The Collection of Antiquities

(Le Cabinet des Antiques)

Honoré de Balzac

Translated by Ellen Marriage

Dedication

To Baron Von Hammer–Purgstall, Member of the Aulic Council, Author of the History of the Ottoman Empire.

Dear Baron — You have taken so warm an interest in my long, vast "History of French Manners in the Nineteenth Century," you have given me so much encouragement to persevere with my work, that you have given me a right to associate your name with some portion of it. Are you not one of the most important representatives of conscientious, studious Germany? Will not your approval win for me the approval of others, and protect this attempt of mine? So proud am I to have gained your good opinion, that I have striven to deserve it by continuing my labors with the unflagging courage characteristic of your methods of study, and of that exhaustive research among documents without which you could never have given your monumental work to the world of letters. Your sympathy with such labor as you yourself have bestowed upon the most brilliant civilization of the East, has often sustained my ardor through nights of toil given to the details of our modern civilization. And will not you, whose naive kindliness can only be compared with that of our own La Fontaine, be glad to know of this?

May this token of my respect for you and your work find you at Dobling, dear Baron, and put you and yours in mind of one of your most sincere admirers and friends.

DE BALZAC.

The Collection of Antiquities

There stands a house at a corner of a street, in the middle of a town, in one of the least important prefectures in France, but the name of the street and the name of the town must be suppressed here. Every one will appreciate the motives of this sage reticence demanded by convention; for if a writer takes upon himself the office of annalist of his own time, he is bound to touch on many sore subjects. The house was called the Hotel d'Esgrignon; but let d'Esgrignon be considered a mere fancy name, neither more nor less connected with real people than the conventional Belval, Floricour, or Derville of the stage, or the Adalberts and Mombreuses of romance. After all, the names of the principal characters will be quite as much disguised; for though in this history the chronicler would prefer to conceal the facts under a mass of contradictions, anachronisms, improbabilities, and absurdities, the truth will out in spite of him. You uproot a vine-stock, as you imagine, and the stem will send up lusty shoots after you have ploughed your vineyard over.

The "Hotel d'Esgrignon" was nothing more nor less than the house in which the old Marquis lived; or, in the style of ancient documents, Charles Marie Victor Ange Carol, Marquis d'Esgrignon. It was only an ordinary house, but the townspeople and tradesmen had begun by calling it the Hotel d'Esgrignon in jest, and ended after a score of years by giving it that name in earnest.

The name of Carol, or Karawl, as the Thierrys would have spelt it, was glorious among the names of the most powerful chieftains of the Northmen who conquered Gaul and established the feudal system there. Never had Carol bent his head before King or Communes, the Church or Finance. Intrusted in the days of yore with the keeping of a French March, the title of marquis in their family meant no shadow of imaginary office; it had been a post of honor with duties to discharge. Their fief had always been their domain. Provincial nobles were they in every sense of the word; they might boast of an unbroken line of great descent; they had been neglected by the court for two hundred years; they were lords paramount in the estates of a province where the people looked up to them with superstitious awe, as to the image of the Holy Virgin that cures the toothache. The house of d'Esgrignon, buried in its remote border country, was preserved as the charred piles of one of Caesar's bridges are maintained intact in a river bed. For

thirteen hundred years the daughters of the house had been married without a dowry or taken the veil; the younger sons of every generation had been content with their share of their mother's dower and gone forth to be captains or bishops; some had made a marriage at court; one cadet of the house became an admiral, a duke, and a peer of France, and died without issue. Never would the Marquis d'Esgrignon of the elder branch accept the title of duke.

"I hold my marquisate as His Majesty holds the realm of France, and on the same conditions," he told the Constable de Luynes, a very paltry fellow in his eyes at that time.

You may be sure that d'Esgrignons lost their heads on the scaffold during the troubles. The old blood showed itself proud and high even in 1789. The Marquis of that day would not emigrate; he was answerable for his March. The reverence in which he was held by the countryside saved his head; but the hatred of the genuine sans-culottes was strong enough to compel him to pretend to fly, and for a while he lived in hiding. Then, in the name of the Sovereign People, the d'Esgrignon lands were dishonored by the District, and the woods sold by the Nation in spite of the personal protest made by the Marquis, then turned forty. Mlle. d'Esgrignon, his half-sister, saved some portions of the fief, thanks to the young steward of the family, who claimed on her behalf the partage de presuccession, which is to say, the right of a relative to a portion of the emigre's lands. To Mlle. d'Esgrignon, therefore, the Republic made over the castle itself and a few farms. Chesnel [Choisnel], the faithful steward, was obliged to buy in his own name the church, the parsonage house, the castle gardens, and other places to which his patron was attached — the Marquis advancing the money.

The slow, swift years of the Terror went by, and the Marquis, whose character had won the respect of the whole country, decided that he and his sister ought to return to the castle and improve the property which Maitre Chesnel — for he was now a notary — had contrived to save for them out of the wreck. Alas! was not the plundered and dismantled castle all too vast for a lord of the manor shorn of all his ancient rights; too large for the landowner whose woods had been sold piecemeal, until he could scarce draw nine thousand francs of income from the pickings of his old estates?

It was in the month of October 1800 that Chesnel brought the Marquis back to the old feudal castle, and saw with deep emotion, almost beyound his control,

his patron standing in the midst of the empty courtyard, gazing round upon the moat, now filled up with rubbish, and the castle towers razed to the level of the roof. The descendant of the Franks looked for the missing Gothic turrets and the picturesque weather vanes which used to rise above them; and his eyes turned to the sky, as if asking of heaven the reason of this social upheaval. No one but Chesnel could understand the profound anguish of the great d'Esgrignon, now known as Citizen Carol. For a long while the Marquis stood in silence, drinking in the influences of the place, the ancient home of his forefathers, with the air that he breathed; then he flung out a most melancholy exclamation.

"Chesnel," he said, "we will come back again some day when the troubles are over; I could not bring myself to live here until the edict of pacification has been published; *they* will not allow me to set my scutcheon on the wall."

He waved his hand toward the castle, mounted his horse, and rode back beside his sister, who had driven over in the notary's shabby basket-chaise.

The Hotel d'Esgrignon in the town had been demolished; a couple of factories now stood on the site of the aristocrat's house. So Maitre Chesnel spent the Marquis' last bag of louis on the purchase of the old-fashioned building in the square, with its gables, weather-vane, turret, and dovecote. Once it had been the courthouse of the bailiwick, and subsequently the presidial; it had belonged to the d'Esgrignons from generation to generation; and now, in consideration of five hundred louis d'or, the present owner made it over with the title given by the Nation to its rightful lord. And so, half in jest, half in earnest, the old house was christened the Hotel d'Esgrignon.

In 1800 little or no difficulty was made over erasing names from the fatal list, and some few emigres began to return. Among the very first nobles to come back to the old town were the Baron de Nouastre and his daughter. They were completely ruined. M. d'Esgrignon generously offered them the shelter of his roof; and in his house, two months later, the Baron died, worn out with grief. The Nouastres came of the best blood in the province; Mlle. de Nouastre was a girl of two-and-twenty; the Marquis d'Esgrignon married her to continue his line. But she died in childbirth, a victim to the unskilfulness of her physician, leaving, most fortunately, a son to bear the name of the d'Esgrignons. The old Marquis — he was but fifty-three, but adversity and sharp distress had added months to every year — the poor old Marquis saw the death of the loveliest of human creatures, a noble

woman in whom the charm of the feminine figures of the sixteenth century lived again, a charm now lost save to men’s imaginations. With her death the joy died out of his old age. It was one of those terrible shocks which reverberate through every moment of the years that follow. For a few moments he stood beside the bed where his wife lay, with her hands folded like a saint, then he kissed her on the forehead, turned away, drew out his watch, broke the mainspring, and hung it up beside the hearth. It was eleven o’clock in the morning.

“Mlle. d’Esgrignon,” he said, “let us pray God that this hour may not prove fatal yet again to our house. My uncle the archbishop was murdered at this hour; at this hour also my father died ——”

He knelt down beside the bed and buried his face in the coverlet; his sister did the same, in another moment they both rose to their feet. Mlle. d’Esgrignon burst into tears; but the old Marquis looked with dry eyes at the child, round the room, and again on his dead wife. To the stubbornness of the Frank he united the fortitude of a Christian.

These things came to pass in the second year of the nineteenth century. Mlle. d’Esgrignon was then twenty-seven years of age. She was a beautiful woman. An excontractor for forage to the armies of the Republic, a man of the district, with an income of six thousand francs, persuaded Chesnel to carry a proposal of marriage to the lady. The Marquis and his sister were alike indignant with such presumption in their man of business, and Chesnel was almost heartbroken; he could not forgive himself for yielding to the Sieur du Croisier’s [du Bousquier] blandishments. The Marquis’ manner with his old servant changed somewhat; never again was there quite the old affectionate kindliness, which might almost have been taken for friendship. From that time forth the Marquis was grateful, and his magnanimous and sincere gratitude continually wounded the poor notary’s feelings. To some sublime natures gratitude seems an excessive payment; they would rather have that sweet equality of feeling which springs from similar ways of thought, and the blending of two spirits by their own choice and will. And Maitre Chesnel had known the delights of such high friendship; the Marquis had raised him to his own level. The old noble looked on the good notary as something more than a servant, something less than a child; he was the voluntary liege man of the house, a serf bound to his lord by all the ties of affection. There was no balancing of obligations; the sincere affection on either side put them out of the

question.

In the eyes of the Marquis, Chesnel's official dignity was as nothing; his old servitor was merely disguised as a notary. As for Chesnel, the Marquis was now, as always, a being of a divine race; he believed in nobility; he did not blush to remember that his father had thrown open the doors of the salon to announce that "My Lord Marquis is served." His devotion to the fallen house was due not so much to his creed as to egoism; he looked on himself as one of the family. So his vexation was intense. Once he had ventured to allude to his mistake in spite of the Marquis' prohibition, and the old noble answered gravely —"Chesnel, before the troubles you would not have permitted yourself to entertain such injurious suppositions. What can these new doctrines be if they have spoiled *you*?"

Maitre Chesnel had gained the confidence of the whole town; people looked up to him; his high integrity and considerable fortune contributed to make him a person of importance. From that time forth he felt a very decided aversion for the Sieur du Crosier; and though there was little rancor in his composition, he set others against the sometime forage-contractor. Du Croisier, on the other hand, was a man to bear a grudge and nurse a vengeance for a score of years. He hated Chesnel and the d'Esgrignon family with the smothered, all-absorbing hate only to be found in a country town. His rebuff had simply ruined him with the malicious provincials among whom he had come to live, thinking to rule over them. It was so real a disaster that he was not long in feeling the consequences of it. He betook himself in desperation to a wealthy old maid, and met with a second refusal. Thus failed the ambitious schemes with which he had started. He had lost his hope of a marriage with Mlle. d'Esgrignon, which would have opened the Faubourg Saint–Germain of the province to him; and after the second rejection, his credit fell away to such an extent that it was almost as much as he could do to keep his position in the second rank.

In 1805, M. de la Roche–Guyon, the oldest son of an ancient family which had previously intermarried with the d'Esgrignons, made proposals in form through Maitre Chesnel for Mlle. Marie Armande Clair d'Esgrignon. She declined to hear the notary.

"You must have guessed before now that I am a mother, dear Chesnel," she said; she had just put her nephew, a fine little boy of five, to bed.

The old Marquis rose and went up to his sister, but just returned from the

cradle; he kissed her hand reverently, and as he sat down again, found words to say:

"My sister, you are a d'Esgrignon."

A quiver ran through the noble girl; the tears stood in her eyes. M. d'Esgrignon, the father of the present Marquis, had married a second wife, the daughter of a farmer of taxes ennobled by Louis XIV. It was a shocking mesalliance in the eyes of his family, but fortunately of no importance, since a daughter was the one child of the marriage. Armande knew this. Kind as her brother had always been, he looked on her as a stranger in blood. And this speech of his had just recognized her as one of the family.

And was not her answer the worthy crown of eleven years of her noble life? Her every action since she came of age had borne the stamp of the purest devotion; love for her brother was a sort of religion with her.

"I shall die Mlle. d'Esgrignon," she said simply, turning to the notary.

"For you there could be no fairer title," returned Chesnel, meaning to convey a compliment. Poor Mlle. d'Esgrignon reddened.

"You have blundered, Chesnel," said the Marquis, flattered by the steward's words, but vexed that his sister had been hurt. "A d'Esgrignon may marry a Montmorency; their descent is not so pure as ours. The d'Esgrignons bear or, two bends, gules," he continued, "and nothing during nine hundred years has changed their scutcheon; as it was at first, so it is today. Hence our device, Cil est nostre, taken at a tournament in the reign of Philip Augustus, with the supporters, a knight in armor or on the right, and a lion gules on the left."

"I do not remember that any woman I have ever met has struck my imagination as Mlle. d'Esgrignon did," said Emile Blondet, to whom contemporary literature is indebted for this history among other things. "Truth to tell, I was a boy, a mere child at the time, and perhaps my memory-pictures of her owe something of their vivid color to a boy's natural turn for the marvelous.

"If I was playing with other children on the Parade, and she came to walk there with her nephew Victurnien, the sight of her in the distance thrilled me with very much the effect of galvanism on a dead body. Child as I was, I felt as though new life had been given me.

“Mlle. Armande had hair of tawny gold; there was a delicate fine down on her cheek, with a silver gleam upon it which I loved to catch, putting myself so that I could see the outlines of her face lit up by the daylight, and feel the fascination of those dreamy emerald eyes, which sent a flash of fire through me whenever they fell upon my face. I used to pretend to roll on the grass before her in our games, only to try to reach her little feet, and admire them on a closer view. The soft whiteness of her skin, her delicate features, the clearly cut lines of her forehead, the grace of her slender figure, took me with a sense of surprise, while as yet I did not know that her shape was graceful, nor her brows beautiful, nor the outline of her face a perfect oval. I admired as children pray at that age, without too clearly understanding why they pray. When my piercing gaze attracted her notice, when she asked me (in that musical voice of hers, with more volume in it, as it seemed to me, than all other voices), ‘What are you doing little one? Why do you look at me?’— I used to come nearer and wriggle and bite my finger-nails, and redden and say, ‘I do not know.’ And if she chanced to stroke my hair with her white hand, and ask me how old I was, I would run away and call from a distance, ‘Eleven!’

Every princess and fairy of my visions, as I read the Arabian Nights, looked and walked like Mlle. d’Esgrignon; and afterwards, when my drawing-master gave me heads from the antique to copy, I noticed that their hair was braided like Mlle. d’Esgrignon’s. Still later, when the foolish fancies had vanished one by one, Mlle. Armande remained vaguely in my memory as a type; that Mlle. Armande for whom men made way respectfully, following the tall brown-robed figure with their eyes along the Parade and out of sight. Her exquisitely graceful form, the rounded curves sometimes revealed by a chance gust of wind, and always visible to my eyes in spite of the ample folds of stuff, revisited my young man’s dreams. Later yet, when I came to think seriously over certain mysteries of human thought, it seemed to me that the feeling of reverence was first inspired in me by something expressed in Mlle. d’Esgrignon’s face and bearing. The wonderful calm of her face, the suppressed passion in it, the dignity of her movements, the saintly life of duties fulfilled — all this touched and awed me. Children are more susceptible than people imagine to the subtle influences of ideas; they never make game of real dignity; they feel the charm of real graciousness, and beauty attracts them, for childhood itself is beautiful, and there are mysterious ties between things of the same nature.

“Mlle. d’Esgrignon was one of my religions. To this day I can never climb the

staircase of some old manor-house but my foolish imagination must needs picture Mlle. Armande standing there, like the spirit of feudalism. I can never read old chronicles but she appears before my eyes in the shape of some famous woman of old times; she is Agnes Sorel, Marie Touchet, Gabrielle; and I lend her all the love that was lost in her heart, all the love that she never expressed. The angel shape seen in glimpses through the haze of childish fancies visits me now sometimes across the mists of dreams."

Keep this portrait in mind; it is a faithful picture and sketch of character. Mlle. d'Esgrignon is one of the most instructive figures in this story; she affords an example of the mischief that may be done by the purest goodness for lack of intelligence.

Two-thirds of the emigres returned to France during 1804 and 1805, and almost every exile from the Marquis d'Esgrignon's province came back to the land of his fathers. There were certainly defections. Men of good birth entered the service of Napoleon, and went into the army or held places at the Imperial court, and others made alliances with the upstart families. All those who cast in their lots with the Empire retrieved their fortunes and recovered their estates, thanks to the Emperor's munificence; and these for the most part went to Paris and stayed there. But some eight or nine families still remained true to the proscribed noblesse and loyal to the fallen monarchy. The La Roche–Guyons, Nouastres, Verneuils, Casterans, Troisvilles, and the rest were some of them rich, some of them poor; but money, more or less, scarcely counted for anything among them. They took an antiquarian view of themselves; for them the age and preservation of the pedigree was the one all-important matter; precisely as, for an amateur, the weight of metal in a coin is a small matter in comparison with clean lettering, a flawless stamp, and high antiquity. Of these families, the Marquis d'Esgrignon was the acknowledged head. His house became their cenacle. There His Majesty, Emperor and King, was never anything but "M. de Bonaparte"; there "the King" meant Louis XVIII., then at Mittau; there the Department was still the Province, and the prefecture the intendance.

The Marquis was honored among them for his admirable behavior, his loyalty as a noble, his undaunted courage; even as he was respected throughout the town for his misfortunes, his fortitude, his steadfast adherence to his political convictions. The man so admirable in adversity was invested with all the majesty

of ruined greatness. His chivalrous fair-mindedness was so well known, that litigants many a time had referred their disputes to him for arbitration. All gently bred Imperalists and the authorities themselves showed as much indulgence for his prejudices as respect for his personal character; but there was another and a large section of the new society which was destined to be known after the Restoration as the Liberal party; and these, with du Croisier as their unacknowledged head, laughed at an aristocratic oasis which nobody might enter without proof of irreproachable descent. Their animosity was all the more bitter because honest country squires and the higher officials, with a good many worthy folk in the town, were of the opinion that all the best society thereof was to be found in the Marquis d'Esgrignon's salon. The prefect himself, the Emperor's chamberlain, made overtures to the d'Esgrignons, humbly sending his wife (a Grandlieu) as ambassadress.

Wherefore, those excluded from the miniature provincial Faubourg Saint–Germain nicknamed the salon "The Collection of Antiquities," and called the Marquis himself "M. Carol." The receiver of taxes, for instance, addressed his applications to "M. Carol (ci-devant des Grignons)," maliciously adopting the obsolete way of spelling.

"For my own part," said Emile Blondet, "if I try to recall my childhood memories, I remember that the nickname of 'Collection of Antiquities' always made me laugh, in spite of my respect — my love, I ought to say — for Mlle. d'Esgrignon. The Hotel d'Esgrignon stood at the angle of two of the busiest thoroughfares in the town, and not five hundred paces away from the market place. Two of the drawing-room windows looked upon the street and two upon the square; the room was like a glass cage, every one who came past could look through it from side to side. I was only a boy of twelve at the time, but I thought, even then, that the salon was one of those rare curiosities which seem, when you come to think of them afterwards, to lie just on the borderland between reality and dreams, so that you can scarcely tell to which side they most belong.

"The room, the ancient Hall of Audience, stood above a row of cellars with grated air-holes, once the prison cells of the old court-house, now converted into a kitchen. I do not know that the magnificent lofty chimney-piece of the Louvre, with its marvelous carving, seemed more wonderful to me than the vast open hearth of the salon d'Esgrignon when I saw it for the first time. It was covered like

a melon with a network of tracery. Over it stood an equestrian portrait of Henri III., under whom the ancient duchy of appanage reverted to the crown; it was a great picture executed in low relief, and set in a carved and gilded frame. The ceiling spaces between the chestnut cross-beams in the fine old roof were decorated with scroll-work patterns; there was a little faded gilding still left along the angles. The walls were covered with Flemish tapestry, six scenes from the Judgment of Solomon, framed in golden garlands, with satyrs and cupids playing among the leaves. The parquet floor had been laid down by the present Marquis, and Chesnel had picked up the furniture at sales of the wreckage of old chateaux between 1793 and 1795; so that there were Louis Quatorze consoles, tables, clock-cases, andirons, candle-sconces and tapestry-covered chairs, which marvelously completed a stately room, large out of all proportion to the house. Luckily, however, there was an equally lofty ante-chamber, the ancient Salle des Pas Perdus of the presidial, which communicated likewise with the magistrate's deliberating chamber, used by the d'Esgrignons as a dining-room.

"Beneath the old paneling, amid the threadbare braveries of a bygone day, some eight or ten dowagers were drawn up in state in a quavering line; some with palsied heads, others dark and shriveled like mummies; some erect and stiff, others bowed and bent, but all of them tricked out in more or less fantastic costumes as far as possible removed from the fashion of the day, with beribboned caps above their curled and powdered 'heads,' and old discolored lace. No painter however earnest, no caricature however wild, ever caught the haunting fascination of those aged women; they come back to me in dreams; their puckered faces shape themselves in my memory whenever I meet an old woman who puts me in mind of them by some faint resemblance of dress or feature. And whether it is that misfortune has initiated me into the secrets of irremediable and overwhelming disaster; whether that I have come to understand the whole range of human feelings, and, best of all, the thoughts of Old Age and Regret; whatever the reason, nowhere and never again have I seen among the living or in the faces of the dying the wan look of certain gray eyes that I remember, nor the dreadful brightness of others that were black.

"Neither Hoffmann nor Maturin, the two weirdest imaginations of our time, ever gave me such a thrill of terror as I used to feel when I watched the automaton movements of those bodies sheathed in whalebone. The paint on actors' faces never caused me a shock; I could see below it the rouge in grain, the rouge de

naissance, to quote a comrade at least as malicious as I can be. Years had leveled those women's faces, and at the same time furrowed them with wrinkles, till they looked like the heads on wooden nutcrackers carved in Germany. Peeping in through the window-panes, I gazed at the battered bodies, and ill-jointed limbs (how they were fastened together, and, indeed, their whole anatomy was a mystery I never attempted to explain); I saw the lantern jaws, the protuberant bones, the abnormal development of the hips; and the movements of these figures as they came and went seemed to me no whit less extraordinary than their sepulchral immobility as they sat round the card-tables.

"The men looked gray and faded like the ancient tapestries on the wall, in dress they were much more like the men of the day, but even they were not altogether convincingly alive. Their white hair, their withered waxen-hued faces, their devastated foreheads and pale eyes, revealed their kinship to the women, and neutralized any effects of reality borrowed from their costume.

"The very certainty of finding all these folk seated at or among the tables every day at the same hours invested them at length in my eyes with a sort of spectacular interest as it were; there was something theatrical, something unearthly about them.

"Whenever, in after times, I have gone through museums of old furniture in Paris, London, Munich, or Vienna, with the gray-headed custodian who shows you the splendors of time past, I have peopled the rooms with figures from the Collection of Antiquities. Often, as little schoolboys of eight or ten we used to propose to go and take a look at the curiosities in their glass cage, for the fun of the thing. But as soon as I caught sight of Mlle. Armande's sweet face, I used to tremble; and there was a trace of jealousy in my admiration for the lovely child Victurnien, who belonged, as we all instinctively felt, to a different and higher order of being from our own. It struck me as something indescribably strange that the young fresh creature should be there in that cemetery awakened before the time. We could not have explained our thoughts to ourselves, yet we felt that we were bourgeois and insignificant in the presence of that proud court."

The disasters of 1813 and 1814, which brought about the downfall of Napoleon, gave new life to the Collection of Antiquities, and what was more than life, the hope of recovering their past importance; but the events of 1815, the troubles of the foreign occupation, and the vacillating policy of the Government

until the fall of M. Decazes, all contributed to defer the fulfilment of the expectations of the personages so vividly described by Blondet. This story, therefore, only begins to shape itself in 1822.

In 1822 the Marquis d'Esgrignon's fortunes had not improved in spite of the changes worked by the Restoration in the condition of emigres. Of all the nobles hardly hit by Revolutionary legislation, his case was the hardest. Like other great families, the d'Esgrignons before 1789 derived the greater part of their income from their rights as lords of the manor in the shape of dues paid by those who held of them; and, naturally, the old seigneurs had reduced the size of the holdings in order to swell the amounts paid in quit-rents and heriots. Families in this position were hopelessly ruined. They were not affected by the ordinance by which Louis XVIII. put the emigres into possession of such of their lands as had not been sold; and at a later date it was impossible that the law of indemnity should indemnify them. Their suppressed rights, as everybody knows, were revived in the shape of a land tax known by the very name of domaines, but the money went into the coffers of the State.

The Marquis by his position belonged to that small section of the Royalist party which would hear of no kind of compromise with those whom they styled, not Revolutionaries, but revolted subjects, or, in more parliamentary language, they had no dealings with Liberals or Constitutionnels. Such Royalists, nicknamed Ultras by the opposition, took for leaders and heroes those courageous orators of the Right, who from the very beginning attempted, with M. de Polignac, to protest against the charter granted by Louis XVIII. This they regarded as an ill-advised edict extorted from the Crown by the necessity of the moment, only to be annulled later on. And, therefore, so far from cooperating with the King to bring about a new condition of things, the Marquis d'Esgrignon stood aloof, an upholder of the straitest sect of the Right in politics, until such time as his vast fortune should be restored to him. Nor did he so much as admit the thought of the indemnity which filled the minds of the Villele ministry, and formed a part of a design of strengthening the Crown by putting an end to those fatal distinctions of ownership which still lingered on in spite of legislation.

The miracles of the Restoration of 1814, the still greater miracle of Napoleon's return in 1815, the portents of a second flight of the Bourbons, and a second reinstatement (that almost fabulous phase of contemporary history), all these

things took the Marquis by surprise at the age of sixty-seven. At that time of life, the most high-spirited men of their age were not so much vanquished as worn out in the struggle with the Revolution; their activity, in their remote provincial retreats, had turned into a passionately held and immovable conviction; and almost all of them were shut in by the enervating, easy round of daily life in the country. Could worse luck befall a political party than this — to be represented by old men at a time when its ideas are already stigmatized as old-fashioned?

When the legitimate sovereign appeared to be firmly seated on the throne again in 1818, the Marquis asked himself what a man of seventy should do at court; and what duties, what office he could discharge there? The noble and high-minded d'Esgrignon was fain to be content with the triumph of the Monarchy and Religion, while he waited for the results of that unhoped-for, indecisive victory, which proved to be simply an armistice. He continued as before, lord-paramount of his salon, so felicitously named the Collection of Antiquities.

But when the victors of 1793 became the vanquished in their turn, the nickname given at first in jest began to be used in bitter earnest. The town was no more free than other country towns from the hatreds and jealousies bred of party spirit. Du Croisier, contrary to all expectation, married the old maid who had refused him at first; carrying her off from his rival, the darling of the aristocratic quarter, a certain Chevalier whose illustrious name will be sufficiently hidden by suppressing it altogether, in accordance with the usage formerly adopted in the place itself, where he was known by his title only. He was "the Chevalier" in the town, as the Comte d'Artois was "Monsieur" at court. Now, not only had that marriage produced a war after the provincial manner, in which all weapons are fair; it had hastened the separation of the great and little noblesse, of the aristocratic and bourgeois social elements, which had been united for a little space by the heavy weight of Napoleonic rule. After the pressure was removed, there followed that sudden revival of class divisions which did so much harm to the country.

The most national of all sentiments in France is vanity. The wounded vanity of the many induced a thirst for Equality; though, as the most ardent innovator will some day discover, Equality is an impossibility. The Royalists pricked the Liberals in the most sensitive spots, and this happened specially in the provinces, where either party accused the other of unspeakable atrocities. In those days the

blackest deeds were done in politics, to secure public opinion on one side or the other, to catch the votes of that public of fools which holds up hands for those that are clever enough to serve out weapons to them. Individuals are identified with their political opinions, and opponents in public life forthwith became private enemies. It is very difficult in a country town to avoid a man-to-man conflict of this kind over interests or questions which in Paris appear in a more general and theoretical form, with the result that political combatants also rise to a higher level; M. Laffitte, for example, or M. Casimir–Perier can respect M. de Villele or M. de Payronnet as a man. M. Laffitte, who drew the fire on the Ministry, would have given them an asylum in his house if they had fled thither on the 29th of July 1830. Benjamin Constant sent a copy of his work on Religion to the Vicomte de Chateaubriand, with a flattering letter acknowledging benefits received from the former Minister. At Paris men are systems, whereas in the provinces systems are identified with men; men, moreover, with restless passions, who must always confront one another, always spy upon each other in private life, and pull their opponents' speeches to pieces, and live generally like two duelists on the watch for a chance to thrust six inches of steel between an antagonist's ribs. Each must do his best to get under his enemy's guard, and a political hatred becomes as all-absorbing as a duel to the death. Epigram and slander are used against individuals to bring the party into discredit.

In such warfare as this, waged ceremoniously and without rancor on the side of the Antiquities, while du Croisier's faction went so far as to use the poisoned weapons of savages — in this warfare the advantages of wit and delicate irony lay on the side of the nobles. But it should never be forgotten that the wounds made by the tongue and the eyes, by gibe or slight, are the last of all to heal. When the Chevalier turned his back on mixed society and entrenched himself on the Mons Sacer of the aristocracy, his witticisms thenceforward were directed at du Croisier's salon; he stirred up the fires of war, not knowing how far the spirit of revenge was to urge the rival faction. None but purists and loyal gentlemen and women sure one of another entered the Hotel d'Esgrignon; they committed no indiscretions of any kind; they had their ideas, true or false, good or bad, noble or trivial, but there was nothing to laugh at in all this. If the Liberals meant to make the nobles ridiculous, they were obliged to fasten on the political actions of their opponents; while the intermediate party, composed of officials and others who paid court to the higher powers, kept the nobles informed of all that was done and

said in the Liberal camp, and much of it was abundantly laughable. Du Croisier's adherents smarted under a sense of inferiority, which increased their thirst for revenge.

In 1822, du Croisier put himself at the head of the manufacturing interest of the province, as the Marquis d'Esgrignon headed the noblesse. Each represented his party. But du Croisier, instead of giving himself out frankly for a man of the extreme Left, ostensibly adopted the opinions formulated at a later date by the 221 deputies.

By taking up this position, he could keep in touch with the magistrates and local officials and the capitalists of the department. Du Croisier's salon, a power at least equal to the salon d'Esgrignon, larger numerically, as well as younger and more energetic, made itself felt all over the countryside; the Collection of Antiquities, on the other hand, remained inert, a passive appendage, as it were, of a central authority which was often embarrassed by its own partisans; for not merely did they encourage the Government in a mistaken policy, but some of its most fatal blunders were made in consequence of the pressure brought to bear upon it by the Conservative party.

The Liberals, so far, had never contrived to carry their candidate. The department declined to obey their command knowing that du Croisier, if elected, would take his place on the Left Centre benches, and as far as possible to the Left. Du Croisier was in correspondence with the Brothers Keller, the bankers, the oldest of whom shone conspicuous among "the nineteen deputies of the Left," that phalanx made famous by the efforts of the entire Liberal press. This same M. Keller, moreover, was related by marriage to the Comte de Gondreville, a Constitutional peer who remained in favor with Louis XVIII. For these reasons, the Constitutional Opposition (as distinct from the Liberal party) was always prepared to vote at the last moment, not for the candidate whom they professed to support, but for du Croisier, if that worthy could succeed in gaining a sufficient number of Royalist votes; but at every election du Croisier was regularly thrown out by the Royalists. The leaders of that party, taking their tone from the Marquis d'Esgrignon, had pretty thoroughly fathomed and gauged their man; and with each defeat, du Croisier and his party waxed more bitter. Nothing so effectually stirs up strife as the failure of some snare set with elaborate pains.

