The Deputy of Arcis

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PART I. THE ELECTION

I. ALL ELECTIONS BEGIN WITH A BUSTLE

Before beginning to describe an election in the provinces, it is proper to state that the town of Arcis-sur-Aube was not the theatre of the events here related.

The arrondissement of Arcis votes at Bar-sur-Aube, which is forty miles from Arcis; consequently there is no deputy from Arcis in the Chamber.

Discretion, required in a history of contemporaneous manners and morals, dictates this precautionary word. It is rather an ingenious contrivance to make the description of one town the frame for events which happened in another; and several times already in the course of the Comedy of Human Life, this means has been employed in spite of its disadvantages, which consist chiefly in making the frame of as much importance as the canvas.

Toward the end of the month of April, 1839, about ten o'clock in the morning, the salon of Madame Marion, widow of a former receiver-general of the department of the Aube, presented a singular appearance. All the furniture had been removed except the curtains to the windows, the ornaments on the fireplace, the chandelier, and the tea-table. An Aubusson carpet, taken up two weeks before the usual time, obstructed the steps of the portico, and the floor had been violently rubbed and polished, though without increasing its usual brightness. All this was a species of domestic premonition concerning the result of the elections which were about to take place over the whole surface of France. Often things are as spiritually intelligent as men,—an argument in favor of the occult sciences.

The old man-servant of Colonel Giguet, Madame Marion's older brother, had just finished dusting the room; the chamber-maid and the cook were carrying, with an alacrity that denoted an enthusiasm equal to their attachment, all the chairs of the house, and piling them up in the garden, where the trees were already unfolding their leaves, through which the cloudless blue of the sky was visible. The springlike atmosphere and sun of May allowed the glass door and the two windows of the oblong salon to be kept open.

An old lady, Madame Marion herself, now ordered the two maids to place the chairs at one end of the salon, four rows deep, leaving between the rows a space of about three feet. When this was done, each row presented a front of ten chairs, all of divers species. A line of chairs was also placed along the wall, under the windows and before the glass door. At the other end of the salon, facing the forty chairs, Madame Marion placed three arm-chairs behind the tea-table, which was covered with a green cloth, on which she placed a bell.

Old Colonel Giguet arrived on this battle-field at the moment when his sister bethought herself of filling the empty spaces on either side of the fireplace with benches from the antechamber, disregarding the baldness of their velvet covers which had done good service for twenty-four years.

"We can seat seventy persons," she said to her brother triumphantly.

"God grant that we may have seventy friends!" replied the colonel.

"If, after receiving every night, for twenty-four years, the whole society of Arcis-sur-

Aube, a single one of my regular visitors fails us on this occasion—" began the old lady, in a threatening manner.

"Pooh, pooh!" replied the colonel, interrupting his sister, "I'll name you ten who cannot and ought not to come. First," he said, beginning to count on his fingers, "Antonin Goulard, sub-prefect, for one; Frederic Marest, *procureur-du-roi*, there's two; Monsieur Olivier Vinet, his substitute, three; Monsieur Martener, examining-judge, four; the justice of peace—"

"But I am not so silly," said the old lady, interrupting her brother in her turn, "as to expect office-holders to come to a meeting the object of which is to give another deputy to the Opposition. For all that, Antonin Goulard, Simon's comrade and schoolmate, would be very well pleased to see him a deputy because—"

"Come, sister, leave our own business of politics to us men. Where is Simon?"

"He is dressing," she answered. "He was wise not to breakfast, for he is very nervous. It is queer that, though he is in the habit of speaking in court, he dreads this meeting as if he were certain to meet enemies."

"Faith! I have often had to face masked batteries, and my soul—I won't say my body—never quailed; but if I had to stand there," said the old soldier, pointing to the tea-table, "and face forty bourgeois gaping at me, their eyes fixed on mine, and expecting sonorous and correct phrases, my shirt would be wringing wet before I could get out a word."

"And yet, my dear father," said Simon Giguet, entering from the smaller salon, "you really must make that effort for me; for if there is a man in the department of the Aube whose voice is all-powerful it is assuredly you. In 1815—"

"In 1815," said the little old man, who was wonderfully well preserved, "I did not have to speak; I simply wrote out a little proclamation which brought us two thousand men in twenty-four hours. But it is a very different thing putting my name to a paper which is read by a department, and standing up before a meeting to make a speech. Napoleon himself failed there; at the 18th Brumaire he talked nothing but nonsense to the Five Hundred."

"But, my dear father," urged Simon, "it concerns my life, my fortune, my happiness. Fix your eyes on some one person and think you are talking to him, and you'll get through all right."

"Heavens!" cried Madame Marion, "I am only an old woman, but under such circumstances and knowing what depends on it, I—oh! I should be eloquent!"

"Too eloquent, perhaps," said the colonel. "To go beyond the mark is not attaining it. But why make so much of all this?" he added, looking at his son. "It is only within the last two days you have taken up this candidacy of ideas; well, suppose you are not nominated, —so much the worse for Arcis, that's all."

These words were in keeping with the whole life of him who said them. Colonel Giguet was one of the most respected officers in the Grand Army, the foundation of his character being absolute integrity joined to extreme delicacy. Never did he put himself forward; favors, such as he received, sought him. For this reason he remained eleven years a mere captain of the artillery of the Guard, not receiving the rank of major until 1814. His almost

fanatical attachment to Napoleon forbade his taking service under the Bourbons after the first abdication. In fact, his devotion in 1815 was such that he would have been banished with so many others if the Comte de Gondreville had not contrived to have his name effaced from the ordinance and put on the retired list with a pension, and the rank of colonel.

Madame Marion, *nee* Giguet, had another brother who was colonel of gendarmerie at Troyes, whom she followed to that town at an earlier period. It was there that she married Monsieur Marion, receiver-general of the Aube, who also had had a brother, the chief-justice of an imperial court. While a mere barrister at Arcis this young man had lent his name during the Terror to the famous Malin de l'Aube, the representative of the people, in order to hold possession of the estate of Gondreville. [See "An Historical Mystery."] Consequently, all the support and influence of Malin, now become count and senator, was at the service of the Marion family. The barrister's brother was made receiver-general of the department, at a period when, far from having forty applicants for one place, the government was fortunate in getting any one to accept such a slippery office.

Marion, the receiver-general, inherited the fortune of his brother the chief-justice, and Madame Marion that of her brother the colonel of gendarmerie. In 1814, the receiver-general met with reverses. He died when the Empire died; but his widow managed to gather fifteen thousand francs a year from the wreck of his accumulated fortunes. The colonel of gendarmerie had left his property to his sister on learning the marriage of his brother the artillery officer to the daughter of a rich banker of Hamburg. It is well known what a fancy all Europe had for the splendid troopers of Napoleon!

In 1814, Madame Marion, half-ruined, returned to Arcis, her native place, where she bought, on the Grande-Place, one of the finest houses in the town. Accustomed to receive much company at Troyes, where the receiver-general reigned supreme, she now opened her salon to the notabilities of the liberal party in Arcis. A woman accustomed to the advantages of salon royalty does not easily renounce them. Vanity is the most tenacious of all habits.

Bonapartist, and afterwards a liberal—for, by the strangest of metamorphoses, the soldiers of Napoleon became almost to a man enamoured of the constitutional system—Colonel Giguet was, during the Restoration, the natural president of the governing committee of Arcis, which consisted of the notary Grevin, his son-in-law Beauvisage, and Varlet junior, the chief physician of Arcis, brother-in-law of Grevin, and a few other liberals.

"If our dear boy is not nominated," said Madame Marion, having first looked into the antechamber and garden to make sure that no one overheard her, "he cannot have Mademoiselle Beauvisage; his success in this election means a marriage with Cecile."

"Cecile!" exclaimed the old man, opening his eyes very wide and looking at his sister in stupefaction.

"There is no one but you in the whole department who would forget the *dot* and the expectations of Mademoiselle Beauvisage," said his sister.

"She is the richest heiress in the department of the Aube," said Simon Giguet.

“But it seems to me,” said the old soldier, “that my son is not to be despised as a match; he is your heir, he already has something from his mother, and I expect to leave him something better than a dry name.”

“All that put together won’t make thirty thousand a year, and suitors are already coming forward who have as much as that, not counting their position,” returned Madame Marion.

“And?” asked the colonel.

“They have been refused.”

“Then what do the Beauvisage family want?” said the colonel, looking alternately at his son and sister.

It may seem extraordinary that Colonel Giguet, the brother of Madame Marion in whose house the society of Arcis had met for twenty-four years, and whose salon was the echo of all reports, all scandals, and all the gossip of the department of the Aube,—a good deal of it being there manufactured,—should be ignorant of facts of this nature. But his ignorance will seem natural when we mention that this noble relic of the Napoleonic legions went to bed at night and rose in the morning with the chickens, as all old persons should do if they wish to live out their lives. He was never present at the intimate conversations which went on in the salon. In the provinces there are two sorts of intimate conversation,—one, which is held officially when all the company are gathered together, playing at cards or conversing; the other, which *simmers*, like a well made soup, when three or four friends remain around the fireplace, friends who can be trusted to repeat nothing of what is said beyond their own limits.

For nine years, ever since the triumph of his political ideas, the colonel had lived almost entirely outside of social life. Rising with the sun, he devoted himself to horticulture; he adored flowers, and of all flowers he best loved roses. His hands were brown as those of a real gardener; he took care himself of his beds. Constantly in conference with his working gardener he mingled little, especially for the last two years, with the life of others; of whom, indeed, he saw little. He took but one meal with the family, namely, his dinner; for he rose too early to breakfast with his son and sister. To his efforts we owe the famous rose Giguet, known so well to all amateurs.

This old man, who had now passed into the state of a domestic fetich, was exhibited, as we may well suppose, on all extraordinary occasions. Certain families enjoy the benefit of a demi-god of this kind, and plume themselves upon him as they would upon a title.

“I have noticed,” replied Madame Marion to her brother’s question, “that ever since the revolution of July Madame Beauvisage has aspired to live in Paris. Obliged to stay here as long as her father lives, she has fastened her ambition on a future son-in-law, and my lady dreams now of the splendors and dignities of political life.”

“Could you love Cecile?” said the colonel to his son.

“Yes, father.”

“And does she like you?”

“I think so; but the thing is, to please the mother and grandfather. Though old Grevin himself wants to oppose my election, my success would determine Madame Beauvisage to

accept me, because she expects to manage me as she pleases and to be minister under my name."

"That's a good joke!" cried Madame Marion. "What does she take us for?"

"Whom has she refused?" asked the colonel.

"Well, within the last three months, Antonin Goulard and the *procureur-du-roi*, Frederic Marest, have received, so they say, equivocal answers which mean anything—*except yes*."

"Heavens!" cried the old man throwing up his arms. "What days we live in, to be sure! Why, Lucie was the daughter of a hosier, and the grand-daughter of a farmer. Does Madame Beauvisage want the Comte de Cinq-Cygne for a son-in-law?"

"Don't laugh at Madame Beauvisage, brother. Cecile is rich enough to choose a husband anywhere, even in the class to which the Cinq-Cygnes belong. But there's the bell announcing the electors, and I disappear—regretting much I can't hear what you are all going to say."

II. REVOLT OF A LIBERAL ROTTEN-BOROUGH

Though 1839 is, politically speaking, very distant from 1847, we can still remember the elections produced by the Coalition, an ephemeral effort of the Chamber of Deputies to realize the threat of parliamentary government,—a threat *a la* Cromwell, which without a Cromwell could only end, under a prince "the enemy of fraud," in the triumph of the present system, by which the Chambers and the ministers are like the wooden puppets which the proprietor of the Guignolet shows exhibits to the great satisfaction of wonder-stricken idlers in the streets.

The arrondissement of Arcis-sur-Aube then found itself in a singular position. It supposed itself free to choose its deputy. From 1816 to 1836 it had always elected one of the heaviest orators of the Left, belonging to the famous seventeen who were called "Great Citizens" by the liberal party,—namely, Francois Keller, of the house of Keller Bros., the son-in-law of the Comte de Gondreville. Gondreville, one of the most magnificent estates in France, is situated about a mile from Arcis.

This banker, recently made count and peer of France, expected, no doubt, to transfer to his son, then thirty years of age, his electoral succession, in order to make him some day eligible for the peerage. Already a major on the staff and a great favorite of the prince-royal, Charles Keller, now a viscount, belonged to the court party of the citizen-king. The most brilliant future seemed pledged to a young man enormously rich, full of energy, already remarkable for his devotion to the new dynasty, the grandson of the Comte de Gondreville, and nephew of the Marechal de Carigliano; but this election, so necessary to his future prospects, presented suddenly certain difficulties to overcome.

Since the accession to power of the bourgeois class, Arcis had felt a vague desire to show itself independent. Consequently, the last election of Francois Keller had been disturbed by certain republicans, whose red caps and long beards had not, however, seriously alarmed the bourgeois of Arcis. By canvassing the country carefully the radical candidate would be able to secure some thirty or forty votes. A few of the townspeople, humiliated at seeing their town always treated as a rotten borough, joined the democrats, though enemies to democracy. In France, under the system of balloting, politico-chemical products are formed in which the laws of affinity are reversed.

Now, to elect young Keller in 1839, after having elected his father for twenty years, would show a monstrous electoral servitude, against which the pride of the newly enriched bourgeoisie revolved, for they felt themselves to be fully worth either Monsieur Malin, otherwise called Comte de Gondreville, the Keller Bros., the Cinq-Cygnes, or even, the King of the French.

The numerous partisans of old Gondreville, the king of the department of the Aube, were therefore awaiting some fresh proof of his ability, already so thoroughly tested, to circumvent this rising revolt. In order not to compromise the influence of his family in the arrondissement of Arcis, that old statesman would doubtless propose for candidate some young man who could be induced to accept an official function and then yield his place to Charles Keller,—a parliamentary arrangement which renders the elect of the people

subject to re-election.

When Simon Giguet sounded the old notary Grevin, the faithful friend of the Comte de Gondreville, on the subject of the elections, the old man replied that, while he did not know the intentions of the Comte de Gondreville, he should himself vote for Charles Keller and employ his influence for that election.

As soon as this answer of old Grevin had circulated through Arcis, a reaction against him set in. Although for thirty years this provincial Aristides possessed the confidence of the whole town,—having been mayor of Arcis from 1804 to 1814 and again during the Hundred Days,—and although the Opposition had accepted him as their leader until the triumph of 1830, at which period he refused the honors of the mayoralty on the ground of his great age, and finally, although the town, in order to manifest its affection for him, elected his son-in-law, Monsieur Beauvisage, mayor in his stead, it now revolted against him and some young striplings went so far as to talk of his dotage. The partisans of Simon Giguet then turned to Phileas Beauvisage, the mayor, and won him over the more easily to their side because, without having quarrelled with his father-in-law, he assumed an independence of him which had ended in coldness,—an independence that the sly old notary allowed him to maintain, seeing in it an excellent means of action on the town of Arcis.

The mayor, questioned the evening before in the open street, declared positively that he should cast his vote for the first-comer on the list of eligibles rather than give it to Charles Keller, for whom, however, he had a high esteem.

“Arcis shall be no longer a rotten borough!” he said, “or I’ll emigrate to Paris.”

Flatter the passions of the moment and you will always be a hero, even at Arcis-sur-Aube.

“Monsieur le maire,” said everybody, “gives noble proof of his firmness of character.”

Nothing progresses so rapidly as a legal revolt. That evening Madame Marion and her friends organized for the morrow a meeting of “independent electors” in the interests of Simon Giguet, the colonel’s son. The morrow had now come and had turned the house topsy-turvy to receive the friends on whose independence the leaders of the movement counted. Simon Giguet, the native-born candidate of a little town jealously desirous to elect a son of its own, had, as we have seen, put to profit this desire; and yet, the whole prosperity and fortune of the Giguet family were the work of the Comte de Gondreville. But when it comes to an election, what are sentiments!

This Scene is written for the information of countries so unfortunate as not to know the blessings of national representation, and which are, therefore, ignorant by what intestinal convulsions, what Brutus-like sacrifices, a little town gives birth to a deputy. Majestic but natural spectacle, which may, indeed, be compared with that of childbirth,—the same throes, the same impurities, the same lacerations, the same final triumph!

It may be asked why an only son, whose fortune was sufficient, should be, like Simon Giguet, an ordinary barrister in a little country town where barristers are pretty nearly useless. A word about the candidate is therefore necessary.

Colonel Giguet had had, between 1806 and 1813, by his wife who died in 1814, three

children, the eldest of whom, Simon, alone survived. Until he became an only child, Simon was brought up as a youth to whom the exercise of a profession would be necessary. And about the time he became by the death of his brothers the family heir, the young man met with a serious disappointment. Madame Marion had counted much, for her nephew, on the inheritance of his grandfather the banker of Hamburg. But when that old German died in 1826, he left his grandson Giguet a paltry two thousand francs a year. The worthy banker, endowed with great procreative powers, having soothed the worries of business by the pleasures of paternity, favored the families of eleven other children who surrounded him, and who made him believe, with some appearance of justice, that Simon Giguet was already a rich man.

Besides all this, the colonel was bent on giving his son an independent position, and for this reason: the Giguets could not expect any government favors under the Restoration. Even if Simon had not been the son of an ardent Bonapartist, he belonged to a family whose members had justly incurred the animosity of the Cinq-Cygne family, owing to the part which Giguet, the colonel of gendarmerie, and the Marions, including Madame Marion, had taken as witnesses on the famous trial of the Messieurs de Simeuse, unjustly condemned in 1805 for the abduction of the Comte de Gondreville, then senator, and formerly representative of the people, who had despoiled the Cinq-Cygne family of their property. [See “An Historical Mystery.”]

Grevin was not only one of the most important witnesses at that trial, but he was one of the chief promoters of the prosecution. That affair divides to this day the arrondissement of Arcis into two parties; one of which declares the innocence of the condemned; the other standing by the Comte de Gondreville and his adherents. Though, under the Restoration, the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne used all the influence the return of the Bourbons gave her to arrange things as she wished in the department of the Aube, the Comte de Gondreville contrived to counterbalance this Cinq-Cygne royalty by the secret authority he wielded over the liberals of the town through the notary Grevin, Colonel Giguet, his son-in-law Keller (always elected deputy in spite of the Cinq-Cygnes), and also by the credit he maintained, as long as Louis XVIII. lived, in the counsels of the crown. It was not until after the death of that king that the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne was able to get Michu appointed judge of the court of assizes in Arcis. She desired of all things to obtain this place for the son of the steward who had perished on the scaffold at Troyes, the victim of his devotion to the Simeuse family, whose full-length portrait always hung in her salon, whether in Paris or at Cinq-Cygne. Until 1823 the Comte de Gondreville had possessed sufficient power over Louis XVIII. to prevent this appointment of Michu.

It was by the advice of the Comte de Gondreville that Colonel Giguet made his son a lawyer. Simon had all the more opportunity of shining at the bar in the arrondissement of Arcis because he was the only barrister, solicitors pleading their own cases in these petty localities. The young man had really secured certain triumphs in the court of assizes of the Aube, but he was none the less an object of derision to Frederic Marest, *procureur-du-roi*, Olivier Vinet, the substitute *procureur*, and the judge, Michu,—the three best minds in the court.

Simon Giguet, like other men, paid goodly tribute to the mighty power of ridicule that pursued him. He liked to hear himself talk, and he talked on all occasions; he solemnly

delivered himself of dry and long-winded sentences which passed for eloquence among the upper bourgeoisie of Arcis. The poor fellow belonged to that species of bore which desires to explain everything, even the simplest thing. He explained rain; he explained the revolution of July; he explained things impenetrable; he explained Louis-Philippe, Odilon Barrot, Monsieur Thiers, the Eastern Question; he explained Champagne; he explained 1788; he explained the tariff of custom houses and humanitarians, magnetism and the economy of the civil list.

This lean young man, with a bilious skin, tall enough to justify his sonorous nullity (for it is rare that a tall man does not have eminent faculties of some kind) outdid the puritanism of the votaries of the extreme Left, all of them so sensitive, after the manner of prudes who have their intrigues to hide. Dressed invariably in black, he wore a white cravat which came down low on his chest, so that his face seemed to issue from a horn of white paper, for the collar of his shirt was high and stiff after a fashion now, fortunately, exploded. His trousers and his coats were always too large for him. He had what is called in the provinces dignity; that is to say, he was stiffly erect and pompously dull in manner. His friend, Antonin Goulard, accused him of imitating Monsieur Dupin. And in truth, the young barrister was apt to wear shoes and stout socks of black filoselle.

Protected by the respect that every one bore to his father, and by the influence exercised by his aunt over a little town whose principal inhabitants had frequented her salon for many years, Simon Giguet, possessing already ten thousand francs a year, not counting the fees of his profession and the fortune his aunt would not fail to leave him, felt no doubt of his election. Nevertheless, the first sound of the bell announcing the arrival of the most influential electors echoed in the heart of the ambitious aspirant and filled it with vague fears. Simon did not conceal from himself the cleverness and the immense resources of old Grevin, nor the prestige attending the means that would surely be employed by the ministry to promote the candidacy of a young and dashing officer then in Africa, attached to the staff of the prince-royal.

“I think,” he said to his father, “that I have the colic; I feel a warmth at the pit of my stomach that makes me very uneasy.”

“Old soldiers,” replied the colonel, “have the same feeling when they hear the cannon beginning to growl at the opening of a battle.”

“What will it be in the Chamber!” said the barrister.

“The Comte de Gondreville told me,” said the old colonel, “that he has known more than one orator affected with the qualms which precede, even with us old fire-eaters, the opening of a battle. But all this is idle talk. You want to be a deputy,” added the old man, shrugging his shoulders, “then be one!”

“Father, the real triumph will be Cecile! Cecile has an immense fortune. Now-a-days an immense fortune means power.”

“Dear me! how times have changed! Under the Emperor men had to be brave.”

“Each epoch is summed up in a phrase,” said Simon, recalling an observation of the Comte de Gondreville, which paints that personage well. He remarked: “Under the Empire, when it was desirable to destroy a man, people said, ‘He is a coward.’ To-day we

say, ‘He is a cheat.’”

“Poor France! where are they leading you?” cried the colonel; “I shall go back to my roses.”

“Oh, stay, father! You are the keystone of the arch.”

III. OPPOSITION DEFINES ITSELF

The mayor, Monsieur Phileas Beauvisage, was the first to present himself, accompanied by the successor of his father-in-law, the busiest notary in town, Achille Pigoult, grandson of an old man who had continued justice of the peace in Arcis during the Revolution, the Empire, and the Restoration. Achille Pigoult, thirty-two years of age, had been eighteen years a clerk in Grevin's office with no means of becoming himself a notary. His father, son of the justice of peace, had died of a so-called apoplexy, having gone wrong in business.

The Comte de Gondreville, however, with whom old Pigoult had relations dating back to 1793, lent money for the necessary security, and thus enabled the grandson of the judge who made the first examination in the Simeuse case to buy the practice of his master, Grevin. Achille had set up his office in the Place de l'Eglise, in a house belonging to the Comte de Gondreville, which the latter had leased to him at so low a price that any one could see how desirous that crafty politician was to hold the leading notary of Arcis in the hollow of his hand.

Young Pigoult, a short, skinny man, whose eyes seemed to pierce the green spectacles which could not modify the spitefulness of his glance, well-informed as to all the interests of the neighborhood, owing his aptitude in managing affairs to a certain facility of speech, passed for what is called a *quizzer*, saying things plainly and with more cleverness than the aborigines could put into their conversations. Still a bachelor, he was awaiting a rich marriage through the offices of his two protectors, Grevin and the Comte de Gondreville. Consequently, barrister Giguet was not a little surprised on seeing Achille appear at the meeting in company with Monsieur Phileas Beauvisage.

The notary, whose face was so seamed by the smallpox that it seemed to be covered with a white net, formed a perfect contrast to the rotund person of the mayor, whose face resembled a full moon, but a warm and lively moon; its tones of lily and of rose being still further brightened by a gracious smile, the result not so much of a disposition of the soul as of that formation of the lips for which the word "simpering" seems to have been created. Phileas Beauvisage was endowed with so great a contentment with himself that he smiled on all the world and under all circumstances. Those simpering lips smiled at a funeral. The liveliness that abounded in his infantine blue eyes did not contradict that perpetual and well-nigh intolerable smile.

This internal satisfaction passed all the more readily for benevolence and affability, because Phileas had made himself a language of his own, remarkable for its immoderate use of the formulas of politeness. He always "had the honor"; to all his inquiries as to the health of absent persons he added the adjectives "dear," "good," "excellent." He lavished condoling or congratulatory phrases apropos of all the petty miseries and all the little felicities of life. He concealed under a deluge of commonplaces his native incapacity, his total want of education, and a weakness of character which can only be expressed by the old word "weathercock." Be not uneasy: the weathercock had for its axis the beautiful Madame Beauvisage, Severine Grevin, the most remarkable woman in the arrondissement.

When Severine heard of what she called her husband's "freak" as to the election, she said to him on the morning of the meeting at Madame Marion's:—

"It was well enough to give yourself an air of independence; but you mustn't go to that Giguet meeting unless Achille Pigoult accompanies you; I've told him to come and take you."

Giving Achille Pigoult as mentor to Beauvisage meant sending a spy from the Gondreville party to the Giguet assemblage. We may therefore imagine the grimace which contracted the puritan visage of Simon, who was forced to welcome graciously an *habitue* of his aunt's salon and an influential elector, in whom, nevertheless, he saw an enemy.

"Ah!" he thought to himself, "what a mistake I made in refusing him that security when he asked for it! Old Gondreville had more sense than I—Good-day to you, Achille," he said, assuming a jaunty manner; "I suppose you mean to trip me up."

"Your meeting isn't a conspiracy against the independence of our votes," replied the notary, smiling. "We are all playing above-board, I take it."

"Above-board," echoed Beauvisage.

And the mayor began to laugh with that expressionless laugh by which some persons end all their sentences; which may, perhaps, be called the *ritornello* of their conversation. After which he placed himself in what we must describe as his third position, standing full-front, his chest expanded, and his hands behind his back. He was dressed in black coat and trousers, with an effulgent white waistcoat, opened in such a way as to show two diamond shirt-buttons worth several thousand francs.

"We shall fight, but we shall not be the less good friends," he said. "That is the essence of constitutional morals; he! he! he! That is how *I* understand the alliance of monarchy with liberty; ha! ha! ha!"

Whereupon the mayor took Simon's hand, saying:

"How are you, my good friend? Your dear aunt and our worthy colonel are no doubt as well to-day as they were yesterday,—that is, I presume so,—he! he! he!" adding, with an air of perfect beatitude, "perhaps a little agitated by the ceremony now about to take place. Ha! ha! young man; so we intend to enter a political career? Ha! ha! ha! This is our first step—mustn't step back—it is a great career. I'd rather it were you than I to rush into the storms and tempests of the legislative body, hi! hi!—however agreeable it may be to see that body in our own person, hi! hi! hi!—the sovereign power of France in one four hundred and fifty-third! Hi! hi! hi!"

The vocal organ of Phileas Beauvisage had an agreeable sonority altogether in harmony with the leguminous curves of his face (of the color of a light yellow pumpkin), his solid back, and his broadly expanded chest. That voice, bass in volume, could soften to a baritone and utter, in the giggle with which Phileas ended his phrases, a silvery note. When God desired, in order to place all species of mankind in this his terrestrial paradise, to create within it a provincial bourgeois, his hands never made a more perfect and complete type than Phileas Beauvisage.

"I admire," said that great work, "the devotion of those who fling themselves into the

tumult of political life; he! he! he! It takes more nerve than I possess. Who could have told us in 1812 or 1813 that we should come to this? As for me, nothing can surprise me in these days, when asphalt, India-rubber, railroads, and steam have changed the ground we tread on, and overcoats, and distances, he, he!”

These last words were seasoned with a prolonged laugh, and accompanied by a gesture which he had made more especially his own: he closed his right fist, struck it into the rounded palm of his left hand, and rubbed it there with joyous satisfaction. This performance coincided with his laughs on the frequent occasions when he thought he had said a witty thing. Perhaps it is superfluous to add that Phileas Beauvisage was regarded in Arcis as an amiable and charming man.

“I shall endeavor,” replied Simon Giguet, “to worthily represent—”

“The sheep of Champagne,” interpolated Achille Pigoult, interrupting him.

The candidate swallowed that shaft without reply, for he was forced at that moment to go forward and receive two more influential electors.

One was the landlord of the Mulet, the best inn in Arcis, standing on the Grande-Place at the corner of the rue de Brienne. This worthy landlord, named Poupart, had married the sister of a man-servant attached to the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne, the well-known Gothard, one of the actors and witnesses in the Simeuse affair.

Poupart, though a most devoted adherent of the Cinq-Cygne family, had been sounded during the last day or two, by Colonel Giguet’s valet, with so much cleverness and perseverance that he thought he was doing an ill-turn to the Comte de Gondreville, the enemy of the Cinq-Cygnes, by giving his influence to the election of Simon Giguet; and he was now conversing on that point with the man who accompanied him, an apothecary named Fromaget, who, as he did not furnish his wares to the chateau de Gondreville, desired nothing better than to cabal against the Kellers.

These two individuals of the lesser bourgeoisie could, in consequence of their connections, determine a certain number of floating votes, for they influenced and advised a number of persons to whom the political opinions of the candidate were a matter of indifference. Consequently, Simon took possession of Poupart, and delivered the apothecary Fromaget to his father, who had just come in to make his bow to the electors.

The sub-engineer of the arrondissement, the secretary of the mayor’s office, four sheriffs, three solicitors, the clerk of the court, and the clerk of the justice of the peace, the registry-clerk, and the tax-collector, all officials under government, two doctors, rivals of Varlet, Grevin’s brother-in-law, a miller named Laurent Goussard, the head of the republicans of Arcis, the two assistant mayors, the printer and publisher of Arcis, and about a dozen other bourgeois arrived in succession, and walked about the garden until the gathering seemed numerous enough to admit of opening the session.

At length, about mid-day, fifty men, all in their best clothes,—most of them having come out of curiosity to see the handsome salons which were much talked of throughout the arrondissement,—were seated on the chairs Madame Marion had provided for them. The windows were left open, and presently so deep a silence reigned that the rustle of Madame Marion’s gown was heard,—that good woman not being able to resist the

pleasure of descending to the garden and placing herself in a corner whence she could listen to what went on in the salon. The cook, the chamber-maid, and the man-servant stood in the dining-room and shared the emotions of their masters.

“Messieurs,” said Simon Giguet, “some among you desire to honor my father by asking him to preside at this meeting; but Colonel Giguet requests me to present his thanks, and express due gratitude for a desire in which he sees a reward for his services to the country. We are in his house; he thinks he ought, therefore, to decline those functions, and he desires to propose in his stead an honorable merchant on whom your suffrages have already bestowed the chief magistracy of this town, Monsieur Phileas Beauvisage.”

“Bravo! bravo!”

“We are, I think, all of one mind in adopting for this meeting—essentially friendly, but entirely free, which will prejudice in no way whatever the great preparatory and primary meeting in which you will produce your candidates and weigh their merits—in adopting, as I said, the parliamentary and constitutional—forms—of the—electoral Chamber.”

“Yes, yes!” cried the assembly with one voice.

“Consequently,” continued Simon, “I have the honor to request, according to the wish of all present, that his honor the mayor will now take the chair.”

Phileas rose and crossed the salon, conscious that he was becoming as red as a cherry. Then, when he stood behind the table, he saw, not a hundred eyes, but a hundred thousand candles. The sun seemed to him to be setting fire to the salon, and he had, to use his own expression, a lump of salt in his throat.

“Return thanks,” said Simon, in a low voice.

“Messieurs—”

Such total silence ensued that Phileas had a spasm of colic.

“What must I say, Simon?” he whispered.

“Well, well!” exclaimed Achille Pigoult.

“Messieurs,” said Simon, goaded by the sarcastic interjection of the little notary, “the honor which you have done to Monsieur le Maire may take him unawares, but it cannot surprise him.”

“That’s it,” said Beauvisage; “I am too sensible of this attention on the part of my fellow-citizens not to be excessively flattered by it.”

“Bravo!” cried the notary alone.

“The devil take me!” thought Beauvisage, “if I am ever caught haranguing again.”

“Will Messieurs Fromaget and Marcelin accept the functions of inspectors of the ballot?”

“It would be more regular,” said Achille Pigoult, rising, “if the meeting itself nominated those officers,—following, of course, the parliamentary forms of the Chamber.”

“That is best,” said the huge Monsieur Mollot, clerk of the court; “otherwise what is

here taking place would be a mere farce; we should not be free in our action, in which case we might as well continue to do the will of Monsieur Simon Giguet."

Simon said a few words to Beauvisage, who rose and delivered himself of a "Messieurs!" in palpitating tones.

"Pardon me, Monsieur le president," said Achille Pigoult, "the chairman presides, he does not speak."

"Messieurs," continued Beauvisage, prompted by Simon, "if we are—to conform—to parliamentary usage—I shall beg—the honorable gentleman—Monsieur Pigoult—to address the meeting—from this table—here present—"

Pigoult sprang to the table, stood beside it with his fingers resting lightly on its edge, and gave proof of his boldness by delivering the following speech without the slightest embarrassment, and somewhat after the manner of the illustrious Monsieur Thiers.

"Messieurs, it was not I who made that proposal for parliamentary usage; nevertheless I can conceive that an assemblage of some sixty notabilities of Champagne needs a chairman to guide it; for no flock can get on without a shepherd. If we had voted for secret balloting, I am certain that the name of our excellent mayor would have been returned unanimously. His opposition to the candidate put forward by his relations proves to us that he possesses civic courage in the highest degree, inasmuch as he has dared to free himself from the closest ties—those of family. Patriotism before family! that is indeed so great an effort that, to make it, we are forced to believe that Brutus from his realm of justice still contemplates us after the lapse of two thousand, five hundred and some years. It seemed natural to Maitre Giguet, who had the merit of divining our wishes in the choice of a chairman, to guide us still further in electing inspectors; but, if I am not mistaken, you think with me that once is enough—and you are right. Our mutual friend, Simon Giguet, who intends to offer himself as candidate, would have the air of assuming mastery, and he might, consequently, lose in our minds the good-will we should otherwise bestow upon a modest attitude like that of his venerable father. Now what is our worthy chairman doing at this moment by accepting the method of presiding suggested to him by the candidate? He is depriving us of our liberty! I ask you: is it proper that the chairman of our choice should tell us to nominate, by rising or sitting, inspectors of the ballot thus forced upon us? Have we any liberty of choice? If I were proposed, I believe all present would rise out of politeness; indeed, we should all feel bound to rise for one another, and I say there can be no choice where there is no freedom of action."

"He is right," said the sixty auditors.

"Therefore, let us each write two names on a ballot, and the two gentlemen who are elected will then feel themselves the real choice of this assembly; they will have the right, conjointly with our honorable chairman, to pronounce upon the majority when we come to a vote on the resolutions to be offered. We are here, I think, to promise to a candidate the fullest support that each can give at the coming primary meeting of all the electors of the arrondissement. This act is therefore, and I so declare it, a grave one. Does it not concern one four-hundredth part of the governing power,—as our excellent mayor has lately said with the ready wit that characterizes him and for which we have so high an appreciation?"

During these remarks Colonel Giguet was cutting a sheet of paper into strips, and

Simon had sent for pens and ink.

This preliminary discussion on forms had already made Simon extremely uneasy, and had also aroused the attention of the sixty assembled bourgeois. Presently they began to write their ballots, and the wily Pigoult contrived to obtain a majority for Monsieur Mollot, the clerk of the court, and Monsieur Godivet, the registrar. These nominations were naturally very displeasing to Fromaget, the apothecary, and Marcelin the solicitor.

“You enable us,” said Achille Pigoult, “to manifest our independence. Therefore you may feel more pride in being rejected than you could have felt in being chosen.”

Everybody laughed.

Simon Giguet then produced silence by demanding speech of the chairman, whose shirt was already wet and became still wetter as he mustered all his courage to say:—

“Monsieur Simon Giguet has the floor.”

IV. THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY TEMPEST

“Messieurs,” said Simon Giguet, “I ask permission to thank Monsieur Achille Pigoult, who, although our meeting is altogether friendly—”

“It is a meeting preparatory to the great primary meeting,” said the solicitor Marcelin.

“That is what I was about to explain,” resumed Simon, “I thank Monsieur Achille Pigoult for having insisted on the strictness of parliamentary forms. This is the first time that the arrondissement of Arcis has been at liberty to use—”

“At liberty!” said Pigoult, interrupting the orator.

“At liberty!” cried the assembly.

“At liberty,” continued Simon Giguet, “to use its rights in the great battle of a general election to the Chamber of Deputies; and as, in a few days, we shall have a meeting, at which all electors will be present, to judge of the merits of the candidates, we ought to feel ourselves most fortunate in becoming accustomed here, in this limited meeting, to the usages of great assemblies. We shall be all the more able to decide the political future of the town of Arcis; for the question now is to substitute a town’s interests for family interests, a whole region for a man.”

Simon then reviewed the history of the Arcis elections for the last twenty years. While approving the constant election of Francois Keller, he said the moment had now come to shake off the yoke of the house of Gondreville. Arcis ought to be no more a fief of the liberals than a fief of the Cinq-Cygnes. Advanced opinions were arising in France of which the Kellers were not the exponents. Charles Keller, having become a viscount, belonged to the court; he could have no independence, because, in presenting him as candidate, his family thought much more of making him succeed to his father’s peerage than of benefiting his constituency as deputy, etc., etc. And, finally, Simon presented himself to the choice of his fellow-citizens, pledging his word to sit on the same bench with the illustrious Odilon Barrot, and never to desert the glorious flag of Progress.

Progress! one of those words behind which more flimsy ambitions than ideas were trying to group themselves; for, after 1830, it represented only the pretensions of a few hungry democrats. Nevertheless, this word had still a great effect upon Arcis, and gave stability to whosoever might inscribe it on his banner. To call himself a man of progress was to declare himself a philosopher in all things and a puritan in politics; it declared him in favor of railroads, mackintoshes, penitentiaries, wooden pavements, Negro freedom, savings-banks, seamless shoes, lighting by gas, asphalt pavements, universal suffrage, and reduction of the civil list. In short, it meant pronouncing himself against the treaties of 1815, against the Eldest Branch, against the colossus of the North, perfidious Albion, against all enterprises, good or bad, of the government. Thus we see that the word *progress* might signify “No,” as well as “Yes.” It was gilding put upon the word *liberalism*, a new pass-word for new ambitions.

“If I have rightly understood what this meeting is for,” said Jean Violette, a stocking-maker, who had recently bought the Beauvisage house, “it is to pledge ourselves to

support, by employing every means in our power, Monsieur Simon Giguet at the elections as deputy in place of Comte Francois Keller. If each of us intends to coalesce in this manner we have only to say plainly Yes or No on that point."

"That is going too quickly to the point! Political affairs do not advance in that way, or there would be no politics at all!" cried Pigoult, whose old grandfather, eighty-six years old, had just entered the room. "The last speaker undertakes to decide what seems to me, according to my feeble lights, the very object we are met to discuss. I demand permission to speak."

"Monsieur Achille Pigoult has the floor," said Beauvisage, at last able to pronounce that phrase with all his municipal and constitutional dignity.

"Messieurs," said the notary, "if there is a house in Arcis in which no voice should be raised against the influence of the Comte de Gondreville, it is surely the one we are now in. The worthy Colonel Giguet is the only person in it who has not sought the benefits of the senatorial power; he, at least, has never asked anything of the Comte de Gondreville, who took his name off the list of exiles in 1815 and caused him to receive the pension which the colonel now enjoys without lifting a finger to obtain it."

A murmur, flattering to the old soldier, greeted this observation.

"But," continued the orator, "the Marions are covered with the count's benefits. Without that influence, the late Colonel Giguet would not have commanded the gendarmerie of the Aube. The late Monsieur Marion would not have been chief-justice of the Imperial court without the protection of the count, to whom I myself have every reason to be thankful. You will therefore think it natural that I should be his advocate within these walls. There are, indeed, few persons in this arrondissement who have not received benefits from that family."

[Murmurs.]

"A candidate puts himself in the stocks," continued Achille Pigoult, warming up. "I have the right to scrutinize his life before I invest him with my powers. I do not desire ingratitude in the delegate I may help to send to the Chamber, for ingratitude is like misfortune—one ingratitude leads to others. We have been, he tells us, the stepping-stone of the Kellers; well, from what I have heard here, I am afraid we may become the stepping-stone of the Giguets. We live in a practical age, do we not? Well, then, let us examine into what will be the results to the arrondissement of Arcis if Simon Giguet is elected. They talk to you of independence! Simon, whom I thus maltreat as candidate, is my personal friend, as he is that of all who hear me, and I should myself be charmed to see him the orator of the Left, seated between Garnier-Pages and Lafitte; but how would that benefit the arrondissement? The arrondissement would lose the support of the Comte de Gondreville and the Kellers. We all, in the course of five years, have had and shall have need of the one and of the others. Some have gone to the Marechale de Carigliano to obtain the release of a young fellow who had drawn a bad number. Others have had recourse to the influence of the Kellers in many matters which are decided according to their recommendation. We have always found the old Comte de Gondreville ready to do us service. It is enough to belong to Arcis to obtain admission to him without being forced to kick our heels in his antechamber. Those two families know every one in Arcis. Where

is the financial influence of the Giguets, and what power have they with the ministry? Have they any standing at the Bourse? When we want to replace our wretched wooden bridge with one of stone can they obtain from the department and the State the necessary funds? By electing Charles Keller we shall cement a bond of friendship which has never, to this day, failed to do us service. By electing my good, my excellent schoolmate, my worthy friend Simon Giguet, we shall realize nothing but losses until the far-distant time when he becomes a minister. I know his modesty well enough to be certain he will not contradict me when I say that I doubt his election to the post of deputy." [Laughter.] "I have come to this meeting to oppose a course which I regard as fatal to our arrondissement. Charles Keller belongs to the court, they say to me. Well, so much the better! we shall not have to pay the costs of his political apprenticeship; he knows the affairs of the country; he knows parliamentary necessities; he is much nearer being a statesman than my friend Simon, who will not pretend to have made himself a Pitt or a Talleyrand in a little town like Arcis—"

"Danton went from it!" cried Colonel Giguet, furious at Achille's speech and the justice of it.

"Bravo!"

This was an acclamation, and sixty persons clapped their hands.

"My father has a ready wit," whispered Simon Giguet to Beauvisage.

"I do not understand why, apropos of an election," continued the old colonel, rising suddenly, with the blood boiling in his face, "we should be hauled up for the ties which connect us with the Comte de Gondreville. My son's fortune comes from his mother; he has asked nothing of the Comte de Gondreville. The comte might never have existed and Simon would have been what he now is,—the son of a colonel of artillery who owes his rank to his services; a man whose opinions have never varied. I should say openly to the Comte de Gondreville if he were present: 'We have elected your son-in-law for twenty years; to-day we wish to prove that in so doing we acted of our own free-will, and we now elect a man of Arcis, in order to show that the old spirit of 1789, to which you owe your fortune, still lives in the land of Danton, Malin, Grevin, Pigoult, Marion—That is all!"

And the old man sat down. Whereupon a great hubbub arose. Achille opened his mouth to reply. Beauvisage, who would not have thought himself chairman unless he had rung his bell, increased the racket, and called for silence. It was then two o'clock.

"I shall take the liberty to observe to the honorable Colonel Giguet, whose feelings are easily understood, that he took upon himself to speak, which is against parliamentary usage," said Achille Pigoult.

"I think it is not necessary to call the colonel to order," said the chairman. "He is a father—"

Silence was re-established.

"We did not come here," cried Fromaget, "to say Amen to everything the Messieurs Giguet, father and son, may wish—"

"No! no!" cried the assembly.

“Things are going badly,” said Madame Marion to her cook in the garden.

“Messieurs,” resumed Achille, “I confine myself to asking my friend Simon Giguet, categorically, what he expects to do for our interests.”

“Yes! yes!” cried the assembly.

“Since when,” demanded Simon Giguet, “have good citizens like those of Arcis made trade and barter of the sacred mission of deputy?”

It is impossible to represent the effect produced by noble sentiments on a body of men. They will applaud fine maxims, while they none the less vote for the degradation of their country, like the galley-slave who shouted for the punishment of Robert Macaire when he saw the thing played, and then went off and killed his own Monsieur Germeuil.

“Bravo!” cried several true-blood Giguet electors.

“You will send me to the Chamber,” went on Simon, “if you do send me, to represent principles, the principles of 1789; to be one of the ciphers, if you choose, of the Opposition, but a cipher that votes with it to enlighten the government, make war against abuses, and promote progress in all things—”

“What do you call progress?” asked Fromaget. “For us, progress means getting the waste lands of la Champagne under cultivation.”

“Progress! I will explain to you what I mean by that,” cried Giguet, exasperated by the interruption.

“It is the frontier of the Rhine for France,” put in the colonel, “and the destruction of the treaties of 1815.”

“It is selling wheat dear and keeping bread cheap,” cried Achille Pigoult sarcastically, thinking that he made a joke, but actually expressing one of the delusions that reign in France.

“It is the happiness of all, obtained by the triumph of humanitarian doctrines,” continued Simon.

“What did I tell you?” said Achille to his neighbors.

“Hush! silence! let us listen!” said various voices.

“Messieurs,” said the stout Mollot, smiling, “the debate is beginning; give your attention to the orator; and let him explain himself.”

“In all transitional epochs, Messieurs,” continued Simon, gravely, “and we are now in such an epoch—”

“Ba-a-a! ba-a-a!” bleated a friend of Achille Pigoult, who possessed the faculty (precious at elections) of ventriloquism.

A roar of laughter came from the whole assembly, who were Champagnards before all else. Simon Giguet folded his arms and waited till the tumult subsided.

“If it was intended to give me a lesson,” he resumed, “and to tell me that I belong to the flock of the glorious defenders of the rights of humanity, the flock of the immortal priest

who pleads for dying Poland, the daring pamphleteers, the scrutinizers of the civil test, the philosophers who demand sincerity in the working of our institutions, if that was the intention of my nameless interrupter, I thank him. To me, progress is the realization of all that was promised to us by the revolution of July; it is electoral reform, it is—”

“What! are you a democrat?” said Achille Pigoult.

“No,” replied the candidate. “To desire the legitimate and regular development of our institutions, is that being a democrat? To me, progress is fraternity re-established between the members of the great French family. We cannot conceal from ourselves that many sufferings—”

At three o’clock Simon Giguet was still explaining Progress, accompanied by the rhythmic snores of various electors which denoted a sound sleep. The malicious Achille Pigoult had urged all present to listen religiously to the young orator, who was now floundering in his phrases and paraphrases hopelessly at random.

V. THE PERPLEXITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT IN ARCIS

At this moment several groups of bourgeois, electors and non-electors, were standing before the Chateau d'Arcis, the iron gates of which open on the square near to the door of Madame Marion's house. This square is a piece of open ground from which issue several roads and several streets. In it is a covered market. Opposite to the chateau, on the other side of the square, which is neither paved nor macadamized, and where the rain has made various little gutters, is a fine esplanade, called the Avenue of Sighs. Is that to the honor or to the blame of the leaders of the town? This singular ambibology is no doubt a stroke of native wit.

Two handsome side avenues, planted with lindens, lead from the square to a circular boulevard which forms another promenade, though usually deserted, where more dirt and rubbish than promenaders may commonly be seen.

At the height of the discussion which Achille Pigoult was dramatizing with a coolness and courage worthy of a member of a real parliament, four personages were walking down one of the linden avenues which led from the Avenue of Sighs. When they reached the square, they stopped as if by common consent, and looked at the inhabitants of Arcis, who were humming before the chateau like so many bees before returning to their hives at night. The four promenaders were the whole ministerial conclave of Arcis, namely: the sub-prefect, the *procureur-du-roi*, his substitute, and the examining-judge, Monsieur Martener. The judge of the court, Monsieur Michu, was, as we know already, a partisan of the Elder Branch and a devoted adherent of the house of Cinq-Cygne.

"No, I don't understand the action of the government," repeated the sub-prefect, Antonin Goulard, pointing to the groups which seemed to be thickening. "At such an important crisis to leave me without instructions!"

"In that you are like the rest of us," said Olivier Vinet, the substitute, smiling.

"Why do you blame the government?" asked the *procureur-du-roi*, Frederic Marest.

"The ministry is much embarrassed," remarked young Martener. "It knows that this arrondissement belongs, in a certain way, to the Kellers, and it is very desirous not to thwart them. It is forced to keep on good terms with the only man who is comparable to Monsieur de Talleyrand. It is not to the prefect, but to the Comte de Gondreville that you ought to send the commissary of police."

"Meanwhile," said Frederic Marest, "the Opposition is bestirring itself; you see yourselves the influence of Monsieur Giguet. Our mayor, Monsieur Beauvisage, is presiding over that preparatory meeting."

"After all," said Olivier Vinet slyly to the sub-prefect, "Simon Giguet is your friend and schoolmate; he will belong to the Thiers' party; you risk nothing in supporting his election."

"The present ministry could dismiss me before its fall," replied the sub-prefect, "and

who knows when I should be reappointed?”

“Collinet, the grocer!—that makes the sixty-sixth elector who has entered the Giguet house,” said Monsieur Martener, who was practising his trade as examining-judge by counting the electors.

“If Charles Keller is the ministerial candidate,” resumed the sub-prefect, “I ought to have been told of it; the government makes a mistake in giving time for Simon Giguet to get hold of the electors.”

These four individuals had now reached, walking slowly, the spot where the avenue ceases and becomes an open square.

“There’s Monsieur Groslier,” said the judge, catching sight of a man on horseback.

This was the commissary of police; he saw the government of Arcis collected on the public square, and he rode up to the four gentlemen.

“Well, Monsieur Groslier?” said the sub-prefect, taking the commissary a little apart from his three colleagues.

“Monsieur,” said the commissary of police in a low voice, “Monsieur la prefet has sent me to tell you some sad news; Monsieur le Vicomte Charles Keller is dead. The news reached Paris by telegram night before last, and the two Messieurs Keller, the Comte de Gondreville, the Marechale Carigliano, in fact the whole family are now at Gondreville. Abd-el-Kader has resumed the offensive in Africa; the war is being vigorously carried on. This poor young man was among the first victims of the renewal of hostilities. You will receive confidential instructions, so Monsieur le prefet told me, in relation to the coming election.”

“By whom?” asked the sub-prefect.

“If I knew that, the matter would not be confidential,” replied the commissary. “In fact, I think the prefect himself does not know. He told me that the matter would be a secret one between you and the ministry.”

Then he rode on, after seeing the sub-prefect lay his fingers on his lips as a warning to keep silence.

“Well, what news from the prefecture?” said the *procureur-du-roi*, when Goulard returned to the group of the three functionaries.

“Nothing satisfactory,” replied Goulard, stepping quickly, as if he wanted to get away from the others, who now walked silently toward the middle of the square, somewhat piqued by the manner of the sub-prefect. There Monsieur Martener noticed old Madame Beauvisage, the mother of Phileas, surrounded by nearly all the bourgeois on the square, to whom she was apparently relating something. A solicitor, named Sinot, who numbered all the royalists of Arcis among his clients, and who had not gone to the Giguet meeting, now detached himself from the group, and running to the door of the Marion house rang the bell violently.

“What can be the matter?” said Frederic Marest, dropping his eyeglass, and calling the attention of his colleagues to this circumstance.

“The matter is, messieurs,” said the sub-prefect, thinking it useless to keep a secret which was evidently known to the other party, “that Charles Keller has been killed in Africa, and that this event doubles the chances of Simon Giguet. You know Arcis; there can be no other ministerial candidate than Charles Keller. Any other man would find the whole local patriotism of the place arrayed against him.

“Will they really elect such an idiot as Simon Giguet?” said Olivier Vinet, laughing.

This young substitute, then only twenty-three years of age, was the son of one of our most famous attorney-generals, who had come into power with the Revolution of July; he therefore owed his early entrance into public life to the influence of his father. The latter, always elected deputy by the town of Provins, is one of the buttresses of the Centre in the Chamber. Therefore the son, whose mother was a Demoiselle de Chargeboeuf [see “Pierrette”], had a certain air of assurance, both in his functions and in his personal behavior, that plainly showed the backing of his father. He expressed his opinion on men and things without reserve; for he confidently expected not to stay very long at Arcis, but to receive his appointment as *procureur-du-roi* at Versailles, a sure step to a post in Paris.

The confident air of this little Vinet, and the sort of assumption which the certainty of making his way gave to him, was all the more irritating to Frederic Marest, his superior, because a biting wit accompanied the rather undisciplined habits and manners of his young subordinate. Frederic Marest, *procureur-du-roi*, a man about forty years of age, who had spent six years of his life under the Restoration in becoming a substitute only to be neglected and left in Arcis by the government of July, in spite of the fact that he had some eighteen thousand francs a year of his own, was perpetually kept on the rack between the necessity of winning the good graces of young Vinet’s father—a touchy attorney-general who might become Keeper of the Seals—and of keeping his own dignity.

Olivier Vinet, slender in figure, with a pallid face, lighted by a pair of malicious green eyes, was one of those sarcastic young gentlemen, inclined to dissipation, who nevertheless know how to assume the pompous, haughty, and pedantic air with which magistrates arm themselves when they once reach the bench. The tall, stout, heavy, and grave *procureur-du-roi* had lately invented a system by which he hoped to keep out of trouble with the exasperating Olivier; he treated him as a father would treat a spoilt child.

“Olivier,” he replied to his substitute, slapping him on the shoulder, “a man of your capacity ought to reflect that Maitre Giguet is very likely to become deputy. You’d have made that remark just as readily before the people of Arcis as before us, who are safe friends.”

“There is one thing against Giguet,” observed Monsieur Martener.

This good young man, rather heavy but full of capacity, the son of a physician in Provins, owed his place to Vinet’s father, who was long a lawyer in Provins and still continued to be the patron of his people as the Comte de Gondreville was the patron of the people of Arcis.

“What is that?” asked the sub-prefect.

“Local patriotism is always bitterly against a man who is imposed upon the electors,” replied the examining-judge, “but when it happens that the good people of Arcis have to

elevate one of their own equals to the Chamber, envy and jealousy are stronger than patriotism."

"That is very simple," said the *procureur-du-roi*, "and very true. If you can manage to collect fifty ministerial votes you will find yourself master of the coming election," he added, addressing the sub-prefect.

"It will do if you produce a candidate of the same calibre as Simon Giguet," said Olivier Vinet.

The sub-prefect allowed an expression of satisfaction to appear upon his features, which did not escape the notice of his three companions, with whom, moreover, he had a full understanding. All four being bachelors, and tolerably rich, they had formed, without premeditation, an alliance against the dulness of the provinces. The three functionaries had already remarked the sort of jealousy that Goulard felt for Giguet, which a few words on their antecedents will explain.

Antonin Goulard, the son of a former huntsman to the house of Simeuse, enriched by the purchase of the confiscated property of *emigres* was, like Simon Giguet, a son of Arcis. Old Goulard, his father, left the abbey of Valpreux (corruption of Val-des-Preux) to live in Arcis after the death of his wife, and he sent his son to the imperial lyceum, where Colonel Giguet had already placed his son Simon. The two schoolmates subsequently went through their legal studies in Paris together, and their intimacy was continued in the amusements of youth. They promised to help each other to success in life whenever they entered upon their different careers. But fate willed that they should end by being rivals.

In spite of Goulard's manifest advantages, in spite of the cross of the Legion of honor which the Comte de Gondreville had obtained for him in default of promotion, the offer of his heart and position had been frankly declined when, about six months before this history begins, he had privately presented himself to Madame Beauvisage as a suitor for her daughter's hand. No step of that nature is ever taken secretly in the provinces. The *procureur-du-roi*, Frederic Marest, whose fortune, buttonhole, and position were about on a par with those of Antonin Goulard, had received a like refusal, three years earlier, based on the difference of ages. Consequently, the two officials were on terms of strict politeness with the Beauvisage family, and laughed at them severally in private. Both had divined and communicated to each other the real motive of the candidacy of Simon Giguet, for they fully understood the hopes of Madame Marion; and they were bent on preventing her nephew from marrying the heiress whose hand had been refused to them.

"God grant that I may be master of this election," said Goulard, "and that the Comte de Gondreville may get me made a prefect, for I have no more desire than you to spend the rest of my days here, though I was born in Arcis."

"You have a fine opportunity to be elected deputy yourself, my chief," said Olivier Vinet to Marest. "Come and see my father, who will, I think, arrive here from Provins in a few hours. Let us propose to him to have you chosen as ministerial candidate."

"Halt!" said Antonin; "the ministry has its own views about the deputy of Arcis."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed Vinet, "there are two ministries: the one that thinks it makes elections, and another that thinks it profits by them."

“Don’t let us complicate Antonin’s difficulties,” said Frederic Marest, winking at his substitute.

The four officials, who had crossed the open square and were close to the Mulet inn, now saw Poupart leaving the house of Madame Marion and coming towards them. A moment later, and the *porte cochere* of that house vomited the sixty-seven conspirators.

“So you went to that meeting?” said Antonin Goulard to Poupart.

“I shall never go again, monsieur le sous-prefet,” said the innkeeper. “The son of Monsieur Keller is dead, and I have now no object in going there. God has taken upon himself to clear the ground.”

“Well, Pigoult, what happened?” cried Olivier Vinet, catching sight of the young notary.

“Oh!” said Pigoult, on whose forehead the perspiration, which had not dried, bore testimony to his efforts, “Simon has just told some news that made them all unanimous. Except five persons,—Poupart, my grandfather, Mollot, Sinot, and I,—all present swore, as at the Jeu de Paume, to employ every means to promote the triumph of Simon Giguet, of whom I have made a mortal enemy. Oh! we got warm, I can tell you! However, I led the Giguets to fulminate against the Gondrevilles. That puts the old count on my side. No later than to-morrow he will hear what the *soi-disant* patriots of Arcis have said about him and his corruptions and his infamies, to free their necks, as they called it, of his yoke.”

“Unanimous, were they?” said Olivier Vinet, laughing.

“Unanimous, *to-day*,” remarked Monsieur Martener.

“Oh!” exclaimed Pigoult, “the general sentiment of the electors is for one of their own townsmen. Whom can you oppose to Simon Giguet,—a man who has just spent two hours in explaining the word *progress*.”

“Take old Grevin!” cried the sub-prefect.

“He has no such ambition,” replied Pigoult. “But we must first of all consult the Comte de Gondreville. Look, look!” he added; “see the attentions with which Simon is taking him that gilded booby, Beauvisage.”

And he pointed to the candidate, who was holding the mayor by the arm and whispering in his ear. Beauvisage meantime was bowing right and left to the inhabitants, who gazed at him with the deference which provincials always testify to the richest man in their locality.

“But there’s no use cajoling *him*,” continued Pigoult. “Cecile’s hand does not depend on either her father or her mother.”

“On whom, then?”

“On my old patron, Monsieur Grevin. Even if Simon is elected deputy, the town is not won.”

Though the sub-prefect and Frederic Marest tried to get an explanation of these words, Pigoult refused to give the reason of an exclamation which seemed to them big with meaning and implying a certain knowledge of the plans of the Beauvisage family.

All Arcis was now in a commotion, not only on account of the fatal event which had

just overtaken the Gondreville family, but because of the great resolution come to at the Giguet house, where Madame Marion and her three servants were hurriedly engaged in putting everything in its usual order, ready to receive her customary guests, whose curiosity would probably bring them that evening in large numbers.

VI. THE CAMPAIGN OF 1814 FROM THE HOSIERY POINT OF VIEW

Champagne has all the appearance of a poor region, and it is a poor region. Its general aspect is sad; the land is flat. Passing through the villages, and even the towns, you will see nothing but miserable buildings of wood or half-baked clay; the best are built of brick. Stone is scarcely used at all except on public buildings. At Arcis the chateau, the law courts, and the church are the only stone buildings. Nevertheless, Champagne, or, if you prefer to say so, the departments of the Aube, Marne, and Haut-Marne, richly endowed with vineyards, the fame of which is world-wide, are otherwise full of flourishing industries.

Without speaking of the manufactures of Reims, nearly all the hosiery of France—a very considerable trade—is manufactured about Troyes. The surrounding country, over a circuit of thirty miles, is covered with workmen, whose looms can be seen through the open doors as we pass through the villages. These workmen are employed by agents, who themselves are in the service of speculators called manufacturers. The agents negotiate with the large Parisian houses, often with the retail hosiers, all of whom put out the sign, “Manufacturers of Hosiery.” None of them have ever made a pair of stockings, nor a cap, nor a sock; all their hosiery comes chiefly from Champagne, though there are a few skilled workmen in Paris who can rival the Champenois.

This intermediate agency between the producer and the consumer is an evil not confined to hosiery. It exists in almost all trades, and increases the cost of merchandise by the amount of the profit exacted by the middlemen. To break down these costly partitions, that injure the sale of products, would be a magnificent enterprise, which, in its results, would attain to the height of statesmanship. In fact, industry of all kinds would gain by establishing within our borders the cheapness so essential to enable us to carry on victoriously the industrial warfare with foreign countries,—a struggle as deadly as that of arms.

But the destruction of an abuse of this kind would not return to modern philanthropists the glory and the advantages of a crusade against the empty nutshells of the penitentiary and negrophobia; consequently, the interloping profits of these *bankers of merchandise* will continue to weigh heavily both on producers and consumers. In France—keen-witted land!—it is thought that to simplify is to destroy. The Revolution of 1789 is still a terror.

We see, by the industrial energy displayed in a land where Nature is a godmother, what progress agriculture might make if capital would go into partnership with the soil, which is not so thankless in Champagne as it is in Scotland, where capital has done wonders. The day when agriculture will have conquered the unfertile portion of those departments, and industry has seconded capital on the Champagne chalk, the prosperity of that region will triple itself. Into that land, now without luxury, where homes are barren, English comfort will penetrate, money will obtain that rapid circulation which is the half of wealth, and is already beginning in several of the inert portions of our country. Writers, administrators, the Church from its pulpit, the Press in its columns, all to whom chance has given power

to influence the masses, should say and resay this truth,—to hoard is a social crime. The deliberate hoarding of a province arrests industrial life, and injures the health of a nation.

Thus the little town of Arcis, without much means of transition, doomed apparently to the most complete immobility, is, relatively, a rich town abounding in capital slowly amassed by its trade in hosiery.

Monsieur Phileas Beauvisage was the Alexander, or, if you will, the Attila of this business. And here follow the means by which this honorable merchant had acquired his supremacy over cotton.

The last remaining child of farmers named Beauvisage, tenants of the splendid farm of Bellache, a dependency of the Gondreville estate, his parents made, in 1811, a great sacrifice in order to buy a substitute and save their only child from conscription. After that, in 1813, the mother Beauvisage, having become a widow, saved her son once more from enrolment in the Gardes, thanks to the influence of the Comte de Gondreville. Phileas, who was then twenty-one years of age, had been devoted for the last three years to the peaceable trade of hosiery.

Coming to the end of the lease of Bellache, old Madame Beauvisage declined to renew it. She saw she had enough to do in her old age in taking care of her property. That nothing might give her uneasiness of mind, she proceeded, by the help of Monsieur Grevin, the notary of Arcis, to liquidate her husband’s estate, although her son made no request whatever for a settlement. The result proved that she owed him the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand francs. The good woman did not sell her landed property, most of which came from the unfortunate Michu, the former bailiff of the Simeuse family; she paid the sum to Phileas in ready money,—advising him to buy out the business of his employer, Monsieur Pigoult, the son of the old justice of the peace, whose affairs were in so bad a way that his death, as we have said, was thought to be voluntary.

Phileas Beauvisage, a virtuous youth, having a deep respect for his mother, concluded the purchase from his patron, and as he had the bump of what phrenologists term “acquisitiveness,” his youthful ardor spent itself upon this business, which he thought magnificent and desired to increase by speculation.

The name of Phileas, which may seem peculiar, is only one of the many oddities which we owe to the Revolution. Attached to the Simeuse family, and consequently, good Catholics, the Beauvisage father and mother desired to have their son baptized. The rector of Cinq-Cygne, the Abbe Goujet, whom they consulted, advised them to give their son for patron a saint whose Greek name might signify the municipality,—for the child was born at a period when children were inscribed on the civil registers under the fantastic names of the Republican calendar.

In 1814, hosiery, a stable business with few risks in ordinary times, was subject to all the variations in the price of cotton. This price depended at that time on the triumph or the defeat of the Emperor Napoleon, whose adversaries, the English generals, used to say in Spain: “The town is taken; now get out your bales.”

Pigoult, former patron of young Phileas, furnished the raw material to his workmen, who were scattered all over the country. At the time when he sold the business to Beauvisage junior, he possessed a large amount of raw cotton bought at a high price,

whereas Lisbon was sending enormous quantities into the Empire at six sous the kilogramme, in virtue of the Emperor's celebrated decree. The reaction produced in France by the introduction of the Portuguese cotton caused the death of Pigoult, Achille's father, and began the fortune of Phileas, who, far from losing his head like his master, made his prices moderate by buying cotton cheaply and in doubling the quantity ventured upon by his predecessor. This simple system enabled Phileas to triple the manufacture and to pose as the benefactor of the workingmen; so that he was able to disperse his hosiery in Paris and all over France at a profit, when the luckiest of his competitors were only able to sell their goods at cost price.

At the beginning of 1814, Phileas had emptied his warerooms. The prospect of a war on French soil, the hardships of which were likely to press chiefly on Champagne, made him cautious. He manufactured nothing, and held himself ready to meet all events with his capital turned into gold. At this period the custom-house lines were no longer maintained. Napoleon could not do without his thirty thousand custom-house officers for service in the field. Cotton, then introduced through a thousand loopholes, slipped into the markets of France. No one can imagine how sly and how alert cotton had become at this epoch, nor with what eagerness the English laid hold of a country where cotton stockings sold for six francs a pair, and cambric shirts were objects of luxury.

Manufacturers from the second class, the principal workmen, reckoning on the genius of Napoleon, had bought up the cottons that came from Spain. They worked it up in hopes of being able later to give the law to the merchants of Paris. Phileas observed these facts. When the war ravaged Champagne, he kept himself between the French army and Paris. After each lost battle he went among the workmen who had buried their products in casks,—a sort of silo of hosiery,—then, gold in hand, this Cossack of weaving bought up, from village to village, below the cost of fabrication, tons of merchandise which might otherwise become at any time a prey to an enemy whose feet were as much in need of being *socked* as its throat of being moistened.

Phileas displayed under these unfortunate circumstances an activity nearly equal to that of the Emperor. This general of hosiery made a commercial campaign of 1814 with splendid but ignored courage. A league or two behind where the army advanced he bought up caps and socks as the Emperor gathered immortal palms by his very reverses. The genius was equal on both sides, though exercised in different spheres; one aimed at covering heads, the other at mowing them down. Obliged to create some means of transportation in order to save his tons of hosiery, which he stored in a suburb of Paris, Phileas often put in requisition horses and army-waggons, as if the safety of the empire were concerned. But the majesty of commerce was surely as precious as that of Napoleon. The English merchants, in buying out the European markets, certainly got the better of the colossus who threatened their trade.

By the time the Emperor abdicated at Fontainebleau, Phileas, triumphant, was master of the situation. He maintained, by clever manoeuvring, the depreciation in cottons, and doubled his fortune at the moment when his luckiest competitors were getting rid of their merchandise at a loss of fifty per cent. He returned to Arcis with a fortune of three hundred thousand francs, half of which, invested on the Grand-Livre at sixty, returned him an income of fifteen thousand francs a year. He employed the remainder in building,

furnishing, and adorning a handsome house on the Place du Pont in Arcis.

On the return of the successful hosier, Monsieur Grevin was naturally his confidant. The notary had an only daughter to marry, then twenty years of age. Grevin, a widower, knew the fortune of Madame Beauvisage, the mother, and he believed in the energy and capacity of a young man bold enough to have turned the campaign of 1814 to his profit. Severine Grevin had her mother's fortune of sixty thousand francs for her dower. Grevin was then over fifty; he feared to die, and saw no chance of marrying his daughter as he wished under the Restoration—for her, he had had ambition. Under these circumstances he was shrewd enough to make Phileas ask her in marriage.

Severine Grevin, a well-trained young lady and handsome, was considered at that time the best match in Arcis. In fact, an alliance with the intimate friend of the senator Comte de Gondreville, peer of France, was certainly a great honor for the son of a Gondreville tenant-farmer. The widow Beauvisage, his mother, would have made any sacrifice to obtain it; but on learning the success of her son, she dispensed with the duty of giving him a *dot*,—a wise economy which was imitated by the notary.

Thus was consummated the union of the son of a farmer formerly so faithful to the Simeuse family with the daughter of its most cruel enemy. It was, perhaps, the only application made of the famous saying of Louis XVIII.: "Union and Oblivion."

On the second return of the Bourbons, Grevin's father-in-law, old Doctor Varlet, died at the age of seventy-six, leaving two hundred thousand francs in gold in his cellar, besides other property valued at an equal sum. Thus Phileas and his wife had, outside of their business, an assured income of thirty thousand francs a year.

The first two years of this marriage sufficed to show Madame Severine and her father, Monsieur Grevin the absolute silliness of Phileas Beauvisage. His one gleam of commercial rapacity had seemed to the notary the result of superior powers; the shrewd old man had mistaken youth for strength, and luck for genius in business. Phileas certainly knew how to read and write and cipher well, but he had read nothing. Of crass ignorance, it was quite impossible to keep up even a slight conversation with him; he replied to all remarks with a deluge of commonplaces pleasantly uttered. As the son of a farmer, however, Phileas was not without a certain commercial good sense, and he was also kind and tender, and would often weep at a moving tale. It was this native goodness of heart which made him respect his wife, whose superiority had always caused him the deepest admiration.

Severine, a woman of ideas, knew all things, so Phileas believed. And she knew them the more correctly because she consulted her father on all subjects. She was gifted with great firmness, which made her the absolute mistress in her own home. As soon as the latter result was attained, the old notary felt less regret in seeing that his daughter's only domestic happiness lay in the autocracy which usually satisfies all women of her nature. But what of the woman herself? Here follows what she was said to have found in life.

VII. THE BEAUVISAGE FAMILY

During the reaction of 1815, a Vicomte de Chargeboeuf (of the poorer branch of the family) was sent to Arcis as sub-prefect through the influence of the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne, to whose family he was allied. This young man remained sub-prefect for five years. The beautiful Madame Beauvisage was not, it was said, a stranger to the reasons that kept him in this office for a period far too prolonged for his own advancement. We ought to say, however, that these remarks were not justified by any of the scandals which in the provinces betray those passions that are difficult to conceal from the Argus-eyes of a little town. If Severine loved the Vicomte de Chargeboeuf and was beloved by him, it was in all honor and propriety, said the friends of the Grevins and the Marions; and that double coterie imposed its opinion on the whole arrondissement; but the Marions and the Grevins had no influence on the royalists, and the royalists regarded the sub-prefect as fortunate in love.

As soon as the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne heard what was said in the chateaux about her relation, she sent for him; and such was her horror for all who were connected, near or far, with the actors in the judicial drama so fatal to her family, that she strictly enjoined him to change his residence. Not only that, but she obtained his appointment as sub-prefect of Sancerre with the promise of advancement to the prefecture.

Some shrewd observers declared that the viscount pretended this passion for the purpose of being made prefect; for he well knew the hatred felt by the marquise for the name of Grevin. Others remarked on the coincidence of the viscount’s apparitions in Paris with the visits made by Madame Beauvisage to the capital on frivolous pretexts. An impartial historian would be puzzled to form a just opinion on the facts of this matter, which are buried in the mysteries of private life. One circumstance alone seems to give color to the reports.

