The Secrets of the Princesse of Cadignan

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DEDICATION

To Theophile Gautier

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CHAPTER I. THE LAST WORD OF TWO GREAT COQUETTES

After the disasters of the revolution of July, which destroyed so many aristocratic fortunes dependent on the court, Madame la Princesse de Cadignan was clever enough to attribute to political events the total ruin she had caused by her own extravagance. The prince left France with the royal family, and never returned to it, leaving the princess in Paris, protected by the fact of his absence; for their debts, which the sale of all their salable property had not been able to extinguish, could only be recovered through him. The revenues of the entailed estates had been seized. In short, the affairs of this great family were in as bad a state as those of the elder branch of the Bourbons.

This woman, so celebrated under her first name of Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, very wisely decided to live in retirement, and to make herself, if possible, forgotten. Paris was then so carried away by the whirling current of events that the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, buried in the Princesse de Cadignan, a change of name unknown to most of the new actors brought upon the stage of society by the revolution of July, did really become a stranger in her own city.

In Paris the title of duke ranks all others, even that of prince; though, in heraldic theory, free of all sophism, titles signify nothing; there is absolute equality among gentlemen. This fine equality was formerly maintained by the House of France itself; and in our day it is so still, at least, nominally; witness the care with which the kings of France give to their sons the simple title of count. It was in virtue of this system that Francois I. crushed the splendid titles assumed by the pompous Charles the Fifth, by signing his answer: “Francois, seigneur de Vanves.” Louis XI. did better still by marrying his daughter to an untitled gentleman, Pierre de Beaujeu. The feudal system was so thoroughly broken up by Louis XIV. that the title of duke became, during his reign, the supreme honor of the aristocracy, and the most coveted.

Nevertheless there are two or three families in France in which the principality, richly endowed in former times, takes precedence of the duchy. The house of Cadignan, which possesses the title of Duc de Maufrigneuse for its eldest sons, is one of these exceptional families. Like the princes of the house of Rohan in earlier days, the princes of Cadignan had the right to a throne in their own domain; they could have pages and gentlemen in their service. This explanation is necessary, as much to escape foolish critics who know nothing, as to record the customs of a world which, we are told, is about to disappear, and which, evidently, so many persons are assisting to push away without knowing what it is.

The Cadignans bear: or, five lozenges sable appointed, placed fess-wise, with the word “Memini” for motto, a crown with a cap of maintenance, no supporters or mantle. In these days the great crowd of strangers flocking to Paris, and the almost universal ignorance of the science of heraldry, are beginning to bring the title of prince into fashion. There are no real princes but those possessed of principalities, to whom belongs the title of highness. The disdain shown by the French nobility for the title of prince, and the reasons which caused Louis XIV. to give supremacy to the title of duke, have prevented Frenchmen from

claiming the appellation of “highness” for the few princes who exist in France, those of Napoleon excepted. This is why the princes of Cadignan hold an inferior position, nominally, to the princes of the continent.

The members of the society called the faubourg Saint-Germain protected the princess by a respectful silence due to her name, which is one of those that all men honor, to her misfortunes, which they ceased to discuss, and to her beauty, the only thing she saved of her departed opulence. Society, of which she had once been the ornament, was thankful to her for having, as it were, taken the veil, and cloistered herself in her own home. This act of good taste was for her, more than for any other woman, an immense sacrifice. Great deeds are always so keenly felt in France that the princess gained, by her retreat, as much as she had lost in public opinion in the days of her splendor.

She now saw only one of her old friends, the Marquise d’Espard, and even to her she never went on festive occasions or to parties. The princess and the marquise visited each other in the forenoons, with a certain amount of secrecy. When the princess went to dine with her friend, the marquise closed her doors. Madame d’Espard treated the princess charmingly; she changed her box at the opera, leaving the first tier for a baignoire on the ground-floor, so that Madame de Cadignan could come to the theatre unseen, and depart incognito. Few women would have been capable of a delicacy which deprived them of the pleasure of bearing in their train a fallen rival, and of publicly being her benefactress. Thus relieved of the necessity for costly toilets, the princess could enjoy the theatre, whither she went in Madame d’Espard’s carriage, which she would never have accepted openly in the daytime. No one has ever known Madame d’Espard’s reasons for behaving thus to the Princesse de Cadignan; but her conduct was admirable, and for a long time included a number of little acts which, viewed single, seem mere trifles, but taken in the mass become gigantic.

In 1832, three years had thrown a mantle of snow over the follies and adventures of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and had whitened them so thoroughly that it now required a serious effort of memory to recall them. Of the queen once adored by so many courtiers, and whose follies might have given a theme to a variety of novels, there remained a woman still adorably beautiful, thirty-six years of age, but quite justified in calling herself thirty, although she was the mother of Duc Georges de Maufrigneuse, a young man of eighteen, handsome as Antinous, poor as Job, who was expected to obtain great successes, and for whom his mother desired, above all things, to find a rich wife. Perhaps this hope was the secret of the intimacy she still kept up with the marquise, in whose salon, which was one of the first in Paris, she might eventually be able to choose among many heiresses for Georges’ wife. The princess saw five years between the present moment and her son’s marriage,—five solitary and desolate years; for, in order to obtain such a marriage for her son, she knew that her own conduct must be marked in the corner with discretion.

The princess lived in the rue de Miromesnil, in a small house, of which she occupied the ground-floor at a moderate rent. There she made the most of the relics of her past magnificence. The elegance of the great lady was still redolent about her. She was still surrounded by beautiful things which recalled her former existence. On her chimney-piece was a fine miniature portrait of Charles X., by Madame Mirbel, beneath which were engraved the words, “Given by the King”; and, as a pendant, the portrait of “Madame”,

who was always her kind friend. On a table lay an album of costliest price, such as none of the bourgeoises who now lord it in our industrial and fault-finding society would have dared to exhibit. This album contained portraits, about thirty in number, of her intimate friends, whom the world, first and last, had given her as lovers. The number was a calumny; but had rumor said ten, it might have been, as her friend Madame d'Espard remarked, good, sound gossip. The portraits of Maxime de Trailles, de Marsay, Rastignac, the Marquis d'Esgrignon, General Montriveau, the Marquis de Ronquerolles and d'Ajuda-Pinto, Prince Galathionne, the young Ducs de Grandlieu and de Rhetore, the Vicomte de Serizy, and the handsome Lucien de Rubempre, had all been treated with the utmost coquetry of brush and pencil by celebrated artists. As the princess now received only two or three of these personages, she called the book, jokingly, the collection of her errors.

Misfortune had made this woman a good mother. During the fifteen years of the Restoration she had amused herself far too much to think of her son; but on taking refuge in obscurity, this illustrious egoist bethought her that the maternal sentiment, developed to its extreme, might be an absolution for her past follies in the eyes of sensible persons, who pardon everything to a good mother. She loved her son all the more because she had nothing else to love. Georges de Maufrigneuse was, moreover, one of those children who flatter the vanities of a mother; and the princess had, accordingly, made all sorts of sacrifices for him. She hired a stable and coach-house, above which he lived in a little entresol with three rooms looking on the street, and charmingly furnished; she had even borne several privations to keep a saddle-horse, a cab-horse, and a little groom for his use. For herself, she had only her own maid, and as cook, a former kitchen-maid. The duke's groom had, therefore, rather a hard place. Toby, formerly tiger to the "late" Beaudenord (such was the jesting term applied by the gay world to that ruined gentleman),—Toby, who at twenty-five years of age was still considered only fourteen, was expected to groom the horses, clean the cabriolet, or the tilbury, and the harnesses, accompany his master, take care of the apartments, and be in the princess's antechamber to announce a visitor, if, by chance, she happened to receive one.

When one thinks of what the beautiful Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had been under the Restoration,—one of the queens of Paris, a dazzling queen, whose luxurious existence equalled that of the richest women of fashion in London,—there was something touching in the sight of her in that humble little abode in the rue de Miromesnil, a few steps away from her splendid mansion, which no amount of fortune had enabled her to keep, and which the hammer of speculators has since demolished. The woman who thought she was scarcely well served by thirty servants, who possessed the most beautiful reception-rooms in all Paris, and the loveliest little private apartments, and who made them the scene of such delightful fetes, now lived in a small apartment of five rooms,—an antechamber, dining-room, salon, one bed-chamber, and a dressing-room, with two women-servants only.

"Ah! she is devoted to her son," said that clever creature, Madame d'Espard, "and devoted without ostentation; she is happy. Who would ever have believed so frivolous a woman was capable of such persistent resolution! Our good archbishop has, consequently, greatly encouraged her; he is most kind to her, and has just induced the old Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne to pay her a visit."

Let us admit a truth! One must be a queen to know how to abdicate, and to descend with dignity from a lofty position which is never wholly lost. Those only who have an inner consciousness of being nothing in themselves, show regrets in falling, or struggle, murmuring, to return to a past which can never return,—a fact of which they themselves are well aware. Compelled to do without the choice exotics in the midst of which she had lived, and which set off so charmingly her whole being (for it is impossible not to compare her to a flower), the princess had wisely chosen a ground-floor apartment; there she enjoyed a pretty little garden which belonged to it,—a garden full of shrubs, and an always verdant turf, which brightened her peaceful retreat. She had about twelve thousand francs a year; but that modest income was partly made up of an annual stipend sent her by the old Duchesse de Navarreins, paternal aunt of the young duke, and another stipend given by her mother, the Duchesse d'Uxelles, who was living on her estate in the country, where she economized as old duchesses alone know how to economize; for Harpagon is a mere novice compared to them. The princess still retained some of her past relations with the exiled royal family; and it was in her house that the marshal to whom we owe the conquest of Africa had conferences, at the time of "Madame's" attempt in La Vendee, with the principal leaders of legitimist opinion,—so great was the obscurity in which the princess lived, and so little distrust did the government feel for her in her present distress.

Beholding the approach of that terrible fortieth year, the bankruptcy of love, beyond which there is so little for a woman as woman, the princess had flung herself into the kingdom of philosophy. She took to reading, she who for sixteen years had felt a cordial horror for serious things. Literature and politics are to-day what piety and devotion once were to her sex,—the last refuge of their feminine pretensions. In her late social circle it was said that Diane was writing a book. Since her transformation from a queen and beauty to a woman of intellect, the princess had contrived to make a reception in her little house a great honor which distinguished the favored person. Sheltered by her supposed occupation, she was able to deceive one of her former adorers, de Marsay, the most influential personage of the political bourgeoisie brought to the fore in July 1830. She received him sometimes in the evenings, and, occupied his attention while the marshal and a few legitimists were talking, in a low voice, in her bedroom, about the recovery of power, which could be attained only by a general co-operation of ideas,—the one element of success which all conspirators overlook. It was the clever vengeance of the pretty woman, who thus inveigled the prime minister, and made him act as screen for a conspiracy against his own government.

This adventure, worthy of the finest days of the Fronde, was the text of a very witty letter, in which the princess rendered to "Madame" an account of the negotiations. The Duc de Maufrigneuse went to La Vendee, and was able to return secretly without being compromised, but not without taking part in "Madame's" perils; the latter, however, sent him home the moment she saw that her cause was lost. Perhaps, had he remained, the eager vigilance of the young man might have foiled that treachery. However great the faults of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse may have seemed in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, the behavior of her son on this occasion certainly effaced them in the eyes of the aristocracy. There was great nobility and grandeur in thus risking her only son, and the heir of an historic name. Some persons are said to intentionally cover the faults of their private life by public services, and vice versa; but the Princesse de Cadignan made no

such calculation. Possibly those who apparently so conduct themselves make none. Events count for much in such cases.