In 1822 there seemed to be a lull in hostilities which had been kept up with

great spirit during the first four years of the Restoration. The salon du Croisier and the salon d'Esgrignon, having measured their strength and weakness, were in all probability waiting for opportunity, that Providence of party strife. Ordinary persons were content with the surface quiet which deceived the Government; but those who knew du Croisier better, were well aware that the passion of revenge in him, as in all men whose whole life consists in mental activity, is implacable, especially when political ambitions are involved. About this time du Croisier, who used to turn white and red at the bare mention of d'Esgrignon or the Chevalier, and shuddered at the name of the Collection of Antiquities, chose to wear the impassive countenance of a savage. He smiled upon his enemies, hating them but the more deeply, watching them the more narrowly from hour to hour. One of his own party, who seconded him in these calculations of cold wrath, was the President of the Tribunal, M. du Ronceret, a little country squire, who had vainly endeavored to gain admittance among the Antiquities.

The d'Esgrignons' little fortune, carefully administered by Maitre Chesnel, was barely sufficient for the worthy Marquis' needs; for though he lived without the slightest ostentation, he also lived like a noble. The governor found by his Lordship the Bishop for the hope of the house, the young Comte Victurnien d'Esgrignon, was an elderly Oratorian who must be paid a certain salary, although he lived with the family. The wages of a cook, a waiting-woman for Mlle. Armande, an old valet for M. le Marquis, and a couple of other servants, together with the daily expenses of the household, and the cost of an education for which nothing was spared, absorbed the whole family income, in spite of Mlle. Armande's economies, in spite of Chesnel's careful management, and the servants' affection. As yet, Chesnel had not been able to set about repairs at the ruined castle; he was waiting till the leases fell in to raise the rent of the farms, for rents had been rising lately, partly on account of improved methods of agriculture, partly by the fall in the value of money, of which the landlord would get the benefit at the expiration of leases granted in 1809.

The Marquis himself knew nothing of the details of the management of the house or of his property. He would have been thunderstruck if he had been told of the excessive precautions needed "to make both ends of the year meet in December," to use the housewife's saying, and he was so near the end of his life, that every one shrank from opening his eyes. The Marquis and his adherents believed that a House, to which no one at Court or in the Government gave a

thought, a House that was never heard of beyond the gates of the town, save here and there in the same department, was about to revive its ancient greatness, to shine forth in all its glory. The d'Esgrignons' line should appear with renewed lustre in the person of Victurnien, just as the despoiled nobles came into their own again, and the handsome heir to a great estate would be in a position to go to Court, enter the King's service, and marry (as other d'Esgrignons had done before him) a Navarreins, a Cadignan, a d'Uxelles, a Beausant, a Blamont–Chauvry; a wife, in short, who should unite all the distinctions of birth and beauty, wit and wealth, and character.

The intimates who came to play their game of cards of an evening — the Troisvilles (pronounced Treville), the La Roche–Guyons, the Casterans (pronounced Cateran), and the Duc de Verneuil — had all so long been accustomed to look up to the Marquis as a person of immense consequence, that they encouraged him in such notions as these. They were perfectly sincere in their belief; and indeed, it would have been well founded if they could have wiped out the history of the last forty years. But the most honorable and undoubted sanctions of right, such as Louis XVIII. had tried to set on record when he dated the Charter from the one-and-twentieth year of his reign, only exist when ratified by the general consent. The d'Esgrignons not only lacked the very rudiments of the language of latter-day politics, to wit, money, the great modern *relief*, or sufficient rehabilitation of nobility; but, in their case, too, "historical continuity" was lacking, and that is a kind of renown which tells quite as much at Court as on the battlefield, in diplomatic circles as in Parliament, with a book, or in connection with an adventure; it is, as it were, a sacred ampulla poured upon the heads of each successive generation. Whereas a noble family, inactive and forgotten, is very much in the position of a hard-featured, poverty-stricken, simple-minded, and virtuous maid, these qualifications being the four cardinal points of misfortune. The marriage of a daughter of the Troisvilles with General Montcornet, so far from opening the eyes of the Antiquities, very nearly brought about a rupture between the Troisvilles and the salon d'Esgrignon, the latter declaring that the Troisvilles were mixing themselves up with all sorts of people.

There was one, and one only, among all these folk who did not share their illusions. And that one, needless to say, was Chesnel the notary. Although his devotion, sufficiently proved already, was simply unbounded for the great house now reduced to three persons; although he accepted all their ideas, and thought

them nothing less than right, he had too much common sense, he was too good a man of business to more than half the families in the department, to miss the significance of the great changes that were taking place in people's minds, or to be blind to the different conditions brought about by industrial development and modern manners. He had watched the Revolution pass through the violent phase of 1793, when men, women, and children wore arms, and heads fell on the scaffold, and victories were won in pitched battles with Europe; and now he saw the same forces quietly at work in men's minds, in the shape of ideas which sanctioned the issues. The soil had been cleared, the seed sown, and now came the harvest. To his thinking, the Revolution had formed the mind of the younger generation; he touched the hard facts, and knew that although there were countless unhealed wounds, what had been done was past recall. The death of a king on the scaffold, the protracted agony of a queen, the division of the nobles' lands, in his eyes were so many binding contracts; and where so many vested interests were involved, it was not likely that those concerned would allow them to be attacked. Chesnel saw clearly. His fanatical attachment to the d'Esgrignons was whole-hearted, but it was not blind, and it was all the fairer for this. The young monk's faith that sees heaven laid open and beholds the angels, is something far below the power of the old monk who points them out to him. The exsteward was like the old monk; he would have given his life to defend a worm-eaten shrine.

He tried to explain the "innovations" to his old master, using a thousand tactful precautions; sometimes speaking jestingly, sometimes affecting surprise or sorrow over this or that; but he always met the same prophetic smile on the Marquis' lips, the same fixed conviction in the Marquis' mind, that these follies would go by like others. Events contributed in a way which has escaped attention to assist such noble champions of forlorn hope to cling to their superstitions. What could Chesnel do when the old Marquis said, with a lordly gesture, "God swept away Bonaparte with his armies, his new great vassals, his crowned kings, and his vast conceptions! God will deliver us from the rest." And Chesnel hung his head sadly, and did not dare to answer, "It cannot be God's will to sweep away France." Yet both of them were grand figures; the one, standing out against the torrent of facts like an ancient block of lichen-covered granite, still upright in the depths of an Alpine gorge; the other, watching the course of the flood to turn it to account. Then the good gray-headed notary would groan over the irreparable havoc which the superstitions were sure to work in the mind, the habits, and ideas

of the Comte Victurnien d'Esgrignon.

Idolized by his father, idolized by his aunt, the young heir was a spoilt child in every sense of the word; but still a spoilt child who justified paternal and maternal illusions. Maternal, be it said, for Victurnien's aunt was truly a mother to him; and yet, however careful and tender she may be that never bore a child, there is something lacking in her motherhood. A mother's second sight cannot be acquired. An aunt, bound to her nursling by ties of such pure affection as united Mlle. Armande to Victurnien, may love as much as a mother might; may be as careful, as kind, as tender, as indulgent, but she lacks the mother's instinctive knowledge when and how to be severe; she has no sudden warnings, none of the uneasy presentiments of the mother's heart; for a mother, bound to her child from the beginnings of life by all the fibres of her being, still is conscious of the communication, still vibrates with the shock of every trouble, and thrills with every joy in the child's life as if it were her own. If Nature has made of woman, physically speaking, a neutral ground, it has not been forbidden to her, under certain conditions, to identify herself completely with her offspring. When she has not merely given life, but given of her whole life, you behold that wonderful, unexplained, and inexplicable thing — the love of a woman for one of her children above the others. The outcome of this story is one more proof of a proven truth — a mother's place cannot be filled. A mother foresees danger long before a Mlle. Armande can admit the possibility of it, even if the mischief is done. The one prevents the evil, the other remedies it. And besides, in the maiden's motherhood there is an element of blind adoration, she cannot bring herself to scold a beautiful boy.

A practical knowledge of life, and the experience of business, had taught the old notary a habit of distrustful clear-sighted observation something akin to the mother's instinct. But Chesnel counted for so little in the house (especially since he had fallen into something like disgrace over that unlucky project of a marriage between a d'Esgrignon and a du Croisier), that he had made up his mind to adhere blindly in future to the family doctrines. He was a common soldier, faithful to his post, and ready to give his life; it was never likely that they would take his advice, even in the height of the storm; unless chance should bring him, like the King's bedesman in The Antiquary, to the edge of the sea, when the old baronet and his daughter were caught by the high tide.

Du Croisier caught a glimpse of his revenge in the anomalous education given to the lad. He hoped, to quote the expressive words of the author quoted above, “to drown the lamb in its mother’s milk.” *This* was the hope which had produced his taciturn resignation and brought that savage smile on his lips.

The young Comte Victurnien was taught to believe in his own supremacy as soon as an idea could enter his head. All the great nobles of the realm were his peers, his one superior was the King, and the rest of mankind were his inferiors, people with whom he had nothing in common, towards whom he had no duties. They were defeated and conquered enemies, whom he need not take into account for a moment; their opinions could not affect a noble, and they all owed him respect. Unluckily, with the rigorous logic of youth, which leads children and young people to proceed to extremes whether good or bad, Victurnien pushed these conclusions to their utmost consequences. His own external advantages, moreover, confirmed him in his beliefs. He had been extraordinarily beautiful as a child; he became as accomplished a young man as any father could wish.

He was of average height, but well proportioned, slender, and almost delicate-looking, but muscular. He had the brilliant blue eyes of the d’Esgrignons, the finely-moulded aquiline nose, the perfect oval of the face, the auburn hair, the white skin, and the graceful gait of his family; he had their delicate extremities, their long taper fingers with the inward curve, and that peculiar distinction of shapeliness of the wrist and instep, that supple felicity of line, which is as sure a sign of race in men as in horses. Adroit and alert in all bodily exercises, and an excellent shot, he handled arms like a St. George, he was a paladin on horseback. In short, he gratified the pride which parents take in their children’s appearance; a pride founded, for that matter, on a just idea of the enormous influence exercised by physical beauty. Personal beauty has this in common with noble birth; it cannot be acquired afterwards; it is everywhere recognized, and often is more valued than either brains or money; beauty has only to appear and triumph; nobody asks more of beauty than that it should simply exist.

Fate had endowed Victurnien, over and above the privileges of good looks and noble birth, with a high spirit, a wonderful aptitude of comprehension, and a good memory. His education, therefore, had been complete. He knew a good deal more than is usually known by young provincial nobles, who develop into highly-distinguished sportsmen, owners of land, and consumers of tobacco; and are apt

to treat art, sciences, letters, poetry, or anything offensively above their intellects, cavalierly enough. Such gifts of nature and education surely would one day realize the Marquis d'Esgrignon's ambitions; he already saw his son a Marshal of France if Victurnien's tastes were for the army; an ambassador if diplomacy held any attractions for him; a cabinet minister if that career seemed good in his eyes; every place in the state belonged to Victurnien. And, most gratifying thought of all for a father, the young Count would have made his way in the world by his own merits even if he had not been a d'Esgrignon.

All through his happy childhood and golden youth, Victurnien had never met with opposition to his wishes. He had been the king of the house; no one curbed the little prince's will; and naturally he grew up insolent and audacious, selfish as a prince, self-willed as the most high-spirited cardinal of the Middle Ages — defects of character which any one might guess from his qualities, essentially those of the noble.

The Chevalier was a man of the good old times when the Gray Musketeers were the terror of the Paris theatres, when they horsewhipped the watch and drubbed servers of writs, and played a host of page's pranks, at which Majesty was wont to smile so long as they were amusing. This charming deceiver and hero of the ruelles had no small share in bringing about the disasters which afterwards befell. The amiable old gentleman, with nobody to understand him, was not a little pleased to find a budding Faublas, who looked the part to admiration, and put him in mind of his own young days. So, making no allowance for the difference of the times, he sowed the maxims of a roue of the Encyclopaedic period broadcast in the boy's mind. He told wicked anecdotes of the reign of His Majesty Louis XV.; he glorified the manners and customs of the year 1750; he told of the orgies in petites maisons, the follies of courtesans, the capital tricks played on creditors, the manners, in short, which furnished forth Dancourt's comedies and Beaumarchais' epigrams. And unfortunately, the corruption lurking beneath the utmost polish tricked itself out in Voltairean wit. If the Chevalier went rather too far at times, he always added as a corrective that a man must always behave himself like a gentleman.

Of all this discourse, Victurnien comprehended just so much as flattered his passions. From the first he saw his old father laughing with the Chevalier. The two elderly men considered that the pride of a d'Esgrignon was a sufficient safeguard

against anything unbefitting; as for a dishonorable action, no one in the house imagined that a d'Esgrignon could be guilty of it. *Honor*, the great principle of Monarchy, was planted firm like a beacon in the hearts of the family; it lighted up the least action, it kindled the least thought of a d'Esgrignon. "A d'Esgrignon ought not to permit himself to do such and such a thing; he bears a name which pledges him to make a future worthy of the past"— a noble teaching which should have been sufficient in itself to keep alive the tradition of noblesse — had been, as it were, the burden of Victurnien's cradle song. He heard them from the old Marquis, from Mlle. Armande, from Chesnel, from the intimates of the house. And so it came to pass that good and evil met, and in equal forces, in the boy's soul.

At the age of eighteen, Victurnien went into society. He noticed some slight discrepancies between the outer world of the town and the inner world of the Hotel d'Esgrignon, but he in no wise tried to seek the causes of them. And, indeed, the causes were to be found in Paris. He had yet to learn that the men who spoke their minds out so boldly in evening talk with his father, were extremely careful of what they said in the presence of the hostile persons with whom their interests compelled them to mingle. His own father had won the right of freedom of speech. Nobody dreamed of contradicting an old man of seventy, and besides, every one was willing to overlook fidelity to the old order of things in a man who had been violently despoiled.

Victurnien was deceived by appearances, and his behavior set up the backs of the townspeople. In his impetuous way he tried to carry matters with too high a hand over some difficulties in the way of sport, which ended in formidable lawsuits, hushed up by Chesnel for money paid down. Nobody dared to tell the Marquis of these things. You may judge of his astonishment if he had heard that his son had been prosecuted for shooting over his lands, his domains, his covers, under the reign of a son of St. Louis! People were too much afraid of the possible consequences to tell him about such trifles, Chesnel said.

The young Count indulged in other escapades in the town. These the Chevalier regarded as "amourettes," but they cost Chesnel something considerable in portions for forsaken damsels seduced under imprudent promises of marriage: yet other cases there were which came under an article of the Code as to the abduction of minors; and but for Chesnel's timely intervention, the new law would have been allowed to take its brutal course, and it is hard to say where the Count

might have ended. Victurnien grew the bolder for these victories over bourgeois justice. He was so accustomed to be pulled out of scrapes, that he never thought twice before any prank. Courts of law, in his opinion, were bugbears to frighten people who had no hold on him. Things which he would have blamed in common people were for him only pardonable amusements. His disposition to treat the new laws cavalierly while obeying the maxims of a Code for aristocrats, his behavior and character, were all pondered, analyzed, and tested by a few adroit persons in du Croisier's interests. These folk supported each other in the effort to make the people believe that Liberal slanders were revelations, and that the Ministerial policy at bottom meant a return to the old order of things.

What a bit of luck to find something by way of proof of their assertions! President du Ronceret, and the public prosecutor likewise, lent themselves admirably, so far as was compatible with their duty as magistrates, to the design of letting off the offender as easily as possible; indeed, they went deliberately out of their way to do this, well pleased to raise a Liberal clamor against their overlarge concessions. And so, while seeming to serve the interests of the d'Esgrignons, they stirred up feeling against them. The treacherous de Ronceret had it in his mind to pose as incorruptible at the right moment over some serious charge, with public opinion to back him up. The young Count's worst tendencies, moreover, were insidiously encouraged by two or three young men who followed in his train, paid court to him, won his favor, and flattered and obeyed him, with a view to confirming his belief in a noble's supremacy; and all this at a time when a noble's one chance of preserving his power lay in using it with the utmost discretion for half a century to come.

Du Croisier hoped to reduce the d'Esgrignons to the last extremity of poverty; he hoped to see their castle demolished, and their lands sold piecemeal by auction, through the follies which this harebrained boy was pretty certain to commit. This was as far as he went; he did not think, with President du Ronceret, that Victurnien was likely to give justice another kind of hold upon him. Both men found an ally for their schemes of revenge in Victurnien's overweening vanity and love of pleasure. President du Ronceret's son, a lad of seventeen, was admirably fitted for the part of instigator. He was one of the Count's companions, a new kind of spy in du Croisier's pay; du Croisier taught him his lesson, set him to track down the noble and beautiful boy through his better qualities, and sardonically prompted him to encourage his victim in his worst faults. Fabien du Ronceret was

a sophisticated youth, to whom such a mystification was attractive; he had precisely the keen brain and envious nature which finds in such a pursuit as this the absorbing amusement which a man of an ingenious turn lacks in the provinces.

In three years, between the ages of eighteen and one-and-twenty, Victurnien cost poor Chesnel nearly eighty thousand francs! And this without the knowledge of Mlle. Armande or the Marquis. More than half of the money had been spent in buying off lawsuits; the lad's extravagance had squandered the rest. Of the Marquis' income of ten thousand livres, five thousand were necessary for the housekeeping; two thousand more represented Mlle. Armande's allowance (parsimonious though she was) and the Marquis' expenses. The handsome young heir-presumptive, therefore, had not a hundred louis to spend. And what sort of figure can a man make on two thousand livres? Victurnien's tailor's bills alone absorbed his whole allowance. He had his linen, his clothes, gloves, and perfumery from Paris. He wanted a good English saddle-horse, a tilbury, and a second horse. M. du Croisier had a tilbury and a thoroughbred. Was the bourgeoisie to cut out the noblesse? Then, the young Count must have a man in the d'Esgrignon livery. He prided himself on setting the fashion among young men in the town and the department; he entered that world of luxuries and fancies which suit youth and good looks and wit so well. Chesnel paid for it all, not without using, like ancient parliaments, the right of protest, albeit he spoke with angelic kindness.

"What a pity it is that so good a man should be so tiresome!" Victurnien would say to himself every time that the notary staunched some wound in his purse.

Chesnel had been left a widower, and childless; he had taken his old master's son to fill the void in his heart. It was a pleasure to him to watch the lad driving up the High Street, perched aloft on the box-seat of the tilbury, whip in hand, and a rose in his button-hole, handsome, well turned out, envied by every one.

Pressing need would bring Victurnien with uneasy eyes and coaxing manner, but steady voice, to the modest house in the Rue du Bercail; there had been losses at cards at the Troisvilles, or the Duc de Verneuil's, or the prefecture, or the receiver-general's, and the Count had come to his providence, the notary. He had only to show himself to carry the day.

"Well, what is it, M. le Comte? What has happened?" the old man would ask,

with a tremor in his voice.

On great occasions Victurnien would sit down, assume a melancholy, pensive expression, and submit with little coquetries of voice and gesture to be questioned. Then when he had thoroughly roused the old man's fears (for Chesnel was beginning to fear how such a course of extravagance would end), he would own up to a peccadillo which a bill for a thousand francs would absolve. Chesnel possessed a private income of some twelve thousand livres, but the fund was not inexhaustible. The eighty thousand francs thus squandered represented his savings, accumulated for the day when the Marquis should send his son to Paris, or open negotiations for a wealthy marriage.

Chesnel was clear-sighted so long as Victurnien was not there before him. One by one he lost the illusions which the Marquis and his sister still fondly cherished. He saw that the young fellow could not be depended upon in the least, and wished to see him married to some modest, sensible girl of good birth, wondering within himself how a young man could mean so well and do so ill, for he made promises one day only to break them all on the next.

But there is never any good to be expected of young men who confess their sins and repent, and straightway fall into them again. A man of strong character only confesses his faults to himself, and punishes himself for them; as for the weak, they drop back into the old ruts when they find that the bank is too steep to climb. The springs of pride which lie in a great man's secret soul had been slackened in Victurnien. With such guardians as he had, such company as he kept, such a life as he led, he had suddenly became an enervated voluptuary at that turning-point in his life when a man most stands in need of the harsh discipline of misfortune and adversity which formed a Prince Eugene, a Frederick II., a Napoleon. Chesnel saw that Victurnien possessed that uncontrollable appetite for enjoyments which should be the prerogative of men endowed with giant powers; the men who feel the need of counterbalancing their gigantic labors by pleasures which bring one-sided mortals to the pit.

At times the good man stood aghast; then, again, some profound sally, some sign of the lad's remarkable range of intellect, would reassure him. He would say, as the Marquis said at the rumor of some escapade, "Boys will be boys." Chesnel had spoken to the Chevalier, lamenting the young lord's propensity for getting into debt; but the Chevalier manipulated his pinch of snuff, and listened with a smile of

amusement.

"My dear Chesnel, just explain to me what a national debt is," he answered. "If France has debts, egad! why should not Victurnien have debts? At this time and at all times princes have debts, every gentleman has debts. Perhaps you would rather that Victurnien should bring you his savings? — Do you know that our great Richelieu (not the Cardinal, a pitiful fellow that put nobles to death, but the Marechal), do you know what he did once when his grandson the Prince de Chinon, the last of the line, let him see that he had not spent his pocket-money at the University?"

"No, M. le Chevalier."

"Oh, well; he flung the purse out of the window to a sweeper in the courtyard, and said to his grandson, 'Then they do not teach you to be a prince here?'"

Chesnel bent his head and made no answer. But that night, as he lay awake, he thought that such doctrines as these were fatal in times when there was one law for everybody, and foresaw the first beginnings of the ruin of the d'Esgrignons.

But for these explanations which depict one side of provincial life in the time of the Empire and the Restoration, it would not be easy to understand the opening scene of this history, an incident which took place in the great salon one evening towards the end of October 1822. The card-tables were forsaken, the Collection of Antiquities — elderly nobles, elderly countesses, young marquises, and simple baronesses — had settled their losses and winnings. The master of the house was pacing up and down the room, while Mlle. Armande was putting out the candles on the card-tables. He was not taking exercise alone, the Chevalier was with him, and the two wrecks of the eighteenth century were talking of Victurnien. The Chevalier had undertaken to broach the subject with the Marquis.

"Yes, Marquis," he was saying, "your son is wasting his time and his youth; you ought to send him to court."

"I have always thought," said the Marquis, "that if my great age prevents me from going to court — where, between ourselves, I do not know what I should do among all these new people whom his Majesty receives, and all that is going on there — that if I could not go myself, I could at least send my son to present our homage to His Majesty. The King surely would do something for the Count — give him a company, for instance, or a place in the Household, a chance, in short, for

the boy to win his spurs. My uncle the Archbishop suffered a cruel martyrdom; I have fought for the cause without deserting the camp with those who thought it their duty to follow the Princes. I held that while the King was in France, his nobles should rally round him. — Ah! well, no one gives us a thought; a Henry IV. would have written before now to the d'Esgrignons, 'Come to me, my friends; we have won the day!'— After all, we are something better than the Troisvilles, yet here are two Troisvilles made peers of France; and another, I hear, represents the nobles in the Chamber." (He took the upper electoral colleges for assemblies of his own order.) "Really, they think no more of us than if we did not exist. I was waiting for the Princes to make their journey through this part of the world; but as the Princes do not come to us, we must go to the Princes."

"I am enchanted to learn that you think of introducing our dear Victurnien into society," the Chevalier put in adroitly. "He ought not to bury his talents in a hole like this town. The best fortune that he can look for here is to come across some Norman girl" (mimicking the accent), "country-bred, stupid, and rich. What could he make of her? — his wife? Oh! good Lord!"

"I sincerely hope that he will defer his marriage until he has obtained some great office or appointment under the Crown," returned the gray-haired Marquis. "Still, there are serious difficulties in the way."

And these were the only difficulties which the Marquis saw at the outset of his son's career.

"My son, the Comte d'Esgrignon, cannot make his appearance at court like a tatterdemalion," he continued after a pause, marked by a sigh; "he must be equipped. Alas! for these two hundred years we have had no retainers. Ah! Chevalier, this demolition from top to bottom always brings me back to the first hammer stroke delivered by M. de Mirabeau. The one thing needful nowadays is money; that is all that the Revolution has done that I can see. The King does not ask you whether you are a descendant of the Valois or a conquerer of Gaul; he asks whether you pay a thousand francs in tailles which nobles never used to pay. So I cannot well send the Count to court without a matter of twenty thousand crowns ——"

"Yes," assented the Chevalier, "with that trifling sum he could cut a brave figure."

“Well,” said Mlle. Armande, “I have asked Chesnel to come to-night. Would you believe it, Chevalier, ever since the day when Chesnel proposed that I should marry that miserable du Croisier ——”

“Ah! that was truly unworthy, mademoiselle!” cried the Chevalier.

“Unpardonable!” said the Marquis.

“Well, since then my brother has never brought himself to ask anything whatsoever of Chesnel,” continued Mlle. Armande.

“Of your old household servant? Why, Marquis, you would do Chesnel honor — an honor which he would gratefully remember till his latest breath.”

“No,” said the Marquis, “the thing is beneath one’s dignity, it seems to me.”

“There is not much question of dignity; it is a matter of necessity,” said the Chevalier, with the trace of a shrug.

“Never,” said the Marquis, riposting with a gesture which decided the Chevalier to risk a great stroke to open his old friend’s eyes.

“Very well,” he said, “since you do not know it, I will tell you myself that Chesnel has let your son have something already, something like ——”

“My son is incapable of accepting anything whatever from Chesnel,” the Marquis broke in, drawing himself up as he spoke. “He might have come to *you* to ask you for twenty-five louis ——”

“Something like a hundred thousand livres,” said the Chevalier, finishing his sentence.

“The Comte d’Esgrignon owes a hundred thousand livres to a Chesnel!” cried the Marquis, with every sign of deep pain. “Oh! if he were not an only son, he should set out to-night for Mexico with a captain’s commission. A man may be in debt to money-lenders, they charge a heavy interest, and you are quits; that is right enough; but *Chesnel*! a man to whom one is attached! ——”

“Yes, our adorable Victurnien has run through a hundred thousand livres, dear Marquis,” resumed the Chevalier, flicking a trace of snuff from his waistcoat; “it is not much, I know. I myself at his age —— But, after all, let us let old memories be, Marquis. The Count is living in the provinces; all things taken into consideration, it is not so much amiss. He will not go far; these irregularities are

common in men who do great things afterwards ——”

“And he is sleeping upstairs, without a word of this to his father,” exclaimed the Marquis.

“Sleeping innocently as a child who has merely got five or six little bourgeoises into trouble, and now must have duchesses,” returned the Chevalier.

“Why, he deserves a lettre de cachet!”

“‘They’ have done away with lettres de cachet,” said the Chevalier. “You know what a hubbub there was when they tried to institute a law for special cases. We could not keep the provost’s courts, which M. *de* Bonaparte used to call commissions militaires.”

“Well, well; what are we to do if our boys are wild, or turn out scapegraces? Is there no locking them up in these days?” asked the Marquis.

The Chevalier looked at the heartbroken father and lacked courage to answer, “We shall be obliged to bring them up properly.”

“And you have never said a word of this to me, Mlle. d’Esgrignon,” added the Marquis, turning suddenly round upon Mlle. Armande. He never addressed her as Mlle. d’Esgrignon except when he was vexed; usually she was called “my sister.”

“Why, monsieur, when a young man is full of life and spirits, and leads an idle life in a town like this, what else can you expect?” asked Mlle. d’Esgrignon. She could not understand her brother’s anger.

“Debts! eh! why, hang it all!” added the Chevalier. “He plays cards, he has little adventures, he shoots — all these things are horribly expensive nowadays.”

“Come,” said the Marquis, “it is time to send him to the King. I will spend tomorrow morning in writing to our kinsmen.”

“I have some acquaintance with the Ducs de Navarreins, de Lenoncourt, de Maufrigneuse, and de Chaulieu,” said the Chevalier, though he knew, as he spoke, that he was pretty thoroughly forgotten.

“My dear Chevalier, there is no need of such formalities to present a d’Esgrignon at court,” the Marquis broke in. —“A hundred thousand livres,” he muttered; “this Chesnel makes very free. This is what comes of these accursed troubles. M. Chesnel protects my son. And now I must ask him. . . . No, sister, you

must undertake this business. Chesnel shall secure himself for the whole amount by a mortgage on our lands. And just give this harebrained boy a good scolding; he will end by ruining himself if he goes on like this."

The Chevalier and Mlle. d'Esgrignon thought these words perfectly simple and natural, absurd as they would have sounded to any other listener. So far from seeing anything ridiculous in the speech, they were both very much touched by a look of something like anguish in the old noble's face. Some dark premonition seemed to weigh upon M. d'Esgrignon at that moment, some glimmering of an insight into the changed times. He went to the settee by the fireside and sat down, forgetting that Chesnel would be there before long; that Chesnel, of whom he could not bring himself to ask anything.

Just then the Marquis d'Esgrignon looked exactly as any imagination with a touch of romance could wish. He was almost bald, but a fringe of silken, white locks, curled at the tips, covered the back of his head. All the pride of race might be seen in a noble forehead, such as you may admire in a Louis XV., a Beaumarchais, a Marechal de Richelieu, it was not the square, broad brow of the portraits of the Marechal de Saxe; nor yet the small hard circle of Voltaire, compact to overfulness; it was graciously rounded and finely moulded, the temples were ivory tinted and soft; and mettle and spirit, unquenched by age, flashed from the brilliant eyes. The Marquis had the Conde nose and the lovable Bourbon mouth, from which, as they used to say of the Comte d'Artois, only witty and urbane words proceed. His cheeks, sloping rather than foolishly rounded to the chin, were in keeping with his spare frame, thin legs, and plump hands. The strangulation cravat at his throat was of the kind which every marquis wears in all the portraits which adorn eighteenth century literature; it is common alike to Saint–Preux and to Lovelace, to the elegant Montesquieu's heroes and to Diderot's homespun characters (see the first editions of those writers' works).

The Marquis always wore a white, gold-embroidered, high waistcoat, with the red ribbon of a commander of the Order of St. Louis blazing upon his breast; and a blue coat with wide skirts, and fleur-delys on the flaps, which were turned back — an odd costume which the King had adopted. But the Marquis could not bring himself to give up the Frenchman's knee-breeches nor yet the white silk stockings or the buckles at the knees. After six o'clock in the evening he appeared in full dress.

He read no newspapers but the Quotidienne and the Gazette de France, two journals accused by the Constitutional press of obscurantist views and uncounted "monarchical and religious" enormities; while the Marquis d'Esgrignon, on the other hand, found heresies and revolutionary doctrines in every issue. No matter to what extremes the organs of this or that opinion may go, they will never go quite far enough to please the purists on their own side; even as the portrayer of this magnificent personage is pretty certain to be accused of exaggeration, whereas he has done his best to soften down some of the cruder tones and dim the more startling tints of the original.

The Marquis d'Esgrignon rested his elbows on his knees and leant his head on his hands. During his meditations Mlle. Armande and the Chevalier looked at one another without uttering the thoughts in their minds. Was he pained by the discovery that his son's future must depend upon his sometime land steward? Was he doubtful of the reception awaiting the young Count? Did he regret that he had made no preparation for launching his heir into that brilliant world of court? Poverty had kept him in the depths of his province; how should he have appeared at court? He sighed heavily as he raised his head.