Cecile-Renee Beauvisage was born in 1820, just as Monsieur de Chargeboeuf left Arcis, and among his various names was that of Rene. This name was given by the Comte de Gondreville as godfather of the child. Had the mother objected to the name, she would in some degree have given color to the rumor. As gossip always endeavors to justify itself, the giving of this name was said to be a bit of maliciousness on the part of the old count. Madame Keller, the count’s daughter, who was named Cecile, was the godmother. As for the resemblance shown in the person of Cecile-Renee Beauvisage, it was striking. This young girl was like neither father nor mother; in course of time she had become the living image of the Vicomte de Chargeboeuf, whose aristocratic manners she had also acquired. This double resemblance, both moral and physical, was not observed by the inhabitants of Arcis, for the viscount never returned to that town.

Severine made her husband happy in his own way. He liked good living and everything easy about him; she supplied him with the choicest wines, a table worthy of a bishop, served by the best cook in the department but without the pretensions of luxury; for she kept her household strictly to the conditions of the burgher life of Arcis. It was a proverb in Arcis that you must dine with Madame Beauvisage and spend your evening with Madame Marion.

The renewed influence in the arrondissement of Arcis which the Restoration gave to the house of Cinq-Cygne had naturally drawn closer the ties that bound together the various families affected by the criminal trial relating to the abduction of Gondreville. [See “An Historical Mystery.”] The Marions, Grevins, and Giguets were all the more united because the triumph of their political opinions, called “constitutional,” now required the utmost harmony.

As a matter of policy Severine encouraged her husband to continue his trade in hosiery, which any other man but himself would have long renounced; and she sent him to Paris, and about the country, on business connected with it. Up to the year 1830 Phileas, who was thus enabled to exercise his bump of “acquisitiveness,” earned every year a sum equivalent to his expenses. The interest on the property of Monsieur and Madame Beauvisage, being capitalized for the last fifteen years by Grevin’s intelligent care, became, by 1830, a round sum of half a million francs. That sum was, in fact, Cecile’s *dot*, which the old notary then invested in the Three-per-cents at fifty, producing a safe income of thirty thousand a year.

After 1830 Beauvisage sold his business in hosiery to Jean Violette, one of his agents (grandson of one of the chief witnesses for the prosecution in the Simeuse trial), the proceeds of which amounted to three hundred thousand francs. Monsieur and Madame Beauvisage had also in prospect their double inheritance from old Grevin on one side, and the old farmer’s wife Beauvisage on the other. Great provincial fortunes are usually the product of time multiplied by economy. Thirty years of old age make capital.

In giving to Cecile-Renee a *dot* of fifty thousand francs a year, her parents still reserved for themselves the two inheritances, thirty thousand a year on the Grand Livre, and their house in Arcis.

If the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne were only dead, Cecile might assuredly marry the young marquis; but the health of that great lady, who was still vigorous and almost beautiful at sixty years of age, precluded all hope of such a marriage if it even entered the minds of Grevin and his daughter, as some persons, surprised at their rejection of eligible suitors like the sub-prefect and the *procureur-du-roi*, declared that it did.

The Beauvisage residence, one of the best in Arcis, stands on the Place du Pont on a line with the rue Vide-Bourse, at the corner of the rue du Pont, which leads to the Place de l’Eglise. Though, like many provincial houses, without either court or garden, it produces a certain effect, in spite of its ornamentation in bad taste. The front door opens on the Place; the windows of the ground-floor look out on the street-side towards the post-house and inn, and command beyond the Place a rather picturesque view of the Aube, the navigation of which begins at the bridge. Beyond the bridge is another little Place or square, on which lives Monsieur Grevin, and from which the high-road to Sezanne starts.

On the street and on the square, the Beauvisage house, painted a spotless white, looks as though built of stone. The height of the windows and their external mouldings contribute to give a certain style to the house which contrasts strongly with the generally forlorn appearance of the houses of Arcis, constructed, as we have already said, of wood, and covered with plaster, imitating the solidity of stone. Still, these houses are not without a certain originality, through the fact that each architect, or each burgher, has endeavored to

solve for himself the problem of styles of building.

The bridge at Arcis is of wood. About four hundred feet above the bridge the river is crossed by another bridge, on which rise the tall wooden sides of a mill with several sluices. The space between the public bridge and this private bridge forms a basin, on the banks of which are several large houses. By an opening between the roofs can be seen the height on which stands the chateau of Arcis with its park and gardens, its outer walls and trees which overhand the river above the bridges, and the rather scanty pastures of the left bank.

The sound of the water as it runs through the courses above the dam, the music of the wheels, from which the churned water falls back into the basin in sparkling cascades, animate the rue du Pont, contrasting in this respect with the tranquillity of the river flowing downward between the garden of Monsieur Grevin, whose house is at one angle of the bridge on the left bank, and the port where the boats and barges discharge their merchandise before a line of poor but picturesque houses.

Nothing can better express provincial life than the deep silence that envelops the little town and reigns in its busiest region. It is easy to imagine, therefore, how disquieting the presence of a stranger, if he only spends half a day there, may be to the inhabitants; with what attention faces protrude from the windows to observe him, and also the condition of espial in which all the residents of the little place stand to each other. Life has there become so conventional that, except on Sundays and fete-days, a stranger meets no one either on the boulevards or the Avenue of Sighs, not even, in fact, upon the streets.

It will now be readily understood why the ground-floor of the Beauvisage house is on a level with the street and square. The square serves as its courtyard. Sitting at his window the eyes of the late hosier could take in the whole of the Place de l’Eglise, the two squares of the bridge, and the road to Sezanne. He could see the coaches arriving and the travellers descending at the post-inn; and on court days he could watch the proceedings around the offices of the mayor and the justice of peace. For these reasons, Beauvisage would not have exchanged his house for the chateau, in spite of its lordly air, its stone walls, and its splendid situation.

VIII. IN WHICH THE DOT, ONE OF THE HEROINES OF THIS HISTORY, APPEARS

Entering the Beauvisage house we find a versatile, at the farther end of which rises the staircase. To right we enter a large salon with two windows opening on the square; to left is a handsome dining-room, looking on the street. The floor above is the one occupied by the family.

Notwithstanding the large fortune of the Beauvisage husband and wife, their establishment consisted of only a cook and a chamber-maid, the latter a peasant, who washed and ironed and frotted the floors rather than waited on her two mistresses, who were accustomed to spend their time in dressing and waiting upon each other. Since the sale of the business to Jean Violette, the horse and cabriolet used by Phileas, and kept at the Hotel de la Poste, had been relinquished and sold.

At the moment when Phileas reached his house after the Giguet meeting, his wife, already informed of the resolutions passed, had put on her boots and shawl and was preparing to go to her father; for she felt very sure that Madame Marion would, on that same evening, make her certain overtures relating to Simon and Cecile. After telling his wife of Charles Keller’s death, Phileas asked her opinion with an artless “What do you think of that, wife?” which fully pictured his habit of deferring to Severine’s opinion in all things. Then he sat down in an arm-chair and awaited her reply.

In 1839, Madame Beauvisage, then forty-four years old, was so well-preserved that she might, in that respect, rival Mademoiselle Mars. By calling to mind the most charming Celimene that the Theatre-Francais ever had, an excellent idea of Severine Grevin’s appearance will be obtained. The same richness of coloring, the same beauty of features, the same clearly defined outlines; but the hosier’s wife was short,—a circumstance which deprived her of that noble grace, that charming coquetry *a la* Sevigne, through which the great actress commends herself to the memory of men who saw both the Empire and the Restoration.

Provincial life and the rather careless style of dress into which, for the last ten years, Severine had allowed herself to fall, gave a somewhat common air to that noble profile and those beautiful features; increasing plumpness was destroying the outlines of a figure magnificently fine during the first twelve years of her married life. But Severine redeemed these growing imperfections with a sovereign, superb, imperious glance, and a certain haughty carriage of her head. Her hair, still black and thick and long, was raised high upon her head, giving her a youthful look. Her shoulders and bosom were snowy, but they now rose puffily in a manner to obstruct the free movement of the neck, which had grown too short. Her plump and dimpled arms ended in pretty little hands that were, alas, too fat. She was, in fact, so overdone with fulness of life and health that her flesh formed a little pad, as one might call it, above her shoes. Two ear-drops, worth about three-thousand francs each, adorned her ears. She wore a lace cap with pink ribbons, a mousseline-de-laine gown in pink and gray stripes with an edging of green, opened at the bottom to show a petticoat trimmed with valencienne lace; and a green cashmere shawl with palm-leaves,

the point of which reached the ground as she walked.

“You are not so hungry,” she said, casting her eyes on Beauvisage, “that you can’t wait half an hour? My father has finished dinner and I couldn’t eat mine in peace without knowing what he thinks and whether we ought to go to Gondreville.”

“Go, go, my dear. I’ll wait,” said Phileas, using the “thee” and “thou.”

“Good heavens!” cried Severine with a significant gesture of her shoulders. “Shall I never break you of that habit of tutoying me?”

“I never do it before company—not since 1817,” said Phileas.

“You do it constantly before the servants and your daughter.”

“As you will, Severine,” replied Beauvisage sadly.

“Above all, don’t say a word to Cecile about this resolution of the electors,” added Madame Beauvisage, who was looking in the glass to arrange her shawl.

“Shall I go with you to your father’s?” asked Phileas.

“No, stay with Cecile. Besides, Jean Violette was to pay the rest of the purchase-money to-day. He has twenty thousand francs to bring you. This is the third time he has put us off three months; don’t grant him any more delays; if he can’t pay now, give his note to Courtet, the sheriff, and take the law of him. Achille Pigoult will tell you how to proceed. That Violette is the worthy son of his grandfather; I think he is capable of enriching himself by going into bankruptcy,—there’s neither law nor gospel in him.”

“He is very intelligent,” said Beauvisage.

“You have given him the good-will of a fine business for thirty thousand francs, which is certainly worth fifty thousand; and in ten years he has only paid you ten thousand—”

“I never sued anybody yet,” replied Beauvisage, “and I’d rather lose my money than torment a poor man—”

“A man who laughs at you!”

Beauvisage was silent; feeling unable to reply to that cruel remark, he looked at the boards which formed the floor of the salon.

Perhaps the progressive abolition of mind and will in Beauvisage will be explained by the abuse of sleep. Going to bed every night at eight o’clock and getting up the next morning at eight, he had slept his twelve hours nightly for the last twenty years, never waking; or if that extraordinary event did occur, it was so serious a matter to his mind that he talked of it all day. He spent an hour at his toilet, for his wife had trained him not to appear in her presence at breakfast unless properly shaved, cleaned, and dressed for the day. When he was in business, he departed to his office after breakfast and returned only in time for dinner. Since 1832, he had substituted for his business occupations a daily visit to his father-in-law, a promenade about the town, or visits to his friends.

In all weather he wore boots, blue coat and trousers, and a white waistcoat,—the style of dress exacted by his wife. His linen was remarkable for its fineness and purity, owing to the fact that Severine obliged him to change it daily. Such care for his person, seldom

taken in the provinces, contributed to make him considered in Arcis very much as a man of elegance is considered in Paris. Externally this worthy seller of cotton hose seemed to be a personage; for his wife had sense enough never to utter a word which could put the public of Arcis on the scent of her disappointment and the utter nullity of her husband, who, thanks to his smiles, his handsome dress, and his manners, passed for a man of importance. People said that Severine was so jealous of him that she prevented him from going out in the evening, while in point of fact Phileas was bathing the roses and lilies of his skin in happy slumber.

Beauvisage, who lived according to his tastes, pampered by his wife, well served by his two servants, cajoled by his daughter, called himself the happiest man in Arcis, and really was so. The feeling of Severine for this nullity of a man never went beyond the protecting pity of a mother for her child. She disguised the harshness of the words she was frequently obliged to say to him by a joking manner. No household was ever more tranquil; and the aversion Phileas felt for society, where he went to sleep, and where he could not play cards (being incapable of learning a game), had made Severine sole mistress of her evenings.

Cecile's entrance now put an end to her father's embarrassment, and he cried out heartily:—

"Hey! how fine we are!"

Madame Beauvisage turned round abruptly and cast a look upon her daughter which made the girl blush.

"Cecile, who told you to dress yourself in that way?" she demanded.

"Are we not going to-night to Madame Marion's? I dressed myself now to see if my new gown fitted me."

"Cecile! Cecile!" exclaimed Severine, "why do you try to deceive your mother? It is not right; and I am not pleased with you—you are hiding something from me."

"What has she done?" asked Beauvisage, delighted to see his daughter so prettily dressed.

"What has she done? I shall tell her," said Madame Beauvisage, shaking her finger at her only child.

Cecile flung herself on her mother's neck, kissing and coaxing her, which is a means by which only daughters get their own way.

Cecile Beauvisage, a girl of nineteen, had put on a gown of gray silk trimmed with gimp and tassels of a deeper shade of gray, making the front of the gown look like a pelisse. The corsage, ornamented with buttons and caps to the sleeves, ended in a point in front, and was laced up behind like a corset. This species of corset defined the back, the hips, and the bust perfectly. The skirt, trimmed with three rows of fringe, fell in charming folds, showing by its cut and its make the hand of a Parisian dressmaker. A pretty fichu edged with lace covered her shoulders; around her throat was a pink silk neckerchief, charmingly tied, and on her head was a straw hat ornamented with one moss rose. Her hands were covered with black silk mittens, and her feet were in bronze kid boots. This

gala air, which gave her somewhat the appearance of the pictures in a fashion-book, delighted her father.

Cecile was well made, of medium height, and perfectly well-proportioned. She had braided her chestnut hair, according to the fashion of 1839, in two thick plaits which followed the line of the face and were fastened by their ends to the back of her head. Her face, a fine oval, and beaming with health, was remarkable for an aristocratic air which she certainly did not derive from either her father or her mother. Her eyes, of a light brown, were totally devoid of that gentle, calm, and almost timid expression natural to the eyes of young girls. Lively, animated, and always well in health, Cecile spoiled, by a sort of bourgeois matter-of-factness, and the manners of a petted child, all that her person presented of romantic charm. Still, a husband capable of reforming her education and effacing the traces of provincial life, might still evolve from that living block a charming woman of the world.

Madame Beauvisage had had the courage to bring up her daughter to good principles; she had made herself employ a false severity which enabled her to compel obedience and repress the little evil that existed in the girl’s soul. Mother and daughter had never been parted; thus Cecile had, what is more rare in young girls than is generally supposed, a purity of thought, a freshness of heart, and a naivete of nature, real, complete, and flawless.

“Your dress is enough to make me reflect,” said Madame Beauvisage. “Did Simon Giguet say anything to you yesterday that you are hiding from me?”

“Dear mamma,” said Cecile in her mother’s ear, “he bores me; but there is no one else for me in Arcis.”

“You judge him rightly; but wait till your grandfather has given an opinion,” said Madame Beauvisage, kissing her daughter, whose reply proved her good-sense, though it also revealed the breach made in her innocence by the idea of marriage.

Severine was devoted to her father; she and her daughter allowed no one but themselves to take charge of his linen; they knitted his socks for him, and gave the most minute care to his comfort. Grevin knew that no thought of self-interest had entered their affection; the million they would probably inherit could not dry their tears at his death; old men are very sensible to disinterested tenderness. Every morning before going to see him, Madame Beauvisage and Cecile attended to his dinner for the next day, sending him the best that the market afforded.

Madame Beauvisage had always desired that her father would present her at the Chateau de Gondreville and connect her with the count’s daughters; but the wise old man explained, again and again, how difficult it would be to have permanent relations with the Duchesse de Carigliano, who lived in Paris and seldom came to Gondreville, or with the brilliant Madame Keller, after doing a business in hosiery.

“Your life is lived,” he said to his daughter; “find all your enjoyments henceforth in Cecile, who will certainly be rich enough to give you an existence as broad and high as you deserve. Choose a son-in-law with ambition and means, and you can follow her to Paris and leave that jackass Beauvisage behind you. If I live long enough to see Cecile’s husband I’ll pilot you all on the sea of political interests, as I once piloted others, and you

will reach a position equal to that of the Kellers.”

These few words were said before the revolution of July, 1830. Grevin desired to live that he might get under way the future grandeur of his daughter, his grand-daughter, and his great-grandchildren. His ambition extended to the third generation.

When he talked thus, the old man’s idea was to marry Cecile to Charles Keller; he was now grieving over that lost hope, uncertain where to look in the future. Having no relations with Parisian society, and seeing in the department of the Aube no other husband for Cecile than the youthful Marquis de Cinq-Cygne, he was asking himself whether by the power of gold he could surmount the animosities which the revolution of July had roused between the royalists who were faithful to their principles, and their conquerors. The happiness of his grand-daughter seemed to him so doubtful if he delivered her into the hands of the proud and haughty Marquise de Cinq-Cygne that he decided in his own mind to trust to the friend of old age, Time. He hoped that his bitter enemy the marquise might die, and, in that case, he thought he could win the son through his grandfather, old d’Hauteserre, who was then living at Cinq-Cygne and whom he knew to be accessible to the persuasions of money.

If this plan failed, and Cecile Beauvisage remained unmarried, he resolved as a last resort to consult his friend Gondreville, who would, he believed, find his Cecile a husband, after his heart and his ambition, among the dukes of the Empire.

IX. A STRANGER

Severine found her father seated on a wooden bench at the end of his terrace, under a bower of lilacs then in bloom, and taking his coffee; for it was half-past five in the afternoon. She saw, by the pain on her father's face, that he had already heard the news. In fact, the old count had sent a valet to his friend, begging him to come to him.

Up to the present time, old Grevin had endeavored not to encourage his daughter's ambition too far; but now, in the midst of the contradictory reflections which the melancholy death of Charles Keller caused him, his secret escaped his lips.

"My dear child," he said to her, "I had formed the finest plans for your future. Cecile was to have been Vicomtesse Keller, for Charles, by my influence, would now have been selected deputy. Neither Gondreville nor his daughter Madame Keller would have refused Cecile's *dot* of sixty thousand francs a year, especially with the prospect of a hundred thousand more which she will some day have from you. You would have lived in Paris with your daughter, and played your part of mother-in-law in the upper regions of power."

Madame Beauvisage made a sign of satisfaction.

"But we are knocked down by the death of this charming young man, to whom the prince royal had already given his friendship. Now this Simon Giguet, who has thrust himself upon the scene, is a fool, and the worst of all fools, for he thinks himself an eagle. You are, however, too intimate with the Giguets and the Marion household not to put the utmost politeness into your refusal—but you must refuse him."

"As usual, you and I are of the same opinion, father."

"You can say that I have otherwise disposed of Cecile's hand, and that will cut short all preposterous pretensions like that of Antonin Goulard. Little Vinet may offer himself, and he is preferable to the others who are smelling after the *dot*; he has talent, and shrewdness, and he belongs to the Chargeboeufs by his mother; but he has too much character not to rule his wife, and he is young enough to make himself loved. You would perish between two sentiments—for I know you by heart, my child."

"I shall be much embarrassed this evening at the Marions' to know what to say," remarked Severine.

"Well, then, my dear," said her father, "send Madame Marion to me; I'll talk to her."

"I knew, father, that you were thinking of our future, but I had no idea you expected it to be so brilliant," said Madame Beauvisage, taking the hands of the old man and kissing them.

"I have pondered the matter so deeply," said Grevin, "that in 1831 I bought the Beauseant mansion in Paris, which you have probably seen."

Madame de Beauvisage made a movement of surprise on hearing this secret, until then so carefully kept, but she did not interrupt her father.

"It will be my wedding present," he went on. "In 1832 I let it for seven years to an

Englishman for twenty-four thousand francs a year,—a pretty stroke of business; for it only cost me three hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, of which I thus recover nearly two hundred thousand. The lease ends in July of this year."

Severine kissed her father on the forehead and on both cheeks. This last revelation so magnified her future that she was well-nigh dazzled.

"I shall advise my father," she said to herself, as she recrossed the bridge, "to give only the reversion of that property to his grandchildren, and let me have the life-interest in it. I have no idea of letting my daughter and son-in-law turn me out of doors; they must live with me."

At dessert, when the two women-servants were safely at their own dinner in the kitchen, and Madame Beauvisage was certain of not being overheard, she thought it advisable to give Cecile a little lecture.

"My daughter," she said, "behave this evening with propriety, like a well-bred girl; and from this day forth be more sedate. Do not chatter heedlessly, and never walk alone with Monsieur Giguet, or Monsieur Olivier Vinet, or the sub-prefect, or Monsieur Martener,—in fact, with any one, not even Achille Pigoult. You will not marry any of the young men of Arcis, or of the department. Your fate is to shine in Paris. Therefore I shall now give you charming dresses, to accustom you to elegance. We can easily find out where the Princesse de Cadignan and the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne get their things. I mean that you shall cease to look provincial. You must practise the piano for three hours every day. I shall send for Monsieur Moise from Troyes until I know what master I ought to get from Paris. Your talents must all be developed, for you have only one year more of girlhood before you. Now I have warned you, and I shall see how you behave this evening. You must manage to keep Simon at a distance, but without coquetting with him."

"Don't be uneasy, mamma; I intend to adore the *stranger*."

These words, which made Madame Beauvisage laugh, need some explanation.

"Ha! I haven't seen him yet," said Phileas, "but everybody is talking about him. When I want to know who he is, I shall send the corporal or Monsieur Groslier to ask him for his passport."

There is no little town in France where, at a given time, the drama or the comedy of the *stranger* is not played. Often the stranger is an adventurer who makes dupes and departs, carrying with him the reputation of a woman, or the money of a family. Oftener the stranger is a real stranger, whose life remains mysterious long enough for the town to busy itself curiously about his words and deeds.

Now the probable accession to power of Simon Giguet was not the only serious event that was happening in Arcis. For the last two days the attention of the little town had been focussed on a personage just arrived, who proved to be the first Unknown of the present generation. The *stranger* was at this moment the subject of conversation in every household in the place. He was the beam fallen from heaven into the city of the frogs.

The situation of Arcis-sur-Aube explains the effect which the arrival of a stranger was certain to produce. About eighteen miles from Troyes, on the high-road to Paris, opposite to a farm called "La Belle Etoile," a county road branches off from the main road, and

leads to Arcis, crossing the vast plains where the Seine cuts a narrow green valley bordered with poplars, which stand out upon the whiteness of the chalk soil of Champagne. The main road from Arcis to Troyes is eighteen miles in length, and makes the arch of a bow, the extremities of which are Troyes and Arcis, so that the shortest route from Paris to Arcis is by the county road which turns off, as we have said, near the Belle Etoile. The Aube is navigable only from Arcis to its mouth. Therefore this town, standing eighteen miles from a high-road, and separated from Troyes by monotonous plains, is isolated more or less, and has but little commerce or transportation either by land or water. Arcis is, in fact, a town completely isolated, where no travellers pass, and is attached to Troyes and La Belle Etoile by stage-coaches only. All the inhabitants know each other; they even know the commercial travellers who come, now and then, on business from the large Parisian houses. Thus, as in all provincial towns in a like position, a stranger, if he stayed two days, would wag the tongues and excite the imaginations of the whole community without his name or his business being known.

Now, Arcis being still in a state of tranquillity three days before the morning when, by the will of the creator of so many histories, the present tale begins, there was seen to arrive by the county road a stranger, driving a handsome tilbury drawn by a valuable horse, and accompanied by a tiny groom, no bigger than my fist, mounted on a saddle-horse. The coach, connecting with the diligences to Troyes, had brought from La Belle Etoile three trunks coming from Paris, marked with no name, but belonging to this stranger, who took up his quarters at the Mulet inn. Every one in Arcis supposed, on the first evening, that this personage had come with the intention of buying the estate of Arcis; and much was said in all households about the future owner of the chateau. The tilbury, the traveller, his horses, his servant, one and all appeared to belong to a man who had dropped upon Arcis from the highest social sphere.

The stranger, no doubt fatigued, did not show himself for a time; perhaps he spent part of the day in arranging himself in the rooms he had chosen, announcing his intention of staying a certain time. He requested to see the stable where his horses were to be kept, showed himself very exacting, and insisted that they should be placed in stalls apart from those of the innkeeper’s horses, and from those of guests who might come later. In consequence of such singular demands, the landlord of the hotel du Mulet considered his guest to be an Englishman.

On the evening of the first day several attempts were made at the Mulet by inquisitive persons to satisfy their curiosity; but no light whatever could be obtained from the little groom, who evaded all inquiries, not by refusals or by silence, but by sarcasms which seemed to be beyond his years and to prove him a corrupt little mortal.

After making a careful toilet and dining at six o’clock, the stranger mounted a horse, and, followed by his groom, rode off along the road to Brienne, not returning till a very late hour to the Mulet. The landlord, his wife, and her maids had meantime gained no information from a careful examination of his trunks, and the articles about his rooms, as to the projects or the condition of their mysterious inmate.

On the stranger’s return the mistress of the house carried up to him the book in which, according to police regulations, he was required to inscribe his name, rank, the object of his journey, and the place from which he came.

“I shall write nothing,” he said to the mistress of the inn. “If any one questions you, you can say I refused; and you may send the sub-prefect to see me, for I have no passport. I dare say that many persons will make inquiries about me, madame, and you can tell them just what you like. I wish you to know nothing about me. If you worry me on this point, I shall go to the Hotel de la Poste on the Place du Pont and remain there for the fortnight I propose to spend here. I should be sorry for that, because I know that you are the sister of Gothard, one of the heroes of the Simeuse affair.”

“Enough, monsieur,” said the sister of the steward of Cinq-Cygne.

After such a beginning, the stranger kept the mistress of the house a whole hour and made her tell him all she knew of Arcis, of its fortunes, its interests, and its functionaries. The next day he disappeared on horseback, followed by his tiger, returning at midnight.

We can now understand Mademoiselle Cecile’s little joke, which Madame Beauvisage thought to be without foundation. Beauvisage and Cecile, surprised by the order of the day promulgated by Severine, were enchanted. While his wife went to dress for Madame Marion’s reception, the father listened to the many conjectures it was natural a girl should make in such a case. Then, fatigued with his day, he went to bed as soon as his wife and daughter had departed.

As may readily be supposed by those who know anything of country towns, a crowd of persons flocked to Madame Marion’s that evening. The triumph of Giguet junior was thought to be a victory won against the Comte de Gondreville, and to insure forever the independence of Arcis in the matter of elections. The news of the death of poor Charles Keller was regarded as a judgment from heaven, intended to silence all rivalries.

Antonin Goulard, Frederic Marest, Olivier Vinet, and Monsieur Martener, the authorities who, until then, had frequented this salon (the prevailing opinions of which did not seem to them contrary to the government created by the popular will in July, 1830), came as usual, possessed by curiosity to see what attitude the Beauvisage family would take under the circumstances.

The salon, restored to its usual condition, showed no signs of the meeting which appeared to have settled the destiny of Simon Giguet. By eight o’clock four card-tables, each with four players, were under way. The smaller salon and the dining-room were full of people. Never, except on grand occasions, such as balls and fete-days, had Madame Marion seen such an influx at the door of her salon, forming as it were the tail of a comet.

“It is the dawn of power,” said Olivier Vinet to the mistress of the house, showing her this spectacle, so gratifying to the heart of a person who delighted in receiving company.

“No one knows what there is in Simon,” replied the mother. “We live in times when young men who persevere and are moral and upright can aspire to everything.”

This answer was made, not so much to Vinet as to Madame Beauvisage, who had entered the room with her daughter and was now beginning to offer her congratulations on the event. In order to escape indirect appeals and pointed interpretations of careless words, Madame Beauvisage took a vacant place at a whist-table and devoted her mind to the winning of one hundred fishes. One hundred fishes, or counters, made fifty sous! When a player had lost that sum it was talked of in Arcis for a couple of days.

Cecile went to talk with Mademoiselle Mollot, one of her good friends, appearing to be seized with redoubled affection for her. Mademoiselle Mollot was the beauty of Arcis, just as Cecile was the heiress. Monsieur Mollot, clerk of the court, lived on the Grande-Place in a house constructed in the same manner as that of Beauvisage on the Place du Pont. Madame Mollot, forever seated at the window of her salon on the ground-floor, was attacked (as the result of that situation) by intense, acute, insatiable curiosity, now become a chronic and inveterate disease. The moment a peasant entered the square from the road to Brienne she saw him, and watched to see what business could have brought him to Arcis; she had no peace of mind until that peasant was explained. She spent her life in judging the events, men, things, and households of Arcis.

The ambition of the house of Mollot, father, mother, and daughter, was to marry Ernestine (an only daughter) to Antonin Goulard. Consequently the refusal of the Beauvisage parents to entertain the proposals of the sub-prefect had tightened the bonds of friendship between the two families.

“There’s an impatient man!” said Ernestine to Cecile, indicating Simon Giguet. “He wants to come and talk with us; but every one who comes in feels bound to congratulate him. I’ve heard him say fifty times already: ‘It is, I think, less to me than to my father that this compliment of my fellow-citizens has been paid; but, in any case, pray believe that I shall be devoted not only to our general interests but to yours individually.’ I can guess those words by the motion of his lips, and all the while he is looking at you with an air of martyrdom.”

“Ernestine,” replied Cecile, “don’t leave me the whole evening; I don’t want to listen to his proposals made under cover of ‘alases!’ and mingled with sighs.”

“Don’t you want to be the wife of a Keeper of the Seals?”

“Ah! that’s all nonsense,” said Cecile, laughing.

“But I assure you,” persisted Ernestine, “that just before you came in Monsieur Godivet, the registrar, was declaring with enthusiasm that Simon would be Keeper of the Seals in three years.”

“Do they count on the influence of the Comte de Gondreville?” asked the sub-prefect, coming up to the two girls and guessing that they were making fun of his friend Giguet.

“Ah! Monsieur Antonin,” said the handsome Ernestine, “you who promised my mother to find out all about the *stranger*, what have you heard about him?”

“The events of to-day, Mademoiselle, are so much more important,” said Antonin, taking a seat beside Cecile, like a diplomat delighted to escape general attention by conversing with two girls. “All my career as sub-prefect or prefect is at stake.”

“What! I thought you allowed your friend Simon to be nominated unanimously.”

“Simon is my friend, but the government is my master, and I expect to do my best to prevent Simon from being elected. And here comes Madame Mollot, who owes me her concurrence as the wife of a man whose functions attach him to the government.”

“I am sure we ask nothing better than to be on your side,” replied the sheriff’s wife. “Mollot has told me,” she continued in a low voice, “what took place here to-day—it is

pitiable! Only one man showed talent, and that was Achille Pigoult. Everybody agrees that he would make a fine orator in the Chamber; and therefore, though he has nothing, and my daughter has a *dot* of sixty thousand francs, not to speak of what, as an only child, she will inherit from us and also from her uncle at Mollot and from my aunt Lambert at Troyes,—well, I declare to you that if Monsieur Achille Pigoult did us the honor to ask her to wife, I should give her to him; yes, I should—provided always she liked him. But the silly little goose wants to marry as she pleases; it is Mademoiselle Beauvisage who puts such notions into her head."

The sub-prefect received this double broadside like a man who knows he has thirty thousand francs a year, and expects a prefecture.

"Mademoiselle is right," he said, looking at Cecile; "she is rich enough to make a marriage of love."

"Don't let us talk about marriage," said Ernestine; "it saddens my poor dear Cecile, who was owning to me just now that in order not to be married for her money, but for herself, she should like an affair with some stranger who knew nothing of Arcis and her future expectations as Lady Croesus, and would spin her a romance to end in true love and a marriage."

"That's a very pretty idea!" cried Olivier Vinet, joining the group of young ladies in order to get away from the partisans of Simon, the idol of the day. "I always knew that Mademoiselle had as much sense as money."

"And," continued Ernestine, "she has selected for the hero of her romance—"

"Oh!" interrupted Madame Mollot, "an old man of fifty!—fie!"

"How do you know he is fifty?" asked Olivier Vinet, laughing.

"How?" replied Madame Mollot. "Why, this morning I was so puzzled that I got out my opera-glass—"

"Bravo!" cried the superintendent of *ponts et chaussees*, who was paying court to the mother to obtain the daughter.

"And so," continued Madame Mollot, "I was able to see him shaving; with such elegant razors!—mounted in gold, or silver-gilt!"

"Gold! gold, of course!" said Vinet. "When things are unknown they should always be imagined of the finest quality. Consequently I, not having seen this gentleman, am perfectly sure that he is at least a count."

This speech created a laugh; and the laughing group excited the jealousy of a group of dowagers and the attention of a troop of men in black who surrounded Simon Giguet. As for the latter, he was chafing in despair at not being able to lay his fortune and his future at the feet of the rich Cecile.

"Yes," continued Vinet, "a man distinguished for his birth, for his manners, his fortune, his equipages,—a lion, a dandy, a yellow-kid-glover!"

"Monsieur Olivier," said Ernestine, "he drives the prettiest tilbury you ever saw."

"What? Antonin, you never told me he had a tilbury when we were talking about that

conspirator this morning. A tilbury! Why, that’s an extenuating circumstance; he can’t be a republican.”

“Mesdemoiselles, there is nothing that I will not do in the interests of your amusement,” said Antonin Goulard. “I will instantly proceed to ascertain if this individual is a count, and if he is, what kind of count.”

“You can make a report upon him,” said the superintendent of bridges.

“For the use of all future sub-prefects,” added Olivier Vinet.

“How can you do it?” asked Madame Mollot.

“Oh!” replied the sub-prefect, “ask Mademoiselle Beauvisage whom she would accept as her husband among all of us here present; she will not answer. Allow me the same discretion. Mesdemoiselles, restrain your anxiety; in ten minutes you shall know whether the Unknown is a count or a commercial traveller.”

X. THE REVELATIONS OF AN OPERA-GLASS

Antonin Goulard left the little group of young ladies, in which, besides Cecile and Ernestine, were Mademoiselle Berton, daughter of the tax-collector,—an insignificant young person who played the part of satellite to Cecile,—and Mademoiselle Herbelot, sister of the second notary of Arcis, an old maid of thirty, soured, affected, and dressed like all old maids; for she wore, over a bombazine gown, an embroidered fichu, the corners of which, gathered to the front of the bodice, were knotted together after the well-known fashion under the Terror.

“Julien,” said the sub-prefect to his valet, who was waiting in the antechamber, “you who served six years at Gondreville ought to know how a count’s coronet is made.”

“Yes, monsieur; it has pearls on its nine points.”

“Very good. Go to the Mulet, and try to clap your eye on the tilbury of the gentleman who is stopping there, and then come and tell me what is painted on it. Do your business thoroughly, and bring me all the gossip of the inn. If you see the little groom, ask him at what hour to-morrow his master can receive the sub-prefect—in case you find the nine pearls. Don’t drink, don’t gossip yourself, and come back quickly; and as soon as you get back let me know it by coming to the door of the salon.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

The Mulet inn, as we have already said, stands on the square, at the opposite corner to the garden wall of the Marion estate on the other side of the road leading to Brienne. Therefore the solution of the problem could be rapid. Antonin Goulard returned to his place by Cecile to await results.

“We talked so much about the stranger yesterday that I dreamed of him all night,” said Madame Mollot.

“Ha! ha! do you still dream of unknown heroes, fair lady?” said Vinet.

“You are very impertinent; if I chose I could make you dream of me,” she retorted. “So this morning when I rose—”

It may not be useless to say that Madame Mollot was considered a clever woman in Arcis; that is, she expressed herself fluently and abused that advantage. A Parisian, wandering by chance into these regions, like the Unknown, would have thought her excessively garrulous.

“—I was, naturally, making my toilet, and as I looked mechanically about me—”

“Through the window?” asked Antonin.

“Certainly; my dressing-room opens on the street. Now you know, of course, that Poupart has put the stranger into one of the rooms exactly opposite to mine—”

“One room, mamma!” interrupted Ernestine. “The count occupies three rooms! The little groom, dressed all in black, is in the first. They have made a salon of the next, and the Unknown sleeps in the third.”

“Then he has half the rooms in the inn,” remarked Mademoiselle Herbelot.

“Well, young ladies, and what has that to do with his person?” said Madame Mollot, sharply, not pleased at the interruption. “I am talking of the man himself—”

“Don’t interrupt the orator,” put in Vinet.

“As I was stooping—”

“Seated?” asked Antonin.

“Madame was of course as she naturally would be,—making her toilet and looking at the Mulet,” said Vinet.

In the provinces such jokes are prized, for people have so long said everything to each other that they have recourse at last to the sort of nonsense our fathers indulged in before the introduction of English hypocrisy,—one of those products against which custom-houses are powerless.

“Don’t interrupt the orator,” repeated Cecile Beauvisage to Vinet, with whom she exchanged a smile.

“My eyes involuntarily fell on the window of the room in which the stranger had slept the night before. I don’t know what time he went to bed, although I was awake till past midnight; but I have the misfortune to be married to a man who snores fit to crack the planks and the rafters. If I fall asleep first, oh! I sleep so sound nothing can wake me; but if Mollot drops off first my night is ruined—”

“Don’t you ever go off together?” said Achille Pigoult, joining the group. “I see you are talking of sleep.”

“Hush, naughty boy!” replied Madame Mollot, graciously.

“Do you know what they mean?” whispered Cecile to Ernestine.

“At any rate, he was not in at one o’clock in the morning,” continued Madame Mollot.

“Then he defrauded you!—came home without your knowing it!” said Achille Pigoult. “Ha! that man is sly indeed; he’ll put us all in his pouch and sell us in the market-place.”

“To whom?” asked Vinet.

“Oh! to a project! to an idea! to a system!” replied the notary, to whom Olivier smiled with a knowing air.

“Imagine my surprise,” continued Madame Mollot, “when I saw a stuff, a material, of splendid magnificence, most beautiful! dazzling! I said to myself, ‘That must be a dressing-gown of the spun-glass material I have sometimes seen in exhibitions of industrial products.’ So I fetched my opera-glass to examine it. But, good gracious! what do you think I saw? Above the dressing-gown, where the head ought to have been, I saw an enormous mass, something like a knee—I can’t tell you how my curiosity was excited.”

“I can conceive it,” said Antonin.

“No, you can *not* conceive it,” said Madame Mollot; “for this knee—”

“Ah! I understand,” cried Olivier Vinet, laughing; “the Unknown was also making his

toilet, and you saw his two knees."

"No, no!" cried Madame Mollot; "you are putting incongruities into my mouth. The stranger was standing up; he held a sponge in his hand above an immense basin, and—none of your jokes, Monsieur Olivier!—it wasn't his knee, it was his head! He was washing his bald head; he hasn't a spear of hair upon it."

"Impudent man!" said Antonin. "He certainly can't have come with ideas of marriage in that head. Here we must have hair in order to be married. That's essential."

"I am therefore right in saying that our Unknown visitor must be fifty years old. Nobody ever takes to a wig before that time of life. After a time, when his toilet was finished, he opened his window and looked out; and *then* he wore a splendid head of black hair. He turned his eyeglass full on me,—for by that time, I was in my balcony. Therefore, my dear Cecile, you see for yourself that you can't take that man for the hero of your romance."

"Why not? Men of fifty are not to be despised, if they are counts," said Ernestine.

"Heavens! what has age to do with it?" said Mademoiselle Herbelot.

"Provided one gets a husband," added Vinet, whose cold maliciousness made him feared.

"Yes," replied the old maid, feeling the cut, "I should prefer a man of fifty, indulgent, kind, and considerate, to a young man without a heart, whose wit would bite every one, even his wife."

"This is all very well for conversation," retorted Vinet, "but in order to love the man of fifty and reject the other, it is necessary to have the opportunity to choose."

"Oh!" said Madame Mollot, in order to stop this passage at arms between the old maid and Vinet, who always went to far, "when a woman has had experience of life she knows that a husband of fifty or one of twenty-five is absolutely the same thing if she merely respects him. The important things in marriage are the benefits to be derived from it. If Mademoiselle Beauvisage wants to go to Paris and shine there—and in her place I should certainly feel so—she ought not to take a husband in Arcis. If I had the fortune she will have, I should give my hand to a count, to a man who would put me in a high social position, and I shouldn't ask to see the certificate of his birth."

"It would satisfy you to see his toilet," whispered Vinet in her ear.

"But the king makes counts," said Madame Marion, who had now joined the group and was surveying the bevy of young ladies.

"Ah! madame," remarked Vinet, "but some young girls prefer their counts already made."

"Well, Monsieur Antonin," said Cecile, laughing at Vinet's sarcasm. "Your ten minutes have expired, and you haven't told us whether the Unknown is a count or not."

"I shall keep my promise," replied the sub-prefect, perceiving at that moment the head of his valet in the doorway; and again he left his place beside Cecile.

"You are talking of the stranger," said Madame Marion. "Is anything really known

about him?”

“No, madame,” replied Achille Pigoult; “but he is, without knowing it, like the clown of a circus, the centre of the eyes of the two thousand inhabitants of this town. I know one thing about him,” added the little notary.

“Oh, tell us, Monsieur Achille!” cried Ernestine, eagerly.

“His tiger’s name is Paradise!”

“Paradise!” echoed every one included in the little circle.

“Can a man be called Paradise?” asked Madame Herbelot, who had joined her sister-in-law.

“It tends to prove,” continued the notary, “that the master is an angel; for when his tiger follows him—you understand.”

“It is the road of Paradise! very good, that,” said Madame Marion, anxious to flatter Achille Pigoult in the interests of her nephew.

“Monsieur,” said Antonin’s valet in the dining-room, “the tilbury has a coat of arms—”

“Coat of arms!”

“Yes, and droll enough they are! There’s a coronet with nine points and pearls—”

“Then he’s a count!”

“And a monster with wings, flying like a postilion who has dropped something. And here is what is written on the belt,” added the man, taking a paper from his pocket. “Mademoiselle Anicette, the Princesse de Cadignan’s lady’s maid, who came in a carriage” (the Cinq-Cygne carriage before the door of the Mulet!) “to bring a letter to the gentleman, wrote it down for me.”

“Give it to me.”

The sub-prefect read the words: *Quo me trahit fortuna*.

Though he was not strong enough in French blazon to know the house that bore that device, Antonin felt sure that the Cinq-Cygnes would not send their chariot, nor the Princess de Cadignan a missive by her maid, except to a person of the highest nobility.

“Ha! so you know the maid of the Princess de Cadignan! happy man!” said Antonin.

Julien, a young countryman, after serving six months in the household of the Comte de Gondreville, had entered the service of the sub-prefect, who wanted a servant of the *right style*.

“But, monsieur, Anicette is my father’s god-daughter. Papa, who wanted to do well by the girl, whose father was dead, sent her to a dressmaker in Paris because my mother could not endure her.”

“Is she pretty?”

“Rather; the proof is that she got into trouble in Paris; but finally, as she has talent and can make gowns and dress hair, she got a place with the princess.”

“What did she tell you about Cinq-Cygne? Is there much company?”

“A great deal, monsieur. There’s the princess and Monsieur d’Arthez, the Duc de Maufrigneuse and the duchess and the young marquis. In fact the chateau is full. They expect Monseigneur the Bishop of Troyes to-night.”

“Monsieur Troubert! I should like to know how long he is going to stay.”

“Anicette thinks for some time; and she believes he is coming to meet the gentleman who is now at the Mulet. They expect more company. The coachman told me they were talking a great deal about the election. Monsieur le president Michu is expected in a few days.”

“Try to bring that lady’s maid into town on pretence of shopping. Have you any designs upon her?”

“If she has any savings I don’t know but what I might. She is a sly one, though.”

“Tell her to come and see you at the sub-prefecture.”

“Yes, monsieur. I’ll go and tell her now.”

“Don’t say anything about me, or she might not come.”

“Ah! monsieur; haven’t I served at Gondreville?”

“You don’t know why they sent that message from Cinq-Cygne at this hour, do you? It is half-past nine o’clock.”

“It must have been something pressing. The gentleman had only just returned from Gondreville.”

“Gondreville!—has he been to Gondreville?”

“He dined there, monsieur. If you went to the Mulet you’d laugh! The little tiger is, saving your presence, as drunk as a fiddler. He drank such a lot of champagne in the servants’ hall that he can’t stand on his legs; they have been filling him for fun.”

“And the count?”

“The count had gone to bed; but as soon as he received the letter he got up. He is now dressing himself; and they are putting the horse in the tilbury. The count is to spend the night at Cinq-Cygne.”

“He must be some great personage.”

“Oh, yes, monsieur; for Gothard, the steward of Cinq-Cygne, came this morning to see his brother-in-law Poupart, and warned him to be very discreet about the gentleman and to serve him like a king.”

“Vinet must be right,” thought the sub-prefect. “Can there be some cabal on foot?”

“It was Duc Georges de Maufrigneuse who sent Gothard to the Mulet. Poupart came to the meeting here this morning only because the gentleman wished him to do so; if he had sent him to Paris, he’d go. Gothard told Poupart to keep silent about the gentleman, and to fool all inquisitive people.”

“If you can get Anicette here, don’t fail to let me know,” said Antonin.

“But I could see her at Cinq-Cygne if monsieur would send me to his house at Val-Preux.”

“That’s an idea. You might profit by the chariot to get there. But what reason could you give to the little groom?”

“He’s a madcap, that boy, monsieur. Would you believe it, drunk as he is, he has just mounted his master’s thoroughbred, a horse that can do twenty miles an hour, and started for Troyes with a letter in order that it may reach Paris to-morrow! And only nine years and a half old! What will he be at twenty?”

The sub-prefect listened mechanically to these remarks. Julien gossiped on, his master listening, absorbed in thought about the stranger.

“Wait here,” he said to the man as he turned with slow steps to re-enter the salon. “What a mess!” he thought to himself,—“a man who dines at Gondreville and spends the night at Cinq-Cygnes! Mysteries indeed!”

“Well?” cried the circle around Mademoiselle Beauvisage as soon as he reappeared.

“He is a count, and *vieille roche*, I answer for it.”

“Oh! how I should like to see him!” cried Cecile.

“Mademoiselle,” said Antonin, smiling and looking maliciously at Madame Mollot, “he is tall and well-made and does not wear a wig. His little groom was as drunk as the twenty-four cantons; they filled him with champagne at Gondreville and that little scamp, only nine years old, answered my man Julien, who asked him about his master’s wig, with all the assumption of an old valet: ‘My master! wear a wig!—if he did I’d leave him. He dyes his hair and that’s bad enough.’”

“Your opera-glass magnifies,” said Achille Pigoult to Madame Mollot, who laughed.

“Well, the tiger of the handsome count, drunk as he is, is now riding to Troyes to post a letter, and he’ll get there, as they say, in five-quarters of an hour.”

“I’d like to have that tiger,” said Vinet.

“If the count dined at Gondreville we shall soon know all about him,” remarked Cecile; “for my grandpapa is going there to-morrow morning.”

“What will strike you as very strange,” said Antonin Goulard, “is that the party at Cinq-Cygne have just sent Mademoiselle Anicette, the maid of the Princesse de Cadignan, in the Cinq-Cygne carriage, with a note to the stranger, and he is going now to pass the night there.”

“*Ah ca*!” said Olivier Vinet, “then he is not a man; he’s a devil, a phoenix, he will poculate—”

“Ah, fie! monsieur,” said Madame Mollot, “you use words that are really—”

“‘Poculate’ is a word of the highest latinity, madame,” replied Vinet, gravely. “So, as I said, he will poculate with Louis Philippe in the morning, and banquet at the Holy-Rood with Charles the Tenth at night. There is but one reason that allows a decent man to go to

both camps—from Montague to Capulet! Ha, ha! I know who that stranger is. He's—"

"The president of a railway from Paris to Lyons, or Paris to Dijon, or from Montereau to Troyes."

"That's true," said Antonin. "You have it. There's nothing but speculation that is welcomed everywhere."

"Yes, just see how great names, great families, the old and the new peerage are rushing hot-foot into enterprises and partnerships," said Achille Pigoult.

"Francs attract the Franks," remarked Olivier Vinet, without a smile.

"You are not an *olive*-branch of peace," said Madame Mollot, laughing.

"But is it not demoralizing to see such names as Verneuil, Maufrigneuse, and Herouville side by side with those of du Tillet and Nucingen in the Bourse speculations?"

"Our great Unknown is undoubtedly an embryo railway," said Olivier Vinet.

"Well, to-morrow all Arcis will be upside-down about it," said Achille Pigoult. "I shall call upon the Unknown and ask him to make me notary of the affair. There'll be two thousand deeds to draw, at the least."

"Our romance is turning into a locomotive," said Ernestine to Cecile.

"A count with a railway is all the more marriageable," remarked Achille Pigoult. "But who knows whether he is a bachelor?"

"Oh! I shall know that to-morrow from grandpapa," cried Cecile, with pretended enthusiasm.

"What a jest!" said Madame Mollot. "You can't really mean, my little Cecile, that you are thinking of that stranger?"

"But the husband is always the stranger," interposed Olivier Vinet, making a sign to Mademoiselle Beauvisage which she fully understood.

"Why shouldn't I think of him?" asked Cecile; "that isn't compromising. Besides, he is, so these gentlemen say, either some great speculator, or some great seigneur, and either would suit me. I love Paris; and I want a house, a carriage, an opera-box, etc., in Paris."

"That's right," said Vinet. "When people dream, they needn't refuse themselves anything. If I had the pleasure of being your brother I should marry you to the young Marquis de Cinq-Cygne, who seems to me a lively young scamp who will make the money dance, and will laugh at his mother's prejudices against the actors in the famous Simeuse melodrama."

"It would be easier for you to make yourself prime-minister," said Madame Marion. "There will never be any alliance between the granddaughter of Grevin and the Cinq-Cygnes."

"Romeo came within an ace of marrying Juliet," remarked Achille Pigoult, "and Mademoiselle is more beautiful than—"

"Oh! if you are going to quote operas and opera beauties!" said Herbelot the notary,

naively, having finished his game of whist.

“My legal brother,” said Achille Pigoult, “is not very strong on the history of the middle ages.”

“Come, Malvina!” said the stout notary to his wife, making no reply to his young associate.

“Tell me, Monsieur Antonin,” said Cecile to the sub-prefect, “you spoke of Anicette, the maid of the Princesse de Cadignan; do you know her?”

“No, but Julien does; she is the goddaughter of his father, and they are good friends together.”

“Then try, through Julien, to get her to live with us. Mamma wouldn’t consider wages.”

“Mademoiselle, to hear is to obey, as they say to despots in Asia,” replied the sub-prefect. “Just see to what lengths I will go in order to serve you.”

And he left the room to give Julien orders to go with Anicette in the chariot and coax her away from the princess at any price.

XI. IN WHICH THE CANDIDATE BEGINS TO LOSE VOTES

At this moment Simon Giguet, who had got through his bowing and scraping to all the influential men of Arcis, and who regarded himself as sure of his election, joined the circle around Cecile and Mademoiselle Mollot. The evening was far advanced. Ten o'clock had struck. After an enormous consumption of cakes, orgeat, punch, lemonade, and various syrups, those who had come that evening solely for political reasons and who were not accustomed to Madame Marion's floors, to them aristocratic, departed,—all the more willingly, because they were unaccustomed to sitting up so late. The evening then began to take on its usual air of intimacy. Simon Giguet hoped that he could now exchange a few words with Cecile, and he looked at her like a conqueror. The look displeased her.

"My dear fellow," said Antonin to Simon, observing on his friend's face the glory of success, "you come at a moment when the noses of all the young men in Arcis are put out of joint."

"Very much so," said Ernestine, whom Cecile had nudged with her elbow. "We are distracted, Cecile and I, about the great Unknown, and we are quarrelling for him."

"But," said Cecile, "he is no longer unknown; he is a count."

"Some adventurer!" replied Simon Giguet, with an air of contempt.

"Will you say that, Monsieur Simon," answered Cecile, feeling piqued, "of a man to whom the Princesse de Cadignan has just sent her servants, who dined at Gondreville to-day, and is to spend this evening with the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne?"

This was said sharply, and in so hard a tone that Simon was disconcerted.

"Ah, mademoiselle," said Olivier Vinet, "if we said to each other's faces what we all say behind our backs, social life wouldn't be possible. The pleasures of society, especially in the provinces, are to slander and backbite our neighbors."

"Monsieur Simon is jealous of your enthusiasm for the mysterious count," said Ernestine.

"It seems to me," said Cecile, "that Monsieur Simon has no right to be jealous of my affections."

After which remark, uttered in a way to dumfound Simon, Cecile rose; the others made way for her and she went to her mother, who was just finishing her rubber of whist.

"My dearest!" cried Madame Marion, hurrying after the heiress, "I think you are rather hard on my poor Simon."

"What has she done, my dear little kitten?" asked Madame Beauvisage.

"Mamma, Monsieur Simon called my great Unknown an adventurer!"

Simon had followed his aunt and was now beside the card-table. The four persons whose interests were concerned were thus in the middle of the salon,—Cecile and her

mother on one side of the table, Madame Marion and her nephew on the other.

“Really, madame,” said Simon Giguet, “there must be a strong desire to find fault and to quarrel with me simply because I happened to say that a gentleman whom all Arcis is talking about and who stops at the Mulet—”

“Do you think he has come here to put himself in competition with you?” said Madame Beauvisage jestingly.

“I should be very indignant with him certainly if he were to cause the slightest misunderstanding between Mademoiselle Cecile and myself,” said the candidate, with a supplicating look at the young girl.

“You gave your opinion, monsieur, in a decisive manner which proves that you are very despotic,” she replied; “but you are right; if you wish to be minister you ought to be decisive.”

Here Madame Marion took Madame Beauvisage by the arm and led her to a sofa. Cecile, finding herself alone, returned to her former seat to avoid hearing Simon’s answer to her speech, and the candidate was left standing rather foolishly before the table, where he mechanically played with the counters.

“My dear friend,” said Madame Marion in a low voice to Madame Beauvisage, “you see that nothing can now hinder my nephew’s election.”

“I am delighted both for your sake and for the Chamber of Deputies,” said Severine.

“My nephew is certain to go far, my dear; and I’ll tell you why: his own fortune, that which his father will leave him and mine, will amount altogether to some thirty thousand francs a year. When a man is a deputy and has a fortune like that, he can aspire to anything.”

“Madame, he has our utmost admiration and our most earnest wishes for the success of his political career; but—”

“I am not asking for an answer,” said Madame Marion, hastily interrupting her friend. “I only beg you to reflect on the following suggestions: Do our children suit each other? Can we marry them? We should then live in Paris during the sessions; and who knows if the deputy of Arcis may not be settled there permanently in some fine place in the magistracy? Look at Monsieur Vinet of Provins, how he has made his way. People blamed Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf for marrying him; yet she will soon be wife of the Keeper of the Seals; Monsieur Vinet can be peer of France whenever he pleases.”

“Madame, I have not the power to marry my daughter according to my own tastes. In the first place, her father and I leave her absolutely free to choose for herself. If she wanted to marry the ‘great Unknown’ and we found that the match was suitable, we should give our consent. Besides this, Cecile is wholly dependent on her grandfather, who intends to give her on her marriage the Hotel de Beauseant in Paris, which he purchased for us six years ago; the value of which is now rated at eight hundred thousand francs. It is one of the finest houses in the faubourg Saint-Germain. Moreover, he intends to add two hundred thousand francs for the cost of fitting it up. A grandfather who behaves in this way, and who can influence my mother-in-law to make a few sacrifices for her

granddaughter in expectation of a suitable marriage, has a right to advise—”

“Certainly,” said Madame Marion, stupefied by this confidence, which made the marriage of her nephew and Cecile extremely difficult.

“Even if Cecile had nothing to expect from her grandfather Grevin,” continued Madame Beauvisage, “she would not marry without first consulting him. If you have any proposals to make, go and see my father.”

“Very good; I will go,” said Madame Marion.

Madame Beauvisage made a sign to Cecile, and together they left the salon.

The next day Antonin and Frederic Marest found themselves, according to their usual custom, with Monsieur Martener and Olivier, beneath the lindens of the Avenue of Sighs, smoking their cigars and walking up and down. This daily promenade is one of the petty pleasures of government officials in the provinces when they happen to be on good terms with one another.

After they had made a few turns, Simon Giguet came up and joined them saying to the sub-prefect with a mysterious air:—

“You ought to be faithful to an old comrade who wishes to get you the rosette of an officer and a prefecture.”

“You are beginning your political career betimes,” said Antonin, laughing. “You are trying to corrupt me, rapid puritan!”

“Will you support me?”

“My dear fellow, you know very well that Bar-sur-Aube votes here. Who can guarantee a majority under such circumstances? My colleague of Bar-sur-Aube would complain of me if I did not unite my efforts with his in support of the government. Your promise is conditional; whereas my dismissal would be certain.”

“But I have no competitors.”

“You think so,” said Antonin, “but some one is sure to turn up; you may rely on that.”

“Why doesn’t my aunt come, when she knows I am on a gridiron!” exclaimed Giguet, suddenly. “These three hours are like three years!”

His secret had escaped him and he now admitted to his friend that Madame Marion had gone on his behalf to old Grevin with a formal proposal for Cecile’s hand.

The pair had now reached the Brienne road opposite to the Mulet hostelry. While the lawyer looked down the street towards the bridge his aunt would have to cross, the sub-prefect examined the gullies made by the rain in the open square. Arcis is not paved. The plains of Champagne furnish no material fit for building, nor even pebbles large enough for cobble-stone pavements. One or two streets and a few detached places are imperfectly macadamized and that is saying enough to describe their condition after a rain. The sub-prefect gave himself an appearance of occupation by apparently exercising his thoughts on this important object; but he lost not a single expression of suffering on the anxious face of his companion.

At this moment, the stranger was returning from the Chateau de Cinq-Cygne, where he had apparently passed the night. Goulard resolved to clear up, himself, the mystery wrapped about the Unknown, who was physically enveloped in an overcoat of thick cloth called a *paletot*, then the fashion. A mantle, thrown across his knees for a covering, hid the lower half of his body, while an enormous muffler of red cashmere covered his neck and head to the eyes. His hat, jauntily tipped to one side, was, nevertheless, not ridiculous. Never was a mystery more mysteriously bundled up and swathed.

“Look out!” cried the tiger, who preceded the tilbury on horseback. “Open, papa Poupart, open!” he screamed in his shrill little voice.

The three servants of the inn ran out, and the tilbury drove in without any one being able to see a single feature of the stranger’s face. The sub-prefect followed the tilbury into the courtyard, and went to the door of the inn.

“Madame Poupart,” said Antonin, “will you ask Monsieur—Monsieur—”

“I don’t know his name,” said Gothard’s sister.

“You do wrong! The rules of the police are strict, and Monsieur Groslier doesn’t trifle, like some commissaries of police.”

“Innkeepers are never to blame about election-time,” remarked the little tiger, getting off his horse.

“I’ll repeat that to Vinet,” thought the sub-prefect. “Go and ask your master if he can receive the sub-prefect of Arcis.”

Presently Paradise returned.

“Monsieur begs Monsieur the sub-prefect to come up; he will be delighted to see him.”

“My lad,” said Olivier Vinet, who with the two other functionaries had joined the sub-prefect before the inn, “how much does your master give a year for a boy of your cut and wits?”

“Give, monsieur! What do you take me for? Monsieur le comte lets himself be milked, and I’m content.”

“That boy was raised in a good school!” said Frederic Marest.

“The highest school, monsieur,” said the urchin, amazing the four friends with his perfect self-possession.

“What a Figaro!” cried Vinet.

“Mustn’t lower one’s price,” said the infant. “My master calls me a little Robert-Macaire, and since we have learned how to invest our money we are Figaro, plus a savings bank.”

“How much do you earn?”

“Oh! some races I make two or three thousand francs—and without selling my master, monsieur.”

“Sublime infant!” said Vinet; “he knows the turf.”

“Yes, and all gentlemen riders,” said the child, sticking out his tongue at Vinet.

Antonin Goulard, ushered by the landlord into a room which had been turned into a salon, felt himself instantly under the focus of an eyeglass held in the most impertinent manner by the stranger.

“Monsieur,” said the sub-prefect with a certain official hauteur, “I have just learned from the wife of the innkeeper that you refuse to conform to the ordinances of the police, and as I do not doubt that you are a person of distinction, I have come myself—”

“Is your name Goulard?” demanded the stranger in a high voice.

“I am the sub-prefect, monsieur,” replied Antonin Goulard.

“Your father belonged to the Simeuse family?”

“And I, monsieur, belong to the government; that is how times differ.”

“You have a servant named Julien, who has tried to entice the Princesse de Cadignan’s maid away from her?”

“Monsieur, I do not allow any one to speak to me in this manner,” said Goulard; “you misunderstand my character.”

“And you want to know about mine!” returned the Unknown. “Well, I will now make myself known. You can write in the landlord’s book: ‘Impertinent fellow. Direct from Paris. Age doubtful. Travelling for pleasure.’ It would be rather a novelty in France to imitate England and let people come and go as they please, without tormenting them at every turn for ‘papers.’ I have no passport; now, what will you do to me?”

“The *procureur-du-roi* is walking up and down there under the lindens,” said the sub-prefect.

“Monsieur Marest! Wish him good-morning from me.”

“But who are you?”

“Whatever you wish me to be, my dear Monsieur Goulard,” said the stranger. “You alone shall decide *what* I am to be in this department. Give me some advice on that head. Here, read that.”

And the stranger handed the sub-prefect the following letter:—

(Confidential.) Prefecture of the Aube.

Monsieur the Sub-prefect,—You will consult with the bearer of this letter as to the election at Arcis, and you will conform to all the suggestions and requests he may make to you. I request you to conduct this matter with the utmost discretion, and to treat the bearer with all the respect that is due to his station.

The letter was written and signed by the prefect of the Aube.

“You have been talking prose without knowing it,” said the Unknown, taking back the letter.

Antonin Goulard, already struck with the aristocratic tone and manners of this personage, became respectful.

“How was that, monsieur?” he asked.

“By endeavoring to entice Anicette. She told us of the attempts of your man Julien to corrupt her. But my little tiger, Paradise, got the better of him, and he ended by admitting that you wanted to put Anicette into the service of one of the richest families in Arcis. Now, as the richest family in Arcis is the Beauvisage family I make no doubt it is Mademoiselle Cecile who covets this treasure.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Very good; then Anicette shall enter the Beauvisage household at once.”

He whistled. Paradise presented himself so rapidly that his master said: “You were listening!”

“In spite of myself, Monsieur le comte; these partitions are nothing but paper. But if Monsieur le comte prefers, I will move upstairs.”

“No, you can listen; it is your perquisite. It is for me to speak low when I don’t want you to know my affairs. Go back to Cinq-Cygne, and give this gold piece to that little Anicette from me. Julien shall have the credit of enticing her away,” he continued, addressing Goulard. “That bit of gold will inform her that she is to follow him. Anicette may be useful to the success of our candidate.”

“Anicette?”

“Monsieur, it is now thirty-two years since lady’s-maids have served my purposes. I had my first adventure at the age of thirteen, like the regent, the great-great-grandfather of our present King. Do you know the fortune of this Mademoiselle Beauvisage?”

“I can’t help knowing it, monsieur, for yesterday at Madame Marion’s, Madame Beauvisage said openly that Monsieur Grevin, Cecile’s grandfather, would give his granddaughter the hotel de Beauseant in Paris and two hundred thousand francs for a wedding present.”

The stranger’s eyes expressed no surprise. He seemed to consider the fortune rather paltry.

“Do you know Arcis well?” he asked of Goulard.

“I am the sub-prefect and I was born here.”

“What is the best way to balk curiosity?”

“By satisfying it. For instance, Monsieur le Comte has a baptismal name; let him register that with the title of count.”

“Very good; Comte Maxime.”

“And if monsieur will assume the position of a railway official, Arcis will be content; it will amuse itself by floating that stick at least for a fortnight.”

“No, I prefer to be concerned in irrigation; it is less common. I have come down to survey the wastelands of Champagne in order to reclaim them. That will be, my good Monsieur Goulard, a reason for inviting me to dine with you to-morrow to meet the mayor and his family; I wish to see them, and study them.”

“I shall be only to happy to receive you,” said the sub-prefect; “but I must ask your

indulgence for the deficiencies of my little household."

"If I succeed in managing the election of Arcis according to the wishes of those who have sent me here, you, my dear friend, will be made a prefect. Here, read these"; and he held out two letters to his visitor.

"Very good, Monsieur le comte," said Antonin, returning them.

"Make a list of all the votes on which the ministry may count. Above all, let no one suspect that you and I understand each other. I am a speculator in land, and I don't care a fig for elections."

"I will send the commissary of police to force you to inscribe your name on Poupart's register."

"So do. Adieu, monsieur. Heavens! what a region this is," said the count, in a loud voice; "one can't take a step without having the community, sub-prefect and all, on one's back."

"You will have to answer to the commissary of police, monsieur," said Antonin, in an equally loud tone.

And for the next twenty minutes Madame Mollot talked of the altercation that took place between the sub-prefect and the stranger.

"Well, what wood is the beam that has plumped into our bog made of?" said Olivier Vinet when Antonin Goulard rejoined them on leaving the Mulet.

"He is a Comte Maxime who is here to study the geological system of Champagne, with a view to finding mineral waters," replied the sub-prefect, with an easy manner.

"Say a speculator," said Oliver.

"Does he expect to get the natives to lay out capital?" asked Monsieur Martener.

"I doubt if our royalists will go into that kind of mining," remarked Vinet, laughing.

"What should you think from the air and gestures of Madame Marion?" said the sub-prefect turning off the subject by pointing to Madame Marion and Simon, who were deep in conversation.

Simon had gone toward the bridge to meet his aunt, and was now walking with her up the square.

"If he was accepted one word would suffice," said the shrewd Olivier.

"Well?" said all the officials when Simon came to them under the lindens.

"My aunt thinks the matter very hopeful," replied Simon. "Madame Beauvisage and old Grevin, who has just gone to Gondreville, were not at all surprised at my proposals; they talked of our respective fortunes, and said they wished to leave Cecile perfectly free to make her choice. Besides which, Madame Beauvisage said that, as for herself, she saw no objection to an alliance by which she should feel herself honored; although she postponed all answer until after my election, and possibly my first appearance in the Chamber. Old Grevin said he should consult the Comte de Gondreville, without whose advice he never took any important step."

“All of which means,” said Goulard, point-blank, “that you will never marry Cecile, my old fellow.”

“Why not?” said Giguet, ironically.

“My dear friend, Madame Beauvisage and her daughter spend four evenings every week in the salon of your aunt; your aunt is the most distinguished woman in Arcis; and she is, though twenty years the elder, an object of envy to Madame Beauvisage; don’t you see, therefore, that they wished to wrap up their refusal in certain civilities?”

“Not to say entire yes or no in such cases,” said Vinet, “is to say *no*, with due regard to the intimacy of the two families. Though Madame Beauvisage has the largest fortune in Arcis, Madame Marion is the most esteemed woman in the place; for, with the exception of our chief-justice’s wife, who sees no one now, she is the only woman who knows how to hold a salon; she is the queen of Arcis. Madame Beauvisage has tried to make her refusal polite, that’s all.”

“I think that old Grevin was fooling your mother,” said Frederic Marest.

“Yesterday you attacked the Comte de Gondreville, you insulted and grievously affronted him, and he is to be consulted about your marriage to Cecile!”

“Pere Grevin is a sly old dog,” said Vinet.

“Madame Beauvisage is very ambitious,” pursued Antonin Goulard. “She knows very well her daughter is to have two millions; she means to be mother-in-law of a minister, or an ambassador, in order to play the great lady in Paris.”

“Well, why not?” said Simon Giguet.

“I wish you may get it!” replied the sub-prefect looking at Vinet, with whom he went off into a hearty laugh as soon as they were out of hearing. “He won’t even be deputy,” added Antonin, addressing Vinet; “the ministry have other views. You will find a letter from your father when you get home, enjoining you to make sure of the votes of all the persons in your department, and see that they go for the ministerial candidate. Your own promotion depends on this; and he requests you to be very discreet.”

“But who is the candidate for whom our ushers and sheriffs and clerks, and solicitors and notaries are to vote?” asked Vinet.

“The one I shall name to you.”

“How do you know my father has written to me, and what he wrote?”

“The stranger told me—”

“The man after water?”

“My dear Vinet, you and I are not to know; we must treat him as a stranger. He saw your father at Provins as he came through. Just now this same man gave me a note from the prefect instructing me to follow in every particular the instructions of Comte Maxime about this election. I knew very well I should have a battle to fight! Come and dine somewhere and we will get out our batteries. You are to be *procureur-du-roi* at Mantes, and I am to be prefect; but we must *seem* to have nothing to do with the election, for don’t you see, we are between the hammer and the anvil. Simon is the candidate of a party

which wants to overturn the present ministry and may succeed; but for men as intelligent as you and I there is but one course to take."

"What is that?"

"To serve those who make and unmake ministers. A letter was shown to me from one of those personages who represent the stable and immovable thought of the State."

Before going farther, it is necessary to explain who this Unknown person was, and what his purpose was in coming to Champagne.

XII. THE SALON OF MADAME D’ESPARD

About two months before the nomination of Simon Giguet, at eleven o’clock one evening, in a mansion of the faubourg Saint-Honore belonging to the Marquise d’Espard, while tea was being served the Chevalier d’Espard, brother-in-law to the marquise, put down his tea-cup, and, looking round the circle, remarked:—

“Maxime was very melancholy to-night,—didn’t you think so?”

“Yes,” replied Rastignac, “but his sadness is easily accounted for. He is forty-eight years old; at that age a man makes no new friends, and now that we have buried de Marsay, Maxime has lost the only man capable of understanding him, of being useful to him, and of using him.”

“He probably has pressing debts. Couldn’t you put him in the way of paying them?” said the marquise to Rastignac.

At this period Rastignac was, for the second time, in the ministry; he had just been made count almost against his will. His father-in-law, the Baron de Nucingen, was peer of France, his younger brother a bishop, the Comte de Roche-Hugon, his brother-in-law, was an ambassador, and he himself was thought to be indispensable in all future combinations of the ministry.

“You always forget, my dear marquise,” replied Rastignac, “that our government exchanges its silver for gold only; it pays no heed to men.”

“Is Maxime a man who would blow out his brains?” inquired the banker du Tillet.

“Ha! you wish I were; we should be quits then,” said Comte Maxime de Trailles, whom everybody supposed to have left the house.

The count rose suddenly, like an apparition, from the depths of an arm-chair placed exactly behind that of the Chevalier d’Espard.

Every one present laughed.

“Will you have a cup of tea?” said the young Comtesse de Rastignac, whom the marquise had asked to do the honors in her place.

“Gladly,” replied the count, standing before the fireplace.

This man, the prince of fashionable scoundrels, had managed to maintain himself until now in the high and mighty position of a dandy in Paris, then called *Gants Jaunes* (lemon-kid-glovers), and since, “lions.” It is useless to relate the history of his youth, full of questionable adventures, with now and then some horrible drama, in which he had always known how to save appearances. To this man women were never anything else than a means; he believed no more in their griefs than he did in their joys; he regarded them, like the late de Marsay, as naughty children. After squandering his own fortune, he had spent that of a famous courtesan, La Belle Hollandaise, the mother of Esther Gobseck. He had caused the misery of Madame Restaud, sister of Madame Delphine de Nucingen, the mother of the young Comtesse de Rastignac.

The world of Paris offers many unimaginable situations. The Baronne de Nucingen was at this moment in Madame d'Espard's salon in presence of the author of all her sister's misery, in presence of a murderer who killed only the happiness of women. That, perhaps, was the reason why he was there. Madame de Nucingen had dined at Madame d'Espard's with her daughter, married a few months earlier to the Comte de Rastignac, who had begun his political career by occupying the post of under-secretary of state in the famous ministry of the late de Marsay, the only real statesman produced by the Revolution of July.

Comte Maxime de Trailles alone knew how many disasters he had caused; but he had always taken care to shelter himself from blame by scrupulously obeying the laws of the Man-Code. Though he had squandered in the course of his life more money than the four galleys of France could have stolen in the same time, he had kept clear of justice. Never had he lacked in honor; his gambling debts were paid scrupulously. An admirable player, his partners were chiefly the great seigneurs, ministers, and ambassadors. He dined habitually with all the members of the diplomatic body. He fought duels, and had killed two or three men in his life; in fact, he had half murdered them, for his coolness and self-possession were unparalleled. No young man could compare with him in dress, in the distinction of his manners, the elegance of his witty speech, the grace of his easy carriage, —in short, what was called in those days "the grand air." In his capacity of page to the Emperor, trained from the age of twelve in the art of riding, he was held to be the skilfulest of horsemen. Having always fine horses in his stable, he raised some, and ruled the fashion in equestrianism. No man could stand a supper of young bloods better than he; he drank more than the best-trained toper, but he came out fresh and cool, and ready to begin again as if orgy were his element. Maxime, one of those despised men who know how to repress the contempt they inspire by the insolence of their attitude and the fear they cause, never deceived himself as to his actual position. Hence his real strength. Strong men are always their own critics.

