into an atelier, and Madame Descoings gave him a little money for the indispensable requirements of the painter's trade;--in the minds of the two widows, the art of painting was nothing but a trade. With the feeling and ardor of his vocation, the lad himself arranged his humble atelier. Madame Descoings persuaded the owner of the house to put a skylight in the roof. The garret was turned into a vast hall painted in chocolate-color by Joseph himself. On the walls he hung a few sketches. Agathe contributed, not without reluctance, an iron stove; so that her son might be able to work at home, without, however, abandoning the studio of Gros, nor that of Schinner.

The constitutional party, supported chiefly by officers on half-pay and the Bonapartists, were at this time inciting "emeutes" around the Chamber of Deputies, on behalf of the Charter, though no one actually wanted it. Several conspiracies were brewing. Philippe, who dabbled in them, was arrested, and then released for want of proof; but the minister of war cut short his half-pay by putting him on the active list,--a step which might be called a form of discipline. France was no longer safe; Philippe was liable to fall into some trap laid for him by spies,--provocative agents, as they were called, being much talked of in those days.

While Philippe played billiards in disaffected cafes, losing his time and acquiring the habit of wetting his whistle with "little glasses" of all sorts of liquors. Agathe lived in mortal terror for the safety of the great man of the family. The Grecian sages were too much accustomed to wend their nightly way up Madame Bridau's staircase, finding the two widows ready and waiting, and hearing from them all the news of their day, ever to break up the habit of coming to the green salon for their game of cards. The ministry of the interior, though purged of its former _employes_ in 1816, had retained Claparon, one of those cautious men, who whisper the news of the "Moniteur," adding invariably, "Don't quote me." Desroches, who had retired from active service some time after old Du Bruel, was still battling for his pension. The three friends, who were witnesses of Agathe's distress, advised her to send the colonel to travel in foreign countries.

"They talk about conspiracies, and your son, with his disposition, will be certain to fall a victim in some of them; there is plenty of treachery in these days."

"Philippe is cut from the wood the Emperor made into marshals," said Du Bruel, in a low voice, looking cautiously about him; "and he mustn't give up his profession. Let him serve in the East, in India--"

"Think of his health," said Agathe.

"Why doesn't he get some place, or business?" said old Desroches; "there are plenty of private offices to be had. I am going as head of a bureau in an insurance company, as soon as I have got my pension."

"Philippe is a soldier; he would not like to be any thing else," said the warlike Agathe.

"Then he ought to have the sense to ask for employment--"

"And serve _these others_!" cried the widow. "Oh! I will never give him that advice."

"You are wrong," said Du Bruel. "My son has just got an appointment through the Duc de Navarreins. The Bourbons are very good to those who are sincere in rallying to them. Your son could be appointed lieutenant-colonel to a regiment."

"They only appoint nobles in the cavalry. Philippe would never rise to be a colonel," said Madame Descoings.

Agathe, much alarmed, entreated Philippe to travel abroad, and put himself at the service of some foreign power who, she thought, would

gladly welcome a staff officer of the Emperor.

"Serve a foreign nation!" cried Philippe, with horror.

Agathe kissed her son with enthusiasm.

"His father all over!" she exclaimed.

"He is right," said Joseph. "France is too proud of her heroes to let them be heroic elsewhere. Napoleon may return once more."

However, to satisfy his mother, Philippe took up the dazzling idea of joining General Lallemand in the United States, and helping him to found what was called the Champ d'Asile, one of the most disastrous swindles that ever appeared under the name of national subscription. Agathe gave ten thousand francs to start her son, and she went to Havre to see him off. By the end of 1817, she had accustomed herself to live on the six hundred francs a year which remained to her from her property in the Funds; then, by a lucky chance, she made a good investment of the ten thousand francs she still kept of her savings, from which she obtained an interest of seven per cent. Joseph wished to emulate his mother's devotion. He dressed like a bailiff; wore the commonest shoes and blue stockings; denied himself gloves, and burned charcoal; he lived on bread and milk and Brie cheese. The poor lad got no sympathy, except from Madame Descoings, and from Bixiou, his student-friend and comrade, who was then making those admirable caricatures of his, and filling a small office in the ministry.

"With what joy I welcomed the summer of 1818!" said Joseph Bridau in after-years, relating his troubles; "the sun saved me the cost of charcoal."

As good a colorist by this time as Gros himself, Joseph now went to his master for consultation only. He was already meditating a tilt against classical traditions, and Grecian conventionalities, in short, against the leading-strings which held down an art to which Nature _as she is_ belongs, in the omnipotence of her creations and her imagery. Joseph made ready for a struggle which, from the day when he first exhibited in the Salon, has never ceased. It was a terrible year. Roguin, the notary of Madame Descoings and Madame Bridau, absconded with the moneys held back for seven years from Madame Descoings's annuity, which by that time were producing two thousand francs a year. Three days after this disaster, a bill of exchange for a thousand francs, drawn by Philippe upon his mother, arrived from New York. The poor fellow, misled like so many others, had lost his all in the Champ d'Asile. A letter, which accompanied the bill, drove Agathe, Joseph, and the Descoings to tears, and told of debts contracted in New York, where his comrades in misfortunes had indorsed for him.

"It was I who made him go!" cried the poor mother, eager to divert the blame from Philippe.

"I advise you not to send him on many such journeys," said the old Descoings to her niece.

Madame Descoings was heroic. She continued to give the three thousand francs a year to Madame Bridau, but she still paid the dues on her trey which had never turned up since the year 1799. About this time, she began to doubt the honesty of the government, and declared it was

capable of keeping the three numbers in the urn, so as to excite the shareholders to put in enormous stakes. After a rapid survey of all their resources, it seemed to the two women impossible to raise the thousand francs without selling out the little that remained in the Funds. They talked of pawning their silver and part of the linen, and even the needless pieces of furniture. Joseph, alarmed at these suggestions, went to see Gerard and told him their circumstances. The great painter obtained an order from the household of the king for two copies of a portrait of Louis XVIII., at five hundred francs each. Though not naturally generous, Gros took his pupil to an artist-furnishing house and fitted him out with the necessary materials. But the thousand francs could not be had till the copies were delivered, so Joseph painted four panels in ten days, sold them to the dealers and brought his mother the thousand francs with which to meet the bill of exchange when it fell due. Eight days later, came a letter from the colonel, informing his mother that he was about to return to France on board a packet from New York, whose captain had trusted him for the passage-money. Philippe announced that he should need at least a thousand francs on his arrival at Havre.

"Good," said Joseph to his mother, "I shall have finished my copies by that time, and you can carry him the money."

"Dear Joseph!" cried Agathe in tears, kissing her son, "God will bless you. You do love him, then, poor persecuted fellow? He is indeed our glory and our hope for the future. So young, so brave, so unfortunate! everything is against him; we three must always stand by him."

"You see now that painting is good for something," cried Joseph, overjoyed to have won his mother's permission to be a great artist.

Madame Bridau rushed to meet her beloved son, Colonel Philippe, at Havre. Once there, she walked every day beyond the round tower built by Francois I., to look out for the American packet, enduring the keenest anxieties. Mothers alone know how such sufferings quicken maternal love. The vessel arrived on a fine morning in October, 1819, without delay, and having met with no mishap. The sight of a mother and the air of one's native land produces a certain affect on the coarsest nature, especially after the miseries of a sea-voyage. Philippe gave way to a rush of feeling, which made Agathe think to herself, "Ah! how he loves me!" Alas, the hero loved but one person in the world, and that person was Colonel Philippe. His misfortunes in Texas, his stay in New York,—a place where speculation and individualism are carried to the highest pitch, where the brutality of self-interest attains to cynicism, where man, essentially isolated, is compelled to push his way for himself and by himself, where politeness does not exist,—in fact, even the minor events of Philippe's journey had developed in him the worst traits of an old campaigner: he had grown brutal, selfish, rude; he drank and smoked to excess; physical hardships and poverty had depraved him. Moreover, he considered himself persecuted; and the effect of that idea is to make persons who are unintelligent persecutors and bigots themselves. To Philippe's conception of life, the universe began at his head and ended at his feet, and the sun shone for him alone. The things he had seen in New York, interpreted by his practical nature, carried away his last scruples on the score of morality. For such beings, there are but two ways of existence. Either they believe, or they do not believe; they have the virtues of honest men, or they give themselves up to the demands of necessity; in which case they proceed to turn their

slightest interests and each passing impulse of their passions into necessities.

Such a system of life carries a man a long way. It was only in appearance that Colonel Philippe retained the frankness, plain-dealing, and easy-going freedom of a soldier. This made him, in reality, very dangerous; he seemed as guileless as a child, but, thinking only of himself, he never did anything without reflecting what he had better do,--like a wily lawyer planning some trick "à la Maître Gonin"; words cost him nothing, and he said as many as he could to get people to believe. If, unfortunately, some one refused to accept the explanations with which he justified the contradictions between his conduct and his professions, the colonel, who was a good shot and could defy the most adroit fencing-master, and possessed the coolness of one to whom life is indifferent, was quite ready to demand satisfaction for the first sharp word; and when a man shows himself prepared for violence there is little more to be said. His imposing stature had taken on a certain rotundity, his face was bronzed from exposure in Texas, he was still succinct in speech, and had acquired the decisive tone of a man obliged to make himself feared among the populations of a new world. Thus developed, plainly dressed, his body trained to endurance by his recent hardships, Philippe in the eyes of his mother was a hero; in point of fact, he had simply become what people (not to mince matters) call a blackguard.

Shocked at the destitution of her cherished son, Madame Bridau bought him a complete outfit of clothes at Havre. After listening to the tale of his woes, she had not the heart to stop his drinking and eating and amusing himself as a man just returned from the Champ d'Asile was likely to eat and drink and divert himself. It was certainly a fine conception,--that of conquering Texas with the remains of the imperial army. The failure was less in the idea than in the men who conceived it; for Texas is to-day a republic, with a future full of promise. This scheme of Liberalism under the Restoration distinctly proves that the interests of the party were purely selfish and not national, seeking power and nothing else. Neither men, nor occasion, nor cause, nor devotion were lacking; only the money and the support of the hypocritical party at home who dispensed enormous sums, but gave nothing when it came to recovering empire. Household managers like Agathe have a plain common-sense which enables them to perceive such political chicanery: the poor woman saw the truth through the lines of her son's tale; for she had read, in the exile's interests, all the pompous editorials of the constitutional journals, and watched the management of the famous subscription, which produced barely one hundred and fifty thousand francs when it ought to have yielded five or six millions. The Liberal leaders soon found out that they were playing into the hands of Louis XVIII. by exporting the glorious remnants of our grand army, and they promptly abandoned to their fate the most devoted, the most ardent, the most enthusiastic of its heroes,--those, in short, who had gone in the advance. Agathe was never able, however, to make her son see that he was more duped than persecuted. With blind belief in her idol, she supposed herself ignorant, and deplored, as Philippe did, the evil times which had done him such wrong. Up to this time he was, to her mind, throughout his misfortunes, less faulty than victimized by his noble nature, his energy, the fall of the Emperor, the duplicity of the Liberals, and the rancor of the Bourbons against the Bonapartists. During the week at Havre, a week which was horribly costly, she dared not ask him to make terms with the royal government and apply to the minister of war.

She had hard work to get him away from Havre, where living is very expensive, and to bring him back to Paris before her money gave out. Madame Descoings and Joseph, who were awaiting their arrival in the courtyard of the coach-office of the Messageries Royales, were struck with the change in Agathe's face.

"Your mother has aged ten years in two months," whispered the Descoings to Joseph, as they all embraced, and the two trunks were being handed down.

"How do you do, mere Descoings?" was the cool greeting the colonel bestowed on the old woman whom Joseph was in the habit of calling "maman Descoings."

"I have no money to pay for a hackney-coach," said Agathe, in a sad voice.

"I have," replied the young painter. "What a splendid color Philippe has turned!" he cried, looking at his brother.

"Yes, I've browned like a pipe," said Philippe. "But as for you, you're not a bit changed, little man."

Joseph, who was now twenty-one, and much thought of by the friends who had stood by him in his days of trial, felt his own strength and was aware of his talent; he represented the art of painting in a circle of young men whose lives were devoted to science, letters, politics, and philosophy. Consequently, he was wounded by his brother's contempt, which Philippe still further emphasized with a gesture, pulling his ears as if he were still a child. Agathe noticed the coolness which succeeded the first glow of tenderness on the part of Joseph and Madame Descoings; but she hastened to tell them of Philippe's sufferings in exile, and so lessened it. Madame Descoings, wishing to make a festival of the return of the prodigal, as she called him under her breath, had prepared one of her good dinners, to which old Claparon and the elder Desroches were invited. All the family friends were to come, and did come, in the evening. Joseph had invited Leon Giraud, d'Arthez, Michel Chrestien, Fulgence Ridal, and Horace Bianchon, his friends of the fraternity. Madame Descoings had promised Bixiou, her so-called step-son, that the young people should play at ecarte. Desroches the younger, who had now taken, under his father's stern rule, his degree at law, was also of the party. Du Bruel, Claparon, Desroches, and the Abbe Loraux carefully observed the returned exile, whose manners and coarse features, and voice roughened by the abuse of liquors, together with his vulgar glance and phraseology, alarmed them not a little. While Joseph was placing the card-tables, the more intimate of the family friends surrounded Agathe and asked,--

"What do you intend to make of Philippe?"

"I don't know," she answered, "but he is determined not to serve the Bourbons."

"Then it will be very difficult for you to find him a place in France. If he won't re-enter the army, he can't be readily got into government employ," said old Du Bruel. "And you have only to listen to him to see he could never, like my son, make his fortune by writing plays."

The motion of Agathe's eyes, with which alone she replied to this speech, showed how anxious Philippe's future made her; they all kept silence. The exile himself, Bixiou, and the younger Desroches were playing at *ecarte*, a game which was then the rage.

"Maman Descoings, my brother has no money to play with," whispered Joseph in the good woman's ear.

The devotee of the Royal Lottery fetched twenty francs and gave them to the artist, who slipped them secretly into his brother's hand. All the company were now assembled. There were two tables of *boston*; and the party grew lively. Philippe proved a bad player: after winning for awhile, he began to lose; and by eleven o'clock he owed fifty francs to young Desroches and to Bixiou. The racket and the disputes at the *ecarte* table resounded more than once in the ears of the more peaceful *boston* players, who were watching Philippe surreptitiously. The exile showed such signs of bad temper that in his final dispute with the younger Desroches, who was none too amiable himself, the elder Desroches joined in, and though his son was decidedly in the right, he declared he was in the wrong, and forbade him to play any more. Madame Descoings did the same with her grandson, who was beginning to let fly certain witticisms; and although Philippe, so far, had not understood him, there was always a chance that one of the barbed arrows might piece the colonel's thick skull and put the sharp jester in peril.

"You must be tired," whispered Agathe in Philippe's ear; "come to bed."

"Travel educates youth," said Bixiou, grinning, when Madame Bridau and the colonel had disappeared.

Joseph, who got up at dawn and went to bed early, did not see the end of the party. The next morning Agathe and Madame Descoings, while preparing breakfast, could not help remarking that soires would be terribly expensive if Philippe were to go on playing that sort of game, as the Descoings phrased it. The worthy old woman, then seventy-six years of age, proposed to sell her furniture, give up her appartement on the second floor (which the owner was only too glad to occupy), and take Agathe's parlor for her chamber, making the other room a sitting-room and dining-room for the family. In this way they could save seven hundred francs a year; which would enable them to give Philippe fifty francs a month until he could find something to do. Agathe accepted the sacrifice. When the colonel came down and his mother had asked how he liked his little bedroom, the two widows explained to him the situation of the family. Madame Descoings and Agathe possessed, by putting all their resources together, an income of five thousand three hundred francs, four thousand of which belonged to Madame Descoings and were merely a life annuity. The Descoings made an allowance of six hundred a year to Bixiou, whom she had acknowledged as her grandson during the last few months, also six hundred to Joseph; the rest of her income, together with that of Agathe, was spent for the household wants. All their savings were by this time eaten up.

"Make yourselves easy," said the lieutenant-colonel. "I'll find a situation and put you to no expense; all I need for the present is board and lodging."

Agathe kissed her son, and Madame Descoings slipped a hundred francs

into his hand to pay for his losses of the night before. In ten days the furniture was sold, the _appartement_ given up, and the change in Agathe's domestic arrangements accomplished with a celerity seldom seen outside of Paris. During those ten days, Philippe regularly decamped after breakfast, came back for dinner, was off again for the evening, and only got home about midnight to go to bed. He contracted certain habits half mechanically, and they soon became rooted in him; he got his boots blacked on the Pont Neuf for the two sous it would have cost him to go by the Pont des Arts to the Palais-Royal, where he consumed regularly two glasses of brandy while reading the newspapers, --an occupation which employed him till midday; after that he sauntered along the rue Vivienne to the cafe Minerve, where the Liberals congregated, and where he played at billiards with a number of old comrades. While winning and losing, Philippe swallowed four or five more glasses of divers liquors, and smoked ten or a dozen cigars in going and coming, and idling along the streets. In the evening, after consuming a few pipes at the Hollandais smoking-rooms, he would go to some gambling-place towards ten o'clock at night. The waiter handed him a card and a pin; he always inquired of certain well-seasoned players about the chances of the red or the black, and staked ten francs when the lucky moment seemed to come; never playing more than three times, win or lose. If he won, which usually happened, he drank a tumbler of punch and went home to his garret; but by that time he talked of smashing the ultras and the Bourbon body-guard, and trolled out, as he mounted the staircase, "We watch to save the Empire!" His poor mother, hearing him, used to think "How gay Philippe is to-night!" and then she would creep up and kiss him, without complaining of the fetid odors of the punch, and the brandy, and the pipes.

"You ought to be satisfied with me, my dear mother," he said, towards the end of January; "I lead the most regular of lives."

The colonel had dined five times at a restaurant with some of his army comrades. These old soldiers were quite frank with each other on the state of their own affairs, all the while talking of certain hopes which they based on the building of a submarine vessel, expected to bring about the deliverance of the Emperor. Among these former comrades, Philippe particularly liked an old captain of the dragoons of the Guard, named Giroudeau, in whose company he had seen his first service. This friendship with the late dragoon led Philippe into completing what Rabelais called "the devil's equipage"; and he added to his drams, and his tobacco, and his play, a "fourth wheel."

One evening at the beginning of February, Giroudeau took Philippe after dinner to the Gaité, occupying a free box sent to a theatrical journal belonging to his nephew Finot, in whose office Giroudeau was cashier and secretary. Both were dressed after the fashion of the Bonapartist officers who now belonged to the Constitutional Opposition; they wore ample overcoats with square collars, buttoned to the chin and coming down to their heels, and decorated with the rosette of the Legion of honor; and they carried malacca canes with loaded knobs, which they held by strings of braided leather. The late troopers had just (to use one of their own expressions) "made a bout of it," and were mutually unbosoming their hearts as they entered the box. Through the fumes of a certain number of bottles and various glasses of various liquors, Giroudeau pointed out to Philippe a plump and agile little ballet-girl whom he called Florentine, whose good graces and affection, together with the box, belonged to him as the

representative of an all-powerful journal.

"But," said Philippe, "I should like to know how far her good graces go for such an iron-gray old trooper as you."

"Thank God," replied Giroudeau, "I've stuck to the traditions of our glorious uniform. I have never wasted a farthing upon a woman in my life."

"What's that?" said Philippe, putting a finger on his left eye.

"That is so," answered Giroudeau. "But, between ourselves, the newspaper counts for a good deal. To-morrow, in a couple of lines, we shall advise the managers to let Mademoiselle Florentine dance a particular step, and so forth. Faith, my dear boy, I'm uncommonly lucky!"

"Well!" thought Philippe; "if this worthy Giroudeau, with a skull as polished as my knee, forty-eight years, a big stomach, a face like a ploughman, and a nose like a potato, can get a ballet-girl, I ought to be the lover of the first actress in Paris. Where does one find such luck?" he said aloud.

"I'll show you Florentine's place to-night. My Dulcinea only earns fifty francs a month at the theatre," added Giroudeau, "but she is very prettily set up, thanks to an old silk dealer named Cardot, who gives her five hundred francs a month."

"Well, but--?" exclaimed the jealous Philippe.

"Bah!" said Giroudeau; "true love is blind."

When the play was over Giroudeau took Philippe to Mademoiselle Florentine's appartement, which was close to the theatre, in the rue de Crussol.

"We must behave ourselves," said Giroudeau. "Florentine's mother is here. You see, I haven't the means to pay for one, so the worthy woman is really her own mother. She used to be a concierge, but she's not without intelligence. Call her Madame; she makes a point of it."

Florentine happened that night to have a friend with her,--a certain Marie Godeschal, beautiful as an angel, cold as a danseuse, and a pupil of Vestris, who foretold for her a great choregraphic destiny. Mademoiselle Godeschal, anxious to make her first appearance at the Panorama-Dramatique under the name of Mariette, based her hopes on the protection and influence of a first gentleman of the bedchamber, to whom Vestris had promised to introduce her. Vestris, still green himself at this period, did not think his pupil sufficiently trained to risk the introduction. The ambitious girl did, in the end, make her pseudonym of Mariette famous; and the motive of her ambition, it must be said, was praiseworthy. She had a brother, a clerk in Derville's law office. Left orphans and very poor, and devoted to each other, the brother and sister had seen life such as it is in Paris. The one wished to be a lawyer that he might support his sister, and he lived on ten sous a day; the other had coldly resolved to be a dancer, and to profit by her beauty as much as by her legs that she might buy a practice for her brother. Outside of their feeling for each other, and of their mutual life and interests, everything was to them, as it once

was to the Romans and the Hebrews, barbaric, outlandish, and hostile. This generous affection, which nothing ever lessened, explained Mariette to those who knew her intimately.

The brother and sister were living at this time on the eighth floor of a house in the Vieille rue du Temple. Mariette had begun her studies when she was ten years old; she was now just sixteen. Alas! for want of becoming clothes, her beauty, hidden under a coarse shawl, dressed in calico, and ill-kept, could only be guessed by those Parisians who devote themselves to hunting grisettes and the quest of beauty in misfortune, as she trotted past them with mincing step, mounted on iron pattens. Philippe fell in love with Mariette. To Mariette, Philippe was commander of the dragoons of the Guard, a staff-officer of the Emperor, a young man of twenty-seven, and above all, the means of proving herself superior to Florentine by the evident superiority of Philippe over Giroudeau. Florentine and Giroudeau, the one to promote his comrade's happiness, the other to get a protector for her friend, pushed Philippe and Mariette into a "mariage en detrempe,"--a Parisian term which is equivalent to "morganatic marriage," as applied to royal personages. Philippe when they left the house revealed his poverty to Giroudeau, but the old roue reassured him.

"I'll speak to my nephew Finot," he said. "You see, Philippe, the reign of phrases and quill-drivers is upon us; we may as well submit. To-day, scribblers are paramount. Ink has ousted gunpowder, and talk takes the place of shot. After all, these little toads of editors are pretty good fellows, and very clever. Come and see me to-morrow at the newspaper office; by that time I shall have said a word for you to my nephew. Before long you'll have a place on some journal or other. Mariette, who is taking you at this moment (don't deceive yourself) because she literally has nothing, no engagement, no chance of appearing on the stage, and I have told her that you are going on a newspaper like myself,--Mariette will try to make you believe she is loving you for yourself; and you will believe her! Do as I do,--keep her as long as you can. I was so much in love with Florentine that I begged Finot to write her up and help her to a debut; but my nephew replied, 'You say she has talent; well, the day after her first appearance she will turn her back on you.' Oh, that's Finot all over! You'll find him a knowing one."

The next day, about four o'clock, Philippe went to the rue de Sentier, where he found Giroudeau in the entresol,--caged like a wild beast in a sort of hen-coop with a sliding panel; in which was a little stove, a little table, two little chairs, and some little logs of wood. This establishment bore the magic words, SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE, painted on the door in black letters, and the word "Cashier," written by hand and fastened to the grating of the cage. Along the wall that lay opposite to the cage, was a bench, where, at this moment, a one-armed man was breakfasting, who was called Coloquinte by Giroudeau, doubtless from the Egyptian colors of his skin.

"A pretty hole!" exclaimed Philippe, looking round the room. "In the name of thunder! what are you doing here, you who charged with poor Colonel Chabert at Eylau? You--a gallant officer!"

"Well, yes! broum! broum!--a gallant officer keeping the accounts of a little newspaper," said Giroudeau, settling his black silk skull-cap. "Moreover, I'm the working editor of all that rubbish," he added, pointing to the newspaper itself.

"And I, who went to Egypt, I'm obliged to stamp it," said the one-armed man.

"Hold your tongue, Coloquinte," said Giroudeau. "You are in presence of a hero who carried the Emperor's orders at the battle of Montereau."

Coloquinte saluted. "That's where I lost my missing arm!" he said.

"Coloquinte, look after the den. I'm going up to see my nephew."

The two soldiers mounted to the fourth floor, where, in an attic room at the end of a passage, they found a young man with a cold light eye, lying on a dirty sofa. The representative of the press did not stir, though he offered cigars to his uncle and his uncle's friend.

"My good fellow," said Giroudeau in a soothing and humble tone, "this is the gallant cavalry officer of the Imperial Guard of whom I spoke to you."

"Eh! well?" said Finot, eyeing Philippe, who, like Giroudeau, lost all his assurance before the diplomatist of the press.

"My dear boy," said Giroudeau, trying to pose as an uncle, "the colonel has just returned from Texas."

"Ah! you were taken in by that affair of the Champ d'Asile, were you? Seems to me you were rather young to turn into a Soldier-laborer."

The bitterness of this jest will only be understood by those who remember the deluge of engravings, screens, clocks, bronzes, and plaster-casts produced by the idea of the Soldier-laborer, a splendid image of Napoleon and his heroes, which afterwards made its appearance on the stage in vaudevilles. That idea, however, obtained a national subscription; and we still find, in the depths of the provinces, old wall-papers which bear the effigy of the Soldier-laborer. If this young man had not been Giroudeau's nephew, Philippe would have boxed his ears.

"Yes, I was taken in by it; I lost my time, and twelve thousand francs to boot," answered Philippe, trying to force a grin.

"You are still fond of the Emperor?" asked Finot.

"He is my god," answered Philippe Bridau.

"You are a Liberal?"

"I shall always belong to the Constitutional Opposition. Oh Foy! oh Manuel! oh Laffitte! what men they are! They'll rid us of these others,--these wretches, who came back to France at the heels of the enemy."

"Well," said Finot coldly, "you ought to make something out of your misfortunes; for you are the victim of the Liberals, my good fellow. Stay a Liberal, if you really value your opinions, but threaten the party with the follies in Texas which you are ready to show up. You never got a farthing of the national subscription, did you? Well, then

you hold a fine position: demand an account of that subscription. I'll tell you how you can do it. A new Opposition journal is just starting, under the auspices of the deputies of the Left; you shall be the cashier, with a salary of three thousand francs. A permanent place. All you want is some one to go security for you in twenty thousand francs; find that, and you shall be installed within a week. I'll advise the Liberals to silence you by giving you the place. Meantime, talk, threaten,--threaten loudly."

Giroudeau let Philippe, who was profuse in his thanks, go down a few steps before him, and then he turned back to say to his nephew, "Well, you are a queer fellow! you keep me here on twelve hundred francs--"

"That journal won't live a year," said Finot. "I've got something better for you."

"Thunder!" cried Philippe to Giroudeau. "He's no fool, that nephew of yours. I never once thought of making something, as he calls it, out of my position."

That night at the cafe Lemblin and the cafe Minerve Colonel Philippe fulminated against the Liberal party, which had raised subscriptions, sent heroes to Texas, talked hypocritically of Soldier-laborers, and left them to starve, after taking the money they had put into it, and keeping them in exile for two years.

"I am going to demand an account of the moneys collected by the subscription for the Champ d'Asile," he said to one of the frequenters of the cafe, who repeated it to the journalists of the Left.

Philippe did not go back to the rue Mazarin; he went to Mariette and told her of his forthcoming appointment on a newspaper with ten thousand subscribers, in which her choregraphic claims should be warmly advanced.

Agathe and Madame Descoings waited up for Philippe in fear and trembling, for the Duc de Berry had just been assassinated. The colonel came home a few minutes after breakfast; and when his mother showed her uneasiness at his absence, he grew angry and asked if he were not of age.

"In the name of thunder, what's all this! here have I brought you some good news, and you both look like tombstones. The Duc de Berry is dead, is he?--well, so much the better! that's one the less, at any rate. As for me, I am to be cashier of a newspaper, with a salary of three thousand francs, and there you are, out of all your anxieties on my account."

"Is it possible?" cried Agathe.

"Yes; provided you can go security for me in twenty thousand francs; you need only deposit your shares in the Funds, you will draw the interest all the same."

The two widows, who for nearly two months had been desperately anxious to find out what Philippe was about, and how he could be provided for, were so overjoyed at this prospect that they gave no thought to their other catastrophes. That evening, the Grecian sages, old Du Bruel, Claparon, whose health was failing, and the inflexible Desroches were

unanimous; they all advised Madame Bridau to go security for her son. The new journal, which fortunately was started before the assassination of the Duc de Berry, just escaped the blow which Monsieur Decazes then launched at the press. Madame Bridau's shares in the Funds, representing thirteen hundred francs' interest, were transferred as security for Philippe, who was then appointed cashier. That good son at once promised to pay one hundred francs every month to the two widows, for his board and lodging, and was declared by both to be the best of sons. Those who had thought ill of him now congratulated Agathe.

"We were unjust to him," they said.

Poor Joseph, not to be behind his brother in generosity, resolved to pay for his own support, and succeeded.

CHAPTER IV

Three months later, the colonel, who ate and drank enough for four men, finding fault with the food and compelling the poor widows, on the score of his payments, to spend much money on their table, had not yet paid down a single penny. His mother and Madame Descoings were unwilling, out of delicacy, to remind him of his promise. The year went by without one of those coins which Leon Gozlan so vigorously called "tigers with five claws" finding its way from Philippe's pocket to the household purse. It is true that the colonel quieted his conscience on this score by seldom dining at home.

"Well, he is happy," said his mother; "he is easy in mind; he has a place."

Through the influence of a feuilleton, edited by Vernou, a friend of Bixiou, Finot, and Giroudeau, Mariette made her appearance, not at the Panorama-Dramatique but at the Porte-Saint-Martin, where she triumphed beside the famous Begrاند. Among the directors of the theatre was a rich and luxurious general officer, in love with an actress, for whose sake he had made himself an impresario. In Paris, we frequently meet with men so fascinated with actresses, singers, or ballet-dancers, that they are willing to become directors of a theatre out of love. This officer knew Philippe and Giroudeau. Mariette's first appearance, heralded already by Finot's journal and also by Philippe's, was promptly arranged by the three officers; for there seems to be solidarity among the passions in a matter of folly.

The mischievous Bixiou was not long in revealing to his grandmother and the devoted Agathe that Philippe, the cashier, the hero of heroes, was in love with Mariette, the celebrated ballet-dancer at the Porte-Saint-Martin. The news was a thunder-clap to the two widows; Agathe's religious principles taught her to think that all women on the stage were brands in the burning; moreover, she thought, and so did Madame Descoings, that women of that kind dined off gold, drank pearls, and wasted fortunes.

"Now do you suppose," said Joseph to his mother, "that my brother is such a fool as to spend his money on Mariette? Such women only ruin rich men."

"They talk of engaging Mariette at the Opera," said Bixiou. "Don't be worried, Madame Bridau; the diplomatic body often comes to the Porte-Saint-Martin, and that handsome girl won't stay long with your son. I did hear that an ambassador was madly in love with her. By the bye, another piece of news! Old Claparon is dead, and his son, who has become a banker, has ordered the cheapest kind of funeral for him. That fellow has no education; they wouldn't behave like that in China."

Philippe, prompted by mercenary motives, proposed to Mariette that she should marry him; but she, knowing herself on the eve of an engagement at the Grand Opera, refused the offer, either because she guessed the colonel's motive, or because she saw how important her independence would be to her future fortune. For the remainder of this year, Philippe never came more than twice a month to see his mother. Where was he? Either at his office, or the theatre, or with Mariette. No light whatever as to his conduct reached the household of the rue Mazarin. Giroudeau, Finot, Bixiou, Vernou, Lousteau, saw him leading a life of pleasure. Philippe shared the gay amusements of Tullia, a leading singer at the Opera, of Florentine, who took Mariette's place at the Porte-Saint-Martin, of Florine and Matifat, Coralie and Camusot. After four o'clock, when he left his office, until midnight, he amused himself; some party of pleasure had usually been arranged the night before,--a good dinner, a card-party, a supper by some one or other of the set. Philippe was in his element.

This carnival, which lasted eighteen months, was not altogether without its troubles. The beautiful Mariette no sooner appeared at the Opera, in January, 1821, than she captured one of the most distinguished dukes of the court of Louis XVIII. Philippe tried to make head against the peer, and by the month of April he was compelled by his passion, notwithstanding some luck at cards, to dip into the funds of which he was cashier. By May he had taken eleven hundred francs. In that fatal month Mariette started for London, to see what could be done with the lords while the temporary opera house in the Hotel Choiseul, rue Lepelletier, was being prepared. The luckless Philippe had ended, as often happens, in loving Mariette notwithstanding her flagrant infidelities; she herself had never thought him anything but a dull-minded, brutal soldier, the first rung of a ladder on which she had never intended to remain long. So, foreseeing the time when Philippe would have spent all his money, she captured other journalistic support which released her from the necessity of depending on him; nevertheless, she did feel the peculiar gratitude that class of women acknowledge towards the first man who smooths their way, as it were, among the difficulties and horrors of a theatrical career.

Forced to let his terrible mistress go to London without him, Philippe went into winter quarters, as he called it,--that is, he returned to his attic room in his mother's appartement. He made some gloomy reflections as he went to bed that night, and when he got up again. He was conscious within himself of the inability to live otherwise than as he had been living the last year. The luxury that surrounded Mariette, the dinners, the suppers, the evenings in the side-scenes, the animation of wits and journalists, the sort of racket that went on around him, the delights that tickled both his senses and his vanity, --such a life, found only in Paris, and offering daily the charm of some new thing, was now more than habit,--it had become to Philippe as much a necessity as his tobacco or his brandy. He saw plainly that he

could not live without these continual enjoyments. The idea of suicide came into his head; not on account of the deficit which must soon be discovered in his accounts, but because he could no longer live with Mariette in the atmosphere of pleasure in which he had disported himself for over a year. Full of these gloomy thoughts, he entered for the first time his brother's painting-room, where he found the painter in a blue blouse, copying a picture for a dealer.

"So that's how pictures are made," said Philippe, by way of opening the conversation.

"No," said Joseph, "that is how they are copied."

"How much do they pay you for that?"

"Eh! never enough; two hundred and fifty francs. But I study the manner of the masters and learn a great deal; I found out the secrets of their method. There's one of my own pictures," he added, pointing with the end of his brush to a sketch with the colors still moist.

"How much do you pocket in a year?"

"Unfortunately, I am known only to painters. Schinner backs me; and he has got me some work at the Chateau de Presles, where I am going in October to do some arabesques, panels, and other decorations, for which the Comte de Serizy, no doubt, will pay well. With such trifles and with orders from the dealers, I may manage to earn eighteen hundred to two thousand francs a year over and above the working expenses. I shall send that picture to the next exhibition; if it hits the public taste, my fortune is made. My friends think well of it."

"I don't know anything about such things," said Philippe, in a subdued voice which caused Joseph to turn and look at him.

"What is the matter?" said the artist, seeing that his brother was very pale.

"I should like to know how long it would take you to paint my portrait?"

"If I worked steadily, and the weather were clear, I could finish it in three or four days."

"That's too long; I have only one day to give you. My poor mother loves me so much that I wished to leave her my likeness. We will say no more about it."

"Why! are you going away again?"

"I am going never to return," replied Philippe with an air of forced gayety.

"Look here, Philippe, what is the matter? If it is anything serious, I am a man and not a ninny. I am accustomed to hard struggles, and if discretion is needed, I have it."

"Are you sure?"

"On my honor."

"You will tell no one, no matter who?"

"No one."

"Well, I am going to blow my brains out."

"You!--are you going to fight a duel?"

"I am going to kill myself."

"Why?"

"I have taken eleven hundred francs from the funds in my hands; I have got to send in my accounts to-morrow morning. Half my security is lost; our poor mother will be reduced to six hundred francs a year. That would be nothing! I could make a fortune for her later; but I am dishonored! I cannot live under dishonor--"

"You will not be dishonored if it is paid back. To be sure, you will lose your place, and you will only have the five hundred francs a year from your cross; but you can live on five hundred francs."

"Farewell!" said Philippe, running rapidly downstairs, and not waiting to hear another word.

Joseph left his studio and went down to breakfast with his mother; but Philippe's confession had taken away his appetite. He took Madame Descoings aside and told her the terrible news. The old woman made a frightened exclamation, let fall the saucepan of milk she had in her hand, and flung herself into a chair. Agathe rushed in; from one exclamation to another the mother gathered the fatal truth.

"He! to fail in honor! the son of Bridau to take the money that was trusted to him!"

The widow trembled in every limb; her eyes dilated and then grew fixed; she sat down and burst into tears.

"Where is he?" she cried amid the sobs. "Perhaps he has flung himself into the Seine."

"You must not give up all hope," said Madame Descoings, "because a poor lad has met with a bad woman who has led him to do wrong. Dear me! we see that every day. Philippe has had such misfortunes! he has had so little chance to be happy and loved that we ought not to be surprised at his passion for that creature. All passions lead to excess. My own life is not without reproach of that kind, and yet I call myself an honest woman. A single fault is not vice; and after all, it is only those who do nothing that are never deceived."

Agathe's despair overcame her so much that Joseph and the Descoings were obliged to lessen Philippe's wrong-doings by assuring her that such things happened in all families.

"But he is twenty-eight years old," cried Agathe, "he is no longer a child."

Terrible revelation of the inward thought of the poor woman on the

conduct of her son.

"Mother, I assure you he thought only of your sufferings and of the wrong he had done you," said Joseph.

"Oh, my God! let him come back to me, let him live, and I will forgive all," cried the poor mother, to whose mind a horrible vision of Philippe dragged dead out of the river presented itself.

Gloomy silence reigned for a short time. The day went by with cruel alternations of hope and fear; all three ran to the window at the least sound, and gave way to every sort of conjecture. While the family were thus grieving, Philippe was quietly getting matters in order at his office. He had the audacity to give in his accounts with a statement that, fearing some accident, he had retained eleven hundred francs at his own house for safe keeping. The scoundrel left the office at five o'clock, taking five hundred francs more from the desk, and coolly went to a gambling-house, which he had not entered since his connection with the paper, for he knew very well that a cashier must not be seen to frequent such a place. The fellow was not wanting in acumen. His past conduct proved that he derived more from his grandfather Rouget than from his virtuous sire, Bridau. Perhaps he might have made a good general; but in private life, he was one of those utter scoundrels who shelter their schemes and their evil actions behind a screen of strict legality, and the privacy of the family roof.

At this conjuncture Philippe maintained his coolness. He won at first, and gained as much as six thousand francs; but he let himself be dazzled by the idea of getting out of his difficulties at one stroke. He left the trente-et-quarante, hearing that the black had come up sixteen times at the roulette table, and was about to put five thousand francs on the red, when the black came up for the seventeenth time. The colonel then put a thousand francs on the black and won. In spite of this remarkable piece of luck, his head grew weary; he felt it, though he continued to play. But that divining sense which leads a gambler, and which comes in flashes, was already failing him. Intermittent perceptions, so fatal to all gamblers, set in. Lucidity of mind, like the rays of the sun, can have no effect except by the continuity of a direct line; it can divine only on condition of not breaking that line; the curvettings of chance bemuddle it. Philippe lost all. After such a strain, the careless mind as well as the bravest weakens. When Philippe went home that night he was not thinking of suicide, for he had never really meant to kill himself; he no longer thought of his lost place, nor of the sacrificed security, nor of his mother, nor of Mariette, the cause of his ruin; he walked along mechanically. When he got home, his mother in tears, Madame Descoings, and Joseph, all fell on his neck and kissed him and brought him joyfully to a seat by the fire.

"Bless me!" thought he, "the threat has worked."

The brute at once assumed an air suitable to the occasion; all the more easily, because his ill-luck at cards had deeply depressed him. Seeing her atrocious Benjamin so pale and woe-begone, the poor mother knelt beside him, kissed his hands, pressed them to her heart, and gazed at him for a long time with eyes swimming in tears.

"Philippe," she said, in a choking voice, "promise not to kill

yourself, and all shall be forgotten."

Philippe looked at his sorrowing brother and at Madame Descoings, whose eyes were full of tears, and thought to himself, "They are good creatures." Then he took his mother in his arms, raised her and put her on his knee, pressed her to his heart and whispered as he kissed her, "For the second time, you give me life."

The Descoings managed to serve an excellent dinner, and to add two bottles of old wine with a little "liqueur des iles," a treasure left over from her former business.

"Agathe," she said at dessert, "we must let him smoke his cigars," and she offered some to Philippe.

These two poor creatures fancied that if they let the fellow take his ease, he would like his home and stay in it; both, therefore, tried to endure his tobacco-smoke, though each loathed it. That sacrifice was not so much as noticed by Philippe.

On the morrow, Agathe looked ten years older. Her terrors calmed, reflection came back to her, and the poor woman had not closed an eye throughout that horrible night. She was now reduced to six hundred francs a year. Madame Descoings, like all fat women fond of good eating, was growing heavy; her step on the staircase sounded like the chopping of logs; she might die at any moment; with her life, four thousand francs would disappear. What folly to rely on that resource! What should she do? What would become of them? With her mind made up to become a sick-nurse rather than be supported by her children, Agathe did not think of herself. But Philippe? what would he do if reduced to live on the five hundred francs of an officer of the Legion of honor? During the past eleven years, Madame Descoings, by giving up three thousand francs a year, had paid her debt twice over, but she still continued to sacrifice her grandson's interests to those of the Bridau family. Though all Agathe's honorable and upright feelings were shocked by this terrible disaster, she said to herself: "Poor boy! is it his fault? He is faithful to his oath. I have done wrong not to marry him. If I had found him a wife, he would not have got entangled with this danseuse. He has such a vigorous constitution--"

Madame Descoings had likewise reflected during the night as to the best way of saving the honor of the family. At daybreak, she got out of bed and went to her friend's room.

"Neither you nor Philippe should manage this delicate matter," she urged. "Our two old friends Du Bruel and Claparon are dead, but we still have Desroches, who is very sagacious. I'll go and see him this morning. He can tell the newspaper people that Philippe trusted a friend and has been made a victim; that his weakness in such respects makes him unfit to be a cashier; what has now happened may happen again, and that Philippe prefers to resign. That will prevent his being turned off."

Agathe, seeing that this business lie would save the honor of her son, at any rate in the eyes of strangers, kissed Madame Descoings, who went out early to make an end of the dreadful affair.

Philippe, meanwhile, had slept the sleep of the just. "She is sly, that old woman," he remarked, when his mother explained to him why

breakfast was late.

Old Desroches, the last remaining friend of these two poor women, who, in spite of his harsh nature, never forgot that Bridau had obtained for him his place, fulfilled like an accomplished diplomat the delicate mission Madame Descoings had confided to him. He came to dine that evening with the family, and notified Agathe that she must go the next day to the Treasury, rue Vivienne, sign the transfer of the funds involved, and obtain a coupon for the six hundred francs a year which still remained to her. The old clerk did not leave the afflicted household that night without obliging Philippe to sign a petition to the minister of war, asking for his reinstatement in the active army. Desroches promised the two women to follow up the petition at the war office, and to profit by the triumph of a certain duke over Philippe in the matter of the danseuse, and so obtain that nobleman's influence.

"Philippe will be lieutenant-colonel in the Duc de Maufrigneuse's regiment within three months," he declared, "and you will be rid of him."

Desroches went away, smothered with blessings from the two poor widows and Joseph. As to the newspaper, it ceased to exist at the end of two months, just as Finot had predicted. Philippe's crime had, therefore, so far as the world knew, no consequences. But Agathe's motherhood had received a deadly wound. Her belief in her son once shaken, she lived in perpetual fear, mingled with some satisfactions, as she saw her worst apprehensions unrealized.

When men like Philippe, who are endowed with physical courage, and yet are cowardly and ignoble in their moral being, see matters and things resuming their accustomed course about them after some catastrophe in which their honor and decency is well-nigh lost, such family kindness, or any show of friendliness towards them is a premium of encouragement. They count on impunity; their minds distorted, their passions gratified, only prompt them to study how it happened that they succeeded in getting round all social laws; the result is they become alarmingly adroit.

A fortnight later, Philippe, once more a man of leisure, lazy and bored, renewed his fatal cafe life,—his drams, his long games of billiards embellished with punch, his nightly resort to the gambling-table, where he risked some trifling stake and won enough to pay for his dissipations. Apparently very economical, the better to deceive his mother and Madame Descoings, he wore a hat that was greasy, with the nap rubbed off at the edges, patched boots, a shabby overcoat, on which the red ribbon scarcely showed so discolored and dirty was it by long service at the buttonhole and by the splatterings of coffee and liquors. His buckskin gloves, of a greenish tinge, lasted him a long while; and he only gave up his satin neckcloth when it was ragged enough to look like wadding. Mariette was the sole object of the fellow's love, and her treachery had greatly hardened his heart. When he happened to win more than usual, or if he supped with his old comrade, Giroudeau, he followed some Venus of the slums, with brutal contempt for the whole sex. Otherwise regular in his habits, he breakfasted and dined at home and came in every night about one o'clock. Three months of this horrible life restored Agathe to some degree of confidence.

As for Joseph, who was working at the splendid picture to which he afterwards owed his reputation, he lived in his atelier. On the prediction of her grandson Bixiou, Madame Descoings believed in Joseph's future glory, and she showed him every sort of motherly kindness; she took his breakfast to him, she did his errands, she blacked his boots. The painter was never seen till dinner-time, and his evenings were spent at the Cenacle among his friends. He read a great deal, and gave himself that deep and serious education which only comes through the mind itself, and which all men of talent strive after between the ages of twenty and thirty. Agathe, seeing very little of Joseph, and feeling no uneasiness about him, lived only for Philippe, who gave her the alternations of fears excited and terrors allayed, which seem the life, as it were, of sentiment, and to be as necessary to maternity as to love. Desroches, who came once a week to see the widow of his patron and friend, gave her hopes. The Duc de Maufrigneuse had asked to have Philippe in his regiment; the minister of war had ordered an inquiry; and as the name of Bridau did not appear on any police list, nor on any record at the Palais de Justice, Philippe would be reinstated in the army early in the coming year.

To arrive at this result, Desroches set all the powers that he could influence in motion. At the prefecture of police he learned that Philippe spent his evenings in the gambling-house; and he thought it best to tell this fact privately to Madame Descoings, exhorting her to keep an eye on the lieutenant-colonel, for one outbreak would imperil all; as it was, the minister of war was not likely to inquire whether Philippe gambled. Once restored to his rank under the flag of his country, he would perhaps abandon a vice only taken up from idleness. Agathe, who no longer received her friends in the evening, sat in the chimney-corner reading her prayers, while Madame Descoings consulted the cards, interpreted her dreams, and applied the rules of the "cabala" to her lottery ventures. This jovial fanatic never missed a single drawing; she still pursued her trey,—which never turned up. It was nearly twenty-one years old, just approaching its majority; on this ridiculous idea the old woman now pinned her faith. One of its three numbers had stayed at the bottom of all the wheels ever since the institution of the lottery. Accordingly, Madame Descoings laid heavy stakes on that particular number, as well as on all the combinations of the three numbers. The last mattress remaining to her bed was the place where she stored her savings; she unsewed the ticking, put in from time to time the bit of gold saved from her needs, wrapped carefully in wool, and then sewed the mattress up again. She intended, at the last drawing, to risk all her savings on the different combinations of her treasured trey.

This passion, so universally condemned, has never been fairly studied. No one has understood this opium of poverty. The lottery, all-powerful fairy of the poor, bestowed the gift of magic hopes. The turn of the wheel which opens to the gambler a vista of gold and happiness, lasts no longer than a flash of lightning, but the lottery gave five days' existence to that magnificent flash. What social power can to-day, for the sum of five sous, give us five days' happiness and launch us ideally into all the joys of civilization? Tobacco, a craving far more immoral than play, destroys the body, attacks the mind, and stupefies a nation; while the lottery did nothing of the kind. This passion, moreover, was forced to keep within limits by the long periods that occurred between the drawings, and by the choice of wheels which each investor individually clung to. Madame Descoings never staked on any but the "wheel of Paris." Full of confidence that the trey cherished

for twenty-one years was about to triumph, she now imposed upon herself enormous privations, that she might stake a large amount of savings upon the last drawing of the year. When she dreamed her cabalistic visions (for all dreams did not correspond with the numbers of the lottery), she went and told them to Joseph, who was the sole being who would listen, and not only not scold her, but give her the kindly words with which an artist knows how to soothe the follies of the mind. All great talents respect and understand a real passion; they explain it to themselves by finding the roots of it in their own hearts or minds. Joseph's ideas was, that his brother loved tobacco and liquors, Maman Descoings loved her trey, his mother loved God, Desroches the younger loved lawsuits, Desroches the elder loved angling,—in short, all the world, he said, loved something. He himself loved the "beau ideal" in all things; he loved the poetry of Lord Byron, the painting of Gericault, the music of Rossini, the novels of Walter Scott. "Every one to his taste, maman," he would say; "but your trey does hang fire terribly."

"It will turn up, and you will be rich, and my little Bixiou as well."

"Give it all to your grandson," cried Joseph; "at any rate, do what you like best with it."

"Hey! when it turns up I shall have enough for everybody. In the first place, you shall have a fine atelier; you sha'n't deprive yourself of going to the opera so as to pay for your models and your colors. Do you know, my dear boy, you make me play a pretty shabby part in that picture of yours?"

By way of economy, Joseph had made the Descoings pose for his magnificent painting of a young courtesan taken by an old woman to a Doge of Venice. This picture, one of the masterpieces of modern painting, was mistaken by Gros himself for a Titian, and it paved the way for the recognition which the younger artists gave to Joseph's talent in the Salon of 1823.

"Those who know you know very well what you are," he answered gayly. "Why need you trouble yourself about those who don't know you?"

For the last ten years Madame Descoings had taken on the ripe tints of a russet apple at Easter. Wrinkles had formed in her superabundant flesh, now grown pallid and flabby. Her eyes, full of life, were bright with thoughts that were still young and vivacious, and might be considered grasping; for there is always something of that spirit in a gambler. Her fat face bore traces of dissimulation and of the mental reservations hidden in the depths of her heart. Her vice necessitated secrecy. There were also indications of gluttony in the motion of her lips. And thus, although she was, as we have seen, an excellent and upright woman, the eye might be misled by her appearance. She was an admirable model for the old woman Joseph wished to paint. Coralie, a young actress of exquisite beauty who died in the flower of her youth, the mistress of Lucien de Rubempre, one of Joseph's friends, had given him the idea of the picture. This noble painting has been called a plagiarism of other pictures, while in fact it was a splendid arrangement of three portraits. Michel Chrestien, one of his companions at the Cenacle, lent his republican head for the senator, to which Joseph added a few mature tints, just as he exaggerated the expression of Madame Descoings's features. This fine picture, which was destined to make a great noise and bring the artist much hatred,

jealousy, and admiration, was just sketched out; but, compelled as he was to work for a living, he laid it aside to make copies of the old masters for the dealers; thus he penetrated the secrets of their processes, and his brush is therefore one of the best trained of the modern school. The shrewd sense of an artist led him to conceal the profits he was beginning to lay by from his mother and Madame Descoings, aware that each had her road to ruin,—the one in Philippe, the other in the lottery. This astuteness is seldom wanting among painters; busy for days together in the solitude of their studios, engaged in work which, up to a certain point, leaves the mind free, they are in some respects like women,—their thoughts turn about the little events of life, and they contrive to get at their hidden meaning.

Joseph had bought one of those magnificent chests or coffers of a past age, then ignored by fashion, with which he decorated a corner of his studio, where the light danced upon the bas-reliefs and gave full lustre to a masterpiece of the sixteenth century artisans. He saw the necessity for a hiding-place, and in this coffer he had begun to accumulate a little store of money. With an artist's carelessness, he was in the habit of putting the sum he allowed for his monthly expenses in a skull, which stood on one of the compartments of the coffer. Since his brother had returned to live at home, he found a constant discrepancy between the amount he spent and the sum in this receptacle. The hundred francs a month disappeared with incredible celerity. Finding nothing one day, when he had only spent forty or fifty francs, he remarked for the first time: "My money must have got wings." The next month he paid more attention to his accounts; but add as he might, like Robert Macaire, sixteen and five are twenty-three, he could make nothing of them. When, for the third time, he found a still more important discrepancy, he communicated the painful fact to Madame Descoings, who loved him, he knew, with that maternal, tender, confiding, credulous, enthusiastic love that he had never had from his own mother, good as she was,—a love as necessary to the early life of an artist as the care of the hen is to her unfledged chickens. To her alone could he confide his horrible suspicions. He was as sure of his friends as he was of himself; and the Descoings, he knew, would take nothing to put in her lottery. At the idea which then suggested itself the poor woman wrung her hands. Philippe alone could have committed this domestic theft.

"Why didn't he ask me, if he wanted it?" cried Joseph, taking a dab of color on his palette and stirring it into the other colors without seeing what he did. "Is it likely I should refuse him?"

"It is robbing a child!" cried the Descoings, her face expressing the deepest disgust.

"No," replied Joseph, "he is my brother; my purse is his: but he ought to have asked me."

"Put in a special sum, in silver, this morning, and don't take anything out," said Madame Descoings. "I shall know who goes into the studio; and if he is the only one, you will be certain it is he."

The next day Joseph had proof of his brother's forced loans upon him. Philippe came to the studio when his brother was out and took the little sum he wanted. The artist trembled for his savings.

"I'll catch him at it, the scamp!" he said, laughing, to Madame Descoings.

"And you'll do right: we ought to break him of it. I, too, I have missed little sums out of my purse. Poor boy! he wants tobacco; he's accustomed to it."