That sigh, in those days, came from the real aristocracy all over France; from the loyal provincial noblesse, consigned to neglect with most of those who had drawn sword and braved the storm for the cause.

"What have the Princes done for the du Guenics, or the Fontaines, or the Bauvans, who never submitted?" he muttered to himself. "They fling miserable pensions to the men who fought most bravely, and give them a royal lieutenancy in a fortress somewhere on the outskirts of the kingdom."

Evidently the Marquis doubted the reigning dynasty. Mlle. d'Esgrignon was trying to reassure her brother as to the prospects of the journey, when a step outside on the dry narrow footway gave them notice of Chesnel's coming. In another moment Chesnel appeared; Josephin, the Count's gray-aired valet, admitted the notary without announcing him.

"Chesnel, my boy ——" (Chesnel was a white-haired man of sixty-nine, with a square-jawed, venerable countenance; he wore knee-breeches, ample enough to fill several chapters of dissertation in the manner of Sterne, ribbed stockings, shoes with silver clasps, an ecclesiastical-looking coat and a high waistcoat of scholastic cut.)

“Chesnel, my boy, it was very presumptuous of you to lend money to the Comte d’Esgrignon! If I repaid you at once and we never saw each other again, it would be no more than you deserve for giving wings to his vices.”

There was a pause, a silence such as there falls at court when the King publicly reprimands a courtier. The old notary looked humble and contrite.

“I am anxious about that boy, Chesnel,” continued the Marquis in a kindly tone; “I should like to send him to Paris to serve His Majesty. Make arrangements with my sister for his suitable appearance at court. — And we will settle accounts ——”

The Marquis looked grave as he left the room with a friendly gesture of farewell to Chesnel.

“I thank M. le Marquis for all his goodness,” returned the old man, who still remained standing.

Mlle. Armande rose to go to the door with her brother; she had rung the bell, old Josephin was in readiness to light his master to his room.

“Take a seat, Chesnel,” said the lady, as she returned, and with womanly tact she explained away and softened the Marquis’ harshness. And yet beneath that harshness Chesnel saw a great affection. The Marquis’ attachment for his old servant was something of the same order as a man’s affection for his dog; he will fight any one who kicks the animal, the dog is like a part of his existence, a something which, if not exactly himself, represents him in that which is nearest and dearest — his sensibilities.

“It is quite time that M. le Comte should be sent away from the town, mademoiselle,” he said sententiously.

“Yes,” returned she. “Has he been indulging in some new escapade?”

“No, mademoiselle.”

“Well, why do you blame him?”

“I am not blaming him, mademoiselle. No, I am not blaming him. I am very far from blaming him. I will even say that I shall never blame him, whatever he may do.”

There was a pause. The Chevalier, nothing if not quick to take in a situation,

began to yawn like a sleep-ridden mortal. Gracefully he made his excuses and went, with as little mind to sleep as to go and drown himself. The imp Curiosity kept the Chevalier wide awake, and with airy fingers plucked away the cotton wool from his ears.

“Well, Chesnel, is it something new?” Mlle. Armande began anxiously.

“Yes, things that cannot be told to M. le Marquis; he would drop down in an apoplectic fit.”

“Speak out,” she said. With her beautiful head leant on the back of her low chair, and her arms extended listlessly by her side, she looked as if she were waiting passively for her deathblow.

“Mademoiselle, M. le Comte, with all his cleverness, is a plaything in the hands of mean creatures, petty natures on the lookout for a crushing revenge. They want to ruin us and bring us low! There is the President of the Tribunal, M. de Ronceret; he has, as you know, a very great notion of his descent ——”

“His grandfather was an attorney,” interposed Mlle. Armande.

“I know he was. And for that reason you have not received him; nor does he go to M. de Troisville’s, nor to M. le Duc de Verneuil’s, nor to the Marquis de Casteran’s; but he is one of the pillars of du Croisier’s salon. Your nephew may rub shoulders with young M. Fabien du Ronceret without condescending too far, for he must have companions of his own age. Well and good. That young fellow is at the bottom of all M. le Comte’s follies; he and two or three of the rest of them belong to the other side, the side of M. le Chevalier’s enemy, who does nothing but breathe threats of vengeance against you and all the nobles together. They all hope to ruin you through your nephew. The ringleader of the conspiracy is this sycophant of a du Croisier, the pretended Royalist. Du Croisier’s wife, poor thing, knows nothing about it; you know her, I should have heard of it before this if she had ears to hear evil. For some time these wild young fellows were not in the secret, nor was anybody else; but the ringleaders let something drop in jest, and then the fools got to know about it, and after the Count’s recent escapades they let fall some words while they were drunk. And those words were carried to me by others who are sorry to see such a fine, handsome, noble, charming lad ruining himself with pleasure. So far people feel sorry for him; before many days are over they will — I am afraid to say what ——”

“They will despise him; say it out, Chesnel!” Mlle. Armande cried piteously.

“Ah! How can you keep the best people in the town from finding out faults in their neighbors? They do not know what to do with themselves from morning to night. And so M. le Comte’s losses at play are all reckoned up. Thirty thousand francs have taken flight during these two months, and everybody wonders where he gets the money. If they mention it when I am present, I just call them to order. Ah! but —‘Do you suppose’ (I told them this morning), ‘do you suppose that if the d’Esgrignon family have lost their manorial rights, that therefore they have been robbed of their hoard of treasure? The young Count has a right to do as he pleases; and so long as he does not owe you a half-penny, you have no right to say a word.’”

Mlle, Armande held out her hand, and the notary kissed it respectfully.

“Good Chesnel! . . . But, my friend, how shall we find the money for this journey? Victurnien must appear as befits his rank at court.”

“Oh! I have borrowed money on Le Jard, mademoiselle.”

“What? You have nothing left! Ah, heaven! what can we do to reward you?”

“You can take the hundred thousand francs which I hold at your disposal. You can understand that the loan was negotiated in confidence, so that it might not reflect on you; for it is known in the town that I am closely connected with the d’Esgrignon family.”

Tears came into Mlle. Armande’s eyes. Chesnel saw them, took a fold of the noble woman’s dress in his hands, and kissed it.

“Never mind,” he said, “a lad must sow his wild oats. In great salons in Paris his boyish ideas will take a new turn. And, really, though our old friends here are the worthiest folk in the world, and no one could have nobler hearts than they, they are not amusing. If M. le Comte wants amusement, he is obliged to look below his rank, and he will end by getting into low company.”

Next day the old traveling coach saw the light, and was sent to be put in repair. In a solemn interview after breakfast, the hope of the house was duly informed of his father’s intentions regarding him — he was to go to court and ask to serve His Majesty. He would have time during the journey to make up his mind about his career. The navy or the army, the privy council, an embassy, or the Royal Household — all were open to a d’Esgrignon, a d’Esgrignon had only to choose.

The King would certainly look favorably upon the d'Esgrignons, because they had asked nothing of him, and had sent the youngest representative of their house to receive the recognition of Majesty.

But young d'Esgrignon, with all his wild pranks, had guessed instinctively what society in Paris meant, and formed his own opinions of life. So when they talked of his leaving the country and the paternal roof, he listened with a grave countenance to his revered parent's lecture, and refrained from giving him a good deal of information in reply. As, for instance, that young men no longer went into the army or the navy as they used to do; that if a man had a mind to be a second lieutenant in a cavalry regiment without passing through a special training in the Ecoles, he must first serve in the Pages; that sons of the greatest houses went exactly like commoners to Saint–Cyr and the Ecole polytechnique, and took their chances of being beaten by base blood. If he had enlightened his relatives on these points, funds might not have been forthcoming for a stay in Paris; so he allowed his father and Aunt Armande to believe that he would be permitted a seat in the King's carriages, that he must support his dignity at court as the d'Esgrignon of the time, and rub shoulders with great lords of the realm.

It grieved the Marquis that he could send but one servant with his son; but he gave him his own valet Josephin, a man who can be trusted to take care of his young master, and to watch faithfully over his interests. The poor father must do without Josephin, and hope to replace him with a young lad.

"Remember that you are a Carol, my boy," he said; "remember that you come of an unalloyed descent, and that your scutcheon bears the motto Cil est nostre; with such arms you may hold your head high everywhere, and aspire to queens. Render grace to your father, as I to mine. We owe it to the honor of our ancestors, kept stainless until now, that we can look all men in the face, and need bend the knee to none save a mistress, the King, and God. This is the greatest of your privileges."

Chesnel, good man, was breakfasting with the family. He took no part in counsels based on heraldry, nor in the inditing of letters addressed to divers mighty personages of the day; but he had spent the night in writing to an old friend of his, one of the oldest established notaries of Paris. Without this letter it is not possible to understand Chesnel's real and assumed fatherhood. It almost recalls Daedalus' address to Icarus; for where, save in old mythology, can you look

for comparisons worthy of this man of antique mould?

> "MY DEAR AND ESTIMABLE SORBIER— I remember with no little pleasure that I made my first campaign in our honorable profession under your father, and that you had a liking for me, poor little clerk that I was. And now I appeal to old memories of the days when we worked in the same office, old pleasant memories for our hearts, to ask you to do me the one service that I have ever asked of you in the course of our long lives, crossed as they have been by political catastrophes, to which, perhaps, I owe it that I have the honor to be your colleague. And now I ask this service of you, my friend, and my white hairs will be brought with sorrow to the grave if you should refuse my entreaty. It is no question of myself or of mine, Sorbier, for I lost poor Mme. Chesnel, and I have no child of my own. Something more to me than my own family (if I had one) is involved — it is the Marquis d'Esgrignon's only son. I have had the honor to be the Marquis' land steward ever since I left the office to which his father sent me at his own expense, with the idea of providing for me. The house which nurtured me has passed through all the troubles of the Revolution. I have managed to save some of their property; but what is it, after all, in comparison with the wealth that they have lost? I cannot tell you, Sorbier, how deeply I am attached to the great house, which has been all but swallowed up under my eyes by the abyss of time. M. le Marquis was proscribed, and his lands confiscated, he was getting on in years, he had no child. Misfortunes upon misfortunes! Then M. le Marquis married, and his wife died when the young Count was born, and today this noble, dear, and precious child is all the life of the d'Esgrignon family; the fate of the house hangs upon him. He has got into debt here with amusing himself. What else should he do in the provinces with an allowance of a miserable hundred louis? Yes, my friend, a hundred louis, the great house has come to this.

"In this extremity his father thinks it necessary to send the Count to Paris to ask for the King's favor at court. Paris is a very dangerous place for a lad; if he is to keep steady there, he must have the grain of sense which makes notaries of us. Besides, I should be heartbroken to think of the poor boy living amid such hardships as we have known. — Do you remember the pleasure with which we spent a day and a night there waiting to see The Marriage of Figaro? Oh, blind that we were! — We were happy and poor, but a noble cannot be happy in poverty. A noble in want — it is a thing against nature! Ah! Sorbier, when one has known the satisfaction of propping one of the grandest genealogical trees in the kingdom in its fall, it is so natural to interest oneself in it and to grow fond of it, and love it and water it and look to see it blossom. So you will not be surprised at so many precautions on my part; you will not wonder when I beg the help of your lights, so that all may go well with our young man.

"Keep yourself informed of his movements and doings, of the company which he keeps, and watch over his connections with women. M. le Chevalier says that an opera dancer often costs less than a court lady. Obtain information on that point and let me know. If you are too busy, perhaps Mme. Sorbier might know what becomes of the young man, and where he goes. The idea of playing the part

of guardian angel to such a noble and charming boy might have attractions for her. God will remember her for accepting the sacred trust. Perhaps when you see M. le Comte Victurnien, her heart may tremble at the thought of all the dangers awaiting him in Paris; he is very young, and handsome; clever, and at the same time disposed to trust others. If he forms a connection with some designing woman, Mme. Sorbier could counsel him better than you yourself could do. The old man-servant who is with him can tell you many things; sound Josephin, I have told him to go to you in delicate matters.

"But why should I say more? We once were clerks together, and a pair of scamps; remember our escapades, and be a little bit young again, my old friend, in your dealings with him. The sixty thousand francs will be remitted to you in the shape of a bill on the Treasury by a gentlemen who is going to Paris," and so forth.

If the old couple to whom this epistle was addressed had followed out Chesnel's instructions, they would have been compelled to take three private detectives into their pay. And yet there was ample wisdom shown in Chesnel's choice of a depositary. A banker pays money to any one accredited to him so long as the money lasts; whereas, Victurnien was obliged, every time that he was in want of money, to make a personal visit to the notary, who was quite sure to use the right of remonstrance.

Victurnien heard that he was to be allowed two thousand francs every month, and thought that he betrayed his joy. He knew nothing of Paris. He fancied that he could keep up princely state on such a sum.

Next day he started on his journey. All the benedictions of the Collection of Antiquities went with him; he was kissed by the dowagers; good wishes were heaped on his head; his old father, his aunt, and Chesnel went with him out of the town, tears filling the eyes of all three. The sudden departure supplied material for conversation for several evenings; and what was more, it stirred the rancorous minds of the salon du Croisier to the depths. The forage-contractor, the president, and others who had vowed to ruin the d'Esgrignons, saw their prey escaping out of their hands. They had based their schemes of revenge on a young man's follies, and now he was beyond their reach.

The tendency in human nature, which often gives a bigot a rake for a daughter, and makes a frivolous woman the mother of a narrow pietist; that rule of contraries, which, in all probability, is the "resultant" of the law of similarities,

drew Victurnien to Paris by a desire to which he must sooner or later have yielded. Brought up as he had been in the old-fashioned provincial house, among the quiet, gentle faces that smiled upon him, among sober servants attached to the family, and surroundings tinged with a general color of age, the boy had only seen friends worthy of respect. All of those about him, with the exception of the Chevalier, had example of venerable age, were elderly men and women, sedate of manner, decorous and sententious of speech. He had been petted by those women in gray gowns and embroidered mittens described by Blondet. The antiquated splendors of his father's house were as little calculated as possible to suggest frivolous thoughts; and lastly, he had been educated by a sincerely religious abbe, possessed of all the charm of old age, which has dwelt in two centuries, and brings to the Present its gifts of the dried roses of experience, the faded flowers of the old customs of its youth. Everything should have combined to fashion Victurnien to serious habits; his whole surroundings from childhood bade him continue the glory of a historic name, by taking his life as something noble and great; and yet Victurnien listened to dangerous promptings.

For him, his noble birth was a stepping-stone which raised him above other men. He felt that the idol of Noblesse, before which they burned incense at home, was hollow; he had come to be one of the commonest as well as one of the worst types from a social point of view — a consistent egoist. The aristocratic cult of the *ego* simply taught him to follow his own fancies; he had been idolized by those who had the care of him in childhood, and adored by the companions who shared in his boyish escapades, and so he had formed a habit of looking and judging everything as it affected his own pleasure; he took it as a matter of course when good souls saved him from the consequences of his follies, a piece of mistaken kindness which could only lead to his ruin. Victurnien's early training, noble and pious though it was, had isolated him too much. He was out of the current of the life of the time, for the life of a provincial town is certainly not in the main current of the age; Victurnien's true destiny lifted him above it. He had learned to think of an action, not as it affected others, nor relatively, but absolutely from his own point of view. Like despots, he made the law to suit the circumstance, a system which works in the lives of prodigal sons the same confusion which fancy brings into art.

Victurnien was quick-sighted, he saw clearly and without illusion, but he acted on impulse, and unwisely. An indefinable flaw of character, often seen in

young men, but impossible to explain, led him to will one thing and do another. In spite of an active mind, which showed itself in unexpected ways, the senses had but to assert themselves, and the darkened brain seemed to exist no longer. He might have astonished wise men; he was capable of setting fools agape. His desires, like a sudden squall of bad weather, overclouded all the clear and lucid spaces of his brain in a moment; and then, after the dissipations which he could not resist, he sank, utterly exhausted in body, heart, and mind, into a collapsed condition bordering upon imbecility. Such a character will drag a man down into the mire if he is left to himself, or bring him to the highest heights of political power if he has some stern friend to keep him in hand. Neither Chesnel, nor the lad's father, nor Aunt Armande had fathomed the depths of a nature so nearly akin on many sides to the poetic temperament, yet smitten with a terrible weakness at its core.

By the time the old town lay several miles away, Victurnien felt not the slightest regret; he thought no more about the father, who had loved ten generations in his son, nor of the aunt, and her almost insane devotion. He was looking forward to Paris with vehement ill-starred longings; in thought he had lived in that fairyland, it had been the background of his brightest dreams. He imagined that he would be first in Paris, as he had been in the town and the department where his father's name was potent; but it was vanity, not pride, that filled his soul, and in his dreams his pleasures were to be magnified by all the greatness of Paris. The distance was soon crossed. The traveling coach, like his own thoughts, left the narrow horizon of the province for the vast world of the great city, without a break in the journey. He stayed in the Rue de Richelieu, in a handsome hotel close to the boulevard, and hastened to take possession of Paris as a famished horse rushes into a meadow.

He was not long in finding out the difference between country and town, and was rather surprised than abashed by the change. His mental quickness soon discovered how small an entity he was in the midst of this all-comprehending Babylon; how insane it would be to attempt to stem the torrent of new ideas and new ways. A single incident was enough. He delivered his father's letter of introduction to the Duc de Lenoncourt, a noble who stood high in favor with the King. He saw the duke in his splendid mansion, among surroundings befitting his rank. Next day he met him again. This time the Peer of France was lounging on foot along the boulevard, just like any ordinary mortal, with an umbrella in his

hand; he did not even wear the Blue Ribbon, without which no knight of the order could have appeared in public in other times. And, duke and peer and first gentleman of the bedchamber though he was, M. de Lenoncourt, in spite of his high courtesy, could not repress a smile as he read his relative's letter; and that smile told Victurnien that the Collection of Antiquities and the Tuileries were separated by more than sixty leagues of road; the distance of several centuries lay between them.

The names of the families grouped about the throne are quite different in each successive reign, and the characters change with the names. It would seem that, in the sphere of court, the same thing happens over and over again in each generation; but each time there is a quite different set of personages. If history did not prove that this is so, it would seem incredible. The prominent men at the court of Louis XVIII., for instance, had scarcely any connection with the Rivieres, Blacas, d'Avarays, Vitrolles, d'Autichamps, Pasquiers, Larochejaqueleins, Decazes, Dambrays, Laines, de Villeles, La Bourdonnayes, and others who shone at the court of Louis XV. Compare the courtiers of Henri IV. with those of Louis XIV.; you will hardly find five great families of the former time still in existence. The nephew of the great Richelieu was a very insignificant person at the court of Louis XIV.; while His Majesty's favorite, Villeroi, was the grandson of a secretary ennobled by Charles IX. And so it befell that the d'Esgrignons, all but princes under the Valois, and all-powerful in the time of Henri IV., had no fortune whatever at the court of Louis XVIII., which gave them not so much as a thought. At this day there are names as famous as those of royal houses — the Foix–Graillys, for instance, or the d'Herouvilles — left to obscurity tantamount to extinction for want of money, the one power of the time.

All which things Victurnien beheld entirely from his own point of view; he felt the equality that he saw in Paris as a personal wrong. The monster Equality was swallowing down the last fragments of social distinction in the Restoration. Having made up his mind on this head, he immediately proceeded to try to win back his place with such dangerous, if blunted weapons, as the age left to the noblesse. It is an expensive matter to gain the attention of Paris. To this end, Victurnien adopted some of the ways then in vogue. He felt that it was a necessity to have horses and fine carriages, and all the accessories of modern luxury; he felt, in short, "that a man must keep abreast of the times," as de Marsay said — de Marsay, the first dandy that he came across in the first drawing-room to which he

was introduced. For his misfortune, he fell in with a set of roues, with de Marsay, de Ronquerolles, Maxime de Trailles, des Lupeaulx, Rastignac, Ajuda–Pinto, Beaudenord, de la Roche–Hugon, de Manerville, and the Vandenesses, whom he met wherever he went, and a great many houses were open to a young man with his ancient name and reputation for wealth. He went to the Marquise d'Espard's, to the Duchesses de Grandlieu, de Carigliano, and de Chaulieu, to the Marquises d'Aiglemont and de Listomere, to Mme. de Serizy's, to the Opera, to the embassies and elsewhere. The Faubourg Saint–Germain has its provincial genealogies at its fingers' ends; a great name once recognized and adopted therein is a passport which opens many a door that will scarcely turn on its hinges for unknown names or the lions of a lower rank.

Victurnien found his relatives both amiable and ready to welcome him so long as he did not appear as a suppliant; he saw at once that the surest way of obtaining nothing was to ask for something. At Paris, if the first impulse moves people to protect, second thoughts (which last a good deal longer) impel them to despise the protege. Independence, vanity, and pride, all the young Count's better and worse feelings combined, led him, on the contrary, to assume an aggressive attitude. And therefore the Ducs de Verneuil, de Lenoncourt, de Chaulieu, de Navarreins, d'Herouville, de Grandlieu, and de Maufrigneuse, the Princes de Cadignan and de Blamont–Chauvry, were delighted to present the charming survivor of the wreck of an ancient family at court.

Victurnien went to the Tuileries in a splendid carriage with his armorial bearings on the panels; but his presentation to His Majesty made it abundantly clear to him that the people occupied the royal mind so much that his nobility was like to be forgotten. The restored dynasty, moreover, was surrounded by triple ranks of eligible old men and gray-headed courtiers; the young noblesse was reduced to a cipher, and this Victurnien guessed at once. He saw that there was no suitable place for him at court, nor in the government, nor the army, nor, indeed, anywhere else. So he launched out into the world of pleasure. Introduced at the Elyess–Bourbon, at the Duchesse d'Angouleme's, at the Pavillon Marsan, he met on all sides with the surface civilities due to the heir of an old family, not so old but it could be called to mind by the sight of a living member. And, after all, it was not a small thing to be remembered. In the distinction with which Victurnien was honored lay the way to the peerage and a splendid marriage; he had taken the field with a false appearance of wealth, and his vanity would not allow him to declare

his real position. Besides, he had been so much complimented on the figure that he made, he was so pleased with his first success, that, like many other young men, he felt ashamed to draw back. He took a suite of rooms in the Rue du Bac, with stables and a complete equipment for the fashionable life to which he had committed himself. These preliminaries cost him fifty thousand francs, which money, moreover, the young gentleman managed to draw in spite of all Chesnel's wise precautions, thanks to a series of unforeseen events.

Chesnel's letter certainly reached his friend's office, but Maitre Sorbier was dead; and Mme. Sorbier, a matter-of-fact person, seeing it was a business letter, handed it on to her husband's successor. Maitre Cardot, the new notary, informed the young Count that a draft on the Treasury made payable to the deceased would be useless; and by way of reply to the letter, which had cost the old provincial notary so much thought, Cardot despatched four lines intended not to reach Chesnel's heart, but to produce the money. Chesnel made the draft payable to Sorbier's young successor; and the latter, feeling but little inclination to adopt his correspondent's sentimentality, was delighted to put himself at the Count's orders, and gave Victurnien as much money as he wanted.

Now those who know what life in Paris means, know that fifty thousand francs will not go very far in furniture, horses, carriages, and elegance generally; but it must be borne in mind that Victurnien immediately contracted some twenty thousand francs' worth of debts besides, and his tradespeople at first were not at all anxious to be paid, for our young gentleman's fortune had been prodigiously increased, partly by rumor, partly by Josephin, that Chesnel in livery.

Victurnien had not been in town a month before he was obliged to repair to his man of business for ten thousand francs; he had only been playing whist with the Ducs de Navarreins, de Chaulieu, and de Lenoncourt, and now and again at his club. He had begun by winning some thousands of francs but pretty soon lost five or six thousand, which brought home to him the necessity of a purse for play. Victurnien had the spirit that gains goodwill everywhere, and puts a young man of a great family on a level with the very highest. He was not merely admitted at once into the band of patrician youth, but was even envied by the rest. It was intoxicating to him to feel that he was envied, nor was he in this mood very likely to think of reform. Indeed, he had completely lost his head. He would not think of the means; he dipped into his money-bags as if they could be refilled indefinitely;

he deliberately shut his eyes to the inevitable results of the system. In that dissipated set, in the continual whirl of gaiety, people take the actors in their brilliant costumes as they find them, no one inquires whether a man can afford to make the figure he does, there is nothing in worse taste than inquiries as to ways and means. A man ought to renew his wealth perpetually, and as Nature does — below the surface and out of sight. People talk if somebody comes to grief; they joke about a newcomer's fortune till their minds are set at rest, and at this they draw the line. Victurnien d'Esgrignon, with all the Faubourg Saint–Germain to back him, with all his protectors exaggerating the amount of his fortune (were it only to rid themselves of responsibility), and magnifying his possessions in the most refined and well-bred way, with a hint or a word; with all these advantages — to repeat — Victurnien was, in fact, an eligible Count. He was handsome, witty, sound in politics; his father still possessed the ancestral castle and the lands of the marquisate. Such a young fellow is sure of an admirable reception in houses where there are marriageable daughters, fair but portionless partners at dances, and young married women who find that time hangs heavy on their hands. So the world, smiling, beckoned him to the foremost benches in its booth; the seats reserved for marquises are still in the same place in Paris; and if the names are changed, the things are the same as ever.

In the most exclusive circle of society in the Faubourg Saint–Germain, Victurnien found the Chevalier's double in the person of the Vidame de Pamiers. The Vidame was a Chevalier de Valois raised to the tenth power, invested with all the prestige of wealth, enjoying all the advantages of high position. The dear Vidame was a repositary for everybody's secrets, and the gazette of the Faubourg besides; nevertheless, he was discreet, and, like other gazettes, only said things that might safely be published. Again Victurnien listened to the Chevalier's esoteric doctrines. The Vidame told young d'Esgrignon, without mincing matters, to make conquests among women of quality, supplementing the advice with anecdotes from his own experience. The Vicomte de Pamiers, it seemed, had permitted himself much that it would serve no purpose to relate here; so remote was it all from our modern manners, in which soul and passion play so large a part, that nobody would believe it. But the excellent Vidame did more than this.

"Dine with me at a tavern tomorrow," said he, by way of conclusion. "We will digest our dinner at the Opera, and afterwards I will take you to a house where several people have the greatest wish to meet you."

The Vidame gave a delightful little dinner at the Rocher de Cancale; three guests only were asked to meet Victurnien — de Marsay, Rastignac, and Blondet. Emile Blondet, the young Count's fellow-townsman, was a man of letters on the outskirts of society to which he had been introduced by a charming woman from the same province. This was one of the Vicomte de Troisville's daughters, now married to the Comte de Montcornet, one of those of Napoleon's generals who went over to the Bourbons. The Vidame held that a dinner-party of more than six persons was beneath contempt. In that case, according to him, there was an end alike of cookery and conversation, and a man could not sip his wine in a proper frame of mind.

"I have not yet told you, my dear boy, where I mean to take you to-night," he said, taking Victurnien's hands and tapping on them. "You are going to see Mlle. des Touches; all the pretty women with any pretensions to wit will be at her house en petit comite. Literature, art, poetry, any sort of genius, in short, is held in great esteem there. It is one of our old-world bureaux d'esprit, with a veneer of monarchical doctrine, the livery of this present age."

"It is sometimes as tiresome and tedious there as a pair of new boots, but there are women with whom you cannot meet anywhere else," said de Marsay.

"If all the poets who went there to rub up their muse were like our friend here," said Rastignac, tapping Blondet familiarly on the shoulder, "we should have some fun. But a plague of odes, and ballads, and driveling meditations, and novels with wide margins, pervades the sofas and the atmosphere."

"I don't dislike them," said de Marsay, "so long as they corrupt girls' minds, and don't spoil women."

"Gentlemen," smiled Blondet, "you are encroaching on my field of literature."

"You need not talk. You have robbed us of the most charming woman in the world, you lucky rogue; we may be allowed to steal your less brilliant ideas," cried Rastignac.

"Yes, he is a lucky rascal," said the Vidame, and he twitched Blondet's ear. "But perhaps Victurnien here will be luckier still this evening ——"

"*Already*!" exclaimed de Marsay. "Why, he only came here a month ago; he has scarcely had time to shake the dust of his old manor house off his feet, to wipe off the brine in which his aunt kept him preserved; he has only just set up a decent

horse, a tilbury in the latest style, a groom ——"

"No, no, not a groom," interrupted Rastignac; "he has some sort of an agricultural laborer that he brought with him 'from his place.' Buisson, who understands a livery as well as most, declared that the man was physically incapable of wearing a jacket."

"I will tell you what, you ought to have modeled yourself on Beaudenord," the Vidame said seriously. "He has this advantage over all of you, my young friends, he has a genuine specimen of the English tiger ——"

"Just see, gentlemen, what the noblesse have come to in France!" cried Victurnien. "For them the one important thing is to have a tiger, a thoroughbred, and baubles ——"

"Bless me!" said Blondet. "'This gentleman's good sense at times appalls me.'— Well, yes, young moralist, you nobles have come to that. You have not even left to you that lustre of lavish expenditure for which the dear Vidame was famous fifty years ago. We revel on a second floor in the Rue Montorgueil. There are no more wars with the Cardinal, no Field of the Cloth of Gold. You, Comte d'Esgrignon, in short, are supping in the company of one Blondet, younger son of a miserable provincial magistrate, with whom you would not shake hands down yonder; and in ten years' time you may sit beside him among peers of the realm. Believe in yourself after that, if you can."

"Ah, well," said Rastignac, "we have passed from action to thought, from brute force to force of intellect, we are talking ——"

"Let us not talk of our reverses," protested the Vidame; "I have made up my mind to die merrily. If our friend here has not a tiger as yet, he comes of a race of lions, and can dispense with one."

"He cannot do without a tiger," said Blondet; "he is too newly come to town."

"His elegance may be new as yet," returned de Marsay, "but we are adopting it. He is worthy of us, he understands his age, he has brains, he is nobly born and gently bred; we are going to like him, and serve him, and push him ——"

"Whither?" inquired Blondet.

"Inquisitive soul!" said Rastignac.

"With whom will he take up to-night?" de Marsay asked.

“With a whole seraglio,” said the Vidame.

“Plague take it! What can we have done that the dear Vidame is punishing us by keeping his word to the infanta? I should be pitiable indeed if I did not know her ——”

“And I was once a coxcomb even as he,” said the Vidame, indicating de Marsay.

The conversation continued pitched in the same key, charmingly scandalous, and agreeably corrupt. The dinner went off very pleasantly. Rastignac and de Marsay went to the Opera with the Vidame and Victurnien, with a view to following them afterwards to Mlle. des Touches’ salon. And thither, accordingly, this pair of rakes betook themselves, calculating that by that time the tragedy would have been read; for of all things to be taken between eleven and twelve o’clock at night, a tragedy in their opinion was the most unwholesome. They went to keep a watch on Victurnien and to embarrass him, a piece of schoolboys’s mischief embittered by a jealous dandy’s spite. But Victurnien was gifted with that page’s effrontery which is a great help to ease of manner; and Rastignac, watching him as he made his entrance, was surprised to see how quickly he caught the tone of the moment.

“That young d’Esgrignon will go far, will he not?” he said, addressing his companion.

“That is as may be,” returned de Marsay, “but he is in a fair way.”