Under the Restoration he had made the most of his former condition of page to the Emperor. He attributed to his pretended Bonapartist opinions the rebuffs he met with from the different ministers when he asked for an office under the Bourbons; for, in spite of his connections, his birth, and his dangerous aptitudes, he never obtained anything. After the failure of these attempts he entered the secret cabal which led in time to the fall of the Elder branch.

When the Younger branch, preceded by the Parisian populace, had trodden down the Elder branch and was seated on the throne, Maxime reproduced his attachment to Napoleon, for whom he cared as much as for his first love. He then did great services to the newcomers, who soon found the payment for them onerous; for Maxime too often demanded payment of men who knew how to reckon those services. At the first refusal, Maxime assumed at once an attitude of hostility, threatening to reveal unpleasant details; for budding dynasties, like infants, have much soiled linen. De Marsay, during his ministry, repaired the mistake of his predecessors, who had ignored the utility of this man. He gave him those secret missions which require a conscience made malleable by the hammer of necessity, an adroitness which recoils before no methods, impudence, and, above all, the self-possession, the coolness, the embracing glance which constitute the hired *bravi* of thought and statesmanship. Such instruments are both rare and necessary.

As a matter of calculation, de Marsay maintained Comte Maxime de Trailles in the highest society; he described him as a man ripened by passions, taught by experience, who knew men and things, to whom travel and a certain faculty for observation had imparted an understanding of European interests, of foreign cabinets, and of all the ramifications of the great continental families. De Marsay convinced Maxime of the necessity of doing himself credit; he taught him discretion, less as a virtue than a speculation; he proved to him that the governing powers would never abandon a solid, safe, elegant, and polished instrument.

"In politics," he said, blaming Maxime for having uttered a threat, "we should never *blackmail* but once."

Maxime was a man who could sound the depths of that saying.

De Marsay dead, Comte Maxime de Trailles had fallen back into his former state of existence. He went to the baths every year and gambled; he returned to Paris for the winter; but, though he received some large sums from the depths of certain niggardly coffers, that sort of half-pay to a daring man kept for use at any moment and possessing many secrets of the art of diplomacy, was insufficient for the dissipations of a life as splendid as that of the king of dandies, the tyrant of several Parisian clubs. Consequently Comte Maxime was often uneasy about matters financial. Possessing no property, he had never been able to consolidate his position by being made a deputy; also, having no ostensible functions, it was impossible for him to hold a knife at the throat of any minister to compel his nomination as peer of France. At the present moment he saw that Time was getting the better of him; for his lavish dissipations were beginning to wear upon his person, as they had already worn out his divers fortunes. In spite of his splendid exterior, he knew himself, and could not be deceived about that self. He intended to "make an end"—to marry.

A man of acute mind, he was under no illusion as to the apparent consideration in which he was held; he well knew it was false. No women were truly on his side, either in the great world of Paris or among the bourgeoisie. Much secret malignity, much apparent good-humor, and many services rendered were necessary to maintain him in his present position; for every one desired his fall, and a run of ill-luck might at any time ruin him. Once sent to Clichy or forced to leave the country by notes no longer renewable, he would sink into the gulf where so many political carcasses may be seen,—carcasses of men who find no consolation in one another's company. Even this very evening he was in dread of a collapse of that threatening arch which debt erects over the head of many a Parisian. He had allowed his anxieties to appear upon his face; he had refused to play cards at Madame d'Espard's; he had talked with the women in an absent-minded manner, and finally he had sunk down silent and absorbed in the arm-chair from which he had just risen like Banquo's ghost.

Comte Maxime de Trailles now found himself the object of all glances, direct and indirect, standing as he did before the fireplace and illumined by the cross-lights of two candelabra. The few words said about him compelled him, in a way, to bear himself proudly; and he did so, like a man of sense, without arrogance, and yet with the intention of showing himself to be above suspicion. A painter could scarcely have found a better moment in which to seize the portrait of a man who, in his way, was truly extraordinary.

Does it not require rare faculties to play such a part,—to enable one through thirty years to seduce women; to constrain one to employ great gifts in an underhand sphere only,—inciting a people to rebel, tracking the secrets of austere politicians, and triumphing nowhere but in boudoirs and on the back-stairs of cabinets?

Is there not something, difficult to say what, of greatness in being able to rise to the highest calculations of statesmen and then to fall coldly back into the void of a frivolous life? Where is the man of iron who can withstand the alternating luck of gambling, the rapid missions of diplomacy, the warfare of fashion and society, the dissipations of gallantry,—the man who makes his memory a library of lies and craft, who envelops such diverse thoughts, such conflicting manoeuvres, in one impenetrable cloak of perfect manners? If the wind of favor had blown steadily upon those sails forever set, if the luck of circumstances had attended Maxime, he could have been Mazarin, the Marechal de Richelieu, Potemkin, or—perhaps more truly—Lauzun, without Pignerol.

The count, though rather tall and constitutionally slender, had of late acquired some protuberance of stomach, but he “restrained it to the majestic,” as Brillat-Savarin once said. His clothes were always so well made, that he kept about his whole person an air of youth, something active and agile, due no doubt to his habits of exercise,—fencing, riding, and hunting. Maxime possessed all the physical graces and elegances of aristocracy, still further increased by his personally superior bearing. His long, Bourbonine face was framed by whiskers and a beard, carefully kept, elegantly cut, and black as jet. This color, the same as that of his abundant hair, he now obtained by an Indian cosmetic, very costly and used in Persia, the secret of which he kept to himself. He deceived the most practised eye as to the white threads which for some time past had invaded his hair. The remarkable property of this dye, used by Persians for their beards only, is that it does not render the features hard; it can be shaded by indigo to harmonize well with the individual character of the skin. It was this operation that Madame Mollot may have seen,—though people in Arcis, by way of a jest, still ask themselves what it was that Madame Mollot saw.

Maxime had a very handsome forehead, blue eyes, a Greek nose, a pleasant mouth, and a well-cut chin; but the circle of his eyes was now marked with numberless lines, so fine that they might have been traced by a razor and not visible at a little distance. His temples had similar lines. The face was also slightly wrinkled. His eyes, like those of gamblers who have sat up innumerable nights, were covered with a glaze, but the glance, though it was thus weakened, was none the less terrible,—in fact, it terrified; a hidden heat was felt beneath it, a lava of passions not yet extinct. The mouth, once so fresh and rosy, now had colder tints; it was straight no longer, but inclined to the right,—a sinuosity that seemed to indicate falsehood. Vice had twisted the lips, but the teeth were white and handsome.

These blemishes disappeared on a general view of his face and person. His figure was so attractive that no young man could compete with Maxime when on horseback in the Bois, where he seemed younger and more graceful than the youngest and most graceful among them. The privilege of eternal youth has been possessed by several men in our day.

The count was all the more dangerous because he seemed to be easy and indolent, never showing the iron determination which he had about all things. This apparent indifference, which enabled him to abet a popular sedition for the purpose of strengthening the authority of a prince with as much ability as he would have bestowed upon a court

intrigue, had a certain grace. People never distrust calmness and uniformity of manner, especially in France, where we are accustomed to a great deal of movement and stir about the smallest things.

The count, who was dressed in the fashion of 1839, wore a black coat, a cashmere waistcoat of dark blue embroidered with tiny flowers of a lighter blue, black trousers, gray silk stockings, and varnished leather shoes. His watch, placed in one of his waistcoat pockets, was fastened by an elegant chain to a button-hole.

“Rastignac,” he said, accepting the cup of tea which the pretty Madame de Rastignac offered him, “will you come with me to the Austrian ambassador’s?”

“My dear fellow, I am too recently married not to go home with my wife.”

“That means that *later*—” said the young countess, turning round and looking at her husband.

“Later is the end of the world,” replied Maxime. “But I shall certainly win my cause if I take Madame for a judge.”

With a charming gesture, the count invited the pretty countess to come nearer to him. After listening a few moments and looking at her mother, she said to Rastignac:—

“If you want to go to the embassy with Monsieur de Trailles, mamma will take me home.”

A few moments later the Baronne de Nucingen and the Comtesse de Rastignac went away together. Maxime and Rastignac followed a little later, and when they were both seated in the count’s carriage, the latter said:—

“What do you want of me, Maxime? Why do you take me by the throat in this way? What did you say to my wife?”

“I told her I had something to say to you. You are a lucky fellow, you are! You have ended by marrying the only heiress of the Nucingen millions—after twenty years at hard labor.”

“Maxime!”

“But I! here am I, exposed to the doubts of everybody. A miserable coward like du Tillet dares to ask if I have the courage to kill myself! It is high time for me to settle down. Does the ministry want to get rid of me, or does it not? You ought to know. At any rate, you must find out,” continued Maxime, making a gesture with his hand to silence Rastignac. “Here is my plan: listen to it. You ought to serve me, for I have served you, and can serve you again. The life I live now is intolerable; I want an escape from it. Help me to a marriage which shall bring me half a million. Once married, appoint me minister to some wretched little republic in America. I’ll stay there long enough to make my promotion to the same post in Germany legitimate. If I am worth anything, they will soon take me out of it; if I am not worth anything, they can dismiss me. Perhaps I may have a child. If so, I shall be stern with him; his mother will be rich; I’ll make him a minister, perhaps an ambassador.”

“Here is my answer,” said Rastignac. “An incessant battle is going on—greater than

common people who are not in it have any idea of—between power in its swaddling-clothes and power in its childhood. Power in swaddling-clothes is the Chamber of Deputies which, not being restrained by an hereditary chamber—”

“Ha! ha!” said Maxime, “you are now a peer of France.”

“I should say the same if I were not,” said the new peer. “But don’t interrupt me; you are concerned in all this. The Chamber of Deputies is fated to become the whole government, as de Marsay used to tell us (the only man by whom France could have been saved), for peoples don’t die; they are slaves or free men, and that’s all. Child-power is the royalty that was crowned in August, 1830. The present ministry is beaten; it dissolves the Chamber and brings on a general election in order to prevent the coming ministry from calling one; but it does not expect a victory. If it were victorious in these elections, the dynasty would be in danger; whereas, if the ministry is beaten, the dynastic party can fight to advantage for a long time. The mistakes of the Chamber will turn to the profit of a will which wants, unfortunately, to be the whole political power. When a ruler is that whole, as Napoleon was, there comes a moment when he must supplement himself; and having by that time alienated superior men, he, the great single will, can find no assistant. That assistant ought to be what is called a cabinet; but there is no cabinet in France, there is only a Will with a life lease. In France it is the government that is blamed, the opposition never; it may lose as many battles as it fights, but, like the allies in 1814, one victory suffices. With ‘three glorious days’ it overturned and destroyed everything. Therefore, if we are heirs of power, we must cease to govern, and wait. I belong by my personal opinions to the aristocracy, and by my public opinions to the royalty of July. The house of Orleans served me to raise the fortunes of my family, and I shall ever remain attached to it.”

“The ‘ever’ of Monsieur de Talleyrand, be it understood,” put in Maxime.

“At this moment I can’t do anything for you,” continued Rastignac. “We shall not be in power more than six months longer. Yes, those six months will be our last dying agony, I know that; but we know what we were when we formed ourselves, a stop-gap ministry and that was all. But you can distinguish yourself in the electoral battle that is soon to be fought. If you can bring one vote to the Chamber, a deputy faithful to the dynastic cause, you will find your wishes gratified. I will speak of your good services, and I will keep my eye on the reports of our confidential agents; I may find you some difficult task in which you can distinguish yourself. If you succeed, I can insist upon your talents, your devotion, and claim your reward. Your marriage, my dear fellow, can be made only in some ambitious provincial family of tradespeople or manufacturers. In Paris you are too well known. We must therefore look out for a millionaire parvenu, endowed with a daughter, and possessed with a desire to parade himself and his family at the Chateau des Tuileries.”

“Make your father-in-law lend me twenty-five thousand francs to enable me to wait as long as that; he will then have an interest in seeing that I am not paid in holy-water if I succeed; he will further a rich marriage for his own sake.”

“You are wily, Maxime, and you distrust me. But I like able men, and I will attend to your affair.”

They reached the Austrian embassy. The Comte de Rastignac saw the minister of the

interior in one of the salons and went to talk with him in a corner. Comte Maxime de Trailles, meantime, was apparently engrossed by the old Comtesse de Listomere, but he was, in reality, following the course of the conversation between the two peers of France; he watched their gestures, interpreted their looks, and ended by catching a favorable glance cast upon him by the minister.

Maxime and Rastignac left the embassy together about one in the morning, and before getting into their respective carriages, Rastignac said to Maxime on the steps of the portico: “Come and see me just before the elections. Between now and then I shall know in what locality the chances of the ministry are worst, and what resources two heads like yours and mine can find there.”

“But my twenty-five thousand francs are needed,” replied de Trailles.

“Well, you must hide yourself, that’s all.”

Fifty days later, one morning before dawn, the Comte de Trailles went to the rue de Varennes, mysteriously in a hired cab. At the gate of the ministry of Public Works, he sent the cab away, looked about him to see that he was not watched, and then waited in a little salon on the first floor until Rastignac should awake. A few moments later the valet who had taken in his card ushered Maxime into the minister’s bed-chamber, where that statesman was making his morning toilet.

“My dear Maxime,” said the latter, “I can tell you a secret which will be in the newspapers two days hence, and which, meantime, you can turn to your own profit. That poor Charles Keller, who danced the mazurka so well, as been killed in Africa. His death leaves a vacancy; he was our candidate in the arrondissement of Arcis. Here is a copy of two reports, one from the sub-prefect, the other from the commissary of police, informing the ministry that the election of the poor fellow would meet with opposition. In that of the commissary of police you will find some information about the state of the town which ought to be useful to a man of your shrewdness; it seems that the ambition of the rival candidate comes chiefly from his desire to marry a certain heiress. To one of your calibre that word is enough. The Cinq-Cygnes, the Princesse de Cadignan, and Georges de Maufrigneuse are living at Cinq-Cygne, close to Arcis; you can certainly obtain through them all the Legitimist votes, therefore—”

“Don’t waste your breath,” said Maxime. “Is the commissary still there?”

“Yes.”

“Give me a letter to him.”

“My dear fellow,” replied Rastignac, giving Maxime quite a bundle of papers, “you will find there two letters written to Gondreville for you. You have been a page and he has been a senator; you can’t fail therefore to understand each other. Madame Francois Keller is pious; here is a letter introducing you to her from the Marechale de Carigliano. The marechale has become dynastic; she recommends you warmly, and may go down herself. I will only add one word: Distrust the sub-prefect, whom I think capable of working this candidate, this Simon Giguet, into a support for himself with the president of the council. If you want letters, powers, credentials, write to me.”

“And those twenty-five thousand francs?” said Maxime.

“Sign this note to the order of du Tillet, and here’s the money.”

“I shall succeed,” said the count, “and you may tell the king that the deputy of Arcis shall belong to him body and soul. If I fail, I give you leave to abandon me.”

An hour later Maxime de Trailles was in his tilbury on the road to Arcis.

XIII. PREFACE BEFORE LETTERING

Once in possession of the information furnished by the landlady of the Mulet and by the sub-prefect Antonin Goulard, Monsieur de Trailles had soon arranged his plan of electoral operations, and this plan evinces itself so readily that the reader must already have perceived it.

To the candidacy of Simon Giguet, the wily agent of the government policy suddenly and abruptly opposed that of Phileas Beauvisage; and in spite of the nullity and unfitness of that individual this new combination, we must admit, had several incontestable chances of success. In the light of his municipal halo Beauvisage had one enormous advantage with the mass of indifferent voters; as mayor of the town his name was known to them. Logic has much more to do with the conducting of matters and things here below than it seems to have; it is like a woman to whom, after many infidelities, we still return. What common-sense prescribes is that voters called upon to choose their representative in public matters should be thoroughly informed as to his capacity, his honesty, and his general character. Too often, in practice, unfortunate twists are given to this principle; but whenever the electoral sheep, left to their own instincts, can persuade themselves that they are voting from their own intelligence and their own lights, we may be certain to see them following that line eagerly and with a sentiment of self-love. Now to know a man’s name, electorally speaking, is a good beginning toward a knowledge of the man himself.

Passing from indifferent to interested electors, we may be sure that Phileas was certain of rallying to himself the Gondreville party, now deprived by death of their own candidate. The question for them was to punish the presumption of Simon Giguet, and any candidate would be acceptable to the viceroy of Arcis. The mere nomination of a man against his grandson was a flagrant act of hostility and ingratitude, and a check to the count’s provincial importance which must be removed and punished at any cost.

Still, when the first news of his electoral ambition reached his father-in-law, Beauvisage was met by an astonishment little flattering to his feelings and not encouraging. The old notary had gauged his son-in-law once for all, and to his just and upright mind the idea of Phileas as a public man produced in its way the disagreeable effect that discordant instruments produce upon the ear. If it be true that no man is a prophet in his own country, he is often even less so in his own family. Still, the first impression once passed, Grevin would doubtless acclimatize himself to the idea of an expedient which would chime in with the plans he had already made for Severine’s future. Besides, for the safety of Gondreville’s interests, so seriously threatened, what sacrifice of his own opinion would the old notary not have made?

With the legitimist and the republican parties who could have no weight in the election, except that of increasing a majority, the candidacy of Beauvisage had a singular recommendation,—namely, his utter incapacity. Conscious of not possessing sufficient strength to elect a deputy of their own, the two extremes of the antidynastic opposition seized, almost with ardor, the opportunity to stick a thorn in the side in what they called “the present order of things,” and it might confidently be expected that in this frame of mind they would joyfully and with all their hearts support a candidate so supremely

ridiculous that a large slice of the ridicule must fall upon the government which supported him.

Moreover, in the opinions of the Left-Centre which had provisionally adopted Simon Giguet as its candidate, this move of Beauvisage was likely to produce a serious split; for he too had declared himself a man of the dynastic opposition, and, until further orders, Monsieur de Trailles (though all the while assuring him of the support of the ministry) encouraged his retaining that political tint, which was clearly the most popular in that region. But whatever baggage of political convictions the incorruptible deputy of Arcis might bring with him to Paris, his horoscope was drawn: it was very certain that after his first appearance in the salons of the Tuileries an august seduction would make a henchman of him, if ministerial blandishments had not already produced that result.

The public side of this matter being thus well-planned and provided for, the ministerial agent could turn his attention to the personal aspect of the question, namely, that of turning the stuff he was making into a deputy to the still further use of being made into a father-in-law.

First point, the *dot*; second point, the daughter; and both appeared to suit him. The first did not dazzle him; but as to the second, he did not conceal from himself the imperfections of a provincial education which he should have to unmake, but this was no serious objection to his sapient conjugal pedagogy.

Madame Beauvisage, when the matter was laid before her, swept her husband into it at a single bound. Maxime recognized her for an ambitious woman who, in spite of her forty-four years, still had the air of being conscious of a heart. Hence he saw that the game had better begin with a false attack on her to fall back later on the daughter. How far these advanced works could be pushed, circumstances would show. In either case, Maxime was well aware that his title, his reputation as a man of the world, and his masterly power of initiating them into the difficult and elegant mysteries of Parisian society were powerful reasons to bind the two women to him, not to speak of their gratitude for the political success of Monsieur Beauvisage of which he was the author.

But however all this might be, his matrimonial campaign offered one very serious difficulty. The consent of old Grevin would have to be obtained, and he was not a man to allow Cecile to be married without investigating to its depths the whole past of a suitor. This inquiry made, was it not to be feared that the thirty years' stormy biography of a roue would seem to the cautious old man a poor security for the future?

However, the species of governmental mission with which Monsieur de Trailles appeared in Arcis might seem to be an offset and even a condonation that would neutralize the effect of such disclosures. By getting the Comte de Gondreville to confide the news of that mission to old Grevin before it was publicly made known, he had flattered the old man's vanity and obtained a certain foothold in his mind. Moreover, he determined, when the time came, to forestall the old notary's distrust by seeming to distrust himself, and to propose, as a precaution against his old habits of extravagance, to introduce a clause into the marriage-contract providing for the separation of property and settling the wife's fortune upon herself. In this way he gave security against any return to his old habits of prodigality. As for himself, it was his affair to obtain such empire over his wife by the

power of sentiment that he could recover practically the marital power of which the contract dispossessed him.

At first nothing occurred to contradict the wisdom and clearsightedness of all these intentions. The Beauvisage candidacy being made public took fire like a train of gunpowder, and Monsieur de Trailles was able to feel such assurance of the success of his efforts that he wrote to Rastignac informing him of the fortunate and highly successful progress of his mission.

But, all of a sudden, in face of the triumphant Beauvisage rose another candidate; and, be it said in passing for the sake of our history, this rivalry presented itself under such exceptional and unforeseen circumstances that it changed what might have been a trivial electoral struggle into a drama possessing wider and more varied interests.

The man who now appears in this narrative will play so considerable a part in it that it seems necessary to install him, as it were, by means of retrospective and somewhat lengthy explanations. But to suspend the course of the narrative for this purpose would be to fly in the face of every rule of art and expose the present pious guardian of literary orthodoxy to the wrath of critics. In presence of this difficulty, the author would find himself greatly embarrassed, if his lucky star had not placed in his hands a correspondence in which, with a vim and animation that he himself could never have imparted to them, all the details that are essential to a full explanation will be found related.

These letters must be read with attention. They bring upon the scene many persons already well-known in the Comedy of Human Life, and they reveal a vast number of facts necessary to the understanding and development of the present drama. Their statements made, and brought to the point where we now seem to abandon our narrative, the course of that narrative will, without concussion and quite naturally, resume its course; and we like to persuade ourselves that, by thus introducing this series of letters, the unity of our tale, which seemed for a moment in danger, will be maintained.

PART II. LETTERS EXPLANATORY

I. THE COMTE DE L’ESTORADE TO MONSIEUR MARIE-GASTON

[See “The Memoirs of Two Young Married Women.”]

Dear Monsieur,—In accordance with your desire I have seen the prefect of police, in order to ascertain if the pious intention of which you wrote me in your letter, dated from Carrara, would meet with opposition from the authorities.

The prefect informed me that the imperial decree of the 23rd Prairial, year XII., by which the whole system of burials is still regulated, establishes, in the most unequivocal manner, the right of all persons to be interred on their own property. You have only to obtain a permit from the prefecture of the Seine-et-Oise, and then, without further formality, you can remove the remains of Madame Marie-Gaston to the mausoleum you propose to erect in your park at Ville d’Avray.

But I shall venture myself to offer an objection. Are you quite sure that you will not expose yourself to certain difficulties made by the Chaulieus, with whom you are not on the best of terms?

Will they not, to a certain extent, be justified in complaining that the removal from a public cemetery to private grounds of the body of one who is dear to them as well as to you, would make their visits to her grave entirely dependent on your good will and pleasure? For of course, and this is evident, you will always have the right to forbid their entrance to your property.

I know that, legally, the body of the wife, living or dead, belongs to the husband, to the exclusion of her relations, even the nearest; but, under the influence of the ill-will of which they have already given you proof, the relations of Madame Marie-Gaston might have the distressing idea of carrying the matter into court, and if so, how painful to you! You would gain the suit, no doubt, for the Duc de Chaulieu’s influence is not what it was under the Restoration; but have you reflected on the venom which the speech of a lawyer might shed upon such a question? and remember that he will speak as the echo of honorable affections—those of a father, mother, and two brothers asking not to be deprived of the sad happiness of praying at the grave of their lost one.

If you will let me express my thought, it is not without keen regret that I see you engaged in creating fresh nourishment for your grief, already so long inconsolable. We had hoped that, after passing two years in Italy, you would return to us more resigned, and able to take up an active life which might distract your mind. Evidently, this species of temple which you propose, in the fervor of your recollections, to erect in a spot where they are, alas! already too numerous, can only serve to perpetuate their bitterness; and I cannot approve the revival you are proposing to make of them.

Nevertheless, as we should always serve a friend according to his wishes, not our own, I have done your commission relating to Monsieur Dorlange, the sculptor, but I must tell you frankly that he showed no eagerness to enter into your wishes. His first remark, when I announced myself as coming from you, was that he did not know you; and this reply,

singular as it may seem to you, was made so naturally that at first I thought there must be some mistake, the result, possibly, of confusion of name. However, before long your oblivious friend was willing to agree that he studied with you at the college of Tours and also that hew as the same Monsieur Dorlange who, in 1831 and under quite exceptional circumstances, carried off the grand prize for sculpture. No doubt remained in my mind as to his identity. I attributed his want of memory to the long interruption (of which you yourself told me) in your intercourse. I think that that interruption wounded him more than you are aware, and when he seemed to have forgotten your very name, it was simply a revenge he could not help taking when the occasion offered.

But that was not the real obstacle. Remembering the fraternal intimacy that once existed between Monsieur Dorlange and yourself, I could not suppose his wounded feelings inexorable. So, after explaining to him the nature of the work you wanted him to do, I was about to say a few words as to the grievance he might have against you, when I suddenly found myself face to face with an obstacle of a most unexpected nature.

“Monsieur,” he said to me, “the importance of the order you wish to give me, the assurance that no expense should be spared for the grandeur and perfection of the work, the invitation you convey to me to go to Carrara and choose the marble and see it excavated, all that is truly a great piece of good fortune for an artist, and at any other time I should gladly have accepted it. But at the present moment, without having actually decided to abandon the career of Art, I am on the point of entering that of politics. My friends urge me to present myself at the coming elections, and you will easily see that, if elected, my parliamentary duties and my initiation into an absolutely new life would, for a long time at least, preclude my entering with sufficient absorption of mind into the work you propose to me.” And then, after a pause, he added; “I should have to satisfy a great grief which seeks consolation from this projected mausoleum. Such grief would, naturally, be impatient; whereas I should be slow, preoccupied in mind, and probably hindered. It is therefore better that the proposal should be made elsewhere; but this will not prevent me from feeling, as I ought, both gratified and honored by the confidence shown in me.”

I thought for a moment of asking him whether, in case his election failed, I could then renew the proposal, but on the whole I contented myself with expressing regret and saying that I would inform you of the result of my mission. It is useless to add that I shall know in a few days the upshot of this sudden parliamentary ambition which has, so inopportunely, started up in your way.

I think myself that this candidacy may be only a blind. Had you not better write yourself to Monsieur Dorlange? for his whole manner, though perfectly polite and proper, seemed to show a keen remembrance of the wrong you did him in renouncing his friendship, with that of your other friends, at the time of your marriage. I know it may cost you some pain to explain the really exceptional circumstances of your marriage; but after what I have seen in the mind of your old friend, I think, if you really wish for the assistance of his great talent, you should personally take some steps to obtain it.

But if you feel that any such action is more than you have strength for, I suggest another means. In all matters in which my wife has taken part I have found her a most able negotiator; and in this particular case I should feel the utmost confidence in her intervention. She herself suffered from the exclusiveness of Madame Marie-Gaston’s love

for you. No one can explain to him better than she the absorbing conjugal life which drew its folds so closely around you. And it seems to me that the magnanimity and comprehension which she always showed to her “dear lost treasure,” as she calls her, might be conveyed by her to your friend.

You have plenty of time to think over this suggestion, for Madame de l’Estorade is, just now, still suffering from a serious illness, brought on by maternal terror. A week ago our little Nais came near being crushed to death before her eyes; and without the courageous assistance of a stranger who sprang to the horses’ heads and stopped them short, God knows what dreadful misfortune would have overtaken us. This cruel emotion produced in Madame de l’Estorade a nervous condition which seriously alarmed us for a time. Though she is now much better, it will be several days before she could see Monsieur Dorlange in case her feminine mediation may seem to you desirable.

But once more, in closing, my dear Monsieur Gaston, would it not be better to abandon your idea? A vast expense, a painful quarrel with the Chaulieus, and, for you, a renewal of your bitter sorrow—this is what I fear. Nevertheless, I am, at all times and for all things, entirely at your orders, as indeed my sentiments of esteem and gratitude command.

II. THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO MADAME OCTAVE DE CAMPS

Paris, February, 1839.

Dear Madame de Camps,—Of all the proofs of sympathy which the accident to my dear child has brought me, not one has touched me so much as your excellent letter.

In reply to your affectionate solicitude I must tell you that in that terrible moment Nais was marvellously calm and self-possessed. It could not, I think, be possible to see death nearer; yet neither before nor after the accident did my valiant little daughter even blench; her whole behavior showed the utmost resolution, and, thank God! her health has not suffered for a moment.

As for me, in consequence of such terror, I was seized with convulsive spasms, and for several days, as I now hear, the doctors were very uneasy, and even feared for my reason. But thanks to the strength of my constitution, I am now almost myself again, and nothing would remain of this cruel agitation if, by a singular fatality, it were not connected with another unpleasant circumstance which has lately seen fit to fasten upon my life.

Before receiving from your letter these fresh assurances of your regard, I had thought of invoking the help of your friendship and advice; and to-day, when you tell me that it would make you happy and proud to take the place of my poor Louise de Chaulieu, the precious friend of whom death has deprived me, can I hesitate for a moment?

I take you at your word, and that delightful cleverness with which you foiled the fools who commented on your marriage to Monsieur de Camps [see "Madame Firmiani"], that singular tact with which we saw you steer your way through circumstances that were full of embarrassment and danger, in short the wonderful art which enabled you to keep both your secret and your dignity, I now ask you to put to the service of assisting me in the dilemma I mentioned just now.

Unfortunately in consulting a physician we naturally want to see him and tell him our symptoms *viva voce*, and it is here that Monsieur de Camps with his industrial genius seems to me most aggravating. Thanks to those villanous iron-works which he has taken it into his head to purchase, you are almost lost to Paris and to society! Formerly when we had you here, at hand, in ten minutes talk, without embarrassment, without preparation, I could have told you everything; but now I am obliged to think over what I have to say, to gather myself together, and pass into the solemnity of a written statement.

But after all, perhaps it is better to plunge boldly in, and since, in spite of circumlocutions and preambles, I shall have sooner or later to come to the point, why not say at once that my trouble concerns the stranger who saved my daughter's life.

Stranger! yes, a stranger to Monsieur de l'Estorade and to all who have told you about the accident, but not a stranger to me, whom, for the last three months, this man has condescended to honor with the most obstinate attention. That the mother of three children, one of them a big boy of fifteen, should at thirty-three years of age become the

object of an ardent passion will seem to you, as it does to me, an impossible fact; and that is the ridiculous misfortune about which I want to consult you.

When I say that this stranger is known to me, I must correct myself; for I know neither his name, nor his abode, nor anything about him. I have never met him in society, and I may add that, although he wears the ribbon of the Legion of honor, there is nothing in his air and manner—which are totally devoid of elegance—to make me suppose I ever shall meet him in our world.

It was at Saint-Thomas d'Aquin, where, as you know, I go to hear mass, that this annoying obsession began. I used almost daily to take my children to walk in the Tuileries, as the house we have hired here has no garden. This habit being noticed by my persecutor, I found him repeatedly there and wherever else I might be met outside of my own home. Perfectly discreet, although so audacious, this singular follower never accompanied me to my own door; he kept at a sufficient distance to give me the comfort of feeling that his foolish assiduity would not be observed by others.

Heaven only knows the sacrifices and annoyances I have borne to be rid of him. I never go to church now except on Sundays; I often keep my dear children at home to the injury of their health; or else I make excuses not to accompany them, and against all the principles of my education and prudence, I leave them to the care of the servants. Visits, shopping I do only in a carriage, which did not prevent my *shadow* from being at hand when the accident happened to Nais, and saving her life, an act that was brave and providential.

But it is precisely this great obligation I am now under which makes—does it not, I appeal to you?—a most deplorable complication.

In the first place, about thanking him. If I do that, I encourage him, and he would certainly take advantage of it to change the character of our present intercourse. But if I pass him without notice—think of it! a mother—a mother who owes him the life of her daughter, to pretend not to see him! to pass him without a single word of gratitude!

That, however, is the intolerable alternative in which I find myself placed, and you can now see how much I need the counsels of your experience. What can I do to break the unpleasant habit this man has taken of being my shadow? How shall I thank him without encouraging him? or not thank him without incurring self-reproach?

Those are the problems submitted to your wisdom. If you will do me the kindness to solve them—and I know no one so capable—I shall add gratitude to all the other affectionate sentiments which, as you know, I have so long felt for you.

III. THE COMTE DE L’ESTORADE TO MONSIEUR MARIE-GASTON

Paris, February, 1839.

Perhaps, my dear Monsieur Gaston, the public journals will have told you before this letter can arrive of the duel fought yesterday between your friend Monsieur Dorlange and the Duc de Rhetore. But the papers, while announcing the fact as a piece of news, are debarred by custom and propriety from inferring the motives of a quarrel, and therefore they will only excite your curiosity without satisfying it.

I have, fortunately, heard from a very good source, all the details of the affair, and I hasten to transmit them to you; they are, I think, of a nature to interest you to the highest degree.

Three days ago, that is to say on the very evening of the day when I paid my visit to Monsieur Dorlange, the Duc de Rhetore occupied a stall at the Opera-house. Next to him sat Monsieur de Ronquerolles, who has recently returned from a diplomatic mission which kept him out of France for several years. During the entr’acte these gentlemen did not leave their seats to walk about the foyer; but, as is often done, they stood up, with their backs to the stage, facing the audience and consequently Monsieur Dorlange, who was seated directly behind them, seeming to be absorbed in an evening newspaper. There had been that day a very scandalous, or what is called a very interesting, session of the Chamber of deputies.

The conversation between the duke and the marquis having naturally turned on the events of Parisian society which had taken place during Monsieur de Ronquerolles’ absence, the latter made the following remark which was of a nature to rouse the attention of Monsieur Dorlange.

“Your poor sister Madame de Macumer! what a sad end, after her singular marriage!”

“Ah! you know,” replied Monsieur de Rhetore, in that high-pitched tone of his, “my sister had too much imagination not to be romantic and visionary. She loved her first husband, Monsieur de Macumer, passionately, but after a time one gets tired of everything, even widowhood. This Marie-Gaston crossed her path. He is agreeable in person; my sister was rich; he was deeply in debt and behaved with corresponding eagerness and devotion. The result was that the scoundrel not only succeeded Monsieur de Macumer and killed his wife with jealousy, but he got out of her every penny the law allowed the poor foolish woman to dispose of. My sister’s property amounted to at least twelve hundred thousand francs, not counting a delightful villa splendidly furnished which she built at Ville d’Avray. Half of this that man obtained, the other half went to the Duc and Duchesse de Chaulieu, my father and mother, who were entitled to it by law as heirs ascendant. As for my brother Lenoncourt and myself, we were simply disinherited.”

As soon as your name, my dear Monsieur Gaston, was uttered, Monsieur Dorlange laid aside his newspaper, and then, as Monsieur de Rhetore ended his remarks, he rose and

said:—

“Pardon me, Monsieur le duc, if I venture to correct your statement; but, as a matter of conscience, I ought to inform you that you are totally misinformed.”

“What is that you say?” returned the duke, blinking his eyes and speaking in that contemptuous tone we can all imagine.

“I say, Monsieur le duc, that Marie-Gaston is my friend from childhood; he has never been thought a *scoundrel*; on the contrary, the world knows him as a man of honor and talent. So far from killing his wife with jealousy, he made her perfectly happy during the three years their marriage lasted. As for the property—”

“Have you considered, monsieur,” said the Duc de Rhetore, interrupting him, “the result of such language?”

“Thoroughly, monsieur; and I repeat that the property left to Marie-Gaston by the will of his wife is so little desired by him that, to my knowledge, he is about to spend a sum of two or three hundred thousand francs in building a mausoleum for a wife whom he has never ceased to mourn.”

“After all, monsieur, who are you?” said the Duc de Rhetore, again interrupting him with ill-restrained impatience.

“Presently,” replied Monsieur Dorlange, “I shall have the honor to tell you; you must now permit me to add that the property of which you say you have been disinherited Madame Marie-Gaston had the right to dispose of without any remorse of conscience. It came from her first husband, the Baron de Macumer; and she had, previously to that marriage, given up her own property in order to constitute a fortune for your brother, the Duc de Lenoncourt-Givry, who, as younger son, had not, like you, Monsieur le Duc, the advantages of an entail.”

So saying, Monsieur Dorlange felt in his pocket for his card-case.

“I have no cards with me,” he said at last, “but my name is Dorlange, a theatrical name, easy to remember, and I live at No. 42 rue de l’Ouest.”

“Not a very central quarter,” remarked Monsieur de Rhetore, ironically. Then turning to Monsieur de Ronquerolles, whom he thus constituted one of his seconds, “I beg your pardon, my dear fellow,” he said, “for the voyage of discovery you will have to undertake for me to-morrow morning.” And then almost immediately he added: “Come to the foyer; we can talk there with greater *safety*.”

By his manner of accenting the last word it was impossible to mistake the insulting meaning he intended to attach to it.

The two gentlemen having left their seats, without this scene attracting any notice, in consequence of the stalls being empty for the most part during the entr’acte, Monsieur Dorlange saw at some distance the celebrated sculptor Stidmann, and went up to him.

“Have you a note-book of any kind in your pocket?” he said.

“Yes, I always carry one.”

“Will you lend it to me and let me tear out a page? I have an idea in my mind which I

don’t want to lose. If I do not see you again after the play to make restitution, I will send it to you to-morrow morning without fail.”

Returning to his place, Monsieur Dorlange sketched something rapidly, and when the curtain rose and the two gentlemen returned to their seats, he touched the Duc de Rhetore lightly on the shoulder and said, giving him the drawing:—

“My card, which I have the honor to present to you.”

This “card” was a charming sketch of an architectural design placed in a landscape. Beneath it was written “Plan for a mausoleum to be erected to the memory of Madame Marie-Gaston, *nee* Chaulieu, by her husband; from the designs of Charles Dorlange, sculptor, 42 rue de l’Ouest.”

It was impossible to let Monsieur de Rhetore know more delicately that he had to do with a suitable adversary; and you will remark, my dear Monsieur Gaston, that Monsieur Dorlange made this drawing the means of enforcing his denial and giving proof of your disinterestedness and the sincerity of your grief.

After the play was over, Monsieur de Rhetore parted from Monsieur de Ronquerolles, and the latter went up to Monsieur Dorlange and endeavored, very courteously, to bring about a reconciliation, remarking to him that, while he was right in the subject-matter, his method of proceeding was unusual and offensive; Monsieur de Rhetore, on the other hand, had shown great moderation, and would now be satisfied with a mere expression of regret; in short, Monsieur de Ronquerolles said all that can be said on such an occasion.

Monsieur Dorlange would not listen to anything which seemed a submission on his part, and the next day he received a visit from Monsieur de Ronquerolles and General Montriveau on behalf of the Duc de Rhetore. Again an effort was made to induce Monsieur Dorlange to give another turn to his words. But your friend would not depart from this ultimatum:—

“Will Monsieur de Rhetore withdraw the words I felt bound to notice; if so, I will withdraw mine.”

“But that is impossible,” they said to him. “Monsieur de Rhetore has been personally insulted; you, on the contrary, have not been. Right or wrong, he has the conviction that Monsieur Marie-Gaston has done him an injury. We must always make certain allowances for wounded self-interests; you can never get absolute justice from them.”

“It comes to this, then,” replied Monsieur Dorlange, “that Monsieur de Rhetore may continue to calumniate my friend at his ease; in the first place, because he is in Italy; and secondly, because Marie-Gaston would always feel extreme repugnance to come to certain extremities with the brother of his wife. It is precisely that powerlessness, relatively speaking, to defend himself, which constitutes my right—I will say more—my duty to interfere. It was not without a special permission of Providence that I was enabled to catch a few of the malicious words that were said of him, and, as Monsieur de Rhetore declines to modify any of them, we must, if it please you, continue this matter to the end.”

The duel then became inevitable; the terms were arranged in the course of the day, and the meeting, with pistols, was appointed for the day after. On the ground Monsieur Dorlange was perfectly cool. When the first fire was exchanged without result, the

seconds proposed to put an end to the affair.

“No, one more shot!” he said gaily, as if he were shooting in a pistol-gallery.

This time he was shot in the fleshy part of the thigh, not a dangerous wound, but one which caused him to lose a great deal of blood. As they carried him to the carriage which brought him, Monsieur de Rhetore, who hastened to assist them, being close beside him, he said, aloud:—

“This does not prevent Marie-Gaston from being a man of honor and a heart of gold.”

Then he fainted.

This duel, as you can well believe, has made a great commotion; Monsieur Dorlange has been the hero of the hour for the last two days; it is impossible to enter a single salon without finding him the one topic of conversation. I heard more, perhaps, in the salon of Madame de Montcornet than elsewhere. She receives, as you know, many artists and men of letters, and to give you an idea of the manner in which your friend is considered, I need only stenograph a conversation at which I was present in the countess’s salon last evening.

The chief talkers were Emile Blondet of the “Debats,” and Monsieur Bixiou, the caricaturist, one of the best-informed *ferrets* of Paris. They are both, I think, acquaintances of yours, but, at any rate, I am certain of your intimacy with Joseph Bridau, our great painter, who shared in the talk, for I well remember that he and Daniel d’Arthez were the witnesses of your marriage.

“The first appearance of Dorlange in art,” Joseph Bridau was saying, when I joined them, “was fine; the makings of a master were already so apparent in the work he did for his examinations that the Academy, under pressure of opinion, decided to crown him—though he laughed a good deal at its programme.”

“True,” said Bixiou, “and that ‘Pandora’ he exhibited in 1837, after his return from Rome, is also a very remarkable figure. But as she won him, at once, the cross and any number of commissions from the government and the municipality, together with scores of flourishing articles in the newspapers, I don’t see how he can rise any higher after all that success.”

“That,” said Blondet, “is a regular Bixiou opinion.”

“No doubt; and well-founded it is. Do you know the man?”

“No; he is never seen anywhere.”

“Exactly; he is a bear, but a premeditated bear; a reflecting and determined bear.”

“I don’t see,” said Joseph Bridau, “why this savage inclination for solitude should be so bad for an artist. What does a sculptor gain by frequenting salons where gentlemen and ladies have taken to a habit of wearing clothes?”

“Well, in the first place, a sculptor can amuse himself in a salon; and that will keep him from taking up a mania, or becoming a visionary; besides, he sees the world as it is, and learns that 1839 is not the fifteenth nor the sixteenth century.”

“Has Dorlange any such delusions?” asked Emile Blondet.

“He? he will talk to you by the hour of returning to the life of the great artists of the middle ages with the universality of their studies and their knowledge, and that frightfully laborious life of theirs; which may help us to understand the habits and ways of a semi-barbarous society, but can never exist in ours. He does not see, the innocent dreamer, that civilization, by strangely complicating all social conditions, absorbs for business, for interests, for pleasures, thrice as much time as a less advanced society required for the same purposes. Look at the savage in his hut; he hasn’t anything to do. Whereas we, with the Bourse, the opera, the newspapers, parliamentary discussions, salons, elections, railways, the Cafe de Paris and the National Guard—what time have we, if you please, to go to work?”

“Beautiful theory of a do-nothing!” cried Emile Blondet, laughing.

“No, my dear fellow, I am talking truth. The curfew no longer rings at nine o’clock. Only last night my concierge Ravenouillet gave a party; and I think I made a great mistake in not accepting the indirect invitation he gave me to be present.”

“Nevertheless,” said Joseph Bridau, “it is certain that if a man doesn’t mingle in the business, the interests, and the pleasures of our epoch, he can make out of the time he thus saves a pretty capital. Independently of his orders, Dorlange has, I think, a little competence; so that nothing hinders him from arranging his life to suit himself.”

“But you see he goes to the opera; for it was there he found his duel. Besides, you are all wrong in representing him as isolated from this contemporaneous life, for I happen to know that he is just about to harness himself to it by the most rattling and compelling chains of the social system—I mean political interests.”

“Does he want to be a statesman?” asked Emile Blondet, sarcastically.

“Yes, no doubt that’s in his famous programme of universality; and you ought to see the consistency and perseverance he puts into that idea! Only last year two hundred and fifty thousand francs dropped into his mouth as if from the skies, and he instantly bought a hovel in the rue Saint-Martin to make himself eligible for the Chamber. Then—another pretty speculation—with the rest of the money he bought stock in the ‘National,’ where I meet him every time I want to have a laugh over the republican Utopia. He has his flatterers on the staff of that estimable newspaper; they have persuaded him that he’s a born orator and can cut the finest figure in the Chamber. They even talk of getting up a candidacy for him; and on some of their enthusiastic days they go so far as to assert that he bears a distant likeness to Danton.”

“But this is getting burlesque,” said Emile Blondet.

I don’t know if you have ever remarked, my dear Monsieur Gaston, that in men of real talent there is always great leniency of judgment. In this, Joseph Bridau is pre-eminent.

“I think with you,” he said, “that if Dorlange takes this step, and enters politics, he will be lost to art. But, after all, why should he not succeed in the Chamber? He expresses himself with great facility, and seems to me to have ideas at his command. Look at Canalis when he was made deputy! ‘What! a poet!’ everybody cried out,—which didn’t prevent him from making himself a fine reputation as orator, and becoming a minister.”

“But the first question is how to get into the Chamber,” said Emile Blondet. “Where

does Dorlange propose to stand?”

“Why, naturally, for one of the rotten boroughs of the ‘National.’ I don’t know if it has yet been chosen.”

“General rule,” said the writer for the “Debats.” “To obtain your election, even though you may have the support of an active and ardent party, you must also have a somewhat extended political notoriety, or, at any rate, some provincial backing of family or fortune. Has Dorlange any of those elements of success?”

“As for the backing of a family, that element is particularly lacking,” replied Bixiou; “in fact, in his case, it is conspicuously absent.”

“Really?” said Emile Blondet. “Is he a natural child?”

“Nothing could be more natural,—father and mother unknown. But I believe, myself, that he can be elected. It is the ins and outs of his political ideas that will be the wonder.”

“He is a republican, I suppose, if he is a friend of those ‘National’ gentlemen, and resembles Danton?”

“Yes, of course; but he despises his co-religionists, declaring they are only good for carrying a point, and for violence and bullying. Provisionally, he is satisfied with a monarchy hedged in by republican institutions; but he insists that our civic royalty will infallibly be lost through the abuse of influence, which he roughly calls corruption. This will lead him towards the little Church of the Left-centre; but there again—for there’s always a but—he finds only a collection of ambitious minds and eunuchs unconsciously smoothing the way to a revolution, which he, for his part, sees looming on the horizon with great regret, because, he says, the masses are too little prepared, and too little intelligent, not to let it slip through their fingers. Legitimacy he simply laughs at; he doesn’t admit it to be a principle in any way. To him it is simply the most fixed and consistent form of monarchical heredity; he sees no other superiority in it than that of old wine over new. But while he is neither legitimist, nor conservative, nor Left-centre, and is republican without wanting a republic, he proclaims himself a Catholic, and sits astride the hobby of that party, namely,—liberty of education. But this man, who wants free education for every one, is afraid of the Jesuits; and he is still, as in 1829, uneasy about the encroachments of the clergy and the Congregation. Can any of you guess the great party which he proposes to create in the Chamber, and of which he intends to be the leader? That of the righteous man, the impartial man, the honest man! as if any such thing could live and breathe in the parliamentary cook-shops; and as if, moreover, all opinions, to hide their ugly nothingness, had not, from time immemorial, wrapped themselves in that banner.”

“Does he mean to renounce sculpture absolutely?” asked Joseph Bridau.

“Not yet; he is just finishing the statue of some saint, I don’t know which; but he lets no one see it, and says he does not intend to send it to the Exhibition this year—he has ideas about it.”

“What ideas?” asked Emile Blondet.

“Oh! that religious works ought not to be delivered over to the judgment of critics, or to

the gaze of a public rotten with scepticism; they ought, he thinks, to go, without passing through the uproar of the world, piously and modestly to the niches for which they are intended."

"*Ah ca*!" exclaimed Emile Blondet, "and it is this fervent Catholic who fights a duel!"

"Better or worse than that. This Catholic lives with a woman whom he brought back from Italy,—a species of Goddess of Liberty, who serves him as model and housekeeper."

"What a tongue that Bixiou has; he keeps a regular intelligence office," said some of the little group as it broke up at the offer of tea from Madame de Montcornet.

You see from this, my dear Monsieur Gaston, that the political aspirations of Monsieur Dorlange are not regarded seriously by his friends. I do not doubt that you will write to him soon to thank him for the warmth with which he defended you from calumny. That courageous devotion has given me a true sympathy for him, and I shall hope that you will use the influence of early friendship to turn his mind from the deplorable path he seems about to enter. I make no judgment on the other peculiarities attributed to him by Monsieur Bixiou, who has a cutting and a flippant tongue; I am more inclined to think, with Joseph Bridau, that such mistakes are venial. But a fault to be forever regretted, according to my ideas, will be that of abandoning his present career to fling himself into the maelstrom of politics. You are yourself interested in turning him from this idea, if you strongly desire to entrust that work to his hands. Preach to him as strongly as you can the wisdom of abiding by his art.

On the subject of the explanation I advised you to have with him, I must tell you that your task is greatly simplified. You need not enter into any of the details which would be to you so painful. Madame de l'Estorade, to whom I spoke of the role of mediator which I wanted her to play, accepted the part very willingly. She feels confident of being able, after half an hour's conversation, to remove the painful feeling from your friend's mind, and drive away the clouds between you.

While writing this long letter, I have sent for news of his condition. He is going on favorably, and the physicians say that, barring all unforeseen accidents, his friends need have no anxiety as to his state. It seems he is an object of general interest, for, to use the expression of my valet, people are "making cue" to leave their names at his door. It must be added that the Duke de Rhetore is not liked, which may partly account for this sympathy. The duke is stiff and haughty, but there is little in him. What a contrast the brother is to her who lives in our tenderest memory. She was simple and kind, yet she never derogated from her dignity; nothing equalled the lovable qualities of her heart but the charms of her mind.

IV. THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORAADE TO MADAME OCTAVE DE CAMPS

Paris, February, 1839.

Nothing could be more judicious than what you have written me, my dear friend. It was certainly to have been expected that my "bore" would have approached me on the occasion of our next meeting. His heroism gave him the right to do so, and politeness made it a duty. Under pain of being thought unmannerly he was bound to make inquiries as to the results of the accident on my health and that of Nais. But if, contrary to all these expectations, he did not descend from his cloud, my resolution, under your judicious advice, was taken. If the mountain did not come to me, I should go to the mountain; like Hippolyte in the tale of Theramene, I would rush upon the monster and discharge my gratitude upon him at short range. I have come to think with you that the really dangerous side of this foolish obsession on his part is its duration and the inevitable gossip in which, sooner or later, it would involve me.

Therefore, I not only accepted the necessity of speaking to my shadow first, but under pretence that my husband wished to call upon him and thank him in person, I determined to ask him his name and address, and if I found him a suitable person I intended to ask him to dinner on the following day; believing that if he had but a shadow of common-sense, he would, when he saw the manner in which I live with my husband, my frantic passion, as you call it, for my children, in short, the whole atmosphere of my well-ordered home, he would, as I say, certainly see the folly of persisting in his present course. At any rate half the danger of his pursuit was over if it were carried on openly. If I was still to be persecuted, it would be in my own home, where we are all, more or less, exposed to such annoyances, which an honest woman possessing some resources of mind can always escape with honor.

Well, all these fine schemes and all your excellent advice have come to nothing. Since the accident, or rather since the day when my physician first allowed me to go out, nothing, absolutely nothing have I seen of my unknown lover. But, strange to say, although his presence was intolerably annoying, I am conscious that he still exercises a sort of magnetism over me. Without seeing him, I feel him near me; his eyes weigh upon me, though I do not meet them. He is ugly, but his ugliness has something energetic and powerfully marked, which makes one remember him as a man of strong and energetic faculties. In fact, it is impossible not to think about him; and now that he appears to have relieved me of his presence, I an conscious of a void—that sort of void the ear feels when a sharp and piercing noise which has long annoyed it ceases. What I am going to add may seem to you great foolishness; but are we always mistress of such mirages of the imagination?

I have often told you of my arguments with Louise de Chaulieu in relation to the manner in which women ought to look at life. I used to tell her that the passion with which she never ceased to pursue the ideal was ill-regulated and fatal to happiness. To this she

answered: “You have never loved, my dearest; love has this rare phenomenon about it: we may live all our lives without ever meeting the being to whom nature has assigned the power of making us happy. But if the day of splendor comes when that being unexpectedly awakes your heart from sleep, what will you do then?” [See “Memoirs of Two Young Married Women.”]

The words of those about to die are often prophetic. What if this man were to be the tardy serpent with whom Louise threatened me? That he could ever be really dangerous to me; that he could make me fail in my duty, that is certainly not what I fear; I am strong against all such extremes. But I did not, like you, my dear Madame de Camps, marry a man whom my heart had chosen. It was only by dint of patience, determination, and reason that I was able to build up the solid and serious attachment which binds me to Monsieur de l’Estorade. Ought I not, therefore, to be doubly cautious lest anything distract me from that sentiment, be it only the diversion of my thoughts in this annoying manner, to another man?

I shall say to you, as, MONSIEUR, Louis XIV.‘s brother, said to his wife, to whom he was in the habit of showing what he had written and asking her to decipher it: See into my heart and mind, dear friend, disperse the mists, quiet the worries, and the flux and reflux of will which this affair stirs up in me. My poor Louise was mistaken, was she not? I am not a woman, am I, on whom the passion of love could gain a foothold? The man who, on some glorious day, will render me happy is my Armand, my Rene, my Nais, three angels for whom I have hitherto lived—there can never be for me, I feel it deeply, another passion!

V. THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO MADAME OCTAVE DE CAMPS

Paris, March, 1839.

About the year 1820 in the course of the same week two *news* (to use the schoolboy phrase of my son Armand) entered the college of Tours. One had a charming face, the other would have been thought ugly if health, frankness, and intelligence beaming on his features had not compensated for their irregularity and inelegance.

Here you will stop me, and ask whether I have come to the end of my own adventure, that I should now be writing this feuilleton-story. No, this tale is really a continuation of that adventure, though it seems little like it; so, give it your best attention and do not interrupt me again.

One of these lads, the handsome one, was dreamy, contemplative, and a trifle *elegaic*; the other, ardent, impetuous, and always in action. They were two natures which completed each other; a priceless blessing to every friendship that is destined to last. Both had the same bar-sinister on them at their birth. The dreamer was the natural son of the unfortunate Lady Brandon. His name was Marie-Gaston; which, indeed, seems hardly an actual name. The other, born of wholly unknown parents, was named Dorlange, which is certainly no name at all. Dorlange, Valmon, Volmar, Melcourt, are heard upon the stage and nowhere else; already they belong to a past style, and will soon rejoin Alceste, Arnolphe, Clitandre, Damis, Eraste, Philinte, and Arsinoe.

Another reason why the poor ill-born lads should cling together was the cruel abandonment to which they were consigned. For the seven years their studies lasted there was not a day, even during the holidays, when the door of their prison opened. Now and then Marie-Gaston received a visit from an old woman who had served his mother; through her the quarterly payment for his schooling was regularly made. That of Dorlange was also made with great punctuality through a banker in Tours. A point to be remarked is that the price paid for the schooling of the latter was the highest which the rules of the establishment allowed; hence the conclusion that his unknown parents were persons in easy circumstances. Among his comrades, Dorlange attained to a certain respect which, had it been withheld, he would very well have known how to enforce with his fists. But under their breaths, his comrades remarked that he was never sent for to see friends in the parlor, and that outside the college walls no one appeared to take an interest in him.

The two lads, who were both destined to become distinguished men, were poor scholars; though each had his own way of studying. By the time he was fifteen Marie-Gaston had written a volume of verses, satires, elegies, meditations, not to speak of two tragedies. The favorite studies of Dorlange led him to steal logs of wood, out of which, with his knife, he carved madonnas, grotesque figures, fencing-masters, saints, grenadiers of the Old Guard, and, but this was secretly, Napoleons.

In 1827, their school-days ended, the two friends left college together and were sent to Paris. A place had been chosen for Dorlange in the atelier of the sculptor Bosio, and from

that moment a rather fantastic course was pursued by an unseen protection that hovered over him. When he reached the house in Paris to which the head-master of the school had sent him, he found a dainty little apartment prepared for his reception. Under the glass shade of the clock was a large envelope addressed to him, so placed as to strike his eye the moment that he entered the room. In that envelope was a note, written in pencil, containing these words:—

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The day after your arrival in Paris go at eight in the morning
punctually to the garden of the Luxembourg, Allee de
l'Observatoire, fourth bench to the right, starting from the gate.
This order is strict. Do not fail to obey it.
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Punctual to the minute, Dorlange was not long at the place of rendezvous before he was met by a very small man, whose enormous head, bearing an immense shock of hair, together with a pointed nose, chin, and crooked legs made him seem like a being escaped from one of Hoffman's tales. Without saying a word, for to his other physical advantages this weird messenger added that of being deaf and dumb, he placed in the young man's hand a letter and a purse. The letter said that the family of Dorlange were glad to see that he wished to devote himself to art. They urged him to work bravely and to profit by the instructions of the great master under whose direction he was placed. They hoped he would live virtuously; and, in any case, an eye would be kept upon his conduct. There was no desire, the letter went on to say, that he should be deprived of the respectable amusements of his age. For his needs and for his pleasures, he might count upon the sum of six hundred and fifty francs every three months, which would be given to him in the same place by the same man; but he was expressly forbidden to follow the messenger after he had fulfilled his commission; if this injunction were directly or indirectly disobeyed, the punishment would be severe; it would be nothing less than the withdrawal of the stipend and, possibly, total abandonment.

Do you remember, my dear Madame de Camps, that in 1831 you and I went together to the Beaux-Arts to see the exhibition of works which were competing for the Grand Prix in sculpture? The subject given out for competition was Niobe weeping for her children. Do you also remember my indignation at one of the competing works around which the crowd was so compact that we could scarcely approach it? The insolent youth had dared to turn that sacred subject into jest! His Niobe was infinitely touching in her beauty and grief, but to represent her children, as he did, by monkeys squirming on the ground in the most varied and grotesque attitudes, what a deplorable abuse of talent—!

You tried in vain to make me see that the monkeys were enchantingly graceful and clever, and that a mother's blind idolatry could not be more ingeniously ridiculed; I held to the opinion that the conception was monstrous, and the indignation of the old academicians who demanded the expulsion of this intolerable work, seemed to me most justifiable. But the Academy, instigated by the public and by the newspapers, which talked of opening a subscription to send the young sculptor to Rome, were not of my opinion and that of their older members. The extreme beauty of the Niobe atoned for all the rest and the defamer of mothers saw his work crowned, in spite of an admonition given to him by the venerable secretary on the day of the distribution of the prizes. But, poor fellow! I excuse him, for I now learn that he never knew his mother. It was Dorlange, the poor abandoned child at Tours, the friend of Marie-Gaston.

From 1827 to 1831 the two friends were inseparable. Dorlange, regularly supplied with means, was a sort of Marquis d'Aligre; Gaston, on the contrary, was reduced to his own resources for a living, and would have lived a life of extreme poverty had it not been for his friend. But where friends love each other—and the situation is more rare than people imagine—all on one side and nothing on the other is a determining cause for association. So, without any reckoning between them, our two pigeons held in common their purse, their earnings, their pains, pleasures, hopes, in fact, they held all things in common, and lived but one life between the two. This state of things lasted till Dorlange had won the Grand Prix, and started for Rome. Henceforth community of interests was no longer possible. But Dorlange, still receiving an ample income through his mysterious dwarf, bethought himself of making over to Gaston the fifteen hundred francs paid to him by the government for the "prix de Rome." But a good heart in receiving is more rare than the good heart that gives. His mind being ulcerated by constant misfortune Marie-Gaston refused, peremptorily, what pride insisted on calling *alms*. Work, he said, had been provided for him by Daniel d'Arthez, one of our greatest writers, and the payment for that, added to his own small means, sufficed him. This proud rejection, not properly understood by Dorlange, produced a slight coolness between the two friends; nevertheless, until the year 1833, their intimacy was maintained by a constant exchange of letters. But here, on Marie-Gaston's side, perfect confidence ceased, after a time, to exist. He was hiding something; his proud determination to depend wholly on himself was a sad mistake. Each day brought him nearer to penury. At last, staking all upon one throw, he imprudently involved himself in journalism. Assuming all the risks of an enterprise which amounted to thirty thousand francs, a stroke of ill-fortune left him nothing to look forward to but a debtor's prison, which yawned before him.

It was at this moment that his meeting with Louise de Chaulieu took place. During the nine months that preceded their marriage, Marie-Gaston's letters to his friend became fewer and far-between. Dorlange ought surely to have been the first to know of this change in the life of his friend, but not one word of it was confided to him. This was exacted by the high and mighty lady of Gaston's love, Louise de Chaulieu, Baronne de Macumer.

When the time for the marriage came, Madame de Macumer pushed this mania for secrecy to extremes. I, her nearest and dearest friend, was scarcely informed of the event, and no one was admitted to the ceremony except the witnesses required by law. Dorlange was still absent. The correspondence between them ceased, and if Marie-Gaston had entered the convent of La Trappe, he could not have been more completely lost to his friend.

When Dorlange returned from Rome in 1836, the sequestration of Marie-Gaston's person and affection was more than ever close and inexorable. Dorlange had too much self-respect to endeavor to pass the barriers thus opposed to him, and the old friends not only never saw each other, but no communication passed between them.

But when the news of Madame Marie-Gaston's death reached him Dorlange forgot all and hastened to Ville d'Avray to comfort his friend. Useless eagerness! Two hours after that sad funeral was over, Marie-Gaston, without a thought for his friends or for a sister-in-law and two nephews who were dependent on him, flung himself into a post-chaise and

started for Italy. Dorlange felt that this egotism of sorrow filled the measure of the wrong already done to him; and he endeavored to efface from his heart even the recollection of a friendship which sympathy under misfortune could not recall.

My husband and I loved Louise de Chaulieu too tenderly not to continue our affection for the man who had been so much to her. Before leaving France, Marie-Gaston had requested Monsieur de l'Estorade to take charge of his affairs, and later he sent him a power-of-attorney to enable him to do so properly.

Some weeks ago his grief, still living and active, suggested to him a singular idea. In the midst of the beautiful park at Ville d'Avray is a little lake, with an island upon it which Louise dearly loved. To that island, a shady calm retreat, Marie-Gaston wished to remove the body of his wife, after building a mausoleum of Carrara marble to receive it. He wrote to us to communicate this idea, and, remembering Dorlange in this connection, he requested my husband to see him and ask him to undertake the work. At first Dorlange feigned not to remember even the name of Marie-Gaston, and he made some civil pretext to decline the commission. But see and admire the consistency of such determinations when people love each other! That very evening, being at the opera, he heard the Duc de Rhetore speak insultingly of his former friend, and he vehemently resented the duke's words. A duel followed in which he was wounded; the news of this affair has probably already reached you. So here is a man facing death at night for a friend whose very name he pretended not to know in the morning!

You will ask, my dear Madame de Camps, what this long tale has to do with my own ridiculous adventure. That is what I would tell you now if my letter were not so immoderately long. I told you my tale would prove to be a feuilleton-story, and I think the moment has come to make the customary break in it. I hope I have not sufficiently exalted your curiosity to have the right not to satisfy it. To be concluded, therefore, whether you like it or not, in the following number.

VI. THE COMTESSE DE L’ESTORADE TO MADAME OCTAVE DE CAMPS

Paris, March, 1839.

The elements of the long biographical dissertation I lately sent you, my dear friend, were taken chiefly from a recent letter from Monsieur Marie-Gaston. On leaning of the brave devotion shown in his defence his first impulse was to rush to Paris and press the hand of the friend who avenged himself thus nobly for neglect and forgetfulness. Unfortunately the evening before his departure he met with a dangerous fall at Savarezza, one of the outlying quarries of Carrara, and dislocated his ankle. Being obliged to postpone his journey, he wrote to Monsieur Dorlange to express his gratitude; and, by the same courier, he sent me a voluminous letter, relating the whole past of their lifelong friendship and asking me to see Monsieur Dorlange and be the mediator between them. He was not satisfied with the expression of his warm gratitude, he wanted also to show him that in spite of contrary appearances, he had never ceased to deserve the affection of his early friend.

On receiving Monsieur Gaston’s letter, my first idea was to write to the sculptor and ask him to come and see me, but finding that he was not entirely recovered from his wound, I went, accompanied by my husband and Nais, to the artist’s studio, which we found in a pleasant little house in the rue de l’Ouest, behind the garden of the Luxembourg, one of the most retired quarters of Paris. We were received in the vestibule by a woman about whom Monsieur de l’Estorade had already said a word to me. It appears that the *laureat* of Rome did not leave Italy without bringing away with him an agreeable souvenir in the form of a bourgeoise Galatea, half housekeeper, half model; about whom certain indiscreet rumors are current. But let me hasten to say that there was absolutely nothing in her appearance or manner to lead me to credit them. In fact, there was something cold and proud and almost savage about her, which is, they tell me, a strong characteristic of the Transteverine peasant-women. When she announced our names Monsieur Dorlange was standing in a rather picturesque working costume with his back to us, and I noticed that he hastily drew an ample curtain before the statue on which he was engaged.

At the moment when he turned round, and before I had time to look at him, imagine my astonishment when Nais ran forward and, with the artlessness of a child, flung her arms about his neck crying out:—

“Are! here is my monsieur who saved me!”

What! the monsieur who saved her? Then Monsieur Dorlange must be the famous Unknown?—Yes, my dear friend, I now recognized him. Chance, that cleverest of romance-makers, willed that Monsieur Dorlange and my bore were one. Happily, my husband had launched into the expression of his feelings as a grateful father; I thus had time to recover myself, and before it became my turn to say a word, I had installed upon my face what you are pleased to call my grand l’Estorade air; under which, as you know, I mark twenty-five degrees below zero, and can freeze the words on the lips of any

presuming person.

As for Monsieur Dorlange, he seemed to me less troubled than surprised by the meeting. Then, as if he thought we kept him too long on the topic of our gratitude, he abruptly changed the subject.

“Madame,” he said to me, “since we are, as it seems, more acquainted than we thought, may I dare to gratify my curiosity?”—

I fancied I saw the claw of a cat preparing to play with its mouse, so I answered, coldly: —

“Artists, I am told, are often indiscreet in their curiosity.”

I put a well-marked stiffness into my manner which completed the meaning of the words. I could not see that it baffled him.

“I hope,” he replied, “that my question is not of that kind. I only desire to ask if you have a sister.”

“No, monsieur,” I replied, “I have no sister—none, at least, that I know of,” I added, jestingly.

“I thought it not unlikely, however,” continued Monsieur Dorlange, in the most natural manner possible; “for the family in which I have met a lady bearing the strongest resemblance to you is surrounded by a certain mysterious atmosphere which renders all suppositions possible.”

“Is there any indiscretion in asking the name of that family?”

“Not the least; they are people whom you must have known in Paris in 1829-1830. They lived in great state and gave fine parties. I myself met them in Italy.”

“But their name?” I said.

“De Lanty,” he replied, without embarrassment or hesitation.

And, in fact, my dear Madame de Camps, a family of that name did live in Paris about that time, and you probably remember, as I do, that many strange stories were told about them. As Monsieur Dorlange answered my question he turned back towards his veiled statue.

“The sister whom you have not, madame,” he said to me abruptly, “I shall permit myself to give you, and I venture to hope that you will see a certain family likeness in her.”

So saying, he removed the cloth that concealed his work, and there *I* stood, under the form of a saint, with a halo round my head. Could I be angry at the liberty thus taken?

My husband and Nais gave a cry of admiration at the wonderful likeness they had before their eyes. As for Monsieur Dorlange, he at once explained the cause of his scenic effect.

“This statue,” he said, “is a Saint-Ursula, ordered by a convent in the provinces. Under circumstances which it would take too long to relate, the type of this saint, the person whom I mentioned just now, was firmly fixed in my memory. I should vainly have

attempted to create by my imagination another type for that saint, it could not have been so completely the expression of my thought. I therefore began to model this figure which you see from memory, then one day, madame, at Saint-Thomas d'Aquin, I saw you, and I had the superstition to believe that you were sent to me by Providence. After that, I worked from you only, and as I did not feel at liberty to ask you to come to my studio, the best I could do was to study you when we met, and I multiplied my chances of doing so. I carefully avoided knowing your name and social position, for I feared to bring you down from the ideal and materialize you."

"Oh! I have often seen you following us," said Nais, with her clever little air.

How little we know children, and their turn for observation! As for my husband, it seemed to me that he ought to have pricked up his ears at this tale of the daring manner in which his wife had been used as a model. Monsieur de l'Estorade is certainly no fool; in all social matters he has the highest sense of conventional propriety, and as for jealousy, I think if I gave him the slightest occasion he would show himself ridiculously jealous. But now, the sight of his "beautiful Renee," as he calls me, done into white marble in the form of a saint, had evidently cast him into a state of admiring ecstasy. He, with Nais, were taking an inventory to prove the fidelity of the likeness—yes, it was really my attitude, really my eyes, really my mouth, really those two little dimples in my cheeks!

I felt it my duty to take up the role that Monsieur de l'Estorade laid aside, so I said, very gravely, to the presuming artist:—

"Do you not think, monsieur, that to appropriate without permission, or—not to mince my words—steal a person's likeness, may seem a very strange proceeding?"

"For that reason, madame," he replied, in a respectful tone, "I was fully determined to abide by your wishes in the matter. Although my statue is fated to be buried in the oratory of a distant convent, I should not have sent it to its destination without obtaining your permission to do so. I could have known your name whenever I wished; I already knew your address; and I intended, when the time came, to confess the liberty I had taken, and ask you to visit my studio. I should then have said what I say now: if the likeness displeases you I can, with a few strokes of my chisel, so change it as to make it unrecognizable."

My husband, who apparently thought the likeness not sufficiently close, turned, at this moment, to Monsieur Dorlange, and said, with a delighted air:—

"Do you not think, monsieur, that Madame de l'Estorade's nose is rather more delicate than you have made it?"

All this *unexpectedness* so upset me that I felt unfitted to intervene on behalf of Monsieur Marie-Gaston, and I should, I believe, have pleaded his cause very ill if Monsieur Dorlange had not stopped me at the first words I said about it.

"I know, madame," he said, "all that you can possibly tell me about my unfaithful friend. I do not forgive, but I forget my wrong. Things having so come about that I have nearly lost my life for his sake, it would certainly be very illogical to keep a grudge against him. Still, as regards that mausoleum at Ville d'Avray, nothing would induce me to undertake it. I have already mentioned to Monsieur de l'Estorade one hindrance that is

daily growing more imperative; but besides that, I think it a great pity that Marie-Gaston should thus ruminate on his grief; and I have written to tell him so. He ought to be more of a man, and find in study and in work the consolations we can always find there."

The object of our visit being thus disposed of, I saw no hope of getting to the bottom of the other mystery it had opened, so I rose to take leave, and as I did so Monsieur Dorlange said to me:—

"May I hope that you will not exact the injury I spoke of to my statue?"

"It is for my husband and not for me to reply to that question," I said; "however, we can talk of it later, for Monsieur de l'Estorade hopes that you will give us the honor of a visit."

Monsieur bowed in respectful acquiescence, and we came away,—I, in great ill-humor; I was angry with Nais, and also with my husband, and felt much inclined to make him a scene, which he would certainly not have understood.

Now what do you think of all this? Is the man a clever swindler, who invented that fable for some purpose, or is he really an artist, who took me in all simplicity of soul for the living realization of his idea? That is what I intend to find out in the course of a few days, for now I am committed to your programme, and to-morrow Monsieur and Madame de l'Estorade will have the honor of inviting Monsieur Dorlange to dinner.