"Poor boy! poor boy!" cried the artist. "I'm rather of Fulgence and Bixiou's opinion: Philippe is a dead-weight on us. He runs his head into riots and has to be shipped to America, and that costs the mother twelve thousand francs; he can't find anything to do in the forests of the New World, and so he comes back again, and that costs twelve thousand more. Under pretence of having carried two words of Napoleon to a general, he thinks himself a great soldier and makes faces at the Bourbons; meantime, what does he do? amuse himself, travel about, see foreign countries! As for me, I'm not duped by his misfortunes; he doesn't look like a man who fails to get the best of things! Somebody finds him a good place, and there he is, leading the life of a Sardanapalus with a ballet-girl, and guzzling the funds of his journal; that costs the mother another twelve thousand francs! I don't care two straws for myself, but Philippe will bring that poor woman to beggary. He thinks I'm of no account because I was never in the dragoons of the Guard; but perhaps I shall be the one to support that poor dear mother in her old age, while he, if he goes on as he does, will end I don't know how. Bixiou often says to me, 'He is a downright rogue, that brother of yours.' Your grandson is right. Philippe will be up to some mischief that will compromise the honor of the family, and then we shall have to scrape up another ten or twelve thousand francs! He gambles every night; when he comes home, drunk as a templar, he drops on the staircase the pricked cards on which he marks the turns of the red and black. Old Desroches is trying to get him back into the army, and, on my word on honor, I believe he would hate to serve again. Would you ever have believed that a boy with such heavenly blue eyes and the look of Bayard could turn out such a scoundrel?"

CHAPTER V

In spite of the coolness and discretion with which Philippe played his trifling game every night, it happened every now and then that he was what gamblers call "cleaned out." Driven by the irresistible necessity of having his evening stake of ten francs, he plundered the household, and laid hands on his brother's money and on all that Madame Descoings or Agathe left about. Already the poor mother had had a dreadful vision in her first sleep: Philippe entered the room and took from the pockets of her gown all the money he could find. Agathe pretended to sleep, but she passed the rest of the night in tears. She saw the truth only too clearly. "One wrong act is not a vice," Madame Descoings had declared; but after so many repetitions, vice was unmistakable. Agathe could doubt no longer; her best-beloved son had neither delicacy nor honor.

On the morrow of that frightful vision, before Philippe left the house after breakfast, she drew him into her chamber and begged him, in a tone of entreaty, to ask her for what money he needed. After that, the applications were so numerous that in two weeks Agathe was drained of all her savings. She was literally without a penny, and began to think

of finding work. The means of earning money had been discussed in the evenings between herself and Madame Descoings, and she had already taken patterns of worsted work to fill in, from a shop called the "Pere de Famille,"--an employment which pays about twenty sous a day. Notwithstanding Agathe's silence on the subject, Madame Descoings had guessed the motive of this desire to earn money by women's-work. The change in her appearance was eloquent: her fresh face had withered, the skin clung to the temples and the cheek-bones, and the forehead showed deep lines; her eyes lost their clearness; an inward fire was evidently consuming her; she wept the greater part of the night. A chief cause of these outward ravages was the necessity of hiding her anguish, her sufferings, her apprehensions. She never went to sleep until Philippe came in; she listened for his step, she had learned the inflections of his voice, the variations of his walk, the very language of his cane as it touched the pavement. Nothing escaped her. She knew the degree of drunkenness he had reached, she trembled as she heard him stumble on the stairs; one night she picked up some pieces of gold at the spot where he had fallen. When he had drunk and won, his voice was gruff and his cane dragged; but when he had lost, his step had something sharp, short and angry about it; he hummed in a clear voice, and carried his cane in the air as if presenting arms. At breakfast, if he had won, his behavior was gay and even affectionate; he joked roughly, but still he joked, with Madame Descoings, with Joseph, and with his mother; gloomy, on the contrary, when he had lost, his brusque, rough speech, his hard glance, and his depression, frightened them. A life of debauch and the abuse of liquors debased, day by day, a countenance that was once so handsome. The veins of the face were swollen with blood, the features became coarse, the eyes lost their lashes and grew hard and dry. No longer careful of his person, Philippe exhaled the miasmas of a tavern and the smell of muddy boots, which, to an observer, stamped him with debauchery.

"You ought," said Madame Descoings to Philippe during the last days of December, "you ought to get yourself new-clothed from head to foot."

"And who is to pay for it?" he answered sharply. "My poor mother hasn't a sou; and I have five hundred francs a year. It would take my whole year's pension to pay for the clothes; besides I have mortgaged it for three years--"

"What for?" asked Joseph.

"A debt of honor. Giroudeau borrowed a thousand francs from Florentine to lend me. I am not gorgeous, that's a fact; but when one thinks that Napoleon is at Saint Helena, and has sold his plate for the means of living, his faithful soldiers can manage to walk on their bare feet," he said, showing his boots without heels, as he marched away.

"He is not bad," said Agathe, "he has good feelings."

"You can love the Emperor and yet dress yourself properly," said Joseph. "If he would take any care of himself and his clothes, he wouldn't look so like a vagabond."

"Joseph! you ought to have some indulgence for your brother," cried Agathe. "You do the things you like, while he is certainly not in his right place."

"What did he leave it for?" demanded Joseph. "What can it matter to

him whether Louis the Eighteenth's bugs or Napoleon's cuckoos are on the flag, if it is the flag of his country? France is France! For my part, I'd paint for the devil. A soldier ought to fight, if he is a soldier, for the love of his art. If he had stayed quietly in the army, he would have been a general by this time."

"You are unjust to him," said Agathe, "your father, who adored the Emperor, would have approved of his conduct. However, he has consented to re-enter the army. God knows the grief it has caused your brother to do a thing he considers treachery."

Joseph rose to return to his studio, but his mother took his hand and said:--

"Be good to your brother; he is so unfortunate."

When the artist got back to his painting-room, followed by Madame Descoings, who begged him to humor his mother's feelings, and pointed out to him how changed she was, and what inward suffering the change revealed, they found Philippe there, to their great amazement.

"Joseph, my boy," he said, in an off-hand way, "I want some money. Confound it! I owe thirty francs for cigars at my tobacconist's, and I dare not pass the cursed shop till I've paid it. I've promised to pay it a dozen times."

"Well, I like your present way best," said Joseph; "take what you want out of the skull."

"I took all there was last night, after dinner."

"There was forty-five francs."

"Yes, that's what I made it," replied Philippe. "I took them; is there any objection?"

"No, my friend, no," said Joseph. "If you were rich, I should do the same by you; only, before taking what I wanted, I should ask you if it were convenient."

"It is very humiliating to ask," remarked Philippe; "I would rather see you taking as I do, without a word; it shows more confidence. In the army, if a comrade dies, and has a good pair of boots, and you have a bad pair, you change, that's all."

"Yes, but you don't take them while he is living."

"Oh, what meanness!" said Philippe, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, so you haven't got any money?"

"No," said Joseph, who was determined not to show his hiding-place.

"In a few days we shall be rich," said Madame Descoings.

"Yes, you; you think your trey is going to turn up on the 25th at the Paris drawing. You must have put in a fine stake if you think you can make us all rich."

"A paid-up trey of two hundred francs will give three millions,

without counting the couplets and the singles."

"At fifteen thousand times the stake--yes, you are right; it is just two hundred you must pay up!" cried Philippe.

Madame Descoings bit her lips; she knew she had spoken imprudently. In fact, Philippe was asking himself as he went downstairs:--

"That old witch! where does she keep her money? It is as good as lost; I can make a better use of it. With four pools at fifty francs each, I could win two hundred thousand francs, and that's much surer than the turning up of a trey."

He tried to think where the old woman was likely to have hid the money. On the days preceding festivals, Agathe went to church and stayed there a long time; no doubt she confessed and prepared for the communion. It was now the day before Christmas; Madame Descoings would certainly go out to buy some dainties for the "reveillon," the midnight meal; and she might also take occasion to pay up her stake. The lottery was drawn every five days in different localities, at Bordeaux, Lyons, Lille, Strasburg, and Paris. The Paris lottery was drawn on the twenty-fifth of each month, and the lists closed on the twenty-fourth, at midnight. Philippe studied all these points and set himself to watch. He came home at midday; the Descoings had gone out, and had taken the key of the appartement. But that was no difficulty. Philippe pretended to have forgotten something, and asked the concierge to go herself and get a locksmith, who lived close by, and who came at once and opened the door. The villain's first thought was the bed; he uncovered it, passed his hands over the mattress before he examined the bedstead, and at the lower end felt the pieces wrapped up in paper. He at once ripped the ticking, picked out twenty napoleons, and then, without taking time to sew up the mattress, re-made the bed neatly enough, so that Madame Descoings could suspect nothing.

The gambler stole off with a light foot, resolving to play at three different times, three hours apart, and each time for only ten minutes. Thorough-going players, ever since 1786, the time at which public gaming-houses were established,--the true players whom the government dreaded, and who ate up, to use a gambling term, the money of the bank,--never played in any other way. But before attaining this measure of experience they lost fortunes. The whole science of gambling-houses and their gains rests upon three things: the impassibility of the bank; the even results called "drawn games," when half the money goes to the bank; and the notorious bad faith authorized by the government, in refusing to hold or pay the player's stakes except optionally. In a word, the gambling-house, which refuses the game of a rich and cool player, devours the fortune of the foolish and obstinate one, who is carried away by the rapid movement of the machinery of the game. The croupiers at "trente et quarante" move nearly as fast as the ball.

Philippe had ended by acquiring the sang-froid of a commanding general, which enables him to keep his eye clear and his mind prompt in the midst of tumult. He had reached that statesmanship of gambling which in Paris, let us say in passing, is the livelihood of thousands who are strong enough to look every night into an abyss without getting a vertigo. With his four hundred francs, Philippe resolved to make his fortune that day. He put aside, in his boots, two hundred francs, and kept the other two hundred in his pocket. At three o'clock

he went to the gambling-house (which is now turned into the theatre of the Palais-Royal), where the bank accepted the largest sums. He came out half an hour later with seven thousand francs in his pocket. Then he went to see Florentine, paid the five hundred francs which he owed to her, and proposed a supper at the Rocher de Cancale after the theatre. Returning to his game, along the rue de Sentier, he stopped at Giroudeau's newspaper-office to notify him of the gala. By six o'clock Philippe had won twenty-five thousand francs, and stopped playing at the end of ten minutes as he had promised himself to do. That night, by ten o'clock, he had won seventy-five thousand francs. After the supper, which was magnificent, Philippe, by that time drunk and confident, went back to his play at midnight. In defiance of the rule he had imposed upon himself, he played for an hour and doubled his fortune. The bankers, from whom, by his system of playing, he had extracted one hundred and fifty thousand francs, looked at him with curiosity.

"Will he go away now, or will he stay?" they said to each other by a glance. "If he stays he is lost."

Philippe thought he had struck a vein of luck, and stayed. Towards three in the morning, the hundred and fifty thousand francs had gone back to the bank. The colonel, who had imbibed a considerable quantity of grog while playing, left the place in a drunken state, which the cold of the outer air only increased. A waiter from the gambling-house followed him, picked him up, and took him to one of those horrible houses at the door of which, on a hanging lamp, are the words: "Lodgings for the night." The waiter paid for the ruined gambler, who was put to bed, where he remained till Christmas night. The managers of gambling-houses have some consideration for their customers, especially for high players. Philippe awoke about seven o'clock in the evening, his mouth parched, his face swollen, and he himself in the grip of a nervous fever. The strength of his constitution enabled him to get home on foot, where meanwhile he had, without willing it, brought mourning, desolation, poverty, and death.

The evening before, when dinner was ready, Madame Descoings and Agathe expected Philippe. They waited dinner till seven o'clock. Agathe always went to bed at ten; but as, on this occasion, she wished to be present at the midnight mass, she went to lie down as soon as dinner was over. Madame Descoings and Joseph remained alone by the fire in the little salon, which served for all, and the old woman asked the painter to add up the amount of her great stake, her monstrous stake, on the famous trey, which she was to pay that evening at the Lottery office. She wished to put in for the doubles and singles as well, so as to seize all chances. After feasting on the poetry of her hopes, and pouring the two horns of plenty at the feet of her adopted son, and relating to him her dreams which demonstrated the certainty of success, she felt no other uneasiness than the difficulty of bearing such joy, and waiting from mid-night until ten o'clock of the morrow, when the winning numbers were declared. Joseph, who saw nothing of the four hundred francs necessary to pay up the stakes, asked about them. The old woman smiled, and led him into the former salon, which was now her bed-chamber.

"You shall see," she said.

Madame Descoings hastily unmade the bed, and searched for her scissors to rip the mattress; she put on her spectacles, looked at the ticking,

saw the hole, and let fall the mattress. Hearing a sigh from the depths of the old woman's breast, as though she were strangled by a rush of blood to the heart, Joseph instinctively held out his arms to catch the poor creature, and placed her fainting in a chair, calling to his mother to come to them. Agathe rose, slipped on her dressing-gown, and ran in. By the light of a candle, she applied the ordinary remedies,--eau-de-cologne to the temples, cold water to the forehead, a burnt feather under the nose,--and presently her aunt revived.

"They were there is morning; HE has taken them, the monster!" she said.

"Taken what?" asked Joseph.

"I had twenty louis in my mattress; my savings for two years; no one but Philippe could have taken them."

"But when?" cried the poor mother, overwhelmed, "he has not been in since breakfast."

"I wish I might be mistaken," said the old woman. "But this morning in Joseph's studio, when I spoke before Philippe of my stakes, I had a presentiment. I did wrong not to go down and take my little all and pay for my stakes at once. I meant to, and I don't know what prevented me. Oh, yes!--my God! I went out to buy him some cigars."

"But," said Joseph, "you left the door locked. Besides, it is so infamous. I can't believe it. Philippe couldn't have watched you, cut open the mattress, done it deliberately,--no, no!"

"I felt them this morning, when I made my bed after breakfast," repeated Madame Descoings.

Agathe, horrified, went down stairs and asked if Philippe had come in during the day. The concierge related the tale of his return and the locksmith. The mother, heart-stricken, went back a changed woman. White as the linen of her chemise, she walked as we might fancy a spectre walks, slowly, noiselessly, moved by some superhuman power, and yet mechanically. She held a candle in her hand, whose light fell full upon her face and showed her eyes, fixed with horror. Unconsciously, her hands by a desperate movement had dishevelled the hair about her brow; and this made her so beautiful with anguish that Joseph stood rooted in awe at the apparition of that remorse, the vision of that statue of terror and despair.

"My aunt," she said, "take my silver forks and spoons. I have enough to make up the sum; I took your money for Philippe's sake; I thought I could put it back before you missed it. Oh! I have suffered much."

She sat down. Her dry, fixed eyes wandered a little.

"It was he who did it," whispered the old woman to Joseph.

"No, no," cried Agathe; "take my silver plate, sell it; it is useless to me; we can eat with yours."

She went to her room, took the box which contained the plate, felt its light weight, opened it, and saw a pawnbroker's ticket. The poor

mother uttered a dreadful cry. Joseph and the Descoings ran to her, saw the empty box, and her noble falsehood was of no avail. All three were silent, and avoided looking at each other; but the next moment, by an almost frantic gesture, Agathe laid her finger on her lips as if to entreat a secrecy no one desired to break. They returned to the salon, and sat beside the fire.

"Ah! my children," cried Madame Descoings, "I am stabbed to the heart: my treasury will turn up, I am certain of it. I am not thinking of myself, but of you two. Philippe is a monster," she continued, addressing her niece; "he does not love you after all that you have done for him. If you do not protect yourself against him he will bring you to beggary. Promise me to sell out your Funds and buy a life-annuity. Joseph has a good profession and he can live. If you will do this, dear Agathe, you will never be an expense to Joseph. Monsieur Desroches has just started his son as a notary; he would take your twelve thousand francs and pay you an annuity."

Joseph seized his mother's candlestick, rushed up to his studio, and came down with three hundred francs.

"Here, Madame Descoings!" he cried, giving her his little store, "it is no business of ours what you do with your money; we owe you what you have lost, and here it is, almost in full."

"Take your poor little all?--the fruit of those privations that have made me so unhappy! are you mad, Joseph?" cried the old woman, visibly torn between her dogged faith in the coming treasury, and the sacrilege of accepting such a sacrifice.

"Oh! take it if you like," said Agathe, who was moved to tears by this action of her true son.

Madame Descoings took Joseph by the head, and kissed him on the forehead:--

"My child," she said, "don't tempt me. I might only lose it. The lottery, you see, is all folly."

No more heroic words were ever uttered in the hidden dramas of domestic life. It was, indeed, affection triumphant over inveterate vice. At this instant, the clocks struck midnight.

"It is too late now," said Madame Descoings.

"Oh!" cried Joseph, "here are your cabalistic numbers."

The artist sprang at the paper, and rushed headlong down the staircase to pay the stakes. When he was no longer present, Agathe and Madame Descoings burst into tears.

"He has gone, the dear love," cried the old gambler; "but it shall all be his; he pays his own money."

Unhappily, Joseph did not know the way to any of the lottery-offices, which in those days were as well known to most people as the cigarshops to a smoker in ours. The painter ran along, reading the street names upon the lamps. When he asked the passers-by to show him a lottery-office, he was told they were all closed, except the one

under the portico of the Palais-Royal which was sometimes kept open a little later. He flew to the Palais-Royal: the office was shut.

"Two minutes earlier, and you might have paid your stake," said one of the vendors of tickets, whose beat was under the portico, where he vociferated this singular cry: "Twelve hundred francs for forty sous," and offered tickets all paid up.

By the glimmer of the street lamp and the lights of the cafe de la Rotonde, Joseph examined these tickets to see if, by chance, any of them bore the Descoings's numbers. He found none, and returned home grieved at having done his best in vain for the old woman, to whom he related his ill-luck. Agathe and her aunt went together to the midnight mass at Saint-Germain-des-Pres. Joseph went to bed. The collation did not take place. Madame Descoings had lost her head; and in Agathe's heart was eternal mourning.

The two rose late on Christmas morning. Ten o'clock had struck before Madame Descoings began to bestir herself about the breakfast, which was only ready at half-past eleven. At that hour, the oblong frames containing the winning numbers are hung over the doors of the lottery-offices. If Madame Descoings had paid her stake and held her ticket, she would have gone by half-past nine o'clock to learn her fate at a building close to the ministry of Finance, in the rue Neuve-des-Petits Champs, a situation now occupied by the Theatre Ventadour in the place of the same name. On the days when the drawings took place, an observer might watch with curiosity the crowd of old women, cooks, and old men assembled about the door of this building; a sight as remarkable as the cue of people about the Treasury on the days when the dividends are paid.

"Well, here you are, rolling in wealth!" said old Desroches, coming into the room just as the Descoings was swallowing her last drop of coffee.

"What do you mean?" cried poor Agathe.

"Her tray has turned up," he said, producing the list of numbers written on a bit of paper, such as the officials of the lottery put by hundreds into little wooden bowls on their counters.

Joseph read the list. Agathe read the list. The Descoings read nothing; she was struck down as by a thunderbolt. At the change in her face, at the cry she gave, old Desroches and Joseph carried her to her bed. Agathe went for a doctor. The poor woman was seized with apoplexy, and she only recovered consciousness at four in the afternoon; old Haudry, her doctor, then said that, in spite of this improvement, she ought to settle her worldly affairs and think of her salvation. She herself only uttered two words:--

"Three millions!"

Old Desroches, informed by Joseph, with due reservations, of the state of things, related many instances where lottery-players had seen a fortune escape them on the very day when, by some fatality, they had forgotten to pay their stakes; but he thoroughly understood that such a blow might be fatal when it came after twenty years' perseverance. About five o'clock, as a deep silence reigned in the little _appartement_, and the sick woman, watched by Joseph and his mother, the

one sitting at the foot, the other at the head of her bed, was expecting her grandson Bixiou, whom Desroches had gone to fetch, the sound of Philippe's step and cane resounded on the staircase.

"There he is! there he is!" cried the Descoings, sitting up in bed and suddenly able to use her paralyzed tongue.

Agathe and Joseph were deeply impressed by this powerful effect of the horror which violently agitated the old woman. Their painful suspense was soon ended by the sight of Philippe's convulsed and purple face, his staggering walk, and the horrible state of his eyes, which were deeply sunken, dull, and yet haggard; he had a strong chill upon him, and his teeth chattered.

"Starvation in Prussia!" he cried, looking about him. "Nothing to eat or drink?--and my throat on fire! Well, what's the matter? The devil is always meddling in our affairs. There's my old Descoings in bed, looking at me with her eyes as big as saucers."

"Be silent, monsieur!" said Agathe, rising. "At least, respect the sorrows you have caused."

"_Monsieur_, indeed!" he cried, looking at his mother. "My dear little mother, that won't do. Have you ceased to love your son?"

"Are you worthy of love? Have you forgotten what you did yesterday? Go and find yourself another home; you cannot live with us any longer, --that is, after to-morrow," she added; "for in the state you are in now it is difficult--"

"To turn me out,--is that it?" he interrupted. "Ha! are you going to play the melodrama of 'The Banished Son'? Well done! is that how you take things? You are all a pretty set! What harm have I done? I've cleaned out the old woman's mattress. What the devil is the good of money kept in wool? Do you call that a crime? Didn't she take twenty thousand francs from you? We are her creditors, and I've paid myself as much as I could get,--that's all."

"My God! my God!" cried the dying woman, clasping her hands and praying.

"Be silent!" exclaimed Joseph, springing at his brother and putting his hand before his mouth.

"To the right about, march! brat of a painter!" retorted Philippe, laying his strong hand on Joseph's head, and twirling him round, as he flung him on a sofa. "Don't dare to touch the moustache of a commander of a squadron of the dragoons of the Guard!"

"She has paid me back all that she owed me," cried Agathe, rising and turning an angry face to her son; "and besides, that is my affair. You have killed her. Go away, my son," she added, with a gesture that took all her remaining strength, "and never let me see you again. You are a monster."

"I kill her?"

"Her trey has turned up," cried Joseph, "and you stole the money for her stake."

"Well, if she is dying of a lost trey, it isn't I who have killed her," said the drunkard.

"Go, go!" said Agathe. "You fill me with horror; you have every vice. My God! is this my son?"

A hollow rattle sounded in Madame Descoings's throat, increasing Agathe's anger.

"I love you still, my mother,--you who are the cause of all my misfortunes," said Philippe. "You turn me out of doors on Christmas-day. What did you do to grandpa Rouget, to your father, that he should drive you away and disinherit you? If you had not displeased him, we should all be rich now, and I should not be reduced to misery. What did you do to your father,--you who are a good woman? You see by your own self, I may be a good fellow and yet be turned out of house and home,--I, the glory of the family--"

"The disgrace of it!" cried the Descoings.

"You shall leave this room, or you shall kill me!" cried Joseph, springing on his brother with the fury of a lion.

"My God! my God!" cried Agathe, trying to separate the brothers.

At this moment Bixiou and Haudry the doctor entered. Joseph had just knocked his brother over and stretched him on the ground.

"He is a regular wild beast," he cried. "Don't speak another word, or I'll--"

"I'll pay you for this!" roared Philippe.

"A family explanation," remarked Bixiou.

"Lift him up," said the doctor, looking at him. "He is as ill as Madame Descoings; undress him and put him to bed; get off his boots."

"That's easy to say," cried Bixiou, "but they must be cut off; his legs are swollen."

Agathe took a pair of scissors. When she had cut down the boots, which in those days were worn outside the clinging trousers, ten pieces of gold rolled on the floor.

"There it is,--her money," murmured Philippe. "Cursed fool that I was, I forgot it. I too have missed a fortune."

He was seized with a horrible delirium of fever, and began to rave. Joseph, assisted by old Desroches, who had come back, and by Bixiou, carried him to his room. Doctor Haudry was obliged to write a line to the Hopital de la Charite and borrow a strait-waistcoat; for the delirium ran so high as to make him fear that Philippe might kill himself,--he was raving. At nine o'clock calm was restored. The Abbe Loraux and Desroches endeavored to comfort Agathe, who never ceased to weep at her aunt's bedside. She listened to them in silence, and obstinately shook her head; Joseph and the Descoings alone knew the extent and depth of her inward wound.

"He will learn to do better, mother," said Joseph, when Desroches and Bixiou had left.

"Oh!" cried the widow, "Philippe is right,--my father cursed me: I have no right to-- Here, here is your money," she said to Madame Descoings, adding Joseph's three hundred francs to the two hundred found on Philippe. "Go and see if your brother does not need something," she said to Joseph.

"Will you keep a promise made to a dying woman?" asked Madame Descoings, who felt that her mind was failing her.

"Yes, aunt."

"Then swear to me to give your property to young Desroches for a life annuity. My income ceases at my death; and from what you have just said, I know you will let that wretch wring the last farthing out of you."

"I swear it, aunt."

The old woman died on the 31st of December, five days after the terrible blow which old Desroches had so innocently given her. The five hundred francs--the only money in the household--were barely enough to pay for her funeral. She left a small amount of silver and some furniture, the value of which Madame Bixiou paid over to her grandson Bixiou. Reduced to eight hundred francs' annuity paid to her by young Desroches, who had bought a business without clients, and himself took the capital of twelve thousand francs, Agathe gave up her appartement on the third floor, and sold all her superfluous furniture. When, at the end of a month, Philippe seemed to be convalescent, his mother coldly explained to him that the costs of his illness had taken all her ready money, that she should be obliged in future to work for her living, and she urged him, with the utmost kindness, to re-enter the army and support himself.

"You might have spared me that sermon," said Philippe, looking at his mother with an eye that was cold from utter indifference. "I have seen all along that neither you nor my brother love me. I am alone in the world; I like it best!"

"Make yourself worthy of our affection," answered the poor mother, struck to the very heart, "and we will give it back to you--"

"Nonsense!" he cried, interrupting her.

He took his old hat, rubbed white at the edges, stuck it over one ear, and went downstairs, whistling.

"Philippe! where are you going without any money?" cried his mother, who could not repress her tears. "Here, take this--"

She held out to him a hundred francs in gold, wrapped up in paper. Philippe came up the stairs he had just descended, and took the money.

"Well; won't you kiss me?" she said, bursting into tears.

He pressed his mother in his arms, but without the warmth of feeling

which was all that could give value to the embrace.

"Where shall you go?" asked Agathe.

"To Florentine, Girodeau's mistress. Ah! they are real friends!" he answered brutally.

He went away. Agathe turned back with trembling limbs, and failing eyes, and aching heart. She fell upon her knees, prayed God to take her unnatural child into His own keeping, and abdicated her woeful motherhood.

CHAPTER VI

By February, 1822, Madame Bridau had settled into the attic room recently occupied by Philippe, which was over the kitchen of her former appartement. The painter's studio and bedroom was opposite, on the other side of the staircase. When Joseph saw his mother thus reduced, he was determined to make her as comfortable as possible. After his brother's departure he assisted in the re-arrangement of the garret room, to which he gave an artist's touch. He added a rug; the bed, simple in character but exquisite in taste, had something monastic about it; the walls, hung with a cheap glazed cotton selected with taste, of a color which harmonized with the furniture and was newly covered, gave the room an air of elegance and nicety. In the hallway he added a double door, with a "portiere" to the inner one. The window was shaded by a blind which gave soft tones to the light. If the poor mother's life was reduced to the plainest circumstances that the life of any woman could have in Paris, Agathe was at least better off than all others in a like case, thanks to her son.

To save his mother from the cruel cares of such reduced housekeeping, Joseph took her every day to dine at a table-d'hote in the rue de Beaune, frequented by well-bred women, deputies, and titled people, where each person's dinner cost ninety francs a month. Having nothing but the breakfast to provide, Agathe took up for her son the old habits she had formerly had with the father. But in spite of Joseph's pious lies, she discovered the fact that her dinner was costing him nearly a hundred francs a month. Alarmed at such enormous expense, and not imagining that her son could earn much money by painting naked women, she obtained, thanks to her confessor, the Abbe Loraux, a place worth seven hundred francs a year in a lottery-office belonging to the Comtesse de Bauvan, the widow of a Chouan leader. The lottery-offices of the government, the lot, as one might say, of privileged widows, ordinarily sufficed for the support of the family of each person who managed them. But after the Restoration the difficulty of rewarding, within the limits of constitutional government, all the services rendered to the cause, led to the custom of giving to reduced women of title not only one but two lottery-offices, worth, usually, from six to ten thousand a year. In such cases, the widow of a general or nobleman thus "protected" did not keep the lottery-office herself; she employed a paid manager. When these managers were young men they were obliged to employ an assistant; for, according to law, the offices had to be kept open till midnight; moreover, the reports required by the minister of finance involved considerable writing. The Comtesse de Bauvan, to whom the Abbe Loraux explained the circumstances of the widow Bridau, promised, in case her manager should leave, to give the

place to Agathe; meantime she stipulated that the widow should be taken as assistant, and receive a salary of six hundred francs. Poor Agathe, who was obliged to be at the office by ten in the morning, had scarcely time to get her dinner. She returned to her work at seven in the evening, remaining there till midnight. Joseph never, for two years, failed to fetch his mother at night, and bring her back to the rue Mazarin; and often he went to take her to dinner; his friends frequently saw him leave the opera or some brilliant salon to be punctually at midnight at the office in the rue Vivienne.

Agathe soon acquired the monotonous regularity of life which becomes a stay and a support to those who have endured the shock of violent sorrows. In the morning, after doing up her room, in which there were no longer cats and little birds, she prepared the breakfast at her own fire and carried it into the studio, where she ate it with her son. She then arranged Joseph's bedroom, put out the fire in her own chamber, and brought her sewing to the studio, where she sat by the little iron stove, leaving the room if a comrade or a model entered it. Though she understood nothing whatever of art, the silence of the studio suited her. In the matter of art she made not the slightest progress; she attempted no hypocrisy; she was utterly amazed at the importance they all attached to color, composition, drawing. When the Cenacle friends or some brother-painter, like Schinner, Pierre Grassou, Leon de Lora,--a very youthful "rapin" who was called at that time Mistigris,--discussed a picture, she would come back afterwards, examine it attentively, and discover nothing to justify their fine words and their hot disputes. She made her son's shirts, she mended his stockings, she even cleaned his palette, supplied him with rags to wipe his brushes, and kept things in order in the studio. Seeing how much thought his mother gave to these little details, Joseph heaped attentions upon her in return. If mother and son had no sympathies in the matter of art, they were at least bound together by signs of tenderness. The mother had a purpose. One morning as she was petting Joseph while he was sketching a large picture (finished in after years and never understood), she said, as it were, casually and aloud,--

"My God! what is he doing?"

"Doing? who?"

"Philippe."

"Oh, ah! he's sowing his wild oats; that fellow will make something of himself by and by."

"But he has gone through the lesson of poverty; perhaps it was poverty which changed him to what he is. If he were prosperous he would be good--"

"You think, my dear mother, that he suffered during that journey of his. You are mistaken; he kept carnival in New York just as he does here--"

"But if he is suffering at this moment, near to us, would it not be horrible?"

"Yes," replied Joseph. "For my part, I will gladly give him some money; but I don't want to see him; he killed our poor Descoings."

"So," resumed Agathe, "you would not be willing to paint his portrait?"

"For you, dear mother, I'd suffer martyrdom. I can make myself remember nothing except that he is my brother."

"His portrait as a captain of dragoons on horseback?"

"Yes, I've a copy of a fine horse by Gros and I haven't any use for it."

"Well, then, go and see that friend of his and find out what has become of him."

"I'll go!"

Agathe rose; her scissors and work fell at her feet; she went and kissed Joseph's head, and dropped two tears on his hair.

"He is your passion, that fellow," said the painter. "We all have our hopeless passions."

That afternoon, about four o'clock, Joseph went to the rue du Sentier and found his brother, who had taken Giroudeau's place. The old dragoon had been promoted to be cashier of a weekly journal established by his nephew. Although Finot was still proprietor of the other newspaper, which he had divided into shares, holding all the shares himself, the proprietor and editor "de visu" was one of his friends, named Lousteau, the son of that very sub-delegate of Issoudun on whom the Bridaus' grandfather, Doctor Rouget, had vowed vengeance; consequently he was the nephew of Madame Hochon. To make himself agreeable to his uncle, Finot gave Philippe the place Giroudeau was quitting; cutting off, however, half the salary. Moreover, daily, at five o'clock, Giroudeau audited the accounts and carried away the receipts. Coloquinte, the old veteran, who was the office boy and did errands, also kept an eye on the slippery Philippe; who was, however, behaving properly. A salary of six hundred francs, and the five hundred of his cross sufficed him to live, all the more because, living in a warm office all day and at the theatre on a free pass every evening, he had only to provide himself with food and a place to sleep in. Coloquinte was departing with the stamped papers on his head, and Philippe was brushing his false sleeves of green linen, when Joseph entered.

"Bless me, here's the cub!" cried Philippe. "Well, we'll go and dine together. You shall go to the opera; Florine and Florentine have got a box. I'm going with Giroudeau; you shall be of the party, and I'll introduce you to Nathan."

He took his leaded cane, and moistened a cigar.

"I can't accept your invitation; I am to take our mother to dine at a table d'hote."

"Ah! how is she, the poor, dear woman?"

"She is pretty well," answered the painter, "I have just repainted our father's portrait, and aunt Descoings's. I have also painted my own, and I should like to give our mother yours, in the uniform of the

dragoons of the Imperial Guard."

"Very good."

"You will have to come and sit."

"I'm obliged to be in this hen-coop from nine o'clock till five."

"Two Sundays will be enough."

"So be it, little man," said Napoleon's staff officer, lighting his cigar at the porter's lamp.

When Joseph related Philippe's position to his mother, on their way to dinner in the rue de Beaune, he felt her arm tremble in his, and joy lighted up her worn face; the poor soul breathed like one relieved of a heavy weight. The next day, inspired by joy and gratitude, she paid Joseph a number of little attentions; she decorated his studio with flowers, and bought him two stands of plants. On the first Sunday when Philippe was to sit, Agathe arranged a charming breakfast in the studio. She laid it all out on the table; not forgetting a flask of brandy, which, however, was only half full. She herself stayed behind a screen, in which she made a little hole. The ex-dragon sent his uniform the night before, and she had not refrained from kissing it. When Philippe was placed, in full dress, on one of those straw horses, all saddled, which Joseph had hired for the occasion, Agathe, fearing to betray her presence, mingled the soft sound of her tears with the conversation of the two brothers. Philippe posed for two hours before and two hours after breakfast. At three o'clock in the afternoon, he put on his ordinary clothes and, as he lighted a cigar, he proposed to his brother to go and dine together in the Palais-Royal, jingling gold in his pocket as he spoke.

"No," said Joseph, "it frightens me to see gold about you."

"Ah! you'll always have a bad opinion of me in this house," cried the colonel in a thundering voice. "Can't I save my money, too?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Agathe, coming out of her hiding-place, and kissing her son. "Let us go and dine with him, Joseph!"

Joseph dared not scold his mother. He went and dressed himself; and Philippe took them to the Rocher de Cancale, where he gave them a splendid dinner, the bill for which amounted to a hundred francs.

"The devil!" muttered Joseph uneasily; "with an income of eleven hundred francs you manage, like Ponchard in the 'Dame Blanche,' to save enough to buy estates."

"Bah, I'm on a run of luck," answered the dragoon, who had drunk enormously.

Hearing this speech just as they were on the steps of the cafe, and before they got into the carriage to go to the theatre,--for Philippe was to take his mother to the Cirque-Olympique (the only theatre her confessor allowed her to visit),--Joseph pinched his mother's arm. She at once pretended to feel unwell, and refused to go the theatre; Philippe accordingly took them back to the rue Mazarin, where, as soon as she was alone with Joseph in her garret, Agathe fell into a gloomy

silence.

The following Sunday Philippe came again. This time his mother was visibly present at the sitting. She served the breakfast, and put several questions to the dragoon. She then learned that the nephew of old Madame Hochon, the friend of her mother, played a considerable part in literature. Philippe and his friend Giroudeau lived among a circle of journalists, actresses, and booksellers, where they were regarded in the light of cashiers. Philippe, who had been drinking kirsch before posing, was loquacious. He boasted that he was about to become a great man. But when Joseph asked a question as to his pecuniary resources he was dumb. It so happened that there was no newspaper on the following day, it being a fete, and to finish the picture Philippe proposed to sit again on the morrow. Joseph told him that the Salon was close at hand, and as he did not have the money to buy two frames for the pictures he wished to exhibit, he was forced to procure it by finishing a copy of a Rubens which had been ordered by Elie Magus, the picture-dealer. The original belonged to a wealthy Swiss banker, who had only lent it for ten days, and the next day was the last; the sitting must therefore be put off till the following Sunday.

"Is that it?" asked Philippe, pointing to a picture by Rubens on an easel.

"Yes," replied Joseph; "it is worth twenty thousand francs. That's what genius can do. It will take me all to-morrow to get the tones of the original and make the copy look so old it can't be distinguished from it."

"Adieu, mother," said Philippe, kissing Agathe. "Next Sunday, then."

The next day Elie Magus was to come for his copy. Joseph's friend, Pierre Grassou, who was working for the same dealer, wanted to see it when finished. To play him a trick, Joseph, when he heard his knock, put the copy, which was varnished with a special glaze of his own, in place of the original, and put the original on his easel. Pierre Grassou was completely taken in; and then amazed and delighted at Joseph's success.

"Do you think it will deceive old Magus?" he said to Joseph.

"We shall see," answered the latter.

The dealer did not come as he had promised. It was getting late; Agathe dined that day with Madame Desroches, who had lately lost her husband, and Joseph proposed to Pierre Grassou to dine at his table d'hote. As he went out he left the key of his studio with the concierge.

An hour later Philippe appeared and said to the concierge,--

"I am to sit this evening; Joseph will be in soon, and I will wait for him in the studio."

The woman gave him the key; Philippe went upstairs, took the copy, thinking it was the original, and went down again; returned the key to the concierge with the excuse that he had forgotten something, and hurried off to sell his Rubens for three thousand francs. He had taken

the precaution to convey a message from his brother to Elie Magus, asking him not to call till the following day.

That evening when Joseph returned, bringing his mother from Madame Desroches's, the concierge told him of Philippe's freak,--how he had called intending to wait, and gone away again immediately.

"I am ruined--unless he has had the delicacy to take the copy," cried the painter, instantly suspecting the theft. He ran rapidly up the three flights and rushed into his studio. "God be praised!" he ejaculated. "He is, what he always has been, a vile scoundrel."

Agathe, who had followed Joseph, did not understand what he was saying; but when her son explained what had happened, she stood still, with the tears in her eyes.

"Have I but one son?" she said in a broken voice.

"We have never yet degraded him to the eyes of strangers," said Joseph; "but we must now warn the concierge. In future we shall have to keep the keys ourselves. I'll finish his blackguard face from memory; there's not much to do to it."

"Leave it as it is; it will pain me too much ever to look at it," answered the mother, heart-stricken and stupefied at such wickedness.

Philippe had been told how the money for this copy was to be expended; moreover he knew the abyss into which he would plunge his brother through the loss of the Rubens; but nothing restrained him. After this last crime Agathe never mentioned him; her face acquired an expression of cold and concentrated and bitter despair; one thought took possession of her mind.

"Some day," she said to herself, "we shall hear of a Bridau in the police courts."

Two months later, as Agathe was about to start for her office, an old officer, who announced himself as a friend of Philippe on urgent business, called on Madame Bridau, who happened to be in Joseph's studio.

When Giroudeau gave his name, mother and son trembled, and none the less because the ex-dragoon had the face of a tough old sailor of the worst type. His fishy gray eyes, his piebald moustache, the remains of his shaggy hair fringing a skull that was the color of fresh butter, all gave an indescribably debauched and libidinous expression to his appearance. He wore an old iron-gray overcoat decorated with the red ribbon of an officer of the Legion of honor, which met with difficulty over a gastronomic stomach in keeping with a mouth that stretched from ear to ear, and a pair of powerful shoulders. The torso was supported by a spindling pair of legs, while the rubicund tints on the cheek-bones bore testimony to a rollicking life. The lower part of the cheeks, which were deeply wrinkled, overhung a coat-collar of velvet the worse for wear. Among other adornments, the ex-dragoon wore enormous gold rings in his ears.

"What a 'noceur'!" thought Joseph, using a popular expression, meaning a "loose fish," which had lately passed into the ateliers.

"Madame," said Finot's uncle and cashier, "your son is in so unfortunate a position that his friends find it absolutely necessary to ask you to share the somewhat heavy expense which he is to them. He can no longer do his work at the office; and Mademoiselle Florentine, of the Porte-Saint-Martin, has taken him to lodge with her, in a miserable attic in the rue de Vendome. Philippe is dying; and if you and his brother are not able to pay for the doctor and medicines, we shall be obliged, for the sake of curing him, to have him taken to the hospital of the Capuchins. For three hundred francs we would keep him where he is. But he must have a nurse; for at night, when Mademoiselle Florentine is at the theatre, he persists in going out, and takes things that are irritating and injurious to his malady and its treatment. As we are fond of him, this makes us really very unhappy. The poor fellow has pledged the pension of his cross for the next three years; he is temporarily displaced from his office, and he has literally nothing. He will kill himself, madame, unless we can put him into the private asylum of Doctor Dubois. It is a decent hospital, where they will take him for ten francs a day. Florentine and I will pay half, if you will pay the rest; it won't be for more than two months."

"Monsieur, it is difficult for a mother not to be eternally grateful to you for your kindness to her son," replied Agathe; "but this son is banished from my heart, and as for money, I have none. Not to be a burden on my son whom you see here, who works day and night and deserves all the love his mother can give him, I am the assistant in a lottery-office--at my age!"

"And you, young man," said the old dragoon to Joseph; "can't you do as much for your brother as a poor dancer at the Porte-Saint-Martin and an old soldier?"

"Look here!" said Joseph, out of patience; "do you want me to tell you in artist language what I think of your visit? Well, you have come to swindle us on false pretences."

"To-morrow your brother shall go to the hospital."

"And he will do very well there," answered Joseph. "If I were in like case, I should go there too."

Giroudeau withdrew, much disappointed, and also really mortified at being obliged to send to a hospital a man who had carried the Emperor's orders at the battle of Montereau. Three months later, at the end of July, as Agathe one morning was crossing the Pont Neuf to avoid paying a sou at the Pont des Arts, she saw, coming along by the shops of the Quai de l'Ecole, a man bearing all the signs of second-class poverty, who, she thought, resembled Philippe. In Paris, there are three distinct classes of poverty. First, the poverty of the man who preserves appearances, and to whom a future still belongs; this is the poverty of young men, artists, men of the world, momentarily unfortunate. The outward signs of their distress are not visible, except under the microscope of a close observer. These persons are the equestrian order of poverty; they continue to drive about in cabriolets. In the second order we find old men who have become indifferent to everything, and, in June, put the cross of the Legion of honor on alpaca overcoats; that is the poverty of small incomes, --of old clerks, who live at Sainte-Perine and care no longer about their outward man. Then comes, in the third place, poverty in rags,

the poverty of the people, the poverty that is poetic; which Callot, Hogarth, Murillo, Charlet, Raffet, Gavarni, Meissonier, Art itself adores and cultivates, especially during the carnival. The man in whom poor Agathe thought she recognized her son was astride the last two classes of poverty. She saw the ragged neck-cloth, the scurfy hat, the broken and patched boots, the threadbare coat, whose buttons had shed their mould, leaving the empty shrivelled pod dangling in congruity with the torn pockets and the dirty collar. Scraps of flue were in the creases of the coat, which showed plainly the dust that filled it. The man drew from the pockets of his seam-rent iron-gray trousers a pair of hands as black as those of a mechanic. A knitted woollen waistcoat, discolored by use, showed below the sleeves of his coat, and above the trousers, and no doubt served instead of a shirt. Philippe wore a green silk shade with a wire edge over his eyes; his head, which was nearly bald, the tints of his skin, and his sunken face too plainly revealed that he was just leaving the terrible Hopital du Midi. His blue overcoat, whitened at the seams, was still decorated with the ribbon of his cross; and the passers-by looked at the hero, doubtless some victim of the government, with curiosity and commiseration; the rosette attracted notice, and the fiercest "ultra" was jealous for the honor of the Legion. In those days, however much the government endeavored to bring the Order into disrepute by bestowing its cross right and left, there were not fifty-three thousand persons decorated.

Agathe trembled through her whole being. If it were impossible to love this son any longer, she could still suffer for him. Quivering with this last expression of motherhood, she wept as she saw the brilliant staff officer of the Emperor turn to enter tobacconist's and pause on the threshold; he had felt in his pocket and found nothing. Agathe left the bridge, crossed the quai rapidly, took out her purse, thrust it into Philippe's hand, and fled away as if she had committed a crime. After that, she ate nothing for two days; before her was the horrible vision of her son dying of hunger in the streets of Paris.

"When he has spent all the money in my purse, who will give him any?" she thought. "Giroudeau did not deceive us; Philippe is just out of that hospital."

She no longer saw the assassin of her poor aunt, the scourge of the family, the domestic thief, the gambler, the drunkard, the low liver of a bad life; she saw only the man recovering from illness, yet doomed to die of starvation, the smoker deprived of his tobacco. At forty-seven years of age she grew to look like a woman of seventy. Her eyes were dimmed with tears and prayers. Yet it was not the last grief this son was to bring upon her; her worst apprehensions were destined to be realized. A conspiracy of officers was discovered at the heart of the army, and articles from the "Moniteur" giving details of the arrests were hawked about the streets.

In the depths of her cage in the lottery-office of the rue Vivienne, Agathe heard the name of Philippe Bridau. She fainted, and the manager, understanding her trouble and the necessity of taking certain steps, gave her leave of absence for two weeks.

"Ah! my friend," she said to Joseph, as she went to bed that night, "it is our severity which drove him to it."

"I'll go and see Desroches," answered Joseph.

While the artist was confiding his brother's affairs to the younger Desroches,--who by this time had the reputation of being one of the keenest and most astute lawyers in Paris, and who, moreover, did sundry services for personages of distinction, among others for des Lupeaulx, then secretary of a ministry,--Giroudeau called upon the widow. This time, Agathe believed him.

"Madame," he said, "if you can produce twelve thousand francs your son will be set at liberty for want of proof. It is necessary to buy the silence of two witnesses."

"I will get the money," said the poor mother, without knowing how or where.

Inspired by this danger, she wrote to her godmother, old Madame Hochon, begging her to ask Jean-Jacques Rouget to send her the twelve thousand francs and save his nephew Philippe. If Rouget refused, she entreated Madame Hochon to lend them to her, promising to return them in two years. By return of courier, she received the following letter:--

My dear girl: Though your brother has an income of not less than forty thousand francs a year, without counting the sums he has laid by for the last seventeen years, and which Monsieur Hochon estimates at more than six hundred thousand francs, he will not give one penny to nephews whom he has never seen. As for me, you know I cannot dispose of a farthing while my husband lives. Hochon is the greatest miser in Issoudun. I do not know what he does with his money; he does not give twenty francs a year to his grandchildren. As for borrowing the money, I should have to get his signature, and he would refuse it. I have not even attempted to speak to your brother, who lives with a concubine, to whom he is a slave. It is pitiable to see how the poor man is treated in his own home, when he might have a sister and nephews to take care of him.

I have hinted to you several times that your presence at Issoudun might save your brother, and rescue a fortune of forty, perhaps sixty, thousand francs a year from the claws of that slut; but you either do not answer me, or you seem never to understand my meaning. So to-day I am obliged to write without epistolary circumlocution. I feel for the misfortune which has overtaken you, but, my dearest, I can do no more than pity you. And this is why: Hochon, at eighty-five years of age, takes four meals a day, eats a salad with hard-boiled eggs every night, and frisks about like a rabbit. I shall have spent my whole life--for he will live to write my epitaph--without ever having had twenty francs in my purse. If you will come to Issoudun and counteract the influence of that concubine over your brother, you must stay with me, for there are reasons why Rouget cannot receive you in his own house; but even then, I shall have hard work to get my husband to let me have you here. However, you can safely come; I can make him mind me as to that. I know a way to get what I want out of him; I have only to speak of making my will. It seems such a horrid thing to do that I do not often have recourse to it; but for you, dear Agathe, I will do the impossible.

I hope your Philippe will get out of his trouble; and I beg you to employ a good lawyer. In any case, come to Issoudun as soon as you

can. Remember that your imbecile of a brother at fifty-seven is an older and weaker man than Monsieur Hochon. So it is a pressing matter. People are talking already of a will that cuts off your inheritance; but Monsieur Hochon says there is still time to get it revoked.

Adieu, my little Agathe; may God help you! Believe in the love of your godmother,

Maximilienne Hochon, nee Lousteau.

P.S. Has my nephew, Etienne, who writes in the newspapers and is intimate, they tell me, with your son Philippe, been to pay his respects to you? But come at once to Issoudun, and we will talk over things.

This letter made a great impression on Agathe, who showed it, of course, to Joseph, to whom she had been forced to mention Giroudeau's proposal. The artist, who grew wary when it concerned his brother, pointed out to her that she ought to tell everything to Desroches.

Conscious of the wisdom of that advice, Agathe went with her son the next morning, at six o'clock, to find Desroches at his house in the rue de Bussy. The lawyer, as cold and stern as his late father, with a sharp voice, a rough skin, implacable eyes, and the visage of a fox as he licks his lips of the blood of chickens, bounded like a tiger when he heard of Giroudeau's visit and proposal.

"And pray, mere Bridau," he cried, in his little cracked voice, "how long are you going to be duped by your cursed brigand of a son? Don't give him a farthing. Make yourself easy, I'll answer for Philippe. I should like to see him brought before the Court of Peers; it might save his future. You are afraid he will be condemned; but I say, may it please God his lawyer lets him be convicted. Go to Issoudun, secure the property for your children. If you don't succeed, if your brother has made a will in favor of that woman, and you can't make him revoke it,--well then, at least get all the evidence you can of undue influence, and I'll institute proceedings for you. But you are too honest a woman to know how to get at the bottom facts of such a matter. I'll go myself to Issoudun in the holidays,--if I can."

That "go myself" made Joseph tremble in his skin. Desroches winked at him to let his mother go downstairs first, and then the lawyer detained the young man for a single moment.

"Your brother is a great scoundrel; he is the cause of the discovery of this conspiracy,--intentionally or not, I can't say, for the rascal is so sly no one can find out the exact truth as to that. Fool or traitor,--take your choice. He will be put under the surveillance of the police, nothing more. You needn't be uneasy; no one knows this secret but myself. Go to Issoudun with your mother. You have good sense; try to save the property."

"Come, my poor mother, Desroches is right," said Joseph, rejoining Agathe on the staircase. "I have sold my two pictures, let us start for Berry; you have two weeks' leave of absence."

After writing to her godmother to announce their arrival, Agathe and

Joseph started the next evening for their trip to Issoudun, leaving Philippe to his fate. The diligence rolled through the rue d'Enfer toward the Orleans highroad. When Agathe saw the Luxembourg, to which Philippe had been transferred, she could not refrain from saying,--

"If it were not for the Allies he would never be there!"

Many sons would have made an impatient gesture and smiled with pity; but the artist, who was alone with his mother in the coupe, caught her in his arms and pressed her to his heart, exclaiming:--

"Oh, mother! you are a mother just as Raphael was a painter. And you will always be a fool of a mother!"

Madame Bridau's mind, diverted before long from her griefs by the distractions of the journey, began to dwell on the purpose of it. She re-read the letter of Madame Hochon, which had so stirred up the lawyer Desroches. Struck with the words "concubine" and "slut," which the pen of a septuagenarian as pious as she was respectable had used to designate the woman now in process of getting hold of Jean-Jacques Rouget's property, struck also with the word "imbecile" applied to Rouget himself, she began to ask herself how, by her presence at Issoudun, she was to save the inheritance. Joseph, poor disinterested artist that he was, knew little enough about the Code, and his mother's last remark absorbed his mind.

"Before our friend Desroches sent us off to protect our rights, he ought to have explained to us the means of doing so," he exclaimed.

"So far as my poor head, which whirls at the thought of Philippe in prison,--without tobacco, perhaps, and about to appear before the Court of Peers!--leaves me any distinct memory," returned Agathe, "I think young Desroches said we were to get evidence of undue influence, in case my brother has made a will in favor of that--that--woman."

"He is good at that, Desroches is," cried the painter. "Bah! if we can make nothing of it I'll get him to come himself."

"Well, don't let us trouble our heads uselessly," said Agathe. "When we get to Issoudun my godmother will tell us what to do."

This conversation, which took place just after Madame Bridau and Joseph changed coaches at Orleans and entered the Sologne, is sufficient proof of the incapacity of the painter and his mother to play the part the inexorable Desroches had assigned to them.

In returning to Issoudun after thirty years' absence, Agathe was about to find such changes in its manners and customs that it is necessary to sketch, in a few words, a picture of that town. Without it, the reader would scarcely understand the heroism displayed by Madame Hochon in assisting her goddaughter, or the strange situation of Jean-Jacques Rouget. Though Doctor Rouget had taught his son to regard Agathe in the light of a stranger, it was certainly a somewhat extraordinary thing that for thirty years a brother should have given no signs of life to a sister. Such a silence was evidently caused by peculiar circumstances, and any other sister and nephew than Agathe and Joseph would long ago have inquired into them. There is, moreover, a certain connection between the condition of the city of Issoudun and the interests of the Bridau family, which can only be seen as the

story goes on.

CHAPTER VII

Issoudun, be it said without offence to Paris, is one of the oldest cities in France. In spite of the historical assumption which makes the emperor Probus the Noah of the Gauls, Caesar speaks of the excellent wine of Champ-Fort ("de Campo Forti") still one of the best vintages of Issoudun. Rigord writes of this city in language which leaves no doubt as to its great population and its immense commerce. But these testimonies both assign a much lesser age to the city than its ancient antiquity demands. In fact, the excavations lately undertaken by a learned archaeologist of the place, Monsieur Armand Peremet, have brought to light, under the celebrated tower of Issoudun, a basilica of the fifth century, probably the only one in France. This church preserves, in its very materials, the sign-manual of an anterior civilization; for its stones came from a Roman temple which stood on the same site.

Issoudun, therefore, according to the researches of this antiquary, like other cities of France whose ancient or modern autonym ends in "Dun" ("dunum") bears in its very name the certificate of an autochthonous existence. The word "Dun," the appanage of all dignity consecrated by Druidical worship, proves a religious and military settlement of the Celts. Beneath the Dun of the Gauls must have lain the Roman temple to Isis. From that comes, according to Chaumon, the name of the city, Issous-Dun,--"Is" being the abbreviation of "Isis." Richard Coeur-de-lion undoubtedly built the famous tower (in which he coined money) above the basilica of the fifth century,--the third monument of the third religion of this ancient town. He used the church as a necessary foundation, or stay, for the raising of the rampart; and he preserved it by covering it with feudal fortifications as with a mantle. Issoudun was at that time the seat of the ephemeral power of the Routiers and the Cottereaux, adventurers and free-lancers, whom Henry II. sent against his son Richard, at the time of his rebellion as Comte de Poitou.