The Vidame introduced his young friend to one of the most amiable and frivolous duchesses of the day, a lady whose adventures caused an explosion five years later. Just then, however, she was in the full blaze of her glory; she had been suspected, it is true, of equivocal conduct; but suspicion, while it is still suspicion and not proof, marks a woman out with the kind of distinction which slander gives to a man. Nonentities are never slandered; they chafe because they are left in peace. This woman was, in fact, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, a daughter of the d’Uxelles; her father-inlaw was still alive; she was not to be the Princesse de Cadignan for some years to come. A friend of the Duchesse de Langeais and the Vicomtesse de Beauseant, two glories departed, she was likewise intimate with the Marquise d’Espard, with whom she disputed her fragile sovereignty as queen of fashion. Great relations lent her countenance for a long while, but the Duchesse de

Maufrigneuse was one of those women who, in some way, nobody knows how, or why, or where, will spend the rents of all the lands of earth, and of the moon likewise, if they were not out of reach. The general outline of her character was scarcely known as yet; de Marsay, and de Marsay only, really had read her. That redoubtable dandy now watched the Vidame de Pamiers' introduction of his young friend to that lovely woman, and bent over to say in Rastignac's ear:

"My dear fellow, he will go up *whizz*! like a rocket, and come down like a stick," an atrociously vulgar saying which was remarkably fulfilled.

The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had lost her heart to Victurnien after first giving her mind to a serious study of him. Any lover who should have caught the glance by which she expressed her gratitude to the Vidame might well have been jealous of such friendship. Women are like horses let loose on a steppe when they feel, as the Duchess felt with the Vidame de Pamiers, that the ground is safe; at such moments they are themselves; perhaps it pleases them to give, as it were, samples of their tenderness in intimacy in this way. It was a guarded glance, nothing was lost between eye and eye; there was no possibility of reflection in any mirror. Nobody intercepted it.

"See how she has prepared herself," Rastignac said, turning to de Marsay. "What a virginal toilette; what swan's grace in that snow-white throat of hers! How white her gown is, and she is wearing a sash like a little girl; she looks round like a madonna inviolate. Who would think that you had passed that way?"

"The very reason why she looks as she does," returned de Marsay, with a triumphant air.

The two young men exchanged a smile. Mme. de Maufrigneuse saw the smile and guessed at their conversation, and gave the pair a broadside of her eyes, an art acquired by Frenchwomen since the Peace, when Englishwomen imported it into this country, together with the shape of their silver plate, their horses and harness, and the piles of insular ice which impart a refreshing coolness to the atmosphere of any room in which a certain number of British females are gathered together. The young men grew serious as a couple of clerks at the end of a homily from headquarters before the receipt of an expected bonus.

The Duchess when she lost her heart to Victurnien had made up her mind to play the part of romantic Innocence, a role much understudied subsequently by

other women, for the misfortune of modern youth. Her Grace of Maufrigneuse had just come out as an angel at a moment's notice, precisely as she meant to turn to literature and science somewhere about her fortieth year instead of taking to devotion. She made a point of being like nobody else. Her parts, her dresses, her caps, opinions, toilettes, and manner of acting were all entirely new and original. Soon after her marriage, when she was scarcely more than a girl, she had played the part of a knowing and almost depraved woman; she ventured on risky repartees with shallow people, and betrayed her ignorance to those who knew better. As the date of that marriage made it impossible to abstract one little year from her age without the knowledge of Time, she had taken it into her head to be immaculate. She scarcely seemed to belong to earth; she shook out her wide sleeves as if they had been wings. Her eyes fled to heaven at too warm a glance, or word, or thought.

There is a madonna painted by Piola, the great Genoese painter, who bade fair to bring out a second edition of Raphael till his career was cut short by jealousy and murder; his madonna, however, you may dimly discern through a pane of glass in a little street in Genoa.

A more chaste-eyed madonna than Piola's does not exist but compared with Mme. de Maufrigneuse, that heavenly creature was a Messalina. Women wondered among themselves how such a giddy young thing had been transformed by a change of dress into the fair veiled seraph who seemed (to use an expression now in vogue) to have a soul as white as new fallen snow on the highest Alpine crests. How had she solved in such short space the Jesuitical problem how to display a bosom whiter than her soul by hiding it in gauze? How could she look so ethereal while her eyes drooped so murderously? Those almost wanton glances seemed to give promise of untold languorous delight, while by an ascetic's sigh of aspiration after a better life the mouth appeared to add that none of those promises would be fulfilled. Ingenuous youths (for there were a few to be found in the Guards of that day) privately wondered whether, in the most intimate moments, it were possible to speak familiarly to this White Lady, this starry vapor slidden down from the Milky Way. This system, which answered completely for some years at a stretch, was turned to good account by women of fashion, whose breasts were lined with a stout philosophy, for they could cloak no inconsiderable exactions with these little airs from the sacristy. Not one of the celestial creatures but was quite well aware of the possibilities of less ethereal love which lay in the

longing of every well-conditioned male to recall such beings to earth. It was a fashion which permitted them to abide in a semi-religious, semi-Ossianic empyrean; they could, and did, ignore all the practical details of daily life, a short and easy method of disposing of many questions. De Marsay, foreseeing the future developments of the system, added a last word, for he saw that Rastignac was jealous of Victurnien.

"My boy," said he, "stay as you are. Our Nucingen will make your fortune, whereas the Duchess would ruin you. She is too expensive."

Rastignac allowed de Marsay to go without asking further questions. He knew Paris. He knew that the most refined and noble and disinterested of women — a woman who cannot be induced to accept anything but a bouquet — can be as dangerous an acquaintance for a young man as any opera girl of former days. As a matter of fact, the opera girl is an almost mythical being. As things are now at the theatres, dancers and actresses are about as amusing as a declaration of the rights of woman, they are puppets that go abroad in the morning in the character of respected and respectable mothers of families, and act men's parts in tight-fitting garments at night.

Worthy M. Chesnel, in his country notary's office, was right; he had foreseen one of the reefs on which the Count might shipwreck. Victurnien was dazzled by the poetic aureole which Mme. de Maufrigneuse chose to assume; he was chained and padlocked from the first hour in her company, bound captive by that girlish sash, and caught by the curls twined round fairy fingers. Far corrupted the boy was already, but he really believed in that farrago of maidenliness and muslin, in sweet looks as much studied as an Act of Parliament. And if the one man, who is in duty bound to believe in feminine fibs, is deceived by them, is not that enough?

For a pair of lovers, the rest of their species are about as much alive as figures on the tapestry. The Duchess, flattery apart, was avowedly and admittedly one of the ten handsomest women in society. "The loveliest woman in Paris" is, as you know, as often met with in the world of love-making as "the finest book that has appeared in this generation," in the world of letters.

The converse which Victurnien held with the Duchess can be kept up at his age without too great a strain. He was young enough and ignorant enough of life in Paris to feel no necessity to be upon his guard, no need to keep a watch over his lightest words and glances. The religious sentimentalism, which finds a broadly

humorous commentary in the after-thoughts of either speaker, puts the old-world French chat of men and women, with its pleasant familiarity, its lively ease, quite out of the question; they make love in a mist nowadays.

Victurnien was just sufficient of an unsophisticated provincial to remain suspended in a highly appropriate and unfeigned rapture which pleased the Duchess; for women are no more to be deceived by the comedies which men play than by their own. Mme. de Maufrigneuse calculated, not without dismay, that the young Count's infatuation was likely to hold good for six whole months of disinterested love. She looked so lovely in this dove's mood, quenching the light in her eyes by the golden fringe of their lashes, that when the Marquise d'Espard bade her friend good-night, she whispered, "Good! very good, dear!" And with those farewell words, the fair Marquise left her rival to make the tour of the modern Pays du Tendre; which, by the way, is not so absurd a conception as some appear to think. New maps of the country are engraved for each generation; and if the names of the routes are different, they still lead to the same capital city.

In the course of an hour's tete-a-tete, on a corner sofa, under the eyes of the world, the Duchess brought young d'Esgrignon as far as Scipio's Generosity, the Devotion of Amadis, and Chivalrous Self-abnegation (for the Middle Ages were just coming into fashion, with their daggers, machicolations, hauberks, chain-mail, peaked shoes, and romantic painted card-board properties). She had an admirable turn, moreover, for leaving things unsaid, for leaving ideas in a discreet, seeming careless way, to work their way down, one by one, into Victurnien's heart, like needles into a cushion. She possessed a marvelous skill in reticence; she was charming in hypocrisy, lavish of subtle promises, which revived hope and then melted away like ice in the sun if you looked at them closely, and most treacherous in the desire which she felt and inspired. At the close of this charming encounter she produced the running noose of an invitation to call, and flung it over him with a dainty demureness which the printed page can never set forth.

"You will forget me," she said. "You will find so many women eager to pay court to you instead of enlightening you. . . . But you will come back to me undeceived. Are you coming to me first? . . . No. As you will. — For my own part, I tell you frankly that your visits will be a great pleasure to me. People of soul are so rare, and I think that you are one of them. — Come, good-bye; people will begin to

talk about us if we talk together any longer.”

She made good her words and took flight. Victurnien went soon afterwards, but not before others had guessed his ecstatic condition; his face wore the expression peculiar to happy men, something between an Inquisitor’s calm discretion and the self-contained beatitude of a devotee, fresh from the confessional and absolution.

“Mme. de Maufrigneuse went pretty briskly to the point this evening,” said the Duchesse de Grandlieu, when only half-a-dozen persons were left in Mlle. des Touches’ little drawing-room — to wit, des Lupeaulx, a Master of Requests, who at that time stood very well at court, Vandenesse, the Vicomtesse de Grandlieu, Canalis, and Mme. de Serizy.

“D’Esgrignon and Maufrigneuse are two names that are sure to cling together,” said Mme. de Serizy, who aspired to epigram.

“For some days past she has been out at grass on Platonism,” said des Lupeaulx.

“She will ruin that poor innocent,” added Charles de Vandenesse.

“What do you mean?” asked Mlle. des Touches.

“Oh, morally and financially, beyond all doubt,” said the Vicomtesse, rising.

The cruel words were cruelly true for young d’Esgrignon.

Next morning he wrote to his aunt describing his introduction into the high world of the Faubourg Saint–Germain in bright colors flung by the prism of love, explaining the reception which met him everywhere in a way which gratified his father’s family pride. The Marquis would have the whole long letter read to him twice; he rubbed his hands when he heard of the Vidame de Pamiers’ dinner — the Vidame was an old acquaintance — and of the subsequent introduction to the Duchess; but at Blondet’s name he lost himself in conjectures. What could the younger son of a judge, a public prosecutor during the Revolution, have been doing there?

There was joy that evening among the Collection of Antiquities. They talked over the young Count’s success. So discreet were they with regard to Mme. de Maufrigneuse, that the one man who heard the secret was the Chevalier. There was no financial postscript at the end of the letter, no unpleasant reference to the

sinews of war, which every young man makes in such a case. Mlle. Armande showed it to Chesnel. Chesnel was pleased and raised not a single objection. It was clear, as the Marquis and the Chevalier agreed, that a young man in favor with the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse would shortly be a hero at court, where in the old days women were all-powerful. The Count had not made a bad choice. The dowagers told over all the gallant adventures of the Maufrigneuses from Louis XIII. to Louis XVI. — they spared to inquire into preceding reigns — and when all was done they were enchanted. — Mme. de Maufrigneuse was much praised for interesting herself in Victurnien. Any writer of plays in search of a piece of pure comedy would have found it well worth his while to listen to the Antiquities in conclave.

Victurnien received charming letters from his father and aunt, and also from the Chevalier. That gentleman recalled himself to the Vidame's memory. He had been at Spa with M. de Pamiers in 1778, after a certain journey made by a celebrated Hungarian princess. And Chesnel also wrote. The fond flattery to which the unhappy boy was only too well accustomed shone out of every page; and Mlle. Armande seemed to share half of Mme. de Maufrigneuse's happiness.

Thus happy in the approval of his family, the young Count made a spirited beginning in the perilous and costly ways of dandyism. He had five horses — he was moderate — de Marsay had fourteen! He returned the Vidame's hospitality, even including Blondet in the invitation, as well as de Marsay and Rastignac. The dinner cost five hundred francs, and the noble provincial was feted on the same scale. Victurnien played a good deal, and, for his misfortune, at the fashionable game of whist.

He laid out his days in busy idleness. Every day between twelve and three o'clock he was with the Duchess; afterwards he went to meet her in the Bois de Boulogne and ride beside her carriage. Sometimes the charming couple rode together, but this was early in fine summer mornings. Society, balls, the theatre, and gaiety filled the Count's evening hours. Everywhere Victurnien made a brilliant figure, everywhere he flung the pearls of his wit broadcast. He gave his opinion on men, affairs, and events in profound sayings; he would have put you in mind of a fruit-tree putting forth all its strength in blossom. He was leading an enervating life wasteful of money, and even yet more wasteful, it may be of a man's soul; in that life the fairest talents are buried out of sight, the most incorruptible honesty perishes, the best-tempered springs of will are slackened.

The Duchess, so white and fragile and angel-like, felt attracted to the dissipations of bachelor life; she enjoyed first nights, she liked anything amusing, anything improvised. Bohemian restaurants lay outside her experience; so d'Esgrignon got up a charming little party at the Rocher de Cancale for her benefit, asked all the amiable scamps whom she cultivated and sermonized, and there was a vast amount of merriment, wit, and gaiety, and a corresponding bill to pay. That supper led to others. And through it all Victurnien worshiped her as an angel. Mme. de Maufrigneuse for him was still an angel, untouched by any taint of earth; an angel at the Varietes, where she sat out the half-obscene, vulgar farces, which made her laugh; an angel through the cross-fire of highly-flavored jests and scandalous anecdotes, which enlivened a stolen frolic; a languishing angel in the latticed box at the Vaudeville; an angel while she criticised the postures of opera dancers with the experience of an elderly habitue of le coin de la reine; an angel at the Porte Saint–Martin, at the little boulevard theatres, at the masked balls, which she enjoyed like any schoolboy. She was an angel who asked him for the love that lives by self-abnegation and heroism and self-sacrifice; an angel who would have her lover live like an English lord, with an income of a million francs. D'Esgrignon once exchanged a horse because the animal's coat did not satisfy her notions. At play she was an angel, and certainly no bourgeoise that ever lived could have bidden d'Esgrignon "Stake for me!" in such an angelic way. She was so divinely reckless in her folly, that a man might well have sold his soul to the devil lest this angel should lose her taste for earthly pleasures.

The first winter went by. The Count had drawn on M. Cardot for the trifling sum of thirty thousand francs over and above Chesnel's remittance. As Cardot very carefully refrained from using his right of remonstrance, Victurnien now learned for the first time that he had overdrawn his account. He was the more offended by an extremely polite refusal to make any further advance, since it so happened that he had just lost six thousand francs at play at the club, and he could not very well show himself there until they were paid.

After growing indignant with Maitre Cardot, who had trusted him with thirty thousand francs (Cardot had written to Chesnel, but to the fair Duchess' favorite he made the most of his so-called confidence in him), after all this, d'Esgrignon was obliged to ask the lawyer to tell him how to set about raising the money, since debts of honor were in question.

“Draw bills on your father’s banker, and take them to his correspondent; he, no doubt, will discount them for you. Then write to your family, and tell them to remit the amount to the banker.”

An inner voice seemed to suggest du Croisier’s name in this predicament. He had seen du Croisier on his knees to the aristocracy, and of the man’s real disposition he was entirely ignorant. So to du Croisier he wrote a very offhand letter, informing him that he had drawn a bill of exchange on him for ten thousand francs, adding that the amount would be repaid on receipt of the letter either by M. Chesnel or by Mlle. Armande d’Esgrignon. Then he indited two touching epistles — one to Chesnel, another to his aunt. In the matter of going headlong to ruin, a young man often shows singular ingenuity and ability, and fortune favors him. In the morning Victurnien happened on the name of the Paris bankers in correspondence with du Croisier, and de Marsay furnished him with the Kellers’ address. De Marsay knew everything in Paris. The Kellers took the bill and gave him the sum without a word, after deducting the discount. The balance of the account was in du Croisier’s favor.

But the gaming debt was as nothing in comparison with the state of things at home. Invoices showered in upon Victurnien.

“I say! Do you trouble yourself about that sort of thing?” Rastignac said, laughing. “Are you putting them in order, my dear boy? I did not think you were so business-like.”

“My dear fellow, it is quite time I thought about it; there are twenty odd thousand francs there.”

De Marsay, coming in to look up d’Esgrignon for a steeplechase, produced a dainty little pocket-book, took out twenty thousand francs, and handed them to him.

“It is the best way of keeping the money safe,” said he; “I am twice enchanted to have won it yesterday from my honored father, Milord Dudley.”

Such French grace completely fascinated d’Esgrignon; he took it for friendship; and as to the money, punctually forgot to pay his debts with it, and spent it on his pleasures. The fact was that de Marsay was looking on with an unspeakable pleasure while young d’Esgrignon “got out of his depth,” in dandy’s idiom; it pleased de Marsay in all sorts of fondling ways to lay an arm on the lad’s

shoulder; by and by he should feel its weight, and disappear the sooner. For de Marsay was jealous; the Duchess flaunted her love affair; she was not at home to other visitors when d'Esgrignon was with her. And besides, de Marsay was one of those savage humorists who delight in mischief, as Turkish women in the bath. So when he had carried off the prize, and bets were settled at the tavern where they breakfasted, and a bottle or two of good wine had appeared, de Marsay turned to d'Esgrignon with a laugh:

"Those bills that you are worrying over are not yours, I am sure."

"Eh! if they weren't, why should he worry himself?" asked Rastignac.

"And whose should they be?" d'Esgrignon inquired.

"Then you do not know the Duchess' position?" queried de Marsay, as he sprang into the saddle.

"No," said d'Esgrignon, his curiosity aroused.

"Well, dear fellow, it is like this," returned de Marsay —"thirty thousand francs to Victorine, eighteen thousand francs to Houbigaut, lesser amounts to Herbault, Nattier, Nourtier, and those Latour people — altogether a hundred thousand francs."

"An angel!" cried d'Esgrignon, with eyes uplifted to heaven.

"This is the bill for her wings," Rastignac cried facetiously.

"She owes all that, my dear boy," continued de Marsay, "precisely because she is an angel. But we have all seen angels in this position," he added, glancing at Rastignac; "there is this about women that is sublime: they understand nothing of money; they do not meddle with it, it is no affair of theirs; they are invited guests at the 'banquet of life,' as some poet or other said that came to an end in the workhouse."

"How do you know this when I do not?" d'Esgrignon artlessly returned.

"You are sure to be the last to know it, just as she is sure to be the last to hear that you are in debt."

"I thought she had a hundred thousand livres a year," said d'Esgrignon.

"Her husband," replied de Marsay, "lives apart from her. He stays with his regiment and practises economy, for he has one or two little debts of his own as

well, has our dear Duke. Where do you come from? Just learn to do as we do and keep our friends' accounts for them. Mlle. Diane (I fell in love with her for the name's sake), Mlle. Diane d'Uxelles brought her husband sixty thousand livres of income; for the last eight years she has lived as if she had two hundred thousand. It is perfectly plain that at this moment her lands are mortgaged up to their full value; some fine morning the crash must come, and the angel will be put to flight by — must it be said? — by sheriff's officers that have the effrontery to lay hands on an angel just as they might take hold of one of us."

"Poor angel!"

"Lord! it costs a great deal to dwell in a Parisian heaven; you must whiten your wings and your complexion every morning," said Rastignac.

Now as the thought of confessing his debts to his beloved Diane had passed through d'Esgrignon's mind, something like a shudder ran through him when he remembered that he still owed sixty thousand francs, to say nothing of bills to come for another ten thousand. He went back melancholy enough. His friends remarked his ill-disguised preoccupation, and spoke of it among themselves at dinner.

"Young d'Esgrignon is getting out of his depth. He is not up to Paris. He will blow his brains out. A little fool!" and so on and so on.

D'Esgrignon, however, promptly took comfort. His servant brought him two letters. The first was from Chesnel. A letter from Chesnel smacked of the stale grumbling faithfulness of honesty and its consecrated formulas. With all respect he put it aside till the evening. But the second letter he read with unspeakable pleasure. In Ciceronian phrases, du Croisier groveled before him, like a Sganarelle before a Geronte, begging the young Count in future to spare him the affront of first depositing the amount of the bills which he should condescend to draw. The concluding phrase seemed meant to convey the idea that here was an open cashbox full of coin at the service of the noble d'Esgrignon family. So strong was the impression that Victurnien, like Sganarelle or Mascarille in the play, like everybody else who feels a twinge of conscience at his finger-tips, made an involuntary gesture.

Now that he was sure of unlimited credit with the Kellers, he opened Chesnel's letter gaily. He had expected four full pages, full of expostulation to the

brim; he glanced down the sheet for the familiar words “prudence,” “honor,” “determination to do right,” and the like, and saw something else instead which made his head swim.

> “MONSIEUR LE COMTE— Of all my fortune I have now but two hundred thousand francs left. I beg of you not to exceed that amount, if you should do one of the most devoted servants of your family the honor of taking it. I present my respects to you.
>
> “CHESNEL.”

“He is one of Plutarch’s men,” Victurnien said to himself, as he tossed the letter on the table. He felt chagrined; such magnanimity made him feel very small.

“There! one must reform,” he thought; and instead of going to a restaurant and spending fifty or sixty francs over his dinner, he retrenched by dining with the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and told her about the letter.

“I should like to see that man,” she said, letting her eyes shine like two fixed stars.

“What would you do?”

“Why, he should manage my affairs for me.”

Diane de Maufrigneuse was divinely dressed; she meant her toilet to do honor to Victurnien. The levity with which she treated his affairs or, more properly speaking, his debts fascinated him.

The charming pair went to the Italiens. Never had that beautiful and enchanting woman looked more seraphic, more ethereal. Nobody in the house could have believed that she had debts which reached the sum total mentioned by de Marsay that very morning. No single one of the cares of earth had touched that sublime forehead of hers, full of woman’s pride of the highest kind. In her, a pensive air seemed to be some gleam of an earthly love, nobly extinguished. The men for the most part were wagering that Victurnien, with his handsome figure, laid her under contribution; while the women, sure of their rival’s subterfuge, admired her as Michael Angelo admired Raphael, in petto. Victurnien loved Diane, according to one of these ladies, for the sake of her hair — she had the most beautiful fair hair in France; another maintained that Diane’s pallor was her principal merit, for she was not really well shaped, her dress made the most of her figure; yet others thought that Victurnien loved her for her foot, her one good point, for she had a flat figure. But (and this brings the present-day manner of

Paris before you in an astonishing manner) whereas all the men said that the Duchess was subsidizing Victurnien's splendor, the women, on the other hand, gave people to understand that it was Victurnien who paid for the angel's wings, as Rastignac said.

As they drove back again, Victurnien had it on the tip of his tongue a score of times to open this chapter, for the Duchess' debts weighed more heavily upon his mind than his own; and a score of times his purpose died away before the attitude of the divine creature beside him. He could see her by the light of the carriage lamps; she was bewitching in the love-languor which always seemed to be extorted by the violence of passion from her madonna's purity. The Duchess did not fall into the mistake of talking of her virtue, of her angel's estate, as provincial women, her imitators, do. She was far too clever. She made him, for whom she made such great sacrifices, think these things for himself. At the end of six months she could make him feel that a harmless kiss on her hand was a deadly sin; she contrived that every grace should be extorted from her, and this with such consummate art, that it was impossible not to feel that she was more an angel than ever when she yielded.

None but Parisian women are clever enough always to give a new charm to the moon, to romanticize the stars, to roll in the same sack of charcoal and emerge each time whiter than ever. This is the highest refinement of intellectual and Parisian civilization. Women beyond the Rhine or the English Channel believe nonsense of this sort when they utter it; while your Parisienne makes her lover believe that she is an angel, the better to add to his bliss by flattering his vanity on both sides — temporal and spiritual. Certain persons, detractors of the Duchess, maintain that she was the first dupe of her own white magic. A wicked slander. The Duchess believed in nothing but herself.

By the end of the year 1823 the Kellers had supplied Victurnien with two hundred thousand francs, and neither Chesnel nor Mlle. Armande knew anything about it. He had had, besides, two thousand crowns from Chesnel at one time and another, the better to hide the sources on which he was drawing. He wrote lying letters to his poor father and aunt, who lived on, happy and deceived, like most happy people under the sun. The insidious current of life in Paris was bringing a dreadful catastrophe upon the great and noble house; and only one person was in the secret of it. This was du Croisier. He rubbed his hands gleefully as he went past

in the dark and looked in at the Antiquities. He had good hope of attaining his ends; and his ends were not, as heretofore, the simple ruin of the d'Esgrignons, but the dishonor of their house. He felt instinctively at such times that his revenge was at hand; he scented it in the wind! He had been sure of it indeed from the day when he discovered that the young Count's burden of debt was growing too heavy for the boy to bear.

Du Croisier's first step was to rid himself of his most hated enemy, the venerable Chesnel. The good old man lived in the Rue du Bercail, in a house with a steep-pitched roof. There was a little paved courtyard in front, where the rose-bushes grew and clambered up to the windows of the upper story. Behind lay a little country garden, with its box-edged borders, shut in by damp, gloomy-looking walls. The prim, gray-painted street door, with its wicket opening and bell attached, announced quite as plainly as the official scutcheon that "a notary lives here."

It was half-past five o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour the old man usually sat digesting his dinner. He had drawn his black leather-covered armchair before the fire, and put on his armor, a painted pasteboard contrivance shaped like a top boot, which protected his stockinged legs from the heat of the fire; for it was one of the good man's habits to sit for a while after dinner with his feet on the dogs and to stir up the glowing coals. He always ate too much; he was fond of good living. Alas! if it had not been for that little failing, would he not have been more perfect than it is permitted to mortal man to be? Chesnel had finished his cup of coffee. His old housekeeper had just taken away the tray which had been used for the purpose for the last twenty years. He was waiting for his clerks to go before he himself went out for his game at cards, and meanwhile he was thinking — no need to ask of whom or what. A day seldom passed but he asked himself, "Where is *he*? What is *he* doing?" He thought that the Count was in Italy with the fair Duchesse de Maufrigneuse.

When every franc of a man's fortune has come to him, not by inheritance, but through his own earning and saving, it is one of his sweetest pleasures to look back upon the pains that have gone to the making of it, and then to plan out a future for his crowns. This it is to conjugate the verb "to enjoy" in every tense. And the old lawyer, whose affections were all bound up in a single attachment, was thinking that all the carefully-chosen, well-tilled land which he had pinched and

scraped to buy would one day go to round the d’Esgrignon estates, and the thought doubled his pleasure. His pride swelled as he sat at his ease in the old armchair; and the building of glowing coals, which he raised with the tongs, sometimes seemed to him to be the old noble house built up again, thanks to his care. He pictured the young Count’s prosperity, and told himself that he had done well to live for such an aim. Chesnel was not lacking in intelligence; sheer goodness was not the sole source of his great devotion; he had a pride of his own; he was like the nobles who used to rebuild a pillar in a cathedral to inscribe their name upon it; he meant his name to be remembered by the great house which he had restored. Future generations of d’Esgrignons should speak of old Chesnel. Just at this point his old housekeeper came in with signs of alarm in her countenance.

“Is the house on fire, Brigitte?”

“Something of the sort,” said she. “Here is M. du Croisier wanting to speak to you ——”

“M. du Croisier,” repeated the old lawyer. A stab of cold misgiving gave him so sharp a pang at the heart that he dropped the tongs. “M. du Croisier here!” thought he, “our chief enemy!”

Du Croisier came in at that moment, like a cat that scents milk in a dairy. He made a bow, seated himself quietly in the easy-chair which the lawyer brought forward, and produced a bill for two hundred and twenty-seven thousand francs, principal and interest, the total amount of sums advanced to M. Victurnien in bills of exchange drawn upon du Croisier, and duly honored by him. Of these, he now demanded immediate payment, with a threat of proceeding to extremities with the heir-presumptive of the house. Chesnel turned the unlucky letters over one by one, and asked the enemy to keep the secret. This he engaged to do if he were paid within forty-eight hours. He was pressed for money he had obliged various manufacturers; and there followed a series of the financial fictions by which neither notaries nor borrowers are deceived. Chesnel’s eyes were dim; he could scarcely keep back the tears. There was but one way of raising the money; he must mortgage his own lands up to their full value. But when du Croisier learned the difficulty in the way of repayment, he forgot that he was hard pressed; he no longer wanted ready money, and suddenly came out with a proposal to buy the old lawyer’s property. The sale was completed within two days. Poor Chesnel could

not bear the thought of the son of the house undergoing a five years' imprisonment for debt. So in a few days' time nothing remained to him but his practice, the sums that were due to him, and the house in which he lived. Chesnel, stripped of all his lands, paced to and fro in his private office, paneled with dark oak, his eyes fixed on the beveled edges of the chestnut cross-beams of the ceiling, or on the trellised vines in the garden outside. He was not thinking of his farms now, or of Le Jard, his dear house in the country; not he.

"What will become of him? He ought to come back; they must marry him to some rich heiress," he said to himself; and his eyes were dim, his head heavy.

How to approach Mlle. Armande, and in what words to break the news to her, he did not know. The man who had just paid the debts of the family quaked at the thought of confessing these things. He went from the Rue du Bercail to the Hotel d'Esgrignon with pulses throbbing like some girl's heart when she leaves her father's roof by stealth, not to return again till she is a mother and her heart is broken.

Mlle. Armande had just received a charming letter, charming in its hypocrisy. Her nephew was the happiest man under the sun. He had been to the baths, he had been traveling in Italy with Mme. de Maufrigneuse, and now sent his journal to his aunt. Every sentence was instinct with love. There were enchanting descriptions of Venice, and fascinating appreciations of the great works of Venetian art; there were most wonderful pages full of the Duomo at Milan, and again of Florence; he described the Apennines, and how they differed from the Alps, and how in some village like Chiavari happiness lay all around you, ready made.

The poor aunt was under the spell. She saw the far-off country of love, she saw, hovering above the land, the angel whose tenderness gave to all that beauty a burning glow. She was drinking in the letter at long draughts; how should it have been otherwise? The girl who had put love from her was now a woman ripened by repressed and pent-up passion, by all the longings continually and gladly offered up as a sacrifice on the altar of the hearth. Mlle. Armande was not like the Duchess. She did not look like an angel. She was rather like the little, straight, slim and slender, ivory-tinted statues, which those wonderful sculptors, the builders of cathedrals, placed here and there about the buildings. Wild plants sometimes find a hold in the damp niches, and weave a crown of beautiful bluebell flowers about

the carved stone. At this moment the blue buds were unfolding in the fair saint’s eyes. Mlle. Armande loved the charming couple as if they stood apart from real life; she saw nothing wrong in a married woman’s love for Victurnien; any other woman she would have judged harshly; but in this case, not to have loved her nephew would have been the unpardonable sin. Aunts, mothers, and sisters have a code of their own for nephews and sons and brothers.

Mlle. Armande was in Venice; she saw the lines of fairy palaces that stand on either side of the Grand Canal; she was sitting in Victurnien’s gondola; he was telling her what happiness it had been to feel that the Duchess’ beautiful hand lay in his own, to know that she loved him as they floated together on the breast of the amorous Queen of Italian seas. But even in that moment of bliss, such as angels know, some one appeared in the garden walk. It was Chesnel! Alas! the sound of his tread on the gravel might have been the sound of the sands running from Death’s hour-glass to be trodden under his unshod feet. The sound, the sight of a dreadful hopelessness in Chesnel’s face, gave her that painful shock which follows a sudden recall of the senses when the soul has sent them forth into the world of dreams.

“What is it?” she cried, as if some stab had pierced to her heart.