On one of the first fine days in the month of May, 1833, the Marquise d'Espard and the princess were turning about—one could hardly call it walking—in the single path which wound round the grass-plat in the garden, about half-past two in the afternoon, just as the sun was leaving it. The rays reflected on the walls gave a warm atmosphere to the little space, which was fragrant with flowers, the gift of the marquise.

"We shall soon lose de Marsay," said the marquise; "and with him will disappear your last hope of fortune for your son. Ever since you played him that clever trick, he has returned to his affection for you."

"My son will never capitulate to the younger branch," returned the princess, "if he has to die of hunger, or I have to work with my hands to feed him. Besides, Berthe de Cinq-Cygne has no aversion to him."

"Children don't bind themselves to their parents' principles," said Madame d'Espard.

"Don't let us talk about it," said the princess. "If I can't coax over the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne, I shall marry Georges to the daughter of some iron-founderer, as that little d'Esgrignon did."

"Did you love Victurnien?" asked the marquise.

"No," replied the princess, gravely, "d'Esgrignon's simplicity was really only a sort of provincial silliness, which I perceived rather too late—or, if you choose, too soon."

"And de Marsay?"

"De Marsay played with me as if I were a doll. I was so young at the time! We never love men who pretend to teach us; they rub up all our little vanities."

"And that wretched boy who hanged himself?"

"Lucien? An Antinous and a great poet. I worshiped him in all conscience, and I might have been happy. But he was in love with a girl of the town; and I gave him up to Madame de Serizy…. If he had cared to love me, should I have given him up?"

"What an odd thing, that you should come into collision with an Esther!"

"She was handsomer than I," said the Princess.—"Very soon it shall be three years that I have lived in solitude," she resumed, after a pause, "and this tranquillity has nothing painful to me about it. To you alone can I dare to say that I feel I am happy. I was surfeited with adoration, weary of pleasure, emotional on the surface of things, but conscious that emotion itself never reached my heart. I have found all the men whom I have known petty, paltry, superficial; none of them ever caused me a surprise; they had no innocence, no grandeur, no delicacy. I wish I could have met with one man able to inspire me with respect."

"Then are you like me, my dear?" asked the marquise; "have you never felt the emotion of love while trying to love?"

"Never," replied the princess, laying her hand on the arm of her friend.

They turned and seated themselves on a rustic bench beneath a jasmine then coming into flower. Each had uttered one of those sayings that are solemn to women who have reached their age.

“Like you,” resumed the princess, “I have received more love than most women; but through all my many adventures, I have never found happiness. I committed great follies, but they had an object, and that object retreated as fast as I approached it. I feel to-day in my heart, old as it is, an innocence which has never been touched. Yes, under all my experience, lies a first love intact,—just as I myself, in spite of all my losses and fatigues, feel young and beautiful. We may love and not be happy; we may be happy and never love; but to love and be happy, to unite those two immense human experiences, is a miracle. That miracle has not taken place for me.”

“Nor for me,” said Madame d’Espard.

“I own I am pursued in this retreat by dreadful regret: I have amused myself all through life, but I have never loved.”

“What an incredible secret!” cried the marquise.

“Ah! my dear,” replied the princess, “such secrets we can tell to ourselves, you and I, but nobody in Paris would believe us.”

“And,” said the marquise, “if we were not both over thirty-six years of age, perhaps we would not tell them to each other.”

“Yes; when women are young they have so many stupid conceits,” replied the princess. “We are like those poor young men who play with a toothpick to pretend they have dined.”

“Well, at any rate, here we are!” said Madame d’Espard, with coquettish grace, and a charming gesture of well-informed innocence; “and, it seems to me, sufficiently alive to think of taking our revenge.”

“When you told me, the other day, that Beatrix had gone off with Conti, I thought of it all night long,” said the princess, after a pause. “I suppose there was happiness in sacrificing her position, her future, and renouncing society forever.”

“She was a little fool,” said Madame d’Espard, gravely. “Mademoiselle des Touches was delighted to get rid of Conti. Beatrix never perceived how that surrender, made by a superior woman who never for a moment defended her claims, proved Conti’s nothingness.”

“Then you think she will be unhappy?”

“She is so now,” replied Madame d’Espard. “Why did she leave her husband? What an acknowledgment of weakness!”

“Then you think that Madame de Rochefide was not influenced by the desire to enjoy a true love in peace?” asked the princess.

“No; she was simply imitating Madame de Beausant and Madame de Langeais, who, be it said, between you and me, would have been, in a less vulgar period than ours, the La Villiere, the Diane de Poitiers, the Gabrielle d’Estrees of history.”

“Less the king, my dear. Ah! I wish I could evoke the shades of those women, and ask them—”

“But,” said the marquise, interrupting the princess, “why ask the dead? We know living women who have been happy. I have talked on this very subject a score of times with Madame de Montcornet since she married that little Emile Blondet, who makes her the happiest woman in the world; not an infidelity, not a thought that turns aside from her; they are as happy as they were the first day. These long attachments, like that of Rastignac and Madame de Nucingen, and your cousin, Madame de Camps, for her Octave, have a secret, and that secret you and I don’t know, my dear. The world has paid us the extreme compliment of thinking we are two rakes worthy of the court of the regent; whereas we are, in truth, as innocent as a couple of school-girls.”

“I should like that sort of innocence,” cried the princess, laughing; “but ours is worse, and it is very humiliating. Well, it is a mortification we offer up in expiation of our fruitless search; yes, my dear, fruitless, for it isn’t probable we shall find in our autumn season the fine flower we missed in the spring and summer.”

“That’s not the question,” resumed the marquise, after a meditative pause. “We are both still beautiful enough to inspire love, but we could never convince any one of our innocence and virtue.”

“If it were a lie, how easy to dress it up with commentaries, and serve it as some delicious fruit to be eagerly swallowed! But how is it possible to get a truth believed? Ah! the greatest of men have been mistaken there!” added the princess, with one of those meaning smiles which the pencil of Leonardo da Vinci alone has rendered.

“Fools love well, sometimes,” returned the marquise.

“But in this case,” said the princess, “fools wouldn’t have enough credulity in their nature.”

“You are right,” said the marquise. “But what we ought to look for is neither a fool nor even a man of talent. To solve our problem we need a man of genius. Genius alone has the faith of childhood, the religion of love, and willingly allows us to band its eyes. Look at Canalis and the Duchesse de Chaulieu! Though we have both encountered men of genius, they were either too far removed from us or too busy, and we too absorbed, too frivolous.”

“Ah! how I wish I might not leave this world without knowing the happiness of true love,” exclaimed the princess.

“It is nothing to inspire it,” said Madame d’Espard; “the thing is to feel it. I see many women who are only the pretext for a passion without being both its cause and its effect.”

“The last love I inspired was a beautiful and sacred thing,” said the princess. “It had a future in it. Chance had brought me, for once in a way, the man of genius who is due to us, and yet so difficult to obtain; there are more pretty women than men of genius. But the devil interfered with the affair.”

“Tell me about it, my dear; this is all news to me.”

“I first noticed this beautiful passion about the middle of the winter of 1829. Every Friday, at the opera, I observed a young man, about thirty years of age, in the orchestra

stalls, who evidently came there for me. He was always in the same stall, gazing at me with eyes of fire, but, seemingly, saddened by the distance between us, perhaps by the hopelessness of reaching me."

"Poor fellow! When a man loves he becomes eminently stupid," said the marquise.

"Between every act he would slip into the corridor," continued the princess, smiling at her friend's epigrammatic remark. "Once or twice, either to see me or to make me see him, he looked through the glass sash of the box exactly opposite to mine. If I received a visit, I was certain to see him in the corridor close to my door, casting a furtive glance upon me. He had apparently learned to know the persons belonging to my circle; and he followed them when he saw them turning in the direction of my box, in order to obtain the benefit of the opening door. I also found my mysterious adorer at the Italian opera-house; there he had a stall directly opposite to my box, where he could gaze at me in naive ecstasy—oh! it was pretty! On leaving either house I always found him planted in the lobby, motionless; he was elbowed and jostled, but he never moved. His eyes grew less brilliant if he saw me on the arm of some favorite. But not a word, not a letter, no demonstration. You must acknowledge that was in good taste. Sometimes, on getting home late at night, I found him sitting upon one of the stone posts of the porte-cochere. This lover of mine had very handsome eyes, a long, thick, fan-shaped beard, with a moustache and side-whiskers; nothing could be seen of his skin but his white cheek-bones, and a noble forehead; it was truly an antique head. The prince, as you know, defended the Tuileries on the riverside, during the July days. He returned to Saint-Cloud that night, when all was lost, and said to me: 'I came near being killed at four o'clock. I was aimed at by one of the insurgents, when a young man, with a long beard, whom I have often seen at the opera, and who was leading the attack, threw up the man's gun, and saved me.' So my adorer was evidently a republican! In 1831, after I came to lodge in this house, I found him, one day, leaning with his back against the wall of it; he seemed pleased with my disasters; possibly he may have thought they drew us nearer together. But after the affair of Saint-Merri I saw him no more; he was killed there. The evening before the funeral of General Lamarque, I had gone out on foot with my son, and my republican accompanied us, sometimes behind, sometimes in front, from the Madeleine to the Passage des Panoramas, where I was going."

"Is that all?" asked the marquise.

"Yes, all," replied the princess. "Except that on the morning Saint-Merri was taken, a gamin came here and insisted on seeing me. He gave me a letter, written on common paper, signed by my republican."

"Show it to me," said the marquise.

"No, my dear. Love was too great and too sacred in the heart of that man to let me violate its secrets. The letter, short and terrible, still stirs my soul when I think of it. That dead man gives me more emotions than all the living men I ever coquetted with; he constantly recurs to my mind."

"What was his name?" asked the marquise.

"Oh! a very common one: Michel Chrestien."

“You have done well to tell me,” said Madame d’Espard, eagerly. “I have often heard of him. This Michel Chrestien was the intimate friend of a remarkable man you have already expressed a wish to see,—Daniel d’Arthez, who comes to my house some two or three times a year. Chrestien, who was really killed at Saint-Merri, had no lack of friends. I have heard it said that he was one of those born statesmen to whom, like de Marsay, nothing is wanting but opportunity to become all they might be.”

“Then he had better be dead,” said the princess, with a melancholy air, under which she concealed her thoughts.

“Will you come to my house some evening and meet d’Arthez?” said the marquise. “You can talk of your ghost.”

“Yes, I will,” replied the princess.

CHAPTER II. DANIEL D'ARTHEZ

A few days after this conversation Blondet and Rastignac, who knew d'Arthez, promised Madame d'Espard that they would bring him to dine with her. This promise might have proved rash had it not been for the name of the princess, a meeting with whom was not a matter of indifference to the great writer.

Daniel d'Arthez, one of the rare men who, in our day, unite a noble character with great talent, had already obtained, not all the popularity his works deserve, but a respectful esteem to which souls of his own calibre could add nothing. His reputation will certainly increase; but in the eyes of connoisseurs it had already attained its full development. He is one of those authors who, sooner or later, are put in their right place, and never lose it. A poor nobleman, he had understood his epoch well enough to seek personal distinction only. He had struggled long in the Parisian arena, against the wishes of a rich uncle who, by a contradiction which vanity must explain, after leaving his nephew a prey to the utmost penury, bequeathed to the man who had reached celebrity the fortune so pitilessly refused to the unknown writer. This sudden change in his position made no change in Daniel d'Arthez's habits; he continued to work with a simplicity worthy of the antique past, and even assumed new toils by accepting a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, where he took his seat on the Right.