The history of Aquitaine, which was not written by the Benedictines, will probably never be written, because there are no longer Benedictines: thus we are not able to light up these archaeological tenebrae in the history of our manners and customs on every occasion of their appearance. There is another testimony to the ancient importance of Issoudun in the conversion into a canal of the Tournemine, a little stream raised several feet above the level of the Theols which surrounds the town. This is undoubtedly the work of Roman genius. Moreover, the suburb which extends from the castle in a northerly direction is intersected by a street which for more than two thousand years has borne the name of the rue de Rome; and the inhabitants of this suburb, whose racial characteristics, blood, and physiognomy have a special stamp of their own, call themselves descendants of the Romans. They are nearly all vine-growers, and display a remarkable inflexibility of manners and customs, due, undoubtedly, to their origin,--perhaps also to their victory over the Cottereaux and the Routiers, whom they exterminated on the plain of Charost in the twelfth century.

After the insurrection of 1830, France was too agitated to pay much

attention to the rising of the vine-growers of Issoudun; a terrible affair, the facts of which have never been made public,--for good reasons. In the first place, the bourgeois of Issoudun refused to allow the military to enter the town. They followed the use and wont of the bourgeoisie of the Middle Ages and declared themselves responsible for their own city. The government was obliged to yield to a sturdy people backed up by seven or eight thousand vine-growers, who had burned all the archives, also the offices of "indirect taxation," and had dragged through the streets a customs officer, crying out at every street lantern, "Let us hang him here!" The poor man's life was saved by the national guard, who took him to prison on pretext of drawing up his indictment. The general in command only entered the town by virtue of a compromise made with the vine-growers; and it needed some courage to go among them. At the moment when he showed himself at the hotel-de-ville, a man from the faubourg de Rome slung a "volant" round his neck (the "volant" is a huge pruning-hook fastened to a pole, with which they trim trees) crying out, "No more clerks, or there's an end to compromise!" The fellow would have taken off that honored head, left untouched by sixteen years of war, had it not been for the hasty intervention of one of the leaders of the revolt, to whom a promise had been made that _the chambers should be asked to suppress the excisemen_.

In the fourteenth century, Issoudun still had sixteen or seventeen thousand inhabitants, remains of a population double that number in the time of Rigord. Charles VII. possessed a mansion which still exists, and was known, as late as the eighteenth century, as the Maison du Roi. This town, then a centre of the woollen trade, supplied that commodity to the greater part of Europe, and manufactured on a large scale blankets, hats, and the excellent Chevreautin gloves. Under Louis XIV., Issoudun, the birthplace of Baron and Bourdaloue, was always cited as a city of elegance and good society, where the language was correctly spoken. The curate Poupard, in his History of Sancerre, mentions the inhabitants of Issoudun as remarkable among the other Berrichons for subtlety and natural wit. To-day, the wit and the splendor have alike disappeared. Issoudun, whose great extent of ground bears witness to its ancient importance, has now barely twelve thousand inhabitants, including the vine-dressers of four enormous suburbs,--those of Saint-Paterne, Vilatte, Rome, and Alouette, which are really small towns. The bourgeoisie, like that of Versailles, are spread over the length and breadth of the streets. Issoudun still holds the market for the fleeces of Berry; a commerce now threatened by improvements in the stock which are being introduced everywhere except in Berry.

The vineyards of Issoudun produce a wine which is drunk throughout the two departments, and which, if manufactured as Burgundy and Gascony manufacture theirs, would be one of the best wines in France. Alas, "to do as our fathers did," with no innovations, is the law of the land. Accordingly, the vine-growers continue to leave the refuse of the grape in the juice during its fermentation, which makes the wine detestable, when it might be a source of ever-springing wealth, and an industry for the community. Thanks to the bitterness which the refuse infuses into the wine, and which, they say, lessens with age, a vintage will keep a century. This reason, given by the vine-grower in excuse for his obstinacy, is of sufficient importance to oenology to be made public here; Guillaume le Breton has also proclaimed it in some lines of his "Phillippide."

The decline of Issoudun is explained by this spirit of sluggishness, sunken to actual torpor, which a single fact will illustrate. When the authorities were talking of a highroad between Paris and Toulouse, it was natural to think of taking it from Vierzon to Chateauroux by way of Issoudun. The distance was shorter than to make it, as the road now is, through Vatan, but the leading people of the neighborhood and the city council of Issoudun (whose discussion of the matter is said to be recorded), demanded that it should go by Vatan, on the ground that if the highroad went through their town, provisions would rise in price and they might be forced to pay thirty sous for a chicken. The only analogy to be found for this proceeding is in the wilder parts of Sardinia, a land once so rich and populous, now so deserted. When Charles Albert, with a praiseworthy intention of civilization, wished to unite Sassari, the second capital of the island, with Cagliari by a magnificent highway (the only one ever made in that wild waste by name Sardinia), the direct line lay through Bornova, a district inhabited by lawless people, all the more like our Arab tribes because they are descended from the Moors. Seeing that they were about to fall into the clutches of civilization, the savages of Bornova, without taking the trouble to discuss the matter, declared their opposition to the road. The government took no notice of it. The first engineer who came to survey it, got a ball through his head, and died on his level. No action was taken on this murder, but the road made a circuit which lengthened it by eight miles!

The continual lowering of the price of wines drunk in the neighborhood, though it may satisfy the desire of the bourgeoisie of Issoudun for cheap provisions, is leading the way to the ruin of the vine-growers, who are more and more burdened with the costs of cultivation and the taxes; just as the ruin of the woollen trade is the result of the non-improvement in the breeding of sheep. Country-folk have the deepest horror of change; even that which is most conducive to their interests. In the country, a Parisian meets a laborer who eats an enormous quantity of bread, cheese, and vegetables; he proves to him that if he would substitute for that diet a certain portion of meat, he would be better fed, at less cost; that he could work more, and would not use up his capital of health and strength so quickly. The Berrichon sees the correctness of the calculation, but he answers, "Think of the gossip, monsieur." "Gossip, what do you mean?" "Well, yes, what would people say of me?" "He would be the talk of the neighborhood," said the owner of the property on which this scene took place; "they would think him as rich as a tradesman. He is afraid of public opinion, afraid of being pointed at, afraid of seeming ill or feeble. That's how we all are in this region." Many of the bourgeoisie utter this phrase with feelings of inward pride.

While ignorance and custom are invincible in the country regions, where the peasants are left very much to themselves, the town of Issoudun itself has reached a state of complete social stagnation. Obligated to meet the decadence of fortunes by the practice of sordid economy, each family lives to itself. Moreover, society is permanently deprived of that distinction of classes which gives character to manners and customs. There is no opposition of social forces, such as that to which the cities of the Italian States in the Middle Ages owed their vitality. There are no longer any nobles in Issoudun. The Cottreaux, the Routiers, the Jacquerie, the religious wars and the Revolution did away with the nobility. The town is proud of that triumph. Issoudun has repeatedly refused to receive a garrison, always

on the plea of cheap provisions. She has thus lost a means of intercourse with the age, and she has also lost the profits arising from the presence of troops. Before 1756, Issoudun was one of the most delightful of all the garrison towns. A judicial drama, which occupied for a time the attention of France, the feud of a lieutenant-general of the department with the Marquis de Chapt, whose son, an officer of dragoons, was put to death,--justly perhaps, yet traitorously, for some affair of gallantry,--deprived the town from that time forth of a garrison. The sojourn of the forty-fourth demi-brigade, imposed upon it during the civil war, was not of a nature to reconcile the inhabitants to the race of warriors.

Bourges, whose population is yearly decreasing, is a victim of the same social malady. Vitality is leaving these communities. Undoubtedly, the government is to blame. The duty of an administration is to discover the wounds upon the body-politic, and remedy them by sending men of energy to the diseased regions, with power to change the state of things. Alas, so far from that, it approves and encourages this ominous and fatal tranquillity. Besides, it may be asked, how could the government send new administrators and able magistrates? Who, of such men, is willing to bury himself in the arrondissements, where the good to be done is without glory? If, by chance, some ambitious stranger settles there, he soon falls into the inertia of the region, and tunes himself to the dreadful key of provincial life. Issoudun would have benumbed Napoleon.

As a result of this particular characteristic, the arrondissement of Issoudun was governed, in 1822, by men who all belonged to Berry. The administration of power became either a nullity or a farce,--except in certain cases, naturally very rare, which by their manifest importance compelled the authorities to act. The procureur du roi, Monsieur Mouilleron, was cousin to the entire community, and his substitute belonged to one of the families of the town. The judge of the court, before attaining that dignity, was made famous by one of those provincial sayings which put a cap and bells on a man's head for the rest of his life. As he ended his summing-up of all the facts of an indictment, he looked at the accused and said: "My poor Pierre! the thing is as plain as day; your head will be cut off. Let this be a lesson to you." The commissary of police, holding office since the Restoration, had relations throughout the arrondissement. Moreover, not only was the influence of religion null, but the curate himself was held in no esteem.

It was this bourgeoisie, radical, ignorant, and loving to annoy others, which now related tales, more or less comic, about the relations of Jean-Jacques Rouget with his servant-woman. The children of these people went none the less to Sunday-school, and were as scrupulously prepared for their communion: the schools were kept up all the same; mass was said; the taxes were paid (the sole thing that Paris extracts of the provinces), and the mayor passed resolutions. But all these acts of social existence were done as mere routine, and thus the laxity of the local government suited admirably with the moral and intellectual condition of the governed. The events of the following history will show the effects of this state of things, which is not as unusual in the provinces as might be supposed. Many towns in France, more particularly in the South, are like Issoudun. The condition to which the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie has reduced that local capital is one which will spread over all France, and even to Paris, if the bourgeois continues to rule the exterior and interior

policy of our country.

Now, one word of topography. Issoudun stretches north and south, along a hillside which rounds towards the highroad to Chateauroux. At the foot of the hill, a canal, now called the "Riviere forcee" whose waters are taken from the Theols, was constructed in former times, when the town was flourishing, for the use of manufactories or to flood the moats of the rampart. The "Riviere forcee" forms an artificial arm of a natural river, the Tournemine, which unites with several other streams beyond the suburb of Rome. These little threads of running water and the two rivers irrigate a tract of wide-spreading meadow-land, enclosed on all sides by little yellowish or white terraces dotted with black speckles; for such is the aspect of the vineyards of Issoudun during seven months of the year. The vine-growers cut the plants down yearly, leaving only an ugly stump, without support, sheltered by a barrel. The traveller arriving from Vierzon, Vatan, or Chateauroux, his eyes weary with monotonous plains, is agreeably surprised by the meadows of Issoudun,--the oasis of this part of Berry, which supplies the inhabitants with vegetables throughout a region of thirty miles in circumference. Below the suburb of Rome, lies a vast tract entirely covered with kitchen-gardens, and divided into two sections, which bear the name of upper and lower Baltan. A long avenue of poplars leads from the town across the meadows to an ancient convent named Frapesle, whose English gardens, quite unique in that arrondissement, have received the ambitious name of Tivoli. Loving couples whisper their vows in its alleys of a Sunday.

Traces of the ancient grandeur of Issoudun of course reveal themselves to the eyes of a careful observer; and the most suggestive are the divisions of the town. The chateau, formerly almost a town itself with its walls and moats, is a distinct quarter which can only be entered, even at the present day, through its ancient gateways,--by means of three bridges thrown across the arms of the two rivers,--and has all the appearance of an ancient city. The ramparts show, in places, the formidable strata of their foundations, on which houses have now sprung up. Above the chateau, is the famous tower of Issoudun, once the citadel. The conqueror of the city, which lay around these two fortified points, had still to gain possession of the tower and the castle; and possession of the castle did not insure that of the tower, or citadel.

The suburb of Saint-Paterne, which lies in the shape of a palette beyond the tower, encroaching on the meadow-lands, is so considerable that in the very earliest ages it must have been part of the city itself. This opinion derived, in 1822, a sort of certainty from the then existence of the charming church of Saint-Paterne, recently pulled down by the heir of the individual who bought it of the nation. This church, one of the finest specimens of the Romanesque that France possessed, actually perished without a single drawing being made of the portal, which was in perfect preservation. The only voice raised to save this monument of a past art found no echo, either in the town itself or in the department. Though the castle of Issoudun has the appearance of an old town, with its narrow streets and its ancient mansions, the city itself, properly so called, which was captured and burned at different epochs, notably during the Fronde, when it was laid in ashes, has a modern air. Streets that are spacious in comparison with those of other towns, and well-built houses form a striking contrast to the aspect of the citadel,--a contrast that has

won for Issoudun, in certain geographies, the epithet of "pretty."

In a town thus constituted, without the least activity, even business activity, without a taste for art, or for learned occupations, and where everybody stayed in the little round of his or her own home, it was likely to happen, and did happen under the Restoration in 1816 when the war was over, that many of the young men of the place had no career before them, and knew not where to turn for occupation until they could marry or inherit the property of their fathers. Bored in their own homes, these young fellows found little or no distraction elsewhere in the city; and as, in the language of that region, "youth must shed its cuticle" they sowed their wild oats at the expense of the town itself. It was difficult to carry on such operations in open day, lest the perpetrators should be recognized; for the cup of their misdemeanors once filled, they were liable to be arraigned at their next peccadillo before the police courts; and they therefore judiciously selected the night time for the performance of their mischievous pranks. Thus it was that among the traces of divers lost civilizations, a vestige of the spirit of drollery that characterized the manners of antiquity burst into a final flame.

The young men amused themselves very much as Charles IX. amused himself with his courtiers, or Henry V. of England and his companions, or as in former times young men were wont to amuse themselves in the provinces. Having once banded together for purposes of mutual help, to defend each other and invent amusing tricks, there presently developed among them, through the clash of ideas, that spirit of malicious mischief which belongs to the period of youth and may even be observed among animals. The confederation, in itself, gave them the mimic delights of the mystery of an organized conspiracy. They called themselves the "Knights of Idleness." During the day these young scamps were youthful saints; they all pretended to extreme quietness; and, in fact, they habitually slept late after the nights on which they had been playing their malicious pranks. The "Knights" began with mere commonplace tricks, such as unhooking and changing signs, ringing bells, flinging casks left before one house into the cellar of the next with a crash, rousing the occupants of the house by a noise that seemed to their frightened ears like the explosion of a mine. In Issoudun, as in many country towns, the cellar is entered by an opening near the door of the house, covered with a wooden scuttle, secured by strong iron hinges and a padlock.

In 1816, these modern Bad Boys had not altogether given up such tricks as these, perpetrated in the provinces by all young lads and gamins. But in 1817 the Order of Idleness acquired a Grand Master, and distinguished itself by mischief which, up to 1823, spread something like terror in Issoudun, or at least kept the artisans and the bourgeoisie perpetually uneasy.

This leader was a certain Maxence Gilet, commonly called Max, whose antecedents, no less than his youth and his vigor, predestined him for such a part. Maxence Gilet was supposed by all Issoudun to be the natural son of the sub-delegate Lousteau, that brother of Madame Hochon whose gallantries had left memories behind them, and who, as we have seen, drew down upon himself the hatred of old Doctor Rouget about the time of Agathe's birth. But the friendship which bound the two men together before their quarrel was so close that, to use an expression of that region and that period, "they willingly walked the same road." Some people said that Maxence was as likely to be the son

of the doctor as of the sub-delegate; but in fact he belonged to neither the one nor the other,--his father being a charming dragoon officer in garrison at Bourges. Nevertheless, as a result of their enmity, and very fortunately for the child, Rouget and Lousteau never ceased to claim his paternity.

Max's mother, the wife of a poor sabot-maker in the Rome suburb, was possessed, for the perdition of her soul, of a surprising beauty, a Trasteverine beauty, the only property which she transmitted to her son. Madame Gilet, pregnant with Maxence in 1788, had long desired that blessing, which the town attributed to the gallantries of the two friends,--probably in the hope of setting them against each other. Gilet, an old drunkard with a triple throat, treated his wife's misconduct with a collusion that is not uncommon among the lower classes. To make sure of protectors for her son, Madame Gilet was careful not to enlighten his reputed fathers as to his parentage. In Paris, she would have turned out a millionaire; at Issoudun she lived sometimes at her ease, more often miserably, and, in the long run, despised. Madame Hochon, Lousteau's sister, paid sixty francs a year for the lad's schooling. This liberality, which Madame Hochon was quite unable to practise on her own account because of her husband's stinginess, was naturally attributed to her brother, then living at Sancerre.

When Doctor Rouget, who certainly was not lucky in sons, observed Max's beauty, he paid the board of the "young rogue," as he called him, at the seminary, up to the year 1805. As Lousteau died in 1800, and the doctor apparently obeyed a feeling of vanity in paying the lad's board until 1805, the question of the paternity was left forever undecided. Maxence Gilet, the butt of many jests, was soon forgotten, --and for this reason: In 1806, a year after Doctor Rouget's death, the lad, who seemed to have been created for a venturesome life, and was moreover gifted with remarkable vigor and agility, got into a series of scrapes which more or less threatened his safety. He plotted with the grandsons of Monsieur Hochon to worry the grocers of the city; he gathered fruit before the owners could pick it, and made nothing of scaling walls. He had no equal at bodily exercises, he played base to perfection, and could have outrun a hare. With a keen eye worthy of Leather-stocking, he loved hunting passionately. His time was passed in firing at a mark, instead of studying; and he spent the money extracted from the old doctor in buying powder and ball for a wretched pistol that old Gilet, the sabot-maker, had given him. During the autumn of 1806, Maxence, then seventeen, committed an involuntary murder, by frightening in the dusk a young woman who was pregnant, and who came upon him suddenly while stealing fruit in her garden. Threatened with the guillotine by Gilet, who doubtless wanted to get rid of him, Max fled to Bourges, met a regiment then on its way to Egypt, and enlisted. Nothing came of the death of the young woman.

A young fellow of Max's character was sure to distinguish himself, and in the course of three campaigns he did distinguish himself so highly that he rose to be a captain, his lack of education helping him strenuously. In Portugal, in 1809, he was left for dead in an English battery, into which his company had penetrated without being able to hold it. Max, taken prisoner by the English, was sent to the Spanish hulks at the island of Cabrera, the most horrible of all stations for prisoners of war. His friends begged that he might receive the cross of the Legion of honor and the rank of major; but the Emperor was then in Austria, and he reserved his favors for those who did brilliant

deeds under his own eye: he did not like officers or men who allowed themselves to be taken prisoner, and he was, moreover, much dissatisfied with events in Portugal. Max was held at Cabrera from 1810 to 1814.[1] During those years he became utterly demoralized, for the hulks were like galleys, minus crime and infamy. At the outset, to maintain his personal free will, and protect himself against the corruption which made that horrible prison unworthy of a civilized people, the handsome young captain killed in a duel (for duels were fought on those hulks in a space scarcely six feet square) seven bullies among his fellow-prisoners, thus ridding the island of their tyranny to the great joy of the other victims. After this, Max reigned supreme in his hulk, thanks to the wonderful ease and address with which he handled weapons, to his bodily strength, and also to his extreme cleverness.

[1] The cruelty of the Spaniards to the French prisoners at Cabrera was very great. In the spring of 1811, H.M. brig "Minorca," Captain Wormeley, was sent by Admiral Sir Charles Cotton, then commanding the Mediterranean fleet, to make a report of their condition. As she neared the island, the wretched prisoners swam out to meet her. They were reduced to skin and bone; many of them were naked; and their miserable condition so moved the seamen of the "Minorca" that they came aft to the quarter-deck, and asked permission to subscribe three days' rations for the relief of the sufferers. Captain Wormeley carried away some of the prisoners, and his report to Sir Charles Cotton, being sent to the Admiralty, was made the basis of a remonstrance on the part of the British government with Spain on the subject of its cruelties. Sir Charles Cotton despatched Captain Wormeley a second time to Cabrera with a good many head of live cattle and a large supply of other provisions.--Tr.

But he, in turn, committed arbitrary acts; there were those who curried favor with him, and worked his will, and became his minions. In that school of misery, where bitter minds dreamed only of vengeance, where the sophistries hatched in such brains were laying up, inevitably, a store of evil thoughts, Max became utterly demoralized. He listened to the opinions of those who longed for fortune at any price, and did not shrink from the results of criminal actions, provided they were done without discovery. When peace was proclaimed, in April, 1814, he left the island, depraved though still innocent. On his return to Issoudun he found his father and mother dead. Like others who give way to their passions and make life, as they call it, short and sweet, the Gilets had died in the almshouse in the utmost poverty. Immediately after his return, the news of Napoleon's landing at Cannes spread through France; Max could do no better than go to Paris and ask for his rank as major and for his cross. The marshal who was at that time minister of war remembered the brave conduct of Captain Gilet in Portugal. He put him in the Guard as captain, which gave him the grade of major in the infantry; but he could not get him the cross. "The Emperor says that you will know how to win it at the first chance," said the marshal. In fact, the Emperor did put the brave captain on his list for decoration the evening after the fight at Fleurus, where Gilet distinguished himself.

After the battle of Waterloo Max retreated to the Loire. At the time of the disbandment, Marshal Feltre refused to recognize Max's grade as

major, or his claim to the cross. The soldier of Napoleon returned to Issoudun in a state of exasperation that may well be conceived; he declared that he would not serve without either rank or cross. The war-office considered these conditions presumptuous in a young man of twenty-five without a name, who might, if they were granted, become a colonel at thirty. Max accordingly sent in his resignation. The major --for among themselves Bonapartists recognized the grades obtained in 1815--thus lost the pittance called half-pay which was allowed to the officers of the army of the Loire. But all Issoudun was roused at the sight of the brave young fellow left with only twenty napoleons in his possession; and the mayor gave him a place in his office with a salary of six hundred francs. Max kept it a few months, then gave it up of his own accord, and was replaced by a captain named Carpentier, who, like himself, had remained faithful to Napoleon.

By this time Gilet had become grand master of the Knights of Idleness, and was leading a life which lost him the good-will of the chief people of the town; who, however, did not openly make the fact known to him, for he was violent and much feared by all, even by the officers of the old army who, like himself, had refused to serve under the Bourbons, and had come home to plant their cabbages in Berry. The little affection felt for the Bourbons among the natives of Issoudun is not surprising when we recall the history which we have just given. In fact, considering its size and lack of importance, the little place contained more Bonapartists than any other town in France. These men became, as is well known, nearly all Liberals.

In Issoudun and its neighborhood there were a dozen officers in Max's position. These men admired him and made him their leader,--with the exception, however, of Carpentier, his successor, and a certain Monsieur Mignonnet, ex-captain in the artillery of the Guard. Carpentier, a cavalry officer risen from the ranks, had married into one of the best families in the town,--the Borniche-Herau. Mignonnet, brought up at the Ecole Polytechnique, had served in a corps which held itself superior to all others. In the Imperial armies there were two shades of distinction among the soldiers themselves. A majority of them felt a contempt for the bourgeois, the "civilian," fully equal to the contempt of nobles for their serfs, or conquerors for the conquered. Such men did not always observe the laws of honor in their dealings with civilians; nor did they much blame those who rode rough-shod over the bourgeoisie. The others, and particularly the artillery, perhaps because of its republicanism, never adopted the doctrine of a military France and a civil France, the tendency of which was nothing less than to make two nations. So, although Major Potel and Captain Renard, two officers living in the Rome suburb, were friends to Maxence Gilet "through thick and thin," Major Mignonnet and Captain Carpentier took sides with the bourgeoisie, and thought his conduct unworthy of a man of honor.

Major Mignonnet, a lean little man, full of dignity, busied himself with the problems which the steam-engine requires us to solve, and lived in a modest way, taking his social intercourse with Monsieur and Madame Carpentier. His gentle manners and ways, and his scientific occupations won him the respect of the whole town; and it was frequently said of him and of Captain Carpentier that they were "quite another thing" from Major Potel and Captain Renard, Maxence, and other frequenters of the cafe Militaire, who retained the soldierly manners and the defective morals of the Empire.

At the time when Madame Bridau returned to Issoudun, Max was excluded from the society of the place. He showed, moreover, proper self-respect in never presenting himself at the club, and in never complaining of the severe reprobation that was shown him; although he was the handsomest, the most elegant, and the best dressed man in the place, spent a great deal of money, and kept a horse,--a thing as amazing at Issoudun as the horse of Lord Byron at Venice. We are now to see how it was that Maxence, poor and without apparent means, was able to become the dandy of the town. The shameful conduct which earned him the contempt of all scrupulous or religious persons was connected with the interests which brought Agathe and Joseph to Issoudun.

Judging by the audacity of his bearing, and the expression of his face, Max cared little for public opinion; he expected, no doubt, to take his revenge some day, and to lord it over those who now condemned him. Moreover, if the bourgeoisie of Issoudun thought ill of him, the admiration he excited among the common people counterbalanced their opinion; his courage, his dashing appearance, his decision of character, could not fail to please the masses, to whom his degradations were, for the most part, unknown, and indeed the bourgeoisie themselves scarcely suspected its extent. Max played a role at Issoudun which was something like that of the blacksmith in the "Fair Maid of Perth"; he was the champion of Bonapartism and the Opposition; they counted upon him as the burghers of Perth counted upon Smith on great occasions. A single incident will put this hero and victim of the Hundred-Days into clear relief.

In 1819, a battalion commanded by royalist officers, young men just out of the Maison Rouge, passed through Issoudun on its way to go into garrison at Bourges. Not knowing what to do with themselves in so constitutional a place as Issoudun, these young gentlemen went to while away the time at the cafe Militaire. In every provincial town there is a military cafe. That of Issoudun, built on the place d'Armes at an angle of the rampart, and kept by the widow of an officer, was naturally the rendezvous of the Bonapartists, chiefly officers on half-pay, and others who shared Max's opinions, to whom the politics of the town allowed free expression of their idolatry for the Emperor. Every year, dating from 1816, a banquet was given in Issoudun to commemorate the anniversary of his coronation. The three royalists who first entered asked for the newspapers, among others, for the "Quotidienne" and the "Drapeau Blanc." The politics of Issoudun, especially those of the cafe Militaire, did not allow of such royalist journals. The establishment had none but the "Commerce,"--a name which the "Constitutionnel" was compelled to adopt for several years after it was suppressed by the government. But as, in its first issue under the new name, the leading article began with these words, "Commerce is essentially constitutional," people continued to call it the "Constitutionnel," the subscribers all understanding the sly play of words which begged them to pay no attention to the label, as the wine would be the same.

The fat landlady replied from her seat at the desk that she did not take those papers. "What papers do you take then?" asked one of the officers, a captain. The waiter, a little fellow in a blue cloth jacket, with an apron of coarse linen tied over it, brought the "Commerce."

"Is that your paper? Have you no other?"

"No," said the waiter, "that's the only one."

The captain tore it up, flung the pieces on the floor, and spat upon them, calling out,--

"Bring dominos!"

In ten minutes the news of the insult offered to the Constitution Opposition and the Liberal party, in the supersacred person of its revered journal, which attacked priests with courage and the wit we all remember, spread throughout the town and into the houses like light itself; it was told and repeated from place to place. One phrase was on everybody's lips,--

"Let us tell Max!"

Max soon heard of it. The royalist officers were still at their game of dominos when that hero entered the cafe, accompanied by Major Potel and Captain Renard, and followed by at least thirty young men, curious to see the end of the affair, most of whom remained outside in the street. The room was soon full.

"Waiter, _my_ newspaper," said Max, in a quiet voice.

Then a little comedy was played. The fat hostess, with a timid and conciliatory air, said, "Captain, I have lent it!"

"Send for it," cried one of Max's friends.

"Can't you do without it?" said the waiter; "we have not got it."

The young royalists were laughing and casting sidelong glances at the new-comers.

"They have torn it up!" cried a youth of the town, looking at the feet of the young royalist captain.

"Who has dared to destroy that paper?" demanded Max, in a thundering voice, his eyes flashing as he rose with his arms crossed.

"And we spat upon it," replied the three young officers, also rising, and looking at Max.

"You have insulted the whole town!" said Max, turning livid.

"Well, what of that?" asked the youngest officer.

With a dexterity, quickness, and audacity which the young men did not foresee, Max slapped the face of the officer nearest to him, saying,--

"Do you understand French?"

They fought near by, in the allee de Frapesle, three against three; for Potel and Renard would not allow Max to deal with the officers alone. Max killed his man. Major Potel wounded his so severely, that the unfortunate young man, the son of a good family, died in the hospital the next day. As for the third, he got off with a sword cut, after wounding his adversary, Captain Renard. The battalion left for

Bourges that night. This affair, which was noised throughout Berry, set Max up definitely as a hero.

The Knights of Idleness, who were all young, the eldest not more than twenty-five years old, admired Maxence. Some among them, far from sharing the prudery and strict notions of their families concerning his conduct, envied his present position and thought him fortunate. Under such a leader, the Order did great things. After the month of May, 1817, never a week passed that the town was not thrown into an uproar by some new piece of mischief. Max, as a matter of honor, imposed certain conditions upon the Knights. Statutes were drawn up. These young demons grew as vigilant as the pupils of Amoros,--bold as hawks, agile at all exercises, clever and strong as criminals. They trained themselves in climbing roofs, scaling houses, jumping and walking noiselessly, mixing mortar, and walling up doors. They collected an arsenal of ropes, ladders, tools, and disguises. After a time the Knights of Idleness attained to the beau-ideal of malicious mischief, not only as to the accomplishment but, still more, in the invention of their pranks. They came at last to possess the genius for evil that Panurge so much delighted in; which provokes laughter, and covers its victims with such ridicule that they dare not complain. Naturally, these sons of good families of Issoudun possessed and obtained information in their households, which gave them the ways and means for the perpetration of their outrages.

Sometimes the young devils incarnate lay in ambush along the Grand'rué or the Basse rue, two streets which are, as it were, the arteries of the town, into which many little side streets open. Crouching, with their heads to the wind, in the angles of the wall and at the corners of the streets, at the hour when all the households were hushed in their first sleep, they called to each other in tones of terror from ambush along the whole length of the town: "What's the matter?" "What is it?" till the repeated cries woke up the citizens, who appeared in their shirts and cotton night-caps, with lights in their hands, asking questions of one another, holding the strangest colloquies, and exhibiting the queerest faces.

A certain poor bookbinder, who was very old, believed in hobgoblins. Like most provincial artisans, he worked in a small basement shop. The Knights, disguised as devils, invaded the place in the middle of the night, put him into his own cutting-press, and left him shrieking to himself like the souls in hell. The poor man roused the neighbors, to whom he related the apparitions of Lucifer; and as they had no means of undeceiving him, he was driven nearly insane.

In the middle of a severe winter, the Knights took down the chimney of the collector of taxes, and built it up again in one night apparently as it was before, without making the slightest noise, or leaving the least trace of their work. But they so arranged the inside of the chimney as to send all the smoke into the house. The collector suffered for two months before he found out why his chimney, which had always drawn so well, and of which he had often boasted, played him such tricks; he was then obliged to build a new one.

At another time, they put three trusses of hay dusted with brimstone, and a quantity of oiled paper down the chimney of a pious old woman who was a friend of Madame Hochon. In the morning, when she came to light her fire, the poor creature, who was very gentle and kindly, imagined she had started a volcano. The fire-engines came, the whole

population rushed to her assistance. Several Knights were among the firemen, and they deluged the old woman's house, till they had frightened her with a flood, as much as they had terrified her with the fire. She was made ill with fear.

When they wished to make some one spend the night under arms and in mortal terror, they wrote an anonymous letter telling him that he was about to be robbed; then they stole softly, one by one, round the walls of his house, or under his windows, whistling as if to call each other.

One of their famous performances, which long amused the town, where in fact it is still related, was to write a letter to all the heirs of a miserly old lady who was likely to leave a large property, announcing her death, and requesting them to be promptly on hand when the seals were affixed. Eighty persons arrived from Vatan, Saint-Florent, Vierzon and the neighboring country, all in deep mourning,—widows with sons, children with their fathers, some in carriages, some in wicker gigs, others in dilapidated carts. Imagine the scene between the old woman's servants and the first arrivals! and the consultations among the notaries! It created a sort of riot in Issoudun.

At last, one day the sub-prefect woke up to a sense that this state of things was all the more intolerable because it seemed impossible to find out who was at the bottom of it. Suspicion fell on several young men; but as the National Guard was a mere name in Issoudun, and there was no garrison, and the lieutenant of police had only eight gendarmes under him, so that there were no patrols, it was impossible to get any proof against them. The sub-prefect was immediately posted in the "order of the night," and considered thenceforth fair game. This functionary made a practice of breakfasting on two fresh eggs. He kept chickens in his yard, and added to his mania for eating fresh eggs that of boiling them himself. Neither his wife nor his servant, in fact no one, according to him, knew how to boil an egg properly; he did it watch in hand, and boasted that he carried off the palm of egg-boiling from all the world. For two years he had boiled his eggs with a success which earned him many witticisms. But now, every night for a whole month, the eggs were taken from his hen-house, and hard-boiled eggs substituted. The sub-prefect was at his wits' end, and lost his reputation as the "sous-prefet a l'oeuf." Finally he was forced to breakfast on other things. Yet he never suspected the Knights of Idleness, whose trick had been cautiously played. After this, Max managed to grease the sub-prefect's stoves every night with an oil which sent forth so fetid a smell that it was impossible for any one to stay in the house. Even that was not enough; his wife, going to mass one morning, found her shawl glued together on the inside with some tenacious substance, so that she was obliged to go without it. The sub-prefect finally asked for another appointment. The cowardly submissiveness of this officer had much to do with firmly establishing the weird and comic authority of the Knights of Idleness.

Beyond the rue des Minimés and the place Misère, a section of a quarter was at that time enclosed between an arm of the "Rivière forcée" on the lower side and the ramparts on the other, beginning at the place d'Armes and going as far as the pottery market. This irregular square is filled with poor-looking houses crowded one against the other, and divided here and there by streets so narrow that two persons cannot walk abreast. This section of the town, a sort of cour des Miracles, was occupied by poor people or persons working

at trades that were little remunerative,--a population living in hovels, and buildings called picturesquely by the familiar term of "blind houses." From the earliest ages this has no doubt been an accursed quarter, the haunt of evil-doers; in fact one thoroughfare is named "the street of the Executioner." For more than five centuries it has been customary for the executioner to have a red door at the entrance of his house. The assistant of the executioner of Chateauroux still lives there,--if we are to believe public rumor, for the townspeople never see him: the vine-dressers alone maintain an intercourse with this mysterious being, who inherits from his predecessors the gift of curing wounds and fractures. In the days when Issoudun assumed the airs of a capital city the women of the town made this section of it the scene of their wanderings. Here came the second-hand sellers of things that look as if they never could find a purchaser, old-clothes dealers whose wares infected the air; in short, it was the rendezvous of that apocryphal population which is to be found in nearly all such portions of a city, where two or three Jews have gained an ascendancy.

At the corner of one of these gloomy streets in the livelier half of the quarter, there existed from 1815 to 1823, and perhaps later, a public-house kept by a woman commonly called Mere Cognette. The house itself was tolerably well built, in courses of white stone, with the intermediary spaces filled in with ashlar and cement, one storey high with an attic above. Over the door was an enormous branch of pine, looking as though it were cast in Florentine bronze. As if this symbol were not explanatory enough, the eye was arrested by the blue of a poster which was pasted over the doorway, and on which appeared, above the words "Good Beer of Mars," the picture of a soldier pouring out, in the direction of a very décolletée woman, a jet of foam which spurted in an arched line from the pitcher to the glass which she was holding towards him; the whole of a color to make Delacroix swoon.

The ground-floor was occupied by an immense hall serving both as kitchen and dining-room, from the beams of which hung, suspended by huge nails, the provisions needed for the custom of such a house. Behind this hall a winding staircase led to the upper storey; at the foot of the staircase a door led into a low, long room lighted from one of those little provincial courts, so narrow, dark, and sunken between tall houses, as to seem like the flue of a chimney. Hidden by a shed, and concealed from all eyes by walls, this low room was the place where the Bad Boys of Issoudun held their plenary court. Ostensibly, Pere Cognet boarded and lodged the country-people on market-days; secretly, he was landlord to the Knights of Idleness. This man, who was formerly a groom in a rich household, had ended by marrying La Cognette, a cook in a good family. The suburb of Rome still continues, like Italy and Poland, to follow the Latin custom of putting a feminine termination to the husband's name and giving it to the wife.

By uniting their savings Pere Cognet and his spouse had managed to buy their present house. La Cognette, a woman of forty, tall and plump, with the nose of a Roxelane, a swarthy skin, jet-black hair, brown eyes that were round and lively, and a general air of mirth and intelligence, was selected by Maxence Gilet, on account of her character and her talent for cookery, as the Leonarde of the Order. Pere Cognet might be about fifty-six years old; he was thick-set, very much under his wife's rule, and, according to a witticism which she was fond of repeating, he only saw things with a good eye--for he was

blind of the other. In the course of seven years, that is, from 1816 to 1823, neither wife nor husband had betrayed what went on nightly at their house, or who they were that shared in the plot; they felt the liveliest regard for the Knights; their devotion was absolute. But this may seem less creditable if we remember that self-interest was the security of their affection and their silence. No matter at what hour of the night the Knights dropped in upon the tavern, the moment they knocked in a certain way Pere Cognet, recognizing the signal, got up, lit the fire and the candles, opened the door, and went to the cellar for a particular wine that was laid in expressly for the Order; while La Cognette cooked an excellent supper, eaten either before or after the expeditions, which were usually planned the previous evening or in the course of the preceding day.

CHAPTER VIII

While Joseph and Madame Bridau were journeying from Orleans to Issoudun, the Knights of Idleness perpetrated one of their best tricks. An old Spaniard, a former prisoner of war, who after the peace had remained in the neighborhood, where he did a small business in grain, came early one morning to market, leaving his empty cart at the foot of the tower of Issoudun. Maxence, who arrived at a rendezvous of the Knights, appointed on that occasion at the foot of the tower, was soon assailed with the whispered question, "What are we to do to-night?"

"Here's Pere Fario's cart," he answered. "I nearly cracked my shins over it. Let us get it up on the embankment of the tower in the first place, and we'll make up our minds afterwards."

When Richard Coeur-de-Lion built the tower of Issoudun he raised it, as we have said, on the ruins of the basilica, which itself stood above the Roman temple and the Celtic Dun. These ruins, each of which represents a period of several centuries, form a mound big with the monuments of three distinct ages. The tower is, therefore, the apex of a cone, from which the descent is equally steep on all sides, and which is only approached by a series of steps. To give in a few words an idea of the height of this tower, we may compare it to the obelisk of Luxor on its pedestal. The pedestal of the tower of Issoudun, which hid within its breast such archaeological treasures, was eighty feet high on the side towards the town. In an hour the cart was taken off its wheels and hoisted, piece by piece, to the top of the embankment at the foot of the tower itself,--a work that was somewhat like that of the soldiers who carried the artillery over the pass of the Grand Saint-Bernard. The cart was then remounted on its wheels, and the Knights, by this time hungry and thirsty, returned to Mere Cognette's, where they were soon seated round the table in the low room, laughing at the grimaces Fario would make when he came after his barrow in the morning.

The Knights, naturally, did not play such capers every night. The genius of Sganarelle, Mascarille, and Scapin combined would not have sufficed to invent three hundred and sixty-five pieces of mischief a year. In the first place, circumstances were not always propitious: sometimes the moon shone clear, or the last prank had greatly irritated their betters; then one or another of their number refused to share in some proposed outrage because a relation was involved. But

if the scamps were not at Mere Cognette's every night, they always met during the day, enjoying together the legitimate pleasures of hunting, or the autumn vintages and the winter skating. Among this assemblage of twenty youths, all of them at war with the social somnolence of the place, there are some who were more closely allied than others to Max, and who made him their idol. A character like his often fascinates other youths. The two grandsons of Madame Hochon--Francois Hochon and Baruch Borniche--were his henchmen. These young fellows, accepting the general opinion of the left-handed parentage of Lousteau, looked upon Max as their cousin. Max, moreover, was liberal in lending them money for their pleasures, which their grandfather Hochon refused; he took them hunting, let them see life, and exercised a much greater influence over them than their own family. They were both orphans, and were kept, although each had attained his majority, under the guardianship of Monsieur Hochon, for reasons which will be explained when Monsieur Hochon himself comes upon the scene.

At this particular moment Francois and Baruch (we will call them by their Christian names for the sake of clearness) were sitting, one on each side of Max, at the middle of a table that was rather ill lighted by the fuliginous gleams of four tallow candles of eight to the pound. A dozen to fifteen bottles of various wines had just been drunk, for only eleven of the Knights were present. Baruch--whose name indicates pretty clearly that Calvinism still kept some hold on Issoudun--said to Max, as the wine was beginning to unloose all tongues,--

"You are threatened in your stronghold."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Max.

"Why, my grandmother has had a letter from Madame Bridau, who is her goddaughter, saying that she and her son are coming here. My grandmother has been getting two rooms ready for them."

"What's that to me?" said Max, taking up his glass and swallowing the contents at a gulp with a comic gesture.

Max was then thirty-four years old. A candle standing near him threw a gleam upon his soldierly face, lit up his brow, and brought out admirably his clear skin, his ardent eyes, his black and slightly curling hair, which had the brilliancy of jet. The hair grew vigorously upward from the forehead and temples, sharply defining those five black tongues which our ancestors used to call the "five points." Notwithstanding this abrupt contrast of black and white, Max's face was very sweet, owing its charm to an outline like that which Raphael gave to the faces of his Madonnas, and to a well-cut mouth whose lips smiled graciously, giving an expression of countenance which Max had made distinctively his own. The rich coloring which blooms on a Berrichon cheek added still further to his look of kindly good-humor. When he laughed heartily, he showed thirty-two teeth worthy of the mouth of a pretty woman. In height about five feet six inches, the young man was admirably well-proportioned,--neither too stout nor yet too thin. His hands, carefully kept, were white and rather handsome; but his feet recalled the suburb and the foot-soldier of the Empire. Max would certainly have made a good general of division; he had shoulders that were worth a fortune to a marshal of France, and a breast broad enough to wear all the orders of Europe. Every movement betrayed intelligence; born with grace and charm, like nearly all the children of love, the

noble blood of his real father came out in him.

"Don't you know, Max," cried the son of a former surgeon-major named Goddet--now the best doctor in the town--from the other end of the table, "that Madame Hochon's goddaughter is the sister of Rouget? If she is coming here with her son, no doubt she means to make sure of getting the property when he dies, and then--good-by to your harvest!"

Max frowned. Then, with a look which ran from one face to another all round the table, he watched the effect of this announcement on the minds of those present, and again replied,--

"What's that to me?"

"But," said Francois, "I should think that if old Rouget revoked his will,--in case he has made one in favor of the Rabouilleuse--"

Here Max cut short his henchman's speech. "I've stopped the mouths of people who have dared to meddle with you, my dear Francois," he said; "and this is the way you pay your debts? You use a contemptuous nickname in speaking of a woman to whom I am known to be attached."

Max had never before said as much as this about his relations with the person to whom Francois had just applied a name under which she was known at Issoudun. The late prisoner at Cabrera--the major of the grenadiers of the Guard--knew enough of what honor was to judge rightly as to the causes of the disesteem in which society held him. He had therefore never allowed any one, no matter who, to speak to him on the subject of Mademoiselle Flore Brazier, the servant-mistress of Jean-Jacques Rouget, so energetically termed a "slut" by the respectable Madame Hochon. Everybody knew it was too ticklish a subject with Max, ever to speak of it unless he began it; and hitherto he had never begun it. To risk his anger or irritate him was altogether too dangerous; so that even his best friends had never joked him about the Rabouilleuse. When they talked of his liaison with the girl before Major Potel and Captain Renard, with whom he lived on intimate terms, Potel would reply,--

"If he is the natural brother of Jean-Jacques Rouget where else would you have him live?"

"Besides, after all," added Captain Renard, "the girl is a worthless piece, and if Max does live with her where's the harm?"

After this merited snub, Francois could not at once catch up the thread of his ideas; but he was still less able to do so when Max said to him, gently,--

"Go on."

"Faith, no!" cried Francois.

"You needn't get angry, Max," said young Goddet; "didn't we agree to talk freely to each other at Mere Cogne's? Shouldn't we all be mortal enemies if we remembered outside what is said, or thought, or done here? All the town calls Flore Brazier the Rabouilleuse; and if Francois did happen to let the nickname slip out, is that a crime against the Order of Idleness?"

"No," said Max, "but against our personal friendship. However, I thought better of it; I recollected we were in session, and that was why I said, 'Go on.'"

A deep silence followed. The pause became so embarrassing for the whole company that Max broke it by exclaiming:--

"I'll go on for him," [sensation] "--for all of you," [amazement] "--and tell you what you are thinking" [profound sensation]. "You think that Flore, the Rabouilleuse, La Brazier, the housekeeper of Pere Rouget,--for they call him so, that old bachelor, who can never have any children!--you think, I say, that that woman supplies all my wants ever since I came back to Issoudun. If I am able to throw three hundred francs a month to the dogs, and treat you to suppers,--as I do to-night,--and lend money to all of you, you think I get the gold out of Mademoiselle Flore Brazier's purse? Well, yes" [profound sensation]. "Yes, ten thousand times yes! Yes, Mademoiselle Brazier is aiming straight for the old man's property."

"She gets it from father to son," observed Goddet, in his corner.

"You think," continued Max, smiling at Goddet's speech, "that I intend to marry Flore when Pere Rouget dies, and so this sister and her son, of whom I hear to-night for the first time, will endanger my future?"

"That's just it," cried Francois.

"That is what every one thinks who is sitting round this table," said Baruch.

"Well, don't be uneasy, friends," answered Max. "Forewarned is forearmed! Now then, I address the Knights of Idleness. If, to get rid of these Parisians I need the help of the Order, will you lend me a hand? Oh! within the limits we have marked out for our fooleries," he added hastily, perceiving a general hesitation. "Do you suppose I want to kill them,--poison them? Thank God I'm not an idiot. Besides, if the Bridaus succeed, and Flore has nothing but what she stands in, I should be satisfied; do you understand that? I love her enough to prefer her to Mademoiselle Fichet,--if Mademoiselle Fichet would have me."

Mademoiselle Fichet was the richest heiress in Issoudun, and the hand of the daughter counted for much in the reported passion of the younger Goddet for the mother. Frankness of speech is a pearl of such price that all the Knights rose to their feet as one man.

"You are a fine fellow, Max!"

"Well said, Max; we'll stand by you!"

"A fig for the Bridaus!"

"We'll bridle them!"

"After all, it is only three swains to a shepherdess."

"The deuce! Pere Lousteau loved Madame Rouget; isn't it better to love a housekeeper who is not yoked?"

"If the defunct Rouget was Max's father, the affair is in the family."

"Liberty of opinion now-a-days!"

"Hurrah for Max!"

"Down with all hypocrites!"

"Here's a health to the beautiful Flore!"

Such were the eleven responses, acclamations, and toasts shouted forth by the Knights of Idleness, and characteristic, we may remark, of their excessively relaxed morality. It is now easy to see what interest Max had in becoming their grand master. By leading the young men of the best families in their follies and amusements, and by doing them services, he meant to create a support for himself when the day for recovering his position came. He rose gracefully and waved his glass of claret, while all the others waited eagerly for the coming allocution.

"As a mark of the ill-will I bear you, I wish you all a mistress who is equal to the beautiful Flore! As to this irruption of relations, I don't feel any present uneasiness; and as to the future, we'll see what comes--"

"Don't let us forget Fario's cart!"

"Hang it! that's safe enough!" said Goddet.

"Oh! I'll engage to settle that business," cried Max. "Be in the market-place early, all of you, and let me know when the old fellow goes for his cart."

It was striking half-past three in the morning as the Knights slipped out in silence to go to their homes; gliding close to the walls of the houses without making the least noise, shod as they were in list shoes. Max slowly returned to the place Saint-Jean, situated in the upper part of the town, between the port Saint-Jean and the port Vilatte, the quarter of the rich bourgeoisie. Maxence Gilet had concealed his fears, but the news had struck home. His experience on the hulks at Cabrera had taught him a dissimulation as deep and thorough as his corruption. First, and above all else, the forty thousand francs a year from landed property which old Rouget owned was, let it be clearly understood, the constituent element of Max's passion for Flore Brazier. By his present bearing it is easy to see how much confidence the woman had given him in the financial future she expected to obtain through the infatuation of the old bachelor. Nevertheless, the news of the arrival of the legitimate heirs was of a nature to shake Max's faith in Flore's influence. Rouget's savings, accumulating during the last seventeen years, still stood in his own name; and even if the will, which Flore declared had long been made in her favor, were revoked, these savings at least might be secured by putting them in the name of Mademoiselle Brazier.

"That fool of a girl never told me, in all these seven years, a word about the sister and nephews!" cried Max, turning from the rue de la Marmouse into the rue l'Avenier. "Seven hundred and fifty thousand francs placed with different notaries at Bourges, and Vierzon, and Chateauroux, can't be turned into money and put into the Funds in a

week, without everybody knowing it in this gossiping place! The most important thing is to get rid of these relations; as soon as they are driven away we ought to make haste to secure the property. I must think it over."

Max was tired. By the help of a pass-key, he let himself into Pere Rouget's house, and went to bed without making any noise, saying to himself,--

"To-morrow, my thoughts will be clear."

It is now necessary to relate where the sultana of the place Saint-Jean picked up the nickname of "Rabouilleuse," and how she came to be the quasi-mistress of Jean-Jacques Rouget's home.

As old Doctor Rouget, the father of Jean-Jacques and Madame Bridau, advanced in years, he began to perceive the nonentity of his son; he then treated him harshly, trying to break him into a routine that might serve in place of intelligence. He thus, though unconsciously, prepared him to submit to the yoke of the first tyranny that threw its halter over his head.

Coming home one day from his professional round, the malignant and vicious old man came across a bewitching little girl at the edge of some fields that lay along the avenue de Tivoli. Hearing the horse, the child sprang up from the bottom of one of the many brooks which are to be seen from the heights of Issoudun, threading the meadows like ribbons of silver on a green robe. Naiad-like, she rose suddenly on the doctor's vision, showing the loveliest virgin head that painters ever dreamed of. Old Rouget, who knew the whole country-side, did not know this miracle of beauty. The child, who was half naked, wore a forlorn little petticoat of coarse woollen stuff, woven in alternate strips of brown and white, full of holes and very ragged. A sheet of rough writing paper, tied on by a shred of osier, served her for a hat. Beneath this paper--covered with pot-hooks and round O's, from which it derived the name of "schoolpaper"--the loveliest mass of blonde hair that ever a daughter of Eve could have desired, was twisted up, and held in place by a species of comb made to comb out the tails of horses. Her pretty tanned bosom, and her neck, scarcely covered by a ragged fichu which was once a Madres handkerchief, showed edges of the white skin below the exposed and sun-burned parts. One end of her petticoat was drawn between the legs and fastened with a huge pin in front, giving that garment the look of a pair of bathing drawers. The feet and the legs, which could be seen through the clear water in which she stood, attracted the eye by a delicacy which was worthy of a sculptor of the middle ages. The charming limbs exposed to the sun had a ruddy tone that was not without beauty of its own. The neck and bosom were worthy of being wrapped in silks and cashmeres; and the nymph had blue eyes fringed with long lashes, whose glance might have made a painter or a poet fall upon his knees. The doctor, enough of an anatomist to trace the exquisite figure, recognized the loss it would be to art if the lines of such a model were destroyed by the hard toil of the fields.

"Where do you come from, little girl? I have never seen you before," said the old doctor, then sixty-two years of age. This scene took place in the month of September, 1799.

"I belong in Vatan," she answered.

Hearing Rouget's voice, an ill-looking man, standing at some distance in the deeper waters of the brook, raised his head. "What are you about, Flore?" he said, "While you are talking instead of catching, the creatures will get away."

"Why have you come here from Vatan?" continued the doctor, paying no heed to the interruption.

"I am catching crabs for my uncle Brazier here."

"Rabouiller" is a Berrichon word which admirably describes the thing it is intended to express; namely, the action of troubling the water of a brook, making it boil and bubble with a branch whose end-shoots spread out like a racket. The crabs, frightened by this operation, which they do not understand, come hastily to the surface, and in their flurry rush into the net the fisher has laid for them at a little distance. Flore Brazier held her "rabouilloir" in her hand with the natural grace of childlike innocence.

"Has your uncle got permission to hunt crabs?"

"Hey! are not we all under a Republic that is one and indivisible?" cried the uncle from his station.

"We are under a Directory," said the doctor, "and I know of no law which allows a man to come from Vatan and fish in the territory of Issoudun"; then he said to Flore, "Have you got a mother, little one!"

"No, monsieur; and my father is in the asylum at Bourges. He went mad from a sun-stroke he got in the fields."

"How much do you earn?"

"Five sous a day while the season lasts; I catch 'em as far as the Braisne. In harvest time, I glean; in winter, I spin."

"You are about twelve years old?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Do you want to come with me? You shall be well fed and well dressed, and have some pretty shoes."

"No, my niece will stay with me; I am responsible to God and man for her," said Uncle Brazier who had come up to them. "I am her guardian, d'ye see?"

The doctor kept his countenance and checked a smile which might have escaped most people at the aspect of the man. The guardian wore a peasant's hat, rotted by sun and rain, eaten like the leaves of a cabbage that has harbored several caterpillars, and mended, here and there, with white thread. Beneath the hat was a dark and sunken face, in which the mouth, nose, and eyes, seemed four black spots. His forlorn jacket was a bit of patchwork, and his trousers were of crash towelling.

"I am Doctor Rouget," said that individual; "and as you are the guardian of the child, bring her to my house, in the place Saint-Jean."

It will not be a bad day's work for you; nor for her, either."

Without waiting for an answer, and sure that Uncle Brazier would soon appear with his pretty "rabouilleuse," Doctor Rouget set spurs to his horse and returned to Issoudun. He had hardly sat down to dinner, before his cook announced the arrival of the citizen and citizenne Brazier.

"Sit down," said the doctor to the uncle and niece.

Flore and her guardian, still barefooted, looked round the doctor's dining-room with wondering eyes; never having seen its like before.

The house, which Rouget inherited from the Descoings estate, stands in the middle of the place Saint-Jean, a so-called square, very long and very narrow, planted with a few sickly lindens. The houses in this part of town are better built than elsewhere, and that of the Descoings's was one of the finest. It stands opposite to the house of Monsieur Hochon, and has three windows in front on the first storey, and a porte-cochere on the ground-floor which gives entrance to a courtyard, beyond which lies the garden. Under the archway of the porte-cochere is the door of a large hall lighted by two windows on the street. The kitchen is behind this hall, part of the space being used for a staircase which leads to the upper floor and to the attic above that. Beyond the kitchen is a wood-shed and wash-house, a stable for two horses and a coach-house, over which are some little lofts for the storage of oats, hay, and straw, where, at that time, the doctor's servant slept.