VII. THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO MADAME OCTAVE DE CAMPS

Paris, March, 1839.

My dear friend,—Monsieur Dorlange dined with us yesterday. My intention was to invite him alone to a formal family dinner, so as to have him more completely under my eye, and put him to the question at my ease. But Monsieur de l'Estorade, to whom I had not explained my charitable motives, showed me that such an invitation might wound the sensibilities of our guest; it might seem to him that the Comte de l'Estorade thought the sculptor Dorlange unfitted for the society of his friends.

"We can't," said my husband gaily, "treat him like the sons of our farmers who come here with the epaulet of a lieutenant on their shoulder, and whom we invite with closed doors because we can't send them to the servants' hall."

We therefore invited to meet him Monsieur Joseph Bridau, the painter, the Chevalier d'Espard, Monsieur and Madame de la Bastie (formerly, you remember, Mademoiselle Modeste Mignon) and the Marquis de Ronquerolles. When my husband invited the latter, he asked him if he had any objection to meeting the adversary of the Duc de Rhetore.

"So far from objecting," replied Monsieur de Ronquerolles, "I am glad of the opportunity to meet a man of talent, who in the affair you speak of behaved admirably." And he added, after my husband had told him of our great obligation to Monsieur Dorlange, "Then he is a true hero, your sculptor! if he goes on this way, we can't hold a candle to him."

In his studio, with a bare throat leaving his head, which is rather too large for his body, free, and dressed in a sort of Oriental costume, Monsieur Dorlange looked to me a great deal better than he does in regular evening dress. Though I must say that when he grows animated in speaking his face lights up, a sort of a magnetic essence flows from his eyes which I had already noticed in our preceding encounters. Madame de la Bastie was as much struck as I was by this peculiarity.

I don't know if I told you that the ambition of Monsieur Dorlange is to be returned to the Chamber at the coming elections. This was the reason he gave for declining Monsieur Gaston's commission. What Monsieur de l'Estorade and I thought, at first, to be a mere excuse was an actual reason. At table when Monsieur Joseph Bridau asked him point-blank what belief was to be given to the report of his parliamentary intentions, Monsieur Dorlange formally announced them; from that moment, throughout the dinner, the talk was exclusively on politics.

When it comes to topics foreign to his studies, I expected to find our artist, if not a novice, at least very slightly informed. Not at all. On men, on things, on the past as on the future of parties, he had very clear and really novel views, which were evidently not borrowed from the newspapers; and he put them forth in lively, easy, and elegant language; so that after his departure Monsieur de Ronquerolles and Monsieur de

l'Estorade declared themselves positively surprised at the strong and powerful political attitude he had taken. This admission was all the more remarkable because, as you know, the two gentlemen are zealous conservatives, whereas Monsieur Dorlange inclines in a marked degree to democratic principles.

This unexpected superiority in my problematical follower reassured me not a little; still, I was resolved to get to the bottom of the situation, and therefore, after dinner I drew him into one of those tete-a-tetes which the mistress of a house can always bring about.

After talking awhile about Monsieur Marie-Gaston, our mutual friend, the enthusiasms of my dear Louise and my efforts to moderate them, I asked him how soon he intended to send his Saint-Ursula to her destination.

"Everything is ready for her departure," he replied, "but I want your *exeat*, madame; will you kindly tell me if you desire me to change her expression?"

"One question in the first place," I replied: "Will your work suffer by such a change, supposing that I desire it?"

"Probably. If you cut the wings of a bird you hinder its flight."

"Another question: Is it I, or the *other person* whom the statue best represents?"

"You, madame; that goes without saying, for you are the present, she the past."

"But, to desert the past for the present is a bad thing and goes by a bad name, monsieur; and yet you proclaim it with a very easy air."

"True," said Monsieur Dorlange, laughing, "but art is ferocious; wherever it sees material for its creations, it pounces upon it desperately."

"Art," I replied, "is a great word under which a multitude of things shelter themselves. The other day you told me that circumstances, too long to relate at that moment, had contributed to fix the image of which I was the reflection in your mind, where it has left a vivid memory; was not that enough to excite my curiosity?"

"It was true, madame, that time did not allow of my making an explanation of those circumstances; but, in any case, having the honor of speaking to you for the first time, it would have been strange, would it not, had I ventured to make you any confidences?"

"Well, but now?" I said, boldly.

"Now, unless I receive more express encouragement, I am still unable to suppose that anything in my past can interest you."

"Why not? Some acquaintances ripen fast. Your devotion to my Nais has advanced our friendship rapidly. Besides," I added, with affected levity, "I am passionately fond of stories."

"But mine has no conclusion to it; it is an enigma even to myself."

"All the better; perhaps between us we might find the key to it."

Monsieur Dorlange appeared to take counsel with himself; then, after a short pause he said:—

“It is true that women are admirably fitted to seize the lighter shades of meaning in acts and sentiments which we men are unable to decipher. But this confidence does not concern myself alone; I should have to request that it remain absolutely between ourselves, not even excepting Monsieur de l’Estorade from this restriction. A secret is never safe beyond the person who confides it, and the person who hears it.”

I was much puzzled, as you can well suppose, about what might follow; still, continuing my explorations, I replied:—

“Monsieur de l’Estorade is so little in the habit of hearing everything from me, that he never even read a line of my correspondence with Madame Marie-Gaston.”

Until then, Monsieur Dorlange had stood before the fireplace, at one corner of which I was seated; but he now took a chair beside me and said, by way of preamble:—

“I mentioned to you, madame, the family of Lanty—”

At that instant—provoking as rain in the midst of a picnic—Madame de la Bastie came up to ask me if I had been to see Nathan’s last drama. Monsieur Dorlange was forced to give up his seat beside me, and no further opportunity for renewing the conversation occurred during the evening.

I have really, as you see now, no light upon the matter, and yet when I recall the whole manner and behavior of Monsieur Dorlange, whom I studied carefully, my opinion inclines to his perfect innocence. Nothing proves that the love I suspected plays any part in this curious affair; and I will allow you to think that I and my terrors, with which I tormented you, were terribly absurd,—in short, that I have played the part of Belise in the *Femmes Savantes*, who fancies that every man she sees is fatally in love with her.

I therefore cheerfully abandon that stupid conclusion. Lover or not, Monsieur Dorlange is a man of high character, with rare distinction of mind; and if, as I believe now, he has no misplaced pretensions, it is an honor and pleasure to count him among our friends. Nais is enchanted with her preserver. After he left us that evening, she said to me, with an amusing little air of approbation,—

“Mamma, how well Monsieur Dorlange talks.”

Apropos of Nais, here is one of her remarks:—

“When he stopped the horses, mamma, and you did not seem to notice him, I thought he was only a man.”

“How do you mean,—only a man?”

“Well, yes! one of those persons to whom one pays no attention. But, oh! I was so glad when I found out he was a monsieur. Didn’t you hear me cry out, ‘Ah! you are the monsieur who saved me’?”

Though her innocence is perfect, there was such pride and vanity in this little speech that I gave her, as you may well suppose, a lecture upon it. This distinction of man and monsieur is dreadful; but, after all, the child told the truth. She only said, with her blunt simplicity, what our democratic customs still allow us to put in practice, though they forbid us to put it into words. The Revolution of ‘89 has at least introduced that virtuous

hypocrisy into our social system.

But I refrain from politics.

VIII. THE COMTESSE DE L’ESTORADE TO MADAME OCTAVE DE CAMPS

April, 1839.

For the last two weeks we have heard nothing more of Monsieur Dorlange. Not only has he not seen fit to renew the conversation so provokingly interrupted by Madame de la Bastie, but he has not even remembered that it was proper to leave his card at the house after a dinner.

While we were breakfasting yesterday morning, I happened to make this remark (though without any sharpness), and just then our Lucas, who, as an old servant, sometimes allows himself a little familiarity, had the door swung triumphantly open to admit him, bearing *something*, I knew not what, wrapped in tissue paper, which he deposited with great care on the table, giving a note to Monsieur de l’Estorade at the same time.

“What is that?” I said to Lucas, on whose face I detected the signs of a “surprise,” at the same time putting out my hand to uncover the mysterious article.

“Oh! madame must be careful!” cried Lucas; “it is fragile.”

During this time my husband had read the note, which he now passed to me, saying:—

“Read it. Monsieur Dorlange sends us an excuse.”

The note said:—

Monsieur le Comte,—I think I observed that Madame la comtesse granted me rather reluctantly her permission to profit by the audacious larceny I committed at her expense. I have, therefore, taken upon myself to change the character of my statue, and, at the present moment, the *two sisters* no longer resemble each other. Nevertheless, as I did not wish that *all* should be lost to the world, I modelled the head of Saint-Ursula before retouching it. From that model I have now made a reduction, which I place upon the charming shoulders of a countess not yet canonized, thank God! The mould was broken as soon as the one cast, which I have now the honor of sending you, was made. This fact may, perhaps, give some little additional value to the bust in your eyes.

Accept, Monsieur le comte, etc., etc.

While I was reading the note, my husband, Lucas, Rene, and Nais had eagerly extracted me from my swathings, and then, in truth, I appeared no longer a saint, but a woman of the world. I really thought my husband and children would go out of their minds with admiration and pleasure. The news of this masterpiece spread about the house, and all our servants, whom we rather spoil, came flocking, one after another, as if sent for, crying out, “Oh, it is madame’s own self!” I alone did not share in the general enthusiasm. As for Monsieur de l’Estorade, after working for an hour to find a place in his study where the bust could be seen in its best light, he came in to say to me:—

“On my way to the Treasury to-day I shall go and see Monsieur Dorlange, and if he is at liberty this evening I shall ask him to dine with us. To-day is Armand’s half-holiday, and I

would like him to see the boy. The assembled family can then thank him for his gift."

Monsieur Dorlange accepted the invitation. At dinner Monsieur de l'Estorade inquired further about his candidacy, giving it however, no approval. This led straight to politics. Armand, whose mind is naturally grave and reflective and who reads the newspapers, mingled in the conversation. Against the practice of youths of the present day, he thinks like his father; that is, he is very conservative; though perhaps less just and wise, as might well be expected in a lad of fifteen. He was consequently led to contradict Monsieur Dorlange, whose inclination as I told you, is somewhat jacobin. And I must say I thought the arguments of my little man neither bad nor ill-expressed. Without ceasing to be polite, Monsieur Dorlange had an air of disdaining a discussion with the poor boy, so much so that I saw Armand on the point of losing patience and replying sharply. However, as he has been well brought up, I had only to make him a sign and he controlled himself; but seeing him turn scarlet and shut himself up in gloomy silence, I felt that his pride had received a blow, and I thought it little generous in Monsieur Dorlange to crush a young lad in that way.

I know very well that children in these days make the mistake of wishing to be personages before their time, and that it often does them good to suppress such conceit. But really, Armand has an intellectual development and a power of reasoning beyond his age. Do you want a proof of it? Until last year, I had never consented to part with him, and it was only as a day scholar that he followed his course of study at the College Henri IV. Well, he himself, for the sake of his studies, which were hindered by going and coming to and fro, asked to be placed in the regular manner in the school; and he employed more entreaties and arguments with me to put him under that discipline than an ordinary boy would have used to escape it. Therefore this manly air and manner, which in most schoolboys would, of course, be intolerably ridiculous, seems in him the result of his natural precocity; and this precocity ought to be forgiven him, inasmuch as it comes to him from God.

In consequence of his unfortunate birth Monsieur Dorlange is less fitted than most men to judge of children in their homes, and he therefore, necessarily, shows a want of indulgence. But he had better take care; if he wishes to pay court to me merely as a friend he has chosen a very bad method of doing so.

Of course an evening in the midst of the family did not allow of his returning to the subject of his private history; but I thought he did not show any particular desire to do so. In fact, he occupied himself much more with Nais than with me, cutting out silhouettes in black paper for her during nearly the whole evening. I must also mention that Madame de Rastignac came in and I, on my side, was obliged to give my company to her. While we were conversing near the fire, Monsieur Dorlange at the other end of the room was posing the two children Nais and Rene, who presently brought me their likenesses snipped out with scissors, Nais whispering triumphantly in my ear:—

"You don't know; but Monsieur Dorlange is going to make my bust in marble."

Since this family dinner, civil war has been declared among my children. Nais extols to the skies her "dear preserver," as she calls him, and is supported in her opinion by Rene, who is delivered over to the sculptor body and soul in return for a superb lancer on

horseback which Monsieur Dorlange cut out for him. Armand, on the contrary, thinks him ugly, which is undeniable; he says he resembles the portraits of Danton which he has seen in the illustrated histories of the Revolution, in which remark there is some truth. He says also that Monsieur Dorlange has given me in my bust the air of a grisette, which is not true at all. Hence, disputes among my darlings which are endless.

IX. DORLANGE TO MARIE-GASTON

Paris, April, 1839.

Why do I desert my art, and what do I intend to do in this cursed galley of politics? This shows what it is, my dear romantic friend, to shut one's self up for years in a conjugal convent. During that time the world has progressed. To friends forgotten at the gate life brings new combinations; and the more they are ignored, the more disposed the forgetter is to cast the blame upon those forgotten; it is so easy to preach to others!

Learn, then, my dear inquisitor, that I do not enter politics of my own volition. In pushing myself in this unexpected manner into the electoral breach, I merely follow an inspiration that has been made to me. A ray of light has come into my darkness; a father has partly revealed himself, and, if I may believe appearances, he holds a place in the world which ought to satisfy the most exacting ambition. This revelation, considering the very ordinary course of my life, has come to me surrounded by fantastic and romantic circumstances which served to be related to you in some detail.

As you have lived in Italy, I think it useless to explain to you the Cafe Greco, the usual rendezvous of the pupils of the Academy and the artists of all countries who flock to Rome. In Paris, rue de Coq-Saint-Honore, we have a distant counterpart of that institution in a cafe long known as that of the Cafe des Arts. Two or three times a week I spend an evening there, where I meet several of my contemporaries in the French Academy in Rome. They have introduced me to a number of journalists and men of letters, all of them amiable and distinguished men, with whom there is both profit and pleasure in exchanging ideas.

In a certain corner, where we gather, many questions of a nature to interest serious minds are debated; but the most eager interest, namely politics, takes the lead in our discussions. In this little club the prevailing opinion is democratic; it is represented under all its aspects, the phalansterian Utopia not excepted. That's enough to tell you that before this tribunal the ways of the government are often judged with severity, and that the utmost liberty of language reigns in our discussions. The consequence is that about a year ago the waiter who serves us habitually took me aside one day to give me, as he said, a timely warning.

"Monsieur," he said, "you are watched by the police; and you would do well not to talk like Saint Paul, open-mouthed."

"The police! my good friend," I replied, "why the devil should the police watch me? What I say, and a good deal else, is printed every morning in the newspapers."

"No matter for that, they *are* watching you. I have seen it. There is a little old man, who takes a great deal of snuff, who is always within hearing distance of you; when you speak he seems to pay more attention to your words than to those of the others; and once I saw him write something down in a note-book in marks that were not writing."

"Well, the next time he comes, point him out to me."

The next time proved to be the next day. The person shown to me was a short man with gray hair, a rather neglected person and a face deeply pitted with the small-pox, which seemed to make him about fifty years of age. He frequently dipped in a large snuffbox; and seemed to be giving to my remarks an attention I might consider either flattering or inquisitive, as I pleased; but a certain air of gentleness and integrity in this supposed police-spy inclined me to the kinder interpretation. I said so to the waiter, who had plumed himself on discovering a spy.

"*Parbleu*!" he replied, "they always put on that honeyed manner to hide their game."

Two days later, on a Sunday, at the hour of vespers, in one of my rambles about old Paris—for which, as you know, I always had a taste—I happened to enter the church of Saint-Louis-en-l'Ile, the parish church of the remote quarter of the city which bears that name. This church is a building of very little interest, no matter what historians and certain "Guides to Paris" may say. I should therefore have passed rapidly through it if the remarkable talent of the organist who was performing part of the service had not induced me to remain.

To say that the playing of that man realized my ideal is giving it high praise, for I dare say you will remember that I always distinguished between organ-players and organists, a superior order of nobility the title of which is not to be given unwittingly.

The service over, I had a curiosity to see the face of so eminent an artist buried in that out-of-the-way place. Accordingly I posted myself near the door of the organ loft, to see him as he left the church—a thing I certainly would not have done for a crowned head; but great artists, after all, are they not kings by divine right?

Imagine my amazement when, after waiting a few minutes, instead of seeing a totally unknown face I saw that of a man in whom I recognized my listener at the Cafe des Arts. But that is not all: behind him came the semblance of a human being in whose crooked legs and bushy tangled hair I recognized by old tri-monthly providence, my banker, my *money-bringer*,—in a word my worthy friend, the mysterious dwarf.

I did not escape, myself, his vigilant eye, and I saw him point me out to the organist with an eager gesture. The latter turned hastily to look at me and then, without further demonstration, continued his way. Meanwhile the bandy-legged creature went up familiarly to the giver of holy-water and offered him a pinch of snuff; then without paying any further attention to me, he limped to a low door at the side of the church and disappeared. The evident pains this deformed being had taken to fix the organist's attention upon me seemed to me a revelation. Evidently, the *maestro* knew of the singular manner by which my quarterly stipend had reached me; which stipend, I should tell you, had been regularly continued until my orders for work so increased as to put me beyond all necessity. It was not improbable therefore that this man, who listened to me at the Cafe des Arts, was the repository of other secrets relating to my early life; and I became most eager to obtain an explanation from him; all the more because, as I was now living on my own resources, my curiosity could not be punished, as formerly threatened, by the withdrawal of my subsidy.

Making my decision quickly, I followed the organist at once; but by the time I reached the door of the church he was out of sight. However, my luck prompted me to follow the

direction he had taken, and as I reached the quai de Bethune I saw him to my great joy rapping at the door of a house. Entering resolutely after him, I asked the porter for the organist of Saint-Louis-de-l'Ile.

"Monsieur Jacques Bricheteau?"

"Yes; Monsieur Jacques Bricheteau; he lives here I believe."

"Fourth floor above the entresol, door to the left. He has just come in, and you can overtake him on the stairs."

Rapidly as I ran up, my man had the key of his door already in the lock when I reached him.

"Have I the honor of speaking to Monsieur Jacques Bricheteau?" I asked.

"Don't know any such person," he replied with effrontery, unlocking his door.

"Perhaps I pronounce the name incorrectly; I mean the organist of Saint-Louis-de-l'Ile."

"I have never heard of any organist in this house."

"Pardon me, monsieur, there is one, for the concierge has just told me so. Besides I saw you leave the organ loft of that church followed by an individual who—"

Before I could finish my sentence this singular individual cut short our interview by entering his apartment and locking the door behind him. For a moment I thought that I must have been mistaken; but on reflection I saw that a mistake was impossible. I had to do with a man who, for years, had proved his unremitting discretion. No, he was obstinately bent on avoiding me; I was not mistaken in recognizing him.

I then began to pull the bell vigorously, being quite resolved to get some answer at least to my demand. For some little time the besieged took the racket I made patiently; then, all of a sudden, I noticed that the bell had ceased to ring. Evidently, the wire was disconnected; the besieged was secure, unless I kicked in the door; but that of course, was not altogether the thing to do.

I returned to the porter and, without giving the reasons for my discomfiture, I told him about it. In that way I won his confidence and so obtained some little information about the impenetrable Monsieur Jacques Bricheteau. Though readily given, this information did not enlighten me at all as to the actual situation. Bricheteau was said to be a quiet lodger, civil, but not communicative; though punctual in paying his rent, his means seemed small; he kept no servant and took his meals out of the house. Going out every morning before ten o'clock, he seldom came in before night; the inference was that he was either a clerk in some office, or that he gave music lessons in private houses.

One detail alone in the midst of this vague and useless information was of interest. For the last few months Monsieur Jacques Bricheteau had received a voluminous number of letters the postage on which indicated that they came from foreign parts; but, in spite of his desires, the worthy concierge had never, he said, been able to decipher the post-mark. Thus this detail, which might have been very useful to me became for the moment absolutely worthless.

I returned home, persuading myself that a pathetic letter addressed to the refractory

Bricheteau would induce him to receive me. Mingling with my entreaties the touch of a threat, I let him know that I was firmly resolved at all costs to get to the bottom of the mystery which weighed upon my life; the secret of which he evidently knew. The next morning, before nine o'clock, I went to his house, only to learn that after paying the rent to the end of his term, he had packed up his furniture and left the house in the early morning, without the porter being able to discover from the men who removed his property (well-paid to keep silence, no doubt) where they were ordered to carry it. These men being strangers in the quarter, it was quite impossible to discover them later.

I felt, however, that I still had a clue to him, through the organ at Saint-Louis, and the following Sunday after high mass I posted myself as before at the door of the organ loft, determined not to let go of the sphinx until I had made him speak. But here again, disappointment! Monsieur Jacques Bricheteau's place was taken by a pupil. The same thing happened on the three following Sundays. On the fourth, I accosted the pupil and asked him if the master were ill.

"No, monsieur," he replied. "Monsieur Bricheteau has asked for leave of absence. He will be absent for some time; I believe on business."

"Where, then, can I write to him?"

"I don't rightly know; but I think you had better address your letter to his house; not far from here, quai de Bethune."

"But he has moved; didn't you know it?"

"No, indeed; where does he live now?"

This was poor luck; to ask information of a man who asked it of me when I questioned him. As if to put be quite beside myself while I was making these inquiries, I saw that damned dwarf in the distance evidently laughing at me.

Happily for my patience and my curiosity, which, under the pressure of all this opposition was growing terrible, a certain amount of light was given me. A few days after my last discomfiture, a letter reached me bearing the post-mark Stockholm, Sweden; which address did not surprise me because, while in Rome, I had been honored by the friendship of Thorwaldsen, the great Swedish sculptor, and I had often met in his studio many of his compatriots. Probably, therefore, this letter conveyed an order from one of them, sent through Thorwaldsen. But, on opening the letter what was my amazement, and my emotion, in presence of its opening words:—

Monsieur my Son,—

The letter was long. I had no patience to read it until I knew the name I bore. I turned to the signature; again my disappointment was complete—there was no name!

Monsieur my Son,

said my anonymous father,—

I do not regret that by your passionate insistence on knowing the secret of your birth, you have forced the person who has watched over you from childhood to come here to confer with me as to the course your vehement and dangerous curiosity requires us to pursue.

For some time past, I have entertained a thought which I bring to

maturity to-day; the execution of which could have been more satisfactorily settled by word of mouth than it can now be by correspondence.

Immediately after your birth, which cost your mother's life, being forced to expatriate myself, I made in a foreign country a noble fortune, and I occupy in the ministry of that country an eminent position. I foresee the moment when, free to restore to you my name, I shall also be able to secure to you the inheritance of my titles and the position to which I have attained.

But, to reach that height, the reputation you have, I am told, acquired in art is not a sufficient recommendation. It is my wish that you should enter political life; and in that career, under the present institutions of France, there are not two ways of becoming a man of distinction: you must begin by being made a deputy. I know that you are not yet of the legal age, and also that you do not possess the property qualification. But, in another year you will be thirty years old, and that is just the necessary time required by law to be a land-owner before becoming a candidate for election.

To-morrow, therefore, you can present yourself to Mongenod Bros., bankers, rue de la Victoire. A sum of two hundred and fifty thousand francs will be paid to you; this you must immediately employ in the purchase of real estate, applying part of the surplus to obtain an interest in some newspaper which, when the right time comes, will support your candidacy, and the rest in another expense I shall presently explain to you.

Your political aptitude is guaranteed to me by the person who, with a disinterested zeal for which I shall ever be grateful, has watched over you since you were abandoned. For some time past he has secretly followed you and listened to you, and he is certain that you will make yourself a dignified position in the Chamber. Your opinions of ardent yet moderate liberalism please me; without being aware of it, you have very cleverly played into my game. I cannot as yet tell you the place of your probable election. The secret power which is preparing for that event is all the more certain to succeed because its plans are pursued quietly and for the present in the shade. But success will be greatly assisted by the execution of a work which I shall now propose to you, requesting you to accept its apparent strangeness without surprise or comment.

For the time being you must continue to be a sculptor, and with the talents of which you have already given proofs, I wish you to make a statue of Saint-Ursula. That is a subject which does not lack either interest or poesy. Saint-Ursula, virgin and martyr, was, as is generally believed, a daughter of prince of Great Britain. Becoming the abbess of a convent of unmarried women, who were called with popular naivete the Eleven Thousand Virgins, she was martyred by the Huns in the fifth century; later, she was patroness of the order of the Ursulines, to which she gave its name, and she was also patroness of the famous house of Sorbonne. An able artist like yourself could, it seems to me, make much of these details.

Without knowing the locality of which you will be made the representative, it is expedient that you should from the present moment, make known your political opinions and your intention of becoming a candidate for election. But I cannot too strongly insist on your keeping secret the communication now made to you; at any rate as much as your patience will allow. Leave my agent in peace, and await the slow and quiet development of the brilliant future to which you are destined, without yielding to a curiosity which might, I warn you, lead to great disasters.

If you refuse to enter my plans, you will take from yourself all chance of ever penetrating a mystery which you have shown yourself so eager to understand. But I do not admit even the supposition of your resistance, and I prefer to believe in your deference to the wishes of a father who will regard it as the finest day of his life when at last it be granted to him to reveal himself to his son.

P.S. Your statue, which is intended for a convent of Ursuline nuns, must be in white marble. Height: one metre seven hundred and six millimetres; in other words, five feet three inches. As it will not be placed in a niche, you must carefully finish all sides of it. The costs of the work are to be taken out of the two hundred and fifty thousand francs mentioned above.

This letter chilled and pained me. In the first place, it took from me a hope long cherished,—that of recovering a mother as loving as yours, of whose adorable tenderness, dear friend, you have so often told me. After all, it was a half-light thrown upon the fogs of my life without even allowing me to know whether I was or was not the child of a legitimate marriage. It also seemed to me that such paternal intimations addressed to a man of my age were much too despotic and imperious. Was it not a strange proceeding to change my whole life as if I were a boy just leaving school! At first I employed to myself all the arguments against this political vocation which you and my other friends have since addressed to me. Nevertheless curiosity impelled me to go the Mongenods'; and finding there, sure enough, in actual, living money, the two hundred and fifty thousand francs announced to me, I was led to reason in another way.

I reflected that a will which began by making such an outlay must have something serious in it. And inasmuch as this mysterious father knew all and I nothing, it seemed to me that to enter on a struggle with him was neither reasonable nor opportune. In fact, had I any real repugnance to the career suggested to me? No. Political interests have always roused me to a certain degree; and if my electoral attempt should come to nothing, I could always return to my art without being more ridiculous than the other still-born ambitions which each new legislature produces.

Accordingly, I have bought the necessary piece of property, and made myself a shareholder in the "National." I have also made the Saint-Ursula, and am now awaiting instructions, which seem to me rather long in coming, as to her actual destination. Moreover, I have made known my parliamentary ambition, and the fact that I intend to stand in the coming elections.

I need not ask you to preserve the utmost secrecy about my present confidence. Discretion is a virtue which you practise, to my knowledge, in too signal a manner to need any exhorting thereto from me. But I am wrong, dear friend, in making these unkind allusions to the past, for at this moment I am, more perhaps than you know, the obliged party. Partly out of interest in me, but more because of the general aversion your brother-in-law's extreme haughtiness inspires, the democratic party has flocked to my door to make inquiries about my wound, and the talk and excitement about this duel have served me well; there is no doubt that my candidacy has gained much ground. Therefore, I say, a truce to your gratitude; do you not see how much I owe to you?

X. DORLANGE TO MARIE-GASTON

Paris, April, 1839.

Dear Friend,—For better or for worse, I continue my candidacy without a constituency to elect me. This surprises my friends and worries me, for it is only a few weeks now to the general election; and if it happens that all this mysterious “preparation” comes to nought, a pretty figure I shall cut in the caricatures of Monsieur Bixiou, of whose malicious remarks on the subject you lately wrote me.

One thing reassures me: it does not seem likely that any one would have sown two hundred and fifty thousand francs in my electoral furrow without feeling pretty sure of gathering a harvest. Perhaps, to take a cheerful view of the matter, this very slowness may be considered as showing great confidence of success.

However that may be, I am kept by this long delay in a state of inaction which weighs upon me. Astride as it were of two existences,—one in which I have not set foot, the other in which my foot still lingers,—I have no heart to undertake real work; I am like a traveller who, having arrived before the hour when the diligence starts, does not know what to do with his person nor how to spend his time. You will not complain, I think, that I turn this enforced *far niente* to the profit of our correspondence; and now that I am thus at leisure, I shall take up two points in your last letter which did not seem to me of sufficient importance to pay much attention to at the time: I refer to your warning that my parliamentary pretensions did not meet the approval of Monsieur Bixiou; and to your suggestion that I might expose myself to falling in love with Madame de l’Estorade—if I were not in love with her already. Let us discuss, in the first instance, Monsieur Bixiou’s grand disapprobation—just as we used to talk in the olden time of the grand treachery of Monsieur de Mirabeau.

I’ll describe that man to you in a single word. Envy. In Monsieur Bixiou there is, unquestionably, the makings of a great artist; but in the economy of his existence the belly has annihilated the heart and the head, and he is now and forever under the dominion of sensual appetites; he is riveted to the condition of a *caricaturist*,—that is to say, to the condition of a man who from day to day discounts himself in petty products, regular galley-slave pot-boilers, which, to be sure, give him a lively living, but in themselves are worthless and have no future. With talents misused and now impotent, he has in his mind, as he has on his face, that everlasting and despairing *grin* which human thought instinctively attributes to fallen angels. Just as the Spirit of darkness attacks, in preference, great saints because they recall to him most bitterly the angelic nature from which he has fallen, so Monsieur Bixiou delights to slaver the talents and characters of those who he sees have courageously refused to squander their strength, sap, and aims as he has done.

But the thing which ought to reassure you somewhat as to the danger of his calumny and his slander (for he employs both forms of backbiting) is that at the very time when he believes he is making a burlesque autopsy of me he is actually an obedient puppet whose wire I hold in my hands, and whom I am making talk as I please. Being convinced that a

certain amount of noisy discussion would advance my political career, I looked about me for what I may call a public crier. Among these circus trumpets, if I could have found one with a sharper tone, a more deafening blare than Bixiou's, I would have chosen it. As it was, I have profited by the malevolent curiosity which induces that amiable lepidopter to insinuate himself into all studios. I confided the whole affair to him; even to the two hundred and fifty thousand francs (which I attributed to a lucky stroke at the Bourse), I told him all my plans of parliamentary conduct, down to the number of the house I have bought to conform to the requirements of the electoral law. It is all jotted down in his notebook.

That statement, I think, would somewhat reduce the admiration of his hearers in the salon Montcornet did they know of it. As for the political horoscope which he has been so kind as to draw for me, I cannot honestly say that his astrology is at fault. It is very certain that with my intention of following no set of fixed opinions, I must reach the situation so admirably summed up by the lawyer of Monsieur de la Palisse, when he exclaimed with burlesque emphasis: "What do you do, gentlemen, when you place a man in solitude? You isolate him."

Isolation will certainly be my lot, and the artist-life, in which a man lives alone and draws from himself like the Great Creator whose work he toils to imitate, has predisposed me to welcome the situation. But although, in the beginning especially, it will deprive me of all influence in the lobbies, it may serve me well in the tribune, where I shall be able to speak with strength and *freedom*. Being bound by no promises and by no party trammels, nothing will prevent me from being the man I am, and expressing, in all their sacred crudity, the ideas which I think sound and just. I know very well that before an audience plain, honest truth may fail to be contagious or even welcome. But have you never remarked that, by using our opportunities wisely, we finally meet with days which may be called the festivals of morality and intelligence, days on which, naturally and almost without effort, the thought of good triumphs?

I do not, however, conceal from myself that, although I may reach to some reputation as an orator, such a course will never lead to a ministry, and that it does not bestow that reputation of being a practical man to which it is now the fashion to sacrifice so much. But if at arm's length in the tribune I have but little influence, I shall make my mark at a greater distance. I shall speak as it were from a window, beyond the close and narrow sphere of parliamentary discussion, and above the level of its petty passions and its petty interests. This species of success appears to meet the views of the mysterious paternal intentions toward me. What they seem to require is that I shall sound and resound. From that point of view, i' faith, politics have a poetic side which is not out of keeping with my past life.

Now, to take up your other warning: that of my passion born or to be born for Madame de l'Estorade. I quote your most judicious deductions for the purpose of answering them fully.

In 1837, when you left for Italy, Madame de l'Estorade was, you say, in the flower of her beauty; and the queer, audacious persistence which I have shown in deriving inspiration from her shows that it has not faded. Hence, if the evil be not already done, you warn me to be on my guard; from the admiration of an artist to the adoration of the

man there is but a step, and the history of the late Pygmalion is commended to my study.

In the first place, learned doctor and mythologian, allow me this remark. Being on the spot and therefore much better placed than you to judge of the dangers of the situation, I can assure you that the principal person concerned does not appear to feel the least anxiety. Monsieur de l'Estorade quarrels with me for one thing only: he thinks my visits too few, and my reserve misanthropy.

Parbleu! I hear you say, a husband is always the last to know that his wife is being courted. So be it. But the high renown of Madame de l'Estorade's virtue, her cold and rather calculating good sense, which often served to balance the ardent and passionate impetuosity of one you knew well,—what of that? And will you not grant that motherhood as it appears in that lady—pushed to a degree of fervor which I might almost call fanaticism—would be to her an infallible preservative?

So much for her. But it is not, I see, for her tranquillity, it is mine for which your friendship is concerned; if Pygmalion had not succeeded in giving life to his statue, a pretty life his love would have made him!

To your charitable solicitude I must answer, (1) by asserting my principles (though the word and the thing are utterly out of date); (2) by a certain stupid respect that I feel for conjugal loyalty; (3) by the natural preoccupation which the serious public enterprise I am about to undertake must necessarily give to my mind and imagination. I must also tell you that I belong, if not by spiritual height, at least by all the tendencies of my mind and character, to that strong and serious school of artists of another age who, finding that art is long and life is short—*ars longa et vita brevis*—did not commit the mistake of wasting their time and lessening their powers of creation by silly and insipid intrigues.

But I have a better reason still to offer you. As Monsieur de l'Estorade has told you of the really romantic incidents of my first meeting with his wife, you know already that a *memory* was the cause of my studying her as a model. Well, that memory, while it attracted me to the beautiful countess, is the strongest of all reasons to keep me from her. This appears to you, I am sure, sufficiently enigmatical and far-fetched; but wait till I explain it.

If you had not thought proper to break the thread of our intercourse, I should not to-day be obliged to take up the arrears of our confidence; as it is, my dear boy, you must now take your part in my past history and listen to me bravely.

In 1835, the last year of my stay in Rome, I became quite intimate with a comrade in the Academy named Desroziers. He was a musician and a man of distinguished and very observing mind, who would probably have gone far in his art if malarial fever had not put an end to him the following year. Suddenly the idea took possession of us to go to Sicily, one of the excursions permitted by the rules of the school; but as we were radically "dry," as they say, we walked about Rome for some time endeavoring to find some means of recruiting our finances. On one of these occasions we happened to pass before the Palazzo Braschi. Its wide-open doors gave access to the passing and repassing of a crowd of persons of all sorts.

"*Parbleu*!" exclaimed Desroziers, "here's the very thing for us."

And without explaining his words or where he was taking me, he made me follow the crowd and enter the palace.

After mounting a magnificent marble staircase and crossing a very long suite of apartments rather poorly furnished,—which is customary in Italian palaces, all their luxury being put into ceilings, statues, paintings, and other objects of art,—we reached a room that was wholly hung with black and lighted by quantities of tapers. It was, of course, a *chambre-ardente*. In the middle of it on a raised platform surmounted by a baldaquin, lay a *thing*, the most hideous and grotesque thing you can possibly conceive. Imagine a little old man whose hands and face had reached such a stage of emaciation that a mummy would have seemed to you in comparison plump and comely.

Clothed in black satin breeches, a violet velvet coat cut *a la Francaise*, a white waistcoat embroidered in gold, from which issued an enormous shirt-frill of point d'Angleterre, this skeleton had cheeks covered with a thick layer of rouge which heightened still further the parchment tones of the rest of his skin. Upon his head was a blond wig frizzed into innumerable little curls, surmounted by an immense plumed hat jauntily perched to one side in a manner which irresistibly provoked the laughter of even the most respectful visitors.

After one glance given to this ridiculous and lamentable exhibition,—an obligatory part of all funerals, according to the etiquette of the Roman aristocracy,—Desroziers exclaimed: "There's the end; now come and see the beginning."

Not replying to any of my questions, because he was arranging a dramatic effect, he took me to the Albani gallery and placed me before a statue representing Adonis stretched on a lion's skin.

"What do you think of that?" he said.

"What?" I replied at a first glance; "why, it is as fine as an antique."

"Antique as much as I am!" replied Desroziers. "It is a portrait in youth of that wizened old being we have just seen dead."

"Antique or not, it is a masterpiece," I said. "But how is all this beauty, or its hideous caricature, to get us to Sicily? That is the question."

"I'll tell you," replied Desroziers. "I know the family of that old scarecrow. His niece married the Comte de Lanty, and they have long wanted to buy this statue which the Albani museum won't give up at any price. They have tried to have it copied, but they never got anything satisfactory. Now, you know the director of the museum well. Get him to let you make a copy of it. I give music-lessons to the Comte de Lanty's daughter, Mademoiselle Marianina, and I'll talk of your copy. If you succeed, as of course you will, the count will buy it and pay you forty times the cost of a trip to Sicily."

Two days later I began the work, and, as it suited my taste, I worked so hotly at it that by the end of three weeks the Lanty family, escorted by Desroziers, came to see my copy. The count, who seemed to me a good connoisseur, declared himself satisfied with the work and bought it. Mademoiselle Marianina, who was the heiress and favorite of her grand-uncle, was particularly delighted with it. Marianina was then about twenty-one years old, and I shall not make you her portrait because you know Madame de l'Estorade,

to whom her likeness is extraordinary. Already an accomplished musician, this charming girl had a remarkable inclination for all the arts. Coming from time to time to my studio to watch the completion of the statue, a taste for sculpture seized her, as it did the Princesse Marie d'Orleans, and until the departure of the family, which took place a few months before I myself left Rome, Mademoiselle de Lanty took lessons from me in modelling.

I never dreamed of being another Saint-Preux or Abelard, but I must own that I found rare happiness in imparting my knowledge. Marianina was so gay and happy, her judgment of art so sound, her voice, when she sang, so stirred my heart, that had it not been for her vast fortune, which kept me at a distance, I should have run great danger to my peace of mind. Admitted into the household on the footing of a certain familiarity, I could see that my beautiful pupil took pleasure in our intercourse, and when the family returned to Paris she expressed the utmost regret at leaving Rome; I even fancied, God forgive me, that I saw something like a tear in her eye when we parted.

On my return to Paris, some months later, my first visit was to the hotel de Lanty. Marianina was too well bred and too kind at heart to be discourteous to any one, but I felt at once that a cold restrained manner was substituted for the gracious friendliness of the past. It seemed to me probable that her evident liking, I will not say for me personally, but for my conversation and acquirements, had been noticed by her parents, who had doubtless taught her a lesson; in fact, the stiff and forbidding manner of Monsieur and Madame de Lanty left me no other supposition.

Naturally, I did not call again; but a few months later, when I exhibited my Pandora in the salon of 1837, I one day saw the whole Lanty family approach it. The mother was on the arm of Comte Maxime de Trailles, a well-known lion. *Nil admirari* is the natural instinct of all men of the world; so, after a very cursory glance at my work, Monsieur de Trailles began to find shocking faults in it, and in so high and clear a voice that not a word was lost within a certain range. Marianina shrugged her shoulders as she listened to this profound discourse, and when it was ended she said,—

"How fortunate you came with us! Without your enlightened knowledge I might, with the rest of the good public, have thought this statue admirable. It is a pity the sculptor is not here to learn his business from you."

"He *is* here, behind you," said a stout woman, who had once been my landlady, and was standing near, laughing heartily. Involuntarily Marianina turned; when she saw me a vivid color came into her cheeks, and I slipped away into the crowd. A girl who took my part so warmly, and then showed such emotion on being detected in doing so, could not be absolutely indifferent to me; and as on my first visit I had only, after all, been coldly received, I decided, after my great success at the Exhibition, in consequence of which I was made a chevalier of the Legion of honor, to call again upon the Lantys; perhaps my new distinctions would procure me a better reception.

Monsieur de Lanty received me without rising, and with the following astounding apostrophe:—

"I think you very courageous, monsieur, to venture to present yourself here."

"I have never been received in a manner that seemed to require courage on my part."

“You have come, no doubt,” continued Monsieur de Lanty, “in search of your property which you were careless enough to leave in our hands. I shall return you that article of gallantry.”

So saying, he rose and took from a drawer in his secretary an elegant little portfolio, which he gave to me.

As I looked at it in a sort of stupefaction, he added:

“Yes; I know the letters are not there; I presume you will allow me to keep them.”

“This portfolio, the letters you mention—all this is an enigma to me, monsieur.”

At this moment Madame de Lanty entered the room.

“What do you want?” said her husband, roughly.

“I knew monsieur was here, and as I feared some painful explanation, I came to do my duty as a woman, and interpose.”

“You need fear nothing, madame,” I said; “evidently what is taking place is the result of some misunderstanding.”

“Ah! this is too much!” cried Monsieur de Lanty, reopening the drawer from which he had taken the portfolio, and taking out a packet of letters tied with a rose-colored ribbon. “I think these will put an end to your *misunderstanding*.”

I looked at the letters; they were not postmarked, and simply bore my name, Monsieur Dorlange, in a woman’s handwriting, which was unknown to me.

“Monsieur,” I said, “you know more than I do; you have in your possession letters that seem to belong to me, but which I have never received.”

“Upon my word,” cried Monsieur de Lanty, “you are an admirable comedian; I never saw innocence better played.”

“But, monsieur,” I said, “who wrote those letters, and why are they addressed to me?”

“It is useless to deny them, monsieur,” said Madame de Lanty; “Marianina has confessed all.”

“Mademoiselle Marianina!” I exclaimed. “Then the matter is very simple; have the goodness to bring us together; let me hear from her lips the explanation of this singular affair.”

“The evasion is clever,” replied Monsieur de Lanty; “but my daughter is no longer here: she is in a convent, forever sheltered from your intrigues and the dangers of her own ridiculous passion. If that is what you came to know, all is said. Let us part, for my patience and moderation have a limit, if your insolence has none.”

“Monsieur!” I began, angrily; but Madame de Lanty, who was standing behind her husband, made me a gesture as if she would fall upon her knees; and reflecting that perhaps Marianina’s future depended on the attitude I now took, I controlled myself and left the room without further words.

The next morning, before I was out of bed, the Abbe Fontanon was announced to me.

When he entered he proved to be a tall old man with a bilious skin and a sombre, stern expression, which he tried to soften by a specious manner and a show of gentle but icy obsequiousness.

“Monsieur,” he said, “Madame la Comtesse de Lanty, whose confessor I have the honor to be, requests me to give you a few explanations, to which you have an incontestable right, as to the scene that took place last evening between her husband and yourself.”

“I am ready to listen to you, monsieur,” I replied.

“Monsieur de Lanty,” continued the abbe, “is a bad sleeper; and one night last summer he was awakened by the sound of cautious steps. He opened his door, and called out to know who was there. He was not mistaken; some one was there, but did not answer, and disappeared before Monsieur de Lanty could obtain a light. At first it was thought to be an attempt at robbery; but on further inquiry it appeared that a *gentleman* had taken a room in the neighborhood, and had frequently been seen in company with Mademoiselle Marianina,—in short, the matter concerned a love affair and not a robbery. Monsieur de Lanty has long watched his daughter, whose ardent inclinations have given him much anxiety; you yourself, monsieur, caused him some uneasiness in Rome—”

“Very needless, Monsieur l’abbe,” I said, interrupting him.

“Yes. I know that your relations to Mademoiselle de Lanty have always been perfectly proper and becoming. But since their return to Paris another individual has occupied her mind,—a bold and enterprising man, capable of risking everything to compromise and thus win an heiress. Being taxed with having encouraged this man and allowed these nocturnal interviews, Mademoiselle de Lanty at first denied everything. Then, evidently fearing that her father, a violent man, would take some steps against her lover, she threw herself at his feet and admitted the visits, but denied that the visitor was the man her father named to her. At first she refused obstinately to substitute another name for the one she disavowed. After some days passed in this struggle, she finally confessed to her mother, under a pledge of secrecy, that her father was right in his suspicions, but she dreaded the results to the family if she acknowledged the truth to him. The man in question was a noted duellist, and her father and brother would surely bring him to account for his conduct. It was then, monsieur, that the idea occurred to this imprudent girl to substitute another name for that of her real lover.”

“Ah! I understand,” I said; “the name of a nobody, an artist, a sculptor, or some insignificant individual of that kind.”

“You do Mademoiselle de Lanty injustice by that remark,” replied the abbe. “What decided her to make your name a refuge against the dangers she foresaw was the fact that Monsieur de Lanty had formerly had suspicions about you, and she thought that circumstance gave color to her statement.”

“But, Monsieur l’abbe,” I said, “how do you explain those letters, that portfolio, which her father produced yesterday?”

“That again was an invention of Marianina; and I may add that this duplicity assures me that had she remained in the world her future might have been terrible.”

“Am I to suppose that this tale has been told you by Madame de Lanty?”

“Confided to me, monsieur, yes. You yourself saw Madame de Lanty’s desire to stop your explanations yesterday, lest the truth might appear to her husband. I am requested by her to thank you for your connivance—passive, of course—in this pious falsehood. She felt that she could only show her profound gratitude by telling you the whole truth and relying upon your discretion.”

“Where is Mademoiselle Marianina?”

“As Monsieur de Lanty told you, in a convent in Italy. To avoid scandal, it was thought best to send her to some safe retreat. Her own conduct will decide her future.”

Now what do you think of that history? Does it not seem to you very improbable? Here are two explanations which have each come into my mind with the force of a conviction. First, Marianina’s brother has just married into a grand-ducal family of Germany. Immense sacrifices must have been required of the de Lanty family to make such an alliance. Was Marianina’s *dot*, and the fortune she inherited from that old grand-uncle, required to pay the costs of that princely union? Secondly, did Marianina really feel an attachment for me? And did she, in a girlish way, express it on those letters which she never sent? To punish her, had her parents sent her to a convent? And to disgust me, and throw me off the track, had the mother invented this history of another love in which she seemed to make me play so mortifying a part?

I may add that the intervention of the Abbe Fontanon authorizes such an interpretation. I have made inquiries about him, and I find he is one of those mischievous priests who worm themselves into the confidence of families for their own ends; he has already destroyed the harmony of one home,—that of Monsieur de Granville, attorney-general of the royal court of Paris under the Restoration.

As to the truth or falsehood of these suppositions I know nothing, and, in all probability, shall continue to know nothing. But, as you can easily understand, the thought of Marianina is a luminous point to which my eye is forever attached. Shall I love her? Shall I hate her and despise her? That is the question perpetually in my mind. Uncertainty of that kind is far more certain to fix a woman in a man’s soul than to dislodge her.

Well, to sum up in two brief sentences my reply to your warnings: As for the opinion of Monsieur Bixiou, I care as little for it as for last year’s roses; and as for that other danger which you fear, I cannot tell you whether I love Marianina or not, but this I know, I do *not* love Madame de l’Estorade. That, I think, is giving you a plain and honest answer. And now, let us leave our master the Future to do what he likes.

XI. THE COMTESSE DE L’ESTORADE TO MADAME OCTAVE DE CAMPS

Paris, May, 1839.

Monsieur Dorlange came last evening to take leave of us. He starts to-day for Arcis-sur-Aube, where the ceremony of inaugurating *his* statue takes place. That is also the place selected by the Opposition journals for his candidacy. Monsieur de l’Estorade declares that the locality could not have been worse chosen, and that it leaves his election without a chance.

Monsieur Dorlange paid his visit early. I was alone. Monsieur de l’Estorade was dining with the Minister of the Interior, and the children were in bed. The conversation interrupted by Madame de la Bastie could now be renewed, as I was about to ask him to continue the history, of which he had only told me the last words, when our old Lucas brought me a letter. It was from my Armand, to let me know that he had been ill since morning, and was then in the infirmary.

“Order the carriage,” I said to Lucas, in a state of agitation you can easily conceive.

“But, madame,” replied Lucas, “monsieur has ordered the carriage to fetch him at half-past nine o’clock, and Tony has already started.”

“Then send for a cab.”

“I don’t know that I can find one,” said our old servant, who is a man of difficulties; “it is beginning to rain.”

Without noticing that remark and without thinking of Monsieur Dorlange, I went hastily to my room to put on my bonnet and shawl. That done, I returned to the salon, where my visitor still remained.

“You must excuse me, monsieur,” I said to him, “for leaving you so abruptly. I must hasten to the Henri IV. College. I could not possibly pass a night in the dreadful anxiety my son’s letter has caused me; he tells me he has been ill since morning in the infirmary.”

“But,” replied Monsieur Dorlange, “surely you are not going alone in a hired carriage to that lonely quarter?”

“Lucas will go with me.”

At that moment Lucas returned; his prediction was realized; there was not a coach on the stand; it was raining in torrents. Time was passing; already it was almost too late to enter the school, where masters and pupils go to bed at nine o’clock.

“Put on thick shoes,” I said to Lucas, “and come with me on foot.”

Instantly I saw his face lengthen. He is no longer young and loves his ease; moreover, he complains every winter of rheumatism. He made various objections,—that it was very late; that we should “revolutionize” the school; I should take cold; Monsieur Armand could not be very ill if he wrote himself; in short, it was clear that my plan of campaign

did not suit my old retainer.

Monsieur Dorlange very obligingly offered to go himself in my place and bring me word about Armand; but that did not suit me at all; I felt that I *must* see for myself. Having thanked him, I said to Lucas in a tone of authority:—

“Get ready at once, for one thing is true in your remarks: it is getting late.”

Seeing himself driven into a corner, Lucas raised the standard of revolt.

“It is not possible that madame should go out in such weather; and I don’t want monsieur to scold me for giving in to such a singular idea.”

“Then you do not intend to obey me?”

“Madame knows very well that for anything reasonable I would do what she told me if I had to go through fire to obey her.”

“Heat is good for rheumatism, but rain is not,” I said; then, turning to Monsieur Dorlange, I added: “As you were so kind as to offer to do this errand alone, may I ask you to give me your arm and come with me?”

“I am like Lucas,” he said, “I do not think this excursion absolutely necessary; but as I am not afraid of being scolded by Monsieur de l’Estorade, I shall have the honor to accompany you.”

We started. The weather was frightful; we had hardly gone fifty steps before we were soaked in spite of Lucas’s huge umbrella, with which Monsieur Dorlange sheltered me at his own expense. Luckily a coach happened to pass; Monsieur Dorlange hailed the driver; it was empty. Of course I could not tell my companion that he was not to get in; such distrust was extremely unbecoming and not for me to show. But you know, my dear friend, that showers of rain have helped lovers from the days of Dido down. However, Monsieur Dorlange said nothing: he saw my anxiety and he had the good taste not to attempt conversation, breaking the silence only from time to time with casual remarks. When we reached the school, after getting out of the carriage to give me his hand he saw for himself that he must not enter the house and he therefore got back into the carriage to await my return.

Well, I found Monsieur Armand had hoaxed me. His illness reduced itself to a headache, which departed soon after he had written me. The doctor, for the sake of ordering something, had told him to take an infusion of linden-leaves, telling him that the next day he could go back to his studies. I had taken a club to kill a flea, and committed all sorts of enormities to get there at an hour when the entire establishment were going to bed, only to find my young gentleman perfectly well and playing chess with one of the nurses.

On leaving the school I found the rain had ceased and the moon was shining brightly. My heart was full; the reaction from my great anxiety had set in and I felt a need of breathing the fresh air. I therefore proposed to Monsieur Dorlange to dismiss the coach and return on foot.

Here was an opportunity for him to make me that long-delayed explanation; but Monsieur Dorlange seemed so little inclined to take advantage of it that, using Monsieur Armand’s freak as a text, he read me a lecture on the danger of spoiling children: a subject

which was not at all agreeable to me, as he must have perceived from the rather stiff manner with which I listened to him. Come, thought I, I must and will get to the bottom of this history; it is like the tale of Sancho's herdsman, which had the faculty of never getting told. So, cutting short my companion's theories of education, I said distinctly:—

"This is a very good time, I think, to continue the confidence you were about to make to me. Here we are sure of no interruption."

"I am afraid I shall prove a poor story-teller," replied Monsieur Dorlange. "I have spent all my fire this very day in telling that tale to Marie-Gaston."

"That," I answered laughing, "is against your own theory of secrecy, in which a third party is one too many."

"Oh, Marie-Gaston and I count for one only. Besides, I had to reply to his odd ideas about you and me."

"What about me?"

"Well, he imagined that in looking at the sun I should be dazzled by its rays."

"Which means, speaking less metaphorically—?"

"That, in view of the singularities which accompanied my first knowledge of you and led me to the honor of your acquaintance, I might expose myself to the danger, madame, of not retaining my reason and self-possession."

"And your history refutes this fear in the mind of Monsieur Marie-Gaston?"

"You shall judge."

And then, without further preamble, he told me a long tale which I need not repeat here; the gist of it is, however, that Monsieur Dorlange is in love with a woman who posed in his imagination for Saint-Ursula; but as this woman appears to be forever lost to him it did not seem to me impossible that in the long run he might transfer his sentiments for her memory to me. When he had finished his tale he asked if I did not think it a victorious answer to the ridiculous fears of our friend.

"Modesty," I replied, "obliges me to share your security; but they say that in the army shots frequently ricochet and kill their victims."

"Then you think me capable of the impertinence Marie-Gaston is good enough to suspect in me?"

"I don't know about its being an impertinence," I said stiffly, "but if such a fancy came into your mind, I should think you very much to be pitied."

His answer was vehement.

"Madame," he said, "you will not have to pity me. In my opinion, first love is a vaccination which protects us from a second."

The conversation stopped there. We had now reached my own door, and I invited Monsieur Dorlange to come in. He accepted my politeness, remarking that Monsieur de l'Estorade had probably returned and he could thus take leave of him.

My husband was at home. I don’t know whether Lucas, forestalling the rebuke I intended to give him, had made out a story to excuse himself, or whether Monsieur de l’Estorade for the first time in his life, felt, in view of my maternal escapade, a movement of jealousy. It is certain, however, that his manner of receiving me was curt; he called it an unheard-of thing to go out at such an hour, in such weather, to see a boy who proved, by announcing his own illness, that it was nothing serious. After letting him talk in this discourteous way for some little time, I thought it was time to put an end to the scene, so I said in a rather peremptory tone:—

“As I wanted to sleep at night, I went to the school in a pelting rain; I came back by moonlight; and I beg you to remark that monsieur, who was so good as to escort me, has come upstairs to bid you good-bye, because he leaves Paris to-morrow morning.”

I have habitually enough power over Monsieur de l’Estorade to make this call to order effective; but I saw that my husband was displeased, and that instead of having made Monsieur Dorlange an easy diversion, I had called down upon his head the ill-humor of my ogre, who instantly turned upon him.

After telling him that much had been said about his candidacy during dinner at the ministry, Monsieur de l’Estorade began to show him all the reasons why he might expect an overwhelming defeat; namely, that Arcis-sur-Aube was one of the boroughs where the administration felt itself most secure; that a man of extraordinary political ability had already been sent there to manipulate the election, and had made a first report giving triumphant news of his success. These were only generalities, to which Monsieur Dorlange replied with modesty, but also with the air of a man who had resolved who take his chances against all risks to which his election might be exposed. Monsieur de l’Estorade then produced a final shaft which, under the circumstances, was calculated to have a marvellous effect, because it attacked both the candidate and his private life.

“Listen to me, my dear monsieur,” said my husband, “when a man starts on an electoral career he must remember that he stakes everything; his public life and also his private life. Your adversaries will ransack your present and your past with a pitiless hand, and sorrow to him who has any dark spots to hide. Now I ought not to conceal from you that to-night, at the ministers’, much was said about a little scandal which, while it may be venial in the life of an artist, takes proportions altogether more serious in that of the people’s representative. You understand me, of course. I refer to that handsome Italian woman whom you have in your house. Take care; some puritanical elector whose own morality may be more or less problematical, is likely to call you to account for her presence.”

The reply made by Monsieur Dorlange was very dignified.

“To those,” he said, “who may arraign me on that detail of my private life I wish but one thing—that they may have nothing worse upon their consciences. If I had not already wearied madame on our way from the school with an interminable story, I would tell you the facts relating to my handsome Italian, and you would see, Monsieur le comte, that her presence in my house reflects in no way upon me.

“But,” returned Monsieur de l’Estorade, softening his tone, “you take my observation rather too seriously. As I said just now, an artist may have a handsome model in his house —that may be natural enough—but she is not a usual piece of furniture in that of a

legislator.”

“No, what seems more to their liking,” replied Monsieur Dorlange, with some heat, “is the good they can get for themselves out of a calumny accepted eagerly and without examination. However, far from dreading inquiry on the subject you mention, I desire it, and the ministry will do me a great service if it will employ the extremely able political personage you say they have put upon my path to bring that delicate question before the electors.”

“Do you really start to-morrow?” asked Monsieur de l’Estorade, finding that he had started a subject which not only did not confound Monsieur Dorlange, but, on the contrary, gave him the opportunity to reply with a certain hauteur of tone and speech.

“Yes, and very early too; so that I must now take leave of you, having certain preparations still to make.”

So saying, Monsieur Dorlange rose, and after making me a rather ceremonious bow and not bestowing his hand on Monsieur de l’Estorade, who, in turn, did not hold out his own, he left the room.

“What was the matter with Armand?” asked my husband, as if to avoid any other explanation.

“Never mind Armand,” I said, “it is far more interesting to know what is the matter with you; for never did I see you so out of tune, so sharp and uncivil.”

“What! because I told a ridiculous candidate that he would have to go into mourning for his reputation?”

“In the first place, that was not complimentary; and in any case the moment was ill-chosen with a man on whom my maternal anxiety had just imposed a disagreeable service.”

“I don’t like meddlers,” retorted Monsieur de l’Estorade, raising his voice more than I had ever known him do to me. “And after all, if he had not been here to give you his arm you would not have gone.”

“You are mistaken; I should have gone alone; for your servant, being master here, refused to accompany me.”

“But you must certainly admit that if any acquaintance had met you at half-past nine o’clock walking arm-in-arm with Monsieur Dorlange the thing would have seemed to them, to say the least, singular.”

Pretending to discover what I had known for the last hour, I exclaimed:—

“Is it possible that after sixteen years of married life you do me the honor to be jealous. Now I see why, in spite of your respect for proprieties, you spoke to Monsieur Dorlange in my presence of that Italian woman whom people think his mistress; that was a nice little perfidy by which you meant to ruin him in my estimation.”

Thus exposed to the light, my poor husband talked at random for a time, and finally had no resource but to ring for Lucas and lecture him severely. That ended the explanation.

What do you think of this conjugal proceeding, by which my husband, wishing to do a

man some harm in my estimation, gave him the opportunity to appear to the utmost advantage? For—there was no mistaking it—the sort of emotion with which Monsieur Dorlange repelled the charge was the cry of a conscience at peace with itself, and which knows itself able to confound a calumny.

XII. DORLANGE TO MARIE-GASTON

Paris, May, 1839.

On my return this evening from the Estorades, on whom I had paid my parting call, I found your letter, my dear friend, in which you announce your coming arrival. I shall await you to-morrow during the day, but in the evening I must, without further delay, start for Arcis-sur-Aube, where, in the course of the next week my political matters will come to a head. What particular hold I may have on that town, which, as it appears, I have the ambition to represent, and on what co-operation and assistance I may rely,—in a word, *who* is making my electoral bed,—all that I know as little about as I did last year when I was told for the first time that I must enter political life.

A few days ago I received a second letter from my father, postmarked Paris this time, and not Stockholm. Judging by the style of the document, it would not surprise me if the "eminent services" rendered in a Northern court by the mysterious author of my days turned out to be those of a Prussian corporal. It would be impossible to issue orders in a more imperative tone, or to dwell more minutely on trifling particulars.

The note or memorandum was headed thus: *What my son is to do*.

On receipt of these instructions I am to send to its destination the Saint-Ursula; to superintend the packing and boxing of it myself, and to despatch it by the fastest carrier, to Mother Marie-des-Anges, superior of the convent of the Ursulines at Arcis-sur-Aube.

The order went on to say that I was to follow the statue in a few days, so as to arrive at the said Arcis-sur-Aube not later than the 3rd of May. Even the inn at which I was to put up was dictated. I would find myself expected at the Hotel de la Poste; so that if I happen to prefer any of the others I must resign that fancy. I am also enjoined to publish in the newspapers on the day of my departure the fact that I present myself as candidate in the electoral arrondissement of Arcis-sur-Aube; avoiding, however, to make any profession of political faith, which would be both useless and premature. The document ended with an injunction which, while it humiliated me somewhat, gave me a certain faith in what was happening. The Mongenod Brothers, and draw for another sum of two hundred and fifty thousand francs, which *is to be* deposited in my name, "taking the utmost care," continued my instructions, "when transporting this money from Paris to Arcis-sur-Aube that it be not lost or stolen."

What do you think of that last clause, dear friend? That sum *is to be* deposited; then it is not already there; and suppose it is not there?—Besides, what am I to do with it in Arcis? Am I to stand my election on English principles? if so, a profession of political faith would certainly be useless and premature. As to the advice not to lose or allow to be stolen the money in my possession, do you not think that that is making me rather juvenile? I feel an inclination to suck my thumb and cry for a rattle. However, I shall let myself go with the current that is bearing me along, and, notwithstanding the news of your coming arrival, after paying a visit to the Brothers Mongenod, I shall valiantly start, imagining the stupefaction of the good people of Arcis on seeing another candidate pop up in their midst

like a Jack-in-the-box.

In Paris I have already fired my gun. The “National” has announced my candidacy in the warmest terms; and it seems that this evening, in the house of the Minister of the Interior, where Monsieur de l’Estorade was dining, I was discussed at some length. I ought to add that, according to Monsieur de l’Estorade, the general impression is that I shall certainly fail of election. The ministry might possibly fear a candidate from the Left centre; but as for the democratic party to which I am supposed to belong, they do not even allow that it exists. The Left centre candidate has, however, been disposed of by a ministerial envoy of the ablest and most active description, and at this moment, when I set off my small balloon, the election of the Conservative candidate is pretty well assured.

Among the elements of my inevitable defeat, Monsieur de l’Estorade condescended to mention a matter about which, dear friend, I am rather surprised that you have not already lectured me. It is one of those agreeable calumnies put in circulation in the salon Montcornet by the honored and honorable Monsieur Bixiou. The scandal concerns a handsome Italian woman whom I brought back from Italy and with whom I am said to be living in a manner not canonical. Come, tell me, what hindered you from asking me to explain this important matter? Did you think the charge so shameful that you feared to offend me by alluding to it? Or have you such confidence in my morality that you felt no need of being strengthened therein? I did not have time to enter upon the necessary explanations to Monsieur de l’Estorade, neither have I the leisure to write them to you now. If I speak of the incident it is for the purpose of telling you of an observation I think I have made, into the truth of which I want you to examine after you get here. It is this:—

I have an idea that it would not be agreeable to Monsieur de l’Estorade to see me successful in my electoral campaign. He never gave much approbation to the plan; in fact he tried to dissuade me, but always from the point of view of my own interests. But to-day, when he finds that the plan has taken shape, and is actually discussed in the ministerial salon, my gentleman turns bitter, and he seems to feel a malignant pleasure in prophesying my defeat and in producing this charming little infamy under which he expects to bury our friendship.

Why so! I will tell you: while feeling some gratitude for the service I did him, the worthy man also felt from the height of his social position a superiority over me of which my entrance to the Chamber will now dispossess him; and it is not agreeable to him to renounce that sense of superiority. After all, what is an artist, even though he may be a man of genius, compared to a peer of France, a personage who puts his hand to the tiller and steers the great political and social system; a man who has access to kings and ministers, and who would have the right if, by impossibility, such audacity should seize upon his mind, of depositing a black ball against the budget. Well, this privileged being does not like that I, and others like me, should assume the importance and authority of that insolent elective Chamber.

But that is not all. Hereditary statesmen have a foolish pretension: that of being initiated by long study into a certain science represented as arduous, which they call the science of public affairs and which they (like physicians with medical science) alone have the right to practise. They are not willing that an underling, a journalist for instance, or lower than that, an artist, a cutter of images, should presume to slip into their domain and speak out

beside them. A poet, an artist, a writer may be endowed with eminent faculties, they will agree to that; the profession of such men presupposes it; but statesmen they cannot be. Chateaubriand himself, though better placed than the rest of us to make himself a niche in the Governmental Olympus, was turned out of doors one morning by a concise little note, signed Joseph de Villele, dismissing him, as was proper, to Rene, Atala, and other futilities.

I know that time and that tall posthumous daughter of ours whom we call Posterity will some day do good justice and plead the right thing in the right place. Towards the end of 2039, the world, if it deigns to last till then, will know what Canalis, Joseph Bridau, Daniel d'Arthez, Stidmann, and Leon de Lora were in 1839; whereas an infinitely small number of persons will know that during the same period Monsieur le Comte de l'Estorade was peer of France, and president of the Cour des comptes; Monsieur le Comte de Rastignac minister of Public Works; and his brother-in-law, Monsieur le Baron Martial de la Roche-Hugon was a diplomat and Councillor of State employed on more or less extraordinary services.

But while awaiting this tardy classification and distant reform, I think it well to let our great governing class know from time to time that unless their names are Richelieu or Colbert they are liable to competition and are forced to accept it. So, with this aggravating intention I begin to take pleasure in my enterprise; and if I am elected, I shall, unless you assure me that I have mistaken de l'Estorade's meaning, find occasion to let him and others of his kind know that one can, if so disposed, climb over the walls of their little parks and strut as their equals.

But how is it, my dear friend, that I rattle on about myself and say no word about the sad emotions which must attend your return to France? How can you bear them? And instead of endeavoring to lay them aside, I fear you are willingly nursing them and taking a melancholy pleasure in their revival. Dear friend, I say to you of these great sorrows what I said just now of our governing class—we should consider them from the point of view of time and space, by the action of which they become after a while imperceptible.

Do me a favor! On arriving in Paris without having a house prepared to receive you, it would be very friendly—you would seem like the man of old times—if you would take up your quarters with me, instead of going to Ville d'Avray, which, indeed, I think dangerous and even bad for you. Stay with me, and you can thus judge of my handsome housekeeper, and you will see how much she has been calumniated and misunderstood. You will also be near to the l'Estorades in whom I expect you to find consolations; and besides, this act would be a charming expiation for all the involuntary wrongs you have done me. At any rate, I have given my orders, and your room is ready for you.

P.S. You have not yet arrived, dear friend, and I must close this letter, which will be given to you by my housekeeper when you come by my house, for I am certain that your first visit will be to me.

I went this morning to the Mongenods'; the two hundred and fifty thousand francs were there, but with the accompaniment of a most extraordinary circumstance; the money was in the name of the Comte de Sallenauve, otherwise Dorlange, sculptor, 42 rue de l'Ouest. In spite of an appellation which has never been mine, the money was mine, and was paid

to me without the slightest hesitation. I had enough presence of mind not to seem stupefied by my new name and title before the cashier; but I saw Monsieur Mongenod the elder in private, a man who enjoys the highest reputation at the Bank, and to him I expressed my astonishment, asking for whatever explanations he was able to give me. He could give none; the money came to him through a Dutch banker, his correspondent at Rotterdam, and he knew nothing beyond that. *Ah ca*! what does it all mean? Am I to be a noble? Has the moment come for my father to acknowledge me? I start in a state of agitation and of anxiety which you can well understand. Until I hear from you, I shall address my letters to you here. If you decide not to stay in my house, let me know your address at once. Say nothing of what I have now told you to the l'Estorades; let it remain secret between us.

XIII. DORLANGE TO MARIE-GASTON

Arcis-sur-Aube, May 3, 1839.

Dear friend,—Last evening, before Maitre Achille Pigoult, notary of this place, the burial of Charles Dorlange took place,—that individual issuing to the world, like a butterfly from a grub, under the name and estate of Charles de Sallenauve, son of Francois-Henri-Pantaleon Dumirail, Marquis de Sallenauve. Here follows the tale of certain facts which preceded this brilliant transformation.

Leaving Paris on the evening of May 1st, I arrived at Arcis, according to my father's directions, on the following day. You can believe my surprise when I saw in the street where the diligence stopped the elusive Jacques Bricheteau, whom I had not seen since our singular meeting on the Ile Saint-Louis. This time I beheld him, instead of behaving like the dog of Jean de Nivelle, come towards me with a smile upon his lips, holding out his hand and saying:—

"At last, my dear monsieur, we are almost at the end of all our mysteries, and soon, I hope, you will see that you have no cause to complain of me. Have you brought the money?"

"Yes," I replied, "neither lost nor stolen." And I drew from my pocket a wallet containing the two hundred and fifty thousand francs in bank notes.

"Very good!" said Jacques Bricheteau. "Now let us go to the Hotel de la Poste; no doubt you know who awaits you there."

"No, indeed I do not," I replied.

"You must have remarked the name and title under which that money was paid to you?"

"Certainly; that strange circumstance struck me forcibly, and has, I must own, stirred my imagination."

"Well, we shall now completely lift the veil, one corner of which we were careful to raise at first, so that you might not come too abruptly to the great and fortunate event that is now before you."

"Am I to see my father?"

"Yes," replied Jacques Bricheteau; "your father is awaiting you; but I must warn you against a probable cloud on his manner of receiving you. The marquis has suffered much; the court life which he has always led has trained him to show no outward emotions; besides, he has a horror of everything bourgeois. You must not be surprised, therefore, at the cold and dignified reception he will probably give you; at heart, he is good and kind, and you will appreciate him better when you know him."

"Here," thought I, "are very comforting assurances, and as I myself am not very ardently disposed, I foresee that this interview will be at some degrees below zero."

On going into the room where the Marquis awaited me, I saw a very tall, very thin, very

bald man, seated at a table on which he was arranging papers. On hearing the door open, he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead, rested his hands on the arms of his chair, and looking round at us he waited.

“Monsieur le Comte de Sallenauve,” said Jacques Bricheteau, announcing me with the solemnity of an usher of ambassadors or a groom of the Chambers.

But in the presence of the man to whom I owed my life the ice in me was instantly melted; I stepped forward with an eager impulse, feeling the tears rise to my eyes. He did not move. There was not the faintest trace of agitation in his face, which had that peculiar look of high dignity that used to be called “the grand air”; he merely held out his hand, limply grasped mine, and then said:

“Be seated, monsieur—for I have not yet the right to call you my son.”

When Jacques Bricheteau and I had taken chairs—

“Then you have no objection,” said this strange kind of father, “to assuming the political position we are trying to secure for you?”

“None at all,” said I. “The notion startled me at first, but I soon grew accustomed to it; and to ensure success, I have punctually carried out all the instructions that were conveyed to me.”

“Excellent,” said the Marquis, taking up from the table a gold snuff-box which he twirled in his fingers.

Then, after a short silence, he added:

“Now I owe you certain explanations. Our good friend Jacques Bricheteau, if he will have the kindness, will lay them before you.”

This was equivalent to the royal formula of the old regime: “My chamberlain will tell you the rest.”

“To go back to the origin of everything,” said Jacques Bricheteau, accepting the duty thus put upon him, “I must first tell you that you are not a legitimate Sallenauve. When Monsieur le marquis, here present, returned after the emigration, in the year 1808, he made the acquaintance of your mother, and in 1809 you were born as the fruit of their intercourse. Your birth, as you already know, cost your mother her life, and as misfortunes never come singly, Monsieur de Sallenauve was compromised in a conspiracy against the imperial power and compelled to fly the country. Brought up in Arcis with me, the marquis, wishing to give me a proof of his friendship, confided to me, on his departure to this new expatriation, the care of your childhood. I accepted that charge, I will not say with alacrity, but certainly with gratitude.”