Since his accession to fame he had sometimes gone into society. One of his old friends, the now-famous physician, Horace Bianchon, persuaded him to make the acquaintance of the Baron de Rastignac, under-secretary of State, and a friend of de Marsay, the prime minister. These two political officials acquiesced, rather nobly, in the strong wish of d'Arthez, Bianchon, and other friends of Michel Chrestien for the removal of the body of that republican to the church of Saint-Merri for the purpose of giving it funeral honors. Gratitude for a service which contrasted with the administrative rigor displayed at a time when political passions were so violent, had bound, so to speak, d'Arthez to Rastignac. The latter and de Marsay were much too clever not to profit by that circumstance; and thus they won over other friends of Michel Chrestien, who did not share his political opinions, and who now attached themselves to the new government. One of them, Leon Giraud, appointed in the first instance master of petitions, became eventually a Councillor of State.

The whole existence of Daniel d'Arthez is consecrated to work; he sees society only by snatches; it is to him a sort of dream. His house is a convent, where he leads the life of a Benedictine; the same sobriety of regimen, the same regularity of occupation. His friends knew that up to the present time woman had been to him no more than an always dreaded circumstance; he had observed her too much not to fear her; but by dint of studying her he had ceased to understand her,—like, in this, to those deep strategists who are always beaten on unexpected ground, where their scientific axioms are either modified or contradicted. In character he still remains a simple-hearted child, all the while proving himself an observer of the first rank. This contrast, apparently impossible, is explainable to those who know how to measure the depths which separate faculties from feelings; the former proceed from the head, the latter from the heart. A man can be a great man and a wicked one, just as he can be a fool and a devoted lover. D'Arthez is one of those

privileged beings in whom shrewdness of mind and a broad expanse of the qualities of the brain do not exclude either the strength or the grandeur of sentiments. He is, by rare privilege, equally a man of action and a man of thought. His private life is noble and generous. If he carefully avoided love, it was because he knew himself, and felt a premonition of the empire such a passion would exercise upon him.

For several years the crushing toil by which he prepared the solid ground of his subsequent works, and the chill of poverty, were marvellous preservatives. But when ease with his inherited fortune came to him, he formed a vulgar and most incomprehensible connection with a rather handsome woman, belonging to the lower classes, without education or manners, whom he carefully concealed from every eye. Michel Chrestien attributed to men of genius the power of transforming the most massive creatures into sylphs, fools into clever women, peasants into countesses; the more accomplished a woman was, the more she lost her value in their eyes, for, according to Michel, their imagination had the less to do. In his opinion love, a mere matter of the senses to inferior beings, was to great souls the most immense of all moral creations and the most binding. To justify d'Arthez, he instanced the example of Raffaele and the Fornarina. He might have offered himself as an instance for this theory, he who had seen an angel in the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse. This strange fancy of d'Arthez might, however, be explained in other ways; perhaps he had despaired of meeting here below with a woman who answered to that delightful vision which all men of intellect dream of and cherish; perhaps his heart was too sensitive, too delicate, to yield itself to a woman of society; perhaps he thought best to let nature have her way, and keep his illusions by cultivating his ideal; perhaps he had laid aside love as being incompatible with his work and the regularity of a monastic life which love would have wholly upset.

For several months past d'Arthez had been subjected to the jests and satire of Blondet and Rastignac, who reproached him with knowing neither the world nor women. According to them, his authorship was sufficiently advanced, and his works numerous enough, to allow him a few distractions; he had a fine fortune, and here he was living like a student; he enjoyed nothing,—neither his money nor his fame; he was ignorant of the exquisite enjoyments of the noble and delicate love which well-born and well-bred women could inspire and feel; he knew nothing of the charming refinements of language, nothing of the proofs of affection incessantly given by refined women to the commonest things. He might, perhaps, know woman; but he knew nothing of the divinity. Why not take his rightful place in the world, and taste the delights of Parisian society?

"Why doesn't a man who bears party per bend gules and or, a bezant and crab counterchanged," cried Rastignac, "display that ancient escutcheon of Picardy on the panels of a carriage? You have thirty thousand francs a year, and the proceeds of your pen; you have justified your motto: Ars thesaurusque virtus, that punning device our ancestors were always seeking, and yet you never appear in the Bois de Boulogne! We live in times when virtue ought to show itself."

"If you read your works to that species of stout Laforet, whom you seem to fancy, I would forgive you," said Blondet. "But, my dear fellow, you are living on dry bread, materially speaking; in the matter of intellect you haven't even bread."

This friendly little warfare had been going on for several months between Daniel and

his friends, when Madame d’Espard asked Rastignac and Blondet to induce d’Arthez to come and dine with her, telling them that the Princesse de Cadignan had a great desire to see that celebrated man. Such curiosities are to certain women what magic lanterns are to children,—a pleasure to the eyes, but rather shallow and full of disappointments. The more sentiments a man of talent excites at a distance, the less he responds to them on nearer view; the more brilliant fancy has pictured him, the duller he will seem in reality. Consequently, disenchanted curiosity is often unjust.

Neither Blondet nor Rastignac could deceive d’Arthez; but they told him, laughing, that they now offered him a most seductive opportunity to polish up his heart and know the supreme fascinations which love conferred on a Parisian great lady. The princess was evidently in love with him; he had nothing to fear but everything to gain by accepting the interview; it was quite impossible he could descend from the pedestal on which madame de Cadignan had placed him. Neither Blondet nor Rastignac saw any impropriety in attributing this love to the princess; she whose past had given rise to so many anecdotes could very well stand that lesser calumny. Together they began to relate to d’Arthez the adventures of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse: her first affair with de Marsay; her second with d’Ajuda, whom she had, they said, distracted from his wife, thus avenging Madame de Beausant; also her later connection with young d’Esgrignon, who had travelled with her in Italy, and had horribly compromised himself on her account; after that they told him how unhappy she had been with a certain celebrated ambassador, how happy with a Russian general, besides becoming the Egeria of two ministers of Foreign affairs, and various other anecdotes. D’Arthez replied that he knew a great deal more than they could tell him about her through their poor friend, Michel Chrestien, who adored her secretly for four years, and had well-nigh gone mad about her.

“I have often accompanied him,” said Daniel, “to the opera. He would make me run through the streets as far as her horses that he might see the princess through the window of her coupe.”

“Well, there you have a topic all ready for you,” said Blondet, smiling. “This is the very woman you need; she’ll initiate you most gracefully into the mysteries of elegance; but take care! she has wasted many fortunes. The beautiful Diane is one of those spendthrifts who don’t cost a penny, but for whom a man spends millions. Give yourself up to her, body and soul, if you choose; but keep your money in your hand, like the old fellow in Girodet’s ‘Deluge.’”

From the tenor of these remarks it was to be inferred that the princess had the depth of a precipice, the grace of a queen, the corruption of diplomatists, the mystery of a first initiation, and the dangerous qualities of a siren. The two clever men of the world, incapable of foreseeing the denouement of their joke, succeeded in presenting Diane d’Uxelles as a consummate specimen of the Parisian woman, the cleverest of coquettes, the most enchanting mistress in the world. Right or wrong, the woman whom they thus treated so lightly was sacred to d’Arthez; his desire to meet her needed no spur; he consented to do so at the first word, which was all the two friends wanted of him.

Madame d’Espard went to see the princess as soon as she had received this answer.

“My dear, do you feel yourself in full beauty and coquetry?” she said. “If so, come and

dine with me a few days hence, and I'll serve up d'Arthez. Our man of genius is by nature, it seems, a savage; he fears women, and has never loved! Make your plans on that. He is all intellect, and so simple that he'll mislead you into feeling no distrust. But his penetration, which is wholly retrospective, acts later, and frustrates calculation. You may hoodwink him to-day, but to-morrow nothing can dupe him."

"Ah!" cried the princess, "if I were only thirty years old what amusement I might have with him! The one enjoyment I have lacked up to the present is a man of intellect to fool. I have had only partners, never adversaries. Love was a mere game instead of being a battle."

"Dear princess, admit that I am very generous; for, after all, you know!—charity begins at home."

The two women looked at each other, laughing, and clasped hands in a friendly way. Assuredly they both knew each other's secrets, and this was not the first man nor the first service that one had given to the other; for sincere and lasting friendships between women of the world need to be cemented by a few little crimes. When two friends are liable to kill each other reciprocally, and see a poisoned dagger in each other's hand, they present a touching spectacle of harmony, which is never troubled, unless, by chance, one of them is careless enough to drop her weapon.

So, eight days later, a little dinner such as are given to intimates by verbal invitation only, during which the doors are closed to all other visitors, took place at Madame d'Espard's house. Five persons were invited,—Emile Blondet and Madame de Montcornet, Daniel d'Arthez, Rastignac, and the Princesse de Cadignan. Counting the mistress of the house, there were as many men as women.

Chance never exerted itself to make wiser preparations than those which opened the way to a meeting between d'Arthez and Madame de Cadignan. The princess is still considered one of the chief authorities on dress, which, to women, is the first of arts. On this occasion she wore a gown of blue velvet with flowing white sleeves, and a tulle guimpe, slightly frilled and edged with blue, covering the shoulders, and rising nearly to the throat, as we see in several of Raffaele's portraits. Her maid had dressed her hair with white heather, adroitly placed among its blond cascades, which were one of the great beauties to which she owed her celebrity.

Certainly Diane did not look to be more than twenty-five years old. Four years of solitude and repose had restored the freshness of her complexion. Besides, there are moments when the desire to please gives an increase of beauty to women. The will is not without influence on the variations of the face. If violent emotions have the power to yellow the white tones of persons of bilious and melancholy temperament, and to green lymphatic faces, shall we not grant to desire, hope, and joy, the faculty of clearing the skin, giving brilliancy to the eye, and brightening the glow of beauty with a light as jocund as that of a lovely morning? The celebrated faintness of the princess had taken on a ripeness which now made her seem more august. At this moment of her life, impressed by her many vicissitudes and by serious reflections, her noble, dreamy brow harmonized delightfully with the slow, majestic glance of her blue eyes. It was impossible for the ablest physiognomist to imagine calculation or self-will beneath that unspeakable delicacy

of feature. There were faces of women which deceive knowledge, and mislead observation by their calmness and delicacy; it is necessary to examine such faces when passions speak, and that is difficult, or after they have spoken, which is no longer of any use, for then the woman is old and has ceased to dissimulate.

The princess is one of those impenetrable women; she can make herself what she pleases to be: playful, childlike, distractingly innocent; or reflective, serious, and profound enough to excite anxiety. She came to Madame d'Espard's dinner with the intention of being a gentle, simple woman, to whom life was known only through its deceptions: a woman full of soul, and calumniated, but resigned,—in short, a wounded angel.

She arrived early, so as to pose on a sofa near the fire beside Madame d'Espard, as she wished to be first seen: that is, in one of those attitudes in which science is concealed beneath an exquisite naturalness; a studied attitude, putting in relief the beautiful serpentine outline which, starting from the foot, rises gracefully to the hip, and continues with adorable curves to the shoulder, presenting, in fact, a profile of the whole body. With a subtlety which few women would have dreamed of, Diane, to the great amazement of the marquise, had brought her son with her. After a moment's reflection, Madame d'Espard pressed the princess's hand, with a look of intelligence that seemed to say:—

"I understand you! By making d'Arthez accept all the difficulties at once you will not have to conquer them later."

Rastignac brought d'Arthez. The princess made none of those compliments to the celebrated author with which vulgar persons overwhelmed him; but she treated him with a kindness full of graceful respect, which, with her, was the utmost extent of her concessions. Her manner was doubtless the same with the King of France and the royal princes. She seemed happy to see this great man, and glad that she had sought him. Persons of taste, like the princess, are especially distinguished for their manner of listening, for an affability without superciliousness, which is to politeness what practice is to virtue. When the celebrated man spoke, she took an attentive attitude, a thousand times more flattering than the best-seasoned compliments. The mutual presentation was made quietly, without emphasis, and in perfectly good taste, by the marquise.