The hall which the little peasant and her uncle admired with such wonder is decorated with wooden carvings of the time of Louis XV., painted gray, and a handsome marble chimney-piece, over which Flore beheld herself in a large mirror without any upper division and with a carved and gilded frame. On the panelled walls of the room, from space to space, hung several pictures, the spoil of various religious houses, such as the abbeys of Deols, Issoudun, Saint-Gildas, La Pree, Chezal-Beniot, Saint-Sulpice, and the convents of Bourges and Issoudun, which the liberality of our kings had enriched with the precious gifts of the glorious works called forth by the Renaissance. Among the pictures obtained by the Descoings and inherited by Rouget, was a Holy Family by Albano, a Saint-Jerome of Demenichino, a Head of Christ by Gian Bellini, a Virgin of Leonardo, a Bearing of the Cross by Titian, which formerly belonged to the Marquis de Belabre (the one who sustained a siege and had his head cut off under Louis XIII.); a Lazarus of Paul Veronese, a Marriage of the Virgin by the priest Genoisi, two church paintings by Rubens, and a replica of a picture by Perugino, done either by Perugino himself or by Raphael; and finally, two Correggios and one Andrea del Sarto.

The Descoings had culled these treasures from three hundred church pictures, without knowing their value, and selecting them only for their good preservation. Many were not only in magnificent frames, but some were still under glass. Perhaps it was the beauty of the frames and the value of the glass that led the Descoings to retain the pictures. The furniture of the room was not wanting in the sort of luxury we prize in these days, though at that time it had no value in Issoudun. The clock, standing on the mantle-shelf between two superb silver candlesticks with six branches, had an ecclesiastical splendor which revealed the hand of Boulle. The armchairs of carved oak,

covered with tapestry-work due to the devoted industry of women of high rank, would be treasured in these days, for each was surmounted with a crown and coat-of-arms. Between the windows stood a rich console, brought from some castle, on whose marble slab stood an immense China jar, in which the doctor kept his tobacco. But neither Rouget, nor his son, nor the cook, took the slightest care of all these treasures. They spat upon a hearth of exquisite delicacy, whose gilded mouldings were now green with verdigris. A handsome chandelier, partly of semi-transparent porcelain, was peppered, like the ceiling from which it hung, with black speckles, bearing witness to the immunity enjoyed by the flies. The Descoings had draped the windows with brocatelle curtains torn from the bed of some monastic prior. To the left of the entrance-door, stood a chest or coffer, worth many thousand francs, which the doctor now used for a sideboard.

"Here, Fanchette," cried Rouget to his cook, "bring two glasses; and give us some of the old wine."

Fanchette, a big Berrichon countrywoman, who was considered a better cook than even La Cognette, ran in to receive the order with a celerity which said much for the doctor's despotism, and something also for her own curiosity.

"What is an acre of vineyard worth in your parts?" asked the doctor, pouring out a glass of wine for Brazier.

"Three hundred francs in silver."

"Well, then! leave your niece here as my servant; she shall have three hundred francs in wages, and, as you are her guardian, you can take them."

"Every year?" exclaimed Brazier, with his eyes as wide as saucers.

"I leave that to your conscience," said the doctor. "She is an orphan; up to eighteen, she has no right to what she earns."

"Twelve to eighteen--that's six acres of vineyard!" said the uncle.

"Ay, she's a pretty one, gentle as a lamb, well made and active, and obedient as a kitten. She were the light o' my poor brother's eyes--"

"I will pay a year in advance," observed the doctor.

"Bless me! say two years, and I'll leave her with you, for she'll be better off with you than with us; my wife beats her, she can't abide her. There's none but I to stand up for her, and the little saint of a creature is as innocent as a new-born babe."

When he heard the last part of this speech, the doctor, struck by the word "innocent," made a sign to the uncle and took him out into the courtyard and from thence to the garden; leaving the Rabouilleuse at the table with Fanchette and Jean-Jacques, who immediately questioned her, and to whom she naively related her meeting with the doctor.

"There now, my little darling, good-by," said Uncle Brazier, coming back and kissing Flore on the forehead; "you can well say I've made your happiness by leaving you with this kind and worthy father of the poor; you must obey him as you would me. Be a good girl, and behave nicely, and do everything he tells you."

"Get the room over mine ready," said the doctor to Fanchette. "Little Flore--I am sure she is worthy of the name--will sleep there in future. To-morrow, we'll send for a shoemaker and a dressmaker. Put another plate on the table; she shall keep us company."

That evening, all Issoudun could talk of nothing else than the sudden appearance of the little "rabouilleuse" in Doctor Rouget's house. In that region of satire the nickname stuck to Mademoiselle Brazier before, during, and after the period of her good fortune.

The doctor no doubt intended to do with Flore Brazier, in a small way, what Louis XV. did in a large one with Mademoiselle de Romans; but he was too late about it; Louis XV. was still young, whereas the doctor was in the flower of old age. From twelve to fourteen, the charming little Rabouilleuse lived a life of unmixed happiness. Always well-dressed, and often much better tricked out than the richest girls in Issoudun, she sported a gold watch and jewels, given by the doctor to encourage her studies, and she had a master who taught her to read, write, and cipher. But the almost animal life of the true peasant had instilled into Flore such deep repugnance to the bitter cup of knowledge, that the doctor stopped her education at that point. His intentions with regard to the child, whom he cleansed and clothed, and taught, and formed with a care which was all the more remarkable because he was thought to be utterly devoid of tenderness, were interpreted in a variety of ways by the cackling society of the town, whose gossip often gave rise to fatal blunders, like those relating to the birth of Agathe and that of Max. It is not easy for the community of a country town to disentangle the truth from the mass of conjecture and contradictory reports to which a single fact gives rise. The provinces insist--as in former days the politicians of the little Provence at the Tuileries insisted--on full explanations, and they usually end by knowing everything. But each person clings to the version of the event which he, or she, likes best; proclaims it, argues it, and considers it the only true one. In spite of the strong light cast upon people's lives by the constant spying of a little town, truth is thus often obscured; and to be recognized, it needs the impartiality which historians or superior minds acquire by looking at the subject from a higher point of view.

"What do you suppose that old gorilla wants at his age with a little girl only fifteen years old?" society was still saying two years after the arrival of the Rabouilleuse.

"Ah! that's true," they answered, "his days of merry-making are long past."

"My dear fellow, the doctor is disgusted at the stupidity of his son, and he persists in hating his daughter Agathe; it may be that he has been living a decent life for the last two years, intending to marry little Flore; suppose she were to give him a fine, active, strapping boy, full of life like Max?" said one of the wise heads of the town.

"Bah! don't talk nonsense! After such a life as Rouget and Lousteau led from 1770 to 1787, is it likely that either of them would have children at sixty-five years of age? The old villain has read the Scriptures, if only as a doctor, and he is doing as David did in his old age; that's all."

"They say that Brazier, when he is drunk, boasts in Vatan that he cheated him," cried one of those who always believed the worst of people.

"Good heavens! neighbor; what won't they say at Issoudun?"

From 1800 to 1805, that is, for five years, the doctor enjoyed all the pleasures of educating Flore without the annoyances which the ambitions and pretensions of Mademoiselle de Romans inflicted, it is said, on Louis le Bien-Aime. The little Rabouilleuse was so satisfied when she compared the life she led at the doctor's with that she would have led at her uncle Brazier's, that she yielded no doubt to the exactions of her master as if she had been an Eastern slave. With due deference to the makers of idylls and to philanthropists, the inhabitants of the provinces have very little idea of certain virtues; and their scruples are of a kind that is roused by self-interest, and not by any sentiment of the right or the becoming. Raised from infancy with no prospect before them but poverty and ceaseless labor, they are led to consider anything that saves them from the hell of hunger and eternal toil as permissible, particularly if it is not contrary to any law. Exceptions to this rule are rare. Virtue, socially speaking, is the companion of a comfortable life, and comes only with education.

Thus the Rabouilleuse was an object of envy to all the young peasant-girls within a circuit of ten miles, although her conduct, from a religious point of view, was supremely reprehensible. Flore, born in 1787, grew up in the midst of the saturnalias of 1793 and 1798, whose lurid gleams penetrated these country regions, then deprived of priests and faith and altars and religious ceremonies; where marriage was nothing more than legal coupling, and revolutionary maxims left a deep impression. This was markedly the case at Issoudun, a land where, as we have seen, revolt of all kinds is traditional. In 1802, Catholic worship was scarcely re-established. The Emperor found it a difficult matter to obtain priests. In 1806, many parishes all over France were still widowed; so slowly were the clergy, decimated by the scaffold, gathered together again after their violent dispersion.

In 1802, therefore, nothing was likely to reproach Flore Brazier, unless it might be her conscience; and conscience was sure to be weaker than self-interest in the ward of Uncle Brazier. If, as everybody chose to suppose, the cynical doctor was compelled by his age to respect a child of fifteen, the Rabouilleuse was none the less considered very "wide awake," a term much used in that region. Still, some persons thought she could claim a certificate of innocence from the cessation of the doctor's cares and attentions in the last two years of his life, during which time he showed her something more than coldness.

Old Rouget had killed too many people not to know when his own end was nigh; and his notary, finding him on his death-bed, draped as it were, in the mantle of encyclopaedic philosophy, pressed him to make a provision in favor of the young girl, then seventeen years old.

"So I do," he said, cynically; "my death sets her at liberty."

This speech paints the nature of the old man. Covering his evil doings with witty sayings, he obtained indulgence for them, in a land where wit is always applauded,—especially when addressed to obvious self-interest. In those words the notary read the concentrated hatred

of a man whose calculations had been balked by Nature herself, and who revenged himself upon the innocent object of an impotent love. This opinion was confirmed to some extent by the obstinate resolution of the doctor to leave nothing to the Rabouilleuse, saying with a bitter smile, when the notary again urged the subject upon him,--

"Her beauty will make her rich enough!"

CHAPTER IX

Jean-Jacques Rouget did not mourn his father, though Flore Brazier did. The old doctor had made his son extremely unhappy, especially since he came of age, which happened in 1791; but he had given the little peasant-girl the material pleasures which are the ideal of happiness to country-folk. When Fanchette asked Flore, after the funeral, "Well, what is to become of you, now that monsieur is dead?" Jean-Jacques's eyes lighted up, and for the first time in his life his dull face grew animated, showed feeling, and seemed to brighten under the rays of a thought.

"Leave the room," he said to Fanchette, who was clearing the table.

At seventeen, Flore retained that delicacy of feature and form, that distinction of beauty which attracted the doctor, and which women of the world know how to preserve, though it fades among the peasant-girls like the flowers of the field. Nevertheless, the tendency to embonpoint, which handsome countrywomen develop when they no longer live a life of toil and hardship in the fields and in the sunshine, was already noticeable about her. Her bust had developed. The plump white shoulders were modelled on rich lines that harmoniously blended with those of the throat, already showing a few folds of flesh. But the outline of the face was still faultless, and the chin delicate.

"Flore," said Jean-Jacques, in a trembling voice, "you feel at home in this house?"

"Yes, Monsieur Jean."

As the heir was about to make his declaration, he felt his tongue stiffen at the recollection of the dead man, just put away in his grave, and a doubt seized him as to what lengths his father's benevolence might have gone. Flore, who was quite unable even to suspect his simplicity of mind, looked at her future master and waited for a time, expecting Jean-Jacques to go on with what he was saying; but she finally left him without knowing what to think of such obstinate silence. Whatever teaching the Rabouilleuse may have received from the doctor, it was many a long day before she finally understood the character of Jean-Jacques, whose history we now present in a few words.

At the death of his father, Jacques, then thirty-seven, was as timid and submissive to paternal discipline as a child of twelve years old. That timidity ought to explain his childhood, youth, and after-life to those who are reluctant to admit the existence of such characters, or such facts as this history relates,--though proofs of them are, alas, common everywhere, even among princes; for Sophie Dawes was taken by

the last of the Condes under worse circumstances than the Rabouilleuse. There are two species of timidity,—the timidity of the mind, and the timidity of the nerves; a physical timidity, and a moral timidity. The one is independent of the other. The body may fear and tremble, while the mind is calm and courageous, or vice versa. This is the key to many moral eccentricities. When the two are united in one man, that man will be a cipher all his life; such double-sided timidity makes him what we call "an imbecile." Often fine suppressed qualities are hidden within that imbecile. To this double infirmity we may, perhaps, owe the lives of certain monks who lived in ecstasy; for this unfortunate moral and physical disposition is produced quite as much by the perfection of the soul and of the organs, as by defects which are still unstudied.

The timidity of Jean-Jacques came from a certain torpor of his faculties, which a great teacher or a great surgeon, like Despleins, would have roused. In him, as in the cretins, the sense of love had inherited a strength and vigor which were lacking to his mental qualities, though he had mind enough to guide him in ordinary affairs. The violence of passion, stripped of the ideal in which most young men expend it, only increased his timidity. He had never brought himself to court, as the saying is, any woman in Issoudun. Certainly no young girl or matron would make advances to a young man of mean stature, awkward and shame-faced in attitude; whose vulgar face, with its flattened features and pallid skin, making him look old before his time, was rendered still more hideous by a pair of large and prominent light-green eyes. The presence of a woman stultified the poor fellow, who was driven by passion on the one hand as violently as the lack of ideas, resulting from his education, held him back on the other. Paralyzed between these opposing forces, he had not a word to say, and feared to be spoken to, so much did he dread the obligation of replying. Desire, which usually sets free the tongue, only petrified his powers of speech. Thus it happened that Jean-Jacques Rouget was solitary and sought solitude because there alone he was at his ease.

The doctor had seen, too late for remedy, the havoc wrought in his son's life by a temperament and a character of this kind. He would have been glad to get him married; but to do that, he must deliver him over to an influence that was certain to become tyrannical, and the doctor hesitated. Was it not practically giving the whole management of the property into the hands of a stranger, some unknown girl? The doctor knew how difficult it was to gain true indications of the moral character of a woman from any study of a young girl. So, while he continued to search for a daughter-in-law whose sentiments and education offered some guarantees for the future, he endeavored to push his son into the ways of avarice; meaning to give the poor fool a sort of instinct that might eventually take the place of intelligence.

He trained him, in the first place, to mechanical habits of life; and instilled into him fixed ideas as to the investment of his revenues: and he spared him the chief difficulties of the management of a fortune, by leaving his estates all in good order, and leased for long periods. Nevertheless, a fact which was destined to be of paramount importance in the life of the poor creature escaped the notice of the wily old doctor. Timidity is a good deal like dissimulation, and is equally secretive. Jean-Jacques was passionately in love with the Rabouilleuse. Nothing, of course, could be more natural. Flore was the only woman who lived in the bachelor's presence, the only one he could see at his ease; and at all hours he secretly contemplated her and

watched her. To him, she was the light of his paternal home; she gave him, unknown to herself, the only pleasures that brightened his youth. Far from being jealous of his father, he rejoiced in the education the old man was giving to Flore: would it not make her all he wanted, a woman easy to win, and to whom, therefore, he need pay no court? The passion, observe, which is able to reflect, gives even to ninnies, fools, and imbeciles a species of intelligence, especially in youth. In the lowest human creature we find an animal instinct whose persistency resembles thought.

The next day, Flore, who had been reflecting on her master's silence, waited in expectation of some momentous communication; but although he kept near her, and looked at her on the sly with passionate glances, Jean-Jacques still found nothing to say. At last, when the dessert was on the table, he recommenced the scene of the night before.

"You like your life here?" he said to Flore.

"Yes, Monsieur Jean."

"Well, stay here then."

"Thank you, Monsieur Jean."

This strange situation lasted three weeks. One night, when no sound broke the stillness of the house, Flore, who chanced to wake up, heard the regular breathing of human lungs outside her door, and was frightened to discover Jean-Jacques, crouched like a dog on the landing.

"He loves me," she thought; "but he will get the rheumatism if he keeps up that sort of thing."

The next day Flore looked at her master with a certain expression. This mute almost instinctive love had touched her; she no longer thought the poor ninny so ugly, though his forehead was crowned with pimples resembling ulcers, the signs of a vitiated blood.

"You don't want to go back and live in the fields, do you?" said Jean-Jacques when they were alone.

"Why do you ask me that?" she said, looking at him.

"To know--" replied Rouget, turning the color of a boiled lobster.

"Do you wish to send me back?" she asked.

"No, mademoiselle."

"Well, what is it you want to know? You have some reason--"

"Yes, I want to know--"

"What?" said Flore.

"You won't tell me?" exclaimed Rouget.

"Yes I will, on my honor--"

"Ah! that's it," returned Rouget, with a frightened air. "Are you an honest girl?"

"I'll take my oath--"

"Are you, truly?"

"Don't you hear me tell you so?"

"Come; are you the same as you were when your uncle brought you here barefooted?"

"A fine question, faith!" cried Flore, blushing.

The heir lowered his head and did not raise it again. Flore, amazed at such an encouraging sign from a man who had been overcome by a fear of that nature, left the room.

Three days later, at the same hour (for both seemed to regard the dessert as a field of battle), Flore spoke first, and said to her master,--

"Have you anything against me?"

"No, mademoiselle," he answered, "No--" [a pause] "On the contrary."

"You seemed annoyed the other day to hear I was an honest girl."

"No, I only wished to know--" [a pause] "But you would not tell me--"

"On my word!" she said, "I will tell you the whole truth."

"The whole truth about--my father?" he asked in a strangled voice.

"Your father," she said, looking full into her master's eye, "was a worthy man--he liked a joke--What of that?--there was nothing in it. But, poor dear man, it wasn't the will that was wanting. The truth is, he had some spite against you, I don't know what, and he meant--oh! he meant you harm. Sometimes he made me laugh; but there! what of that?"

"Well, Flore," said the heir, taking her hand, "as my father was nothing to you--"

"What did you suppose he was to me?" she cried, as if offended by some unworthy suspicion.

"Well, but just listen--"

"He was my benefactor, that was all. Ah! he would have liked to make me his wife, but--"

"But," said Rouget, taking the hand which Flore had snatched away from him, "if he was nothing to you you can stay here with me, can't you?"

"If you wish it," she said, dropping her eyes.

"No, no! if you wish it, you!" exclaimed Rouget. "Yes, you shall be--mistress here. All that is here shall be yours; you shall take care of my property, it is almost yours now--for I love you; I have always

loved you since the day you came and stood there--there!--with bare feet."

Flore made no answer. When the silence became embarrassing, Jean-Jacques had recourse to a terrible argument.

"Come," he said, with visible warmth, "wouldn't it be better than returning to the fields?"

"As you will, Monsieur Jean," she answered.

Nevertheless, in spite of her "as you will," Jean-Jacques got no further. Men of his nature want certainty. The effort that they make in avowing their love is so great, and costs them so much, that they feel unable to go on with it. This accounts for their attachment to the first woman who accepts them. We can only guess at circumstances by results. Ten months after the death of his father, Jean-Jacques changed completely; his leaden face cleared, and his whole countenance breathed happiness. Flore exacted that he should take minute care of his person, and her own vanity was gratified in seeing him well-dressed; she always stood on the sill of the door, and watched him starting for a walk, until she could see him no longer. The whole town noticed these changes, which had made a new man of the bachelor.

"Have you heard the news?" people said to each other in Issoudun.

"What is it?"

"Jean-Jacques inherits everything from his father, even the Rabouilleuse."

"Don't you suppose the old doctor was wicked enough to provide a ruler for his son?"

"Rouget has got a treasure, that's certain," said everybody.

"She's a sly one! She is very handsome, and she will make him marry her."

"What luck that girl has had, to be sure!"

"The luck that only comes to pretty girls."

"Ah, bah! do you believe that? look at my uncle Borniche-Herau. You have heard of Mademoiselle Ganivet? she was as ugly as seven capital sins, but for all that, she got three thousand francs a year out of him."

"Yes, but that was in 1778."

"Still, Rouget is making a mistake. His father left him a good forty thousand francs' income, and he ought to marry Mademoiselle Herau."

"The doctor tried to arrange it, but she would not consent; Jean-Jacques is so stupid--"

"Stupid! why women are very happy with that style of man."

"Is your wife happy?"

Such was the sort of tattle that ran through Issoudun. If people, following the use and wont of the provinces, began by laughing at this quasi-marriage, they ended by praising Flore for devoting herself to the poor fellow. We now see how it was that Flore Brazier obtained the management of the Rouget household,--from father to son, as young Goddet had said. It is desirable to sketch the history of that management for the edification of old bachelors.

Fanchette, the cook, was the only person in Issoudun who thought it wrong that Flore Brazier should be queen over Jean-Jacques Rouget and his home. She protested against the immorality of the connection, and took a tone of injured virtue; the fact being that she was humiliated by having, at her age, a crab-girl for a mistress,--a child who had been brought barefoot into the house. Fanchette owned three hundred francs a year in the Funds, for the doctor made her invest her savings in that way, and he had left her as much more in an annuity; she could therefore live at her ease without the necessity of working, and she quitted the house nine months after the funeral of her old master, April 15, 1806. That date may indicate, to a perspicacious observer, the epoch at which Flore Brazier ceased to be an honest girl.

The Rabouilleuse, clever enough to foresee Fanchette's probable defection,--there is nothing like the exercise of power for teaching policy,--was already resolved to do without a servant. For six months she had studied, without seeming to do so, the culinary operations that made Fanchette a cordon-bleu worthy of cooking for a doctor. In the matter of choice living, doctors are on a par with bishops. The doctor had brought Fanchette's talents to perfection. In the provinces the lack of occupation and the monotony of existence turn all activity of mind towards the kitchen. People do not dine as luxuriously in the country as they do in Paris, but they dine better; the dishes are meditated upon and studied. In rural regions we often find some Careme in petticoats, some unrecognized genius able to serve a simple dish of haricot-beans worthy of the nod with which Rossini welcomed a perfectly-rendered measure.

When studying for his degree in Paris, the doctor had followed a course of chemistry under Rouelle, and had gathered some ideas which he afterwards put to use in the chemistry of cooking. His memory is famous in Issoudun for certain improvements little known outside of Berry. It was he who discovered that an omelette is far more delicate when the whites and the yolks are not beaten together with the violence which cooks usually put into the operation. He considered that the whites should be beaten to a froth and the yolks gently added by degrees; moreover a frying-pan should never be used, but a "cagnard" of porcelain or earthenware. The "cagnard" is a species of thick dish standing on four feet, so that when it is placed on the stove the air circulates underneath and prevents the fire from cracking it. In Touraine the "cagnard" is called a "cauquemarre." Rabelais, I think, speaks of a "cauquemarre" for cooking cockatrice eggs, thus proving the antiquity of the utensil. The doctor had also found a way to prevent the tartness of browned butter; but his secret, which unluckily he kept to his own kitchen, has been lost.

Flore, a born fryer and roaster, two qualities that can never be acquired by observation nor yet by labor, soon surpassed Fanchette. In making herself a cordon-bleu she was thinking of Jean-Jacques's comfort; though she was, it must be owned, tolerably dainty.

Incapable, like all persons without education, of doing anything with her brains, she spent her activity upon household matters. She rubbed up the furniture till it shone, and kept everything about the house in a state of cleanliness worthy of Holland. She managed the avalanches of soiled linen and the floods of water that go by the name of "the wash," which was done, according to provincial usage, three times a year. She kept a housewifely eye to the linen, and mended it carefully. Then, desirous of learning little by little the secret of the family property, she acquired the very limited business knowledge which Rouget possessed, and increased it by conversations with the notary of the late doctor, Monsieur Heron. Thus instructed, she gave excellent advice to her little Jean-Jacques. Sure of being always mistress, she was as eager and solicitous about the old bachelor's interests as if they had been her own. She was not obliged to guard against the exactions of her uncle, for two months before the doctor's death Brazier died of a fall as he was leaving a wine-shop, where, since his rise in fortune, he spent most of his time. Flore had also lost her father; thus she served her master with all the affection which an orphan, thankful to make herself a home and a settlement in life, would naturally feel.

This period of his life was paradise to poor Jean-Jacques, who now acquired the gentle habits of an animal, trained into a sort of monastic regularity. He slept late. Flore, who was up at daybreak attending to her housekeeping, woke him so that he should find his breakfast ready as soon as he had finished dressing. After breakfast, about eleven o'clock, Jean-Jacques went to walk; talked with the people he met, and came home at three in the afternoon to read the papers,--those of the department, and a journal from Paris which he received three days after publication, well greased by the thirty hands through which it came, browned by the snuffy noses that had pored over it, and soiled by the various tables on which it had lain. The old bachelor thus got through the day until it was time for dinner; over that meal he spent as much time as it was possible to give to it. Flore told him the news of the town, repeating the cackle that was current, which she had carefully picked up. Towards eight o'clock the lights were put out. Going to bed early is a saving of fire and candles very commonly practised in the provinces, which contributes no doubt to the empty-mindedness of the inhabitants. Too much sleep dulls and weakens the brain.

Such was the life of these two persons during a period of nine years, the great events of which were a few journeys to Bourges, Vierzon, Chateauroux, or somewhat further, if the notaries of those towns and Monsieur Heron had no investments ready for acceptance. Rouget lent his money at five per cent on a first mortgage, with release of the wife's rights in case the owner was married. He never lent more than a third of the value of the property, and required notes payable to his order for an additional interest of two and a half per cent spread over the whole duration of the loan. Such were the rules his father had told him to follow. Usury, that clog upon the ambition of the peasantry, is the destroyer of country regions. This levy of seven and a half per cent seemed, therefore, so reasonable to the borrowers that Jean-Jacques Rouget had his choice of investments; and the notaries of the different towns, who got a fine commission for themselves from clients for whom they obtained money on such good terms, gave due notice to the old bachelor.

During these nine years Flore obtained in the long run, insensibly and

without aiming for it, an absolute control over her master. From the first, she treated him very familiarly; then, without failing him in proper respect, she so far surpassed him in superiority of mind and force of character that he became in fact the servant of his servant. Elderly child that he was, he met this mastery half-way by letting Flore take such care of him that she treated him more as a mother would a son; and he himself ended by clinging to her with the feeling of a child dependent on a mother's protection. But there were other ties between them not less tightly knotted. In the first place, Flore kept the house and managed all its business. Jean-Jacques left everything to the crab-girl so completely that life without her would have seemed to him not only difficult, but impossible. In every way, this woman had become the one need of his existence; she indulged all his fancies, for she knew them well. He loved to see her bright face always smiling at him,--the only face that had ever smiled upon him, the only one to which he could look for a smile. This happiness, a purely material happiness, expressed in the homely words which come readiest to the tongue in a Berrichon household, and visible on the fine countenance of the young woman, was like a reflection of his own inward content. The state into which Jean-Jacques was thrown when Flore's brightness was clouded over by some passing annoyance revealed to the girl her power over him, and, to make sure of it, she sometimes liked to use it. Using such power means, with women of her class, abusing it. The Rabouilleuse, no doubt, made her master play some of those scenes buried in the mysteries of private life, of which Otway gives a specimen in the tragedy of "Venice Preserved," where the scene between the senator and Aquilina is the realization of the magnificently horrible. Flore felt so secure of her power that, unfortunately for her, and for the bachelor himself, it did not occur to her to make him marry her.

Towards the close of 1815, Flore, who was then twenty-seven, had reached the perfect development of her beauty. Plump and fresh, and white as a Norman countrywoman, she was the ideal of what our ancestors used to call "a buxom housewife." Her beauty, always that of a handsome barmaid, though higher in type and better kept, gave her a likeness to Mademoiselle George in her palmy days, setting aside the latter's imperial dignity. Flore had the dazzling white round arms, the ample modelling, the satiny textures of the skin, the alluring though less rigidly correct outlines of the great actress. Her expression was one of sweetness and tenderness; but her glance commanded less respect than that of the noblest Agrippina that ever trod the French stage since the days of Racine: on the contrary, it evoked a vulgar joy. In 1816 the Rabouilleuse saw Maxence Gilet, and fell in love with him at first sight. Her heart was cleft by the mythological arrow,--admirable description of an effect of nature which the Greeks, unable to conceive the chivalric, ideal, and melancholy love begotten of Christianity, could represent in no other way. Flore was too handsome to be disdained, and Max accepted his conquest.

Thus, at twenty-eight years of age, the Rabouilleuse felt for the first time a true love, an idolatrous love, the love which includes all ways of loving,--that of Gulnare and that of Medora. As soon as the penniless officer found out the respective situations of Flore and Jean-Jacques Rouget, he saw something more desirable than an "amourette" in an intimacy with the Rabouilleuse. He asked nothing better for his future prosperity than to take up his abode at the Rouget's, recognizing perfectly the feeble nature of the old bachelor.

Flore's passion necessarily affected the life and household affairs of her master. For a month the old man, now grown excessively timid, saw the laughing and kindly face of his mistress change to something terrible and gloomy and sullen. He was made to endure flashes of angry temper purposely displayed, precisely like a married man whose wife is meditating an infidelity. When, after some cruel rebuff, he nerved himself to ask Flore the reason of the change, her eyes were so full of hatred, and her voice so aggressive and contemptuous, that the poor creature quailed under them.

"Good heavens!" she cried; "you have neither heart nor soul! Here's sixteen years that I have spent my youth in this house, and I have only just found out that you have got a stone there (striking her breast). For two months you have seen before your eyes that brave captain, a victim of the Bourbons, who was cut out for a general, and is down in the depths of poverty, hunted into a hole of a place where there's no way to make a penny of money! He's forced to sit on a stool all day in the mayor's office to earn--what? Six hundred miserable francs,--a fine thing, indeed! And here are you, with six hundred and fifty-nine thousand well invested, and sixty thousand francs' income, --thanks to me, who never spend more than three thousand a year, everything included, even my own clothes, yes, everything!--and you never think of offering him a home here, though there's the second floor empty! You'd rather the rats and mice ran riot in it than put a human being there,--and he a lad your father always allowed to be his own son! Do you want to know what you are? I'll tell you,--a fratricide! And I know why, too. You see I take an interest in him, and that provokes you. Stupid as you seem, you have got more spite in you than the spitefullest of men. Well, yes! I do take an interest in him, and a keen one--"

"But, Flore--"

"_But, Flore_', indeed! What's that got to do with it? You may go and find another Flore (if you can!), for I hope this glass of wine may poison me if I don't get away from your dungeon of a house. I haven't, God be thanked! cost you one penny during the twelve years I've been with you, and you have had the pleasure of my company into the bargain. I could have earned my own living anywhere with the work that I've done here,--washing, ironing, looking after the linen, going to market, cooking, taking care of your interests before everything, slaving myself to death from morning till night,--and this is my reward!"

"But, Flore--"

"Oh, yes, '_Flore_'! find another Flore, if you can, at your time of life, fifty-one years old, and getting feeble,--for the way your health is failing is frightful, I know that! and besides, you are none too amusing--"

"But, Flore--"

"Let me alone!"

She went out, slamming the door with a violence that echoed through the house, and seemed to shake it to its foundations. Jean-Jacques softly opened the door and went, still more softly, into the kitchen where she was muttering to herself.

"But, Flore," said the poor sheep, "this is the first time I have heard of this wish of yours; how do you know whether I will agree to it or not?"

"In the first place," she said, "there ought to be a man in the house. Everybody knows you have ten, fifteen, twenty thousand francs here; if they came to rob you we should both be murdered. For my part, I don't care to wake up some fine morning chopped in quarters, as happened to that poor servant-girl who was silly enough to defend her master. Well! if the robbers knew there was a man in the house as brave as Caesar and who wasn't born yesterday,--for Max could swallow three burglars as quick as a flash,--well, then I should sleep easy. People may tell you a lot of stuff,--that I love him, that I adore him,--and some say this and some say that! Do you know what you ought to say? You ought to answer that you know it; that your father told you on his deathbed to take care of his poor Max. That will stop people's tongues; for every stone in Issoudun can tell you he paid Max's schooling--and so! Here's nine years that I have eaten your bread--"

"Flore,--Flore!"

"--and many a one in this town has paid court to me, I can tell you! Gold chains here, and watches there,--what don't they offer me? 'My little Flore,' they say, 'why won't you leave that old fool of a Rouget,'--for that's what they call you. 'I leave him!' I always answer, 'a poor innocent like that? I think I see myself! what would become of him? No, no, where the kid is tethered, let her browse--"

"Yes, Flore; I've none but you in this world, and you make me happy. If it will give you pleasure, my dear, well, we will have Maxence Gilet here; he can eat with us--"

"Heavens! I should hope so!"

"There, there! don't get angry--"

"Enough for one is enough for two," she answered laughing. "I'll tell you what you can do, my lamb, if you really mean to be kind; you must go and walk up and down near the Mayor's office at four o'clock, and manage to meet Monsieur Gilet and invite him to dinner. If he makes excuses, tell him it will give me pleasure; he is too polite to refuse. And after dinner, at dessert, if he tells you about his misfortunes, and the hulks and so forth--for you can easily get him to talk about all that--then you can make him the offer to come and live here. If he makes any objection, never mind, I shall know how to settle it."

Walking slowly along the boulevard Baron, the old celibate reflected, as much as he had the mind to reflect, over this incident. If he were to part from Flore (the mere thought confused him) where could he find another woman? Should he marry? At his age he should be married for his money, and a legitimate wife would use him far more cruelly than Flore. Besides, the thought of being deprived of her tenderness, even if it were a mere pretence, caused him horrible anguish. He was therefore as polite to Captain Gilet as he knew how to be. The invitation was given, as Flore had requested, before witnesses, to guard the hero's honor from all suspicion.

A reconciliation took place between Flore and her master; but from that day forth Jean-Jacques noticed many a trifle that betokened a total change in his mistress's affections. For two or three weeks Flore Brazier complained to the tradespeople in the markets, and to the women with whom she gossiped, about Monsieur Rouget's tyranny, --how he had taken it into his head to invite his self-styled natural brother to live with him. No one, however, was taken in by this comedy; and Flore was looked upon as a wonderfully clever and artful creature. Old Rouget really found himself very comfortable after Max became the master of his house; for he thus gained a companion who paid him many attentions, without, however, showing any servility. Gilet talked, discussed politics, and sometimes went to walk with Rouget. After Max was fairly installed, Flore did not choose to do the cooking; she said it spoiled her hands. At the request of the grand master of the Order of the Knights of Idleness, Mere Cognette produced one of her relatives, an old maid whose master, a curate, had lately died without leaving her anything, --an excellent cook, withal, --who declared she would devote herself for life or death to Max and Flore. In the name of the two powers, Mere Cognette promised her an annuity of three hundred francs a year at the end of ten years, if she served them loyally, honestly, and discreetly. The Védie, as she was called, was noticeable for a face deeply pitted by the small-pox, and correspondingly ugly.

After the new cook had entered upon her duties, the Rabouilleuse took the title of Madame Brazier. She wore corsets; she had silk, or handsome woollen and cotton dresses, according to the season, expensive neckerchiefs, embroidered caps and collars, lace ruffles at her throat, boots instead of shoes, and, altogether, adopted a richness and elegance of apparel which renewed the youthfulness of her appearance. She was like a rough diamond, that needed cutting and mounting by a jeweller to bring out its full value. Her desire was to do honor to Max. At the end of the first year, in 1817, she brought a horse, styled English, from Bourges, for the poor cavalry captain, who was weary of going afoot. Max had picked up in the purlieu of Issoudun an old lancer of the Imperial Guard, a Pole named Kouski, now very poor, who asked nothing better than to quarter himself in Monsieur Rouget's house as the captain's servant. Max was Kouski's idol, especially after the duel with the three royalists. So, from 1817, the household of the old bachelor was made up of five persons, three of whom were masters, and the expenses advanced to about eight thousand francs a year.

CHAPTER X

At the time when Madame Bridau returned to Issoudun to save --as Maitre Desroches expressed it --an inheritance that was seriously threatened, Jean-Jacques Rouget had reached by degrees a condition that was semi-vegetative. In the first place, after Max's instalment, Flore put the table on an episcopal footing. Rouget, thrown in the way of good living, ate more and still more, enticed by the Védie's excellent dishes. He grew no fatter, however, in spite of this abundant and luxurious nourishment. From day to day he weakened like a worn-out man, --fatigued, perhaps, with the effort of digestion, --and his eyes had dark circles around them. Still, when his friends and neighbors met him in his walks and questioned him about his health, he always answered that he was never better in his life. As he had always been

thought extremely deficient in mind, people did not notice the constant lowering of his faculties. His love for Flore was the one thing that kept him alive; in fact, he existed only for her, and his weakness in her presence was unbounded; he obeyed the creature's mere look, and watched her movements as a dog watches every gesture of his master. In short, as Madame Hochon remarked, at fifty-seven years of age he seemed older than Monsieur Hochon, an octogenarian.

Every one will suppose, and with reason, that Max's appartement was worthy of so charming a fellow. In fact, in the course of six years our captain had by degrees perfected the comfort of his abode and adorned every detail of it, as much for his own pleasure as for Flore's. But it was, after all, only the comfort and luxury of Issoudun,--colored tiles, rather elegant wallpapers, mahogany furniture, mirrors in gilt frames, muslin curtains with red borders, a bed with a canopy, and draperies arranged as the provincial upholsterers arrange them for a rich bride; which in the eyes of Issoudun seemed the height of luxury, but are so common in vulgar fashion-plates that even the petty shopkeepers in Paris have discarded them at their weddings. One very unusual thing appeared, which caused much talk in Issoudun, namely, a rush-matting on the stairs, no doubt to muffle the sound of feet. In fact, though Max was in the habit of coming in at daybreak, he never woke any one, and Rouget was far from suspecting that his guest was an accomplice in the nocturnal performances of the Knights of Idleness.

About eight o'clock the next morning, Flore, wearing a dressing-gown of some pretty cotton stuff with narrow pink stripes, a lace cap on her head, and her feet in furred slippers, softly opened the door of Max's chamber; seeing that he slept, she remained standing beside the bed.

"He came in so late!" she said to herself. "It was half-past three. He must have a good constitution to stand such amusements. Isn't he strong, the dear love! I wonder what they did last night."

"Oh, there you are, my little Flore!" said Max, waking like a soldier trained by the necessities of war to have his wits and his self-possession about him the instant that he waked, however suddenly it might happen.

"You are sleepy; I'll go away."

"No, stay; there's something serious going on."

"Were you up to some mischief last night?"

"Ah, bah! It concerns you and me and that old fool. You never told me he had a family! Well, his family are coming,--coming here,--no doubt to turn us out, neck and crop."

"Ah! I'll shake him well," said Flore.

"Mademoiselle Brazier," said Max gravely, "things are too serious for giddiness. Send me my coffee; I'll take it in bed, where I'll think over what we had better do. Come back at nine o'clock, and we'll talk about it. Meanwhile, behave as if you had heard nothing."

Frightened at the news, Flore left Max and went to make his coffee;

but a quarter of an hour later, Baruch burst into Max's bedroom, crying out to the grand master,--

"Fario is hunting for his barrow!"

In five minutes Max was dressed and in the street, and though he sauntered along with apparent indifference, he soon reached the foot of the tower embankment, where he found quite a collection of people.

"What is it?" asked Max, making his way through the crowd and reaching the Spaniard.

Fario was a withered little man, as ugly as though he were a blue-blooded grandee. His fiery eyes, placed very close to his nose and piercing as a gimlet, would have won him the name of a sorcerer in Naples. He seemed gentle because he was calm, quiet, and slow in his movements; and for this reason people commonly called him "goodman Fario." But his skin--the color of gingerbread--and his softness of manner only hid from stupid eyes, and disclosed to observing ones, the half-Moorish nature of a peasant of Granada, which nothing had as yet roused from its phlegmatic indolence.

"Are you sure," Max said to him, after listening to his grievance, "that you brought your cart to this place? for, thank God, there are no thieves in Issoudun."

"I left it just there--"

"If the horse was harnessed to it, hasn't he drawn it somewhere."

"Here's the horse," said Fario, pointing to the animal, which stood harnessed thirty feet away.

Max went gravely up to the place where the horse stood, because from there the bottom of the tower at the top of the embankment could be seen,--the crowd being at the foot of the mound. Everybody followed Max, and that was what the scoundrel wanted.

"Has anybody thoughtlessly put a cart in his pocket?" cried Francois.

"Turn out your pockets, all of you!" said Baruch.

Shouts of laughter resounded on all sides. Fario swore. Oaths, with a Spaniard, denote the highest pitch of anger.

"Was your cart light?" asked Max.

"Light!" cried Fario. "If those who laugh at me had it on their feet, their corns would never hurt them again."

"Well, it must be devilishly light," answered Max, "for look there!" pointing to the foot of the tower; "it has flown up the embankment."

At these words all eyes were lifted to the spot, and for a moment there was a perfect uproar in the market-place. Each man pointed at the barrow bewitched, and all their tongues wagged.

"The devil makes common cause with the inn-keepers," said Goddet to the astonished Spaniard. "He means to teach you not to leave your cart

about in the streets, but to put it in the tavern stables."

At this speech the crowd hooted, for Fario was thought to be a miser.

"Come, my good fellow," said Max, "don't lose heart. We'll go up to the tower and see how your barrow got there. Thunder and cannon! we'll lend you a hand! Come along, Baruch."

"As for you," he whispered to Francois, "get the people to stand back, and make sure there is nobody at the foot of the embankment when you see us at the top."

Fario, Max, Baruch, and three other knights climbed to the foot of the tower. During the rather perilous ascent Max and Fario noticed that no damage to the embankment, nor even trace of the passage of the barrow, could be seen. Fario began to imagine witchcraft, and lost his head. When they reached the top and examined into the matter, it really seemed a thing impossible that the cart had got there.

"How shall I ever get it down?" said the Spaniard, whose little eyes began for the first time to show fear; while his swarthy yellow face, which seemed as if it could never change color, whitened.

"How?" said Max. "Why, that's not difficult."

And taking advantage of the Spaniard's stupefaction, he raised the barrow by the shafts with his robust arms and prepared to fling it down, calling in thundering tones as it left his grasp, "Look out there, below!"

No accident happened, for the crowd, persuaded by Francois and eaten up with curiosity, had retired to a distance from which they could see more clearly what went on at the top of the embankment. The cart was dashed to an infinite number of pieces in a very picturesque manner.

"There! you have got it down," said Baruch.

"Ah, brigands! ah, scoundrels!" cried Fario; "perhaps it was you who brought it up here!"

Max, Baruch, and their three comrades began to laugh at the Spaniard's rage.

"I wanted to do you a service," said Max coolly, "and in handling the damned thing I came very near flinging myself after it; and this is how you thank me, is it? What country do you come from?"

"I come from a country where they never forgive," replied Fario, trembling with rage. "My cart will be the cab in which you shall drive to the devil!--unless," he said, suddenly becoming as meek as a lamb, "you will give me a new one."

"We will talk about that," said Max, beginning to descend.

When they reached the bottom and met the first hilarious group, Max took Fario by the button of his jacket and said to him,--

"Yes, my good Fario, I'll give you a magnificent cart, if you will give me two hundred and fifty francs; but I won't warrant it to go,

like this one, up a tower."

At this last jest Fario became as cool as though he were making a bargain.

"Damn it!" he said, "give me the wherewithal to replace my barrow, and it will be the best use you ever made of old Rouget's money."

Max turned livid; he raised his formidable fist to strike Fario; but Baruch, who knew that the blow would descend on others besides the Spaniard, plucked the latter away like a feather and whispered to Max,--

"Don't commit such a folly!"

The grand master, thus called to order, began to laugh and said to Fario,--

"If I, by accident, broke your barrow, and you in return try to slander me, we are quits."

"Not yet," muttered Fario. "But I am glad to know what my barrow was worth."

"Ah, Max, you've found your match!" said a spectator of the scene, who did not belong to the Order of Idleness.

"Adieu, Monsieur Gilet. I haven't thanked you yet for lending me a hand," cried the Spaniard, as he kicked the sides of his horse and disappeared amid loud hurrahs.

"We will keep the tires of the wheels for you," shouted a wheelwright, who had come to inspect the damage done to the cart.

One of the shafts was sticking upright in the ground, as straight as a tree. Max stood by, pale and thoughtful, and deeply annoyed by Fario's speech. For five days after this, nothing was talked of in Issoudun but the tale of the Spaniard's barrow; it was even fated to travel abroad, as Goddet remarked,--for it went the round of Berry, where the speeches of Fario and Max were repeated, and at the end of a week the affair, greatly to the Spaniard's satisfaction, was still the talk of the three departments and the subject of endless gossip. In consequence of the vindictive Spaniard's terrible speech, Max and the Rabouilleuse became the object of certain comments which were merely whispered in Issoudun, though they were spoken aloud in Bourges, Vatan, Vierzon, and Chateauroux. Maxence Gilet knew enough of that region of the country to guess how envenomed such comments would become.

"We can't stop their tongues," he said at last. "Ah! I did a foolish thing!"

"Max!" said Francois, taking his arm. "They are coming to-night."

"They! Who!"

"The Bridaus. My grandmother has just had a letter from her goddaughter."

"Listen, my boy," said Max in a low voice. "I have been thinking deeply of this matter. Neither Flore nor I ought to seem opposed to the Bridaus. If these heirs are to be got rid of, it is for you Hochons to drive them out of Issoudun. Find out what sort of people they are. To-morrow at Mere Cognette's, after I've taken their measure, we can decide what is to be done, and how we can set your grandfather against them."

"The Spaniard found the flaw in Max's armor," said Baruch to his cousin Francois, as they turned into Monsieur Hochon's house and watched their comrade entering his own door.

While Max was thus employed, Flore, in spite of her friend's advice, was unable to restrain her wrath; and without knowing whether she would help or hinder Max's plans, she burst forth upon the poor bachelor. When Jean-Jacques incurred the anger of his mistress, the little attentions and vulgar fondlings which were all his joy were suddenly suppressed. Flore sent her master, as the children say, into disgrace. No more tender glances, no more of the caressing little words in various tones with which she decked her conversation,--"my kitten," "my old darling," "my bibi," "my rat," etc. A "you," cold and sharp and ironically respectful, cut like the blade of a knife through the heart of the miserable old bachelor. The "you" was a declaration of war. Instead of helping the poor man with his toilet, handing him what he wanted, forestalling his wishes, looking at him with the sort of admiration which all women know how to express, and which, in some cases, the coarser it is the better it pleases,--saying, for instance, "You look as fresh as a rose!" or, "What health you have!" "How handsome you are, my old Jean!"--in short, instead of entertaining him with the lively chatter and broad jokes in which he delighted, Flore left him to dress alone. If he called her, she answered from the foot of the staircase, "I can't do everything at once; how can I look after your breakfast and wait upon you up there? Are not you big enough to dress your own self?"

"Oh, dear! what have I done to displease her?" the old man asked himself that morning, as he got one of these rebuffs after calling for his shaving-water.

"Vedie, take up the hot water," cried Flore.

"Vedie!" exclaimed the poor man, stupefied with fear of the anger that was crushing him. "Vedie, what is the matter with Madame this morning?"

Flore Brazier required her master and Vedie and Kouski and Max to call her Madame.

"She seems to have heard something about you which isn't to your credit," answered Vedie, assuming an air of deep concern. "You are doing wrong, monsieur. I'm only a poor servant-woman, and you may say I have no right to poke my nose into your affairs; but I do say you may search through all the women in the world, like that king in holy Scripture, and you won't find the equal of Madame. You ought to kiss the ground she steps on. Goodness! if you make her unhappy, you'll only spoil your own life. There she is, poor thing, with her eyes full of tears."

Vedie left the poor man utterly cast down; he dropped into an armchair

and gazed into vacancy like the melancholy imbecile that he was, and forgot to shave. These alternations of tenderness and severity worked upon this feeble creature whose only life was through his amorous fibre, the same morbid effect which great changes from tropical heat to arctic cold produce upon the human body. It was a moral pleurisy, which wore him out like a physical disease. Flore alone could thus affect him; for to her, and to her alone, he was as good as he was foolish.

"Well, haven't you shaved yet?" she said, appearing at his door.

Her sudden presence made the old man start violently; and from being pale and cast down he grew red for an instant, without, however, daring to complain of her treatment.

"Your breakfast is waiting," she added. "You can come down as you are, in dressing-gown and slippers; for you'll breakfast alone, I can tell you."

Without waiting for an answer, she disappeared. To make him breakfast alone was the punishment he dreaded most; he loved to talk to her as he ate his meals. When he got to the foot of the staircase he was taken with a fit of coughing; for emotion excited his catarrh.

"Cough away!" said Flore in the kitchen, without caring whether he heard her or not. "Confound the old wretch! he is able enough to get over it without bothering others. If he coughs up his soul, it will only be after--"

Such were the amenities the Rabouilleuse addressed to Rouget when she was angry. The poor man sat down in deep distress at a corner of the table in the middle of the room, and looked at his old furniture and the old pictures with a disconsolate air.

"You might at least have put on a cravat," said Flore. "Do you think it is pleasant for people to see such a neck as yours, which is redder and more wrinkled than a turkey's?"

"But what have I done?" he asked, lifting his big light-green eyes, full of tears, to his tormentor, and trying to face her hard countenance.

"What have you done?" she exclaimed. "As if you didn't know? Oh, what a hypocrite! Your sister Agathe--who is as much your sister as I am sister of the tower of Issoudun, if one's to believe your father, and who has no claim at all upon you--is coming here from Paris with her son, a miserable two-penny painter, to see you."

"My sister and my nephews coming to Issoudun!" he said, bewildered.

"Oh, yes! play the surprised, do; try to make me believe you didn't send for them! sewing your lies with white bread, indeed! Don't fash yourself; we won't trouble your Parisians--before they set their feet in this house, we shall have shaken the dust of it off ours. Max and I will be gone, never to return. As for your will, I'll tear it in quarters under your nose, and to your very beard--do you hear? Leave your property to your family, if you don't think we are your family; and then see if you'll be loved for yourself by a lot of people who have not seen you for thirty years,--who in fact have never seen you!

Is it that sort of sister who can take my place? A pinchbeck saint!"

"If that's all, my little Flore," said the old man, "I won't receive my sister, or my nephews. I swear to you this is the first word I have heard of their coming. It is all got up by that Madame Hochon--a sanctimonious old--"

Max, who had overheard old Rouget's words, entered suddenly, and said in a masterful tone,--

"What's all this?"

"My good Max," said the old man, glad to get the protection of the soldier who, by agreement with Flore, always took his side in a dispute, "I swear by all that is most sacred, that I now hear this news for the first time. I have never written to my sister; my father made me promise not to leave her any of my property; to leave it to the Church sooner than to her. Well, I won't receive my sister Agathe to this house, or her sons--"

"Your father was wrong, my dear Jean-Jacques, and Madame Brazier is still more wrong," answered Max. "Your father no doubt had his reasons, but he is dead, and his hatred should die with him. Your sister is your sister, and your nephews are your nephews. You owe it to yourself to welcome them, and you owe it to us as well. What would people say in Issoudun? Thunder! I've got enough upon my shoulders as it is, without hearing people say that we shut you up and don't allow you a will of your own, or that we influence you against your relations and are trying to get hold of your property. The devil take me if I don't pull up stakes and be off, if that sort of calumny is to be flung at me! the other is bad enough! Let's eat our breakfast."

Flore, who was now as mild as a weasel, helped Védie to set the table. Old Rouget, full of admiration for Max, took him by both hands and led him into the recess of a window, saying in a low voice:--

"Ah! Max, if I had a son, I couldn't love him better than I love you. Flore is right: you two are my real family. You are a man of honor, Max, and what you have just said is true."

"You ought to receive and entertain your sister and her son, but not change the arrangements you have made about your property," said Max. "In that way you will do what is right in the eyes of the world, and yet keep your promise to your father."

"Well! my dear loves!" cried Flore, gayly, "the salmi is getting cold. Come, my old rat, here's a wing for you," she said, smiling on Jean-Jacques.

At the words, the long-drawn face of the poor creature lost its cadaverous tints, the smile of a Theriaki flickered on his pendent lips; but he was seized with another fit of coughing; for the joy of being taken back to favor excited as violent an emotion as the punishment itself. Flore rose, pulled a little cashmere shawl from her own shoulders, and tied it round the old man's throat, exclaiming: "How silly to put yourself in such a way about nothing. There, you old goose, that will do you good; it has been next my heart--"

"What a good creature!" said Rouget to Max, while Flore went to fetch

a black velvet cap to cover the nearly bald head of the old bachelor.

"As good as she is beautiful"; answered Max, "but she is quick-tempered, like all people who carry their hearts in their hands."

The baldness of this sketch may displease some, who will think the flashes of Flore's character belong to the sort of realism which a painter ought to leave in shadow. Well! this scene, played again and again with shocking variations, is, in its coarse way and its horrible veracity, the type of such scenes played by women on whatever rung of the social ladder they are perched, when any interest, no matter what, draws them from their own line of obedience and induces them to grasp at power. In their eyes, as in those of politicians, all means to an end are justifiable. Between Flore Brazier and a duchess, between a duchess and the richest bourgeoisie, between a bourgeoisie and the most luxuriously kept mistress, there are no differences except those of the education they have received, and the surroundings in which they live. The pouting of a fine lady is the same thing as the violence of a Rabouilleuse. At all levels, bitter sayings, ironical jests, cold contempt, hypocritical complaints, false quarrels, win as much success as the low outbursts of this Madame Everard of Issoudun.

Max began to relate, with much humor, the tale of Fario and his barrow, which made the old man laugh. Védie and Kouski, who came to listen, exploded in the kitchen, and as to Flore, she laughed convulsively. After breakfast, while Jean-Jacques read the newspapers (for they subscribed to the "Constitutionnel" and the "Pandore"), Max carried Flore to his own quarters.

"Are you quite sure he has not made any other will since the one in which he left the property to you?"

"He hasn't anything to write with," she answered.

"He might have dictated it to some notary," said Max; "we must look out for that. Therefore it is well to be cordial to the Bridaus, and at the same time endeavor to turn those mortgages into money. The notaries will be only too glad to make the transfers; it is grist to their mill. The Funds are going up; we shall conquer Spain, and deliver Ferdinand VII. and the Cortez, and then they will be above par. You and I could make a good thing out of it by putting the old fellow's seven hundred and fifty thousand francs into the Funds at eighty-nine. Only you must try to get it done in your name; it will be so much secured anyhow."

"A capital idea!" said Flore.