At these words the marquis held out his hand to Jacques Bricheteau, who was seated near him, and after a silent pressure, which did not seem to me remarkably warm, Jacques Bricheteau continued:—

“The mysterious precautions I was forced to take in carrying out my trust are explained by Monsieur le marquis’s position towards the various governments which have succeeded each other in France since the period of your birth. Under the Empire, I feared that a

government little indulgent to attacks upon itself might send you to share your father's exile; it was then that the idea of giving you a sort of anonymous existence first occurred to me. Under the Restoration I feared for you another class of enemies; the Sallenauve family, which has no other representatives at the present day than Monsieur le marquis, was then powerful. In some way it got wind of your existence, and also of the fact that the marquis had taken the precaution not to recognize you, in order to retain the right to leave you his whole fortune, which, as a natural child, the law would in part have deprived you. The obscurity in which I kept you seemed to me the best security, against the schemes of greedy relations, and certain mysterious steps taken by them from time to time proved the wisdom of these precautions. Under the government of July, on the other hand, it was I myself who I feared might endanger you. I had seen the establishment of the new order of things with the deepest regret, and not believing in its duration, I took part in certain active hostilities against it, which brought me under the ban of the police."

Here the recollection that Jacques Bricheteau had been pointed out by the waiter of the Cafe des Arts as a member of the police made me smile, whereupon the speaker stopped and said with a very serious air:—

"Do these explanations which I have the honor to give you seem improbable?"

I explained the meaning of my smile.

"That waiter," said Jacques Bricheteau, "was not altogether mistaken; for I have long been employed at the prefecture of police in the health department; but I have nothing to do with police espial; on the contrary, I have more than once come near being the victim of it."

Here a rather ridiculous noise struck our ears, nothing less than a loud snore from my father, who thus gave us to know that he did not take a very keen interest in the explanations furnished in his name with a certain prolixity. I don't know whether Jacques Bricheteau's vanity being touched put him slightly out of temper, but he rose impatiently and shook the arm of the sleeper, crying out:—

"Hey! marquis, if you sleep like this at the Council of state, upon my soul, your country must be well governed!"

Monsieur de Sallenauve opened his eyes, shook himself, and then said, turning to me:—

"Pardon me, Monsieur le comte, but for the last ten nights I have travelled, without stopping, to meet you here; and though I spent the last night in a bed, I am still much fatigued."

So saying he rose, took a large pinch of snuff, and began to walk up and down the room, while Jacques Bricheteau continued:—

"It is a little more than a year since I received a letter from your father explaining his long silence, the plans he had made for you, and the necessity he was under of keeping his incognito for a few years longer. It was at that very time that you made your attempt to penetrate a secret the existence of which had become apparent to you."

"You made haste to escape me," I said laughing. "It was then you went to Stockholm."

"No, I went to your father's residence; I put the letter that he gave me for you into the

post at Stockholm."

"I do not seize your—"

"Nothing is easier to understand," interrupted the marquis. "I do not reside in Sweden, and we wished to throw you off the track."

"Will you continue the explanation yourself?" asked Jacques Bricheteau, who spoke, as you may have observed, my dear friend, with elegance and fluency.

"No, no, go on," said the marquis; "you are giving it admirably."

"Feeling certain that your equivocal position as to family would injure the political career your father desired you to enter, I made that remark to him in one of my letters. He agreed with me, and resolved to hasten the period of your legal recognition, which, indeed, the extinction of the family in its other branch rendered desirable. But the recognition of a natural son is a serious act which the law surrounds with many precautions. Deeds must be signed before a notary, and to do this by power of attorney would involve both in a publicity which he is anxious for the present to avoid, he being married, and, as it were, naturalized in the country of his adoption. Hence, he decided to come here himself, obtaining leave of absence for a few weeks, in order to sign in person all papers necessary to secure to you his name and property in this country. Now let me put to you a final question. Do you consent to take the name of de Sallenauve and be recognized as his son?"

"I am not a lawyer," I answered; "but it seems to me that, supposing I do not feel honored by this recognition, it does not wholly depend on me to decline it."

"Pardon me," replied Jacques Bricheteau; "under the circumstances you could, if you chose, legally contest the paternity. I will also add,—and in doing so I am sure that I express the intentions of your father,—if you think that a man who has already spent half a million on furthering your career is not a desirable father, we leave you free to follow your own course, and shall not insist in any way."

"Precisely, precisely," said Monsieur de Sallenauve, uttering that affirmation with the curt intonation and shrill voice peculiar to the relics of the old aristocracy.

Politeness, to say the least, forced me to accept the paternity thus offered to me. To the few words I uttered to that effect, Jacques Bricheteau replied gaily:—

"We certainly do not intend to make you buy a father in a poke. Monsieur le marquis is desirous of laying before you all title-deeds and documents of every kind of which he is the present holder. Moreover, as he has been so long absent from this country, he intends to prove his identity by several of his contemporaries who are still living. For instance, among the honorable personages who have already recognized him I may mention the worthy superior of the Ursuline convent, Mother Marie-des-Anges, for whom, by the bye, you have done a masterpiece."

"Faith, yes," said the marquis, "a pretty thing, and if you turn out as well in politics—"

"Well, marquis," interrupted Jacques Bricheteau, who seemed to me inclined to manage the affair, "are you ready to proceed with our young friend to the verification of the documents?"

“That is unnecessary,” I remarked, and did not think that by this refusal I pledged my faith too much; for, after all, what signify papers in the hands of a man who might have forged them or stolen them? But my father would not consent; and for more than two hours they spread before me parchments, genealogical trees, contracts, patents, documents of all kinds, from which it appeared that the family of Sallenauve is, after that of Cinq-Cygne, the most ancient family in the department of the Aube. I ought to add that the exhibition of these archives was accompanied by an infinite number of spoken details which seemed to make the identity of the Marquis de Sallenauve indisputable. On all other subjects my father is laconic; his mental capacity does not seem to me remarkable, and he willingly allowed his *mouthpiece* to talk for him. But here, in the matter of his parchments, he was loquaciously full of anecdotes, recollections, heraldic knowledge; in short, he was exactly the old noble, ignorant and superficial in all things, but possessed of Benedictine erudition where the genealogy of his family was concerned.

The *session* would, I believe, be still going on, if Jacques Bricheteau had not intervened. As the marquis was preparing to read a voluminous memorandum refuting a chapter in Tallemant des Reaux’ “Historiettes” which did not redound to the credit of the great house of Sallenauve, the wise organist remarked that it was time we dined, if we intended to keep an appointment already made for seven o’clock at the office of Maitre Achille Pigoult the notary.

We dined, not at the table-d’hote, but in private, and the dinner seemed very long on account of the silent preoccupation of the marquis, and the slowness with which, owing to his loss of teeth, he swallowed his food.

At seven o’clock we went to the notary’s office; but as it is now two o’clock in the morning, and I am heavy with sleep, I shall put off till to-morrow an account of what happened there.

May 4, 5 A.M.

I reckoned on peaceful slumbers, embellished by dreams. On the contrary, I did not sleep an hour, and I have waked up stung to the heart by an odious thought. But before I transmit that thought to you, I must tell you what happened at the notary’s.

Maitre Achille Pigoult, a puny little man, horribly pitted with the small-pox, and afflicted with green spectacles, above which he darts glances of vivacious intelligence, asked us if we felt warm enough, the room having no fire. Politeness required us to say yes, although he had already given signs of incendiarism by striking a match, when, from a distant and dark corner of the room, a broken, feeble voice, the owner of which we had not as yet perceived, interposed to prevent the prodigality.

“No, Achille, no, don’t make a fire,” said an old man. “There are five in the room, and the lamp gives out a good heat; before long the room would be too hot to bear.”

Hearing these words, the marquis exclaimed:—

“Ah! this is the good Monsieur Pigoult, formerly justice of the peace.”

Thus recognized, the old man rose and went up to my father, into whose face he peered.

“*Parbleu*!” he cried, “I recognize you for a Champagnard of the *vieille roche*. Achille

did not deceive me in declaring that I should see two of my former acquaintances. You," he said, addressing the organist, "you are little Bricheteau, the nephew of our good abbess, Mother Marie-des-Anges; but as for that tall skeleton, looking like a duke and peer, I can't recall his name. However, I don't blame my memory; after eighty-six years' service it may well be rusty."

"Come, grandfather," said Achille Pigoult, "brush up your memory; and you, gentlemen, not a word, not a gesture. I want to be clear in my own mind. I have not the honor to know the client for whom I am asked to draw certain deeds, and I must, as a matter of legal regularity, have him identified."

While his son spoke, the old man was evidently straining his memory. My father, fortunately, has a nervous twitching of the face, which increased under the fixed gaze his *certifier* fastened upon him.

"Hey! *parbleu*! I have it!" he cried. "Monsieur is the Marquise de Sallenauve, whom we used to call the 'Grimacer,' and who would now be the owner of the Chateau d'Arcis if, instead of wandering off, like the other fools, into emigration, he had stayed at home and married his pretty cousin."

"You are still *sans-culotte*, it seems," said the marquis, laughing.

"Messieurs," said the notary, gravely, "the proof I had arranged for myself is conclusive. This proof, together with the title-deeds and documents Monsieur le marquis has shown to me, and which he deposits in my hands, together with the certificate of identity sent to me by Mother Marie-des-Anges, who cannot, under the rules of her Order, come to my office, are sufficient for the execution of the deeds which I have here—already prepared. The presence of two witnesses is required for one of them. Monsieur Bricheteau will, of course, be the witness on your side and on the other my father, if agreeable to you; it is an honor that, as I think, belongs to him of right, for, as one may say, this matter has revived his memory."

"Very good, messieurs, let us proceed," said Jacques Bricheteau, heartily.

The notary sat down at his desk; the rest of us sat in a circle around him, and the reading of the first document began. Its purport was to establish, authentically, the recognition made by Francois-Henri-Pantaleon Dumirail, Marquis de Sallenauve, of me, his son. But in the course of the reading a difficulty came up. Notarial deeds must, under pain of being null and void, state the domicile of all contracting parties. Now, where was my father's domicile? This part had been left in blank by the notary, who now insisted on filling it before proceeding farther.

"As for this domicile," said Achille Pigoult, "Monsieur le marquis appears to have none in France, as he does not reside in this country, and has owned no property here for a long time."

"It is true," said the marquis, seeming to put more meaning into his words than they naturally carried, "I am a mere vagabond in France."

"Ah!" said Jacques Bricheteau, "vagabonds like you, who can present their sons with the necessary sums to buy estates, are not to be pitied. Still, the remark is a just one, not only as to France, but as to your residence in foreign countries. With your eternal mania

for roving, it is really very difficult to assign you a domicile."

"Well," said Achille Pigoult, "it does not seem worth while to let so small a matter stop us. Monsieur," he continued, motioning to me, "is now the owner of the Chateau d'Arcis, for an engagement to sell is as good as the sale itself. What more natural, therefore, than that the father's domicile should be stated as being on his son's estate, especially as this is really the family property now returned into the hands of the family, being purchased by the father for the son, particularly as that father is known and recognized by some of the oldest and most important inhabitants of the place?"

"Yes, that is true," said old Pigoult, adopting his son's opinion without hesitation.

"In short," said Jacques Bricheteau, "you think the matter can go on."

"You see that my father, a man of great experience, did not hesitate to agree with me. We say, therefore," continued the notary, taking up his pen, "Francois-Henri-Pantaleon Dumirail, Marquis de Sallenauve, domiciled with Monsieur Charles de Sallenauve, his natural son, by him legally recognized, in the house known as the Chateau d'Arcis, arrondissement of Arcis-sur-Aube, department of the Aube."

The rest of the deed was read and executed without comment.

Then followed a rather ridiculous scene.

"Now, Monsieur le comte," said Jacques Bricheteau, "embrace your father."

The marquis opened his arms rather indifferently, and I coldly fell into them, vexed with myself for not being deeply moved and for not hearing in my heart the voice of kindred. Was this barrenness of emotion the result of my sudden accession to wealth? A moment later a second deed made me possessor, on payment of one hundred and eighty thousand francs in ready money, of the Chateau d'Arcis,—a grand edifice which had caught my eye, on my first arrival in the town, by its lordly and feudal air.

"You may congratulate yourselves," said Achille Pigoult, "that you have got that estate for a song."

"Come, come!" said Jacques Bricheteau, "how long have you had it on your hands to sell? Your client would have let it go for one hundred and fifty thousand to others, but, as family property, you thought you could get more from us. We shall have to spend twenty thousand to make the house habitable; the land doesn't return a rental of more than four thousand; so that our money, all expenses deducted, won't return us more than two and a half per cent."

"What are you complaining about?" returned Achille Pigoult. "You have employment to give and money to pay in the neighborhood, and what can be better for a candidate?"

"Ah! that electoral business," said Jacques Bricheteau; "we will talk about that to-morrow when we bring you the purchase-money and your fees."

Thereupon we took leave, and returned to the Hotel de la Poste, where I bade good-night to my father and came to my room to write to you.

Now I must tell you the terrible idea that drove sleep from my brain and put the pen once more in my hand,—although I am somewhat distracted from it by writing the

foregoing two pages, and I do not see quite as much evidence for my notion as I did before I renewed this letter.

One thing is certain: during the last year many romantic incidents have happened to me. You may say that adventure seems to be the logical way of life for one in my position; that my birth, the chances that brought you (whose fate is so like mine) and me together, my relations with Marianina and my handsome housekeeper, and perhaps I might say with Madame de l'Estorade, all point to the possession of a fickle star, and that my present affair is only one of its caprices.

True; but what if, at the present moment under the influence of that star, I were implicated without my knowledge in some infernal plot of which I was made the passive instrument?

To put some order into my ideas, I begin by this half-million spent for an interest which you must agree is very nebulous,—that of fitting me to succeed my father in the ministry of some imaginary country, the name of which is carefully concealed from me.

Next: who is spending these fabulous sums on me? Is it a father tenderly attached to a child of love? No, it is a father who shows me the utmost coldness, who goes to sleep when deeds which concern our mutual existence are being drawn, and for whom I, on my side, am conscious of no feeling; in fact, not to mince my words, I should think him a great booby of an *emigre* if it were not for the filial respect and duty I force myself to feel for him.

But—suppose this man were not my father, not even the Marquis de Sallenauve, as he asserts himself to be; suppose, like that unfortunate Lucien de Rubempre, whose history has made so much noise, I were caught in the toils of a serpent like that false abbe Don Carlos Herrera, and had made myself liable to the same awful awakening. You may say to me that you see no such likelihood; that Carlos Herrera had an object in fascinating Lucien and making him his double; but that I, an older man with solid principles and no love of luxury, who have lived a life of thought and toil, should fear such influence, is nonsense.

So be it. But why should the man who recognizes me as his son conceal the very country in which he lives, and the name by which he is known in that equally nameless Northern land which it is intimated that he governs? Why make such sacrifices for my benefit and show so little confidence? And see the mystery with which Jacques Bricheteau has surrounded my life! Do you think that that long-winded explanation of his explained it?

All this, my dear friend, rolling in my head and clashing with that half-million already paid to me, has given substance to a strange idea, at which you may perhaps laugh, but which, nevertheless, is not without precedent in criminal annals.

I told you just now that this thought invaded me as it were suddenly; it came like an instinct upon me. Assuredly, if I had had the faintest inkling of it last evening, I would have cut off my right hand sooner than sign that deed by which I have henceforth bound my fate to that of an unknown man whose past and future may be as gloomy as a canto of Dante's Hell, and who may drag me down with him into utter darkness.

In short, this idea—round which I am making you circle because I cannot bring myself

to let you enter it—here it is, in all its crudity; I am afraid of being, without my knowledge, the agent, the tool of those associations of false coiners who are known in criminal records to concoct schemes as complicated and mysterious as the one I am now involved in, in order to put into circulation the money they coin. In all such cases you will find great coming and going of accomplices; cheques drawn from a distance on the bankers in great commercial centres like Paris, Stockholm, Rotterdam. Often one hears of poor dupes compromised. In short, do you not see in the mysterious ways of this Bricheteau something like an imitation, a reflection of the manoeuvres to which these criminal workers are forced to have recourse, arranging them with a talent and a richness of imagination to which a novelist can scarcely attain?

One thing is certain: there is about me a thick unwholesome atmosphere, in which I feel that air is lacking and I cannot breathe. However, assure me, if you can, persuade me, I ask no better, that this is all an empty dream. But in any case I am determined to have a full explanation with these two men to-morrow, and to obtain, although so late, more light than they have yet doled out to me….

Another and yet stranger fact! As I wrote those last words, a noise of horses' hoofs came from the street. Distrustful now of everything, I opened my window, and in the dawning light I saw a travelling carriage before the door of the inn, the postilion in the saddle, and Jacques Bricheteau talking to some one who was seated in the vehicle. Deciding quickly on my action, I ran rapidly downstairs; but before I reached the bottom I heard the roll of wheels and the cracking of the postilion's whip. At the foot of the staircase I came face to face with Jacques Bricheteau. Without seeming embarrassed, in fact with the most natural air in the world, he said to me,—

"What! my dear ward already up?"

"Of course; the least I could do was to say farewell to my excellent father."

"He did not wish it," replied that damned musician, with an imperturbability and phlegm that deserved a thrashing; "he feared the emotions of parting."

"Is he so dreadfully hurried that he could not even give a day to his new and ardent paternity?"

"The truth is, he is an original; what he came to do, he has done; after that, to his mind, there is nothing to stay for."

"Ah! I understand; he hastens to those high functions he performs at that Northern court!"

Jacques Bricheteau could no longer mistake the ironical tone in which these words were said.

"Until now," he said, "you have shown more faith."

"Yes; but I confess that faith begins to stagger under the weight of the mysteries with which it is loaded down without relief."

"Seeing you at this decisive moment in your career giving way to doubts which our whole conduct pursued to you through many years ought to refute, I should be almost in despair," replied Jacques Bricheteau, "if I had none but personal denials and asseverations

to offer you. But, as you will remember, old Pigoult spoke of an aunt of mine, living in this neighborhood, where you will soon, I hope, find her position a most honorable one. I had arranged that you should see her in the course of the day; but now, if you will grant me the time to shave, I will take you at once, early as it is, to the convent of the Ursulines. There you shall question Mother Marie-des-Anges, who has the reputation of a saint throughout this whole department, and I think that at the close of your interview with her no doubt can remain upon your mind."

While that devil of a man was speaking, his countenance had so perfect a look of integrity and benevolence, his speech, always calm, elegant, and self-possessed, so impressed the mind of his hearer, that I felt the tide of my anger going down and my sense of security rising.

In fact, his answer *is* irresistible. The convent of the Ursuline sisters—heavens and earth! that can't be the rendezvous of makers of false coin; and if the Mother Marie-des-Anges guarantees my father to me, as it appears she has already done to the notary, I should be foolish indeed to persist in my doubts.

"Very good," I said to Jacques Bricheteau, "I will go up and get my hat and walk up and down the bank of the river until you are ready."

"That's right; and be sure you watch the door of the hotel to see that I do not give you the slip as I did once upon a time on the Quai de Bethune."

Impossible to be more intelligent than that man; he seems to divine one's thoughts. I was ashamed of this last doubt of mine, and told him that, on the whole, I would go and finish a letter while awaiting him. It was this letter, dear friend, which I must now close if I wish it to go by to-day's post. I will write you soon of my visit to the convent.

XIV. MARIE-GASTON TO MADAME LA COMTESSE DE L’ESTORADE

Arcis-sur-Aube, May 6, 1839.

Madame,—In any case I should gladly have profited by the request you were so good as to make that I should write to you during my stay in this town; but in granting me this favor you could not really know the full extent of your charity. Without you, madame, and the consolation of writing to you sometimes, what would become of me under the habitual weight of my sad thoughts in a town which has neither society, nor commerce, nor curiosities, nor environs; and where all intellectual activity spends itself on the making of pickled pork, soap-grease, stockings, and cotton night-caps. Dorlange, whom I shall not long call by that name (you shall presently know why) is so absorbed in steering his electoral frigate that I scarcely see him.

I told you, madame, that I resolved to come down here and join our mutual friend in consequence of a certain trouble of mind apparent in one of his letters, which informed me of a great revolution taking place in his life. I am able to-day to be more explicit. Dorlange at last knows his father. He is the natural son of the Marquis de Sallenauve, the last living scion of one of the best families in Champagne. Without explaining the reasons which have hitherto induced him to keep his son’s birth secret, the marquis has now recognized him legally. He has also bought and presented to him an estate formerly belonging to the Sallenauve family. This estate is situated in Arcis itself, and its possession will assist the project of our friend’s election. That project dates much farther back than we thought; and it did not take its rise in the fancy of Dorlange.

A year ago, the marquis began to prepare for it by sending his son a sum of money for the purchase of real estate in conformity with electoral laws; and it is also for the furtherance of this purpose that he has now made him doubly a landowner. The real object of all these sacrifices not seeming plain to Charles de Sallenauve, doubts have arisen in his mind, and it was to assist in dispelling them that my friendship for the poor fellow brought me here.

The marquis appears to be as odd and whimsical as he is opulent; for, instead of remaining in Arcis, where his presence and his name would contribute to the success of the election he desires, the very day after legal formalities attending the recognition of his son had been complied with, he departed furtively for foreign countries, where he says he has important interests, without so much as taking leave of his son. This coldness has poisoned the happiness Charles would otherwise feel in these events; but one must take fathers as they are, for Dorlange and I are living proofs that all cannot have them as they want them.

Another eccentricity of the marquis is the choice he has made, as chief assistant in his son’s election, of an old Ursuline nun, with whom he seems to have made a bargain, in which, strange to say, you have unconsciously played a part. Yes, madame, the Saint-Ursula for which, unknown to yourself, you were posing, will have, to all appearances, a

considerable influence on the election of our friend. The case is this:

For many years Mother Marie-des-Anges, superior of the Ursuline convent at Arcis-sur-Aube, has desired to install in the chapel of her convent an image of its patron saint. But this abbess, who is a woman of taste and intelligence, would not listen to the idea of one of those stock figures which can be bought ready-made from the venders of church decorations. On the other hand, she thought it was robbing her poor to spend on this purpose the large sum necessary to procure a work of art. The nephew of this excellent woman is an organist in Paris to whom the Marquis de Sallenauve, then in emigration, had confided the care of his son. When it became a question of making Charles a deputy, the marquis naturally thought of Arcis, a place where his family had left so many memories. The organist also recollected his aunt's desire; he knew how influential she was in that region because of her saintliness, and having in his nature a touch of that intrigue which likes to undertake things difficult and arduous, he went to see her, with the approval of the Marquis de Sallenauve, and let her know that one of the most skilful sculptors in Paris was ready to make her the statue of Saint-Ursula if she, on her side, would promise to secure the artist's election as deputy from the arrondissement of Arcis.

The old nun did not think the undertaking beyond her powers. She now possesses the object of her pious longings; the statue arrived some days ago, and is already in the chapel of the convent, where she proposes to give it, before long, a solemn inauguration. It now remains to be seen whether the good nun will perform her part of the contract.

Well, madame, strange to say, after hearing and inquiring into the whole matter I shall not be surprised if this remarkable woman should carry the day. From the description our friend gives of her, Mother Marie-des-Anges is a small woman, short and thick-set, whose face is prepossessing and agreeable beneath its wrinkles and the mask of saffron-tinted pallor which time and the austerities of a cloister have placed upon it. Carrying very lightly the weight of her corpulence and also that of her seventy-six years, she is lively, alert, and frisky to a degree that shames the youngest of us. For fifty years she has governed in a masterly manner her community, which has always been the most regular, the best organized, and also the richest society in the diocese of Troyes. Admirably fitted for the training of youth, she has long conducted a school for girls, which is famous throughout the department of the Aube and adjacent regions. Having thus superintended the education of nearly all the daughters of the best houses in the province, it is easy to imagine the influence she has acquired among the aristocracy,—an influence she probably intends to use in the electoral struggle she has promised to take part in.

On the other hand, it appears that this really extraordinary woman is the sovereign disposer of the votes of the democratic party in the arrondissement of Arcis. Until now, the existence of that party in Arcis has been considered problematical; but it is actually, by its nature, active and stirring, and our candidate proposes to present himself under its banner. Evidently, therefore, the support the good mother has promised will be useful and important.

I am sure you will admire with me the—as one might say—bicephalous ability of this old nun, who has managed to keep well with the nobility and the secular clergy on the one hand, and on the other to lead with her wand the radical party, their sworn enemy. Admirable for her charity and her lucid intellect, respected throughout the region as a

saint, exposed during the Revolution to a dreadful persecution, which she bore with rare courage, one can easily understand her close relations with the upper and conservative classes; but why she should be equally welcome to democrats and to the subverters of order would seem, at first, to pass all belief.

The power which she undoubtedly wields over the revolutionary party took its rise, madame, in a struggle which they formerly had together. In 1793 that amiable party were bent on cutting her throat. Driven from her convent, and convicted of harboring a "refractory" priest, she was incarcerated, arraigned before the Revolutionary tribunal, and condemned to death. The matter was reported to Danton, a native of Arcis, and then a member of the National Convention. Danton had known Mother Marie-des-Anges; he thought her the most virtuous and enlightened woman he had ever met. Hearing of her condemnation, he was furiously angry, and wrote, as they said in those days, a high-horse letter to the Revolutionary tribunal, and, with an authority no human being in Arcis would have dared to contest, he ordered a reprieve.

The same day he mounted the tribune, and after speaking in general terms of the "bloody boobies" who by their foolish fury compromised the future of the Revolution, he told who and what Mother Marie-des-Anges really was; he dwelt on her marvellous aptitude for the training of youth, and he presented a scheme in which she was placed at the head of a "grand national gynaecium," the organization of which was to be made the subject of another decree. Robespierre, who would have thought the intellect of an Ursuline nun only a more imperative reason for bringing her under the revolutionary axe, was absent that day from the session, and the motion was voted with enthusiasm. The head of Mother Marie-des-Anges being indispensably necessary to the carrying out of this decree of the sovereign people, she kept it on her shoulders, and the headsman put aside his machine.

Though the other decree, organising the Grand National Gynaecium, was lost sight of in the many other duties that devolved upon the Convention, the excellent nun carried it out after her fashion. Instead of something grand and Greek and national, she started in Arcis a secular girl's-school, and as soon as a little quiet was restored to the minds of the community, pupils flocked in from all quarters. Under the Empire Mother Marie-des-Anges was able to reconstitute her Ursuline sisterhood, and the first act of her restored authority was a recognition of gratitude. She decreed that on every year on the 5th of April, the anniversary of Danton's death, a service should be held in the chapel of the convent for the repose of his soul. To those who objected to this edict she answered: "Do you know many for whom it is more necessary to implore God's mercy?"

Under the Restoration, the celebration of this service became a sort of scandal; but Mother Marie-des-Anges would never hear of suppressing it, and the great veneration which has always surrounded her obliged these cavillers to hold their tongues. This courageous obstinacy had its reward, under the government of July. To-day Mother Marie-des-Anges is high in court favor, and there is nothing she cannot obtain in the most august regions of power; but it is only just to add that she asks nothing,—not even for her charities, for she provides the means to do them nobly by the wise manner in which she administers the property of her convent.

Her gratitude, thus openly shown to the memory of the great revolutionist, has been of

course to the revolutionary party a potent recommendation, but not the only one.

In Arcis the leader of the advanced Left is a rich miller named Laurent Goussard, who possesses two or three mills on the river Aube. This man, formerly a member of the revolutionary municipality of Arcis and the intimate friend of Danton, was the one who wrote to the latter telling him that the axe was suspended over the throat of the ex-superior of the Ursulines. This, however, did not prevent the worthy *sans-culotte* from buying up the greater part of the convent property when it was sold under the name of national domain.

At the period when Mother Marie-des-Anges was authorized to reconstitute her community, Laurent Goussard, who had not made much by his purchase, went to see the good abbess, and proposed to her to buy back the former property of her convent. Very shrewd in business, Laurent Goussard, whose niece Mother Marie-des-Anges had educated gratuitously, seemed to pique himself on the great liberality of his offer, the terms of which were that the sisterhood should reimburse him the amount of his purchase-money. The dear man was not however making a bad bargain, for the difference in the value of assignats with which he had paid and the good sound money he would receive made a pretty profit. But Mother Marie-des-Anges, remembering that without his warning Danton could not have saved her, did better still for her first helper. At the time when Laurent Goussard made his offer the community of the Ursulines was, financially speaking, in an excellent position. Having since its restoration received many liberal gifts, it was also enriched by the savings of its superior, made from the proceeds of her secular school, which she generously made over to the common fund. Laurent Goussard must therefore have been thunderstruck when he read the following letter:—

> Your proposal does not suit me. My conscience will not allow me to buy property below its proper value. Before the Revolution the property of our abbey was estimated at—[so much]. That is the price I choose to give, and not that to which it has fallen since the great depreciation of all property called national. In a word, my friend, I wish to pay you more than you ask; let me know if that suits you.

Laurent Goussard thought at first that either she had misunderstood him or he her. But when it became clear to him that owing to these pretended scruples of Mother Marie-des-Anges, he was the gainer of fifty thousand francs, he would not do violence to so tender a conscience, and he pocketed this profit (which came to him literally from heaven), but he went about relating everywhere the marvellous proceeding, which, as you can well imagine, put Mother Marie-des-Anges on a pinnacle of respect (especially from the holders of other national property) which leaves her nothing to fear from any future revolution. Personally Laurent Goussard has become her slave, her henchman. He does no business, he takes no step, he never moves a sack of flour without going to her for advice; and, as she said in joke the other day, if she took a fancy to make a John the Baptist of the sub-prefect, Laurent Goussard would bring her his head on a charger. That is proof enough that he will also bring his vote and that of his friends to any candidate she may favor.

Among the clergy Mother Marie-des-Anges has, naturally, many affiliations,—as much on account of her high reputation for goodness as for the habit of her order, but she particularly counts among the number of her most zealous servitors Monseigneur Troubert, bishop of the diocese, who, though formerly a familiar of the Congregation [see “The Vicar of Tours”], has nevertheless managed to secure from the dynasty of July an

archbishopric which will lead to a cardinalship.

When you have the clergy you have, or you are very near having, the legitimist party with you,—a party which, while passionately desirous of free education and filled with hatred for the July throne, is not averse, when occasion offers, to yielding to a monstrous union with the radical party. Now the head of the legitimists in Arcis and its neighborhood is, of course, the family of Cinq-Cygne. Never does the old marquise, whose haughty nature and powerful will you, madame, know well [see “An Historical Mystery”],—never does she drive into Arcis from her chateau of Cinq-Cygne, without paying a visit to Mother Marie-des-Anges, who in former days educated her daughter Berthe, now the Duchesse Georges de Maufrigneuse.

But now we come to the most opposing and resisting side,—that of the conservatives, which must not be confounded with the party of the administration. Here we find as its leader the Comte de Gondreville, your husband’s colleague in the Chamber of peers. Closely allied to the count is a very influential man, his old friend Grevin, formerly mayor and notary of Arcis, who, in turn, draws after him another elector of considerable influence, Maitre Achille Pigoult, to whom, on retiring from active life, he sold his practice as notary.

But Mother Marie-des-Anges has a powerful means of access to the Comte de Gondreville through his daughter, the Marechale de Carigliano. That great lady, who, as you know, has taken to devotion, goes into retreat every year at the Ursuline convent. More than that, the good Mother, without giving any explanation, intimates that she has a lever of some kind on the Comte de Gondreville known to herself only; in fact, the life of that old regicide—turned senator, then count of the Empire, then peer of France under two dynasties—has wormed itself through too many tortuous underground ways not to allow us to suppose the existence of secrets he might not care to have unmasked.

Now Gondreville is Grevin,—his confidant, and, as they say, his tool, his catspaw for the last fifty years. But even supposing that by an utter impossibility their close union should, under present circumstances, be sundered, we are certainly sure of Achille Pigoult, Grevin’s successor, on whom, when the purchase of the chateau d’Arcis was made in his office by the Marquis de Sallenauve, a fee was bestowed of such an unusual amount that to accept it was virtually to pledge himself.

As for the ruck of the electors, our friend cannot fail to make recruits there, by the work he is about to give in repairing the chateau, which, fortunately for him, is falling into ruin in several places. We must also count on the manifesto which Charles de Sallenauve has just issued, in which he openly declares that he will accept neither favors nor employment from the government. So that, really, taking into consideration his own oratorical talent, the support of the Opposition journals both here and in Paris, the insults and calumnies which the ministerial journals are already beginning to fire upon him, I feel great hopes of his success.

Forgive me for presenting to you in glowing colors the parliamentary future of a man of whom, you said to me the other day, you felt you could not safely make a friend, because of the lofty and rather impertinent assumption of his personality. To tell the truth, madame, whatever political success may be in store for Charles de Sallenauve, I fear he may one

day regret the calmer fame of which he was already assured in the world of art. But neither he nor I was born under an easy and accommodating star. Birth has been a costly thing to us; it is therefore doubly cruel not to like us. You have been kind to me because you fancy that a lingering fragrance of our dear Louise still clings to me; give something, I beseech you, of the same kindness to him whom I have not hesitated in this letter to call our friend.

XV. MARIE-GASTON TO THE COMTESSE DE L’ESTORADE

Arcis-sur-Aube, May 13, 1839.

Madame,—I see that the electoral fever is upon you, as you are good enough to send me from Monsieur de l’Estorade so many *discouragements* which certainly deserve consideration.

We knew already of the mission given to Comte Maxime de Trailles,—a mission he endeavored at first to conceal under some irrigating project. We even know what you, madame, seem not to know,—that this able ministerial agent has found means to combine with the cares of electoral politics those of his own private policy. Monsieur Maxime de Trailles, if we are rightly informed, was on the point of succumbing to the chronic malady with which he has been so long afflicted; I mean *debt*. Not debts, for we say “the debt of Monsieur de Trailles,” as we say “the debt of England.” In this extremity the patient, resolved on heroic remedies, adopted that of marriage, which might perhaps be called marriage *in extremis*.

To cut a long story short, Monsieur de Trailles was sent to Arcis to put an end to the candidacy of an upstart of the Left centre, a certain Simon Giguet; and having brought forward the mayor of the town as the ministerial candidate, he finds the said mayor, named Beauvisage, possessed of an only daughter, rather pretty, and able to bring her husband five hundred thousand francs amassed in the honorable manufacture of cotton night-caps. Now you see, I am sure, the mechanism of the affair.

As for our own claims, we certainly do not make cotton night-caps, but we make statues,—statues for which we are decorated with the Legion of honor; religious statues, inaugurated with great pomp by Monseigneur the bishop of the diocese and all the constituted authorities; statues, or rather *a* statue, which the whole population of the town has flocked to the Ursuline convent to behold, where Mesdames the nuns, not a little puffed up with this magnificent addition to their bijou of a chapel, have kept their house and their oratory open to all comers for this whole day. Is not that likely to popularize our candidacy?

This evening, to crown the ceremony of inaugurating our Saint-Ursula, we give in our chateau of Arcis a banquet to fifty guests, among whom we have had the malice to invite (with the chief inhabitants of the place) all the ministerial functionaries and, above all, the ministerial candidate. But, in view of our own declared candidacy, we feel pretty well assured that the latter will not respond to the invitation. So much the better! more room for others; and the missing guests, whose names will be made known on the morrow, will be convicted of a *servilism* which will, we think, injure their influence with the population.

Yesterday we paid a visit at the chateau de Cinq-Cygne, where d’Arthez presented us, in the first place, to the Princesse de Cadignan, who is wonderfully well preserved. Both she and the old Marquise de Cinq-Cygne received Dorlange—I should say, Sallenauve—in the warmest manner. It was from them that we learned the history of Monsieur Maxime de

Trailles' mission and its present results. It seems that on his arrival the ministerial agent received some attentions at Cinq-Cygne,—mere floating sticks, to discover the set of his current. He evidently flattered himself that he should find support at Cinq-Cygne for his electioneering intrigue; which is so far from being the case that Duc Georges de Maufrigneuse, to whom, as a Jockey Club comrade, he told all his projects, gave us the information about them which I have now given to you, and which, if you will be so kind, I should like you to make over to Monsieur de l'Estorade.

May 12th.

The dinner has taken place, madame; it was magnificently served, and Arcis will talk about it for some time to come. Sallenauve has in that great organist (who, by the bye, showed his talent on the organ admirably during the ceremony of inauguration) a sort of steward and factotum who leaves all the Vatels of the world far behind him; he would never have fallen on his sword for lack of a fish! Colored lamps, garlands, draperies, decorated the dining-room; even fireworks were provided; nothing was wanting to the fete, which lasted to a late hour in the gardens of the chateau, where the populace danced and drank to its heart's content.

Nearly all the invited guests came except those we desired to compromise. The invitations having been sent at short notice, it was amusing to read the notes and letters of excuse, which Sallenauve ordered to be brought to him in the salon as they arrived. As he opened each he took care to say: "This is from Monsieur the sub-prefect; this from the *procureur-du-roi*; this from Monsieur Vinet the substitute, expressing regret that they cannot accept the invitation." All these concerted refusals were received with smiles and whispers by the company; but when a letter arrived from Beauvisage, and Sallenauve read aloud the "impossibility in which he found himself to *correspond* to his politeness," the hilarity grew noisy and general, and was only stopped by the entrance of Monsieur Martener, examining judge, who performed an act of courage in coming to the dinner which his colleagues declined. We must remark, however, than an examining-judge has two sides to him. On that of the judge he is irremovable; he can only be deprived of the slight increase of salary he receives as an examiner and of the privilege of signing warrants and questioning thieves,—splendid rights of which the chancellor can mulct him by a stroke of his pen. But allowing that Monsieur Martener was only semi-brave, he was greeted on this occasion as a full moon.

The Duc de Maufrigneuse, d'Arthez, and Monseigneur the bishop, who was staying at Cinq-Cygne for a few days, were all present, and this made more noticeable the absence of one man, namely, Grevin, whose excuse, sent earlier in the day, was not read to the company. The non-appearance of the Comte de Gondreville was explained by the recent death of his grandson, Charles Keller; and in sending the invitation Sallenauve had been careful to let him know he should understand a refusal. But that Grevin, the count's right arm, should absent himself, seemed to show that he and his patron were convinced of the probable election of Beauvisage, and would have no intercourse with the new candidate.

The dinner being given in honor of Saint-Ursula's installation, which could not be celebrated by a banquet in the convent, Sallenauve had a fine opportunity for the following toast:—

“To the Mother of the poor; the noble and saintly spirit which, for fifty years, has shone on Champagne, and to which we owe the vast number of distinguished and accomplished women who adorn this beautiful region of our country.”

If you know, as I do, madame, what a forlorn, beggarly region Champagne is, you would say, or something like it, that Sallenauve is a rascally fellow, and that the passion to enter the legislature makes a man capable of shocking deceit. Was it worth while, in fact, for a man who usually respects himself to boldly tell a lie of criminal dimensions, when a moment later a little unforeseen circumstance occurred which did more than all the speeches ever uttered to commend him to the sympathy of the electors?

You told me, madame, that your son Armand found a strong likeness to the portraits of Danton in our friend Sallenauve; and it seems that the boy’s remark was true, for several persons present who had known the great revolutionist during his lifetime made the same observation. Laurent Goussard, who, as I told you in a former letter, was Danton’s friend, was also, in a way, his brother-in-law; for Danton, who was something of a gallant, had been on close terms for several years with the miller’s sister. Well, the likeness must be striking, for after dinner, while we were taking our coffee, the worthy Goussard, whose head was a little warmed by the fumes of wine, came up to Sallenauve and asked him whether he was certain he had made no mistake about his father, and could honestly declare that Danton had nothing to do with his making.

Sallenauve took the matter gaily, and answered arithmetically,—

“Danton died April 5, 1794. To be his son, I must have been born no later than January, 1795, which would make me forty-four years old to-day. But the register of my birth, and I somewhat hope my face, make me out exactly thirty.”

“Yes, you are right,” said Laurent Goussard; “figures demolish my idea; but no matter, —we’ll vote for you all the same.”

I think the man is right; this chance resemblance is likely to have great weight in the election. You must remember, madame, that, in spite of the fatal facts which cling about his memory, Danton is not an object of horror and execration in Arcis, where he was born and brought up. In the first place time has purged him; his grand character and powerful intellect remain, and the people are proud of their compatriot. In Arcis they talk of Danton as in Marseilles they talk of Cannebiere. Fortunate, therefore, is our candidate’s likeness to this demigod, the worship of whom is not confined to the town, but extends to the surrounding country.

These voters *extra muros* are sometimes curiously simple-minded, and obvious contradictions trouble them not at all. Some agents sent into the adjacent districts have used this fancied resemblance; and as in a rural propaganda the object is less to strike fair than to strike hard, Laurent Goussard’s version, apocryphal as it is, is hawked about the country villages with a coolness that admits of no contradiction.

While this pretended revolutionary origin is advancing our friend’s prospects in one direction, in another the tale put forth to the worthy voters whom it is desirable to entice is different, but truer and not less striking to the minds of the country-people. This is the gentlemen, they are told, who has bought the chateau of Arcis; and as the chateau of Arcis stands high above the town and is known to all the country round, it is to these simple folk

a species of symbol. They are always ready to return to memories of the past, which is much less dead and buried than people suppose; “Ah! he’s the *seigneur* of the chateau,” they say.

This, madame, is how the electoral kitchen is carried on and the way in which a deputy is cooked.

XVI. MARIE-GASTON TO THE COMTESSE DE L’ESTORADE

Arcis-sur-Aube, May 15, 1839.

Madame,—You do me the honor to say that my letters amuse you, and you tell me not to fear that I send too many.

We are no longer at the Hotel de la Poste, having left it for the chateau; but thanks to the rivalry existing between the two inns, the Poste and the Mulet, in the latter of which Monsieur de Trailles has established his headquarters, we are kept informed of what is going on in the town and among our enemies. Since our departure, as our late landlord informs us, a Parisian journalist has arrived at his hotel. This individual, whose name I do not know, at once announced himself as Jack-the-giant-killer, sent down to reinforce with his Parisian vim and vigor the polemic which the local press, subsidized by the “bureau of public spirit,” has directed against us.

In that there is nothing very grave or very gay; since the world was a world, governments have always found pens for sale, and never have they failed to buy them; but the comedy of this affair begins with the co-arrival and the co-presence in the hotel of a young lady of very problematical virtue. The name of this young lady as it appears on her passport is Mademoiselle Chocardelle; but the journalist in speaking of her calls her Antonia, or, when he wants to treat her with more respect, Mademoiselle Antonia.

Now, what can bring Mademoiselle Chocardelle to Arcis? A pleasure trip, you will say, offered to her by the journalist, who combines with that object our daily defamation and his consequent earnings from the secret-service fund of the government. Not at all; Mademoiselle Chocardelle has come to Arcis on business of her own,—namely, to enforce a claim.

It seems that Charles Keller before his departure for Africa, where he met a glorious death, drew a note of hand, payable to Mademoiselle Antonia on order, for ten thousand francs, “value received in furniture,” a charming ambiguity, the furniture having been received by, and not from, Mademoiselle Chocardelle, who estimated at ten thousand francs the sacrifice she made in accepting it.

A few days after Charles Keller’s death, the note being almost due, Mademoiselle Antonia went to the counting-room of the Keller Brothers to inquire about its payment. The cashier, who is crabbed, like all cashiers, replied that he did not see how Mademoiselle Antonia had the face to present such a note; at any rate, the heads of the house were at Gondreville, where the whole family had met after receiving the fatal news, and he should pay no such note without referring the matter to them.

“Very good, then I’ll refer it to them myself,” replied Mademoiselle Antonia. Thereupon she was meditating a departure alone to Arcis, when the government felt the need of insulting us with more wit and point than provincial journalism can muster, and so confided that employment to a middle-aged journalist to whom Mademoiselle Antonia

had, during the absence of Charles Keller, shown some kindness. “I am going to Arcis,” seems to have been said at the same instant by writer and lady. The most commonplace lives encounter similar coincidences.

Now, madame, admire the manner in which things link together. Setting forth on a purely selfish financial enterprise, behold Mademoiselle Chocardelle suddenly brought to the point of wielding an immense electoral influence! And observe also that her influence is of a nature to compensate for all the witty pin-pricks of her gallant companion.

Mademoiselle’s affair, it appears, hung fire. Twice she went to Gondreville, and was not admitted. The journalist was busy,—partly with his articles, and partly with certain commissions given to him by Monsieur de Trailles, under whose orders he was told to place himself. Mademoiselle Antonia was therefore much alone; and in the ennui of such solitude, she was led to create for herself a really desperate amusement.

A few steps from the Hotel de la Poste is a bridge across the Aube; a path leads down beside it, by a steep incline, to the water’s edge, which, being hidden from the roadway above and little frequented, offers peace and solitude to whoever may like to dream there to the sound of the rippling current. Mademoiselle Antonia at first took a book with her; but books not being, as she says, in her line, she looked about for other ways of killing her time, and bethought herself of fishing, for which amusement the landlord of the inn supplied her with a rod. Much pleased with her first successes, the pretty exile devoted herself to an occupation which must be attractive,—witness the fanatics that it makes; and the few persons who crossed the bridge could admire at all hours a charming naiad in a flounced gown and a broad-brimmed straw hat, engaged in fishing with the conscientious gravity of a *gamin de Paris*.

Up to this time Mademoiselle Antonia and her fishing have had nothing to do with our election; but if you will recall, madame, in the history of Don Quixote (which I have heard you admire for its common-sense and jovial reasoning) the rather disagreeable adventures of Rosinante and the muleteers, you will have a foretaste of the good luck which the development of Mademoiselle Antonia’s new passion brought to us.

Our rival, Beauvisage, is not only a successful stocking-maker and an exemplary mayor, but he is also a model husband, having never tripped in loyalty to his wife, whom he respects and admires. Every evening, by her orders, he goes to bed before ten o’clock, while Madame Beauvisage and her daughter go into what Arcis is pleased to call society. But there is no more treacherous water, they say, than still water, just as there was nothing less proper and well-behaved than the calm and peaceable Rosinante on the occasion referred to.

At any rate, while making the tour of his town according to his laudable official habit, Beauvisage from the top of the bridge chanced to catch sight of the fair Parisian who with outstretched arms and gracefully bent body was pursuing her favorite pastime. A slight movement, the charming impatience with which the pretty fisher twitched her line from the water when the fish had not bitten, was perhaps the electric shock which struck upon the heart of the magistrate, hitherto irreproachable. No one can say, perhaps, how the thing really came about. But I ought to remark that during the interregnum that occurred between the making of socks and night-caps and the assumption of municipal duties,

Beauvisage himself had practised the art of fishing with a line with distinguished success. Probably it occurred to him that the poor young lady, having more ardor than science, was not going the right way to work, and the thought of improving her method may have been the real cause of his apparent degeneracy. However that may be, it is certain that, crossing the bridge in company with her mother, Mademoiselle Beauvisage suddenly cried out, like a true *enfant terrible*,—

"Goodness! there's papa talking with that Parisian woman!"

To assure herself at a glance of the monstrous fact, to rush down the bank and reach her husband (whom she found with laughing lips and the happy air of a browsing sheep), to blast him with a stern "What are you doing here?" to order his retreat to Arcis with the air of a queen, while Mademoiselle Chocardelle, first astonished and then enlightened as to what it all meant, went off into fits of laughter, took scarcely the time I have taken to tell it. Such, madame, was the proceeding by which Madame Beauvisage, *nee* Grevin, rescued her husband; and though that proceeding may be called justifiable, it was certainly injudicious, for before night the whole town had heard of the catastrophe, and Beauvisage, arraigned and convicted by common consent of deplorable immorality, saw fresh desertions taking place in the already winnowed phalanx of his partisans.

However, the Gondreville and Grevin side still held firm, and—would you believe it, madame?—it was again Mademoiselle Antonia to whom we owe the overthrow of their last rampart.

Here is the tale of that phenomenon: Mother Marie-des-Anges wanted an interview with the Comte de Gondreville; but how to get it she did not know, because to ask for it was not, as she thought, proper. Having, it appears, unpleasant things to say to him, she did not wish to bring the old man to the convent expressly to hear them; such a proceeding seemed to her uncharitable. Besides, things comminatory delivered point-blank will often provoke their recipient instead of alarming him; whereas the same things slipped in sweetly never fail of their effect. Still, time was passing; the election, as you know, takes place to-morrow, Sunday, and the preparatory meeting of all the candidates and the electors, to-night. The poor dear saintly woman did not know what course to take, when a little matter occurred, most flattering to her vanity, which solved her doubts. A pretty sinner, she was told, who had come to Arcis to "do" Monsieur Keller the financier, then at Gondreville, out of some money, had heard of the virtues and the inexhaustible kindness of Mother Marie-des-Anges—in short, she regarded her, after Danton, as the most interesting object of the place, and deeply regretted that she dared not ask to be admitted to her presence.

An hour later the following note was left at the Hotel de la Poste:—

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Mademoiselle,—I am told that you desire to see me, but that you
do not know how to accomplish it. Nothing is easier. Ring the
door-bell of my quiet house, ask to see me, and do not be alarmed
at my black robe and aged face. I am not one of those who force
their advice upon pretty young women who do not ask for it, and
who may become in time greater saints than I. That is the whole
mystery of obtaining an interview with Mother Marie-des-Anges, who
salutes you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [Picture of
small cross.]
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An invitation so graciously given was not to be resisted; and Mademoiselle Antonia, after putting on the soberest costume she could get together, went to the convent.

I wish I could give you the details of that interview, which must have been curious; but no one was present, and nothing was known except what the lost sheep, who returned in tears, told of it. When the journalist tried to joke her on this conversion, Mademoiselle Antonia turned upon him.

“Hold your tongue,” she said; “you never in your life wrote a sentence like what she said to me.”

“What did she say to you?”

“‘Go, my child,’ said that old woman, ‘the ways of God are beautiful, and little known; there is often more of a saint in a Magdalen than in a nun.’”

The journalist laughed, but scenting danger he said,—

“When are you going again to Gondreville to see that Keller? If he doesn’t pay the money soon, I’ll hit him a blow in some article, in spite of all Maxime may say.”

“I don’t play dirty tricks myself,” replied Antonia, with dignity.

“Don’t you? Do you mean you are not going to present that note again?”

“Not now,” replied the admirer and probably the echo of Mother Marie-des-Anges, but using her own language; “I don’t blackmail a family in affliction. I should remember it on my death-bed, and doubt God’s mercy.”

“Why don’t you make yourself an Ursuline, now that we are here?”

“Ha, if I only had the courage! I might be happier if I did. But, in any case, I am not going to Gondreville; Mother Marie-des-Anges has undertaken to arrange that matter for me.”

“Foolish girl! Have you given her that note?”

“I wanted to tear it up, but she prevented me, and told me to give it to her and she would arrange it honestly for my interests.”

“Very fine! You were a creditor, and now you are a beggar.”

“No, for I have given the money in alms. I told madame to keep it for her poor.”

“Oh! if you add the vice of patronizing convents to your other vice of fishing in rivers, you will be a pleasant girl to frequent.”

“You won’t frequent me much longer, for I go to-night, and leave you to your dirty work.”

“Bless me! so you retire to the Carmelites?”

“The Carmelites!” replied Antonia, wittily; “no, my old fellow, we don’t retire to the Carmelites unless we leave a king.”

Such women, even the most ignorant, all know the story of La Valliere, whom they would assuredly have made their patroness if Sister Louise-of-the-Sacred-Mercy had been canonized.

I don’t know how Mother Marie-des-Anges managed it, but early this morning the

carriage of the old Comte de Gondreville stopped before the gate of the convent; and when the count again entered it he was driven to the office of his friend Grevin; and later in the day the latter said to several friends that certainly his son-in-law was too much of a fool, he had compromised himself with that Parisian woman, and would undoubtedly lose his election.

I am told that the rectors of the two parishes in Arcis have each received a thousand crowns for their poor from Mother Marie-des-Anges, who informed them that it came from a benefactor who did not wish his name known. Sallenauve is furious because our partisans are going about saying that the money came from him. But when you are running before the wind you can’t mathematically measure each sail, and you sometimes get more of a breeze than you really want.

Monsieur Maxime de Trailles makes no sign, but there is every reason to suppose that this failure of his candidate, which he must see is now inevitable, will bury both him and his marriage. But, at any rate, he is a clever fellow, who will manage to get his revenge.

What a curious man, madame, this organist is! His name is that of one of our greatest physicians,—though they are not related to each other,—Bricheteau. No one ever showed more activity, more presence of mind, more devotion, more intelligence; and there are not two men in all Europe who can play the organ as he does. You say you do not want Nais to be a mere piano *strummer*; then I advise you to let this Bricheteau teach her. He is a man who would show her what music really is; he will not give himself airs, for I assure you he is as modest as he is gifted. To Sallenauve he is like a little terrier; as watchful, as faithful, and I may add as ugly,—if so good and frank a countenance as his can ever be thought anything but handsome!

XVII. MARIE-GASTON TO MADAME LA COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE

Arcis-sur-Aube, May 16, 1839.

Madame,—Last evening the preparatory meeting took place,—a ridiculous ceremony, very annoying to the candidates, which cannot, however, be avoided.

Perhaps it is natural that before pledging themselves to a man who is to represent them for four or five years, voters should want to question him, and discover, if possible, what he really is. Is he a man of intelligence? Does he really sustain the ideas put forth about him? Will he be cordial and affable to the various interests which may claim his support? Is he firm in character? Can he defend his ideas—if he has any? In a word, will the constituency be worthily, faithfully, and honestly represented? That is the serious and respectable aspect of this institution, which, not being a part of the law, must, in order to be so firmly fixed in our customs, have a sound reason for its existence.

But every medal has its reverse; as may be seen in these meetings of candidates with electors puffed up by their own self-importance, eager to exercise for a moment the sovereignty they are about to delegate to their deputy, and selling it as dearly as they can to him. Considering the impertinence of certain questions addressed to a candidate, it would really seem as if the latter were a serf over whom each elector had rights of life and death. Not a corner of his private life where the unhappy man is safe from prying curiosity. All things are possible in the line of preposterous questioning; for instance: Why does the candidate prefer the wine of Champagne to the wine of Bordeaux? At Bordeaux, where wine is a religion, this preference implies an idea of non-patriotism and may seriously affect the election. Many voters go to these meetings solely to enjoy the embarrassment of the candidates. Holding them as it were in the pillory, they play with them like a child with a beetle, an old judge with the criminal he examines, or a young surgeon at an autopsy.

Others have not such elevated tastes; they come merely to enjoy the racket, the confusion of tongues which is certain to take place on such occasions. Some see their opportunity to exhibit a choice talent; for (as they say in the reports of the Chamber) when "the tumult is at its height," a cock is heard to crow or a dog to howl as if his paw were trodden upon,—noises that are imitated with marvellous accuracy. But truly, are not fools and stupid beings a majority in the world, and ought they not to have their representative?

The meeting took place in a large dance-hall, the loft for the orchestra forming a sort of private box to which non-voters were admitted, I among the number. Some ladies had already taken the front seats; Madame Marion, aunt of Simon Giguet, the Left centre candidate; Madame and Mademoiselle Mollot, wife and daughter of the clerk of the court, and some others whose names and position I did not catch. Madame and Mademoiselle Beauvisage shone conspicuously, like Brutus and Cassius, by their absence.

Before the candidacy of Monsieur Beauvisage was brought forward on the ministerial side after the death of Charles Keller, that of Monsieur Simon Giguet was thought to be

certain of success. Now, in consequence of that of our friend Sallenauve, who has in turn distanced Beauvisage, Giguet has fallen a step lower still. His father, a former colonel of the Empire, is greatly respected throughout this region. As an expression of regret for not electing his son (according to all probabilities), the electors made him, by acclamation, chairman of the meeting.

The first candidate who was called upon to speak was Simon Giguet; he made a long-winded address, full of commonplaces. Few questions were asked him which deserve a place in the present report. The audience felt that the tug of war was elsewhere.

Monsieur Beauvisage was then summoned; whereupon Maitre Achille Pigoult the notary rose, and asked leave to make a statement.

“Monsieur le maire,” he said, “has, since yesterday, been attacked by—”

“Ha! ha!” derisive laughter on the part of the electors.

Colonel Giguet rang his bell repeatedly, without being able to enforce silence. At the first lull Maitre Pigoult resumed,—

“I have the honor to inform you, gentlemen, that, attacked by an indisposition which, not serious in itself—”

Fresh interruption, noisier than the first.

Like all military men, Colonel Giguet is not patient nor parliamentary; he therefore rose and called out vehemently,—

“Messieurs, we are not at a circus. I request you to behave in a more seemly manner; if not, I leave the chair.”

It is to be supposed that men in masses like to be handled roughly; for this lesson was greeted with merry applause, after which silence appeared to be firmly re-established.

“I regret to inform you,” began Maitre Achille Pigoult, varying his formula for the third time, “that, attacked by an indisposition happily not serious, which may confine him to his chamber—”

“Throat trouble,” suggested a voice.

“—our venerable and excellent mayor,” continued Achille Pigoult, taking no notice of the interruption, “is unable to be present at this meeting. Madame Beauvisage, with whom I have just had the honor of an interview, requests me to inform you that, *for the present*, Monsieur Beauvisage renounces the honor of receiving your suffrages, and requests those of you who have given him your intelligent sympathy to transfer your votes to Monsieur Simon Giguet.”

This Achille Pigoult is a malicious fellow, who intentionally brought in the name of Madame Beauvisage to exhibit her conjugal sovereignty. But the assembly was really too provincial to catch the meaning of that little bit of treachery. Besides, in the provinces, women take part in the most virile affairs of the men. The well-known saying of the vicar’s old housekeeper, “We don’t say masses at that price,” would pass without comment in Champagne.

At last came Sallenauve. I was struck with the ease and quiet dignity of his manner.

That is a very reassuring pledge, madame, of his conduct under more trying circumstances; for when a man rises to speak it makes but little difference who and what his audience are. To an orator goaded by fear, great lords and porters are precisely the same thing. They are eyes that look at you, ears that hear you. Individuals are not there, only one huge being,—an assembly, felt as a mass, without analyzing the elements.

After enumerating briefly the ties which connected him with this region, slipping in as he did so an adroit and dignified allusion to his birth which "was not like that of others," Sallenauve stated clearly his political ideas. A Republic he thought the finest of all governments; but he did not believe it possible to establish one in France; consequently, he did not desire it. He thought that a truly parliamentary government, in which court influence should be so vigorously muzzled that nothing need be feared from its tendency to interference and caballing would best conduce to the dignity and the welfare of the nation. Liberty and equality, the two great principles that triumphed in '89, would obtain from such a government the strongest guarantees. As to the manoeuvring of the royal power against those principles, it was not for institutions to check it, but for men,—customs, public opinion, rather than laws; and for himself, Sallenauve, he should ever stand in the breach as a living obstacle. He declared himself a warm partisan of free education; believed that greater economy might be exercised in the budget; that too many functionaries were attached to the government; and, above all, that the court was too largely represented in the Chamber. To maintain his independence he was firmly resolved to accept no post and no favors from the government. Neither ought those who might elect him to expect that he would ever take steps on their behalf which were not warranted by reason and by justice. It was said that the word *impossible* was not French. Yet there was an impossibility by which he took pride in being stopped—that of injustice, and that of disloyalty, even the faintest, to the Right. [Loud applause.]

Silence being once more restored,—

"Monsieur," said one of the electors, after obtaining the floor from the chairman, "you say that you will accept no post under government. Does not that imply reproach to public functionaries? My name is Godivet; I am registrar of the archives, but I do not consider that a reason why I should incur the contempt of my fellow-citizens."

Sallenauve replied,—

"I am happy, monsieur, to learn that the government has invested a man like you with functions which you fulfil, I am sure, with perfect uprightness and great ability; but I venture to ask if you rose to your present position at one jump?"

"Certainly not, monsieur; I began by being a supernumerary for three years; after that I passed through all the grades; and I can show that favor had nothing to do with my promotion."

"Then, monsieur, what would you say if with my rank as deputy (supposing that I obtain the suffrages of this arrondissement) I, who have never been a supernumerary and never passed through any grades, and whose only claim upon the administration is that of having voted for it,—what would you say if I were suddenly appointed over your head as the director-general of your department?"

"I should say—I should say, monsieur, that the choice was a good one, because the king

himself would have made it."

"No, monsieur, you would not say it, or if you said it aloud, which I scarcely think possible, you would think in your heart that the choice was ridiculous and unjust. 'How the devil,' you would say to yourself, 'could this man, this sculptor, know anything about the intricate business of registering archives?' And you would be right in condemning such royal caprice; for what becomes of long and honorable services, justly acquired rights, and steady promotion under such a system of arbitrary choice? It is that I may not be the accomplice of this crying abuse, because I think it neither just nor honest nor useful to obtain in this way important public functions, that I denounce the system and bind myself to accept no office. Is this, monsieur, pouring contempt on public functions? Is it not rather lifting them to higher honor?"

Monsieur Godivet declared himself satisfied, and said no more.

"*Ah ca*! monsieur," cried another elector, after demanding the floor in the rather tipsy voice, "you say you will ask no favors for your constituents; then what good will you be to us?"

"My friend, I did not say I would ask nothing for my constituents. I said I would ask nothing but what was just; but that, I may add, I shall ask with energy and perseverance, for that is how justice should be followed up."

"But," persisted the voter, "there are various ways of doing justice; witness the suit I was made to lose against Jean Remy, with whom I had trouble about a boundary—"

Colonel Giguet, interrupting,—

"Come, come, you are not going, I hope to talk about your private affairs, and speak disrespectfully of magistrates?"

The voter resumed,—

"Magistrates, colonel, I respect, for I was one myself for six months in '93, and I know the law. But, returning to my point, I ask monsieur, who is here to answer questions, to me as well as to others, what he thinks about tobacco licenses."

"My opinion on tobacco licenses! That is rather difficult to formulate; I can, however, say that, if my information is correct, they are usually very well distributed."

"Hey! hey! you're a man, you!" cried the inebriate elector, "and I'll vote for you, for they can't fool you,—no! But they do give those licenses all wrong! Look at that daughter of Jean Remy. Bad neighbor. Never owned anything but his cart, and fights every day with his wife—"

"But, my good fellow," said the chairman, interposing, "you are abusing the patience of this assembly."

"No, no! let him talk!" cried voices from all parts of the room.

The voter was amusing, and Sallenauve himself seemed to let the chairman know he would like to see what the man was driving at.

The elector, being allowed to continue, went on:—

“I was going to say, with due respect to you, colonel, about that daughter of Jean Remy’s,—a man I’ll pursue to hell, for my bounds were in their right place, and them experts was all wrong. Well! what did that slut do? Left her father and mother and went to Paris! What did she do there? I didn’t go to see, but I’m told she made acquaintance with a deputy, and has got the tobacco license for the rue Mouffetard, the longest street in Paris. But I’d like to see my wife, widow of an honest man, doubled up with rheumatism for having slept in the woods during that terror in 1815,—I’d like to see my poor widow get a license!”

“But you are not dead yet,” they shouted to him from all parts of the room. The colonel, meantime, to put an end to the burlesque scene, nodded to a little confectioner who was waiting for the floor, a well-known Republican. The new questioner, in a falsetto voice, put the following insidious question to the candidate,—a question which might, by the way, be called national in Arcis,—

“What does Monsieur think of Danton?”

“Monsieur Dauphin,” said the chairman, “I have the honor to remind you that Danton belongs to history.”

“To the Pantheon of history, monsieur; that is the proper expression.”

“Well, history, or the Pantheon of history, as you please; but Danton is irrelevant here.”

“Permit me, Mr. Chairman,” said Sallenauve, “though the question does not seem to have much purpose on the bearing of this meeting, I cannot forego the opportunity thus given me to give proof of the impartiality and independence with which I can judge that great memory, the fame of which still echoes in this town.”

“Hear! hear!” cried the assembly, almost unanimously.

“I am firmly convinced,” resumed Sallenauve, “that if Danton had been born in a calm and peaceful epoch like our own, he would have shown himself, what in fact he was, a good father, a good husband, a warm and faithful friend, a man of kindly temper, who, by the force of his great talents, would have risen to some eminent place in the State and in society.”

“Yes, yes! bravo! very good!”

“Born, on the contrary, in troublesome times, and amid the storm of unchained passions, Danton was better constituted than others to kindle the flame of that atmosphere of fire. Danton was the torch that fired; his scarlet glare lent itself only too readily to scenes of blood and horror which I must not recall. But, they said, the national independence was at stake, traitors and dissemblers must be awed,—in a word, a cruel and awful sacrifice was necessary for the public weal. Messieurs, I do not accept that theory. To kill, without the necessity demonstrated a score of times of legitimate defence, to kill women, children, prisoners, unarmed men, was a crime,—a crime, look at it how you will, that was execrable; those who ordered it, those who consented to it, those who executed it are, to my mind, deserving of the same reprobation.”

I wish I could give you an idea, madame, of the tone and expression of Sallenauve as he uttered this anathema. You know how his face is transfigured when an ardent thought

comes into his mind. The assemblage was mute and gloomy. Evidently he had wounded their sensibilities; but, under the curb of his powerful hand, it dared not throw up its head.

“But,” he continued, “to all consummated and irreparable crimes there are two issues,—repentance and expiation. His repentance Danton did not utter,—he was too proud a man,—but he *acted* it. He was the first, to the sound of that axe falling without pity and without respite,—the first, at the risk of his own head being the next victim,—to call for a ‘committee of mercy.’ It was the sure, the infallible means of bringing him to expiation; and you all know whether, when that day of expiation came, he quailed before it. Passing through death,—won by his courageous effort to stop the effusion of blood,—it may be truly said that the face and the memory of Danton have washed off the bloody stain which September put upon them. Committed, at the age of thirty-five, to the judgment of posterity, Danton has left us the memory of a great intellect, a strong and powerful character, noble private qualities, more than one generous action,—all derived from his own being; whereas the bloody errors he committed were the contagion of his epoch. In a word, with men of his quality, unjust would be the justice which does not temper itself with mercy. And here, messieurs, you have in your midst—better than you, better than I, better than all orators and historians—a woman who has weighed and understood Danton, and who says to the pitiless, with the impulse of her charity, ‘He has gone to God; let us pray for him.’”

The trap thus avoided by this happy allusion to Mother Marie-des-Anges, and the assembly evidently satisfied, it might be supposed that the candidate had come to the end of his baiting. The colonel was even preparing to pass to the vote, when several electors sprang up, declaring that two important explanations were still required from the candidate. He had said that he should ever be found an obstacle to all attempts of the royal power to subvert our institutions. What did he mean by such resistance? Was it armed resistance, the resistance of riots and barricades?

“Barricades,” replied Sallenauve, “have nearly always seemed to me machines which turned of themselves and crushed the men who raised them. We must believe that in the nature of riots there is something which serves the interests of the government, for I have invariably heard the police accused of inciting them. My resistance, that which I spoke of, will ever be a legal resistance, pursued by legal means, by the press, by the tribune, and with patience,—that great force granted to the oppressed and to the vanquished.”

If you knew Latin, madame, I should say to you, *In cauda venenum*; which means, “In the tail of the serpent is its venom,”—a remark of antiquity which modern science does not admit. Monsieur de l’Estorade was not mistaken; Sallenauve’s private life was destined to be ransacked, and, no doubt under the inspiration of the virtuous Maxime de Trailles, the second question put to our friend was about the handsome Italian woman said to be *hidden* by him in his house in Paris.

Sallenauve showed no embarrassment at being thus interpellated. He merely asked whether the assembly would think proper to spend its time in listening to a romantic story in which there was no scandal.

But here comes Sallenauve himself; he tells me that the electoral college is formed in a manner that leaves little doubt of his election. I leave my pen to him, to tell you the

romantic tale, already, I believe, interrupted on several occasions. He will close this letter.

XVIII. CHARLES DE SALLENAUVE TO THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE

7 P.M.

Madame,—The rather abrupt manner in which I parted from you and Monsieur de l'Estorade the evening of our visit to Armand's school, has been explained to you by the preoccupations of all sorts to which at that moment I was a victim. Marie-Gaston tells me that he has kept you informed of the subsequent events.

I acknowledge that in the restless and agitated state of mind in which I then was, the sort of belief which Monsieur de l'Estorade appeared to give to the scandal which he mentioned caused me great displeasure and some surprise. How, thought I, is it possible that a man of Monsieur de l'Estorade's morality and intellect can *a priori* suppose me capable of such disorder, when he sees me anxious to give to my life all the weight and consideration which the respect of others alone can bestow? Only a few moments before this painful conversation I had been on the point of making you a confidence which would, I presume, have protected me against the unfortunate impression which Monsieur de l'Estorade conveyed to your mind. As for Monsieur de l'Estorade himself, I was, I confess, so annoyed at seeing the careless manner in which he made himself the echo of a calumny against which I felt he ought rather to have defended me that I did not *deign* to make any explanation to him. I now withdraw that word, but it was then the true expression of a displeasure keenly felt.

In the course of my electoral contest, I have been obliged to make public the justification I did not make to you; and I have had the satisfaction of finding that men in masses are more capable than individuals of understanding generous impulses and of distinguishing the honest language of truth. Here are the facts which I related, but more briefly and with less detail, to my electors.

A few months before my departure from Rome, I was in a cafe frequented by the pupils of the Academy, when an Italian musician, named Benedetto, came in, as he usually did every evening. Nominally he was a musician and a tolerable one; but we had been warned that he was also a spy of the Roman police. However that might be, he was very amusing; and as we cared nothing for the police, we not only endured but we encouraged his visits, —which was not hard to do in view of his passion for *poncio spongato* and *spuma di latte*.

On his entrance one evening, a member of our party asked him who was the woman with whom he had met him that morning.

"My wife, signore," answered the Italian.

"Yours, Benedetto!—you the husband of such a beauty!"

"Si, signore."

"Nonsense! you are ugly and drunken, and people say you are police spy; but she, on the contrary, is as handsome as Diana the huntress."

“I charmed her with my talent; she adores me.”

“Well, if she is your wife, make her pose to our friend here, Dorlange, who wants a model for his Pandora. He can’t get a finer one.”

“That can be managed,” replied the Italian.

The next day I was in my studio in company with several young painters and sculptors when Benedetto came in accompanied by a woman of rare beauty, whom I need not describe, for you have seen her, madame, at my house. A joyous hurrah greeted the Italian, who said to me,—

“*Ecco la Pandora*! Hey! what do you think of her?”

“Marvellously beautiful; but would she pose?”

“Pooh!” exclaimed Benedetto, with an air which seemed to say: “I’d like to see her refuse.”

“But,” I remarked, “she would cost too much, a model of her beauty.”

“No; you need only make my bust—just a plaster cast—and give it to her.”

“Very good,” I said. Then I told my friends to go and leave us alone together.

Nobody minded me. Judging the wife by the husband, the eager young fellows pressed round her; while she, wounded and angered by the audacity of their eyes, looked like a caged panther irritated by peasants at a fair.

Going up to her and pulling her aside, Benedetto told her in Italian that I wanted to copy her from head to foot, and she must then and there take off her clothes. The woman gave him one withering look, and made for the door. Benedetto rushed forward to prevent her; while my comrades, for the honor of the studio, endeavored to bar his way.

Then began an argument between the wife and the husband; but, as I saw that Benedetto sustained his part of it with great brutality, I was angry, and, having a pretty vigorous arm, I pushed him aside, and took the wife, who was trembling all over, to the door. She said, in Italian, a few words of thanks, and disappeared instantly.

Returning to Benedetto, who was gesticulating furiously, I told him to leave the studio, that his conduct was infamous, and if I heard of his ill-treating his wife I would have him punished.

“*Debole*!” (idiot!) he replied, shrugging his shoulders, and departing amid derisive cheers.