At dinner d'Arthez was placed beside the princess, who, far from imitating the eccentricities of diet which many affected women display, ate her dinner with a very good appetite, making it a point of honor to seem a natural woman, without strange ways or fancies. Between two courses she took advantage of the conversation becoming general to say to d'Arthez, in a sort of aside:—

"The secret of the pleasure I take in finding myself beside you, is the desire I feel to learn something of an unfortunate friend of yours, monsieur. He died for another cause greater than ours; but I was under the greatest obligations to him, although unable to acknowledge or thank him for them. I know that you were one of his best friends. Your mutual friendship, pure and unalterable, is a claim upon me. You will not, I am sure, think it extraordinary, that I have wished to know all you could tell me of a man so dear to you. Though I am attached to the exiled family, and bound, of course, to hold monarchical opinions, I am not among those who think it is impossible to be both republican and noble in heart. Monarchy and the republic are two forms of government which do not stifle

noble sentiments."

"Michel Chrestien was an angel, madame," replied Daniel, in a voice of emotion. "I don't know among the heroes of antiquity a greater than he. Be careful not to think him one of those narrow-minded republicans who would like to restore the Convention and the amenities of the Committee of Public Safety. No, Michel dreamed of the Swiss federation applied to all Europe. Let us own, between ourselves, that *after* the glorious government of one man only, which, as I think, is particularly suited to our nation, Michel's system would lead to the suppression of war in this old world, and its reconstruction on bases other than those of conquest, which formerly feudalized it. From this point of view the republicans came nearest to his idea. That is why he lent them his arm in July, and was killed at Saint-Merri. Though completely apart in opinion, he and I were closely bound together as friends."

"That is noble praise for both natures," said Madame de Cadignan, timidly.

"During the last four years of his life," continued Daniel, "he made to me alone a confidence of his love for you, and this confidence knitted closer than ever the already strong ties of brotherly affection. He alone, madame, can have loved you as you ought to be loved. Many a time I have been pelted with rain as we accompanied your carriage at the pace of the horses, to keep at a parallel distance, and see you—admire you."

"Ah! monsieur," said the princess, "how can I repay such feelings!"

"Why is Michel not here!" exclaimed Daniel, in melancholy accents.

"Perhaps he would not have loved me long," said the princess, shaking her head sadly. "Republicans are more absolute in their ideas than we absolutists, whose fault is indulgence. No doubt he imagined me perfect, and society would have cruelly undeceived him. We are pursued, we women, by as many calumnies as you authors are compelled to endure in your literary life; but we, alas! cannot defend ourselves either by our works or by our fame. The world will not believe us to be what we are, but what it thinks us to be. It would soon have hidden from his eyes the real but unknown woman that is in me, behind the false portrait of the imaginary woman which the world considers true. He would have come to think me unworthy of the noble feelings he had for me, and incapable of comprehending him."

Here the princess shook her head, swaying the beautiful blond curls, full of heather, with a touching gesture. This plaintive expression of grievous doubts and hidden sorrows is indescribable. Daniel understood them all; and he looked at the princess with keen emotion.

"And yet, the night on which I last saw him, after the revolution of July, I was on the point of giving way to the desire I felt to take his hand and press it before all the world, under the peristyle of the opera-house. But the thought came to me that such a proof of gratitude might be misinterpreted; like so many other little things done from noble motives which are called to-day the follies of Madame de Maufrigneuse—things which I can never explain, for none but my son and God have understood me."

These words, breathed into the ear of the listener, in tones inaudible to the other guests, and with accents worthy of the cleverest actress, were calculated to reach the heart; and

they did reach that of d'Arthez. There was no question of himself in the matter; this woman was seeking to rehabilitate herself in favor of the dead. She had been calumniated; and she evidently wanted to know if anything had tarnished her in the eyes of him who had loved her; had he died with all his illusions?

"Michel," replied d'Arthez, "was one of those men who love absolutely, and who, if they choose ill, can suffer without renouncing the woman they have once elected."

"Was I loved thus?" she said, with an air of exalted beatitude.

"Yes, madame."

"I made his happiness?"

"For four years."

"A woman never hears of such a thing without a sentiment of proud satisfaction," she said, turning her sweet and noble face to d'Arthez with a movement full of modest confusion.

One of the most skilful manoeuvres of these actresses is to veil their manner when words are too expressive, and speak with their eyes when language is restrained. These clever discords, slipped into the music of their love, be it false or true, produce irresistible attractions.

"Is it not," she said, lowering her voice and her eyes, after feeling well assured they had produced her effect,—"is it not fulfilling one's destiny to have rendered a great man happy?"

"Did he not write that to you?"

"Yes; but I wanted to be sure, quite sure; for, believe me, monsieur, in putting me so high he was not mistaken."

Women know how to give a peculiar sacredness to their words; they communicate something vibrant to them, which extends the meaning of their ideas, and gives them depth; though later their fascinated listener may not remember precisely what they said, their end has been completely attained,—which is the object of all eloquence. The princess might at that moment have been wearing the diadem of France, and her brow could not have seemed more imposing than it was beneath that crown of golden hair, braided like a coronet, and adorned with heather. She was simple and calm; nothing betrayed a sense of any necessity to appear so, nor any desire to seem grand or loving. D'Arthez, the solitary toiler, to whom the ways of the world were unknown, whom study had wrapped in its protecting veils, was the dupe of her tones and words. He was under the spell of those exquisite manners; he admired that perfect beauty, ripened by misfortune, placid in retirement; he adored the union of so rare a mind and so noble a soul; and he longed to become, himself, the heir of Michel Chrestien.

The beginning of this passion was, as in the case of almost all deep thinkers, an idea. Looking at the princess, studying the shape of her head, the arrangement of those sweet features, her figure, her hand, so finely modelled, closer than when he accompanied his friend in their wild rush through the streets, he was struck by the surprising phenomenon of the moral second-sight which a man exalted by love invariably finds within him. With

what lucidity had Michel Chrestien read into that soul, that heart, illumined by the fires of love! Thus the princess acquired, in d'Arthez's eyes, another charm; a halo of poesy surrounded her.

As the dinner proceeded, Daniel called to mind the various confidences of his friend, his despair, his hopes, the noble poems of a true sentiment sung to his ear alone, in honor of this woman. It is rare that a man passes without remorse from the position of confidant to that of rival, and d'Arthez was free to do so without dishonor. He had suddenly, in a moment, perceived the enormous differences existing between a well-bred woman, that flower of the great world, and common women, though of the latter he did not know beyond one specimen. He was thus captured on the most accessible and sensitive sides of his soul and of his genius. Impelled by his simplicity, and by the impetuosity of his ideas, to lay immediate claim to this woman, he found himself restrained by society, also by the barrier which the manners and, let us say the word, the majesty of the princess placed between them. The conversation, which remained upon the topic of Michel Chrestien until the dessert, was an excellent pretext for both to speak in a low voice: love, sympathy, comprehension! she could pose as a maligned and misunderstood woman; he could slip his feet into the shoes of the dead republican. Perhaps his candid mind detected itself in regretting his dead friend less. The princess, at the moment when the dessert appeared upon the table, and the guests were separated by a brilliant hedge of fruits and sweetmeats, thought best to put an end to this flow of confidences by a charming little speech, in which she delicately expressed the idea that Daniel and Michel were twin souls.

After this d'Arthez threw himself into the general conversation with the gayety of a child, and a self-conceited air that was worthy of a schoolboy. When they left the dining-room, the princess took d'Arthez's arm, in the simplest manner, to return to Madame d'Espard's little salon. As they crossed the grand salon she walked slowly, and when sufficiently separated from the marquise, who was on Blondet's arm, she stopped.

"I do not wish to be inaccessible to the friend of that poor man," she said to d'Arthez; "and though I have made it a rule to receive no visitors, you will always be welcome in my house. Do not think this a favor. A favor is only for strangers, and to my mind you and I seem old friends; I see in you the brother of Michel."

D'Arthez could only press her arm, unable to make other reply.

After coffee was served, Diane de Cadignan wrapped herself, with coquettish motions, in a large shawl, and rose. Blondet and Rastignac were too much men of the world, and too polite to make the least remonstrance, or try to detain her; but Madame d'Espard compelled her friend to sit down again, whispering in her ear:—

"Wait till the servants have had their dinner; the carriage is not ready yet."

So saying, the marquise made a sign to the footman, who was taking away the coffee-tray. Madame de Montcornet perceived that the princess and Madame d'Espard had a word to say to each other, and she drew around her d'Arthez, Rastignac, and Blondet, amusing them with one of those clever paradoxical attacks which Parisian women understand so thoroughly.

"Well," said the marquise to Diane, "what do you think of him?"

“He is an adorable child, just out of swaddling-clothes! This time, like all other times, it will only be a triumph without a struggle.”

“Well, it is disappointing,” said Madame d’Espard. “But we might evade it.”

“How?”

“Let me be your rival.”

“Just as you please,” replied the princess. “I’ve decided on my course. Genius is a condition of the brain; I don’t know what the heart gets out of it; we’ll talk about that later.”

Hearing the last few words, which were wholly incomprehensible to her, Madame d’Espard returned to the general conversation, showing neither offence at that indifferent “As you please,” nor curiosity as to the outcome of the interview. The princess stayed an hour longer, seated on the sofa near the fire, in the careless, nonchalant attitude of Guerin’s Dido, listening with the attention of an absorbed mind, and looking at Daniel now and then, without disguising her admiration, which never went, however, beyond due limits. She slipped away when the carriage was announced, with a pressure of the hand to the marquise, and an inclination of the head to Madame de Montcornet.

The evening concluded without any allusion to the princess. The other guests profited by the sort of exaltation which d’Arthez had reached, for he put forth the treasures of his mind. In Blondet and Rastignac he certainly had two acolytes of the first quality to bring forth the delicacy of his wit and the breadth of his intellect. As for the two women, they had long been counted among the cleverest in society. This evening was like a halt in the oasis of a desert,—a rare enjoyment, and well appreciated by these four persons, habitually victimized to the endless caution entailed by the world of salons and politics. There are beings who have the privilege of passing among men like beneficent stars, whose light illumines the mind, while its rays send a glow to the heart. D’Arthez was one of those beings. A writer who rises to his level, accustoms himself to free thought, and forgets that in society all things cannot be said; it is impossible for such a man to observe the restraint of persons who live in the world perpetually; but as his eccentricities of thought bore the mark of originality, no one felt inclined to complain. This zest, this piquancy, rare in mere talent, this youthfulness and simplicity of soul which made d’Arthez so nobly original, gave a delightful charm to this evening. He left the house with Rastignac, who, as they drove home, asked him how he liked the princess.

“Michel did well to love her,” replied d’Arthez; “she is, indeed, an extraordinary woman.”

“Very extraordinary,” replied Rastignac, dryly. “By the tone of your voice I should judge you were in love with her already. You will be in her house within three days; and I am too old a denizen of Paris not to know what will be the upshot of that. Well, my dear Daniel, I do entreat you not to allow yourself to be drawn into any confusion of interests, so to speak. Love the princess if you feel any love for her in your heart, but keep an eye on your fortune. She has never taken or asked a penny from any man on earth, she is far too much of a d’Uxelles and a Cadignan for that; but, to my knowledge, she has not only spent her own fortune, which was very considerable, but she has made others waste millions. How? why? by what means? No one knows; she doesn’t know herself. I myself saw her

swallow up, some thirteen years ago, the entire fortune of a charming young fellow, and that of an old notary, in twenty months."