"And as there will be an income of fifty thousand francs from eight hundred and ninety thousand, we must make him borrow one hundred and forty thousand francs for two years, to be paid back in two instalments. In two years, we shall get one hundred thousand francs in Paris, and ninety thousand here, and risk nothing."

"If it were not for you, my handsome Max, what would become of me now?" she said.

"Oh! to-morrow night at Mere Cogne's, after I have seen the Parisians, I shall find a way to make the Hochons themselves get rid of them."

"Ah! what a head you've got, my angel! You are a love of a man."

The place Saint-Jean is at the centre of a long street called at the upper end the rue Grand Narette, and at the lower the rue Petite Narette. The word "Narette" is used in Berry to express the same lay of the land as the Genoese word "salita" indicates,--that is to say, a steep street. The Grand Narette rises rapidly from the place Saint-Jean to the port Vilatte. The house of old Monsieur Hochon is exactly opposite that of Jean-Jacques Rouget. From the windows of the room where Madame Hochon usually sat, it was easy to see what went on at the Rouget household, and vice versa, when the curtains were drawn back or the doors were left open. The Hochon house was like the Rouget house, and the two were doubtless built by the same architect. Monsieur Hochon, formerly tax-collector at Selles in Berry, born, however, at Issoudun, had returned to his native place and married the sister of the sub-delegate, the gay Lousteau, exchanging his office at Selles for another of the same kind at Issoudun. Having retired before 1787, he escaped the dangers of the Revolution, to whose principles, however, he firmly adhered, like all other "honest men" who howl with the winners. Monsieur Hochon came honestly by the reputation of miser. but it would be mere repetition to sketch him here. A single specimen of the avarice which made him famous will suffice to make you see Monsieur Hochon as he was.

At the wedding of his daughter, now dead, who married a Borniche, it was necessary to give a dinner to the Borniche family. The bridegroom, who was heir to a large fortune, had suffered great mortification from having mismanaged his property, and still more because his father and mother refused to help him out. The old people, who were living at the time of the marriage, were delighted to see Monsieur Hochon step in as guardian,--for the purpose, of course, of making his daughter's dowry secure. On the day of the dinner, which was given to celebrate the signing of the marriage contract, the chief relations of the two families were assembled in the salon, the Hochons on one side, the Borniches on the other,--all in their best clothes. While the contract was being solemnly read aloud by young Heron, the notary, the cook came into the room and asked Monsieur Hochon for some twine to truss up the turkey,--an essential feature of the repast. The old man dove into the pocket of his surtout, pulled out an end of string which had evidently already served to tie up a parcel, and gave it to her; but before she could leave the room he called out, "Gritte, mind you give it back to me!" (Gritte is the abbreviation used in Berry for Marguerite.)

From year to year old Hochon grew more petty in his meanness, and more penurious; and at this time he was eighty-five years old. He belonged to the class of men who stop short in the street, in the middle of a lively dialogue, and stoop to pick up a pin, remarking, as they stick it in the sleeve of their coat, "There's the wife's stipend." He complained bitterly of the poor quality of the cloth manufactured now-a-days, and called attention to the fact that his coat had lasted only ten years. Tall, gaunt, thin, and sallow; saying little, reading little, and doing nothing to fatigue himself; as observant of forms as an oriental,--he enforced in his own house a discipline of strict abstemiousness, weighing and measuring out the food and drink of the family, which, indeed, was rather numerous, and consisted of his wife, nee Lousteau, his grandson Borniche with a sister Adolphine, the heirs of old Borniche, and lastly, his other grandson, Francois Hochon.

Hochon's eldest son was taken by the draft of 1813, which drew in the sons of well-to-do families who had escaped the regular conscription, and were now formed into a corps styled the "guards of honor." This heir-presumptive, who was killed at Hanau, had married early in life a rich woman, intending thereby to escape all conscriptions; but after he was enrolled, he wasted his substance, under a presentiment of his end. His wife, who followed the army at a distance, died at Strasburg in 1814, leaving debts which her father-in-law Hochon refused to pay, --answering the creditors with an axiom of ancient law, "Women are minors."

The house, though large, was scantily furnished; on the second floor, however, there were two rooms suitable for Madame Bridau and Joseph. Old Hochon now repented that he had kept them furnished with two beds, each bed accompanied by an old armchair of natural wood covered with needlework, and a walnut table, on which figured a water-pitcher of the wide-mouthed kind called "gueulard," standing in a basin with a blue border. The old man kept his winter store of apples and pears, medlars and quinces on heaps of straw in these rooms, where the rats and mice ran riot, so that they exhaled a mingled odor of fruit and vermin. Madame Hochon now directed that everything should be cleaned; the wall-paper, which had peeled off in places, was fastened up again with wafers; and she decorated the windows with little curtains which she pieced together from old hoards of her own. Her husband having refused to let her buy a strip of drugget, she laid down her own bedside carpet for her little Agathe,--"Poor little thing!" as she called the mother, who was now over forty-seven years old. Madame Hochon borrowed two night-tables from a neighbor, and boldly hired two chests of drawers with brass handles from a dealer in second-hand furniture who lived next to Mere Cogne. She herself had preserved two pairs of candlesticks, carved in choice woods by her own father, who had the "turning" mania. From 1770 to 1780 it was the fashion among rich people to learn a trade, and Monsieur Lousteau, the father, was a turner, just as Louis XVI. was a locksmith. These candlesticks were ornamented with circlets made of the roots of rose, peach, and apricot trees. Madame Hochon actually risked the use of her precious relics! These preparations and this sacrifice increased old Hochon's anxiety; up to this time he had not believed in the arrival of the Bridaus.

The morning of the day that was celebrated by the trick on Fario, Madame Hochon said to her husband after breakfast:--

"I hope, Hochon, that you will receive my goddaughter, Madame Bridau, properly." Then, after making sure that her grandchildren were out of hearing, she added: "I am mistress of my own property; don't oblige me to make up to Agathe in my will for any incivility on your part."

"Do you think, madame," answered Hochon, in a mild voice, "that, at my age, I don't know the forms of decent civility?"

"You know very well what I mean, you crafty old thing! Be friendly to our guests, and remember that I love Agathe."

"And you love Maxence Gilet also, who is getting the property away from your dear Agathe! Ah! you've warmed a viper in your bosom there; but after all, the Rouget money is bound to go to a Lousteau."

After making this allusion to the supposed parentage and both Max and Agathe, Hochon turned to leave the room; but old Madame Hochon, a woman still erect and spare, wearing a round cap with ribbon knots and her hair powdered, a taffet petticoat of changeable colors like a pigeon's breast, tight sleeves, and her feet in high-heeled slippers, deposited her snuff-box on a little table, and said:--

"Really, Monsieur Hochon, how can a man of your sense repeat absurdities which, unhappily, cost my poor friend her peace of mind, and Agathe the property which she ought to have had from her father. Max Gilet is not the son of my brother, whom I often advised to save the money he paid for him. You know as well as I do that Madame Rouget was virtue itself--"

"And the daughter takes after her; for she strikes me as uncommonly stupid. After losing all her fortune, she brings her sons up so well that here is one in prison and likely to be brought up on a criminal indictment before the Court of Peers for a conspiracy worthy of Berton. As for the other, he is worse off; he's a painter. If your proteges are to stay here till they have extricated that fool of a Rouget from the claws of Gilet and the Rabouilleuse, we shall eat a good deal more than half a measure of salt with them."

"That's enough, Monsieur Hochon; you had better wish they may not have two strings to their bow."

Monsieur Hochon took his hat, and his cane with an ivory knob, and went away petrified by that terrible speech; for he had no idea that his wife could show such resolution. Madame Hochon took her prayer-book to read the service, for her advanced age prevented her from going daily to church; it was only with difficulty that she got there on Sundays and holidays. Since receiving her goddaughter's letter she had added a petition to her usual prayers, supplicating God to open the eyes of Jean-Jacques Rouget, and to bless Agathe and prosper the expedition into which she herself had drawn her. Concealing the fact from her grandchildren, whom she accused of being "parpillots," she had asked the curate to say a mass for Agathe's success during a neuvaine which was being held by her granddaughter, Adolphine Borniche, who thus made her prayers in church by proxy.

Adolphine, then eighteen,--who for the last seven years had sewed at the side of her grandmother in that cold household of monotonous and methodical customs,--had undertaken her neuvaine all the more willingly because she hoped to inspire some feeling in Joseph Bridau, in whom she took the deepest interest because of the monstrosities which her grandfather attributed in her hearing to the young Parisian.

All the old people and sensible people of the town, and the fathers of families approved of Madame Hochon's conduct in receiving her goddaughter; and their good wishes for the latter's success were in proportion to the secret contempt with which the conduct of Maxence Gilet had long inspired them. Thus the news of the arrival of Rouget's sister and nephew raised two parties in Issoudun,--that of the higher and older bourgeoisie, who contented themselves with offering good wishes and in watching events without assisting them, and that of the Knights of Idleness and the partisans of Max, who, unfortunately, were capable of committing many high-handed outrages against the Parisians.

CHAPTER XI

Agathe and Joseph arrived at the coach-office of the Messageries-Royales in the place Misere at three o'clock. Though tired with the journey, Madame Bridau felt her youth revive at sight of her native land, where at every step she came upon memories and impressions of her girlish days. In the then condition of public opinion in Issoudun, the arrival of the Parisians was known all over the town in ten minutes. Madame Hochon came out upon her doorstep to welcome her godchild, and kissed her as though she were really a daughter. After seventy-two years of a barren and monotonous existence, exhibiting in their retrospect the graves of her three children, all unhappy in their lives, and all dead, she had come to feel a sort of fictitious motherhood for the young girl whom she had, as she expressed it, carried in her pouch for sixteen years. Through the gloom of provincial life the old woman had cherished this early friendship, this girlish memory, as closely as if Agathe had remained near her, and she had also taken the deepest interest in Bridau. Agathe was led in triumph to the salon where Monsieur Hochon was stationed, chilling as a tepid oven.

"Here is Monsieur Hochon; how does he seem to you?" asked his wife.

"Precisely the same as when I last saw him," said the Parisian woman.

"Ah! it is easy to see you come from Paris; you are so complimentary," remarked the old man.

The presentations took place: first, young Baruch Borniche, a tall youth of twenty-two; then Francois Hochon, twenty-four; and lastly little Adolphine, who blushed and did not know what to do with her arms; she was anxious not to seem to be looking at Joseph Bridau, who in his turn was narrowly observed, though from different points of view, by the two young men and by old Hochon. The miser was saying to himself, "He is just out of the hospital; he will be as hungry as a convalescent." The young men were saying, "What a head! what a brigand! we shall have our hands full!"

"This is my son, the painter; my good Joseph," said Agathe at last, presenting the artist.

There was an effort in the accent that she put upon the word "good," which revealed the mother's heart, whose thoughts were really in the prison of the Luxembourg.

"He looks ill," said Madame Hochon; "he is not at all like you."

"No, madame," said Joseph, with the brusque candor of an artist; "I am like my father, and very ugly at that."

Madame Hochon pressed Agathe's hand which she was holding, and glanced at her as much as to say, "Ah! my child; I understand now why you prefer your good-for-nothing Philippe."

"I never saw your father, my dear boy," she said aloud; "it is enough to make me love you that you are your mother's son. Besides, you have talent, so the late Madame Descoings used to write to me; she was the only one of late years who told me much about you."

"Talent!" exclaimed the artist, "not as yet; but with time and patience I may win fame and fortune."

"By painting?" said Monsieur Hochon ironically.

"Come, Adolphine," said Madame Hochon, "go and see about dinner."

"Mother," said Joseph, "I will attend to the trunks which they are bringing in."

"Hochon," said the grandmother to Francois, "show the rooms to Monsieur Bridau."

As the dinner was to be served at four o'clock and it was now only half past three, Baruch rushed into the town to tell the news of the Bridau arrival, describe Agathe's dress, and more particularly to picture Joseph, whose haggard, unhealthy, and determined face was not unlike the ideal of a brigand. That evening Joseph was the topic of conversation in all the households of Issoudun.

"That sister of Rouget must have seen a monkey before her son was born," said one; "he is the image of a baboon."

"He has the face of a brigand and the eyes of a basilisk."

"All artists are like that."

"They are as wicked as the red ass, and as spiteful as monkeys."

"It is part of their business."

"I have just seen Monsieur Beaussier, and he says he would not like to meet him in a dark wood; he saw him in the diligence."

"He has got hollows over the eyes like a horse, and he laughs like a maniac."

"The fellow looks as though he were capable of anything; perhaps it's his fault that his brother, a fine handsome man they tell me, has gone to the bad. Poor Madame Bridau doesn't seem as if she were very happy with him."

"Suppose we take advantage of his being here, and have our portraits painted?"

The result of all these observations, scattered through the town was, naturally, to excite curiosity. All those who had the right to visit the Hochons resolved to call that very night and examine the Parisians. The arrival of these two persons in the stagnant town was like the falling of a beam into a community of frogs.

After stowing his mother's things and his own into the two attic chambers, which he examined as he did so, Joseph took note of the silent house, where the walls, the stair-case, the wood-work, were devoid of decoration and humid with frost, and where there was literally nothing beyond the merest necessaries. He felt the brusque transition from his poetic Paris to the dumb and arid province; and when, coming downstairs, he chanced to see Monsieur Hochon cutting

slices of bread for each person, he understood, for the first time in his life, Moliere's Harpagon.

"We should have done better to go to an inn," he said to himself.

The aspect of the dinner confirmed his apprehensions. After a soup whose watery clearness showed that quantity was more considered than quality, the bouilli was served, ceremoniously garnished with parsley; the vegetables, in a dish by themselves, being counted into the items of the repast. The bouilli held the place of honor in the middle of the table, accompanied with three other dishes: hard-boiled eggs on sorrel opposite to the vegetables; then a salad dressed with nut-oil to face little cups of custard, whose flavoring of burnt oats did service as vanilla, which it resembles much as coffee made of chiccory resembles mocha. Butter and radishes, in two plates, were at each end of the table; pickled gherkins and horse-radish completed the spread, which won Madam Hochon's approbation. The good old woman gave a contented little nod when she saw that her husband had done things properly, for the first day at least. The old man answered with a glance and a shrug of his shoulders, which it was easy to translate into--

"See the extravagances you force me to commit!"

As soon as Monsieur Hochon had, as it were, slivered the bouilli into slices, about as thick as the sole of a dancing-shoe, that dish was replaced by another, containing three pigeons. The wine was of the country, vintage 1811. On a hint from her grandmother, Adolphine had decorated each end of the table with a bunch of flowers.

"At Rome as the Romans do," thought the artist, looking at the table, and beginning to eat,--like a man who had breakfasted at Vierzon, at six o'clock in the morning, on an execrable cup of coffee. When Joseph had eaten up all his bread and asked for more, Monsieur Hochon rose, slowly searched in the pocket of his surtout for a key, unlocked a cupboard behind him, broke off a section of a twelve-pound loaf, carefully cut a round of it, then divided the round in two, laid the pieces on a plate, and passed the plate across the table to the young painter, with the silence and coolness of an old soldier who says to himself on the eve of battle, "Well, I can meet death." Joseph took the half-slice, and fully understood that he was not to ask for any more. No member of the family was the least surprised at this extraordinary performance. The conversation went on. Agathe learned that the house in which she was born, her father's house before he inherited that of the old Descoings, had been bought by the Borniches; she expressed a wish to see it once more.

"No doubt," said her godmother, "the Borniches will be here this evening; we shall have half the town--who want to examine you," she added, turning to Joseph, "and they will all invite you to their houses."

Gritte, who in spite of her sixty years, was the only servant of the house, brought in for dessert the famous ripe cheese of Touraine and Berry, made of goat's milk, whose mouldy discolorations so distinctly reproduce the pattern of the vine-leaves on which it is served, that Touraine ought to have invented the art of engraving. On either side of these little cheeses Gritte, with a company air, placed nuts and some time-honored biscuits.

"Well, Gritte, the fruit?" said Madame Hochon.

"But, madame, there is none rotten," answered Gritte.

Joseph went off into roars of laughter, as though he were among his comrades in the atelier; for he suddenly perceived that the parsimony of eating only the fruits which were beginning to rot had degenerated into a settled habit.

"Bah! we can eat them all the same," he exclaimed, with the heedless gayety of a man who will have his say.

"Monsieur Hochon, pray get some," said the old lady.

Monsieur Hochon, much incensed at the artist's speech, fetched some peaches, pears, and Saint Catherine plums.

"Adolphine, go and gather some grapes," said Madame Hochon to her granddaughter.

Joseph looked at the two young men as much as to say: "Is it to such high living as this that you owe your healthy faces?"

Baruch understood the keen glance and smiled; for he and his cousin Hochon were behaving with much discretion. The home-life was of less importance to youths who supped three times the week at Mere Cognette's. Moreover, just before dinner, Baruch had received notice that the grand master convoked the whole Order at midnight for a magnificent supper, in the course of which a great enterprise would be arranged. The feast of welcome given by old Hochon to his guests explains how necessary were the nocturnal repasts at the Cognette's to two young fellows blessed with good appetites, who, we may add, never missed any of them.

"We will take the liqueur in the salon," said Madame Hochon, rising and motioning to Joseph to give her his arm. As they went out before the others, she whispered to the painter:--

"Eh! my poor boy; this dinner won't give you an indigestion; but I had hard work to get it for you. It is always Lent here; you will get enough just to keep life in you, and no more. So you must bear it patiently."

The kind-heartedness of the old woman, who thus drew her own predicament, pleased the artist.

"I have lived fifty years with that man, without ever hearing half-a-dozen gold pieces chink in my purse," she went on. "Oh! if I did not hope that you might save your property, I would never have brought you and your mother into my prison."

"But how can you survive it?" cried Joseph naively, with the gayety which a French artist never loses.

"Ah, you may well ask!" she said. "I pray."

Joseph quivered as he heard the words, which raised the old woman so much in his estimation that he stepped back a little way to look into

her face; it was radiant with so tender a serenity that he said to her,--

"Let me paint your portrait."

"No, no," she answered, "I am too weary of life to wish to remain here on canvas."

Gayly uttering the sad words, she opened a closet, and brought out a flask containing ratafia, a domestic manufacture of her own, the receipt for which she obtained from the far-famed nuns to whom is also due the celebrated cake of Issoudun,--one of the great creations of French confectionery; which no chef, cook, pastry-cook, or confectioner has ever been able to reproduce. Monsieur de Riviere, ambassador at Constantinople, ordered enormous quantities every year for the Seraglio.

Adolphine held a lacquer tray on which were a number of little old glasses with engraved sides and gilt edges; and as her mother filled each of them, she carried it to the company.

"It seems as though my father's turn were coming round!" exclaimed Agathe, to whom this immutable provincial custom recalled the scenes of her youth.

"Hochon will go to his club presently to read the papers, and we shall have a little time to ourselves," said the old lady in a low voice.

In fact, ten minutes later, the three women and Joseph were alone in the salon, where the floor was never waxed, only swept, and the worsted-work designs in oaken frames with grooved mouldings, and all the other plain and rather dismal furniture seemed to Madame Bridau to be in exactly the same state as when she had left Issoudun. Monarchy, Revolution, Empire, and Restoration, which respected little, had certainly respected this room where their glories and their disasters had left not the slightest trace.

"Ah! my godmother, in comparison with your life, mine has been cruelly tried," exclaimed Madame Bridau, surprised to find even a canary which she had known when alive, stuffed, and standing on the mantleshelf between the old clock, the old brass brackets, and the silver candlesticks.

"My child," said the old lady, "trials are in the heart. The greater and more necessary the resignation, the harder the struggle with our own selves. But don't speak of me, let us talk of your affairs. You are directly in front of the enemy," she added, pointing to the windows of the Rouget house.

"They are sitting down to dinner," said Adolphine.

The young girl, destined for a cloister, was constantly looking out of the window, in hopes of getting some light upon the enormities imputed to Maxence Gilet, the Rabouilleuse, and Jean-Jacques, of which a few words reached her ears whenever she was sent out of the room that others might talk about them. The old lady now told her granddaughter to leave her alone with Madame Bridau and Joseph until the arrival of visitors.

"For," she said, turning to the Parisians, "I know my Issoudun by heart; we shall have ten or twelve batches of inquisitive folk here to-night."

In fact Madame Hochon had hardly related the events and the details concerning the astounding influence obtained by Maxence Gilet and the Rabouilleuse over Jean-Jacques Rouget (without, of course, following the synthetical method with which they have been presented here), adding the many comments, descriptions, and hypotheses with which the good and evil tongues of the town embroidered them, before Adolphine announced the approach of the Borniche, Beaussier, Lousteau-Prangin, Fichet, Goddet-Herau families; in all, fourteen persons looming in the distance.

"You now see, my dear child," said the old lady, concluding her tale, "that it will not be an easy matter to get this property out of the jaws of the wolf--"

"It seems to me so difficult--with a scoundrel such as you represent him, and a daring woman like that crab-girl--as to be actually impossible," remarked Joseph. "We should have to stay a year in Issoudun to counteract their influence and overthrow their dominion over my uncle. Money isn't worth such a struggle,--not to speak of the meannesses to which we should have to condescend. My mother has only two weeks' leave of absence; her place is a permanent one, and she must not risk it. As for me, in the month of October I have an important work, which Schinner has just obtained for me from a peer of France; so you see, madame, my future fortune is in my brushes."

This speech was received by Madame Hochon with much amazement. Though relatively superior to the town she lived in, the old lady did not believe in painting. She glanced at her goddaughter, and again pressed her hand.

"This Maxence is the second volume of Philippe," whispered Joseph in his mother's ear, "--only cleverer and better behaved. Well, madame," he said, aloud, "we won't trouble Monsieur Hochon by staying very long."

"Ah! you are young; you know nothing of the world," said the old lady. "A couple of weeks, if you are judicious, may produce great results; listen to my advice, and act accordingly."

"Oh! willingly," said Joseph, "I know I have a perfectly amazing incapacity for domestic statesmanship: for example, I am sure I don't know what Desroches himself would tell us to do if my uncle declines to see us."

Mesdames Borniche, Goddet-Herau, Beaussier, Lousteau-Prangin and Fichet, decorated with their husbands, here entered the room.

When the fourteen persons were seated, and the usual compliments were over, Madame Hochon presented her goddaughter Agathe and Joseph. Joseph sat in his armchair all the evening, engaged in slyly studying the sixty faces which, from five o'clock until half past nine, posed for him gratis, as he afterwards told his mother. Such behavior before the aristocracy of Issoudun did not tend to change the opinion of the little town concerning him: every one went home ruffled by his sarcastic glances, uneasy under his smiles, and even frightened at his

face, which seemed sinister to a class of people unable to recognize the singularities of genius.

After ten o'clock, when the household was in bed, Madame Hochon kept her goddaughter in her chamber until midnight. Secure from interruption, the two women told each other the sorrows of their lives, and exchanged their sufferings. As Agathe listened to the last echoes of a soul that had missed its destiny, and felt the sufferings of a heart, essentially generous and charitable, whose charity and generosity could never be exercised, she realized the immensity of the desert in which the powers of this noble, unrecognized soul had been wasted, and knew that she herself, with the little joys and interests of her city life relieving the bitter trials sent from God, was not the most unhappy of the two.

"You who are so pious," she said, "explain to me my shortcomings; tell me what it is that God is punishing in me."

"He is preparing us, my child," answered the old woman, "for the striking of the last hour."

At midnight the Knights of Idleness were collecting, one by one like shadows, under the trees of the boulevard Baron, and speaking together in whispers.

"What are we going to do?" was the first question of each as he arrived.

"I think," said Francois, "that Max means merely to give us a supper."

"No; matters are very serious for him, and for the Rabouilleuse: no doubt, he has concocted some scheme against the Parisians."

"It would be a good joke to drive them away."

"My grandfather," said Baruch, "is terribly alarmed at having two extra mouths to feed, and he'd seize on any pretext--"

"Well, comrades!" cried Max softly, now appearing on the scene, "why are you star-gazing? the planets don't distil kirschwasser. Come, let us go to Mere Cognette's!"

"To Mere Cognette's! To Mere Cognette's!" they all cried.

The cry, uttered as with one voice, produced a clamor which rang through the town like the hurrah of troops rushing to an assault; total silence followed. The next day, more than one inhabitant must have said to his neighbor: "Did you hear those frightful cries last night, about one o'clock? I thought there was surely a fire somewhere."

A supper worthy of La Cognito brightened the faces of the twenty-two guests; for the whole Order was present. At two in the morning, as they were beginning to "siroter" (a word in the vocabulary of the Knights which admirably expresses the act of sipping and tasting the wine in small quantities), Max rose to speak:--

"My dear fellows! the honor of your grand master was grossly attacked this morning, after our memorable joke with Fario's cart,--attacked by

a vile pedler, and what is more, a Spaniard (oh, Cabrera!); and I have resolved to make the scoundrel feel the weight of my vengeance; always, of course, within the limits we have laid down for our fun. After reflecting about it all day, I have found a trick which is worth putting into execution,--a famous trick, that will drive him crazy. While avenging the insult offered to the Order in my person, we shall be feeding the sacred animals of the Egyptians,--little beasts which are, after all, the creatures of God, and which man unjustly persecutes. Thus we see that good is the child of evil, and evil is the offspring of good; such is the paramount law of the universe! I now order you all, on pain of displeasing your very humble grand master, to procure clandestinely, each one of you, twenty rats, male or female as heaven pleases. Collect your contingent within three days. If you can get more, the surplus will be welcome. Keep the interesting rodents without food; for it is essential that the delightful little beasts be ravenous with hunger. Please observe that I will accept both house-mice and field-mice as rats. If we multiply twenty-two by twenty, we shall have four hundred; four hundred accomplices let loose in the old church of the Capuchins, where Fario has stored all his grain, will consume a not insignificant quantity! But be lively about it! There's no time to lose. Fario is to deliver most of the grain to his customers in a week or so; and I am determined that that Spaniard shall find a terrible deficit. Gentlemen, I have not the merit of this invention," continued Max, observing the signs of general admiration. "Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God that which is God's. My scheme is only a reproduction of Samson's foxes, as related in the Bible. But Samson was an incendiary, and therefore no philanthropist; while we, like the Brahmins, are the protectors of a persecuted race. Mademoiselle Flore Brazier has already set all her mouse-traps, and Kouski, my right-arm, is hunting field-mice. I have spoken."

"I know," said Goddet, "where to find an animal that's worth forty rats, himself alone."

"What's that?"

"A squirrel."

"I offer a little monkey," said one of the younger members, "he'll make himself drunk on wheat."

"Bad, very bad!" exclaimed Max, "it would show who put the beasts there."

"But we might each catch a pigeon some night," said young Beaussier, "taking them from different farms; if we put them through a hole in the roof, they'll attract thousands of others."

"So, then, for the next week, Fario's storehouse is the order of the night," cried Max, smiling at Beaussier. "Recollect; people get up early in Saint-Paterne. Mind, too, that none of you go there without turning the soles of your list shoes backward. Knight Beaussier, the inventor of pigeons, is made director. As for me, I shall take care to leave my imprint on the sacks of wheat. Gentlemen, you are, all of you, appointed to the commissariat of the Army of Rats. If you find a watchman sleeping in the church, you must manage to make him drunk, --and do it cleverly,--so as to get him far away from the scene of the Rodents' Orgy."

"You don't say anything about the Parisians?" questioned Goddet.

"Oh!" exclaimed Max, "I want time to study them. Meantime, I offer my best shotgun--the one the Emperor gave me, a treasure from the manufactory at Versailles--to whoever finds a way to play the Bridaus a trick which shall get them into difficulties with Madame and Monsieur Hochon, so that those worthy old people shall send them off, or they shall be forced to go of their own accord,--without, understand me, injuring the venerable ancestors of my two friends here present, Baruch and Francois."

"All right! I'll think of it," said Goddet, who coveted the gun.

"If the inventor of the trick doesn't care for the gun, he shall have my horse," added Max.

After this night twenty brains were tortured to lay a plot against Agathe and her son, on the basis of Max's programme. But the devil alone, or chance, could really help them to success; for the conditions given made the thing well-nigh impossible.

The next morning Agathe and Joseph came downstairs just before the second breakfast, which took place at ten o'clock. In Monsieur Hochon's household the name of first breakfast was given to a cup of milk and slice of bread and butter which was taken in bed, or when rising. While waiting for Madame Hochon, who notwithstanding her age went minutely through the ceremonies with which the duchesses of Louis XV.'s time performed their toilette, Joseph noticed Jean-Jacques Rouget planted squarely on his feet at the door of his house across the street. He naturally pointed him out to his mother, who was unable to recognize her brother, so little did he look like what he was when she left him.

"That is your brother," said Adolphine, who entered, giving an arm to her grandmother.

"What an idiot he looks like!" exclaimed Joseph.

Agathe clasped her hands, and raised her eyes to heaven.

"What a state they have driven him to! Good God! can that be a man only fifty-seven years old?"

She looked attentively at her brother, and saw Flore Brazier standing directly behind him, with her hair dressed, a pair of snowy shoulders and a dazzling bosom showing through a gauze neckerchief, which was trimmed with lace; she was wearing a dress with a tight-fitting waist, made of grenadine (a silk material then much in fashion), with leg-of-mutton sleeves so-called, fastened at the wrists by handsome bracelets. A gold chain rippled over the crab-girl's bosom as she leaned forward to give Jean-Jacques his black silk cap lest he should take cold. The scene was evidently studied.

"Hey!" cried Joseph, "there's a fine woman, and a rare one! She is made, as they say, to paint. What flesh-tints! Oh, the lovely tones! what surface! what curves! Ah, those shoulders! She's a magnificent caryatide. What a model she would have been for one of Titians' Venuses!"

Adolphine and Madame Hochon thought he was talking Greek; but Agathe signed to them behind his back, as if to say that she was accustomed to such jargon.

"So you think a creature who is depriving you of your property handsome?" said Madame Hochon.

"That doesn't prevent her from being a splendid model!--just plump enough not to spoil the hips and the general contour--"

"My son, you are not in your studio," said Agathe. "Adolphine is here."

"Ah, true! I did wrong. But you must remember that ever since leaving Paris I have seen nothing but ugly women--"

"My dear godmother," said Agathe hastily, "how shall I be able to meet my brother, if that creature is always with him?"

"Bah!" said Joseph. "I'll go and see him myself. I don't think him such an idiot, now I find he has the sense to rejoice his eyes with a Titian's Venus."

"If he were not an idiot," said Monsieur Hochon, who had come in, "he would have married long ago and had children; and then you would have no chance at the property. It is an ill wind that blows no good."

"Your son's idea is very good," said Madame Hochon; "he ought to pay the first visit. He can make his uncle understand that if you call there he must be alone."

"That will affront Mademoiselle Brazier," said old Hochon. "No, no, madame; swallow the pill. If you can't get the whole property, secure a small legacy."

The Hochons were not clever enough to match Max. In the middle of breakfast Kouski brought over a letter from Monsieur Rouget, addressed to his sister, Madame Bridau. Madame Hochon made her husband read it aloud, as follows:--

My dear Sister,--I learn from strangers of your arrival in Issoudun. I can guess the reason which made you prefer the house of Monsieur and Madame Hochon to mine; but if you will come to see me you shall be received as you ought to be. I should certainly pay you the first visit if my health did not compel me just now to keep the house; for which I offer my affectionate regrets. I shall be delighted to see my nephew, whom I invite to dine with me to-morrow,--young men are less sensitive than women about the company. It will give me pleasure if Messrs. Baruch Borniche and Francois Hochon will accompany him.

Your affectionate brother,

J.-J. Rouget.

"Say that we are at breakfast, but that Madame Bridau will send an answer presently, and the invitations are all accepted," said Monsieur

Hochon to the servant.

The old man laid a finger on his lips, to require silence from everybody. When the street-door was shut, Monsieur Hochon, little suspecting the intimacy between his grandsons and Max, threw one of his slyest looks at his wife and Agathe, remarking,--

"He is just as capable of writing that note as I am of giving away twenty-five louis; it is the soldier who is corresponding with us!"

"What does that portend?" asked Madame Hochon. "Well, never mind; we will answer him. As for you, monsieur," she added, turning to Joseph, "you must dine there; but if--"

The old lady was stopped short by a look from her husband. Knowing how warm a friendship she felt for Agathe, old Hochon was in dread lest she should leave some legacy to her goddaughter in case the latter lost the Rouget property. Though fifteen years older than his wife, the miser hoped to inherit her fortune, and to become eventually the sole master of their whole property. That hope was a fixed idea with him. Madame Hochon knew that the best means of obtaining a few concessions from her husband was to threaten him with her will. Monsieur Hochon now took sides with his guests. An enormous fortune was at stake; with a sense of social justice, he wished it to go to the natural heirs, instead of being pillaged by unworthy outsiders. Moreover, the sooner the matter was decided, the sooner he should get rid of his guests. Now that the struggle between the interlopers and the heirs, hitherto existing only in his wife's mind, had become an actual fact, Monsieur Hochon's keen intelligence, lulled to sleep by the monotony of provincial life, was fully roused. Madame Hochon had been agreeably surprised that morning to perceive, from a few affectionate words which the old man had said to her about Agathe, that so able and subtle an auxiliary was on the Bridau side.

Towards midday the brains of Monsieur and Madame Hochon, of Agathe, and Joseph (the latter much amazed at the scrupulous care of the old people in the choice of words), were delivered of the following answer, concocted solely for the benefit of Max and Flore:--

My dear Brother,--If I have stayed away from Issoudun, and kept up no intercourse with any one, not even with you, the fault lies not merely with the strange and false ideas my father conceived about me, but with the joys and sorrows of my life in Paris; for if God made me a happy wife, he has also deeply afflicted me as a mother. You are aware that my son, your nephew Philippe, lies under accusation of a capital offence in consequence of his devotion to the Emperor. Therefore you can hardly be surprised if a widow, compelled to take a humble situation in a lottery-office for a living, should come to seek consolation from those among whom she was born.

The profession adopted by the son who accompanies me is one that requires great talent, many sacrifices, and prolonged studies before any results can be obtained. Glory for an artist precedes fortune; is not that to say that Joseph, though he may bring honor to the family, will still be poor? Your sister, my dear Jean-Jacques, would have borne in silence the penalties of paternal injustice, but you will pardon a mother for reminding you that you have two nephews; one of whom carried the Emperor's orders at the

battle of Montereau and served in the Guard at Waterloo, and is now in prison for his devotion to Napoleon; the other, from his thirteenth year, has been impelled by natural gifts to enter a difficult though glorious career.

I thank you for your letter, my dear brother, with heart-felt warmth, for my own sake, and also for Joseph's, who will certainly accept your invitation. Illness excuses everything, my dear Jean-Jacques, and I shall therefore go to see you in your own house. A sister is always at home with a brother, no matter what may be the life he has adopted.

I embrace you tenderly.

Agathe Rouget

"There's the matter started. Now, when you see him," said Monsieur Hochon to Agathe, "you must speak plainly to him about his nephews."

The letter was carried over by Gritte, who returned ten minutes later to render an account to her masters of all that she had seen and heard, according to a settled provincial custom.

"Since yesterday Madame has had the whole house cleaned up, which she left--"

"Whom do you mean by Madame?" asked old Hochon.

"That's what they call the Rabouilleuse over there," answered Gritte. "She left the salon and all Monsieur Rouget's part of the house in a pitiable state; but since yesterday the rooms have been made to look like what they were before Monsieur Maxence went to live there. You can see your face on the floors. La Védie told me that Kouski went off on horseback at five o'clock this morning, and came back at nine, bringing provisions. It is going to be a grand dinner!--a dinner fit for the archbishop of Bourges! There's a fine bustle in the kitchen, and they are as busy as bees. The old man says, 'I want to do honor to my nephew,' and he pokes his nose into everything. It appears _the Rougets_ are highly flattered by the letter. Madame came and told me so. Oh! she had on such a dress! I never saw anything so handsome in my life. Two diamonds in her ears!--two diamonds that cost, Védie told me, three thousand francs apiece; and such lace! rings on her fingers, and bracelets! you'd think she was a shrine; and a silk dress as fine as an altar-cloth. So then she said to me, 'Monsieur is delighted to find his sister so amiable, and I hope she will permit us to pay her all the attention she deserves. We shall count on her good opinion after the welcome we mean to give her son. Monsieur is very impatient to see his nephew.' Madame had little black satin slippers; and her stockings! my! they were marvels,--flowers in silk and openwork, just like lace, and you could see her rosy little feet through them. Oh! she's in high feather, and she had a lovely little apron in front of her which, Védie says, cost more than two years of our wages put together."

"Well done! We shall have to dress up," said the artist laughing.

"What do you think of all this, Monsieur Hochon?" said the old lady when Gritte had departed.

Madame Hochon made Agathe observe her husband, who was sitting with his head in his hands, his elbows on the arms of his chair, plunged in thought.

"You have to do with a Maitre Bonin!" said the old man at last. "With your ideas, young man," he added, looking at Joseph, "you haven't force enough to struggle with a practised scoundrel like Maxence Gilet. No matter what I say to you, you will commit some folly. But, at any rate, tell me everything you see, and hear, and do to-night. Go, and God be with you! Try to get alone with your uncle. If, in spite of all your genius, you can't manage it, that in itself will throw some light upon their scheme. But if you do get a moment alone with him, out of ear-shot, damn it, you must pull the wool from his eyes as to the situation those two have put him in, and plead your mother's cause."

CHAPTER XII

At four o'clock, Joseph crossed the open space which separated the Rouget house from the Hochon house,—a sort of avenue of weakly lindens, two hundred feet long and of the same width as the rue Grande Narette. When the nephew arrived, Kouski, in polished boots, black cloth trousers, white waistcoat, and black coat, announced him. The table was set in the large hall, and Joseph, who easily distinguished his uncle, went up to him, kissed him, and bowed to Flore and Max.

"We have not seen each other since I came into the world, my dear uncle," said the painter gayly; "but better late than never."

"You are very welcome, my friend," said the old man, looking at his nephew in a dull way.

"Madame," Joseph said to Flore with an artist's vivacity, "this morning I was envying my uncle the pleasure he enjoys in being able to admire you every day."

"Isn't she beautiful?" said the old man, whose dim eyes began to shine.

"Beautiful enough to be the model of a great painter."

"Nephew," said Rouget, whose elbow Flore was nudging, "this is Monsieur Maxence Gilet; a man who served the Emperor, like your brother, in the Imperial Guard."

Joseph rose, and bowed.

"Your brother was in the dragoons, I believe," said Maxence. "I was only a dust-trotter."

"On foot or on horseback," said Flore, "you both of you risked your skins."

Joseph took note of Max quite as much as Max took note of Joseph. Max, who got his clothes from Paris, was dressed as the young dandies of that day dressed themselves. A pair of light-blue cloth trousers, made

with very full plaits, covered his feet so that only the toes and the spurs of his boots were seen. His waist was pinched in by a white waistcoat with chased gold buttons, which was laced behind to serve as a belt. The waistcoat, buttoned to the throat, showed off his broad chest, and a black satin stock obliged him to hold his head high, in soldierly fashion. A handsome gold chain hung from a waistcoat pocket, in which the outline of a flat watch was barely seen. He was twisting a watch-key of the kind called a "criquet," which Breguet had lately invented.

"The fellow is fine-looking," thought Joseph, admiring with a painter's eye the eager face, the air of strength, and the intellectual gray eyes which Max had inherited from his father, the noble. "My uncle must be a fearful bore, and that handsome girl takes her compensations. It is a triangular household; I see that."

At this instant, Baruch and Francois entered.

"Have you been to see the tower of Issoudun?" Flore asked Joseph. "No? then if you would like to take a little walk before dinner, which will not be served for an hour, we will show you the great curiosity of the town."

"Gladly," said the artist, quite incapable of seeing the slightest impropriety in so doing.

While Flore went to put on her bonnet, gloves, and cashmere shawl, Joseph suddenly jumped up, as if an enchanter had touched him with his wand, to look at the pictures.

"Ah! you have pictures, indeed, uncle!" he said, examining the one that had caught his eye.

"Yes," answered the old man. "They came to us from the Descoings, who bought them during the Revolution, when the convents and churches in Berry were dismantled."

Joseph was not listening; he was lost in admiration of the pictures.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "Oh! what painting! that fellow didn't spoil his canvas. Dear, dear! better and better, as it is at Nicolet's--"

"There are seven or eight very large ones up in the garret, which were kept on account of the frames," said Gilet.

"Let me see them!" cried the artist; and Max took him upstairs.

Joseph came down wildly enthusiastic. Max whispered a word to the Rabouilleuse, who took the old man into the embrasure of a window, where Joseph heard her say in a low voice, but still so that he could hear the words:--

"Your nephew is a painter; you don't care for those pictures; be kind, and give them to him."

"It seems," said Jean-Jacques, leaning on Flore's arm to reach the place where Joseph was standing in ecstasy before an Albano, "--it seems that you are a painter--"

"Only a 'rapin,'" said Joseph.

"What may that be?" asked Flore.

"A beginner," replied Joseph.

"Well," continued Jean-Jacques, "if these pictures can be of any use to you in your business, I give them to you,--but without the frames. Oh! the frames are gilt, and besides, they are very funny; I will put--"

"Well done, uncle!" cried Joseph, enchanted; "I'll make you copies of the same dimensions, which you can put into the frames."

"But that will take your time, and you will want canvas and colors," said Flore. "You will have to spend money. Come, Pere Rouget, offer your nephew a hundred francs for each copy; here are twenty-seven pictures, and I think there are eleven very big ones in the garret which ought to cost double,--call the whole four thousand francs. Oh, yes," she went on, turning to Joseph, "your uncle can well afford to pay you four thousand francs for making the copies, since he keeps the frames--but bless me! you'll want frames; and they say frames cost more than pictures; there's more gold on them. Answer, monsieur," she continued, shaking the old man's arm. "Hein? it isn't dear; your nephew will take four thousand francs for new pictures in the place of the old ones. It is," she whispered in his ear, "a very good way to give him four thousand francs; he doesn't look to me very flush--"

"Well, nephew, I will pay you four thousand francs for the copies--"

"No, no!" said the honest Joseph; "four thousand francs and the pictures, that's too much; the pictures, don't you see, are valuable--"

"Accept, simpleton!" said Flore; "he is your uncle, you know."

"Very good, I accept," said Joseph, bewildered by the luck that had befallen him; for he had recognized a Perugino.

The result was that the artist beamed with satisfaction as he went out of the house with the Rabouilleuse on his arm, all of which helped Maxence's plans immensely. Neither Flore, nor Rouget, nor Max, nor indeed any one in Issoudun knew the value of the pictures, and the crafty Max thought he had bought Flore's triumph for a song, as she paraded triumphantly before the eyes of the astonished town, leaning on the arm of her master's nephew, and evidently on the best of terms with him. People flocked to their doors to see the crab-girl's triumph over the family. This astounding event made the sensation on which Max counted; so that when they all returned at five o'clock, nothing was talked of in every household but the cordial understanding between Max and Flore and the nephew of old Rouget. The incident of the pictures and the four thousand francs circulated already. The dinner, at which Lousteau, one of the court judges, and the Mayor of Issoudun were present, was splendid. It was one of those provincial dinners lasting five hours. The most exquisite wines enlivened the conversation. By nine o'clock, at dessert, the painter, seated opposite to his uncle, and between Flore and Max, had fraternized with the soldier, and thought him the best fellow on earth. Joseph returned home at eleven o'clock somewhat tipsy. As to old Rouget, Kouski had carried him to

his bed dead-drunk; he had eaten as though he were an actor from foreign parts, and had soaked up the wine like the sands of the desert.

"Well," said Max when he was alone with Flore, "isn't this better than making faces at them? The Bridaus are well received, they get small presents, and are smothered with attentions, and the end of it is they will sing our praises; they will go away satisfied and leave us in peace. To-morrow morning you and I and Kouski will take down all those pictures and send them over to the painter, so that he shall see them when he wakes up. We will put the frames in the garret, and cover the walls with one of those varnished papers which represent scenes from Telemachus, such as I have seen at Monsieur Mouilleron's."

"Oh, that will be much prettier!" said Flore.

On the morrow, Joseph did not wake up till midday. From his bed he saw the pictures, which had been brought in while he was asleep, leaning one against another on the opposite wall. While he examined them anew, recognizing each masterpiece, studying the manner of each painter, and searching for the signature, his mother had gone to see and thank her brother, urged thereto by old Hochon, who, having heard of the follies the painter had committed the night before, almost despaired of the Bridau cause.

"Your adversaries have the cunning of foxes," he said to Agathe. "In all my days I never saw a man carry things with such a high hand as that soldier; they say war educates young men! Joseph has let himself be fooled. They have shut his mouth with wine, and those miserable pictures, and four thousand francs! Your artist hasn't cost Maxence much!"

The long-headed old man instructed Madame Bridau carefully as to the line of conduct she ought to pursue,--advising her to enter into Maxence's ideas and cajole Flore, so as to set up a sort of intimacy with her, and thus obtain a few moments' interview with Jean-Jacques alone. Madame Bridau was very warmly received by her brother, to whom Flore had taught his lesson. The old man was in bed, quite ill from the excesses of the night before. As Agathe, under the circumstances, could scarcely begin at once to speak of family matters, Max thought it proper and magnanimous to leave the brother and sister alone together. The calculation was a good one. Poor Agathe found her brother so ill that she would not deprive him of Madame Brazier's care.

"Besides," she said to the old bachelor, "I wish to know a person to whom I am grateful for the happiness of my brother."

These words gave evident pleasure to the old man, who rang for Madame Flore. Flore, as we may well believe, was not far off. The female antagonists bowed to each other. The Rabouilleuse showed the most servile attentions and the utmost tenderness to her master; fancied his head was too low, beat up the pillows, and took care of him like a bride of yesterday. The poor creature received it with a rush of feeling.

"We owe you much gratitude, mademoiselle," said Agathe, "for the proofs of attachment you have so long given to my brother, and for the way in which you watch over his happiness."

"That is true, my dear Agathe," said the old man; "she has taught me what happiness is; she is a woman of excellent qualities."

"And therefore, my dear brother, you ought to have recompensed Mademoiselle by making her your wife. Yes! I am too sincere in my religion not to wish to see you obey the precepts of the church. You would each be more tranquil in mind if you were not at variance with morality and the laws. I have come here, dear brother, to ask for help in my affliction; but do not suppose that we wish to make any remonstrance as to the manner in which you may dispose of your property--"

"Madame," said Flore, "we know how unjust your father was to you. Monsieur, here, can tell you," she went on, looking fixedly at her victim, "that the only quarrels we have ever had were about you. I have always told him that he owes you part of the fortune he received from his father, and your father, my benefactor,--for he was my benefactor," she added in a tearful voice; "I shall ever remember him! But your brother, madame, has listened to reason--"

"Yes," said the old man, "when I make my will you shall not be forgotten."

"Don't talk of these things, my dear brother; you do not yet know my nature."

After such a beginning, it is easy to imagine how the visit went on. Rouget invited his sister to dinner on the next day but one.

We may here mention that during these three days the Knights of Idleness captured an immense quantity of rats and mice, which were kept half-famished until they were let loose in the grain one fine night, to the number of four hundred and thirty-six, of which some were breeding mothers. Not content with providing Fario's store-house with these boarders, the Knights made holes in the roof of the old church and put in a dozen pigeons, taken from as many different farms. These four-footed and feathered creatures held high revels,--all the more securely because the watchman was enticed away by a fellow who kept him drunk from morning till night, so that he took no care of his master's property.

Madame Bridau believed, contrary to the opinion of old Hochon, that her brother has as yet made no will; she intended asking him what were his intentions respecting Mademoiselle Brazier, as soon as she could take a walk with him alone,--a hope which Flore and Maxence were always holding out to her, and, of course, always disappointing.

Meantime the Knights were searching for a way to put the Parisians to flight, and finding none that were not impracticable follies.

At the end of a week--half the time the Parisians were to stay in Issoudun--the Bridaus were no farther advanced in their object than when they came.

"Your lawyer does not understand the provinces," said old Hochon to Madame Bridau. "What you have come to do can't be done in two weeks, nor in two years; you ought never to leave your brother, but live here and try to give him some ideas of religion. You cannot countermine the

fortifications of Flore and Maxence without getting a priest to sap them. That is my advice, and it is high time to set about it."

"You certainly have very singular ideas about the clergy," said Madame Hochon to her husband.

"Bah!" exclaimed the old man, "that's just like you pious women."

"God would never bless an enterprise undertaken in a sacrilegious spirit," said Madame Bridau. "Use religion for such a purpose! Why, we should be more criminal than Flore."

This conversation took place at breakfast,--Francois and Baruch listening with all their ears.

"Sacrilege!" exclaimed old Hochon. "If some good abbe, keen as I have known many of them to be, knew what a dilemma you are in, he would not think it sacrilege to bring your brother's lost soul back to God, and call him to repentance for his sins, by forcing him to send away the woman who causes the scandal (with a proper provision, of course), and showing him how to set his conscience at rest by giving a few thousand francs a year to the seminary of the archbishop and leaving his property to the rightful heirs."

The passive obedience which the old miser had always exacted from his children, and now from his grandchildren (who were under his guardianship and for whom he was amassing a small fortune, doing for them, he said, just as he would for himself), prevented Baruch and Francois from showing signs of surprise or disapproval; but they exchanged significant glances expressing how dangerous and fatal such a scheme would be to Max's interest.

"The fact is, madame," said Baruch, "that if you want to secure your brother's property, the only sure and true way will be to stay in Issoudun for the necessary length of time--"

"Mother," said Joseph hastily, "you had better write to Desroches about all this. As for me, I ask nothing more than what my uncle has already given me."

After fully recognizing the great value of his thirty-nine pictures, Joseph had carefully unnailed the canvases and fastened paper over them, gumming it at the edges with ordinary glue; he then laid them one above another in an enormous wooden box, which he sent to Desroches by the carrier's waggon, proposing to write him a letter about it by post. The precious freight had been sent off the night before.

"You are satisfied with a pretty poor bargain," said Monsieur Hochon.

"I can easily get a hundred and fifty thousand francs for those pictures," replied Joseph.

"Painter's nonsense!" exclaimed old Hochon, giving Joseph a peculiar look.

"Mother," said Joseph, "I am going to write to Desroches and explain to him the state of things here. If he advises you to remain, you had better do so. As for your situation, we can always find you another

like it."

"My dear Joseph," said Madame Hochon, following him as he left the table, "I don't know anything about your uncle's pictures, but they ought to be good, judging by the places from which they came. If they are worth only forty thousand francs,--a thousand francs apiece,--tell no one. Though my grandsons are discreet and well-behaved, they might, without intending harm, speak of this windfall; it would be known all over Issoudun; and it is very important that our adversaries should not suspect it. You behave like a child!"

In fact, before evening many persons in Issoudun, including Max, were informed of this estimate, which had the immediate effect of causing a search for all the old paintings which no one had ever cared for, and the appearance of many execrable daubs. Max repented having driven the old man into giving away the pictures, and the rage he felt against the heirs after hearing from Baruch old Hochon's ecclesiastical scheme, was increased by what he termed his own stupidity. The influence of religion upon such a feeble creature as Rouget was the one thing to fear. The news brought by his two comrades decided Maxence Gilet to turn all Rouget's investments into money, and to borrow upon his landed property, so as to buy into the Funds as soon as possible; but he considered it even more important to get rid of the Parisians at once. The genius of the Mascarilles and Scapins out together would hardly have solved the latter problem easily.

Flore, acting by Max's advice, pretended that Monsieur was too feeble to take walks, and that he ought, at his age, to have a carriage. This pretext grew out of the necessity of not exciting inquiry when they went to Bourges, Vierzon, Chateauroux, Vatan, and all the other places where the project of withdrawing investments obliged Max and Flore to betake themselves with Rouget. At the close of the week, all Issoudun was amazed to learn that the old man had gone to Bourges to buy a carriage,--a step which the Knights of Idleness regarded as favorable to the Rabouilleuse. Flore and Max selected a hideous "berlingot," with cracked leather curtains and windows without glass, aged twenty-two years and nine campaigns, sold on the decease of a colonel, the friend of grand-marshal Bertrand, who, during the absence of that faithful companion of the Emperor, was left in charge of the affairs of Berry. This "berlingot," painted bright green, was somewhat like a caleche, though shafts had taken the place of a pole, so that it could be driven with one horse. It belonged to a class of carriages brought into vogue by diminished fortunes, which at that time bore the candid name of "demi-fortune"; at its first introduction it was called a "seringue." The cloth lining of this demi-fortune, sold under the name of caleche, was moth-eaten; its gimps looked like the chevrons of an old Invalid; its rusty joints squeaked,--but it only cost four hundred and fifty francs; and Max bought a good stout mare, trained to harness, from an officer of a regiment then stationed at Bourges. He had the carriage repainted a dark brown, and bought a tolerable harness at a bargain. The whole town of Issoudun was shaken to its centre in expectation of Pere Rouget's equipage; and on the occasion of its first appearance, every household was on its door-step and curious faces were at all the windows.

The second time the old bachelor went out he drove to Bourges, where, to escape the trouble of attending personally to the business, or, if you prefer it, being ordered to do so by Flore, he went before a notary and signed a power of attorney in favor of Maxence Gilet,

enabling him to make all the transfers enumerated in the document. Flore reserved to herself the business of making Monsieur sell out the investments in Issoudun and its immediate neighborhood. The principal notary in Bourges was requested by Rouget to get him a loan of one hundred and forty thousand francs on his landed estate. Nothing was known at Issoudun of these proceedings, which were secretly and cleverly carried out. Maxence, who was a good rider, went with his own horse to Bourges and back between five in the morning and five in the afternoon. Flore never left the old bachelor. Rouget consented without objection to the action Flore dictated to him; but he insisted that the investment in the Funds, producing fifty thousand francs a year, should stand in Flore's name as holding a life-interest only, and in his as owner of the principal. The tenacity the old man displayed in the domestic disputes which this idea created caused Max a good deal of anxiety; he thought he could see the result of reflections inspired by the sight of the natural heirs.

Amid all these movements, which Max concealed from the knowledge of everyone, he forgot the Spaniard and his granary. Fario came back to Issoudun to deliver his corn, after various trips and business manoeuvres undertaken to raise the price of cereals. The morning after his arrival he noticed that the roof the church of the Capuchins was black with pigeons. He cursed himself for having neglected to examine its condition, and hurried over to look into his storehouse, where he found half his grain devoured. Thousands of mice-marks and rat-marks scattered about showed a second cause of ruin. The church was a Noah's-ark. But anger turned the Spaniard white as a bit of cambric when, trying to estimate the extent of the destruction and his consequence losses, he noticed that the grain at the bottom of the heap, near the floor, was sprouting from the effects of water, which Max had managed to introduce by means of tin tubes into the very centre of the pile of wheat. The pigeons and the rats could be explained by animal instinct; but the hand of man was plainly visible in this last sign of malignity.