Several days passed, and no signs of Benedetto. By the end of a week he was forgotten. Three days before my departure from Rome his wife entered my studio.

“You are leaving Rome,” she said, “and I want you to take me with you.”

“Take you with me!—but your husband?”

“Dead,” she answered tranquilly.

A thought crossed my mind.

“Did you kill him?” I said.

She made an affirmative sign, adding, “But I meant to die too.”

“How was it?” I asked.

“After he offered me that affront,” she replied, “he came home and beat me, as he often did; then he went out and was gone all day. At night he returned with a pistol and threatened to shoot me; but I got the pistol away from him, for he was drunk. I threw him —the *briccone*!—on his bed, and he fell asleep. Then I stuffed up the doors and windows, and lighted the charcoal brazier. My head ached horribly, and I knew nothing more till the next day, when I woke up in the hands of my neighbors. They had smelt the charcoal, and burst in the door,—but he was dead.”

“And the law?”

“I told the judge everything. Besides, *he* had tried to sell me to an Englishman,—that’s why he wanted to disgrace me here with you; he thought I would resist less. The judge told me I might go, I had done right; then I confessed to a priest, and he gave me absolution.”

“But, *cara mia*, what can you do in France? Better stay in Italy; besides, I am not rich.”

She smiled disdainfully.

“I shall not cost you much,” she said; “on the contrary, I can save you money.”

“How so?”

“I can be the model for your statues if I choose. Besides which, I am a capital housekeeper. If Benedetto had behaved properly, we should have had a good home,—*per che*, I know how to make one; and I’ve another great talent too!”

She ran to a guitar, which was hanging on the wall, and began to sing a bravura air, accompanying herself with singular energy.

“In France,” she said, when she had finished, “I could take lessons and go upon the stage, where I know I should succeed; that was Benedetto’s idea.”

“But why not do that in Italy?”

“I am hiding from that Englishman,” she replied; “he wants to carry me off. I am determined to go to France; I have learned to speak French. If I stay here, I shall throw myself into the Tiber.”

By abandoning such a nature, more terrible than seductive, to itself, Monsieur de l’Estorade will, I think, agree that I was likely to cause some misfortune. I consented, therefore, that Signora Luigia should accompany me to Paris. Since then she has managed my household with discretion and economy. She even offered to pose for my Pandora; but the memory of that scene with her husband has, as you may well believe, kept me from accepting her offer. I have given her a singing-master, and she is now almost prepared to make her appearance on the stage. But in spite of her theatrical projects, she, pious like all Italians, has joined the sisterhood of the Virgin in Saint-Sulpice, my parish church, and during the month of May, which began a few days ago, the letter of chairs counts on her beautiful voice for part of her receipts. She is assiduous at the services, confesses, and

takes the sacrament regularly. Her confessor, a most respectable old man, came to see me lately to request that she might not be required to pose for any more of my statues, saying that she would not listen to him on that point, believing herself bound in honor to me.

My own intention, if I am elected, which now seems probable, is to separate from this woman. In a position which will place me more before the public, she would become an object of remark as injurious to her reputation and future prospects as to mine. I have talked with Marie-Gaston about the difficulty I foresee in making this separation. Until now, my house has been the whole of Paris to this poor woman; and the thought of flinging her alone into the gulf, of which she knows nothing, horrifies me.

Marie-Gaston thinks that the help and advice of a person of her own sex, with a high reputation for virtue and good judgment, would be in such a case most efficacious; and he declares that he and I both know a lady who, at our earnest entreaty, might take this duty upon herself. The person to whom Marie-Gaston makes allusion is but a recent acquaintance of mine, and I could hardly ask even an old friend to take such a care upon her shoulders. I know, however, that you once did me the honor to say that “certain relations ripen rapidly.” Marie-Gaston insists that this lady, being kind and pious and most charitable, will be attracted by the idea of helping and advising a poor lonely woman. On our return to Paris, madame, we shall venture to consult you, and you will tell us whether we may ask for this precious assistance.

In any case, I will ask you to be my intermediary with Monsieur de l’Estorade; tell him the facts I have now told you, and say that I hope the little cloud between us may be effectually removed. If I am elected, we shall be, I know, in opposite camps; but as my intention is not to take a tone of systematic opposition in all the questions which may arise between our parties, I do not think there *need* be any break between us.

By this time to-morrow, madame, I may have received a checkmate which will send me back forever to my studio, or I shall have a foot in a new career. Shall I tell you that the thought of the latter result distresses me?—doubtless from a fear of the Unknown.

I was almost forgetting to give you another piece of news. I have consulted Mother Marie-des-Anges (whose history Marie-Gaston tells me he has related to you) on the subject of my doubts and fears as to the violence done to Mademoiselle de Lanty, and she has promised that in course of time she will discover the convent in which Marianina is a prisoner. The worthy Mother, if she takes this into her head, is almost certain to succeed in finding the original of her Saint-Ursula.

I am not feeling at all easy in mind about Marie-Gaston. He seems to me in a state of feverish agitation, partly created by the immense interest he takes in my success. But I greatly fear that his efforts will result in a serious reaction. His own grief, which at this moment he is repressing, has not in reality lost its sting. Have you not been struck by the rather flighty and mocking tone of his letters, some of which he has shown to me? That is not in his nature, for in his happiest days he was never turbulently gay; and I am sadly afraid that when this fictitious excitement about my election is over he may fall into utter prostration. He has, however, consented to come and live with me, and not to go to Ville d’Avray unless I am with him. Even this act of prudence, which I asked without hoping to obtain it, makes me uneasy. Evidently he is afraid of the memories that await him there.

Have I the power to lessen the shock? Old Philippe, who was left in charge of the place when he went to Italy, had orders not to move or change anything whatever in the house. Our friend is therefore likely to find himself, in presence of those speaking objects, on the morrow as it were of his wife’s death. Another alarming thing! he has only spoken of her once, and will not suffer me to approach the subject. I hope, however, that this may be a crisis; once passed, I trust we may, by all uniting, succeed in composing his mind.

Victor or vanquished, I trust to meet you soon, madame, and always as your most respectful and devoted servant,

Charles de Sallenauve.

XIX. MARIE-GASTON TO THE COMTESSE DE L’ESTORADE

Arcis-sur-Aube, May 17, 1839.

That stupid riot in Paris, the incredible particulars of which we heard this morning by telegraph, came near causing us to lose the election.

The sub-prefect instantly placarded all over the town the news of this attempt at insurrection—no doubt instigated by the government to affect the elections. “What! elect a democrat!” was repeated everywhere in Arcis, and doubtless elsewhere, “so that his speeches in the Chamber may be made the ammunition of insurgents!”

That argument threw our phalanx into disorder and hesitation. But the idea occurred to Jacques Bricheteau to turn the danger itself to good account, and he hastily printed on a sheet of paper and distributed all over the town in enormous quantities the following notice:—

A bloody riot took place yesterday in Paris. Questioned as to the employment of such guilty and desperate means of opposition, one of our candidates, Monsieur de Sallenauve, answered thus: “Riots will always be found to serve the interests of the government; for this reason the police are invariably accused of inciting them. True resistance, that which I stand for, will always be legal resistance, pursued by legal means, by the press, by the tribune, and with Patience—that great force granted to the oppressed and to the vanquished.”

These words, you will remember, madame, were those in which Sallenauve answered his questioners at the preparatory meeting. Then followed in large letters:—

THE RIOT HAS BEEN SUPPRESSED. WHO WILL PROFIT BY IT?

That sheet of paper did marvels; it completely foiled the efforts of Monsieur de Trailles, who, throwing off the mask, had spent his day in perorating, in white gloves, on the market-place and from the steps of the electoral college.

This evening the result is known; namely, two hundred and one votes cast: two for Beauvisage; twenty-nine for Simon Giguet; one hundred and seventy for Sallenauve.

Consequently, Monsieur Charles de Sallenauve is proclaimed Deputy.

PART III. MONSIEUR DE SALLENAUVE

I. THE SORROWS OF MONSIEUR DE TRAILLES

During the evening which followed the election in which he had played a part so humiliating to his vanity, Maxime de Trailles returned to Paris. It might be supposed that in making, on his arrival, a rapid toilet and ordering his carriage to be instantly brought round, he was hastening to pay a visit to the Comte de Rastignac, minister of Public Works, to whom he must have desired to render an account of his mission, and explain as best he could the reasons of its ill-success.

But another and more pressing interest seemed to claim him.

“To Colonel Franchessini’s,” he said to his coachman.

Arriving at the gate of one of the prettiest hotels in the *quartier* Breda, and nodding to the concierge, he received an affirmative sign, which meant, “Monsieur is at home”; and at the same time a valet appeared on the portico to receive him.

“Is the colonel visible?” he asked.

“He has just gone into madame’s room. Does monsieur wish me to call him?”

“No, I’ll wait for him in the study.”

Then, like one familiar with the house, and without waiting for the servant to usher him, he entered a large room on the ground-floor, which looked into a garden, and was filled with a miscellaneous collection of articles testifying to the colonel’s habits and tastes. Books, charts, and maps certainly justified the word “study”; but, as a frantic sportsman and member of the Jockey Club, the colonel had allowed this sanctum of mental labor and knowledge to become, by degrees, his smoking, fencing, and harness room. Pipes and weapons of all shapes and all lands, saddles, hunting-whips, spurs, bits of many patterns, foils and boxing-gloves formed a queer and heterogenous collection. However, by thus surrounding his daily life with the objects of his favorite *studies*, the colonel proved himself a man who possessed the courage of his opinions. In fact, he openly said that, beyond a passing notice, there was no reading worth a man’s attention except the “Stud Journal.”

It is to be supposed, however, that politics had managed in some way to slip into this existence devoted to muscular exercise and the hippic science, for, from a heap of the morning journals disdainfully flung upon the floor by the worthy colonel, Monsieur de Trailles picked up a copy of the legitimist organ, in which he read, under the heading of ELECTIONS, the following article:

> The staff of the National Guard and the Jockey Club, which had various representatives in the last Chamber, have just sent one of their shining notabilities to the one about to open. Colonel Franchessini, so well known for his ardor in punishing the refractories of the National Guard, has been elected almost unanimously in one of the rotten boroughs of the civil list. It is supposed that he will take his seat beside the phalanx of other henchmen, and show himself in the Chamber, as he has elsewhere, one of the firmest supporters of the policy of the *present order of things*.

As Maxime finished reading the article, the colonel entered.

After serving the Empire for a very short time, Colonel Franchessini had become one of the most brilliant colonels of the Restoration; but in consequence of certain mists which had risen about the perfect honorableness of his character he had found himself obliged to send in his resignation, so that in 1830 he was fully prepared to devote himself in the most ardent manner to the dynasty of July. He did not re-enter military service, because, shortly after his misadventure he had met with an Englishwoman, enormously rich, who being taken with his beauty, worthy at that time of the Antinous, had made him her husband, and the colonel henceforth contented himself with the epaulets of the staff of the National Guard. He became, in that position, one of the most exacting and turbulent of blusterers, and through the influence of that quality combined with the fortune his wife had given him, he had just been elected, as the paper stated, to the Chamber of deputies. Approaching the fifties, like his friend de Trailles, Colonel Franchessini had still some pretensions to the after-glow of youth, which his slim figure and agile military bearing seemed likely to preserve to him for some time longer. Although he had conquered the difficulty of his gray hair, reducing its silvery reflections by keeping it cut very close, he was less resigned to the scantiness of his moustache, which he wore in youthful style, twirled to a sharp point by means of a Hungarian cosmetic, which also preserved to a certain degree its primitive color. But whoso wants to prove too much proves nothing, and in the black which the colonel used there was noticeably a raw tone, and an equality of shade too perfect for truth of nature. Hence his countenance, swarthy and strongly marked with the Italian origin indicated by his name, had an expression of singular rigidity, to which his features, now become angular, his piercing glance, and his nose like the beak of a bird of prey, did not afford the requisite corrective.

“Hey, Maxime!” he cried, shaking hands with his visitor, “where the devil do you come from? It is more than a fortnight since I have seen you at the club.”

“Where do I come from?” replied Monsieur de Trailles. “I’ll tell you presently; but first let me congratulate you on your election.”

“Yes,” said the colonel, with apparent indifference, “*they* would put me up; but I assure you, upon my honor, I was very innocent of it all, and if no one had done more than I—”

“But, my dear fellow, you are a blessed choice for that arrondissement; I only wish that the electors I have had to do with were equally intelligent.”

“What! have you been standing for election? I didn’t suppose, taking into consideration the—rather troubled state of your finances, that you could manage it.”

“True, and I was not electioneering on my own account. Rastignac was uneasy about the arrondissement of Arcis-sur-Aube, and he asked me to go down there for a few days.”

“Arcis-sur-Aube? Seems to me I read an article about that this morning in one of those cabbage-leaves. Horrid choice, isn’t it?—some plasterer or image-maker they propose to send us?”

“Precisely; and it is about that very thing I have come to see you before I see the others. I have just arrived, and I don’t want to go to Rastignac until after I have talked with you.”

“How is he getting on, that little minister?” said the colonel, taking no notice of the clever steps by which Maxime was gravitating toward the object of his visit. “They seem

to be satisfied with him at the palace. Do you know that little Nucingen whom he married?”

“Yes, I often see Rastignac; he is a very old acquaintance of mine.”

“She is pretty, that little thing,” continued the colonel, “very pretty; and I think, the first year of marriage well buried, one might risk one’s self in that direction with some success.”

“Come, come,” said Maxime, “you are a serious man now, a legislator! As for me, the mere meddling in electoral matters in the interests of other people has sobered me.”

“Did you say you went to Arcis-sur-Aube to hinder the election of that stone-cutter?”

“Not at all; I went there to throw myself in the way of the election of a Left-centre candidate.”

“Pah! the Left, pure and simple, is hardly worse. But take a cigar; these are excellent. The princes smoke them.”

The colonel rose and rang the bell, saying to the servant when he came, “A light!”

The cigars lighted, Monsieur de Trailles endeavored to prevent another interruption by declaring before he was questioned that he had never smoked anything more exquisite. Comfortably ensconced in his arm-chair, the colonel seemed to offer the hope of a less fugacious attention, and Monsieur de Trailles resumed:—

“All went well at first. To crush the candidate the ministry wanted to be rid of,—a lawyer, and the worst sort of cad,—I unearthed a stocking-maker, a fearful fool, whom I persuaded to offer himself as candidate. The worthy man was convinced that he belonged to the dynastic opposition. That is the opinion which, for the time being, prevails in that region. The election, thanks to me, was as good as made; and, our man once in Paris, the great Seducer in the Tuileries had only to say five words to him, and this dynastic opposer could have been turned inside out like one of this own stockings, and made to do whatever was wanted of him.”

“Pretty well played that!” said the colonel. “I recognize my Maxime.”

“You will recognize him still farther when he tells you that he was able, without recourse to perquisites, to make his own little profit out of the affair. In order to graft a little parliamentary ambition upon my vegetable, I addressed myself to his wife,—a rather appetizing provincial, though past her prime.”

“Yes, yes, I see; very good!” said Franchessini; “husband made deputy—satisfied—shut his mouth.”

“You are all wrong, my dear fellow; the pair have an only daughter, a spoilt child, nineteen years old, very agreeable face, and something like a million in her pocket.”

“But, my dear Maxime, I passed your tailor’s house last night, and it was not illuminated.”

“No; that would have been premature. However, here was the situation: two women frantic to get to Paris; gratitude to the skies for the man who would get them an introduction to the Palais-Bourbon; the little one crazy for the title of countess; the mother

transported at the idea, carefully insinuated by me, of holding a political salon,—you must see all that such a situation offers, and you know me too well, I fancy, to suppose that I should fall below any of its opportunities."

"Quite easy in mind as to that," said the colonel, getting up to open a window and let out the smoke of their two cigars.

"I was on the point," continued Maxime, "of pocketing both daughter and *dot*, when there fell from the skies, or rather there rose from the nether regions, a Left candidate, the stone-cutter, as you call him, a man with two names,—in short, a natural son—"

"Ha!" said the colonel, "those fellows do have lucky stars, to be sure. I am not surprised if one of them mowed the grass from under your feet."

"My dear friend," said Maxime, "if we were in the middle ages, I should explain by magic and sorcery the utter discomfiture of my candidate, and the election of the stone-man, whom you are fated to have for your colleague. How is it possible to believe, what is however the fact, that an old *tricoteuse*, a former friend of Danton, and now the abbess of a convent of Ursulines, should actually, by the help of her nephew, an obscure organist in Paris, have so bewitched the whole electoral college that this upstart has been elected by a large majority?"

"But I suppose he had some friends and acquaintances in the town?"

"Not the ghost of one,—unless it might be that nun. Fortune, relations, father, even a name, he never had until the day of his arrival at Arcis two weeks ago; and now, if you please, the Comte Charles de Sallenauve, seigneur of the chateau of Arcis, is elected to the Chamber of deputies! God only knows how it was done! The pretended head of a former great family, representing himself as absent in foreign lands for many years, suddenly appears with this schemer before a notary in Arcis, recognizes him at a gallop as his son, buys the chateau of Arcis and presents it to him, and is off during the night before any one could even know what road he took. The trick thus played, the abbess and her aide-de-camp, the organist, launched the candidate, and at once republicans, legitimists, conservatives, clergy, nobility, bourgeoisie, in fact everybody, as if by some spell cast upon that region, all did the bidding of that old witch of a nun, and without the stalwart battalion of the functionaries (who under my eye stood firm and did not flinch), his election would have been, like yours, unanimous."

"Then, my poor friend, good-bye to the *dot*."

"Not precisely; though it must certainly be adjourned. The father grumbles because the blessed tranquillity of his life was disturbed and he himself covered with ridicule, though the poor dear man had already enough of that! The daughter still wants to be a countess, but the mother takes it hard that her political salon should be floating away from her, and God knows how far I shall be led in order to comfort her. Besides all this, I myself am goaded by the necessity of having to find the solution of my own problem pretty soon. I *had* found it there: I intended to marry, and take a year to settle my affairs; at the next session I should have made my father-in-law resign and stepped into his seat in the Chamber; then, you understand, what an horizon before me!"

"But, my dear fellow, political horizon apart, don't let that million slip through your

fingers.”

“Oh, heavens! as for that, except for the delay, I feel safe enough. My future family is about to remove to Paris. After this mortifying defeat, life in Arcis will not be endurable. Beauvisage (forgive the name, it is that of my adopted family)—Beauvisage is like Coriolanus, ready if he can to bring fire and slaughter on his ungrateful birthplace. Besides, in transplanting themselves hither, these unfortunate exiles know where to lay their heads, being the owners of the hotel Beauseant.”

“Owners of the hotel Beauseant!” cried the colonel, in amazement.

“Yes; Beauseant—Beauvisage; only a termination to change. Ah! my dear fellow, you don’t know what these provincial fortunes are, accumulated penny by penny, especially when to the passion for saving is added the incessant aspiration of that leech called commerce. We must make up our minds to some course; the bourgeoisie are rising round us like a flood; it is almost affable in them to buy our chateaus and estates when they might guillotine us as in 1793, and get them for nothing.”

“Happily for you, my dear Maxime, you have reduced the number of your chateaus and estates.”

“You see yourself that is not so,” replied Maxime, “inasmuch as I am now engaged in providing myself with one. The Beauseant house is to be repaired and refurnished immediately, and I am charged with the ordering of the work. But I have made my future mother-in-law another promise, and I want your help, my dear fellow, in fulfilling it.”

“It isn’t a tobacco license, or a stamped-paper office, is it?”

“No, something less difficult. These damned women, when hatred or a desire for vengeance takes possession of them, are marvels of instinct; and Madame Beauvisage, who roars like a lioness at the very name of Sallenauve, has taken it into her head that beneath his incomprehensible success there is some foul intrigue or mystery. It is certain that the appearance and disappearance of this mysterious father have given rise to very singular conjectures; and probably if the thumb-screws were put upon the organist, who was, they say, entrusted with the education of the interesting bastard, we might get the secret of his birth and possibly other unexpected revelations. Now I have thought of a man on whom you have, I believe, great influence, who might in this hunt for facts assist us immensely. Don’t you remember the robbery of those jewels from Jenny Cardine, about which she was so unhappy one night at Very’s? You asked the waiter for pens and paper, and on a simple note which you sent at three o’clock in the morning to a Monsieur Saint-Esteve the police went to work, and before the evening of the next day the thieves were captured and the jewels restored.”

“Yes,” said the colonel, “I remember all that; my interference was lucky. But I must tell you that had I paused to reflect I should not have treated Monsieur de Saint-Esteve so cavalierly. He is a man to be approached with greater ceremony.”

“*Ah ca*! but isn’t he a former galley-slave, whose pardon you helped to obtain, and who feels for you the veneration they say Fieschi felt for one of his protectors?”

“Yes, that is true. Monsieur de Saint-Esteve, like his predecessor, Bibi-Lupin, has had *misfortunes*; but he is to-day the head of the detective police, the important functions of

which office he fulfils with rare capacity. If the matter concerned anything that comes within his department, I should not hesitate to give you a letter to him; but the affair you speak of is delicate; and in any case I must first sound him and see if he is willing to talk with you.”

“I thought you managed him despotically. Let us say no more about it, if you think it so very difficult.”

“The greatest difficulty is that I never see him; and I naturally cannot write to him for such an object. I should have to watch for an occasion, a chance meeting. But why don’t you speak of this to Rastignac? He could give him an order to act at once.”

“Don’t you understand that Rastignac will receive me very ill indeed? I had assured him, by letter, of success, and now I am forced to report in person our defeat. Besides, on every account, I would rather owe this service to your friendship.”

“Well, it sha’n’t fail you,” said the colonel, rising. “I’ll do my best to satisfy you; only, there must be a delay.”

The visit had lasted long, and Maxime felt that a hint was given him to abridge it. He therefore took leave, putting into his manner a certain coldness which the colonel appeared not to notice.

No sooner had Monsieur de Trailles departed than Franchessini opened a pack of cards and took out the knave of spades. This he cut up in a curious manner, leaving the figure untouched. Placing this species of hieroglyphic between two sheets of paper, he consigned it to an envelope. On this envelope and disguising his hand the colonel wrote as follows: —

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Monsieur de Saint-Esteve, rue Saint-Anne, near the Quai des
Orfevres.
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That done, he rang the bell and gave orders to put up his carriage, which he had ordered before Maxime’s arrival; after which he went out alone on foot, and threw his singular missive into the first street letter-box that he passed. He had taken care, before he left the house, to see if it were properly sealed.

II. A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ELEVEN O’CLOCK AND MIDNIGHT

As a result of the elections which had just taken place, the ministry, contrary to expectation, maintained a majority in the Chamber,—a doubtful and provisional majority which would give it an uncertain and struggling existence. But, at any rate, it had obtained that merely numerical success which parties seek at any price to prolong their power. The Te Deum was sung in all its camps,—a paean which serves as well to celebrate victorious defeats as honest victories.

On the evening of the day when Colonel Franchessini received the visit from Maxime de Trailles, the general result of the elections was made known. The ministers of the left bank, whose wives received on that day, found their salons crowded, particularly the Comte de Rastignac, the minister of Public Works.

Madame de l’Estorade, too much absorbed in her children to be very exact in the fulfilment of her social duties, had owed a visit to Madame de Rastignac ever since the evening when the minister’s wife had interrupted her conversation with the sculptor apropos of the famous statue. Monsieur de l’Estorade, zealous conservative as we know already, had insisted that politics and politeness now combined to oblige them both to pay this social debt. Arriving early, in order to be rid the sooner of such a bore, Madame de l’Estorade found herself seated at the upper end of a circle of women, while the men stood about them conversing. Her chair was side by side with that of Madame de Rastignac.

In hoping to make her visit short, Madame de l’Estorade had not counted on the allurements of conversation which, under the circumstances of this so-called political victory, laid hold of her husband. A man of more influence by his judgment than by his oratory in the Chamber of Peers, Monsieur de l’Estorade, as he circulated through the salons, was stopped at every turn by the various notabilities of politics, finance, and diplomacy, and requested to give his opinion on the future of the session now about to begin. To all such questions he replied with more or less extended observations, and sometimes he had the pleasure of finding himself the centre of a group respectfully receptive of his opinions. This success rendered him very inattentive to the telegraphy of his wife, who, watching his various evolutions, made him signs whenever she could catch his eye that she wished to go away.

The years that had elapsed since Monsieur de l’Estorade had obtained the hand of the beautiful Renee de Maucombe, while they had scarcely dimmed the splendor of her beauty, had considerably aged her husband. The twenty years’ difference in their ages—he being now fifty-two, she thirty-two—was growing all the more apparent because even at the time of the marriage he was turning gray and his health was failing. An affection of the liver, latent for several years, was now developing, and at the same time the wilful disposition which is noticeable in statesmen and men of ambition made his mouth less sensitive to the conjugal bit. Monsieur de l’Estorade talked so long and so well that after a time the salons thinned, leaving a group of the intimates of the house around his wife and their hostess. At this moment the minister himself slipped an arm through his, and, leading

him up to the group surrounding their two wives, Rastignac said to Madame de l’Estorade, —

“I bring you back your husband; I have just found him in criminal conversation with a member of the Zollverin, who would probably have clung to him all night if it had not been for me.”

“I was myself on the point of asking Madame de Rastignac for a bed, that I might release her from the burden of my company, which Monsieur de l’Estorade’s interminable conversations have put upon her.”

Madame de Rastignac protested that, on the contrary, she desired to enjoy as long as possible Madame de l’Estorade’s company, only regretting that she had been so often obliged to interrupt their conversation to receive those strange objects, the newly fledged deputies, who had come in relays to make their bow to her.

“Oh! my dear,” cried Rastignac, “here’s the session about to open, and we really must not take these disdainful airs toward the elect of the nation. Besides which, you will get into difficulties with madame, who, I am told, is the protectress of one of these sovereigns of late date.”

“I?” said Madame de l’Estorade, rather surprised, and blushing a little. She had one of those complexions, still fresh and dazzling, which are predisposed to these flushes of color.

“Ah! true,” said Madame de Rastignac; “I had forgotten that artist who cut out the pretty figures for your children the last time I had the pleasure of paying you a visit. I own I was far from thinking then that he would be one of our masters.”

“And yet, ever since then,” replied Madame de l’Estorade, “his election has been talked about; though it must be owned that until now no one thought seriously of it.”

“I did,” said Monsieur de l’Estorade, rather eagerly, seizing the occasion to put another star to his reputation for prophecy; “from the first political conversation that I had with him I said—and Monsieur de Ronquerolles is here to bear me out—that I was surprised at the ability and the breadth of aim he manifested.”

“Certainly,” said the personage thus interpellated, “he is not an ordinary fellow; but I do not believe in his future. He is a man who goes by the first impulsion, and, as Monsieur de Talleyrand has wisely remarked, the first impulse is the good impulse.”

“Well, monsieur?” inquired Madame de l’Estorade, ingenuously.

“Well, madame,” replied Monsieur de Ronquerolles, who was vain of his scepticism, “heroism is not of our day; it is heavy baggage, horribly embarrassing, which gets us into mud-holes continually.”

“Nevertheless, I believe that great qualities of heart and mind have some share in the composition of a distinguished man.”

“Qualities of mind? Yes, you are right there, provided always they work in a certain direction. But as for qualities of the heart in political life, what good are they?—to hoist you on stilts with which you can’t walk as well as you can on the ground, and from which

you are liable to fall and break your neck at the first push.”

“At that rate,” said Madame de Rastignac, laughing, while Madame de l’Estorade was silent, disdaining to reply, “the political world must be peopled by none but scoundrels.”

“That is so, madame,—ask Lazarille”; and as he made this allusion to a famous stage joke, he laid his hand on the minister’s shoulder.

“My dear fellow,” said Rastignac, “I think your generalities are a little too particular.”

“No, no; but come,” returned Monsieur de Ronquerolles, “let us talk seriously. To my knowledge, this Monsieur de Sallenauve—that is the name I think he has taken in exchange for Dorlange, which he himself called theatrical—has done, within a short time, two fine actions. I, being present and assisting, saw him stand up to be killed by the Duc de Rhetore, on account of certain ill-sounding words said about a friend. Those words, in the first place, he could not help hearing; and having heard them it was, I will not say his duty, but his *right* to resent them.”

“Ah!” said Madame de Rastignac, “then it was he who fought that duel people said so much about?”

“Yes, madame, and I ought to say—for I understand such matters—that at the meeting he behaved with consummate bravery.”

To avoid the recital of the second fine action, Madame de l’Estorade, at the risk of impolitely cutting short a topic thus begun, rose, and made an almost imperceptible sign to her husband that she wished to go. But Monsieur de l’Estorade took advantage of its faintness to stay where he was.

Monsieur de Ronquerolles continued:—

“His other fine action was to throw himself in front of some runaway horses to save madame’s daughter from imminent death.”

All eyes turned on Madame de l’Estorade, who, this time, blushed deeply; but recovering speech, if only in order to seem composed, she said with feeling,—

“According to your theory of heroism you must think Monsieur de Sallenauve very foolish to have thus risked his life and his future; but I assure you that there is one woman who will never agree with you, and that is—the mother of my child.”

As she said the words, tears were in Madame de l’Estorade’s voice; she pressed Madame de Rastignac’s hand affectionately, and made so decided a movement to leave the room that she finally put in motion her immovable husband.

“Thank you,” said Madame de Rastignac, as she accompanied her to the door, “for having broken a lance with that cynic; Monsieur de Rastignac’s past life has left him with odious acquaintances.”

As she resumed her place, Monsieur de Ronquerolles was saying,—

“Ha! saved her child’s life indeed! The fact is that poor l’Estorade is turning as yellow as a lemon.”

“Ah, monsieur, but that is shocking,” cried Madame de Rastignac. “A woman whom no

breath of slander has ever touched; who lives only for her husband and children; whose eyes were full of tears at the mere thought of the danger the child had run!—”

“Heavens! madame,” retorted Monsieur de Ronquerolles, paying no heed to the rebuke, “all I can say is that newfoundlands are always dangerous. If Madame de l’Estorade becomes too much compromised, she has one resource,—she can marry him to the girl he saved.”

Monsieur de Ronquerolles had no sooner said the words than he perceived the horrible blunder he had committed in making such a speech before Mademoiselle de Nucingen. He colored high,—a most unusual sign in him,—and the solemn silence which seemed to wrap all present completed his discomfiture.

“This clock must be slow,” said the minister, catching at any words that would make a sound and break up an evening that was ending unfortunately.

“True,” said de Ronquerolles, looking at his watch; “it is a quarter to twelve.”

He bowed to Madame de Rastignac ceremoniously, and went away, followed by the rest of the company.

“You saw his embarrassment,” said Rastignac to his wife; “he had no malicious intention in what he said.”

“It is of no consequence. I was saying just now to Madame de l’Estorade’s that your past life had given you a number of detestable acquaintances.”

“But, my dear, the King himself is compelled to smile graciously on men he would fain put in the Bastille,—if we still had a Bastille and the Charter permitted him.”

Madame de Rastignac made no reply, and without bidding her husband good-night, she went up to her room. A few moments later the minister went to the private door which led into it, and not finding the key in the lock, he said, “Augusta!” in the tone of voice a simple bourgeois might have used in such a case.

For all answer, he heard a bolt run hastily on the other side of the door.

“Ah!” he thought to himself with a gesture of vexation, “there are some pasts very different from that door,—they are always wide open to the present.”

Then, after a moment’s silence, he added, to cover his retreat, “Augusta, I wanted to ask you what hour Madame de l’Estorade receives. I ought to call upon her to-morrow, after what happened here to-night.”

“At four o’clock,” said the young wife through the door,—“on her return from the Tuileries, where she takes the children to walk every day.”

One of the questions that were frequently put by Parisian society after the marriage of Madame de Rastignac was: “Does she love her husband?”

The doubt was permissible. The marriage of Mademoiselle de Nucingen was the unpleasant and scarcely moral product of one of those immoral unions which find their issue in the life of a daughter, after years and satiety have brought them to a condition of dry-rot and paralysis. In such marriages of *convenience* the husband is satisfied, for he escapes a happiness which has turned rancid to him, and he profits by a speculation like

that of the magician in the “Arabian Nights” who exchanges old lamps for new. But the wife, on the contrary, must ever feel a living memory between herself and her husband; a memory which may revive, and while wholly outside of the empire of the senses, has the force of an old authority antagonistic to her young influence. In such a position the wife is a victim.

During the short time we have taken to give this brief analysis of a situation too frequently existing, Rastignac lingered at the door.

“Well,” he said at last, deciding to retire, “good-night, Augusta.”

As he said the words, rather piteously, the door opened suddenly, and his wife, throwing herself into his arms, laid her head upon his shoulder sobbing.

The question was answered: Madame de Rastignac loved her husband; but for all that, the distant muttering of a subterranean fire might be heard beneath the flowers of their garden.

III. A MINISTER’S MORNING

The next day, when Rastignac entered his office, the adjoining waiting-room was already occupied by eleven persons waiting with letters of introduction to solicit favors, also two peers of France and several deputies.

Presently a bell rang. The usher, with an eagerness which communicated itself to all present, entered the sanctum; an instant later he came out, bearing this stereotyped message:—

“The minister is obliged to attend a Council. He will, however, have the honor to receive the gentlemen of the two Chambers. As for the others, they can call again at another time.”

“What other time?” asked one of the postponed; “this is the third time in three days that I have come here uselessly.”

The usher made a gesture which meant, “It is not my affair; I follow my orders.” But hearing certain murmurs as to the *privilege* granted to honorable members, he said, with a certain solemnity,—

“The honorable gentlemen came to discuss affairs of public interest with his Excellency.”

The office-seekers, being compelled to accept this fib, departed. After which the bell rang again. The usher then assumed his most gracious expression of face. By natural affinity, the lucky ones had gathered in a group at one end of the room. Though they had never seen one another before, most of them being the offspring of the late national lying-in, they seemed to recognize a certain representative air which is very difficult to define, though it can never be mistaken. The usher, not venturing to choose among so many eminent personages, turned a mute, caressing glance on all, as if to say,—

“Whom shall I have the honor of first announcing?”

“Gentlemen,” said Colonel Franchessini, “I believe I have seen you all arrive.”

And he walked to the closed door, which the usher threw open, announcing in a loud, clear voice,—

“Monsieur le Colonel Franchessini!”

“Ha! so you are the first this morning,” said the minister, making a few steps towards the colonel, and giving him his hand. “What have you come for, my dear fellow?—a railroad, a canal, a suspension bridge?”

“I have come, my good-natured minister, on private business in which you are more interested than I.”

“That is not a judicious way of urging it, for I warn you I pay little or no attention to my own business.”

“I had a visit from Maxime this morning, on his return from Arcis-sur-Aube,” said the

colonel, coming to the point. “He gave me all the particulars of that election. He thinks a spoke might be put in the wheel of it. Now, if you have time to let me make a few explanations—”

The minister, who was sitting before his desk with his back to the fireplace, turned round to look at the clock.

“Look here, my dear fellow,” he said, “I’m afraid you will be long, and I have a hungry pack outside there waiting for me. I shouldn’t listen to you comfortably. Do me the favor to go and take a walk and come back at twelve o’clock to breakfast. I’ll present you to Madame de Rastignac, whom you don’t know, I think, and after breakfast we will take a few turns in the garden; then I can listen to you in peace.”

“Very good, I accept that arrangement,” said the colonel, rising.

As he crossed the waiting-room, he said,—

“Messieurs, I have not delayed you long, I hope.”

Then, after distributing a few grasps of the hand, he departed.

Three hours later, when the colonel entered the salon where he was presented to Madame de Rastignac, he found there the Baron de Nucingen, who came nearly every day to breakfast with his son-in-law before the Bourse hour, Emile Blondet of the “Debats,” Messieurs Moreau (de l’Oise), Dionis, and Camusot, three deputies madly loquacious, and two newly elected deputies whose names it is doubtful if Rastignac knew himself. Franchessini also recognized Martial de la Roche-Hugon, the minister’s brother-in-law, and the inevitable des Lupeaulx, peer of France. As for another figure, who stood talking with the minister for some time in the recess of a window, the colonel learned, after inquiring of Emile Blondet, that it was that of a former functionary of the upper police, who continued, as an amateur, to do part of his former business, going daily to each minister under all administrations with as much zeal and regularity as if he were still charged with his official duties.

Madame de Rastignac seen at close quarters seemed to the colonel a handsome blonde, not at all languishing. She was strikingly like her mother, but with that shade of greater distinction which in the descendants of parvenus increases from generation to generation as they advance from their source. The last drop of the primitive Goriot blood had evaporated in this charming young woman, who was particularly remarkable for the high-bred delicacy of all her extremities, the absence of which in Madame de Nucingen had shown the daughter of Pere Goriot.

As the colonel wished to retain a footing in the house he now entered for the first time, he talked about his wife.

“She lived,” he said, “in the old English fashion, in her *home*; but he should be most glad to bring her out of her retreat in order to present her to Madame de Rastignac if the latter would graciously consent.”

“Now,” said the minister, dropping the arm of Emile Blondet, with whom he had been conversing, “let us go into the garden,”—adding, as soon as they were alone, “We want no ears about us in this matter.”

“Maxime came to see me, as I told you,” said the colonel, “on his return from Arcis-sur-Aube, and he is full of an idea of discovering something about the pretended parentage of this sculptor by which to oust him—”

“I know,” interrupted Rastignac; “he spoke to me about that idea, and there’s neither rhyme nor reason in it. Either this Sallenauve has some value, or he is a mere cipher. If the latter, it is useless to employ such a dangerous instrument as the man Maxime proposes to neutralize a power that does not exist. If, on the other hand, this new deputy proves really an orator, we can deal with him in the tribune and in the newspapers without the help of such underground measures. General rule: in a land of unbridled publicity like ours, wherever the hand of the police appears, if even to lay bare the most shameful villany, there’s always a hue and cry against the government. Public opinion behaves like the man to whom another man sang an air of Mozart to prove that Mozart was a great musician. Was he vanquished by evidence? ‘Mozart,’ he replied to the singer, ‘may have been a great musician, but you, my dear fellow, have a cold in your head.’”

“There’s a great deal of truth in what you say,” replied Franchessini; “but the man whom Maxime wants to unmask may be one of those honest mediocrities who make themselves a thorn in the side of all administrations; your most dangerous adversaries are not the giants of oratory.”

“I expect to find out the real weight of the man before long,” replied Rastignac, “from a source I have more confidence in than I have in Monsieur de Trailles. On this very occasion he has allowed himself to be tripped up, and now wants to compensate by heroic measures for his own lack of ability. As for your other man, I shall not employ him for the purpose Maxime suggests, but you may tell him from me—”

“Yes!” said Franchessini, with redoubled attention.

“—that if he meddles in politics, as he shows an inclination to do, there are certain deplorable memories in his life—”

“But they are only memories now; he has made himself a new skin.”

“I know all about him,” replied Rastignac; “do you suppose there are no other detectives in Paris? I know that since 1830, when he took Bibi-Lupin’s place as chief of the detective police, he has given his life a most respectable bourgeois character; the only fault I find is that he overdoes it.”

“And yet—” said the colonel.

“He is rich,” continued Rastignac, not heeding the interruption. “His salary is twelve thousand francs, and he has the three hundred thousand Lucien de Rubempre left him,—also the proceeds of a manufactory of varnished leather which he started at Gentilly; it pays him a large profit. His aunt, Jacqueline Collin, who lives with him, still does a shady business secretly, which of course brings in large fees, and I have the best of reasons for believing that they both gamble at the Bourse. He is so anxious to keep out of the mud that he has gone to the other extreme. Every evening he plays dominoes, like any bourgeois, in a cafe near the Prefecture, and Sundays he goes out to a little box of a place he has bought near the forest of Romainville, in the Saint-Gervais meadows; there he cultivates blue dahlias, and talked, last year, of crowning a Rosiere. All that, my dear colonel, is too

bucolic to allow of my employing him on any political police-work."

"I think myself," said Franchessini, "that in order not to attract attention, he rolls himself too much into a ball."

"Make him unwind, and then, if he wants to return to active life and take a hand in politics, he may find some honest way of doing so. He'll never make a Saint Vincent de Paul,—though the saint was at the galleys once upon a time; but there are plenty of ways in which he could get a third or fourth class reputation. If Monsieur de Saint-Esteve, as he now calls himself, takes that course, and I am still in power, tell him to come and see me; I might employ him then."

"That is something, certainly," said Franchessini, aloud; but he thought to himself that since the days of the pension Vauquer the minister had taken long strides and that roles had changed between himself and Vautrin.

"You can tell him what I say," continued Rastignac, going up the steps of the portico, "but be cautious how you word it."

"Don't be uneasy," replied the colonel. "I will speak to him judiciously, for he's a man who must not be pushed too far; there are some old scores in life one can't wipe out."

The minister, by making no reply to this remark, seemed to admit the truth of it.

"You must be in the Chamber when the king opens it; we shall want all the enthusiasm we can muster," said Rastignac to the colonel, as they parted.

The latter, when he took leave of Madame de Rastignac, asked on what day he might have the honor of presenting his wife.

"Why, any day," replied the countess, "but particularly on Fridays."

IV. A CATECHISM

Rastignac called on Madame de l'Estorade the next day at the hour named to him by his wife. Like all those present at the scene produced by Monsieur de Ronquerolles, the minister had been struck by the emotion shown by the countess, and, without stopping to analyze the nature of the sentiment she might feel for the man who had saved her child, he was convinced of her serious interest in him.

By the suddenness and the masterly stroke of his election, Sallenauve had become an object of strong interest to the minister,—all the more because up to the last moment his candidacy was not seriously considered. It was now known that in the preparatory meeting he had given proofs of talent. To his active and dangerous party, which had but few representatives in the Chamber, he might become an organ that would echo far. By his peculiar position of birth and fortune, whatever might be the truth of it, he was one who could do without the favors of government; and all information obtained about him went to show that he was a man of grave character and opinions, who could not be turned from his chosen way.

On the other hand, the cloud upon his life might at a given moment serve to neutralize his honor; and Rastignac, while rejecting the proposal of de Trailles and Franchessini to put the mystery into the hands of the police, did not himself renounce a means which, dangerous as it seemed to him, he might use if occasion warranted.

In this situation Madame de l'Estorade could be useful to him in two ways. Through her he could meet the new deputy accidentally, without appearing to seek him, and thus study him at his ease, in order to know if he had a vulnerable point accessible to persuasion. And, secondly, if he found him unpersuadable, he could let Madame de l'Estorade know in confidence of the secret inquiry about to be carried on into Sallenauve's antecedents, which, conveyed by her to the deputy, would have the effect of making him cautious and, consequently, less aggressive.

However, his immediate plan suffered some modification; for Madame de l'Estorade was not at home, and he was just leaving the house when Monsieur de l'Estorade returned on foot.

"My wife will be here soon," he said; "she has gone to Ville d'Avray with her daughter, and Monsieur and Madame Octave de Camps. Monsieur Marie-Gaston, one of our good friends,—you know, the charming poet who married Louise de Chaulieu,—has a country-house in that neighborhood, where his wife died. He returned there to-day for the first time since his misfortune; and these ladies have had the charity to meet him there, and so lessen the first shock of his recollections."

"I can therefore hardly hope to see her to-day; and it was to her, and not to you, my dear count, that I came to offer my excuses for the scene of last night which seemed to annoy her much. Say to her, if you please, that I will take another opportunity of doing so,—By the bye," he added, "the election of your friend Sallenauve is making a devilish talk; the king spoke to me about it this morning, and I did not please him by repeating the favorable opinion you expressed of the new deputy last night."

“Well, but you know the tribune is a reef on which reputations are often wrecked. I am sorry you represented Sallenauve to the king as being on intimate terms with us. I have nothing to do with elections; but I may say that I did all I could to dissuade this objectionable candidate from presenting himself.”

“Of course the king cannot blame you for merely knowing an Opposition deputy.”

“No; but last night, in your salon, you seemed to imply that my wife was much interested in him. I did not wish to contradict you before witnesses; besides, really, one can’t repudiate a man to whom we are under a great obligation. But my wife, ever since the day he was nominated, feels that our gratitude has become a burden. She was saying to me the other day that we had better let the acquaintance die out.”

“Not, I hope, until you have done me a service by means of it,” said Rastignac.

“At your orders, my dear minister, in all things.”

“I want to meet this man and judge him for myself. To send him an invitation to dinner would be useless; under the eye of his party, he would not dare accept it, or if he did, he would be on his guard, and I should not see him as he is. But if I met him accidentally, I should find him without armor, and I could feel for his vulnerable spots.”

“To invite you both to dine with me might be open to the same objection; but I could, one of these evenings, make sure of a visit from him, and let you know—Stop!” cried Monsieur de l’Estorade; “a bright idea has come to me.”

“If it is really bright,” thought Rastignac, “it is fortunate I did not meet the wife.”

“We are just about to give a children’s ball,—a fancy of my little girl, to which Madame de l’Estorade, weary of refusing, has at last consented; the child wishes it to be given in celebration of her rescue. Of course, therefore, the rescuer is a necessary and integral part of the affair. Come to the ball, and I promise you noise enough to cover all investigations of your man; and certainly premeditation will never be suspected at such a meeting.”

“You are too good,” replied Rastignac, pressing the peer’s hand affectionately. “Perhaps we had better say nothing about it to Madame de l’Estorade; a mere hint given to our man would put him on his guard, and I want to spring upon him suddenly, like a tiger on his prey.”

“That’s understood—complete surprise to everybody.”

“Adieu, then,” said Rastignac; “I shall make the king laugh to-morrow at the notion of children plotting politics.”

“Ah!” replied Monsieur de l’Estorade, philosophically, “but isn’t that how life itself is carried on?—great effects from little causes.”

Rastignac had scarcely departed before Madame de l’Estorade returned with Nais and Monsieur and Madame de Camps.

“My dear,” said her husband, “you have just missed a charming visitor.”

“Who was it?” asked the countess, indifferently.

“The minister of Public Works, who came to make you his excuses. He noticed with

regret the disagreeable impression made upon you by the theories of that scamp de Ronquerolles."

"He has taken a good deal of trouble for a very small matter," said Madame de l'Estorade, not sharing her husband's enthusiasm.

"But all the same," he replied, "it was very gracious of him to think of your feelings." Then, in order to change the conversation, he asked Madame de Camps about their visit.

"Oh!" she replied, "the place is enchanting; you have no idea of its elegance and *comfort*."

"How about Gaston?" asked Monsieur de l'Estorade.

"He was, I won't say very calm," replied Madame de l'Estorade, "but at any rate master of himself. His condition satisfied me all the more because the day had begun by a serious annoyance to him."

"What was it?"

"Monsieur de Sallenauve could not come with him," replied Nais, taking upon herself to reply.

She was one of those children brought up in a hot-house, who put themselves forward much oftener than they ought to do.

"Nais," said Madame de l'Estorade, "go to Mary and tell her to do up your hair."

The child understood perfectly well that she was sent away for speaking improperly, and she made a face as she left the room.

"This morning," said Madame de l'Estorade as soon as Nais had shut the door, "Monsieur Gaston and Monsieur de Sallenauve were to start together for Ville d'Avray, and meet us there, as agreed upon. But last night they had a visit from that organist who took such an active part in the election. He came to hear the Italian housekeeper sing and judge if she were ready to go upon the stage."

"Yes, yes," said Monsieur de l'Estorade; "of course Sallenauve wants to get rid of her now that he has ceased to make statues."

"Just so," replied Madame de l'Estorade, with a slight tone of asperity. "In order to put a stop to all calumny Monsieur de Sallenauve wishes her to carry out her idea of going on the stage; but he wanted, in the first place, an opinion he could trust. Monsieur Gaston and Monsieur de Sallenauve accompanied the organist to Saint-Sulpice, where, during the services of the Month of Mary, the Italian woman sings every evening. After hearing her, the organist said she had a fine contralto that was worth, at the lowest, sixty thousand francs a year."

"Just the revenue of my iron-works," remarked Monsieur de Camps.

"That evening," continued Madame de l'Estorade, "Monsieur de Sallenauve told his housekeeper the opinion given of her talent, and with great kindness and delicacy let her know that she must now carry out her intention of supporting herself in that way. 'Yes,' she replied, 'I think the time has come. We will talk of it later'; and she stopped the conversation. This morning when the breakfast hour came, there was no sign of her.

Thinking she must be ill, Monsieur de Sallenauve sent an old charwoman who does the rough work of the house to her room. No answer. Much disturbed, Monsieur Gaston and Monsieur de Sallenauve went themselves to see what it meant. After knocking and calling in vain, they determined to open the door, the key of which was outside. In the room no housekeeper! but in place of her a letter addressed to Monsieur de Sallenauve, in which she said that finding herself an embarrassment to him, she had retired to the house of one of her friends, thanking him for all his goodness to her."

"The bird has found its wings," said Monsieur de l'Estorade, "and takes flight."

"That is not Monsieur de Sallenauve's idea," replied the countess; "he does not believe in such ingratitude. He is confident that, feeling herself a burden to him and yielding to the desperation which is natural to her, she felt obliged to leave his house without giving him a chance in any manner to provide for her future."

"A good riddance!" remarked Monsieur de l'Estorade.

"Neither Monsieur de Sallenauve nor Monsieur Gaston takes that stoical view of it. In view of the headstrong nature of the woman, they fear some violence to herself, which, as we know, she once attempted. Or else they dread some evil adviser. The charwoman states that two or three visits have been lately made at the house by a lady of middle age, richly dressed, in a carriage, whose manner was singular, and who seemed to desire secrecy in speaking with Luigia."

"Some charitable woman, of course," said Monsieur de l'Estorade; "the runaway is given to piety."

"At any rate the truth must be discovered, and it was that which kept Monsieur de Sallenauve from accompanying Monsieur Gaston to Ville d'Avray."

"Well," remarked Monsieur de l'Estorade, "in spite of their respective virtue, it is my opinion he holds by her."

"In any case," returned Madame de l'Estorade, emphasizing the word, "she does not *hold* by him."

"I don't agree with you," said Madame de Camps; "to avoid a man is often the greatest proof of love."

Madame de l'Estorade looked at her friend with a vexed air, and a slight tinge of color came into her cheeks. But no one took notice of it, for at this moment the servant threw open the door and announced dinner.

After dinner, the theatre was proposed; that is one of the amusements that Parisians miss the most in the provinces. Monsieur Octave de Camps, coming from his "villanous iron-works," as Madame de l'Estorade called them, had arrived in Paris eager for this pleasure, which his wife, more serious and sober, did not enjoy to the same extent. Therefore, when Monsieur de Camps proposed going to the Porte-Saint-Martin to see a fairy piece then much in vogue, Madame Octave replied:—

"Neither Madame de l'Estorade nor I have the least desire to go out this evening; we are very tired with our expedition. Take Rene and Nais; they will enjoy the fairies far more than we."

The two children awaited in deep anxiety the permission which Madame de l'Estorade finally granted; and a few moments later the two friends, left to themselves, prepared for an evening of comfortable talk.

"I am not at home to any one," said Madame de l'Estorade to Lucas, as soon as her family had departed.

"Now that we are alone," said Madame de Camps, "I shall proceed to blows; I have not travelled two hundred miles to wrap up in cotton-wool the truth I have come to tell you."

"Ready to hear it," said Madame de l'Estorade, laughing.

"Your last letter, my dear, simply frightened me."

"Why? Because I told you I was trying to keep a man at a distance?"

"Yes. Why keep him at a distance? If Monsieur de Camps or Monsieur Gaston or Monsieur de Rastignac were to make a practice of coming here habitually, would you trouble yourself about them?"

"No; but they have not the same claim upon me: it is that I fear."

"Tell me, do you think Monsieur de Sallenauve loves you?"

"No; I am now quite sure to the contrary; and I also think that on my side—"

"We'll talk about that presently; now I want to ask if you desire Monsieur de Sallenauve to love you?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Well, then, the best possible way to make him do so is to wound his self-love, and show yourself unjust and ungrateful to him; you will only force him to think the more of you."

"But, my dear friend, isn't that a very far-fetched observation?"

"Did you never observe that men are more taken by our snubs than by our caresses? Severity fixes their attention upon us."

"If that were so, all the men we disdain and never think of would sigh for us."

"Oh! my dear, don't make me talk such nonsense. To take fire, a man must have some degree of combustibility; and if that *other* person is lost to him forever, why shouldn't he, as you said yourself, ricochet upon you?"

"That other person is not lost to him; he expects, more than ever, to find her by the help of a very clever seeker, the mother-superior of a convent at Arcis."

"Very good; then why employ the delay in holding him at arm's-length,—a proceeding which will only draw him towards you?"

"My dear moralist, I don't admit your theory in the least. As for Monsieur de Sallenauve, he will be much too busy with his duties in the Chamber to think of me. Besides, he is a man who is full of self-respect; he will be mortified by my manner, which will seem to him both ungrateful and unjust. If I try to put two feet of distance between us, he will put four; you may rely on that."

“And *you*, my dear?” asked Madame de Camps.

“How do you mean?—I?”

“You who are not busy, who have no Chamber to occupy your mind; you who have, I will agree, a great deal of self-respect, but who know as little about the things of the heart as the veriest school-girl,—what will become of you under the dangerous system you are imposing upon yourself?”

“If I don’t love him when near, I shall certainly love him still less at a distance.”

“So that when you see him take his ostracism coolly, your self-love as a woman will not be piqued.”

“Certainly not; that is precisely the result I desire.”

“And if you find, on the contrary, that he complains of you, or if he does not complain, that he suffers from your treatment, will your conscience tell you absolutely nothing?”

“It will tell me that I am doing right, and that I could not do otherwise.”

“And if success attends him and fame with its hundred voices talks of him, how will you think of him?”

“As I think of Monsieur Thiers and Monsieur Berryer.”

“And Nais, who adores him and will probably say, the first time he dines with you, ‘Ah! mamma, how well he talks!’—”

“If you are going to argue on the chatter of a child—”

“And Monsieur de l’Estorade, who already irritates you? He is beginning to-day to sacrifice him to the spirit of party; shall you silence him every time he makes some malevolent insinuation about Monsieur de Sallenauve, and denies his honor and his talent? —you know the judgment people make on those who do not think as we do.”

“In short,” said Madame de l’Estorade, “you are trying to make me admit that the surest way to think of a person is to put him out of sight.”

“Listen to me, my dear,” said Madame de Camps, with a slight touch of gravity. “I have read and re-read your letters. You were there your own self, more natural and less quibbling than you are now, and an impression has remained upon my mind: it is that Monsieur de Sallenauve has touched your heart, though he may not have entered it.”

Madame de l’Estorade made a gesture of denial, but the confessor went on:—

“I know that idea provokes you; you can’t very well admit to me what you have studiously denied to yourself. But what is, is. We don’t say of a man, ‘A sort of magnetism issues from him, one feels his eye without meeting it’; we don’t cry out, ‘I am invulnerable on the side of love,’ without having had some prickings of it.”

“But so many things have happened since I wrote that nonsense.”

“True, he was only a sculptor then, and before long he may be a minister,—not like Monsieur de Rastignac, but like our great poet, Canalis.”

“I like sermons with definite deductions,” said Madame de l’Estorade, with a touch of

impatience.

“That is what Vergniaud said to Robespierre on the 31st of May, and I reply, with Robespierre, Yes, I’ll draw my conclusion; and it is against your self-confidence as a woman, who, having reached the age of thirty-two without a suspicion of what love is, cannot admit that at this late date she may be subjected to the common law.”

“But what I want is a practical conclusion,” said Madame de l’Estorade, tapping her foot.

“My practical conclusion,—here it is,” replied Madame Octave. “If you will not persist in the folly of swimming against the current, I see no danger whatever in your being submerged. You are strong; you have principles and religion; you adore your children; you love Monsieur de l’Estorade, their father, in them. With all that ballast you cannot sink.”

“Well?” said Madame de l’Estorade, interrogatively.

“Well, there is no need to have recourse to violent measures, the success of which is very problematical. Remain as you are; build no barricades when no one attacks you. Don’t excite tempests of heart and conscience merely to pacify your conscience and quiet your heart, now ruffled only by a tiny breeze. No doubt between a man and a woman the sentiment of friendship does take something of the character ordinarily given to love; but such friendship is neither an impossible illusion nor is it a yawning gulf.”

“Then,” said Madame de l’Estorade, with a thoughtful air, “do you wish me to make a friend of Monsieur de Sallenauve?”

“Yes, dear, in order not to make him a fixed idea, a regret, a struggle,—three things which poison life.”

“But my husband, who has already had a touch of jealousy?”

“As for your husband, I find him somewhat changed, and not for the better. I miss that deference he always showed to you personally, to your ideas and impressions,—a deference which honored him more than he thought, because there is true greatness in the power to admire. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that public life is spoiling him a little. As you cannot be with him in the Chamber of peers, he is beginning to suspect that he can have a life without you. If I were you, I should watch these symptoms of independence, and not let the work of your lifetime come to nought.”

“Do you know, my dear,” said Madame de l’Estorade, laughing, “that you are giving me advice that may end in fire and slaughter?”

“Not at all. I am a woman forty-five years of age, who has always seen things on their practical side. I did not marry my husband, whom I loved, until I had convinced myself, by putting him to the test, that he was worthy of my esteem. I don’t make life; I take it as it comes,—trying to put order and *possibility* into all the occurrences it brings to me. I an neither the frenzied passion of Louise de Chaulieu, nor the insensible reason of Renee de Maucombe. I am a Jesuit in petticoats, persuaded that rather wide sleeves are better than sleeves that are tight to the wrist; and I have never gone in search of the philosopher’s stone—”

At this instant Lucas opened the door of the salon and announced,—

“Monsieur le Comte de Sallenauve.”

His mistress gave him a look inquiring why he had disobeyed her orders, to which Lucas replied by a sign implying that he did not suppose the prohibition applied in this instance.

Madame de Camps, who had never yet seen the new deputy, now gave her closest attention to a study of him.

Sallenauve explained his visit by his great desire to know how matters had gone at Ville d’Avray, and whether Marie-Gaston had been deeply affected by his return there. As for the business which detained him in Paris, he said he had so far met with no success. He had seen the prefect of police, who had given him a letter to Monsieur de Saint-Esteve, the chief of the detective police. Aware of the antecedents of that man, Monsieur de Sallenauve expressed himself as much surprised to find a functionary with extremely good manners and bearing; but he held out faint hope of success. “A woman hiding in Paris,” he said, “is an eel in its safest hole.” He (Sallenauve) should continue the search the next day with the help of Jacques Bricheteau; but if nothing came of it, he should go in the evening to Ville d’Avray, for he did not, he said, share Madame de l’Estorade’s security as to Gaston’s state of mind.

As he was taking leave, Madame de l’Estorade said to him,—

“Do not forget Nais’ ball which takes place the day after to-morrow. You will affront her mortally if you fail to be present. Try to bring Monsieur Gaston with you. It might divert his mind a little.”

V. CHILDREN

On his return from the theatre Monsieur Octave de Camps declared that it would be long before they caught him at a *fairy* piece again. But Nais, on the contrary, still under the spell of its marvels gave a lively recital of the scene, which showed how much her imagination was capable of being stirred.

As Madame de Camps and her husband walked away together, the former remarked,—

“That child is really very disquieting. Madame de l’Estorade develops her too much; I should not be surprised if she gave her a great deal of trouble in future years.”

It would be difficult to mark the precise moment in our contemporary habits and customs when a new species of religion, which might be called child-idolatry, appeared. Nor shall we find it easier to discover by what species of influence this worship has reached its present enormous development among us. But, although unexplained, the fact exists and ought to be recorded by every faithful historian of the great and the little movements of society. In the family of to-day children have taken the place of the household gods of the ancients, and whoever does not share this worship is not a morose and sour spirit, nor a captious and annoying reasoner,—he is simply an atheist.

Try to amuse one of these beloved adored ones, all puffed up, as they naturally are, by a sense of their importance, with dolls and toys and Punch-and-Judys, as in the days of our unsophisticated innocence! Nonsense! Boys must have ponies and cigarettes, and the reading of novelettes; and girls, the delight of playing hostess, giving afternoon dances, and evening parties at which the real Guignol of the Champs Elysees and Robert Houdin appear,—the entertainment being announced on the invitation cards. Sometimes, as now in the case of Nais de l’Estorade, these little sovereigns obtain permission to give a ball in *grown-up* style,—so much so, that policemen are stationed about the doors, and Delisle, Nattier, and Prevost provide the toilets and the decorations.

With the character we have already seen in Nais, it may be said that no one was better fitted than she for the duties that devolved upon her by the abdication of her mother. This abdication took place before the evening of the ball itself, for it was Mademoiselle Nais de l’Estorade who, in her own name, invited her guests to do her the honor to pass the evening *chez elle*; and as Madame de l’Estorade would not allow the parody to go as far as printed cards, Nais spent several days writing her notes of invitation, taking care to put in the corner, in conspicuous letters, the sacramental word, “Dancing.”

Nothing could be more curious, or, as Madame de Camps might have said, more alarming, than the self-possession of this little girl of fourteen, behaving precisely as she had seen her mother do on like occasions; stationed, to receive her company, at the door of the salon, and marking by her manner the proper grades of welcome, from eager cordiality to a coldness that verged on disdain. To her best friends she gave her hand in truly English style; for the rest she had smiles, apportioned to the degrees of intimacy,—simple inclination of the head for unknown guests or those of less account; with little speeches now and then, and delicious mamma-like airs for the tiny children whom it is necessary to ask to these juvenile routs, however dangerous and difficult to manage that element may

be.

With the fathers and mothers of her guests, as the ball was not given for them, Nais as a general thing reversed the nature of the Gospel invocation, *Sinite parvulos venire ad me*, and was careful not to pass the limit of cold though respectful politeness. But when Lucas, following the instructions he had received, reversed the natural order of things and announced, “Mesdemoiselles de la Roche-Hugon, Madame la Baronne de la Roche-Hugon, and Madame la Comtesse de Rastignac,” the little strategist laid aside her reserve, and, running up to the wife of the minister, she took her hand and pressed it to her lips with charming grace.

After the dancing began, Nais was unable to accept all the invitations which the elegant young lions vied with one another in pressing upon her; in fact, she grew sadly confused as to the number and order of her engagements,—a circumstance which very nearly led, in spite of the *entente cordiale*, to an open rupture between France and perfidious Albion. A quadrille doubly promised, to a young English peer aged ten and a pupil in the Naval School of about the same years, came very near producing unpleasant complications, inasmuch as the young British scion of nobility had assumed a boxing attitude. That fray pacified, another annoying episode occurred. A small boy, seeing a servant with a tray of refreshments and being unable to reach up to the objects of his greed, had the deplorable idea of putting his hand on the edge of the tray and bending it down to him. Result: a cascade of mingled orgeat, negus, and syrups; and happy would it have been had the young author of this mischief been the only sufferer from the sugary torrent; but, alas! nearly a dozen innocent victims were splashed and spattered by the disastrous accident,—among them four or five bacchantes, who were furious at seeing their toilets injured, and would fain have made an Orpheus of the clumsy infant. While he was being rescued with great difficulty from their clutches by the German governess, a voice was heard amid the hubbub,—that of a pretty little blonde, saying to a small Scottish youth with whom she had danced the whole evening,—

“How odd of Nais to invite little boys of that age!”

“That’s easily explained,” said the Scottish youth; “he’s a boy of the Treasury department. Nais had to ask him on account of her parents,—a matter of policy, you know.”

Then, taking the arm of one of his friends, the same youth continued:—

“Hey, Ernest,” he said, “I’d like a cigar; suppose we find a quiet corner, out of the way of all this racket?”

“I can’t, my dear fellow,” replied Ernest, in a whisper; “you know Leontine always makes me a scene when she smells I’ve been smoking, and she is charming to me to-night. See, look at what she has given me!”

“A horse-hair ring!” exclaimed the Scot, disdainfully, “with two locked hearts; all the boys at school have them.”

“What have you to show that’s better?” replied Ernest, in a piqued tone.

“Oh!” said the Scot, with a superior air, “something much better.”

And drawing from the pouch which formed an integral part of his costume a note on violet paper highly perfumed,—

“There,” he said, putting it under Ernest’s nose, “smell that!”

Indelicate friend that he was, Ernest pounced upon the note and took possession of it. The Scottish youth, furious, flung himself upon the treacherous French boy; on which Monsieur de l’Estorade, a thousand leagues from imagining the subject of the quarrel, intervened and parted the combatants, which enabled the ravisher to escape into a corner of the salon to enjoy his booty. The note contained no writing. The young scamp had probably taken the paper out of his mother’s blotting-book. A moment after, returning to his adversary and giving him the note, he said in a jeering tone,—

“There’s your note; it is awfully compromising.”

“Keep it, monsieur,” replied the Scot. “I shall ask for it to-morrow in the Tuileries, under the horse-chestnuts; meantime, you will please understand that all intercourse is at an end between us.”

Ernest was less knightly; he contented himself with putting the thumb of his right hand to his nose and spreading the fingers,—an ironical gesture he had acquired from his mother’s coachman; after which he ran to find his partner for the next quadrille.

But what details are these on which we are wasting time, when we know that interests of the highest order are moving, subterraneously, beneath the surface of the children’s ball.

Arriving from Ville d’Avray late in the afternoon, Sallenauve had brought Madame de l’Estorade ill news of Marie-Gaston. Under an appearance of resignation, he was gloomy, and, singular to say, he had not visited the grave of his wife,—as if he feared an emotion he might not have the power to master. It seemed to Sallenauve that his friend had come to the end of his strength, and that a mental prostration of the worst character was succeeding the over-excitement he had shown at his election. One thing reassured the new deputy, and enabled him to come to Paris for, at any rate, a few hours. A friend of Marie-Gaston, an English nobleman with whom he had been intimate in Florence, came out to see him, and the sad man greeted the new-comer with apparent joy.

In order to distract Sallenauve’s thoughts from this anxiety, Madame de l’Estorade introduced him to Monsieur Octave de Camps, the latter having expressed a great desire to know him. The deputy had not talked ten minutes with the iron-master before he reached his heart by the magnitude of the metallurgical knowledge his conversation indicated.

During the year in which he had been preparing for a parliamentary life, Sallenauve had busied himself by acquiring the practical knowledge which enables an orator of the Chamber to take part in all discussions and have reasons to give for his general views. He had turned his attention more especially to matters connected with the great question of the revenue and taxation; such, for instance, as the custom-house, laws of exchange, stamp duties, and taxation, direct and indirect. Approaching in this manner that problematical science—which is, nevertheless, so sure of itself!—called political economy, Sallenauve had also studied the sources which contribute to form the great current of national prosperity; and in this connection the subject of mines, the topic at this moment most interesting to Monsieur de Camps, had not been neglected by him. We can imagine the

admiration of the iron-master, who had studied too exclusively the subject of iron ore to know much about the other branches of metallurgy, when the young deputy told him, apropos of the wealth of our soil, a sort of Arabian Nights tale, which, if science would only take hold of it, might become a reality.

“But, monsieur, do you really believe,” cried Monsieur de Camps, “that, besides our coal and iron mines, we possess mines of copper, lead, and, possibly, silver?”

“If you will take the trouble to consult certain specialists,” replied Sallenauve, “you will find that neither the boasted strata of Bohemia and Saxony nor even those of Russia and Hungary can be compared to those hidden in the Pyrenees, in the Alps from Briancon to the Isere, in the Cevennes on the Lozere side, in the Puy-de-Dome, Bretagne, and the Vosges. In the Vosges, more especially about the town of Saint-Die, I can point out to you a single vein of the mineral of silver which lies to the depth of fifty to eighty metres with a length of thirteen kilometres.”

“But, monsieur, why has such untold metallurgical wealth never been worked?”

“It has been, in former days,” replied Sallenauve, “especially during the Roman occupation of Gaul. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the work was abandoned; but the lords of the soil and the clergy renewed it in the middle ages; after that, during the struggle of feudality against the royal power and the long civil wars which devastated France, the work was again suspended, and has never since been taken up.”

“Are you sure of what you say?”

“Ancient authors, Strabo and others, all mention these mines, and the tradition of their existence still lingers in the regions where they are situated; decrees of emperors and the ordinances of certain of our kings bear testimony to the value of their products; in certain places more material proof may be found in excavations of considerable depth and length, in galleries and halls cut in the solid rock,—in short, in the many traces still existing of those vast works which have immortalized Roman industry. To this must be added that the modern study of geological science has confirmed and developed these irrefutable indications.”

The imagination of Monsieur Octave de Camps, hitherto limited to the development of a single iron-mine, took fire, and he was about to ask his instructor to give him his ideas on the manner of awakening a practical interest in the matter, when Lucas, throwing wide open the double doors of the salon, announced in his loudest and most pompous voice,—

“Monsieur the minister of Public Works.”

The effect produced on the elders of the assembly was electric.

“I want to see what sort of figure that little Rastignac cuts as a statesman,” said Monsieur de Camps, rising from his seat; but in his heart he was thinking of the government subsidy he wanted for his iron-mine. The new deputy, on his side, foresaw an inevitable meeting with the minister, and wondered what his friends in the Opposition would say when they read in the “National” that a representative of the Left was seen to have an interview with a minister celebrated for his art in converting political opponents. Anxious also to return to Marie-Gaston, he resolved to profit by the general stir created by the minister’s arrival to slip away; and by a masterly manoeuvre he made his way slyly to

the door of the salon, expecting to escape without being seen. But he reckoned without Nais, to whom he was engaged for a quadrille. That small girl sounded the alarm at the moment when he laid his hand on the handle of the door; and Monsieur de l'Estorade, mindful of his promise to Rastignac, hastened to put a stop to the desertion. Finding his quiet retreat impossible, Sallenauve was afraid that an open departure after the arrival of the minister might be construed as an act of puritanical opposition in the worst taste; he therefore accepted the situation promptly, and decided to remain.

Monsieur de l'Estorade knew that Sallenauve was far too wise to be the dupe of any artifices he might have used to bring about his introduction to the minister. He therefore went straight to the point, and soon after Rastignac's arrival he slipped his arm through that of the statesman, and, approaching the deputy, said to him,—

"Monsieur the minister of Public Works, who, on the eve of the battle, wishes me to introduce him to a general of the enemy's army."

"Monsieur le ministre does me too much honor," replied Sallenauve, ceremoniously. "Far from being a general, I am a private soldier, and a very unknown one."

"Hum!" said the minister; "it seems to me that the battle at Arcis-sur-Aube was not an insignificant victory; you routed our ranks, monsieur, in a singular manner."

"There was nothing wonderful in that; you must have heard that a saint fought for us."

"Well, at any rate," said Rastignac, "I prefer this result to the one arranged for us by a man I thought cleverer than he proved to be, whom I sent down there. It seems that Beauvisage is a perfect nonentity; he'd have rubbed off upon us; and after all, he was really as much Left centre as the other man, Giguet. Now the Left centre is our real enemy, because it is aiming to get our portfolios."

"Oh!" said Monsieur de l'Estorade, "after what we heard of the man, I think he would have done exactly what was wanted of him."

"My dear friend, don't believe that," said the minister. "Fools are often more tenacious of the flag under which they enlisted than we think for. Besides, to go over to the enemy is to make a choice, and that supposes an operation of the mind; it is much easier to be obstinate."

"I agree with the minister," said Sallenauve; "extreme innocence and extreme rascality are equally able to defend themselves against seduction."

Here Monsieur de l'Estorade, seeing, or pretending to see, a signal made to him, looked over his shoulder and said,—

"I'm coming."

And the two adversaries being thus buckled together, he hastened away as if summoned to some duty as master of the house.

Sallenauve was anxious not to seem disturbed at finding himself alone with the minister. The meeting having come about, he decided to endure it with a good grace, and, taking the first word, he asked if the ministry had prepared, in view of the coming sessions, a large number of bills.

“No, very few,” replied Rastignac. “To tell the truth, we do not expect to be in power very long; we brought about an election because in the general confusion into which the press has thrown public opinion, our constitutional duty was to force that opinion to reconstitute itself; but the fact is, we did not expect the result to be favorable to us, and we are therefore taken somewhat unawares.”