“All is lost!” said Chesnel. “M. le Comte will bring dishonor upon the house if we do not set it in order.” He held out the bills, and described the agony of the last few days in a few simple but vigorous and touching words.

“He is deceiving us! The miserable boy!” cried Mlle. Armande, her heart swelling as the blood surged back to it in heavy throbs.

“Let us both say mea culpa, mademoiselle,” the old lawyer said stoutly; “we have always allowed him to have his own way; he needed stern guidance; he could not have it from you with your inexperience of life; nor from me, for he would not listen to me. He has had no mother.”

“Fate sometimes deals terribly with a noble house in decay,” said Mlle. Armande, with tears in her eyes.

The Marquis came up as she spoke. He had been walking up and down the garden while he read the letter sent by his son after his return. Victurnien gave his itinerary from an aristocrat’s point of view; telling how he had been welcomed by the greatest Italian families of Genoa, Turin, Milan, Florence, Venice, Rome, and

Naples. This flattering reception he owed to his name, he said, and partly, perhaps, to the Duchess as well. In short, he had made his appearance magnificently, and as befitted a d'Esgrignon.

"Have you been at your old tricks, Chesnel?" asked the Marquis.

Mlle. Armande made Chesnel an eager sign, dreadful to see. They understood each other. The poor father, the flower of feudal honor, must die with all his illusions. A compact of silence and devotion was ratified between the two noble hearts by a simple inclination of the head.

"Ah! Chesnel, it was not exactly in this way that the d'Esgrignons went into Italy at the end of the fourteenth century, when Marshal Trivulzio, in the service of the King of France, served under a d'Esgrignon, who had a Bayard too under his orders. Other times, other pleasures. And, for that matter, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse is at least the equal of a Marchesa di Spinola."

And, on the strength of his genealogical tree, the old man swung himself off with a coxcomb's air, as if he himself had once made a conquest of the Marchesa di Spinola, and still possessed the Duchess of today.

The two companions in unhappiness were left together on the garden bench, with the same thought for a bond of union. They sat for a long time, saying little save vague, unmeaning words, watching the father walk away in his happiness, gesticulating as if he were talking to himself.

"What will become of him now?" Mlle. Armande asked after a while.

"Du Croisier has sent instructions to the MM. Keller; he is not to be allowed to draw any more without authorization."

"And there are debts," continued Mlle. Armande.

"I am afraid so."

"If he is left without resources, what will he do?"

"I dare not answer that question to myself."

"But he must be drawn out of that life, he must come back to us, or he will have nothing left."

"And nothing else left to him," Chesnel said gloomily. But Mlle. Armande as yet did not and could not understand the full force of those words.

“Is there any hope of getting him away from that woman, that Duchess? Perhaps she leads him on.”

“He would not stick at a crime to be with her,” said Chesnel, trying to pave the way to an intolerable thought by others less intolerable.

“Crime,” repeated Mlle. Armande. “Oh, Chesnel, no one but you would think of such a thing!” she added, with a withering look; before such a look from a woman’s eyes no mortal can stand. “There is but one crime that a noble can commit — the crime of high treason; and when he is beheaded, the block is covered with a black cloth, as it is for kings.”

“The times have changed very much,” said Chesnel, shaking his head. Victurnien had thinned his last thin, white hairs. “Our Martyr–King did not die like the English King Charles.”

That thought soothed Mlle. Armande’s splendid indignation; a shudder ran through her; but still she did not realize what Chesnel meant.

“To-morrow we will decide what we must do,” she said; “it needs thought. At the worst, we have our lands.”

“Yes,” said Chesnel. “You and M. le Marquis own the estate conjointly; but the larger part of it is yours. You can raise money upon it without saying a word to him.”

The players at whist, reversis, boston, and backgammon noticed that evening that Mlle. Armande’s features, usually so serene and pure, showed signs of agitation.

“That poor heroic child!” said the old Marquise de Casteran, “she must be suffering still. A woman never knows what her sacrifices to her family may cost her.”

Next day it was arranged with Chesnel that Mlle. Armande should go to Paris to snatch her nephew from perdition. If any one could carry off Victurnien, was it not the woman whose motherly heart yearned over him? Mlle. Armande made up her mind that she would go to the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse and tell her all. Still, some sort of pretext was necessary to explain the journey to the Marquis and the whole town. At some cost to her maidenly delicacy, Mlle. Armande allowed it to be thought that she was suffering from a complaint which called for a consultation of

skilled and celebrated physicians. Goodness knows whether the town talked of this or no! But Mlle. Armande saw that something far more than her own reputation was at stake. She set out. Chesnel brought her his last bag of louis; she took it, without paying any attention to it, as she took her white capuchine and thread mittens.

"Generous girl! What grace!" he said, as he put her into the carriage with her maid, a woman who looked like a gray sister.

Du Croisier had thought out his revenge, as provincials think out everything. For studying out a question in all its bearings, there are no folk in this world like savages, peasants, and provincials; and this is how, when they proceed from thought to action, you find every contingency provided for from beginning to end. Diplomatists are children compared with these classes of mammals; they have time before them, an element which is lacking to those people who are obliged to think about a great many things, to superintend the progress of all kinds of schemes, to look forward for all sorts of contingencies in the wider interests of human affairs. Had de Croisier sounded poor Victurnien's nature so well, that he foresaw how easily the young Count would lend himself to his schemes of revenge? Or was he merely profiting by an opportunity for which he had been on the watch for years? One circumstance there was, to be sure, in his manner of preparing his stroke, which shows a certain skill. Who was it that gave du Croisier warning of the moment? Was it the Kellers? Or could it have been President du Ronceret's son, then finishing his law studies in Paris?

Du Croisier wrote to Victurnien, telling him that the Kellers had been instructed to advance no more money; and that letter was timed to arrive just as the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse was in the utmost perplexity, and the Comte d'Esgrignon consumed by the sense of poverty as dreadful as it was cunningly hidden. The wretched young man was exerting all his ingenuity to seem as if he were wealthy!

Now in the letter which informed the victim that in future the Kellers would make no further advances without security, there was a tolerably wide space left between the forms of an exaggerated respect and the signature. It was quite easy to tear off the best part of the letter and convert it into a bill of exchange for any amount. The diabolical missive had been enclosed in an envelope, so that the other side of the sheet was blank. When it arrived, Victurnien was writhing in the

lowest depths of despair. After two years of the most prosperous, sensual, thoughtless, and luxurious life, he found himself face to face with the most inexorable poverty; it was an absolute impossibility to procure money. There had been some throes of crisis before the journey came to an end. With the Duchess' help he had managed to extort various sums from bankers; but it had been with the greatest difficulty, and, moreover, those very amounts were about to start up again before him as overdue bills of exchange in all their rigor, with a stern summons to pay from the Bank of France and the commercial court. All through the enjoyments of those last weeks the unhappy boy had felt the point of the Commander's sword; at every supper-party he heard, like Don Juan, the heavy tread of the statue outside upon the stairs. He felt an unaccountable creeping of the flesh, a warning that the sirocco of debt is nigh at hand. He reckoned on chance. For five years he had never turned up a blank in the lottery, his purse had always been replenished. After Chesnel had come du Croisier (he told himself), after du Croisier surely another gold mine would pour out its wealth. And besides, he was winning great sums at play; his luck at play had saved him several unpleasant steps already; and often a wild hope sent him to the Salon des Etrangers only to lose his winnings afterwards at whist at the club. His life for the past two months had been like the immortal finale of Mozart's Don Giovanni; and of a truth, if a young man has come to such a plight as Victurnien's, that finale is enough to make him shudder. Can anything better prove the enormous power of music than that sublime rendering of the disorder and confusion arising out of a life wholly give up to sensual indulgence? that fearful picture of a deliberate effort to shut out the thought of debts and duels, deceit and evil luck? In that music Mozart disputes the palm with Moliere. The terrific finale, with its glow, its power, its despair and laughter, its grisly spectres and elfish women, centres about the prodigal's last effort made in the after-supper heat of wine, the frantic struggle which ends the drama. Victurnien was living through this infernal poem, and alone. He saw visions of himself — a friendless, solitary outcast, reading the words carved on the stone, the last words on the last page of the book that had held him spellbound — THE END!

Yes; for him all would be at an end, and that soon. Already he saw the cold, ironical eyes which his associates would turn upon him, and their amusement over his downfall. Some of them he knew were playing high on that gambling-table kept open all day long at the Bourse, or in private houses at the clubs, and

anywhere and everywhere in Paris; but not one of these men could spare a banknote to save an intimate. There was no help for it — Chesnel must be ruined. He had devoured Chesnel's living.

He sat with the Duchess in their box at the Italiens, the whole house envying them their happiness, and while he smiled at her, all the Furies were tearing at his heart. Indeed, to give some idea of the depths of doubt, despair, and incredulity in which the boy was groveling; he who so clung to life — the life which the angel had made so fair — who so loved it, that he would have stooped to baseness merely to live; he, the pleasure-loving scapegrace, the degenerate d'Esgrignon, had even taken out his pistols, had gone so far as to think of suicide. He who would never have brooked the appearance of an insult was abusing himself in language which no man is likely to hear except from himself.

He left du Croisier's letter lying open on the bed. Josephin had brought it in at nine o'clock. Victurnien's furniture had been seized, but he slept none the less. After he came back from the Opera, he and the Duchess had gone to a voluptuous retreat, where they often spent a few hours together after the most brilliant court balls and evening parties and gaieties. Appearances were very cleverly saved. Their love-nest was a garret like any other to all appearance; Mme. de Maufrigneuse was obliged to bow her head with its court feathers or wreath of flowers to enter in at the door; but within all the peris of the East had made the chamber fair. And now that the Count was on the brink of ruin, he had longed to bid farewell to the dainty nest, which he had built to realize a day-dream worthy of his angel. Presently adversity would break the enchanted eggs; there would be no brood of white doves, no brilliant tropical birds, no more of the thousand bright-winged fancies which hover above our heads even to the last days of our lives. Alas! alas! in three days he must be gone; his bills had fallen into the hands of the money-lenders, the law proceedings had reached the last stage.

An evil thought crossed his brain. He would fly with the Duchess; they would live in some undiscovered nook in the wilds of North or South America; but — he would fly with a fortune, and leave his creditors to confront their bills. To carry out the plan, he had only to cut off the lower portion of that letter with du Croisier's signature, and to fill in the figures to turn it into a bill, and present it to the Kellers. There was a dreadful struggle with temptation; tears shed, but the honor of the family triumphed, subject to one condition. Victurnien wanted to be

sure of his beautiful Diane; he would do nothing unless she should consent to their flight. So he went to the Duchess in the Rue Faubourg Saint–Honore, and found her in coquettish morning dress, which cost as much in thought as in money, a fit dress in which to begin to play the part of Angel at eleven o'clock in the morning.

Mme. de Maufrigneuse was somewhat pensive. Cares of a similar kind were gnawing her mind; but she took them gallantly. Of all the various feminine organizations classified by physiologists, there is one that has something indescribably terrible about it. Such women combine strength of soul and clear insight, with a faculty for prompt decision, and a recklessness, or rather resolution in a crisis which would shake a man's nerves. And these powers lie out of sight beneath an appearance of the most graceful helplessness. Such women only among womankind afford examples of a phenomenon which Buffon recognized in men alone, to wit, the union, or rather the disunion, of two different natures in one human being. Other women are wholly women; wholly tender, wholly devoted, wholly mothers, completely null and completely tiresome; nerves and brain and blood are all in harmony; but the Duchess, and others like her, are capable of rising to the highest heights of feelings, or of showing the most selfish insensibility. It is one of the glories of Moliere that he has given us a wonderful portrait of such a woman, from one point of view only, in that greatest of his full-length figures — Celimene; Celimene is the typical aristocratic woman, as Figaro, the second edition of Panurge, represents the people.

So, the Duchess, being overwhelmed with debt, laid it upon herself to give no more than a moment's thought to the avalanche of cares, and to take her resolution once and for all; Napoleon could take up or lay down the burden of his thoughts in precisely the same way. The Duchess possessed the faculty of standing aloof from herself; she could look on as a spectator at the crash when it came, instead of submitting to be buried beneath. This was certainly great, but repulsive in a woman. When she awoke in the morning she collected her thoughts; and by the time she had begun to dress she had looked at the danger in its fullest extent and faced the possibilities of terrific downfall. She pondered. Should she take refuge in a foreign country? Or should she go to the King and declare her debts to him? Or again, should she fascinate a du Tillet or a Nucingen, and gamble on the stock exchange to pay her creditors? The city man would find the money; he would be intelligent enough to bring her nothing but the profits, without so much as

mentioning the losses, a piece of delicacy which would gloss all over. The catastrophe, and these various ways of averting it, had all been reviewed quite coolly, calmly, and without trepidation.

As a naturalist takes up some king of butterflies and fastens him down on cotton-wool with a pin, so Mme. de Maufrigneuse had plucked love out of her heart while she pondered the necessity of the moment, and was quite ready to replace the beautiful passion on its immaculate setting so soon as her duchess' coronet was safe. *She* knew none of the hesitation which Cardinal Richelieu hid from all the world but Pere Joseph; none of the doubts that Napoleon kept at first entirely to himself. "Either the one or the other," she told herself.

She was sitting by the fire, giving orders for her toilette for a drive in the Bois if the weather should be fine, when Victurnien came in.

The Comte d'Esgrignon, with all his stifled capacity, his so keen intellect, was in exactly the state which might have been looked for in the woman. His heart was beating violently, the perspiration broke out over him as he stood in his dandy's trappings; he was afraid as yet to lay a hand on the corner-stone which upheld the pyramid of his life with Diane. So much it cost him to know the truth. The cleverest men are fain to deceive themselves on one or two points if the truth once known is likely to humiliate them in their own eyes, and damage themselves with themselves. Victurnien forced his own irresolution into the field by committing himself.

"What is the matter with you?" Diane de Maufrigneuse had said at once, at the sight of her beloved Victurnien's face.

"Why, dear Diane, I am in such a perplexity; a man gone to the bottom and at his last gasp is happy in comparison."

"Pshaw! it is nothing," said she; "you are a child. Let us see now; tell me about it."

"I am hopelessly in debt. I have come to the end of my tether."

"Is that all?" said she, smiling at him. "Money matters can always be arranged somehow or other; nothing is irretrievable except disasters in love."

Victurnien's mind being set at rest by this swift comprehension of his position, he unrolled the bright-colored web of his life for the last two years and a

half; but it was the seamy side of it which he displayed with something of genius, and still more of wit, to his Diane. He told his tale with the inspiration of the moment, which fails no one in great crises; he had sufficient artistic skill to set it off by a varnish of delicate scorn for men and things. It was an aristocrat who spoke. And the Duchess listened as she could listen.

One knee was raised, for she sat with her foot on a stool. She rested her elbow on her knee and leant her face on her hand so that her fingers closed daintily over her shapely chin. Her eyes never left his; but thoughts by myriads flitted under the blue surface, like gleams of stormy light between two clouds. Her forehead was calm, her mouth gravely intent — grave with love; her lips were knotted fast by Victurnien's lips. To have her listening thus was to believe that a divine love flowed from her heart. Wherefore, when the Count had proposed flight to this soul, so closely knit to his own, he could not help crying, "You are an angel!"

The fair Maufrigneuse made silent answer; but she had not spoken as yet.

"Good, very good," she said at last. (She had not given herself up to the love expressed in her face; her mind had been entirely absorbed by deep-laid schemes which she kept to herself.) "But *that* is not the question, dear." (The "angel" was only "that" by this time.) "Let us think of your affairs. Yes, we will go, and the sooner the better. Arrange it all; I will follow you. It is glorious to leave Paris and the world behind. I will set about my preparations in such a way that no one can suspect anything."

I will follow you! Just so Mlle. Mars might have spoken those words to send a thrill through two thousand listening men and women. When a Duchesse de Maufrigneuse offers, in such words, to make such a sacrifice to love, she has paid her debt. How should Victurnien speak of sordid details after that? He could so much the better hide his schemes, because Diane was particularly careful not to inquire into them. She was now, and always, as de Marsay said, an invited guest at a banquet wreathed with roses, a banquet which mankind, as in duty bound, made ready for her.

Victurnien would not go till the promise had been sealed. He must draw courage from his happiness before he could bring himself to do a deed on which, as he inwardly told himself, people would be certain to put a bad construction. Still (and this was the thought that decided him) he counted on his aunt and father to hush up the affair; he even counted on Chesnel. Chesnel would think of

one more compromise. Besides, “this business,” as he called it in his thoughts, was the only way of raising money on the family estate. With three hundred thousand francs, he and Diane would lead a happy life hidden in some palace in Venice; and there they would forget the world. They went through their romance in advance.

Next day Victurnien made out a bill for three hundred thousand francs, and took it to the Kellers. The Kellers advanced the money, for du Croisier happened to have a balance at the time; but they wrote to let him know that he must not draw again on them without giving them notice. Du Croisier, much astonished, asked for a statement of accounts. It was sent. Everything was explained. The day of his vengeance had arrived.

When Victurnien had drawn “his” money, he took it to Mme. de Maufrigneuse. She locked up the banknotes in her desk, and proposed to bid the world farewell by going to the Opera to see it for the last time. Victurnien was thoughtful, absent, and uneasy. He was beginning to reflect. He thought that his seat in the Duchess’ box might cost him dear; that perhaps, when he had put the three hundred thousand francs in safety, it would be better to travel post, to fall at Chesnel’s feet, and tell him all. But before they left the opera-house, the Duchess, in spite of herself, gave Victurnien an adorable glance, her eyes were shining with the desire to go back once more to bid farewell to the nest which she loved so much. And boy that he was, he lost a night.

The next day, at three o’clock, he was back again at the Hotel de Maufrigneuse; he had come to take the Duchess’ orders for that night’s escape. And, “Why should we go?” asked she; “I have thought it all out. The Vicomtesse de Beauseant and the Duchesse de Langeais disappeared. If I go too, it will be something quite commonplace. We will brave the storm. It will be a far finer thing to do. I am sure of success.” Victurnien’s eyes dazzled; he felt as if his skin were dissolving and the blood oozing out all over him.

“What is the matter with you?” cried the fair Diane, noticing a hesitation which a woman never forgives. Your truly adroit lover will hasten to agree with any fancy that Woman may take into her head, and suggest reasons for doing otherwise, while leaving her free exercise of her right to change her mind, her intentions, and sentiments generally as often as she pleases. Victurnien was angry for the first time, angry with the wrath of a weak man of poetic temperament; it was a storm of rain and lightning flashes, but no thunder followed. The angel on

whose faith he had risked more than his life, the honor of his house, was very roughly handled.

“So,” said she, “we have come to this after eighteen months of tenderness! You are unkind, very unkind. Go away! — I do not want to see you again. I thought that you loved me. You do not.”

“*I do not love you*?” repeated he, thunderstruck by the reproach.

“No, monsieur.”

“And yet ——” he cried. “Ah! if you but knew what I have just done for your sake!”

“And how have you done so much for me, monsieur? As if a man ought not to do anything for a woman that has done so much for him.”

“You are not worthy to know it!” Victurnien cried in a passion of anger.

“Oh!”

After that sublime, “Oh!” Diane bowed her head on her hand and sat, still, cold, and implacable as angels naturally may be expected to do, seeing that they share none of the passions of humanity. At the sight of the woman he loved in this terrible attitude, Victurnien forgot his danger. Had he not just that moment wronged the most angelic creature on earth? He longed for forgiveness, he threw himself before her, he kissed her feet, he pleaded, he wept. Two whole hours the unhappy young man spent in all kinds of follies, only to meet the same cold face, while the great silent tears dropping one by one, were dried as soon as they fell lest the unworthy lover should try to wipe them away. The Duchess was acting a great agony, one of those hours which stamp the woman who passes through them as something august and sacred.

Two more hours went by. By this time the Count had gained possession of Diane’s hand; it felt cold and spiritless. The beautiful hand, with all the treasures in its grasp, might have been supple wood; there was nothing of Diane in it; he had taken it, it had not been given to him. As for Victurnien, the spirit had ebbed out of his frame, he had ceased to think. He would not have seen the sun in heaven. What was to be done? What course should he take? What resolution should he make? The man who can keep his head in such circumstances must be made of the same stuff as the convict who spent the night in robbing the

Bibliotheque Royale of its gold medals, and repaired to his honest brother in the morning with a request to melt down the plunder. “What is to be done?” cried the brother. “Make me some coffee,” replied the thief. Victurnien sank into a bewildered stupor, darkness settled down over his brain. Visions of past rapture flitted across the misty gloom like the figures that Raphael painted against a black background; to these he must bid farewell. Inexorable and disdainful, the Duchess played with the tip of her scarf. She looked in irritation at Victurnien from time to time; she coquetted with memories, she spoke to her lover of his rivals as if anger had finally decided her to prefer one of them to a man who could so change in one moment after twenty-eight months of love.

“Ah! that charming young Felix de Vandenesse, so faithful as he was to Mme. de Mortsauf, would never have permitted himself such a scene! He can love, can de Vandenesse! De Marsay, that terrible de Marsay, such a tiger as everyone thought him, was rough with other men; but like all strong men, he kept his gentleness for women. Montriveau trampled the Duchesse de Langeais under foot, as Othello killed Desdemona, in a burst of fury which at any rate proved the extravagance of his love. It was not like a paltry squabble. There was rapture in being so crushed. Little, fair-haired, slim, and slender men loved to torment women; they could only reign over poor, weak creatures; it pleased them to have some ground for believing that they were men. The tyranny of love was their one chance of asserting their power. She did not know why she had put herself at the mercy of fair hair. Such men as de Marsay, Montriveau, and Vandenesse, dark-haired and well grown, had a ray of sunlight in their eyes.”

It was a storm of epigrams. Her speeches, like bullets, came hissing past his ears. Every word that Diane hurled at him was triple-barbed; she humiliated, stung, and wounded him with an art that was all her own, as half a score of savages can torture an enemy bound to a stake.

“You are mad!” he cried at last, at the end of his patience, and out he went in God knows what mood. He drove as if he had never handled the reins before, locked his wheels in the wheels of other vehicles, collided with the curbstone in the Place Louis–Quinze, went he knew not whither. The horse, left to its own devices, made a bolt for the stable along the Quai d’Orsay; but as he turned into the Rue de l’Universite, Josephin appeared to stop the runaway.

“You cannot go home, sir,” the old man said, with a scared face; “they have

come with a warrant to arrest you."

Victurnien thought that he had been arrested on the criminal charge, albeit there had not been time for the public prosecutor to receive his instructions. He had forgotten the matter of the bills of exchange, which had been stirred up again for some days past in the form of orders to pay, brought by the officers of the court with accompaniments in the shape of bailiffs, men in possession, magistrates, commissaries, policemen, and other representatives of social order. Like most guilty creatures, Victurnien had forgotten everything but his crime.

"It is all over with me," he cried.

"No, M. le Comte, drive as fast as you can to the Hotel du Bon la Fontaine, in the Rue de Grenelle. Mlle. Armande is waiting there for you, the horses have been put in, she will take you with her."

Victurnien, in his trouble, caught like a drowning man at the branch that came to his hand; he rushed off to the inn, reached the place, and flung his arms about his aunt. Mlle. Armande cried as if her heart would break; any one might have thought that she had a share in her nephew's guilt. They stepped into the carriage. A few minutes later they were on the road to Brest, and Paris lay behind them. Victurnien uttered not a sound; he was paralyzed. And when aunt and nephew began to speak, they talked at cross purposes; Victurnien, still laboring under the unlucky misapprehension which flung him into Mlle. Armande's arms, was thinking of his forgery; his aunt had the debts and the bills on her mind.

"You know all, aunt," he had said.

"Poor boy, yes, but we are here. I am not going to scold you just yet. Take heart."

"I must hide somewhere."

"Perhaps. . . . Yes, it is a very good idea."

"Perhaps I might get into Chesnel's house without being seen if we timed ourselves to arrive in the middle of the night?"

"That will be best. We shall be better able to hide this from my brother. — Poor angel! how unhappy he is!" said she, petting the unworthy child.

"Ah! now I begin to know what dishonor means; it has chilled my love."

“Unhappy boy; what bliss and what misery!” And Mlle. Armande drew his fevered face to her breast and kissed his forehead, cold and damp though it was, as the holy women might have kissed the brow of the dead Christ when they laid Him in His grave clothes. Following out the excellent scheme suggested by the prodigal son, he was brought by night to the quiet house in the Rue du Bercail; but chance ordered it that by so doing he ran straight into the wolf’s jaws, as the saying goes. That evening Chesnel had been making arrangements to sell his connection to M. Lepressoir’s head-clerk. M. Lepressoir was the notary employed by the Liberals, just as Chesnel’s practice lay among the aristocratic families. The young fellow’s relatives were rich enough to pay Chesnel the considerable sum of a hundred thousand francs in cash.

Chesnel was rubbing his hands. “A hundred thousand francs will go a long way in buying up debts,” he thought. “The young man is paying a high rate of interest on his loans. We will lock him up down here. I will go yonder myself and bring those curs to terms.”

Chesnel, honest Chesnel, upright, worthy Chesnel, called his darling Comte Victurnien’s creditors “curs.”

Meanwhile his successor was making his way along the Rue du Bercail just as Mlle. Armande’s traveling carriage turned into it. Any young man might be expected to feel some curiosity if he saw a traveling carriage stop at a notary’s door in such a town and at such an hour of the night; the young man in question was sufficiently inquisitive to stand in a doorway and watch. He saw Mlle. Armande alight.

“Mlle. Armande d’Esgrignon at this time of night!” said he to himself. “What can be going forward at the d’Esgrignons’?”

At the sight of mademoiselle, Chesnel opened the door circumspectly and set down the light which he was carrying; but when he looked out and saw Victurnien, Mlle. Armande’s first whispered word made the whole thing plain to him. He looked up and down the street; it seemed quite deserted; he beckoned, and the young Count sprang out of the carriage and entered the courtyard. All was lost. Chesnel’s successor had discovered Victurnien’s hiding place.

Victurnien was hurried into the house and installed in a room beyond Chesnel’s private office. No one could enter it except across the old man’s dead

body.

“Ah! M. le Comte!” exclaimed Chesnel, notary no longer.

“Yes, monsieur,” the Count answered, understanding his old friend’s exclamation. “I did not listen to you; and now I have fallen into the depths, and I must perish.”

“No, no,” the good man answered, looking triumphantly from Mlle. Armande to the Count. “I have sold my connection. I have been working for a very long time now, and am thinking of retiring. By noon tomorrow I shall have a hundred thousand francs; many things can be settled with that. Mademoiselle, you are tired,” he added; “go back to the carriage and go home and sleep. Business tomorrow.”

“Is he safe?” returned she, looking at Victurnien.

“Yes.”

She kissed her nephew; a few tears fell on his forehead. Then she went.

“My good Chesnel,” said the Count, when they began to talk of business, “what are your hundred thousand francs in such a position as mine? You do not know the full extent of my troubles, I think.”

Victurnien explained the situation. Chesnel was thunderstruck. But for the strength of his devotion, he would have succumbed to this blow. Tears streamed from the eyes that might well have had no tears left to shed. For a few moments he was a child again, for a few moments he was bereft of his senses; he stood like a man who should find his own house on fire, and through a window see the cradle ablaze and hear the hiss of the flames on his children’s curls. He rose to his full height — il se dressa en pied, as Amyot would have said; he seemed to grow taller; he raised his withered hands and wrung them despairingly and wildly.

“If only your father may die and never know this, young man! To be a forger is enough; a parricide you must not be. Fly, you say? No. They would condemn you for contempt of court! Oh, wretched boy! Why did you not forge *my* signature? *I* would have paid; I should not have taken the bill to the public prosecutor. — Now I can do nothing. You have brought me to a stand in the lowest pit in hell! — Du Croisier! What will come of it? What is to be done? — If you had killed a man, there might be some help for it. But forgery — *forgery*! And time — the time is

flying," he went on, shaking his fist towards the old clock. "You will want a sham passport now. One crime leads to another. First," he added, after a pause, "first of all we must save the house of d'Esgrignon."

"But the money is still in Mme. de Maufrigneuse's keeping," exclaimed Victurnien.

"Ah!" exclaimed Chesnel. "Well, there is some hope left — a faint hope. Could we soften du Croisier, I wonder, or buy him over? He shall have all the lands if he likes. I will go to him; I will wake him and offer him all we have. — Besides, it was not you who forged that bill; it was I. I will go to jail; I am too old for the hulks, they can only put me in prison."

"But the body of the bill is in my handwriting," objected Victurnien, without a sign of surprise at this reckless devotion.

"Idiot! . . . that is, pardon, M. le Comte. Josephin should have been made to write it," the old notary cried wrathfully. "He is a good creature; he would have taken it all on his shoulders. But there is an end of it; the world is falling to pieces," the old man continued, sinking exhausted into a chair. "Du Croisier is a tiger; we must be careful not to rouse him. What time is it? Where is the draft? If it is at Paris, it might be bought back from the Kellers; they might accommodate us. Ah! but there are dangers on all sides; a single false step means ruin. Money is wanted in any case. But there! nobody knows you are here, you must live buried away in the cellar if needs must. I will go at once to Paris as fast as I can; I can hear the mail coach from Brest."

In a moment the old man recovered the faculties of his youth — his agility and vigor. He packed up clothes for the journey, took money, brought a six-pound loaf to the little room beyond the office, and turned the key on his child by adoption.

"Not a sound in here," he said, "no light at night; and stop here till I come back, or you will go to the hulks. Do you understand, M. le Comte? Yes, *to the hulks*! if anybody in a town like this knows that you are here."

With that Chesnel went out, first telling his housekeeper to give out that he was ill, to allow no one to come into the house, to send everybody away, and to postpone business of every kind for three days. He wheedled the manager of the coach-office, made up a tale for his benefit — he had the makings of an ingenious novelist in him — and obtained a promise that if there should be a place, he should

have it, passport or no passport, as well as a further promise to keep the hurried departure a secret. Luckily, the coach was empty when it arrived.

In the middle of the following night Chesnel was set down in Paris. At nine o'clock in the morning he waited on the Kellers, and learned that the fatal draft had returned to du Croisier three days since; but while obtaining this information, he in no way committed himself. Before he went away he inquired whether the draft could be recovered if the amount were refunded. Francois Keller's answer was to the effect that the document was du Croisier's property, and that it was entirely in his power to keep or return it. Then, in desperation, the old man went to the Duchess.

Mme. de Maufrigneuse was not at home to any visitor at that hour. Chesnel, feeling that every moment was precious, sat down in the hall, wrote a few lines, and succeeded in sending them to the lady by dint of wheedling, fascinating, bribing, and commanding the most insolent and inaccessible servants in the world. The Duchess was still in bed; but, to the great astonishment of her household, the old man in black knee-breeches, ribbed stockings, and shoes with buckles to them, was shown into her room.

"What is it, monsieur?" she asked, posing in her disorder. "What does he want of me, ungrateful that he is?"

"It is this, Mme. la Duchesse," the good man exclaimed, "you have a hundred thousand crowns belonging to us."

"Yes," began she. "What does it signify ——?"

"The money was gained by a forgery, for which we are going to the hulks, a forgery which we committed for love of you," Chesnel said quickly. "How is it that you did not guess it, so clever as you are? Instead of scolding the boy, you ought to have had the truth out of him, and stopped him while there was time, and saved him."

At the first words the Duchess understood; she felt ashamed of her behavior to so impassioned a lover, and afraid besides that she might be suspected of complicity. In her wish to prove that she had not touched the money left in her keeping, she lost all regard for appearances; and besides, it did not occur to her that the notary was a man. She flung off the eider-down quilt, sprang to her desk (flitting past the lawyer like an angel out of one of the vignettes which illustrate

Lamartine’s books), held out the notes, and went back in confusion to bed.