Fario sat down on the steps of a chapel altar, holding his head between his hands. After half an hour of Spanish reflections, he spied the squirrel, which Goddet could not refrain from giving him as a guest, playing with its tail upon a cross-beam, on the middle of which rested one of the uprights that supported the roof. The Spaniard rose and turned to his watchman with a face that was as calm and cold as an Arab's. He made no complaint, but went home, hired laborers to gather into sacks what remained of the sound grain, and to spread in the sun all that was moist, so as to save as much as possible; then, after estimating that his losses amounted to about three fifths, he attended to filling his orders. But his previous manipulations of the market had raised the price of cereals, and he lost on the three fifths he was obliged to buy to fill his orders; so that his losses amounted really to more than half. The Spaniard, who had no enemies, at once attributed this revenge to Gilet. He was convinced that Maxence and some others were the authors of all the nocturnal mischief, and had in all probability carried his cart up the embankment of the tower, and now intended to amuse themselves by ruining him. It was a matter to him of over three thousand francs,--very nearly the whole capital he had scraped together since the peace. Driven by the desire for vengeance, the man now displayed the cunning and stealthy persistence of a detective to whom a large reward is offered. Hiding at night in different parts of Issoudun, he soon acquired proof of the proceedings of the Knights of Idleness; he saw them all, counted them, watched

their rendezvous, and knew of their suppers at Mere Cognette's; after that he lay in wait to witness one of their deeds, and thus became well informed as to their nocturnal habits.

In spite of Max's journeys and pre-occupations, he had no intention of neglecting his nightly employments,--first, because he did not wish his comrades to suspect the secret of his operations with Pere Rouget's property; and secondly, to keep the Knights well in hand. They were therefore convened for the preparation of a prank which might deserve to be talked of for years to come. Poisoned meat was to be thrown on a given night to every watch-dog in the town and in the environs. Fario overheard them congratulating each other, as they came out from a supper at the Cognettes', on the probable success of the performance, and laughing over the general mourning that would follow this novel massacre of the innocents,--revelling, moreover, in the apprehensions it would excite as to the sinister object of depriving all the households of their guardian watch-dogs.

"It will make people forget Fario's cart," said Goddet.

Fario did not need that speech to confirm his suspicions; besides, his mind was already made up.

After three weeks' stay in Issoudun, Agathe was convinced, and so was Madame Hochon, of the truth of the old miser's observation, that it would take years to destroy the influence which Max and the Rabouilleuse had acquired over her brother. She had made no progress in Jean-Jacques's confidence, and she was never left alone with him. On the other hand, Mademoiselle Brazier triumphed openly over the heirs by taking Agathe to drive in the caleche, sitting beside her on the back seat, while Monsieur Rouget and his nephew occupied the front. Mother and son impatiently awaited an answer to the confidential letter they had written to Desroches. The day before the night on which the dogs were to be poisoned, Joseph, who was nearly bored to death in Issoudun, received two letters: the first from the great painter Schinner,--whose age allowed him a closer intimacy than Joseph could have with Gros, their master,--and the second from Desroches.

Here is the first, postmarked Beaumont-sur-Oise:--

My dear Joseph,--I have just finished the principal panel-paintings at the chateau de Presles for the Comte de Serizy. I have left all the mouldings and the decorative painting; and I have recommended you so strongly to the count, and also to Gridot the architect, that you have nothing to do but pick up your brushes and come at once. Prices are arranged to please you. I am off to Italy with my wife; so you can have Mistigris to help you along. The young scamp has talent, and I put him at your disposal. He is twittering like a sparrow at the very idea of amusing himself at the chateau de Presles.

Adieu, my dear Joseph; if I am still absent, and should send nothing to next year's Salon, you must take my place. Yes, dear Jojo, I know your picture is a masterpiece, but a masterpiece which will rouse a hue and cry about romanticism; you are doomed to lead the life of a devil in holy water. Adieu.

Thy friend,

Schinner

Here follows the letter of Desroches:--

My dear Joseph,--Your Monsieur Hochon strikes me as an old man full of common-sense, and you give me a high idea of his methods; he is perfectly right. My advice, since you ask it, is that your mother should remain at Issoudun with Madame Hochon, paying a small board,--say four hundred francs a year,--to reimburse her hosts for what she eats. Madame Bridau ought, in my opinion, to follow Monsieur Hochon's advice in everything; for your excellent mother will have many scruples in dealing with persons who have no scruple at all, and whose behavior to her is a master-stroke of policy. That Maxence, you are right enough, is dangerous. He is another Philippe, but of a different calibre. The scoundrel makes his vices serve his fortunes, and gets his amusement gratis; whereas your brother's follies are never useful to him. All that you say alarms me, but I could do no good by going to Issoudun. Monsieur Hochon, acting behind your mother, will be more useful to you than I. As for you, you had better come back here; you are good for nothing in a matter which requires continual attention, careful observation, servile civilities, discretion in speech, and a dissimulation of manner and gesture which is wholly against the grain of artists.

If they have told you no will has been made, you may be quite sure they have possessed one for a long time. But wills can be revoked, and as long as your fool of an uncle lives he is no doubt susceptible of being worked upon by remorse and religion. Your inheritance will be the result of a combat between the Church and the Rabouilleuse. There will inevitably come a time when that woman will lose her grip on the old man, and religion will be all-powerful. So long as your uncle makes no gift of the property during his lifetime, and does not change the nature of his estate, all may come right whenever religion gets the upper hand. For this reason, you must beg Monsieur Hochon to keep an eye, as well as he can, on the condition of your uncle's property. It is necessary to know if the real estate is mortgaged, and if so, where and in whose name the proceeds are invested. It is so easy to terrify an old man with fears about his life, in case you find him despoiling his own property for the sake of these interlopers, that almost any heir with a little adroitness could stop the spoliation at its outset. But how should your mother, with her ignorance of the world, her disinterestedness, and her religious ideas, know how to manage such an affair? However, I am not able to throw any light on the matter. All that you have done so far has probably given the alarm, and your adversaries may already have secured themselves--

"That is what I call an opinion in good shape," exclaimed Monsieur Hochon, proud of being himself appreciated by a Parisian lawyer.

"Oh! Desroches is a famous fellow," answered Joseph.

"It would be well to read that letter to the two women," said the old man.

"There it is," said Joseph, giving it to him; "as to me, I want to be off to-morrow; and I am now going to say good-by to my uncle."

"Ah!" said Monsieur Hochon, "I see that Monsieur Desroches tells you in a postscript to burn the letter."

"You can burn it after showing it to my mother," said the painter.

Joseph dressed, crossed the little square, and called on his uncle, who was just finishing breakfast. Max and Flore were at table.

"Don't disturb yourself, my dear uncle; I have only come to say good-by."

"You are going?" said Max, exchanging glances with Flore.

"Yes; I have some work to do at the chateau of Monsieur de Serizy, and I am all the more glad of it because his arm is long enough to do a service to my poor brother in the Chamber of Peers."

"Well, well, go and work"; said old Rouget, with a silly air. Joseph thought him extraordinarily changed within a few days. "Men must work --I am sorry you are going."

"Oh! my mother will be here some time longer," remarked Joseph.

Max made a movement with his lips which the Rabouilleuse observed, and which signified: "They are going to try the plan Baruch warned me of."

"I am very glad I came," said Joseph, "for I have had the pleasure of making your acquaintance and you have enriched my studio--"

"Yes," said Flore, "instead of enlightening your uncle on the value of his pictures, which is now estimated at over one hundred thousand francs, you have packed them off in a hurry to Paris. Poor dear man! he is no better than a baby! We have just been told of a little treasure at Bourges,--what did they call it? a Poussin,--which was in the choir of the cathedral before the Revolution and is now worth, all by itself, thirty thousand francs."

"That was not right of you, my nephew," said Jean-Jacques, at a sign from Max, which Joseph could not see.

"Come now, frankly," said the soldier, laughing, "on your honor, what should you say those pictures were worth? You've made an easy haul out of your uncle! and right enough, too,--uncles are made to be pillaged. Nature deprived me of uncles, but damn it, if I'd had any I should have shown them no mercy."

"Did you know, monsieur," said Flore to Rouget, "what your pictures were worth? How much did you say, Monsieur Joseph?"

"Well," answered the painter, who had grown as red as a beetroot, "--the pictures are certainly worth something."

"They say you estimated them to Monsieur Hochon at one hundred and fifty thousand francs," said Flore; "is that true?"

"Yes," said the painter, with childlike honesty.

"And did you intend," said Flore to the old man, "to give a hundred and fifty thousand francs to your nephew?"

"Never, never!" cried Jean-Jacques, on whom Flore had fixed her eye.

"There is one way to settle all this," said the painter, "and that is to return them to you, uncle."

"No, no, keep them," said the old man.

"I shall send them back to you," said Joseph, wounded by the offensive silence of Max and Flore. "There is something in my brushes which will make my fortune, without owing anything to any one, even an uncle. My respects to you, mademoiselle; good-day, monsieur--"

And Joseph crossed the square in a state of irritation which artists can imagine. The entire Hochon family were in the salon. When they saw Joseph gesticulating and talking to himself, they asked him what was the matter. The painter, who was as open as the day, related before Baruch and Francois the scene that had just taken place; and which, two hours later, thanks to the two young men, was the talk of the whole town, embroidered with various circumstances that were more or less ridiculous. Some persons insisted that the painter was maltreated by Max; others that he had misbehaved to Flore, and that Max had turned him out of doors.

"What a child your son is!" said Hochon to Madame Bridau; "the booby is the dupe of a scene which they have been keeping back for the last day of his visit. Max and the Rabouilleuse have known the value of those pictures for the last two weeks,--ever since he had the folly to tell it before my grandsons, who never rested till they had blurted it out to all the world. Your artist had better have taken himself off without taking leave."

"My son has done right to return the pictures if they are really so valuable," said Agathe.

"If they are worth, as he says, two hundred thousand francs," said old Hochon, "it was folly to put himself in the way of being obliged to return them. You might have had that, at least, out of the property; whereas, as things are going now, you won't get anything. And this scene with Joseph is almost a reason why your brother should refuse to see you again."

CHAPTER XIII

Between midnight and one o'clock, the Knights of Idleness began their gratuitous distribution of comestibles to the dogs of the town. This memorable expedition was not over till three in the morning, the hour at which these reprobates went to sup at Cognette's. At half-past four, in the early dawn, they crept home. Just as Max turned the corner of the rue l'Avenier into the Grande rue, Fario, who stood ambushed in a recess, struck a knife at his heart, drew out the blade, and escaped by the moat towards Vilatte, wiping the blade of his knife on his handkerchief. The Spaniard washed the handkerchief in the Riviere forcee, and returned quietly to his lodgings at Saint-Paterne,

where he got in by a window he had left open, and went to bed: later, he was awakened by his new watchman, who found him fast asleep.

As he fell, Max uttered a fearful cry which no one could mistake. Lousteau-Prangin, son of a judge, a distant relation to the family of the sub-delegate, and young Goddet, who lived at the lower end of the Grande rue, ran at full speed up the street, calling to each other,--

"They are killing Max! Help! help!"

But not a dog barked; and all the town, accustomed to the false alarms of these nightly prowlers, stayed quietly in their beds. When his two comrades reached him, Max had fainted. It was necessary to rouse Monsieur Goddet, the surgeon. Max had recognized Fario; but when he came to his senses, with several persons about him, and felt that his wound was not mortal, it suddenly occurred to him to make capital out of the attack, and he said, in a faint voice,--

"I think I recognized that cursed painter!"

Thereupon Lousteau-Prangin ran off to his father, the judge. Max was carried home by Cognette, young Goddet, and two other persons. Mere Cognette and Monsieur Goddet walked beside the stretcher. Those who carried the wounded man naturally looked across at Monsieur Hochon's door while waiting for Kouski to let them in, and saw Monsieur Hochon's servant sweeping the steps. At the old miser's, as everywhere else in the provinces, the household was early astir. The few words uttered by Max had roused the suspicions of Monsieur Goddet, and he called to the woman,--

"Gritte, is Monsieur Joseph Bridau in bed?"

"Bless me!" she said, "he went out at half-past four. I don't know what ailed him; he walked up and down his room all night."

This simple answer drew forth such exclamations of horror that the woman came over, curious to know what they were carrying to old Rouget's house.

"A precious fellow he is, that painter of yours!" they said to her. And the procession entered the house, leaving Gritte open-mouthed with amazement at the sight of Max in his bloody shirt, stretched half-fainting on a mattress.

Artists will readily guess what ailed Joseph, and kept him restless all night. He imagined the tale the bourgeoisie of Issoudun would tell of him. They would say he had fleeced his uncle; that he was everything but what he had tried to be,--a loyal fellow and an honest artist! Ah! he would have given his great picture to have flown like a swallow to Paris, and thrown his uncle's paintings at Max's nose. To be the one robbed, and to be thought the robber!--what irony! So at the earliest dawn, he had started for the poplar avenue which led to Tivoli, to give free course to his agitation.

While the innocent fellow was vowing, by way of consolation, never to return to Issoudun, Max was preparing a horrible outrage for his sensitive spirit. When Monsieur Goddet had probed the wound and discovered that the knife, turned aside by a little pocket-book, had happily spared Max's life (though making a serious wound), he did as

all doctors, and particularly country surgeons, do; he paved the way for his own credit by "not answering for the patient's life"; and then, after dressing the soldier's wound, and stating the verdict of science to the Rabouilleuse, Jean-Jacques Rouget, Kouski, and the Védie, he left the house. The Rabouilleuse came in tears to her dear Max, while Kouski and the Védie told the assembled crowd that the captain was in a fair way to die. The news brought nearly two hundred persons in groups about the place Saint-Jean and the two Narettes.

"I sha'n't be a month in bed; and I know who struck the blow," whispered Max to Flore. "But we'll profit by it to get rid of the Parisians. I have said I thought I recognized the painter; so pretend that I am expected to die, and try to have Joseph Bridau arrested. Let him taste a prison for a couple of days, and I know well enough the mother will be off in a jiffy for Paris when she gets him out. And then we needn't fear the priests they talk of setting on the old fool."

When Flore Brazier came downstairs, she found the assembled crowd quite prepared to take the impression she meant to give them. She went out with tears in her eyes, and related, sobbing, how the painter, "who had just the face for that sort of thing," had been angry with Max the night before about some pictures he had "wormed out" of Pere Rouget.

"That brigand--for you've only got to look at him to see what he is --thinks that if Max were dead, his uncle would leave him his fortune; as if," she cried, "a brother were not more to him than a nephew! Max is Doctor Rouget's son. The old one told me so before he died!"

"Ah! he meant to do the deed just before he left Issoudun; he chose his time, for he was going away to-day," said one of the Knights of Idleness.

"Max hasn't an enemy in Issoudun," said another.

"Besides, Max recognized the painter," said the Rabouilleuse.

"Where's that cursed Parisian? Let us find him!" they all cried.

"Find him?" was the answer, "why, he left Monsieur Hochon's at daybreak."

A Knight of Idleness ran off at once to Monsieur Mouilleron. The crowd increased; and the tumult became threatening. Excited groups filled up the whole of the Grande-Narette. Others stationed themselves before the church of Saint-Jean. An assemblage gathered at the porte Vilatte, which is at the farther end of the Petite-Narette. Monsieur Lousteau-Prangin and Monsieur Mouilleron, the commissary of police, the lieutenant of gendarmes, and two of his men, had some difficulty in reaching the place Saint-Jean through two hedges of people, whose cries and exclamations could and did prejudice them against the Parisian; who was, it is needless to say, unjustly accused, although, it is true, circumstances told against him.

After a conference between Max and the magistrates, Monsieur Mouilleron sent the commissary of police and a sergeant with one gendarme to examine what, in the language of the ministry of the interior, is called "the theatre of the crime." Then Messieurs

Mouilleron and Lousteau-Prangin, accompanied by the lieutenant of gendarmes crossed over to the Hochon house, which was now guarded by two gendarmes in the garden and two at the front door. The crowd was still increasing. The whole town was surging in the Grande rue.

Gritte had rushed terrified to her master, crying out: "Monsieur, we shall be pillaged! the town is in revolt; Monsieur Maxence Gilet has been assassinated; he is dying! and they say it is Monsieur Joseph who has done it!"

Monsieur Hochon dressed quickly, and came downstairs; but seeing the angry populace, he hastily retreated within the house, and bolted the door. On questioning Gritte, he learned that his guest had left the house at daybreak, after walking the floor all night in great agitation, and had not yet come in. Much alarmed, he went to find Madame Hochon, who was already awakened by the noise, and to whom he told the frightful news which, true or false, was causing almost a riot in Issoudun.

"He is innocent, of course," said Madame Hochon.

"Before his innocence can be proved, the crowd may get in here and pillage us," said Monsieur Hochon, livid with fear, for he had gold in his cellar.

"Where is Agathe?"

"Sound asleep."

"Ah! so much the better," said Madame Hochon. "I wish she may sleep on till the matter is cleared up. Such a shock might kill the poor child."

But Agathe woke up and came down half-dressed; for the evasive answers of Gritte, whom she questioned, had disturbed both her head and heart. She found Madame Hochon, looking very pale, with her eyes full of tears, at one of the windows of the salon beside her husband.

"Courage, my child. God sends us our afflictions," said the old lady. "Joseph is accused--"

"Of what?"

"Of a bad action which he could never have committed," answered Madame Hochon.

Hearing the words, and seeing the lieutenant of gendarmes, who at this moment entered the room accompanied by the two gentlemen, Agathe fainted away.

"There now!" said Monsieur Hochon to his wife and Gritte, "carry off Madame Bridau; women are only in the way at these times. Take her to her room and stay there, both of you. Sit down, gentlemen," continued the old man. "The mistake to which we owe your visit will soon, I hope, be cleared up."

"Even if it should be a mistake," said Monsieur Mouilleron, "the excitement of the crowd is so great, and their minds are so exasperated, that I fear for the safety of the accused. I should like

to get him arrested, and that might satisfy these people."

"Who would ever have believed that Monsieur Maxence Gilet had inspired so much affection in this town?" asked Lousteau-Prangin.

"One of my men says there's a crowd of twelve hundred more just coming in from the faubourg de Rome," said the lieutenant of gendarmes, "and they are threatening death to the assassin."

"Where is your guest?" said Monsieur Mouilleron to Monsieur Hochon.

"He has gone to walk in the country, I believe."

"Call Gritte," said the judge gravely. "I was in hopes he had not left the house. You are aware that the crime was committed not far from here, at daybreak."

While Monsieur Hochon went to find Gritte, the three functionaries looked at each other significantly.

"I never liked that painter's face," said the lieutenant to Monsieur Mouilleron.

"My good woman," said the judge to Gritte, when she appeared, "they say you saw Monsieur Joseph Bridau leave the house this morning?"

"Yes, monsieur," she answered, trembling like a leaf.

"At what hour?"

"Just as I was getting up: he walked about his room all night, and was dressed when I came downstairs."

"Was it daylight?"

"Barely."

"Did he seem excited?"

"Yes, he was all of a twitter."

"Send one of your men for my clerk," said Lousteau-Prangin to the lieutenant, "and tell him to bring warrants with him--"

"Good God! don't be in such a hurry," cried Monsieur Hochon. "The young man's agitation may have been caused by something besides the premeditation of this crime. He meant to return to Paris to-day, to attend to a matter in which Gilet and Mademoiselle Brazier had doubted his honor."

"Yes, the affair of the pictures," said Monsieur Mouilleron. "Those pictures caused a very hot quarrel between them yesterday, and it is a word and a blow with artists, they tell me."

"Who is there in Issoudun who had any object in killing Gilet?" said Lousteau. "No one,--neither a jealous husband nor anybody else; for the fellow has never harmed a soul."

"But what was Monsieur Gilet doing in the streets at four in the

morning?" remarked Monsieur Hochon.

"Now, Monsieur Hochon, you must allow us to manage this affair in our own way," answered Mouilleron; "you don't know all: Gilet recognized your painter."

At this instant a clamor was heard from the other end of the town, growing louder and louder, like the roll of thunder, as it followed the course of the Grande-Narette.

"Here he is! here he is!--he's arrested!"

These words rose distinctly on the ear above the hoarse roar of the populace. Poor Joseph, returning quietly past the mill at Landrole intending to get home in time for breakfast, was spied by the various groups of people, as soon as he reached the place Misere. Happily for him, a couple of gendarmes arrived on a run in time to snatch him from the inhabitants of the faubourg de Rome, who had already pinioned him by the arms and were threatening him with death.

"Give way! give way!" cried the gendarmes, calling to some of their comrades to help them, and putting themselves one before and the other behind Bridau.

"You see, monsieur," said the one who held the painter, "it concerns our skin as well as yours at this moment. Innocent or guilty, we must protect you against the tumult raised by the murder of Captain Gilet. And the crowd is not satisfied with suspecting you; they declare, hard as iron, that you are the murderer. Monsieur Gilet is adored by all the people, who--look at them!--want to take justice into their own hands. Ah! didn't we see them, in 1830, dusting the jackets of the tax-gatherers? whose life isn't a bed of roses, anyway!"

Joseph Bridau grew pale as death, and collected all his strength to walk onward.

"After all," he said, "I am innocent. Go on!"

Poor artist! he was forced to bear his cross. Amid the hooting and insults and threats from the mob, he made the dreadful transit from the place Misere to the place Saint-Jean. The gendarmes were obliged to draw their sabres on the furious mob, which pelted them with stones. One of the officers was wounded, and Joseph received several of the missiles on his legs, and shoulders, and hat.

"Here we are!" said one of the gendarmes, as they entered Monsieur Hochon's hall, "and not without difficulty, lieutenant."

"We must now manage to disperse the crowd; and I see but one way, gentlemen," said the lieutenant to the magistrates. "We must take Monsieur Bridau to the Palais accompanied by all of you; I and my gendarmes will make a circle round you. One can't answer for anything in presence of a furious crowd of six thousand--"

"You are right," said Monsieur Hochon, who was trembling all the while for his gold.

"If that's your only way to protect innocence in Issoudun," said Joseph, "I congratulate you. I came near being stoned--"

"Do you wish your friend's house to be taken by assault and pillaged?" asked the lieutenant. "Could we beat back with our sabres a crowd of people who are pushed from behind by an angry populace that knows nothing of the forms of justice?"

"That will do, gentlemen, let us go; we can come to explanations later," said Joseph, who had recovered his self-possession.

"Give way, friends!" said the lieutenant to the crowd; "_He_ is arrested, and we are taking him to the Palais."

"Respect the law, friends!" said Monsieur Mouilleron.

"Wouldn't you prefer to see him guillotined?" said one of the gendarmes to an angry group.

"Yes, yes, they shall guillotine him!" shouted one madman.

"They are going to guillotine him!" cried the women.

By the time they reached the end of the Grande-Narette the crowd were shouting: "They are taking him to the guillotine!" "They found the knife upon him!" "That's what Parisians are!" "He carries crime on his face!"

Though all Joseph's blood had flown to his head, he walked the distance from the place Saint-Jean to the Palais with remarkable calmness and self-possession. Nevertheless, he was very glad to find himself in the private office of Monsieur Lousteau-Prangin.

"I need hardly tell you, gentlemen, that I am innocent," said Joseph, addressing Monsieur Mouilleron, Monsieur Lousteau-Prangin, and the clerk. "I can only beg you to assist me in proving my innocence. I know nothing of this affair."

When the judge had stated all the suspicious facts which were against him, ending with Max's declaration, Joseph was astounded.

"But," said he, "it was past five o'clock when I left the house. I went up the Grande rue, and at half-past five I was standing looking up at the facade of the parish church of Saint-Cyr. I talked there with the sexton, who came to ring the angelus, and asked him for information about the building, which seems to me fantastic and incomplete. Then I passed through the vegetable-market, where some women had already assembled. From there, crossing the place Misere, I went as far as the mill of Landrole by the Pont aux Anes, where I watched the ducks for five or six minutes, and the miller's men must have noticed me. I saw the women going to wash; they are probably still there. They made a little fun of me, and declared that I was not handsome; I told them it was not all gold that glittered. From there, I followed the long avenue to Tivoli, where I talked with the gardener. Pray have these facts verified; and do not even arrest me, for I give you my word of honor that I will stay quietly in this office till you are convinced of my innocence."

These sensible words, said without the least hesitation, and with the ease of a man who is perfectly sure of his facts, made some impression on the magistrates.

"Yes, we must find all these persons and summon them," said Monsieur Mouilleron; "but it is more than the affair of a day. Make up your mind, therefore, in your own interests, to be imprisoned in the Palais."

"Provided I can write to my mother, so as to reassure her, poor woman --oh! you can read the letter," he added.

This request was too just not to be granted, and Joseph wrote the following letter:--

"Do not be uneasy, dear mother; the mistake of which I am a victim can easily be rectified; I have already given them the means of doing so. To-morrow, or perhaps this evening, I shall be at liberty. I kiss you, and beg you to say to Monsieur and Madame Hochon how grieved I am at this affair; in which, however, I have had no hand,--it is the result of some chance which, as yet, I do not understand."

When the note reached Madame Bridau, she was suffering from a nervous attack, and the potions which Monsieur Goddet was trying to make her swallow were powerless to soothe her. The reading of the letter acted like balm; after a few quiverings, Agathe subsided into the depression which always follows such attacks. Later, when Monsieur Goddet returned to his patient he found her regretting that she had ever quitted Paris.

"Well," said Madame Hochon to Monsieur Goddet, "how is Monsieur Gilet?"

"His wound, though serious, is not mortal," replied the doctor. "With a month's nursing he will be all right. I left him writing to Monsieur Mouilleron to request him to set your son at liberty, madame," he added, turning to Agathe. "Oh! Max is a fine fellow. I told him what a state you were in, and he then remembered a circumstance which goes to prove that the assassin was not your son; the man wore list shoes, whereas it is certain that Monsieur Joseph left the house in his boots--"

"Ah! God forgive him the harm he has done me--"

The fact was, a man had left a note for Max, after dark, written in type-letters, which ran as follows:--

"Captain Gilet ought not to let an innocent man suffer. He who struck the blow promises not to strike again if Monsieur Gilet will have Monsieur Joseph Bridau set at liberty, without naming the man who did it."

After reading this letter and burning it, Max wrote to Monsieur Mouilleron stating the circumstance of the list shoes, as reported by Monsieur Goddet, begging him to set Joseph at liberty, and to come and see him that he might explain the matter more at length.

By the time this letter was received, Monsieur Lousteau-Prangin had verified, by the testimony of the bell-ringer, the market-women and washerwomen, and the miller's men, the truth of Joseph's explanation. Max's letter made his innocence only the more certain, and Monsieur

Mouilleron himself escorted him back to the Hochons'. Joseph was greeted with such overflowing tenderness by his mother that the poor misunderstood son gave thanks to ill-luck--like the husband to the thief, in La Fontaine's fable--for a mishap which brought him such proofs of affection.

"Oh," said Monsieur Mouilleron, with a self-satisfied air, "I knew at once by the way you looked at the angry crowd that you were innocent; but whatever I may have thought, any one who knows Issoudun must also know that the only way to protect you was to make the arrest as we did. Ah! you carried your head high."

"I was thinking of something else," said the artist simply. "An officer in the army told me that he was once stopped in Dalmatia under similar circumstances by an excited populace, in the early morning as he was returning from a walk. This recollection came into my mind, and I looked at all those heads with the idea of painting a revolt of the year 1793. Besides, I kept saying to myself: Blackguard that I am! I have only got my deserts for coming here to look after an inheritance, instead of painting in my studio."

"If you will allow me to offer you a piece of advice," said the procureur du roi, "you will take a carriage to-night, which the postmaster will lend you, and return to Paris by the diligence from Bourges."

"That is my advice also," said Monsieur Hochon, who was burning with a desire for the departure of his guests.

"My most earnest wish is to get away from Issoudun, though I leave my only friend here," said Agathe, kissing Madame Hochon's hand. "When shall I see you again?"

"Ah! my dear, never until we meet above. We have suffered enough here below," she added in a low voice, "for God to take pity upon us."

Shortly after, while Monsieur Mouilleron had gone across the way to talk with Max, Gritte greatly astonished Monsieur and Madame Hochon, Agathe, Joseph, and Adolphine by announcing the visit of Monsieur Rouget. Jean-Jacques came to bid his sister good-by, and to offer her his caleche for the drive to Bourges.

"Ah! your pictures have been a great evil to us," said Agathe.

"Keep them, my sister," said the old man, who did not even now believe in their value.

"Neighbor," remarked Monsieur Hochon, "our best friends, our surest defenders, are our own relations; above all, when they are such as your sister Agathe, and your nephew Joseph."

"Perhaps so," said old Rouget in his dull way.

"We ought all to think of ending our days in a Christian manner," said Madame Hochon.

"Ah! Jean-Jacques," said Agathe, "what a day this has been!"

"Will you accept my carriage?" asked Rouget.

"No, brother," answered Madame Bridau, "I thank you, and wish you health and comfort."

Rouget let his sister and nephew kiss him, and then he went away without manifesting any feeling himself. Baruch, at a hint from his grandfather, had been to see the postmaster. At eleven o'clock that night, the two Parisians, ensconced in a wicker cabriolet drawn by one horse and ridden by a postilion, quitted Issoudun. Adolphine and Madame Hochon parted from them with tears in their eyes; they alone regretted Joseph and Agathe.

"They are gone!" said Francois Hochon, going, with the Rabouilleuse, into Max's bedroom.

"Well done! the trick succeeded," answered Max, who was now tired and feverish.

"But what did you say to old Mouilleron?" asked Francois.

"I told him that I had given my assassin some cause to waylay me; that he was a dangerous man and likely, if I followed up the affair, to kill me like a dog before he could be captured. Consequently, I begged Mouilleron and Prangin to make the most active search ostensibly, but really to let the assassin go in peace, unless they wished to see me a dead man."

"I do hope, Max," said Flore, "that you will be quiet at night for some time to come."

"At any rate, we are delivered from the Parisians!" cried Max. "The fellow who stabbed me had no idea what a service he was doing us."

The next day, the departure of the Parisians was celebrated as a victory of the provinces over Paris by every one in Issoudun, except the more sober and staid inhabitants, who shared the opinions of Monsieur and Madame Hochon. A few of Max's friends spoke very harshly of the Bridaus.

"Do those Parisians fancy we are all idiots," cried one, "and think they have only got to hold their hats and catch legacies?"

"They came to fleece, but they have got shorn themselves," said another; "the nephew is not to the uncle's taste."

"And, if you please, they actually consulted a lawyer in Paris--"

"Ah! had they really a plan?"

"Why, of course,--a plan to get possession of old Rouget. But the Parisians were not clever enough; that lawyer can't crow over us Berrichons!"

"How abominable!"

"That's Paris for you!"

"The Rabouilleuse knew they came to attack her, and she defended herself."

"She did gloriously right!"

To the townspeople at large the Bridaus were Parisians and foreigners; they preferred Max and Flore.

We can imagine the satisfaction with which, after this campaign, Joseph and Agathe re-entered their little lodging in the rue Mazarin. On the journey, the artist recovered his spirits, which had, not unnaturally, been put to flight by his arrest and twenty-four hours' confinement; but he could not cheer up his mother. The Court of Peers was about to begin the trial of the military conspirators, and that was sufficient to keep Agathe from recovering her peace of mind. Philippe's conduct, in spite of the clever defender whom Desroches recommended to him, roused suspicions that were unfavorable to his character. In view of this, Joseph, as soon as he had put Desroches in possession of all that was going on at Issoudun, started with Mistigris for the chateau of the Comte de Serizy, to escape hearing about the trial of the conspirators, which lasted for twenty days.

It is useless to record facts that may be found in contemporaneous histories. Whether it were that he played a part previously agreed upon, or that he was really an informer, Philippe was condemned to five years' surveillance by the police department, and ordered to leave Paris the same day for Autun, the town which the director-general of police selected as the place of his exile for five years. This punishment resembled the detention of prisoners on parole who have a town for a prison. Learning that the Comte de Serizy, one of the peers appointed by the Chamber on the court-martial, was employing Joseph to decorate his chateau at Presles, Desroches begged the minister to grant him an audience, and found Monsieur de Serizy most amiably disposed toward Joseph, with whom he had happened to make personal acquaintance. Desroches explained the financial condition of the two brothers, recalling the services of the father, and the neglect shown to them under the Restoration.

"Such injustice, monseigneur," said the lawyer, "is a lasting cause of irritation and discontent. You knew the father; give the sons a chance, at least, of making a fortune--"

And he drew a succinct picture of the situation of the family affairs at Issoudun, begging the all-powerful vice-president of the Council of State to take steps to induce the director-general of police to change Philippe's place of residence from Autun to Issoudun. He also spoke of Philippe's extreme poverty, and asked a dole of sixty francs a month, which the minister of war ought, he said, for mere shame's sake, to grant to a former lieutenant-colonel.

"I will obtain all you ask of me, for I think it just," replied the count.

Three days later, Desroches, furnished with the necessary authority, fetched Philippe from the prison of the Court of Peers, and took him to his own house, rue de Bethizy. Once there, the young barrister read the miserable vagabond one of those unanswerable lectures in which lawyers rate things at their actual value; using plain terms to qualify the conduct, and to analyze and reduce to their simplest meaning the sentiments and ideas of clients toward whom they feel enough interest to speak plainly. After humbling the Emperor's

staff-officer by reproaching him with his reckless dissipations, his mother's misfortunes, and the death of Madame Descoings, he went on to tell him the state of things at Issoudun, explaining it according to his lights, and probing both the scheme and the character of Maxence Gilet and the Rabouilleuse to their depths. Philippe, who was gifted with a keen comprehension in such directions, listened with much more interest to this part of Desroches's lecture than to what had gone before.

"Under these circumstances," continued the lawyer, "you can repair the injury you have done to your estimable family,--so far at least as it is reparable; for you cannot restore life to the poor mother you have all but killed. But you alone can--"

"What can I do?" asked Philippe.

"I have obtained a change of residence for you from Autun to Issoudun.--"

Philippe's sunken face, which had grown almost sinister in expression and was furrowed with sufferings and privation, instantly lighted up with a flash of joy.

"And, as I was saying, you alone can recover the inheritance of old Rouget's property; half of which may by this time be in the jaws of the wolf named Gilet," replied Desroches. "You now know all the particulars, and it is for you to act accordingly. I suggest no plan; I have no ideas at all as to that; besides, everything will depend on local circumstances. You have to deal with a strong force; that fellow is very astute. The way he attempted to get back the pictures your uncle had given to Joseph, the audacity with which he laid a crime on your poor brother's shoulders, all go to prove that the adversary is capable of everything. Therefore, be prudent; and try to behave properly out of policy, if you can't do so out of decency. Without telling Joseph, whose artist's pride would be up in arms, I have sent the pictures to Monsieur Hochon, telling him to give them up to no one but you. By the way, Maxence Gilet is a brave man."

"So much the better," said Philippe; "I count on his courage for success; a coward would leave Issoudun."

"Well,--think of your mother who has been so devoted to you, and of your brother, whom you made your milch cow."

"Ah! did he tell you that nonsense?" cried Philippe.

"Am I not the friend of the family, and don't I know much more about you than they do?" asked Desroches.

"What do you know?" said Philippe.

"That you betrayed your comrades."

"I!" exclaimed Philippe. "I! a staff-officer of the Emperor! Absurd! Why, we fooled the Chamber of Peers, the lawyers, the government, and the whole of the damned concern. The king's people were completely hood-winked."

"That's all very well, if it was so," answered the lawyer. "But, don't

you see, the Bourbons can't be overthrown; all Europe is backing them; and you ought to try to make your peace with the war department,--you could do that readily enough if you were rich. To get rich, you and your brother, you must lay hold of your uncle. If you will take the trouble to manage an affair which needs great cleverness, patience, and caution, you have enough work before you to occupy your five years."

"No, no," cried Philippe, "I must take the bull by the horns at once. This Maxence may alter the investment of the property and put it in that woman's name; and then all would be lost."

"Monsieur Hochon is a good adviser, and sees clearly; consult him. You have your orders from the police; I have taken your place in the Orleans diligence for half-past seven o'clock this evening. I suppose your trunk is ready; so, now come and dine."

"I own nothing but what I have got on my back," said Philippe, opening his horrible blue overcoat; "but I only need three things, which you must tell Giroudeau, the uncle of Finot, to send me,--my sabre, my sword, and my pistols."

"You need more than that," said the lawyer, shuddering as he looked at his client. "You will receive a quarterly stipend which will clothe you decently."

"Bless me! are you here, Godeschal?" cried Philippe, recognizing in Desroches's head-clerk, as they passed out, the brother of Mariette.

"Yes, I have been with Monsieur Desroches for the last two months."

"And he will stay with me, I hope, till he gets a business of his own," said Desroches.

"How is Mariette?" asked Philippe, moved at his recollections.

"She is getting ready for the opening of the new theatre."

"It would cost her little trouble to get my sentence remitted," said Philippe. "However, as she chooses!"

After a meagre dinner, given by Desroches who boarded his head-clerk, the two lawyers put the political convict in the diligence, and wished him good luck.

CHAPTER XIV

On the second of November, All-Souls' day, Philippe Bridau appeared before the commissary of police at Issoudun, to have the date of his arrival recorded on his papers; and by that functionary's advice he went to lodge in the rue l'Avenier. The news of the arrival of an officer, banished on account of the late military conspiracy, spread rapidly through the town, and caused all the more excitement when it was known that this officer was a brother of the painter who had been falsely accused. Maxence Gilet, by this time entirely recovered from his wound, had completed the difficult operation of turning all Pere Rouget's mortgages into money, and putting the proceeds in one sum, on

the "grand-livre." The loan of one hundred and forty thousand francs obtained by the old man on his landed property had caused a great sensation,--for everything is known in the provinces. Monsieur Hochon, in the Bridau interest, was much put about by this disaster, and questioned old Monsieur Heron, the notary at Bourges, as to the object of it.

"The heirs of old Rouget, if old Rouget changes his mind, ought to make me a votive offering," cried Monsieur Heron. "If it had not been for me, the old fellow would have allowed the fifty thousand francs' income to stand in the name of Maxence Gilet. I told Mademoiselle Brazier that she ought to look to the will only, and not run the risk of a suit for spoliation, seeing what numerous proofs these transfers in every direction would give against them. To gain time, I advised Maxence and his mistress to keep quiet, and let this sudden change in the usual business habits of the old man be forgotten."

"Protect the Bridaus, for they have nothing," said Monsieur Hochon, who in addition to all other reasons, could not forgive Gilet the terrors he had endured when fearing the pillage of his house.

Maxence Gilet and Flore Brazier, now secure against all attack, were very merry over the arrival of another of old Rouget's nephews. They knew they were able, at the first signal of danger, to make the old man sign a power of attorney under which the money in the Funds could be transferred either to Max or Flore. If the will leaving Flore the principal, should be revoked, an income of fifty thousand francs was a very tolerable crumb of comfort,--more particularly after squeezing from the real estate that mortgage of a hundred and forty thousand.

The day after his arrival, Philippe called upon his uncle about ten o'clock in the morning, anxious to present himself in his dilapidated clothing. When the convalescent of the Hopital du Midi, the prisoner of the Luxembourg, entered the room, Flore Brazier felt a shiver pass over her at the repulsive sight. Gilet himself was conscious of that particular disturbance both of mind and body, by which Nature sometimes warns us of a latent enmity, or a coming danger. If there was something indescribably sinister in Philippe's countenance, due to his recent misfortunes, the effect was heightened by his clothes. His forlorn blue great-coat was buttoned in military fashion to the throat, for painful reasons; and yet it showed much that it pretended to conceal. The bottom edges of the trousers, ragged like those of an almshouse beggar, were the sign of abject poverty. The boots left wet splashes on the floor, as the mud oozed from fissures in the soles. The gray hat, which the colonel held in his hand, was horribly greasy round the rim. The malacca cane, from which the polish had long disappeared, must have stood in all the corners of all the cafes in Paris, and poked its worn-out end into many a corruption. Above the velvet collar, rubbed and worn till the frame showed through it, rose a head like that which Frederick Lemaitre makes up for the last act in "The Life of a Gambler,"--where the exhaustion of a man still in the prime of life is betrayed by the metallic, brassy skin, discolored as if with verdigris. Such tints are seen on the faces of debauched gamblers who spend their nights in play: the eyes are sunken in a dusky circle, the lids are reddened rather than red, the brow is menacing from the wreck and ruin it reveals. Philippe's cheeks, which were sunken and wrinkled, showed signs of the illness from which he had scarcely recovered. His head was bald, except for a fringe of hair at the back which ended at the ears. The pure blue of his brilliant

eyes had acquired the cold tones of polished steel.

"Good-morning, uncle," he said, in a hoarse voice. "I am your nephew, Philippe Bridau,--a specimen of how the Bourbons treat a lieutenant-colonel, an old soldier of the old army, one who carried the Emperor's orders at the battle of Montereau. If my coat were to open, I should be put to shame in presence of Mademoiselle. Well, it is the rule of the game! We hoped to begin it again; we tried it, and we have failed! I am to reside in your city by the order of the police, with a full pay of sixty francs a month. So the inhabitants needn't fear that I shall raise the price of provisions! I see you are in good and lovely company."

"Ah! you are my nephew," said Jean-Jacques.

"Invite monsieur le colonel to breakfast with us," said Flore.

"No, I thank you, madame," answered Philippe, "I have breakfasted. Besides, I would cut off my hand sooner than ask a bit of bread or a farthing from my uncle, after the treatment my mother and brother received in this town. It did not seem proper, however, that I should settle here, in Issoudun, without paying my respects to him from time to time. You can do what you like," he added, offering the old man his hand, into which Rouget put his own, which Philippe shook, "--whatever you like. I shall have nothing to say against it; provided the honor of the Bridaus is untouched."

Gilet could look at the lieutenant-colonel as much as he pleased, for Philippe pointedly avoided casting his eyes in his direction. Max, though the blood boiled in his veins, was too well aware of the importance of behaving with political prudence--which occasionally resembles cowardice--to take fire like a young man; he remained, therefore, perfectly calm and cold.

"It wouldn't be right, monsieur," said Flore, "to live on sixty francs a month under the nose of an uncle who has forty thousand francs a year, and who has already behaved so kindly to Captain Gilet, his natural relation, here present--"

"Yes, Philippe," cried the old man, "you must see that!"

On Flore's presentation, Philippe made a half-timid bow to Max.

"Uncle, I have some pictures to return to you; they are now at Monsieur Hochon's. Will you be kind enough to come over some day and identify them."

Saying these last words in a curt tone, lieutenant-colonel Philippe Bridau departed. The tone of his visit made, if possible, a deeper impression on Flore's mind, and also on that of Max, than the shock they had felt at the first sight of that horrible campaigner. As soon as Philippe had slammed the door, with the violence of a disinherited heir, Max and Flore hid behind the window-curtains to watch him as he crossed the road, to the Hochons'.

"What a vagabond!" exclaimed Flore, questioning Max with a glance of her eye.

"Yes; unfortunately there were men like him in the armies of the

Emperor; I sent seven to the shades at Cabrera," answered Gilet.

"I do hope, Max, that you won't pick a quarrel with that fellow," said Mademoiselle Brazier.

"He smelt so of tobacco," complained the old man.

"He was smelling after your money-bags," said Flore, in a peremptory tone. "My advice is that you don't let him into the house again."

"I'd prefer not to," replied Rouget.

"Monsieur," said Gritte, entering the room where the Hochon family were all assembled after breakfast, "here is the Monsieur Bridau you were talking about."

Philippe made his entrance politely, in the midst of a dead silence caused by general curiosity. Madame Hochon shuddered from head to foot as she beheld the author of all Agathe's woes and the murderer of good old Madame Descoings. Adolphine also felt a shock of fear. Baruch and Francois looked at each other in surprise. Old Hochon kept his self-possession, and offered a seat to the son of Madame Bridau.

"I have come, monsieur," said Philippe, "to introduce myself to you; I am forced to consider how I can manage to live here, for five years, on sixty francs a month."

"It can be done," said the octogenarian.

Philippe talked about things in general, with perfect propriety. He mentioned the journalist Lousteau, nephew of the old lady, as a "rara avis," and won her good graces from the moment she heard him say that the name of Lousteau would become celebrated. He did not hesitate to admit his faults of conduct. To a friendly admonition which Madame Hochon addressed to him in a low voice, he replied that he had reflected deeply while in prison, and could promise that in future he would live another life.

On a hint from Philippe, Monsieur Hochon went out with him when he took his leave. When the miser and the soldier reached the boulevard Baron, a place where no one could overhear them, the colonel turned to the old man,--

"Monsieur," he said, "if you will be guided by me, we will never speak together of matters and things, or people either, unless we are walking in the open country, or in places where we cannot be heard. Maitre Desroches has fully explained to me the influence of the gossip of a little town. Therefore I don't wish you to be suspected of advising me; though Desroches has told me to ask for your advice, and I beg you not to be chary of giving it. We have a powerful enemy in our front, and it won't do to neglect any precaution which may help to defeat him. In the first place, therefore, excuse me if I do not call upon you again. A little coldness between us will clear you of all suspicion of influencing my conduct. When I want to consult you, I will pass along the square at half-past nine, just as you are coming out after breakfast. If you see me carry my cane on my shoulder, that will mean that we must meet--accidentally--in some open space which you will point out to me."

"I see you are a prudent man, bent on success," said old Hochon.

"I shall succeed, monsieur. First of all, give me the names of the officers of the old army now living in Issoudun, who have not taken sides with Maxence Gilet; I wish to make their acquaintance."

"Well, there's a captain of the artillery of the Guard, Monsieur Mignonnet, a man about forty years of age, who was brought up at the Ecole Polytechnique, and lives in a quiet way. He is a very honorable man, and openly disapproves of Max, whose conduct he considers unworthy of a true soldier."

"Good!" remarked the lieutenant-colonel.

"There are not many soldiers here of that stripe," resumed Monsieur Hochon; "the only other that I know is an old cavalry captain."

"That is my arm," said Philippe. "Was he in the Guard?"

"Yes," replied Monsieur Hochon. "Carpentier was, in 1810, sergeant-major in the dragoons; then he rose to be sub-lieutenant in the line, and subsequently captain of cavalry."

"Giroudeau may know him," thought Philippe.

"This Monsieur Carpentier took the place in the mayor's office which Gilet threw up; he is a friend of Monsieur Mignonnet."

"How can I earn my living here?"

"They are going, I think, to establish a mutual insurance agency in Issoudun, for the department of the Cher; you might get a place in it, but the pay won't be more than fifty francs a month at the outside."

"That will be enough."

At the end of a week Philippe had a new suit of clothes,--coat, waistcoat, and trousers,--of good blue Elbeuf cloth, bought on credit, to be paid for at so much a month; also new boots, buckskin gloves, and a hat. Giroudeau sent him some linen, with his weapons and a letter for Carpentier, who had formerly served under Giroudeau. The letter secured him Carpentier's good-will, and the latter presented him to his friend Mignonnet as a man of great merit and the highest character. Philippe won the admiration of these worthy officers by confiding to them a few facts about the late conspiracy, which was, as everybody knows, the last attempt of the old army against the Bourbons; for the affair of the sergeants at La Rochelle belongs to another order of ideas.

Warned by the fate of the conspiracy of the 19th of August, 1820, and of those of Berton and Caron, the soldiers of the old army resigned themselves, after their failure in 1822, to await events. This last conspiracy, which grew out of that of the 19th of August, was really a continuation of the latter, carried on by a better element. Like its predecessor, it was absolutely unknown to the royal government. Betrayed once more, the conspirators had the wit to reduce their vast enterprise to the puny proportions of a barrack plot. This conspiracy, in which several regiments of cavalry, infantry, and artillery were concerned, had its centre in the north of France. The strong places

along the frontier were to be captured at a blow. If success had followed, the treaties of 1815 would have been broken by a federation with Belgium, which, by a military compact made among the soldiers, was to withdraw from the Holy Alliance. Two thrones would have been plunged in a moment into the vortex of this sudden cyclone. Instead of this formidable scheme--concerted by strong minds and supported by personages of high rank--being carried out, one small part of it, and that only, was discovered and brought before the Court of Peers. Philippe Bridau consented to screen the leaders, who retired the moment the plot was discovered (either by treachery or accident), and from their seats in both Chambers lent their co-operation to the inquiry only to work for the ultimate success of their purpose at the heart of the government.

To recount this scheme, which, since 1830, the Liberals have openly confessed in all its ramifications, would trench upon the domain of history and involve too long a digression. This glimpse of it is enough to show the double part which Philippe Bridau undertook to play. The former staff-officer of the Emperor was to lead a movement in Paris solely for the purpose of masking the real conspiracy and occupying the mind of the government at its centre, while the great struggle should burst forth at the north. When the latter miscarried before discovery, Philippe was ordered to break all links connecting the two plots, and to allow the secrets of the secondary plot only to become known. For this purpose, his abject misery, to which his state of health and his clothing bore witness, was amply sufficient to undervalue the character of the conspiracy and reduce its proportions in the eyes of the authorities. The role was well suited to the precarious position of the unprincipled gambler. Feeling himself astride of both parties, the crafty Philippe played the saint to the royal government, all the while retaining the good opinion of the men in high places who were of the other party,--determined to cast in his lot at a later day with whichever side he might then find most to his advantage.

These revelations as to the vast bearings of the real conspiracy made Philippe a man of great distinction in the eyes of Carpentier and Mignonnet, to whom his self-devotion seemed a state-craft worthy of the palmy days of the Convention. In a short time the tricky Bonapartist was seen to be on friendly terms with the two officers, and the consideration they enjoyed in the town was, of course, shared by him. He soon obtained, through their recommendation, the situation in the insurance office that old Hochon had suggested, which required only three hours of his day. Mignonnet and Carpentier put him up at their club, where his good manners and bearing, in keeping with the high opinion which the two officers expressed about him, won him a respect often given to external appearances that are only deceitful.

Philippe, whose conduct was carefully considered and planned, had indeed made many reflections while in prison as to the inconveniences of leading a debauched life. He did not need Desroches's lecture to understand the necessity of conciliating the people at Issoudun by decent, sober, and respectable conduct. Delighted to attract Max's ridicule by behaving with the propriety of a Mignonnet, he went further, and endeavored to lull Gilet's suspicions by deceiving him as to his real character. He was bent on being taken for a fool by appearing generous and disinterested; all the while drawing a net around his adversary, and keeping his eye on his uncle's property. His mother and brother, on the contrary, who were really disinterested,

generous, and lofty, had been accused of greed because they had acted with straightforward simplicity. Philippe's covetousness was fully roused by Monsieur Hochon, who gave him all the details of his uncle's property. In the first secret conversation which he held with the octogenarian, they agreed that Philippe must not awaken Max's suspicions; for the game would be lost if Flore and Max were to carry off their victim, though no further than Bourges.

Once a week the colonel dined with Mignonnet; another day with Carpentier; and every Thursday with Monsieur Hochon. At the end of three weeks he received other invitations for the remaining days, so that he had little more than his breakfast to provide. He never spoke of his uncle, nor of the Rabouilleuse, nor of Gilet, unless it were in connection with his mother and his brother's stay in Issoudun. The three officers--the only soldiers in the town who were decorated, and among whom Philippe had the advantage of the rosette, which in the eyes of all provincials gave him a marked superiority--took a habit of walking together every day before dinner, keeping, as the saying is, to themselves. This reserve and tranquillity of demeanor had an excellent effect on Issoudun. All Max's adherents thought Philippe a "sabreur,"--an expression applied by soldiers to the commonest sort of courage in their superior officers, while denying that they possess the requisite qualities of a commander.

"He is a very honorable man," said Goddet the surgeon, to Max.

"Bah!" replied Gilet, "his behavior before the Court of Peers proves him to have been either a dupe or a spy; he is, as you say, ninny enough to have been duped by the great players."

After obtaining his situation, Philippe, who was well informed as to the gossip of the town, wished to conceal certain circumstances of his present life as much as possible from the knowledge of the inhabitants; he therefore went to live in a house at the farther end of the faubourg Saint-Paterne, to which was attached a large garden. Here he was able in the utmost secrecy to fence with Carpentier, who had been a fencing-master in the infantry before entering the cavalry. Philippe soon recovered his early dexterity, and learned other and new secrets from Carpentier, which convinced him that he need not fear the prowess of any adversary. This done, he began openly to practise with pistols, with Mignonnet and Carpentier, declaring it was for amusement, but really intending to make Max believe that, in case of a duel, he should rely on that weapon. Whenever Philippe met Gilet he waited for him to bow first, and answered the salutation by touching the brim of his hat cavalierly, as an officer acknowledges the salute of a private. Maxence Gilet gave no sign of impatience or displeasure; he never uttered a single word about Bridau at the Cognettes' where he still gave suppers; although, since Fario's attack, the pranks of the Order of Idleness were temporarily suspended.

After a while, however, the contempt shown by Lieutenant-colonel Bridau for the former cavalry captain, Gilet, was a settled fact, which certain Knights of Idleness, who were less bound to Max than Francois, Baruch, and three or four others, discussed among themselves. They were much surprised to see the violent and fiery Max behave with such discretion. No one in Issoudun, not even Potel or Renard, dared broach so delicate a subject with him. Potel, somewhat disturbed by this open misunderstanding between two heroes of the Imperial Guard, suggested that Max might be laying a net for the

colonel; he asserted that some new scheme might be looked for from the man who had got rid of the mother and one brother by making use of Fario's attack upon him, the particulars of which were now no longer a mystery. Monsieur Hochon had taken care to reveal the truth of Max's atrocious accusation to the best people of the town. Thus it happened that in talking over the situation of the lieutenant-colonel in relation to Max, and in trying to guess what might spring from their antagonism, the whole town regarded the two men, from the start, as adversaries.

Philippe, who had carefully investigated all the circumstances of his brother's arrest and the antecedents of Gilet and the Rabouilleuse, was finally brought into rather close relations with Fario, who lived near him. After studying the Spaniard, Philippe thought he might trust a man of that quality. The two found their hatred so firm a bond of union, that Fario put himself at Philippe's disposal, and related all that he knew about the Knights of Idleness. Philippe promised, in case he succeeded in obtaining over his uncle the power now exercised by Gilet, to indemnify Fario for his losses; this bait made the Spaniard his henchman. Maxence was now face to face with a dangerous foe; he had, as they say in those parts, some one to handle. Roused by much gossip and various rumors, the town of Issoudun expected a mortal combat between the two men, who, we must remark, mutually despised each other.