"Thirteen years ago!" exclaimed d'Arthez,—"why, how old is she now?"

"Didn't you see, at dinner," replied Rastignac, laughing, "her son, the Duc de Maufrigneuse. That young man is nineteen years old; nineteen and seventeen make—"

"Thirty-six!" cried the amazed author. "I gave her twenty."

"She'll accept them," said Rastignac; "but don't be uneasy, she will always be twenty to you. You are about to enter the most fantastic of worlds. Good-night, here you are at home," said the baron, as they entered the rue de Bellefond, where d'Arthez lived in a pretty little house of his own. "We shall meet at Mademoiselle des Touches's in the course of the week."

CHAPTER III. THE PRINCESS GOES TO WORK

D’Arthez allowed love to enter his heart after the manner of my Uncle Toby, without making the slightest resistance; he proceeded by adoration without criticism, and by exclusive admiration. The princess, that noble creature, one of the most remarkable creations of our monstrous Paris, where all things are possible, good as well as evil, became—whatever vulgarity the course of time may have given to the expression—the angel of his dreams. To fully understand the sudden transformation of this illustrious author, it is necessary to realize the simplicity that constant work and solitude leave in the heart; all that love—reduced to a mere need, and now repugnant, beside an ignoble woman—excites of regret and longings for diviner sentiments in the higher regions of the soul. D’Arthez was, indeed, the child, the boy that Madame de Cadignan had recognized. An illumination something like his own had taken place in the beautiful Diane. At last she had met that superior man whom all women desire and seek, if only to make a plaything of him,—that power which they consent to obey, if only for the pleasure of subduing it; at last she had found the grandeurs of the intellect united with the simplicity of a heart all new to love; and she saw, with untold happiness, that these merits were contained in a form that pleased her. She thought d’Arthez handsome, and perhaps he was. Though he had reached the age of gravity (for he was now thirty-eight), he still preserved a flower of youth, due to the sober and ascetic life which he had led. Like all men of sedentary habits, and statesmen, he had acquired a certainly reasonable embonpoint. When very young, he bore some resemblance to Bonaparte; and the likeness still continued, as much as a man with black eyes and thick, dark hair could resemble a sovereign with blue eyes and scanty, chestnut hair. But whatever there once was of ardent and noble ambition in the great author’s eyes had been somewhat quenched by successes. The thoughts with which that brow once teemed had flowered; the lines of the hollow face were filling out. Ease now spread its golden tints where, in youth, poverty had laid the yellow tones of the class of temperament whose forces band together to support a crushing and long-continued struggle. If you observe carefully the noble faces of ancient philosophers, you will always find those deviations from the type of a perfect human face which show the characteristic to which each countenance owes its originality, chastened by the habit of meditation, and by the calmness necessary for intellectual labor. The most irregular features, like those of Socrates, for instance, become, after a time, expressive of an almost divine serenity.

To the noble simplicity which characterized his head, d’Arthez added a naive expression, the naturalness of a child, and a touching kindliness. He did not have that politeness tinged with insincerity with which, in society, the best-bred persons and the most amiable assume qualities in which they are often lacking, leaving those they have thus duped wounded and distressed. He might, indeed, fail to observe certain rules of social life, owing to his isolated mode of living; but he never shocked the sensibilities, and therefore this perfume of savagery made the peculiar affability of a man of great talent the more agreeable; such men know how to leave their superiority in their studies, and come down to the social level, lending their backs, like Henry IV., to the children’s leap-frog, and their minds to fools.

If d’Arthez did not brace himself against the spell which the princess had cast about

him, neither did she herself argue the matter in her own mind, on returning home. It was settled for her. She loved with all her knowledge and all her ignorance. If she questioned herself at all, it was to ask whether she deserved so great a happiness, and what she had done that Heaven should send her such an angel. She wanted to be worthy of that love, to perpetuate it, to make it her own forever, and to gently end her career of frivolity in the paradise she now foresaw. As for coquetting, quibbling, resisting, she never once thought of it. She was thinking of something very different!—of the grandeur of men of genius, and the certainty which her heart divined that they would never subject the woman they chose to ordinary laws.

Here begins one of those unseen comedies, played in the secret regions of the consciousness between two beings of whom one will be the dupe of the other, though it keeps on this side of wickedness; one of those dark and comic dramas to which that of *Tartuffe* is mere child's play,—dramas that do not enter the scenic domain, although they are natural, conceivable, and even justifiable by necessity; dramas which may be characterized as not vice, only the other side of it.

The princess began by sending for d'Arthez's books, of which she had never, as yet, read a single word, although she had managed to maintain a twenty minutes' eulogism and discussion of them without a blunder. She now read them all. Then she wanted to compare these books with the best that contemporary literature had produced. By the time d'Arthez came to see her she was having an indigestion of mind. Expecting this visit, she had daily made a toilet of what may be called the superior order; that is, a toilet which expresses an idea, and makes it accepted by the eye without the owner of the eye knowing why or wherefore. She presented an harmonious combination of shades of gray, a sort of semi-mourning, full of graceful renunciation,—the garments of a woman who holds to life only through a few natural ties,—her child, for instance,—but who is weary of life. Those garments bore witness to an elegant disgust, not reaching, however, as far as suicide; no, she would live out her days in these earthly galleys.

She received d'Arthez as a woman who expected him, and as if he had already been to see her a hundred times; she did him the honor to treat him like an old acquaintance, and she put him at his ease by pointing to a seat on a sofa, while she finished a note she was then writing. The conversation began in a commonplace manner: the weather, the ministry, de Marsay's illness, the hopes of the legitimists. D'Arthez was an absolutist; the princess could not be ignorant of the opinions of a man who sat in the Chamber among the fifteen or twenty persons who represented the legitimist party; she found means to tell him how she had fooled de Marsay to the top of his bent, then, by an easy transition to the royal family and to "Madame," and the devotion of the Prince de Cadignan to their service, she drew d'Arthez's attention to the prince:—

"There is this to be said for him: he loved his masters, and was faithful to them. His public character consoles me for the sufferings his private life has inflicted upon me—Have you never remarked," she went on, cleverly leaving the prince aside, "you who observe so much, that men have two natures: one of their homes, their wives, their private lives,—this is their true self; here no mask, no dissimulation; they do not give themselves the trouble to disguise a feeling; they are what they ARE, and it is often horrible! The other man is for others, for the world, for salons; the court, the sovereign, the public often

see them grand, and noble, and generous, embroidered with virtues, adorned with fine language, full of admirable qualities. What a horrible jest it is!—and the world is surprised, sometimes, at the caustic smile of certain women, at their air of superiority to their husbands, and their indifference—”

She let her hand fall along the arm of her chair, without ending her sentence, but the gesture admirably completed the speech. She saw d’Arthez watching her flexible figure, gracefully bending in the depths of her easy-chair, noting the folds of her gown, and the pretty little ruffle which sported on her breast,—one of those audacities of the toilet that are suited only to slender waists,—and she resumed the thread of her thoughts as if she were speaking to herself:—

“But I will say no more. You writers have ended by making ridiculous all women who think they are misunderstood, or ill-mated, and who try to make themselves dramatically interesting,—attempts which seem to me, I must say, intolerably vulgar. There are but two things for women in that plight to do,—yield, and all is over; resist, and amuse themselves; in either case they should keep silence. It is true that I neither yielded wholly, nor resisted wholly; but, perhaps, that was only the more reason why I should be silent. What folly for women to complain! If they have not proved the stronger, they have failed in sense, in tact, in capacity, and they deserve their fate. Are they not queens in France? They can play with you as they like, when they like, and as much as they like.” Here she danced her vinaigrette with an airy movement of feminine impertinence and mocking gayety. “I have often heard miserable little specimens of my sex regretting that they were women, wishing they were men; I have always regarded them with pity. If I had to choose, I should still elect to be a woman. A fine pleasure, indeed, to owe one’s triumph to force, and to all those powers which you give yourselves by the laws you make! But to see you at our feet, saying and doing foolish things,—ah! it is an intoxicating pleasure to feel within our souls that weakness triumphs! But when we triumph, we ought to keep silence, under pain of losing our empire. Beaten, a woman’s pride should gag her. The slave’s silence alarms the master.”

This chatter was uttered in a voice so softly sarcastic, so dainty, and with such coquettish motions of the head, that d’Arthez, to whom this style of woman was totally unknown, sat before her exactly like a partridge charmed by a setter.

“I entreat you, madame,” he said, at last, “to tell me how it was possible that a man could make you suffer? Be assured that where, as you say, other women are common and vulgar, you can only seem distinguished; your manner of saying things would make a cook-book interesting.”

“You go fast in friendship,” she said, in a grave voice which made d’Arthez extremely uneasy.

The conversation changed; the hour was late, and the poor man of genius went away contrite for having seemed curious, and for wounding the sensitive heart of that rare woman who had so strangely suffered. As for her, she had passed her life in amusing herself with men, and was another Don Juan in female attire, with this difference: she would certainly not have invited the Commander to supper, and would have got the better of any statue.

It is impossible to continue this tale without saying a word about the Prince de Cadignan, better known under the name of the Duc de Maufrigneuse, otherwise the spice of the princess's confidences would be lost, and strangers would not understand the Parisian comedy she was about to play for her man of genius.

The Duc de Maufrigneuse, like a true son of the old Prince de Cadignan, is a tall, lean man, of elegant shape, very graceful, a sayer of witty things, colonel by the grace of God, and a good soldier by accident; brave as a Pole, which means without sense or discernment, and hiding the emptiness of his mind under the jargon of good society. After the age of thirty-six he was forced to be as absolutely indifferent to the fair sex as his master Charles X., punished, like that master, for having pleased it too well. For eighteen years the idol of the faubourg Saint-Germain, he had, like other heirs of great families led a dissipated life, spent solely on pleasure. His father, ruined by the revolution, had somewhat recovered his position on the return of the Bourbons, as governor of a royal domain, with salary and perquisites; but this uncertain fortune the old prince spent, as it came, in keeping up the traditions of a great seigneur before the revolution; so that when the law of indemnity was passed, the sums he received were all swallowed up in the luxury he displayed in his vast hotel.

The old prince died some little time before the revolution of July aged eighty-seven. He had ruined his wife, and had long been on bad terms with the Duc de Navarreins, who had married his daughter for a first wife, and to whom he very reluctantly rendered his accounts. The Duc de Maufrigneuse, early in life, had had relations with the Duchesse d'Uxelles. About the year 1814, when Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was forty-six years of age, the duchess, pitying his poverty, and seeing that he stood very well at court, gave him her daughter Diane, then in her seventeenth year, and possessing, in her own right, some fifty or sixty thousand francs a year, not counting her future expectations. Mademoiselle d'Uxelles thus became a duchess, and, as her mother very well knew, she enjoyed the utmost liberty. The duke, after obtaining the unexpected happiness of an heir, left his wife entirely to her own devices, and went off to amuse himself in the various garrisons of France, returning occasionally to Paris, where he made debts which his father paid. He professed the most entire conjugal indulgence, always giving the duchess a week's warning of his return; he was adored by his regiment, beloved by the Dauphin, an adroit courtier, somewhat of a gambler, and totally devoid of affectation. Having succeeded to his father's office as governor of one of the royal domains, he managed to please the two kings, Louis XVIII. and Charles X., which proves he made the most of his nonentity; and even the liberals liked him; but his conduct and life were covered with the finest varnish; language, noble manners, and deportment were brought by him to a state of perfection. But, as the old prince said, it was impossible for him to continue the traditions of the Cadignans, who were all well known to have ruined their wives, for the duchess was running through her property on her own account.