“You are like the peasant,” said Sallenauve, laughing, “who, expecting the end of the world, did not sow his wheat.”

“Well, we don’t look upon our retirement as the end of the world,” said Rastignac, modestly; “there are men to come after us, and many of them well able to govern; only, as we expected to give but few more representations in that transitory abode called ‘power,’ we have not unpacked either our costumes or our scenery. Besides, the coming session, in any case, can only be a business session. The question now is, of course, between the palace, that is, personal influence, and the doctrine of parliamentary supremacy. This question will naturally come up when the vote is taken on the secret-service fund. Whenever, in one way or the other, that is settled, and the budget is voted, together with a few bills of secondary interest, Parliament has really completed its task; it will have put an end to a distressing struggle, and the country will know to which of the two parties it can look for the development of its prosperity.”

“And you think,” said Sallenauve, “that in a well-balanced system of government that question is a useful one to raise?”

“Well,” replied Rastignac, “we have not raised it. It is born perhaps of circumstances; a great deal, as I think, from the restlessness of certain ambitions, and also from the tactics of parties.”

“So that, in your opinion, one of the combatants is not guilty and has absolutely nothing to reproach himself with?”

“You are a republican,” said Rastignac, “and therefore, *a priori*, an enemy to the dynasty. I think I should lose my time in trying to change your ideas on the policy you complain of.”

“You are mistaken,” said the theoretical republican deputy; “I have no preconceived hatred to the reigning dynasty. I even think that in its past, *striped*, if I may say so, with royal affinities and revolutionary memories, it has all that is needed to respond to the liberal and monarchical instincts of the nation. But you will find it difficult to persuade me that in the present head of the dynasty we shall not find extreme ideas of personal influence, which in the long run will undermine and subvert the finest as well as the strongest institutions.”

“Yes,” said Rastignac, ironically, “and they are saved by the famous axiom of the deputy of Sancerre: ‘The king reigns, but does not govern.’”

Whether he was tired of standing to converse, or whether he wished to prove his ease in releasing himself from the trap which had evidently been laid for him, Sallenauve, before replying, drew up a chair for his interlocutor, and, taking one himself, said,—

“Will you permit me to cite the example of another royal behavior?—that of a prince who was not considered indifferent to his royal prerogative, and who was not ignorant of

constitutional mechanism—”

“Louis XVIII.,” said Rastignac, “or, as the newspapers used to call him, ‘the illustrious author of the Charter’?”

“Precisely; and will you kindly tell me where he died?”

“*Parbleu*! at the Tuileries.”

“And his successor?”

“In exile—Oh! I see what you are coming to.”

“My conclusion is certainly not difficult to guess. But have you fully remarked the deduction to be drawn from that royal career?—for which I myself feel the greatest respect. Louis XVIII. was not a citizen king. He granted this Charter, but he never consented to it. Born nearer to the throne than the prince whose regrettable tendencies I mentioned just now, he might naturally share more deeply still the ideas, the prejudices, and the infatuations of the court; in person he was ridiculous (a serious princely defect in France); he bore the brunt of a new and untried regime; he succeeded a government which had intoxicated the people with that splendid gilded smoke called glory; and if he was not actually brought back to France by foreigners, at any rate he came as the result of the armed invasion of Europe. Now, shall I tell you why, in spite of all these defects and disadvantages, in spite, too, of the ceaseless conspiracy kept up against his government, it was given to him to die tranquilly in his bed at the Tuileries?”

“Because he had made himself a constitutional king,” said Rastignac, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. “But do you mean to say that we are not that?”

“In the letter, yes; in the spirit, no. When Louis XVIII. gave his confidence to a minister, he gave it sincerely and wholly. He did not cheat him; he played honestly into his hand,—witness the famous ordinance of September 5, and the dissolution of the Chamber, which was more Royalist than himself,—a thing he had the wisdom not to desire. Later, a movement of public opinion shook the minister who had led him along that path; that minister was his favorite, his son, as he called him. No matter; yielding to the constitutional necessity, he bravely sent him to foreign parts, after loading him with crosses and titles,—in short, with everything that could soften the pain of his fall; and he did not watch and manoeuvre surreptitiously to bring him back to power, which that minister never regained.”

“For a man who declares he does not hate us,” said Rastignac, “you treat us rather roughly. According to you we are almost faithless to the constitutional compact, and our policy, to your thinking ambiguous and tortuous, gives us a certain distant likeness to Monsieur Doublemain in the ‘Mariage de Figaro.’”

“I do not say that the evil is as deep as that,” replied Sallenauve; “perhaps, after all, *we* are simply a *faiseur*,—using the word, be it understood, in the sense of a meddler, one who wants to have his finger in everything.”

“Ah! monsieur, but suppose we are the ablest politician in the country.”

“If we are, it does not follow that our kingdom ought not to have the chance of becoming as able as ourselves.”

“*Parbleu*!” cried Rastignac, in the tone of a man who comes to the climax of a conversation, “I wish I had power to realize a wish—”

“And that is?”

“To see you grappling with that ability which you call meddlesome.”

“Well, you know, Monsieur le ministre, that we all spend three fourths of life in wishing for the impossible.”

“Why impossible? Would you be the first man of the Opposition to be seen at the Tuileries? An invitation to dinner given publicly, openly, which would, by bringing you into contact with one whom you misjudge at a distance—”

“I should have the honor to refuse.”

And he emphasized the words *have the honor* in a way to show the meaning he attached to them.

“You are all alike, you men of the Opposition!” cried the minister; “you won’t let yourselves be enlightened when the opportunity presents itself; or, to put it better, you—”

“Do you call the rays of those gigantic red bottles in a chemist’s shop *light*, when they flash into your eyes as you pass them after dark? Don’t they, on the contrary, seem to blind you?”

“It is not our rays that frighten you,” said Rastignac; “it is the dark lantern of your party watchmen on their rounds.”

“There may be some truth in what you say; a party and the man who undertakes to represent it are in some degree a married couple, who in order to live peaceably together must be mutually courteous, frank, and faithful in heart as well as in principle.”

“Well, try to be moderate. Your dream is far more impossible to realize than mine; the day will come when you will have more to say about the courtesy of your chaste better half.”

“If there is an evil for which I ought to be prepared, it is that.”

“Do you think so? With the lofty and generous sentiments so apparent in your nature, shall you remain impassive under political attack,—under calumny, for instance?”

“You yourself, Monsieur le ministre, have not escaped its venom; but it did not, I think, deter you from your course.”

“But,” said Rastignac, lowering his voice, “suppose I were to tell you that I have already sternly refused to listen to a proposal to search into your private life on a certain side which, being more in the shade than the rest, seems to offer your enemies a chance to entrap you.”

“I do not thank you for the honor you have done yourself in rejecting with contempt the proposals of men who can be neither of my party nor of yours; they belong to the party of base appetites and selfish passions. But, supposing the impossible, had they found some acceptance from you, pray believe that my course, which follows the dictates of my conscience, could not be affected thereby.”

“But your party,—consider for a moment its elements: a jumble of foiled ambitions, brutal greed, plagiarists of ‘93, despots disguising themselves as lovers of liberty.”

“My party has nothing, and seeks to gain something. Yours calls itself conservative, and it is right; its chief concern is how to preserve its power, offices, and wealth,—in short, all it now monopolizes.”

“But, monsieur, we are not a closed way; we open our way, on the contrary, to all ambitions. But the higher you are in character and intellect, the less we can allow you to pass, dragging after you your train of democrats; for the day when that crew gains the upper hand it will not be a change of policy, but a revolution.”

“But what makes you think I want an opening of any kind?”

“What! follow a course without an aim?—a course that leads nowhere? A certain development of a man’s faculties not only gives him the right but makes it his duty to seek to govern.”

“To watch the governing power is a useful career, and, I may add, a very busy one.”

“You can fancy, monsieur,” said Rastignac, good-humoredly, “that if Beauvisage were in your place I should not have taken the trouble to argue with him; I may say, however, that he would have made my effort less difficult.”

“This meeting, which *chance* has brought about between us,” said Sallenauve, “will have one beneficial result; we understand each other henceforth, and our future meetings will always therefore be courteous—which will not lessen the strength of our convictions.”

“Then I must say to the king—for I had his royal commands to—”

Rastignac did not end the sentence in which he was, so to speak, firing his last gun, for the orchestra began to play a quadrille, and Nais, running up, made him a coquettish courtesy, saying,—

“Monsieur le ministre, I am very sorry, but you have taken my partner, and you must give him up. He is down for my eleventh quadrille, and if I miss it my list gets into terrible confusion.”

“You permit me, monsieur?” said Sallenauve, laughing. “As you see, I am not a very savage republican.” So saying, he followed Nais, who led him along by the hand.

Madame de l’Estorade, comprehending that this fancy of Nais was rather compromising to the dignity of the new deputy, had arranged that several papas and mammas should figure in the same quadrille; and she herself with the Scottish lad danced *vis-a-vis* to her daughter, who beamed with pride and joy. In the evolutions of the last figure, where Nais had to take her mother’s hand, she said, pressing it passionately,—

“Poor mamma! if it hadn’t been for *him*, you wouldn’t have me now.”

This sudden reminder so agitated Madame de l’Estorade, coming as it did unexpectedly, that she was seized with a return of the nervous trembling her daughter’s danger had originally caused, and was forced to sit down. Seeing her change color, Sallenauve, Nais, and Madame Octave de Camps ran to her to know if she were ill.

“It is nothing,” she answered, addressing Sallenauve; “only that my little girl reminded me suddenly of the utmost obligation we are under to you, monsieur. ‘Without *him*,’ she said, ‘you would not have me.’ Ah! monsieur, without your generous courage where would my child be now?”

“Come, come, don’t excite yourself,” interposed Madame Octave de Camps, observing the convulsive and almost gasping tone of her friend’s voice. “It is not reasonable to put yourself in such a state for a child’s speech.”

“She is better than the rest of us,” replied Madame de l’Estorade, taking Nais in her arms.

“Come, mamma, be reasonable,” said that young lady.

“She puts nothing in the world,” continued Madame de l’Estorade, “before her gratitude to her preserver, whereas her father and I have scarcely shown him any.”

“But, madame,” said Sallenauve, “you have courteously—”

“Courteously!” interrupted Nais, shaking her pretty head with an air of disapproval; “if any one had saved my daughter, I should be different to him from that.”

“Nais,” said Madame de Camps, sternly, “children should be silent when their opinion is not asked.”

“What is the matter,” said Monsieur de l’Estorade, joining the group.

“Nothing,” said Madame de Camps; “only a giddiness Renee had in dancing.”

“Is it over?”

“Yes, I am quite well again,” said Madame de l’Estorade.

“Then come and say good-night to Madame de Rastignac, who is preparing to take leave.”

In his eagerness to get to the minister’s wife, he forgot to give his own wife his arm. Sallenauve was more thoughtful. As they walked together in the wake of her husband, Madame de l’Estorade said,—

“I saw you talking for a long time with Monsieur de Rastignac; did he practise his well-known seductions upon you?”

“Do you think he succeeded?” replied Sallenauve.

“No; but such attempts to capture are always disagreeable, and I beg you to believe that I was not a party to the plot. I am not so violently ministerial as my husband.”

“Nor I as violently revolutionary as they think.”

“I trust that these annoying politics, which have already produced a jar between you and Monsieur de l’Estorade, may not disgust you with the idea of being counted among our friends.”

“That is an honor, madame, for which I can only be grateful.”

“It is not an honor but a pleasure that I hoped you would find in it,” said Madame de

l’Estorade, quickly. “I say, with Nais, if I had saved the life of a friend’s child, I should cease to be ceremonious with her.”

So saying, and without listening to his answer, she disengaged her arm quickly from that of Sallenauve, and left him rather astonished at the tone in which she had spoken.

In seeing Madame de l’Estorade so completely docile to the advice, more clever than prudent, perhaps, of Madame de Camps, the reader, we think, can scarcely be surprised. A certain attraction has been evident for some time on the part of the frigid countess not only to the preserver of her daughter, but to the man who under such romantic and singular circumstances had come before her mind. Carefully considered, Madame de l’Estorade is seen to be far from one of those impassible natures which resist all affectionate emotions except those of the family. With a beauty that was partly Spanish, she had eyes which her friend Louise de Chaulieu declared could ripen peaches. Her coldness was not what physicians call congenital; her temperament was an acquired one. Marrying from *reason* a man whose mental insufficiency is very apparent, she made herself love him out of pity and a sense of protection. Up to the present time, by means of a certain atrophy of heart, she had succeeded, without one failure, in making Monsieur de l’Estorade perfectly happy. With the same instinct, she had exaggerated the maternal sentiment to an almost inconceivable degree, until in that way she had fairly stifled all the other cravings of her nature. It must be said, however, that the success she had had in accomplishing this hard task was due in a great measure to *the circumstance* of Louise de Chaulieu. To her that dear mistaken one was like the drunken slave whom the Spartans made a living lesson to their children; and between the two friends a sort of tacit wager was established. Louise having taken the side of romantic passion, Renee held firmly to that of superior reason; and in order to win the game, she had maintained a courage of good sense and wisdom which might have cost her far more to practise without this incentive. At the age she had now reached, and with her long habit of self-control, we can understand how, seeing, as she believed, the approach of a love against which she had preached so vehemently, she should instantly set to work to rebuff it; but a man who did not feel that love, while thinking her ideally beautiful, and who possibly loved elsewhere,—a man who had saved her child from death and asked no recompense, who was grave, serious, and preoccupied in an absorbing enterprise,—why should she still continue to think such a man dangerous? Why not grant to him, without further hesitation, the lukewarm sentiment of friendship?

VI. CURIOSITY THAT CAME WITHIN AN ACE OF BEING FATAL

On returning to Ville d’Avray, Sallenauve was confronted by a singular event. Who does not know how sudden events upset the whole course of our lives, and place us, without our will, in compromising positions?

Sallenauve was not mistaken in feeling serious anxiety as to the mental state of his friend Marie-Gaston.

When that unfortunate man had left the scene of his cruel loss immediately after the death of his wife, he would have done a wiser thing had he then resolved never to revisit it. Nature, providentially ordered, provides that if those whose nearest and dearest are struck by the hand of death accept the decree with the resignation which ought to follow the execution of all necessary law, they will not remain too long under the influence of their grief. Rousseau has said, in his famous letter against suicide: “Sadness, weariness of spirit, regret, despair are not lasting sorrows, rooted forever in the soul; experience will always cast out that feeling of bitterness which makes us at first believe our grief eternal.”

But this truth ceases to be true for imprudent and wilful persons, who seek to escape the first anguish of sorrow by flight or some violent distraction. All mental and moral suffering is a species of illness which, taking time for its specific, will gradually wear out, in the long run, of itself. If, on the contrary, it is not allowed to consume itself slowly on the scene of its trouble, if it is fanned into flame by motion or violent remedies, we hinder the action of nature; we deprive ourselves of the blessed relief of comparative forgetfulness, promised to those who will accept their suffering, and so transform it into a chronic affection, the memories of which, though hidden, are none the less true and deep.

If we violently oppose this salutary process, we produce an acute evil, in which the imagination acts upon the heart; and as the latter from its nature is limited, while the former is infinite, it is impossible to calculate the violence of the impressions to which a man may yield himself.

When Marie-Gaston returned to the house at Ville d’Avray, after two years’ absence, he fancied that only a tender if melancholy memory awaited him; but not a step could he make without recalling his lost joys and the agony of losing them. The flowers that his wife had loved, the lawns, the trees just budding into greenness under the warm breath of May,—they were here before his eyes; but she who had created this beauteous nature was lying cold in the earth. Amid all the charms and elegances gathered to adorn this nest of their love, there was nothing for the man who rashly returned to that dangerous atmosphere but sounds of lamentation, the moans of a renewed and now ever-living grief. Alarmed himself at the vertigo of sorrow which seized him, Marie-Gaston shrank, as Sallenauve had said, from taking the last step in his ordeal; he had calmly discussed with his friend the details of the mausoleum he wished to raise above the mortal remains of his beloved Louise, but he had not yet brought himself to visit her grave in the village cemetery where he had laid them. There was everything, therefore, to fear from a grief which time had not only not assuaged, but, on the contrary, had increased by duration,

until it was sharper and more intolerable than before.

The gates were opened by Philippe, the old servant, who had been constituted by Madame Gaston majordomo of the establishment.

“How is your master?” asked Sallenauve.

“He has gone away, monsieur,” replied Philippe.

“Gone away!”

“Yes, monsieur; with that English gentleman whom monsieur left here with him.”

“But without a word to me! Do you know where they have gone?”

“After dinner, which went off very well, monsieur suddenly gave orders to pack his travelling-trunk; he did part of it himself. During that time the Englishman, who said he would go into the park and smoke, asked me privately where he could go to write a letter without monsieur seeing him. I took him to my room; but I did not dare question him about this journey, for I never saw any one with such forbidding and uncommunicative manners. By the time the letter was written monsieur was ready, and without giving me any explanation they both got into the Englishman’s carriage, and I heard one of them say to the coachman, ‘Paris.’”

“What became of the letter?” asked Sallenauve.

“It is there in my room, where the Englishman gave it me secretly. It is addressed to monsieur.”

“Fetch it at once, my dear man,” cried Sallenauve.

After reading the letter, his face seemed to Philippe convulsed.

“Tell them not to unharness,” he said; and he read the letter through a second time.

When the old servant returned after executing the order, Sallenauve asked him at what hour they had started.

“About nine,” answered Philippe.

“Three hours in advance!” muttered the deputy, looking at his watch, and returning to the carriage which had brought him. As he was getting into it, the old majordomo forced himself to say,—

“Monsieur found no bad news in that letter, did he?”

“No; but your master may be absent for some time; keep the house in good order.” Then he said to the coachman, “Paris!”

The next day, quite early in the morning, Monsieur de l’Estorade was in his study, employed in a rather singular manner. It will be remembered that on the day when Sallenauve, then Dorlange the sculptor, had sent him the bust of Madame de l’Estorade, he had not found a place where, as he thought, the little masterpiece had a proper light. From the moment that Rastignac hinted to him that his intercourse with the sculptor, now deputy, might injure him at court, he had agreed with his son Armand that the artist had given to Madame de l’Estorade the air of a grisette; but now that Sallenauve, by his

resistance to ministerial blandishments, had taken an openly hostile attitude to the government, that bust seemed to the peer of France no longer worthy of exhibition, and the worthy man was now engaged in finding some dark corner where, without recourse to the absurdity of actually hiding it, it would be out of range to the eyes of visitors, whose questions as to its maker he should no longer be forced to answer. He was therefore perched on the highest step of his library ladder, holding in his hands the gift of the sculptor, and preparing to relegate it to the top of a bookcase, where it was destined to keep company with an owl and a cormorant shot by Armand during the recent holidays and stuffed by paternal pride, when the door of the study opened and Lucas announced,—

“Monsieur Philippe.”

The age of the old majordomo and the confidential post he occupied in Marie-Gaston’s establishment seemed to the factotum of the house of l’Estorade to authorize the designation of “monsieur,”—a civility expectant of return, be it understood.

Descending from his eminence, the peer of France asked Philippe what brought him, and whether anything had happened at Ville d’Avray. The old servant related the singular departure of his master, and the no less singular departure of Sallenauve without a word of explanation; then he added,—

“This morning, while putting monsieur’s room in order, a letter addressed to Madame le comtesse fell out of a book. As the letter was sealed and all ready to be sent, I supposed that monsieur, in the hurry of departure, had forgotten to tell me to put it in the post. I thought therefore I had better bring it here myself. Perhaps Madame la comtesse will find in it some explanation of this sudden journey, about which I have dreamed all night.”

Monsieur de l’Estorade took the letter.

“Three black seals!” he said.

“The color doesn’t surprise me,” replied Philippe; “for since Madame’s death monsieur has not laid off his mourning; but I do think three seals are rather strange.”

“Very well,” said Monsieur de l’Estorade; “I will give the letter to my wife.”

“If there should be anything in it to ease my mind about monsieur, would Monsieur le comte be so kind as to let me know?” said Philippe.

“You can rely on that, my good fellow. *Au revoir*.”

“I beg Monsieur le comte’s pardon for offering an opinion,” said the majordomo, not accepting the leave just given him to depart; “but in case the letter contained some bad news, doesn’t Monsieur le comte think that it would be best for him to know of it, in order to prepare Madame la comtesse for the shock?”

“What! Do you suppose—” said Monsieur de l’Estorade, not finishing his idea.

“I don’t know; but monsieur has been very gloomy the last few days.”

“To break the seal of a letter not addressed to us is always a serious thing to do,” remarked the peer of France. “This bears my wife’s address, but—in point of fact—it was never sent to her; in short, it is most embarrassing.”

“But if by reading it some misfortune might be averted?”

“Yes, yes; that is just what keeps me in doubt.”

Here Madame de l’Estorade cut the matter short by entering the room. Lucas had told her of the unexpected arrival of Philippe.

“Is anything the matter?” she asked with anxious curiosity.

The apprehensions Sallenauve had expressed the night before as to Marie-Gaston’s condition returned to her mind. As soon as Philippe had repeated the explanations he had already given to her husband, she broke the seals of the letter.

Whatever may have been the contents of that disquieting epistle, nothing was reflected on Madame de l’Estorade’s face.

“You say that your master left Ville d’Avray in company with an English gentleman,” she said to Philippe. “Did he seem to go unwillingly, as if yielding to violence?”

“No, far from that, madame; he seemed to be rather cheerful.”

“Well, there is nothing that need make us uneasy. This letter was written some days ago, and, in spite of its three black seals, it has no reference to anything that has happened since.”

Philippe bowed and went away. As soon as husband and wife were alone together, Monsieur de l’Estorade said, stretching out his hand for the letter,—

“What did he write about?”

“No, don’t read it,” said the countess, not giving him the letter.

“Why not?”

“It would pain you. It is enough for me to have had the shock; I could scarcely control myself before that old servant.”

“Does it refer to suicide?”

Madame de l’Estorade nodded her head in affirmation.

“A real, immediate intention?”

“The letter is dated yesterday morning; and apparently, if it had not been for the providential arrival of that Englishman, the poor fellow would have taken advantage of Monsieur de Sallenauve’s absence last night to kill himself.”

“The Englishman must have suspected his intention, and carried him off to divert him from it. If that is so, he won’t let him out of his sight.”

“And we may also count on Monsieur Sallenauve, who has probably joined them by this time.”

“Then I don’t see that there is anything so terrible in the letter”; and again he offered to take it.

“No,” said Madame de l’Estorade, drawing back, “if I ask you not to read it. Why give yourself painful emotions? The letter not only expresses the intention of suicide, but it shows that our poor friend is completely out of his mind.”

At this instant piercing screams from Rene, her youngest child, put Madame de l’Estorade into one of those material agitations which she less than any other woman was able to control.

“My God!” she cried, as she rushed from the study, “what has happened?”

Less ready to be alarmed, Monsieur de l’Estorade contented himself by going to the door and asking a servant what was the matter.

“Oh, nothing, Monsieur le comte,” replied the man. “Monsieur Rene in shutting a drawer pinched his finger; that is all.”

The peer of France thought it unnecessary to convey himself to the scene of action; he knew, by experience in like cases, that he must let his wife’s exaggerated maternal solicitude have free course, on pain of being sharply snubbed himself. As he returned to his desk, he noticed lying on the ground the famous letter, which Madame de l’Estorade had evidently dropped in her hasty flight. Opportunity and a certain fatality which appears to preside over the conduct of all human affairs, impelled Monsieur de l’Estorade, who thought little of the shock his wife had dreaded for him, to satisfy his curiosity by reading the letter.

Marie-Gaston wrote as follows:—

Madame,—This letter will seem to you less amusing than those I addressed to you from Arcis-sur-Aube. But I trust you will not be alarmed by the decision which I now announce. I am going to rejoin my wife, from whom I have been too long separated; and this evening, shortly after midnight, I shall be with her, never to part again.

You have, no doubt, said to yourselves—you and Sallenauve—that I was acting strangely in not visiting her grave; that is a remark that two of my servants made the other day, not being aware that I overheard them. I should certainly be a great fool to go and look at a stone in the cemetery which can make me no response, when every night, at twelve o’clock, I hear a little rap on the door of my room, and our dear Louise comes in, not changed at all, except, as I think, more plump and beautiful. She has had great trouble in obtaining permission from Marie, queen of angels, to withdraw me from earth. But last night she brought me formal leave, sealed with green wax; and she also gave me a tiny vial of hydrocyanic acid. A single drop of that acid puts us to sleep, and on waking up we find ourselves on the other side.

Louise desired me to give you a message from her. I am to tell you that Monsieur de l’Estorade has a disease of the liver and will not live long, and that after his death you are to marry Sallenauve, because, on the *other side*, husbands and wives who really love each other are reunited; and she thinks we shall all four—she and I and you and Sallenauve—be much happier together than if we had your present husband, who is very dull, and whom you married reluctantly.

My message given, nothing remains for me, madame, but to wish you all the patience you need to continue for your allotted time in this low world, and to subscribe myself
Your very affectionately devoted

Marie-Gaston.

If, after reading this letter, it had occurred to Monsieur de l’Estorade to look at himself in the glass, he would have seen, in the sudden convulsion and discoloration of his face, the outward and visible signs of the terrible blow which his unfortunate curiosity had brought down upon him. His heart, his mind, his self-respect staggered under one and the

same shock; the madness evident in the sort of prediction made about him only added to his sense of its horror. Presently convincing himself, like a mussulman, that madmen have the gift of second sight, he believed he was a lost man, and instantly a stabbing pain began on his liver side, while in the direction of Sallenauve, his predicted successor, an awful hatred succeeded to his mild good-will. But at the same time, conscious of the total want of reason and even of the absurdity of the impression which had suddenly surged into his mind, he was afraid lest its existence should be suspected, and he looked about him to see in what way he could conceal from his wife his fatal indiscretion, the consequences of which must forever weigh upon his life. It was certain, he thought, that if she found the paper in his study she would deduce therefrom the fact that he had read it. Rising from his desk, he softly opened the door leading from the study to the salon, crossed the latter room on tiptoe, and dropped the letter at the farther end of it, as Madame de l'Estorade might suppose she had herself done in her hasty departure. Then returning to his study, he scattered his papers over his desk, like a school-boy up to mischief, who wants to mislead his master by a show of application, intending to appear absorbed in his accounts when his wife returned. Useless to add that he listened with keen anxiety lest some other person than she should come into the salon; in which case he determined to rush out and prevent other eyes from reading the dreadful secrets contained in that paper.

Presently, however, the voice of Madame de l'Estorade, speaking to some one at the door of the salon, reassured him as to the success of his trick, and a moment later she entered the study accompanied by Monsieur Octave de Camps. Going forward to receive his visitor, he was able to see through the half-opened door the place where he had thrown the letter. Not only had it disappeared, but he detected a movement which assured him that Madame de l'Estorade had tucked it away in that part of her gown where Louis XIV. did not dare to search for the secrets of Mademoiselle d'Hautefort.

"I have come, my dear friend," said Monsieur de Camps, "to get you to go with me to Rastignac's, as agreed on last night."

"Very good," said the peer, putting away his papers with a feverish haste that plainly indicated he was not in his usual state of mind.

"Don't you feel well?" asked Madame de l'Estorade, who knew her husband by heart too well not to be struck by the singular stupefaction of his manner, while at the same time, looking in his face, she saw the signs of internal convulsion.

"True," said Monsieur de Camps, "you certainly do not look so well as usual. If you prefer it, we will put off this visit."

"No, not at all," replied Monsieur de l'Estorade. "I have tired myself with this work, and I need the air. But what was the matter with Rene?" he inquired of his wife, whose attention he felt was unpleasantly fixed upon him. "What made him cry like that?"

"Oh, a mere nothing!" she replied, not relaxing her attention.

"Well, my dear fellow," said the peer, trying to take an easy tone, "just let me change my coat and I'll be with you."

When the countess was alone with Monsieur de Camps, she said, rather anxiously,—

"Don't you think Monsieur de l'Estorade seems very much upset?"

“Yes; as I said just now, he does not look like himself. But the explanation he gave seems sufficient. This office life is bad for the health. I have never been as well as since I am actively engaged about my iron-works.”

“Yes, certainly,” said Madame de l’Estorade, with a heavy sigh; “he ought to have a more active life. It seems plain that there is something amiss with his liver.”

“What! because he is so yellow? He has been so ever since I have known him.”

“Oh, monsieur, I can’t be mistaken! There is something seriously the matter with him; and if you would kindly do me a service—”

“Madame, I am always at your orders.”

“When Monsieur de l’Estorade returns, speak of the injury to Rene’s finger, and tell me that little wounds like that sometimes have serious consequences if not attended to at once, and that will give me an excuse to send for Doctor Bianchon.”

“Certainly,” replied Monsieur de Camps; “but I really don’t think a physician is necessary. Still, if it reassures you—”

At this moment Monsieur de l’Estorade reappeared. He had almost recovered his usual expression of face, but he exhaled a strong odor of *melisse des Carmes,* which indicated that he had felt the need of that tonic. Monsieur de Camps played his part admirably, and as for Madame de l’Estorade it did not cost her much trouble to simulate maternal anxiety.

“My dear,” she said to her husband, when Monsieur de Camps had delivered himself of his medical opinion, “as you return from Monsieur de Rastignac’s, please call on Doctor Bianchon and ask him to come here.”

“Pooh!” said Monsieur de l’Estorade, shrugging his shoulders, “the idea of disturbing a busy man like him for what you yourself said was a mere nothing!”

“If you won’t go, I shall send Lucas; Monsieur de Camps’ opinion has completely upset me.”

“If it pleases you to be ridiculous,” said the peer of France, crossly, “I have no means of preventing it; but I beg you to remark one thing: if people disturb physicians for mere nonsense, they often can’t get them when they are really wanted.”

“Then you won’t go for the doctor?”

“Not I,” replied Monsieur de l’Estorade; “and if I had the honor of being anything in my own house, I should forbid you to send anybody in my place.”

“My dear, you are the master here, and since you put so much feeling into your refusal, let us say no more; I will bear my anxiety as best I can.”

“Come, de Camps,” said Monsieur de l’Estorade; “for if this goes on, I shall be sent to order that child’s funeral.”

“But, my dear husband,” said the countess, taking his hand, “you must be ill, to say such dreadful things in that cool way. Where is your usual patience with my little maternal worries, or your exquisite politeness for every one, your wife included?”

“But,” said Monsieur de l’Estorade, getting more excited instead of calmer, under this

form of studied though friendly reproach, “your maternal feelings are turning into monomania, and you make life intolerable to every one but your children. The devil! suppose they are your children; I am their father, and, though I am not adored as they are, I have the right to request that my house be not made uninhabitable!”

While Monsieur de l’Estorade, striding about the room, delivered himself of this philippic, the countess made a despairing sign to Monsieur de Camps, as if to ask him whether he did not see most alarming symptoms in such a scene. In order to cut short the quarrel of which he had been the involuntary cause, the latter said, as if hurried,—

“Come, let us go!”

“Yes,” replied Monsieur de l’Estorade, passing out first and neglecting to say good-bye to his wife.

“Ah! stay; I have forgotten a message my wife gave me,” said Monsieur de Camps, turning back to Madame de l’Estorade. “She told me to say she would come for you at two o’clock to go and see the spring things at the ‘Jean de Paris,’ and she has arranged that after that we shall all four go to the flower-show. When we leave Rastignac, l’Estorade and I will come back here, and wait for you if you have not returned before us.”

Madame de l’Estorade paid little attention to this programme, for a flash of light had illumined her mind. As soon as she was alone, she took Marie-Gaston’s letter from her gown, and, finding it folded in the proper manner, she exclaimed,—

“Not a doubt of it! I remember perfectly that I folded it with the writing outside, as I put it back into the envelope; he must have read it!”

An hour later, Madame de l’Estorade and Madame de Camps met in the same salon where they had talked of Sallenauve a few days earlier.

“Good heavens! what is the matter with you?” cried Madame de Camps, seeing tears on the face of her friend, who was finishing a letter she had written.

Madame de l’Estorade told her all that had happened, and showed her Marie-Gaston’s letter.

“Are you very sure,” asked Madame de Camps, “that your husband has read the luckless scrawl?”

“How can I doubt it?” returned Madame de l’Estorade. “The paper can’t have turned of itself; besides, in recalling the circumstances, I have a dim recollection that at the moment when I started to run to Rene I felt something drop,—fate willed that I should not stop to pick it up.”

“Often, when people strain their memories in that way they fasten on some false indication.”

“But, my dear friend, the extraordinary change in the face and behavior of Monsieur de l’Estorade, coming so suddenly as it did, must have been the result of some sudden shock. He looked like a man struck by lightning.”

“But if you account for the change in his appearance in that way, why look for symptoms of something wrong with his liver?”

“Ah! this is not the first time I have seen symptoms of that,” replied Madame de l’Estorade. “But you know when sick people don’t complain, we forget about their illness. See,” and she pointed to a volume lying open beside her; “just before you came in, I found in this medical dictionary that persons who suffer from diseases of the liver are apt to be morose, irritable, impatient. Well, for some time past, I have noticed a great change in my husband’s disposition. You yourself mentioned it to me the other day. Besides, the scene Monsieur de Camps has just witnessed—which is, I may truly say, unprecedented in our household—is enough to prove it.”

“My dear love, you are like those unpleasant persons who are resolved to torture themselves. In the first place, you have looked into medical books, which is the very height of imprudence. I defy you to read a description of any sort of disease without fancying that either you or some friends of yours have the symptoms of it. In the next place, you are mixing up things; the effects of fear and of a chronic malady are totally different.”

“No, I am not mixing them up; I know what I am talking about. You don’t need to be told that if in our poor human machine some one part gets out of order, it is on *that* that any strong emotion will strike.”

“Well,” said Madame de Camps, not pursuing the medical discussion, “if the letter of that unhappy madman has really fallen into the hands of your husband, the peace of your home is seriously endangered; that is the point to be discussed.”

“There are not two ways to be followed as to that,” said Madame de l’Estorade. “Monsieur de Sallenauve must never set foot in this house again.”

“That is precisely what I came to speak about to-day. Do you know that last night I did not think you showed the composure which is so marked a trait in your character?”

“When?” asked Madame de l’Estorade.

“Why, when you expressed so effusively your gratitude to Monsieur de Sallenauve. When I advised you not to avoid him, for fear it would induce him to keep at your heels, I never intended that you should shower your regard upon his head in a way to turn it. The wife of so zealous a dynastic partisan as Monsieur de l’Estorade ought to know what the *juste milieu* is by this time.”

“Ah! my dear, I entreat you, don’t make fun of my poor husband.”

“I am not talking of your husband, I am talking of you. Last night you so surprised me that I have come here to take back my words. I like people to follow my advice, but I don’t like them to go beyond it.”

“At any other time I should make you explain what horrible impropriety I have committed under your counsel; but fate has interposed and settled everything. Monsieur de Sallenauve will, at any cost, disappear from our path, and therefore why discuss the degree of kindness one might have shown him?”

“But,” said Madame de Camps, “since I must tell you all, I have come to think him a dangerous acquaintance,—less for you than for some one else.”

“Who?” asked Madame de l’Estorade.

“Nais. That child, with her passion for her ‘preserver,’ makes me really uneasy.”

“Oh!” said the countess, smiling rather sadly, “are you not giving too much importance to childish nonsense?”

“Nais is, of course, a child, but a child who will ripen quickly into a woman. Did you not tell me yourself that you were sometimes frightened at the intuition she showed in matters beyond her years?”

“That is true. But what you call her passion for Monsieur de Sallenauve, besides being perfectly natural, is expressed by the dear little thing with such freedom and publicity that the sentiment is, it seems to me, obviously childlike.”

“Well, don’t trust to that; especially not after this troublesome being ceases to come to your house. Suppose that when the time comes to marry your daughter, this fancy should have smouldered in her heart and increased; imagine your difficulty!”

“Oh! between now and then, thank Heaven! there’s time enough,” replied Madame de l’Estorade, in a tone of incredulity.

“Between now and then,” said Madame de Camps, “Monsieur de Sallenauve may have reached a distinction which will put his name on every lip; and Nais, with her lively imagination, is more likely than other girls to be dazzled by it.”

“But, my dear love, look at the disproportion in their ages.”

“Monsieur de Sallenauve is thirty, and Nais will soon be fourteen; that is precisely the difference between you and Monsieur de l’Estorade.”

“Well, you may be right,” said Madame de l’Estorade, “and the sort of marriage I made from reason Nais may want to make from folly. But you needn’t be afraid; I will ruin that idol in her estimation.”

“But there again, as in the comedy of hatred you mean to play for Monsieur de l’Estorade’s benefit, you need moderation. If you do not manage it by careful transitions, you may miss your end. Never allow the influence of circumstances to appear when it is desirable than an impulse or an action should seem spontaneous.”

“But,” said Madame de l’Estorade, excitedly, “do you think that my hatred, as you call it, will be acted? I do hate him, that man; he is our evil genius!”

“Come, come, my dear, be calm! I don’t know you—you, you have always been Reason incarnate.”

At this moment Lucas entered the room and asked his mistress if she would receive *a* Monsieur Jacques Bricheteau. Madame de l’Estorade looked at her friend, as if to consult her.

“He is that organist who was so useful to Monsieur de Sallenauve during the election. I don’t know what he can want of me.”

“Never mind,” said Madame de Camps, “receive him. Before beginning hostilities it is always well to know what is going on in the enemy’s camp.”

“Show him in,” said the countess.

Jacques Bricheteau entered. Expecting to be received in a friendly country, he had not taken any particular pains with his dress. An old maroon frock-coat to the cut of which it would have been difficult to assign a date, a plaid waistcoat buttoned to the throat, surmounted by a black cravat worn without a collar and twisted round the neck, yellowish trousers, gray stockings, and laced shoes,—such was the more than negligent costume in which the organist allowed himself to appear in a countess's salon.

Requested briefly to sit down, he said,—

"Madame, I hope I am not indiscreet in thus presenting myself without having the honor of being known to you, but Monsieur Marie-Gaston told me of your desire that I should give music-lessons to your daughter. At first I replied that it was impossible, for all my time was occupied; but the prefect of police has just afforded me some leisure by dismissing me from a place I filled in his department; therefore I am now happy to place myself at your disposal."

"Your dismissal, monsieur, was caused by your activity in Monsieur de Sallenauve's election, was it not?" asked Madame de Camps.

"As no reason was assigned for it, I think your conjecture is probably correct; especially as in twenty years I have had no trouble whatever with my chiefs."

"It can't be denied," said Madame de l'Estorade, sharply, "that you have opposed the views of the government by this proceeding."

"Consequently, madame, I have accepted this dismissal as an expected evil. What interest, after all, had I in retaining my paltry post, compared to that of Monsieur de Sallenauve's election?"

"I am very sorry," resumed Madame de l'Estorade, "to be unable to accept the offer you are good enough to make me. But I have not yet considered the question of a music-master for my daughter; and, in any case, I fear that, in view of your great and recognized talent, your instruction would be too advanced for a little girl of fourteen."

"Well," said Jacques Bricheteau, smiling, "no one has recognized my talent, madame. Monsieur de Sallenauve and Monsieur Marie-Gaston have only heard me once or twice. Apart from that I am the most obscure of professors, and perhaps the dullest. But setting aside the question of your daughter's master, I wish to speak of a far more important interest, which has, in fact, brought me here. I mean Monsieur de Sallenauve."

"Has Monsieur de Sallenauve," said Madame de l'Estorade, with marked coldness of manner, "sent you here with a message to my husband?"

"No, madame," replied Jacques Bricheteau, "he has unfortunately given me no message. I cannot find him. I went to Ville d'Avray this morning, and was told that he had started on a journey with Monsieur Marie-Gaston. The servant having told me that the object and direction of this journey were probably known to you—"

"Not in any way," interrupted Madame de l'Estorade.

Not as yet perceiving that his visit was unacceptable and that no explanation was desired, Jacques Bricheteau persisted in his statement:—

“This morning, I received a letter from the notary at Arcis-sur-Aube, who informs me that my aunt, Mother Marie-des-Anges, desires me to be told of a scandalous intrigue now being organized for the purpose of ousting Monsieur de Sallenauve from his post as deputy. The absence of our friend will seriously complicate the matter. We can take no steps without him; and I cannot understand why he should disappear without informing those who take the deepest interest in him.”

“That he has not informed you is certainly singular,” replied Madame de l’Estorade, in the same freezing tone; “but as for my husband or me, there is nothing to be surprised about.”

The meaning of this discourteous answer was too plain for Jacques Bricheteau not to perceive it. He looked straight at the countess, who lowered her eyes; but the whole expression of her countenance, due north, confirmed the meaning he could no longer mistake in her words.

“Pardon me, madame,” he said, rising. “I was not aware that the future and the reputation of Monsieur de Sallenauve had become indifferent to you. Only a moment ago, in your antechamber, when your servant hesitated to take in my name, Mademoiselle, your daughter, as soon as she heard I was the friend of Monsieur de Sallenauve, took my part warmly; and I had the stupidity to suppose that such friendliness was the tone of the family.”

After this remark, which gave Madame de l’Estorade the full change for her coin, Jacques Bricheteau bowed ceremoniously and was about to leave the room, when a sudden contradiction of the countess’s comedy of indifference appeared in the person of Nais, who rushed in exclaiming triumphantly,—

“Mamma, a letter from Monsieur de Sallenauve!”

The countess turned crimson.

“What do you mean by running in here like a crazy girl?” she said sternly; “and how do you know that this letter is from the person you mention?”

“Oh!” replied Nais, twisting the knife in the wound, “when he wrote you those letters from Arcis-sur-Aube, I saw his handwriting.”

“You are a silly, inquisitive little girl,” said her mother, driven by these aggravating circumstances quite outside of her usual habits of indulgence. “Go to your room.” Then she added to Jacques Bricheteau, who lingered after the arrival of the letter,—

“Permit me, monsieur.”

“It is for me, madame, to ask permission to remain until you have read that letter. If *by chance* Monsieur de Sallenauve gives you any particulars about his journey, you will, perhaps, allow me to profit by them.”

“Monsieur de Sallenauve,” said the countess, after reading the letter, “requests me to inform my husband that he has gone to Hanwell, county of Middlesex, England. You can address him there, monsieur, to the care of Doctor Ellis.”

Jacques Bricheteau made a second ceremonious bow and left the room.

“Nais has just given you a taste of her quality,” said Madame de Camps; “but you deserved it,—you really treated that poor man too harshly.”

“I could not help it,” replied Madame de l’Estorade; “the day began wrong, and all the rest follows suit.”

“Well, about the letter?”

“It is dreadful; read it yourself.”

Madame,—I was able to overtake Lord Lewin, the Englishman of whom I spoke to you, a few miles out of Paris. Providence sent him to Ville d’Avray to save us from an awful misfortune. Possessing an immense fortune, he is, like so many of his countrymen, a victim to *spleen*, and it is only his natural force of character which has saved him from the worst results of that malady. His indifference to life and the perfect coolness with which he spoke of suicide won him Marie-Gaston’s friendship in Florence. Lord Lewin, having studied the subject of violent emotions, is very intimate with Doctor Ellis, a noted alienist, and it not infrequently happens that he spends two or three weeks with him at Hanwell, Middlesex Co., one of the best-managed lunatic asylums in England,—Doctor Ellis being in charge of it.

When he arrived at Ville d’Avray, Lord Lewin saw at once that Marie-Gaston had all the symptoms of incipient mania. Invisible to other eyes, they were apparent to those of Lord Lewin. In speaking to me of our poor friend, he used the word *chiffonait*,—meaning that he picked up rubbish as he walked, bits of straw, scraps of paper, rusty nails, and put them carefully into his pocket. That, he informed me, is a marked symptom well known to those who study the first stages of insanity. Enticing him to the subject of their conversations in Florence, he obtained the fact that the poor fellow meditated suicide, and the reason for it. Every night, Gaston told him, his wife appeared to him, and he had now resolved to *rejoin* her, to use his own expression. Instead of opposing this idea, Lord Lewin took a tone of approval. “But,” he said, “men such as we ought not to die in a common way. I myself have always had the idea of going to South America, where, not far from Paraguay, there is one of the greatest cataracts in the world, —the Saut de Gayra. The mists rising from it can be seen at a distance of many miles. An enormous volume of water is suddenly forced through a narrow channel, and rushes with terrific force and the noise of a hundred thunder-claps into the gulf below. There, indeed, one could find a noble death.”

“Let us go there,” said Gaston.

“Yes,” said Lord Lewin, “I am ready to go at once; we must sail from England; it will take a few weeks to get there.”

In this way, madame, he enticed our poor friend to England, where, as you will already have supposed, he has placed him in charge of Doctor Ellis, who, they say, has not his equal in Europe for the treatment of this particular form of mental aberration.

I joined them at Beauvais, and have followed them to Hanwell, taking care not to be seen by Marie-Gaston. Here I shall be detained until the doctor is able to give a decided opinion as to the probable results of our friend’s condition. I greatly fear, however, that I cannot possibly return to Paris in time for the opening of the session. But I shall write to the president of the Chamber, and in case any questions regarding my absence should arise, may I ask Monsieur de l’Estorade to do me the favor of stating that, to his knowledge, I have been absolutely forced by sufficient reasons to absent myself? He will, of course, understand that I ought not to explain under any circumstances the nature of the affair which has taken me out of the country at this unlucky time; but I am certain it will be all-sufficient if a man of Monsieur de l’Estorade’s position and character guarantees the necessity of my absence.

I beg you to accept, madame, etc., etc.

As Madame de Camps finished reading the letter, the sound of a carriage entering the courtyard was heard.

“There are the gentlemen,” said the countess. “Now, had I better show this letter to my husband or not?”

“You can’t avoid doing so,” replied Madame de Camps. “In the first place, Nais will chatter about it. Besides, Monsieur de Sallenauve addresses you in a most respectful manner, and there is nothing in the letter to feed your husband’s notion.”

“Who is that common-looking man I met on the stairs talking with Nais?” said Monsieur de l’Estorade to his wife, as he entered the salon.

As Madame de l’Estorade did not seem to understand him, he added,—

“He is pitted with the small-pox, and wears a maroon coat and shabby hat.”

“Oh!” said Madame de Camps, addressing her friend; “it must be the man who was here just now. Nais has seized the occasion to inquire about her idol.”

“But who is he?” repeated Monsieur de l’Estorade.

“I think his name is Bricheteau; he is a friend of Monsieur de Sallenauve,” replied Madame de Camps.

Seeing the cloud on her husband’s brow, Madame de l’Estorade hastened to explain the double object of the organist’s visit, and she gave him the letter of the new deputy. While he was reading it, Madame de l’Estorade said, aside, to Monsieur de Camps,—

“He seems to me much better, don’t you think so?”

“Yes; there’s scarcely a trace left of what we saw this morning. He was too wrought up about his work. Going out did him good; and yet he met with a rather unpleasant surprise at Rastignac’s.”

“What was it?” asked Madame de l’Estorade, anxiously.

“It seems that the affairs of your friend Sallenauve are going wrong.”

“Thanks for the commission!” said Monsieur de l’Estorade, returning the letter to his wife. “I shall take very good care not to guarantee his conduct in any respect.”

“Have you heard anything disagreeable about him?” asked Madame de l’Estorade, endeavoring to give a tone of indifference to her question.

“Yes; Rastignac has just told me of letters received from Arcis, where they have made the most compromising discoveries.”

“Well, what did I tell you?” cried Madame de l’Estorade.

“How do you mean? What *did* you tell me?”

“I told you some time ago that the acquaintance was one that had better be allowed to die out. I remember using that very expression.”

“But *I* didn’t draw him here.”

“Well, you can’t say that I did; and just now, before I knew of these discoveries you

speak of, I was telling Madame de Camps of another reason why it was desirable to put an end to the acquaintance."

"Yes," said Madame de Camps, "your wife and I were just discussing, as you came in, the sort of frenzy Nais has taken for what she calls her 'preserver.' We agreed in thinking there might be future danger in that direction."

"From all points of view," said Monsieur de l'Estorade, "it is an unwholesome acquaintance."

"It seems to me," said Monsieur de Camps, who was not in the secret of these opinions, "that you go too fast. They may have made what they call compromising discoveries about Monsieur de Sallenauve; but what is the value of those discoveries? Don't hang him till a verdict has been rendered."

"My husband can do as he likes," said Madame de l'Estorade; "but as for me, I shall drop the acquaintance at once. I want my friends to be, like Caesar's wife, beyond suspicion."

"Unfortunately," said Monsieur de l'Estorade, "there's that unfortunate obligation—"

"But, my dear," cried Madame de l'Estorade, "if a galley-slave saved my life, must I admit him to my salon?"

"Oh! dearest," exclaimed Madame de Camps, "you are going too far."

"At any rate," said the peer of France, "there is no need to make an open rupture; let things end quietly between us. The dear man is now in foreign parts, and who knows if he means to return?"

"What!" exclaimed Monsieur de Camps, "has he left the country for a mere rumor?"

"Not precisely for that reason," said Monsieur de l'Estorade; "he found a pretext. But once out of France, you know—"

"I don't believe in that conclusion," said Madame de l'Estorade; "I think he will return, and if so, my dear, you really must take your courage in both hands and cut short his acquaintance."

"Is that," said Monsieur de l'Estorade, looking attentively at his wife, "your actual desire?"

"Mine?" she replied; "if I had my way, I should write to him and say that he would do us a favor by not reappearing in our house. As that would be rather a difficult letter to write, let us write it together, if you are willing."

"We will see about it," said Monsieur de l'Estorade, brightening up under this suggestion; "there's no danger in going slow. The most pressing thing at this moment is the flower-show; I think it closes at four o'clock; if so, we have only an hour before us."

Madame de l'Estorade, who had dressed before the arrival of Madame de Camps, rang for her maid to bring her a bonnet and shawl. While she was putting them on before a mirror, her husband came up behind her and whispered in her ear,—

"Then you really love me, Renee?"

“Are you crazy, to ask me such a question as that?” she answered, looking at him affectionately.

“Well, then, I must make a confession: that letter, which Philippe brought—I read it.”

“Then I am not surprised at the change in your looks and manner,” said his wife. “I, too, will make you a confession: that letter to Monsieur de Sallenauve, giving him his dismissal,—I have written it; you will find it in my blotting-book. If you think it will do, send it.”

Quite beside himself with delight at finding his proposed successor so readily sacrificed, Monsieur de l’Estorade did not control his joy; taking his wife in his arms, he kissed her effusively.

“Well done!” cried Monsieur de Camps, laughing; “you have improved since morning.”

“This morning I was a fool,” said the peer of France, hunting in the blotting-book for the letter, which he might have had the grace to believe in without seeing.

“Hush!” said Madame de Camps, in a low voice to her husband, to prevent further remarks. “I’ll explain this queer performance to you by and by.”

Rejuvenated by ten years at least, the peer of France offered his arm to Madame de Camps, while the amateur iron-master offered his to the countess.

“But Nais!” said Monsieur de l’Estorade, noticing the melancholy face of his daughter, who was looking over the stairs at the party. “Isn’t she going too?”

“No,” said the countess; “I am displeased with her.”

“Ah, bah!” said the father, “I proclaim an amnesty. Get your hat,” he added, addressing his daughter.

Nais looked at her mother to obtain a ratification, which her knowledge of the hierarchy of power in that establishment made her judge to be necessary.

“You can come,” said her mother, “if your father wishes it.”

While they waited in the antechamber for the child, Monsieur de l’Estorade noticed that Lucas was standing up beside a half-finished letter.

“Whom are you writing to?” he said to his old servant.

“To my son,” replied Lucas, “who is very impatient to get his sergeant’s stripes. I am telling him that Monsieur le comte has promised to speak to his colonel for him.”

“True, true,” said the peer of France; “it slipped my memory. Remind me of it to-morrow morning, and I’ll do it the first thing after I am up.”

“Monsieur le comte is very good—”

“And here,” continued his master, feeling in his waistcoat pocket, and producing three gold pieces, “send that to the corporal, and tell him to drink a welcome to the stripes.”

Lucas was stupefied. Never had he seen his master so expansive or so generous.

When Nais returned, Madame de l’Estorade, who had been admiring herself for her

courage in showing displeasure to her daughter for half an hour, embraced her as if they were meeting after an absence of two years; after which they started for the Luxembourg, where in those days the Horticultural Society held its exhibitions.

VII. THE WAY TO MANAGE POLITICAL INTRIGUES

Toward the close of the audience given by the minister of Public Works to Monsieur Octave de Camps, who was presented by the Comte de l'Estorade, an usher entered the room, and gave the minister the card of the attorney-general, Monsieur Vinet, and that of Monsieur Maxime de Trailles.

"Very good," said Rastignac; "say to those gentlemen that I will receive them in a few moments."

Shortly after, Monsieur de l'Estorade and Monsieur de Camps rose to take leave; and it was then that Rastignac very succinctly let the peer know of the danger looming on the horizon of his friend Sallenauve. Monsieur de l'Estorade exclaimed against the word *friend*.

"I don't know, my dear minister," he said, "why you insist on giving that title to a man who is, really and truly, a mere acquaintance, and, I may add, a passing acquaintance, if the rumors you have just mentioned to us take actual shape."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said the minister, "because the friendly relations which I supposed you to hold towards him would have embarrassed me a good deal in the hostilities which I foresee must break out between him and the government."

"Most grateful, I am sure, for that sentiment," replied the peer of France; "but be kind enough to remember that I give you *carte blanche*. You are free to handle Monsieur de Sallenauve as your political enemy, without a moment's fear of troubling me."

Thereupon they parted, and Messieurs Vinet and de Trailles were introduced.

The attorney-general, Vinet, was the most devoted and the most consulted champion of the government among its various officials. In a possible reconstitution of the ministry he was obviously the candidate for the portfolio of justice. Being thoroughly initiated into all the business of that position, and versed in its secret dealings, nothing was hatched in that department on which he was not consulted, if not actually engaged. The electoral matters of Arcis-sur-Aube had a double claim to his interest, partly on account of his wife, a Chargeboeuf of Brie, and a relative of the Cinq-Cygnes, but chiefly because of the office held by his son in the local administration. So that when, earlier in the morning, Monsieur de Trailles carried to Rastignac a letter from Madame Beauvisage, wife of the defeated governmental candidate, full of statements injurious to the new deputy, the minister had replied, without listening to any explanations,—

"See Vinet about it; and tell him, from me, to come here with you."

Notified by de Trailles, who offered to fetch him in his carriage, Vinet was ready enough to go to the minister; and now that we find the three together in Rastignac's study, we shall be likely to obtain some better knowledge of the sort of danger hanging over Sallenauve's head than we gained from Jacques Bricheteau's or Monsieur de l'Estorade's very insufficient information.

"You say, my dear friends," said the minister, "that we can win a game against that

puritan, who seemed to me, when I met him at l'Estorade's last evening, to be an out-and-out enemy to the government?"

Admitted to this interview without official character, Maxime de Trailles knew life too well to take upon himself to answer this query. The attorney-general, on the contrary, having a most exalted sense of his own political importance, did not miss the opportunity to put himself forward.

"When Monsieur de Trailles communicated to me this morning a letter from Madame Beauvisage," he hastened to say, "I had just received one from my son, conveying to me very much the same information. I am of Monsieur de Trailles' opinion, that the affair may become very serious for our adversary, provided, however, that it is well managed."

"I know, as yet, very little about the affair," remarked the minister. "As I wished for your opinion in the first place, my dear Vinet, I requested Monsieur de Trailles to postpone his explanation of its details until you could be present at the discussion."

This time Maxime was plainly authorized and even required to speak, but again Vinet stole the opportunity.

"Here is what my son Olivier writes me, and it is confirmed by the letter of Madame Beauvisage, in whom, be it said in passing, my dear minister, you have lost a most excellent deputy. It appears that on the last market-day Maitre Achille Pigoult, who is left in charge of the affairs of the new deputy, received a visit from a peasant-woman of Romilly, a large village in the neighborhood of Arcis. The mysterious father of the deputy, the so-called Marquis de Sallenauve, declared himself to be the last remaining scion of the family; but it seems that this woman produced papers in due form, which show her to be a Sallenauve in the direct line, and within the degree of parentage required to constitute her an heir."

"Was she as ignorant of the existence of the Marquis de Sallenauve as the marquis seems to have been of hers?" asked Rastignac.

"That does not clearly appear from what she says," replied the attorney-general; "but it might so happen among relations so curiously placed."

"Go on, if you please," said Rastignac; "before we draw conclusions we must know the facts, which, as you are aware, is not always done in the Chamber of deputies."

"Fortunately, sometimes, for the ministers," remarked Maxime, laughing.

"Monsieur is right," said Vinet; "hail to the man who can muddle questions. But to return to our peasant-woman. Not being satisfied, naturally, with Maitre Pigoult's reception of her news, she went into the market-square, and there by the help of a legal practitioner from her village, who seems to have accompanied her, she spread about reports which are very damaging to my worthy colleague in the Chamber. She said, for instance, that it was not true that the Marquis de Sallenauve was his father; that it was not even true that the Marquis de Sallenauve was still living; and moreover that the spurious Sallenauve was a man of no heart, who had repudiated his real parents,—adding that she could, by the help of the able man who accompanied her, compel him to disgorge the Sallenauve property and 'clear out' of the place."

“I have no objection to that,” said Rastignac; “but this woman must, of course, have papers to prove her allegations?”

“That is the weak point of the matter,” replied Vinet. “But let me go on with my story. The government has at Arcis a most intelligent and devoted functionary in the commissary of police. Circulating among the groups, as he usually does on market days, he heard these statements of the peasant-woman, and reported them at once, not to the mayor, who might not have heeded them, but to Madame Beauvisage.”

“*Ah ca*!” said Rastignac, addressing Maxime; “was the candidate you gave us such a dolt as that?”

“Just the man you needed,” replied Maxime,—“silly to the last degree, and capable of being wound round anybody’s finger. I’ll go any lengths to repair that loss.”

“Madame Beauvisage,” continued Vinet, “wished to speak with the woman herself, and she ordered Groslier—that’s the commissary of police—to fetch her with a threatening air to the mayor’s office, so as to give her an idea that the authorities disapproved of her conduct.”

“Did Madame Beauvisage concoct that plan?” asked Rastignac.

“Yes,” replied Maxime, “she is a very clever woman.”

“Questioned closely by the mayoress,” continued Vinet, “who took care to have the mayor present, the peasant-woman was far from categorical. Her grounds for asserting that the new deputy could not be the son of the marquis, and the assurance with which she stated that the latter had long been dead were not, as it appears, very clearly established; vague rumors and the deductions drawn by the village practitioner seem to be all there was to them.”

“Then,” said Rastignac, “what does all this lead to?”

“Absolutely nothing from a legal point of view,” replied the attorney-general; “for supposing the woman were able to establish the fact that this recognition of the said Dorlange was a mere pretence, she has no status on which to proceed farther. By Article 339 of the Civil Code direct heirship alone has the right to attack the recognition of natural children.”

“Your balloon is collapsing fast,” said the minister.

“So that the woman,” continued Vinet, “has no object in proceeding, for she can’t inherit; it belongs to the government to pursue the case of supposition of person; she can do no more than denounce the fact.”

“From which you conclude?” said Rastignac, with that curtness of speech which to a prolix speaker is a warning to be concise.

“From which I conclude, judicially speaking, that the Romilly peasant-woman, so far as she is concerned, will have her trouble for her pains; but, speaking politically, the thing takes quite another aspect.”

“Let us see the political side,” said the minister; “up to this point, I see nothing.”

“In the first place,” replied the attorney-general, “you will admit that it is always

possible to bring a bad case?”

“Certainly.”

“And I don’t suppose it would signify much to you if the woman did embark in a matter in which she can lose nothing but her costs?”

“No, I assure you I am wholly indifferent.”

“In any case, I should have advised you to let things take their course. The Beauvisage husband and wife have engaged to pay the costs and also the expense of keeping the peasant-woman and her counsel in Paris during the inquiry.”

“Then,” said Rastignac, still pressing for a conclusion, “the case is really begun. What will be the result?”

“What will be the result?” cried the attorney-general, getting excited; “why, anything you please if, *before the case comes for trial*, your newspapers comment upon it, and your friends spread reports and insinuations. What will result? why, an immense fall in public estimation for our adversary suspected of stealing a name which does not belong to him! What will result? why, the opportunity for a fierce challenge in the Chamber.”

“Which you will take upon yourself to make?” asked Rastignac.

“Ah! I don’t know about that. The matter would have to be rather more studied, and the turn the case might take more certain, if I had anything to do with it.”

“So, for the present,” remarked the minister, “the whole thing amounts to an application of Basile’s famous theory about calumny: ‘good to set a-going, because some of it will always stick.’”

“Calumny!” exclaimed Vinet, “that remains to be seen. Perhaps a good round of gossip is all that can be made of it. Monsieur de Trailles, here, knows better than I do the state of things down there. He can tell you that the disappearance of the father immediately after the recognition had a bad effect upon people’s minds; and every one in Arcis has a vague impression of secret plotting in this affair of the election. You don’t know, my dear minister, all that can be made in the provinces of a judicial affair when adroitly manipulated,—cooked, as I may say. In my long and laborious career at the bar I saw plenty of that kind of miracle. But a parliamentary debate is another thing. In that there’s no need of proof; one can kill one’s man with probabilities and assertions, if hotly maintained.”

“But, to come to the point,” said Rastignac, “how do you think the affair ought to be managed?”

“In the first place,” replied Vinet, “I should leave the Beauvisage people to pay all costs of whatever kind, inasmuch as they propose to do so.”

“Do I oppose that?” said the minister. “Have I the right or the means to do so?”

“The affair,” continued Vinet, “should be placed in the hands of some capable and wily solicitor, like Desroches, for example, Monsieur de Trailles’ lawyer. He’ll know how to put flesh on the bones of a case you justly consider rather thin.”

“Well, it is certainly not my place to say to Monsieur de Trailles or any other man, ‘I

forbid you to employ whom you will as your solicitor.’”

“Then we need some pleader who can talk in a moving way about that sacred thing the Family, and put himself into a state of indignation about these surreptitious and furtive ways of entering its honored enclosure.”

“Desroches can point out some such person to you. The government cannot prevent a man from saying what he pleases.”

“But,” interposed Maxime, who was forced out of his passive role by the minister’s coldness, “is *not preventing* all the help we are to expect in this affair from the government?”

“You don’t expect us, I hope, to take this matter upon ourselves?”

“No, of course not; but we have certainly supposed that you would take some interest in the matter.”

“But how?—in what way?”

“Well, as Monsieur le procureur said just now, by giving a hint to the subsidized newspapers, by stirring up your friends to spread the news, by using a certain influence which power always exerts on the minds of magistrates.”

“Thank you, no!” replied Rastignac. “When you want the government for an accomplice, my dear Maxime, you must provide a better-laid plot than that. From your manner this morning I supposed there was really something in all this, and so I ventured to disturb our excellent attorney-general, who knows how I value his advice. But really, your scheme seems to me too transparent and also too narrow not to be doomed to inevitable defeat. If I were not married, and could pretend to the hand of Mademoiselle Beauvisage, perhaps I should feel differently; of course you will do as you think best. I do not say that the government will not wish you well in your attempt, but it certainly cannot descend to make it with you.”

“But see,” said Vinet, interposing to cut off Maxime’s reply, which would doubtless have been bitter; “suppose we send the affair to the criminal courts, and the peasant-woman, instigated by the Beauvisage couple, should denounce the man who had sworn before a notary, and offered himself for election falsely, as a Sallenauve: the question is one for the court of assizes.”

“But proofs? I return to that, you must have proof,” said Rastignac. “Have you even a shadow of it?”

“You said yourself, just now,” remarked Maxime, “that it was always possible to bring a bad case.”

“A civil case, yes; but to fail in a criminal case is a far more serious matter. It would be a pretty thing if you were shown not to have a leg to stand on, and the case ended in a decision of *non-lieu*. You couldn’t find a better way to put our enemy on a pedestal as high as the column of July.”

“So,” said Maxime, “you see absolutely nothing that can be done?”

“For us, no. For you, my dear Maxime, who have no official character, and who, if need

be, can support the attack on Monsieur de Sallenauve pistol in hand, as it were, nothing hinders you from proceeding in the matter."

"Oh, yes!" said Maxime, bitterly, "I'm a sort of free lance."

"Not at all; you are a man intuitively convinced of facts impossible to prove legally, and you do not give way before the judgment of God or man."

Monsieur de Trailles rose angrily. Vinet rose also, and, shaking hands with Rastignac as he took leave of him, he said,—

"I don't deny that your course is a prudent one, and I don't say that in your place I should not do the same thing."

"Adieu, Maxime; without bitterness, I hope," said Rastignac to Monsieur de Trailles, who bowed coldly and with dignity.

When the two conspirators were alone in the antechamber, Maxime turned to his companion.

"Do you understand such squeamishness?" he asked.

"Perfectly," replied Vinet, "and I wonder to see a clever man like you so duped."

"Yes, duped to make you lose your time and I mine by coming here to listen to a lecture on virtue!"

"That's not it; but I do think you guileless to be taken in by that refusal to co-operate."

"What! do you think—"

"I think that this affair is risky; if it succeeds, the government, arms folded, will reap the benefit. But if on the contrary we fail, it will not take a share in the defeat. But you may be sure of this, for I know Rastignac well: without seeming to know anything, and without compromising himself in any way, he will help us, and perhaps more usefully than by open connivance. Think! did he say a single word on the morality of the affair? Didn't he say, again and again, 'I don't oppose—I have no right to prevent'? And as to the venom of the case, the only fault he found was that it wasn't sure to kill. But in truth, my dear monsieur, this is going to be a hard pull, and we shall want all the cleverness of that fellow Desroches to get us through."

"Then you think I had better see him?"

"Better see him! why, my good friend, you ought to go to him at once."

"Wouldn't it be better if he talked with you?"

"Oh! no, no!" exclaimed Vinet. "I may be the man to put the question in the Chamber; and if Desroches were seen with me, I should lose my virginity."

So saying, he took leave of Maxime with some haste, on the ground that he ought then to be at the Chamber.

"But I," said Maxime, running after him,—"suppose I want to consult you in the matter?"

"I leave to-night for my district, to get things into order before the opening of the new

session.”

“But about bringing up the question which you say may devolve on you?”

“I or another. I will hasten back as soon as I can; but you understand, I must put my department in order for a six months’ absence.”

“A good journey to you, then, Monsieur le procureur-general,” replied Maxime, sarcastically.

Left to himself, Monsieur de Trailles had a period of discouragement, resulting from the discovery that these two political Bertrands meant that his paw should pull the chestnuts from the fire. Rastignac’s behavior particularly galled him. His mind went back to their first interview at Madame Restaud’s, twenty years earlier, when he himself held the sceptre of fashion, and Rastignac, a poor student, neither knew how to come into a room nor how to leave it. [See “Pere Goriot.”] And now Rastignac was peer of France and minister, while he, Maxime, become his agent, was obliged with folded arms to hear himself told that his plot was weak and he must carry it out alone, if at all.

But this discouragement did not last.

“Yes!” he cried to himself, “I *will* carry it out; my instinct tells me there is something in it. What nonsense!—a Dorlange, a nobody, to attempt to checkmate Maxime de Trailles and make a stepping-stone of my defeat! To my solicitor’s,” he said to the coachman, opening the door of the carriage himself.

Desroches was at home; and Monsieur de Trailles was immediately admitted into his study.

Desroches was a lawyer who had had, like Raffaelle, several manners. First, possessor of a practice without clients, he had made fish of every case that came into his net; and he felt himself, in consequence, little respected by the court. But he was a hard worker, well versed in all the ins and outs of chicanery, a keen observer, and an intelligent reader of the movements of the human heart. Consequently he had made for himself, in course of time, a very good practice; he had married a rich woman, and the moment that he thought himself able to do without crooked ways he had seriously renounced them. In 1839 Desroches had become an honest and skilful solicitor: that is to say, he assumed the interests of his clients with warmth and ability; he never counselled an openly dishonorable proceeding, still less would he have lent a hand to it. As to that fine flower of delicacy to be met with in Derville and some others like him, besides the sad fact that it is difficult to keep its fragrance from evaporating in this business world of which Monsieur de Talleyrand says, “Business means getting the property of others,” it is certain that it can never be added to any second state of existence. The loss of that bloom of the soul, like that of other virginities, is irreparable. Desroches had not aspired to restore it to himself. He no longer risked anything ignoble or dishonest, but the good tricks admitted the code of procedure, the good traps, the good treacheries which could be legitimately played off upon an adversary, he was very ready to undertake.

Desroches was moreover a man of parts and witty; loving the pleasures of the table, and like all men perpetually the slaves of imperious toil, he felt the need of vigorous amusement, taken on the wing and highly spiced. While purifying after a fashion his

judicial life, he still continued the legal adviser of artists, men of letters, actresses, courtesans, and elegant bohemians like Maxime de Trailles, because he liked to live their life; they were sympathetic to him as he to them. Their witty *argot*, their easy morals, their rather loose adventures, their expedients, their brave and honorable toil, in a word, their greatness and their weakness,—he understood it all marvellously well; and, like an ever-indulgent providence, he lent them his aid whenever they asked for it. But in order to conceal from his dignified and more valuable clients whatever might be compromising in the *clientele* he really preferred, Desroches had his days of domesticity when he was husband and father, especially on Sundays. He appeared in the Bois de Boulogne in a modest caleche beside his wife (whose ugliness revealed the size of her *dot*), with three children on the front seat, who were luckless enough to resemble their mother. This family picture, these virtuous Dominical habits, recalled so little the week-day Desroches, dining in cafes with all the male and female *viveurs* of renown, that one of them, Malaga, a circus-rider, famous for her wit and vim, remarked that lawyers ought not to be allowed to masquerade in that way and deceive the public with fictitious family joys.

It was to this relative integrity that de Trailles now went for counsel, as he never failed to do in all the many difficulties he encountered in life. Following a good habit, Desroches listened, without interrupting, to the long explanation of the case submitted to him. As Maxime hid nothing from this species of confessor, he gave his reasons for wishing to injure Sallenauve, representing him, in all good faith, as having usurped the name under which he was elected to the Chamber,—his hatred making him take the possibility for positive evidence.

In his heart, Desroches did not want to take charge of an affair in which he saw not the slightest chance of success; but he showed his lax integrity by talking over the affair with his client as if it were an ordinary case of legal practice, instead of telling him frankly his opinion that this pretended “case” was a mere intrigue. The number of things done in the domain of evil by connivance in speech, without proceeding to the actual collusion of action, are incalculable.

“In the first place,” said Desroches, when the matter was all explained, “a civil suit is not to be thought of. Your Romilly peasant-woman might have her hands full of proofs, but she has no ground herself to stand upon; she has no legal interest in contesting the rights of this recognized natural son.”

“Yes, that is what Vinet said just now.”

“As for the criminal case, you could, no doubt, compel it by giving information to the police authorities of this alleged imposture—”

“Vinet,” interrupted Maxime, “inclined to the criminal proceeding.”

“Yes, but there are a great many objections to it. In the first place, in order that the complaint be received at all, you must produce a certain amount of proof; then, supposing it is received, and the authorities are determined to pursue the case, you must have more evidence of criminality than you have now; and, moreover, supposing that you can show that the so-called Marquis de Sallenauve committed a fraud, how will you prove that the so-called son was privy to it? He might have been the dupe of some political schemer.”

“But what interest could such a schemer have in giving Dorlange the many advantages

he has derived from the recognition?”

“Ah! my dear fellow, in political manners all queer proceedings are possible; there is no such fertile source for compilers of *causes celebres* and novelists. In the eyes of the law, you must remember, the counterfeiting of a person is not always a crime.”

“How so?” asked Maxime.

“Here,” said Desroches, taking up the Five Codes; “do me the favor to read Article 5 of the Penal Code, the only one which gives an opening to the case you have in mind.”

Maxime read aloud the article, which was as follows:—

“‘Any functionary or public officer who, in the exercise of his function, shall commit forgery—either by false signatures, by alterations of deeds, writings, or signatures, or by counterfeiting persons—’ There, you see,” said Maxime, interrupting himself,—“‘by counterfeiting persons—‘”

“Go on,” insisted Desroches.