One morning, toward the end of November, Philippe met Monsieur Hochon about twelve o'clock, in the long avenue of Frapesle, and said to him:--

"I have discovered that your grandsons Baruch and Francois are the intimate friends of Maxence Gilet. The rascals are mixed up in all the pranks that are played about this town at night. It was through them that Maxence knew what was said in your house when my mother and brother were staying there."

"How did you get proof of such a monstrous thing?"

"I overheard their conversation one night as they were leaving a drinking-shop. Your grandsons both owe Max more than three thousand francs. The scoundrel told the lads to try and find out our intentions; he reminded them that you had once thought of getting round my uncle by priestcraft, and declared that nobody but you could guide me; for he thinks, fortunately, that I am nothing more than a 'sabreur.'"

"My grandsons! is it possible?"

"Watch them," said Philippe. "You will see them coming home along the place Saint-Jean, at two or three o'clock in the morning, as tipsy as champagne-corks, and in company with Gilet--"

"That's why the scamps keep so sober at home!" cried Monsieur Hochon.

"Fario has told me all about their nocturnal proceedings," resumed Philippe; "without him, I should never have suspected them. My uncle is held down under an absolute thralldom, if I may judge by certain things which the Spaniard has heard Max say to your boys. I suspect Max and the Rabouilleuse of a scheme to make sure of the fifty thousand francs' income from the Funds, and then, after pulling that

feather from their pigeon's wing, to run away, I don't know where, and get married. It is high time to know what is going on under my uncle's roof, but I don't see how to set about it."

"I will think of it," said the old man.

They separated, for several persons were now approaching.

Never, at any time in his life, did Jean-Jacques suffer as he had done since the first visit of his nephew Philippe. Flore was terrified by the presentiment of some evil that threatened Max. Weary of her master, and fearing that he might live to be very old, since he was able to bear up under their criminal practices, she formed the very simple plan of leaving Issoudun and being married to Maxence in Paris, after obtaining from Jean-Jacques the transfer of the income in the Funds. The old bachelor, guided, not by any justice to his family, nor by personal avarice, but solely by his passion, steadily refused to make the transfer, on the ground that Flore was to be his sole heir. The unhappy creature knew to what extent Flore loved Max, and he believed he would be abandoned the moment she was made rich enough to marry. When Flore, after employing the tenderest cajoleries, was unable to succeed, she tried rigor; she no longer spoke to her master; Védie was sent to wait upon him, and found him in the morning with his eyes swollen and red with weeping. For a week or more, poor Rouget had breakfasted alone, and Heaven knows on what food!

The day after Philippe's conversation with Monsieur Hochon, he determined to pay a second visit to his uncle, whom he found much changed. Flore stayed beside the old man, speaking tenderly and looking at him with much affection; she played the comedy so well that Philippe guessed some immediate danger, merely from the solicitude thus displayed in his presence. Gilet, whose policy it was to avoid all collision with Philippe, did not appear. After watching his uncle and Flore for a time with a discerning eye, the colonel judged that the time had come to strike his grand blow.

"Adieu, my dear uncle," he said, rising as if to leave the house.

"Oh! don't go yet," cried the old man, who was comforted by Flore's false tenderness. "Dine with us, Philippe."

"Yes, if you will come and take a walk with me."

"Monsieur is very feeble," interposed Mademoiselle Brazier; "just now he was unwilling even to go out in the carriage," she added, turning upon the old man the fixed look with which keepers quell a maniac.

Philippe took Flore by the arm, compelling her to look at him, and looking at her in return as fixedly as she had just looked at her victim.

"Tell me, mademoiselle," he said, "is it a fact that my uncle is not free to take a walk with me?"

"Why, yes he is, monsieur," replied Flore, who was unable to make any other answer.

"Very well. Come, uncle. Mademoiselle, give him his hat and cane."

"But--he never goes out without me. Do you, monsieur?"

"Yes, Philippe, yes; I always want her--"

"It would be better to take the carriage," said Flore.

"Yes, let us take the carriage," cried the old man, in his anxiety to make his two tyrants agree.

"Uncle, you will come with me, alone, and on foot, or I shall never return here; I shall know that the town of Issoudun tells the truth, when it declares you are under the dominion of Mademoiselle Flore Brazier. That my uncle should love you, is all very well," he resumed, holding Flore with a fixed eye; "that you should not love my uncle is also on the cards; but when it comes to your making him unhappy--halt! If people want to get hold of an inheritance, they must earn it. Are you coming, uncle?"

Philippe saw the eyes of the poor imbecile roving from himself to Flore, in painful hesitation.

"Ha! that's how it is, is it?" resumed the lieutenant-colonel. "Well, adieu, uncle. Mademoiselle, I kiss your hands."

He turned quickly when he reached the door, and caught Flore in the act of making a menacing gesture at his uncle.

"Uncle," he said, "if you wish to go with me, I will meet you at your door in ten minutes: I am now going to see Monsieur Hochon. If you and I do not take that walk, I shall take upon myself to make some others walk."

So saying, he went away, and crossed the place Saint-Jean to the Hochons.

Every one can imagine the scenes which the revelations made by Philippe to Monsieur Hochon had brought about within that family. At nine o'clock, old Monsieur Heron, the notary, presented himself with a bundle of papers, and found a fire in the hall which the old miser, contrary to all his habits, had ordered to be lighted. Madame Hochon, already dressed at this unusual hour, was sitting in her armchair at the corner of the fireplace. The two grandsons, warned the night before by Adolphine that a storm was gathering about their heads, had been ordered to stay in the house. Summoned now by Gritte, they were alarmed at the formal preparations of their grandparents, whose coldness and anger they had been made to feel in the air for the last twenty-four hours.

"Don't rise for them," said their grandfather to Monsieur Heron; "you see before you two miscreants, unworthy of pardon."

"Oh, grandpapa!" said Francois.

"Be silent!" said the old man sternly. "I know of your nocturnal life and your intimacy with Monsieur Maxence Gilet. But you will meet him no more at Mere Cognette's at one in the morning; for you will not leave this house, either of you, until you go to your respective destinations. Ha! it was you who ruined Fario, was it? you, who have narrowly escaped the police-courts-- Hold your tongue!" he said,

seeing that Baruch was about to speak. "You both owe money to Monsieur Maxence Gilet; who, for six years, has paid for your debauchery. Listen, both of you, to my guardianship accounts; after that, I shall have more to say. You will see, after these papers are read, whether you can still trifle with me,--still trifle with family laws by betraying the secrets of this house, and reporting to a Monsieur Maxence Gilet what is said and what is done here. For three thousand francs, you became spies; for ten thousand, you would, no doubt, become assassins. You did almost kill Madame Bridau; for Monsieur Gilet knew very well it was Fario who stabbed him when he threw the crime upon my guest, Monsieur Joseph Bridau. If that jail-bird did so wicked an act, it was because you told him what Madame Bridau meant to do. You, my grandsons, the spies of such a man! You, house-breakers and marauders! Don't you know that your worthy leader killed a poor young woman, in 1806? I will not have assassins and thieves in my family. Pack your things; you shall go hang elsewhere!"

The two young men turned white and stiff as plaster casts.

"Read on, Monsieur Heron," said Hochon.

The old notary read the guardianship accounts; from which it appeared that the net fortune of the two Borniche children amounted to seventy thousand francs, a sum derived from the dowry of their mother: but Monsieur Hochon had lent his daughter various large sums, and was now, as creditor, the owner of a part of the property of his Borniche grandchildren. The portion coming to Baruch amounted to only twenty thousand francs.

"Now you are rich," said the old man, "take your money, and go. I remain master of my own property and that of Madame Hochon, who in this matter shares all my intentions, and I shall give it to whom I choose; namely, our dear Adolphine. Yes, we can marry her if we please to the son of a peer of France, for she will be an heiress."

"A noble fortune!" said Monsieur Heron.

"Monsieur Maxence Gilet will make up this loss to you," said Madame Hochon.

"Let my hard-saved money go to a scapegrace like you? no, indeed!" cried Monsieur Hochon.

"Forgive me!" stammered Baruch.

"Forgive, and I won't do it again," sneered the old man, imitating a child's voice. "If I were to forgive you, and let you out of this house, you would go and tell Monsieur Maxence what has happened, and warn him to be on his guard. No, no, my little men. I shall keep my eye on you, and I have means of knowing what you do. As you behave, so shall I behave to you. It will be by a long course of good conduct, not that of a day or a month, but of years, that I shall judge you. I am strong on my legs, my eyes are good, my health is sound; I hope to live long enough to see what road you take. Your first move will be to Paris, where you will study banking under Messieurs Mongenod and Sons. Ill-luck to you if you don't walk straight; you will be watched. Your property is in the hand of Messieurs Mongenod; here is a cheque for the amount. Now then, release me as guardian, and sign the accounts, and also this receipt," he added, taking the papers from Monsieur

Heron and handing them to Baruch.

"As for you, Francois Hochon, you owe me money instead of having any to receive," said the old man, looking at his other grandson.

"Monsieur Heron, read his account; it is all clear--perfectly clear."

The reading was done in the midst of perfect stillness.

"You will have six hundred francs a year, and with that you will go to Poitiers and study law," said the grandfather, when the notary had finished. "I had a fine life in prospect for you; but now, you must earn your living as a lawyer. Ah! my young rascals, you have deceived me for six years; you now know it has taken me but one hour to get even with you: I have seven-leagued boots."

Just as old Monsieur Heron was preparing to leave with the signed papers, Gritte announced Colonel Bridau. Madame Hochon left the room, taking her grandsons with her, that she might, as old Hochon said, confess them privately and find out what effect this scene had produced upon them.

Philippe and the old man stood in the embrasure of a window and spoke in low tones.

"I have been reflecting on the state of your affairs over there," said Monsieur Hochon pointing to the Rouget house. "I have just had a talk with Monsieur Heron. The security for the fifty thousand francs a year from the property in the Funds cannot be sold unless by the owner himself or some one with a power of attorney from him. Now, since your arrival here, your uncle has not signed any such power before any notary; and, as he has not left Issoudun, he can't have signed one elsewhere. If he attempts to give a power of attorney here, we shall know it instantly; if he goes away to give one, we shall also know it, for it will have to be registered, and that excellent Heron has means of finding it out. Therefore, if Rouget leaves Issoudun, have him followed, learn where he goes, and we will find a way to discover what he does."

"The power of attorney has not been given," said Philippe; "they are trying to get it; but--they--will--not--suc--ceed--" added the vagabond, whose eye just then caught sight of his uncle on the steps of the opposite house: he pointed him out to Monsieur Hochon, and related succinctly the particulars, at once so petty and so important, of his visit.

"Maxence is afraid of me, but he can't evade me. Mignonnet says that all the officers of the old army who are in Issoudun give a yearly banquet on the anniversary of the Emperor's coronation; so Maxence Gilet and I are sure to meet in a few days."

"If he gets a power of attorney by the morning of the first of December," said Hochon, "he might take the mail-post for Paris, and give up the banquet."

"Very good. The first thing is, then, to get possession of my uncle; I've an eye that cows a fool," said Philippe, giving Monsieur Hochon an atrocious glance that made the old man tremble.

"If they let him walk with you, Maxence must believe he has found some

means to win the game," remarked the old miser.

"Oh! Fario is on the watch," said Philippe, "and he is not alone. That Spaniard has discovered one of my old soldiers in the neighborhood of Vatan, a man I once did some service to. Without any one's suspecting it, Benjamin Bourdet is under Fario's orders, who has lent him a horse to get about with."

"If you kill that monster who has corrupted my grandsons, I shall say you have done a good deed."

"Thanks to me, the town of Issoudun now knows what Monsieur Maxence Gilet has been doing at night for the last six years," replied Philippe; "and the cackle, as you call it here, is now started on him. Morally his day is over."

The moment Philippe left his uncle's house Flore went to Max's room to tell him every particular of the nephew's bold visit.

"What's to be done?" she asked.

"Before trying the last means,--which will be to fight that big reprobate," replied Maxence, "--we must play double or quits, and try our grand stroke. Let the old idiot go with his nephew."

"But that big brute won't mince matters," remonstrated Flore; "he'll call things by their right names."

"Listen to me," said Maxence in a harsh voice. "Do you think I've not kept my ears open, and reflected about how we stand? Send to Pere Cogne for a horse and a char-a-banc, and say we want them instantly: they must be here in five minutes. Pack all your belongings, take Védie, and go to Vatan. Settle yourself there as if you mean to stay; carry off the twenty thousand francs in gold which the old fellow has got in his drawer. If I bring him to you in Vatan, you are to refuse to come back here unless he signs the power of attorney. As soon as we get it I'll slip off to Paris, while you're returning to Issoudun. When Jean-Jacques gets back from his walk and finds you gone, he'll go beside himself, and want to follow you. Well! when he does, I'll give him a talking to."

CHAPTER XV

While the foregoing plot was progressing, Philippe was walking arm in arm with his uncle along the boulevard Baron.

"The two great tacticians are coming to close quarters at last," thought Monsieur Hochon as he watched the colonel marching off with his uncle; "I am curious to see the end of the game, and what becomes of the stake of ninety thousand francs a year."

"My dear uncle," said Philippe, whose phraseology had a flavor of his affinities in Paris, "you love this girl, and you are devilishly right. She is damnably handsome! Instead of billing and cooing she makes you trot like a valet; well, that's all simple enough; but she wants to see you six feet underground, so that she may marry Max, whom she adores."

"I know that, Philippe, but I love her all the same."

"Well, I have sworn by the soul of my mother, who is your own sister," continued Philippe, "to make your Rabouilleuse as supple as my glove, and the same as she was before that scoundrel, who is unworthy to have served in the Imperial Guard, ever came to quarter himself in your house."

"Ah! if you could do that!--" said the old man.

"It is very easy," answered Philippe, cutting his uncle short. "I'll kill Max as I would a dog; but--on one condition," added the old campaigner.

"What is that?" said Rouget, looking at his nephew in a stupid way.

"Don't sign that power of attorney which they want of you before the third of December; put them off till then. Your torturers only want it to enable them to sell the fifty thousand a year you have in the Funds, so that they may run off to Paris and pay for their wedding festivities out of your millions."

"I am afraid so," replied Rouget.

"Well, whatever they may say or do to you, put off giving that power of attorney until next week."

"Yes; but when Flore talks to me she stirs my very soul, till I don't know what I do. I give you my word, when she looks at me in a certain way, her blue eyes seem like paradise, and I am no longer master of myself,--especially when for some days she had been harsh to me."

"Well, whether she is sweet or sour, don't do more than promise to sign the paper, and let me know the night before you are going to do it. That will answer. Maxence shall not be your proxy unless he first kills me. If I kill him, you must agree to take me in his place, and I'll undertake to break in that handsome girl and keep her at your beck and call. Yes, Flore shall love you, and if she doesn't satisfy you--thunder! I'll thrash her."

"Oh! I never could allow that. A blow struck at Flore would break my heart."

"But it is the only way to govern women and horses. A man makes himself feared, or loved, or respected. Now that is what I wanted to whisper in your ear--Good-morning, gentlemen," he said to Mignonnet and Carpentier, who came up at the moment; "I am taking my uncle for a walk, as you see, and trying to improve him; for we are in an age when children are obliged to educate their grandparents."

They all bowed to each other.

"You behold in my dear uncle the effects of an unhappy passion. Those two want to strip him of his fortune and leave him in the lurch--you know to whom I refer? He sees the plot; but he hasn't the courage to give up his SUGAR-PLUM for a few days so as to baffle it."

Philippe briefly explained his uncle's position.

"Gentlemen," he remarked, in conclusion, "you see there are no two ways of saving him: either Colonel Bridau must kill Captain Gilet, or Captain Gilet must kill Colonel Bridau. We celebrate the Emperor's coronation on the day after to-morrow; I rely upon you to arrange the seats at the banquet so that I shall sit opposite to Gilet. You will do me the honor, I hope, of being my seconds."

"We will appoint you to preside, and sit ourselves on either side of you. Max, as vice-president, will of course sit opposite," said Mignonnet.

"Oh! the scoundrel will have Potel and Renard with him," said Carpentier. "In spite of all that Issoudun now knows and says of his midnight maraudings, those two worthy officers, who have already been his seconds, remain faithful to him."

"You see how it all maps out, uncle," said Philippe. "Therefore, sign no paper before the third of December; the next day you shall be free, happy, and beloved by Flore, without having to coax for it."

"You don't know him, Philippe," said the terrified old man. "Maxence has killed nine men in duels."

"Yes; but ninety thousand francs a year didn't depend on it," answered Philippe.

"A bad conscience shakes the hand," remarked Mignonnet sententiously.

"In a few days from now," resumed Philippe, "you and the Rabouilleuse will be living together as sweet as honey,--that is, after she gets through mourning. At first she'll twist like a worm, and yelp, and weep; but never mind, let the water run!"

The two soldiers approved of Philippe's arguments, and tried to hearten up old Rouget, with whom they walked about for nearly two hours. At last Philippe took his uncle home, saying as they parted:--

"Don't take any steps without me. I know women. I have paid for one, who cost me far more than Flore can ever cost you. But she taught me how to behave to the fair sex for the rest of my days. Women are bad children; they are inferior animals to men; we must make them fear us; the worst condition in the world is to be governed by such brutes."

It was about half-past two in the afternoon when the old man got home. Kouski opened the door in tears,--that is, by Max's orders, he gave signs of weeping.

"Oh! Monsieur, Madame has gone away, and taken Védie with her!"

"Gone--a--way!" said the old man in a strangled voice.

The blow was so violent that Rouget sat down on the stairs, unable to stand. A moment after, he rose, looked about the hall, into the kitchen, went up to his own room, searched all the chambers, and returned to the salon, where he threw himself into a chair, and burst into tears.

"Where is she?" he sobbed. "Oh! where is she? where is Max?"

"I don't know," answered Kouski. "The captain went out without telling me."

Gilet thought it politic to be seen sauntering about the town. By leaving the old man alone with his despair, he knew he should make him feel his desertion the more keenly, and reduce him to docility. To keep Philippe from assisting his uncle at this crisis, he had given Kouski strict orders not to open the door to any one. Flore away, the miserable old man grew frantic, and the situation of things approached a crisis. During his walk through the town, Maxence Gilet was avoided by many persons who a day or two earlier would have hastened to shake hands with him. A general reaction had set in against him. The deeds of the Knights of Idleness were ringing on every tongue. The tale of Joseph Bridau's arrest, now cleared up, disgraced Max in the eyes of all; and his life and conduct received in one day their just award. Gilet met Captain Potel, who was looking for him, and seemed almost beside himself.

"What's the matter with you, Potel?"

"My dear fellow, the Imperial Guard is being black-guarded all over the town! These civilians are crying you down! and it goes to the bottom of my heart."

"What are they complaining of?" asked Max.

"Of what you do at night."

"As if we couldn't amuse ourselves a little!"

"But that isn't all," said Potel.

Potel belonged to the same class as the officer who replied to the burgomasters: "Eh! your town will be paid for, if we do burn it!" So he was very little troubled about the deeds of the Order of Idleness.

"What more?" inquired Gilet.

"The Guard is against the Guard. It is that that breaks my heart. Bridau has set all these bourgeois on you. The Guard against the Guard! no, it ought not to be! You can't back down, Max; you must meet Bridau. I had a great mind to pick a quarrel with the low scoundrel myself and send him to the shades; I wish I had, and then the bourgeois wouldn't have seen the spectacle of the Guard against the Guard. In war times, I don't say anything against it. Two heroes of the Guard may quarrel, and fight,--but at least there are no civilians to look on and sneer. No, I say that big villain never served in the Guard. A guardsman would never behave as he does to another guardsman, under the very eyes of the bourgeois; impossible! Ah! it's all wrong; the Guard is disgraced--and here, at Issoudun! where it was once so honored."

"Come, Potel, don't worry yourself," answered Max; "even if you do not see me at the banquet--"

"What! do you mean that you won't be there the day after to-morrow?" cried Potel, interrupting his friend. "Do you wish to be called a coward? and have it said you are running away from Bridau? No, no! The

unmounted grenadiers of the Guard can not draw back before the dragoons of the Guard. Arrange your business in some other way and be there!"

"One more to send to the shades!" said Max. "Well, I think I can manage my business so as to get there--For," he thought to himself, "that power of attorney ought not to be in my name; as old Heron says, it would look too much like theft."

This lion, tangled in the meshes Philippe Bridau was weaving for him, muttered between his teeth as he went along; he avoided the looks of those he met and returned home by the boulevard Vilatte, still talking to himself.

"I will have that money before I fight," he said. "If I die, it shall not go to Philippe. I must put it in Flore's name. She will follow my instructions, and go straight to Paris. Once there, she can marry, if she chooses, the son of some marshal of France who has been sent to the right-about. I'll have that power of attorney made in Baruch's name, and he'll transfer the property by my order."

Max, to do him justice, was never more cool and calm in appearance than when his blood and his ideas were boiling. No man ever united in a higher degree the qualities which make a great general. If his career had not been cut short by his captivity at Cabrera, the Emperor would certainly have found him one of those men who are necessary to the success of vast enterprises. When he entered the room where the hapless victim of all these comic and tragic scenes was still weeping, Max asked the meaning of such distress; seemed surprised, pretended that he knew nothing, and heard, with well-acted amazement, of Flore's departure. He questioned Kouski, to obtain some light on the object of this inexplicable journey.

"Madame said like this," Kouski replied, "--that I was to tell monsieur she had taken twenty thousand francs in gold from his drawer, thinking that monsieur wouldn't refuse her that amount as wages for the last twenty-two years."

"Wages?" exclaimed Rouget.

"Yes," replied Kouski. "Ah! I shall never come back," she said to Védie as she drove away. "Poor Védie, who is so attached to monsieur, remonstrated with madame. 'No, no,' she answered, 'he has no affection for me; he lets his nephew treat me like the lowest of the low'; and she wept--oh! bitterly."

"Eh! what do I care for Philippe?" cried the old man, whom Max was watching. "Where is Flore? how can we find out where she is?"

"Philippe, whose advice you follow, will help you," said Max coldly.

"Philippe?" said the old man, "what has he to do with the poor child? There is no one but you, my good Max, who can find Flore. She will follow you--you could bring her back to me--"

"I don't wish to oppose Monsieur Bridau," observed Max.

"As for that," cried Rouget, "if that hinders you, he told me he meant to kill you."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gilet, laughing, "we will see about it!"

"My friend," said the old man, "find Flore, and I will do all she wants of me."

"Some one must have seen her as she passed through the town," said Maxence to Kouski. "Serve dinner; put everything on the table, and then go and make inquiries from place to place. Let us know, by dessert, which road Mademoiselle Brazier has taken."

This order quieted for a time the poor creature, who was moaning like a child that has lost its nurse. At this moment Rouget, who hated Max, thought his tormentor an angel. A passion like that of this miserable old man for Flore is astonishingly like the emotions of childhood. At six o'clock, the Pole, who had merely taken a walk, returned to announce that Flore had driven towards Vatan.

"Madame is going back to her own people, that's plain," said Kouski.

"Would you like to go to Vatan to-night?" said Max. "The road is bad, but Kouski knows how to drive, and you'll make your peace better to-night than to-morrow morning."

"Let us go!" cried Rouget.

"Put the horse in quietly," said Max to Kouski; "manage, if you can, that the town shall not know of this nonsense, for Monsieur Rouget's sake. Saddle my horse," he added in a whisper. "I will ride on ahead of you."

Monsieur Hochon had already notified Philippe of Flore's departure; and the colonel rose from Monsieur Mignonnet's dinner-table to rush to the place Saint-Jean; for he at once guessed the meaning of this clever strategy. When Philippe presented himself at his uncle's house, Kouski answered through a window that Monsieur Rouget was unable to see any one.

"Fario," said Philippe to the Spaniard, who was stationed in the Grande-Narette, "go and tell Benjamin to mount his horse; it is all-important that I shall know what Gilet does with my uncle."

"They are now putting the horse into the caleche," said Fario, who had been watching the Rouget stable.

"If they go towards Vatan," answered Philippe, "get me another horse, and come yourself with Benjamin to Monsieur Mignonnet's."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Monsieur Hochon, who had come out of his own house when he saw Philippe and Fario standing together.

"The genius of a general, my dear Monsieur Hochon," said Philippe, "consists not only in carefully observing the enemy's movements, but also in guessing his intentions from those movements, and in modifying his own plan whenever the enemy interferes with it by some unexpected action. Now, if my uncle and Max drive out together, they are going to Vatan; Maxence will have promised to reconcile him with Flore, who 'fugit ad salices,'--the manoeuvre is General Virgil's. If that's the line they take, I don't yet know what I shall do; I shall have some

hours to think it over, for my uncle can't sign a power of attorney at ten o'clock at night; the notaries will all be in bed. If, as I rather fancy, Max goes on in advance of my uncle to teach Flore her lesson, --which seems necessary and probable,--the rogue is lost! you will see the sort of revenge we old soldiers take in a game of this kind. Now, as I need a helper for this last stroke, I must go back to Mignonnet's and make an arrangement with my friend Carpentier."

Shaking hands with Monsieur Hochon, Philippe went off down the Petite-Narette to Mignonnet's house. Ten minutes later, Monsieur Hochon saw Max ride off at a quick trot; and the old miser's curiosity was so powerfully excited that he remained standing at his window, eagerly expecting to hear the wheels of the old demi-fortune, which was not long in coming. Jean-Jacques's impatience made him follow Max within twenty minutes. Kouski, no doubt under orders from his master, walked the horse through the town.

"If they get to Paris, all is lost," thought Monsieur Hochon.

At this moment, a lad from the faubourg de Rome came to the Hochon house with a letter for Baruch. The two grandsons, much subdued by the events of the morning, had kept their rooms of their own accord during the day. Thinking over their prospects, they saw plainly that they had better be cautious with their grandparents. Baruch knew very well the influence which his grandfather Hochon exerted over his grandfather and grandmother Borniche: Monsieur Hochon would not hesitate to get their property for Adolphe if his conduct were such as to make them pin their hopes on the grand marriage with which his grandfather had threatened him that morning. Being richer than Francois, Baruch had the most to lose; he therefore counselled an absolute surrender, with no other condition than the payment of their debt to Max. As for Francois, his future was entirely in the hands of his grandfather; he had no expectations except from him, and by the guardianship account, he was now his debtor. The two young men accordingly gave solemn promises of amendment, prompted by their imperilled interests, and by the hope Madame Hochon held out, that the debt to Max should be paid.

"You have done very wrong," she said to them; "repair it by future good conduct, and Monsieur Hochon will forget it."

So, when Francois had read the letter which had been brought for Baruch, over the latter's shoulder, he whispered in his ear, "Ask grandpapa's advice."

"Read this," said Baruch, taking the letter to old Hochon.

"Read it to me yourself; I haven't my spectacles."

My dear Friend,--I hope you will not hesitate, under the serious circumstances in which I find myself, to do me the service of receiving a power of attorney from Monsieur Rouget. Be at Vatan to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. I shall probably send you to Paris, but don't be uneasy; I will furnish you with money for the journey, and join you there immediately. I am almost sure I shall be obliged to leave Issoudun, December third.

Adieu. I count on your friendship; rely on that of your friend,

Maxence

"God be praised!" exclaimed Monsieur Hochon; "the property of that old idiot is saved from the claws of the devil."

"It will be if you say so," said Madame Hochon; "and I thank God,--who has no doubt heard my prayers. The prosperity of the wicked is always fleeting."

"You must go to Vatan, and accept the power of attorney from Monsieur Rouget," said the old man to Baruch. "Their object is to get fifty thousand francs a year transferred to Mademoiselle Brazier. They will send you to Paris, and you must seem to go; but you are to stop at Orleans, and wait there till you hear from me. Let no one--not a soul--know where you lodge; go to the first inn you come to in the faubourg Bannier, no matter if it is only a post-house--"

"Look here!" cried Francois, who had rushed to the window at the sudden noise of wheels in the Grande-Narette. "Here's something new!--Pere Rouget and Colonel Bridau coming back together in the caleche, Benjamin and Captain Carpentier following on horseback!"

"I'll go over," cried Monsieur Hochon, whose curiosity carried the day over every other feeling.

Monsieur Hochon found old Rouget in his bedroom, writing the following letter at his nephew's dictation:

Mademoiselle,--If you do not start to return here the moment you receive this letter, your conduct will show such ingratitude for all my goodness that I shall revoke the will I have made in your favor, and give my property to my nephew Philippe. You will understand that Monsieur Gilet can no longer be my guest after staying with you at Vatan. I send this letter by Captain Carpentier, who will put it into your own hands. I hope you will listen to his advice; he will speak to you with authority from me.
Your affectionate

J.-J. Rouget.

"Captain Carpentier and I MET my uncle, who was so foolish as to follow Mademoiselle Brazier and Monsieur Gilet to Vatan," said Philippe, with sarcastic emphasis, to Monsieur Hochon. "I have made my uncle see that he was running his head into a noose; for that girl will abandon him the moment she gets him to sign a power of attorney, by which they mean to obtain the income of his money in the Funds. That letter will bring her back under his roof, the handsome runaway! this very night, or I'm mistaken. I promise to make her as pliable as a bit of whalebone for the rest of her days, if my uncle allows me to take Maxence Gilet's place; which, in my opinion, he ought never to have had in the first place. Am I not right?--and yet here's my uncle bemoaning himself!"

"Neighbor," said Monsieur Hochon, "you have taken the best means to get peace in your household. Destroy your will, and Flore will be once more what she used to be in the early days."

"No, she will never forgive me for what I have made her suffer,"

whimpered the old man; "she will no longer love me."

"She shall love you, and closely too; I'll take care of that," said Philippe.

"Come, open your eyes!" exclaimed Monsieur Hochon. "They mean to rob you and abandon you."

"Oh! I was sure of it!" cried the poor imbecile.

"See, here is a letter Maxence has written to my grandson Borniche," said old Hochon. "Read it."

"What infamy!" exclaimed Carpentier, as he listened to the letter, which Rouget read aloud, weeping.

"Is that plain enough, uncle?" demanded Philippe. "Hold that hussy by her interests and she'll adore you as you deserve."

"She loves Maxence too well; she will leave me," cried the frightened old man.

"But, uncle, Maxence or I,--one or the other of us--won't leave our footsteps in the dust of Issoudun three days hence."

"Well then go, Monsieur Carpentier," said Rouget; "if you promise me to bring her back, go! You are a good man; say to her in my name all you think you ought to say."

"Captain Carpentier will whisper in her ear that I have sent to Paris for a woman whose youth and beauty are captivating; that will bring the jade back in a hurry!"

The captain departed, driving himself in the old caleche; Benjamin accompanied him on horseback, for Kouski was nowhere to be found. Though threatened by the officers with arrest and the loss of his situation, the Pole had gone to Vatan on a hired horse, to warn Max and Flore of the adversary's move. After fulfilling his mission, Carpentier, who did not wish to drive back with Flore, was to change places with Benjamin, and take the latter's horse.

When Philippe was told of Kouski's flight he said to Benjamin, "You will take the Pole's place, from this time on. It is all mapping out, papa Hochon!" cried the lieutenant-colonel. "That banquet will be jovial!"

"You will come and live here, of course," said the old miser.

"I have told Fario to send me all my things," answered Philippe. "I shall sleep in the room adjoining Gilet's apartment,--if my uncle consents."

"What will come of all this?" cried the terrified old man.

"Mademoiselle Flore Brazier is coming, gentle as a paschal lamb," replied Monsieur Hochon.

"God grant it!" exclaimed Rouget, wiping his eyes.

"It is now seven o'clock," said Philippe; "the sovereign of your heart will be here at half-past eleven: you'll never see Gilet again, and you will be as happy ever after as a pope.--If you want me to succeed," he whispered to Monsieur Hochon, "stay here till the hussy comes; you can help me in keeping the old man up to his resolution; and, together, we'll make that crab-girl see on which side her bread is buttered."

Monsieur Hochon felt the reasonableness of the request and stayed: but they had their hands full, for old Rouget gave way to childish lamentations, which were only quieted by Philippe's repeating over and over a dozen times:--

"Uncle, you will see that I am right when Flore returns to you as tender as ever. You shall be petted; you will save your property: be guided by my advice, and you'll live in paradise for the rest of your days."

When, about half-past eleven, wheels were heard in the Grande-Narette, the question was, whether the carriage were returning full or empty. Rouget's face wore an expression of agony, which changed to the prostration of excessive joy when he saw the two women, as the carriage turned to enter the courtyard.

"Kouski," said Philippe, giving a hand to Flore to help her down. "You are no longer in Monsieur Rouget's service. You will not sleep here to-night; get your things together, and go. Benjamin takes your place."

"Are you the master here?" said Flore sarcastically.

"With your permission," replied Philippe, squeezing her hand as if in a vice. "Come! we must have an understanding, you and I"; and he led the bewildered woman out into the place Saint-Jean.

"My fine lady," began the old campaigner, stretching out his right hand, "three days hence, Maxence Gilet will be sent to the shades by that arm, or his will have taken me off guard. If I die, you will be the mistress of my poor imbecile uncle; 'bene sit.' If I remain on my pins, you'll have to walk straight, and keep him supplied with first-class happiness. If you don't, I know girls in Paris who are, with all due respect, much prettier than you; for they are only seventeen years old: they would make my uncle excessively happy, and they are in my interests. Begin your attentions this very evening; if the old man is not as gay as a lark to-morrow morning, I have only a word to say to you; it is this, pay attention to it,--there is but one way to kill a man without the interference of the law, and that is to fight a duel with him; but I know three ways to get rid of a woman: mind that, my beauty!"

During this address, Flore shook like a person with the ague.

"Kill Max--?" she said, gazing at Philippe in the moonlight.

"Come, here's my uncle."

Old Rouget, turning a deaf ear to Monsieur Hochon's remonstrances, now came out into the street, and took Flore by the hand, as a miser might have grasped his treasure; he drew her back to the house and into his

own room and shut the door.

"This is Saint-Lambert's day, and he who deserts his place, loses it," remarked Benjamin to the Pole.

"My master will shut your mouth for you," answered Kouski, departing to join Max who established himself at the hotel de la Poste.

On the morrow, between nine and eleven o'clock, all the women talked to each other from door to door throughout the town. The story of the wonderful change in the Rouget household spread everywhere. The upshot of the conversations was the same on all sides,--

"What will happen at the banquet between Max and Colonel Bridau?"

Philippe said but few words to the Védie,--"Six hundred francs' annuity, or dismissal." They were enough, however, to keep her neutral, for a time, between the two great powers, Philippe and Flore.

Knowing Max's life to be in danger, Flore became more affectionate to Rouget than in the first days of their alliance. Alas! in love, a self-interested devotion is sometimes more agreeable than a truthful one; and that is why many men pay so much for clever deceivers. The Rabouilleuse did not appear till the next morning, when she came down to breakfast with Rouget on her arm. Tears filled her eyes as she beheld, sitting in Max's place, the terrible adversary, with his sombre blue eyes, and the cold, sinister expression on his face.

"What is the matter, mademoiselle?" he said, after wishing his uncle good-morning.

"She can't endure the idea of your fighting Maxence," said old Rouget.

"I have not the slightest desire to kill Gilet," answered Philippe. "He need only take himself off from Issoudun and go to America on a venture. I should be the first to advise you to give him an outfit, and to wish him a safe voyage. He would soon make a fortune there, and that is far more honorable than turning Issoudun topsy-turvy at night, and playing the devil in your household."

"Well, that's fair enough," said Rouget, glancing at Flore.

"A-mer-i-ca!" she ejaculated, sobbing.

"It is better to kick his legs about in a free country than have them rot in a pine box in France. However, perhaps you think he is a good shot, and can kill me; it's on the cards," observed the colonel.

"Will you let me speak to him?" said Flore, imploring Philippe in a humble and submissive tone.

"Certainly; he can come here and pack up his things. I will stay with my uncle during that time; for I shall not leave the old man again," replied Philippe.

"Védie," cried Flore, "run to the hotel, and tell Monsieur Gilet that I beg him--"

--to come and get his belongings," said Philippe, interrupting

Flore's message.

"Yes, yes, Védie; that will be a good pretext to see me; I must speak to him."

Terror controlled her hatred; and the shock which her whole being experienced when she first encountered this strong and pitiless nature was now so overwhelming that she bowed before Philippe just as Rouget had been in the habit of bending before her. She anxiously awaited Védie's return. The woman brought a formal refusal from Max, who requested Mademoiselle Brazier to send his things to the hotel de la Poste.

"Will you allow me to take them to him?" she said to Jean-Jacques Rouget.

"Yes, but will you come back?" said the old man.

"If Mademoiselle is not back by midday, you will give me a power of attorney to attend to your property," said Philippe, looking at Flore. "Take Védie with you, to save appearances, mademoiselle. In future you are to think of my uncle's honor."

Flore could get nothing out of Max. Desperate at having allowed himself, before the eyes of the whole town, to be routed out of his shameless position, Gilet was too proud to run away from Philippe. The Rabouilleuse combated this objection, and proposed that they should fly together to America; but Max, who did not want Flore without her money, and yet did not wish the girl to see the bottom of his heart, insisted on his intention of killing Philippe.

"We have committed a monstrous folly," he said. "We ought all three to have gone to Paris and spent the winter there; but how could one guess, from the mere sight of that fellow's big carcass, that things would turn out as they have? The turn of events is enough to make one giddy! I took the colonel for one of those fire-eaters who haven't two ideas in their head; that was the blunder I made. As I didn't have the sense to double like a hare in the beginning, I'll not be such a coward as to back down before him. He has lowered me in the estimation of this town, and I cannot get back what I have lost unless I kill him."

"Go to America with forty thousand francs. I'll find a way to get rid of that scoundrel, and join you. It would be much wiser."

"What would people say of me?" he exclaimed. "No; I have buried nine already. The fellow doesn't seem as if he knew much; he went from school to the army, and there he was always fighting till 1815; then he went to America, and I doubt if the brute ever set foot in a fencing-alley; while I have no match with the sabre. The sabre is his arm; I shall seem very generous in offering it to him,--for I mean, if possible, to let him insult me,--and I can easily run him through. Unquestionably, it is my wisest course. Don't be uneasy; we shall be masters of the field in a couple of days."

That it was that a stupid point of honor had more influence over Max than sound policy. When Flore got home she shut herself up to cry at ease. During the whole of that day gossip ran wild in Issoudun, and the duel between Philippe and Maxence was considered inevitable.

"Ah! Monsieur Hochon," said Mignonnet, who, accompanied by Carpentier, met the old man on the boulevard Baron, "we are very uneasy; for Gilet is clever with all weapons."

"Never mind," said the old provincial diplomatist; "Philippe has managed this thing well from the beginning. I should never have thought that big, easy-going fellow would have succeeded as he has. The two have rolled together like a couple of thunder-clouds."

"Oh!" said Carpentier, "Philippe is a remarkable man. His conduct before the Court of Peers was a masterpiece of diplomacy."

"Well, Captain Renard," said one of the townfolk to Max's friend. "They say wolves don't devour each other, but it seems that Max is going to set his teeth in Colonel Bridau. That's pretty serious among you gentlemen of the Old Guard."

"You make fun of it, do you? Because the poor fellow amused himself a little at night, you are all against him," said Potel. "But Gilet is a man who couldn't stay in a hole like Issoudun without finding something to do."

"Well, gentlemen," remarked another, "Max and the colonel must play out their game. Bridau had to avenge his brother. Don't you remember Max's treachery to the poor lad?"

"Bah! nothing but an artist," said Renard.

"But the real question is about the old man's property," said a third. "They say Monsieur Gilet was laying hands on fifty thousand francs a year, when the colonel turned him out of his uncle's house."

"Gilet rob a man! Come, don't say that to any one but me, Monsieur Canivet," cried Potel. "If you do, I'll make you swallow your tongue, --and without any sauce."

Every household in town offered prayers for the honorable Colonel Bridau.

CHAPTER XVI

Towards four o'clock the following day, the officers of the old army who were at Issoudun or its environs, were sauntering about the place du Marche, in front of an eating-house kept by a man named Lacroix, and waiting the arrival of Colonel Philippe Bridau. The banquet in honor of the coronation was to take place with military punctuality at five o'clock. Various groups of persons were talking of Max's discomfiture, and his dismissal from old Rouget's house; for not only were the officers to dine at Lacroix's, but the common soldiers had determined on a meeting at a neighboring wine-shop. Among the officers, Potel and Renard were the only ones who attempted to defend Max.

"Is it any of our business what takes place among the old man's heirs?" said Renard.

"Max is weak with women," remarked the cynical Potel.

"There'll be sabres unsheathed before long," said an old sub-lieutenant, who cultivated a kitchen-garden in the upper Baltan. "If Monsieur Maxence Gilet committed the folly of going to live under old Rouget's roof, he would be a coward if he allowed himself to be turned off like a valet without asking why."

"Of course," said Mignonnet dryly. "A folly that doesn't succeed becomes a crime."

At this moment Max joined the old soldiers of Napoleon, and was received in significant silence. Potel and Renard each took an arm of their friend, and walked about with him, conversing. Presently Philippe was seen approaching in full dress; he trailed his cane after him with an imperturbable air which contrasted with the forced attention Max was paying to the remarks of his two supporters. Bridau's hand was grasped by Mignonnet, Carpentier, and several others. This welcome, so different from that accorded to Max, dispelled the last feeling of cowardice, or, if you prefer it, wisdom, which Flore's entreaties, and above all, her tenderesses, had awakened in the latter's mind.

"We shall fight," he said to Renard, "and to the death. Therefore don't talk to me any more; let me play my part well."

After these words, spoken in a feverish tone, the three Bonapartists returned to the group of officers and mixed among them. Max bowed first to Bridau, who returned his bow, and the two exchanged a frigid glance.

"Come, gentlemen, let us take our seats," said Potel.

"And drink to the health of the Little Corporal, who is now in the paradise of heroes," cried Renard.

The company poured into the long, low dining-hall of the restaurant Lacroix, the windows of which opened on the market-place. Each guest took his seat at the table, where, in compliance with Philippe's request, the two adversaries were placed directly opposite to each other. Some young men of the town, among them several Knights of Idleness, anxious to know what might happen at the banquet, were walking about the street and discussing the critical position into which Philippe had contrived to force Max. They all deplored the crisis, though each considered the duel to be inevitable.

Everything went off well until the dessert, though the two antagonists displayed, in spite of the apparent joviality of the dinner, a certain vigilance that resembled disquietude. While waiting for the quarrel that both were planning, Philippe showed admirable coolness, and Max a distracting gaiety; but to an observer, each was playing a part.

When the desert was served Philippe rose and said: "Fill your glasses, my friends! I ask permission to propose the first toast."

"He said my friends, don't fill your glass," whispered Renard to Max.

Max poured out some wine.

"To the Grand Army!" cried Philippe, with genuine enthusiasm.

"To the Grand Army!" was repeated with acclamation by every voice.

At this moment eleven private soldiers, among whom were Benjamin and Kouski, appeared at the door of the room and repeated the toast,--

"To the Grand Army!"

"Come in, my sons; we are going to drink His health."

The old soldiers came in and stood behind the officers.

"You see He is not dead!" said Kouski to an old sergeant, who had perhaps been grieving that the Emperor's agony was over.

"I claim the second toast," said Mignonnet, as he rose. "Let us drink to those who attempted to restore his son!"

Every one present, except Maxence Gilet, bowed to Philippe Bridau, and stretched their glasses towards him.

"One word," said Max, rising.

"It is Max! it is Max!" cried voices outside; and then a deep silence reigned in the room and in the street, for Gilet's known character made every one expect a taunt.

"May we all meet again at this time next year," said Max, bowing ironically to Philippe.

"It's coming!" whispered Kouski to his neighbor.

"The Paris police would never allow a banquet of this kind," said Potel to Philippe.

"Why do the devil to you mention the police to Colonel Bridau?" said Maxence insolently.

"Captain Potel-- he --meant no insult," said Philippe, smiling coldly. The stillness was so profound that the buzzing of a fly could have been heard if there had been one.

"The police were sufficiently afraid of me," resumed Philippe, "to send me to Issoudun,--a place where I have had the pleasure of meeting old comrades, but where, it must be owned, there is a dearth of amusement. For a man who doesn't despise folly, I'm rather restricted. However, it is certainly economical, for I am not one of those to whom feather-beds give incomes; Mariette of the Grand Opera cost me fabulous sums."

"Is that remark meant for me, my dear colonel?" asked Max, sending a glance at Philippe which was like a current of electricity.

"Take it as you please," answered Bridau.

"Colonel, my two friends here, Renard and Potel, will call to-morrow on--"

"--on Mignonnet and Carpentier," answered Philippe, cutting short Max's sentence, and motioning towards his two neighbors.

"Now," said Max, "let us go on with the toasts."

The two adversaries had not raised their voices above the tone of ordinary conversation; there was nothing solemn in the affair except the dead silence in which it took place.

"Look here, you others!" cried Philippe, addressing the soldiers who stood behind the officers; "remember that our affairs don't concern the bourgeoisie--not a word, therefore, on what goes on here. It is for the Old Guard only."

"They'll obey orders, colonel," said Renard. "I'll answer for them."

"Long live His little one! May he reign over France!" cried Potel.

"Death to Englishmen!" cried Carpentier.

That toast was received with prodigious applause.

"Shame on Hudson Lowe," said Captain Renard.

The dessert passed off well; the libations were plentiful. The antagonists and their four seconds made it a point of honor that a duel, involving so large a fortune, and the reputation of two men noted for their courage, should not appear the result of an ordinary squabble. No two gentlemen could have behaved better than Philippe and Max; in this respect the anxious waiting of the young men and townspeople grouped about the market-place was balked. All the guests, like true soldiers, kept silence as to the episode which took place at dessert. At ten o'clock that night the two adversaries were informed that the sabre was the weapon agreed upon by the seconds; the place chosen for the rendezvous was behind the chancel of the church of the Capuchins at eight o'clock the next morning. Goddet, who was at the banquet in his quality of former army surgeon, was requested to be present at the meeting. The seconds agreed that, no matter what might happen, the combat should last only ten minutes.

At eleven o'clock that night, to Colonel Bridau's amazement, Monsieur Hochon appeared at his rooms just as he was going to bed, escorting Madame Hochon.

"We know what has happened," said the old lady, with her eyes full of tears, "and I have come to entreat you not to leave the house to-morrow morning without saying your prayers. Lift your soul to God!"

"Yes, madame," said Philippe, to whom old Hochon made a sign from behind his wife's back.

"That is not all," said Agathe's godmother. "I stand in the place of your poor mother, and I divest myself, for you, of a thing which I hold most precious,--here," she went on, holding towards Philippe a tooth, fastened upon a piece of black velvet embroidered in gold, to which she had sewn a pair of green strings. Having shown it to him, she replaced it in a little bag. "It is a relic of Sainte Solange, the patron saint of Berry," she said, "I saved it during the Revolution; wear it on your breast to-morrow."

"Will it protect me from a sabre-thrust?" asked Philippe.

"Yes," replied the old lady.

"Then I have no right to wear that accoutrement any more than if it were a cuirass," cried Agathe's son.

"What does he mean?" said Madame Hochon.

"He says it is not playing fair," answered Hochon.

"Then we will say no more about it," said the old lady, "I shall pray for you."

"Well, madame, prayer--and a good point--can do no harm," said Philippe, making a thrust as if to pierce Monsieur Hochon's heart.

The old lady kissed the colonel on his forehead. As she left the house, she gave thirty francs--all the money she possessed--to Benjamin, requesting him to sew the relic into the pocket of his master's trousers. Benjamin did so,--not that he believed in the virtue of the tooth, for he said his master had a much better talisman than that against Gilet, but because his conscience constrained him to fulfil a commission for which he had been so liberally paid. Madame Hochon went home full of confidence in Saint Solange.

At eight o'clock the next morning, December third, the weather being cloudy, Max, accompanied by his seconds and the Pole, arrived on the little meadow which then surrounded the apse of the church of the Capuchins. There he found Philippe and his seconds, with Benjamin, waiting for him. Potel and Mignonnet paced off twenty-four feet; at each extremity, the two attendants drew a line on the earth with a spade: the combatants were not allowed to retreat beyond that line, on pain of being thought cowardly. Each was to stand at his own line, and advance as he pleased when the seconds gave the word.

"Do we take off our coats?" said Philippe to his adversary coldly.

"Of course," answered Maxence, with the assumption of a bully.

They did so; the rosy tints of their skin appearing through the cambric of their shirts. Each, armed with a cavalry sabre selected of equal weight, about three pounds, and equal length, three feet, placed himself at his own line, the point of his weapon on the ground, awaiting the signal. Both were so calm that, in spite of the cold, their muscles quivered no more than if they had been made of iron. Goddet, the four seconds, and the two soldiers felt an involuntary admiration.

"They are a proud pair!"

The exclamation came from Potel.

Just as the signal was given, Max caught sight of Fario's sinister face looking at them through the hole which the Knights of Idleness had made for the pigeons in the roof of the church. Those eyes, which sent forth streams of fire, hatred, and revenge, dazzled Max for a moment. The colonel went straight to his adversary, and put himself on

guard in a way that gained him an advantage. Experts in the art of killing, know that, of two antagonists, the ablest takes the "inside of the pavement,"--to use an expression which gives the reader a tangible idea of the effect of a good guard. That pose, which is in some degree observant, marks so plainly a duellist of the first rank that a feeling of inferiority came into Max's soul, and produced the same disarray of powers which demoralizes a gambler when, in presence of a master or a lucky hand, he loses his self-possession and plays less well than usual.

"Ah! the lascar!" thought Max, "he's an expert; I'm lost!"

He attempted a "moulinet," and twirled his sabre with the dexterity of a single-stick. He wanted to bewilder Philippe, and strike his weapon so as to disarm him; but at the first encounter he felt that the colonel's wrist was iron, with the flexibility of a steel string. Maxence was then forced, unfortunate fellow, to think of another move, while Philippe, whose eyes were darting gleams that were sharper than the flash of their blades, parried every attack with the coolness of a fencing-master wearing his plastron in an armory.

Between two men of the calibre of these combatants, there occurs a phenomenon very like that which takes place among the lower classes, during the terrible tussle called "the savante," which is fought with the feet, as the name implies. Victory depends on a false movement, on some error of the calculation, rapid as lightning, which must be made and followed almost instinctively. During a period of time as short to the spectators as it seems long to the combatants, the contest lies in observation, so keen as to absorb the powers of mind and body, and yet concealed by preparatory feints whose slowness and apparent prudence seem to show that the antagonists are not intending to fight. This moment, which is followed by a rapid and decisive struggle, is terrible to a connoisseur. At a bad parry from Max the colonel sent the sabre spinning from his hand.

"Pick it up," he said, pausing; "I am not the man to kill a disarmed enemy."

There was something atrocious in the grandeur of these words; they seemed to show such consciousness of superiority that the onlookers took them for a shrewd calculation. In fact, when Max replaced himself in position, he had lost his coolness, and was once more confronted with his adversary's raised guard which defended the colonel's whole person while it menaced his. He resolved to redeem his shameful defeat by a bold stroke. He no longer guarded himself, but took his sabre in both hands and rushed furiously on his antagonist, resolved to kill him, if he had to lose his own life. Philippe received a sabre-cut which slashed open his forehead and a part of his face, but he cleft Max's head obliquely by the terrible sweep of a "moulinet," made to break the force of the annihilating stroke Max aimed at him. These two savage blows ended the combat, at the ninth minute. Fario came down to gloat over the sight of his enemy in the convulsions of death; for the muscles of a man of Maxence Gilet's vigor quiver horribly. Philippe was carried back to his uncle's house.

Thus perished a man destined to do great deeds had he lived his life amid environments which were suited to him; a man treated by Nature as a favorite child, for she gave him courage, self-possession, and the political sagacity of a Cesar Borgia. But education had not bestowed

upon him that nobility of conduct and ideas without which nothing great is possible in any walk of life. He was not regretted, because of the perfidy with which his adversary, who was a worse man than he, had contrived to bring him into disrepute. His death put an end to the exploits of the Order of Idleness, to the great satisfaction of the town of Issoudun. Philippe therefore had nothing to fear in consequence of the duel, which seemed almost the result of divine vengeance: its circumstances were related throughout that whole region of country, with unanimous praise for the bravery of the two combatants.

"But they had better both have been killed," remarked Monsieur Mouilleron; "it would have been a good riddance for the Government."

The situation of Flore Brazier would have been very embarrassing were it not for the condition into which she was thrown by Max's death. A brain-fever set in, combined with a dangerous inflammation resulting from her escapade to Vatan. If she had had her usual health, she might have fled the house where, in the room above her, Max's room, and in Max's bed, lay and suffered Max's murderer. She hovered between life and death for three months, attended by Monsieur Goddet, who was also attending Philippe.

As soon as Philippe was able to hold a pen, he wrote the following letters:--

To Monsieur Desroches:

I have already killed the most venomous of the two reptiles; not however without getting my own head split open by a sabre; but the rascal struck with a dying hand. The other viper is here, and I must come to an understanding with her, for my uncle clings to her like the apple of his eye. I have been half afraid the girl, who is devilishly handsome, might run away, and then my uncle would have followed her; but an illness which seized her suddenly has kept her in bed. If God desired to protect me, he would call her soul to himself, now, while she is repenting of her sins. Meantime, on my side I have, thanks to that old trump, Hochon, the doctor of Issoudun, one named Goddet, a worthy soul who conceives that the property of uncles ought to go to nephews rather than to sluts.

Monsieur Hochon has some influence on a certain papa Fichet, who is rich, and whose daughter Goddet wants as a wife for his son: so the thousand francs they have promised him if he mends up my pate is not the chief cause of his devotion. Moreover, this Goddet, who was formerly head-surgeon to the 3rd regiment of the line, has been privately advised by my staunch friends, Mignonnet and Carpentier; so he is now playing the hypocrite with his other patient. He says to Mademoiselle Brazier, as he feels her pulse, "You see, my child, that there's a God after all. You have been the cause of a great misfortune, and you must now repair it. The finger of God is in all this [it is inconceivable what they don't say the finger of God is in!]. Religion is religion: submit, resign yourself, and that will quiet you better than my drugs. Above all, resolve to stay here and take care of your master: forget and forgive,--that's Christianity."

Goddet has promised to keep the Rabouilleuse three months in her

bed. By degrees the girl will get accustomed to living under the same roof with me. I have bought over the cook. That abominable old woman tells her mistress Max would have led her a hard life; and declares she overheard him say that if, after the old man's death, he was obliged to marry Flore, he didn't mean to have his prospects ruined by it, and he should find a way to get rid of her.