“You are an angel, madame.” (She was to be an angel for all the world, it seemed.) “But this will not be the end of it. I count upon your influence to save us.”

“To save you! I will do it or die! Love that will not shrink from a crime must be love indeed. Is there a woman in the world for whom such a thing has been done? Poor boy! Come, do not lose time, dear M. Chesnel; and count upon me as upon yourself.”

“Mme. la Duchesse! Mme. la Duchesse!” It was all that he could say, so overcome was he. He cried, he could have danced; but he was afraid of losing his senses, and refrained.

“Between us, we will save him,” she said, as he left the room.

Chesnel went straight to Josephin. Josephin unlocked the young Count’s desk and writing-table. Very luckily, the notary found letters which might be useful, letters from du Croisier and the Kellers. Then he took a place in a diligence which was just about to start; and by dint of fees to the postilions, the lumbering vehicle went as quickly as the coach. His two fellow-passengers on the journey happened to be in as great a hurry as himself, and readily agreed to take their meals in the carriage. Thus swept over the road, the notary reached the Rue du Bercail, after three days of absence, an hour before midnight. And yet he was too late. He saw the gendarmes at the gate, crossed the threshold, and met the young Count in the courtyard. Victurnien had been arrested. If Chesnel had had the power, he would beyond a doubt have killed the officers and men; as it was, he could only fall on Victurnien’s neck.

“If I cannot hush this matter up, you must kill yourself before the indictment is made out,” he whispered. But Victurnien had sunk into such stupor, that he stared back uncomprehendingly.

“Kill myself?” he repeated.

“Yes. If your courage should fail, my boy, count upon me,” said Chesnel, squeezing Victurnien’s hand.

In spite of the anguish of mind and tottering limbs, he stood firmly planted, to watch the son of his heart, the Comte d’Esgrignon, go out of the courtyard

between two gendarmes, with the commissary, the justice of the peace, and the clerk of the court; and not until the figures had disappeared, and the sound of footsteps had died away into silence, did he recover his firmness and presence of mind.

“You will catch cold, sir,” Brigitte remonstrated.

“The devil take you!” cried her exasperated master.

Never in the nine-and-twenty years that Brigitte had been in his service had she heard such words from him! Her candle fell out of her hands, but Chesnel neither heeded his housekeeper’s alarm nor heard her exclaim. He hurried off towards the Val–Noble.

“He is out of his mind,” said she; “after all, it is no wonder. But where is he off to? I cannot possibly go after him. What will become of him? Suppose that he should drown himself?”

And Brigitte went to waken the head-clerk and send him to look along the river bank; the river had a gloomy reputation just then, for there had lately been two cases of suicide — one a young man full of promise, and the other a girl, a victim of seduction. Chesnel went straight to the Hotel du Croisier. There lay his only hope. The law requires that a charge of forgery must be brought by a private individual. It was still possible to withdraw if du Croisier chose to admit that there had been a misapprehension; and Chesnel had hopes, even then, of buying the man over.

M. and Mme. du Croisier had much more company than usual that evening. Only a few persons were in the secret. M. du Ronceret, president of the Tribunal; M. Sauvager, deputy Public Prosecutor; and M. du Coudrai, a registrar of mortgages, who had lost his post by voting on the wrong side, were the only persons who were supposed to know about it; but Mesdames du Ronceret and du Coudrai had told the news, in strict confidence, to one or two intimate friends, so that it had spread half over the semi-noble, semi-bourgeois assembly at M. du Croisier’s. Everybody felt the gravity of the situation, but no one ventured to speak of it openly; and, moreover, Mme. du Croisier’s attachment to the upper sphere was so well known, that people scarcely dared to mention the disaster which had befallen the d’Esgrignons or to ask for particulars. The persons most interested were waiting till good Mme. du Croisier retired, for that lady always retreated to

her room at the same hour to perform her religious exercises as far as possible out of her husband's sight.

Du Croisier's adherents, knowing the secret and the plans of the great commercial power, looked round when the lady of the house disappeared; but there were still several persons present whose opinions or interests marked them out as untrustworthy, so they continued to play. About half past eleven all had gone save intimates: M. Sauvager, M. Camusot, the examining magistrate, and his wife, M. and Mme. du Ronceret and their son Fabien, M. and Mme. du Coudrai, and Joseph Blondet, the eldest of an old judge; ten persons in all.

It is told of Talleyrand that one fatal day, three hours after midnight, he suddenly interrupted a game of cards in the Duchesse de Luynes' house by laying down his watch on the table and asking the players whether the Prince de Conde had any child but the Duc d'Enghien.

"Why do you ask?" returned Mme. de Luynes, "when you know so well that he has not."

"Because if the Prince has no other son, the House of Conde is now at an end."

There was a moment's pause, and they finished the game. — President du Ronceret now did something very similar. Perhaps he had heard the anecdote; perhaps, in political life, little minds and great minds are apt to hit upon the same expression. He looked at his watch, and interrupted the game of boston with:

"At this moment M. le Comte d'Esgrignon is arrested, and that house which has held its head so high is dishonored forever."

"Then, have you got hold of the boy?" du Coudrai cried gleefully.

Every one in the room, with the exception of the President, the deputy, and du Croisier, looked startled.

"He has just been arrested in Chesnel's house, where he was hiding," said the deputy public prosecutor, with the air of a capable but unappreciated public servant, who ought by rights to be Minister of Police. M. Sauvager, the deputy, was a thin, tall young man of five-and-twenty, with a lengthy olive-hued countenance, black frizzled hair, and deep-set eyes; the wide, dark rings beneath them were completed by the wrinkled purple eyelids above. With a nose like the beak of some

bird of prey, a pinched mouth, and cheeks worn lean with study and hollowed by ambition, he was the very type of a second-rate personage on the lookout for something to turn up, and ready to do anything if so he might get on in the world, while keeping within the limitations of the possible and the forms of law. His pompous expression was an admirable indication of the time-serving eloquence to be expected of him. Chesnel's successor had discovered the young Count's hiding place to him, and he took great credit to himself for his penetration.

The news seemed to come as a shock to the examining magistrate, M. Camusot, who had granted the warrant of arrest on Sauvager's application, with no idea that it was to be executed so promptly. Camusot was short, fair, and fat already, though he was only thirty years old or thereabouts; he had the flabby, livid look peculiar to officials who live shut up in their private study or in a court of justice; and his little, pale, yellow eyes were full of the suspicion which is often mistaken for shrewdness.

Mme. Camusot looked at her spouse, as who should say, "Was I not right?"

"Then the case will come on," was Camusot's comment.

"Could you doubt it?" asked du Coudrai. "Now they have got the Count, all is over."

"There is the jury," said Camusot. "In this case M. le Prefet is sure to take care that after the challenges from the prosecution and the defence, the jury to a man will be for an acquittal. — My advice would be to come to a compromise," he added, turning to du Croisier.

"Compromise!" echoed the President; "why, he is in the hands of justice."

"Acquitted or convicted, the Comte d'Esgrignon will be dishonored all the same," put in Sauvager.

"I am bringing an action,"[1] said du Croisier. "I shall have Dupin senior. We shall see how the d'Esgrignon family will escape out of his clutches."

[1] A trial for an offence of this kind in France is an action brought by a private person (partie civile) to recover damages, and at the same time a criminal prosecution conducted on behalf of the Government. — Tr.

"The d'Esgrignons will defend the case and have counsel from Paris; they will have Berryer," said Mme. Camusot. "You will have a Roland for your Oliver."

Du Croisier, M. Sauvager, and the President du Ronceret looked at Camusot, and one thought troubled their minds. The lady's tone, the way in which she flung her proverb in the faces of the eight conspirators against the house of d'Esgrignon, caused them inward perturbation, which they dissembled as provincials can dissemble, by dint of lifelong practice in the shifts of a monastic existence. Little Mme. Camusot saw their change of countenance and subsequent composure when they scented opposition on the part of the examining magistrate. When her husband unveiled the thoughts in the back of his own mind, she had tried to plumb the depths of hate in du Croisier's adherents. She wanted to find out how du Croisier had gained over this deputy public prosecutor, who had acted so promptly and so directly in opposition to the views of the central power.

"In any case," continued she, "if celebrated counsel come down from Paris, there is a prospect of a very interesting session in the Court of Assize; but the matter will be snuffed out between the Tribunal and the Court of Appeal. It is only to be expected that the Government should do all that can be done, below the surface, to save a young man who comes of a great family, and has the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse for a friend. So I think that we shall have a 'sensation at Landernau.'"

"How you go on, madame!" the President said sternly. "Can you suppose that the Court of First Instance will be influenced by considerations which have nothing to do with justice?"

"The event proves the contrary," she said meaningly, looking full at Sauvager and the President, who glanced coldly at her.

"Explain yourself, madame," said Sauvager. "you speak as if we had not done our duty."

"Mme. Camusot meant nothing," interposed her husband.

"But has not M. le President just said something prejudicing a case which depends on the examination of the prisoner?" said she. "And the evidence is still to be taken, and the Court had not given its decision?"

"We are not at the law-courts," the deputy public prosecutor replied tartly; "and besides, we know all that."

"But the public prosecutor knows nothing at all about it yet," returned she, with an ironical glance. "He will come back from the Chamber of Deputies in all

haste. You have cut out his work for him, and he, no doubt, will speak for himself."

The deputy prosecutor knitted his thick bushy brows. Those interested read tardy scruples in his countenance. A great silence followed, broken by no sound but the dealing of the cards. M. and Mme. Camusot, sensible of a decided chill in the atmosphere, took their departure to leave the conspirators to talk at their ease.

"Camusot," the lady began in the street, "you went too far. Why lead those people to suspect that you will have no part in their schemes? They will play you some ugly trick."

"What can they do? I am the only examining magistrate."

"Cannot they slander you in whispers, and procure your dismissal?"

At that very moment Chesnel ran up against the couple. The old notary recognized the examining magistrate; and with the lucidity which comes of an experience of business, he saw that the fate of the d'Esgrignons lay in the hands of the young man before him.

"Ah, sir!" he exclaimed, "we shall soon need you badly. Just a word with you. — Your pardon, madame," he added, as he drew Camusot aside.

Mme. Camusot, as a good conspirator, looked towards du Croisier's house, ready to break up the conversation if anybody appeared; but she thought, and thought rightly, that their enemies were busy discussing this unexpected turn which she had given to the affair. Chesnel meanwhile drew the magistrate into a dark corner under the wall, and lowered his voice for his companion's ear.

"If you are for the house of d'Esgrignon," he said, "Mme. la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, the Prince of Cadignan, the Ducs de Navarreins and de Lenoncourt, the Keeper of the Seals, the Chancellor, the King himself, will interest themselves in you. I have just come from Paris; I knew all about this; I went post-haste to explain everything at Court. We are counting on you, and I will keep your secret. If you are hostile, I shall go back to Paris tomorrow and lodge a complaint with the Keeper of the Seals that there is a suspicion of corruption. Several functionaries were at du Croisier's house to-night, and no doubt, ate and drank there, contrary to law; and besides, they are friends of his."

Chesnel would have brought the Almighty to intervene if he had had the power. He did not wait for an answer; he left Camusot and fled like a deer towards

du Croisier's house. Camusot, meanwhile, bidden to reveal the notary's confidences, was at once assailed with, "Was I not right, dear?"— a wifely formula used on all occasions, but rather more vehemently when the fair speaker is in the wrong. By the time they reached home, Camusot had admitted the superiority of his partner in life, and appreciated his good fortune in belonging to her; which confession, doubtless, was the prelude of a blissful night.

Chesnel met his foes in a body as they left du Croisier's house, and began to fear that du Croisier had gone to bed. In his position he was compelled to act quickly, and any delay was a misfortune.

"In the King's name!" he cried, as the man-servant was closing the hall door. He had just brought the King on the scene for the benefit of an ambitious little official, and the word was still on his lips. He fretted and chafed while the door was unbarred; then, swift as a thunderbolt, dashed into the ante-chamber, and spoke to the servant.

"A hundred crowns to you, young man, if you can wake Mme. du Croisier and send her to me this instant. Tell her anything you like."

Chesnel grew cool and composed as he opened the door of the brightly lighted drawing-room, where du Croisier was striding up and down. For a moment the two men scanned each other, with hatred and enmity, twenty years' deep, in their eyes. One of the two had his foot on the heart of the house of d'Esgrignon; the other, with a lion's strength, came forward to pluck it away.

"Your humble servant, sir," said Chesnel. "Have you made the charge?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was it made?"

"Yesterday."

"Have any steps been taken since the warrant of arrest was issued?"

"I believe so."

"I have come to treat with you."

"Justice must take its course, nothing can stop it, the arrest has been made."

"Never mind that, I am at your orders, at your feet." The old man knelt before du Croisier, and stretched out his hands entreatingly.

“What do you want? Our lands, our castle? Take all; withdraw the charge; leave us nothing but life and honor. And over and besides all this, I will be your servant; command and I will obey.”

Du Croisier sat down in an easy-chair and left the old man to kneel.

“You are not vindictive,” pleaded Chesnel; “you are good-hearted, you do not bear us such a grudge that you will not listen to terms. Before daylight the young man ought to be at liberty.”

“The whole town knows that he has been arrested,” returned du Croisier, enjoying his revenge.

“It is a great misfortune, but as there will be neither proofs nor trial, we can easily manage that.”

Du Croisier reflected. He seemed to be struggling with self-interest; Chesnel thought that he had gained a hold on his enemy through the great motive of human action. At that supreme moment Mme. du Croisier appeared.

“Come here and help me to soften your dear husband, madame?” said Chesnel, still on his knees. Mme. du Croisier made him rise with every sign of profound astonishment. Chesnel explained his errand; and when she knew it, the generous daughter of the intendants of the Ducs de Alencon turned to du Croisier with tears in her eyes.

“Ah! monsieur, can you hesitate? The d’Esgrignons, the honor of the province!” she said.

“There is more in it than that,” exclaimed du Croisier, rising to begin his restless walk again.

“More? What more?” asked Chesnel in amazement.

“France is involved, M. Chesnel! It is a question of the country, of the people, of giving my lords your nobles a lesson, and teaching them that there is such a thing as justice, and law, and a bourgeoisie — a lesser nobility as good as they, and a match for them! There shall be no more trampling down half a score of wheat fields for a single hare; no bringing shame on families by seducing unprotected girls; they shall not look down on others as good as they are, and mock at them for ten whole years, without finding out at last that these things swell into avalanches, and those avalanches will fall and crush and bury my lords the nobles. You want to

go back to the old order of things. You want to tear up the social compact, the Charter in which our rights are set forth ——"

"And so?"

"Is it not a sacred mission to open the people's eyes?" cried du Croisier. "Their eyes will be opened to the morality of your party when they see nobles going to be tried at the Assize Court like Pierre and Jacques. They will say, then, that small folk who keep their self-respect are as good as great folk that bring shame on themselves. The Assize Court is a light for all the world. Here, I am the champion of the people, the friend of law. You yourselves twice flung me on the side of the people — once when you refused an alliance, twice when you put me under the ban of your society. You are reaping as you have sown."

If Chesnel was startled by this outburst, so no less was Mme. du Croisier. To her this was a terrible revelation of her husband's character, a new light not merely on the past but on the future as well. Any capitulation on the part of the colossus was apparently out of the question; but Chesnel in no wise retreated before the impossible.

"What, monsieur?" said Mme. du Croisier. "Would you not forgive? Then you are not a Christian."

"I forgive as God forgives, madame, on certain conditions."

"And what are they?" asked Chesnel, thinking that he saw a ray of hope.

"The elections are coming on; I want the votes at your disposal."

"You shall have them."

"I wish that we, my wife and I, should be received familiarly every evening, with an appearance of friendliness at any rate, by M. le Marquis d'Esgrignon and his circle," continued du Croisier.

"I do not know how we are going to compass it, but you shall be received."

"I wish to have the family bound over by a surety of four hundred thousand francs, and by a written document stating the nature of the compromise, so as to keep a loaded cannon pointed at its heart."

"We agree," said Chesnel, without admitting that the three hundred thousand francs was in his possession; "but the amount must be deposited with a third party

and returned to the family after your election and repayment."

"No; after the marriage of my grand-niece, Mlle. Duval. She will very likely have four million francs some day; the reversion of our property (mine and my wife's) shall be settled upon her by her marriage-contract, and you shall arrange a match between her and the young Count."

"Never!"

"*Never*!" repeated du Croisier, quite intoxicated with triumph. "Good-night!"

"Idiot that I am," thought Chesnel, "why did I shrink from a lie to such a man?"

Du Croisier took himself off; he was pleased with himself; he had enjoyed Chesnel's humiliation; he had held the destinies of a proud house, the representatives of the aristocracy of the province, suspended in his hand; he had set the print of his heel on the very heart of the d'Esgrignons; and, finally, he had broken off the whole negotiation on the score of his wounded pride. He went up to his room, leaving his wife alone with Chesnel. In his intoxication, he saw his victory clear before him. He firmly believed that the three hundred thousand francs had been squandered; the d'Esgrignons must sell or mortgage all that they had to raise the money; the Assize Court was inevitable to his mind.

An affair of forgery can always be settled out of court in France if the missing amount is returned. The losers by the crime are usually well-to-do, and have no wish to blight an imprudent man's character. But du Croisier had no mind to slacken his hold until he knew what he was about. He meditated until he fell asleep on the magnificent manner in which his hopes would be fulfilled by the way of the Assize Court or by marriage. The murmur of voices below, the lamentations of Chesnel and Mme. du Croisier, sounded sweet in his ears.

Mme. du Croisier shared Chesnel's views of the d'Esgrignons. She was a deeply religious woman, a Royalist attached to the noblesse; the interview had been in every way a cruel shock to her feelings. She, a staunch Royalist, had heard the roaring of that Liberalism, which, in her director's opinion, wished to crush the Church. The Left benches for her meant the popular upheaval and the scaffolds of 1793.

"What would your uncle, that sainted man who hears us, say to this?" exclaimed Chesnel. Mme. du Croisier made no reply, but the great tears rolled

down her checks.

“You have already been the cause of one poor boy’s death; his mother will go mourning all her days,” continued Chesnel; he saw how his words told, but he would have struck harder and even broken this woman’s heart to save Victurnien. “Do you want to kill Mlle. Armande, for she would not survive the dishonor of the house for a week? Do you wish to be the death of poor Chesnel, your old notary? For I shall kill the Count in prison before they shall bring the charge against him, and take my own life afterwards, before they shall try me for murder in an Assize Court.”

“That is enough! that is enough, my friend! I would do anything to put a stop to such an affair; but I never knew M. du Croisier’s real character until a few minutes ago. To you I can make the admission: there is nothing to be done.”

“But what if there is?”

“I would give half the blood in my veins that it were so,” said she, finishing her sentence by a wistful shake of the head.

As the First Consul, beaten on the field of Marengo till five o’clock in the evening, by six o’clock saw the tide of battle turned by Desaix’s desperate attack and Kellermann’s terrific charge, so Chesnel in the midst of defeat saw the beginnings of victory. No one but a Chesnel, an old notary, an exsteward of the manor, old Maitre Sorbier’s junior clerk, in the sudden flash of lucidity which comes with despair, could rise thus, high as a Napoleon, nay, higher. This was not Marengo, it was Waterloo, and the Prussians had come up; Chesnel saw this, and was determined to beat them off the field.

“Madame,” he said, “remember that I have been your man of business for twenty years; remember that if the d’Esgrignons mean the honor of the province, you represent the honor of the bourgeoisie; it rests with you, and you alone, to save the ancient house. Now, answer me; are you going to allow dishonor to fall on the shade of your dead uncle, on the d’Esgrignons, on poor Chesnel? Do you want to kill Mlle. Armande weeping yonder? Or do you wish to expiate wrongs done to others by a deed which will rejoice your ancestors, the intendants of the dukes of Alencon, and bring comfort to the soul of our dear Abbe? If he could rise from his grave, he would command you to do this thing that I beg of you upon my knees.”

“What is it?” asked Mme. du Croisier.

“Well. Here are the hundred thousand crowns,” said Chesnel, drawing the bundles of notes from his pocket. “Take them, and there will be an end of it.”

“If that is all,” she began, “and if no harm can come of it to my husband ——”

“Nothing but good,” Chesnel replied. “You are saving him from eternal punishment in hell, at the cost of a slight disappointment here below.”

“He will not be compromised, will he?” she asked, looking into Chesnel’s face.

Then Chesnel read the depths of the poor wife’s mind. Mme. du Croisier was hesitating between her two creeds; between wifely obedience to her husband as laid down by the Church, and obedience to the altar and the throne. Her husband, in her eyes, was acting wrongly, but she dared not blame him; she would fain save the d’Esgrignons, but she was loyal to her husband’s interests.

“Not in the least,” Chesnel answered; “your old notary swears it by the Holy Gospels ——”

He had nothing left to lose for the d’Esgrignons but his soul; he risked it now by this horrible perjury, but Mme. du Croisier must be deceived, there was no other choice but death. Without losing a moment, he dictated a form of receipt by which Mme. du Croisier acknowledged payment of a hundred thousand crowns five days before the fatal letter of exchange appeared; for he recollected that du Croisier was away from home, superintending improvements on his wife’s property at the time.

“Now swear to me that you will declare before the examining magistrate that you received the money on that date,” he said, when Mme. du Croisier had taken the notes and he held the receipt in his hand.

“It will be a lie, will it not?”

“Venial sin,” said Chesnel.

“I could not do it without consulting my director, M. l’Abbe Couturier.”

“Very well,” said Chesnel, “will you be guided entirely by his advice in this affair?”

“I promise that.”

“And you must not give the money to M. du Croisier until you have been before the magistrate.”

“No. Ah! God give me strength to appear in a Court of Justice and maintain a lie before men!”

Chesnel kissed Mme. du Croisier’s hand, then stood upright, and majestic as one of the prophets that Raphael painted in the Vatican.

“You uncle’s soul is thrilled with joy,” he said; “you have wiped out for ever the wrong that you did by marrying an enemy of altar and throne”— words that made a lively impression on Mme. du Croisier’s timorous mind.

Then Chesnel all at once bethought himself that he must make sure of the lady’s director, the Abbe Couturier. He knew how obstinately devout souls can work for the triumph of their views when once they come forward for their side, and wished to secure the concurrence of the Church as early as possible. So he went to the Hotel d’Esgrignon, roused up Mlle. Armande, gave her an account of that night’s work, and sped her to fetch the Bishop himself into the forefront of the battle.

“Ah, God in heaven! Thou must save the house of d’Esgrignon!” he exclaimed, as he went slowly home again. “The affair is developing now into a fight in a Court of Law. We are face to face with men that have passions and interests of their own; we can get anything out of them. This du Croisier has taken advantage of the public prosecutor’s absence; the public prosecutor is devoted to us, but since the opening of the Chambers he has gone to Paris. Now, what can they have done to get round his deputy? They have induced him to take up the charge without consulting his chief. This mystery must be looked into, and the ground surveyed tomorrow; and then, perhaps, when I have unraveled this web of theirs, I will go back to Paris to set great powers at work through Mme. de Maufrigneuse.”

So he reasoned, poor, aged, clear-sighted wrestler, before he lay down half dead with bearing the weight of so much emotion and fatigue. And yet, before he fell asleep he ran a searching eye over the list of magistrates, taking all their secret ambitions into account, casting about for ways of influencing them, calculating his chances in the coming struggle. Chesnel’s prolonged scrutiny of consciences, given in a condensed form, will perhaps serve as a picture of the judicial world in a country town.

Magistrates and officials generally are obliged to begin their career in the provinces; judicial ambition there ferments. At the outset every man looks

towards Paris; they all aspire to shine in the vast theatre where great political causes come before the courts, and the higher branches of the legal profession are closely connected with the palpitating interests of society. But few are called to that paradise of the man of law, and nine-tenths of the profession are bound sooner or later to regard themselves as shelved for good in the provinces. Wherefore, every Tribunal of First Instance and every Court–Royal is sharply divided in two. The first section has given up hope, and is either torpid or content; content with the excessive respect paid to office in a country town, or torpid with tranquillity. The second section is made up of the younger sort, in whom the desire of success is untempered as yet by disappointment, and of the really clever men urged on continually by ambition as with a goad; and these two are possessed with a sort of fanatical belief in their order.

At this time the younger men were full of Royalist zeal against the enemies of the Bourbons. The most insignificant deputy official was dreaming of conducting a prosecution, and praying with all his might for one of those political cases which bring a man's zeal into prominence, draw the attention of the higher powers, and mean advancement for King's men. Was there a member of an official staff of prosecuting counsel who could hear of a Bonapartist conspiracy breaking out somewhere else without a feeling of envy? Where was the man that did not burn to discover a Caron, or a Berton, or a revolt of some sort? With reasons of State, and the necessity of diffusing the monarchical spirit throughout France as their basis, and a fierce ambition stirred up whenever party spirit ran high, these ardent politicians on their promotion were lucid, clear-sighted, and perspicacious. They kept up a vigorous detective system throughout the kingdom; they did the work of spies, and urged the nation along a path of obedience, from which it had no business to swerve.

Justice, thus informed with monarchical enthusiasm, atoned for the errors of the ancient parliaments, and walked, perhaps, too ostentatiously hand in hand with religion. There was more zeal than discretion shown; but justice sinned not so much in the direction of machiavelism as by giving the candid expression to its views, when those views appeared to be opposed to the general interests of a country which must be put safely out of reach of revolutions. But taken as a whole, there was still too much of the bourgeois element in the administration; it was too readily moved by petty liberal agitation; and as a result, it was inevitable that it should incline sooner or later to the Constitutional party, and join ranks with the

bourgeoisie in the day of battle. In the great body of legal functionaries, as in other departments of the administration, there was not wanting a certain hypocrisy, or rather that spirit of imitation which always leads France to model herself on the Court, and, quite unintentionally, to deceive the powers that be.

Officials of both complexions were to be found in the court in which young d'Esgrignon's fate depended. M. le President du Ronceret and an elderly judge, Blondet by name, represented the section of functionaries shelved for good, and resigned to stay where they were; while the young and ambitious party comprised the examining magistrate M. Camusot, and his deputy M. Michu, appointed through the interests of the Cinq–Cygnes, and certain of promotion to the Court of Appeal of Paris at the first opportunity.

President du Ronceret held a permanent post; it was impossible to turn him out. The aristocratic party declined to give him what he considered to be his due, socially speaking; so he declared for the bourgeoisie, glossed over his disappointment with the name of independence, and failed to realize that his opinions condemned him to remain a president of a court of the first instance for the rest of his life. Once started in this track the sequence of events led du Ronceret to place his hopes of advancement on the triumph of du Croisier and the Left. He was in no better odor at the Prefecture than at the Court–Royal. He was compelled to keep on good terms with the authorities; the Liberals distrusted him, consequently he belonged to neither party. He was obliged to resign his chances of election to du Croisier, he exercised no influence, and played a secondary part. The false position reacted on his character; he was soured and discontented; he was tired of political ambiguity, and privately had made up his mind to come forward openly as leader of the Liberal party, and so to strike ahead of du Croisier. His behavior in the d'Esgrignon affair was the first step in this direction. To begin with, he was an admirable representative of that section of the middle classes which allows its petty passions to obscure the wider interests of the country; a class of crotchety politicians, upholding the government one day and opposing it the next, compromising every cause and helping none; helpless after they have done the mischief till they set about brewing more; unwilling to face their own incompetence, thwarting authority while professing to serve it. With a compound of arrogance and humility they demand of the people more submission than kings expect, and fret their souls because those above them are not brought down to their level, as if greatness could be little, as if power existed without force.

President du Ronceret was a tall, spare man with a receding forehead and scanty, auburn hair. He was wall-eyed, his complexion was blotched, his lips thin and hard, his scarcely audible voice came out like the husky wheezings of asthma. He had for a wife a great, solemn, clumsy creature, tricked out in the most ridiculous fashion, and outrageously overdressed. Mme. la Presidente gave herself the airs of a queen; she wore vivid colors, and always appeared at balls adorned with the turban, dear to the British female, and lovingly cultivated in out-of-the-way districts in France. Each of the pair had an income of four or five thousand francs, which with the President's salary, reached a total of some twelve thousand. In spite of a decided tendency to parsimony, vanity required that they should receive one evening in the week. Du Croisier might import modern luxury into the town, M. and Mme. de Ronceret were faithful to the old traditions. They had always lived in the old-fashioned house belonging to Mme. du Ronceret, and had made no changes in it since their marriage. The house stood between a garden and a courtyard. The gray old gable end, with one window in each story, gave upon the road. High walls enclosed the garden and the yard, but the space taken up beneath them in the garden by a walk shaded with chestnut trees was filled in the yard by a row of outbuildings. An old rust-devoured iron gate in the garden wall balanced the yard gateway, a huge, double-leaved carriage entrance with a buttress on either side, and a mighty shell on the top. The same shell was repeated over the house-door.

The whole place was gloomy, close, and airless. The row of iron-gated openings in the opposite wall, as you entered, reminded you of prison windows. Every passer-by could look in through the railings to see how the garden grew; the flowers in the little square borders never seemed to thrive there.

The drawing-room on the ground floor was lighted by a single window on the side of the street, and a French window above a flight of steps, which gave upon the garden. The dining-room on the other side of the great ante-chamber, with its windows also looking out into the garden, was exactly the same size as the drawing-room, and all three apartments were in harmony with the general air of gloom. It wearied your eyes to look at the ceilings all divided up by huge painted crossbeams and adorned with a feeble lozenge pattern or a rosette in the middle. The paint was old, startling in tint, and begrimed with smoke. The sun had faded the heavy silk curtains in the drawing-room; the old-fashioned Beauvais tapestry which covered the white-painted furniture had lost all its color with wear. A Louis

Quinze clock on the chimney-piece stood between two extravagant, branched sconces filled with yellow wax candles, which the Presidente only lighted on occasions when the old-fashioned rock-crystal chandelier emerged from its green wrapper. Three card-tables, covered with threadbare baize, and a backgammon box, sufficed for the recreations of the company; and Mme. du Ronceret treated them to such refreshments as cider, chestnuts, pastry puffs, glasses of eau sucree, and home-made orgeat. For some time past she had made a practice of giving a party once a fortnight, when tea and some pitiable attempts at pastry appeared to grace the occasion.

Once a quarter the du Roncerets gave a grand three-course dinner, which made a great sensation in the town, a dinner served up in execrable ware, but prepared with the science for which the provincial cook is remarkable. It was a Gargantuan repast, which lasted for six whole hours, and by abundance the President tried to vie with du Croisier's elegance.

And so du Ronceret's life and its accessories were just what might have been expected from his character and his false position. He felt dissatisfied at home without precisely knowing what was the matter; but he dared not go to any expense to change existing conditions, and was only too glad to put by seven or eight thousand francs every year, so as to leave his son Fabien a handsome private fortune. Fabien du Ronceret had no mind for the magistracy, the bar, or the civil service, and his pronounced turn for doing nothing drove his parent to despair.

On this head there was rivalry between the President and the Vice–President, old M. Blondet. M. Blondet, for a long time past, had been sedulously cultivating an acquaintance between his son and the Blandureau family. The Blandureaus were well-to-do linen manufacturers, with an only daughter, and it was on this daughter that the President had fixed his choice of a wife for Fabien. Now, Joseph Blondet's marriage with Mlle. Blandureau depended on his nomination to the post which his father, old Blondet, hoped to obtain for him when he himself should retire. But President du Ronceret, in underhand ways, was thwarting the old man's plans, and working indirectly upon the Blandureaus. Indeed, if it had not been for this affair of young d'Esgrignon's, the astute President might have cut them out, father and son, for their rivals were very much richer.