These particulars were so well understood in the court circles and in the faubourg Saint-Germain, that during the last five years of the Restoration they were considered ancient history, and any one who mentioned them would have been laughed at. Women never spoke of the charming duke without praising him; he was excellent, they said, to his wife; could a man be better? He had left her the entire disposal of her own property, and had always defended her on every occasion. It is true that, whether from pride, kindliness, or

chivalry, Monsieur de Maufrigneuse had saved the duchess under various circumstances which might have ruined other women, in spite of Diane's surroundings, and the influence of her mother and that of the Duc de Navarreins, her father-in-law, and her husband's aunt.

For several ensuing days the princess revealed herself to d'Arthez as remarkable for her knowledge of literature. She discussed with perfect fearlessness the most difficult questions, thanks to her daily and nightly reading, pursued with an intrepidity worthy of the highest praise. D'Arthez, amazed, and incapable of suspecting that Diane d'Uxelles merely repeated at night that which she read in the morning (as some writers do), regarded her as a most superior woman. These conversations, however, led away from Diane's object, and she tried to get back to the region of confidences from which d'Arthez had prudently retired after her coquettish rebuff; but it was not as easy as she expected to bring back a man of his nature who had once been startled away.

However, after a month of literary campaigning and the finest platonic discourses, d'Arthez grew bolder, and arrived every day at three o'clock. He retired at six, and returned at nine, to remain until midnight, or one in the morning, with the regularity of an ardent and impatient lover. The princess was always dressed with more or less studied elegance at the hour when d'Arthez presented himself. This mutual fidelity, the care they each took of their appearance, in fact, all about them expressed sentiments that neither dared avow, for the princess discerned very plainly that the great child with whom she had to do shrank from the combat as much as she desired it. Nevertheless d'Arthez put into his mute declarations a respectful awe which was infinitely pleasing to her. Both felt, every day, all the more united because nothing acknowledged or definite checked the course of their ideas, as occurs between lovers when there are formal demands on one side, and sincere or coquettish refusals on the other.

Like all men younger than their actual age, d'Arthez was a prey to those agitating irresolutions which are caused by the force of desires and the terror of displeasing,—a situation which a young woman does not comprehend when she shares it, but which the princess had too often deliberately produced not to enjoy its pleasures. In fact, Diane enjoyed these delightful juvenilities all the more keenly because she knew that she could put an end to them at any moment. She was like a great artist delighting in the vague, undecided lines of his sketch, knowing well that in a moment of inspiration he can complete the masterpiece still waiting to come to birth. Many a time, seeing d'Arthez on the point of advancing, she enjoyed stopping him short, with an imposing air and manner. She drove back the hidden storms of that still young heart, raised them again, and stilled them with a look, holding out her hand to be kissed, or saying some trifling insignificant words in a tender voice.

These manoeuvres, planned in cold blood, but enchantingly executed, carved her image deeper and deeper on the soul of that great writer and thinker whom she revelled in making childlike, confiding, simple, and almost silly beside her. And yet she had moments of repulsion against her own act, moments in which she could not help admiring the grandeur of such simplicity. This game of choicest coquetry attached her, insensibly, to her slave. At last, however, Diane grew impatient with an Epictetus of love; and when she thought she had trained him to the utmost credulity, she set to work to tie a thicker bandage still over his eyes.

CHAPTER IV. THE CONFESSION OF A PRETTY WOMAN

One evening Daniel found the princess thoughtful, one elbow resting on a little table, her beautiful blond head bathed in light from the lamp. She was toying with a letter which lay on the table-cloth. When d'Arthez had seen the paper distinctly, she folded it up, and stuck it in her belt.

"What is the matter?" asked d'Arthez; "you seem distressed."

"I have received a letter from Monsieur de Cadignan," she replied. "However great the wrongs he has done me, I cannot help thinking of his exile—without family, without son—from his native land."

These words, said in a soulful voice, betrayed angelic sensibility. D'Arthez was deeply moved. The curiosity of the lover became, so to speak, a psychological and literary curiosity. He wanted to know the height that woman had attained, and what were the injuries she thus forgave; he longed to know how these women of the world, taxed with frivolity, cold-heartedness, and egotism, could be such angels. Remembering how the princess had already repulsed him when he first tried to read that celestial heart, his voice, and he himself, trembled as he took the transparent, slender hand of the beautiful Diane with its curving finger-tips, and said,—

"Are we now such friends that you will tell me what you have suffered?"

"Yes," she said, breathing forth the syllable like the most mellifluous note that Tulou's flute had ever sighed.

Then she fell into a revery, and her eyes were veiled. Daniel remained in a state of anxious expectation, impressed with the solemnity of the occasion. His poetic imagination made him see, as it were, clouds slowly dispersing and disclosing to him the sanctuary where the wounded lamb was kneeling at the divine feet.

"Well?" he said, in a soft, still voice.

Diane looked at the tender petitioner; then she lowered her eyes slowly, dropping their lids with a movement of noble modesty. None but a monster would have been capable of imagining hypocrisy in the graceful undulation of the neck with which the princess again lifted her charming head, to look once more into the eager eyes of that great man.

"Can I? ought I?" she murmured, with a gesture of hesitation, gazing at d'Arthez with a sublime expression of dreamy tenderness. "Men have so little faith in things of this kind; they think themselves so little bound to be discreet!"

"Ah! if you distrust me, why am I here?" cried d'Arthez.

"Oh, friend!" she said, giving to the exclamation the grace of an involuntary avowal, "when a woman attaches herself for life, think you she calculates? It is not question of refusal (how could I refuse you anything?), but the idea of what you may think of me if I speak. I would willingly confide to you the strange position in which I am at my age; but

what would you think of a woman who could reveal the secret wounds of her married life? Turenne kept his word to robbers; do I not owe to my torturers the honor of a Turenne?”

“Have you passed your word to say nothing?”

“Monsieur de Cadignan did not think it necessary to bind me to secrecy—You are asking more than my soul! Tyrant! you want me to bury my honor itself in your breast,” she said, casting upon d’Arthez a look, by which she gave more value to her coming confidence than to her personal self.

“You must think me a very ordinary man, if you fear any evil, no matter what, from me,” he said, with ill-concealed bitterness.

“Forgive me, friend,” she replied, taking his hand in hers caressingly, and letting her fingers wander gently over it. “I know your worth. You have related to me your whole life; it is noble, it is beautiful, it is sublime, and worthy of your name; perhaps, in return, I owe you mine. But I fear to lower myself in your eyes by relating secrets which are not wholly mine. How can you believe—you, a man of solitude and poesy—the horrors of social life? Ah! you little think when you invent your dramas that they are far surpassed by those that are played in families apparently united. You are wholly ignorant of certain gilded sorrows.”

“I know all!” he cried.

“No, you know nothing.”

D’Arthez felt like a man lost on the Alps of a dark night, who sees, at the first gleam of dawn, a precipice at his feet. He looked at the princess with a bewildered air, and felt a cold chill running down his back. Diane thought for a moment that her man of genius was a weakling, but a flash from his eyes reassured her.

“You have become to me almost my judge,” she said, with a desperate air. “I must speak now, in virtue of the right that all calumniated beings have to show their innocence. I have been, I am still (if a poor recluse forced by the world to renounce the world is still remembered) accused of such light conduct, and so many evil things, that it may be allowed me to find in one strong heart a haven from which I cannot be driven. Hitherto I have always considered self-justification an insult to innocence; and that is why I have disdained to defend myself. Besides, to whom could I appeal? Such cruel things can be confided to none but God or to one who seems to us very near Him—a priest, or another self. Well! I do know this, if my secrets are not as safe there,” she said, laying her hand on d’Arthez’s heart, “as they are here” (pressing the upper end of her busk beneath her fingers), “then you are not the grand d’Arthez I think you—I shall have been deceived.”

A tear moistened d’Arthez’s eyes, and Diane drank it in with a side look, which, however, gave no motion either to the pupils or the lids of her eyes. It was quick and neat, like the action of a cat pouncing on a mouse.

D’Arthez, for the first time, after sixty days of protocols, ventured to take that warm and perfumed hand, and press it to his lips with a long-drawn kiss, extending from the wrist to the tip of the fingers, which made the princess augur well of literature. She thought to herself that men of genius must know how to love with more perfection than conceited fops, men of the world, diplomatists, and even soldiers, although such beings

have nothing else to do. She was a connoisseur, and knew very well that the capacity for love reveals itself chiefly in mere nothings. A woman well informed in such matters can read her future in a simple gesture; just as Cuvier could say from the fragment of a bone: This belonged to an animal of such or such dimensions, with or without horns, carnivorous, herbivorous, amphibious, etc., age, so many thousand years. Sure now of finding in d'Arthez as much imagination in love as there was in his written style, she thought it wise to bring him up at once to the highest pitch of passion and belief.

She withdrew her hand hastily, with a magnificent movement full of varied emotions. If she had said in words: "Stop, or I shall die," she could not have spoken more plainly. She remained for a moment with her eyes in d'Arthez's eyes, expressing in that one glance happiness, prudery, fear, confidence, languor, a vague longing, and virgin modesty. She was twenty years old! but remember, she had prepared for this hour of comic falsehood by the choicest art of dress; she was there in her armchair like a flower, ready to blossom at the first kiss of sunshine. True or false, she intoxicated Daniel.

It if is permissible to risk a personal opinion we must avow that it would be delightful to be thus deceived for a good long time. Certainly Talma on the stage was often above and beyond nature, but the Princesse de Cadignan is the greatest true comedian of our day. Nothing was wanting to this woman but an attentive audience. Unfortunately, at epochs perturbed by political storms, women disappear like water-lilies which need a cloudless sky and balmy zephyrs to spread their bloom to our enraptured eyes.

The hour had come; Diane was now to entangle that great man in the inextricable meshes of a romance carefully prepared, to which he was fated to listen as the neophyte of early Christian times listened to the epistles of an apostle.

"My friend," began Diane, "my mother, who still lives at Uxelles, married me in 1814, when I was seventeen years old (you see how old I am now!) to Monsieur de Maufrigneuse, not out of affection for me, but out of regard for him. She discharged her debt to the only man she had ever loved, for the happiness she had once received from him. Oh! you need not be astonished at so horrible a conspiracy; it frequently takes place. Many women are more lovers than mothers, though the majority are more mothers than wives. The two sentiments, love and motherhood, developed as they are by our manners and customs, often struggle together in the hearts of women; one or other must succumb when they are not of equal strength; when they are, they produce some exceptional women, the glory of our sex. A man of your genius must surely comprehend many things that bewilder fools but are none the less true; indeed I may go further and call them justifiable through difference of characters, temperaments, attachments, situations. I, for example, at this moment, after twenty years of misfortunes, of deceptions, of calumnies endured, and weary days and hollow pleasures, is it not natural that I should incline to fall at the feet of a man who would love me sincerely and forever? And yet, the world would condemn me. But twenty years of suffering might well excuse a few brief years which may still remain to me of youth given to a sacred and real love. This will not happen. I am not so rash as to sacrifice my hopes of heaven. I have borne the burden and heat of the day, I shall finish my course and win my recompense."

"Angel!" thought d'Arthez.