Thus, all goes well, so far. My uncle, by old Hochon's advice, has destroyed his will.

To Monsieur Giroudeau, care of Mademoiselle Florentine. Rue de Vendome, Marais:

My dear old Fellow,--Find out if the little rat Cesarine has any engagement, and if not, try to arrange that she can come to Issoudun in case I send for her; if I do, she must come at once. It is a matter this time of decent behavior; no theatre morals. She must present herself as the daughter of a brave soldier, killed on the battle-field. Therefore, mind,--sober manners, schoolgirl's clothes, virtue of the best quality; that's the watchword. If I need Cesarine, and if she answers my purpose, I will give her fifty thousand francs on my uncle's death. If Cesarine has other engagements, explain what I want to Florentine; and between you, find me some ballet-girl capable of playing the part.

I have had my skull cracked in a duel with the fellow who was filching my inheritance, and is now feeding the worms. I'll tell you all about it some day. Ah! old fellow, the good times are coming back for you and me; we'll amuse ourselves once more, or we are not the pair we really are. If you can send me five hundred more cartridges I'll bite them.

Adieu, my old fire-eater. Light your pipe with this letter. Mind, the daughter of the officer is to come from Chateauroux, and must seem to be in need of assistance. I hope however that I shall not be driven to such dangerous expedients. Remember me to Mariette and all our friends.

Agathe, informed by Madame Hochon of what had happened, rushed to Issoudun, and was received by her brother, who gave her Philippe's former room. The poor mother's tenderness for the worthless son revived in all its maternal strength; a few happy days were hers at last, as she listened to the praises which the whole town bestowed upon her hero.

"After all, my child," said Madame Hochon on the day of her arrival, "youth must have its fling. The dissipations of a soldier under the Empire must, of course, be greater than those of young men who are looked after by their fathers. Oh! if you only knew what went on here at night under that wretched Max! Thanks to your son, Issoudun now breathes and sleeps in peace. Philippe has come to his senses rather late; he told us frankly that those three months in the Luxembourg sobered him. Monsieur Hochon is delighted with his conduct here; every one thinks highly of it. If he can be kept away from the temptations of Paris, he will end by being a comfort to you."

Hearing these consolatory words Agathe's eyes filled with tears.

Philippe played the saint to his mother, for he had need of her. That wily politician did not wish to have recourse to Cesarine unless he continued to be an object of horror to Mademoiselle Brazier. He saw that Flore had been thoroughly broken to harness by Max; he knew she was an essential part of his uncle's life, and he greatly preferred to use her rather than send for the ballet-girl, who might take it into her head to marry the old man. Fouche advised Louis XVIII. to sleep in Napoleon's sheets instead of granting the charter; and Philippe would have liked to remain in Gilet's sheets; but he was reluctant to risk the good reputation he had made for himself in Berry. To take Max's place with the Rabouilleuse would be as odious on his part as on hers. He could, without discredit and by the laws of nepotism, live in his uncle's house and at his uncle's expense; but he could not have Flore unless her character were whitewashed. Hampered by this difficulty, and stimulated by the hope of finally getting hold of the property, the idea came into his head of making his uncle marry the Rabouilleuse. With this in view he requested his mother to go and see the girl and treat her in a sisterly manner.

"I must confess, my dear mother," he said, in a canting tone, looking at Monsieur and Madame Hochon who accompanied her, "that my uncle's way of life is not becoming; he could, however, make Mademoiselle Brazier respected by the community if he chose. Wouldn't it be far better for her to be Madame Rouget than the servant-mistress of an old bachelor? She had better obtain a definite right to his property by a marriage contract than threaten a whole family with disinheritance. If you, or Monsieur Hochon, or some good priest would speak of the matter to both parties, you might put a stop to the scandal which offends decent people. Mademoiselle Brazier would be only too happy if you were to welcome her as a sister, and I as an aunt."

On the morrow Agathe and Madame Hochon appeared at Flore's bedside, and repeated to the sick girl and to Rouget, the excellent sentiments expressed by Philippe. Throughout Issoudun the colonel was talked of as a man of noble character, especially because of his conduct towards Flore. For a month, the Rabouilleuse heard Goddet, her doctor, the individual who has paramount influence over a sick person, the respectable Madame Hochon, moved by religious principle, and Agathe, so gentle and pious, all representing to her the advantages of a marriage with Rouget. And when, attracted by the idea of becoming Madame Rouget, a dignified and virtuous bourgeoisie, she grew eager to recover, so that the marriage might speedily be celebrated, it was not difficult to make her understand that she would not be allowed to enter the family of the Rougets if she intended to turn Philippe from its doors.

"Besides," remarked the doctor, "you really owe him this good fortune. Max would never have allowed you to marry old Rouget. And," he added in her ear, "if you have children, you can revenge Max, for that will disinherit the Bridaus."

Two months after the fatal duel in February, 1823, the sick woman, urged by those about her, and implored by Rouget, consented to receive Philippe, the sight of whose scars made her weep, but whose softened and affectionate manner calmed her. By Philippe's wish they were left alone together.

"My dear child," said the soldier. "It is I, who, from the start, have

advised your marriage with my uncle; if you consent, it will take place as soon as you are quite recovered."

"So they tell me," she replied.

"Circumstances have compelled me to give you pain, it is natural therefore that I should wish to do you all the good I can. Wealth, respect, and a family position are worth more than what you have lost. You wouldn't have been that fellow's wife long after my uncle's death, for I happen to know, through friends of his, that he intended to get rid of you. Come, my dear, let us understand each other, and live happily. You shall be my aunt, and nothing more than my aunt. You will take care that my uncle does not forget me in his will; on my side, you shall see how well I will have you treated in the marriage contract. Keep calm, think it over, and we will talk of it later. All sensible people, indeed the whole town, urge you to put an end to your illegal position; no one will blame you for receiving me. It is well understood in the world that interests go before feelings. By the day of your marriage you will be handsomer than ever. The pallor of illness has given you an air of distinction, and on my honor, if my uncle did not love you so madly, you should be the wife of Colonel Bridau."

Philippe left the room, having dropped this hint into Flore's mind to waken a vague idea of vengeance which might please the girl, who did, in fact, feel a sort of happiness as she saw this dreadful being at her feet. In this scene Philippe repeated, in miniature, that of Richard III. with the queen he had widowed. The meaning of it is that personal calculation, hidden under sentiment, has a powerful influence on the heart, and is able to dissipate even genuine grief. This is how, in individual life, Nature does that which in works of genius is thought to be consummate art: she works by self-interest,—the genius of money.

At the beginning of April, 1823, the hall of Jean-Jacques Rouget's house was the scene of a splendid dinner, given to celebrate the signing of the marriage contract between Mademoiselle Flore Brazier and the old bachelor. The guests were Monsieur Heron, the four witnesses, Messieurs Mignonnet, Carpentier, Hochon, and Goddet, the mayor and the curate, Agathe Bridau, Madame Hochon, and her friend Madame Borniche, the two old ladies who laid down the law to the society of Issoudun. The bride was much impressed by this concession, obtained by Philippe, and intended by the two ladies as a mark of protection to a repentant woman. Flore was in dazzling beauty. The curate, who for the last fortnight had been instructing the ignorant crab-girl, was to allow her, on the following day, to make her first communion. The marriage was the text of the following pious article in the "Journal du Cher," published at Bourges, and in the "Journal de l'Indre," published at Chateauroux:

Issoudun.--The revival of religion is progressing in Berry. Friends of the Church and all respectable persons in this town were yesterday witnesses of a marriage ceremony by which a leading man of property put an end to a scandalous connection, which began at the time when the authority of religion was overthrown in this region. This event, due to the enlightened zeal of the clergy of Issoudun will, we trust, have imitators, and put a stop to marriages, so-called, which have never been solemnized, and were

only contracted during the disastrous epoch of revolutionary rule.

One remarkable feature of the event to which we allude, is the fact that it was brought about at the entreaty of a colonel belonging to the old army, sent to our town by a sentence of the Court of Peers, who may, in consequence, lose the inheritance of his uncle's property. Such disinterestedness is so rare in these days that it deserves public mention.

By the marriage contract Rouget secured to Flore a dower of one hundred thousand francs, and a life annuity of thirty thousand more.

After the wedding, which was sumptuous, Agathe returned to Paris the happiest of mothers, and told Joseph and Desroches what she called the good news.

"Your son Philippe is too wily a man not to keep his paw on that inheritance," said the lawyer, when he had heard Madame Bridau to the end. "You and your poor Joseph will never get one penny of your brother's property."

"You, and Joseph too, will always be unjust to that poor boy," said the mother. "His conduct before the Court of Peers was worthy of a statesman; he succeeded in saving many heads. Philippe's errors came from his great faculties being unemployed. He now sees how faults of conduct injure the prospects of a man who has his way to make. He is ambitious; that I am sure of; and I am not the only one to predict his future. Monsieur Hochon firmly believes that Philippe has a noble destiny before him."

"Oh! if he chooses to apply his perverted powers to making his fortune, I have no doubt he will succeed: he is capable of everything; and such fellows go fast and far," said Desroches.

"Why do you suppose that he will not succeed by honest means?" demanded Madame Bridau.

"You will see!" exclaimed Desroches. "Fortunate or unfortunate, Philippe will remain the man of the rue Mazarin, the murderer of Madame Descoings, the domestic thief. But don't worry yourself; he will manage to appear honest to the world."

After breakfast, on the morning succeeding the marriage, Philippe took Madame Rouget by the arm when his uncle rose from table and went upstairs to dress,--for the pair had come down, the one in her morning-robe, and the other in his dressing-gown.

"My dear aunt," said the colonel, leading her into the recess of a window, "you now belong to the family. Thanks to me, the law has tied the knot. Now, no nonsense. I intend that you and I should play above board. I know the tricks you will try against me; and I shall watch you like a duenna. You will never go out of this house except on my arm; and you will never leave me. As to what passes within the house, damn it, you'll find me like a spider in the middle of his web. Here is something," he continued, showing the bewildered woman a letter, "which will prove to you that I could, while you were lying ill upstairs, unable to move hand or foot, have turned you out of doors without a penny. Read it."

He gave her the letter.

My dear Fellow,--Florentine, who has just made her debut at the new Opera House in a "pas de trois" with Mariette and Tullia, is thinking steadily about your affair, and so is Florine,--who has finally given up Lousteau and taken Nathan. That shrewd pair have found you a most delicious little creature,--only seventeen, beautiful as an English woman, demure as a "lady," up to all mischief, sly as Desroches, faithful as Godeschal. Mariette is forming her, so as to give you a fair chance. No woman could hold her own against this little angel, who is a devil under her skin; she can play any part you please; get complete possession of your uncle, or drive him crazy with love. She has that celestial look poor Coralie used to have; she can weep,--the tones of her voice will draw a thousand-franc note from a granite heart; and the young mischief soaks up champagne better than any of us. It is a precious discovery; she is under obligations to Mariette, and wants to pay them off. After squandering the fortunes of two Englishmen, a Russian, and an Italian prince, Mademoiselle Esther is now in poverty; give her ten thousand francs, that will satisfy her. She has just remarked, laughing, that she has never yet fricasseed a bourgeois, and it will get her hand in. Esther is well known to Finot, Bixiou, and des Lupeaulx, in fact to all our set. Ah! if there were any real fortunes left in France, she would be the greatest courtesan of modern times.

All the editorial staff, Nathan, Finot, Bixiou, etc., are now joking the aforesaid Esther in a magnificent appartement just arranged for Florine by old Lord Dudley (the real father of de Marsay); the lively actress captured him by the dress of her new role. Tullia is with the Duc de Rhetore, Mariette is still with the Duc de Maufrigneuse; between them, they will get your sentence remitted in time for the King's fete. Bury your uncle under the roses before the Saint-Louis, bring away the property, and spend a little of it with Esther and your old friends, who sign this epistle in a body, to remind you of them.

Nathan, Florine, Bixiou, Finot, Mariette,

Florentine, Giroudeau, Tullia

The letter shook in the trembling hands of Madame Rouget, and betrayed the terror of her mind and body. The aunt dared not look at the nephew, who fixed his eyes upon her with terrible meaning.

"I trust you," he said, "as you see; but I expect some return. I have made you my aunt intending to marry you some day. You are worth more to me than Esther in managing my uncle. In a year from now, we must be in Paris; the only place where beauty really lives. You will amuse yourself much better there than here; it is a perpetual carnival. I shall return to the army, and become a general, and you will be a great lady. There's our future; now work for it. But I must have a pledge to bind this agreement. You are to give me, within a month from now, a power of attorney from my uncle, which you must obtain under pretence of relieving him of the fatigues of business. Also, a month later, I must have a special power of attorney to transfer the income in the Funds. When that stands in my name, you and I have an equal interest in marrying each other. There it all is, my beautiful aunt,

as plain as day. Between you and me there must be no ambiguity. I can marry my aunt at the end of a year's widowhood; but I could not marry a disgraced girl."

He left the room without waiting for an answer. When Védie came in, fifteen minutes later, to clear the table, she found her mistress pale and moist with perspiration, in spite of the season. Flore felt like a woman who had fallen to the bottom of a precipice; the future loomed black before her; and on its blackness, in the far distance, were shapes of monstrous things, indistinctly perceptible, and terrifying. She felt the damp chill of vaults, instinctive fear of the man crushed her; and yet a voice cried in her ear that she deserved to have him for her master. She was helpless against her fate. Flore Brazier had had a room of her own in Rouget's house; but Madame Rouget belonged to her husband, and was now deprived of the free-will of a servant-mistress. In the horrible situation in which she now found herself, the hope of having a child came into her mind; but she soon recognized its impossibility. The marriage was to Jean-Jacques what the second marriage of Louis XII. was to that king. The incessant watchfulness of a man like Philippe, who had nothing to do and never quitted his post of observation, made any form of vengeance impossible. Benjamin was his innocent and devoted spy. The Védie trembled before him. Flore felt herself deserted and utterly helpless. She began to fear death. Without knowing how Philippe might manage to kill her, she felt certain that whenever he suspected her of pregnancy her doom would be sealed. The sound of that voice, the veiled glitter of that gambler's eye, the slightest movement of the soldier, who treated her with a brutality that was still polite, made her shudder. As to the power of attorney demanded by the ferocious colonel, who in the eyes of all Issoudun was a hero, he had it as soon as he wanted it; for Flore fell under the man's dominion as France had fallen under that of Napoleon.

Like a butterfly whose feet are caught in the incandescent wax of a taper, Rouget rapidly dissipated his remaining strength. In presence of that decay, the nephew remained as cold and impassible as the diplomatists of 1814 during the convulsions of imperial France.

Philippe, who did not believe in Napoleon II., now wrote the following letter to the minister of war, which Mariette made the Duc de Maufrigneuse convey to that functionary:--

Monseigneur,--Napoleon is no more. I desired to remain faithful to him according to my oath; now I am free to offer my services to His Majesty. If your Excellency deigns to explain my conduct to His Majesty, the King will see that it is in keeping with the laws of honor, if not with those of his government. The King, who thought it proper that his aide-de-camp, General Rapp, should mourn his former master, will no doubt feel indulgently for me. Napoleon was my benefactor.

I therefore entreat your Excellency to take into consideration the request I make for employment in my proper rank; and I beg to assure you of my entire submission. The King will find in me a faithful subject.

Deign to accept the assurance of respect with which I have the honor to be,
Your Excellency's very submissive and

Very humble servant,

Philippe Bridau

Formerly chief of squadron in the dragoons of the Guard; officer of the Legion of honor; now under police surveillance at Issoudun.

To this letter was joined a request for permission to go to Paris on urgent family business; and Monsieur Moulleron annexed letters from the mayor, the sub-prefect, and the commissary of police at Issoudun, all bestowing many praises on Philippe's conduct, and dwelling upon the newspaper article relating to his uncle's marriage.

Two weeks later, Philippe received the desired permission, and a letter, in which the minister of war informed him that, by order of the King, he was, as a preliminary favor, reinstated lieutenant-colonel in the royal army.

CHAPTER XVII

Lieutenant-Colonel Bridau returned to Paris, taking with him his aunt and the helpless Rouget, whom he escorted, three days after their arrival, to the Treasury, where Jean-Jacques signed the transfer of the income, which henceforth became Philippe's. The exhausted old man and the Rabouilleuse were now plunged by their nephew into the excessive dissipations of the dangerous and restless society of actresses, journalists, artists, and the equivocal women among whom Philippe had already wasted his youth; where old Rouget found excitements that soon after killed him. Instigated by Giroudeau, Lolotte, one of the handsomest of the Opera ballet-girls, was the amiable assassin of the old man. Rouget died after a splendid supper at Florentine's, and Lolotte threw the blame of his death upon a slice of pate de foie gras; as the Strasburg masterpiece could make no defence, it was considered settled that the old man died of indigestion.

Madame Rouget was in her element in the midst of this excessively décolleté society; but Philippe gave her in charge of Mariette, and that mistress did not allow the widow--whose mourning was diversified with a few amusements--to commit any actual follies.

In October, 1823, Philippe returned to Issoudun, furnished with a power of attorney from his aunt, to liquidate the estate of his uncle; a business that was soon over, for he returned to Paris in March, 1824, with sixteen hundred thousand francs,--the net proceeds of old Rouget's property, not counting the precious pictures, which had never left Monsieur Hochon's hands. Philippe put the whole property into the hands of Mongenod and Sons, where young Baruch Borniche was employed, and on whose solvency and business probity old Hochon had given him satisfactory assurances. This house took his sixteen hundred thousand francs at six per cent per annum, on condition of three months' notice in case of the withdrawal of the money.

One fine day, Philippe went to see his mother, and invited her to be present at his marriage, which was witnessed by Giroudeau, Finot,

Nathan, and Bixiou. By the terms of the marriage contract, the widow Rouget, whose portion of her late husband's property amounted to a million of francs, secured to her future husband her whole fortune in case she died without children. No invitations to the wedding were sent out, nor any "billets de faire part"; Philippe had his designs. He lodged his wife in an appartement in the rue Saint-Georges, which he bought ready-furnished from Lolotte. Madame Bridau the younger thought it delightful, and her husband rarely set foot in it. Without her knowledge, Philippe purchased in the rue de Clichy, at a time when no one suspected the value which property in that quarter would one day acquire, a magnificent hotel for two hundred and fifty thousand francs; of which he paid one hundred and fifty thousand down, taking two years to pay the remainder. He spent large sums in altering the interior and furnishing it; in fact, he put his income for two years into this outlay. The pictures, now restored, and estimated at three hundred thousand francs, appeared in such surroundings in all their beauty.

The accession of Charles X. had brought into still greater court favor the family of the Duc de Chaulieu, whose eldest son, the Duc de Rhetore, was in the habit of seeing Philippe at Tullia's. Under Charles X., the elder branch of the Bourbons, believing itself permanently seated on the throne, followed the advice previously given by Marshal Gouvion-Saint-Cyr to encourage the adherence of the soldiers of the Empire. Philippe, who had no doubt made invaluable revelations as to the conspiracies of 1820 and 1822, was appointed lieutenant-colonel in the regiment of the Duc de Maufrigneuse. That fascinating nobleman thought himself bound to protect the man from whom he had taken Mariette. The corps-de-ballet went for something, therefore, in the appointment. Moreover, it was decided in the private councils of Charles X., to give a faint tinge of liberalism to the surroundings of Monseigneur the Dauphin. Philippe, now a sort of equerry to the Duc de Maufrigneuse, was presented not only to the Dauphin, but also to the Dauphine, who was not averse to brusque and soldierly characters who had become noted for a past fidelity. Philippe thoroughly understood the part the Dauphin had to play; and he turned the first exhibition of that spurious liberalism to his own profit, by getting himself appointed aide-de-camp to a marshal who stood well at court.

In January, 1827, Philippe, who was now promoted to the Royal Guard as lieutenant-colonel in a regiment then commanded by the Duc de Maufrigneuse, solicited the honor of being ennobled. Under the Restoration, nobility became a sort of perquisite to the "roturiers" who served in the Guard. Colonel Bridau had lately bought the estate of Brambourg, and he now asked to be allowed to entail it under the title of count. This favor was accorded through the influence of his many intimacies in the highest rank of society, where he now appeared in all the luxury of horses, carriages, and liveries; in short, with the surroundings of a great lord. As soon as he saw himself gazetted in the Almanack under the title of Comte de Brambourg, he began to frequent the house of a lieutenant-general of artillery, the Comte de Soulanges.

Insatiable in his wants, and backed by the mistresses of influential men, Philippe now solicited the honor of being one of the Dauphin's aides-de-camp. He had the audacity to say to the Dauphin that "an old soldier, wounded on many a battle-field and who knew real warfare, might, on occasion, be serviceable to Monseigneur." Philippe, who

could take the tone of all varieties of sycophancy, became in the regions of the highest social life exactly what the position required him to be; just as at Issoudun, he had copied the respectability of Mignonnet. He had, moreover, a fine establishment and gave fetes and dinners; admitting none of his old friends to his house if he thought their position in life likely to compromise his future. He was pitiless to the companions of his former debauches, and curtly refused Bixiou when that lively satirist asked him to say a word in favor of Giroudeau, who wanted to re-enter the army after the desertion of Florentine.

"The man has neither manners nor morals," said Philippe.

"Ha! did he say that of me?" cried Giroudeau, "of me, who helped him to get rid of his uncle!"

"We'll pay him off yet," said Bixiou.

Philippe intended to marry Mademoiselle Amelie de Soulanges, and become a general, in command of a regiment of the Royal Guard. He asked so many favors that, to keep him quiet, they made him a Commander of the Legion of honor, and also Commander of the order of Saint Louis. One rainy evening, as Agathe and Joseph were returning home along the muddy streets, they met Philippe in full uniform, bedizened with orders, leaning back in a corner of a handsome coupe lined with yellow silk, whose armorial bearings were surmounted with a count's coronet. He was on his way to a fete at the Elysee-Bourbon; the wheels splashed his mother and brother as he waved them a patronizing greeting.

"He's going it, that fellow!" said Joseph to his mother.

"Nevertheless, he might send us something better than mud in our faces."

"He has such a fine position, in such high society, that we ought not to blame him for forgetting us," said Madame Bridau. "When a man rises to so great a height, he has many obligations to repay, many sacrifices to make; it is natural he should not come to see us, though he may think of us all the same."

"My dear fellow," said the Duc de Maufrigneuse one evening, to the new Comte de Brambourg, "I am sure that your addresses will be favorably received; but in order to marry Amelie de Soulanges, you must be free to do so. What have you done with your wife?"

"My wife?" said Philippe, with a gesture, look, and accent which Frederick Lemaitre was inspired to use in one of his most terrible parts. "Alas! I have the melancholy certainty of losing her. She has not a week to live. My dear duke, you don't know what it is to marry beneath you. A woman who was a cook, and has the tastes of a cook! who dishonors me--ah! I am much to be pitied. I have had the honor to explain my position to Madame la Dauphine. At the time of the marriage, it was a question of saving to the family a million of francs which my uncle had left by will to that person. Happily, my wife took to drinking; at her death, I come into possession of that million, which is now in the hands of Mongenod and Sons. I have thirty thousand francs a year in the five per cents, and my landed property, which is entailed, brings me in forty thousand more. If, as I am led to suppose, Monsieur de Soulanges gets a marshal's baton, I am on the

high-road with my title of Comte de Brambourg, to becoming general and peer of France. That will be the proper end of an aide-de-camp of the Dauphin."

After the Salon of 1823, one of the leading painters of the day, a most excellent man, obtained the management of a lottery-office near the Markets, for the mother of Joseph Bridau. Agathe was fortunately able, soon after, to exchange it on equal terms with the incumbent of another office, situated in the rue de Seine, in a house where Joseph was able to have his atelier. The widow now hired an agent herself, and was no longer an expense to her son. And yet, as late as 1828, though she was the directress of an excellent office which she owed entirely to Joseph's fame, Madame Bridau still had no belief in that fame, which was hotly contested, as all true glory ever will be. The great painter, struggling with his genius, had enormous wants; he did not earn enough to pay for the luxuries which his relations to society, and his distinguished position in the young School of Art demanded. Though powerfully sustained by his friends of the Cenacle and by Mademoiselle des Touches, he did not please the Bourgeois. That being, from whom comes the money of these days, never unties its purse-strings for genius that is called in question; unfortunately, Joseph had the classics and the Institute, and the critics who cry up those two powers, against him. The brave artist, though backed by Gros and Gerard, by whose influence he was decorated after the Salon of 1827, obtained few orders. If the ministry of the interior and the King's household were with difficulty induced to buy some of his greatest pictures, the shopkeepers and the rich foreigners noticed them still less. Moreover, Joseph gave way rather too much, as we must all acknowledge, to imaginative fancies, and that produced a certain inequality in his work which his enemies made use of to deny his talent.

"High art is at a low ebb," said his friend Pierre Grassou, who made daubs to suit the taste of the bourgeoisie, in whose appartements fine paintings were at a discount.

"You ought to have a whole cathedral to decorate; that's what you want," declared Schinner; "then you would silence criticism with a master-stroke."

Such speeches, which alarmed the good Agathe, only corroborated the judgment she had long since formed upon Philippe and Joseph. Facts sustained that judgment in the mind of a woman who had never ceased to be a provincial. Philippe, her favorite child, was he not the great man of the family at last? in his early errors she saw only the ebullitions of youth. Joseph, to the merit of whose productions she was insensible, for she saw them too long in process of gestation to admire them when finished, seemed to her no more advanced in 1828 than he was in 1816. Poor Joseph owed money, and was bowed down by the burden of debt; he had chosen, she felt, a worthless career that made him no return. She could not conceive why they had given him the cross of the Legion of honor. Philippe, on the other hand, rich enough to cease gambling, a guest at the fetes of Madame, the brilliant colonel who at all reviews and in all processions appeared before her eyes in splendid uniforms, with his two crosses on his breast, realized all her maternal dreams. One such day of public ceremony effaced from Agathe's mind the horrible sight of Philippe's misery on the Quai de l'Ecole; on that day he passed his mother at the self-same spot, in attendance on the Dauphin, with plumes in his shako, and his pelisse

gorgeous with gold and fur. Agathe, who to her artist son was now a sort of devoted gray sister, felt herself the mother of none but the dashing aide-de-camp to his Royal Highness, the Dauphin of France. Proud of Philippe, she felt he made the ease and happiness of her life,--forgetting that the lottery-office, by which she was enabled to live at all, came through Joseph.

One day Agathe noticed that her poor artist was more worried than usual by the bill of his color-man, and she determined, though cursing his profession in her heart, to free him from his debts. The poor woman kept the house with the proceeds of her office, and took care never to ask Joseph for a farthing. Consequently she had no money of her own; but she relied on Philippe's good heart and well-filled purse. For three years she had waited in expectation of his coming to see her; she now imagined that if she made an appeal to him he would bring some enormous sum; and her thoughts dwelt on the happiness she should feel in giving it to Joseph, whose judgment of his brother, like that of Madame Descoings, was so unfair.

Saying nothing to Joseph, she wrote the following letter to Philippe:--

To Monsieur le comte de Brambourg:

My dear Philippe,--You have not given the least little word of remembrance to your mother for five years. That is not right. You should remember the past, if only for the sake of your excellent brother. Joseph is now in need of money, and you are floating in wealth; he works, while you are flying from fete to fete. You now possess, all to yourself, the property of my brother. Little Borniche tells me you cannot have less than two hundred thousand francs a year. Well, then, come and see Joseph. During your visit, slip into the skull a few thousand-franc notes. Philippe, you owe them to us; nevertheless, your brother will feel grateful to you, not to speak of the happiness you will give

Your mother,

Agathe Bridau, nee Rouget

Two days later the concierge brought to the atelier, where poor Agathe was breakfasting with Joseph, the following terrible letter:--

My dear Mother,--A man does not marry a Mademoiselle Amelie de Soulanges without the purse of Fortunatus, if under the name of Comte de Brambourg he hides that of

Your son,

Philippe Bridau

As Agathe fell half-fainting on the sofa, the letter dropped to the floor. The slight noise made by the paper, and the smothered but dreadful exclamation which escaped Agathe startled Joseph, who had forgotten his mother for a moment and was vehemently rubbing in a sketch; he leaned his head round the edge of his canvas to see what had happened. The sight of his mother stretched out on the floor made

him drop palette and brushes, and rush to lift what seemed a lifeless body. He took Agathe in his arms and carried her to her own bed, and sent the servant for his friend Horace Bianchon. As soon as he could question his mother she told him of her letter to Philippe, and of the answer she had received from him. The artist went to his atelier and picked up the letter, whose concise brutality had broken the tender heart of the poor mother, and shattered the edifice of trust her maternal preference had erected. When Joseph returned to her bedside he had the good feeling to be silent. He did not speak of his brother in the three weeks during which--we will not say the illness, but--the death agony of the poor woman lasted. Bianchon, who came every day and watched his patient with the devotion of a true friend, told Joseph the truth on the first day of her seizure.

"At her age," he said, "and under the circumstances which have happened to her, all we can hope to do is to make her death as little painful as possible."

She herself felt so surely called of God that she asked the next day for the religious help of old Abbe Loraux, who had been her confessor for more than twenty-two years. As soon as she was alone with him, and had poured her griefs into his heart, she said--as she had said to Madame Hochon, and had repeated to herself again and again throughout her life:--

"What have I done to displease God? Have I not loved Him with all my soul? Have I wandered from the path of grace? What is my sin? Can I be guilty of wrong when I know not what it is? Have I the time to repair it?"

"No," said the old man, in a gentle voice. "Alas! your life seems to have been pure and your soul spotless; but the eye of God, poor afflicted creature, is keener than that of his ministers. I see the truth too late; for you have misled even me."

Hearing these words from lips that had never spoken other than peaceful and pleasant words to her, Agathe rose suddenly in her bed and opened her eyes wide, with terror and distress.

"Tell me! tell me!" she cried.

"Be comforted," said the priest. "Your punishment is a proof that you will receive pardon. God chastens his elect. Woe to those whose misdeeds meet with fortunate success; they will be kneaded again in humanity until they in their turn are sorely punished for simple errors, and are brought to the maturity of celestial fruits. Your life, my daughter, has been one long error. You have fallen into the pit which you dug for yourself; we fall ever on the side we have ourselves weakened. You gave your heart to an unnatural son, in whom you made your glory, and you have misunderstood the child who is your true glory. You have been so deeply unjust that you never even saw the striking contrast between the brothers. You owe the comfort of your life to Joseph, while your other son has pillaged you repeatedly. The poor son, who loves you with no return of equal tenderness, gives you all the comfort that your life has had; the rich son, who never thinks of you, despises you and desires your death--"

"Oh! no," she cried.

"Yes," resumed the priest, "your humble position stands in the way of his proud hopes. Mother, these are your sins! Woman, your sorrows and your anguish foretell that you shall know the peace of God. Your son Joseph is so noble that his tenderness has never been lessened by the injustice your maternal preferences have done him. Love him now; give him all your heart during your remaining days; pray for him, as I shall pray for you."

The eyes of the mother, opened by so firm a hand, took in with one retrospective glance the whole course of her life. Illumined by this flash of light, she saw her involuntary wrong-doing and burst into tears. The old priest was so deeply moved at the repentance of a being who had sinned solely through ignorance, that he left the room hastily lest she should see his pity.

Joseph returned to his mother's room about two hours after her confessor had left her. He had been to a friend to borrow the necessary money to pay his most pressing debts, and he came in on tiptoe, thinking that his mother was asleep. He sat down in an armchair without her seeing him; but he sprang up with a cold chill running through him as he heard her say, in a voice broken with sobs,--

"Will he forgive me?"

"What is it, mother?" he exclaimed, shocked at the stricken face of the poor woman, and thinking the words must mean the delirium that precedes death.

"Ah, Joseph! can you pardon me, my child?" she cried.

"For what?" he said.

"I have never loved you as you deserved to be loved."

"Oh, what an accusation!" he cried. "Not loved me? For seven years have we not lived alone together? All these seven years have you not taken care of me and done everything for me? Do I not see you every day,--hear your voice? Are you not the gentle and indulgent companion of my miserable life? You don't understand painting?--Ah! but that's a gift not always given. I was saying to Grassou only yesterday: 'What comforts me in the midst of my trials is that I have such a good mother. She is all that an artist's wife should be; she sees to everything; she takes care of my material wants without ever troubling or worrying me.'"

"No, Joseph, no; you have loved me, but I have not returned you love for love. Ah! would that I could live a little longer-- Give me your hand."

Agathe took her son's hand, kissed it, held it on her heart, and looked in his face a long time,--letting him see the azure of her eyes resplendent with a tenderness she had hitherto bestowed on Philippe only. The painter, well fitted to judge of expression, was so struck by the change, and saw so plainly how the heart of his mother had opened to him, that he took her in his arms, and held her for some moments to his heart, crying out like one beside himself,--"My mother! oh, my mother!"

"Ah! I feel that I am forgiven!" she said. "God will confirm the child's pardon of its mother."

"You must be calm: don't torment yourself; hear me. I feel myself loved enough in this one moment for all the past," he said, as he laid her back upon the pillows.

During the two weeks' struggle between life and death, there glowed such love in every look and gesture and impulse of the soul of the pious creature, that each effusion of her feelings seemed like the expression of a lifetime. The mother thought only of her son; she herself counted for nothing; sustained by love, she was unaware of her sufferings. D'Arthez, Michel Chrestien, Fulgence Ridal, Pierre Grassou, and Bianchon often kept Joseph company, and she heard them talking art in a low voice in a corner of her room.

"Oh, how I wish I knew what color is!" she exclaimed one evening as she heard them discussing one of Joseph's pictures.

Joseph, on his side, was sublimely devoted to his mother. He never left her chamber; answered tenderness by tenderness, cherishing her upon his heart. The spectacle was never afterwards forgotten by his friends; and they themselves, a band of brothers in talent and nobility of nature, were to Joseph and his mother all that they should have been,--friends who prayed, and truly wept; not saying prayers and shedding tears, but one with their friend in thought and action. Joseph, inspired as much by feeling as by genius, divined in the occasional expression of his mother's face a desire that was deep hidden in her heart, and he said one day to d'Arthez,--

"She has loved that brigand Philippe too well not to want to see him before she dies."

Joseph begged Bixiou, who frequented the Bohemian regions where Philippe was still occasionally to be found, to persuade that shameless son to play, if only out of pity, a little comedy of tenderness which might wrap the mother's heart in a winding-sheet of illusive happiness. Bixiou, in his capacity as an observing and misanthropical scoffer, desired nothing better than to undertake such a mission. When he had made known Madame Bridau's condition to the Comte de Brambourg, who received him in a bedroom hung with yellow damask, the colonel laughed.

"What the devil do you want me to do there?" he cried. "The only service the poor woman can render me is to die as soon as she can; she would be rather a sorry figure at my marriage with Mademoiselle de Soulanges. The less my family is seen, the better my position. You can easily understand that I should like to bury the name of Bridau under all the monuments in Pere-Lachaise. My brother irritates me by bringing the name into publicity. You are too knowing not to see the situation as I do. Look at it as if it were your own: if you were a deputy, with a tongue like yours, you would be as much feared as Chauvelin; you would be made Comte Bixiou, and director of the Beaux-Arts. Once there, how should you like it if your grandmother Descoings were to turn up? Would you want that worthy woman, who looked like a Madame Saint-Leon, to be hanging on to you? Would you give her an arm in the Tuileries, and present her to the noble family you were trying to enter? Damn it, you'd wish her six feet under ground, in a leaden night-gown. Come, breakfast with me, and let us talk of something

else. I am a parvenu, my dear fellow, and I know it. I don't choose that my swaddling-clothes shall be seen. My son will be more fortunate than I; he will be a great lord. The scamp will wish me dead; I expect it,--or he won't be my son."

He rang the bell, and ordered the servant to serve breakfast.

"The fashionable world wouldn't see you in your mother's bedroom," said Bixiou. "What would it cost you to seem to love that poor woman for a few hours?"

"Whew!" cried Philippe, winking. "So you come from them, do you? I'm an old camel, who knows all about genuflections. My mother makes the excuse of her last illness to get something out of me for Joseph. No, thank you!"

When Bixiou related this scene to Joseph, the poor painter was chilled to the very soul.

"Does Philippe know I am ill?" asked Agathe in a piteous tone, the day after Bixiou had rendered an account of his fruitless errand.

Joseph left the room, suffocating with emotion. The Abbe Loraux, who was sitting by the bedside of his penitent, took her hand and pressed it, and then he answered, "Alas! my child, you have never had but one son."

The words, which Agathe understood but too well, conveyed a shock which was the beginning of the end. She died twenty hours later.

In the delirium which preceded death, the words, "Whom does Philippe take after?" escaped her.

Joseph followed his mother to the grave alone. Philippe had gone, on business it was said, to Orleans; in reality, he was driven from Paris by the following letter, which Joseph wrote to him a moment after their mother had breathed her last sigh:--

Monster! my poor mother has died of the shock your letter caused her. Wear mourning, but pretend illness; I will not suffer her assassin to stand at my side before her coffin.

Joseph B.

The painter, who no longer had the heart to paint, though his bitter grief sorely needed the mechanical distraction which labor is wont to give, was surrounded by friends who agreed with one another never to leave him entirely alone. Thus it happened that Bixiou, who loved Joseph as much as a satirist can love any one, was sitting in the atelier with a group of other friends about two weeks after Agathe's funeral. The servant entered with a letter, brought by an old woman, she said, who was waiting below for the answer.

Monsieur,--To you, whom I scarcely dare to call my brother, I am forced to address myself, if only on account of the name I bear.--

Joseph turned the page and read the signature. The name "Comtesse Flore de Brambourg" made him shudder. He foresaw some new atrocity on

the part of his brother.

"That brigand," he cried, "is the devil's own. And he calls himself a man of honor! And he wears a lot of crosses on his breast! And he struts about at court instead of being bastinadoed! And the scoundrel is called Monsieur le Comte!"

"There are many like him," said Bixiou.

"After all," said Joseph, "the Rabouilleuse deserves her fate, whatever it is. She is not worth pitying; she'd have had my neck wrung like a chicken's without so much as saying, 'He's innocent.'"

Joseph flung away the letter, but Bixiou caught it in the air, and read it aloud, as follows:--

Is it decent that the Comtesse Bridau de Brambourg should die in a hospital, no matter what may have been her faults? If such is to be my fate, if such is your determination and that of monsieur le comte, so be it; but if so, will you, who are the friend of Doctor Bianchon, ask him for a permit to let me enter a hospital?

The person who carries this letter has been eleven consecutive days to the hotel de Brambourg, rue de Clichy, without getting any help from my husband. The poverty in which I now am prevents my employing a lawyer to make a legal demand for what is due to me, that I may die with decency. Nothing can save me, I know that. In case you are unwilling to see your unhappy sister-in-law, send me, at least, the money to end my days. Your brother desires my death; he has always desired it. He warned me that he knew three ways of killing a woman, but I had not the sense to foresee the one he has employed.

In case you will consent to relieve me, and judge for yourself the misery in which I now am, I live in the rue du Houssay, at the corner of the rue Chantereine, on the fifth floor. If I cannot pay my rent to-morrow I shall be put out--and then, where can I go? May I call myself,

Your sister-in-law,

Comtesse Flore de Brambourg.

"What a pit of infamy!" cried Joseph; "there is something under it all."

"Let us send for the woman who brought the letter; we may get the preface of the story," said Bixiou.

The woman presently appeared, looking, as Bixiou observed, like perambulating rags. She was, in fact, a mass of old gowns, one on top of another, fringed with mud on account of the weather, the whole mounted on two thick legs with heavy feet which were ill-covered by ragged stockings and shoes from whose cracks the water oozed upon the floor. Above the mound of rags rose a head like those that Charlet has given to his scavenger-women, caparisoned with a filthy bandanna handkerchief slit in the folds.

"What is your name?" said Joseph, while Bixiou sketched her, leaning on an umbrella belonging to the year II. of the Republic.

"Madame Gruget, at your service. I've seen better days, my young gentleman," she said to Bixiou, whose laugh affronted her. "If my poor girl hadn't had the ill-luck to love some one too much, you wouldn't see me what I am. She drowned herself in the river, my poor Ida, --saving your presence! I've had the folly to nurse up a quaterne, and that's why, at seventy-seven years of age, I'm obliged to take care of sick folks for ten sous a day, and go--"

--without clothes?" said Bixiou. "My grandmother nursed up a trey, but she dressed herself properly."

"Out of my ten sous I have to pay for a lodging--"

"What's the matter with the lady you are nursing?"

"In the first place, she hasn't got any money; and then she has a disease that scares the doctors. She owes me for sixty days' nursing; that's why I keep on nursing her. The husband, who is a count,--she is really a countess,--will no doubt pay me when she is dead; and so I've lent her all I had. And now I haven't anything; all I did have has gone to the pawn-brokers. She owes me forty-seven francs and twelve sous, beside thirty francs for the nursing. She wants to kill herself with charcoal. I tell her it ain't right; and, indeed, I've had to get the concierge to look after her while I'm gone, or she's likely to jump out of the window."

"But what's the matter with her?" said Joseph.

"Ah! monsieur, the doctor from the Sisters' hospital came; but as to the disease," said Madame Gruget, assuming a modest air, "he told me she must go to the hospital. The case is hopeless."

"Let us go and see her," said Bixiou.

"Here," said Joseph to the woman, "take these ten francs."

Plunging his hand into the skull and taking out all his remaining money, the painter called a coach from the rue Mazarin and went to find Bianchon, who was fortunately at home. Meantime Bixiou went off at full speed to the rue de Bussy, after Desroches. The four friends reached Flore's retreat in the rue du Houssay an hour later.

"That Mephistopheles on horseback, named Philippe Bridau," said Bixiou, as they mounted the staircase, "has sailed his boat cleverly to get rid of his wife. You know our old friend Lousteau? well, Philippe paid him a thousand francs a month to keep Madame Bridau in the society of Florine, Mariette, Tullia, and the Val-Noble. When Philippe saw his crab-girl so used to pleasure and dress that she couldn't do without them, he stopped paying the money, and left her to get it as she could--it is easy to know how. By the end of eighteen months, the brute had forced his wife, stage by stage, lower and lower; till at last, by the help of a young officer, he gave her a taste for drinking. As he went up in the world, his wife went down; and the countess is now in the mud. The girl, bred in the country, has a strong constitution. I don't know what means Philippe has lately taken to get rid of her. I am anxious to study this precious little

drama, for I am determined to avenge Joseph here. Alas, friends," he added, in a tone which left his three companions in doubt whether he was jesting or speaking seriously, "give a man over to a vice and you'll get rid of him. Didn't Hugo say: 'She loved a ball, and died of it'? So it is. My grandmother loved the lottery. Old Rouget loved a loose life, and Lolotte killed him. Madame Bridau, poor woman, loved Philippe, and perished of it. Vice! vice! my dear friends, do you want to know what vice is? It is the Bonneau of death."

"Then you'll die of a joke," said Desroches, laughing.

Above the fourth floor, the young men were forced to climb one of the steep, straight stairways that are almost ladders, by which the attics of Parisian houses are often reached. Though Joseph, who remembered Flore in all her beauty, expected to see some frightful change, he was not prepared for the hideous spectacle which now smote his artist's eye. In a room with bare, unpapered walls, under the sharp pitch of an attic roof, on a cot whose scanty mattress was filled, perhaps, with refuse cotton, a woman lay, green as a body that has been drowned two days, thin as a consumptive an hour before death. This putrid skeleton had a miserable checked handkerchief bound about her head, which had lost its hair. The circle round the hollow eyes was red, and the eyelids were like the pellicle of an egg. Nothing remained of the body, once so captivating, but an ignoble, bony structure. As Flore caught sight of the visitors, she drew across her breast a bit of muslin which might have been a fragment of a window-curtain, for it was edged with rust as from a rod. The young men saw two chairs, a broken bureau on which was a tallow-candle stuck into a potato, a few dishes on the floor, and an earthen fire-pot in a corner of the chimney, in which there was no fire; this was all the furniture of the room. Bixiou noticed the remaining sheets of writing-paper, brought from some neighboring grocery for the letter which the two women had doubtless concocted together. The word "disgusting" is a positive to which no superlative exists, and we must therefore use it to convey the impression caused by this sight. When the dying woman saw Joseph approaching her, two great tears rolled down her cheeks.

"She can still weep!" whispered Bixiou. "A strange sight,--tears from dominos! It is like the miracle of Moses."

"How burnt up!" cried Joseph.

"In the fires of repentance," said Flore. "I cannot get a priest; I have nothing, not even a crucifix, to help me see God. Ah, monsieur!" she cried, raising her arms, that were like two pieces of carved wood, "I am a guilty woman; but God never punished any one as he has punished me! Philippe killed Max, who advised me to do dreadful things, and now he has killed me. God uses him as a scourge!"

"Leave me alone with her," said Bianchon, "and let me find out if the disease is curable."

"If you cure her, Philippe Bridau will die of rage," said Desroches. "I am going to draw up a statement of the condition in which we have found his wife. He has not brought her before the courts as an adulteress, and therefore her rights as a wife are intact: he shall have the shame of a suit. But first, we must remove the Comtesse de Brambourg to the private hospital of Doctor Dubois, in the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis. She will be well cared for there. Then I will

summon the count for the restoration of the conjugal home."

"Bravo, Desroches!" cried Bixiou. "What a pleasure to do so much good that will make some people feel so badly!"

Ten minutes later, Bianchon came down and joined them.

"I am going straight to Despleins," he said. "He can save the woman by an operation. Ah! he will take good care of the case, for her abuse of liquor has developed a magnificent disease which was thought to be lost."

"Wag of a mangler! Isn't there but one disease in life?" cried Bixiou.

But Bianchon was already out of sight, so great was his haste to tell Despleins the wonderful news. Two hours later, Joseph's miserable sister-in-law was removed to the decent hospital established by Doctor Dubois, which was afterward bought of him by the city of Paris. Three weeks later, the "Hospital Gazette" published an account of one of the boldest operations of modern surgery, on a case designated by the initials "F. B." The patient died,—more from the exhaustion produced by misery and starvation than from the effects of the treatment.

No sooner did this occur, than the Comte de Brambourg went, in deep mourning, to call on the Comte de Soulanges, and inform him of the sad loss he had just sustained. Soon after, it was whispered about in the fashionable world that the Comte de Soulanges would shortly marry his daughter to a parvenu of great merit, who was about to be appointed brigadier-general and receive command of a regiment of the Royal Guard. De Marsay told this news to Eugene de Rastignac, as they were supping together at the Rocher de Cancale, where Bixiou happened to be.

"It shall not take place!" said the witty artist to himself.

Among the many old friends whom Philippe now refused to recognize, there were some, like Giroudeau, who were unable to revenge themselves; but it happened that he had wounded Bixiou, who, thanks to his brilliant qualities, was everywhere received, and who never forgave an insult. One day at the Rocher de Cancale, before a number of well-bred persons who were supping there, Philippe had replied to Bixiou, who spoke of visiting him at the hotel de Brambourg: "You can come and see me when you are made a minister."

"Am I to turn Protestant before I can visit you?" said Bixiou, pretending to misunderstand the speech; but he said to himself, "You may be Goliath, but I have got my sling, and plenty of stones."

The next day he went to an actor, who was one of his friends, and metamorphosed himself, by the all-powerful aid of dress, into a secularized priest with green spectacles; then he took a carriage and drove to the hotel de Soulanges. Received by the count, on sending in a message that he wanted to speak with him on a matter of serious importance, he related in a feigned voice the whole story of the dead countess, the secret particulars of whose horrible death had been confided to him by Bianchon; the history of Agathe's death; the history of old Rouget's death, of which the Comte de Brambourg had openly boasted; the history of Madame Descoings's death; the history of the theft from the newspaper; and the history of Philippe's private

morals during his early days.

"Monsieur le comte, don't give him your daughter until you have made every inquiry; interrogate his former comrades,--Bixiou, Giroudeau, and others."

Three months later, the Comte de Brambourg gave a supper to du Tillet, Nucingen, Eugene de Rastignac, Maxime de Trailles, and Henri de Marsay. The amphitryon accepted with much nonchalance the half-consolatory condolences they made to him as to his rupture with the house of Soulanges.

"You can do better," said Maxime de Trailles.

"How much money must a man have to marry a demoiselle de Grandlieu?" asked Philippe of de Marsay.

"You? They wouldn't give you the ugliest of the six for less than ten millions," answered de Marsay insolently.

"Bah!" said Rastignac. "With an income of two hundred thousand francs you can have Mademoiselle de Langeais, the daughter of the marquis; she is thirty years old, and ugly, and she hasn't a sou; that ought to suit you."

"I shall have ten millions two years from now," said Philippe Bridau.

"It is now the 16th of January, 1829," cried du Tillet, laughing. "I have been hard at work for ten years and I have not made as much as that yet."

"We'll take counsel of each other," said Bridau; "you shall see how well I understand finance."

"How much do you really own?" asked Nucingen.

"Three millions, excluding my house and my estate, which I shall not sell; in fact, I cannot, for the property is now entailed and goes with the title."

Nucingen and du Tillet looked at each other; after that sly glance du Tillet said to Philippe, "My dear count, I shall be delighted to do business with you."

De Marsay intercepted the look du Tillet had exchanged with Nucingen, and which meant, "We will have those millions." The two bank magnates were at the centre of political affairs, and could, at a given time, manipulate matters at the Bourse, so as to play a sure game against Philippe, when the probabilities might all seem for him and yet be secretly against him.

The occasion came. In July, 1830, du Tillet and Nucingen had helped the Comte de Brambourg to make fifteen hundred thousand francs; he could therefore feel no distrust of those who had given him such good advice. Philippe, who owed his rise to the Restoration, was misled by his profound contempt for "civilians"; he believed in the triumph of the Ordonnances, and was bent on playing for a rise; du Tillet and Nucingen, who were sure of a revolution, played against him for a fall. The crafty pair confirmed the judgment of the Comte de Brambourg

and seemed to share his convictions; they encouraged his hopes of doubling his millions, and apparently took steps to help him. Philippe fought like a man who had four millions depending on the issue of the struggle. His devotion was so noticeable, that he received orders to go to Saint-Cloud with the Duc de Maufrigneuse and attend a council. This mark of favor probably saved Philippe's life; for when the order came, on the 25th of July, he was intending to make a charge and sweep the boulevards, when he would undoubtedly have been shot down by his friend Giroudeau, who commanded a division of the assailants.

A month later, nothing was left of Colonel Bridau's immense fortune but his house and furniture, his estates, and the pictures which had come from Issoudun. He committed the still further folly, as he said himself, of believing in the restoration of the elder branch, to which he remained faithful until 1834. The not incomprehensible jealousy Philippe felt on seeing Giroudeau a colonel drove him to re-enter the service. Unluckily for himself, he obtained, in 1835, the command of a regiment in Algiers, where he remained three years in a post of danger, always hoping for the epaulets of a general. But some malignant influence--that, in fact, of General Giroudeau,--continually balked him. Grown hard and brutal, Philippe exceeded the ordinary severity of the service, and was hated, in spite of his bravery a la Murat.

At the beginning of the fatal year 1839, while making a sudden dash upon the Arabs during a retreat before superior forces, he flung himself against the enemy, followed by only a single company, and fell in, unfortunately, with the main body of the enemy. The battle was bloody and terrible, man to man, and only a few horsemen escaped alive. Seeing that their colonel was surrounded, these men, who were at some distance, were unwilling to perish uselessly in attempting to rescue him. They heard his cry: "Your colonel! to me! a colonel of the Empire!" but they rejoined the regiment. Philippe met with a horrible death, for the Arabs, after hacking him to pieces with their scimitars, cut off his head.

Joseph, who was married about this time, through the good offices of the Comte de Serizy, to the daughter of a millionaire farmer, inherited his brother's house in Paris and the estate of Brambourg, in consequence of the entail, which Philippe, had he foreseen this result, would certainly have broken. The chief pleasure the painter derived from his inheritance was in the fine collection of paintings from Issoudun. He now possesses an income of sixty thousand francs, and his father-in-law, the farmer, continues to pile up the five-franc pieces. Though Joseph Bridau paints magnificent pictures, and renders important services to artists, he is not yet a member of the Institute. As the result of a clause in the deed of entail, he is now Comte de Brambourg, a fact which often makes him roar with laughter among his friends in the atelier.

ADDENDUM

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

Note: The Two Brothers is also known as A Bachelor's Establishment and The Black Sheep. In other Addendum appearances it is referred to as A

Bachelor's Establishment.

Bianchon, Horace

Father Goriot

The Atheist's Mass

Cesar Birotteau

The Commission in Lunacy

Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

The Secrets of a Princess

The Government Clerks

Pierrette

A Study of Woman

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Honorine

The Seamy Side of History

The Magic Skin

A Second Home

A Prince of Bohemia

Letters of Two Brides

The Muse of the Department

The Imaginary Mistress

The Middle Classes

Cousin Betty

The Country Parson

In addition, M. Bianchon narrated the following:

Another Study of Woman

La Grande Breteche

Birotteau, Cesar

Cesar Birotteau

At the Sign of the Cat and Racket

Bixiou, Jean-Jacques

The Purse

The Government Clerks

Modeste Mignon

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

The Firm of Nucingen

The Muse of the Department

Cousin Betty

The Member for Arcis

Beatrix

A Man of Business

Gaudissart II.

The Unconscious Humorists

Cousin Pons

Brambourg, Comte de (Title of Philippe Bridau, later Joseph)

The Unconscious Humorists

Bridau, Philippe

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Bridau, Joseph

The Purse

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

A Start in Life

Modeste Mignon

Another Study of Woman
Pierre Grassou
Letters of Two Brides
Cousin Betty
The Member for Arcis

Bruel, Jean Francois du
The Government Clerks
A Start in Life
A Prince of Bohemia
The Middle Classes
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
A Daughter of Eve

Bruel, Claudine Chaffaroux, Madame du
A Prince of Bohemia
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
Letters of Two Brides
The Middle Classes

Cabirolle, Madame
A Start in Life

Cabirolle, Agathe-Florentine
A Start in Life
Lost Illusions
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Camusot
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
Cousin Pons
The Muse of the Department
Cesar Birotteau
At the Sign of the Cat and Racket

Cardot, Jean-Jerome-Severin
A Start in Life
Lost Illusions
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
At the Sign of the Cat and Racket
Cesar Birotteau

Chaulieu, Henri, Duc de
Letters of Two Brides
Modest Mignon
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
The Thirteen

Chrestien, Michel
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
The Secrets of a Princess

Claparon, Charles
Cesar Birotteau
Melmoth Reconciled
The Firm of Nucingen
A Man of Business
The Middle Classes

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A Start in Life
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