M. Blondet, the victim of the machiavelian President's intrigues, was one of the curious figures which lie buried away in the provinces like old coins in a crypt.

He was at that time a man of sixty-seven or thereabouts, but he carried his years well; he was very tall, and in build reminded you of the canons of the good old times. The smallpox had riddled his face with numberless dints, and spoilt the shape of his nose by imparting to it a gimlet-like twist; it was a countenance by no means lacking in character, very evenly tinted with a diffused red, lighted up by a pair of bright little eyes, with a sardonic look in them, while a certain sarcastic twitch of the purpled lips gave expression to that feature.

Before the Revolution broke out, Blondet senior had been a barrister; afterwards he became the public accuser, and one of the mildest of those formidable functionaries. Goodman Blondet, as they used to call him, deadened the force of the new doctrines by acquiescing in them all, and putting none of them in practice. He had been obliged to send one or two nobles to prison; but his further proceedings were marked with such deliberation, that he brought them through to the 9th Thermidor with a dexterity which won respect for him on all sides. As a matter of fact, Goodman Blondet ought to have been President of the Tribunal, but when the courts of law were reorganized he had been set aside; Napoleon's aversion for Republicans was apt to reappear in the smallest appointments under his government. The qualification of expublic accuser, written in the margin of the list against Blondet's name, set the Emperor inquiring of Cambaceres whether there might not be some scion of an ancient parliamentary stock to appoint instead. The consequence was that du Ronceret, whose father had been a councillor of parliament, was nominated to the presidency; but, the Emperor's repugnance notwithstanding, Cambaceres allowed Blondet to remain on the bench, saying that the old barrister was one of the best jurisconsults in France.

Blondet's talents, his knowledge of the old law of the land and subsequent legislation, should by rights have brought him far in his profession; but he had this much in common with some few great spirits: he entertained a prodigious contempt for his own special knowledge, and reserved all his pretentions, leisure, and capacity for a second pursuit unconnected with the law. To this pursuit he gave his almost exclusive attention. The good man was passionately fond of gardening. He was in correspondence with some of the most celebrated amateurs; it was his ambition to create new species; he took an interest in botanical discoveries, and lived, in short, in the world of flowers. Like all florists, he had a predilection for one particular plant; the pelargonium was his especial favorite.

The court, the cases that came before it, and his outward life were as nothing to him compared with the inward life of fancies and abundant emotions which the old man led. He fell more and more in love with his flower-seraglio; and the pains which he bestowed on his garden, the sweet round of the labors of the months, held Goodman Blondet fast in his greenhouse. But for that hobby he would have been a deputy under the Empire, and shone conspicuous beyond a doubt in the Corps Legislatif.

His marriage was the second cause of his obscurity. As a man of forty, he was rash enough to marry a girl of eighteen, by whom he had a son named Joseph in the first year of their marriage. Three years afterwards Mme. Blondet, then the prettiest woman in the town, inspired in the prefect of the department a passion which ended only with her death. The prefect was the father of her second son Emile; the whole town knew this, old Blondet himself knew it. The wife who might have roused her husband's ambition, who might have won him away from his flowers, positively encouraged the judge in his botanical tastes. She no more cared to leave the place than the prefect cared to leave his prefecture so long as his mistress lived.

Blondet felt himself unequal at his age to a contest with a young wife. He sought consolation in his greenhouse, and engaged a very pretty servant-maid to assist him to tend his ever-changing bevy of beauties. So while the judge potted, pricked out, watered, layered, slipped, blended, and induced his flowers to break, Mme. Blondet spent his substance on the dress and finery in which she shone at the prefecture. One interest alone had power to draw her away from the tender care of a romantic affection which the town came to admire in the end; and this interest was Emile's education. The child of love was a bright and pretty boy, while Joseph was no less heavy and plain-featured. The old judge, blinded by paternal affection loved Joseph as his wife loved Emile.

For a dozen years M. Blondet bore his lot with perfect resignation. He shut his eyes to his wife's intrigue with a dignified, well-bred composure, quite in the style of an eighteenth century grand seigneur; but, like all men with a taste for a quiet life, he could cherish a profound dislike, and he hated his younger son. When his wife died, therefore, in 1818, he turned the intruder out of the house, and packed him off to Paris to study law on an allowance of twelve hundred francs for all resource, nor could any cry of distress extract another penny from his purse.

Emile Blondet would have gone under if it had not been for his real father.

M. Blondet's house was one of the prettiest in the town. It stood almost opposite the prefecture, with a neat little court in front. A row of old-fashioned iron railings between two brick-work piers enclosed it from the street; and a low wall, also of brick, with a second row of railings along the top, connected the piers with the neighboring house. The little court, a space about ten fathoms in width by twenty in length, was cut in two by a brick pathway which ran from the gate to the house door between a border on either side. Those borders were always renewed; at every season of the year they exhibited a successful show of blossom, to the admiration of the public. All along the back of the gardenbeds a quantity of climbing plants grew up and covered the walls of the neighboring houses with a magnificent mantle; the brick-work piers were hidden in clusters of honeysuckle; and, to crown all, in a couple of terra-cotta vases at the summit, a pair of acclimatized cactuses displayed to the astonished eyes of the ignorant those thick leaves bristling with spiny defences which seem to be due to some plant disease.

It was a plain-looking house, built of brick, with brick-work arches above the windows, and bright green Venetian shutters to make it gay. Through the glass door you could look straight across the house to the opposite glass door, at the end of a long passage, and down the central alley in the garden beyond; while through the windows of the dining-room and drawing-room, which extended, like the passage from back to front of the house, you could often catch further glimpses of the flower-beds in a garden of about two acres in extent. Seen from the road, the brick-work harmonized with the fresh flowers and shrubs, for two centuries had overlaid it with mosses and green and russet tints. No one could pass through the town without falling in love with a house with such charming surroundings, so covered with flowers and mosses to the roof-ridge, where two pigeons of glazed crockery ware were perched by way of ornament.

M. Blondet possessed an income of about four thousand livres derived from land, besides the old house in the town. He meant to avenge his wrongs legitimately enough. He would leave his house, his lands, his seat on the bench to his son Joseph, and the whole town knew what he meant to do. He had made a will in that son's favor; he had gone as far as the Code will permit a man to go in the way of disinheriting one child to benefit another; and what was more, he had been putting by money for the past fifteen years to enable his lout of a son to buy

back from Emile that portion of his father's estate which could not legally be taken away from him.

Emile Blondet thus turned adrift had contrived to gain distinction in Paris, but so far it was rather a name than a practical result. Emile's indolence, recklessness, and happy-go-lucky ways drove his real father to despair; and when that father died, a half-ruined man, turned out of office by one of the political reactions so frequent under the Restoration, it was with a mind uneasy as to the future of a man endowed with the most brilliant qualities.

Emile Blondet found support in a friendship with a Mlle. de Troisville, whom he had known before her marriage with the Comte de Montcornet. His mother was living when the Troisvilles came back after the emigration; she was related to the family, distantly it is true, but the connection was close enough to allow her to introduce Emile to the house. She, poor woman, foresaw the future. She knew that when she died her son would lose both mother and father, a thought which made death doubly bitter, so she tried to interest others in him. She encouraged the liking that sprang up between Emile and the eldest daughter of the house of Troisville; but while the liking was exceedingly strong on the young lady's part, a marriage was out of the question. It was a romance on the pattern of Paul et Virginie. Mme. Blondet did what she could to teach her son to look to the Troisvilles, to found a lasting attachment on a children's game of "make-believe" love, which was bound to end as boy-and-girl romances usually do. When Mlle. de Troisville's marriage with General Montcornet was announced, Mme. Blondet, a dying woman, went to the bride and solemnly implored her never to abandon Emile, and to use her influence for him in society in Paris, whither the General's fortune summoned her to shine.

Luckily for Emile, he was able to make his own way. He made his appearance, at the age of twenty, as one of the masters of modern literature; and met with no less success in the society into which he was launched by the father who at first could afford to bear the expense of the young man's extravagance. Perhaps Emile's precocious celebrity and the good figure that he made strengthened the bonds of his friendship with the Countess. Perhaps Mme. de Montcornet, with the Russian blood in her veins (her mother was the daughter of the Princess Scherbelloff), might have cast off the friend of her childhood if he had been a poor man struggling with all his might among the difficulties which beset a man of letters in

Paris; but by the time that the real strain of Emile's adventurous life began, their attachment was unalterable on either side. He was looked upon as one of the leading lights of journalism when young d'Esgrignon met him at his first supper party in Paris; his acknowledged position in the world of letters was very high, and he towered above his reputation. Goodman Blondet had not the faintest conception of the power which the Constitutional Government had given to the press; nobody ventured to talk in his presence of the son of whom he refused to hear. And so it came to pass that he knew nothing of Emile whom he had cursed and Emile's greatness.

Old Blondet's integrity was as deeply rooted in him as his passion for flowers; he knew nothing but law and botany. He would have interviews with litigants, listen to them, chat with them, and show them his flowers; he would accept rare seeds from them; but once on the bench, no judge on earth was more impartial. Indeed, his manner of proceeding was so well known, that litigants never went near him except to hand over some document which might enlighten him in the performance of his duty, and nobody tried to throw dust in his eyes. With his learning, his lights, and his way of holding his real talents cheap, he was so indispensable to President du Ronceret, that, matrimonial schemes apart, that functionary would have done all that he could, in an underhand way, to prevent the vice-president from retiring in favor of his son. If the learned old man left the bench, the President would be utterly unable to do without him.

Goodman Blondet did not know that it was in Emile's power to fulfil all his wishes in a few hours. The simplicity of his life was worthy of one of Plutarch's men. In the evening he looked over his cases; next morning he worked among his flowers; and all day long he gave decisions on the bench. The pretty maid-servant, now of ripe age, and wrinkled like an Easter pippin, looked after the house, and they lived according to the established customs of the strictest parsimony. Mlle. Cadot always carried the keys of her cupboards and fruit-loft about with her. She was indefatigable. She went to market herself, she cooked and dusted and swept, and never missed mass of a morning. To give some idea of the domestic life of the household, it will be enough to remark that the father and son never ate fruit till it was beginning to spoil, because Mlle. Cadot always brought out anything that would not keep. No one in the house ever tasted the luxury of new bread, and all the fast days in the calendar were punctually observed. The gardener was put on rations like a soldier; the elderly Valideh always kept an eye upon him. And she,

for her part, was so deferentially treated, that she took her meals with the family, and in consequence was continually trotting to and fro between the kitchen and the parlor at breakfast and dinner time.

Mlle. Blandureau's parents had consented to her marriage with Joseph Blondet upon one condition — the penniless and briefless barrister must be an assistant judge. So, with the desire of fitting his son to fill the position, old M. Blondet racked his brains to hammer the law into his son's head by dint of lessons, so as to make a cut-and-dried lawyer of him. As for Blondet junior, he spent almost every evening at the Blandureaus' house, to which also young Fabien du Ronceret had been admitted since his return, without raising the slightest suspicion in the minds of father or son.

Everything in this life of theirs was measured with an accuracy worthy of Gerard Dow's Money Changer; not a grain of salt too much, not a single profit foregone; but the economical principles by which it was regulated were relaxed in favor of the greenhouse and garden. "The garden was the master's craze," Mlle. Cadot used to say. The master's blind fondness for Joseph was not a craze in her eyes; she shared the father's predilection; she pampered Joseph; she darned his stockings; and would have been better pleased if the money spent on the garden had been put by for Joseph's benefit.

That garden was kept in marvelous order by a single man; the paths, covered with river-sand, continually turned over with the rake, meandered among the borders full of the rarest flowers. Here were all kinds of color and scent, here were lizards on the walls, legions of little flower-pots standing out in the sun, regiments of forks and hoes, and a host of innocent things, a combination of pleasant results to justify the gardener's charming hobby.

At the end of the greenhouse the judge had set up a grandstand, an amphitheatre of benches to hold some five or six thousand pelargoniums in pots — a splendid and famous show. People came to see his geraniums in flower, not only from the neighborhood, but even from the departments round about. The Empress Marie Louise, passing through the town, had honored the curiously kept greenhouse with a visit; so much was she impressed with the sight, that she spoke of it to Napoleon, and the old judge received the Cross of the Legion of Honor. But as the learned gardener never mingled in society at all, and went nowhere except to the Blandureaus, he had no suspicion of the President's underhand

manoeuvres; and others who could see the President's intentions were far too much afraid of him to interfere or to warn the inoffensive Blondets.

As for Michu, that young man with his powerful connections gave much more thought to making himself agreeable to the women in the upper social circles to which he was introduced by the Cinq–Cygnes, than to the extremely simple business of a provincial Tribunal. With his independent means (he had an income of twelve thousand livres), he was courted by mothers of daughters, and led a frivolous life. He did just enough at the Tribunal to satisfy his conscience, much as a schoolboy does his exercises, saying ditto on all occasions, with a "Yes, dear President." But underneath the appearance of indifference lurked the unusual powers of the Paris law student who had distinguished himself as one of the staff of prosecuting counsel before he came to the provinces. He was accustomed to taking broad views of things; he could do rapidly what the President and Blondet could only do after much thinking, and very often solved knotty points for them. In delicate conjunctures the President and Vice–President took counsel with their junior, confided thorny questions to him, and never failed to wonder at the readiness with which he brought back a task in which old Blondet found nothing to criticise. Michu was sure of the influence of the most crabbed aristocrats, and he was young and rich; he lived, therefore, above the level of departmental intrigues and pettinesses. He was an indispensable man at picnics, he frisked with young ladies and paid court to their mothers, he danced at balls, he gambled like a capitalist. In short, he played his part of young lawyer of fashion to admiration; without, at the same time, compromising his dignity, which he knew how to assert at the right moment like a man of spirit. He won golden opinions by the manner in which he threw himself into provincial ways, without criticising them; and for these reasons, every one endeavored to make his time of exile endurable.

The public prosecutor was a lawyer of the highest ability; he had taken the plunge into political life, and was one of the most distinguished speakers on the ministerialist benches. The President stood in awe of him; if he had not been away in Paris at the time, no steps would have been taken against Victurnien; his dexterity, his experience of business, would have prevented the whole affair. At that moment, however, he was in the Chamber of Deputies, and the President and du Croisier had taken advantage of his absence to weave their plot, calculating, with a certain ingenuity, that if once the law stepped in, and the matter was noised abroad, things would have gone too far to be remedied.

As a matter of fact, no staff of prosecuting counsel in any Tribunal, at that particular time, would have taken up a charge of forgery against the eldest son of one of the noblest houses in France without going into the case at great length, and a special reference, in all probability, to the Attorney–General. In such a case as this, the authorities and the Government would have tried endless ways of compromising and hushing up an affair which might send an imprudent young man to the hulks. They would very likely have done the same for a Liberal family in a prominent position, so long as the Liberals were not too openly hostile to the throne and the altar. So du Croisier's charge and the young Count's arrest had not been very easy to manage. The President and du Croisier had compassed their ends in the following manner.

M. Sauvager, a young Royalist barrister, had reached the position of deputy public prosecutor by dint of subservience to the Ministry. In the absence of his chief he was head of the staff of counsel for prosecution, and, consequently, it fell to him to take up the charge made by du Croisier. Sauvager was a self-made man; he had nothing but his stipend; and for that reason the authorities reckoned upon some one who had everything to gain by devotion. The President now exploited the position. No sooner was the document with the alleged forgery in du Croisier's hands, than Mme. la Presidente du Ronceret, prompted by her spouse, had a long conversation with M. Sauvager. In the course of it she pointed out the uncertainties of a career in the magistrature debout compared with the magistrature assise, and the advantages of the bench over the bar; she showed how a freak on the part of some official, or a single false step, might ruin a man's career.

"If you are conscientious and give your conclusions against the powers that be, you are lost," continued she. "Now, at this moment, you might turn your position to account to make a fine match that would put you above unlucky chances for the rest of your life; you may marry a wife with fortune sufficient to land you on the bench, in the magistrature assise. There is a fine chance for you. M. du Croisier will never have any children; everybody knows why. His money, and his wife's as well, will go to his niece, Mlle. Duval. M. Duval is an ironmaster, his purse is tolerably filled, to begin with, and his father is still alive, and has a little property besides. The father and son have a million of francs between them; they will double it with du Croisier's help, for du Croisier has business connections among great capitalists and manufacturers in Paris. M. and Mme. Duval the

younger would be certain to give their daughter to a suitor brought forward by du Croisier, for he is sure to leave two fortunes to his niece; and, in all probability, he will settle the reversion of his wife's property upon Mlle. Duval in the marriage contract, for Mme. du Croisier has no kin. You know how du Croisier hates the d'Esgrignons. Do him a service, be his man, take up this charge of forgery which he is going to make against young d'Esgrignon, and follow up the proceedings at once without consulting the public prosecutor at Paris. And, then, pray Heaven that the Ministry dismisses you for doing your office impartially, in spite of the powers that be; for if they do, your fortune is made! You will have a charming wife and thirty thousand francs a year with her, to say nothing of four millions expectations in ten years' time."

In two evenings Sauvager was talked over. Both he and the President kept the affair a secret from old Blondet, from Michu, and from the second member of the staff of prosecuting counsel. Feeling sure of Blondet's impartiality on a question of fact, the President made certain of a majority without counting Camusot. And now Camusot's unexpected defection had thrown everything out. What the President wanted was a committal for trial before the public prosecutor got warning. How if Camusot or the second counsel for the prosecution should send word to Paris?

And here some portion of Camusot's private history may perhaps explain how it came to pass that Chesnel took it for granted that the examining magistrate would be on the d'Esgrignons' side, and how he had the boldness to tamper in the open street with that representative of justice.

Camusot's father, a well-known silk mercer in the Rue des Bourdonnais, was ambitious for the only son of his first marriage, and brought him up to the law. When Camusot junior took a wife, he gained with her the influence of an usher of the Royal cabinet, backstairs influence, it is true, but still sufficient, since it had brought him his first appointment as justice of the peace, and the second as examining magistrate. At the time of his marriage, his father only settled an income of six thousand francs upon him (the amount of his mother's fortune, which he could legally claim), and as Mlle. Thirion brought him no more than twenty thousand francs as her portion, the young couple knew the hardships of hidden poverty. The salary of a provincial justice of the peace does not exceed fifteen hundred francs, while an examining magistrate's stipend is augmented by something like a thousand francs, because his position entails expenses and extra

work. The post, therefore, is much coveted, though it is not permanent, and the work is heavy, and that was why Mme. Camusot had just scolded her husband for allowing the President to read his thoughts.

Marie Cecile Amelie Thirion, after three years of marriage, perceived the blessing of Heaven upon it in the regularity of two auspicious events — the births of a girl and a boy; but she prayed to be less blessed in the future. A few more of such blessings would turn straitened means into distress. M. Camusot's father's money was not likely to come to them for a long time; and, rich as he was, he would scarcely leave more than eight or ten thousand francs a year to each of his children, four in number, for he had been married twice. And besides, by the time that all "expectations," as matchmakers call them, were realized, would not the magistrate have children of his own to settle in life? Any one can imagine the situation for a little woman with plenty of sense and determination, and Mme. Camusot was such a woman. She did not refrain from meddling in matters judicial. She had far too strong a sense of the gravity of a false step in her husband's career.

She was the only child of an old servant of Louis XVIII., a valet who had followed his master in his wanderings in Italy, Courland, and England, till after the Restoration the King awarded him with the one place that he could fill at Court, and made him usher by rotation to the royal cabinet. So in Amelie's home there had been, as it were, a sort of reflection of the Court. Thirion used to tell her about the lords, and ministers, and great men whom he announced and introduced and saw passing to and fro. The girl, brought up at the gates of the Tuileries, had caught some tincture of the maxims practised there, and adopted the dogma of passive obedience to authority. She had sagely judged that her husband, by ranging himself on the side of the d'Esgrignons, would find favor with Mme. la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and with two powerful families on whose influence with the King the Sieur Thirion could depend at an opportune moment. Camusot might get an appointment at the first opportunity within the jurisdiction of Paris, and afterwards at Paris itself. That promotion, dreamed of and longed for at every moment, was certain to have a salary of six thousand francs attached to it, as well as the alleviation of living in her own father's house, or under the Camusots' roof, and all the advantages of a father's fortune on either side. If the adage, "Out of sight is out of mind," holds good of most women, it is particularly true where family feeling or royal or ministerial patronage is concerned. The

personal attendants of kings prosper at all times; you take an interest in a man, be it only a man in livery, if you see him every day.

Mme. Camusot, regarding herself as a bird of passage, had taken a little house in the Rue du Cygne. Furnished lodgings there were none; the town was not enough of a thoroughfare, and the Camusots could not afford to live at an inn like M. Michu. So the fair Parisian had no choice for it but to take such furniture as she could find; and as she paid a very moderate rent, the house was remarkably ugly, albeit a certain quaintness of detail was not wanting. It was built against a neighboring house in such a fashion that the side with only one window in each story, gave upon the street, and the front looked out upon a yard where rose-bushes and buckhorn were growing along the wall on either side. On the farther side, opposite the house, stood a shed, a roof over two brick arches. A little wicket-gate gave entrance into the gloomy place (made gloomier still by the great walnut-tree which grew in the yard), but a double flight of steps, with an elaborately-wrought but rust-eaten handrail, led to the house door. Inside the house there were two rooms on each floor. The dining-room occupied that part of the ground floor nearest the street, and the kitchen lay on the other side of a narrow passage almost wholly taken up by the wooden staircase. Of the two first-floor rooms, one did duty as the magistrate's study, the other as a bedroom, while the nursery and the servants' bedroom stood above in the attics. There were no ceilings in the house; the cross-beams were simply white-washed and the spaces plastered over. Both rooms on the first floor and the dining-room below were wainscoted and adorned with the labyrinthine designs which taxed the patience of the eighteenth century joiner; but the carving had been painted a dingy gray most depressing to behold.

The magistrate's study looked as though it belonged to a provincial lawyer; it contained a big bureau, a mahogany armchair, a law student's books, and shabby belongings transported from Paris. Mme. Camusot's room was more of a native product; it boasted a blue-and-white scheme of decoration, a carpet, and that anomalous kind of furniture which appears to be in the fashion, while it is simply some style that has failed in Paris. As to the dining-room, it was nothing but an ordinary provincial dining-room, bare and chilly, with a damp, faded paper on the walls.

In this shabby room, with nothing to see but the walnut-tree, the dark leaves

growing against the walls, and the almost deserted road beyond them, a somewhat lively and frivolous woman, accustomed to the amusements and stir of Paris, used to sit all day long, day after day, and for the most part of the time alone, though she received tiresome and inane visits which led her to think her loneliness preferable to empty tittle-tattle. If she permitted herself the slightest gleam of intelligence, it gave rise to interminable comment and embittered her condition. She occupied herself a great deal with her children, not so much from taste as for the sake of an interest in her almost solitary life, and exercised her mind on the only subjects which she could find — to wit, the intrigues which went on around her, the ways of provincials, and the ambitions shut in by their narrow horizons. So she very soon fathomed mysteries of which her husband had no idea. As she sat at her window with a piece of intermittent embroidery work in her fingers, she did not see her woodshed full of faggots nor the servant busy at the wash tub; she was looking out upon Paris, Paris where everything is pleasure, everything is full of life. She dreamed of Paris gaieties, and shed tears because she must abide in this dull prison of a country town. She was disconsolate because she lived in a peaceful district, where no conspiracy, no great affair would ever occur. She saw herself doomed to sit under the shadow of the walnut-tree for some time to come.

Mme. Camusot was a little, plump, fresh, fair-haired woman, with a very prominent forehead, a mouth which receded, and a turned-up chin, a type of countenance which is passable in youth, but looks old before the time. Her bright, quick eyes expressed her innocent desire to get on in the world, and the envy born of her present inferior position, with rather too much candor; but still they lighted up her commonplace face and set it off with a certain energy of feeling, which success was certain to extinguish in later life. At that time she used to give a good deal of time and thought to her dresses, inventing trimmings and embroidering them; she planned out her costumes with the maid whom she had brought with her from Paris, and so maintained the reputation of Parisiennes in the provinces. Her caustic tongue was dreaded; she was not loved. In that keen, investigating spirit peculiar to unoccupied women who are driven to find some occupation for empty days, she had pondered the President's private opinions, until at length she discovered what he meant to do, and for some time past she had advised Camusot to declare war. The young Count's affair was an excellent opportunity. Was it not obviously Camusot's part to make a stepping-stone of this criminal case by favoring the d'Esgrignons, a family with power of a very different kind from the

power of the du Croisier party?

"Sauvager will never marry Mlle. Duval. They are dangling her before him, but he will be the dupe of those Machiavels in the Val–Noble to whom he is going to sacrifice his position. Camusot, this affair, so unfortunate as it is for the d'Esgrignons, so insidiously brought on by the President for du Croisier's benefit, will turn out well for nobody but *you*," she had said, as they went in.

The shrewd Parisienne had likewise guessed the President's underhand manoeuvres with the Blandureaus, and his object in baffling old Blondet's efforts, but she saw nothing to be gained by opening the eyes of father or son to the perils of the situation; she was enjoying the beginning of the comedy; she knew about the proposals made by Chesnel's successor on behalf of Fabien du Ronceret, but she did not suspect how important that secret might be to her. If she or her husband were threatened by the President, Mme. Camusot could threaten too, in her turn, to call the amateur gardener's attention to a scheme for carrying off the flower which he meant to transplant into his house.

Chesnel had not penetrated, like Mme. Camusot, into the means by which Sauvager had been won over; but by dint of looking into the various lives and interests of the men grouped about the Lilies of the Tribunal, he knew that he could count upon the public prosecutor, upon Camusot, and M. Michu. Two judges for the d'Esgrignons would paralyze the rest. And, finally, Chesnel knew old Blondet well enough to feel sure that if he ever swerved from impartiality, it would be for the sake of the work of his whole lifetime — to secure his son's appointment. So Chesnel slept, full of confidence, on the resolve to go to M. Blondet and offer to realize his so long cherished hopes, while he opened his eyes to President du Ronceret's treachery. Blondet won over, he would take a peremptory tone with the examining magistrate, to whom he hoped to prove that if Victurnien was not blameless, he had been merely imprudent; the whole thing should be shown in the light of a boy's thoughtless escapade.

But Chesnel slept neither soundly nor for long. Before dawn he was awakened by his housekeeper. The most bewitching person in this history, the most adorable youth on the face of the globe, Mme. la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse herself, in man's attire, had driven alone from Paris in a caleche, and was waiting to see him.

"I have come to save him or to die with him," said she, addressing the notary, who thought that he was dreaming. "I have brought a hundred thousand francs,

given me by His Majesty out of his private purse, to buy Victurnien's innocence, if his adversary can be bribed. If we fail utterly, I have brought poison to snatch him away before anything takes place, before even the indictment is drawn up. But we shall not fail. I have sent word to the public prosecutor; he is on the road behind me; he could not travel in my caleche, because he wished to take the instructions of the Keeper of the Seals."

Chesnel rose to the occasion and played up to the Duchess; he wrapped himself in his dressing-gown, fell at her feet, and kissed them, not without asking her pardon for forgetting himself in his joy.

"We are saved!" cried he; and gave orders to Brigitte to see that Mme. la Duchesse had all that she needed after traveling post all night. He appealed to the fair Diane's spirit, by making her see that it was absolutely necessary that she should visit the examining magistrate before daylight, lest any one should discover the secret, or so much as imagine that the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had come.

"And have I not a passport in due form?" quoth she, displaying a sheet of paper, wherein she was described as M. le Vicomte Felix de Vandeness, Master of Requests, and His Majesty's private secretary. "And do I not play my man's part well?" she added, running her fingers through her wig a la Titus, and twirling her riding switch.

"O! Mme. la Duchesse, you are an angel!" cried Chesnel, with tears in his eyes. (She was destined always to be an angel, even in man's attire.) "Button up your greatcoat, muffle yourself up to the eyes in your traveling cloak, take my arm, and let us go as quickly as possible to Camusot's house before anybody can meet us."

"Then am I going to see a man called Camusot?" she asked.

"With a nose to match his name,"[2] assented Chesnel.

[2] Camus, flat-nosed

The old notary felt his heart dead within him, but he thought it none the less necessary to humor the Duchess, to laugh when she laughed, and shed tears when she wept; groaning in spirit, all the same, over the feminine frivolity which could find matter for a jest while setting about a matter so serious. What would he not have done to save the Count? While Chesnel dressed; Mme. de Maufrigneuse sipped the cup of coffee and cream which Brigitte brought her, and agreed with herself that provincial women cooks are superior to Parisian chefs, who despise

the little details which make all the difference to an epicure. Thanks to Chesnel's taste for delicate fare, Brigitte was found prepared to set an excellent meal before the Duchess.

Chesnel and his charming companion set out for M. and Mme. Camusot's house.

"Ah! so there is a Mme. Camusot?" said the Duchess. "Then the affair may be managed."

"And so much the more readily, because the lady is visibly tired enough of living among us provincials; she comes from Paris," said Chesnel.

"Then we must have no secrets from her?"

"You will judge how much to tell or to conceal," Chesnel replied humbly. "I am sure that she will be greatly flattered to be the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse's hostess; you will be obliged to stay in her house until nightfall, I expect, unless you find it inconvenient to remain."

"Is this Mme. Camusot a good-looking woman?" asked the Duchess, with a coxcomb's air.

"She is a bit of a queen in her own house."

"Then she is sure to meddle in court-house affairs," returned the Duchess. "Nowhere but in France, my dear M. Chesnel, do you see women so much wedded to their husbands that they are wedded to their husband's professions, work, or business as well. In Italy, England, and Germany, women make it a point of honor to leave men to fight their own battles; they shut their eyes to their husbands' work as perseveringly as our French citizens' wives do all that in them lies to understand the position of their joint-stock partnership; is not that what you call it in your legal language? Frenchwomen are so incredibly jealous in the conduct of their married life, that they insist on knowing everything; and that is how, in the least difficulty, you feel the wife's hand in the business; the Frenchwoman advises, guides, and warns her husband. And, truth to tell, the man is none the worse off. In England, if a married man is put in prison for debt for twenty-four hours, his wife will be jealous and make a scene when he comes back."

"Here we are, without meeting a soul on the way," said Chesnel. "You are the more sure of complete ascendency here, Mme. la Duchesse, since Mme. Camusot's

father is one Thirion, usher of the royal cabinet.”

“And the King never thought of that!” exclaimed the Duchess. “He thinks of nothing! Thirion introduced us, the Prince de Cadignan, M. de Vandeness, and me! We shall have it all our own way in this house. Settle everything with M. Camusot while I talk to his wife.”

The maid, who was washing and dressing the children, showed the visitors into the little fireless dining-room.

“Take that card to your mistress,” said the Duchess, lowering her voice for the woman’s ear; “nobody else is to see it. If you are discreet, child, you shall not lose by it.”

At the sound of a woman’s voice, and the sight of the handsome young man’s face, the maid looked thunderstruck.

“Wake M. Camusot,” said Chesnel, “and tell him, that I am waiting to see him on important business,” and she departed upstairs forthwith.