“‘—by counterfeiting persons,’” resumed de Trailles, “‘either by writings made or intercalated in the public records or other documents, shall be punished by imprisonment at hard labor for life.’”

Maxime lingered lovingly over the last words, which gave his revenge a foretaste of the fate that awaited Sallenauve.

“My dear count,” said Desroches, “you do as the barristers do; they read to the jury only so much of a legal document as suits their point of view. You pay no attention to the fact that the only persons affected by this article are *functionaries* or *public officers*.”

Maxime re-read the article, and convinced himself of the truth of that remark.

“But,” he objected, “there must be something elsewhere about such a crime when committed by private individuals.”

“No, there is not; you can trust my knowledge of jurisprudence,—the Code is absolutely silent in that direction.”

“Then the crime we wish to denounce can be committed with impunity?”

“Its repression is always doubtful,” replied Desroches. “Judges do sometimes make up for the deficiency of the Code in this respect. Here,” he added, turning over the leaves of a book of reference,—“here are two decisions of the court of assizes, reported in Carnot’s Commentary on the Penal Code: one of July 7, 1814, the other April 24, 1818,—both confirmed by the court of appeals, which condemn for forgery, by ‘counterfeiting persons,’ individuals who were neither functionaries nor public officers: but these decisions, unique in law, rest on the authority of an article in which the crime they punish is not even mentioned; and it is only by elaborate reasoning that they contrived to make this irregular application of it. You can understand, therefore, how very doubtful the issue of such a case would be, because in the absence of a positive rule you can never tell how the magistrates might decide.”

“Consequently, your opinion, like Rastignac’s, is that we had better send our peasant-woman back to Romilly and drop the whole matter?”

“There is always something to be done if one knows how to set about it,” replied Desroches. “There is a point that neither you nor Rastignac nor Vinet seems to have thought of; and that is, to proceed in a criminal case against a member of the national representation, except for flagrant crime, requires the consent and authority of the Chamber.”

“True,” said Maxime, “but I don’t see how a new difficulty is going to help us.”

“You wouldn’t be sorry to send your adversary with the galleys,” said Desroches, laughing.

“A villain,” added Maxime, “who may make me lose a rich marriage; a fellow who poses for stern virtue, and then proceeds to trickery of this kind!”

“Well, you must resign yourself to a less glorious result; but you can make a pretty scandal, and destroy the reputation of your man; and that ought, it seems to me, to serve your ends.”

“Of course,—better that than nothing.”

“Well, then, here’s what I advise. Don’t let your peasant-woman lodge her complaint before the criminal court, but make her place in the hands of the president of the Chamber of deputies a simple request for permission to proceed. Probably the permission will not be granted, and the affair will have to stop at that stage; but the matter being once made known will circulate through the Chambers, the newspapers will get hold of it and make a stir, and the ministry, *sub rosa*, can envenom the vague accusation through its friends.”

“*Parbleu*! my dear fellow,” cried Maxime, delighted to find a way open to his hatred, “you’ve a strong head,—stronger than that of these so-called statesmen. But this request for permission addressed to the president of the Chamber, who is to draw it up?”

“Oh! not I,” said Desroches, who did not wish to mix himself up any farther in this low intrigue. “It isn’t legal assistance that you want; this is simply firing your first gun, and I don’t undertake that business. But you can find plenty of briefless barristers always ready to put their finger in the political pie. Massol, for instance, can draw it up admirably. But you must not tell him that the idea came from me.”

“Oh! as for that,” said Maxime, “I’ll take it all on my own shoulders. Perhaps in this form Rastignac may come round to the project.”

“Yes, but take care you don’t make an enemy of Vinet, who will think you very impertinent to have an idea which ought, naturally, to have come into the head of so great a parliamentary tactician as himself.”

“Well, before long,” said Maxime, rising, “I hope to bring the Vinets and Rastignacs, and others like them, to heel. Where do you dine this evening?” he added.

“In a cave,” replied Desroches, “with a band.”

“Where’s that?”

“I suppose, in the course of your erotic existence, you have had recourse to the good offices of a certain Madame de Saint-Esteve?”

“No,” replied Maxime, “I have always done my own business in that line.”

“True,” said Desroches, “you conquer in the upper ranks, where, as a general thing, they don’t use go-betweens. But, at any rate, you have heard of Madame de Saint-Esteve?”

“Of course; her establishment is in the rue Neuve-Saint-Marc, and it was she who got that pot of money out of Nucingen for La Torpille. Isn’t she some relation to the chief of detective police, who bears the same name, and used to be one of the same kind as herself?”

“I don’t know about that,” said Desroches, “but what I can tell you is that in her business as procuress—as it was called in days less decorous than our own—the worthy woman has made a fortune, and now, without any serious change of occupation, she lives magnificently in the rue de Provence, where she carries on the business of a matrimonial agency.”

“Is that where you are going to dine?” asked Maxime.

“Yes, with the director of the London opera-house, Emile Blondet, Finot, Lousteau, Felicien Vernon, Theodore Gaillard, Hector Merlin, and Bixiou, who was commissioned to invite me, as it seems they are in want of my *experience* and *capacity for business*!”

“*Ah ca*! then there’s some financial object in this dinner?”

“No; it merely concerns a theatrical venture,—the engagement of a prima donna; and they want to submit the terms of the contract to my judgment. You understand that the rest of the guests are invited to trumpet the affair as soon as the papers are signed.”

“Who is the object of all this preparation?”

“Oh! a *star*,—destined, they say, to European success; an Italian, discovered by a Swedish nobleman, Comte Halphertius, through the medium of Madame de Saint-Esteve. The illustrious manager of the London opera-house is negotiating this treaty in order that she shall make her first appearance at his theatre.”

“Well, adieu, my dear fellow; a pleasant dinner,” said Maxime, preparing to depart. “If your star shines in London, it will probably appear in our firmament next winter. As for me, I must go and attend to the sunrise in Arcis. By the bye, where does Massol live?”

“Faith! I couldn’t tell you that. I never myself trust him with a case, for I will not employ barristers who dabble in politics. But you can get his address from the ‘Gazette des Tribuneaux’; he is one of their reporters.”

Maxime went to the office of that newspaper; but, probably on account of creditors, the office servant had express orders not to give the barrister’s address, so that, in spite of his arrogant, imperious manner, Monsieur de Trailles obtained no information. Happily, he bethought him that he frequently saw Massol at the Opera, and he resolved to seek him there that evening. Before going to dinner, he went to the lodgings in the rue Montmartre, where he had installed the Romilly peasant-woman and her counsel, whom Madame Beauvisage had already sent to Paris. He found them at dinner, making the most of the Beauvisage funds, and he gave them an order to come to his apartment the next day at half-past eleven without breakfasting.

In the evening he found Massol, as he expected, at the opera-house. Going up to the lawyer with the slightly insolent manner which was natural to him, he said,—

“Monsieur, I have an affair, half legal, half political, which I desire to talk over with you. If it did not demand a certain amount of secrecy, I would go to your office, but I think we could talk with more safety in my own apartment; where, moreover, I shall be able to put you in communication with other persons concerned in the affair. May I hope that to-morrow morning, at eleven o’clock, you will do me the favor to take a cup of tea with me?”

If Massol had had an office, he might possibly not have consented, for the sake of his legal dignity, to reverse the usual order of things; but as he perched rather than lodged in any particular place, he was glad of an arrangement which left his abode, if he had any, incognito.

“I shall have the honor to be with you at the hour named,” he replied ceremoniously.

“Rue Pigalle,” said Maxime, “No. 6.”

“Yes, I know,” returned Massol,—“a few steps from the corner of the rue de la Rochefoucauld.”

VIII. SOME OLD ACQUAINTANCES

A few evenings after the one on which Sallenauve and Marie-Gaston had taken Jacques Bricheteau to Saint-Sulpice to hear the Signora Luigia's voice, the church was the scene of a curious little incident that passed by almost wholly unperceived. A young man entered hastily by a side-door; he seemed agitated, and so absorbed in some anxiety that he forgot to remove his hat. The beadle caught him by the arm, and his face became livid, but, turning round, he saw at once that his fears were causeless.

"Is your hat glued on your head, young man?" said the beadle, pompously.

"Oh, pardon me, monsieur," he replied, snatching it off; "I forgot myself."

Then he slipped into the thickest of the crowd and disappeared.

A few seconds after the irruption of this youth the same door gave access to a man around whose powerful, seamed face was the collar of a white beard, which, combined with a thick shock of hair, also white but slightly reddish in tone and falling almost to his shoulders, gave him very much the air of an old Conventional, or a Bernardin de Saint-Pierre who had had the small-pox. His face and his hair placed him in the sixties, but his robust figure, the energetic decision of his movements, and, above all, the piercing keenness of the glance which he cast about him on entering the church, showed a powerful organization on which the passage of years had made little or no impression. No doubt, he was in search of the young fellow who had preceded him; but he did not commit the mistake of entering the crowd, where he knew of course that the youth had lost himself. Like a practised hunter, he saw that pursuit was useless, and he was just about to leave the church when, after a short organ prelude, the contralto of the signora delivering its solemn notes gave forth that glorious harmony to which is sung the Litany of the Virgin. The beauty of the voice, the beauty of the chant, the beauty of the words of the sacred hymn, which the fine method of the singer brought out distinctly, made a singular impression on the stalwart stranger. Instead of leaving the church, he put himself in the shadow of a column, against which he leaned as he stood; but as the last notes of the divine canticle died away among the arches of the church, he knelt on the pavement, and whoever had chanced to look that way would have seen two heavy tears rolling slowly down his cheeks. The benediction given, and the crowd dispersing, he rose, wiped his eyes, and, muttering, "What a fool I am!" left the church. Then he went to the Place Saint-Sulpice, and, beckoning to a coach on the stand, he said to the driver,—

"Rue de Provence, my man, quick! there's fat in it."

Reaching the house, he went rapidly up the stairway, and rang at the door of an apartment on the first floor.

"Is my aunt at home?" he inquired of the Negro who opened it. Then he followed the man, and was presently ushered into a salon where the Negro announced,—

"Monsieur de Saint-Esteve."

The salon which the famous chief of the detective police now entered was remarkable

for the luxury, but still more for the horribly bad taste, of its appointments. Three women of advanced age were seated round a card-table earnestly employed in a game of dominoes. Three glasses and an empty silver bowl which gave forth a vinous odor showed that the worship of double-sixes was not without its due libations.

“Good evening, mesdames,” said the chief of police, sitting down; “for I have something to say to each of you.”

“We’ll listen presently,” said his aunt; “you can’t interrupt the game. It won’t be long; I play for four.”

“White all round!” said one of the hags.

“Domino!” cried the Saint-Esteve. “I win; you have four points between you two, and the whites are all out. Well, my dear, what is it?” she said, turning to her nephew, after a rather stormy reckoning among the witches was over.

“You, Madame Fontaine,” said the chief of police, addressing one of the venerable beings, whose head was covered with disorderly gray hair and a battered green bonnet, —“you neglect your duty; you have sent me no report, and, on the contrary, I get many complaints of you. The prefect has a great mind to close your establishment. I protect you on account of the services you are supposed to render us; but if you don’t render them, I warn you, without claiming any gifts of prediction, that your fate-shop will be shut up.”

“There now!” replied the pythoness, “you prevented me from hiring Mademoiselle Lenormand’s apartment in the rue de Tournon, and how can you expect me to make reports about the cooks and clerks and workmen and grisettes who are all I get where I am? If you had let me work among the great folks, I’d make you reports and plenty of them.”

“I don’t see how you can say that, Madame Fontaine,” said Madame de Saint-Esteve. “I am sure I send you all my clients. It was only the other day,” continued the matrimonial agent, “I sent you that Italian singer, living with a deputy who is against the government; why didn’t you report about that?”

“There’s another thing,” said the chief of police, “which appears in several of the complaints that I received about you,—that nasty animal—”

“What, Astaroth?” said Madame Fontaine.

“Yes, that batrachian, that toad, to come down to his right name. It seems he nearly killed a woman who was pregnant—”

“Well, well,” interrupted the sorceress, “if I am to tell fortunes alone, you might as well guillotine me at once. Because a fool of a woman lay-in with a dead child, must toads be suppressed in nature? Why did God make them?”

“My dear woman,” said the chief, “did you never hear that in 1617 a learned man was put to death for having a toad in a bottle?”

“Yes, I know that; but we are not in those light ages,” replied Madame Fontaine, facetiously.

“As for you, Madame Nourrisson, the complaint is that you gather your fruit unripe.

You ought to know by this time the laws and regulations, and I warn you that everything under twenty-one years of age is forbidden. I wonder I have to remind you of it. Now, aunt, what I have to say to you is confidential."

Thus dismissed, two of the Fates departed.

Since the days when Jacques Collin had abdicated his former kingship and had made himself, as they say, a new skin in the police force, Jacqueline Collin, though she had never put herself within reach of the law, had certainly never donned the robe of innocence. But having attained, like her nephew, to what might fairly be called opulence, she kept at a safe and respectful distance from the Penal Code, and under cover of an agency that was fairly avowable, she sheltered practices more or less shady, on which she continued to bestow an intelligence and an activity that were really infernal.

"Aunt," said Vautrin, "I have so many things to say to you that I don't know where to begin."

"I should think so! It is a week since I've seen you."

"In the first place, I must tell you that I have just missed a splendid chance."

"What sort of chance?" asked Jacqueline.

"In the line of my odious calling. But this time the capture was worth making. Do you remember that little Prussian engraver about whom I sent you to Berlin?"

"The one who forged those Vienna bank bills in that wonderful way?"

"Yes. I just missed arresting him near Saint-Sulpice. But I followed him into the church, where I heard your Signora Luigia."

"Ah!" said Jacqueline, "she has made up her mind at last, and has left that imbecile of a sculptor."

"It is about her that I have come to talk to you," said Vautrin. "Here are the facts. The Italian opera season in London has begun badly,—their prima donna is taken ill. Sir Francis Drake, the impresario, arrived in Paris yesterday, at the Hotel des Princes, rue de Richelieu, in search of a prima donna, at any rate *pro tem*. I have been to see him in the interests of the signora. Sir Francis Drake is an Englishman, very bald, with a red nose, and long yellow teeth. He received me with cold politeness, and asked in very good French what my business was."

"Did you propose to him Luigia?"

"That was what I went for,—in the character, be it understood, of a Swedish nobleman. He asked if her talent was known. 'Absolutely unknown,' I replied. 'It is risky,' said Sir Francis; 'nevertheless arrange to let me hear her.' I told him that she was staying with her friend Madame de Saint-Esteve, at whose house I could take the liberty to invite him to dinner."

"When?" asked Jacqueline.

"To-day is the 19th; I said the 21st. Order the dinner from Chevet for fifteen persons, and send for your client Bixiou to make you out the list. Tell him you want the chief men of the press, a lawyer to settle the terms of the contract, and a pianist to accompany the

signora. Let her know what hangs upon it. Sir Francis Drake and I will make up the number. Useless to tell you that I am your friend Comte Halphertius, who, having no house in Paris, gives this dinner at yours. Mind that everything is done in the best taste."

In designating Bixiou to his aunt as the recruiting-officer of the dinner, Vautrin knew that through the universality of his relations with writing, singing, designing, eating, living, and squirming Paris, no one was as capable as he of spreading the news of the dinner broadcast.

At seven o'clock precisely all the guests named by Desroches to Maxime, plus Desroches himself, were assembled in the salon of the rue de Provence, when the Negro footman opened the door and announced Sir Francis Drake and his Excellency the Comte Halphertius. The dress of the Swedish nobleman was correct to the last degree,—black coat, white cravat, and white waistcoat, on which glowed the ribbon of an order hanging from his neck; the rest of his decorations were fastened to his coat by chainlets. At the first glance which he cast upon the company, Vautrin had the annoyance of beholding that Jacqueline's habits and instincts had been more potent than his express order,—for a species of green and yellow turban surmounted her head in a manner which he felt to be ridiculous; but thanks to the admirable manner in which the rest of his programme had been carried out, the luckless coiffure was forgiven.

As for Signora Luigia, dressed in black, which was customary with her, and having had the good sense to reject the services of a *coiffeur*, she was royally beautiful. An air of melancholy gravity, expressed by her whole person, inspired a sentiment of respect which surprised the men who on Bixiou's invitation were there to judge of her. The only special presentation that was made among the guests was that of Desroches to Vautrin, which Bixiou made in the following lively formula:—

"Maitre Desroches, the most intelligent solicitor of modern times—Comte Halphertius of Sweden."

As for Sir Francis Drake, he seemed at first inclined to disdain the influence of the dramatic newspapers, whose representatives were there assembled; but presently recognizing Felicien Vernou and Lousteau, two noted men of that secondary press, he greeted them heartily and shook them by the hand.

Before dinner was announced, Comte Halphertius judged it advisable to make a little speech.

"Dear madame," he said to his aunt, "you are really a fairy godmother. This is the first time I have ever been in a Parisian salon, and here you have assembled to meet me all that literature, the arts, and the legal profession can offer of their best. I, who am only a northern barbarian,—though our country, too, can boast of its celebrities,—Linnaeus, Berzelius, Thorwaldsen, Tegner, Franzen, Geier, and the charming novelist Frederika Bremer,—I find myself a cipher in such company."

"But in Bernadotte France and Sweden clasped hands," replied Madame de Saint-Esteve, whose historical erudition went as far as that.

"It is very certain," said Vautrin, "that our beloved sovereign, Charles XIV.—"

The announcement of dinner by a majordomo, who threw open the double doors of the

salon, put an end to this remark. Jacqueline took Vautrin's arm, saying in a whisper as they walked along,—

"Have I done things all right?"

"Yes," replied Vautrin, "it is all in good style, except that devil of a turban of yours, which makes you look like a poll-parrot."

"Why, no," said Jacqueline, "not at all; with my Javanese face" (she was born on the island of Java), "oriental things set me off."

Madame de Saint-Esteve placed Sir Francis Drake upon her right, and Desroches on her left; Vautrin sat opposite, flanked on either side by Emile Blondet, of the "Debats," and the Signoria Luigia; the rest of the company placed themselves as they pleased. The dinner, on the whole, was dull; Bixiou, at Madame de Saint-Esteve's request, had warned the party to risk nothing that might offend the chaste ears of the pious Italian. Forced to mind their morals, as a celebrated critic once observed, these men of wit and audacity lost their spirit; and, taking refuge in the menu, which was excellent, they either talked together in a low voice, or let the conversation drag itself along in bourgeois commonplaces. They ate and they drank, but they did not dine. Bixiou, incapable of bearing this state of things during a whole dinner, determined to create a reaction. The appearance of this Swedish magnate, evidently on intimate terms with the Saint-Esteve, puzzled him. He noticed a certain insufficiency in Vautrin, and thought to himself that if he were really a great nobleman, he would be more equal to the occasion, and give a tone to the feast. He determined, therefore, to test him, and thus provide amusement, at any rate, for himself. So, at the end of the second course, he suddenly said from his end of the table,—

"Monsieur le comte, you are too young, of course, to have known Gustavus III., whom Scribe and Auber have set in opera, while the rest of us glorify him in a *galop*."

"I beg your pardon," replied Vautrin, jumping at the chance thus given him, "I am nearly sixty years of age, which makes me thirteen in 1792, when our beloved sovereign was killed by the assassin Ankarstroem, so that I can well remember that period."

Thus, by means of a little volume entitled "Characters and Anecdotes of the Court of Sweden," printed in 1808, and bought on the quays in the interests of his Swedish incarnation, the chief of the detective police evaded the trap. He did better. The faucet being open, he poured forth such an abundance of erudition and detailed circumstances, he related so many curious and secret anecdotes, especially relating to the *coup d'etat* by which, in 1772, Gustavus III. had freed his crown,—in short, he was so precise and so interesting that as they left the table Emile Blondet said to Bixiou,—

"I thought, as you did, that a foreign count in the hands of a marriage agent was a very suspicious character; but he knows the court of Sweden in a way that it was quite impossible to get out of books. He is evidently a man well born; one might make some interesting articles out of the stories he has just told."

"Yes," said Bixiou, "and I mean to cultivate his acquaintance; I could make a good deal out of him in the Charivari."

"You have better find out first," said Desroches, "whether he has enough French humor

to like being caricatured."

Presently the first notes of the piano gave notice that the Signora Luigia was about to mount the breach. She first sang the romance in "Saul" with a depth of expression which moved the whole company, even though that areopagus of judges were digesting a good dinner, as to which they had not restrained themselves. Emile Blondet, who was more of a political thinker than a man of imagination, was completely carried away by his enthusiasm. As the song ended, Felicien Vernou and Lousteau went up to Sir Francis Drake and reproached him for wishing to take such a treasure from France, at the same time flattering him for his cleverness as an impresario.

La Luigia then sang an air from the "Nina" of Paesiello; and in that—the part being very dramatic—she showed a talent for comedy second only to her vocal gift. It was received with truly genuine applause; but what assured and completed her success with these trained judges was her modesty and the sort of ignorance in which she still remained of her amazing talent,—in the midst, too, of praises which might have turned her head. Accustomed to frenzied self-love and the insolent pretensions of the veriest sparrow of the opera, these journalists were amazed and touched by the humility, the simplicity of this empress, who seemed quite astonished at the effect she produced.

The success of the trial passed all expectation. There was but one voice as to the desirability of immediately engaging her; and Sir Francis Drake, Vautrin, and Desroches presently passed into an adjoining room to draw up the terms of the contract. As soon as that was done, Vautrin returned to the salon for *la diva*, requesting her to hear the contract read and to affix her signature. Her departure for London without further delay was fixed for the following day in company with Sir Francis Drake.

A few days later the packet-boat from Boulogne conveyed to England another personage of this history. Jacques Bricheteau, having obtained Sallenauve's present address from Madame de l'Estorade, and considering the danger which threatened the new deputy extremely urgent, decided not to write, but to go himself to England and confer with him in person. When he reached London, he was surprised to learn that Hanwell was the most celebrated insane asylum in Great Britain. Had he reflected on the mental condition of Marie-Gaston, he might have guessed the truth. As it was, he felt completely bewildered; but not committing the blunder of losing his time in useless conjectures, he went on without a moment's delay to Hanwell, which establishment is only about nine miles from London, pleasantly situated at the foot of a hill on the borders of Middlesex and Surrey.

After a long detention in the waiting-room, he was at last enabled to see his friend at a moment when Marie-Gaston's insanity, which for several days had been in the stages of mania, was yielding to the care of the doctor, and showed some symptoms of a probable recovery. As soon as Sallenauve was alone with the organist, he inquired the reason that led him to follow him; and he heard, with some emotion, the news of the intrigues which Maxime de Trailles had apparently organized against him. Returning to his original suspicions, he said to Jacques Bricheteau,—

"Are you really sure that that person who declared himself my father was the Marquis de Sallenauve, and that I am truly his son?"

“Mother Marie-des-Anges and Achille Pigoult, by whom I was warned of this plot, have no more doubt than I have of the existence of the Marquis de Sallenauve; this gossip with which they threaten you has, in my judgment, but one dangerous aspect. I mean that by your absence you are giving a free field to your adversaries.”

“But,” replied the deputy, “the Chamber will not condemn me without a hearing. I wrote to the president and asked for leave of absence, and I took the precaution to request de l’Estorade, who knows the reason of my absence, to be kind enough to guarantee me, should my absence be called in question.”

“I think you also wrote to Madame de l’Estorade, didn’t you?”

“I wrote only to her,” replied Sallenauve. “I wanted to tell her about the great misfortune of our mutual friend, and, at the same time, I asked her to explain to her husband the kind service I requested him to do for me.”

“If that is so,” said Bricheteau, “you need not count for one moment on the l’Estorades. A knowledge of this trick which is being organized against you has reached their ears and affected their minds, I am very sure.”

He then related the reception he had met with from Madame de l’Estorade, and the uncivil remarks she had made about Sallenauve, from which he concluded that in the struggle about to take place no assistance could be relied on from that direction.

“I have every reason to be surprised,” said Sallenauve, “after the warm assurances Madame de l’Estorade has given me of an unfailing good-will. However,” he added, philosophically, “everything is possible in this world; and calumny has often undermined friendship.”

“You understand, therefore,” said Bricheteau, “that it is all-important to start for Paris, without a moment’s delay. Your stay here, all things considered, is only relatively necessary.”

“On the contrary,” said Sallenauve, “the doctor considers that my presence here may be of the utmost utility. He has not yet let me see the patient, because he expects to produce some great result when I do see him.”

“That is problematical,” returned Jacques Bricheteau; “whereas by staying here you are compromising your political future and your reputation in the most positive manner. Such a sacrifice no friendship has the right to demand of you.”

“Let us talk of it with the doctor,” said Sallenauve, unable to deny the truth of what Bricheteau said.

On being questioned, the doctor replied that he had just seen symptoms in the patient which threatened another paroxysm.

“But,” cried Sallenauve, eagerly, “you are not losing hope of a cure, are you, doctor?”

“Far from that. I have perfect faith in the ultimate termination of the case; but I see more delay in reaching it than at first I expected,” replied the doctor.

“I have recently been elected to our Chamber of deputies,” said Sallenauve, “and I ought to be in my seat at the opening of the session; in fact, my interests are seriously

concerned, and my friend Monsieur Bricheteau has come over to fetch me. If therefore I can be sure that my presence here is not essential—”

“By all means go,” said the doctor. “It may be a long time before I could allow you to see the patient; therefore you can leave without the slightest self-reproach. In fact, you can really do nothing here at present. Trust him to Lord Lewin and me; I assure you that I shall make his recovery, of which I have no doubt, a matter of personal pride and self-love.”

Sallenauve pressed the doctor’s hand gratefully, and started for London without delay. Arriving there at five o’clock, the travellers were unable to leave before midnight; meantime their eyes were struck at every turn by those enormous posters which English *puffism* alone is able to produce, announcing the second appearance in Her Majesty’s theatre of the Signora Luigia. The name alone was enough to attract the attention of both travellers; but the newspapers to which they had recourse for further information furnished, as is customary in England, so many circumstantial details about the prima donna that Sallenauve could no longer doubt the transformation of his late housekeeper into an operatic star of the first magnitude.

Going to the box-office, which he found closed, every seat having been sold before mid-day, Sallenauve considered himself lucky to obtain two seats from a speculator, at the enormous cost of five pounds apiece. The opera was “La Pazza d’Amore” of Paesiello. When the curtain rose, Sallenauve, who had spent the last two weeks at Hanwell, among the insane, could all the more appreciate the remarkable dramatic talent his late housekeeper displayed in the part of Nina. Even Bricheteau, though annoyed at Sallenauve’s determination to be present, was so carried away by the power of the singer that he said to his companion rather imprudently,—

“Politics have no triumphs as that. Art alone is deity—”

“And Luigia is its prophet!” added Sallenauve.

Never, perhaps, had the Italian opera-house in London presented a more brilliant sight; the whole audience was in a transport of enthusiasm, and bouquets fairly rained upon the stage.

As they left the theatre, Bricheteau looked at his watch; it was a quarter to eleven; they had thus ample time to take the steamer leaving, as the tide served, at midnight. But when the organist turned to make this remark to Sallenauve, who was behind him, he saw nothing of his man; the deputy had vanished!

Ten minutes later the maid of the Signora Luigia entered her mistress’s dressing-room, which was filled with distinguished Englishmen presented by Sir Francis Drake to the new star, and gave her a card. On reading the name the prima donna turned pale and whispered a few words to the waiting-woman; then she seemed so anxious to be rid of the crowd who were pressing round her that her budding adorers were inclined to be angry. But a great singer has rare privileges, and the fatigue of the part into which the *diva* had just put so much soul seemed so good an excuse for her sulkiness that her court dispersed without much murmuring.

Left alone, the signora rapidly resumed her usual dress, and the directors’ carriage took her back to the hotel where she had stayed since arriving in London. On entering her salon

she found Sallenauve, who had preceded her.

“You in London, monsieur!” she said; “it is like a dream!”

“Especially to me,” replied Sallenauve, “who find you here, after searching hopelessly for you in Paris—”

“Did you take that pains?—why?”

“You left me in so strange a manner, and your nature is so rash, you knew so little of Paris, and so many dangers might threaten your inexperience, that I feared for you.”

“Suppose harm did happen to me; I was neither your wife, nor your sister, nor your mistress; I was only your—”

“I thought,” said Sallenauve, hastily, “that you were my friend.”

“I was—under obligation to you,” she replied. “I saw that I was becoming an embarrassment in your new situation. What else could I do but release you from it?”

“Who told you that you were an embarrassment to me? Have I ever said or intimated anything of the kind? Could I not speak to you, as I did, about your professional life without wounding so deeply your sensibility?”

“People feel things as they feel them,” replied Luigia. “I had the inward consciousness that you would rather I were out of your house than in it. My future you had already given me the means to secure; you see for yourself it is opening in a manner that ought to reassure you.”

“It seems to me so brilliant that I hope you will not think me indiscreet if I ask whose hand, more fortunate than mine, has produced this happy result.”

“That of a great Swedish nobleman,” replied Luigia, without hesitation. “Or rather, I should say, as the friend of a lady who took an interest in me, he procured me an engagement at Her Majesty’s Theatre; the kind encouragement of the public has done the rest.”

“Say, rather, your own talent; I was present at the performance this evening.”

Making him a coquettish courtesy, Luigia said,—

“I hope you were satisfied with your humble servant.”

“Your musical powers did not surprise me, for those I knew already; but those transports of dramatic passion, your powerful acting, so sure of itself, did certainly astonish me.”

“It comes from having suffered much,” replied Luigia; “suffering is a great teacher.”

“Suffered? Yes, I know you did, in Italy. But I have liked to feel that after your arrival in France—”

“Always; I have always suffered,” she said in a voice of emotion. “I was not born under a happy star.”

“That ‘always’ seems like a reproach to me,” said Sallenauve, “and yet I do not know what wrong I can have done you.”

“You have done me no wrong; the harm was there!” she cried, striking her breast, —“within me!”

“Probably some foolish fancy, such as that of leaving my house suddenly, because your mistaken sense of honor made you think yourself in my way.”

“Not mistaken,” she replied. “I know what was in your thoughts. If only on account of what you had done for me, I knew I could never aspire to your esteem.”

“But, my dear Luigia, I call such ideas absurd. Have I ever shown you any want of consideration? How could I? Your conduct has always been exemplary.”

“Yes, I tried to do everything that would give you a good opinion of me; but I was none the less the widow of Benedetto.”

“What! can you suppose that that misfortune, the result of a just vengeance—”

“Ah! no, it is not the death of that man that lowered me in your eyes; on the contrary. But I had been the wife of a buffoon, of a police-spy, of a base man, ready to sell me to any one who would give him money.”

“As long as that situation lasted, I thought you deeply to be pitied; but despised, never!”

“And,” continued the Italian, more excitedly, “we had lived two years under the same roof, you and I alone.”

“Yes, and I found my comfort in it.”

“Did you think me ugly?”

“You know better than that, for I made my finest statue from you.”

“Foolish?”

“No one was ever foolish who could act such a part as you did to-night.”

“Then you must see that you despised me.”

Sallenauve seemed wholly surprised by this deduction; he thought himself very clever in replying,—

“It seems to me that if I had behaved to you in any other manner you would have the right to say that I despised you.”

But he had to do with a woman who in everything, in her friendships, her hatreds, her actions, as in her words, went straight to her point. As if she feared not to be fully understood, she went on:—

“To-day, monsieur, I can tell you all, for I speak of the past; the future has opened before me, as you see. From the day you were good to me and by your generous protection I escaped an infamous outrage, my heart has been wholly yours.”

Sallenauve, who had never suspected that feeling, and, above all, was unable to understand how so artlessly crude an avowal of it could be made, knew not what to answer.

“I am not ignorant,” continued the strange woman, “that I should have difficulty in

rising from the degradation in which I appeared to you at our first meeting. If, at the time you consented to take me with you to Paris, I had seen you incline to treat me with gallantry, had you shown any sign of turning to your profit the dangerous situation in which I had placed myself, my heart would instantly have retired; you would have seemed to me an ordinary man—”

“So,” remarked Sallenauve, “to love you would have been insulting; not to love you was cruel! What sort of woman are you, that either way you are displeased?”

“You ought not to have loved me,” she replied, “while the mud was still on my skirts and you scarcely knew me; because then your love would have been the love of the eyes and not of the soul. But when, after two years passed beside you, you had seen by my conduct that I was an honorable woman; when, without ever accepting a pleasure, I devoted myself to the care of the house and your comfort without other relaxation than the study of my art; and when, above all, I sacrificed to you that modesty you had seen me defend with such energy,—then you were cruel not to comprehend, and never, never will your imagination tell you what I have suffered, and all the tears you have made me shed.”

“But, my dear Luigia, I was your host, and even had I suspected what you now reveal to me, my duty as an honorable man would have commanded me to see nothing of it, and to take no advantage of you.”

“Ah! that is not the reason; it is simpler than that. You saw nothing because your fancy turned elsewhere.”

“Well, and if it were so?”

“It ought not to be so,” replied Luigia, vehemently. “That woman is not free; she has a husband and children, and though you did make a saint of her, I presume to say, ridiculous as it may seem, that she is not worth me!”

Sallenauve could not help smiling, but he answered very seriously,—

“You are totally mistaken as to your rival. Madame de l’Estorade was never anything to me but a model, without other value than the fact that she resembled another woman. That one I knew in Rome before I knew you. She had beauty, youth, and a glorious inclination for art. To-day she is confined in a convent; like you, she has paid her tribute to sorrow; therefore, you see—”

“What, three hearts devoted to you,” cried Luigia, “and not one accepted? A strange star is yours! No doubt I suffer from its fatal influence, and therefore I must pardon you.”

“You are good to be merciful; will you now let me ask you a question? Just now you spoke of your future, and I see it with my own eyes. Who are the friends who have suddenly advanced you so far and so splendidly in your career? Have you made any compact with the devil?”

“Perhaps,” said Luigia, laughing.

“Don’t laugh,” said Sallenauve; “you chose to rush alone and unprotected into that hell called Paris, and I dread lest you have made some fatal acquaintance. I know the immense difficulties and the immense dangers that a woman placed as you are now must meet. Who is this lady that you spoke of? and how did you ever meet her while living under my roof?”

“She is a pious and charitable woman, who came to see me during your absence at Arcis. She had noticed my voice at Saint-Sulpice, during the services of the Month of Mary, and she tried to entice me away to her own parish church of Notre-Dame de Lorette,

—it was for that she came to see me.”

“Tell me her name.”

“Madame de Saint-Esteve.”

Though far from penetrating the many mysteries that surrounded Jacqueline Collin, Sallenauve knew Madame de Saint-Esteve to be a woman of doubtful character and a matrimonial agent, having at times heard Bixiou tell tales of her.

“But that woman,” he said, “has a shocking notoriety in Paris. She is an adventuress of the worst kind.”

“I suspected it,” said Luigia. “But what of that?”

“And the man to whom she introduced you?”

“He an adventurer? No, I think not. At any rate, he did me a great service.”

“But he may have designs upon you.”

“Yes, people may have designs upon me,” replied Luigia, with dignity, “but they cannot execute them: between those designs and me, there is myself.”

“But your reputation?”

“That was lost before I left your house. I was said to be your mistress; you had yourself to contradict that charge before the electoral college; you contradicted it, but you could not stop it.”

“And my esteem, for which you profess to care?”

“I no longer want it. You did not love me when I wished for it; you shall not love me now that I no longer wish it.”

“Who knows?” exclaimed Sallenauve.

“There are two reasons why it cannot be,” said the singer. “In the first place, it is too late; and in the second, we are no longer on the same path.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I am an artist and you have ceased to be one. I rise; you fall.”

“Do you call it falling to rise, perhaps, to the highest dignities of the State?”

“To whatever height you rise,” said Luigia, passionately, “you will ever be below your past and the noble future that was once before you—Ah! stay; I think that I have lied to you; had you remained a sculptor, I believe I should have borne still longer your coldness and your disdain; I should have waited until I entered my vocation, until the halo round a singer’s head might have shown you, at last, that I was there beside you. But on the day that you apostatized I would no longer continue my humiliating sacrifice. There is no future possible between us.”

“Do you mean,” said Sallenauve, holding out his hand, which she did not take, “that we cannot even be friends?”

“No,” she replied; “all is over—past and gone. We shall hear of each other; and from

afar, as we pass in life, we can wave our hands in recognition, but nothing further."

"So," said Sallenauve, sadly, "this is how it all ends!"

La Luigia looked at him a moment, her eyes shining with tears.

"Listen," she said in a resolute and sincere tone: "this is possible. I have loved you, and after you, no one can enter the heart you have despised. You will hear that I have lovers; believe it not; you will not believe it, remembering the woman that I am. But who knows? Later your life may be swept clean of the other sentiments that have stood in my way; the freedom, the strangeness of the avowal I have just made to you will remain in your memory, and then it is not impossible that after this long rejection you may end by desiring me. If that should happen,—if at the end of many sad deceptions you should return, in sheer remorse, to the religion of art,—then, then, supposing that long years have not made love ridiculous between us, remember this evening. Now, let us part; it is already too late for a *tete-a-tete*."

So saying, she took a light and passed into an inner room, leaving Sallenauve in a state of mind we can readily imagine after the various shocks and surprises of this interview.

On returning to his hotel he found Jacques Bricheteau awaiting him.

"Where the devil have you been?" cried the organist, impatiently. "It is too late now to take the steamboat."

"Well," said Sallenauve, carelessly, "then I shall have a few hours longer to play truant."

"But during that time your enemies are tunnelling their mine."

"I don't care. In that cave called political life one has to be ready for anything."

"I thought as much!" exclaimed Bricheteau. "You have been to see Luigia; her success has turned your head, and the deputy is thinking of his statues."

"How often have I heard you say yourself that Art alone is great?"

"But an orator," replied Bricheteau, "is also an artist, and the greatest of all. Others speak to the heart and the mind, but he to the conscience and the will of others. At any rate, this is no time to look back; you are engaged in a duel with your adversaries. Are you an honest man, or a scoundrel who has stolen a name? There is the question which may, in consequence of your absence, be answered against you in the Chamber."

"I begin to feel that you have led me into a mistaken path; I had in my hands a treasure, and I have flung it away!"

"Happily," said the organist, "that's only an evening mist which the night will dissipate. To-morrow you will remember the engagement you are under to your father, and the great future which is before you."

IX. IN THE CHAMBER

The king had opened the Chamber, but Sallenauve was not present, and his absence was causing a certain sensation in the democratic ranks. The “National” was particularly disturbed. As a stockholder of the paper, coming frequently to its office before the election, and even consenting to write articles for it, how strange that on the eve of the opening of the session the newly elected deputy should not come near it!

“Now that he is elected,” said some of the editorial staff, remarking on the total disappearance of the man whom they considered they had done their part to elect, “does monsieur think he can treat us scurvily? It is getting too much the habit of these lordly deputies to be very obsequious as long as they are candidates, and throw us away, after they have climbed the tree, like an old coat.”

Less excitable, the editor-in-chief calmed this first ebullition, but Sallenauve’s absence from the royal session seemed to him very strange.

The next day, when the bureaus are constituted, presidents and secretaries appointed, and committees named, Sallenauve’s absence was still more marked. In the bureau for which his name was drawn, it happened that the election of its president depended on one vote; through the absence of the deputy of Arcis, the ministry gained that advantage and the Opposition lost it. Much discontent was expressed by the newspapers of the latter party; they did not, as yet, openly attack the conduct of the defaulter, but they declared that they could not account for it.

Maxime de Trailles, on the other hand, fully prepared and on the watch, was waiting only until the routine business of the bureaus and the appointment of the committees was disposed of to send in the petition of the Romilly peasant-woman, which had been carefully drawn up by Massol, under whose clever pen the facts he was employed to make the most of assumed that degree of probability which barristers contrive to communicate to their sayings and affirmations. But when Maxime had the joy of seeing that Sallenauve’s absence in itself was creating a prejudice against him, he went again to Rastignac and asked him if he did not think it better to hasten the moment of attack, since everything seemed so favorable.

This time Rastignac was much more explicit: Sallenauve’s absence abroad seemed to him the conduct of a man who feared exposure and had lost his head. He therefore advised de Trailles to have the petition sent in at once, and he made no difficulty about promising his assistance to a conspiracy which appeared to be taking color, the result of which must be, in any case, a very pretty scandal. The next day the first trace of his subterranean influence was visible. The order of the day in the Chamber was the verification of powers, —that is, the admission of newly elected members. The deputy appointed to report on the elections in the department of the Aube was a strong partisan of the ministry, and, in consequence of a confidential communication made to him that morning, the following paragraph appeared in his report:—

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The action of the electoral college of Arcis was regular. Monsieur
de Sallenauve produced in proper time all the necessary papers
proving his eligibility; his admission therefore would seem to
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present no difficulty. But rumors of a singular nature have been current since the election as to the name and identity of the new deputy; and, in support of these rumors, a petition to authorize a criminal prosecution has been laid before the president of the Chamber. This petition states an extremely serious fact, namely: that Monsieur de Sallenauve has usurped the name he bears; and this usurpation, being made by means of an official document, assumes the character of forgery committed by substitution of person. A most regrettable circumstance,

continued the report,

is the absence of Monsieur de Sallenauve, who instead of instantly contradicting the accusation made against him, has not appeared since the opening of the Chamber at any of its sessions, and it is not even known where he is. Under these circumstances, his admission, the committee think, cannot be granted; and they feel it therefore their duty to refer the matter to the Chamber.

Daniel d'Arthez, a deputy of the legitimist opposition, who had been favorable to the election of Sallenauve, hastened, after the reading of this report, to ask for the floor, and entreated the Chamber to remark that its adoption would be wholly unjustifiable.

"The point for the committee to decide," he said, "was the regularity of the election. The report distinctly states that this is not called in question. The Chamber can, therefore, do only one thing; namely, admit by an immediate vote the validity of an election about which no irregularity is alleged. To bring in the question of authorizing a criminal investigation would be an abuse of power; because by not allowing discussion or defence, and by dispensing with the usual forms of procedure which guarantee certain rights to a party implicated, the Chamber would be virtually rejecting the action of the electors in the exercise of their sovereign functions. Every one can see, moreover," added the orator, "that to grant the right of criminal investigation in this connection is to prejudge the merits of the case; the presumption of innocence, which is the right of every man, is ignored—whereas in this case the person concerned is a man whose integrity has never been doubted, and who has just been openly honored by the suffrages of his fellow citizens."

The discussion was prolonged for some time, the ministerial orators, of course, taking the other side, until an unfortunate event occurred. The senior deputy, acting as president (for the Chamber was not yet constituted), was a worn-out old man, very absent-minded, and wholly unaccustomed to the functions which his age devolved upon him. He had duly received Monsieur de Sallenauve's letter requesting leave of absence; and had he recollected to communicate it, as in duty bound, to the Chamber at the proper time, the discussion would probably have been nipped in the bud. But parliamentary matters are apt to go haphazard; when, reminded of the letter by the discussion, he produced it, and when the Chamber learned that the request for leave of absence was made for an indefinite period and for the vague purpose of "urgent affairs," the effect was lamentable.

"It is plain," said all the ministerial party, "that he has gone to England to escape an investigation; he feared the result; he feels himself unmasked."

This view, setting aside political prejudices, was shared by the sterner minds of all parties, who refused to conceive of a man not hastening to defend himself from such a blasting accusation. In short, after a very keen and able argument from the attorney-general, Vinet, who had taken heart on finding that the accused was likely to be condemned by default, the question of adjournment was put to the vote and passed, but by a very small majority; eight days being granted to the said deputy to appear and defend

himself.

The day after the vote was passed Maxime de Trailles wrote to Madame Beauvisage as follows:—

Madame,—The enemy received a severe check yesterday. In the opinion of my friend Rastignac, a very intelligent and experienced judge in parliamentary matters, Dorlange can never recover from the blow, no matter what may happen later. If we cannot succeed in producing positive proof to support the statement of our good peasant-woman, it is possible that this rascal, supposing always that he ventures to return to France, may be admitted to the Chamber. But if he is, he can only drag on a despised and miserable existence; he will be driven to resign, and then the election of Monsieur Beauvisage is beyond all doubt; for the electors, ashamed to have forsaken him for such a rascal, will be only too glad to reinstate themselves in public opinion by the choice of an honorable man—who was, in fact, their first choice.

It is to your rare sagacity, madame, that this result is due; for without that species of second sight which showed you the chances hidden in the revelation of that woman, we should have missed our best weapon. I must tell you though you may think this vanity, that neither Rastignac nor the attorney-general, in spite of their great political acumen, perceived the true value of your discovery; and I myself, if I had not had the good fortune of your acquaintance, and thus been enabled to judge of the great value of all ideas emanating from you, even I might have shared the indifference of the two statesmen to the admirable weapon which you have placed in our hands. I have now succeeded in proving to Rastignac the shrewdness and perspicacity you have shown in this matter, and he sincerely admires you for them. Therefore, madame, when I have the happiness of belonging to you by the tie we proposed, I shall not have to initiate you into politics, for you have already found your way there.

Nothing further can take place for a week, which is the period of delay granted by the Chamber. If the defaulter does not then appear, I am confident his election will be annulled. You can easily believe that between now and then all my efforts will be given to increase the feeling in the Chamber against him, both by arguments in the press and by private conversations. Rastignac has also given orders among the ministerial adherents to that effect. We may feel confident, therefore, that by the end of another week our enemy will find public opinion solidly against him.

Will you permit me, madame, to recall myself to the memory of Mademoiselle Cecile, and accept yourself, together with Monsieur Beauvisage, the assurance of my most respectful sentiments.

A hint from certain quarters given to the ministerial journals now began to surround Sallenauve’s name with an atmosphere of disrespect and ridicule; insulting insinuations colored his absence with an appearance of escaping the charges. The effect of these attacks was all the greater because Sallenauve was very weakly defended by his political co-religionists, which was scarcely surprising. Not knowing how to explain his conduct, the Opposition papers were afraid to commit themselves in favor of a man whose future was daily becoming more nebulous.

On the evening before the day on which the time granted for an explanation would expire, Sallenauve being still absent, a ministerial paper published, under the heading of “A Lost Deputy,” a very witty and insolent article, which was read by every one and created a great sensation. During that evening Madame de l’Estorade went to see Madame de Camps, whom she found alone with her husband. She was greatly agitated, and said, as soon as she entered the room,—

“Have you read that infamous article?”

“No,” replied Madame Octave, “but Monsieur de Camps was just telling me about it. It is really shameful that the ministry should not only countenance, but instigate such villanies.”

“I am half crazy,” said Madame de l’Estorade; “the whole blame rests on us.”

“That is saying too much,” said Madame Octave.

“No,” said her husband, “I agree with madame; all the venom of this affair could have been destroyed by one action of de l’Estorade’s, and in refusing to make it he is, if not the author, at least the accomplice of this slander.”

“Your wife has told you—” began Madame de l’Estorade in a reproachful tone.

“Yes,” said Madame de Camps; “it was necessary to explain to my husband the sort of madness that seemed to have taken possession of M. de l’Estorade; but what I said to him was not unfaithful to any secret that concerned you personally.”

“Ah! you are such a united pair,” said Madame de l’Estorade, with a heavy sigh. “I don’t regret that you have told all that to your husband; in fact, two heads are better than one to advise me in the cruel position in which I am placed.”

“What has happened?” asked Madame de Camps.

“My husband is losing his head,” replied the countess. “I don’t see a trace of his old moral sense left in him. Far from understanding that he is, as Monsieur de Camps said just now, the accomplice of the shameful attack which is going on, and that he has not, like those who started it, the excuse of ignorance, he actually seems to take delight in this wickedness. Just now he brought me that vile paper triumphantly, and I could scarcely prevent his being very angry with me for not agreeing with his opinion that it was infinitely witty and amusing.”

“That letter of Monsieur Gaston’s was a terrible shock to him,” said Madame de Camps, —“a shock not only to his heart but to his body.”

“I admit that,” said her husband; “but, hang it! a man is a man, and he ought to take the words of a maniac for what they are worth.”

“It is certainly very singular that Monsieur de Sallenauve does not return,” said Madame Octave; “for that Joseph Bricheteau, to whom you gave his address, must have written to him.”

“Oh!” cried the countess, “there’s fatality in the whole thing. To-morrow the question of confirming the election or not comes up in the Chamber; and if Monsieur de Sallenauve is not here by that time, the ministry expects to annul it.”

“It is infamous,” said Monsieur de Camps, “and I have a great mind to go to the president of the Chamber, and tell him how matters are.”

“I would have asked you to do so at the risk of my husband suspecting my interference, but one thing restrained me. Monsieur de Sallenauve particularly desires that Monsieur Gaston’s mental condition be not made public.”

“It is evident,” said Madame de Camps, “that do defend him in any way would go against his wishes. After all, the decision against him in the Chamber is very doubtful,

whereas Monsieur Gaston’s madness, if mentioned publicly, would never be forgotten.”

“But I have not told you the worst so far as I am concerned,” said Madame de l’Estorade. “Just before dinner my husband imparted to me an absolutely Satanic desire of his—order, I might call it.”

“What was it?” asked Madame de Camps, anxiously.

“He wishes me to go with him to the Chamber to-morrow,—to the gallery reserved for the peers of France,—and listen to the discussion.”

“He is actually, as you say, losing his head,” cried Monsieur de Camps; “he is like Thomas Diafoirus, proposing to take his fiance to enjoy a dissection—”

Madame de Camps made her husband a sign which meant, “Don’t pour oil on the fire.” Then she asked the countess whether she had tried to show M. de l’Estorade the impropriety of that step.

“The moment I began to object,” replied the countess, “he was angry, and said I must be very anxious to keep up our intimacy with ‘that man’ when I rejected such a natural opportunity to show publicly that the acquaintance was at an end.”

“Well, my dear, you will have to go,” said Madame de Camps. “The peace of your home before everything else! Besides, considering all things, your presence at the discussion may be taken as a proof of kindly interest.”

“For sixteen years,” remarked Monsieur de Camps, “you have ruled and governed in your home; and here, at last, is a revolution which cruelly overturns your power.”

“Ah, monsieur, I beg you to believe that that sovereignty—which I always sought to conceal—I never used arbitrarily.”

“As if I did not know that!” replied Monsieur de Camps, taking Madame de l’Estorade’s hand and pressing it affectionately. “I am, nevertheless, of my wife’s opinion: you will have to drink this cup.”

“But I shall die of shame in listening to the ministerial infamies; I shall feel that they are cutting the throat of a man whom two words from me could save.”

“True,” said Monsieur de Camps, “and a man, too, who has done you a vast service. But you must choose: do you prefer to bring hell into your home, and exasperate the unhealthy condition of your husband’s mind?”

“Listen to me, dearest,” said Madame de Camps. “Tell Monsieur de l’Estorade that I want to go to this session, and ask him for a permit; don’t yield the point to any objections. I shall then be there to take care of you, and perhaps protect you from yourself.”

“I did not dare ask it of you,” replied Madame de l’Estorade. “We don’t usually invite friends to see us commit bad actions; but since you are so kind as to offer, I can truly say I shall be less wretched if you are with me. Now good-bye; I don’t want my husband to find me out when he comes home. He is dining with Monsieur de Rastignac, where, no doubt, they are plotting for to-morrow.”

“Yes, go; and I will write you a note in the course of an hour, as if I had not seen you,

asking you to get me a permit for to-morrow's session, which I am told will be very interesting."

"To be reduced to conspiracy!" cried Madame de l'Estorade, kissing her friend.

"My dear love," said Madame de Camps, "they say the life of a Christian is a struggle, but that of a woman married in a certain way is a pitched battle. Have patience and courage."

So saying, the two friends separated.

The next day, about two o'clock, Madame de l'Estorade, accompanied by her husband and Madame Octave de Camps, took their places in the gallery reserved for the members of the peerage. She seemed ill, and answered languidly the bows and salutations that were addressed to her from all parts of the Chamber. Madame de Camps, who was present for the first time in the parliamentary precincts, made two observations: first, she objected strongly to the slovenly costume of a great many of the "honorable gentlemen"; and she was also amazed at the number of bald heads she looked down upon from the gallery. Monsieur de l'Estorade took pains to point out to her all the notabilities present: first, the great men whom we need not mention, because their names are in everybody's memory; next, the poet Canalis, whose air she thought Olympian; d'Arthez, who pleased her by his modesty and absence of assumption; Vinet, of whom she remarked that he was like a viper in spectacles; Victorin Hulot, a noted orator of the Left Centre. It was some time before she could accustom herself to the hum of the various conversations, which seemed to her like the buzzing of bees around their hive; but the thing that most amazed her was the general aspect of this assemblage of legislators, where a singular *laisser-aller* and a total absence of dignity would never have led her to suppose she was in the hall of the representatives of a great people.

It was written that on this day no pain or unpleasantness should be spared to Madame de l'Estorade. Just before the sitting began, the Marquise d'Espard, accompanied by Monsieur de Ronquerolles, entered the peers' gallery and took her seat beside the countess. Though meeting constantly in society, the two women could not endure each other. Madame de l'Estorade despised the spirit of intrigue, the total lack of principle, and the sour, malevolent nature which the marquise covered with an elegant exterior; and the marquise despised, to a still greater degree, what she called the *pot-au-feu* virtues of Madame de l'Estorade. It must also be mentioned that Madame de l'Estorade was thirty-two years old and her beauty was still undimmed, whereas Madame d'Espard was forty-four, and, in spite of the careful dissimulations of the toilet, her beauty was fairly at an end.

"You do not often come here, I think," said Madame d'Espard, after the usual conventional phrases about the *pleasure* of their meeting had passed.

"I never come," replied Madame de l'Estorade.

"And I am most assiduous," said Madame d'Espard.

Then, pretending to a sudden recollection, she added,—

"Ah! I forgot; you have a special interest, I think, on this occasion. A friend of yours is to be *judged*, is he not?"

“Yes; Monsieur de Sallenauve has been to our house several times.”

“How sad it is,” said the marquise, “to see a man who, Monsieur de Ronquerolles tells me, had the making of a hero in many ways, come down to the level of the correctional police.”

“His crime so far,” said Madame de l’Estorade, dryly, “consists solely in his absence.”

“At any rate,” continued the marquise, “he seems to be a man eaten up by ambition. Before his parliamentary attempt, he made, as you doubtless know, a matrimonial attempt upon the Lantys, which ended in the beautiful heiress of that family, into whose good graces he had insinuated himself, being sent to a convent.”

Madame de l’Estorade was not much surprised at finding that this history, which Sallenauve had told her as very secret, had reached the knowledge of Madame d’Espard. The marquise was one of the best informed women in Paris; her salon, as an old academician had said mythologically, was the Temple of Fame.

“I think the sitting is about to begin,” said Madame de l’Estorade; fearing some blow from the claws of the marquise, she was eager to put an end to the conversation.

The president had rung his bell, the deputies were taking their seats, the curtain was about to rise. As a faithful narrator of the session we desire our readers to attend, we think it safer and better in every way to copy *verbatim* the report of the debate as given in one of the morning papers of the following day.

Chamber of Deputies.

In the chair, M. Cointet (vice-president).

(Sitting of May 28.)

At two o’clock the president takes his seat.

M. the Keeper of the Seals, M. the minister of the Interior, M. the minister of Public Works, are on the ministerial bench.

The minutes of the last session are read, approved, and accepted.

The order of the day is the verification of the powers and the admission of the deputy elected by the arrondissement of Arcis-sur-Aube.

The President.—M. the reporter, from the Committee on the elections of the department of the Aube, has the floor.

The Reporter.—Gentlemen, the singular and regrettable situation in which Monsieur de Sallenauve has placed himself has not terminated in the manner that was hoped and expected last week. The period of delay expired yesterday; Monsieur de Sallenauve continues to absent himself from your sittings, and no letter has reached M. le president asking for further leave of absence. This indifference to the functions which Monsieur de Sallenauve appeared to have solicited with so much eagerness [slight agitation on the Left] would be, in any case, a grave mistake; but when connected with an accusation that seriously compromises the deputy elect, it must be regarded as altogether unfortunate for his reputation. [Murmurs on the Left. Approbation from the Centre.] Compelled to search for the solution of a difficulty which may be said to be without precedent in parliamentary annals, your committee, in the adoption of suitable measures, finds itself divided into two very distinct opinions. The minority whom I represent—the committee consisting of but three members—thinks that it ought to submit to you a resolution which I shall call radical, and which has for its object the cutting short of the

difficulty by returning the question to its natural judges. Annul *hic et nunc* the election of Monsieur de Sallenauve, and send him back to the voters by whom he was elected and of whom he is so unfaithful a representative. Such is one of the solutions I have the honor to present to you. [Agitation on the Left.] The majority, on the contrary, are of opinion that the will of the electors cannot be too highly respected, and that the faults of a man honored by their confidence ought not to be discussed until the utmost limits of forbearance and indulgence have been passed. Consequently your committee instruct me to suggest that you grant to Monsieur de Sallenauve a further delay of fifteen days [murmurs from the Centre; “Very good! very good!” from the Left]; being satisfied that if after that delay Monsieur de Sallenauve does not present himself or give any other sign of existence, it will be sufficient proof that he has thrown up his election, and the Chamber need not be dragged on his account into irritating and useless debates. [Murmurs of various kinds.]

M. le Colonel Franchessini, who during the foregoing speech was sitting on the ministers’ bench in earnest conversation with the minister of Public Works, here demanded the floor.

The President.—M. de Canalis has already asked for it.

M. de Canalis.—Gentlemen, M. de Sallenauve is one of those bold men who, like myself, are convinced that politics are not forbidden fruit to any form of intellect, and that in the poet, in the artist, as well as in the magistrate, the administrator, the lawyer, the physician, and the property-holder, may be found the stuff that makes a statesman. In virtue of this community of opinion, M. de Sallenauve has my entire sympathy, and no one can be surprised to see me mount this tribune to support the proposal of the majority of your committee. I cannot, however, agree to their final conclusion; and the idea of our colleague being declared, without discussion, dismissed from this Chamber through the single fact of his absence, prolonged without leave, is repugnant to my reason and also to my conscience. You are told: “The absence of M. de Sallenauve is all the more reprehensible because he is under the odium of a serious accusation.” But suppose this accusation is the very cause of his absence—[“Ha! ha!” from the Centre, and laughter.] Allow me to say, gentlemen, that I am not, perhaps, quite so artless as Messieurs the laughers imagine. I have one blessing, at any rate: ignoble interpretations do not come into my mind; and that M. de Sallenauve, with the eminent position he has filled in the world of art, should seek to enter the world of politics by means of a crime, is a supposition which I cannot admit *a priori*. Around a birth like his two hideous spiders called slander and intrigue have every facility to spread their toils; and far from admitting that he has fled before the accusation that now attacks him, I ask myself whether his absence does not mean that he is now engaged in collecting the elements of his defence. [Left: “Very good!” “That’s right.” Ironical laughter in the Centre.] Under that supposition—in my opinion most probable—so far from arraigning him in consequence of this absence, ought we not rather to consider it as an act of deference to the Chamber whose deliberations he did not feel worthy to share until he found himself in a position to confound his calumniators?

A Voice.—He wants leave of absence for ten years, like Telemachus, to search for his father. [General laughter.]

M. de Canalis.—I did not expect so poetical an interruption; but since the memory of the Odyssey has been thus evoked, I shall ask the Chamber to kindly remember that Ulysses, though disguised as a beggar and loaded with insults, was yet able to string his bow and easily get the better of his enemies. [Violent murmurs from the Centre.] I vote for leave of absence for fifteen days, and that the Chamber be again consulted at the expiration of that time.

M. le Colonel Franchessini.—I do not know if the last speaker intended to intimidate the Chamber, but, for my part, such arguments have very little power upon me, and I am always ready to send them back whence they came. [Left: “Come! come!”]

The President.—Colonel, no provocations!

M. le Colonel Franchessini.—I am, however, of the opinion of the speaker who preceded me; I do not think that the delinquent has fled to escape the accusation against him. Neither that accusation, nor the effect it will produce upon your minds, nor even the quashing of his election would be able at this moment to occupy his mind. Do you wish to know what M. de Sallenauve is doing in England? Then read the English papers. For the last week they have rung with the praises of a new prima donna who has just made her first appearance at the London opera-house. [Violent murmurs; interruption.]

A Voice.—Such gossip is unworthy of this Chamber!

M. le Colonel Franchessini.—Gentlemen, being more accustomed to the frankness of camps than to the reticence of these precincts, I may perhaps have committed the impropriety of thinking aloud. The preceding speaker said to you that he believed M. de Sallenauve was employed in collecting his means of defence; well, I do not say to you "I believe," I tell you I *know* that a rich stranger succeed in substituting his protection for what which Phidias, our colleague, was bestowing on his handsome model, an Italian woman —[Fresh interruption. "Order! order!" "This is intolerable!"]

A Voice.—M. le president, silence the speaker!

Colonel Franchessini crosses his arms and waits till the tumult subsides.

The President.—I request the speaker to keep to the question.

M. le Colonel Franchessini.—The question! I have not left it. But, inasmuch as the Chamber refuses to hear me, I declare that I side with the minority of the committee. It seems to me very proper to send M. de Sallenauve back to his electors in order to know whether they intended to send a deputy or a lover to this Chamber—["Order! order!" Loud disturbance on the Left. The tumult increases.]

M. de Canalis hurries to the tribune.

The President.—M. le ministre of Public Works has asked for the floor; as minister of the king he has the first right to be heard.

M. de Rastignac.—It has not been without remonstrance on my part, gentlemen, that this scandal has been brought to your notice. I endeavored, in the name of the long friendship which unites me to Colonel Franchessini, to persuade him not to speak on this delicate subject, lest his parliamentary inexperience, aggravated in a measure by his witty facility of speech, should lead him to some very regrettable indiscretion. Such, gentleman, was the subject of the little conversation you may have seen that he held with me on my bench before he asked for the floor; and I myself have asked for the same privilege only in order to remove from your minds all idea of my complicity in the great mistake he has just, as I think, committed by condescending to the private details he has thought fit to relate to this assembly. But as, against my intention, and I may add against my will, I have entered the tribune, the Chamber will permit me, perhaps, —although no ministerial interest is here concerned,—to say a few words. [Cries from the Centre: "Go on!" "Speak!"]

M. le ministre then went on to say that the conduct of the absent deputy showed contempt for the Chamber; he was treating it lightly and cavalierly. M. de Sallenauve had asked for leave of absence; but how or where had he asked for it? From a foreign country! That is to say, he began by taking it, and then asked for it! Did he trouble himself, as is usual in such cases, to give a reason for the request? No; he merely says, in his letter to your president, that he is forced to absent himself on "urgent business,"—a very convenient excuse, on which the Chamber might be depopulated of half its members. But, supposing that M. de Sallenauve's business was really urgent, and that he thought it of a nature not to be explained in a letter that would necessarily be made public, why had he not written confidentially to the president, or even

requested a friend in some responsible position, whose simple word would have sufficed, to assure the Chamber of the necessity of the deputy's absence without requiring any statement of private reasons?

At this point M. de Rastignac's remarks were interrupted by a commotion in the corridor to the right. Several deputies left their seats; others jumped upon the benches, apparently endeavoring to see something. The minister, after turning to the president, from whom he seemed to be asking an explanation, went back to the ministerial bench, where he was immediately surrounded by a number of the deputies of the Centre, among whom, noticeable for the vehemence of his gestures, was M. le procureur-general Vinet. Groups formed in the audience chamber; the sitting was, in fact, informally suspended.

After a few moments' delay M. le president rings his bell.

The Ushers.—Take your seats, gentlemen.

The deputies hasten on all sides to do so.

The President.—M. de Sallenauve has the floor.

M. de Sallenauve, who, during the few moments that the sitting was interrupted by his entrance, has been talking with M. de Canalis and M. d'Arthez, goes to the tribune. His manner is modest, but he shows no sign of embarrassment. Every one is struck by his resemblance to the portraits of one of the most fiery of the revolutionary orators.

A Voice.—It is Danton—without the small-pox!

M. de Sallenauve.—[Profound silence.] Gentlemen, I do not misjudge my parliamentary value; I know that the persecution directed apparently against me personally is, in point of fact, aimed at the political opinions I have the honor to represent. But, however that may be, my election seems to have been viewed by the ministry as a matter of some importance. In order to oppose it, a special agent and special journalists were sent to Arcis; and a humble employe under government, with a salary of fifteen hundred francs, was dismissed, after twenty years of faithful and honorable service, for having aided in my success. [Loud murmurs from the Centre.] I thank my honorable interrupters, feeling sure that their loud disapprobation is given to this strange dismissal, which is not open to the slightest doubt. [Laughter on the Left.] As for me, gentlemen, who could not be dismissed, I have been attacked with another weapon,—sagacious calumny, combined with my fortunate absence—

The Minister of Public Works.—Of course the government sent you out of the country.

M. de Sallenauve.—No, Monsieur le ministre. I do not attribute my absence to either your influence or your suggestions; it was necessitated by imperious duty, and it had no other instigation or motive. But, as to the part you have really taken in the denunciation set on foot against me, I am about to tell the facts, and the Chamber will consider them. [Close attention.] The law, in order to protect the independence of the deputy, directs that no criminal prosecution can be begun against a member of the national representation without the preliminary consent of the Chamber; this fact has been turned with great adroitness against me. If the complaint had been laid before the magistrates, it could not have been admitted even for an instant; it is simply a bare charge, not supported by evidence of any kind; and I have never heard that the public authorities are in the habit of prosecuting citizens on the mere allegation of the first-comer. We must therefore admire the subtlety of mind which instantly perceived that, by petitioning you for leave to prosecute, all the benefits of the accusation, politically speaking, would be obtained without encountering the difficulty I have mentioned in the courts. [Excitement.] Now, to what able parliamentary tactician must we ascribe the honor of this invention? You know already, gentleman, that it is due ostensibly to a woman, a peasant-woman, one who labors for her living; hence the conclusion is that the peasant-women of

Champagne have an intellectual superiority of which, up to this time, neither you nor I were at all aware. [Laughter.] It must be said, however, that before coming to Paris to lodge her complaint, this woman had an interview with the mayor of Arcis, my opponent on the ministerial side in the late election. From this conference she obtained certain lights. To which we must add that the mayor, taking apparently much interest in the charge to be brought against me, agreed to pay the costs, not only of the peasant-woman's trip to Paris, but also those of the village practitioner by whom she was accompanied. [Left: "Ha! ha!"] This superior woman having arrived in Paris, with whom did she immediately communicate? With the special agent sent down to Arcis by the government to ensure the success of the ministerial candidate. And who drew up the petition to this honorable Chamber for the necessary authority to proceed to a criminal prosecution? Not precisely the special ministerial agent himself, but a barrister under his dictation, and after a breakfast to which the peasant-woman and her adviser were invited in order to furnish the necessary information. [Much excitement. "Hear! hear!"]

The Minister of Public Works from his seat.—Without discussing the truth of these statements, as to which I have personally no knowledge, I affirm upon my honor that the government is completely ignorant of the proceedings now related, which it blames and disavows in the most conclusive manner.

M. de Sallenauve.—After the formal declaration which I have had the good fortune to evoke it would ill become me, gentlemen, to insist on tracing the responsibility for this intrigue back to the government. But what I have already said will seem to you natural when you remember that, as I entered this hall, the minister of Public Works was in the tribune, taking part, in a most unusual manner, in a discussion on discipline wholly outside of his department, and endeavoring to persuade you that I had conducted myself towards this honorable body with a total want of reverence.

The minister of Public Works said a few words which did not reach us. Great disturbance.

M. Victorin Hulot.—M. le president, have the goodness to request the minister of Public Works not to interrupt the speaker. He can answer.

M. de Sallenauve.—According to M. le comte de Rastignac, I showed essential disrespect to the Chamber by asking, in a foreign country, for leave of absence, which it was obvious I had already taken before making my request. But, in his extreme desire to find me to blame, the minister lost sight of the fact that at the time I left France the Chamber had not met, no president existed, and therefore in making my request at that time to the president of this assembly I should simply have addressed a pure abstraction. [Left: "True!"] As for the insufficiency of the motives with which I supported my request, I regret to have to say to the Chamber that I cannot be more explicit even now; because in revealing the true cause of my absence I should betray the secret of an honorable man, and not my own. I did not conceal from myself that by this reticence I exposed my proceedings to mistaken interpretations,—though I certainly did not expect it to give rise to accusations as burlesque as they are odious. [Much excitement.] In point of fact, I was so anxious not to neglect any of the duties of my new position that I did precisely what the minister of Public Works reproaches me for not doing. I selected a man in a most honorable position, who was, like myself, a repository of the secret I am unable to divulge, and I requested him to make all necessary explanations to the president of this Chamber. But, calumny having no doubt worked upon his mind, that honorable person must have thought it compromising to his name and dignity to do me this service. The danger to me being now over, I shall not betray his prudent incognito. Though I was far indeed from expecting this calculating selfishness, which has painfully surprised and wounded me, I shall be careful to keep this betrayal of friendship between myself and his own conscience, which alone shall reproach him for the wrong he has done me.

At this moment a disturbance occurred in the peers' gallery; a lady had fainted; and several deputies, among them a physician,

left the hall hastily. The sitting was momentarily suspended.

The President.—Ushers, open the ventilators. It is want of air that has caused this unfortunate accident. M. de Sallenauve, be good enough to resume your speech.

M. de Sallenauve.—Two words, gentleman, and I have finished. I think the petition to authorize a criminal prosecution has already lost something of its weight in the minds of my least cordial colleagues. But I have here a letter from the Romilly peasant-woman, my relation, duly signed and authenticated, withdrawing her charge and confirming all the explanations I have just had the honor to give you. I might read this letter aloud to you, but I think it more becoming to place it in the hands of M. le president. ["Very good! very good!"] As for my illegal absence, I returned to Paris early this morning, and I could have been in my seat at the opening of the Chamber; but, as M. de Canalis has told you, I had it much at heart not to appear in this hall until I could disperse the cloud which has so strangely appeared around my reputation. It has taken me the whole morning to obtain these papers. And now, gentlemen, you have to decide whether a few hours' delay in taking his seat in this Chamber justifies you in sending a colleague back to his electors. But after all, whatever is done, whether some persist in thinking me a forger, or a libertine, or merely a negligent deputy, I feel no anxiety about the verdict of my electors. I can confidently assert that after a delay of a few weeks I shall return to you.

Cries on all sides.—The vote! the vote!

On leaving the tribune M. de Sallenauve receives many congratulations.

The President.—I put to vote the admission of M. de Sallenauve as the deputy elected by the arrondissement of Arcis.

Nearly the whole Chamber rises and votes the admission; a few deputies of the Centre alone abstain from taking part in the demonstration.

M. de Sallenauve is admitted and takes the oath.

The President.—The order of the day calls for the reading of the Address to the Throne, but the chairman of the committee appointed to prepare it informs me that the document in question cannot be communicated to the Chamber before to-morrow. Nothing else being named in the order of the day, I declare this sitting adjourned.

The Chamber rose at half-past four o'clock.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

Note.—“The Deputy of Arcis,” of which Balzac wrote and published the first part in 1847, was left unfinished at his death. He designated M. Charles Rabou, editor of the “Revue de Paris,” as the person to take his notes and prepare the rest of the volume for the press. It is instructive to a student of Balzac to see how disconnected and out of proportion the story becomes in these later parts,—showing plainly that the master’s hand was in the habit of pruning away half, if not more, of what it had written, or—to change the metaphor and give the process in his own language—that he put *les grands pots dans les petits pots*, the quarts into the pint pots. “If a thing can be done in one line instead of two,” he says, “I try to do it.” Some parts of this conclusion are evidently added by M. Rabou, and are not derived from Balzac at all,—especially the unnecessary reincarnation of Vautrin. There is no trace of the master’s hand here. The character is made so silly and puerile, and is so out of keeping with Balzac’s strong portrait, which never weakens, that the translator has thought best, in justice to Vautrin, to omit all that is not absolutely necessary to connect the story.