“After all, I have never blamed my mother; she knew little of me. Mothers who lead a life like that of the Duchesse d’Uxelles keep their children at a distance. I saw and knew nothing of the world until my marriage. You can judge of my innocence! I knew nothing; I was incapable of understanding the causes of my marriage. I had a fine fortune; sixty thousand francs a year in forests, which the Revolution overlooked (or had not been able to sell) in the Nivernais, with the noble chateau of d’Anzy. Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was steeped in debt. Later I learned what it was to have debts, but then I was too utterly ignorant of life to suspect my position; the money saved out of my fortune went to pacify my husband’s creditors. Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was forty-eight years of age when I married him; but those years were like military campaigns, they ought to count for twice what they were. Ah! what a life I led for ten years! If any one had known the suffering of this poor, calumniated little woman! To be watched by a mother jealous of her daughter! Heavens! You who make dramas, you will never invent anything as direful as that. Ordinarily, according to the little that I know of literature, a drama is a suite of actions, speeches, movements which hurry to a catastrophe; but what I speak of was a catastrophe in action. It was an avalanche fallen in the morning and falling again at night only to fall again the next day. I am cold now as I speak to you of that cavern without an opening, cold, sombre, in which I lived. I, poor little thing that I was! brought up in a convent like a mystic rose, knowing nothing of marriage, developing late, I was happy at first; I enjoyed the goodwill and harmony of our family. The birth of my poor boy, who is all me—you must have been struck by the likeness? my hair, my eyes, the shape of my face, my mouth, my smile, my teeth!—well, his birth was a relief to me; my thoughts were diverted by the first joys of maternity from my husband, who gave me no pleasure and did nothing for me that was kind or amiable; those joys were all the keener because I knew no others. It had been so often rung into my ears that a mother should respect herself. Besides, a young girl loves to play the mother. I was so proud of my flower—for Georges was beautiful, a miracle, I thought! I saw and thought of nothing but my son, I lived with my son. I never let his nurse dress or undress him. Such cares, so wearing to mothers who have a regiment of children, were all my pleasure. But after three or four years, as I was not an actual fool, light came to my eyes in spite of the pains taken to blindfold me. Can you see me at that final awakening, in 1819? The drama of ‘The Brothers at enmity’ is a rose-water tragedy beside that of a mother and daughter placed as we then were. But I braved them all, my mother, my husband, the world, by public coquetries which society talked of,—and heaven knows how it talked! You can see, my friend, how the men with whom I was accused of folly were to me the dagger with which to stab my enemies. Thinking only of my vengeance, I did not see or feel the wounds I was inflicting on myself. Innocent as a child, I was thought a wicked woman, the worst of women, and I knew nothing of it! The world is very foolish, very blind, very ignorant; it can penetrate no secrets but those which amuse it and serve its malice: noble things, great things, it puts its hand before its eyes to avoid seeing. But, as I look back, it seems to me that I had an attitude and aspect of indignant innocence, with movements of pride, which a great painter would have recognized. I must have enlivened many a ball with my tempests of anger and disdain. Lost poesy! such sublime poems are only made in the glowing indignation which seizes us at twenty. Later, we are wrathful no longer, we are too weary, vice no longer amazes us, we are cowards, we fear. But then—oh! I kept a great pace! For all that I played the silliest personage in the world; I was charged with crimes by which I never benefited. But I had

such pleasure in compromising myself. That was my revenge! Ah! I have played many childish tricks! I went to Italy with a thoughtless youth, whom I crushed when he spoke to me of love, but later, when I herd that he was compromised on my account (he had committed a forgery to get money) I rushed to save him. My mother and husband kept me almost without means; but, this time, I went to the king. Louis XVIII., that man without a heart, was touched; he gave me a hundred thousand francs from his privy purse. The Marquis d'Esgrignon—you must have seen him in society for he ended by making a rich marriage—was saved from the abyss into which he had plunged for my sake. That adventure, caused by my own folly, led me to reflect. I saw that I myself was the first victim of my vengeance. My mother, who knew I was too proud, too d'Uxelles, to conduct myself really ill, began to see the harm that she had done me and was frightened by it. She was then fifty-two years of age; she left Paris and went to live at Uxelles. There she expiates her wrong-doing by a life of devotion and expresses the utmost affection for me. After her departure I was face to face, alone, with Monsieur de Maufrigneuse. Oh! my friend, you men can never know what an old man of gallantry can be. What a home is that of a man accustomed to the adulation of women of the world, when he finds neither incense nor censer in his own house! dead to all! and yet, perhaps for that very reason, jealous. I wished—when Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was wholly mine—I wished to be a good wife, but I found myself repulsed with the harshness of a soured spirit by a man who treated me like a child and took pleasure in humiliating my self-respect at every turn, in crushing me under the scorn of his experience, and in convicting me of total ignorance. He wounded me on all occasions. He did everything to make me detest him and to give me the right to betray him; but I was still the dupe of my own hope and of my desire to do right through several years. Shall I tell you the cruel saying that drove me to further follies? 'The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse has gone back to her husband,' said the world. 'Bah! it is always a triumph to bring the dead to life; it is all she can now do,' replied my best friend, a relation, she, at whose house I met you—"

"Madame d'Espard!" cried Daniel, with a gesture of horror.

"Oh! I have forgiven her. Besides, it was very witty; and I have myself made just as cruel epigrams on other poor women as innocent as myself."

D'Arthez again kissed the hand of that saintly woman who, having hacked her mother in pieces, and turned the Prince de Cadignan into an Othello, now proceeded to accuse herself in order to appear in the eyes of that innocent great man as immaculate as the silliest or the wisest of women desire to seem at all costs to their lovers.

"You will readily understand, my friend, that I returned to society for the purpose of excitement and I may say of notoriety. I felt that I must conquer my independence. I led a life of dissipation. To divert my mind, to forget my real life in fictitious enjoyments I was gay, I shone, I gave fetes, I played the princess, and I ran in debt. At home I could forget myself in the sleep of weariness, able to rise the next day gay, and frivolous for the world; but in that sad struggle to escape my real life I wasted my fortune. The revolution of 1830 came; it came at the very moment when I had met, at the end of that *Arabian Nights"* life, a pure and sacred love which (I desire to be honest) I had longed to know. Was it not natural in a woman whose heart, repressed by many causes and accidents, was awakening at an age when a woman feels herself cheated if she has never known, like the women she

sees about her, a happy love? Ah! why was Michel Chrestien so respectful? Why did he not seek to meet me? There again was another mockery! But what of that? in falling, I have lost everything; I have no illusions left; I had tasted of all things except the one fruit for which I have no longer teeth. Yes, I found myself disenchanted with the world at the very moment when I was forced to leave it. Providential, was it not? like all those strange insensibilities which prepare us for death" (she made a gesture full of pious unction). "All things served me then," she continued; "the disasters of the monarchy and its ruin helped me to bury myself. My son consoles me for much. Maternal love takes the place of all frustrated feelings. The world is surprised at my retirement, but to me it has brought peace. Ah! if you knew how happy the poor creature before you is in this little place. In sacrificing all to my son I forget to think of joys of which I am and ever must be ignorant. Yes, hope has flown, I now fear everything; no doubt I should repulse the truest sentiment, the purest and most veritable love, in memory of the deceptions and the miseries of my life. It is all horrible, is it not? and yet, what I have told you is the history of many women."

The last few words were said in a tone of easy pleasantry which recalled the presence of the woman of the world. D'Arthez was dumbfounded. In his eyes convicts sent to the galleys for murder, or aggravated robbery, or for putting a wrong name to checks, were saints compared to the men and women of society. This atrocious elegy, forged in the arsenal of lies, and steeped in the waters of the Parisian Styx, had been poured into his ears with the inimitable accent of truth. The grave author contemplated for a moment that adorable woman lying back in her easy-chair, her two hands pendant from its arms like dewdrops from a rose-leaf, overcome by her own revelation, living over again the sorrows of her life as she told them—in short an angel of melancholy.

"And judge," she cried, suddenly lifting herself with a spring and raising her hand, while lightning flashed from eyes where twenty chaste years shone—"judge of the impression the love of a man like Michel must have made upon me. But by some irony of fate—or was it the hand of God?—well, he died; died in saving the life of, whom do you suppose? of Monsieur de Cadignan. Are you now surprised to find me thoughtful?"

This was the last drop; poor d'Arthez could bear no more. He fell upon his knees, and laid his head on Diane's hand, weeping soft tears such as the angels shed,—if angels weep. As Daniel was in that bent posture, Madame de Cadignan could safely let a malicious smile of triumph flicker on her lips, a smile such as the monkeys wear after playing a sly trick—if monkeys smile.

"Ah! I have him," thought she; and, indeed, she had him fast.

"But you are—" he said, raising his fine head and looking at her with eyes of love.

"Virgin and martyr," she replied, smiling at the commonness of that hackneyed expression, but giving it a freshness of meaning by her smile, so full of painful gayety. "If I laugh," she continued, "it is that I am thinking of that princess whom the world thinks it knows, that Duchesse de Maufrigneuse to whom it gives as lovers de Marsay, that infamous de Trailles (a political cutthroat), and that little fool of a d'Esgrignon, and Rastignac, Rubempre, ambassadors, ministers, Russian generals, heaven knows who! all Europe! They have gossiped about that album which I ordered made, believing that those

who admired me were my friends. Ah! it is frightful! I wonder that I allow a man at my feet! Despise them all, THAT should be my religion."

She rose and went to the window with a gait and bearing magnificent in motifs.

D'Arthez remained on the low seat to which he had returned not daring to follow the princess; but he looked at her; he heard her blowing her nose. Was there ever a princess who blew her nose? but Diane attempted the impossible to convey an idea of her sensibility. D'Arthez believed his angel was in tears; he rushed to her side, took her round the waist, and pressed her to his heart.

"No, no, leave me!" she murmured in a feeble voice. "I have too many doubts to be good for anything. To reconcile me with life is a task beyond the powers of any man."

"Diane! I will love you for your whole lost life."

"No; don't speak to me thus," she answered. "At this moment I tremble, I am ashamed as though I had committed the greatest sins."

She was now entirely restored to the innocence of little girls, and yet her bearing was august, grand, noble as that of a queen. It is impossible to describe the effect of these manoeuvres, so clever that they acted like the purest truth on a soul as fresh and honest as that of d'Arthez. The great author remained dumb with admiration, passive beside her in the recess of that window awaiting a word, while the princess awaited a kiss; but she was far too sacred to him for that. Feeling cold, the princess returned to her easy-chair; her feet were frozen.

"It will take a long time," she said to herself, looking at Daniel's noble brow and head.

"Is this a woman?" thought that profound observer of human nature. "How ought I to treat her?"

Until two o'clock in the morning they spent their time in saying to each other the silly things that women of genius, like the princess, know how to make adorable. Diane pretended to be too worn, too old, too faded; D'Arthez proved to her (facts of which she was well convinced) that her skin was the most delicate, the softest to the touch, the whitest to the eye, the most fragrant; she was young and in her bloom, how could she think otherwise? Thus they disputed, beauty by beauty, detail by detail with many: "Oh! do you think so?"—"You are beside yourself!"—"It is hope, it is fancy!"—"You will soon see me as I am.—I am almost forty years of age. Can a man love so old a woman?"

D'Arthez responded with impetuous and school-boy eloquence, larded with exaggerated epithets. When the princess heard this wise and witty writer talking the nonsense of an amorous sub-lieutenant she listened with an absorbed air and much sensibility; but she laughed in her sleeve.

When d'Arthez was in the street, he asked himself whether he might not have been rather less respectful. He went over in memory those strange confidences—which have, naturally, been much abridged here, for they needed a volume to convey their mellifluous abundance and the graces which accompanied them. The retrospective perspicacity of this man, so natural, so profound, was baffled by the candor of that tale and its poignancy, and by the tones of the princess.

“It is true,” he said to himself, being unable to sleep, “there are such dramas as that in society. Society covers great horrors with the flowers of its elegance, the embroidery of its gossip, the wit of its lies. We writers invent no more than the truth. Poor Diane! Michel had penetrated that enigma; he said that beneath her covering of ice there lay volcanoes! Bianchon and Rastignac were right; when a man can join the grandeurs of the ideal and the enjoyments of human passion in loving a woman of perfect manners, of intellect, of delicacy, it must be happiness beyond words.”