A few minutes later Mme. Camusot, in her dressing-gown, sprang downstairs and brought the handsome stranger into her room. She had pushed Camusot out of bed and into his study with all his clothes, bidding him dress himself at once and wait there. The transformation scene had been brought about by a bit of pasteboard with the words MADAME LA DUCHESSE DE MAUFRIGNEUSE engraved upon it. A daughter of the usher of the royal cabinet took in the whole situation at once.

“Well!” exclaimed the maid-servant, left with Chesnel in the dining-room, “Would not any one think that a thunderbolt had dropped in among us? The master is dressing in his study; you can go upstairs.”

“Not a word of all this, mind,” said Chesnel.

Now that he was conscious of the support of a great lady who had the King’s consent (by word of mouth) to the measures about to be taken for rescuing the Comte d’Esgrignon, he spoke with an air of authority, which served his cause much better with Camusot than the humility with which he would otherwise have approached him.

“Sir,” said he, “the words let fall last evening may have surprised you, but they are serious. The house of d’Esgrignon counts upon you for the proper conduct of

investigations from which it must issue without a spot.”

“I shall pass over anything in your remarks, sir, which must be offensive to me personally, and obnoxious to justice; for your position with regard to the d’Esgrignons excuses you up to a certain point, but ——”

“Pardon me, sir, if I interrupt you,” said Chesnel. “I have just spoken aloud the things which your superiors are thinking and dare not avow; though what those things are any intelligent man can guess, and you are an intelligent man. — Grant that the young man had acted imprudently, can you suppose that the sight of a d’Esgrignon dragged into an Assize Court can be gratifying to the King, the Court, or the Ministry? Is it to the interest of the kingdom, or of the country, that historic houses should fall? Is not the existence of a great aristocracy, consecrated by time, a guarantee of that Equality which is the catchword of the Opposition at this moment? Well and good; now not only has there not been the slightest imprudence, but we are innocent victims caught in a trap.”

“I am curious to know how,” said the examining magistrate.

“For the last two years, the Sieur du Croisier has regularly allowed M. le Comte d’Esgrignon to draw upon him for very large sums,” said Chesnel. “We are going to produce drafts for more than a hundred thousand crowns, which he continually met; the amounts being remitted by me — bear that well in mind — either before or after the bills fell due. M. le Comte d’Esgrignon is in a position to produce a receipt for the sum paid by him, before this bill, this alleged forgery was drawn. Can you fail to see in that case that this charge is a piece of spite and party feeling? And a charge brought against the heir of a great house by one of the most dangerous enemies of the Throne and Altar, what is it but an odious slander? There has been no more forgery in this affair than there has been in my office. Summon Mme. du Croisier, who knows nothing as yet of the charge of forgery; she will declare to you that I brought the money and paid it over to her, so that in her husband’s absence she might remit the amount for which he has not asked her. Examine du Croisier on the point; he will tell you that he knows nothing of my payment to Mme. du Croisier.

“You may make such assertions as these, sir, in M. d’Esgrignon’s salon, or in any other house where people know nothing of business, and they may be believed; but no examining magistrate, unless he is a driveling idiot, can imagine that a woman like Mme. du Croisier, so submissive as she is to her husband, has a

hundred thousand crowns lying in her desk at this moment, without saying a word to him; nor yet that an old notary would not have advised M. du Croisier of the deposit on his return to town."

"The old notary, sir, had gone to Paris to put a stop to the young man's extravagance."

"I have not yet examined the Comte d'Esgrignon," Camusot began; "his answers will point out my duty."

"Is he in close custody?"

"Yes."

"Sir," said Chesnel, seeing danger ahead, "the examination can be made in our interests or against them. But there are two courses open to you: you can establish the fact on Mme. du Croisier's deposition that the amount was deposited with her before the bill was drawn; or you can examine the unfortunate young man implicated in this affair, and he in his confusion may remember nothing and commit himself. You will decide which is the more credible — a slip of memory on the part of a woman in her ignorance of business, or a forgery committed by a d'Esgrignon."

"All this is beside the point," began Camusot; "the question is, whether M. le Comte d'Esgrignon has or has not used the lower half of a letter addressed to him by du Croisier as a bill of exchange."

"Eh! and so he might," a voice cried suddenly, as Mme. Camusot broke in, followed by the handsome stranger, "so he might when M. Chesnel had advanced the money to meet the bill ——"

She leant over her husband.

"You will have the first vacant appointment as assistant judge at Paris, you are serving the King himself in this affair; I have proof of it; you will not be forgotten," she said, lowering her voice in his ear. "This young man that you see here is the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse; you must never have seen her, and do all that you can for the young Count boldly."

"Gentlemen," said Camusot, "even if the preliminary examination is conducted to prove the young Count's innocence, can I answer for the view the court may take? M. Chesnel, and you also, my sweet, know what M. le President

wants.”

“Tut, tut, tut!” said Mme. Camusot, “go yourself to M. Michu this morning, and tell him that the Count has been arrested; you will be two against two in that case, I will be bound. *Michu* comes from Paris, and you know he is devoted to the noblesse. Good blood cannot lie.”

At that very moment Mlle. Cadot’s voice was heard in the doorway. She had brought a note, and was waiting for an answer. Camusot went out, and came back again to read the note aloud:

“M. le Vice–President begs M. Camusot to sit in audience today and for the next few days, so that there may be a quorum during M. le President’s absence.”

“Then there is an end of the preliminary examination!” cried Mme. Camusot. “Did I not tell you, dear, that they would play you some ugly trick? The President has gone off to slander you to the public prosecutor and the President of the Court–Royal. You will be changed before you can make the examination. Is that clear?”

“You will stay, monsieur,” said the Duchess. “The public prosecutor is coming, I hope, in time.”

“When the public prosecutor arrives,” little Mme. Camusot said, with some heat, “he must find all over. — Yes, my dear, yes,” she added, looking full at her amazed husband. —“Ah! old hypocrite of a President, you are setting your wits against us; you shall remember it! You have a mind to help us to a dish of your own making, you shall have two served up to you by your humble servant Cecile Amelie Thirion! — Poor old Blondet! It is lucky for him that the President has taken this journey to turn us out, for now that great oaf of a Joseph Blondet will marry Mlle. Blandureau. I will let Father Blondet have some seeds in return. — As for you, Camusot, go to M. Michu’s, while Mme. la Duchesse and I will go to find old Blondet. You must expect to hear it said all over the town tomorrow that I took a walk with a lover this morning.”

Mme. Camusot took the Duchess’ arm, and they went through the town by deserted streets to avoid any unpleasant adventure on the way to the old Vice–President’s house. Chesnel meanwhile conferred with the young Count in prison; Camusot had arranged a stolen interview. Cook-maids, servants, and the other early risers of a country town, seeing Mme. Camusot and the Duchess taking their

way through the back streets, took the young gentleman for an adorer from Paris. That evening, as Cecile Amelie had said, the news of her behavior was circulated about the town, and more than one scandalous rumor was occasioned thereby. Mme. Camusot and her supposed lover found old Blondet in his greenhouse. He greeted his colleague's wife and her companion, and gave the charming young man a keen, uneasy glance.

"I have the honor to introduce one of my husband's cousins," said Mme. Camusot, bringing forward the Duchess; "he is one of the most distinguished horticulturists in Paris; and as he cannot spend more than one day with us, on his way back from Brittany, and has heard of your flowers and plants, I have taken the liberty of coming early."

"Oh, the gentleman is a horticulturist, is he?" said the old Blondet.

The Duchess bowed.

"This is my coffee-plant," said Blondet, "and here is a tea-plant."

"What can have taken M. le President away from home?" put in Mme. Camusot. "I will wager that his absence concerns M. Camusot."

"Exactly. — This, monsieur, is the queerest of all cactuses," he continued, producing a flower-pot which appeared to contain a piece of mildewed rattan; "it comes from Australia. You are very young, sir, to be a horticulturist."

"Dear M. Blondet, never mind your flowers," said Mme. Camusot. "*You* are concerned, you and your hopes, and your son's marriage with Mlle. Blandureau. You are duped by the President."

"Bah!" said old Blondet, with an incredulous air.

"Yes," retorted she. "If you cultivated people a little more and your flowers a little less, you would know that the dowry and the hopes you have sown, and watered, and tilled, and weeded are on the point of being gathered now by cunning hands."

"Madame! ——"

"Oh, nobody in the town will have the courage to fly in the President's face and warn you. I, however, do not belong to the town, and, thanks to this obliging young man, I shall soon be going back to Paris; so I can inform you that Chesnel's successor has made formal proposals for Mlle. Claire Blandureau's hand on behalf

of young du Ronceret, who is to have fifty thousand crowns from his parents. As for Fabien, he has made up his mind to receive a call to the bar, so as to gain an appointment as judge."

Old Blondet dropped the flower-pot which he had brought out for the Duchess to see.

"Oh, my cactus! Oh, my son! and Mlle. Blandureau! . . . Look here! the cactus flower is broken to pieces."

"No," Mme. Camusot answered, laughing; "everything can be put right. If you have a mind to see your son a judge in another month, we will tell you how you must set to work ——"

"Step this way, sir, and you will see my pelargoniums, an enchanting sight while they are in flower ——" Then he added to Mme. Camusot, "Why did you speak of these matters while your cousin was present."

"All depends upon him," riposted Mme. Camusot. "Your son's appointment is lost for ever if you let fall a word about this young man."

"Bah!"

"The young man is a flower ——"

"Ah!"

"He is the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, sent here by His Majesty to save young d'Esgrignon, whom they arrested yesterday on a charge of forgery brought against him by du Croisier. Mme. la Duchesse has authority from the Keeper of the Seals; he will ratify any promises that she makes to us ——"

"My cactus is all right!" exclaimed Blondet, peering at his precious plant. —"Go on, I am listening."

"Take counsel with Camusot and Michu to hush up the affair as soon as possible, and your son will get the appointment. It will come in time enough to baffle du Ronceret's underhand dealings with the Blandureaus. Your son will be something better than assistant judge; he will have M. Camusot's post within the year. The public prosecutor will be here today. M. Sauvager will be obliged to resign, I expect, after his conduct in this affair. At the court my husband will show you documents which completely exonerate the Count and prove that the forgery was a trap of du Croisier's own setting."

Old Blondet went into the Olympic circus where his six thousand pelargoniums stood, and made his bow to the Duchess.

"Monsieur," said he, "if your wishes do not exceed the law, this thing may be done."

"Monsieur," returned the Duchess, "send in your resignation to M. Chesnel tomorrow, and I will promise you that your son shall be appointed within the week; but you must not resign until you have had confirmation of my promise from the public prosecutor. You men of law will come to a better understanding among yourselves. Only let him know that the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had pledged her word to you. And not a word as to my journey hither," she added.

The old judge kissed her hand and began recklessly to gather his best flowers for her.

"Can you think of it? Give them to madame," said the Duchess. "A young man should not have flowers about him when he has a pretty woman on his arm."

"Before you go down to the court," added Mme. Camusot, "ask Chesnel's successor about those proposals that he made in the name of M. and Mme. du Ronceret."

Old Blondet, quite overcome by this revelation of the President's duplicity, stood planted on his feet by the wicket gate, looking after the two women as they hurried away through by-streets home again. The edifice raised so painfully during ten years for his beloved son was crumbling visibly before his eyes. Was it possible? He suspected some trick, and hurried away to Chesnel's successor.

At half-past nine, before the court was sitting, Vice–President Blondet, Camusot, and Michu met with remarkable punctuality in the council chamber. Blondet locked the door with some precautions when Camusot and Michu came in together.

"Well, Mr. Vice–President," began Michu, "M. Sauvager, without consulting the public prosecutor, has issued a warrant for the apprehension of one Comte d'Esgrignon, in order to serve a grudge borne against him by one du Croisier, an enemy of the King's government. It is a regular topsy-turvy affair. The President, for his part, goes away, and thereby puts a stop to the preliminary examination! And we know nothing of the matter. Do they, by any chance, mean to force our hand?"

“This is the first word I have heard of it,” said the Vice–President. He was furious with the President for stealing a march on him with the Blandureaus. Chesnel’s successor, the du Roncerets’ man, had just fallen into a snare set by the old judge; the truth was out, he knew the secret.

“It is lucky that we spoke to you about the matter, my dear master,” said Camusot, “or you might have given up all hope of seating your son on the bench or of marrying him to Mlle. Blandureau.”

“But it is no question of my son, nor of his marriage,” said the Vice–President; “we are talking of young Comte d’Esgrignon. Is he or is he not guilty?”

“It seems that Chesnel deposited the amount to meet the bill with Mme. du Croisier,” said Michu, “and a crime has been made of a mere irregularity. According to the charge, the Count made use of the lower half of a letter bearing du Croisier’s signature as a draft which he cashed at the Kellers’.”

“An imprudent thing to do,” was Camusot’s comment.

“But why is du Croisier proceeding against him if the amount was paid in beforehand?” asked Vice–President Blondet.

“He does not know that the money was deposited with his wife; or he pretends that he does not know,” said Camusot.

“It is a piece of provincial spite,” said Michu.

“Still it looks like a forgery to me,” said old Blondet. No passion could obscure judicial clear-sightedness in him.

“Do you think so?” returned Camusot. “But, at the outset, supposing that the Count had no business to draw upon du Croisier, there would still be no forgery of the signature; and the Count believed that he had a right to draw on Croisier when Chesnel advised him that the money had been placed to his credit.”

“Well, then, where is the forgery?” asked Blondet. “It is the intent to defraud which constitutes forgery in a civil action.”

“Oh, it is clear, if you take du Croisier’s version for truth, that the signature was diverted from its purpose to obtain a sum of money in spite of du Croisier’s contrary injunction to his bankers,” Camusot answered.

“Gentlemen,” said Blondet, “this seems to me to be a mere triffle, a quibble. —

Suppose you had the money, I ought perhaps to have waited until I had your authorization; but I, Comte d'Esgrignon, was pressed for money, so I—— Come, come, your prosecution is a piece of revengeful spite. Forgery is defined by the law as an attempt to obtain any advantage which rightfully belongs to another. There is no forgery here, according to the letter of the Roman law, nor according to the spirit of modern jurisprudence (always from the point of a civil action, for we are not here concerned with the falsification of public or authentic documents). Between private individuals the essence of a forgery is the intent to defraud; where is it in this case? In what times are we living, gentlemen? Here is the President going away to balk a preliminary examination which ought to be over by this time! Until today I did not know M. le President, but he shall have the benefit of arrears; from this time forth he shall draft his decisions himself. You must set about this affair with all possible speed, M. Camusot."

"Yes," said Michu. "In my opinion, instead of letting the young man out on bail, we ought to pull him out of this mess at once. Everything turns on the examination of du Croisier and his wife. You might summons them to appear while the court is sitting, M. Camusot; take down their depositions before four o'clock, send in your report to-night, and we will give our decision in the morning before the court sits."

"We will settle what course to pursue while the barristers are pleading," said Vice–President Blondet, addressing Camusot.

And with that the three judges put on their robes and went into court.

At noon Mlle. Armande and the Bishop reached the Hotel d'Esgrignon; Chesnel and M. Couturier were there to meet them. There was a sufficiently short conference between the prelate and Mme. du Croisier's director, and the latter set out at once to visit his charge.

At eleven o'clock that morning du Croisier received a summons to appear in the examining magistrate's office between one and two in the afternoon. Thither he betook himself, consumed by well-founded suspicions. It was impossible that the President should have foreseen the arrival of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse upon the scene, the return of the public prosecutor, and the hasty confabulation of his learned brethren; so he had omitted to trace out a plan for du Croisier's guidance in the event of the preliminary examination taking place. Neither of the pair imagined that the proceedings would be hurried on in this way. Du Croisier

obeyed the summons at once; he wanted to know how M. Camusot was disposed to act. So he was compelled to answer the questions put to him. Camusot addressed him in summary fashion with the six following inquiries:—

“Was the signature on the bill alleged to be a forgery in your handwriting? — Had you previously done business with M. le Comte d’Esgrignon? — Was not M. le Comte d’Esgrignon in the habit of drawing upon you, with or without advice? — Did you not write a letter authorizing M. d’Esgrignon to rely upon you at any time? — Had not Chesnel squared the account not once, but many times already? — Were you not away from home when this took place?”

All these questions the banker answered in the affirmative. In spite of wordy explanations, the magistrate always brought him back to a “Yes” or “No.” When the questions and answers alike had been resumed in the proces-verbal, the examining magistrate brought out a final thunderbolt.

“Was du Croisier aware that the money destined to meet the bill had been deposited with him, du Croisier, according to Chesnel’s declaration, and a letter of advice sent by the said Chesnel to the Comte d’Esgrignon, five days before the date of the bill?”

That last question frightened du Croisier. He asked what was meant by it, and whether he was supposed to be the defendant and M. le Comte d’Esgrignon the plaintiff? He called the magistrate’s attention to the fact that if the money had been deposited with him, there was no ground for the action.

“Justice is seeking information,” said the magistrate, as he dismissed the witness, but not before he had taken down du Croisier’s last observation.

“But the money, sir ——”

“The money is at your house.”

Chesnel, likewise summoned, came forward to explain the matter. The truth of his assertions was borne out by Mme. du Croisier’s deposition. The Count had already been examined. Prompted by Chesnel, he produced du Croisier’s first letter, in which he begged the Count to draw upon him without the insulting formality of depositing the amount beforehand. The Comte d’Esgrignon next brought out a letter in Chesnel’s handwriting, by which the notary advised him of the deposit of a hundred thousand crowns with M. du Croisier. With such primary facts as these to bring forward as evidence, the young Count’s innocence was

bound to emerge triumphantly from a court of law.

Du Croisier went home from the court, his face white with rage, and the foam of repressed fury on his lips. His wife was sitting by the fireside in the drawing-room at work upon a pair of slippers for him. She trembled when she looked into his face, but her mind was made up.

“Madame,” he stammered out, “what deposition is this that you made before the magistrate? You have dishonored, ruined, and betrayed me!”

“I have saved you, monsieur,” answered she. “If some day you will have the honor of connecting yourself with the d’Esgrignons by marrying your niece to the Count, it will be entirely owing to my conduct today.”

“A miracle!” cried he. “Balaam’s ass has spoken. Nothing will astonish me after this. And where are the hundred thousand crowns which (so M. Camusot tells me) are here in my house?”

“Here they are,” said she, pulling out a bundle of banknotes from beneath the cushions of her settee. “I have not committed mortal sin by declaring that M. Chesnel gave them into my keeping.”

“While I was away?”

“You were not here.”

“Will you swear that to me on your salvation?”

“I swear it,” she said composedly.

“Then why did you say nothing to me about it?” demanded he.

“I was wrong there,” said his wife, “but my mistake was all for your good. Your niece will be Marquise d’Esgrignon some of these days, and you will perhaps be a deputy, if you behave well in this deplorable business. You have gone too far; you must find out how to get back again.”

Du Croisier, under stress of painful agitation, strode up and down his drawing-room; while his wife, in no less agitation, awaited the result of this exercise. Du Croisier at length rang the bell.

“I am not at home to any one to-night,” he said, when the man appeared; “shut the gates; and if any one calls, tell them that your mistress and I have gone into the country. We shall start directly after dinner, and dinner must be half an

hour earlier than usual.”

The great news was discussed that evening in every drawing-room; little shopkeepers, working folk, beggars, the noblesse, the merchant class — the whole town, in short, was talking of the Comte d’Esgrignon’s arrest on a charge of forgery. The Comte d’Esgrignon would be tried in the Assize Court; he would be condemned and branded. Most of those who cared for the honor of the family denied the fact. At nightfall Chesnel went to Mme. Camusot and escorted the stranger to the Hotel d’Esgrignon. Poor Mlle. Armande was expecting him; she led the fair Duchess to her own room, which she had given up to her, for his lordship the Bishop occupied Victurnien’s chamber; and, left alone with her guest, the noble woman glanced at the Duchess with most piteous eyes.

“You owed help, indeed, madame, to the poor boy who ruined himself for your sake,” she said, “the boy to whom we are all of us sacrificing ourselves.”

The Duchess had already made a woman’s survey of Mlle. d’Esgrignon’s room; the cold, bare, comfortless chamber, that might have been a nun’s cell, was like a picture of the life of the heroic woman before her. The Duchess saw it all — past, present, and future — with rising emotion, felt the incongruity of her presence, and could not keep back the falling tears that made answer for her.

But in Mlle. Armande the Christian overcame Victurnien’s aunt. “Ah, I was wrong; forgive me, Mme. la Duchesse; you did not know how poor we were, and my nephew was incapable of the admission. And besides, now that I see you, I can understand all — even the crime!”

And Mlle. Armande, withered and thin and white, but beautiful as those tall austere slender figures which German art alone can paint, had tears too in her eyes.

“Do not fear, dear angel,” the Duchess said at last; “he is safe.”

“Yes, but honor? — and his career? Chesnel told me; the King knows the truth.”

“We will think of a way of repairing the evil,” said the Duchess.

Mlle. Armande went downstairs to the salon, and found the Collection of Antiquities complete to a man. Every one of them had come, partly to do honor to the Bishop, partly to rally round the Marquis; but Chesnel, posted in the

antechamber, warned each new arrival to say no word of the affair, that the aged Marquis might never know that such a thing had been. The loyal Frank was quite capable of killing his son or du Croisier; for either the one or the other must have been guilty of death in his eyes. It chanced, strangely enough, that he talked more of Victurnien than usual; he was glad that his son had gone back to Paris. The King would give Victurnien a place before very long; the King was interesting himself at last in the d'Esgrignons. And his friends, their hearts dead within them, praised Victurnien's conduct to the skies. Mlle. Armande prepared the way for her nephew's sudden appearance among them by remarking to her brother that Victurnien would be sure to come to see them, and that he must be even then on his way.

"Bah!" said the Marquis, standing with his back to the hearth, "if he is doing well where he is, he ought to stay there, and not be thinking of the joy it would give his old father to see him again. The King's service has the first claim."

Scarcely one of those present heard the words without a shudder. Justice might give over a d'Esgrignon to the executioner's branding iron. There was a dreadful pause. The old Marquise de Casteran could not keep back a tear that stole down over her rouge, and turned her head away to hide it.

Next day at noon, in the sunny weather, a whole excited population was dispersed in groups along the high street, which ran through the heart of the town, and nothing was talked of but the great affair. Was the Count in prison or was he not? — All at once the Comte d'Esgrignon's well-known tilbury was seen driving down the Rue Saint–Blaise; it had evidently come from the Prefecture, the Count himself was on the box seat, and by his side sat a charming young man, whom nobody recognized. The pair were laughing and talking and in great spirits. They wore Bengal roses in their button-holes. Altogether, it was a theatrical surprise which words fail to describe.

At ten o'clock the court had decided to dismiss the charge, stating their very sufficient reasons for setting the Count at liberty, in a document which contained a thunderbolt for du Croisier, in the shape of an *inasmuch* that gave the Count the right to institute proceedings for libel. Old Chesnel was walking up the Grand Rue, as if by accident, telling all who cared to hear him that du Croisier had set the most shameful of snares for the d'Esgrignons' honor, and that it was entirely owing to the forbearance and magnanimity of the family that he was not

prosecuted for slander.

On the evening of that famous day, after the Marquis d'Esgrignon had gone to bed, the Count, Mlle. Armande, and the Chevalier were left with the handsome young page, now about to return to Paris. The charming cavalier's sex could not be hidden from the Chevalier, and he alone, besides the three officials and Mme. Camusot, knew that the Duchess had been among them.

"The house is saved," began Chesnel, "but after this shock it will take a hundred years to rise again. The debts must be paid now; you must marry an heiress, M. le Comte, there is nothing left for you to do."

"And take her where you may find her," said the Duchess.

"A second mesalliance!" exclaimed Mlle. Armande.

The Duchess began to laugh.

"It is better to marry than to die," she said. As she spoke she drew from her waistcoat pocket a tiny crystal phial that came from the court apothecary.

Mlle. Armande shrank away in horror. Old Chesnel took the fair Maufrigneuse's hand, and kissed it without permission.

"Are you all out of your minds here?" continued the Duchess. "Do you really expect to live in the fifteenth century when the rest of the world has reached the nineteenth? My dear children, there is no noblesse nowadays; there is no aristocracy left! Napoleon's Code Civil made an end of the parchments, exactly as cannon made an end of feudal castles. When you have some money, you will be very much more of nobles than you are now. Marry anybody you please, Victurnien, you will raise your wife to your rank; that is the most substantial privilege left to the French noblesse. Did not M. de Talleyrand marry Mme. Grandt without compromising his position? Remember that Louis XIV. took the Widow Scarron for his wife."

"He did not marry her for her money," interposed Mlle. Armande.

"If the Comtesse d'Esgrignon were one du Croisier's niece, for instance, would you receive her?" asked Chesnel.

"Perhaps," replied the Duchess; "but the King, beyond all doubt, would be very glad to see her. — So you do not know what is going on in the world?" continued she, seeing the amazement in their faces. "Victurnien has been in Paris;

he knows how things go there. We had more influence under Napoleon. Marry Mlle. Duval, Victurnien; she will be just as much Marquise d'Esgrignon as I am Duchesse de Maufrigneuse."

"All is lost — even honor!" said the Chevalier, with a wave of the hand.

"Good-bye, Victurnien," said the Duchess, kissing her lover on the forehead; "we shall not see each other again. Live on your lands; that is the best thing for you to do; the air of Paris is not at all good for you."

"Diane!" the young Count cried despairingly.

"Monsieur, you forget yourself strangely," the Duchess retorted coolly, as she laid aside her role of man and mistress, and became not merely an angel again, but a duchess, and not only a duchess, but Moliere's Celimene.

The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse made a stately bow to these four personages, and drew from the Chevalier his last tear of admiration at the service of le beau sexe.

"How like she is to the Princess Goritza!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

Diane had disappeared. The crack of the postilion's whip told Victurnien that the fair romance of his first love was over. While peril lasted, Diane could still see her lover in the young Count; but out of danger, she despised him for the weakling that he was.

Six months afterwards, Camusot received the appointment of assistant judge at Paris, and later he became an examining magistrate. Goodman Blondet was made a councillor to the Royal–Court; he held the post just long enough to secure a retiring pension, and then went back to live in his pretty little house. Joseph Blondet sat in his father's seat at the court till the end of his days; there was not the faintest chance of promotion for him, but he became Mlle. Blandereau's husband; and she, no doubt, is leading today, in the little flower-covered brick house, as dull a life as any carp in a marble basin. Michu and Camusot also received the Cross of the Legion of Honor, while Blondet became an Officer. As for M. Sauvager, deputy public prosecutor, he was sent to Corsica, to du Croisier's great relief; he had decidedly no mind to bestow his niece upon that functionary.

Du Croisier himself, urged by President du Ronceret, appealed from the finding of the Tribunal to the Court–Royal, and lost his cause. The Liberals

throughout the department held that little d’Esgrignon was guilty; while the Royalists, on the other hand, told frightful stories of plots woven by “that abominable du Croisier” to compass his revenge. A duel was fought indeed; the hazard of arms favored du Croisier, the young Count was dangerously wounded, and his antagonist maintained his words. This affair embittered the strife between the two parties; the Liberals brought it forward on all occasions. Meanwhile du Croisier never could carry his election, and saw no hope of marrying his niece to the Count, especially after the duel.

A month after the decision of the Tribunal was confirmed in the Court–Royal, Chesnel died, exhausted by the dreadful strain, which had weakened and shaken him mentally and physically. He died in the hour of victory, like some old faithful hound that has brought the boar to bay, and gets his death on the tusks. He died as happily as might be, seeing that he left the great House all but ruined, and the heir in penury, bored to death by an idle life, and without a hope of establishing himself. That bitter thought and his own exhaustion, no doubt, hastened the old man’s end. One great comfort came to him as he lay amid the wreck of so many hopes, sinking under the burden of so many cares — the old Marquis, at his sister’s entreaty, gave him back all the old friendship. The great lord came to the little house in the Rue du Bercail, and sat by his old servant’s bedside, all unaware how much that servant had done and sacrificed for him. Chesnel sat upright, and repeated Simeon’s cry. — The Marquis allowed them to bury Chesnel in the castle chapel; they laid him crosswise at the foot of the tomb which was waiting for the Marquis himself, the last, in a sense, of the d’Esgrignons.

And so died one of the last representatives of that great and beautiful thing, Service; giving to that often discredited word its original meaning, the relation between feudal lord and servitor. That relation, only to be found in some out-of-the-way province, or among a few old servants of the King, did honor alike to a noblesse that could call forth such affection, and to a bourgeoisie that could conceive it. Such noble and magnificent devotion is no longer possible among us. Noble houses have no servitors left; even as France has no longer a King, nor an hereditary peerage, nor lands that are bound irrevocably to an historic house, that the glorious names of the nation may be perpetuated. Chesnel was not merely one of the obscure great men of private life; he was something more — he was a great fact. In his sustained self-devotion is there not something indefinably solemn and sublime, something that rises above the one beneficent deed, or the heroic height

which is reached by a moment's supreme effort? Chesnel's virtues belong essentially to the classes which stand between the poverty of the people on the one hand, and the greatness of the aristocracy on the other; for these can combine homely burgher virtues with the heroic ideals of the noble, enlightening both by a solid education.

Victurnien was not well looked upon at Court; there was no more chance of a great match for him, nor a place. His Majesty steadily refused to raise the d'Esgrignons to the peerage, the one royal favor which could rescue Victurnien from his wretched position. It was impossible that he should marry a bourgeoise heiress in his father's lifetime, so he was bound to live on shabbily under the paternal roof with memories of his two years of splendor in Paris, and the lost love of a great lady to bear him company. He grew moody and depressed, vegetating at home with a careworn aunt and a half heart-broken father, who attributed his son's condition to a wasting malady. Chesnel was no longer there.

The Marquis died in 1830. The great d'Esgrignon, with a following of all the less infirm noblesse from the Collection of Antiquities, went to wait upon Charles X. at Nonancourt; he paid his respects to his sovereign, and swelled the meagre train of the fallen king. It was an act of courage which seems simple enough today, but, in that time of enthusiastic revolt, it was heroism.

"The Gaul has conquered!" These were the Marquis' last words.

By that time du Croisier's victory was complete. The new Marquis d'Esgrignon accepted Mlle. Duval as his wife a week after his old father's death. His bride brought him three millions of francs for du Croisier and his wife settled the reversion of their fortunes upon her in the marriage-contract. Du Croisier took occasion to say during the ceremony that the d'Esgrignon family was the most honorable of all the ancient houses in France.

Some day the present Marquis d'Esgrignon will have an income of more than a hundred thousand crowns. You may see him in Paris, for he comes to town every winter and leads a jolly bachelor life, while he treats his wife with something more than the indifference of the grand seigneur of olden times; he takes no thought whatever for her.

"As for Mlle. d'Esgrignon," said Emile Blondet, to whom all the detail of the story is due, "if she is no longer like the divinely fair woman whom I saw by

glimpses in my childhood, she is decidedly, at the age of sixty-seven, the most pathetic and interesting figure in the Collection of Antiquities. She queens it among them still. I saw her when I made my last journey to my native place in search of the necessary papers for my marriage. When my father knew who it was that I had married, he was struck dumb with amazement; he had not a word to say until I told him that I was a prefect.

"'You were born to it,' he said, with a smile.

"As I took a walk around the town, I met Mlle. Armande. She looked taller than ever. I looked at her, and thought of Marius among the ruins of Carthage. Had she not outlived her creed, and the beliefs that had been destroyed? She is a sad and silent woman, with nothing of her old beauty left except the eyes, that shine with an unearthly light. I watched her on her way to mass, with her book in her hand, and could not help thinking that she prayed to God to take her out of the world."

Les Jardies, July 1837.