So thinking, he sounded the love that was in him and found it infinite.

CHAPTER V. A TRIAL OF FAITH

The next day, about two in the afternoon, Madame d’Espard, who had seen and heard nothing of the princess for more than a month, went to see her under the impulse of extreme curiosity. Nothing was ever more amusing of its kind than the conversation of these two crafty adders during the first half-hour of this visit.

Diane d’Uxelles cautiously avoided, as she would the wearing of a yellow gown, all mention of d’Arthez. The marquise circled round and round that topic like a Bedouin round a caravan. Diane amused herself; the marquise fumed. Diane waited; she intended to utilize her friend and use her in the chase. Of these two women, both so celebrated in the social world, one was far stronger than the other. The princess rose by a head above the marquise, and the marquise was inwardly conscious of that superiority. In this, perhaps, lay the secret of their intimacy. The weaker of the two crouched low in her false attachment, watching for the hour, long awaited by feeble beings, of springing at the throat of the stronger and leaving the mark of a joyful bite. Diane saw clear; but the world was the dupe of the wile caresses of the two friends.

The instant that the princess perceived a direct question on the lips of her friend, she said:—

“Ah! dearest, I owe you a most complete, immense, infinite, celestial happiness.”

“What can you mean?”

“Have you forgotten what we ruminated three months ago in the little garden, sitting on a bench in the sun, under the jasmine? Ah! there are none but men of genius who know how to love! I apply to my grand Daniel d’Arthez the Duke of Alba’s saying to Catherine de’ Medici: ‘The head of a single salmon is worth all the frogs in the world.’”

“I am not surprised that I no longer see you,” said Madame d’Espard.

“Promise me, if you meet him, not to say to him one word about me, my angel,” said the princess, taking her friend’s hand. “I am happy, oh! happy beyond all expression; but you know that in society a word, a mere jest can do much harm. One speech can kill, for they put such venom into a single sentence! Ah! if you knew how I long that you might meet with a love like this! Yes, it is a sweet, a precious triumph for women like ourselves to end our woman’s life in this way; to rest in an ardent, pure, devoted, complete and absolute love; above all, when we have sought it long.”

“Why do you ask me to be faithful to my dearest friend?” said Madame d’Espard. “Do you think me capable of playing you some villainous trick?”

“When a woman possesses such a treasure the fear of losing it is so strong that it naturally inspires a feeling of terror. I am absurd, I know; forgive me, dear.”

A few moments later the marquise departed; as she watched her go the princess said to herself:—

“How she will pluck me! But to save her the trouble of trying to get Daniel away from here I’ll send him to her.”

At three o’clock, or a few moments after, d’Arthez arrived. In the midst of some interesting topic on which he was discoursing eloquently, the princess suddenly cut him short by laying her hand on his arm.

“Pardon me, my dear friend,” she said, interrupting him, “but I fear I may forget a thing which seems a mere trifle but may be of great importance. You have not set foot in Madame d’Espard’s salon since the ever-blessed day when I met you there. Pray go at once; not for your sake, nor by way of politeness, but for me. You may already have made her an enemy of mine, if by chance she has discovered that since her dinner you have scarcely left my house. Besides, my friend, I don’t like to see you dropping your connection with society, and neglecting your occupations and your work. I should again be strangely calumniated. What would the world say? That I held you in leading-strings, absorbed you, feared comparisons, and clung to my conquest knowing it to be my last! Who will know that you are my friend, my only friend? If you love me indeed, as you say you love me, you will make the world believe that we are purely and simply brother and sister—Go on with what you were saying.”

In his armor of tenderness, riveted by the knowledge of so many splendid virtues, d’Arthez obeyed this behest on the following day and went to see Madame d’Espard, who received him with charming coquetry. The marquise took very good care not to say a single word to him about the princess, but she asked him to dinner on a coming day.

On this occasion d’Arthez found a numerous company. The marquise had invited Rastignac, Blondet, the Marquis d’Ajuda-Pinto, Maxime de Trailles, the Marquis d’Esgrignon, the two brothers Vandenesse, du Tillet, one of the richest bankers in Paris, the Baron de Nucingen, Raoul Nathan, Lady Dudley, two very treacherous secretaries of embassies and the Chevalier d’Espard, the wiliest person in this assemblage and the chief instigator of his sister-in-law’s policy.

When dinner was well under way, Maxime de Trailles turned to d’Arthez and said smiling:—

“You see a great deal, don’t you, of the Princesse de Cadignan?”

To this question d’Arthez responded by curtly nodding his head. Maxime de Trailles was a “bravo” of the social order, without faith or law, capable of everything, ruining the women who trusted him, compelling them to pawn their diamonds to give him money, but covering this conduct with a brilliant varnish; a man of charming manners and satanic mind. He inspired all who knew him with equal contempt and fear; but as no one was bold enough to show him any sentiments but those of the utmost courtesy he saw nothing of this public opinion, or else he accepted and shared the general dissimulation. He owed to the Comte de Marsay the greatest degree of elevation to which he could attain. De Marsay, whose knowledge of Maxime was of long-standing, judged him capable of fulfilling certain secret and diplomatic functions which he confided to him and of which de Trailles acquitted himself admirably. D’Arthez had for some time past mingled sufficiently in political matters to know the man for what he was, and he alone had sufficient strength and height of character to express aloud what others thought or said in a whisper.

“Is it for her that you neglect the Chamber?” asked Baron de Nucingen in his German accent.

“Ah! the princess is one of the most dangerous women a man can have anything to do with. I owe to her the miseries of my marriage,” exclaimed the Marquis d’Esgrignon.

“Dangerous?” said Madame d’Espard. “Don’t speak so of my nearest friend. I have never seen or known anything in the princess that did not seem to come from the noblest sentiments.”

“Let the marquis say what he thinks,” cried Rastignac. “When a man has been thrown by a fine horse he thinks it has vices and he sells it.”

Piqued by these words, the Marquis d’Esgrignon looked at d’Arthez and said:—

“Monsieur is not, I trust, on such terms with the princess that we cannot speak freely of her?”

D’Arthez kept silence. D’Esgrignon, who was not wanting in cleverness, replied to Rastignac’s speech with an apologetic portrait of the princess, which put the whole table in good humor. As the jest was extremely obscure to d’Arthez he leaned towards his neighbor, Madame de Montcornet, and asked her, in a whisper, what it meant.

“Excepting yourself—judging by the excellent opinion you seem to have of the princess—all the other guests are said to have been in her good graces.”

“I can assure you that such an accusation is absolutely false,” said Daniel.

“And yet, here is Monsieur d’Esgrignon of an old family of Alencon, who completely ruined himself for her some twelve years ago, and, if all is true, came very near going to the scaffold.”

“I know the particulars of that affair,” said d’Arthez. “Madame de Cadignan went to Alencon to save Monsieur d’Esgrignon from a trial before the court of assizes; and this is how he rewards her to-day!”

Madame de Montcornet looked at d’Arthez with a surprise and curiosity that were almost stupid, then she turned her eyes on Madame d’Espard with a look which seemed to say: “He is bewitched!”

During this short conversation Madame de Cadignan was protected by Madame d’Espard, whose protection was like that of the lightning-rod which draws the flash. When d’Arthez returned to the general conversation Maxime de Trailles was saying:—

“With Diane, depravity is not an effect but a cause; perhaps she owes that cause to her exquisite nature; she doesn’t invent, she makes no effort, she offers you the choicest refinements as the inspiration of a spontaneous and naive love; and it is absolutely impossible not to believe her.”

This speech, which seemed to have been prepared for a man of d’Arthez’s stamp, was so tremendous an arraignment that the company appeared to accept it as a conclusion. No one said more; the princess was crushed. D’Arthez looked straight at de Trailles and then at d’Esgrignon with a sarcastic air, and said:—

“The greatest fault of that woman is that she has followed in the wake of men. She squanders patrimonies as they do; she drives her lovers to usurers; she pockets ‘dots’; she ruins orphans; she inspires, possibly she commits, crimes, but—”

Never had the two men, whom d'Arthez was chiefly addressing, listened to such plain talk. At that BUT the whole table was startled, every one paused, fork in air, their eyes fixed alternately on the brave author and on the assailants of the princess, awaiting the conclusion of that horrible silence.

"*But*," said d'Arthez, with sarcastic airiness, "Madame la Princesse de Cadignan has one advantage over men: when they have put themselves in danger for her sake, she saves them, and says no harm of any one. Among the multitude, why shouldn't there be one woman who amuses herself with men as men amuse themselves with women? Why not allow the fair sex to take, from time to time, its revenge?"

"Genius is stronger than wit," said Blondet to Nathan.

This broadside of sarcasms was in fact the discharge of a battery of cannons against a platoon of musketry. When coffee was served, Blondet and Nathan went up to d'Arthez with an eagerness no one else dared to imitate, so unable were the rest of the company to show the admiration his conduct inspired from the fear of making two powerful enemies.

"This is not the first time we have seen that your character equals your talent in grandeur," said Blondet. "You behaved just now more like a demi-god than a man. Not to have been carried away by your heart or your imagination, not to have taken up the defence of a beloved woman—a fault they were enticing you to commit, because it would have given those men of society eaten up with jealousy of your literary fame a triumph over you—ah! give me leave to say you have attained the height of private statesmanship."

"Yes, you are a statesman," said Nathan. "It is as clever as it is difficult to avenge a woman without defending her."

"The princess is one of those heroines of the legitimist party, and it is the duty of all men of honor to protect her quand meme," replied d'Arthez, coldly. "What she has done for the cause of her masters would excuse all follies."

"He keeps his own counsel!" said Nathan to Blondet.

"Precisely as if the princess were worth it," said Rastignac, joining the other two.

D'Arthez went to the princess, who was awaiting him with the keenest anxiety. The result of this experiment, which Diane had herself brought about, might be fatal to her. For the first time in her life this woman suffered in her heart. She knew not what she should do in case d'Arthez believed the world which spoke the truth, instead of believing her who lied; for never had so noble a nature, so complete a man, a soul so pure, a conscience so ingenuous come beneath her hand. Though she had told him cruel lies she was driven to do so by the desire of knowing a true love. That love—she felt it dawning in her heart; yes, she loved d'Arthez; and now she was condemned forever to deceive him! She must henceforth remain to him the actress who had played that comedy to blind his eyes.

When she heard Daniel's step in the dining-room a violent commotion, a shudder which reached to her very vitals came over her. That convulsion, never felt during all the years of her adventurous existence, told her that she had staked her happiness on this issue. Her eyes, gazing into space, took in the whole of d'Arthez's person; their light poured through his flesh, she read his soul; suspicion had not so much as touched him with its bat's-wing.

The terrible emotion of that fear then came to its reaction; joy almost stifled her; for there is no human being who is not more able to endure grief than to bear extreme felicity.

“Daniel, they have calumniated me, and you have avenged me!” she cried, rising, and opening her arms to him.

In the profound amazement caused by these words, the roots of which were utterly unknown to him, Daniel allowed his hand to be taken between her beautiful hands, as the princess kissed him sacredly on the forehead.

“But,” he said, “how could you know—”

“Oh! illustrious ninny! do you not see that I love you fondly?”

Since that day nothing has been said of the Princess de Cadignan, nor of d’Arthez. The princess has inherited some fortune from her mother and she spends all her summers in a villa on the lake of Geneva, where the great writer joins her. She returns to Paris for a few months in winter. D’Arthez is never seen except in the Chamber. His writings are becoming exceedingly rare. Is this a conclusion? Yes, for people of sense; no, for persons who want to know everything.